

The prophecies of Nahum, Zephaniah and Habakkuk reflect the circumstances and outlook in Judah during Josiah's reign (640-609 B.C.) and the days immediately following his death. They depict the imminent rise of Babylon and the subsequent collapse of Assyria (Lasor, Hubbard, Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 313). Habakkuk's name is derived from the verb which means "embrace." Little is known about him. He is called "the prophet" (1:1).

Troubled by Yahweh's seeming silence to his call for justice, in the midst of evil, Habakkuk concludes that Yahweh is indifferent to evil. When Yahweh finally answers Habakkuk's cry for help, the prophet becomes even more perplexed. Subsequently, he decides to watch for an answer again from Yahweh who instructs him to wait because the vision is for the future; thus he must live by faith. When God revealed the coming deliverance of his people and the doom of the wicked (Hab. 3:1-15), Habakkuk's faith rises into a crescendo of praise, despite the grimmest circumstances (Hab. 3:16-19). Habakkuk's prophecy thus teaches us that we must trust in Yahweh even when we do not understand his ways! Let us now examine the opening of Habakkuk's prophecy, his initial frustration with the Lord.

I label this section, "A Shocking Accusation! There is, however, more than one accusation in the first four verses. Thus, we can label this section, "Shocking Accusations Against the Lord!" Habakkuk complains to the Lord (1:1-4). He accuses Yahweh of being undisturbed by evil (v. 2). The prophet has been praying for a long time. The lament, "How long", is the cry of those who long for deliverance. It is the expression of grief by those who have felt forgotten by the Lord. In Psalm 13:1 the Psalmist cries out: "How Long, O LORD" (see also Psa. 74:10; Jer. 12:4; Zech. 1:12; Rev. 6:9-10). There are some who say that Habakkuk's prayer exhibits that of a doubter. But this is hardly the cry of a doubter! Rather, this is the lament of a believer who is perplexed by the prevalence of wickedness among God's people. Habakkuk is witnessing "violence" (Hebrew: *hamas*) among his own people; Yes, among God's people, not the world in general, but among so-called church people. This is like the Christian whose faith is tried for the violence present in the Church. There is violence in the pulpit, violence in the pew, and violence in our Christian institutions. Our failure to cry out to God is not a mark of our great faith in the Lord, it is a sign of the Church's compromise with evil.

Habakkuk is so confounded that he accuses Yahweh of being undisturbed by evil! It takes a profound sense of spiritual maturity for one to point such a finger against the Lord! You see, Habakkuk is caught up in the defense of God's justice. The word theodicy was coined to describe this phenomenon. He is on God's side. And if you are on God's side you would expect Him to act in ways that are consistent with His nature! He hates evil, thus he must punish evil quickly. But here is the crux: The Lord's ways are not ours. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." God always carries justice! But his justice is of two types. Sometimes it is quick and immediate. Other times it is like a slow burning fire. Our responsibility is simply to put our trust in Him, even when we do not understand His ways.

HYMN: God Moves in a Mysterious Way (By William Cowper, 1774)

1. God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.
2. Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sov'reign will.
3. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.
4. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.
5. His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.
6. Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.