

Habakkuk

“Waiting on the Lord”

I. Introduction to Habakkuk

Habakkuk is the thirty-fifth book of the Old Testament and eighth among the Minor Prophets. Very little is known about the man Habakkuk apart from what we glean in a few verses:

Habakkuk 1:1 He calls himself a prophet.

Prophet: one called by God to deliver a message to their generation.

Habakkuk 3:19 He was also a musician who perhaps served in the Temple choir or worship team.

His name means ‘embrace’. According to Walvoord, “Luther took it in the active sense and saw Habakkuk as one who embraced his people to comfort and uphold them. Jerome saw Habakkuk as one who embraced the problem of divine justice in a wicked world. Others prefer the passive sense and picture Habakkuk as one embraced by God as His child and messenger.” Habakkuk is a good example of what it means to embrace or cling to God in times of trouble.

Another possible meaning of His name is ‘to wrestle’. Like Jacob before him, Habakkuk wrestled with God in prayer. The subject of his prayer was reconciling circumstances with what he knew to be true of God.

Habakkuk referred to his message as a ‘burden’. In this case, burden meant ‘oracle or prayer’. Habakkuk is unique among the prophets. Unlike most prophetic books which declare God’s message to the people, Habakkuk records a dialogue between himself and God.

Three times Habakkuk asks, “Why?”

Habakkuk 1:3 “Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble?

For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises.”

Habakkuk 1:13 “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness.

Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he”?

Habakkuk 1:14 “Why do You make men like fish of the sea, like creeping things *that have no ruler over them?*”

He was attempting to reconcile what he knows of God with what he saw happening in the world around him. He is not alone in this. For centuries men have struggled to find answers for injustice. Most of us, at one time or another, have questioned how God can allow certain events to transpire.

Habakkuk

“Waiting on the Lord”

Two important truths to keep in mind when asking God, “Why?”

One, we cannot understand God apart from divine revelation. What life says as opposed to what the Word says. Habakkuk placed inspiration and revelation above experience.

Two, we live for personal comfort. Notice what Habakkuk cries out for in Habakkuk 1:2-4,

“O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear?
Even cry out to You, “Violence!” And You will not save.

Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble?
For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises.

Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth.
For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds”.

The problem today is, we view personal pleasure as the supreme rule of life. We cry “Why?” whenever anything happens to disturb our personal comfort. Habakkuk cried out against injustice, sin, wickedness within his own nation. When was the last time you cried out to the Lord over the sins of our nation? We need to cry out more against wickedness than against what we view as unfair.

Habakkuk was written sometime before the fall of Judah to Babylon. Two major theories have been suggested to pinpoint Jeremiah’s writing.

- During the reign of Manasseh (687 – 642 B.C.) Manasseh’s sin is cited in Scripture as a primary cause of captivity. It is during this time that the first seeds of Babylonian power begin.
- During the reign of Jehoiakim (609 – 598 B.C.) Babylon has already sacked Nineveh and is mounting forces against Egypt. The Battle of Carchemish, where Egypt and Assyria were defeated by Nebuchadnezzar’s forces, led to the supremacy of Babylon and the fall of Judah.

The conditions of his world were deplorable. There was regional, political unrest, as nations prepared for inevitable war with Babylon.

Judah was in a state of moral and spiritual decline. In his writings, Habakkuk mentions violence, iniquity, strife, lawlessness, and perverse judgment. All of this was a consequence of walking away from the Word of God.

Things that should be restricted were being promoted as freedoms, and the true freedoms were being restricted. Jeremiah was imprisoned for preaching this message. It is in this climate that Habakkuk received his message from the Lord.

Habakkuk 2:2 “Then the LORD answered me and said: “Write the vision and make *it* plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it”.

Habakkuk

“Waiting on the Lord”

His message was not addressed to anyone in particular. Instead it was a transcript of his conversation with God. It is clear that God listens when we speak about Him, as illustrated in the following passage in Malachi.

Malachi 3:16 “Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name”.

II. Outline of Habakkuk

The book of Habakkuk begins with a cry and ends with a song. The whole book is built on the fact that Habakkuk does not understand what God is doing. Thus, the story is for those who cannot reconcile what they experience with what they know to be true of God. The problem was that God seemed unconcerned or uninvolved in what was happening.

Habakkuk divides into three parts by its three chapters.

Section 1	Chapter 1	a Burden
Section 2	Chapter 2	an Answer
Section 3	Chapter 3	a Prayer

Warren Wiersbe puts it like this

Chapter 1	Prophet Wondering
Chapter 2	Prophet Waiting
Chapter 3	Prophet Worshipping

Section 1 Chapter 1 a Burden

1:1-4 Habakkuk opening speech is a prayer; a cry to God for justice. He sees the immorality and unrighteousness of his world and cries out for God to make it right. Our hearts cry against injustice. We expect God to make things right. Habakkuk had that same expectation.

