

Unperplexing a Perplexed Prophet

Habakkuk Chapters 2 & 3

Outline

- I. The connection between circumstances and our view of God.
 - A. We tend to think of God as “good” when our circumstances are “good”.
 - B. What if things don’t get better?
 - C. The key: to find God’s goodness and joy *outside* of our circumstances.
- II. Habakkuk is everyman’s spiritual journey.
 - A. Our Christian life begins with spiritual optimism (2 Corinthians 5:17).
 - B. We invariably enter into a *crises of belief*—difficult times God uses to mold us into the people He desires us to be (James 1:12).
 - C. Habakkuk’s crises of faith:
 1. “*How long O Lord will I call for help and You will not hear?*” (1:1).
 2. “*Why do You make me see wickedness?*” (1:3).
- III. The three phases of Habakkuk’s spiritual crises.
 - A. The questioning stage (1:1-4; 12-17).
 1. “*Why?*” and “*How long*” (above).
 2. God’s answer:
 - a. “*I am doing something in your days....but you would not believe it if it was recounted to you.*”
 - b. “*You think it’s bad now? I’m going to make things worse!...I’m bringing in the Chaldeans/Babylonians!*”
 - B. The trusting stage (Chapter 2).
 1. Habakkuk “waits” on the Lord (2:1).
 2. THEN God answered him (2:2-3).
 3. It pleases God when we wait on Him regardless of the situation.
 4. Illustration—Psalm 40:1-2.
 5. The secret to the Christian life—“**but the righteous shall live by faith**” (2:4).
 - a. Quoted three times in the New Testament: Romans 1:16-17; Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 10:37.

b. In the N.T, the context of faith was in salvation. In Habakkuk the context is walking through difficult times. The beauty is that the same saving faith is the faith we walk in daily in our spiritual walk.

6. The balance of chapter two is a description of the treachery of the coming invasion by the Babylonians and the devastation to Israel (Judah).

a. Though injustice floods the earth and evil is rampant, God is in complete control (2:20).

IV. The praising stage (Chapter 3).

A. There is a correlation between faith and joy (Psalm 5:11).

B. Habakkuk breaks out in a song (all of chapter 3).

1. “Shigionoth”—A set of music much like an intense overture.

2. There are three “Selah’s”—pauses to contemplate the words.

3. Ends with “For the choir director, on my stringed instrument”.

a. Habakkuk was most likely a temple musician—a Levite.

C. Three parts to the song:

1. Confession—verses 1-7.

2. God’s impact on all creation—verses 8-15.

3. God’s great help in time of need—verses 16-19.

V. The goal of “high places” (3:19).

A. The places in control of the enemies of God.

B. To walk on high ground like a deer was to have possession of the high ground.

1. **Hind’s feet** most likely refers to the Gedi or Ibex. The Gedi was very sure footed, capable of climbing on narrow ridges.

2. The mountaintop was the safest place to be.

VI. Lessons:

A. It’s ok/good to ask God questions.

B. God can handle all your questions but answers only a few.

C. Waiting—in faith—is the way to handle difficult times.

D. We are saved by faith, and we are to walk in that faith every day.

E. Faith is not reliant on having all the answers and removing all doubt.

F. All this is done NOT ON YOUR STRENGTH, but **Yahweh, the Lord is my strength.**

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Habakkuk Chapters 2 & 3

Sermon Notes

When we think of being happy... or think about being filled with joy... what brings us to those thoughts?... If I went around this room this morning and asked are you full of joy?... I would get....if you were all very honest a plethora of different responses....

