

# Wrestling with God

From Ponder to Praise  
Habakkuk 3:2-19

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I wish all of you could meet my friend David.

David is from Africa, and he is one of the blackest men I have ever known. We first met when we were students at Canadian Bible College in Regina many years ago. It has been more than 30 years now. But I remember David so well!

Last time I saw him he wore a lime green plaid sport jacket. His tie was fluorescent orange with red stripes in it, and it was tied too short and about 8 inches wide! *Oh, David!*

But what I remember most is his attitude of persistent praise. I'd meet David in the breakfast line in the cafeteria. *Good Morning, Brother, isn't God good?* Yes, David, but it's 6:45 in the morning!

Walking down the hall I'd meet David. How you doin', Dave? *I'm praising the Lord*, he would say.

Downtown Regina, I'd spot David buying a few groceries. How's it going, brother Dave? *Fine, thank you, brother. I'm praising the Lord today.*

David and I shared a couple of classes together. He had lots of trouble with English and he worked so hard for his grades. He flunked the O.T. midterm exam, but when I asked him how he did, do you want to guess what he said? *Praise the Lord, Brother Garth! God is teaching me to study harder.*

When I first read Habakkuk 3 in my sermon preparation, it was David who came to mind. Because I think David followed Habakkuk's pattern: Praying. Pondering. Praising.

Let's examine how all of this unfolds for Habakkuk.

## **1. He Prays to the God Almighty**

He says in Habakkuk 3:2...

LORD, I have heard of your fame;  
I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD.  
Renew them in our day,  
in our time make them known;  
in wrath remember mercy.

He has been asking some very hard questions up till now. He has not been pleased with God's response so far.

But this short prayer, rising out of the desperate heart of the prophet, indicates that he has pleaded his cause, he has concluded his dialogue with the Almighty, and he begins to accept the just and merciful ways of God.

Along the way he ponders the mighty, powerful works of the LORD.

## **2. He Ponders the Acts of the Almighty**

What follows in this first section of Habakkuk 3 is inspired poetry. It is a hymn of praise to the greatness of God in history.

Rather than explaining all of God's activity or spelling it out in detail, we are given vivid word pictures to help us see God at work:

- 3 God came from Teman,  
the Holy One from Mount Paran.  
His glory covered the heavens  
and his praise filled the earth.
- 4 His splendor was like the sunrise;  
rays flashed from his hand,  
where his power was hidden.
- 5 Plague went before him;  
pestilence followed his steps.
- 6 He stood, and shook the earth;  
he looked, and made the nations tremble.  
The ancient mountains crumbled  
and the age-old hills collapsed.  
His ways are eternal.
- 7 I saw the tents of Cushan in distress,  
the dwellings of Midian in anguish.
- 8 Were you angry with the rivers, O LORD ?  
Was your wrath against the streams?  
Did you rage against the sea  
when you rode with your horses  
and your victorious chariots?

- 9 You uncovered your bow,  
you called for many arrows.  
You split the earth with rivers;
- 10 the mountains saw you and writhed.  
Torrents of water swept by;  
the deep roared and lifted its waves on high.
- 11 Sun and moon stood still in the heavens  
at the glint of your flying arrows,  
at the lightning of your flashing spear.
- 12 In wrath you strode through the earth  
and in anger you threshed the nations.
- 13 You came out to deliver your people,  
to save your anointed one.  
You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness,  
you stripped him from head to foot.
- 14 With his own spear you pierced his head  
when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though  
about to devour the wretched who were in hiding.
- 15 You trampled the sea with your horses,  
churning the great waters.

As the prophet meditates on the activity of God in Israel's history, his focus is inevitably fixed on the exodus, which is consistently the major theme celebrated in Jewish worship. He ponders those remarkable events on a wide canvas for all to see – from the 400 years of slavery in Egypt, culminating in the deliverance from Pharaoh's control, on through the wilderness wanderings, the events around Mount Sinai, the handover from Moses to Joshua, right up to the entry into the Promised Land.

As Habakkuk reflects on these things in prayer, he encounters God afresh.

Many years ago Patty and I started writing what we called *The Book of Remembrance*. Whenever we experienced a special act of God's grace or an unusual favour from the Father, we'd write it down in the Book of Remembrance and give God the glory for what he had done. From time to time, when we'd get down or circumstances would turn against us, we'd pull out the Book of Remembrance and rehearse the work of God in our lives and in our family – we would ponder the acts of the Almighty – and we'd be encouraged.

In a sense that's what Habakkuk is doing here, and that reflective experience begins to change him, slowly but surely, it changes him.

In his mind's eye Habakkuk sees the entire narrative as God on the march, coming from the south in majestic grandeur.

As the prophet watches this movement, he experiences a transformation, from spectator to participator. As he recounts the faithfulness and the power of God, in his heart he switches from bystander to contributor. He gets off the bench and into the game!

You know...if we would just take some time to consider the mighty acts of God and remember what God has done for our church and for our families...then we would probably abandon any satisfaction with the status quo... We would probably jettison every ounce of spiritual complacency... God would create some holy discontent in our midst... God would move us from warming the bench to scoring the touchdowns... I believe God would call us out to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ who are completely yielded and utterly sold out for God – men and women and young people who are downright convinced that the local church is the hope of the world, and that by serving others we are serving God – no matter where we do whatever we do!

That's what happens when God's people get serious, and God shows up.

