

A Prophet Perplexed

The Book of Habakkuk: Chapter 1

Outline

- I. Background of Habakkuk.
 - A. Habakkuk the man.
 1. The name Habakkuk means “to embrace”.
 - a. Martin Luther—“to embrace” as in wrestling with someone. Habakkuk is in a wrestling match with God!
 2. All that is known about Habakkuk the man is from the book itself.
 - a. Possibly a temple musician, a Levite (3:19b).
 - b. A prophet (1:1)
 3. He “beheld an oracle” = a burden.
 - B. The times.
 1. After Josiah the good king and during the reign of his son Jehoiakim, a not so good king!
 2. Judah is in decline, a time of great violence and disobedience to God.
 - C. The uniqueness of Habakkuk to the other prophets.
 1. This is not a prophesy to Israel or any other nation. Habakkuk is a dialogue between the prophet and God.
 - a. Habakkuk is troubled, perplexed, confused.
- II. Habakkuk’s struggles with God.
 - A. Does God hear (1:2)?
 - B. Does God care (1:2)?
 - C. Is God good (1:3-4)?
 - D. Is God holy (1:13)?
 - E. Does God have any power (1:14-17)?
 - F. Are You just God?
 - G. Can I trust You Lord?
- III. How Habakkuk handles the questioning.

- A. *He was bold and honest.*
 - B. *He never considers to leave or abandon God.*
 - 1. Three responses people often have when frustrated and discouraged with God.
 - a. Walk away from God.
 - b. Pretend everything is fine.
 - c. Continues to walk with the Lord.
- IV. God wants us to know it is ok to question Him.
- A. Psalm 39—David questions and is frustrated with God.
 - B. Psalm 88.
 - C. All is evidence of His great grace and mercy along with a desire to have a meaningful relationship with His children.
- V. God's answer to Habakkuk.
- A. *You're perplexed at what I have done, just you wait!...it's going to get worse!"*
 - B. God's lessons to Habakkuk and us.
 - 1. We won't always understand why and what God does...because we can't!
 - 2. We can never judge God using our own timetables, our own measurements and our own calendars.
- VI. What Habakkuk does.
- A. He waits!

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Sermon Notes

Many years ago I saw one of those “man on the street interviews” where a “reporter/pastor” randomly asked people in various public places a question for their opinion on a given subject... the question back then was “*what do you know about the word Habakkuk?*”

I don’t remember any of the responses the reporter got but I remember them to be pretty interesting... so this week... I thought I would randomly ask a few the same question... various people whose paths crossed mine.

At Fantastic Sam’s where I got a haircut... I asked my “hair stylist” *What do you know about the word Habakkuk?*... she didn’t have to think very long... she said *I think my ex-husband had one in the barn.*

At Safeway one of the assistant managers asked me if I had been finding everything ok... and I asked *Do you know anything about Habakkuk?*... and he said *he wasn’t sure, but I might be able to find one in the specialty shelf in the produce department.*

One thought it was a city in Turkey... one teenager ...from this church...was sure that it was a horror movie... A Jewish Holiday sometime around Christmas.

None of these answers surprised me... Habakkuk is this small obscure book in the Old Testament tucked in between Nahum and Zephaniah... and most people wouldn’t be able to tell me what those are either!... Habakkuk...

If you are hearing that word for the first time in your life... I’m so glad you’re here this morning... I do realize that going through these minor prophets this summer has been a stretch for some of you... if not most of you...and that’s great!.... these are a challenge for anyone!

Part of my goal going through these is to help us understand God’s word more and more... not just to obtain head knowledge but to obtain wisdom for all of life... these prophets who lived some 2500-3000 years ago are as relevant today as they were when they were written.

I am going to break with my format for this book of Habakkuk... we’ve been doing overviews of each one of these minor prophets, one each week... but I plan on spending this week and next on this book...

