

Habakkuk 3:1-19 — How Can I Have Joy In My Troubles?

September 2, 2018

In 1851, an English missionary named Allen Gardiner was shipwrecked. Along with other survivors, he made it to a small, remote, uninhabited island off the tip of South America. There, the castaways slowly died of starvation, one at a time. As far as we can tell, Allen Gardiner was the last one alive. As a Christian, he kept a journal where he reflected on Scripture. When their bodies were discovered, the journal was found next to his deceased body. The last entry in the journal was his reflections on Psalm 34:10.

The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. Psalm 34:10 (ESV)

All alone, as he tangled between life and death, as he meditated on this passage, the last thing he wrote in his journal was essentially this. “I am overwhelmed by the goodness of God.” Here was a man dying of starvation. He was far from home. He was alone. His body was broken. He had no hope; yet, his last words described how he was overwhelmed by the goodness of God. How could he say that?

We think about the goodness of God a different way. We say God is good when we are healthy. We say God is good when we have money in the bank and a nice car in the garage. We say God is good when our circumstances are good. Yet, here was a man in terrible circumstances losing his life but he claimed to be overwhelmed by God’s goodness. How could he say that? People would pay a million dollars to be like Allen Gardiner in his final hours of life.

I have good news. This morning, I am going to tell you how you too can be overwhelmed by the goodness of God even when circumstances in life are terrible. That is not the only good news. I won't charge you a million dollars for the answer. You simply need to stick with me until the end of this morning's message.

Across both campuses, we are studying the book of Habakkuk. This morning, we finish that study. Next week, Pastor Stephen will preach from Daniel 6. After that, we have a small vision series, then we begin the Gospel of Mark, which will take about a year.

I know we have a number of visitors with the holiday weekend so let me take a moment to get you up to speed with the story of Habakkuk. Habakkuk was a prophet to the nation of Judah. He was a frustrated prophet because of the rampant wickedness in his nation. He felt like many Americans do today about their country. Like America, Judah drifted far from God. Habakkuk was looking to God for an answer. He was hoping for revival but God had a different plan. God told him he was bringing judgment upon Judah for its sin. God's answer to the nation's sin was to send the ruthless, godless, and vicious Babylonians to conquer and enslave his people. They would discipline God's people to purify them and bring them to repentance. That is not what Habakkuk was hoping for. After all, Judah was his neighborhood.

Like we would feel in the same situation, Habakkuk felt God was overreacting. While many in the nation of Judah had drifted from God, the worst citizen of Judah was still a hundred times better than the best citizen of Babylon.

Babylon was a hard-core pagan nation. How could God use it to conquer and destroy his people?

Last week, we learned that God described the Babylonians as nothing more than a tool in his hand. He would use them to discipline his people and lead them to repentance. Even though it looked like evil was winning and the world was spinning out of control, the world was very much in God's control. He was still on his throne. When he was done using the Babylonians for his purposes to purify his people, he would turn around and discipline them for their sin.

Remember God is on the throne. Nobody gets away with anything.

That brings us to Habakkuk 3, where we find ourselves this morning. In these final verses, Habakkuk will tell the people of Judah how to keep their eyes on God when Babylon invades and their world falls apart. He will reveal the secret Allen Gardiner understood, how to be overwhelmed by the goodness of God even in the worst of circumstances. Let's read the text, then study it together.

Habakkuk 3:1-19

What is the genre of this chapter?

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth. Habakkuk 3:1 (ESV)

The first and last verse of this chapter show us this chapter is unique. The first verse is actually a title. It is similar to a title that is found in five of the Psalms. Even as you look at the paragraphing in your Bible, it doesn't take long to realize that Habakkuk 3 is a psalm. It is a song. God inspired Habakkuk to give the ancient Israelites a song to sing to encourage them to keep their eyes on

their God when the world was falling apart around them during the Babylonian invasion and exile.

It is a song written according to Shigionoth. That is a term of musical arrangement. It is a term also found in Psalm 7. What does it mean? To be honest, we don't know. We just know it is musical instruction on how to sing this song.

Another word found throughout this chapter is the word Selah. What does Selah mean? We also don't know what Selah means. Sometimes it appears to divide stanzas in a song. Sometimes it appears to mean crescendo. We just don't know. Even though we don't know what these musical terms mean, we do know what is important — they are instructions in how to sing this music. We know this is a song for God's people to sing in the hard times of the Babylonian invasion to remind them of the goodness of God.

With that as our focus, let's dive in.

