

HABAKKUK

Author:

The prophet Habakkuk is not mentioned in any other place in the Bible, so all we know about him is in this writing of his.

Date:

Habakkuk probably wrote a short time before the armies of Babylon invaded Judah, during the reign of either Josiah or Jehoiakim. The Babylonians invaded in 605 BC.

Theme:

Faith in God overcoming doubt about the wisdom of His ways. The question which troubled the prophet's mind was this: Why would God use the cruel and wicked Babylonians to punish His own people Judah? The answer God gave was: "The righteous will live by his faith" (2:4), words referred to three times in the New Testament (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38-39).

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1 The burden which Habakkuk the prophet saw.

² O LORD, how long will I cry out,
and you not listen?
And call out to you *about* violence,
and you not save?

³ Why do you make me look at evil,
and cause *me* to see trouble?
For plundering *and*
violence are before me,
and there is strife,
and contention rises up.

⁴ Therefore the law is made feeble,
and justice never goes forth.
For the wicked surround
the righteous;
so perverted justice results.

⁵ “Look among the nations,
and watch, and be
utterly amazed,
for I will do a work in your days,
which you will not believe,
even though it is told *you*.”

⁶ For, see, I am raising up
the Chaldeans,
that bitter and rash nation.

They will march through the breadth
of the earth to take possession
of dwelling places *which are*
not theirs.

⁷ They *are* terrible and dreaded.
Their judgment and their exaltation
come from themselves.

⁸ And their horses are swifter
than leopards,
and fiercer than evening wolves.
And their horsemen charge ahead,
and their cavalry comes from afar.
They fly like an eagle
swooping to eat.

⁹ They all come for violence.
Their faces advance *like*
the east wind,
and they gather captives like sand.

¹⁰ And they scoff at kings,
and princes are scorned by them.
They deride every stronghold,
for they heap up earth, and take it.

¹¹ Then *his* mind changes,
and he passes on, and offends,
imputing this his power
to his god”.

1:1 “*Burden*”— note at Isa 13:1. Habakkuk received a revelation of truth from God, as all the true prophets of the Old Testament did (2 Pet 1:21).

1:2 The prophet could not get an answer to his prayers, could not get an explanation from God for the problem that troubled him. This was sometimes the complaint of other Old Testament believers – Ps 6:3; 13:1-4; 74:10-11; 89:46-47; Lam 5:20. Probably this same thing has bothered all of us at one time or another. All they (or we) could do was to wait and look to God for Him to work in His time and way.

1:3-4 Here is the problem which tormented Habakkuk. In Judah, where he lived, wicked people had the upper hand and crushed the righteous. Injustice, oppression and violence were everywhere. Yet it seemed to the prophet that God did not care; that He tolerated the situation and did nothing about it. This is a problem that has vexed many people, perhaps nearly all of us at one time or another (see Job 24:1-12; Ps 10:1-12; 13:1-2; 73:2-12; Eccl 3:16-17). God is the all-powerful Ruler of the universe, and He loves justice and righteousness – Ps 33:5; 47:2; 89:14. Yet in this world the wicked prosper and the good suffer and are denied justice. Why doesn’t God do something about it?

1:5-11 In these verses God gives an answer to Habakkuk. He assures him that He is going to do something about the corrupt society of Judah. He will bring an end to it, and the instrument

He will use is the Babylonian army.

“*Amazed*”— Isa 29:9,14. The people of Judah were God’s special people whom He chose above all nations on earth – Deut 10:15; Ps 135:4. Though God had used the Assyrians to destroy the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17:5-6), the people of Judah did not believe such a thing could happen to them.

1:5 “*Told*”— Acts 13:41.

1:6-11 From this description of the Babylonians we see they were an exceedingly violent, arrogant and lawless people who cared nothing at all for the true God.

