

Habakkuk 3

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Date: 23 November 2025

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[0 : 00] Songs that we play and sing and maybe whistle as we go about our business inevitably reflect! the mood that we're in. So when we find ourselves singing, I'm walking on sunshine, Katrina and the waves, it's probably because we're happy.

And when we're humming along, everybody hurts. I REM. Our mood's quite different, isn't it? It's because we're sad or gloomy or feeling the weight of the world around us.

But it works the other way as well because songs can actually change our mood. We can be in one particular mood and then a song is playing or we sing and our mood changes.

I can sometimes be perfectly happy, taking along fine and then realize I'm a bit anxious and agitated and realize it's because Leonard Cohen has been playing in the background for the last hour. Chris Stapleton has a song called What Are You Listening To? That makes this point. It's a song about a breakup and he's thinking about the woman and he's playing a song that reminds him of his ex and he wonders what she's listening to.

And he wonders because he wants to know how she's feeling. So he asks, is it a cover band in some college town bar where it's na-na-naz and air guitar? I.e., are you having fun? I'm wondering, are you having fun? Have you moved on?

[1 : 37] And then he asks, or is it something to get you through? Just a sad song playing on the radio station, tears still falling, hearts still breaking because you're hanging on.

And some songs are like that, aren't they? Songs that you listen to or you sing because you are just hanging on and you sing them to get you through.

Those kinds of songs are real about how hard things are, but they also offer us hope. They give us something to hold on to as we go through the pain.

Habakkuk 3 is a song for those who are hanging on. It's a song to get you through. It's described, chapter 3, verse 1. We're back here, page 786. Habakkuk 3, verse 1. It's described as Habakkuk's prayer, but you'll see that it's also given musical directions.

It's called Shagionoth. It's called Shagionoth. Is that how you pronounce it? Shagionoth? Shagionoth? Who knows? Shagionoth.

[2 : 52] It has those selah bricks that you see in the Psalms, verse 3, verse 9, verse 13, and it closes with an instruction to the choir master, verse 19. It's clearly a song. It's a prayer, but it's designed to be sung by the people who we've seen over the last couple of Sunday evenings are facing the hardest of times. John Calvin says the Shagionoth, like the Shagion of Psalm 7, where David is surrounded by his enemies, but he's still trusting God is with him, is, quote, an irregular meter designed for a poetic style marked by strong emotion and agitation.

The choir master is saying, play it to this tune, and it is a tune that's designed for strong emotion and agitation, an irregular meter. The music reflects the mood. We're all over the place emotionally. This is the sort of song that you sing.

We've seen it, haven't we? Strong emotion and agitation are exactly where Habakkuk finds himself. He opened his prophecy by crying out to God about the violence and the injustice that he sees all around him, and the fact that God just seems ambivalent to it all.

God then responded by saying, nope, nope, not ambivalent, and I am going to send the Babylonians to judge this wickedness. And when Habakkuk cries out to him about this decision, he cries out in disbelief, hang on, surely not the most wicked and most intimidating force in the world. God replies that he will then judge the Babylonians. I'm sending the Babylonians to judge the unfaithful people of God, and then I'm going to judge the Babylonians.

[4 : 32] Last time we saw this five-fold woe, God promises he will dismantle the might of this proud nation in its opposition to the people of God. And yet, with all of that, Habakkuk and the righteous

who are trusting God will have to wait, and they'll have to endure, and one of the ways that they will do that is by singing this song.

It's a song to get them through. Because this song, and I take the song to be the vision that is promised in chapter 2, that Habakkuk is to write down for those who come after him, the bit between verse 3 and verse 15, it reminds those who sing it about the God in whom they have placed their faith.

You remember chapter 1, verse 4? When all of this is going on, the righteous will live by their faith, chapter 1, verse 4, in the God of this song. And so singing about him and his works in history will provide the strength that the faithful need to be able to endure.

And here's the title of the song. When God came to earth. When God came to earth. Do you know this song?

Whatever your circumstances this evening, if you feel like you're hanging on, do you know this song? Because this song will get you through. Habakkuk has heard it, verse 2, can you see?

[6 : 00] And it has sobered him. And he wants God to enact again the events that this song recounts. In the midst of the years, he says, revive it.

In the midst of the years, make it known. In wrath, remember mercy. He's saying, in our time, revive what you have done before. Make known what you revealed in times past.