The reason for this is because this is such a relevant, timely and important message for us today... Habakkuk asks some very penetrating questions to God...Questions we all have had...And God answers them... But

Before we get to the questions this morning... let's get a little background into this book... first of all... I pronounced this book as "Ha-bak-kuk"... some of you are thinking *that's not right... my pastor at this really BIG church I used to go to always said HAB-A-CUK....*

If you search out all the pronunciations historically within the Jewish people themselves... you will find both of those pronunciations as well as *HAV-A-KUKE*... that probably is the best pronunciation ... but I'm going to say it the way I've always said it... Haba-kuk... it doesn't really matter.... The guys been dead for a few thousand years!

Interesting that the meaning of the name Habakkuk is "*to embrace*"... it is the idea of embracing with your arms another person... Martin Luther (by the way was profoundly influenced by Habakkuk...and through Luther's influence we have been greatly influenced... I hope to share some of that today or next week...)

Through Martin Luther and one verse that originated in Habakkuk launched the great protestant reformation back in the 1500's.... but Luther says the name Habakkuk means to embrace as in *wrestling with someone*... one thing is certain... Habakkuk is in a wrestling match with God Himself!

We know almost nothing about the man Habakkuk... we can get from the book itself that he was probably a temple musician... he apparently played a stringed instrument... the book's final words are his signature... **for the choir director, on my stringed instruments...**

Which means he was a Levite... the Levites were in charge of the temple music... other than that... we know he was a prophet of God... (v.1) **The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw...** (some think a different kind of prophet from the others...possibly schooled to be a prophet...)

Verse one also says this is an "oracle"... literally here it means "a burden"... it is the picture of picking up a load then carrying it... in this case... God has given him a message...and this message weighs on his heart... he is carrying it to deliver to his people... it was very...very *heavy*.

He didn't go looking for this load... nor did he want it... he didn't like it for sure... he would rather have been rid of it... it weighed so very heavy on him... but it is of God... and it can't be ignored

Habakkuk lived in a time of extreme violence... and his society was extremely shaken by it... back in the days of Jeremiah... Judah and Jerusalem had become more and more disobedient to God and His requirements... the very fabric of their nation was fraying apart at the seams...

Before this time... Josiah had been king... he was a just king... a good king... he upheld God's laws... He honored God's requirements...we read about Josiah in 2 Chronicles chapter 34...let me read you a few verses out of 2nd Chronicles 34... it links with a previous minor prophet...

Remember two weeks ago when we looked at Micah... in chapter 1 Micah says **The Lord, Yahweh, is going forth from His place. He will come down and tread in the high places of the earth....** Remember the high places?... the high places in Samaria, then capital of the northern kingdom Israel.... And the high places in Jerusalem, capital of the southern kingdom Judah....

The high places were where the idol worship took place... the Asherim... and the graven images of the pagan gods.... *“it’s coming down!....* and it all did under Josiah...

Read 2 Chronicles 34:1-5

but the successor to his throne... Jehoiakim...inherited NONE of his father’s qualities... he was corrupt... he exploited people for his own gain...

Jeremiah wrote (Jer.22:7) **you have eyes and heart only for your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood and for practicing oppression and violence...** so... basically the scene is this...Judah is a mess... bad king... corrupt government... there is wickedness everywhere... the people themselves are becoming more and more wicked...godless people....

Evil everywhere... these are very bad times for the Jewish people... they are being oppressed and they themselves are living terrible compromising lives...they are becoming more and more dull to the things of God... and numb to the consequences of their sins...

The comparison of that day to this day...our day...is frightening in similarity... I was amazed when I pulled out my sermon notes of seven years ago on Habakkuk when I spent six weeks preaching through it...

I said then that *“if you squint your eyes, you might see some similarities between Habakkuk’s days and our days... our society is beginning to show some cracks... it may not be too many years when the United States mirrors the cultural situation of Habakkuk’s day...”*

I had no idea then that it would only be seven years!...our culture does not have cracks... it has Grand Canyons!...I don’t think I need to spend much time pointing all this out... the moral fabric, the political fabric... the social fabric Every fabric has been shredded apart!...

