








When God Seems Silent: A Study of Habakkuk
Lesson Three: HABAKKUK: The Prophet who struggled with God's Justice (1:1)
Dalraida Church of Christ, Montgomery, AL
John L. Kachelman, Jr.

Introduction:

I. One day when Napoleon was reviewing his troops in Paris, he let the reigns fall from his hands and they hit his horses' neck. The proud Charger galloped away. Before the rider could recover the bridle, a common soldier ran from the ranks, caught the reigns, stopped the horse, and placed the bridle once again into the Emperor's hands. "Much obliged to you captain," said Napoleon. (Now the man was a common soldier and not an officer.). The man immediately believed the Emperor's words and said, "Captain of what Regiment, sir?" Napoleon was delighted with the quick perception and willingness to believe his every word, replied, "Of my Guards!" and rode away. As soon as the Emperor left, the soldier laid down his musket and said, "He may pick this up whoever will." Instead of returning to his ranks he started to the company of staff-officers. The officers were amazed at this common soldier's rudeness. One of the generals contemptuously asked, "What does this fellow want here?" "This fellow," replied the newly promoted soldier proudly, "is a captain of the Guard." "HE said it!" replied the soldier as he pointed to the Emperor. "I ask your pardon sir," respectfully said the general. "I was not aware of it." And so, the lowly soldier came dutifully to his prominent post as Captain of Napoleon's Guard.

The path from  obscurity to prominence is one seldom trod. Most remain unseen and unobserved. Habakkuk is a prophet who  refuses to remain obscure in our Bibles. He is  bold and demands our attention. Most are unaware of him but they are delighted once they have discovered him. In all accounts he is just like us except he may be more honest than most!

II. We actually know very little about Habakkuk.

1.  His name is surrounded with controversy. The root word could come either from the Akkadian name for a plant (*Hambakuku*) or from a Hebrew term meaning "embrace." The name is found only in this book. The uniqueness of his name surrounds him with mystery.
2. He is identified with  respect as "the prophet."
 - a. It is suggested that he was among the unnamed prophets who announced Jerusalem's destruction (2 Kings 21:10-16; 2 Chronicles 33:10).
 - b. His contemporaries include Zephaniah and Jeremiah.
 - c. This title was not ordinary and suggests that he may have been a member of the "professional prophets" found in the Temple and King's court (like Nathan in 2 Samuel 7; See Cooke, 658).
3. Even though little is known about Habakkuk,  human curiosity has tried to fill-in the blanks. Many legends abound about this man.
 - a. Rabbinical tradition claims that Habakkuk was a disciple of Nahum (Cooke, 651).
 - b. Others identify him as the "watchman" sent to look toward Babylon (2:1; Leggett, 92).
 - c. Some have tried to make him the son of the Shunamite woman because she "embraced" her son (2 Kings 4:16).
 - d. The Apocrypha alludes to Habakkuk in the legend of "Bel and the dragon."
 - e. All of these legends are "merely fanciful and utterly unreliable" and "quite worthless" (Pulpit Commentary, 11; Keil-Delitzsch, 50).
4. There is reason to believe that Habakkuk was a  Levite and involved in the Temple activities. Habakkuk 3:19 indicates that he was officially qualified to take part in directing the Temple's music.

III. Here is a great prophet whose obscurity is about to vanish. You may have never known this man and his message. But from now on he will stand out from the ranks of the common prophets. After this study you will view Habakkuk entirely different than before.

☞ "Search the Bible through and you will find nothing so matchless in concentrated power as these three chapters of the Book of Habakkuk...here is a man with a soul sensitive to evil, yet firm in his faith in an omnipotent God" (Calikns, 92).

Look now and focus upon the character of this man who wrestles with issues of faith and doubt.

Body:

A. ☞ A man with a **BURDEN** (1:1).

1. "Burden"—a noun translated as "oracle" or "utterance" (Proverbs 30:1). It refers to the prophetic message that had been received from God. When the message announced doom, it was associated with the burden of the prophet declaring it (Nahum 1:1).

Habakkuk's "burden" was made greater because it applied to Judah and Babylon.

"The sentence issued against an individual or community hung as a heavy weight, which at last dragged them down" (Cooke, V, 115).