Some of you would say... *well... to be honest... I really don't have a lot of joy in my life right now... things are pretty rough...* or maybe... *I am so full of joy today... I've had a great week... I got a raise... my children cleaned their rooms... I got a new car... Life is great... I'm full of joy!*

Some of you might respond... *I don't know if I would say I'm full of joy... I'm not full of sadness... basically I'm just in a dull state right now... I'm not depressed... I'm not down... I'm not up either... just going through my days... but I can't say I'm full of joy.*

A question that I think is linked to this question... is *how do you come to the conclusion that God is good?....* think about that for a minute... we say things like that all the time in church.... **GOD IS SO GOOD...** I couldn't help it but I thought of that little ditty of a song we actually used to sing in church *God is so Good....*

I really don't want to be disrespectful to a song played in church at one time.... but with deep lyrics like God is so good... God is so good... God is so good... He's so good to me... let's sing it six hundred times more!... A lady named Velna A. Ledin was the "composer" of that great work!... she admits she was on a long trip with some friends and got bored.... So out of boredom.... composed God is so Good...

I haven't heard it for a while now,... but a few years ago this little jingle was going around... *God is good all the time.... and all the time God is good.....?????????*

We Christians get so deep sometimes!....

What makes us come to say things like that?.... think about it?... God is good!.... when we come to the conclusion God is good we tend to say that when?..... **things are good...** things are going well!.... when the money is there.... our stomachs are full and there's still food left on our plate....**the fig tree is producing figs....**

The garden is thriving.... the kids are cleaning their rooms singing praises to their parents... **WHEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN YOUR LIFE ARE DOING WELL.... THEN YOU SAY.... AH... GOD IS SO GOOD!....** Do you see the connection we tend to make between feeling joyful, happy... and our conclusion that God is so good?

You and I... if you allow me to include you... infer the goodness of God from the good things happening in our life.... and we infer how happiness and joy are a result of the good things happening in our lives... THE PROBLEM WITH THAT IS? _____????

If that is where we get our perspective of joy in our lives.... and if that is where we get our concept of God.... through the circumstances of life.... our emotional and spiritual lives will be like yo yo's going up and down up and down!... the weather changes so does our emotional and spiritual lives....

And then our only hope in tough times is the hope that things get better.... because if they don't.... we will remain miserable be and disenchanted with God!... Unfortunately what is normal is to feel distant from God when things are tough... and here's something to consider.... **WHAT IF THINGS DON'T GET BETTER?**

WHERE IN THE BIBLE DID WE EVER GET THE IDEA THAT IF YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN... YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES WILL GET BETTER?

In 1851 an English missionary... Allen Gardiner was shipwrecked... he and his crew ended up on a remote deserted island off the bottom tip of South America.... each one died.... one at a time... Gardiner was last to die....

He kept a journal.... the too late rescuers found it lying next to his dead body... his last journal entry was Psalm 34:10—**The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing....**

What he was saying was basically this.... *I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God...IN MY TERRIBLE CIRCUMSTANCES...* think about that!... shipwrecked.... exposed to the elements... starving.... knowing he's dying because there are graves all around him..... and he says *I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God...*

How is that?... How does a man when he is at the climax of suffering.... impending doom... death... is.... the way I read that..... **full of joy with an overwhelming sense of God's goodness...** How?... well obviously whatever it is transcends circumstances!.....

This man found a way to rise above his circumstances ... and connect with the love and goodness of Almighty God... he could face anything that was happening... would happen.... **whether or not it got better or worse....**

Habakkuk knows the secret!....I decided to make Habakkuk the exception... spending two weeks on it... the other eleven minor prophets have been getting only one... the reason for two is so that we can unveil his secret.

In many ways **Habakkuk is really everyman's spiritual journey**...most people who seek and follow God end up with many perplexing questions for God.... we begin our Christian journey embracing spiritual truths such as 2 Corinthians 5:17 ...you are a **new creature in Christ!... the old things have passed away... behold new things have come!...**

Begins with excitement and expectation of a new life in Christ!... and the new life is radical and awesome... **We are joyful and God is good all the time**....but all of us soon learn that God's method of maturing us in this new life includes being disciplined... testing....

And during these times... life happens...the new exciting life becomes a testing ground to make us into the person God wants us to become..... it is these times.... the tough times in our walk that we find out what we are spiritually made of...

