

# Habakkuk

## Summary

Habakkuk is a unique prophetic book of only three chapters which gives us an "inside" view into a conversation between God and Habakkuk, His prophet. Habakkuk lived in a time when the people of God did not live as the Lord desired. The Assyrians had already taken the Israelites from the Northern Kingdom into captivity in 722 B.C. and for this reason the people of Judah (Southern Kingdom), where Habakkuk resided, seemed to be following the same pattern of disobedience. The people of Judah had become completely immoral, engaging in wickedness, violence, worship to pagan gods, and sexual immorality. In addition, the kings of Judah during this time did not honor the God of Israel and instead paid tribute to both the Egyptian and Babylonian gods. Habakkuk is grieved by this wickedness of his people - those who claim to follow God - and according to Habakkuk, God seems to overlook what is happening. Habakkuk is confused and frustrated by this, and he takes his issue up with God. This is the first prophet we see in recorded history to question the judgment of God, and even practically demand an answer from Him. However, God in His love and grace reveals many things in His response to Habakkuk. The fact that He responded to Habakkuk's complaint at all shows that God is a personal God and cares about our concerns, even if He is the all-powerful and almighty God that we know Him to be. In addition, God's responses to Habakkuk reveals that God does see the hardships facing us, the wickedness surrounding us, and He cares about them deeply. Lastly, as a result of God's character, Habakkuk's final response of praise in the last chapter of this book reminds us that God has plans we do not see, and we need to trust Him when times are tough or confusing. He may be doing something much greater than what we see in the immediate future, because He is God, and we should praise Him for His ways are far beyond ours.

## Author

Many scholars believe that the book of Habakkuk was written by the man of the same name, a Hebrew prophet who lived during a time of rampant wickedness of God's people. We know very little else about this prophet, but he is believed to have lived in Jerusalem during his ministry.

## Date

Most scholars agree that the book of Habakkuk was written between 600-620 B.C., but many settle on the date of 609 B.C. based on historical contexts surrounding events found in the book.

## Primary Characters

Habakkuk (Habakkuk 1-3)

Jews/Judeans (Habakkuk 1-3)

Babylonians/Chaldeans (Habakkuk 2)

## Historical Moments

Deportation of Jews to Babylon and Fall of Jerusalem Prophesied (Habakkuk 1)

## Major Theological Themes

**God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility** - In the first chapter of Habakkuk, the prophet complains about the wickedness of his own people, and asks why God is not acting on it. God answers, letting Habakkuk know that He will take care of it; He is going to send the Babylonians to punish the Jews. Habakkuk is further stunned by this answer, wondering why God would allow a nation more wicked than Judah to capture them. In chapter two, God explains that the Babylonians will indeed be held accountable for their injustice against His people. Many people have looked at these verses and been confused at the logic of it: if God is going to use the Babylonians to punish the Jews, does that make it God's fault and not the Babylonians? Why would God then punish them if He used them to do this terrible thing? This is the paradox of God's sovereignty and man's free will. It is a theological tension that arises in many other places in the Bible, and this is one example. It is important to understand here that even though God knows someone is going to make a particular decision does not mean that God is to be blamed for the outcome. A real-life example of this would be if a parent offered their child a brand new toy, or one that was broken and beat-up. Of course, the child would choose the new toy, and the parent knows this. However, just because the parent is aware of what their child would choose does not mean the parent is the decision-maker of the situation; the child still makes the choice. It is the same with the Babylonians in Habakkuk's time. God was fully aware of the hard-heartedness and wickedness that the Babylonians had already displayed. He knew their desire to conquer the Southern Kingdom of Israel (Judah) and their propensity to oppress those in their way. In this situation, God is exhibiting His power, love, and justice all in one fell swoop of allowing His own people to be taken into captivity by a nation that does not claim to love

Him, in order to discipline the children of Israel and eventually bring them back to Himself. God is not at fault for our choices or the choices of others because humans have free will. Because God is good and sovereign, He is able to use those choices (even wicked ones) to accomplish His great purposes that go far beyond our human understanding. If we trust God with our lives, we do not have to fear the future. We serve a powerful God who loves us, and this should give us great comfort, even in the midst of a sinful world.

## Lessons Learned from Habakkuk

**The “Woes” of Wickedness** - God assures Habakkuk that He will indeed punish the Babylonians for their injustice and cruelty done to the Israelites. God gives some specific explanations as to how and why this will occur, which are frequently referred to as the “Five Woes” of the Babylonians. They can serve as a message to us today about what God does not allow. These woes include 1) Theft - stealing from others to gain wealth for oneself; 2) Injustice - treating others unjustly to gain security for oneself; 3) Violence - hurting others to gain power for oneself; 4) Exploitation - taking advantage of others to gain pleasure for oneself, and 5) Idolatry - trusting something other than God to direct one's life. God pronounces punishment for these acts. He lets them know that the benefit they expect to receive by committing the sin will be stripped away or never attained. This serves to remind us that we should always seek to “gain” our wealth, security, progress, pleasures, and satisfaction from Christ alone. The ways of wickedness might seem easier and more beneficial short-term, but Habakkuk reminds us that it is not worth it in the end. Instead, when we seek our desires from God and through God, and serve and help others, we can know God is honored and will lift us up.

**Trust God Through Trials** - As Christians, we are often taught that we can come to God with our struggles. We are told to be open and honest with God when we feel upset and to go to Him in prayer instead of running from Him – even if we believe it is God's fault that we are in the situation. Since we know that God is all-powerful, we also believe that He is able to control situations as He pleases, so we get stuck on the question: “Why would God let that happen?” Sometimes, we are blessed with an answer, either with time or through wisdom, but other times, we do not see the reason. It is in these times that we need to remember that God's ways are not our ways, and He sees things that we do not. Habakkuk knows that God will be his strength through this trial. Furthermore, because Habakkuk trusts God, he is able to not only endure but also have joy.