1:6 “*I am raising up*”— compare 1 Chron 5:26; 2 Chron 21:16; Isa 13:17; Jer 51:1; Amos 6:14. If any nation comes to a place of power on earth it is because the one true God has raised it up; if any falls into weakness and decay it is because He has put it down. Compare Dan 4:34-35; Isa 40:15,22-24; Acts 17:26

“*Chaldeans*”— the Babylonians. Babylonia became a world power and crushed Assyria, the previous greatest power, between 612 and 605 BC.

“*The breadth of the earth*”— here this means the lands known to the people of Judah, including their own land. God would use that people to punish His own people. See Jer 51:10 and compare Isa 10:5-6.

1:11 “*His god*”— compare Dan 4:30; 11:38. The Babylonians practically worshiped their military power.

¹² Are you not from everlasting,
O LORD my God, my Holy One?
We will not die. O LORD,
you have appointed them
for judgment, and,
O mighty God, you have established
them for correction.

¹³ Your eyes are too pure
to gaze at evil,
and cannot look on wickedness.
Why do you look on those
who deal treacherously,
and hold your tongue
when the wicked devours
the *man who is* more
righteous than he?

¹⁴ Why do you make men like
the fish of the sea,
like crawling things which have
no ruler over them?

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Therefore they offer sacrifices
to their net,
and burn incense to their dragnet,

because through them
their portion is rich,
and their food abundant.

¹⁷ So will they go on emptying their net,
and continually slaying nations
without sparing?

2 I will stand my watch, and
place myself on the fortifications,
and will look to see what
he will say to me,
and what answer I should give
when I am rebuked.

² And the LORD answered me,
and said, "Write the vision,
and make it plain on tablets,
that he who reads it may run.

³ For the vision is yet for
the appointed time,
but in the end it will speak,
and not lie.

Even though it delays, wait for it,
because it will surely come,
it will not delay.

⁴ "See the proud one.
His soul is not upright in him.
But the righteous will live by his faith.

1:12-17 God has given an answer to Habakkuk's questions in vs 2-4. But the prophet was not happy with the answer. He wanted God to do something, but was not pleased with what God planned to do. It seems to him that the proposed remedy was worse than the disease. He knew that his own people were bad, but that the Babylonians were even worse (v 13). And now his question is, how can a perfectly holy God use such a wicked nation to punish His own people?

1:12 "Everlasting"—Ps 90:2; Ex 3:14.

"My Holy One"—Isa 1:4; 6:3; Lev 20:7.

"Die"—Ps 118:17.

"Judgment", "correction"—he accepts what God says in v 6 about raising up the Babylonians as an instrument to punish Judah.

1:13 "Wickedness"—v 3. It seemed to the prophet that God was going to tolerate an even greater wrong in letting the Babylonians destroy Judah than the wrong already present in Judah. And since God could do no evil and could not even look at it, how could He use the evil Babylonians?

"Those who deal treacherously"—the Babylonians.

"More righteous than he"—though the prophet knew the people of Judah were bad, he thought they were still better than the Babylonians.

1:15 "They"—the Babylonians. The prophet describes them as determined fishermen who catch helpless peoples and nations.

1:16 "Net"—here signifies their military power. It enabled them to plunder other nations and live in luxury themselves.

1:17 This is an important question in the prophet's mind. Could God continue to tolerate the atrocities of the Babylonians? Would He not put a stop to them?

2:1 "Watch"—Isa 21:8; Ezek 3:17. As a prophet Habakkuk was like a watchman for the kingdom of Judah. He realized he had been questioning God and waits to see the result of it.

2:2 "Vision"—the revelation God gave him in a vision appears in the rest of this chapter. It concerns God's judgment on the Babylonians.

"That he who reads it may run" or it could be translated "So that a herald may run with it".

2:3 "Though it delays, wait for it, because it"—or "though He linger, wait for Him, because He".

"It (or He) will not delay"—Babylon fell in 539 BC, about 65 years after God gave this message to His prophet—a brief time in prophecy and in the rise and fall of nations.