We enter into a **crises of belief**... a turning point... a point where you MUST make a decision...we often start to doubt...**Maybe God is good...not ALL the time**....do I give up in my walk with Christ?..... do I **continue on in faith knowing that the testing of my faith produces endurance... and letting endurance have its perfect result so that we come out perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.** [James 1]

Habakkuk has been at this crises point throughout chapter 1.... during that time.... he's been blunt with God... asking Him direct tough questions.... **How long O Lord will I call for help and You will not hear?**

Why do You make me look upon wickedness....and You don't do anything about it?.... In chapter one the words **how long?** stand out... that's what you say when you're in crises of belief..... **HOW LONG GOD?..... and Why God?...**

Isn't that what we cry out to God in our difficult times?... **HOW LONG GOD?... How long will I have to deal with this pain until you do something God?... Only You have the power to heal me... why don't you do something?... Why God?... Why don't you answer my prayers?... why do you let this evil persist?**

This is where Habakkuk is in chapter 1...he's in the questioning stage... in fact... to make this really simple... there are three headings we could make a simple outline with...three phases Habakkuk went through in dealing with his spiritual crises...1. Questioning stage (chapter 1)...You may be in a questioning stage right now...

Life for you has been difficult... this is a crises point...pat attention to Habakkuk!...for as perplexed as he is...he never turns away from God...

2. Trusting stage (chapter 2).... 3. The praising stage (chapter 3).

1. Questioning stage....chapter 1...as a quick review:

Read 1:1-4

We talked about this in detail last week... but it is important to remember that God answered Habakkuk... remember His answer?... it's in verses 5-11

Read 1:5

“From where you stand Habakkuk... it looks as if I’m doing nothing... BUT I AM DOING SOMETHING!... if I tell you what I’m doing... you wouldn’t believe it anyway...” “I am doing something Habakkuk, but if I told you what it is I’m doing you wouldn’t understand....Habakkuk says “tell me”...God tells him... and Habakkuk says... “I don’t understand.”...God tells him what He’s doing... God basically says to Habakkuk... you think things are bad now... just you wait...I’m going to make things much, much, worse!

Read verses 6-10

BUT!... (11) *even though you can’t see it Habakkuk... even though you don’t understand it... I AM DOING SOMETHING... I’M RAISING UP THE CHALDEANS ... THEY WILL ACHIEVE MY PURPOSE.... BUT THEN THEY WILL BE JUDGED....**They whose power in their judge...***

I am so thankful for this short book!... if you’re like me you look around the world... you look at the pervasive evil everywhere... the corruption... the lies... the deception... the violence... the strife...we feel powerless... and we think *“How long God will you let this go on?.... ... “why don’t you do something about it God?....*

And we learn here.... God is sovereign... God is in control....God is not up there wondering *“such how did the world become a mess?... What am I going to do?... no... “**I am doing something in your days—you would not believe if it was recounted to you!**”*

Habakkuk is in a spiritual crises... but he never considers turning from God... no... what DOES he do?... chapter 2.

2. Trusting stage....chapter 2... When you get in a questioning period in life...TRUST HIM!

Read 2:1

Habakkuk climbs up to his “guard post”... picture a station on the wall where one waits and watches for the enemy...it could be the most boring job in the military...just watching and watching...nothing happens... but Habakkuk isn’t waiting and watching for the enemy... He is waiting on God!

I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me... this is such a good example for us to follow...when we have questions.... When we are puzzled at God’s apparent silence... His seemingly absence from our situation.... We should simply wait.... Wait on the Lord.

We don’t know how long Habakkuk waited... it could have been hours... days... weeks... months?....

2:2 Then the Lord answered me and said....