I think basically there are three responses each person can take when this is reality:

1. Ignore it all and eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we all will die...
2. Join in... which I’m afraid many if not most are doing... even in the church.
3. Or get on your knees and cry out to God... that’s what Habakkuk did... not only cry out but question God!...*God what’s going on!?*

Why God do you allow this evil to continue?... don’t you at least silently ask that every day?... When God will you stop all this.... When will you send Your Son Jesus back to earth to wrap all this up?

Habakkuk is unlike any of the other eleven minor prophets.... All the other prophets for that matter... The message of Habakkuk is not a warning to a people... it is not a warning to Judah or Israel... or any other country for that matter... it is a discussion...a dialogue...a discussion between the prophet Habakkuk and God.

Not just a simple discussion... but a very pointed one... Habakkuk is troubled... He is frustrated... He is perplexed.... Perplexed at what? Who?..... **God!**... this is a very honest book... it shows us many things... one being it is ok to ask God penetrating questions... and Habakkuk does.

SO...two parts... 1. let's look at Habakkuk's "complaints" to God.... His questions.... And then 2. God's "answer" to Habakkuk's complaints..... next week... a vital part you do not want to miss... how Habakkuk then moves on... how he deals with God's explanation... which will be such a great help for each one of us who struggles in this world.

Read verses 1-3 Notice two questions Habakkuk asks God.... "**How long Lord?**" (verse 2) and "**Why?**" (verse 3)... I don't think I'm going out on a limb when I say these are two questions we have for God throughout our lives!

"How long will O Lord will I call for help and you will not hear?" Why do you make me see wickedness and cause me to look on trouble?...how long and why?... can you relate to Habakkuk's questions?....of course you do!

Verse three tells us...Habakkuk talking to God... **Why do You make me see iniquity... or... why do You make me look at injustice?**... *God... why have You put me in a position where all I see is evil?*...Habakkuk certainly remembers the good ole days under King Josiah... there was a general feeling of hope in the land.

But that's has all changed and now...and it changed rapidly...isn't that the feeling today?... that things are changing so rapidly...we know things are going to change... but it seems as though everything is accelerated... we used to be in a fight for the culture... we lost that fight.

Everywhere Habakkuk looks... all he sees is corruption... injustice... he says (3) **Destruction and strife are before me... strife exists and contention arises...** (4) **the law is ignored...;justice is never upheld... for the wicked surround the righteous... therefore justice comes out perverted.**

But that isn't the only problem Habakkuk is having... what he sees are not only evil times... but he sees God apparently isn't doing ANYTHING about it!... here's a list of Habakkuk's struggles...

There is no doubt that Habakkuk is in a crises in his faith... a struggle with his faith.... Apparently... because of all his big questions to God... as we look at his struggles... make note of how many of these struggles you've had or have with God... I think we've all experienced these...

1. **Does God hear?** Verse 2 says **How long Lord will I call for help, and You will not hear?...** ever ask God that?... “God... I’ve been praying to you EVERYDAY... and I never hear ANYTHING from You...

2. **Does God care?** (verse 2) **I cry out to You violence!... yet You do not save... God... all these wicked things are going on in the world... all these terrible, terrible things are happening... and You don’t do ANYTHING about them.... Don’t you care?**

I hear a lot of that these days... don’t you?... ever say it yourself?... *does God care?.... if so... why doesn’t He do anything about it?...* we turn on the news and watch what is going on around the world... *God... why do You let it continue on?..... don’t you care?...* which then makes us ask:

3. **Is God good?** **READ VERSES 3-4...** Isn’t that one of the biggest questions asked about God today?... Is God good?... if so.... **How can a good God allow evil to exist.....** and continue on and on? And for some... that’s too big a question... And they exit any relationship with the Almighty.

Of course denying the existence of God doesn’t eliminate the evil in the world... it just removes any hope of understanding it....

