

Habakkuk

By Ross Callaghan

<http://rosscallaghan.yolasite.com>



Habakkuk is the eighth of the twelve Minor Prophets. It is *an oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received from God in answer to a number of his complaints.*

Author The prophet Habakkuk. His name may be derived from a Hebrew word meaning “to embrace”. We don't know much about Habakkuk other than what is recorded in his book. Habakkuk may have been a temple musician because he often refers to musical terms. His writings show that he was a prophet with a deep concern for social justice.

Date Habakkuk may have lived during the reigns of King Josiah (640-609BC) and Jehoiakim (609-598BC) but this is uncertain. He refers to God *raising up the Babylonians* (1:6) so the book may have been written around 625BC just before the establishment of the Babylonian Empire.

Background Josiah and Jehoiakim were two of the last Kings of Judah. Josiah *did what was right in the eyes of the Lord* but Jehoiakim *did evil in the eyes of the Lord*. See 2 Chronicles 34:1-36:10. Under Jehoiakim Judah experienced much evil and injustice and this prompted Habakkuk to question God, asking why He was not doing something about it. Soon after Habakkuk was written Jehoiakim was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and the temple desecrated. Jerusalem finally fell to the Babylonians in 586BC.

Message Habakkuk shows us how we should respond to the evil in the world. He has deep doubts and concerns about the society he is living in and about God's actions in the face of this. Good people are suffering and evil people flourishing, so Habakkuk asks why God is seemingly inactive and evil is going unpunished. By the end of the book Habakkuk has a better understanding of God's purposes and can trust God and submit to His will. He learns that God is just and will punish evil in His own time and way. He recognises that God is sovereign in history and knows what He is doing.

Regardless of what is happening around about us we can *rejoice in the Lord, and be joyful in God our Saviour*. (3:18).

Outline

Habakkuk's first complaint and God's answer. 1:1-11

There is much violence, injustice, strife and conflict in the world. So much so that *the law is paralysed; justice never prevails; the wicked hem in the righteous and justice is perverted*. In the face of this Habakkuk has asked God for help but seemingly He has not listened or done anything in response.

Habakkuk asks God why. *Why do You tolerate wrong?*

God answers by telling Habakkuk that He is going to do something amazing. He is going to raise up the mighty Babylonians, *that ruthless and impetuous people*, and that they will *sweep across the whole earth* bringing great destruction.

Habakkuk's second complaint and God's answer. 1:12-2:20.

God's answer to the first complaint was not enough for Habakkuk. He now asks God how He could use such a terrible instrument of judgment when His *eyes are too pure to look on evil* and He *cannot tolerate wrong*. Will God let evil Babylon fish the sea of humanity forever?

God replies that His answer will come *at an appointed time* and that it will *certainly come*. Even though righteous people may not be totally upright *the righteous will live by their faith*. By putting their faith in God the righteous will be able to live successfully regardless of the evil around them. Those who don't do this will not survive and will get the judgment they deserve.

This includes all of those who:

- ⤴ abuse alcohol
- ⤴ get wealthy by extortion
- ⤴ plunder others
- ⤴ are unjust
- ⤴ plot the ruin of others
- ⤴ are immoral
- ⤴ worship idols.

A truly righteous person will not lose faith because of the evil in the world or because the the wicked are not immediately being punished. Faith trusts in God and in His power to rule, regardless of what is happening in the world.

Ultimately *the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.* Then the Lord *will be in His holy temple* and all the earth will be *silent before Him.*

The righteous will live by faith

Habakkuk 2:4 is one of the most important verses in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament the word *faith* means “firmness” or “strength”. It is a faithful and unwavering commitment to God and His promises, so a righteous person will live by trusting in God in a way that remains firm and strong, regardless of what is going on around them. This concept was also taught by Jesus in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:21), and in James 1:12.

In the New Testament the concept that the righteous will live by faith was developed by the Apostle Paul into the doctrine of “justification by faith”. Paul used Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17 as he introduced this concept to show that *in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.* Now when someone puts their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ God declares them to be righteous in His sight and they become children of God. See Romans 3:21-8:39; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21., and Hebrews 10:38,39. Justification by faith was the central doctrine of the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s. It declares that salvation comes through putting one's faith in Christ, not by doing any kind of good works or trying meet the requirements of the law. See Galatians 2:15-3:29.

Habakkuk's prayer in response to God's answers. 3:1-19

Habakkuk closes with a prayer, with a form like many of the psalms. It is *on shigionoth* which is probably a musical term. The prayer was to be played *on my stringed instruments.*

In his prayer you can sense how Habakkuk is happy with God's answer. God is God after all! Habakkuk *stands in awe* of God and of His deeds. He recognises that God's glory *fills the heavens* and His praise *fills the earth.* In everything that happens God's *ways are eternal.* He came *to deliver His people and crush the leader of the land of wickedness.*

So regardless of what is happening Habakkuk can *rejoice in the Lord, and be joyful in God his Saviour.* He has come to a place where he knows *The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and enables me to go on the heights.*

Habakkuk, like us, can confidently trust that God knows what He is doing: that He is working out His plans in His own times and in His own ways.

Discussion questions

Habakkuk deals with one of the greatest questions that believers living in our evil world can ask: Why doesn't God step in and sort things out? What do other parts of the Bible teach in answer to this question? e.g. Job, Jesus, James. What is your answer to the question? What is Habakkuk's?

Is it acceptable for Christians to question God in the way that Habakkuk did? Why? Why not?

How is *the righteous will live by faith* in the Old Testament different from *the just shall live by faith* in the New Testament? How is it similar?

What does the book of Habakkuk tell us about the character and nature of God, especially in relation to evil people, societies and nations?

What have you learned from your study of Habakkuk? How will you apply this in your life?