

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

Lesson 6, Chapter 2 Concluded

We have completed the first 2 chapters of Habakkuk with the 3rd remaining. Those first 2 chapters are of substantially different nature and purpose than the final one. So much so that it has left the Bible academic world at odds with one another over whether the chapter 3 as we have it is an authentic work of Habakkuk, or if it was added later (probably after Babylon conquered Judah) by someone else.

So, let's begin by dealing with that matter. The main contention is that this was always meant to be a Psalm, and not part of a prophetic oracle. And that as a Psalm, it should have been, and was always intended to be, added to the Book of Psalms. Psalms by another word are essentially hymns. With but the slightest nuance, there is no real difference such that we could rightly interchange the terms psalm and hymn, even though the Church might argue with that contention.

Further, another term that could also be the equivalent of psalm and hymn, is song. All of these were, if not fully intended to be, eventually set to music (and some almost immediately upon their creation), not unlike a modern songwriter that typically first writes the words for a song, then sets it to music before it is completed and released for public consumption. We find these Psalms, hymns and songs scattered throughout the Old Testament, some of them present within prophecies (as with Habakkuk chapter 3). So, the contention that this had to be a later Psalm added to Habakkuk, which was misplaced from being placed within the Book of Psalms, holds no water.

The second major point of contention that Habakkuk did not write chapter 3 comes from the finding of the Habakkuk Scroll among the other Dead Sea Bible Scrolls. In what is technically called 1QpHab (meaning the Habakkuk manuscript found in cave 1 at Qumran as part of the Qumran *peshet*), only chapters 1 and 2 were found. Therefore, those scholars say this is proof that no chapter 3 existed at that time. The truth is that not a single book of the **Tanakh** has been found totally complete and fully intact among the Dead Sea Scrolls. All are missing either chapters or portions of chapters. So, the

Habakkuk *peshet* is merely like all the other Dead Sea Scrolls that have been found.

If there is a third point of contention, it has to do with its poetic and literary structure, which does have some differences from chapters 1 and 2. This is because the 3rd chapter has a different purpose and tone than chapters 1 and 2; but then one would expect a bit of an altered structure. On the other hand, the vocabulary of chapter 3... using some very unique and rare Hebrew words... is quite comparable to, and in-line with, the first 2 chapters.

While no one can say with certainty that chapter 3 was written by someone else, equally there is no way to say with any reliability that it was not. That said, we could approach about any book in the Bible (Old or New Testaments), from the earliest to the latest written, with such a doubt because in no case do we have the original draft copies of them. Yet, that hardly means we can view all the books of the Bible with skepticism because we don't have absolute proof of their originality. Even in matters of modern times that involve photographic evidence, living witnesses, and so on, absolute proof is a standard that can rarely be met. When it comes to historical matters of even a couple of decades ago, let alone thousands of years having passed, "absolute proof" can never be attained. Rather, it is a matter of reasonable reliability and a high degree of verifiable authentication exceeding any cause for serious doubt. And Habakkuk as being confirmed as a complete 3-chapter book written by a single author passes that 2-part test. So, we'll be approaching it with that understanding of its authenticity.

We will probably not find a more re-written chapter in the Bible, nor more variation in translations among the many Bible versions, than Habakkuk chapter 3. I cannot possibly compare all these variations for you as we go along, or we would spend months on this one chapter alone, and I don't think it would add to our understanding one whit. I will mention this, however. In March 1955, in the Wadi Murabba'at a wandering sheep herder found a scroll containing the Minor Prophets. This dry riverbed ravine is located in a part of what is now called The West Bank. The primary thing for us to know is that the contents of Habakkuk's writing is very nearly identical to the Habakkuk *peshet* found in the Qumran cave. The nuances and differences are so

unremarkable as to be almost invisible to all but the most punctilious language scholars. What is even more remarkable, is that these scrolls have a great precision of content with the Masoretic Text of about 1000 A.D., which until the Dead Sea Scrolls find, was the oldest of the Hebrew Bible book texts that had been discovered.

