

Joy for the Fearful
Habakkuk 3:1-19

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Today there is a strange teaching floating around evangelical circles called “health and wealth” doctrine or “prosperity theology.” The thrust of this teaching is that if we Christians are truly walking by faith, we will never be sick and we will always prosper materially. The main propagators of this teaching are the Charismatic. They claim that it is always God’s will for Christians to prosper financially and the only reason they do not is they have no faith. This is very dangerous teaching and is contrary to the total teaching of God’s Word. It is true God always prospers His people but that prosperity may not always be in material wealth. It may also be spiritual prosperity of the soul as it was in the case of Habakkuk.
- B. Prosperity theology, while it is very appealing to the flesh, would have been appalling to the prophet Habakkuk. He would have laughed in the face of “health and wealth” teaching. Why? God had revealed to Habakkuk He was raising up the godless, cruel Babylonians to discipline the nation of Judah for its sin. The prophet at first bucked the message from God because he wanted God to revive the nation. But the message was crystal clear. God would use the Babylonians to invade and conquer Judah and take the choicest young men and women off to Babylon to be slaves. The nation of Judah would be severely disciplined but what about the elect remnant in Israel? Habakkuk was told the righteous shall live by faith in the midst of the impending judgment. The prophet was then assured by God that He would judge the Babylonians for their wicked treatment of surrounding nations, especially God’s elect people, Israel. God would not let Babylon off the hook. Judgment was imminent and certain for them, but in the meantime Judah was to face horrible suffering.

II. PRAYER FOR FUTURE INTERVENTION (3:1, 2)

- A. Prayer For Revival In Israel (1, 2a): *“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth. LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew (revive) them in our day, in your time make them known;”* Habakkuk realized judgment was coming on Judah. He stopped fighting God intellectually and humbly submitted to the will of God for the nation. The prophet began to pray and this prayer is a shigionoth which is poetry set to music. The Amplified Old Testament says, “A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, set to wild, enthusiastic and triumphal music.” The prophet skips from one subject to another with each subject ending with “Selah” (3, 9, 13). The word “Selah” is the coming to a musical forte and then a pause for meditation. Habakkuk first prays for revival in Judah but he knows this will not happen until after the nation has been severely chastened by God through the Babylonians invasion. He is praying for revival when the discipline is all over. Little did he know the revival would be at least 75 years away. NOTE: Revival comes when God brings it, but God’s people should always be praying for revival. Revival begins in the individual heart. Someone has said that “revival is re-Bible”; that is, there is a return to obedience to God’s Word as it is recorded for us in the Bible.

- B. Prayer For Mercy In The Midst Of Judgment (2b): ***“In wrath remember mercy.”*** Habakkuk knows great hardships are ahead for the nation of Israel. The Babylonians will come and rape, maim and kill God’s people, carrying the choicest of Israel’s men and women off to Babylon as slaves. Hard times are ahead for God’s people, and it is all deserved because of Judah’s rebellion to God and His Law. Yet, Habakkuk prays for God to be good, merciful and compassionate on the nation so as to ultimately preserve it and revive God’s works in it again.

III. PRAISE FOR PAST INTERVENTION (3:3-15)

- A. Praise For God’s Person (3, 4): ***“God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran (Selah). His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth. His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden.”*** While Habakkuk was praying, God appeared to him in a theophany. The prophet had a visible manifestation of God in the splendor of God’s might. This caused the prophet’s mind to flash back over thousands of years of Israel’s history and how God had delivered His people time and time again. In 3:3, 4, he saw the majesty of the Lord God at Sinai. He saw the Shikinah glory in the cloud of fire which went before the people in their march from Sinai to Canaan.
- B. Praise For His Power (5-15): ***“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. I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish. 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? You covered your bow, you called for many arrows (Selah). You split the earth with rivers; the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its waves on high. Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear. In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations. 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 (Selah). 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. You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters.”*** As he prayed, the prophet’s mind again flashed back to how God delivered Israel out of Egypt, deliverance from the Egyptians at the Red Sea, how God manifested Himself to His people at Mt. Sinai when God gave them the Law. There may also be a reference to a deliverance God gave Israel in the land of Canaan. This is not all exactly spelled out but it is the obvious meaning of the revelation. The main thought is in 3:13, ***“You came out to deliver your people.”*** Habakkuk’s point is clear. God, who is in covenant with His people, delivered Israel in the past and He will deliver them in the future from the Babylonians. God keeps His promises. If He makes an oath, He shall not break it, and, by covenant, He promised to preserve the nation of Israel. NOTE: When Habakkuk saw this ominous enemy, Babylon, on the horizon, he immediately began to think about God and His past dealings with Israel. He delivered in the past and, in His faithfulness, He will deliver in the future. The prophet at this point has a good knowledge of the sovereign purposes of God in history. He had correct facts. His head was screwed on right but he still had to learn a few more spiritual lessons from God about faith.