2:4 "The proud one"—possibly the king of Babylon representing the whole kingdom, or possibly the kingdom itself personified.

"Faith"—the message is that the prophet should trust God even though he does not understand a thing God is doing. The prophet was baffled at God's ways—1:2-4,13,17. God tells him (and us) that faith in Him is the only way for the righteous, whether they understand little or much of what God does in the world. Compare 2 Cor 5:7. See how this great phrase from Habakkuk is used in the New Testament—Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38-39.

- ⁵ And indeed, because he transgresses through wine,
he is a proud man, and does not stay at home.
 He enlarges his desire as hell,
 and, like death, cannot be satisfied,
 but gathers for himself all nations,
 and heaps up for himself all people.
- ⁶ Shall not all these make up a parable about him,
 and *take up* a taunting proverb against him,
 and say, 'Woe to him who piles up *what is* not his!
 And to him who loads himself down with the weight of pledges.'
But for how long?
- ⁷ Will not those who will bite you rise up suddenly,
 and those who will trouble you awake?
 And you become booty for them?
- ⁸ Because you have plundered many nations,
 all the remainder of the peoples will plunder you,
 because of men's blood, and the violence of the land,
 of the city, and of all who live in it.
- ⁹ "Woe to him who covets ill-gotten gain for his house,
 that he may set his nest on high,
 that he may be delivered from the reach of calamity!"
- ¹⁰ "You have devised a shameful thing for your house,
 cutting off many people,
 and sinning *against* your *own* soul."
- ¹¹ For the stone will cry out of the wall,
 and the beam from the timbers will answer it.
- ¹² "Woe to him who builds a town by bloodshed,
 and establishes a city by wickedness!"
- ¹³ See, *is it* not of the LORD of hosts that the peoples labour for the fire,
 and the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?
- ¹⁴ For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,
 as the waters cover the sea.
- ¹⁵ "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbour,
 who puts your bottle to *him*,
 and makes *him* drunk also,
 that you may look on their nakedness!"
- ¹⁶ You are filled with shame instead

2:5-19 God describes the character of Babylon and speaks of its downfall – vs 6-8,17. He would use Babylon to punish His people (1:6), but this did not mean that He favored Babylon over them. He would deal with Babylon too at the proper time. This is God's answer to Habakkuk.

2:5 "*Transgresses through wine*" – Prov 20:1; 23:31-32; Dan 5:1-4.

"*His desire as hell*" – the Hebrew has "Sheol" – note at Gen 37:35.

"*All people*" – 1:6,9,17. This is evidence that God is speaking of Babylon.

2:6 "*Taunting proverb*" – those nations could only taunt Babylon if they thought Babylon was about to fall.

"*Woe*" – the five "woes" in vs 6-19 signify that punishment would come to Babylon because of their sins. We may be sure that God will not spare any nation, any people which behaves as Babylon did. Compare Isa 5:8-24.

"*The weight of pledges*" – things given in pledge by others to get loans. The KJV has "thick clay" here. It seems that here they were following the Syriac version or the Vulgate, rather than the Hebrew.

2:7-8 The oppressed will rise up and overcome their oppressor. Other nations will treat Babylon

as Babylon treated them.

2:9-11 Like Babylon, individuals sometimes think that by lies, deceit or force they can make themselves secure for the future. Little do they realize that the methods they use to escape ruin will inevitably lead them to ruin.

2:9-11 "*Cry out*" – Babylon was built by riches plundered from other nations. The very walls of the city would testify against it. In the same way do not the walls and beams of many houses all over our land cry out against their owners?

2:12-13 Towns, cities, and empires can be built by violence and sinful methods, but they will all come to nothing in the end. Only what is done through God and for God and by God will endure. Compare 1 John 2:16-17.

2:14 Num 14:21; Isa 11:9. This will come about only when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of Christ – Rev 11:15; Dan 2:34-35.

2:15 This may refer to the methods Babylon used to strip neighboring nations of their wealth.