When did the Lord answer Habakkuk?... AFTER HE WAITED!... after he waited... *then* the Lord answered him...interesting sentence structure here in the Hebrew... **the Lord answered me and said...**

The word translated as “Answered” from the Hebrew is more than just the idea of a response... it carries with it the idea of “being favorable”.... “Endearing”... in other words... God smiled in His response to Habakkuk... it’s as if God said “*I’m so glad you stopped and listened!*”... “*I am so pleased Habakkuk....that you waited on Me!*”

I’m sure it pleases God when we wait on Him regardless of the situation....**The Lord answered me and said... write down the vision and inscribe it on tablets... that the one who reads it may run...**

That’s a bit of a puzzling phrase...**that the one who reads it may run...** it could mean that the one who reads it... the one who gets the vision can get out of there fast!... once the vision is received they are going to want to get away!... from what?...

Literally all hell is going to break lose!...The enemy...the Babylonians are coming...a treacherous people! (3) **The vision is yet for the appointed time...** it hasn’t arrived yet but it’s coming... (appointed time is God’s appointed time!)

Read 3:3

“I know what I’m doing Habakkuk!... I’ve got everything in My control!”...There’s a great correlation to this in Psalm 40... When David says:

**40 I waited patiently for the Lord;
He reached down to me and heard my cry.
2 He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the mud;
And He set my feet on a rock, making my footsteps firm.**

The note in my Bible says...“*God by His grace had taken him from no footing to sure footing*”.... I think most of us at times feel as though we are slipping... we look at everything around us... it all seems to be disintegrating before our eyes... the very fabric of our culture is tearing apart...

We look at the world and could conclude that it is hopeless... but God is not up there biting His nails wondering what to do!... He will set your feet on rock!... He will make your footsteps firm....Habakkuk then goes on to describe these wicked invaders...

(4) **Behold as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him... BUT...the righteous will live by his faith...**tell me that’s a familiar verse!... It originates here with Habakkuk... but it is quoted three times in the New Testament.

Habakkuk himself is found nowhere else in the Bible... but the words from his vision are... this one is in Romans 1:17...Galatians 3:13... and Hebrews 10:37... note this... every time it is mentioned in the New Testament... it is in the context of salvation.

For example... in Romans 1... this is what the apostle Paul writes:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written: “But the righteous one will live by faith.”

See... it is connected to the context of salvation... *you exercise faith to trust Jesus Christ as your Savior thus... the just shall live... eternal life... by faith...* same in Galatians and Hebrews... but the context in Habakkuk is not salvation... in its original context here in verse 4...it’s not about salvation... it is about how to live your life when things are difficult...

The New Testament didn’t get it wrong... it just completed the picture... you begin in your Christian life by faith in Jesus Christ.... And you continue in your Christian walk by that same faith!...hear this... **FAITH IS NOT A SINGLE EVENT IN LIFE, BUT A WAY OF LIFE...**

The same faith we have in coming to Jesus is the same faith we need to trust in God for our everyday life... the idea in Colossians 1:23

If indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard...

Faith is not just something exercised at the moment of your salvation... “*ok, I’m saved now, now I can move on...*”.... **... the righteous one will LIVE by faith...**...you trust in the Lord for your salvation and that same trust is working throughout your life every single day!...IT DOESN’T MATTER...YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES!

By the way ... just so we all are on the same page on who’s a “righteous one”... a righteous one is one who is perfectly conformed to God’s law and His holy character... in other words... a righteous one is “perfect” in the eyes of God...

None of us qualify.... We fall way, way short of that... when you come to Christ... when you have made Him Lord of your life... His “perfect” righteousness is placed on you!.... that’s the ONLY way you can be accepted by God!

When we look at the world and wonder why?... when we see all the injustice around us... **the righteous one shall LIVE by faith!**... by the way.... This is the verse that rocked Martin Luther’s world and lit the Reformation...

The trusting stage is when you set aside the questions.... You look past your circumstances... you don’t dwell on the injustices...the seemingly hopeless situation... the disappointments and difficulties and you set your faith on Him.

Habakkuk spends the rest of chapter two describing the treacherous Chaldeans/Babylonians... and issues a series of “woes” regarding their treacheries...God is going to use this horrible enemy for His own good in “disciplining His people...But He is going to pour out His wrath on

them as well...there will be justice...**woes** are judgements... and there's quite a collection of those here...