You begin question whether or not God is good... you will then ask:

4. **Is God holy?** A holy God cannot cohabitate with evil... evil is EVERYWHERE... is God even holy?...skipping over God’s response in verses 5-11 to more questions.... look at verse 13: **READ VERSE 13**

To Habakkuk... he knows his Bible... He had been taught that God is holy.... Yet... he looks around and not only are wicked people all over the place... they are even doing better than God’s people are doing.... It really seems as though they are in God’s favor... where God’s own people are not!

5. **Does God have ANY power?** *Is that why You don’t do anything God?... You lack power to do so?* Habakkuk is so very frustrated... gives this illustration of God’s seemingly powerless over what’s happening in the world: **READ VERSES 14-17**

These powerful people.... The Chaldeans... they do what they want and no one stops them... they scoop your people up like fish in fishing nets... and they worship their nets!... aren’t You stronger than a stupid fishing net God?

6. **Are You a just God?** *Is there any justice in You?...*you go through these questions... and not getting any answers... it leaves you with a logical last question:

7. **Can I trust You Lord?** *Is God worthy of my trust?...*

REMEMBER THESE QUESTIONS....

I think this is important.... The way in which Habakkuk handles his period of questioning God....In all that he saw.... He did two things... these are important to understand all this:

1. He was bold and honest *Why God?.... Why is this happening God?.... Why don't You do anything about it God?.... I mean... You are the all powerful God.... You could do something about it... I don't understand why You don't?*

That's bold language!... that's very honest.... He's revealing to God what he really is feeling seeing... and he's bold about it... in fact... get the tone here.... He is actually challenging God...

Back to verse 12... is really an amazing verse... we don't realize it as much because of the English translation... he asks God... **are You not from everlasting?** Meaning... are you not eternal and infinite?...Habakkuk is NOT expecting God to answer that question... it's really a rhetorical question....

Stop and think about that.... I can't imagine asking God a rhetorical question!!!

A rhetorical question is a question NOT seeking an answer.... A rhetorical question is as one commentator said.... It is a punishment... it's a punishing statement... basically what Habakkuk was saying was something like this:

*I thought you were this big infinite...wise....powerful great God.... But maybe You're not!... everywhere else in the Bible where those words are used...96 times **are You not...** are used in human arguments.... NEVER has anyone used them in arguing with God....it's a tone... they have implications of frustration... of anger...*

Never has anyone said to God... **are You not...** Until Habakkuk.... Nothing else exactly like this anywhere else in the Bible...

He's not being courteous to God... he's certainly not being very respectful...*look at my people God!... You're supposed to be bringing salvation out of Israel into the world... but it's all a huge mess!....why are you letting evil reign?*

Be honest... haven't you asked these questions?.. *"God... why is it that I work so hard... strive to do all the right things in my life... be responsible... live a good life.... Respect and honor You.... And yet... _____ lives such an evil life... takes advantage of everyone... steps on people.... And yet... has it so very easy... you would almost say he's blessed.... And according to Your word God... he should be cursed!*

Why is it that such terrible things go on in this world... horrific things.... And You don't do anything about it.... WHY GOD?... Do you EVER wrestle with God with those questions?... Habakkuk is wrestling with God.....and he's being bold and honest... He's actually challenging God..... that's the first thing he does...but don't miss the other thing he does....

2. He never even considers to abandon God this is so important... He is struggling with doubts... he is perplexed and doesn't understand what God is or isn't doing... he is frustrated and confused.... But he never even hints at walking away from God...

Are You not from everlasting.... Rhetorical...rhetorical... rhetorical.... O Lord...my God.... My Holy One!!!!

That's like a parent scolding his child... *What were you thinking!... I can't believe you did what you just did... come here sweetheart... sit on my lap.*

He never ever considers to stop obeying God... to stop praying to God... to stop following God... not even an option... do you see how amazing all this is?... do you see how incredible all this is?... I've noticed three responses common when God perplexes us:

1. To walk away from God—That really is the easy thing to do... just stop.
2. To pretend everything is fine and try to smile and be optimistic... spiritually psyche themselves up...or to stay the course... remain faithful to God...as frustrating as it may get... so
3. Instead of walking away from God... or pretending things were great when they weren't and tried to stay on top of the mountaintop... instead... option three... he continues his walk with the Lord.

