

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 10-14-12 PM NOTES
HABAKKUK
#37 in Series, "The Glory of God in the Old Testament"

Jeremiah 15:1 (NKJV) "Then the Lord said to me, 'Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind *would not be* favorable toward this people. Cast *them* out of My sight, and let them go forth.'"

I. Perplexing Problems (Chapter 1)

A. Unanswered Prayer (1:1-2)

Psalms 13:1-2 (NKJV) "How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, *having* sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?"

B. Unrestrained Sin (1:3-4)

Jeremiah 8:12 (NKJV) "'Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; in the time of their punishment they shall be cast down,' says the Lord."

Prayer is communication in a love relationship, not a bunch of formulas thrown up to a God who is detached and only answers when we conjure up the right formulas.

C. Unbelievable Plans (1:5-17)

"God controls not only Israel, but also His enemies, the Chaldeans. Every nation on earth is under the hand of God, for there is no power in this world that is not ultimately controlled by Him. Things are not what they appear to be. It seemed to be the astute military prowess of the Chaldeans that had brought them into the ascendancy. But it was not so at all, for God had raised them up. God is the Lord of history. He is seated in the heavens and the nations to Him are 'as grasshoppers, as a drop in the bucket, or as the small dust of the balance.' The Bible asserts that God is over all. He started the historical process, He is controlling it, and He is going to end it...God does not stop to consult us, and everything takes place according to 'the counsel of His own will.' God has His time; He has his own way; and He acts and works accordingly."

—Martin Lloyd-Jones

Galatians 4:4 (NKJV) "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law."

II. Proper Perspective (Chapter 2)

A. The Reliability of God's Word (2:1-3)

"If any promise of God should fail, the heavens would clothe themselves in sackcloth, the sun and moon and the stars would reel from their courses, and the universe would rock and a hollow wind would moan through a ruined creation the awful message that God can lie."

—F. B. Myer

Titus 1:2b (NKJV) "...God, who cannot lie..."

B. The Resting on God's Promises (2:4-5)

"Before these words broke upon my mind, I hated God and was angry with Him because, not content with frightening us sinners by the law and by the miseries of life, He still further increased our torture by the gospel. But when, by the Spirit of God, I understood those words—'The just shall live by faith!' 'The just shall live by faith!'—then I felt born again like a new man; I entered through the open doors into the Paradise of God."

—Martin Luther

"The just shall live by holding on to God's faithfulness."

—Hudson Taylor

2 Corinthians 1:3 (NKJV) "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort."

Philippians 4:13 (NKJV) "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Hebrews 13:5b (NKJV) "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*"

C. The Retribution of Sinners (2:6-20)

- Dishonesty (2:6)
- Greed (2:9)
- Violence (2:12)
- Drunkenness and Immorality (2:15-17)
- Idolatry (2:19)

III. Powerful Praise (Chapter 3)

A. Focus on God's Character (3:1-15)

- Mercy (3:2)
- Power (3:4)
- Wrath (3:12-13)

B. Faith in God's Care (3:16-19)

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Has it ever seemed to you that your whole world is falling apart? That may be how some of you are feeling right now. Perhaps it was a major event such as the breakup of a marriage, the unexpected death of someone you deeply loved, the loss of a job, or the bad test results regarding your health or the health of a family member. Perhaps it was not one major thing but a series of things that any one would not have devastated you, but put together, they pulled you down. What do you do when your world falls apart? Even if you have never experienced what I’m talking about, it is certain that if you live long enough, you will! We don’t make it out of this world unscathed. During those times when it seems that everything is coming apart, we struggle with questions like, “Why is God allowing this to happen?” and “Why doesn’t God do something”? If you are asking questions like that, I think you will be greatly helped from this study on Habakkuk.