IV. PEACE FOR PRESENT INTERVENTION (3:16-19)

- A. Problem Of Fear (16): ***“I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled.”*** Habakkuk became overwhelmed with fear. Why? He had just seen a vision of God and he realized the awesomeness of the coming judgments on Judah. He experienced an intense, bone-shattering, nerve-racking fear and he was honest enough to tell us about it. Habakkuk was human; he had fears. He wanted to know how he could find peace in the midst of war, or how he could find joy in the midst of suffering. NOTE: We tend to think of these prophets in the Old Testament as beyond fear, as supermen, but they were men subject to frailties as ourselves. They had problems, frustrations and fears, and thank God they were honest enough to admit it. We should point out, however, that Habakkuk’s trembling was not from lack of faith but weakness in his faith. The prophet’s faith had not failed but he was troubled because he was human and not as strong as he ought to be. NOTE: God’s greatest men of faith have trembled in the weakness of the flesh. *Psalm 103:14* says, ***“For he knows how we are formed, and remembers that we are but dust.”*** It is possible to have faith and fear at the same time because we are weak in the flesh. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Read the Bible. Abraham, David, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist all had fear but were diligent in faith. Even the Apostle Paul had fear. Listen to Paul’s own words: ***“For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn – conflicts outside, fears within.”*** (II Cor. 7:5) These examples of the great men of faith show us that God does understand our fears. They are normal but they are to be dealt with Biblically. Fears we will have, but God does not expect us to be controlled by fear.
- B. Provision Of Joy (17, 18): ***“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 Saviour.”***
1. Frightened at the imminent invasion of the Babylonians, Habakkuk said he would wait patiently for God to judge that wicked nation for their vile treatment of Judah. He took comfort in the fact God would judge Babylon, the enemy of Israel. NOTE: As we look at the world today – wars, killings, corruption, murders, violence, deceit and a thousand other injustices, we wonder whether God is ever going to avenge this wicked world. He most certainly is and it will be at the second coming of Christ. Christ will come to make war with the wicked and judge them. ***“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one but he himself knows. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has the name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”*** (Rev. 19:11-16)
 2. Habakkuk was frightened because he was uncertain about the future for God’s people inside of Judah. What would sustain the prophet and the elect

remnant when the Babylonians arrived? When everything was lost to whom would they turn? Prayer and meditation brought the prophet to a place of deep trust. He had not gone through a fruitless spiritual exercise. Out of it all came unswerving trust in spite of the coming calamity. When the enemy would come, they would destroy the fig tree, the vines, the olive trees, mar the fields and carry off the sheep and the cattle. In spite of all this, Habakkuk would rejoice in the Lord and joy in the God of his salvation. The Babylonians would bring great desolations but God would grant great consolations to his servant. Not only would he have calm in the hour of trial, but joy in spite of all the desolation of the land. NOTE: The secret was to rejoice in God. How could he rejoice? Because the prophet understood God was in control of history. In His sovereignty, God had a plan for Habakkuk and the elect remnant in Israel. By faith, the prophet leaned on God. He applied knowledge about God to a real life experience. Habakkuk would learn to rejoice in suffering, rejoice in crisis, and rejoice in tribulation! He was not to be masochistic about suffering; that is, a person who glories in suffering. One who says, "I'm rejoicing that my business just folded up." Or, "I'm so happy I lost an arm, a leg and an eye in an accident!" No, the Christian is not to rejoice in the actual suffering but in the God who has control over the suffering, for somehow He can turn it for good. We Christians are to be rejoicing in the God of history, the God who has control, the God who has a plan and that plan is best for us. ***"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstance, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*** (1 Thess. 5:16)

C. Privilege Of God Himself (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. For the director of music. On my stringed instrument."***