Habakkuk wanted God to show up.

O LORD, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy. Habakkuk 3:2 (ESV)

You will notice O LORD is capitalized. That is because in Hebrews it is the name of God, Yahweh. Habakkuk was not talking to God in the generic. He was talking to God in the specific by using God's personal name, the name God revealed to Moses at the burning bush. Addressing God personally, Habakkuk said, "I have heard the reports about your works." In other words, "I went to Sunday School. I heard the stories about what happened when you showed up in the past. I heard about the flood. I heard about Red Sea. I heard about you

showing up to save your people in the land of Egypt. I wasn't there to experience those things. I heard of those things. I know sometimes you show up in a big way to save your people. God, I want you to do that again."

He continued and said, "O LORD, do I fear." Again he used Yahweh, God's personal name. He feared God. The kind of fear he talked about was not haunted house fear. I know Halloween is coming soon, but that is not what he is talking about. The fear talked about is a fear of awe, respect and admiration. He said, "God, I don't treat you like you are a teletubby or a big purple dinosaur. God, I don't treat you like you are my pet. I have great awe of you. I have respect for you. I know what it was like when you showed up in the past."

Then he sang, "In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known." In the midst of the years is a Hebrew way of saying, "In my lifetime." It also means, "Really soon." He said, "God show up again like you did in the past. God show up again to save your people and make your awesome power known. I remember all the stories of you showing up with might and power to save your people. We learned them in Sunday school. Show up again like you did in the past."

Then he added, "By the way God, in your wrath, remember mercy." In other words, "I remember when God shows up, he doesn't just save people but many times there are bodybags involved." People died as God judged sin. Habakkuk reasoned "Since we are already being disciplined for our sin as a nation, I need to ask God to remember to be merciful when he shows up, not just display his wrath." The song continued.

What happens when God shows up?

Now what Habakkuk did is he mentally went through his Bible history of times when God showed up with power in the past to save his people. We need to remember this is poetry. This is song. This is imagery. It is a stitched-together tapestry of God's saving power, so it is loose.

God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah His splendor covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. Habakkuk 3:3 (ESV)

What is Teman? It is a place in the southern desert area of Judah in the territory of the Edomites. What is Mt. Paran? That is a mountain in the wilderness. Why did Habakkuk bring up these locations? Scholars tell us he was roughly tracing the route Israel followed during the Exodus out of Egypt. In the Exodus, God showed up with might and power to save his people from genocide in the past.

When God saved his people from Egypt, he led them to Mt. Sinai and the Promised Land. Habakkuk said that during the Exodus, God's splendor covered the heavens. When did that happen? Who remembers the cloud by day and the pillar of fire that led Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land? The cloud was not an overgrown cotton ball. It was huge. It was big enough for a nation of thousands to see and follow. During the night, that cloud turned into a pillar of fire. That fire wasn't a little BIC lighter at a concert. It was a huge pillar of flame that lit up the night sky, illuminating the night for an entire nation. That is what Habakkuk remembered when he said God's splendor covered the heavens. The cloud and the fire were there for everyone to see. Can you imagine how that revealed God's power?

In addition, all the nations around them heard of this and saw God's mighty hand at work. They stood in awe of the God of Israel. We see the people of Jericho many years later and a great distance away from Egypt still hadn't stopped talking about the display of God's mighty power he used against Egypt to save his people in the days of Joshua after Moses was dead.

For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. Joshua 2:10 (ESV)

Habakkuk reasoned that if God showed up with shock and awe like this to save his people in the past from certain death in Egypt, he would also show up again in Habakkuk's lifetime to save his people from certain death at the hands of the Babylonians.

The next verses describe the greatness of the power of God when he shows up. Once again, Habakkuk did this by looking backward at the Exodus. He did this poetically and picturesquely as he anticipated what it would be like for God to show up again in his lifetime to save Judah from the Babylonians.

Yahweh's brilliance is more than we can handle.

His brightness was like the light; rays flashed from his hand; and there he veiled his power. Habakkuk 3:4 (ESV)

When God showed up at Mt. Sinai, his brilliance was as bright as sunlight. How many of us can look at the sun in the middle of the day? We can't do it. The brilliance of the sun is too much to handle. Habakkuk said when God showed up at Mt. Sinai, his brilliance was like the light. It was like the sun came to earth and set upon Mt. Sinai. Imagine the brilliance of God when he shows up.

