



Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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The Least Known Book of the Bible, 1967.

The Least Known Book of the Bible
Daniel Jeremy Silver
March 12, 1967

I suspect that the name Habbakuk is rather strange sounding, even in Biblical times. The root is Akadian and not Hebrew. It apparently designates in its original form a species of flower or plant. I suppose that once in our lives all of us have heard the name Habbakuk. A few of us can place him, fewer still have read the three chapters in the Bible which are all that remains to us of his writings and of his speech. In a way it's a great pity because these three short chapters are among the more challenging and more relevant in the Bible.

Habbakuk was a prophet who lived in Judea towards the end of the 7th pre-Christian century. Now the label "prophet" tends to conjure up a tall, angry-eyed peasant, cloaked in the mantel of anger, thundering the rule of God. We have no description of Habbakuk, but the words that he wrote tend to reveal a man who had more of the poet's soul than the preacher's. I think of him rather as a slender man, sensitive, introspective. I suspect he would not have liked to have hurt anyone, rather, he sought to understand the pain of the world. Perhaps he was a composer. The last chapter of the three is a hymn, a psalm written for the sanctuary and it includes even the direction for the choirmaster, but we do not know. Indeed, so little is known and was known of Habbakuk that in long ago times he was pictured by his own text. They built his personality out of the words that he preached, and the most famous of these words are the three classic words, the righteous shall be sustained, shall live by his faith. Folklore made Habbakuk the man who actually brought the sustenance of God to the faithful. He was abroad every day in the countryside bringing the basket of bread and a jug of wine to the sweating, slaving peasant poor who held on to their loyalty and faith, who tried to live uprightly though they were cruelly abused by the wealthy and the rich and often subjected to the violence and destruction of war.

The apocrapha is, as you know, a collection of materials written by our fathers during the last pre-Christian century which, for one reason or another, were not included in the Biblical canon. Many of these apocryphal tales deal with the Biblical hero, Daniel. Daniel, you'll recall, was that charming, witty, urbane and very wise young man who rise high in the councils of the Babylonian and the Persian kings. There was only one stumbling block to his continuing success and that is that the court was heathen, pagan, and that he was a Jew bound to the second commandment. Daniel would not bow the head nor bend the knee to the Babylonian gods. Time and again this angered his royal master and as you will remember he tended to end in the lion's den. The folklore made this paragon of loyaltyⁱⁿ to a rather cunning detective whose task it was to unmask the charlatanry of pagan priests. He was given the obligation of exposing the mechanical contrivances by which the pagan priests made their gods roar with fire or speak in tongues.

One of the stories that's told about Daniel is a story which has to do with a python, a large snake, which lived in a pit in Babylon. The snake had lived there for ages, long beyond the memory of any men, and the priests had said the snake was immortal, the snake was a god. Daniel in his role as the exposor of idolatry, of its pretense, of its folly, simply fed this snake some kind of indigestible food and it swelled up in the snake's belly and the belly exploded and the snake, the god, was no more. The Babylonians decided, according to this folk legend, that it was time, really, to get rid of Daniel and he was thrown again into the lion's den, but they weren't sure that this would be effective and so they also ordered that no one was to bring him food. He was to starve to death if he was not torn to death. God, of course, protects Daniel from the lions and God sends a messenger to Judea to Habakkuk, the legendary Habakkuk, who is busy as he is busy every day out in the fields with his basket of bread and his bottle of wine, sustaining the faithful. And Habakkuk is ordered to go to Babylon to bring this food and this wine

to Daniel, but I've never been, I don't know where Babylon is, I certainly don't know where the lion's den is or where Daniel has been hidden. The angel has no patience and he picks up Habakkuk by the roots of his hair and in a flash that they are at the den in Babylon a thousand miles away. The food is given, the drink is poured and Habakkuk is returned to continue doing that to which he has been assigned, as sort of God's resident-agent on earth to sustain the faithful.

