

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: Character Forged in Crisis**

(Character sketches from Scripture)

#### **Faith's Journey**

(A look at the life of <sup>1</sup>)

Study #4

#### **Sermon series: Character Forged in Crisis**

Character sketches from Scripture

#### **Introduction to Habakkuk**

Shalom. I am Habakkuk. And I'm glad that you are with me today. Habakkuk is who I am, and *habaq* is what I do.

*Habaq*. The word means "to hold tightly; to embrace." I am Habakkuk - the one who embraces.

Today, I am going to live up to my name. I am going to *habaq* the LORD.

I have questions for Him, and I'm not going to let Him go of Him until I have my answers.

#### **Historical setting**

I am a Jew and I come from the tribe of Levi.<sup>2</sup> I serve the LORD as one of His prophets.

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<sup>1</sup> It is believed that Habakkuk was a well-educated man. The language he used in the book was erudite, poetic, and highly polished Hebrew. Sadly, though, not much is known about the man himself.

<sup>2</sup> The postscript to the book suggests that Habakkuk may have been a Levite.

As you know, my nation was divided hundreds of years ago, north and south, shortly after the reign of King Solomon.

Then, a few generations ago, the northern kingdom - called Israel - was destroyed by the Assyrians.

The LORD brought about their destruction because of her sin.

As for me, I serve the southern kingdom, Judah, and her king, Jehoiakim. Now, Judah has always been the more righteous half of our nation.

But these days? The conditions here in Judah are no better than they were in the north before the LORD sent destruction.

My heart aches at the task the LORD has given me: I am His prophet while serving under King Jehoiakim.

Yes, I am to serve as the LORD's prophet while our king is leading us away from the LORD!

Jehoiakim is a very bad king. He is greedy. So, to enrich Judah, he has made alliances with other nations - even with Egypt!

I've called him out for this - more than once! - and I've been beaten for it.

Our king has put his trust for provision and for protection in these other kings. No! We should be trusting the KING!

Jehoiakim has no passion for the LORD. He doesn't trust the LORD at all.

It is all so very discouraging.

#### **Habakkuk's decision to "habaq" the LORD**

Which is why, today I am bringing my discouragement to the LORD. I am going to "*habaq*" (embrace) Him until I get an answer from Him. I have spent my whole life serving the LORD.

My heart's desire is to magnify Him and to see Him glorified. He is NOT being glorified at all because of our king and our sin.

Something must be done about the sin of my people.

There is too much going wrong with my nation to remain silent any longer. I must speak up!

### **Habakkuk speaks to the LORD**

*"You don't listen to me!"*

**[1:2a] How long, LORD, have I called for help  
And You do not hear?"<sup>3</sup>**

I have been crying out to You for years about how bad things are here in Jerusalem. How much longer do I have to cry out before You act?

I'll admit it. I am confused. I'm frustrated.

You seem so distant, like You aren't even listening to me. Nothing is happening. My people's sin remains. You haven't done a thing.

And You know the problems, Lord.

*"Violence is everywhere!"*

**[1:2b] I cry out to You, "Violence!"  
Yet You do not save."**

People can't walk the streets of Your holy city, Jerusalem, without feeling threatened.

Shopkeepers must board up their shops at night.  
Homeowners in the villages don't feel secure.  
Children are victimized.  
Women never feel safe alone.

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<sup>3</sup> Habakkuk doesn't address the people directly as the Lord's spokesman, but gives his message as a dialogue between himself and God.

I have asked You, begged and pleaded with You, to do something - and You haven't saved the innocent from their suffering at all.

I'm having a hard time squaring Your inactivity with Your holiness.

Why don't You listen to my cry?

And it is not just violence.

*"Sin and iniquity abound!"*

**[1:3a] Why do You make me see disaster,  
And make me look at destitution?**

Sexual sin of every kind is here.  
Robbery and theft are routine.  
Apostasy and corruption are the order of the day.  
There is wickedness beyond belief!

And all of this is happening among Your people!

The wickedness of this place is overwhelming - but You sit on Your hands.

I don't know how much more of this I can stand. And I don't see how You can look on Your people's sin and not do anything about it.

Jerusalem has become a loveless place.

And, of course, there is the lawlessness.

**[1:4] Therefore, the Law is ignored  
And justice is never upheld.  
For the wicked surround the righteous;  
Therefore, justice comes out confused.**

Your people have grown cold toward You and Your ways, Lord.

The wicked hold sway over the righteous, and in every court of law, in the temple, at the synagogues, justice is violated.

Lord, for my whole life, I have been zealous for your glory. I have preached to this people till I am blue in the face. I have prayed 'til my knees ached.

How long, Lord, until You do something. When are You going to do something about this mess we're in?

What's that? You ARE going to do something? Well, HALLELUJAH! (to the congregation - IT'S ABOUT TIME!)

And you are going to tell me your plan? You say You are going to deal with the wicked.

This is wonderful.

I wonder what the LORD will do? Will the people finally listen to my prophesying? Will He bring a powerful revival? An outbreak of holiness?