An important word in this verse is the word *rays*. In Hebrew, it is used only one other time in the Bible. It is used in Exodus 34:29 to describe the rays of light that radiated from Moses' face when he came down from Mt. Sinai after meeting with God. Habakkuk said God's brilliance on Mt. Sinai was so bright that it was like the sun came to earth. His brilliance was so bright that it caused Moses' face to absorb the light so at night when everyone turned off the lights he glowed like a light bulb.

Now I have spent a lot of time in the sun and picked up sunburn, but I have never been around light so bright that when they put me in a dark room and turn off the light I glow. Yet, this is the kind of brilliance that Moses experienced that can only come from God.

In addition, Habakkuk said this brilliant light flashed from God's hand but he still veiled his power. The brilliant light that they experienced at Mt. Sinai that made Moses glow was only the light of God's hand and his fist was closed, not open. God's open-fisted true brilliance and power is beyond our imagination. It is beyond our ability to experience. It says in Exodus 33:20 that nobody can see God's brilliance and live. Isaiah 6:2 tells us even angels need to be protected from the full brilliance of God. As it says in 1 Timothy 6:16, God dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.

From Mt. Sinai, we know that when God sets out to save his people, he reveals his power and glory and that is always amazing. God is amazing brilliant light, and the only way we can endure his brilliance is when he is veiled.

Yahweh's presence is more than creation can endure.

Before him went pestilence, and plague followed at his heels. Habakkuk 3:5 (ESV)

When God shows up, his creation also can't handle his presence.

Pestilence proceeds him. The word for pestilence is the word for plagues. This refers to the plagues God put on Egypt, specifically the fifth plague, when the livestock died. Habakkuk said horses, donkeys, cattle, sheep and goats died of a plague because of the approaching presence of our holy God. The Babylonians were powerful, but they were not awesome enough that things dropped dead by their approaching presence.

It also says plague follows at his heels. We started with God arriving, now we will look at God's passing. I am not sure why they translated this Hebrew word as the word plague. In Hebrew it is the word for sparks, flames, bolts of thunder and hot burning ashes. God's feet emit fire, sparks, and bolts of lighting. He leaves behind burning coals on the ground. I know a number of us like the Marvel Superhero movies. I don't care who you have as your favorite super hero, none of them can compare to the amazing power of God when he shows up!

There is an intended comparison. When Habakkuk started his book, he talked about the Babylonians being dreaded, fearsome and the nations of the world standing in awe at their presence. Who is more dreaded? The Babylonians or the God of the universe who shows up to save his people? Nobody can stand God's approaching presence. Animals drop dead as he comes closer. Fire and lighting bolts are emitting from his feet.

As God's people waited in fear for the coming of the Babylonians, the true one to fear was Yahweh, their God, who had a history of showing up and displaying his mighty power to protect and save his people. The people of Judah may have feared the Babylonians, but the Babylonians really needed to fear Yahweh, the true God.

Yahweh stands over the earth.

He stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook the nations; then the eternal mountains were scattered; the everlasting hills sank low. His were the everlasting ways. Habakkuk 3:6 (ESV)

When it says God measured the earth, that means he owns the earth and controls the earth. He is not confined to be on the earth. He stands over the earth. Picture a carpenter who measures a project. God is like that. He measures the earth and can change it at will. That is our God.

In Habakkuk 1, we learned the Babylonians laughed at kings and every defense against them was meaningless. How did the power of the Babylonians compare to Yahweh, who shows up to fights for his people? Yahweh can shake entire nations with as much effort as it takes us to rattle a snow globe. The Babylonians couldn't do that. The eternal mountains were scattered by God. That means God could shatter mountains as if he struck them with a hammer and broke them into a million pieces. Take Mt. Everest. Nobody can move it. Even the Babylonians couldn't move it. God could give that mountain one whack and it would break into pieces. The same idea is found when it says the everlasting hills are laid low. God takes massive mountain ranges, like the Rockies, and with his thumb presses them down like they are Play-Doh. The amazing might of the

Babylonians is nothing compared to the might of God, who cares for his people and promises to save them.

Yahweh's reign is worldwide.

While the Babylonians tried to set up a never-ending kingdom, God snuffed it out in only 100 years. Yahweh's kingdom is everlasting.

I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Habakkuk 3:7 (ESV)

In Habakkuk 2, we learned the Babylonians conquered many nations on their quest for a worldwide kingdom. They conquered Assyria, Syria, Egypt, Tyre and Judah in their conquest. They tried to conquer the world, but they didn't and they couldn't. There were places in the world never threatened by them.



