

The Just Shall Live by Faith

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References: **Habakkuk 1-3**, Habakkuk 1:1; Habakkuk 1:2; Habakkuk 1:3-4; Habakkuk 1:5-6; Habakkuk 1:8; Habakkuk 1:12-13; Habakkuk 2:1-4; Habakkuk 2:20; Habakkuk 3:1; Habakkuk 3:17-19; Genesis 18:25; Joshua 10:12-13; Song of Solomon 2:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:16

Introduction to Habakkuk

Turn with me to the Old Testament, one of our minor prophets, Habakkuk. Habakkuk—you'll find it between Nahum and Zephaniah, if that's any help. Habakkuk: short, three short chapters.

Now, the reason I chose this this morning is that we've been studying through 2 Kings and have come now to the end of the Davidic crown, where the tribe of Judah is just about to be carried away to Babylon. The rising of the Babylonian Empire—it's coming into focus, and Habakkuk wrote probably during the very last days that the kingdom of Judah was on earth, or was in power. Probably during the reign of Jehoiakim, as we'll see in a bit.

Now, the name Habakkuk means embracing. And we'll find that this man, Habakkuk, **embraced** the people of God and was concerned about them throughout his life. One sort of aside is the pronunciation of this name, Habakkuk. Have we got it right? That's what we generally do; we call him Habakkuk. I remember hearing a professor speak, and he called it Habakkuk. And I thought, "Well, that's very learned," and I tried that for a while and gravitated back to Habakkuk. But I thought, well, maybe though if the professor was right, then maybe we should be calling him Habakkuk just out of honor to the name of this prophet.

So, I looked it up in the Hebrew, and as much as I could tell from Dr. Strong, neither pronunciation is the correct one. We emphasize the first syllable, the professor liked the second syllable, but the Hebrew is on the third syllable. It's a—and the first letter of Habakkuk is not just an H; it's a CH, which is a guttural sound like, "ha-ha-ha-ha," hoh-a-book. So, I think we'll stick with our normal English "Habakkuk," if you don't mind not being so accurate.

I checked with Eli Nessum. He said "Habakkuk" and "Habakkuk" are both right. Eli Nessum? Well, he's gone to be with the Lord, so I can't check with Eli at this particular moment. But it would be Hab-Kuk. The U's would be the same, pronounced the same. We say Hab-Kuk. We use two different pronunciations for the U. Anyway, that doesn't matter. Let's get into the book.

So, we could divide this short prophecy with the titles that are given to us in each of the chapters. The first chapter we read is the burden which Habakkuk saw.

[Habakkuk 1:1 NKJV]

The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw.

It was a **burden** to him. God burdened his heart with what he saw—the circumstances that he saw in Judah at that particular time. And then we read in chapter 2 and verse 2, he has a vision. God shows him a vision because he has some questions, and God answers his questions. And one of his answers was a vision of the future. And then, having seen that, in chapter 3, we find a prayer. So, we have here a burden, we have a vision, and we have a prayer—a prayer of **triumphant faith**, because the Lord had given the vision to Habakkuk.

Chapter 1: The Prophet's Burden

We believe that Habakkuk lived during the time shortly before the Babylonian invasion, and we get that from verse 5, where He says, "I will work a work in your days." The days of the prophet himself; he would see the work of the Lord.

So, we take it that he lived in the time of Jehoiakim. It wouldn't have been earlier too much; he probably would have lived during the reign of Josiah and the reforms that were made—that Josiah made throughout the country in the years that he served the Lord before his sudden death. And so, Habakkuk would have grown up seeing the effect of this godly king and his almost single-handed working to reform much of Israel's worship. Now, the reforms were only very shallow. As soon as Josiah died, one son, Jehoahaz, he came to the throne, but was only gone for three months, and then he was deposed. And then the king of Egypt, who was the power in that area at that time, set up Jehoiakim as king.

And Jehoiakim was a **wicked** king. And so, those shallow reforms that were made under Josiah that Habakkuk would have witnessed—more than likely—they vanished. And once again, violence and oppression ruled the day. And so, we find that the faith of the prophet is tested here. We see his question, his first question, in verse 2:

[Habakkuk 1:2 NKJV]

O LORD, how long shall I cry,
And You will not hear?
Even cry out to You, "Violence!"
And You will not save.

Why do You show me iniquity? The Lord had opened his eyes to see the true state of Israel. And he was crying out, "How long, Lord, until You answer my prayers? Will there be another godly king like Josiah or not?" He says, "For plundering, You cause me to see trouble. For plundering and violence are before me."

[Habakkuk 1:3-4 NKJV]

³ Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises. ⁴ Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse judgment proceeds.

So, the first question that he asked there is, "**How long, O Lord?**" and, "You don't seem to be hearing. You made me see these problems, but You don't seem to be answering."