(6) **Woe to him who increases what is not his...** they steal...they're thieves... listen to this:

Read 2:9-11

... The walls made up of stones and timber were actually stolen from other people's houses... and he goes on and on...these are schemers...

Read 2:12, 13

Getting people drunk so they could take advantage of them... Specifically sexually.

Read verse 15- 16

The trusting stage concludes with verse 20... it was very popular to put these words at the entrance to churches... many of the old churches in Europe have this verse inscribed in the walls... **But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him.**

That is so out of context!... the context here is that this horrible Babylonian army will come in and pour out evil in all of Israel... it's a horrible picture!... for sixteen verses Habakkuk's vision detailed the horrible calamity and injustices...**BUT THE LORD IS IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE!LET ALL THE EARTH BE SILENT BEFORE HIM!!!**

He's not in a church building!... A church building is not the temple!... Acts 7:48 **However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says:**

**49 'Heaven is My throne,
And the earth is the footstool of My feet;
What kind of house will you build for Me?' says the Lord,
'Or what place is there for My rest?**

But the Lord is in His holy temple...let all the earth be silent before Him... a verse in the middle of a raging battle!...Calamity is on earth...judgment is being unleashed everywhere... and Almighty God is above in heaven in complete control!... you really want that sign on your church building?...*Come on in to our raging battle!.... "Is that what's going on in there?"*

3. The praising stage....chapter 3

Notice... Habakkuk's circumstances hasn't changed for the better at all... **but he has**... as he waited on the Lord... and as he observed what God was going to do... as he exercised faith in God... joy began welling up in his heart.... Joy from realizing just who God is... he breaks out in praise...

Psalm 5:11 makes a correlation between faith and joy... David writes **But let all those who take refuge in You...**that's the same as *let all of those who place their faith in You God...be glad... let them ever sing for joy...*faith and joy go together... regardless of circumstances... we know this for when David wrote those words he was being pursued by another set of ruthless enemies...

Chapter three is a song... a musical piece... chapters 1 and 2 were an oracle... **a burden...** chapter three turns into a song of praise...(1) A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet according to Shigionoth.... Whatever that is!...nobody knows for sure...

Shigionoth possibly was a set of music... much like an intense overture... full of emotion and grandeur... think William Tell Overture... three times we see the word "selah"... verses 3,9 and 13... it simply means to pause... to stop and think about what you just sang...

At the very end Habakkuk concludes with **For the choir director, on my stringed instrument....** Habakkuk was musical... a musician... most likely one of the temple musicians...which means he was a Levite.

First there's a confession... verse 2

Read 3:2

Habakkuk goes on and basically reveals *"I'm blown away by just how small I am and how big You are!"... How mighty You are and how big Your hand is..."*

Read 3:3-4

I really don't mean to make light of "*God is so Good*".... But THIS IS PRAISE MUSIC!... this reveals the awesomeness of God!... it elevates God from "good" to "awesome"!... It was Charles Swindol back in the 80's who said *worship music should turn our heads upwards not to each other...* not so much horizontal but rather vertical.....

Verse 8 through 15 **describes God's impact on all of creation**.... Verses 16-19 describes His **great help in times of need**....regardless of what goes on in the world around you... God is in control... He is there...

Read 3:17

Did you catch the condition of Judah?... no figs on the fig tree... nothing to eat... no grapes which means no wine.... Sad times for Judah!... no olives on the trees for making olive oil... that was a staple... no produce... no livestock... no beef... doesn't get much worse than this!

Read verse 18

Habakkuk is saying... *it doesn't matter what the conditions are...* it doesn't matter how bleak things get... I will praise the Lord and thank God my savior!...we don't want to miss the last

verse... you probably have heard this verse before... years ago there was a popular book titled *Hinds Feet on High Places*.... 1955.

Read verse 19

There it is again... the high places... we keep running into the high places in these minor prophets... When the Bible mentions “high places”... over 40 times in the Old Testament... it is referring to places under the control of enemies of God...

often... high places were places of pagan worship... in Israel... king after king tried to get rid of these “pagan high places of worship” but couldn’t do it...they couldn’t do it because... and this is figuratively... if your enemy is high on top the mountain... you going up the mountain will never be able to defeat him...