As far as I can tell in my research, one group of people that was hard for them to conquer that existed within their territory were the nomadic tribes. The reasons they were hard to conquer was because they didn't have a capital city. They were nomadic. The nomadic tribes of Cushan and Midian represented people that lived among the Babylonians but were never threatened by the Babylonians.

God is different. He controls the entire earth. When God shows up, it doesn't matter who you are or where you are, everyone in the world will be shaken by God's presence, even the nomadic tribes threatened by the Babylonians.

Yahweh displayed his power over creation to save his people.

Was your wrath against the rivers, O Lord? Was your anger against the rivers, or your indignation against the sea, when you rode on your horses, on your chariot of salvation? Habakkuk 3:8 (ESV)

Let's begin at the end of the verse. Why does God show up in the first place? Why does God display his might and power? He doesn't show up because he is bored. He doesn't display his might and power like he did in the Exodus for the fun of it. He always shows up and displays his power to save his people.

Why does it say that it appears God's wrath was against the rivers and against the sea? Remember what Habakkuk was doing. He was going back to the Exodus. One of the first things God's people ran into when they came out of Egypt was the Red Sea. God displayed his mighty power to save them in their time of need. He literally made the waters of the sea congeal and stand in a heap so his people walked across on dry ground. It appeared God was using his power against the sea but he was actually using it to save his people.

Later, as his people came to the Promised Land, they came to the Jordan River that was at flood stage. God showed up again! He used his power to part the Jordan River so his people could walk across on dry ground. Again, God used his power to save his people

As Habakkuk faced the incredible devastation of the Babylonian army that God was bringing to discipline his people, Habakkuk called his people to remember an even greater power than the Babylonians was with them, Yahweh. When all hope is lost, Yahweh has always showed up to save his people; no

nation can stand against him. No obstacle can stand before him. Even rivers or seas part for him to save his people.

You stripped the sheath from your bow, calling for many arrows. Selah You split the earth with rivers. Habakkuk 3:9 (ESV)

The simple idea is that our God is a warrior who is ready to fight and come to the rescue of his people.

The Babylonians were not the ones to fear. The Babylonians were not in charge of this earth. God is in charge. In the end, God will show up to rescue his people. Nothing can stand in his way, not even the Babylonians.

All creation bends to Yahweh's will.

Habakkuk just told us how much greater Yahweh is than the Babylonians were. Now Habakkuk will describe how much greater God is than his creation. This is important. The Babylonians were polytheists. They believed in many gods, which were all personified by the different elements of creation. There was a god of the sky, a god of the storm, a god of the water, and of course, a god called Mother Earth. They believed there was conflict between the gods and Marduk was the god who won that conflict. These verses tell us there is no such things as a cosmic struggle between the elements of the universe but that Yahweh is in charge of all the elements in the universe.

The mountains saw you and writhed; the raging waters swept on; the deep gave forth its voice; it lifted its hands on high. Habakkuk 3:10 (ESV)

The mountain writhe. That means to twist in anguish. It is the Hebrews word for birth pains. The mountains do not stand proud before God but they fall to the ground, twisting in humility before God. The waters of the earth gives their voice in praise to God. They don't stand against God. They sing their praises to

God. The waters lift their hands in worship. Everything on earth worships

Yahweh. Nothing is in competition with him.

The sun and moon stood still in their place at the light of your arrows as they sped, at the flash of your glittering spear. Habakkuk 3:11 (ESV)

Not only are the elements of creation worshipping God but the elements of creation follow God's command to save his people.

Most likely this is an allusion to Joshua 10, where God commanded the sun to stand still in the sky to allow an extra long day so Joshua could finish destroying the enemies of God's people. God brings all of nature into his subservience, even making the sun and moon stand still to allow him to save his people if he desires.

Yahweh displays his power against the enemies of his people to save them.

The big question is why?. Why does God show up and display his power?

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. Selah Habakkuk 3:12-13 (ESV)

God shows up in power to save his people, to save the ones who have placed their faith and trust in him. This is still true. God shows up to save you and me.

When God does show up, he is not weak. He crushes the head of the wicked and follows it up by disemboweling them from top to bottom.

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. You trampled the sea with your horses, the surging of mighty waters. Habakkuk 3:14-15 (ESV)

Earlier we saw how God displayed his mighty power in the Exodus to save his people in time of need. Next, we saw how God took the elements of creation, like the sun, and used them to display his power and come to the rescue of his people. Now we see God takes providence and uses that to save his people.