Tell me, Lord, when will You move and what are You going to do!

### **The LORD Speaks to Habakkuk**

*"I am active"*

**[1:5] "Look among the nations! Watch! Be horrified! Be frightened speechless! For I am accomplishing a work in your days - You would not believe it even if you were told."**

I wouldn't believe WHAT if I were told?

If You are really concerned with the sin of Your people and You're really about to do something, tell me about it!

I have been asking You to act for years. And You say that You are going to do something while I am alive? Why, that is great news, Lord!

*"I am going to use the Chaldeans"*<sup>4</sup>

**[1:6] "For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, That grim and impetuous people Who march throughout the earth To take possession and to seize dwelling places that are not theirs."**<sup>5</sup>

### **Habakkuk responds to God's plan**

*To the LORD*

What? You are not going to send revival? You're going to send judgment? You are going to judge us by the Chaldeans?

LORD, I know we are sinful - but this can't be right. The people You are calling in to judge us are even more sinful than we are.

*To the congregation*

As you know, this latest re-sprouting of Babylon is of recent origin, begun under Nebopolassar.

Now, his son, Nebuchadnezzar, is building the Babylonians' strength. They are destroying nations all around them.

They haven't yet bothered us, but they have been moving in our direction, barreling westward across the Fertile Crescent.

They leave a wake of destruction wherever they go.

Only recently, they have destroyed the Assyrians (the ones who destroyed the northern kingdom, Israel).

So, let me tell you about the Chaldeans...

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout the Bible, Babylon (or the Chaldeans) symbolizes the confusion caused by godlessness.

<sup>5</sup> In the period of the Judges, God used the Philistines to judge the nation of Israel, to discipline her.

*Habakkuk describes the Chaldeans (vv. 7-11a)*

They are arrogant. But - and this will sound strange - their arrogance is not an empty boast. It is well-placed. They are that powerful.

If you ever saw them dressed for battle, watched as they ran toward an enemy, listened to their war cry - you'd say, *"Their boasts are legit."*

Their horses are as fast as leopards. Their horsemen can ride like the wind. Together, horse and rider are as fierce as wolves.

They are like tornadoes ripping across the desert, unstoppable.

Many kings have built strongholds just to fend off the Chaldeans. Those strongholds don't even slow them down.

Once they hit the battlefield, they do everything they can to strike terror in the hearts of their enemies.

They are bent on maximum violence, total intimidation.

No one has a chance in battle against them. They are undefeatable.

And, like the Assyrians did, the Chaldeans transport defeated people to Babylon where they serve as slaves.<sup>6</sup>

What's that You say now Lord?

*The LORD will judge the Chaldeans*

**[1:11b] "But they will be held guilty,  
They whose strength is their god."**

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<sup>6</sup> This must have been especially discouraging to any conquered nation, but even more so to the Jews, whose hope for prosperity and blessing was connected to the land. Their national identity was destroyed by being removed from the land.

*Habakkuk responds to God's promise of the Chaldeans' eventual judgment*

You will eventually hold them responsible for their own sins.

Well, that's fine, I suppose.

I'm glad for that. But, LORD, I still can't believe You're going to do this!

**Habakkuk's Picture of the LORD**

***[1:12] Are You not from time everlasting,  
LORD, my God, my Holy One?***

***We will not die.***

***You, Lord, have appointed them to deliver judgment;***

***And You, O Rock, have destined them to punish.***

***[113a] Your eyes are too pure to look at evil,***

***And You cannot look at harm favorably.***

We have looked to You for justice ever since You called Abraham from the land of the Chaldeans. This just doesn't seem just.

**Habakkuk's Picture of the LORD Appears Tainted**

*Habakkuk speaks to the LORD*

Sure, You're going to do something.

But this? You are going to use a people more wicked than we ever thought about being to discipline us!

LORD, the Chaldeans capture their enemies with hooks. And it feels like you're just treating us like fish to be dragged off into the Chaldeans' net!

I wanted You to turn us from our sin. I prayed for revival.

How can this - destruction at the hands of the Chaldeans! - be how You are going to deal with our sin?

*Habakkuk speaks to the congregation*

So, the LORD has let me in on what His plan is. And, I have told Him what I think of His plan!

But perhaps I am being hasty...

I have always believed that the LORD is good and that He is trustworthy.

So, it is possible that there is something going on here that I don't understand.

So, what I will do is wait, and see if He answers me.

I will *habaq* (embrace) the LORD until He speaks.

What's that, Lord? You are going to answer me?

All right, I'm listening. I'll station myself as a sentinel on the wall. I'll pay close attention to what You have to say.

**The LORD describes the dividing line of humanity: Faith or no faith.**

*The arrogant*

**[2:4a] "Behold, as for the impudent / proud one, His soul is not right within him..."<sup>7</sup>**

I understand, Lord. The arrogant person is not what You intend for a man or a woman to be.

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<sup>7</sup> See God's assessment of pride: Psalm 12:3; Proverbs 16:16-17; 18:12; 16:5; Is. 13:11; Jer. 9:23; Matt. 23:6-11.

