

Habakkuk

Faith in Babylon's Destruction						
Punishment of Babylon				Praise Song		
Chapters 1–2				Chapter 3		
Habakkuk's Perplexity				Habakkuk's Praise		
God's Actions Challenged				God's Actions Commended		
Faith Troubled				Faith Triumphant		
Problem				Resolution		
Habakkuk	God	Habakkuk	God	Habakkuk		
Why aren't you judging Judah's sin, God? 1:1-4	I will. I'll judge Judah with the Babylonians! 1:5-11	But can you use a nation <i>more</i> wicked than Judah? 1:12–2:1	Sure, but I'll judge them too. 2:2-20	In wrath remember mercy. 3:1-2	Our God is an awesome God! 3:3-15	I'll wait patiently for Babylon's judgment and rejoice in God. 3:16-19
Judah						
c. 607-605 BC						

Key Word: Faith

Key Verse: (God regarding Babylon) "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not right—but the righteous will live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4).

Summary Statement:

Habakkuk questions God's discipline of Judah by Babylon, whom He promises to punish, to which Habakkuk responds by praising His sovereign, faithful workings in the past to encourage Judah to trust Him in the future despite the circumstances.

Applications (especially the first one below):

From Habakkuk's View: Do you trust in God despite the perplexities of your life?

From Babylon's View: When God's people do not remove sin in their midst, God will raise up other means to guard His holiness.

Habakkuk

Introduction

- I. **Title:** The name Habakkuk (חֲבַקּוּק) comes from a verb (חָבַק) that means to "clasp [e.g., the hands]" or to "embrace" (BDB 287d). This helps very little, however, as it can only be guessed whether the embracing is to be taken in an active ("the embracer") or passive ("the embraced") sense. Confusing matters even more is the related Assyrian word *hambakuku*, which is the name of a plant (BDB 287d). In light of the argument of the book that traces how God will discipline Judah through Babylon (which will also be disciplined) it seems that the passive sense of Judah being "embraced by God" may make the best sense. However, until further evidence is presented, the meaning of the name must remain a mystery.

II. Authorship

- A. **External Evidence:** As is true of many of the Minor Prophets, Habakkuk is mentioned only in his prophecy. Much discussion abounds about his identity, including his being the son of the Shunammite woman whom Elijah restored to life (Rabbinic tradition on 2 Kings 4 due to his name meaning "embrace" and the words of Elijah to the woman that she will embrace a son; 2 Kings 4:16; Blue, *BKC*, 1:1506). The apocryphal *Bel and the Dragon* places Habakkuk as an aid to Daniel who was cast into the lion's den a second time. Both of these theories must be cast aside due to their improper dating of Habakkuk's life and speculative nature, respectively.
- B. **Internal Evidence:** Habakkuk is called a prophet (1:1; 3:1) but he also notes in his third chapter, "For the director of music. On my stringed instruments" (3:19b), which may suggest that he was a musician of the Levitical office as well (Blue, *BKC*, 1:1506). This evidence suggests that he was a priest connected with the temple worship in Jerusalem. He also was a poet as evidenced in his educated, sensitive, and articulate poetic style.

III. Circumstances

- A. **Date:** The author gives no reference to a king in the superscription and dates ranging from 700 to 300 BC have been speculated (LaSor, 449). However, the reference to the attacking Babylonians (1:6) places the time of the prophecy between 625 BC, when Nabopolassar seized the throne that gave birth to the Neo-Babylonian kingdom, and 605 BC at Nebuchadnezzar's first attack on Jerusalem in which Daniel was taken captive. The imminency of the Babylonian invasion (2:1; 3:16) argues for a date just before or during 605 BC. In May-June of this year Babylon routed Egypt in the battle of Carchemish before attacking Jerusalem in September (Pentecost, *BKC*, 1:1326). A date between these months for Habakkuk's prophecy therefore would make good sense, but 607-605 is near certain.
- B. **Recipients:** As the northern kingdom had fallen one hundred years earlier, only Judah can be in view as the recipients. While the prophecy concerned Babylon, it was directed towards the people of Judah and there exists no evidence that Habakkuk delivered his message to Babylon itself.
- C. **Occasion:** The recent rise of Babylon over Assyria provoked terror among the people of Judah as the Babylonians swept the land westward toward them (1:6), but God was more concerned about the *internal* affairs of His people. Josiah's reforms were short-lived and incomplete, and his son Jehoahaz was deposed by Egypt after only three months. His brother and successor, Jehoiakim, was evil and rebellious (2 Kings 23:36–24:7; 2 Chron. 36:5–8). Habakkuk therefore saw the internal problems of violence (1:2), injustice (1:3a, 4), strife and conflict (1:3b), disobedience to the law (1:4a), and the oppression of the righteous by the wicked (1:4b). With problems both internal and external Habakkuk cried out to God, "LORD, why don't you do something?" The prophecy records God's response.