He's honest... he's bold... he's frank...He's upset at God... but he's not sitting there going... *I don't even know if I believe in God... I can't believe in a God that allows bad things to happen to good people....God is not running things the way I would run them...*

He's challenging God... but he's totally bought into God...this is a relationship!!!! it's as though he was saying... *I don't get it... I don't understand you... but if I can't figure out life with you.... HOW IN THE WORLD COULD I FIGURE IT OUT WITHOUT YOU! Where else would I go?*

Here's something I vividly realized as I was studying this passage.... And is what I hope you get this morning... we can be bold and honest with God... He not only allows us to be that way... I think He wants us to...

That's why this portion of scripture has been made available to us... If Habakkuk was a mistake... if he was an embarrassment to God and He wished we wouldn't read the book...If He didn't want us to know about Habakkuk believe me,.... He would have not let us have this writing... He also wouldn't have let us read some of the Psalms....

Such as Psalm 39... David... not exactly an angel by the way... also says some tough bold words to God... we like to clean them up with our translations... but after acknowledging that in the big scope of things... **who am I?... you have made my days as handbreadths...**do you know what handbreadths are?...

handbreadths refers to the measurement of the palm of your hand.... somewhere between 2.5 and 4 inches...in other words...**my lifetime is NOTHING in Your sight!...I am so insignificant in the big scheme of things!...**

I'm here waiting God!... I don't even open my mouth while I wait for some response from You!... for thirteen verses David tells God why he's so quiet.....(certainly doing a lot of talking for being quiet!)... **turn Your gaze away from me, that I may smile again...BEFORE I DEPART AND AM NO MORE...**

Translation: "get out of here so that I can be happy again!"...."leave me alone!!!"

Psalm 88... **O Lord I have cried out to You for help, and in the morning my prayer comes before You...O Lord, why do You reject my soul?... why do You hide Your face from me?...**

THE VERY PRESENCE OF THESE stories,... these PRAYERS... IS A WITNESS TO GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE...COMPASSION FOR US AND UNDERSTANDING.... And they all call us to be real with God... to be in a real relationship with Him...

Do you know why Habakkuk could stand there and talk to God like that without having lightning strike him?... Do you know why God... when He assembled His Word for us to read and get to know Him didn't hit delete on the words of Habakkuk or David?

Is it because we are to talk to God like this?... WE SHOULDN'T TALK TO GOD LIKE THAT!!!... I think this is what God says about this"

I've remained their God... I haven't booted them out of the family BECAUSE THEY GOT REAL WITH Me..... NOT because they put on a happy face...because they didn't... not because they kept it all together...they didn't...not because they had perfect self-control...they didn't... not because they are doing everything right...BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT.

I REMAIN THEIR GOD BECAUSE OF MY GRACE... BECAUSE MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM IS NOT BASED ON PERFORMANCE... I ALSO KNOW HOW THEY REACT WHEN THINGS GET DESPERATE!

I REMAIN THEIR GOD BECAUSE OF MY LOVE FOR THEM... WE ARE IN A REAL RELATIONSHIP... NOT SOME ON THE SURFACE IT ALL LOOKS SO GOOD RELATIONSHIP...

The good news is that God answers Habakkuk...the bad news is that we won't like His answer!...God's first answer is in verses 5-11... Habakkuk just finished asking all those questions... *why do You let evil continue?...* and God basically responds...***just you wait!... you haven't seen nothing yet!***

I'm going to send more violence, evil and oppression.... That's what I'm going to do!...YOU CALL THAT AN ANSWER?

Read Verses 6-11a

Habakkuk was bewildered and frustrated... *God... Your people Israel is turning to this corrupt awful thing... come on God... DO SOMETHING!....* and God replies by saying *I am doing something...*

Read Verse 5

God is teaching some very important things to Habakkuk... and us in this...

1. *We won't always understand why and what God does...because we can't* so like Habakkuk... we will stand there astonished and in wonder at what God is doing....or what we think He's NOT doing.... But is... God IS doing something about it all.He says so...

