

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 4-19-15 PM NOTES  
"THE PRAYER OF HABAKKUK"  
HABAKKUK 1-3  
#15 in Series, "Learning to Pray From the Experts"

**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. Habakkuk Is Confused (1:1-17)

A. Habakkuk Is Confused Over Unanswered Prayer (v. 2)

**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?"

B. Habakkuk Is Confused Over Escalating Sin (vv. 3-4)

**Jeremiah 8:12a (NKJV)** "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush."

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

C. Habakkuk Is Confused Over God's Plans (vv. 5-13)

**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."

"When you cannot trace His hand, you can trust His heart."

—Charles Spurgeon

II. Habakkuk Is Informed (2:1-20)

A. Habakkuk Is Informed of the Trustworthiness of God's Word (vv. 1-3)

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

B. Habakkuk Is Informed of the Importance of Faith (v. 4)

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

—Hudson Taylor

C. Habakkuk Is Informed of God's Justice (vv. 5-20)

1. Dishonesty (v. 6)
2. Greed (v. 9)
3. Violence (v. 12)
4. Drunkenness and Immorality (vv. 15-17)
5. Idolatry (v. 19)

III. Habakkuk Prays in Faith (3:1-19)

A. The Prayer Begins With Praise (vv. 1-15)

B. The Prayer Concludes With a Declaration of Faith (vv. 16-19)

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“THE PRAYER OF HABAKKUK”  
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The whole book of Habakkuk is a prayer. At its essence, prayer has two elements: we speak to God and God speaks to us. There are many varieties of speaking to God in prayer. Our prayers may be verbalized in private or in a corporate setting. Our prayers may be only through our thoughts. One of the attributes or perfections of God is His omniscience. That means that God is all knowing. He knows our thoughts as fully as He knows our verbalized words that reflect our thoughts. Prayer also involves God speaking to us. How does God speak to us? I have preached whole series of messages on hearing God, but I will give you the greatly condensed answer to that question. God seldom speaks today directly in an audible voice. However, there is nothing that says He cannot do so if He chooses. It is not just wild-eyed lunatics that say God has spoken audibly to them. Author and theologian Dr. R. C. Sproul (who is anything but a wild eyed lunatic) says that once God spoke audibly to him. How do you know if it is God speaking or if you are “loosing it” mentally? Any audible words from God will be in agreement with His written Word – the Bible. Sometimes God speaks through another person. It may be a preacher or a teacher of the Word, and as they teach, you sense that what they are saying is for you. How do you know that it is not just an emotion? What you sense God saying through another will always be in agreement with His written Word. Sometimes God speaks in the realm of our thoughts. I prefer to call these “impressions”. It usually goes like this: Thoughts pop into our mind that are not in the normal pattern of our thinking. I have been walking along and felt strongly impressed to share a tract or share the Gospel verbally with a total stranger. That is not the normal way of thinking for me (though I wish it would be). I have been impressed to write an email or letter of encouragement to someone and I have had them tell me later that it arrived at a time of deep discouragement and God used the note to lift them out of the depths. How do we know that these thoughts of impressions are really of the Lord? They will never contradict the written Word of God. Are you seeing a pattern here? The primary way that God speaks to us is through the reading and study of His written Word. When we read something in the Scriptures and interpret it according to solid hermeneutical principles, that is God speaking and so often what you get from Scripture will be in answer to a prayer for guidance that you have asked of the Lord.

The whole book of Habakkuk is a prayer. Habakkuk speaks to God, and God responds. Sometimes what God says to Habakkuk is comforting to him, and sometimes what God says causes Habakkuk great consternation.

Before we get into this prayer of Habakkuk, let me give you a little background of the book. 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 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 and to 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 recording his prayer to God and God's answer. 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 was changed through answered prayer as he saw what was happening from God's perspective.

I. Habakkuk Is Confused (1:1-17)

In verse 1, Habakkuk is bearing a heavy burden. His burden was over the sinfulness and rebellion of his people. Specifically, what was burdening him?

#### A. Habakkuk Is Confused over Unanswered Prayer (V2)

Habakkuk knew that God knew his thoughts, so he hid nothing and just laid his innermost thoughts and fears out in the open. The 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)** “<sup>1</sup> How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? <sup>2</sup> 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. For us with our limited knowledge and limited patience, there is a real mystery 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 someone I love who is 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 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. Habakkuk is troubled about unanswered prayer. I can relate!