God's Answer

1:5-11 God answers Habakkuk, but the answer is not what he expected. Habakkuk 1:5-6 God speaks of the Chaldeans' and the army of Babylon

1:7-11 God goes on to describe the Babylonian conquest and victory.

Habakkuk

“Waiting on the Lord”

New Questions for Habakkuk

1:12-17 Habakkuk continues to seek answers from God. Instead of becoming cynical or an agnostic, Habakkuk continues to seek the Lord. He was willing to go to the Word of God.

1:12 We shall not die! We want justice for others, but mercy for ourselves. “We all believe and expect a final court of arbitration for the Hitler’s, Stalin’s and Bin Laden’s of the world. We just don’t think we should end up there.” God wants no one to go to hell, but those who reject Christ will.

1:13 “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness”

Habakkuk understood that God is Holy. However, Habakkuk mistakenly thought that because God is Holy, He could not possibly use Babylon (a wicked nation) to judge Judah (His own people). Habakkuk thought this was incorrect. We often do the same thing.

1John 4:8 “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love”.

We correctly view God as love, yet we erroneously deduce that He must then be tolerant of all lifestyles and choices. God loves, but He calls sin – sin and will judge.

Lamentations 3:22-23 “Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness”.

We correctly view God as merciful, yet, falsely conclude that we are free to continue in sin without consequences. David’s life illustrates this.

1:17 Goes on to further describe the wickedness of Babylon.

Section 2 Chapter 2 an Answer

2:1 Habakkuk’s reaction to what he heard from God.

I will stand my watch. Habakkuk, while confused, is open to hearing from God. Often, our problem is not that God is silent, but that we are unwilling to listen.

2:2-20 God Speaks

2:2-4 “Write the vision and make *it* plain on tablets . . .”

The message was for more than Habakkuk. The purpose of Bible study is to both take in and give out.

We take in through:

- Reading
- Hearing
- Studying
- Memorizing
- Meditating

Habakkuk

“Waiting on the Lord”

We give out through

- Personal application
- Acting upon the Word
- Sharing the Word with others
 - One-on-one
 - Teaching children
 - Sharing the gospel

Quoted three times in the New Testament: Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38

2:5-20 The “proud” are further described as the five woes: greed, covetousness, violence, drunkenness and idolatry.

Section 3 Chapter 3 a Prayer

Habakkuk’s final response – prayer; in two parts.

Prayer for Revival

3:2 “O LORD, I have heard Your speech and was afraid; O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make *it* known; in wrath remember mercy”

Habakkuk recalls the work of God in the past and calls for His future work as spoken of in Habakkuk 3:3-4, 3:8-9, 3:11, 3:13

In the midst of our moral decline, we must pray for God to God the lost and save the world.

We must not become pessimistic, defeated and have an ‘Ichabod attitude’ as Eli’s wife. After the death of Eli, his wife gave birth. Due to complications from labor, she was dying. Before her death, she named her son, ‘Ichabod’. She was declaring that the glory of God had departed from Israel. While she was correct in attesting that sin had devastated the nation. She was wrong in thinking God was finished with Israel. Great works of God were still in Israel’s future. And they are in our future, too.

A Song of Praise

3:18 “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation”

Habakkuk is a changed man; from sorrow to song, from confusion to praise.

How? He waited, prayer, listened to God.

III. Why Study Habakkuk

Habakkuk teaches to wait upon the Lord

The value of waiting: Isaiah 40:30-31

Habakkuk

“Waiting on the Lord”

“Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint”.

How to wait:

1 Corinthians 11:28 “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup”.

Examine: should be a time of self-examination, with the cross in view.

Condone: the cross teaches that God does not condone sin.

Guilt: the cross teaches that guilt is gone, through the blood of Christ.

Colossian 3:1-2 “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”

Seek: watch and see

Why should we wait?

Promise – Acts 1

Wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit

Direction – Acts 16

Keep moving

Understanding – Habakkuk 1

The just live by faith: Habakkuk 2:4

“**Behold** the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.”

Contrast this with the proud.

“You mean God will reject someone . . .?”

“You mean you will reject the way of the proud . . .?”

Lesson on the value of prayer.

Prayer is the means by which the burden of God’s people can be poured out.

God responds to prayer with His Word.

Prayer cannot be used at the expense of the Word of God.

God answers prayer according to His sovereign plan to save.

Habakkuk 3:13 “You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for salvation with Your Anointed. You struck the head from the house of the wicked, by laying bare from foundation to neck.”

Habakkuk

“Waiting on the Lord”

IV. Jesus in Habakkuk

There is no direct messianic prophesy. However, there is a clear message of the Gospel Habakkuk 2:4 “. . .but the just shall live by his faith.”

Faith has always been the currency of the Kingdom. Through it we receive the forgiveness of sin. There is also a promise of the future reign of Christ.

Habakkuk 2:14 “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”

This is a repeat of what is promised in Isaiah 11:9 “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

The ultimate redemption of all things will be when Christ returns.

Habakkuk
“Waiting on the Lord”