Let me set the scene for what Habakkuk wrote. It was about 600 BC and Habakkuk lived in the Southern Kingdom of Israel called by the name of the largest tribe, Judah. About 122 years earlier, the northern kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians and most of the people were deported back to Assyria. You would think that the Southern Kingdom (Judah) would have learned from watching their sister to the North, but they didn’t. Judah, in Habakkuk’s day was filled with great national corruption, crime, hatred and division. Evil and immorality were flaunted openly as ethical standards rooted in the Scriptures were breaking down. Habakkuk was horrified with what he saw happening in his nation. Now Judah stood at the brink of disaster at the hands of the rising national power, Babylon. Habakkuk was a younger contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah and when you read the book of Jeremiah and his follow-up book of Lamentations, you get an idea of the bleakness and hopelessness of the nation. In fact it was so far gone that we read that God said to Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 15:1 (NKJV)** “Then the Lord said to me, ‘*Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth.*’” It was in that setting that Habakkuk wrote this short book of 56 verses. The whole book is a dialogue with God and in that sense it is a prayer. Here is why I want you to listen to what this book says. **It begins with a sigh and a sob and ends with a song and a shout.** While Habakkuk’s circumstances didn’t change, his perspective did as he saw what was happening from God’s perspective. I cannot promise you that the circumstances that are causing your pain will change, but I can help you see those circumstances from God’s perspective.

With that background, let’s dig into the book of Habakkuk. We will divide the message by chapters as we see Habakkuk’s perplexing problem, God giving him a proper perspective, and Habakkuk’s state of rebellion against Gwerful praise.

I. Perplexing Problems (Chapter 1)

Habakkuk has been seeking God, but things seem to be getting worse rather than better. I sense that about our nation. Habakkuk called what he was writing a “burden”. I have a burden for our nation; do you? What was Habakkuk’s burden?

A. Unanswered Prayer (1:1-2)

Our Heavenly Father is not angered when in an attitude of submission and reverence we bring our confusion to Him. You see this over and over in the Psalms. **Psalms 13:1-2 (NKJV)** “¹ How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? ² How long shall I take counsel in my soul, *having* sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?” You find similar confusion with Jeremiah, Job, and even Moses. The language here in Habakkuk implies that he has been praying for a considerable amount of time and God seems to not be hearing. Have you ever noticed that God is never in a hurry? I would quickly add that He is never late and He does not do things on our time-table. Because of our limited knowledge and limited patience, there is a real mystery for us about God’s timing in answering prayer. I have been on a very tight schedule and prayed for a parking

place and immediately see back up lights coming on as someone backs out of a spot right in front of me. But I have prayed for a backsliding Christian to repent for years and in some cases it still has not happened. I have prayed for some whom I deeply love who are in a state of rebellion against God that they would be broken before God and granted repentance but years pass and it doesn't happen. I have prayed for people under the bondage of addiction to draw on the available, amazing, enabling grace of God to walk in victory over this defeated but active monster and yet some are still in bondage. Yet in each of those categories, I can point to examples of answered prayer where God acted quickly. I know that sometimes God waits until things get much worse before he answers and thus His power is displayed even clearer, but sometimes I have no clue why he delays and why He answers the way He answers. Be a little skeptical of those who have all of God's ways in prayer figured out. I know that He does all things well, but I don't understand all the ways He answers and the timing in His answers. Habakkuk is troubled about unanswered prayer. Can you relate?

B. Unrestrained Sin (1:3-4)

It seemed to Habakkuk that the wicked outnumbered and outvoted the righteous. There was violence, injustice, strife, the rich oppressing the poor, and in general, wickedness seemed to have the upper hand. Does the seemingly unrestrained sin of our day grieve you as it did Habakkuk? Jeremiah wrote a description of their day that describes our day as well. **Jeremiah 8:12 (NKJV)** “‘Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; in the time of their punishment they shall be cast down,’ says the Lord.” Like that generation, we live in a culture that has lost the ability to blush. Sin that used to slink down back alleys now struts down Main Street. Why wasn't God doing something? Some of us have been praying diligently for God to send a revival to our nation. Some have prayed for 20 or more years, and yet revival has not come. Let me take a side road here for a moment about prayer because remember that the whole book of Habakkuk is a prayer. Some people approach prayer as a bunch of formulas – find a promise, claim it, thank Him, check it off the list and move to the next item. There certainly is validity to finding promises and claiming them by faith, but genuine prayer also involves times where we just pour our hearts out to God laying out our confusion and sharing our grief and hearts desires. Listen carefully: **Prayer is communication in a love relationship, not a bunch of formulas thrown up to a God who is detached and only answers when we conjure up the right formulas.**

Habakkuk was troubled over unanswered prayer and unrestrained sin.

