

# HABAKKUK

## MINOR PROPHETS SERIES

Habakkuk starts with the prophet addressing a series of complaints to God in prayer. Habakkuk cannot understand why God seems to be deaf to Judah's cry for help, seems to be aloof to violence, stands by without punishing sin, and allows injustice to continue unpunished.

God's answer to Habakkuk is not what the prophet expected. God will raise up the wicked Chaldeans to bring destruction upon Judah. To Habakkuk's surprise and dismay God described how he would bring justice upon his own people at the hand of an even more wicked people.

## Habakkuk's Second Complaint 1:12-2:1

Habakkuk has a hard time accepting how God responded with what he expected from God. Habakkuk's complaint is not from a lack of faith, but a lack of understanding. How could a holy and just God allow his people to be conquered by a more evil and ruthless people?



Habakkuk knows that God is the eternal and Holy Creator so he cannot reconcile God's response with what he knows of God's character. Though he understands that God will punish Judah at the hands of the wicked Chaldeans, he also believes God will not cause them all to die. The prophet has faith that God will not totally forsake his covenant people and that a remnant would survive.

Habakkuk addresses God with the covenant name Yahweh (LORD) instead of the generic El or Elohim. Ancient Hebrew was written without vowels so the name was written as YHWH (the four Hebrew letters: *Yod, Heh, Vav, Heh*).

By 500 B.C. the Jews decided the name YHWH should not be spoken because the potential was too great to commit blasphemy. When reading Scripture they would say the word *adonay*, which means "Lord" when they came to the word YHWH. By the Middle Ages, the vowels from *adonay* were inserted in between the consonants YHWH forming the word Yahweh in English. Jehovah is a German variation of Yahweh. Since any number of vowel combinations could be used we have no way of knowing how YHWH was originally pronounced. This personal name for God, however it was pronounced, pointed to God's preexistence and his intimate relationship with his covenant people.<sup>1</sup>

### I. What do the following words and phrases tell us about the nature of God?

#### a. Everlasting -

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.gotquestions.org/YHWH-tetragrammaton.html>; <https://www.knowingthebible.net/the-meaning-of-yahweh>; and <http://www.behindthename.com/name/yahweh> for further study.

**b. LORD (Yahweh) -**

**c. Holy One -**

**d. Rock -**

Habakkuk's confusion is expressed in verse 13. How could a Holy God with pure eyes use a people more wicked than the Jews to bring their punishment? Wouldn't this be contrary to the actions of a just and holy God? God has eyes to see, yet he seems to look at the traitors idly without taking action against them as they "swallow up" his people.

## **2. How does Habakkuk describe the Chaldeans in verse 13?**

In verses 14-17 Habakkuk challenges God's plan to use the Chaldeans as agents of judgment. If this were to happen then mankind would be like the fish of the sea or crawling things (insects) who have no leader. In other words, he would be treating people like animals who could be led away and controlled by their captors.

The Chaldeans were a vicious people who would catch Judah like fish with a hook or a net. The Chaldeans rejoiced and were glad at their military victories and the fruit earned by their brutality. Habakkuk could not fathom how a Holy God with pure eyes could watch this happen without acting.

In verse 11 Habakkuk said that the god of the Chaldeans was their own might and he reinforces this view in verse 16. Since the Chaldeans worship their own strength and military victories how could God allow these wicked and godless people to use that very strength as a means of judgment against his covenant people?



## **3. What kind of people view their own strength as their god?**



The Chaldeans became rich and lived luxuriously as they ruthlessly conquered their neighbours and worshipped their own military power. How could Yahweh stand by and see these atrocities let alone use them was beyond Habakkuk's ability to understand.

Verse 17 describes the relentless devastation brought by the Chaldean war machine. They win one victory, empty their nets, and go forth to conquer yet another nation. Habakkuk continues to stress the continuous, merciless, and murderous work of the Chaldeans. Habakkuk asks, "Are you going to allow this to go on forever?"

Habakkuk had made his second complaint and now he stands to hear how God will answer in 2:1. The prophet is certain God will respond, but does not know what God will say. He waits and

watches for an unspecified period of time expecting a further revelation from God and perhaps a stern rebuke.

**4. Is the Lord obliged to answer the complaint or objection of every believer? Why or why not?**

## **The Lord's Answer 2:2-5**

God's answer to Habakkuk was not for him alone, but for all those in Judah. He was to write down the vision. This is to identify it as authoritative, to preserve it, and to see it circulated. The revelation was clearly understandable. To be made plain on tablets meant that it was legibly written and possible to be understood. The fact that it was on tablets was an allusion to the law which was also written on tablets. This shows again that the revelation was divine in origin and carried authority. The urgency of the message is seen in the call for the one to read it to "run."

**5. What facts do we learn about the vision (or revelation) in 2:3?**

**6. How does God's timetable sometimes differ from that of man?**

**7. What other prophecies (or promises) can you name from Scripture where patience was required before fulfilment came?**



God answers Habakkuk's complaint by telling him that he will work within his own timeframe. While there was fulfilment to this vision in the days of Habakkuk, this passage primarily looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. God's promises sometimes seem to be slow in being fulfilled and his promises may appear to be thwarted; however God will act at the "appointed time." The promises of the God who cannot lie will always come to pass. God will act decisively within his own timeframe and will never fail to do as he says.

While the coming of the Messiah is ultimately in view in verse 3, God addresses the Chaldeans specifically in verses 4-5. The Chaldeans were "puffed up" trusting only in themselves. At the opposite extreme the righteous shall live by faith. Even in the extreme circumstances that would come upon Judah, those who were righteous would look faithfully to God.

**8. What is the relationship between righteousness and faith?**

**9. What does it mean to "live by faith?"**

The Chaldeans were a puffed up people who are addicted to wine. Wine is described as a “traitor” meaning that it deceives and turns against those who seek its pleasure. “The announcement of the end of the Chaldean kingdom occurred while Belshazzar was drinking himself drunk at a banquet of his lords and ladies (cf. Daniel 5).”<sup>2</sup>

The Chaldeans fit the description as “arrogant” and “never at rest” as they relentlessly pursue the conquest of their neighbours. They are a people who never enjoyed the comfort, rest, and peace of home.

Sheol is the unseen abode of the dead and Sheol is never satisfied. There are never enough dead, but constantly Sheol is adding to its number. This is a metaphor for the greed of the Chaldeans which was never quenched.

As nation after nation are conquered the Chaldeans are not satisfied. They collect nations and peoples as a hobby, but never find lasting pleasure. The Chaldeans may appear to be getting away with their viciousness, but it is only a fleeting illusion. They find no real pleasure in the present and as the next verses in Habakkuk will show, they will face the wrath of God.

---

<sup>2</sup> Smith, James E. Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: A Christian Interpretation. Lulu, 2011. p. 150.