Do it again, Lord. Do it again now. And it is a song that recounts the activity of God from the Exodus, through the wilderness wanderings, to Mount Sinai, the handover from Moses to Joshua, up to the point where God's people entered the promised land.

And as we go through the song and look at it now, what we see is that it reveals to us three things about God. First of which is this. It reveals a God of unmatched splendor.

That's verses 3 and 4. Unmatched splendor. When God came to earth, he made himself known as a God of unmatched splendor. God came from Teman and the Holy One from Mount Paran.

[7 : 05] His splendor covered the heavens and the earth was full of his praise. His brightness was like the light. Rays flashed from his hand and there he veiled his power.

Moses introduced his blessing of the people in Deuteronomy 33 verse 2 in exactly the same way, remembering the same events. God is portrayed as coming to the scene of the action from the wilderness region to the south.

Teman is a district of Edom and Mount Paran lies between Edom and Sinai. It was actually the route that the Israelites took as they journeyed from Egypt to Canaan. But the thing that is most striking, when the route is described, isn't the route.

It is God's splendor and the radiance as he comes. Brightness, rays of light flashing forth from him. When God turns up, his glory covers, fills, radiates everything.

The God in whom the faithful have put their trust is not like any other. Marduk, the Babylonian god, is made of metal and wood. The idols of those who oppose the people of God are, chapter 2 verse 19, overlaid with gold and silver.

[8 : 16] Because they have no glory of their own. The glory, as it were, has to be tacked on on the outside. The brightness, the radiance has to be put on on the outside so that it reflects light from somewhere else.

It has no glory, no beauty of its own. The God of the covenant is the center of his own glory and radiance flows from his hand to fill heaven and earth.

As we endure violence and injustice, in our day as we live through our own experience of divine judgment, we must remember that the splendor of the world is always tacked on the outside.

It might look shiny, but that can only ever be a reflection. The idols of our culture that offer us the answer to the problems that we see around us, whether it's better education, better policing, better economics, better stuff, if they look shiny, it's a veneer.

They have no inherent glory. They cannot, therefore, resolve our problems. We need to go to the God who possesses an unmatched splendor. He's the God of unmatched splendor.

[9 : 28] Let's keep singing because he's also shown to have five to ten unrivaled power.

Unmatched splendor, unrivaled power. Before him went pestilence, verse 5, and plague followed at his heels.

He stood and measured the earth. He looked and shook the heavens, shook the nations. Then the eternal mountains were scattered. The everlasting hills sank low. His were the everlasting ways.

Of course, it's supremely seen at the Exodus, particularly with the plagues. God acts with unrivaled power. He is so great that he measures the earth.

To God, the whole earth is so small. It's like he just needs to take out a measuring tape and hold it up. He shakes the nations like a child shakes a snow globe.

Creation, which is so huge to us, so vast. One of the things we're told, isn't it, when we get our mental health all twisted up, is to get out into nature because the vastness brings you out of yourself.

[10:35] That's what we're told. And it's great advice. It's a good thing to do. When you get up on an airplane or you stand at the foot of a mountain or you row your canoe out into the ocean so that you're away as far as you can go from land and all you can see is water all around you, you realize how small you are compared to the created world.

You look out of that airplane window and you can see what's going on down there. How tiny are you in relation to everything else? God holds it all in his hand.

Saw the flooding this week on the news. Floods are no problem. Snow that grinds everything to a halt in our place. They're nothing to him.

Verse 8, have a look. Rivers and seas. Verse 11, even the sun and the moon, all creation does the bidding of our God. But do you see, it's not just power over creation for its own sake, but his power over everything that comes from creation and sets itself up in opposition to him.

And as I said, Exodus is never far from view here as we read chapter 3. God's horses and chariots, verse 8, go through. They defeat the Red Sea on leaving Egypt and they rage against the river Jordan to enter the promised land.

[11:50] There is the repeated mention of mountains. Do you see verse 6? Again in verse 10. I think what's going on here is an allusion to God's power over the Babylonian mountain goddess.

Ninhershag, apparently she's called. The lady of the mountain. See, the Babylonians thought mountains were very important and their goddess was in charge. Not at all.

God is supreme over it all. Then there's the mention of the raging waters and the deep, verse 10.

So from the mountain goddess of the Babylonians up there, all the way down to the raging waters in the deep and his power over Rahab and Leviathan, those great sea monsters in Isaiah chapter 51 and 27.

From the very top to the very depths. All of these created enemies. What do they do? They lift their hands on high.

