

Biblical Curmudgeons

Commentary for October 1, 2013 — Confronting and Complaining to YHWH

The article for October 2013 is "The Book of Habakkuk" from a 1997 presentation by Dr. Martin. As usual, there is a large amount of interesting information presented in a short time. Read first the "[October 2013 Newsletter](#)" for interesting information about Habakkuk.

The dictionary definition of [curmudgeon](#) is this: "**cur-mudg-eon [ker-muhj-uhn], noun, a bad-tempered, difficult, cantankerous person.**" Synonyms for curmudgeon are: grouch, crank, bear, sourpuss, crosspatch. Besides describing some of my extended family members (and likely some of yours also), several characters in the Bible fit this definition. Here is a quick review of some of them. Note how forceful some of these people are. (In this Commentary I use the Revised Standard Version for clarity.)

Habakkuk asked God, "How long!?" Habakkuk challenged God and asked the question, "When?" He goes further and challenges the justice of God.

"O YHWH, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or [how long] cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongs and look upon trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise."

• *Habakkuk 1:2-3, RSV*

Habakkuk is in anguish over the coming punishment of Judah. Later in chapter 1, he accuses God of snatching people like fish in the sea to destroy them, and being pleased to do so.

"You [YHWH] who are of purer eyes than to behold evil and can not look on wrong, why do you look on faithless men, and are silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?"

For you make men [*adam*] like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. He brings all of them up with a hook, he drags them out with his net, he gathers them in his seine [a dragnet]; so he rejoices and exults."

• *Habakkuk 1:13-15*

Here are some other tough — and confrontational people.

Abraham

The great man of faith, Abraham, challenged God when he asked Him: "**Will you also destroy the righteous with the wicked?**" (Genesis 18:23):

"Far be it from you to do such a thing[!!!], to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

• *Genesis 18:25, RSV*

Abraham bargains with God: "**Then he said, 'Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak'"** (Genesis 18:30). Abraham knew he was pushing against the boundaries of propriety.

Job

We see in the sufferings of Job, he often asked "Why?" to God. He wanted to know why all the evils he suffered (as well as the deaths of his loved ones) came upon him. Job chapters 1 and 2 tell all that God allowed Job to suffer.

Job's wife was a curmudgeon, and a very tough woman. She was not only disgusted with God's role in their mutual loss and suffering, she was exasperated with Job's attitude toward God. Remember, Job's wife suffered the same loss of mature children as much as Job did, although she did not endure physical agonies.

"Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God, and die.'"

But he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips."

• **Job 2:9–10**

This is a very noble sentiment by Job about both good and evil coming from God. Yet as his agonies continued, he complained and questioned God directly, why was he suffering. Job demanded an answer:

"If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of men?"

WHY have you made me your mark?

WHY have I become a burden to you?

WHY do you not pardon my transgression and

[WHY do you not] take away my iniquity?

For now I shall lie in the earth [die]; you will seek me, but I shall not be."

• **Job 7:20–21, RSV**

Job felt he had every right to complain about his situation. I likely would have done the same. He even said to one of his friends who were there, supposedly, to comfort him: **"Why do you, like God, pursue me?"** (Job 19:22).

"As for me, is my complaint against man? [No, it's against God.] Why should I not be impatient?"

• **Job 21:4, RSV**

In the end, Job never did receive a direct answer from God to his questions. At the end, God told Job that it was enough for him to know that I am God ... you are not. God commanded Job to be content with that. Job would be told nothing more. God did not have to justify Himself to Job. Remember, God's tough words were said to someone who was suffering physically and who endured the great loss of his children.¹ Job's complaints were quite reasonable, from our human point of view, although the divine point of view prevailed. After God made that statement, we read that Job's suffering was relieved and his life was restored.

¹ If Job had merely suffered financial losses, I do not doubt he would have complained much at all. In fact, his wealth never came up in his complaints to God.