Now here is an image of a man built up from his own text. This is not Habakkuk, but lacking any description of the man, any history of the man, any biography on which to build, they found a phrase and they personified the man according to the phrase. And it is a phrase most precious to our people. You'll often go into synagogues and find this phrase, the righteous shall be sustained by His faith, woven into the tapestry of the embroidered canopy in front of the Ark. If you have good eyes and can look carefully at the tall stained glass windows around our dome you'll find these three classic words written in a little blue square box below them. Our people tended in ancient times to take the promise quite literally, that God would actually allow no harm to fall to His righteous ones. We read in the Psalm of Solomon that the righteous are in the hands of God, that no torment can there assail them. Now, of course, this is not true. The saint suffers the agonies of life quite as much as any of us, but there is one sense in which this promise is true. Life can be a hapless enterprise. Life can be narrow, turned in on itself, burdensome, worrisome, filled with anguish, and that life which is most muddled up, that life which has less of the breadth, of the joy, of the openness, of the clarity, is that life which is the most faithless. If man lacks that grand vision, the discipline to reach for the heights, and drags himself along and each step is painful, if a man has the vision and the power to discipline himself, that is life that has a bounce to it, buoyancy, hope,

of God which had brought His son up to the earth and the son had died for the sake of man

There is existence and there is life. Existence is a biological phenomena, life is an achievement, and so in a very universay can be said that psychologically it is true that the righteous are brought alive by their faith. Our people took this phrase in another sense still. They held it to be a shorthand explanation of that which is the thrust, the central drive of Judaism.

Rabbi Siemli in the Talmud sought to find those words which would encapsule Judaism. There are in the Torah, he said, 613 commandments, 613 rules a Jew must abide. Someone bothered to add up all the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" and they came to 613. And another interesting aside here - there are 365 "thou shalt not" and there are 248 "thou shalt". Now there are 365 days in the year and according to the ancient physiology there were 248 bones in the body, and so with every bone of our body and every day of the year we ought to obey the law of God. It's hard for man to understand 613 separate prescriptions and so, as Rabbi Seimli said, David came along and reduced them to ten, the ten descriptions of the man who is clean of hands and who has a pure heart, Psalm 15. And Micah came along several centuries later and reduced them to three. It hath been told the old man what is good and what the Lord doth require there of thee, only to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God. And finally, Habakkuk reduced the thrust of Judaism to one fundamental maxim, the righteous shall live by His faith, the righteous shall live by His faithfulness. It is the mark of our faith, of our faithfulness to God and to His law which establishes us as righteous.

Now in Judaism these three words have been held sacred and they have been central in our thinking and they've had an interesting history, also, in Christianity. This phrase was a favorite phrase of Paul who is in a very real sense the founder of historical Christianity. To Paul faith was a prerequisite of salvation. It was the grace of God which had brought His son up to the earth and the son had died for the sins of man

and it was man's act of accepting the Christ, the saviour, which permitted salvation. And so he said in a letter to the Romans, the gospel of Christ is the saving power of God for everyone who has faith, and he sought to prove this, to rest it on a text in the Old Testament by retranslating Habakkuk to mean, he who through faith is righteous shall live. He who through faith is righteous shall live. Now to the Jew righteousness is an ethical category. Righteousness is a measure of character, but in historical Christianity there has always been an element which measures righteousness by doctrine, by faith. Unless you have the faith you cannot be righteous, therefore, Dante must place all the righteous, the good of the world, who do not have the faith in Christ or who could not have had the faith in Christ because they were unaware of it in a middle ground, in a limbo, they cannot be allowed heaven. For the Talmud it was easy for the men to say, the righteous among the non-Jews shall have a place in the world to come. It was not easy for the Christian to say this because faith preceeds righteousness and they ultimately came, Martin Luther and others, to what is called the Doctrine of the Justification by Faith. Righteousness is simply the quality faith. It has lost its ethical mooring and becomes simply a doctrinal exercise. Righteousness is impossible to those who do not have the faith and, therefore, salvation is denied to them. Now these three not so little words had a long and glorious history, but I really don't want to dwell on three little words this morning. I want to try and get the sweep of Habakkuk's thinking because I have found in Habakkuk an exposition answer to one of the classic problems of contemporary life. Our world is burdened with a sense of the injustice of being. We are burdened with the slaughter, the gore, the blood, the cruelty which we see all around us in modern history and we say to ourselves, or our philosophers say to us and our thinkers say to us and our writers say to us, this world is a chaotic world, it's a world that's roiling and confused, it's a world which offers you no promise, man is animal and this is the