That's a symbol of surrender. We give up. Hands up. As they accept defeat. When God came to earth, he displayed unrivaled power.

[12:57] If you remember so much of what Habakkuk was taken up with in the beginning of his prophecy, his first complaint particularly was just how powerful the Babylonians were.

And it was as if God said to him, yep, they really are that powerful. They took whatever they wanted and they laid it all to waste. But now he can sing of a God whose power makes theirs look like nothing.

Nothing more than the playground bully. Playground bullies, they can do a bit of damage, but they'll run for the hills when the headmaster comes out. The God who made heaven and earth.

The God who rules over all creation. He possesses unrivaled power. And he's on your side. If you're living by faith in his son, you belong to his family.

And all of this power and all of this might is directed towards your love and care. Things are hard, yes. But God is for you as a father.

[14:07] In fact, if we stick with that headmaster and bully idea, now the headmaster is also your father. So the playground bully comes in. The headmaster turns up. He'll run for the hills.

But I imagine what the headmaster would do if he was actually your father. Well, that's what it's like. And the bully will feel it even more acutely when he acts for the sake of his son or daughter.

Which is the other thing we see then in the song. We sing of a God of unmatched splendor and a God of unrivaled power. But he is also, thirdly, a God of unfettered judgment.

Verses 12 to 15. Verse 12. You marched through the earth in fury. You threshed the nations in anger.

You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck.

[15:03] You pierced with his own arrows the heads of his warriors, who came like a whirlwind to scatter me, rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret. God has gone out against his enemies in the past.

He did so, verse 12, with Joshua's conquest. I think that's what's in view there. Joshua chapter 10 and 11. He struck them, crushing the enemy and laying him bare from thigh to neck.

I think it's a reference to Samson's defeat of the Philistines. Judges 15, verse 8. He struck them hip and thigh with a great blow. Verse 14 recalls when God's enemies destroyed themselves with their own weapons.

See that? Pierced with his own arrows. That's perhaps an allusion to Gideon's defeat of Midian when they blew the trumpets and the Lord set the enemy swords against each other.

Or perhaps the Moabite and Ammonite attack on Jerusalem in 2 Chronicles 20. Listen to what happened when Jehoshaphat led the people in worship. 2 Chronicles 20.

[16:05] They began to sing in praise. The Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah so that they were routed. For the men of Ammon and Moab rose against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, devoting themselves to destruction.

And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they all helped to destroy one another. Wonderful irony. God judges his enemies in a decisive way, but it is all self-inflicted.

For Habakkuk, as he sings this song with the image of the rapacious Babylonian horde helping themselves to whatever they want.

Chapter 2, verse 5. Collecting as his own all peoples. As he sees the destruction that they cause in front of him. He can also envisage this will all come back on their own heads.

God has done it in the past and he will do it again. As the Babylonians capture people on their hooks. As they catch them up in their dragnet.

[17:09] So the Lord will return his judgment on them in the same unfettered way. God is not tame. Nor is he mocked.

When his time comes, when he decides. And remember, he will not be late. You heard that last week. He will judge the Babylonians.

And it will be by singing of this reality that Habakkuk and the righteous get through. In James Joyce's Ulysses, Stephen Daedalus, one of the central characters, described history, quote, as a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.

History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake. For Habakkuk and for suffering Christians in any era, it is history that will keep us from nightmares. Especially the history that is summarized in verse 13.

Look at verse 13 again. The way that God has saved his people and crushed his enemies. You went out for the salvation of your people. For the salvation of your anointed.

[18:15] You crushed the head of the house of the wicked. Laying him bare from thigh to neck. The song of when God came to earth is a song that gets you through.

When you sing of God's victories, it changes your heart. But I want us to see that this doesn't work like magic. You can't just sing it.

And as if a magic spell is passed, everything becomes easy and calm. You see, Habakkuk sings the song, but then look at how he says he feels. Look at verse 16. I hear and my body trembles. My lips quiver at the sound. Rottenness enters into my bones. My legs tremble beneath me. The promise of God's judgment is a fearful thing.

It's a fearful thing even for the righteous. It's not that they're going to be condemned. It's not that God's going to make a mistake and judge one of his children. But God is a consuming fire.

[19:16] And it is right that we fear him. We don't muck about with God. Unmatched splendor. Unrivaled power. Unfettered judgment against his enemies.

You don't muck about with that. It is right that we fear him. And Habakkuk also realizes that in his situation, the consequences of this judgment are going to be painful.

