

## Bible Study: Habakkuk

Author: Habakkuk

Audience: The southern kingdom of Judah

Date: ca. 609-605 B.C.

Location: Judah

Theme: The righteous shall live by faith

Genre: prose/poetry mixture

### Outline

Habakkuk's First Question (1:1-4)

God's First Answer (1:5-11)

Habakkuk's Second Question (1:12-2:1)

God's Second Answer (2:2-20)

Habakkuk's Prayer of Praise (3:1-19)

### Observation

1:2 Habakkuk's 1st question: "Why don't You do something about the wicked?"

1:2 The righteous often cry out, "How long, O Lord?" (Ps 13:1-4, Rev 6:9-11).

1:3 Habakkuk is tormented by the sight of evil and violence (Ezek 9:4, 2 Pet 2:7-8).

1:4 He cries out against injustice and wickedness (Isa 62:6-7, Matt 5:4).

1:5 God's 1st reply: "I am doing something; I am raising up the Chaldeans."

1:5 This will happen "in your days" (i.e., within Habakkuk's lifetime).

1:6 God raised up the Babylonians to punish Judah (1Kgs 11:14, 23, Prv 16:7)

1:6 They seized dwellings that didn't belong to them (i.e., Judah in 604 B.C.).

1:7 The Babylonians were already well known and feared (i.e., post-612 B.C.).

1:9 They move like the wind, collect captives like sand (2Kgs 24:12-14, 25:11).

1:11 They are so arrogant, they worship their own strength (cf. Dan 4:30).

1:12 Habakkuk's 2nd question: "Why are You using them to punish Judah?"

1:13 The Babylonians are more wicked than Judah! Why favor them?

### Interpretation

When was Habakkuk written (1:1)?

The prominence of Babylon in Habakkuk indicates a post-612 B.C. date, but Babylon apparently had not yet invaded Judah, placing the book before 605. Though no kings are mentioned, the nation's sad spiritual condition suggests a date near the end of Josiah's reign, perhaps after the wicked Jehoiakim replaced him in 609 (see 2 Chron. 36:8; Jer. 22:18-19).<sup>1</sup>

Who were the Chaldeans (1:6)?

The Babylonians ("Kaldu" in the Assyrian annals) were a Semitic people of southern Babylonia. When Nabopolassar, a native Chaldean governor, took the Babylonian throne in 626 B.C., he inaugurated a dynasty that made the "Chaldean" name famous. The word is used in the Bible as a virtual synonym for "Babylonian." The Chaldeans or Babylonians were described as a fierce and terrifying people. They were a law unto themselves and were known for taking conquered peoples into captivity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Willmington's Bible Handbook* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1997), 489.

<sup>2</sup> *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2001), 361.

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After the fall of Nineveh in 606 B.C., Babylon threw off the Assyrian yoke and, under Nebuchadnezzar, it became one of the most splendid cities of the ancient world. Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah in 605 B.C. (Dan 1) and annexed it in 586 B.C. (2Kgs 25).

How did the Babylonians collect captives “like sand” (1:9)?

The NIV renders the first part of the verse: “Their hordes advance like a desert wind” where the Hebrew (*qadim*) refers to a scorching wind that comes from the East to ravage the land. The New Century Version completes the word picture: “Their prisoners are as many as the grains of sand.”

Why would the Babylonians offer a sacrifice to their nets (1:16)?

These fishing implements are used figuratively to represent the weapons of war... It was customary among the ancient nations to offer sacrifices to their weapons. The Scythians offered sacrifices to a sword that was set up as a symbol of Mars. Referring to this, Herodotus, the Greek historian, wrote: “Yearly sacrifices of cattle and of horses are made to it, and more victims are offered thus than to all the rest of their gods.”<sup>3</sup>

### Application

An error to avoid: Thinking that God is ignoring the wicked (1:2).

An example to follow: Crying out to God about the sins of this world (1:3-4).

An error to avoid: Thinking that God can't use the wicked to correct us (1:13).

### Observation

2:1 Habakkuk has questioned God's ways; he takes his stand awaiting God's answer.

