

Habakkuk 3:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation?

Analysis

Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation? Habakkuk asks rhetorical questions about God's theophanic displays involving water. "Was the LORD displeased against the rivers?" (הָיָה יְהוָה חָרָה הַבְּנֵהָרִים/havin'harim charah YHWH)—did the rivers themselves offend God? "Was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea?" (אִם־בָּנֵהָרִים אַפְךָ אִם־בַּיָּם אֵבֶרְתָּךְ/im-ban'harim apekha im-bayyam evratekha)—triple questioning emphasizes the point. The answer is no—God wasn't angry at water itself.

"That thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation" (אֲשֶׁר תִּרְכָּב עָלַי אֲשֶׁר תִּרְכָּב עָלַי אֲשֶׁר תִּרְכָּב עָלַי/asher tirkav al-susekha markevotekha yeshu'ah). God rode His war chariot—the storm clouds—in salvation for His people. The Red Sea parting, Jordan's stopping, and other water miracles weren't displays of anger toward water but salvation acts for Israel using nature as instrument.

The imagery depicts God as divine warrior riding the storm, commanding waters, defeating enemies—not because creation offended Him but to deliver His people. This demonstrates God's total sovereignty: nature itself serves His redemptive purposes. When God moves, all creation obeys—not from divine wrath against creation but as tools of salvation for God's people and judgment on His enemies.

Historical Context

The passage clearly recalls the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 14) and Jordan River crossing (Joshua 3)—foundational salvation events in Israel's history. God's 'riding upon horses and chariots' refers to storm theophany imagery common in ancient Near Eastern texts but applied to YHWH's unique acts of salvation. Unlike pagan storm gods (like Baal) who supposedly fought against chaos waters, YHWH commands waters for His purposes—saving Israel, judging enemies.

Psalm 77:16-20 uses similar imagery, describing the Red Sea crossing as waters trembling before God. The point: God's past mighty acts guarantee His present and future intervention. For Jews facing exile, remembering how God commanded nature for their ancestors' salvation strengthened hope He would deliver again. For Christians, these Old Testament salvation acts typologically point to greater salvation in Christ.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How do God's mighty acts in nature (parting seas, stopping rivers) demonstrate His absolute sovereignty over creation?
2. What comfort comes from knowing God uses all creation—even seemingly hostile forces—as instruments of salvation for His people?
3. How do the exodus water miracles typologically point toward Christian baptism and salvation through Christ?

Interlinear Text

בְּנְהָרִים	חָרָה ה	יְהוָה ה	אֵם	בְּנְהָרִים	
against the rivers	displeased	Was the LORD	H518	against the rivers	
H5104	H2734	H3068		H5104	
אֶפְרָיִם	אֵם	בְּיָם	עֲבָרְתָּ ה	כִּי י	תִרְכָּב
was thine anger	H518	against the sea	was thy wrath	H3588	that thou didst ride
H639		H3220	H5678		H7392
עַל	סוּסֵי יְיָ	מִרְכָּבֹתֶיךָ	יְשׁוּעָה:		
H5921	upon thine horses	and thy chariots	of salvation		
	H5483	H4818	H3444		

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 68:17 (References Lord): The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.

Psalms 18:10 (Parallel theme): And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.

Psalms 114:5 (Parallel theme): What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?

Isaiah 50:2 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst.

Isaiah 19:1 (References Lord): The burden of Egypt. Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it.

Psalms 68:4 (Parallel theme): Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him.

Psalms 114:3 (Parallel theme): The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back.

Psalms 104:3 (Parallel theme): Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind:

Habakkuk 3:15 (Parallel theme): Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters.

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