So, why all the many translations of this chapter that can vary so much? Because several of the words are rare, and their meaning is thus uncertain. Further, Habakkuk, like a few other prophets, has his own unique style of using grammar and syntax that can be really hard to deal with, such as using feminine verbs with male nouns (or vice versa) and then mixing the complete and incomplete tenses in a sentence. It is largely done in order to create a Hebraic poetic structure; thus, the meaning takes second place to eliciting emotional impact on the listeners and readers. Therefore, it can be legitimately challenging to extract the intended meaning.

Then, of course, academics have their own preconceived theological principles and uphold certain denominational doctrines, and so will tailor a translation so as not to conflict with those preconceived principles and doctrines. Because the Wadi Murabba'at texts, the Dead Sea Scrolls texts, and the Masoretic Text for Habakkuk all match almost perfectly, then there won't be much basis to change the text or for us to think any of it is corrupt. I'll do my best to translate and explain meaning within the boundaries of those texts as we have them today, based upon the overall context and what was revealed from the first 2 chapters of Habakkuk's book. If chapter 3 were something that upended or conflicted with the oracles of the first 2 chapters that would be a problem, and one would have to give legitimacy to the idea of a 2nd author from a later date. But that is not the case.

The opening words to chapter 3 characterize what this entire chapter is about, so every attempt to re-characterize it into something else is disingenuous. The first word is **Tehilla**, which is usually taken to mean "prayer". That said that Hebrew word as being a direct one-to-one equivalent to the English word "prayer" is an overstatement and oversimplification. It can lean towards being a direct personal plea to the divine, it can also lean towards being a general psalm that is a sometimes-poetic series of praises and calls for help that can

be used in many different situations and settings that is therefore non-specific. And it indeed can lean towards being song-like in its nature. In fact, the first words of several of the Psalms in the Book of Psalm are called by the Psalms author “a prayer”. Psalm 17 is a good example.

CJB Psalm 17:1 *A prayer of David: Hear a just cause, Yehoveh, heed my cry; listen to my prayer from honest lips.*

Here, in the opening of Habakkuk chapter 3, the word “prayer” as we today think of the word, is probably a good choice so long as we understand that what we are reading stems from Habakkuk responding to the conversation he had with God in chapters 1 and 2. Perhaps we could nuance that just a bit further by calling it a “prayerful response” to the revelations God has given to him. I won’t go to this much length to explain every word in this chapter, but I wanted to use this as a good example of why we have to be cautious in translating a Hebrew word with some succinct equivalent English word. The meaning might be close, but the nuances of it matter a great deal.

There is a strong poetic structure to this prayerful response, but perhaps not as strong as with chapters 1 and 2. Perhaps rather than calling it “poetic”, “lyrical” is the better characterization. It indeed contains the emotions, the hopes, and the wishes of this prophet as He expresses them to Yehoveh. And it is done quite expertly and elegantly. In fact, one could reasonably look at Habakkuk’s words and see that it might even step over the boundary of prayer and into the arena of actual worship. Considering how bothered and upset with God that Habakkuk has been, what with his quite pointed if not almost irreverent questioning of God’s actions (or better, inactions), I can only imagine how much of a conscious effort it was for Habakkuk to give God so much praise and adoration once he realized that the answers he hoped for were not forthcoming. It is quite amazing how much Habakkuk sounds like Asaf, the writer of Psalm 73, carrying such a similar pattern and tone.