1. The prophet reveals his secret to joy. The Sovereign Lord (Almighty Jehovah), was his strength. His strength did not come from men, from himself or circumstances but from God Himself. With every conceivable material blessing taken from him, he still had God Himself, and, in reality, that is all he really needed. With God, we can endure anything; without God we can endure nothing! The prophet came to the place where he could say, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth."
2. God would make the prophet like a sure footed deer on a rocky ledge. In the midst of the crisis, where every material thing was lost, there was still to be great spiritual victory. He would raise to great spiritual heights in the midst of crisis. Habakkuk 3:17-19 is one of the most forceful manifestations of faith's power in the Bible. Habakkuk finally learned in a practical way (not just head knowledge) that ***"the righteous shall live by his faith."*** (Hab. 2:4) What a contrast the conclusion of Habakkuk is from the beginning of the book. In the beginning, he was puzzled, perplexed, confused and even angry with God but in the end the prophet found the all sufficient answer to all of his problems in God Himself. He would trust God even though every material blessing failed.
3. This whole prophecy or at least chapter three was used as liturgy in the temple. Habakkuk probably led the temple orchestra and choir in singing this prophecy. That must have been some kind of a concert!.

V. LESSONS FROM HABAKKUK THREE

- A. God Brings Revival In His Timing. Revival comes from God but we Christians are to be constantly praying for revival. We are always to be witnessing for Christ but at the same time praying for revival. When revival comes, it comes as God's people are praying.
- B. God Helps The Fearful. All Christians have fears. It is part of being human. But by faith, the Christian turns to the Sovereign Lord for grace to defeat or cope with the fear. While we may tremble, God is a Rock. While we may fail in our weakness, He will never fail us.
- C. God Offers Himself As Joy. How the Christian approaches crisis distinguishes him from the world. The world has fears but how do they face them? First, they may face problems by resignation. They reason, "If this is going to happen to me, I suppose there is absolutely nothing I can do about it. I'll just resign myself to it. Grin and bear it." This at best is stoicism. Second, the world may face problems by detachment. "I don't want to think about it. Every time I think about it I get depressed. I'll immerse myself in my work. I'll go play golf. I'll detach myself from the problem, hoping it will go away." Third, the world may face problems by sheer bravado. "Let's pull ourselves together and face this with our chins up. Don't let the thing get you down. Hang in there!" Fourth, the world sometimes faces problems by escapism. "I'll run from my problem by escaping into alcohol or drugs or a fantasy world of unreality." NOTE: None of these ways are God's way to handle problems. The Christian always faces reality. He always looks at the facts. He does not run from the problem. However, the Christian, when trouble comes, when crisis invades the life, when all hell breaks loose, can say, "My joy is God! He has a plan for my life! I can trust Him because He knows what is best for me!" NOTE: The Psalmist (King David) said the very same thing as Habakkuk in *Psalm 46:1-3, 10*: "***God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. . . Be still (cease striving, relax, let go) and know that I am God.***"

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. Saved. Perhaps in the year 1985, we Christians cannot identify with Habakkuk's crisis so let's put it in a 20th century context. "Though the world is about to blow itself off the map with nuclear bombs, though there is constant war or threat of war, though the economy is inflating or deflating, though there is no money in the bank, though I have lost my business, though my wife has left me, though my kids are rebellious, though my life is falling apart outwardly and I'm perplexed, confused and fearful, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God my Saviour." Will we, my Christian brothers and sisters, live by faith when crisis comes? A "by faith lifestyle" most certainly will distinguish us from the unsaved world around us. Prosperity theology in this type of situation has no meaning unless we see that God sometimes chooses to prosper our souls not our pocketbooks in the midst of crisis.
- B. Unsaved.
1. God helps the fearful. Are you afraid? Are you frightened of the world situation – war, the bomb, the establishment? Are you afraid of death, growing old, contracting a dreaded disease? Are you afraid of the economy – inflation, depression, no way to provide adequately for your family or for

retirement? Are you afraid of loving or being loved, of losing a mate or a boyfriend? Fear is all about us and will always be so in a sinful world.

2. But Jesus made some astonishing promises to men. He said, ***“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. . .your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be given to you as well.”*** (Matt. 6:25, 32, 33) Jesus also said, ***“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.”*** (John 14:1) Again he said, ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*** (John 14:27)
3. If you are fearful, if you are driven by your fears, fear only Him who can cast your soul into hell. Cast your fear of eternal judgment on Christ and then He will give you the power to either defeat or cope with all your other fears.
4. Hear the words of Christ: ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*** (Matt. 11:28-30)