“**The high places of Baal**”.... they were called high places because of their symbolic importance of being high above everyone else... it was believed that these pagan gods...if they were on “high ground” would be in charge of the neighborhood so to speak.

Remember Micah 1:3 **For behold the Lord is coming forth from His place...He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth...the mountain will melt under him...**

“to walk on high ground like a deer”...hind’s feet... was to have possession of the land and its people...

Hinds feet is commonly translated as deer... in Israel is the “ein gedi” which means “*spring of the wild goats*”...an oasis in the middle of the desert near the Dead Sea... there are “gedis” all over the steep hill/mountains....we might call the Gedi an Ibex... those were the deer in this passage...

The Gedi hug the hillsides... I’m talking steep cliffs... by walking on these very narrow ledges.... 5” in width.... One mis step and they’re dead.

But these surefooted Gedis walk these ledges...,these ridges... with ease... Habakkuk says God is going to make me like the Gedi... **ON HIS RECLAIMED HIGH PLACES!**

Being on the mountaintop is the safest place to be... going up the mountain is the most dangerous...for some of us walking on level ground is dangerous..... but going up a steep mountain!... one slip and you’re gone!

[In the context here...]

But if you can navigate up... and if you are sure footed...like a deer...like a gedi... it is the safest place on earth you can be... you can’t be attacked!.. You can’t attack going up a mountain... not only that... but whoever is on top of the mountain can see what was coming..... hours maybe days ahead!.... on the top had the vantage point.

What gets you to the top... what keeps you going... is the grandeur of the summit...

That's the picture...

God Is the summit... and it is God making ...pulling and pushing Habakkuk up the mountain when you go through tough times... times of suffering.... bad circumstances...that's climbing up the mountain.....you are going to let your circumstances paralyze you... or you will let them bash you down further... or they will actually push you up the mountain....spiritually.

We all know people who have been through... or who are suffering.... and we see different outcomes for each person... some people as they go through suffering get hardened... they get bitter... some get softer and more tender.....

Some people get very arrogant and prideful during suffering... *Nobody understands what I'm going through!*....others get more humble through suffering.... some get more empathetic to others because of their suffering.... *I understand what you are going through...*

Some get more and more fragile.... some get stronger and stronger.... do you see?... suffering will turn you into a far better person or a far worse person... suffering will either make you fall down and go further down... or it will actually raise you up.... putting you upon the heights of the mountain...

(19) the Lord...**makes me walk on MY high places....**

Rejoicing in your terrible circumstances is walking sure footedly on the mountaintop..... but get this... not on YOUR STRENGTH.... But as Habakkuk reveals to us in verse 19.... God is my strength....**Yahweh the Lord is my strength!**

A few things we need to take with us from Habakkuk.

1. It is ok if not good to question God... ask Him questions...ask Him the why's and how long Lords...
2. God can handle ALL of our questions but will answer only a few. God is not required to give us an explanation!... remember... you may not be able to handle the truth!
3. Waiting...waiting on the lord is how we should handle our times of difficulty, questioning and doubts...
4. We are saved by faith..... we are to walk through all of life in that faith. If we do.. there is not a circumstance too big for us to endure.
5. Faith is not reliant on having all the answers and removing all doubts.... I think that is the idea Jesus was getting at in John 20:29 when He said “**blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe...**”

I was reading about the very first sermon Jonathan Edwards preached [1700's]..... titled *Christian Happiness*.... He was 18 years old... The main point of the sermon was Christians should be happy..... he must have been having a good life!

Let me paraphrase his main points...

Christians should be happy, why?

1. Because our bad things will turn out good [Romans 8:28]
2. Our life and eternity with Christ can NEVER be taken away from us.
3. The best things are yet to come

“I am doing something in your days—you would not believe if you were told.”

2:5