C. Unbelievable Plans (1:5-17)

This is not the answer that Habakkuk wanted to hear. God says, “Here is my sovereign plan and you will find it difficult to believe. I am going to deal with the sin of Judah, but I am going to do it by raising up and giving Judah over to the Chaldeans (Babylonians).” One Bible commentator entitled this section of Habakkuk, “The strangeness of God's ways”. Habakkuk no doubt expected God to send a great revival to Judah, or perhaps He would use a “natural disaster” like the locust plague recorded in Joel. It was unbelievable to Habakkuk that God, who is holy, would use an evil, pride filled, arrogant, pagan nation like Babylon to discipline Judah. Judah was bad, but they were not as bad as Babylon! God did use the Chaldeans and in 587-586 BC they made a final defeat of Judah, took most of the people captive, destroyed the temple, and tore down the walls around Jerusalem. God accomplishes His sovereign plans the way He chooses. Listen to Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones: “God controls not only Israel, but also His enemies, the Chaldeans. Every nation on earth is under the hand of God, for there is no power in this world that is not ultimately controlled by Him. Things are not what they appear to be. It seemed to be the astute military prowess of the Chaldeans that had brought them into the ascendancy. But it was not so at all, for God had raised them up. God is the Lord of history. He is seated in the heavens and the nations to Him are ‘as grasshoppers, as a drop in the bucket, or as the small dust of the balance’. The Bible asserts that God is over all. He started the historical process, He is controlling it, and He is going to end it... God does not stop to consult us, and everything takes place according to ‘the counsel of His own will’. God has His time; He has his own way; and He acts and works accordingly” [Martin Lloyd-Jones, “Faith Tried and Triumphant”, Pages 14-15]. In the whole sweep of history, we see that God raised up the Chaldeans

to be His instrument of discipline against His people and then he raised up the Medes and the Persians to destroy Babylon and the leader of the Medo-Persian Empire (Cyrus) to allow the Jews to leave captivity and go back to Jerusalem to eventually rebuild the temple and the walls around the city. All of this fit into His plan to do what is described in **Galatians 4:4 (NKJV)** “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law”.

II. Proper Perspective (Chapter 2)

After presenting his perplexing problem to God, Habakkuk does something that not many people do; he listened for God to answer. **Habakkuk 2:1 (NKJV)** “I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected.” Habakkuk says that he is simply going to wait on God to help him understand this unbelievable plan. I like his submissive spirit before the Lord. Because he thinks God’s plan is unbelievable, he waits to be corrected because he knows that God is always right. There is no anger, bitterness or rebellion toward God. He simply says that he will listen and in his listening, God changes Habakkuk’s perspective. What did God show him?

A. The Reliability of God’s Word (2:1-3)

God is saying, “I will do what I say; write it down in large letters so runners can proclaim to everyone; what I say will come to pass!” Dr. F. B. Myer said: “If any promise of God should fail, the heavens would clothe themselves in sackcloth, the sun and moon and the stars would reel from their courses, and the universe would rock and a hollow wind would moan through a ruined creation the awful message that God can lie” [Source unknown]. Ah, but we are told in **Titus 1:2b (NKJV)** “...God, who cannot lie...” When it seems that your world is falling apart, get into the word of God and cling to its promises and let God teach you His perspective. He is still in control! He has a plan! There is no panic in heaven, only plans! God’s Word is reliable.

B. The Resting on God’s Promises (2:4-5)

When our world falls apart, God says, “Trust Me”. The last part of verse 4 is probably the best known passage in Habakkuk. It is quoted 3 times in the New Testament (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). This is called “Martin Luther’s verse” and though it is an oversimplification, it is called “the verse that started the Protestant Reformation”. In Luther’s day, the true Gospel (man is justified before God not by his own works, but by Christ’s work on the cross and the receiving of that work through faith alone in Christ alone) was obscured by the traditions of medieval Catholicism. Luther was a Monk in the church and was tortured by his own sense of sinfulness. He followed the works and rituals of the church, but he was still miserable and overcome with his own sense of lostness. It was while reading these words from Habakkuk, “But the just shall live by his faith”, that the Holy Spirit turned on the light and he realized that salvation was by faith in what Christ had done and not based on his following traditions and trusting in his own merit. Listen to Luther’s own words, “Before these words broke upon my mind, I hated God and was angry with Him because, not content with frightening us sinners by the law and by the miseries of life, He still further increased our torture by the gospel. But when, by the Spirit of God, I understood those words – ‘The just shall live by faith!’ ‘The just shall live by faith!’ – then I felt born again like a new man; I entered through the open doors into the Paradise of God” [Martin Luther Quote in James M. Boice, “The Minor Prophets, Volume Two”, Page 409]. This converted Monk then became the recognized leader of what was eventually called the Protestant Reformation. I believe that one of the greatest things any of us could be taught about God and the situation we are in is this: **God is faithful; you can trust Him!** Hudson Taylor the Godly missionary to China used to interpret this passage as meaning something like, “The just shall live by holding on to God’s faithfulness” [Martin Lloyd-Jones, “The Doctrine of God the Father”, Pages 77-78]. That’s a good insight. It will be a great day for any Christian when they come to make a once for all decision, “God is right, God is good, God is faithful, God is sovereign, and God knows what He is doing. I am going to rest in Him and trust Him when I can understand what He is doing and when I cannot understand what He is doing. I am going to rest in His faithfulness when life is