2. *We can never judge God using our own timetables...our own measurements and our own calendars.*

We can see this better than Habakkuk could.... Because we know the outcome.... God says He is going to raise up the Chaldeans (Babylonians) and force Israel into exile... we can now look back at that and realize had that not happened...

The Jews would have never spread throughout the Roman empire... and because of this spreading of the Jews... there was a synagogue in every city of the ancient world... these Jews.... As a direct result of the Chaldeans.... Were dispersed all over the place... teaching about God....

Gentiles who had never heard about God learned about God through these dispersed Jews... they began to study God's word!... by the time Jesus Christ came... and after His death and resurrection Christianity began to spread...

It spread so fast because the most receptive people in the entire world to the gospel were these gentiles who had learned about God through these dispersed Jews!...they were ready for the gospel... and they embraced it.... And because of them....YOU AND I have been given the gospel of Jesus Christ!

I was reading about the gospel and China this week... when the communist came into power in China (1949)... they kicked out all the Western missionaries... and you know Western people.... *Nobody can work without us!...If we are kicked out of China... God is abandoning China!...*

The amazing thing.... **Because** the missionaries were kicked out... the Chinese took over their own Christianity... **THEY MADE IT INDIGENOUS!**... in other words... the Chinese people spread the word among themselves.... And as a result... China is still...in... one of the most vital...fast growing Christian movements in the world!...even though today... Christians in China are terribly persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ....

Can you imagine what this will most likely mean for the future of the world?...when you get 300 million Chinese Christians living for Christ?... they might even evangelize the United States!... do you see?... the Western missionaries thought 100 years of missions work was going down the drain..... they didn't have the same perspective that God has....

Habakkuk thought Israel...God's children was being abandoned by their own God...Habakkuk didn't have God's perspective!... we wonder why God isn't answering our prayers.... Why He is so silent when we ask Him for something.....

Why He is allowing disease and illness and evil prevail at times... Why does God allow evil to persist in the world?... why won't He do something about it

God really is doing something about it all!...after God describes to Habakkuk all that was going to take place with the Chaldeans.... He says in verse 11...**then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on...BUT THEY WILL BE HELD GUILTY... I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING... I HAVE ALL THE POWER.... I HAVE COMPLETE KNOWLEDGE... I AM PERFECT IN WISDOM... I'VE GOT A PLAN... AND IT WILL COME TO PASS.**

Habakkuk wants an answer to his questions.... God says *I'll give you an answer to your question BUT YOU WON'T UNDERSTAND IT!...YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GET IT!...*

Habakkuk says.... *I want to know...tell me what You're doing!....* God tells him what He's doing and Habakkuk says *I don't get it!...* God says... *I told you, you wouldn't get it!*

You have a five-year old child...parents... do you know why they are always screaming?... Because they don't understand what YOU'RE doing... They want something to eat... they find something in the cupboard and reach out to eat it... it is rat poison...they reach out for it... you grab it away... and they scream!

Why?... they don't understand.... You can sit down and try to explain... that's verse 5...*you really want an explanation honey?...*

“You were about to consume long acting anticoagulents... col-lecal-ciferol...brom-ethalen and phosphide rodent-icides... each has a totally different mechanism of acting of poison.... Not good for eating!”

Your five year-old is NOT going to get it!...so they scream and scream until you yell... SHUT UP!... YOU HAVE TO TRUST ME!!!..... *I don't understand why God allows evil and suffering...it doesn't make sense to me!.... therefore.... I won't believe in Him???*

The distance between your mind and God's mind is infinitely greater than the distance between a five year-old and their parents.... Yet... you expect to understand everything God

does!...Habakkuk is more confused than ever.... God is raising up the Babylonians...*I don't get it.*

But he doesn't turn away from God.... He has more questions than ever..... what does he do?...
he waits...

Read 2:1

When nothing is making sense?... when God seems distant or not even there?.....WAIT!....and we will all have to wait for the rest of the story next week...