jungle, and the jungle is of tooth and claw. For centuries now men have built up illusions, neat little self-deceits, hopes, beliefs in God in a pattern to history and progress. These are all folly. The world is Auschwitz. The world is Hiroshima. The world is the blight of the slum. The world is the inevitability of another world war. Learn to live without expectation and you at least spare yourself the ultimate indignity of absolute frustration.

Habakkuk faced the world as we know it. I read a brief paragraph recently by a young Jew who has been much taken by the unredemptive quality of life and of violence in modern life, he said this:

When I say we live in the time of the death of God, I mean that the thread uniting God and man, heaven and earth, has been broken. We stand in the cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos unaided by any purposeful power beyond our own resources. After Auschwitz can a Jew say anything about God?

Habakkuk is interesting because he, too, lived after Auschwitz; he, too, lived in an era of slaughter and pain. He saw the land ravished by a succession of Egyptian and Babylonian invaders. He lived in a time when even the Hebrew wealth oppressed and persecuted the poor. He knew what it was to hear a child cry out in the night. He knew what it was for terror to stalk the streets. He lived in an age quite like our own and he was prepared to look at it and to admit what many men are afraid to admit, that there is no balance to the justice of living, that the innocent do suffer, that the good are slaughtered, the saintly are sometimes ^{simply} cast aside; the powerful, the careless, the coarse, the vile, do sometimes triumph. Habakkuk knew this world.

Why dost thou make me see wrongs
and look upon evil
Destruction and violence are before me
Strife and contention arise
The law is slack
Justice never goes forth
The wicked surround the righteous
Justice goes forth unpunished.

One hears here the echoes of all of our modern tragedy, tragedies of war and of violence, the slum, senseless killing and ^{of} human indifference. Habakkuk was as without illusions as any modern. Sometimes I feel that the 20th century believes that it invented the reality of malignancy and evil in the world. We've known centuries ago: I cry out unto Thee, O Lord, of violence and Thou dost not save.

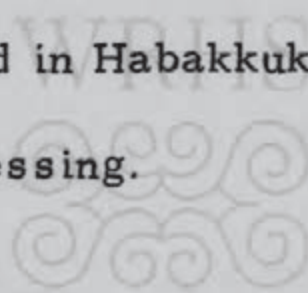
Habakkuk was a man quite as free of illusions, as naked of self-deceit, as any modern and what is interesting in Habakkuk is this, that where the modern philosophy leads us to agnosticism, to skepticism, to despair, Habakkuk accepted the world as he found it and yet affirmed, believed, held out for our hope - I will rejoice in the Lord, I will exult in the God of my salvation. Now, is this simply illusion, an impossibility, implausible? How could this man who accepted the evil of life, how could he affirm God? How could he sustain a sense of hope? This is the genius, by the way, of the Jew. We've never looked at the world through rose-colored glasses, God knows we've had little enough reason to do so, but we've never despaired of life, we've never given up hope, we've always managed to find the reason to affirm God. Well, how did Habakkuk do it? In the first place, Habakkuk said, "there is yet a time for the vision." Let me translate it into modern terms. The evil, the murder, is the headline and the war in Vietnam is the rest of the front page. We are mesmerized by the ugliness of life, by the blood and the gore and the hurt and the pain. These preoccupy us for a variety of reasons, but out of the whole of life how many acts of sacrifice occurred in this city alone yesterday? How many hours of teaching? How many moments of healing? How much tenderness? How much love? This is what we forget and each of us has that sense that though this is a dangerous world, and our destruction is a possibility, yet, beyond that possibility and grander than it is the possibility of peace, of man's using his hand and his heart and his mind usefully to establish the world of decency and justice and of freedom and hope. This is not impossible. There is yet time for the vision. If