The Babylonians came with arrows to kill anyone who stood in their way. God, who is so powerful, would literally take the Babylonian's weapons and use their own weapons against them. The ultimate victory over an enemy comes when you turn their own weapons against them. Many times that is what God does to the enemies of his people.

For example, have you read the book of Esther? In the book, Haman planned to hang Mordecai the Jew on a gallows and to kill the entire Jewish race. All of God's people were facing certain death, like they did in Egypt, yet God displayed his mighty power in a different way. He orchestrated circumstances so that through Esther, Haman ended up hanging on his own gallows and Mordecai was elevated to wicked Haman's position. God saved his people with a great reversal and used the weapons of the enemy of his people against him.

Knowing Yahweh's history of using his power to save his people, how does Habakkuk change his thinking about the coming Babylonian invasion?

I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us. Habakkuk 3:16 (ESV)

Habakkuk shook in fear as he thought about the coming of the Babylonians. His lips quivered. His legs trembled. He was in complete fear of the utter destruction the Babylonians would bring. Yet, he knew no matter what happened, the Babylonians would not have the last word. They were just a tool in

the hand of God to discipline his people and bring them to repentance. God came to the rescue of his people when they faced certain death in the past. He would come to the rescue of his people when they faced certain death by the Babylonians. As Habakkuk said, "I will wait quietly for the day of destruction to come upon them." That brings us full circle to where we started. How did Habakkuk tell us to have joy in trouble while we wait for God to work?

Since Yahweh is our God, how can I find joy in my trouble?

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... Habakkuk 3:17 (ESV)

This is a picture of complete disaster. It is total economic ruin. There were no figs on the fig trees. There were no grapes on the vines. There were no olives. There were no flocks. There were no animals in the barn. This was a terrible situation where God's people are starving to death! It is like a man starving to death alone on a deserted island off the tip of South America. Can there be joy in times like this? Habakkuk gave us the answer.

...yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. Habakkuk 3:18–19 (ESV)

1. **We have joy because we have the Lord.** No matter what we face in life, we have Yahweh. We know the almighty God of the universe who dwells in unapproachable light and whose feet emit flames and bolts of lightning. So few people know him. We don't just know him but he loves us. His love for us is not without action.

2. **We have joy because God is our salvation.** God doesn't just know us. He promises to use his mighty power to save us. Just as his mighty power was displayed to save his people in the past when they faced certain death, he will use his mighty power again to save us from certain death in similar situations. Now in the Old Testament, in Habakkuk's context, he was primarily focused on God using his mighty power to save a remnant of the Jewish people. What about us in our New Testament world? We have even better news. We now know God has broadened his plan. His people are not just those of faith among his people but he sent his own son to save anyone who would simply place his or her faith and trust in him. As Habakkuk 2:4 reminds us, the righteous live by faith. The great news is God revealed his mighty power to save us through his son, who took on flesh. He died in our places for our sins, and he rose to new life. God's mighty power through Jesus saved us from an enemy much worse than the Babylonians. God's power through Jesus saved us from Satan, sin and death. He saved us from our just eternal punishment in the lake of fire from which we could not save ourselves. There is great joy in God's salvation. Even if everything else is taken away, we have joy because God displayed his mighty power to save us and it becomes ours simply by placing our faith in him.
3. **We have joy because God is our strength in hard times.** There is also joy because God promises to sustain us and give us the strength we need to face the audacious challenges of life. I love the picture he gives us of a deer that is surefooted in a high places. He may not be referring to this animal but it

reminds me of the ibex in this part of the world. Their common name is the climbing goat. They climb fearlessly on sheer cliffs with only a toe hold keeping them from certain death. We have joy in our trouble because God is with us as we turn to him, and he gives us the strength to walk in times of sheer adversity. We have joy in trouble because we know God's strength will carry us through.



Conclusion

I don't know what troubles you are facing today. It may be cancer. It may be depression. It may be financial failure. It may be relational failure. I do know that no matter what you are facing, as God's people, our joy doesn't come from our circumstances like the rest of the world. Our joy comes from knowing the mighty God of the universe. Our joy comes from knowing God uses his mighty power to save his people. Our joy comes from knowing that as we face audacious challenges in life he will be with us and carry us through.

No matter what we face, even if it is the destruction of the Babylonians like Habakkuk or dying alone on a deserted island of starvation like Allen Gardiner, we can say, "I am consumed by the goodness God."



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

© You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided (1) you credit the author, (2) modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web address (www.Christ2RCulture.com) on the copied resource.