CJB Psalm 73:1-14 *A psalm of Asaf: How good God is to Isra'el, to those who are pure in heart!*

² But as for me, I lost my balance, my feet nearly slipped, ³ when I grew envious of the arrogant and saw how the wicked prosper. ⁴ For

when their death comes, it is painless; and meanwhile, their bodies are healthy; ⁵ they don't have ordinary people's troubles, they aren't plagued like others. ⁶ So for them, pride is a necklace; and violence clothes them like a robe. ⁷ Their eyes peep out through folds of fat; evil thoughts overflow from their hearts. ⁸ They scoff and speak with malice, they loftily utter threats. ⁹ They set their mouths against heaven; their tongues swagger through the earth. ¹⁰ Therefore his people return here and [thoughtlessly] suck up that whole cup of water. ¹¹ Then they ask, "How does God know? Does the Most High really have knowledge?" ¹² Yes, this is what the wicked are like; those free of misfortune keep increasing their wealth. ¹³ It's all for nothing that I've kept my heart clean and washed my hands, staying free of guilt; ¹⁴ for all day long I am plagued; my punishment comes every morning.

Then, skipping a few verses:

CJB Psalm 73:23-24 *²³ Nevertheless, I am always with you; you hold my right hand. ²⁴ You will guide me with your advice; and afterwards, you will receive me with honor.*

The Psalmist finishes with:

CJB Psalm 73:28 *But for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made Yehoveh ELOHIM my refuge, so that I can tell of all your works.*

So, the mindset of complaint and frustration with God, and yet balanced with undying faith and loyalty in God and to God that we find in Psalm 73, is what we also find in Habakkuk. So, Habakkuk was not breaking new ground. It is something we all need to take to heart and understand that as humans, we are going to have times in our lives that make us unhappy if not miserable. It happens that after years of walking in His ways and consistently expressing our loyalty and devotion to Him, we might look around and think that things ought not to be playing out as they are. It is OK to contend with God; to ask hard questions of Him so long as it comes not from doubt, but rather in full faithfulness to Him who is so far above us that at times we lack even the

capacity to truly understand why things are as they are even when explained to us.

Let's read chapter 3.

READ HABAKKUK CHAPTER 3 all

The first word of verse 1 (***Tehilla***) we have already discussed at some length. Looking at the next few words gets more challenging. While the CJB says, "***This is a prayer of Habakkuk the prophet about mistakes***", other versions take it differently. The most common translation used is:

^{NAS} **Habakkuk 3:1** ***A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.***

The YLT version is the same as the CJB except instead of saying "mistakes", it says, "erring ones". The first thing to know is that the Hebrew ***shigionoth*** is what is being translated, and so most Bible versions simply leave it untranslated and use the original Hebrew word as-is.

Shigionoth cannot be found anywhere else in the Bible. In fact, language scholars will tell you that they have never found that word anywhere in any kind of ancient Hebrew document. The CJB takes it as a verb (mistakes). The other versions make it a noun. So, very likely it is meant as a noun as opposed to the action of erring. In fact, many of the Bible versions make it a proper noun, meaning it is a formal name. The root of the word is ***shiggay***, which means to stray. If that is the case, then likely this word is meaning some kind of song that is already in existence, which has an element of passion but also includes something that expresses human error. I chose Psalm 73 to use as a parallel to Habakkuk for that reason. It existed before Habakkuk and in the first half it expresses a mistaken human perspective of evil and the notion that God seems to allow evil to thrive, but in the end, admits our limited human understanding and that the proper solution is only to continue having faith in God. It is entirely possible that Habakkuk was referring precisely to Psalm 73, but I cannot say that with any kind of certainty. Nonetheless, I think that verse 1 explains that what follows comes

from Habakkuk, and it is a kind of a worshipful prayer that mimics the tone, intention and purpose of the long-ago established Psalm 73.

CJB Habakkuk 3:2 ***Yehoveh, I have heard the report about you. Yehoveh, I am awed by your deeds. Bring your work to life in our own age, make it known in our own time; but in anger, remember compassion.***

This begins the actual prayer. The Father's formal name, Yehoveh, is used twice in verse 2 and several more times in this prayer that forms chapter 3. I want to point out that this shows us that still in Habakkuk's era, around 300 years prior to the late 4th century B.C., using God's name in teaching and in prayer remained usual and customary among the Hebrews. But around 330 B.C. a superstition arose among Jews that made it not only illegal but punishable to speak God's name. This has remained a tradition of Judaism to this day. It is a lamentable error as God regularly tells His worshippers in the Bible to literally call upon His name. Because Christianity has followed this same pattern as Judaism, even if for entirely different reasons, it has obscured the works of the Father and nearly completely blots out His name from our Bibles. In an age of tolerance as a newest virtue of the Church, synagogue and Secular State, when the names of other Gods like Allah are invoked, it is often said that it is really just the God of the Bible, only in another language. That is not true, and so the very reason for using God's name, but refusing to do so, leads to confusion and deadly serious error.