IV. Characteristics

- A. Habakkuk is the only pre-exilic prophet who is designated a prophet by profession in the title of his book (1:1). (Haggai and Zechariah are also designated "prophets" but preached after the exile.)
- B. While most prophets declared God's message *to people*, Habakkuk dialogued with God *about people*. Also, normally God initiated the prophetic process—but in Habakkuk's case he initiated the dialogue that takes up two thirds of the book (*TTTB*, 275).
- C. While most Old Testament prophets *proclaimed* God's judgment, Habakkuk *pleaded for* God's judgment!

Argument

Habakkuk's prophecy actually takes the form of a dialogue as much as a prophetic pronouncement. In the first two chapters Habakkuk questions God why Judah's sin has gone unpunished and God answers that Babylon will be His means of judgment, but that this nation will also be punished as a demonstration of His sovereignty over the nations. In recognition of God's sovereign and just ways, the prophet concludes by writing a praise song which acknowledges His faithful workings in the past in order to encourage Judah to trust Him in the future despite the circumstances (ch. 3). The prophet's purpose is to express that God has everything in control and knows what He is doing.

Synthesis

Babylon's destruction

Interchange

1–2	Punishment of Babylon, God's arm against Judah	
1:1	Introduction	
1:2-4	"Why aren't you judging Judah's sin, God?"	Habakkuk
1:5-11	"I am. I'll use the Babylonians!"	God
1:12–2:1	"But You can't use a nation even <i>more</i> wicked, can You?"	Habakkuk
2:2-20	"Sure, but I'll judge them too."	God
3	Praise song	Habakkuk
3:1-2	Prayer for mercy	
3:3-15	Pondering God's majesty	
3:16-19	Confesses fear and rejoices	

Outline

Summary Statement for the Book

The response of Habakkuk to God's promise to punish Babylon after using Babylon to punish Judah's sin was to trust God's sovereignty despite the circumstances.

- I. **The reason God tells Habakkuk that He would punish Babylon after using Babylon to punish Judah's sin was to encourage Judah to trust His sovereignty (Chs. 1–2).**
 - A. Habakkuk claims to be God's spokesman to affirm the divine authority of his prophecy (1:1).
 - B. Habakkuk complains that God has not punished Judah's injustices (1:2-4).
 1. Habakkuk asks how long he must cry, "Violence!" in the land to the deaf ears of God (1:2).
 2. Habakkuk asks why he must see continued injustice, destruction, violence, strife, and conflict while God stands by without punishing the evildoers (1:3).
 3. Habakkuk notes that the result of these injustices is a spurned law, injustice, and the oppression of the righteous by the wicked (1:4).