2. Thus the term established the inspiration of Habakkuk. God had given him this oracle to announce. Instead of God's Word bringing joy and gladness, it brought a burden! What a tragic thought!
3. When God's Word is received it should bring cheer and uplift discouraged hearts. To be able to proclaim the "glad tidings" of God's Word should be a joy. However, Habakkuk did not find such! He was given a message from God that burdened his heart.
 - a. This reveals his sensitivity because he felt keenly Judah's sin and Babylon's evil.
 - b. This reveals his devotion because he was going to present the Oracle even if it was a grievous task.
 - c. This reveals his humility because God had opened his eyes "to see" this oracle.
 - d. Notice ☞ Psalm 119:18. ☞ Are we as concerned as Habakkuk? We also have a "burden" for the culture and citizens in our nation who are damned because of sin (Acts 26:18). ☞ Are we as faithful as Habakkuk in discharging our duty?

B. ☞ A man with **QUESTIONS** (1:2, 13)


1. Habakkuk's honesty is evident in his questions to God. The prophet echoes the perplexities of many who do not understand the presence of evil and the justice of God (Psalm 44:24; 74:10; 79:5; 80:4; 85:5; 89:46; Lamentations 5:20).
2. Habakkuk's questions are actually complaints that God is not doing "right." "How can a just God allow such reprehensible injustice?"
3. As Habakkuk looked around his nation, all he could see was wickedness, sin, turmoil, tragedy and terror!
4. Habakkuk's questions are asked on our behalf. The struggles of this man mirror our own struggles as we try to understand God's ways.

Sin is out of control; society is disintegrating; people are not listening to God; the law is ineffective; and, it seems that God is not listening to those who seek His help with these matters.

5. As Habakkuk begins his book we discover a man beset with questions that appear to have no answers!

C. ☞ A man with **FRUSTRATIONS** (1:12)

1. Questions that have no answers fuel frustrations—especially regarding spiritual concerns of what is right and what is wrong. Frustration often conquers our patience and we demand a "right now" answer.
2. Habakkuk was totally frustrated with everyday living.
 - a. He saw those who tried to do right get swept away by social, commercial, political, and religious evil (1:4).

- b. He earnestly prayed, but seemed so silent and Habakkuk believed that God did not hear prayers (1:2).
- c. He  saw that everything he held dear was about to be taken by a godless nation. And the worst realization Habakkuk struggled with was that God arranged the loss! (1:12).
- d. He wrestled with the age-old problem—why must the innocent suffer while the ungodly prosper? (Jeremiah 12:1; 5:28; Psalms 73:12-14).

3. Habakkuk's frustration is the result of his firm faith in an omnipotent God. But his faith did not work with the undeniable reality that "God didn't work!" His heart told him one thing but his eyes told him another thing. And both could not be correct!

D.  A man with **PATIENCE** (2:1)



- 1. Here is possibly the most significant fact about Habakkuk—even though his questions were unanswered and he was thoroughly frustrated, he knew God had a reason and he was going to wait for that answer!
- 2. This same patience is urged upon all saints (Psalm 85:8; 5:3). "Bind unbelief is sure to err and scan His work in van; God is His own interpreter and He will make it plain" (William Cowper).

E.  A man with **FAITH** (3:1-7)


- 1. This is the reason he could be patient and he could expect God to explain matters. Habakkuk's faith is the key trait of his character and his prophecy.
- 2. The closing section reveals a faith that is confident and absolute.
- 3. Habakkuk's faith is needed by all saints. Even though he was burdened with a tragic message, even though he had questions that led only to frustration, he could be confident and patient because he clung to a sure and strong faith.


His faith led him to take the problem to God. He did not turn to worldly wisdom and vain philosophy. He simply laid the matter before God, knowing that an answer would ultimately come.

F.  A man with a **BOLD FUTURE** (3:17-19)

- 1. His book begins with perplexity but ends with triumphant acclaim.
- 2.  The closing verses have been called "From tragedy to triumph," "From worry to worship," "From fear to faith." All of these phrases express the bold faith of Habakkuk as he concludes his conversation with God.
- 3. His boldness was similar to Job's (42:1-6) and the Psalmist (Psalm 73:21-28).
- 4.  Regardless of the chaos and crisis in life, Habakkuk was going to trust God. Even though all appeared to be lost, Habakkuk confidently trusted that God would triumph. We need to share his boldness (Romans 8:31-39).

Conclusion:

I. Habakkuk has arisen from obscurity to prominence. Here is a man with whom all can identify. His struggles with God's justice are common to all who seek righteousness.  Let us use Habakkuk as a pattern for our lives. May we face life's struggles with his bold confidence knowing that the future holds blessings for all who fear and obey God!

II. Let all seek first to  emulate Habakkuk by following his ability "to see" God's will (Psalm 119:18) and be courageous in teaching even those messages that are "burdens."

 Are you of this disposition? (Psalm 119:33, 34)

 **Our Next Study:** "The Danger of Despair!" (Habakkuk 1:2-4)