The tone of Habakkuk shifts from complaint to self-humility. God's responses to those complaints helped the Prophet to remember who God is, and that as mere mortals we ought not think ourselves as on par with God, nor that we should be His advisors or even judges such that we can rightfully think God has made some mistakes, or gone back on His Word, or changed His principles because they have proved to be unworkable for humans, etc. To do so is the height of folly, if not full-blown idolatry or even blasphemy.

Honestly, Habakkuk (of all people) saying something like "I have heard the report about You", and then "I am awed by Your deeds" sounds very odd. After all, this man was God's chosen Prophet. He is not at all like Abraham, for

instance, that had never heard of this god (Yehoveh) until God introduced Himself. Obviously, Habakkuk was not only on familiar terms with God, but He had walked with God most (and probably all) of his life. So, what does this mean as concerns Habakkuk hearing the report about Him? I suspect it is just a colloquial manner of speaking that is not meant for us to take precisely literally. It is more like our saying in prayer, "I know who you are God". My conclusion is that Habakkuk drew greatly from the Psalms. Prophets often drew from earlier works of other biblical authors. It may even be that his intent at times was to quote some of them or at least express them in close paraphrase. Listen to the opening of Psalm 44.

CJB Psalm 44:2 *God, we heard it with our ears; our fathers told us about it- a deed which you did in their days, back in days of old.*

This Psalm expresses exactly what Habakkuk is expressing.

When we read that Habakkuk says "I have heard", the Hebrew is **shama**. It is just another form of the word **shema**. **Shama** means something that was already known. **Shema** means something that is present and current. Either spelling, the basic understanding remains the same. It means hearing (in the sense of experiencing or being informed), as well as doing in obedience. So, this is expressing that Habakkuk had from the past known Yehoveh, believed Yehoveh, followed Yehoveh, and adopted Yehoveh's ways. His relationship with God, and knowledge of Him, was anything but new.

I want to pause momentarily to explain another nuance about the words **shema** and **shama**. This word can be used to refer to a report of any newsworthy event, including the arrival of good or bad tidings. So, it has a wider range of meanings and use than we might typically think, and beyond how translators typically use it. Further, when used in conjunction with the term "your deeds" it also indicates that this passage means something from the past that is noteworthy, and it is unlikely to be a single great deed but rather a series of deeds. I think it goes without saying that for Habakkuk, there was no single great deed about some particular moment in time that he had in mind. Rather, this is meant as a general characterization of God's person that has been progressively revealed over a long history with the

Hebrews. It is God's nature that has been steady and unchanging from long, long ago that is evident through the many works and miracles He ordained.

The last half of verse 2 is probably best framed the way the YLT version does it.

^{YLT} **Habakkuk 3:2** *O Jehovah, Thy work! in midst of years revive it, In the midst of years Thou makest known In anger Thou dost remember mercy.*

In this quite literal (but a bit awkward) translation, we notice the repetition of the phrase "in the midst", which seeks to translate the Hebrew **qereb**. It can also be used to mean "inward parts", but that doesn't fit the context. However, what I just read to you from the YLT also doesn't make a whole lot of sense. What could "in the midst of years" possibly mean? There really is nothing comparable to that thought in the **Tanakh** (the Old Testament). One solution is to not accept the vowels traditionally assigned to this Hebrew word, but in intellectual honesty don't really have any strong evidence to back it up as the proper translation. Rather, with but a change of one vowel we could arrive at the word **qerob**, which means something like "approach". And "approach" can be meant in the sense of "in the arrival of time" (such as, we are approaching the End Times). So, this would give us a meaning of "over the passing of time when it approaches the ordained time for something to happen".

