

HABAKKUK

MINOR PROPHETS SERIES

Introduction to Habakkuk 1:1



Habakkuk is a fascinating book is difficult to date precisely since no king is mentioned in the book. The likely date of writing falls somewhere between 612 BC and 605 BC during the reign of Jehoiakim. The prophet himself is unknown outside of the book.¹

Within the book of Habakkuk we have an amazing question and answer session between the prophet and God. Habakkuk cannot understand why God allows evil to flourish while seemingly doing nothing. God instructs Habakkuk that in fact he is active, that evil will be punished, and that his people are to live by faith. Habakkuk is put in the unenviable position of learning that doom and destruction were coming to his own land and people.

The theme of Habakkuk is “Waiting and Trusting in God.” The key phrase for the book is found in Habakkuk 2:4, “...but the righteous shall live by his faith.”

1. What do we learn about the Book of Habakkuk in 1:1?

2. What two sources of authority are seen in 1:1?

Habakkuk's Complaints 1:2-4

God communicated to Habakkuk by a vision. He writes about the “oracle” that he saw. The word translated as oracle in the ESV is sometimes translated as “burden.” To Habakkuk the revelation of God concerning Judah’s destruction was truly a heavy burden

Habakkuk observed the world around him and could not understand how God could allow such evil to persist without taking action. Since Habakkuk addresses God by the phrase, “O Lord,” using the Hebrew word *Yahweh* we should understand this to be a prayer.

Habakkuk pours out his heart in prayer and asking God how long he will stand by without taking action. He has cried for help, but the Lord has not heard (or so he assumes.) The word translated

¹ Smith, James E. *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: A Christian Interpretation*. Lulu, 2011. p. 113

“cry” indicates this was a great need. He asks “how long” because he believes justice to be delayed. Thirteen times this phrase is used in the Old Testament to express exasperation when it seems to the prophet or writer that the Lord is not acting in a timely fashion.

3. Was it wrong for Habakkuk to question God about what seemed to be a lack of judgment against evil? Explain your answer.

Next Habakkuk cries out to the Lord about the violence he sees and then complains to God that he had not acted for deliverance. Habakkuk is concerned about those who are oppressed and afflicted by the violence and cannot understand how God stands by without acting.

Third, Habakkuk sees iniquity or sin all about. He uses three groups of two to describe the sinful situation: He sees iniquity and wrong. He sees destruction and violence. He sees strife and contention. Habakkuk describes a deplorable social and moral condition in the land.

Finally, the prophet complains about the injustice he sees. The law is said to be paralysed. The law is disregarded, disrespected, and completely ineffective to combat the sin and violence which was so prevalent. Without the law, obedience to it, and enforcement there is no justice. Without law and justice the wicked oppress the righteous and anything called justice was just a perversion of real justice.

Jewish society had become violent, sinful, oppressive, and destructive. Their moral and spiritual decay had led to corruption and injustice in the land.

Habakkuk's Four Complaints to God

1. You don't hear my cry for help
2. You don't intervene to deliver from violence
3. You don't punish rampant sin
4. You don't execute justice

4. How does the prophecy of 1 Samuel 8:18 fit into what is happening to Judah?

5. What similarities, if any, do you see with what Habakkuk described in Judah and what we see in our world today?

The Lord Answers Habakkuk 1:5-11

God's answer to Habakkuk is plural showing that it was meant not only for the prophet, but for all of Judah. The answer was not what the Habakkuk expected. In essence, God says “Yes I am active and you will be astounded by what you will see.” God does not answer why he had not acted sooner, but he does not rebuke Habakkuk for his complaints and questions.

God's actions were unbelievable because the destruction of his people would be swift and intense, and God himself would raise up their enemy, and his instrument of judgment would be the

extremely wicked Chaldeans.² Habakkuk wonders why God has not brought judgment upon the wickedness found among his people, but he could never have imagined the intensity of the judgment that God was sending at the hands a nation far more sinful than his own.

6. According to verse 5, How did God expect Habakkuk to receive the answer his complaint?

7. Why doesn't God always answer our prayers how we think they should be answered; especially when they are for righteousness and justice?



Often God works differently than we expect, but we should never believe that he is not active. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 121:4 that God never slumbers nor sleeps. To Habakkuk it is very specifically revealed that God would bring destruction to Judah from the wicked Chaldeans. God has raised up and used wicked rulers and nations throughout history to punish his own people who were mired in rebellion and iniquity.

8. What do we learn about the Chaldeans in verses 6-7?

The Chaldeans were a wicked, bitter, nasty, arrogant and violent nation who were intent on extending their kingdom. In verse 7 we learn that their only understanding of justice and dignity came from themselves. Those who are not godly devise their own standards of behaviour suited to their own desires.

9. Why was the Chaldean army so formidable? (verse 8)

10. How do the Chaldeans treat their enemies? (verse 9)

11. What was the Chaldean view of the kings, leaders, and defenses in the lands they invade? (verse 10)

12. Who was the god of the Chaldeans? (verse 11)

² The Chaldeans referred to the Neo-Babylonian empire founded by Nabopolassar and at its greatest strength under Nebuchadnezzar. (O. Palmer Robertson in *The New International Commentary of the Old Testament: The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1990, p. 148.

To Habakkuk's surprise and dismay God answers his question of why he allowed sin and injustice to prevail with a response that described how he would bring justice upon his own people at the hand of an even more wicked people.

The Chaldeans would be held responsible for their own actions and by believing themselves to be gods; however before this happens God would use them as an agent of judgment upon Judah.

13. In light of the first eleven verses of Habakkuk, how might God answer us if we asked why he has not acted against the violence, injustices, and sin that is so prevalent in our world today?