#### B. Habakkuk Is Confused over Escalating Sin (V3-4)

It seemed to Habakkuk that the wicked way outnumbered the righteous. There was violence, injustice, strife, the rich oppressing the poor, and wickedness seemed to have the upper hand. Does the seemingly unrestrained sin of our day grieve you as it did Habakkuk? Jeremiah, an older contemporary of Habakkuk wrote a description of their day that describes our day as well. **Jeremiah 8:12a (NKJV)** “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush...” Isn’t that a perfect description of our day? It seems that we as a nation have lost the ability to blush. Adrian Rogers used to say, “Sin that used to slink down back alleys now struts down Main Street”. Adrian Rogers died over 10 years ago; what would he say now? Now sin that used to slink down back alleys not only struts down main street; it is welcomed into and even celebrated in the churches of our land! Habakkuk was confused. Why wasn’t God doing something? Can you relate to him? Some of us have been praying diligently for God to send a revival to our nation. Some of us have prayed for 25 or 30 years or more and yet revival has not come. Things are just getting worse. Habakkuk was confused. I am often confused.

I fear that some people over-simplify and in doing so almost trivialize prayer. They see no place for agonizing and wrestling in our confusion in prayer. They 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 heart’s desires. Listen carefully: Prayer is communication in a love relationship with God, not a bunch of formulas thrown up to a God who is detached and only answers when we conjure up the right formulas!

#### C. Habakkuk Is Confused over God’s Plans (V5-13)

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 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 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. Looking at the whole sweep of history, we see that God raised up the Chaldeans to be His instrument of discipline against His people. They were like a switch in a father's hand to discipline his children. When he is finished, he discards the switch. After using the Babylonians to accomplish His judgment against the Jews, He raised up the Medes and the Persians to destroy Babylon and the leader of the Medo-Persian Empire (Cyrus) allowed many of 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". We can trust God's sovereignty even when it seems to make no sense at all. God is always at work to accomplish His purposes. I think it was Charles Spurgeon who said, "When you cannot trace His hand, you can trust His heart".

## II. Habakkuk Is Informed (2:1-20)

Habakkuk decides that in his confusion, he is simply going to wait upon God and receive His correction. This waiting on God is an important and often neglected part of prayer.

### A. Habakkuk Is Informed of the Trustworthiness of God's Word (V1-3)

God tells Habakkuk to write what He tells him on tablets and use giant print so that messengers who take what God says to the people can read it clearly as they run from one place to another getting the word to the people. God will do what He says; His word can be completely trusted. **Titus 1:2b (NKJV)** "... God, who cannot lie..." When you are confused with what is happening and nothing seems to make sense, get into the word of God and cling to its promises and let God teach you His perspective. He is still in control! There is no panic in heaven; only plans! God's plans will come to pass in His exact and perfect timing.

### B. Habakkuk Is Informed of the Importance of Faith (V4)

The last part of this verse 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 15<sup>th</sup> Century), the true Gospel that says we are justified before God not by our 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 on his following traditions and his own merit.

When we are confused and we go to God in prayer as Habakkuk did, I believe that the word from God you are going to hear more than any other is this: "The just shall live by faith; you can trust me!" Hudson Taylor the pioneer missionary to China used to translate this passage, "The just shall live by holding on to God's faithfulness". 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". As you pray, this is the message you will hear when nothing makes sense.

### C. Habakkuk Is Informed of God's Justice (V5-20)

In these verses, God is informing Habakkuk that 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:

1. Dishonesty (V6)
2. Greed (V9)
3. Violence (V12)
4. Drunkenness and Immorality (V15-17)
5. Idolatry (V19)

The greatness of Babylon was shortly lived; in about 70 years they were defeated and were never again a world power. God concludes His informing of Habakkuk in verse 20 (read). 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.” Remember, all of this is in the context of prayer!

### III. Habakkuk Prays in Faith (3:1-19)

These are among the greatest verses in the Bible. I never get tired of reading them. Basically, chapter three shows us what living by faith looks like.

#### A. The Prayer Begins with Praise (V1-15)

Habakkuk begins by rehearsing the attributes of God. In verse 2 he asks God to revive His people and as He pours out His wrath on His enemies, remember mercy for His people. In verse 4 Habakkuk magnifies God’s power. In verses 12, 13 he praises God for His wrath.

What is really happening in this section of Habakkuk’s prayer is that he turns from focusing on the situation at hand and begins to focus on God and His perfections. That enables him (and us) to see trials and challenges in the proper perspective.

#### B. The Prayer Concludes with a Declaration of Faith (V16-19)

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 tanks 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.” That is what living by faith means.

### CONCLUSION

Habakkuk gives us a whole new perspective if prayer. It is a speaking, listening, agonizing, and then trusting as we walk in this amazing love relationship with God.