there was not God in God in the world, if there was not a reason to hope, if the world were simply as chaotic and as vile as the headlines, as the slaughter seems to make it, should it not have disintegrated and destroyed itself long ago? But it has not. We do enjoy a measure of civilization. We do enjoy a measure of freedom. There is a measure of justice in our land. There are the hopes kindled in a billion human breasts, and so, even though we admit the incongruity and the violence and the cruelty of so much of life, there is yet time for the vision. But what of us? What of the decent folk who are tread so often under the ruthless drive of men for power, the decent people who are abused so often by those who use great wealth carelessly and cavalierly, what hope is there for us? Are we simply to bear the burden, to groan under the weight, to drag ourselves along for a certain grave, whenever it comes? And here we come back to Habakkuk's second great teaching, that the righteous shall be sustained by his faith.

Life is not a measure of length. Each of us knows men and women who lived long years pointlessly, empty years, dull years, years which failed to satisfy them. Life is a measure of how much we succeed in living, how much of ourselves we pour into each day. Life is measured not in extent but in compression, in depth, in feeling, in achievement, accomplishment. Those of us who tie our destinies to the stars, those of us who have a sense of the possible greatness of life, those of us who are willing to submit to a moral imperative, the law of God, those of us find our lives graced, ennobled, beautified by our very dedication instead of whimpering under the penalties and the bruises of being, instead of finding each day another obstacle to be climbed over, to look on the day as the opportunity and on life as a thrilling and blessed adventure. For us there is no promise of success or security, there is no assurance we will live out our natural lives, but there is the blessing, the blessing of this moment, the blessing of our sense of clarity and purpose, the blessing of the love which we extend to our family and the

love which is extended to us, the blessing that we ^{can} look ourselves in the soul and say, I have tried, I have sought to be useful, I have been willing to dare to do, no more can be asked.

In the psalm with which Habakkuk concludes there is the phrase, "in anger remember mercy." Habakkuk had that unique Hebraic balance to accept the noise, the brutality, the bruising, the insecurity, the paradox of life, but see also the hope, the blessing, the opportunity. These two must be balanced. Our modern wisdom is not wisdom if it has us only see the blacks and the grays for there are the whites and the yellows and the greens. There is not only prudence but blessing. Life is not only a drama of sin, but it is a drama of redemption. Life is not only the tragic, the turbulent, but the healing, the hope. For those who can find that balance he can live without illusion, yet live with vision. We find in Habakkuk a kindred spirit, a man who affirmed life and God, the burden and the blessing.



[illegible]

Paul insisted that ~~negotiations~~ is just a forecast a category of
Jews. There is no more such thing as ^{just} ~~negotiations~~ from under
D.D. as found in Court. As he calls that he is bound to
be named Paul should. "The papers of Paul is the same
piece of work for negotiations under his hands and he knows the
distances today on a distances interpretation of p²
under he looks to read "the under through found in negotiations
shall come" distances, according to the today, however
resumed to distances - Paul would a real have agreed
under the today under today
distances today is distances today distances today distances
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stated of Paul, today. To distances today distances today distances
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under distances today distances today distances today distances
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self secret, - & the you are see

belief + expectation

secret life for meant

WRHS

AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

מזרחי תל אביב

A course was given at the University of Texas
on the subject of the history of the
United States - France etc. at the University of Paris —

When I say we have in the time of the small of war,
I mean that the thousand units and more,
have x units, has been broken, wasted
in the war, which unfurling cannot be used
by any purposeful power beyond our own
resources. After our units which also
as a few of which are?

well, Hab. lived after conclusion - after a terrible invasion &
under great destruction, and he said - "I need justice in a
land"

But surely Hab. believed himself almost as much of a
to deal with the life as he was and will on injustice -
Did he not?

