

Habakkuk

Background

Habakkuk was the name and title of the writer. His name may have come from the Hebrew word ***Habaq*** which means to embrace or to fold hands. The book was most probably written between **608 and 605 B.C.** during the reign of king Jehoiakim of Judah. Since the Chaldeans were on the rise when Habakkuk wrote the book, the prophet must have lived in Judah. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had passed out of existence in 722 B.C. with the Assyrian invasion. Thus Habakkuk was a prophet of the Southern Kingdom who lived in times of increasing degeneracy and fear.

Habakkuk is unusual among the prophetic books in that it tells a story. In this, it is similar to Jonah, which is also the record of a prophet's experience. Jonah gives the account of a prophet's failure to *sympathize* with God. Habakkuk gives the account of a prophet's failure to *understand* God. Jonah deals with a problem posed by *Nineveh*, and Habakkuk deals with a problem posed by *Babylon*. Habakkuk is a book in which a man, the prophet, asked questions and received answers.

This is the story of Habakkuk. At the beginning, we hear a believer questioning God. The prophet's problem was why God was not doing what He promised to do, specifically: delivering His people from the violence with which the Babylonians were threatening them. Every believer faces the same problem sooner or later. Circumstances challenge the promises of God, and we wonder why God does not do something about the situation.

Habakkuk wondered how God could use an *even more wicked* nation—Babylon—to discipline the wicked Judahites.

Verse 1

*The burden (**the stress, the trouble**) which the prophet Habakkuk saw (**witnessed, felt, experienced**).*

- The writer described this book as a "prophecy" that "Habakkuk the prophet saw" in a vision or dream. This burden was a message predicting judgment on Judah and Babylon.

Verse 2 Habakkuk's complaint

*O LORD, (**the merciful one, the only one to whom i can run**), how long shall I cry, And You will not hear ? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" (**unjust and wicked oppression**) And You will not save (**overthrow and restrain the wicked and restore justice for the righteous**).*

- While in prayer, the prophet asked Yahweh "how long" he would have to keep calling for help before the Lord responded.
- God hears all prayers because He is omniscient (all knowing), but Habakkuk meant that God had not given evidence of hearing by responding to his prayer.
- He had cried out to the Lord reminding Him of the violence that he observed in Judah, but the Lord had not provided deliverance

Verse 3

*Why do You show me iniquity (**unfairness, injustice, immorality, unrighteousness**), And cause me to see trouble (**tribulation, misery, distress, suffering, pain, adversity**)? For plundering (**looting, robbery**) and violence (**brutality, injustice**) are before me; There is strife (**conflict, war, trouble**), and contention (**struggle, war**) arises.*

- Habakkuk wanted to know why Yahweh allowed the "iniquity" and "Wickedness"—that he had to observe every day—to continue in Judah.
- "Destruction", "strife," and "contention" were not only common, but they were increasing. Yet Yahweh did nothing about the situation.

Verse 4

*Therefore **(for this reason)** the law **(which was given through Moses)** is powerless **(weakened, less obeyed)**, and justice never goes forth **(there is corruption)**. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds.*

- Since God had not yet intervened to stop the tide of evil, as He had threatened to do in the Law of Moses, the Judeans were ignoring His law.
- They did not practice justice in their courts,
- the wicked dominated the righteous,
- And the powerful "perverted . . . justice." This was everyday life in Judah.
- "When magistrates permit murder, theft, fornication and the like to go unchecked and unpunished, God calls the whole nation to accounting.
- The unpunished crimes pollute the land, God responds by driving some inhabitants away, destroying others
- And permitting different peoples to dwell in the land."

Verse 5 The Lord's answer

*"Look among the nations **(the heathens)** and watch-Be utterly astounded **(totally shocked, amazed)**!*

- God tells the troubled prophet not to worry about what was going on.
- God was going to raise a nation from the surrounding nations that would be an instrument of His judgement on sinful Judah.

For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you.