2:2 God's 2nd reply: “Have patience; the righteous man will live by his faithfulness.”

2:3 The vision is for the appointed time. Wait for it; it will come (Ps 37:7, 9, Matt 24:13).

2:4 The proud are not morally straight (*yashar*); the righteous are steady (*'emunah*).

2:6 The nations will eventually ridicule the Babylonians (five woes; 3 verses each).

2:6 The first taunt: “Woe to him who piles up stolen goods.”

2:8 The nations you have plundered will also plunder you (Medes & Persians).

2:9 The second taunt: “Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain.”

2:10 You have brought shame to your house and sinned against yourself.

2:12 The third taunt: “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed.”

2:13 Everything they have built is just fuel for the fire of their destruction.

2:15 The fourth taunt: “Woe to him who disrobes his intoxicated neighbors.”

2:14 The earth will be filled with the knowledge of God's glory (cf. Isa 11:9).

2:16 Now it's your turn! Drink the cup of the Lord and be exposed! (Rev 18:5-6)

2:17 The violence you did to Lebanon will overwhelm you (Isa 14:7-8, Gal 6:7).

2:19 The fifth taunt: “Woe to the man who worships a vain and lifeless idol.”

2:20 Contrast: The true God is in His temple; let everyone be silent before Him.

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<sup>3</sup> *Manners & Customs of the Bible* (North Brunswick: Bridge-Logos, 1998), 393.

### Interpretation

Why did God want this message written on tablets (2:2)?

Habakkuk is told to record his message *on tablets*, the ordinary medium of writing in Babylonia. They were made of clay (which when baked became like stone), ivory or wood. These tablets would be enduring reminders that God's word would ultimately be realized.<sup>4</sup>

What did God mean by "the righteous will live by his faith" (2:4)?

A righteous Israelite who remained loyal to God's moral precepts and was humble before the Lord enjoyed God's abundant life. To "live" meant to experience God's blessing by enjoying a life of security, protection, and fullness. Conversely, an apparently victorious but proud and perverse Babylonian would die. Faithfulness (NIV marg.) and faith are related. One who trusts in the Lord is one who relies on Him and is faithful to Him.<sup>5</sup>

Rom. 1:17 expresses the result of faith, with the Greek emphasis on intellectual commitment, which leads to righteousness... Gal. 3:11 contrasts obedience to God as a legalistic requirement which cannot justify anyone to a faithful commitment to him resulting in the unearned gift of life. Heb. 10:38 brings out the force of the call to persevere, living in faithful obedience to God's will in times of personal trial.<sup>6</sup>

What was the violence done to Lebanon (2:17)?

Lebanon, a nation north of Israel, was known for its abundance of cedar trees and wild animals. It had suffered the ruthless removal of timber for Babylonian buildings and the destructive slaughter of beasts that lived in the forests. The violence done to the forests would weigh on Babylon and its senseless hunting and killing of the fauna would terrify it.<sup>7</sup>

At Wadi Brisa in Lebanon, Nebuchadnezzar wrote the following inscription: "I cut a road for the cedars and before Marduke, my king, I brought massive, tall, strong cedars, of wonderful beauty, whose dark appearance was impressive, the mighty products of the Lebanons."<sup>8</sup>

But, the worst charge was that of human bloodshed, already leveled against the Babylonians (2:8, 12). They had not only wrecked the forests and ravaged the hillsides, but had also ruined lands and cities and everyone in them. The indignities on God's creation and His creatures would bring Babylon from apparent world glory to everlasting shame.<sup>9</sup>

### Application

A challenge to face: Wait patiently for God's justice (2:3)

A verse to memorize: The righteous will live by his faith (2:4)

A condition to meet: Believers must remain faithful to God (2:4)

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<sup>4</sup> *New Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Hab 2:2.

<sup>5</sup> *Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 1:1513.

<sup>6</sup> *New Bible Commentary*, Hab 2:2.

<sup>7</sup> *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:1516.

<sup>8</sup> James Muir, *The Spade and the Scriptures*, (Nashville: Broadman, 1940), vol 2, 69.

