

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

- Habakkuk 1
 - The prophet cries out to God because he sees violence and injustice in Judean society. Habakkuk wants God to listen to their cries and act.
 - God responds that the corrupt society of the people of Judah will be conquered by the Babylonian army.
 - Habakkuk is shocked that God would use a wicked nation to punish the people of Judah
- Habakkuk 2
 - The prophet waits for a vision from the Lord
 - God responds that a vision is coming even if it seems to delay. The righteous live by their faith
 - A series of woe oracles make clear that evil contains the seeds of its own destruction

HABAKKUK 3:1 – A SECOND SUPERScription

3 A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk according to Shigionoth.

A superscription is a title at the beginning of a section of scripture. It signifies that something new and different follows. The entire third chapter is a psalm that is called a prayer in the first verse. This psalm is one of the hardest texts of the Bible to translate because the meaning of some of the words has been lost. “*Shigionoth*,” for example, is a *hapax legomenon*, which is a word that only occurs once in the whole Bible. (There are 1,500 in the OT and 1,934 in the NT!) “*Shigionoth*” could be a kind of music or a specific melody or even an instrument that should be played for the psalm. Scholars think that it might be related to the verb, שָׁגַח, “*shagah*,” which means “to wander” or “to go astray.” They guess that this refers to an up-tempo, meandering tune.ⁱ



Jewish coin from c. 132 AD. Trumpet side says “To the freedom of Jerusalem.” Lyre side says “Year two to the freedom of Israel.”

1. The last verse of chapter 2 was, “But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.” Does Habakkuk’s prayer go against God’s instruction or do you think it follows a time of silence?

HABAKKUK 3:2 – THE PROPHET BEGINS TO PRAY

²O LORD, I have heard of your renown,
and I stand in awe, O LORD, of your work.

In our own time revive it;
in our own time make it known;
in wrath may you remember mercy.

1. In verse 2, the same word that is translated as “awe” here can also be translated as “fear” and “reverence.” They are not separate concepts in Hebrew.ⁱⁱ How do you think these ideas could be related to one another? How does this fear/reverence affect our relationship with God?
2. In verse 2, Habakkuk accepts the word of the Lord that he has received. It’s almost like the parent who threatens, “I brought you into this world and I can take you out of it.” Habakkuk believes in God’s power as shown through God’s works: in creation, in vanquishing armies, in acting without human permission and understanding. Yet, he asks for God’s mercy despite the consequences of sin. How would you describe God’s mercy? If God’s mercy doesn’t spare us from all harm, then what is it?

HABAKKUK 3:3-7 –THE PROPHET RECOUNTS THE APPEARANCE OF GOD



“Mountain in Wadi Rum, Jordan” by Daniel Case, 2009.

³God came from Teman,
the Holy One from Mount Paran.

Selah

God’s glory covered the heavens,
and the earth was full of God’s
praise.

⁴The brightness was like the sun;
rays came forth from God’s hand,
where God’s power lay hidden.

⁵Before the Lord went pestilence,

and plague followed close
behind.
⁶God stopped and shook the
earth;
 God looked and made the
nations tremble.
 The eternal mountains were
shattered;
 along God's ancient
pathways
 the everlasting hills sank low.



*"A Bedaween (sic) Encampment near the Dead Sea, Sunset" by
Edwin Weeks.*

⁷I saw the tents of Cushan under affliction;
the tent-curtains of the land of Midian trembled.

This section and the next section are both theophanies. A theophany is when God (*theo* in Greek) appears (*phaino*). Examples of theophanies from the Old Testament include: the burning bush, the pillar of cloud and fire that guided the desert wanderers, thunder and lightning on Mount Sinai, Isaiah and Ezekiel's visions of God seated on a throne and surrounded by seraphim and cherubim.ⁱⁱⁱ

This psalm is very old – perhaps the oldest poetry in the whole Bible. The word used for God is “Eloah,” which is only used in the oldest poems of the Bible. There are two traditions in the Bible – one has God's home base as Mount Sinai (as in the giving of the Ten Commandments) and the other has God's home base on earth in Zion (that is, Jerusalem, in the Temple). This reflects the southern/Sinai tradition. Teman and Paran are desert areas that are south of Judah. It's unclear where Cushan is, but Midian is also in the southern desert areas.^{iv}