2:16 God would treat Babylon as it treated others (compare Ps 18:25-26). God would give Babylon a "cup" to drink which would make it stagger and fall and lie in nakedness and shame, stripped of its power, its wealth, and its glory. Compare Jer 25:15-16,27,28.

of glory. Drink, you also, and be counted as uncircumcised.
 The cup from the LORD's right hand will come around to you, and utter disgrace *will cover* your glory.

¹⁷ For the violence *done* to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and the destruction of beasts *which* made them afraid, *and* because of men's blood, and because of violence *done* to the land, to the city, and to all who live in it.

¹⁸ "What profit is an idol when its maker has carved it, or a cast metal image, a teacher of lies? For the maker trusts in his own handiwork, making idols which cannot speak.

¹⁹ Woe to him who says to a *piece of wood*, 'Awake!', to a mute stone, 'Arise!' Can it teach? See, it *is* overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it.

²⁰ But the LORD *is* in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence

before him".

3 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth.

² O LORD, I have heard your renown, *and* was afraid.
 O LORD, revive your work in the midst of the years.
 In the midst of the years make *yourself* known.
 In wrath remember mercy.

³ God came from Teman, the Holy One from mount Paran. *Selah*
 His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

⁴ And *his* brightness was like the light. He had rays *flashing* out of his hand, and there his power was hidden.

⁵ Before him went the plague, and burning coals followed at his feet.

⁶ He stood and measured the earth. He looked and made the nations tremble, and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills bowed down. His ways *are* everlasting.

"*As uncircumcised*"—like those who are not the people of Israel, those in covenant relationship with the true God.

2:17 Apparently the Babylonians had been very severe in their treatment of Lebanon.

2:18-19 Compare Ps 115:4-8; Isa 40:18-22; 41:29; 44:9-20. Babylon was full of idols – Jer 50:38; the people trusted in the work of their own hands, not in God. This would be a cause of terrible "woe" to them. Observe that an idol is a "teacher of lies" – it lies to people about the nature of God and how to receive divine help. Compare Rom 1:25.

2:20 Idols cannot speak but God can. From His holy temple in heaven He has been pronouncing judgments on the wicked of the earth. Let men be quiet and listen and learn from Him.

3:1 "*Prayer*"—though this is called a prayer, only in v 2 do we see any requests. Prayer can be more than merely asking God for things. Much of this psalm is a very poetic description of God as the great judge and punisher of the nations, the great warrior against wickedness on earth, and the Redeemer of His people.

"*Shigionoth*"—no one knows now the meaning of this Hebrew word. It was probably a musical term indicating this prayer could be sung with

musical instruments.

3:2 "*Revive*"— Ps 85:6; 119:25,37,40,88,107,149,154,156,159; 138:7; 143:11; Isa 57:15; Hos 6:2; 14:7. Habakkuk no longer is set on questioning God as he did in chapter 1. He is willing for God to be God, and is pleading for a revival of God's marvelous work among the people.

"*Wrath*"—see Num 25:3; Ps 90:7-11; John 3:36; Rom 1:18.

"*Mercy*"— Ex 34:6-7.

3:3 "*Teman*"— an area in the land of Edom southeast of Judah.

"*Paran*"—a mountain not far from Edom. The prophet pictures God coming from that direction to subdue His enemies. Whether Habakkuk is referring to a past event or describing a vision which has to do with the future is not clear. Compare Isa 34:5-10; 63:1-6.

"*Selah*"— note at Ps 3:2.

"*The earth*"— 2:14.

3:4 Isa 18:4; Rev 1:16.

3:5 Ex 5:3; 9:14; Lev 26:25; Deut 32:24; Ps 91:3; Rev 15:1.

3:6 Ps 18:7; Jer 4:24-26; Heb 12:26-28; Rev 6:14; 16:18-20.

"*Everlasting*"— Gen 21:33; Ex 3:14; Ps 90:2.