<sup>9</sup> *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:1516.

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### Observation

- 3:1 Habakkuk's prayer is a song. A *shigionoth* is most likely a musical term.
- 3:2 He pleads with God to do His mighty deeds as in days of old.
- 3:3 God came with Israel from Mount Paran during the Exodus (Deut 33:2).
- 3:5 He uses plague and pestilence as His weapons (i.e., the Passover).
- 3:8 He "rode" over the Jordan River and Red Sea during the Exodus.
- 3:11 The sun and moon stood still in the heavens for Joshua.
- 3:14 With his own spear you pierced his head (e.g., 2Sam 23:20-21).
- 3:16 Habakkuk will wait for God's judgment on Babylon (Rev 18:1-2).
- 3:18 Even though evil will come, Habakkuk will exalt and rejoice in God.
- 3:19 Habakkuk gave this "to the Chief Musician" to be sung in the Temple.
- 3:19 This was a song for a stringed instrument (i.e., a harp or lyre).

### Interpretation

What is the significance of "uncovering a bow" (3:9)?

The bow was usually kept in a case made of leather or some other protective material. To uncover it meant to take it out of its case to use it. The expression signifies preparation for battle, and has the same meaning as uncover the shield.<sup>10</sup>

What is the correct translation of Hab 3:16?

The NASB seems to render the Hebrew more accurately than the NKJV, but newer translations now have Habakkuk waiting for God to judge Babylon rather than Habakkuk waiting for the Babylonians to invade Judah:

[NASB] Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, For the people to arise *who* will invade us.

[NKJV] That I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, He will invade them with his troops.

[ESV] Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.

[NCV] But I will wait patiently for the day of disaster that will come to the people who attack us.

[NIV] Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.

### Application

A challenge to face: Wait patiently for God's judgment on Babylon (3:16)

An example to follow: Rejoice in God despite the evils of this world (3:18)

### Basic Lessons of Habakkuk

God is not ignoring evil even though it may seem that way at times

God can use anyone or anything to accomplish His plan, even the wicked

We have to remain faithful to God no matter what happens in this world

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<sup>10</sup> *Manners & Customs of the Bible*, 393.

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### Scriptures

Ps 13:1 For the choir director. A Psalm of David. How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? 2 How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? 3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, 4 And my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," And my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken.

Rev 6:9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" 11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

Ezek 9:4 The LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst."

2 Pet 2:7 and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds)

Isa 62:6 On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; All day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves; 7 And give Him no rest until He establishes And makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

Matt 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

1Ki 11:14 Then the LORD raised up an adversary to Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he was of the royal line in Edom.

1Ki 11:23 God also raised up another adversary to him, Rezon the son of Eliada, who had fled from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah.

Prv 16:7 When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

2Kgs 24:12 Then Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his servants, his princes, and his officers went out to the king of Babylon; and the king of Babylon, in the eighth year of his reign, took him prisoner. 13 And he carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house, and he cut in pieces all the articles of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said. 14 Also he carried into captivity all Jerusalem: all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land.

2Kgs 25:11 Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive the rest of the people who remained in the city and the defectors who had deserted to the king of Babylon, with the rest of the multitude.

Dan 4:30 The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'

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Ps 37:7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.

Ps 37:9 For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth.

Matt 24:13 But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

Isaiah 11:9 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.

Rev 18:5 For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. 6 Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her.

Isa 14:7 The whole earth is at rest and is quiet; They break forth into shouts of joy. 8 Even the cypress trees rejoice over you, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, 'Since you were laid low, no tree cutter comes up against us.'

Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

Deut 33:2 And he said: "The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came with ten thousands of saints; From His right hand Came a fiery law for them.

2Sam 23:20 Then Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel, who had done mighty deeds, killed the two sons of Ariel of Moab. He also went down and killed a lion in the middle of a pit on a snowy day. 21 He killed an Egyptian, an impressive man. Now the Egyptian had a spear in his hand, but he went down to him with a club and snatched the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear.

Rev 18:1 [ESV] After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. 2 And he called out with a mighty voice, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.