And arrogant - that's the Chaldeans!

- They will be Your instruments to judge us. And they will be judged.
- They have increased what was not theirs in the first place, so it will be taken away.
- They will become plunder because they have plundered others.
- They have looted others, so they will be looted.
- They think they are secure because of their strong, thick walls, so they will be assaulted.
- They think their own hands can deliver them from calamity, so they will be delivered into calamity by Your hand.
- They have established their empire with bloodshed. So, their blood will be shed.
- Injustice rules in Babylon. They will taste injustice at the hands of their enemies.
- They worship idols made by their own hands. So, the one, true God will judge them.
- The Chaldeans will drink of the cup of Your wrath because of their arrogance. In the end, they will be overwhelmed as they have overwhelmed others.

Good!

And what is that You say, now, Lord?

*"The faithful"*

**[2:4b] "but the righteous one will live by his faith."<sup>8</sup>**

Is it that simple?

Arrogance or faith. Self-sufficiency or confident trust in You.

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<sup>8</sup> Note the importance of these verses for New Testament theology; Gal. 3:11; Romans 1:17; Heb. 10:38; Heb 11:2; 2 Cor. 5:7; Romans 14:23. You might want to take a look at these passages and see how the New Testament authors developed the thought in their various writings.

We either live by pride in ourselves or by an abiding trust in You?<sup>9</sup>

Faith: this is life the way You intended it to be lived.

The righteous person exercises an abiding trust in You. Period. They trust You, even if they don't understand You or Your ways.<sup>10</sup>

I get it!

Faith in You is sufficient to make it through the hardest things life can throw my way.

(pause to reflect)

I see Your faithfulness. I see your goodness. I see Your mercy.

So, I give You my trust.

### **Habakkuk calls us to worship the LORD**

***[2:20] "But the LORD is in His holy temple.  
Let all the earth be silent before Him."***

*Habakkuk speaks to the LORD*

I have heard Your message. I won't question Your use of the Chaldeans to judge Your people again.

I will trust You to deal with them, in Your own time.

And yes. You will deal with us, Your people, because of our sin.

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<sup>9</sup> The New Testament makes the outright statement that we do walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). It is also imperative that, as stewards of God's message, we be faithful (1 Cor. 4:2).

<sup>10</sup> The Old Testament has no word for abstract "faith." Always it is seen as a positive action of "trust, believe, be faithful."

I have never received worse news than what I have heard from You. I am undone by what You have shown me. But You are my Rock.

You want me to accept Your dealings with us, not miss a beat, and worship You. All right, I will.

***"The righteous one will live by his faith"*** - and I choose faith in You even as I watch my world fall apart at the seams.

*Habakkuk speaks to the congregation*

Have you ever felt like life is awful - that it will never get any better? I have.

Have you ever felt hopeless about the future? I have.

I felt that way just a few minutes ago when the Lord told me of His plan to bring judgment against Judah by means of the wicked Chaldeans.

I was devastated by His plan. I am still devastated.

But I see light beyond the darkness and joy beyond the grief of this loss.

I see Him, and my hope is renewed - not for a pleasant life or for earthly security - but for life with my LORD.

LORD, here is the prayer I offer to You.

### **Habakkuk Prays**

\*\*\*According to Shigionoth

*Resolved to remember the LORD*

***[3:2] LORD, I have heard the report about You, and I was afraid.  
O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years,  
In the midst of the years make it known;  
In anger remember mercy.***

***Selah.***

I call to mind Your majesty as seen in creation.

Powerful storms. Hailstorms and tornadoes, floods, thunder and lightning.

Ocean hurricanes and snow-capped mountain peaks. Sunrises and sunsets, the moon in its phases, the stars in their courses.

You have put all of this together. You are to be praised for Your glorious creation.

***Selah.***

I remember the protection and provision You have given Your people, LORD.

You redeemed us, rescuing us from Pharaoh's hand at the Exodus from Egypt. You split the sea and we walked through on dry land.

You gave us the good land of Canaan, as You had promised.

You have never forgotten the promises You made to Abraham.

You have been our stronghold and our fortress through all generations, LORD.

***Selah.***

Lord, I understand what is coming my way. I accept what You are allowing in my life.

Fear grips me as I contemplate the future. My lips are trembling. My stomach is in knots. Even my bones ache.

I know the worst is coming. And I know that there is nothing I can do about it. My life and the lives of my people are in Your hands.

I must sit idly - and wait for the Chaldeans to destroy us.

But, as I remember You, dread is not the only thing that grips me.

I am also possessed by Your call to faith, and this is my promise to You.

*Resolved to trust the LORD*

***[3:17] Even if the fig tree does not blossom,***

***And there is no fruit on the vines,  
If the yield of the olive fails,  
And the fields produce no food,  
Even if the flock disappears from the fold  
And there are no cattle in the stalls,  
[3:18] Yet I will triumph in the LORD,  
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.  
[3:19] The Lord GOD is my strength,  
And He has made my feet like deer's feet,  
And has me walk on my high places.***

To You, LORD God my Savior, I joyfully give my worship - come what may.