If we assume this is correct (which I do), then Habakkuk is beseeching God to revive or to repeat some things He has done in the past for Israel. And, when He does these awesome (often terrible) deeds on account of being angry either with Israel or with the nations or both, then Habakkuk is asking Yehoveh to, in the midst of His anger, to also remember that He is compassionate and merciful. This reminds us of a God-pattern throughout the Bible of God showing, or being asked to show, mercy even though justice and judgment are what is legitimately called for. In the context of this verse... as I have determined it probably means... the idea is that over the centuries God has in the past meted out righteous justice on Israel, but He has also tempered it with unmerited mercy. So, Habakkuk wants Him to deal with Israel, now, and in the future, in that same historical pattern.

Habakkuk knows that Israel is going to suffer God's wrath just as the nations will. He is not asking God to avoid judging Israel (or in this narrow case, Judah), but rather he is suggesting that it is right to do so but in the same way He has done it before. Even with mercy, however, Israel/Judah will experience the tribulations it deserves for its unfaithfulness and rebellion.

This is an important principle that will happen to Judah due to Babylon's invasion, and later due to the Romans' conquest. And in the End Times, it will occur yet again.

CJB Habakkuk 3:3 *God comes from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Pa'ran. (Selah) His splendor covers the sky, and his praise fills the earth.*

This verse is little more than a minor reworking of a similar song or hymn that Moses spoke over the people of Israel as they listened to him make his final speech from a mountain in Moab.

CJB Deuteronomy 33:1-2 *This is the blessing that Moshe, the man of God, spoke over the people of Isra'el before his death: 2 "Yehoveh came from Sinai; from Se'ir he dawned on his people, shone forth from Mount Pa'ran; and with him were myriads of holy ones; at his right hand was a fiery law for them.*

Some would find Habakkuk 3:3 – 7 as a literary unit. Perhaps. However, this might be pushing the limits a little on just how far we ought to go in dividing up a section of Scripture into subunits. I certainly don't see anything structural about this prayer that would lend itself into anything as definite as that. At best, it might be a subjective way to divide up these 19 verses of chapter 3 into bite-sized chunks only for the sake of easier study.

God is pictured as on a military excursion or march coming from the South. It is describing a theophany... an appearance of God on earth. Here, Habakkuk essentially substitutes the location of Teman for the location of the Sinai desert that Moses used. Teman is the name of an ancient city, and the home

to a large clan of descendants of Esau, located in ancient Edom. So, as we keep talking about the emergence and re-emergence of God-patterns, this is another whereby the earlier descriptions of the actions of God are prophesied to be repeated yet again.

I suppose (considering the wide audience I hope I am talking to) it is necessary to ask the so-called New Testament Church members among you how it is that you expect to understand the End Times without first knowing the Torah and the Prophets? The reality is that the Book of Revelation... which is often the primary if not only source of End Times information for Christians... depends upon its readers first knowing what is taught in the Old Testament, and especially in the Old Testament Prophets. In fact, I contend that the author of the book, John, made allusions to the words of the earlier prophets as a rather standard short-cut used in Hebrew literature, in order to not have to repeat what was already long ago written. I have read much material about the Constantinian Church's views of the End Times... some meant as Bible study, others such as the Left Behind series meant as a kind of contemporary way to represent the author's view on the matter... by wrapping an exciting fictional tale over what the Book of Revelation says, and it is so believed as truth that it has gone a long way to create entire new Church doctrines. Naturally, these doctrines are left wanting because they leave out the all-important context and background information about the End Times where it is most abundant in the Bible: The Old Testament. And this is because Christians are urged not to venture there, lest they become confused.