1. In this season of Advent, we look for God entering our world. Here, God is coming as a divine warrior, with power to make the heavens shine and the earth shake. On Christmas we celebrate the theophany of Jesus, the God-child who is meek and mild. What do these different appearances of God teach us about God? Can we hold the power of a warrior and the innocence of an infant together in our understanding of the Lord?
2. In verses 3b-4, we find descriptions of God equipped for battle: armor glistening, weapons in hand, and ready to charge. In verse 5, we find that pestilence and plague are also under God's control (though these may have been the names of Canaanite deities).^v Then, in verse 6, God creates earthquakes, brings down mountains, and sinks hills, scaring the foreign nations. Here, God is depicted as

powerful and potentially violent. What do you think passages like this mean? Is God violent or is there a deeper theological message here?

HABAKKUK 3:8-15 – THE PROPHET RECOUNTS GOD’S VICTORY OVER CHAOS



"Chaos Monster and Sun God" – a monument of Nineveh

⁸ Was your wrath against the rivers, O LORD?
Or your anger against the rivers,
or your rage against the sea,
when you drove your horses,
your chariots to victory?

⁹ You brandished your naked bow,
sated were the arrows at your command.* *Selah*
You split the earth with rivers.

¹⁰ The mountains saw you, and writhed;
a torrent of water swept by;
the deep gave forth its voice.
The sun raised high its hands;

¹¹ the moon stood still in its exalted place,
at the light of your arrows speeding by,
at the gleam of your flashing spear.

¹² In fury you trod the earth,
in anger you trampled nations.

¹³ You came forth to save your people,
to save your anointed.

You crushed the head of the wicked house,
laying it bare from foundation to roof.* *Selah*

¹⁴ You pierced with their own arrows the head of his warriors,*
who came like a whirlwind to scatter us,
gloating as if ready to devour the poor who were in hiding.

¹⁵ You trampled the sea with your horses,
churning the mighty waters.

* Each asterisk indicates a line where the Hebrew is uncertain

In the first chapter of Habakkuk, the prophet made reference to the creation story in Genesis 1. We all know that the creation story in Genesis 2 is a bit different. But did you know that the Bible has other creation stories, too? In these stories, God conquers the monsters of chaos in order to bring forth creation. Other contemporary cultures had such creation myths. For example, the Assyrian goddess Tiamat, a dragon of darkness and chaos, was defeated by their god Marduk (later adopted as the patron of the city of Babylon). [For other biblical examples, see Job 9:4-13, Job 26:11-14, Psalm 74:12-17, Psalm 89:8-12, and Isaiah 27:1.]^{vi}

1. All of the references to the rivers and the sea in verses 8 and 9 could be references to the Canaanite river (*Nahar*) and sea (*Yam*) gods conquered by Baal-Hadad. Reread these verses with that in mind. What does it mean to say that the God of Israel was the true victor in the battle against chaos? What theological statement is Habakkuk making when he claims the one true God won the battle that other religions claim for themselves?
2. In verses 8 and 9a, Habakkuk uses God's triumph over the gods and monsters of chaos to say that God will surely triumph over the nations who oppose God and the people of God. What does it mean to say, "God is on our side"? Can we do so thoughtfully and carefully, or are we always tempted to claim God's approval for our own agendas?
3. In verses 9b-11, creation sees God coming and stand at attention. What do these verses mean to you? Do they show fear at what is going to happen? Faith and trust in God's purpose? Understanding of what God is doing?
4. Continuing to verses 12-13a, it's almost like Habakkuk is regaling the Lord over victory in battle. For him, one of the greatest attributes of God is that God is the one who comes to save the holy people. We more often speak of Christ as savior than of God the Creator. How can we understand the Creator as savior? The Spirit?
5. Verses 13b-15 offer a description of the battle that God has waged against wicked nations in the past on behalf of the chosen people and will wage again to free them from Babylon. Here, Habakkuk prays as if Babylon is already defeated – even though he sees that his people will be scattered and harmed, he knows that they will be saved and restored. He asserts that in standing against the One who defeated the primordial chaos, Babylon is as good as defeated already. Is this how we should pray in times of crisis? How would things change if we did?