pleasant and when life is very unpleasant. He does all things well!" That's the sense of "The just shall live by faith".

God never promised us a perpetually happy life here. God never promised us a comfortable life. God never promised us an explanation for all that He causes or allows to happen. God did, however, promise us His comfort. **2 Corinthians 1:3 (NKJV)** "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort". God promised His own His enabling power. **Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)** "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." God has promised us His continuing presence with us. **Hebrews 13:5 (NKJV)** "I will never leave you nor forsake you." These and hundreds of other promises await us in God's Word.

C. The Retribution of Sinners (2:6-20)

When Habakkuk is taught by God, he sees that the Chaldeans aren't going to get by with anything. God will deal with them even more harshly than He deals with Judah. In the remainder of chapter 2, God gives five "woes" to the Chaldeans against five areas of sin:

- > Dishonesty (2:6)
- > Greed (2:9)
- > Violence (2:12)
- > Drunkenness and Immorality (2:15-17)
- > Idolatry (2:19)

The greatness of Babylon was short lived; in about 70 years they were defeated and were never again a world power. God concludes His teaching to Habakkuk in **Habakkuk 2:20 (NKJV)** "But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him." God is saying to Habakkuk, to the Chaldeans, and to us, "Hush! I am in control; I know what I am doing; My ways are perfect whether you understand them or not. I am faithful and you can rest in my faithfulness even when your world is falling apart."

III. Powerful Praise (Chapter 3)

Habakkuk 3:1 (NKJV) "A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth." The word "Shigionoth" seems to be a musical notation that we no longer can be certain what it means. What it tells us is that this is a prayer put to music. Many of our favorite hymns and choruses are prayers put to music ("Have Thine Own Way", "How Great Thou Art", and "Where Your Glory Dwells"). Habakkuk begins this powerful praise that reflects His new perspective on his problems with a focus on God's Character.

A. Focus on God's Character (3:1-15)

Here Habakkuk is simply rehearsing the attributes or perfections of God. He speaks of:

1. Mercy (3:2)
2. Power (3:4)
3. Wrath (3:12-13)

Habakkuk turns from focusing on the situation at hand and begins to focus on God and His perfections. That enables us to see our trials and challenges in the proper perspective. The tendency in times of trouble is to focus on our troubles. That often turns prayer into simply worrying with your eyes closed! Let your gaze be on God and your glance be on your troubles and not vice-versa.

B. Faith in God's Care (3:16-19)

These are among the greatest verses in the Old Testament. This is what triumphant living by faith looks like. In verse 16, he confesses his fear and dread, but then he confesses his faith in God's faithfulness. He is in an agricultural economy giving a "worst case scenario". This is the worst that can happen and yet even in that he can rejoice in the Lord because He will give strength and the ability to do whatever is required. The "deer's feet" is likely mountain goats that navigate the rocky hillsides with sure footing without falling. If we took this prayer in verses 17-19 out of an agricultural setting and brought it into suburban America, it might sound something like this: "Though the economy keeps worsening and never gets any better, though I lose my job, though Social Security goes bankrupt and my retirement funds cease to exist, though the whole world goes to war, I will rejoice in the Lord and give praise to the God of my

salvation. He will give me the strength to get through; He will give me wisdom to make right decisions and not fall. He will bring me through triumphant.

CONCLUSION

What is your “worst case scenario” that you are anxious about? Is it divorce, cancer or cancer returning, fearing that you’ll never get married, losing your job, never getting a job, the death of your spouse or child? Even in that worst case scenario, **Habakkuk 3:19 (NKJV)** The Lord God [will be your] strength; He will make [your] feet like deer's *feet*, and He will make [you] walk on [His] high hills.” Because of that, you can say **Habakkuk 3:18 (NKJV)** “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”