- God would work a work of judgement that was beyond belief and imagination that it would shock and amaze Habakkuk.

Verse 6

*For indeed I am raising (**preparing, strengthening**) up the Chaldeans, A bitter (**cruel, without mercy**) and hasty (**speedy and quick in doing injustice**) nation which marches through the breadth of the earth (**conquers a large part of the earth**), To possess dwelling places (**Houses, towns cities like Jerusalem**) that are not theirs (**take over, plunder and keep**).*

- The Chaldeans were the ruling class of the leadership in southern Mesopotamia, in the new empire of the Babylonians. Babylon had been ruled by several dynasties but the Chaldeans were the last and greatest dynasty to rule Babylon.
- They were descendants of Chesed, the son of Abraham's brother Nahor.
- Some modern Iraqis, especially those from southern Iraq, still identify themselves as Chaldeans.
- When the Chaldeans came against Judah, They had been sent by the Lord. It wasn't by force. God only allowed their sinful desire to conquer Judah to be fulfilled. If God hadn't allowed them, they never would have.

Verse 7

*They are terrible (**cruel, fierce, brutal, harsh, monstrous**) and dreadful (**horrible, shocking**); their judgment and their dignity (**authority and superiority**) proceed from themselves. (**Without any law or rule**).*

- Many nations "dreaded and feared" the Babylonians, who were a law unto themselves. They lived by rules that they made up, rather than those that were customary at the time.
- The Jews of Habakkuk's day did not believe that God would allow the Gentiles to overrun their nation (**Jeremiah 5: 11 and 12; Lamentations. 4:12 ;**). Yet their law and their prophets warned them that this could happen (**Deuteronomy 28:49-50;**).

Verse 8

*Their horses also are swifter than leopards (**they will be soon upon the Judeans who would not outrun them**), and more fierce than evening wolves. (**Evening wolves, after starving the whole day were very hungry, fierce and daring. driven by hunger and the need to eat**)*

*Their chargers (**horsemen**) charge ahead; their cavalry (**soldiers on horseback**) comes from afar; they fly as the eagle that hastens to eat.*

- The military weapons of the Babylonians were the best and most modern.
- "Their horses," the implements of war in the ancient world, were the swiftest, faster even "than leopards" (hyperbole?), one of the fastest animals in the cat family (**50km per hour**).
- They were more eager to attack their enemies "than hungry wolves"
- Their horsemen swooped down on their enemies, as fast and unsuspected as "an eagle", diving from the sky to devour a small animal on the ground. (241kph).
- All three of these animals—that God used for comparison with the Babylonians—were excellent hunters, fast, and fierce.

Verse 9

*"They (**Chaldeans**) all come for violence; their faces are set like the east wind. They gather captives like sand.*

- The Babylonians loved "violence." The "faces" of their warriors showed their love for battle, as they moved forward conquering.
- They were as effective at collecting "captives" from other countries as the hot winds from the East were at driving sand before them. (**show pic of wind**)

Verse 10

*They scoff (**laugh**) at kings, and princes (**governors, counsellors, commanders**) are scorned (**despised, looked down on, belittled**) by them. They deride (**mock, scorn**) every stronghold, for they heap up earthen mounds and seize it.*

- The "kings and rulers" of the lands they captured were no threat to them.
- They laughed at them and their fortified cities in contempt.
- They "heap(ed) up rubble" to "capture" fortifications. They did not need special machines, but used whatever materials they found, with which to build siege ramps to conquer them.

Verse 11

Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; He commits offense, ascribing this power to his god."

- This reference was most likely to Nebuchadnezzar who after conquering Judah became proud, built a golden idol for all his subjects to worship. He gave credit for all his success and victories to this idol.

Daniel 4:30

The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty?"

31 While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you!

32 And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."

33 That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

34 ¶ And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honoured Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation.

- The Prophet comforts the faithful that God will also destroy the Babylonians, because they will abuse this victory, and become proud and insolent, attributing the praise of this to their idols.