HABAKKUK 3:16-19 – THE PROPHET GAINS INSIGHT FROM PRAYER

I hear, and I tremble within;
 my lips quiver at the sound.
 Rottenness enters into my bones,
 and my steps tremble beneath me.*
 I wait quietly for the day of calamity
 to come upon the people who attack us.

¹⁷Though the fig tree does not blossom,
 and no fruit is on the vines;
 though the produce of the olive fails,
 and the fields yield no food;
 though the flock is cut off from the fold,
 and there is no herd in the stalls,
¹⁸yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
 I will exult in the God of my salvation.



A fig tree in Ethiopia (photo by Bernard Gagnon)

¹⁹GOD, the Lord, is my strength;
 who makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
 and makes me tread upon the heights.
 To the leader: with stringed instruments.

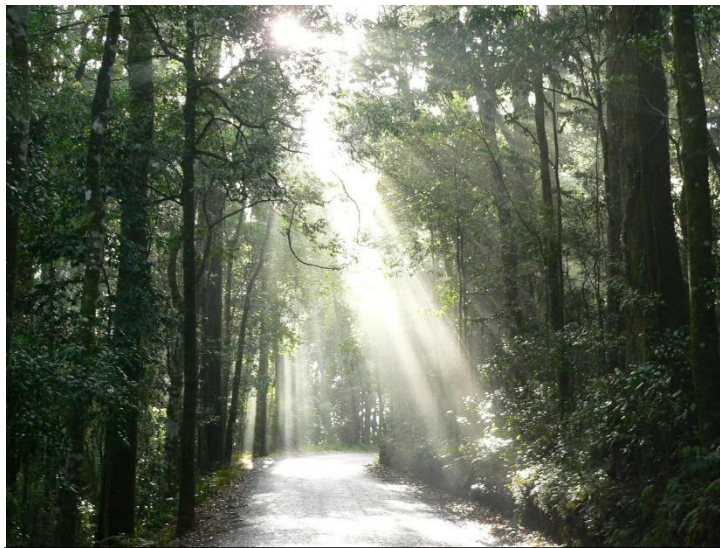
1. In prayer, Habakkuk has seen a new vision and reacts. He is clearly afraid, but still confident that waiting on and trusting in the Lord is what he is called to do. Has praying ever made you feel more afraid? Can fear be faithful?
2. In verse 17, Habakkuk imagines what the calamity and loss and damage will look like, but still finds confidence to endure what he is facing. More than endure – in verse 18, he will, “exult in the God of my salvation.” Do you find this comforting or insufficient as a verse to help us in the face of trials?
3. When psalmists talk about deer feet, they are talking about how sure-footed deer are. It’s often a metaphor for solid faith, for graceful obedience, and for safety in times of danger or trial. Habakkuk rounds out his psalm by saying that God is my strength who makes my faith and my path solid and then makes me go to difficult places (having already equipped me for them). In this Advent season, where do you

feel equipped to go? Is there something or somewhere new that God might be equipping you for?

See if anything looks familiar in the following hymn 😊

“Sometimes a Light Surprises”
By William Cowper, 1779

1. Sometimes a light surprises the Christian while he sings;
It is the Lord, who rises with healing in His wings:
When comforts are declining, He grants the soul again
A season of clear shining, to cheer it after rain.
2. In holy contemplation we sweetly then pursue
The theme of God’s salvation, and find it ever new.
Set free from present sorrow, we cheerfully can say,
Let the unknown tomorrow bring with it what it may.
3. It can bring with it nothing but He will bear us through;
Who gives the lilies clothing will clothe His people, too;
Beneath the spreading heavens, no creature but is fed;
And He Who feeds the ravens will give His children bread.
4. Though vine nor fig tree neither their wonted fruit should bear,
Though all the field should wither, nor flocks nor herds be there;
Yet God the same abiding, His praise shall tune my voice,
For while in Him confiding, I cannot but rejoice.



(Photo by Laszlo Honti)

ⁱ James D. Nogalski. *The Book of the Twelve: Micah-Malachi* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 679. & https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Habakkuk & <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/7692.htm>

ⁱⁱ <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3372.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Nogalski, 679-81.

^{iv} Nogalski, 681-2.

^v Nogalski, 684.

^{vi} Nogalski, 684-5.