Look at verse 17. Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls.

He's saying, I recognize that because of this judgment, there might be no food on the shelves. People may starve. I may starve. The economy might collapse.

He may be destitute. And yet, do you see what singing this song does to his resolve? He says, I'm terrified. I'm shaking from head to toe in the face of this God of such supremacy and majesty.

[20 : 18] Verse 16. Yet, I will wait quietly for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us. Everything might go to pot, he says.

Verse 18. Yet, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation. His fear is met with faith.

He knows things are going to be tough, but he is confident that we will come through and come out the other side. Because, verse 19, God is his strength. God will bring him, verse 20, to the high place.

Make his feet like deers and make me tread on my high places, meaning place of safety. He will take him to a place of safety. God will get him through. However hard it is, he will come out the other side.

All of that fear, he can meet with faith. And it's not just, do you see, grip, heart, and hold on faith. But look again at verse 18. I will rejoice in the Lord.

[21 : 21] I will take joy in the God of my salvation. There will be joy through it all. Well, Habakkuk's come a long way, hasn't he? Remember the start of his prophecy?

Fear and frustration at God. Angst at the situation and anger at what God was going to do. Fear and anger to joy. Fear, frustration, angst, and anger to joy.

And I want to tell you this evening that this is a journey that we can all make. Because God promises the same to us. The God of our salvation says, I will judge all my enemies, but I will never leave you or forsake you.

And that promise, whatever is going on around us personally or at a national level or at a global level, whatever is going on around us, that promise is a cause for joy.

God is in charge. That means there are no accidents. And he is with you. How can we know?

[22 : 36] How can we be sure? Well, here's the thing. Because there was one time when God came to earth that was like no other. He didn't come in the forms that he came in this song.

He came in person. He took on flesh and dwelt among us. He didn't come in unmatched splendor. He came in humility as a baby.

He didn't come in unrivaled power. He came in weakness to suffer and die. He didn't come to bring unfettered judgment, but to take that judgment on himself in our place in order to bring us salvation. When the Lord Jesus came to his people, he didn't find faith. He found exploitation and injustice.

The temple had been turned into a place of commerce rather than prayer.

The religious leaders of the day would take the very last penny from a widow. So corrupt were they. The fig tree. Verse 17, the fig tree that was supposed to be a symbol of Israel, that was supposed to be fruitful, it did not blossom.

[23 : 55] The flock had wandered away from their shepherd. And God came to earth in the person of his son to put that right. Amen. And as the Lord Jesus trusted that God was his strength, verse 19, he was taken to the high place, not of safety, but of the cross.

To bear all of this judgment in our place. He never sinned. He never sinned. And yet the Lord Jesus took the unfettered judgment of God on himself so that you and I would never have to.

The great day of God's wrath that Habakkuk prayed to happen in the midst of the years has happened when God came to earth as a savior.

And in his wrath he remembered mercy. Such that anyone who puts their faith in Christ will receive mercy and grace to cover every sin.

And not only to cover your sin, but to keep you in his strength all the way to glory. Even through the final judgment that will come on the last day.

[25 : 31] If you're not a Christian, when you see the problems that surround us, and you look around and you see all that's going on, and when you feel in those honest moments your own part in all that's going on, you see the seeds of violence and injustice in your own heart, when you know that you're not the kind of person that you want to be, there is an answer.

His name is Jesus. He will forgive you. He'll forgive you of every sin that you've ever committed, whatever, whatever it might be, wherever you've come from, whatever your past looks like, if you turn to Jesus, he will cover all of your sin.

And he will give you the power that you need to change and he will keep you all the way to glory. Those of us like Habakkuk, we're seeking to live faithfully for the Lord and we see the problems

around us.

We are living through the judgment of secularism and false religion. Here is a song that we can sing to get us through. And I want you to know that it is because of the cross of Jesus Christ that we can sing this song with even more confidence than Habakkuk.

Because we have seen God answer this prayer at the cross. And that means that we can take joy in the God of our salvation.

[27 : 08] And even more than Habakkuk, we can trust that God the Lord is our strength. And even more than Habakkuk, we can know that no matter what because Jesus took the judgment that we deserved and got through death on our behalf, he will keep us safe.

So as we come to the end of this really short little prophecy, here's the message. keep trusting God. Whatever is going on, keep trusting Him. The righteous live by faith and we can live by faith when we sing the song of God coming to earth because that is what gets us through.

Let's pray. Let's pray.