Now, is that sort of what we see in the world around us today? There's persecution and violence everywhere. Christians are at the forefront of the violence. We talk about anti-Semitism, but the Jews are very few in comparison to the Christians that are being slaughtered in Nigeria and persecuted in Iraq and Iran. And what of other places where Christians are suffering—suffering greatly? Some lose their lives. We think of North Korea. We think of other places around the world where Christians are suffering—true Christians—and some even suffering at the hands of so-called Christians.

And we cry out to the Lord, "How long, Lord? Is there no justice?" We see the problems, like Habakkuk, but God seems to be deaf at times to this. And it's a real test of faith. And so, he goes to the right place, though. He doesn't complain to his fellow Judeans; rather, he goes to the Lord. And that's the first thing that we can learn from Habakkuk: his complaints were to the Lord. He took them to the Lord alone.

And so, the Lord answers him and says, "Look among the nations. You look now; look carefully. You see the problems? Now look. Broaden your view a little bit to the nations. There's other things happening here. Be utterly astounded!"

[Habakkuk 1:5-6 NKJV]

⁵ "Look among the nations and watch--Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you. ⁶ For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, A bitter and hasty nation Which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places that are not theirs.

And so, He describes now the rise of the Babylonian Empire. And He describes them there in the rest of the chapter down to verse 11. Now another question comes into the mind of the prophet. He's heard about these Chaldeans, and God has described them. They're like evening wolves; they're like eagles coming to the prey; they're like lions rushing to kill. You say, "Well, Lord, they're a bunch of idolaters! You're going to punish Your people using a nation that is even more wicked—an idolatrous nation—than Your own people?"

[Habakkuk 1:8 NKJV]

Their horses also are swifter than leopards,
And more fierce than evening wolves.
Their chargers charge ahead;
Their cavalry comes from afar;
They fly as the eagle that hastens to eat.

He says in verse 12:

[Habakkuk 1:12-13 NKJV]

¹² Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction. ¹³ You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours A person more righteous than he?

"You're of pure eyes to behold that evil—these evil ones are now going to come and they are going to persecute and correct Your people? A nation that is wicked, idolatrous, and they're going to come—the unrighteous punishing the righteous?" "Why do You look on those who deal treacherously?" Why—is the question now. "Why are You going to use the Babylonians, those wicked Babylonians, to chastise Your own people?"

And he continues down there through the rest of chapter 1 to explain to God that they're going to take them all up. They're going to catch our people in the net, and they're going to take them to their own lands.

Chapter 2: The Vision and the Watchtower

In chapter 2, the Lord is going to answer him. But Habakkuk is going to stand up on a rampart; he's going to have a viewpoint to see what God is going to show him.

[Habakkuk 2:1-4 NKJV]

¹ 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. ² Then the LORD answered me and said: "Write the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it. ³ For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry. ⁴ "Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.

He said, "If I'm wrong, I'll answer back to the Lord. I'll explain my ignorance." So, then the Lord answered him and said, "Write the vision. Write it down. I'm going to show you a great vision." Just as He does, He says, "Make it plain on tablets."

So, He definitely said that this chastisement of the Babylonians was going to come. "Wait for it," He says. He's describing there in verse 4 a contrast between the proud Babylonians and their inward thought: "His soul is not upright in him." He's proud, lifted up. But He says, "**The just shall live by faith.**" God has opened his eyes to the injustices, but now He's opening his eyes again to see that the just will live by faith.

That's the great lesson that we can draw from this book. Verse 4 again: "Behold the proud." He's thinking there of the Babylonians, and in particular the king of Babylon. "His soul is not upright in him." God knows that he is not upright. So, in verse 4 we find the other part of it.

It's the second part of that verse. It says, "But the just shall live by his faith." The upright and the unrighteous are both in that verse.

I guess what we could draw from this is that that is like a **keynote** as far as our lives are concerned in an evil age. I think, think perhaps of the Christians in northern Nigeria, in the Sahel, where bands of ISIS come down, slaughter villages, and carry away their daughters and sons, and burn their churches and their fields—there's over a million or more that have been displaced as a result of that. How are they to live? They are the just ones. If they're born again of God's Spirit, what are they to do? They're living in an evil age. Much is happening that is evil. But those that are justified must live by **faith alone**, not by the outward circumstances.

Now, for the Old Testament saint, there was a problem here, because blessings seemed to be tied with obedience. So, if you're a just man, it would be expected that your life would be full of blessings. But here it seems that Habakkuk is preparing them for this great disaster that's going to take place. The justified ones are going to have to live by faith, not by sight. The judgment on the nation—the chastisement on the nation itself—the righteous are going to have to bear. And we, as Christians in this life, we have to bear too the difficulties and the trials and the struggles and the persecutions that there are going to be in this world. And that word, therefore—even though the ones like the king of Babylon live proudly and unrighteously—yet we, the just, shall live by his faith.