David

King David of Israel complained bitterly to God as various crises threatened. Here are some examples: **“Why do you stand afar off, O YHWH? Why do you hide yourself in times of [my] trouble?”** (Psalm 10:1, RSV). David’s words sometimes seem to express the same feelings of being abandoned as Job. Here are some examples:

“A Psalm of David. ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.’”

• *Psalm 22:1–2, RSV*

David complains that God does not respond to his entreaties:

“I say to God, my rock: ‘Why have you forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?’ As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, ‘Where is your God?’”

• *Psalm 42:9–10, RSV*

“For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you cast me off? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?”

• *Psalm 43:2, RSV*

“Rouse yourself! WHY sleep you, O Lord? AWAKE! Do not cast us off for ever! WHY do you hide your face? WHY do you forget our affliction and oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our body cleaves to the ground. Rise up, come to our help! Deliver us for the sake of thy steadfast love!”

• *Psalm 44:23–26, RSV*

Jonah

We know Jonah was difficult and openly opposed God’s will, questioning God’s decision for Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach repentance to the inhabitants of that evil city. Job was afraid they would repent. He wanted Nineveh destroyed. So he ran away.

After being swallowed whole, regurgitated, and swallowing his pride, Jonah, the curmudgeon, finally did what God wanted him to do. He had no alternative. But that did not stop Jonah from complaining to God after he preached repentance to the evil city (and the city did indeed repent as Jonah feared).

Jeremiah

The prophet Jeremiah said to God, why so much evil? Your people perish. Their punishment is too great. Jeremiah admitted that God was responsible for allowing the people to be deceived.

“Then said I, ‘Ah, Lord God! surely you have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, You shall have peace; whereas the sword reached unto the soul.”

• *Jeremiah 4:10*²

Jeremiah even complained that God was being deceitful to him.

² Just prior to the Second Coming of Christ, the apostle Paul tells us that, **“God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie”** (2 Thessalonians 2:11, KJV).

“Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?”

Therefore thus says YHWH: ‘If you return [i.e., repent], I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. ...’”

• **Jeremiah 15:18–19, RSV**

All of the above people were tough individuals who felt comfortable to challenge God directly. Or, they were so frustrated at the situations they were in that they cried out to God in justification from our human point of view. They are not merely complaining. They are telling their feelings to God as any child will do. They have that right. Being a curmudgeon is not necessarily a bad thing. Always remember, God as a parent has a right to say, “enough.”

Jesus

The person with the strongest character of all was Jesus. He was the model of trust and obedience to God the Father. Jesus did not question His Father, but in the Garden of Gethsemane He did have reservations about His coming self-sacrifice. Note the feelings Jesus had, **“My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.”** (Matthew 26:38, RSV). Three times Jesus prayed that His crucifixion need not happen.

“O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as you will.”

• **Matthew 26:39, RSV**

“My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”

• **Matthew 26:42, RSV**

“So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.”

• **Matthew 26:44, RSV**

His concern was legitimate. After all Jesus was a created being, the beginning of everything that God has ever created (Revelation 3:14; John 1:1–3). He was not immortal in the past; He had the potential to die, and He did die. Jesus, in turn, was the creator of everything that exists (from the authority given to Him from God the Father (John 1:3; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16–17; Hebrews 1:2–3, 2:10). He had lived since His creation with the unbelievable power God gave Him. It was a remarkable act for Him to divest Himself of His “form of God” position to be “enfleshed” and born of Mary (Philippians 2:6–11). Before that time, He was effectively immortal, yet He gave Himself to die (Matthew 20:28; John 3:13–17, 10:15, 17, 15:13–14; Ephesians 5:2; Philippians 2:8; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 10:20; 1 John 3:16).

We have no record of Jesus ever complaining to God — until the very end of his life. Even Jesus said, quoting Psalm 22:1, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** (Matthew 27:46, RSV). Jesus was not a curmudgeon. He was the most perfect and humble servant of God. Yet in His likeness of humanity (Philippians 2:7) and His likeness of sin’s flesh (Romans 8:3), He had a period of wanting another way for God’s will to be done.

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