Habakkuk 3:3-4 NIV

*God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth. (God came, and) His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden.*

You see, when God comes to his people, he comes in all of his **holiness**. God is independently, infinitely, immutably Holy, unsullied even by the shadow of sin. That is why John could write, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 Jn. 1:5). When he comes, he comes in the blazing white light of holiness.

When God comes to his people, he also comes in **glory**. "His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth" (3:3).

*That glory is the same glory that Jesus longs to bring to the church – to our church!*

Look at this: Ephesians 3:20-21 NIV. *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

*Lord Jesus, we invite you to come to Heritage Park Church in ALL of your majestic glory!*

Furthermore, when God visits his people he comes in **splendor** (v. 4). He doesn't slip in the back door and quietly sit on the chair in the corner! He comes forth in splendor.

And, when God comes to us, he comes in **power** (v. 4). "His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power has hidden."

God has the power to forgive our sins, heal our broken hearts, save our wayward families, and restore your walk with Jesus Christ.

Habakkuk is pondering all of these mighty acts of God and it's beginning to change him from the inside out. He's beginning to reason that if God has come to the aid of his people in the past, then God will certainly come again to their rescue. And at the end of time God will come once and for all to vindicate those who belong to him, and to exercise judgment on those who are opposed to him.

And his pondering eventually leads to praise:

### **3. He Rejoices in the Work of the Almighty**

Habakkuk 3:16-18 NIV

*I heard and my heart pounded,  
my lips quivered at the sound;  
decay crept into my bones,  
and my legs trembled.  
Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity  
to come on the nation invading us.*

*Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

Habakkuk has brought his request to God in prayer. In placing it before the LORD, he has been led into a profound experience of God's majesty, during which he had been brought face to face with God in his awesome power over nature and over nations.

He now describes the impact of this prayer encounter with the living God. He has been challenged and changed by this time alone with God. The Habakkuk

who speaks in these three verses is a very different person from the Habakkuk to whom we were introduced at the beginning of the book. He is no longer *railing against God*. He is now *praising God* for all God has done...even though things didn't turn out the way he imagined or dreamed they would.

When I consider what God has done for me, and the difference he's made in my life, my heart is filled to overflowing and spilling out. But things haven't turned out the way I planned them. I didn't plan to have a daughter with severe disabilities. I didn't count on losing my mother to alcoholism. I didn't ask for the brokenness that has been smeared across the canvas of my life.

Yet I choose to rejoice in the Lord. I choose joy!

A British pastor by the name of William Sangster, began to notice some uneasiness in his throat and a numbness in his leg. When he went to the doctor, he found that he had an incurable disease that caused progressive muscular degeneration. His muscles would gradually waste away, his voice would fail, his throat would soon be unable to swallow.

Sangster threw himself into his work, figuring he could still write and he would have even more time for prayer. So he wrote articles and books, and helped organize prayer cells throughout England.

Gradually Sangster's legs became useless. His voice failed completely. But he could still hold a pen. On Easter morning, just a few weeks before he died, he scribbled a short letter to his daughter. In it, he said, "It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice to shout, 'He is risen!'--but it would be much worse to have a voice and not want to shout."

I still want to shout – and I have a voice to do so! Folks, we can choose to rejoice in the Lord – in fact, we *should* choose joy – even if things have not turned out the way we hoped. Then, perhaps we can rest in the LORD! We can rest in his strength, rest in his guidance, rest in his care, rest in his enablement.

That's where Habakkuk ends this long leg of his spiritual journey.

He simply trusts in the person of the Almighty.

#### **4. He Trusts in the Person of the Almighty**

He finally arrives at the place where he can lay down all his arguments, all of his doubts and all of his complaints, and just trust in God.

Habakkuk 3:19

*The Sovereign LORD is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
he enables me to go on the heights.*

That sounds like a good place to be doesn't it?

But when the Scriptures talk of the high places, the heights, they consistently refer to the places under the control of forces hostile to God. Over 40 times in the Old Testament the high places were considered places of pagan worship. So, to walk on the high places like a deer was equivalent to taking possession of the land. It involves spiritual warfare and it's costly and it's dangerous.

Gary Lidstone talked to us about spiritual warfare a few weeks ago!

Going on the heights can be dangerous, but it's the only place to be. There is no progress to be made without walking on high places. God's strength in Habakkuk enabled him to turn the high places into a place of worship and praise and honor and glory for God.

And today – this very day – I believe God is inviting you and me to go to the heights.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NIV

*For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

Let's go to the heights today, my friends! And let's go together. We are the family of God. We are the army of God. And no one here can do it alone!

May I encourage you to go to the heights today? You have allowed certain things, certain people, certain situations to discourage you and persuade you that you're nothing, you're nobody, and you're a failure.

That's not true! The Lord is our shepherd... God is our fortress, an ever-present help in a time of trouble. He is your refuge. Your Saviour. Your King. He is the Almighty God.

The Sovereign LORD is your strength! He makes your feet like the feet of a deer, and he empowers you, he enables you, and he is inviting you, today, to go on the heights. And so...

Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and even though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the soybean and tomato crops fail this year or next, and the fields produce no food, though we have no new cars in the garage and no more savings in the bank...

We can still trust in the LORD!

We can still be joyful in God our Savior!

It's a choice you make, my friend! Make it today! You choose rejoicing or complaining. You choose to be glad or be bitter. You choose to be a victim or be a victor.

What's it gonna be?