This 3rd chapter of Habakkuk, then, begins in verse 3 depicting the emergence of God, and then segways in verse 6 and forward, into what His theophanic impact is on humanity in general (including Israel). The first word of this verse is **elohay**. This quite ancient name for God ought not even be translated. It needs to just be left as is in its Hebrew form in the English translations. Instead, invariably the word "God" is substituted. I've spoken on this matter a few times in the past, but the issue is that **elohay** is but the singular of the plural word **elohim**. **Elohay** is relating a kind of office or role God holds as the chief, singular head of the Divine Council in Heaven (and also over humanity as an earthly shadow or type of **elohim** on this planet). This Divine Council in Heaven is composed of spirit beings called **elohim**. So, **elohay** is the name of

a role or it is a descriptive title of God and is not merely another word for God. There is only one Hebrew word that directly means God, and that is **yah**.

After speaking about **elohay** coming in theophany from the direction of Teman, He is next called by the title of Holy One, or **Qadoshe'** in Hebrew. It is common especially among the Prophets to use 2 consecutive titles or roles of God when speaking of Him, more or less to further glorify who He is. Although, I think that sometimes the specific terms they choose are not merely random but rather might be intended to help set a finer context for that particular act of God within the specific prophetic oracle. And, indeed the second half of verse 3 speaks of God in glorifying ways by pointing to His splendor, and then the praise of an awestruck humanity towards Him to such a high level that it is said (using a somewhat common Hebrew expression) "to fill the earth".

To be clear, although this has happened in the past, the verb tenses and grammar make it clear that Habakkuk is speaking of the future. I would call this a progressing revelation as we move from era to era in the future from the time of Habakkuk, each time it happens expanding in scope, intensity, and impact.

CJB Habakkuk 3:4 *His brightness is like the sun, rays come forth from his hand- that is where his power is concealed.*

This is a rather common English translation of this verse; and there is another with a slight variation that is about as equally common. It is found in the KJV among several others.

KJV Habakkuk 3:4 *And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power.*

The variation lies primarily with one translation using the word Sun, the other using the word light, to describe God's appearance; and then one uses the word "rays" and the other "horns" that come from His hand. In the first case, the Hebrew word being alternately called the sun or light is **owr**. For a thorough discussion of this word **owr** go to the TorahClass.com lessons on the Book of Genesis. But, in a nutshell, the word really doesn't denote visible light

but rather it denotes the concept of illumination in the sense of imparting divine wisdom and truth. Without doubt (at least to me) Habakkuk is simply taking poetic license to use the word "**owr**" because when referring to the Sun and the light that comes from it, a couple of different Hebrew terms are typically used with **shemesh** being the most common. Yet, we do not find that Hebrew word used here.

So why would Habakkuk mix up the concepts of spiritual illumination as well as brightness that comes from a visible bright light like the Sun? In my opinion it is intentional for the purpose of poetic structure, but also to give an image of both kinds of illumination occurring at the same time when God makes His appearance...spiritual wisdom and also bright visible light rays. Such an image of Moses is made early in the Torah when Moses comes down from the mountaintop of Sinai with the tablets of the Commandments in his hands.

CJB Exodus 34:29-30 ***²⁹ When Moshe came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, he didn't realize that the skin of his face was sending out rays of light as a result of his talking with Yehoveh. ³⁰ When Aharon and the people of Isra'el saw Moshe, the skin of his face was shining; and they were afraid to approach him.***

Recall that this entire Psalm or prayer of Habakkuk uses deeds and events of the past to describe things of the future. So, this mention of light and light rays in verse 4 is a kind of replay of that historical event, which most Judeans would have recognized by Habakkuk's words.

It has become a rather common refrain from late 20th and early 21st century Bible scholars to say that the words about God from verse 4 are portraying images and traditions about the Sun God that was so popular and widespread throughout the Middle East of those days. I don't find that as credible. Rather the image Habakkuk is describing comes nearly exclusively from the Book of Exodus and has no connection with Middle Eastern pagan Sun God worship.

We'll pause here for today and continue with Habakkuk chapter 3 next time.