Because we have a vision. Did not Habakkuk have that vision of what would take place? And God now enlarges that vision. And in the rest of that chapter, right down to verse 19, there He describes five woes that will come upon that wicked nation, the Babylonians. Woe unto you, woe unto you, woe unto you. Five woes on Babylon. He gives them that vision of the end of the age. And so, we too can persevere in that we know that God, the God of the judge of the whole earth, is going to come and put things right.

[Genesis 18:25 NKJV]

Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

But we have a different perspective. We have a different vision. Our vision is not to the end of the age on earth—not yet. But we are looking for the Lord from heaven. They never had

that expectation; they couldn't expect that. We have, as a church, we have that blessed hope where we expect the Lord to come from heaven.

[1 Thessalonians 4:16 NKJV]

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

We'll be removed immediately from the troubles of this earth and the struggles, and then we'll come with Him. Our vision, brothers and sisters, is so much greater than the Old Testament saints. Heaven is opened up to us.

Now, Habakkuk had a vision of the future, and it's expressed in that third chapter. But then, having seen that vision, let's look at verse 20:

[Habakkuk 2:20 NKJV]

"But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him."

The Judge of the whole earth is going to do right, and the Lord is in His holy temple. Sometimes we use the expression, "**God is still on the throne.**" Yes, God is still on the throne. Let us never forget that. These circumstances of life don't change our destiny one bit.

Chapter 3: The Prayer of Faith

But then the prophet goes on. And having seen this vision, his two questions have been answered. "How long, O Lord?" Well, it's going to come. Chastisement is going to come. But during that time of trouble, the just will live by faith. And He gives them a vision that at the end, God is going to set everything right and put down all rule and authority and power.

And now we have a prayer. The beginning and end of the prayer, we notice that he says there in verse 1:

[Habakkuk 3:1 NKJV]

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth.

"Shigionoth," which is understood to be some type of instrument. And then in the last postscript, we have that this hymn or psalm was dedicated to the chief musician with my stringed instruments, which would lead us to believe that he may have been one of the temple singers and associated with the praise and worship in the temple. But that is the only thing we know about this person.

But then chapter 3 is a review, very shortly, of how God had triumphed in the past. It's written in extreme poetic language. God had triumphed at Sinai. He had triumphed at the Jordan. He had triumphed in victory over the Canaanites with Joshua when the sun stood still.

[Joshua 10:12-13 NKJV]

¹² Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel:

"Sun, stand still over Gibeon;
And Moon, in the Valley of Aijalon."

¹³ So the sun stood still, And the moon stopped, Till the people had revenge Upon their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day.

He had triumphed gloriously. God, in the end, is going to triumph. And so, he says here that I won't worry about present circumstances. And he completes it with this beautiful portion at the end from verse 17 on. He says:

[Habakkuk 3:17-19 NKJV]

¹⁷ Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;

Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;

Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls--

¹⁸ Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.

¹⁹ The LORD God is my strength;
He will make my feet like deer's feet,

And He will make me walk on my high hills.
To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments.

And so, we see that though the outward circumstances be dire—and indeed, when the Babylonians came in, and within twenty years the land was stripped of all its produce, taken over by many, and just the poor of the land were left—but this little hymn of faith would be an encouragement to them. Even though the fig tree may not blossom, nor the fruit be on the vine, though the labor of the olive may fail, yet the just shall live by faith.

They have the burdens of the prophet answered. They see the vision of the future, and they have a song in their heart. They don't trust in the circumstances, but they trust in the God who **controls** the circumstances and reveals His will to them.

Now, some have thought that this psalm or last hymn was written specifically in advance for those who would be returning from the Babylonian exile some seventy years later, when they would come to a land—a barren land, hardly settled. The land had enjoyed its Sabbaths since that fallow for years. But they would sing this song as they returned, and it would be an encouragement to them that God is still on the throne and the just shall live by that faith.

Our Father, we thank You once again for Your grace to us. We thank You for this short prophecy. It was so important in his day—an encouragement to the few, the little remnant that was left, to the righteous, to the justified. So Father, we need that same encouragement today. We see the circumstances in the world where evil men seem to be getting more evil every day. We see the deterioration of morals, and we see the world in conflict in many places. So Father, we don't look for those circumstances. We have a far greater vision. We look for the Lord from heaven. We wait to hear the shout:

[Song of Solomon 2:10 NKJV]

My beloved spoke, and said to me: "Rise up, my love, my fair one, And come away.

And so, Lord, give us too that same assurance that the prophet tried to convey to Israel—that the Lord is still on the throne and Your plan is a plan for us in love. And we thank You for Your grace once again in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.