- ⁷ I saw the tents of Cushan in distress;
and the tent curtains
of the land of Midian trembled.
- ⁸ Was the LORD displeased
with the rivers?
Was your anger against the rivers?
Was your wrath against the sea,
that you rode on your horses and
your chariots of salvation?
- ⁹ Your bow was completely uncovered,
oaths were sworn over your tribes.
Selah
You split the earth with rivers.
- ¹⁰ The mountains saw you,
and they trembled.
Floods of water swept by.
The deep uttered its voice,
and lifted up its hands on high.
- ¹¹ The sun and moon stood
still in their habitation.
At the light of your arrows they went,
and at the shining of
your glittering spear.
- ¹² You marched through the land
in indignation,
you threshed the nations in anger.
- ¹³ You went forth for the deliverance
of your people,
for the deliverance of your anointed.
You struck the head of the house
of the wicked,
by baring its foundation
to the neck. *Selah*
- ¹⁴ You pierced the head of his villages
with his own spears.
They came out like a whirlwind
to scatter me.
Their rejoicing was like devouring
the poor in secret.
- ¹⁵ You walked through the sea
with your horses,
through the heap of great waters.
- ¹⁶ When I heard, my body trembled,
my lips quivered at the sound.
Decay entered my bones,
and I trembled in myself.
But I will wait quietly for the day
of trouble which will come
on the people
who will invade us with
his troops.
- ¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not blossom
and there is no fruit on the vines,
though the yield of the olive fails
and the fields produce no food,
though the flock is cut off
from the fold and there is no herd
in the stalls,
- ¹⁸ Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be glad in the God
of my salvation.
- ¹⁹ The Lord God is my strength,
and he will make my feet
like a deer's feet,
and he causes me to walk
on my heights.
For the choir director.
On my stringed instruments.

3:7 Cushan and Midian were tribes living near Edom. The prophet gives these two names as two examples among many – v 12.

3:8 Ex 7:20-24; 14:15-31; Ps 68:17; 77:16; Rev 8:8-9; 16:3-4.

3:9 Deut 32:23; Ps 7:12-13; 45:3-5.

3:10 Ps 77:16; 93:3.

3:11 Josh 10:12-13; Joel 2:30-31.

3:12 This happened in the past and is happening now, but will be more fully true in the future – Isa 24:1-6; 34:1-4; Zech 14:2-5.

3:13 Compare Ex 3:8; Ps 68:21; 110:6; Isa 31:5; Micah 5:6; Rom 11:26.

3:14-15 See v 8.

3:16 The language here seems to indicate that Habakkuk has seen and heard the things of vs 3-15 in a vision.

“Trembled” – compare Dan 4:19; 7:15,28; 8:27; 10:16-17.

“I will wait quietly” – he will question God about it no more.

“Who will invade us” – Babylon. He accepts God's word that Babylon would be punished

and fall.

3:17-18 Habakkuk puts into practice the word God gave him – “the righteous will live by his faith” (2:4). He is willing to leave the matter of God's judgments and His dealings in the world where they belong – in God's hands, and trust Him and rejoice in Him no matter what happened. Surely this is a great lesson for all of us to learn. The condition described in v 17 would be the result of the Babylonian invasion. The whole idea of this was once a terrible shock to him – 1:12-17. Now he rests in God who always knows what is the best thing to do.

3:18 *“Rejoice”* – Ps 97:12; Isa 61:10; Phil 4:4.

“God of my salvation” – Ex 15:2; Luke 1:47. What brought joy to the prophet was a personal knowledge of God and his own salvation. If we have this same knowledge we too can rejoice in all that may happen to us – Matt 5:11-12; John 16:33; Rom 5:3; 8:28.

3:19 *“My strength”* – Ex 15:2; Ps 18:1,32; 22:19; 73:26; Isa 40:29-31.

“Heights” – Deut 32:13; Ps 18:33. Deer are very sure-footed on the hills and mountains.