- C. God responds by declaring that He will punish Judah through the Babylonians to convince Judah of His sovereignty over the nations (1:5-11).
 - 1. God responds to Habakkuk's question by declaring that He is about to do something amazing and unbelievable (1:5).
 - 2. God will use the fierce and arrogant Babylonians to judge Judah as evidence of His sovereignty over the nations (1:6-11).
 - D. Habakkuk doubts God's justice by complaining that He cannot punish Judah with a nation even more sinful, unjust, and idolatrous (1:12-2:1).
 - 1. Habakkuk asks how God can use a nation with even more *iniquity* than Judah (1:12-13).
 - 2. Habakkuk asks how God can use a nation with even more *injustice* than Judah (1:14-15).
 - 3. Habakkuk asks how God can use a nation with even more *idolatry* than Judah (1:16-17).
 - 4. Habakkuk anticipates God's reply like a watchtower guard watching for the enemy (2:1).
 - E. God responds to Habakkuk's doubts by listing five woes against Babylon so that a righteous remnant of Judah will trust Him (2:2-20).
 - 1. Habakkuk must record God's revelation about Babylon's demise so everyone would know He dealt justly with the wicked nation (2:2-3).
 - 2. God will judge the proud, debauched, greedy, drunk, bloodthirsty Babylonians but preserve the righteous remnant of Judah, so His people should trust Him (2:4-5).
 - 3. God prophesies that the nations conquered by Babylon will sing a taunt song of woe against the arrogant, unjust nation after its fall (2:6-20).
 - a) God will judge ("woe") Babylon for its **greed** when others [Medo-Persians] plunder it (2:6-8).
 - b) God will judge ("woe") Babylon for its **materialism** by exploiting others when it is destroyed (2:9-11).
 - c) God will judge ("woe") Babylon for its **violence** but fill the earth with His glory (2:12-14).
 - d) God will judge ("woe") Babylon for its **immorality** forced upon others (2:15-17).
 - e) God will judge ("woe") Babylon for its **idolatry** but all will see His sovereign majesty when the nation falls (2:18-20).
- II. The response of Habakkuk to God's promise of Babylon's demise was to praise His sovereign, faithful past deeds as the basis for trusting God for the future despite the circumstances (Ch. 3).**
- A. God's mercy in the past means He will judge the Babylonians in Habakkuk's own day (3:1-2).
 - B. God's majesty shown in the past should encourage Judah to trust Him for the future (3:3-15).
 - 1. God showed His sovereign control in His splendor and majesty at Mount Sinai (3:3-4).
 - 2. God showed His power over nature in the plagues of Egypt (3:5).
 - 3. God showed His eternity in His destroying age-old mountains by earthquake (3:6).
 - 4. God's distressed nations on both sides of the Red Sea (3:7).
 - 5. God showed His power in His sovereign control of rivers (3:8-10).
 - 6. God's power over the sun and moon helped Joshua defeat his enemies (3:11).

7. God showed His faithfulness to the Davidic Covenant by defeating Israel's enemies to preserve the Messianic line (3:12-13).
 8. God protected Israel by causing the Midianites to destroy themselves under Gideon (3:14).
 9. God protected Israel by destroying Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea as if done with "God's horses" (3:15).
- C. Habakkuk confesses both fear and confident rejoicing that God will judge Babylon and be his Source of strength despite the circumstances (3:16-19).
1. Habakkuk fears the Babylonians but promises to patiently wait for Babylon's fall (3:16).
 2. Habakkuk proclaims in song that his confidence and rejoicing is in a Person, the Sovereign LORD, not in circumstances (3:17-19).
 - a) He commits to rejoice in the LORD despite the worst of circumstances (3:17-18).
 - b) His strength is in the Sovereign LORD, so he will experience victory (3:19a).
 - c) He notes that the music director should sing this song with stringed instruments (3:19b).

Man and God Contrasted in Habakkuk

Man	God
Accuses God of injustice (1:2-4)	Justly uses whoever He wants (1:12b)
Asks “Why?” (1:3a)	Answers “Who?” (2:20)
Tolerates sin (1:3b-4)	Cannot tolerate wrong (1:13a)
Feels things are out of control (1:14-17)	Has all things in control (1:5)
Says God can’t use the wicked (1:13)	Uses even the wicked in His plan (1:6)
Impatient with God’s judging sin (1:2)	Patient in judgment of sin (2:3; cf. 2 Pet. 3:9)
Wants God to show him by sight (2:1)	Wants man to trust Him by faith (2:4)

Contrasting Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Lamentations

Zephaniah	Habakkuk	Lamentations
Decades before the fall of Jerusalem (ca. 630)	Just before the fall of Jerusalem (ca. 607-605)	Just after the fall of Jerusalem (586)
God will judge	God, when will you judge?	God has judged
Preview of trouble	Promise of trouble	Presence of trouble
Declaration	Dialogue	Dirge
Day of the LORD	Dominion of the LORD	Destruction of the LORD
God is in your midst (3:15, 17)	God is your strength (3:19)	God is your portion (3:24)

Adapted from Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible*, 280