Why did you make me see things
+ look upon them

Disturbance, sudden one before me

Sharp and unexpected crisis

The chance is slow

justice never for justice

The see and recovered as it was

Justice was just recovered,

One has seen the Hab. of conclusion of justice, if recovered

V.N., of the based justice of the see, if recovered under

of the see of justice, But surely Hab. held on to the justice

Justice of the see that will see but for the moment - but

and will quarry up the see. although Hab. was the

multiplying of life, but was not the same fact that was recovered

quarry recovered recovered recovered. Was that recovered

Hab. believed.

I say not the see of justice
+ there is not over.

understand of these matters. But shall we say that which we
have seen - about it is impossible. We are not with a
single person in the world 100 years - & yet we are - but then
a still consciousness of mind - all in it confused - There is
possibly, more in it than 100 years

Though to say that we are all ignorant
of the world - we must say to you
that I repeat in the world
I shall be the best of my generation

Contradiction - not at all! But they should be shown that impossible
of the vision - possibly. What we are doing about it is that we
show to show & we are not trying to suggest anything at all -
show to show - The vision is all right - but we are not
show to show to show - show to show - show to show
give us a statement - a statement - show to show - to show
without let show to show us in show. P. 23 is the
immediate personal presence. If you are not out of the world -
you must be loved - If you can open yourself up and really
show you will show to show show to show -
you; If you can show to show show to show; you will feel
a vision show of purpose. show to show show to show -
we are show to show show to show, show to show, show to show, show to show -
all is a show to show.

We have all been to the same end - simply, & we are not
 out - we are not alone - a cycle - roller - infinitely - infinitely
 known, by each man and each woman - under which they are
 true spiritual society. If each man and each woman is full of
 reason and love - psychological balance.

It is not life but a cycle of life which leads to enlightenment
 of the soul to become free. It is not to be some kind of life
 to have the whole body free, but each man and woman shall
be free. If each man and each woman is free to be
what he is - The whole human race is free
a body freedom is not a possibility but a real life -
for himself and his society.

WRHS
 ESTELLE K. SCHAFER
 MORTON EUGENE GOLDBERG
 MORRIS LOUIS LEVINE
 ETHEL ROSENTHAL HADLEY
 SOL M. KOLISKEY



For Sermon Folder
For Sunday - March 12

Kaddish

Friday Mar 10

Sunday 12

Those who passed away this week

JOSEPH FRIEDMAN
HARRY MECHANIC
BESSIE SACHERMAN

Yahrzeits

JACOB BASS
MINNIE FORSCH GREENSTEIN
TILLIE DOLIN
JULIE BAER
MAUDE SINGER MEISTER
IGNATZ ASCHERMAN
CHARLES EISENMAN
MATILDA DANZIGER GOODMAN
NATHAN WEISENBERG
JUDITH MEYERS
ESTELLE K. SCHAFFER
MORTON EUGENE GOLDBERG
MORRIS LOUIS LEVINE
ETHEL ROSENTHAL NAGUSKY
SOL M. KOLISKEY

MOLLIE GOODMAN
FANNIE LEFKOWITZ
HENRY H. AMSTER
JENNIE LIEBER
HUGO A. FISHEL
HUGO GELLNER

mon
11 Fm
Edblatt
2:30
9:15

The Gospel of Christ is the saving power of God for everyone who has faith

He who through faith is righteous shall live

When I say we live in the time of the death of God, I mean that the thread uniting God and man, heaven and earth, has been broken. We stand in the cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos unaided by any purposeful power beyond our own resources. After Auschwitz can a Jew say about God

Why dost thou make me see wrongs
and look upon evil
Destruction and violence are before me
Strife and contention arise
The law is slack
Justice never goes forth
The wicked surround the righteous
Justice goes forth unpunished

I cry out unto thee of violence
and thou dost not save.

Dread and terrible are they
They all come for violence
Terror goes before them
They gather captives as the sand
They sweep by like the gale and go on
Guilty men, whose own might is their God

Why dost thou look upon faithless men
And sit silent when the wicked swallow up the more righteous than he.
~~The more righteous~~

The vision awaits its time

The righteous shall live by his faith

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord
I will exult in the God of my salvation



1955 Nov 26
in my collection