Verse 12 Habakkuk's Second Complaint

*Are You not from everlasting (**eternal, immortal, never ending**), O LORD (**the Sovereign Lord and Ruler of the world**) my God, my Holy One (**the only one I serve, the pure and just one**)? We shall not die. (**We shall not be utterly cut off and destroyed**) O LORD, You have appointed (**prepared**) them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction.*

- Habakkuk cements his belief and faith that God is the only true God and has always been, and will always be his God.
- Habakkuk believed the Judeans would not perish completely because God had promised to preserve them forever (Genesis 17:2-8).
- The prophet, furthermore, now understood that Yahweh had appointed the Babylonians "to judge" the sinful Judeans.
- God raised up His enemy to correct the Judeans but not to destroy them totally.

Verse 13

*You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously (**unfaithfully, deceitfully, deceptively, falsely**), And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours (**consumes**) a person more righteous than he?*

- Because Yahweh was the "Holy One" as seen in verse 12, Habakkuk knew that He was "too pure" to look approvingly at "evil," nor could He "favour wickedness.
- But this raised another, more serious, problem in the prophet's mind. Why did the Lord then look approvingly on the treachery of the Babylonians?
- Why did He not reprove them and restrain them when the Babylonians slaughtered people who were more righteous than they?
- Why did the godly remnant in Judah have to suffer with their ungodly Judean neighbours?
- Clearly Habakkuk had strong faith in God, but how God was exercising His sovereignty puzzled him.

Verse 14

Why do You make men like fish of the sea, Like creeping things that have no ruler over them?

- Habakkuk asked the Lord why He had made people "like . . . fish" and other sea creatures that apparently have no "ruler over them."
- "This statement probably represents the prophet's most pointed accusation against the Almighty.
- In recognizing the sovereignty of God among the nations, Habakkuk concludes that God himself is ultimately behind this massive mistreatment of humanity."
- Big fish eat little fish, and bigger fish eat the big fish. The same thing was happening in Habakkuk's world. Babylon was eating up the smaller nations, and Yahweh was not intervening to establish justice.

Verse 15 and 16

They take up all of them with a hook; they catch them in their net, and gather them in their dragnet. Therefore they rejoice and are glad.

Therefore they sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their dragnet; because by them their share is sumptuous (Magnificent, luxurious, splendid) and their food plentiful.

- Babylon was like a fisherman, who took other nations captive "with a hook" and "net," and rejoiced over his good catch. Babylonian monuments show the Chaldeans as having driven a hook through the lower lip of their captives and stringing them single file, like fish on a line. This was an Assyrian practice that the Babylonians continued. **(show images)**
- In another Babylonian piece of art, the Chaldeans pictured their major gods dragging a net in which their captured enemies twisted and struggled.
- The Babylonians even worshipped and gave credit to the tools they used to make their impressive conquests, rather crediting Yahweh. They had as little regard for human life as fishermen have for fish.
- That God would allow this to continue seemed blatantly unjust to Habakkuk.

Isaiah 45:21

Tell and bring forth your case; Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A just God and a Savior; there is none besides Me.

Verse 17

Shall they therefore empty their net, and continue to slay nations without pity?

- Habakkuk finished his question by asking the Lord if the Babylonians would continue to carry on their evil practices "without sparing" anyone.
- Yahweh's policy of not interfering with Babylon's wickedness baffled Habakkuk more than His policy of not interfering with Judah's wickedness.
- It was Yahweh's using a nation that practiced such excessive violence to judge the sins of His people that Habakkuk could not understand.

"It is what has perplexed more [people] than Habakkuk even today— the toleration and use of the wicked to further the direction of God's will."

"God can use some very sinful people to cause believers to suffer. This allows learning to take place in two ways:

- first, learning to stop doing one's own sinful actions;
- Second, realizing that what the evil agent of suffering is doing is not right either and that they will also soon pay for their evil ways if they don't repent.