

HABAKKUK

Living by Faith when God Doesn't Seem to Make Sense

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"What are you doing, God?!"

Does it sometimes seem like God doesn't make sense? As you survey the state of the world, the rampant immorality and injustice...do you wonder what He is up to? We're not alone in our questioning. Habakkuk, a little-known prophet, had similar questions for God.

MOVING FROM FEAR TO FAITH WHEN EVERYTHING IS FALLING APART

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Getting into the "sandals" of the book

Author: Who Wrote It?

Habakkuk – "to embrace" or "to fold one's hands," the prophet, is identified as the author of this short book, both in the introductory line (1:1) and at the beginning of his song-prayer (3:1). Jewish scribes and the church fathers always affirmed the authorship and historicity of this book. Only until fairly recent years, with the onset of source "higher" criticism in religious liberalism, have some attempted to claim that chapter three may not be original. But the internal and external evidence clearly points to the contrary.¹

Little else is known about Habakkuk. Apocryphal literature places him in the tribe of Levi, but this information is far from definitive.² He was clearly a well-educated man, noted by the various forms of archaic Hebrew in this book. His profound theological grappling with

God also points toward a deep spiritual sensitivity. He was as much a poet as he was a prophet, demonstrated by the beautiful, emotional lines of poetry in chapter three.

Date: When Was It Written?

The prophet Habakkuk lived during the time of Judah's (the Southern Kingdom) moral, spiritual, and physical collapse. He likely penned this oracle from God somewhere between 608-605 BC, during the reign of the wicked, idol-worshipping King Jehoiakim (609-597 BC; cf. 2 Kgs. 23:36-24:7; 2 Chron. 36:5-8) and just prior to the first Babylonian/Chaldean invasion of Judah in 605 BC (2 Kgs. 24:1).

Setting: What is the History?

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon crushed the forces of Egypt and Assyria in the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC, making the Babylonians the new world empire.³ The righteous King Josiah had initiated wide-sweeping reforms across Judah before Jehoiakim's reign. But the downward spiral of violence, sexual

immorality, injustice, and idolatry quickly escalated under Jehoiakim's rule (2 Kgs. 23:35; Jer. 22:13-19; 26:1-23).

The toxic soup of Judah's rejection of God's rule for life was smacking Habakkuk square between the eyes. Three times in the opening discourse, he talks about *seeing* the violence and iniquity – it was always right in front of his face (1:1, 3a, 3b). The sights and sounds of a nation rejecting God weighed down on Habakkuk with deep intensity.

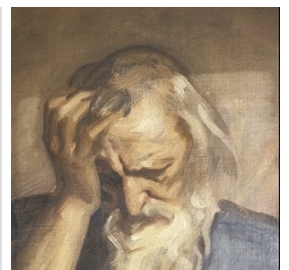
Genre: What Type of Literature?

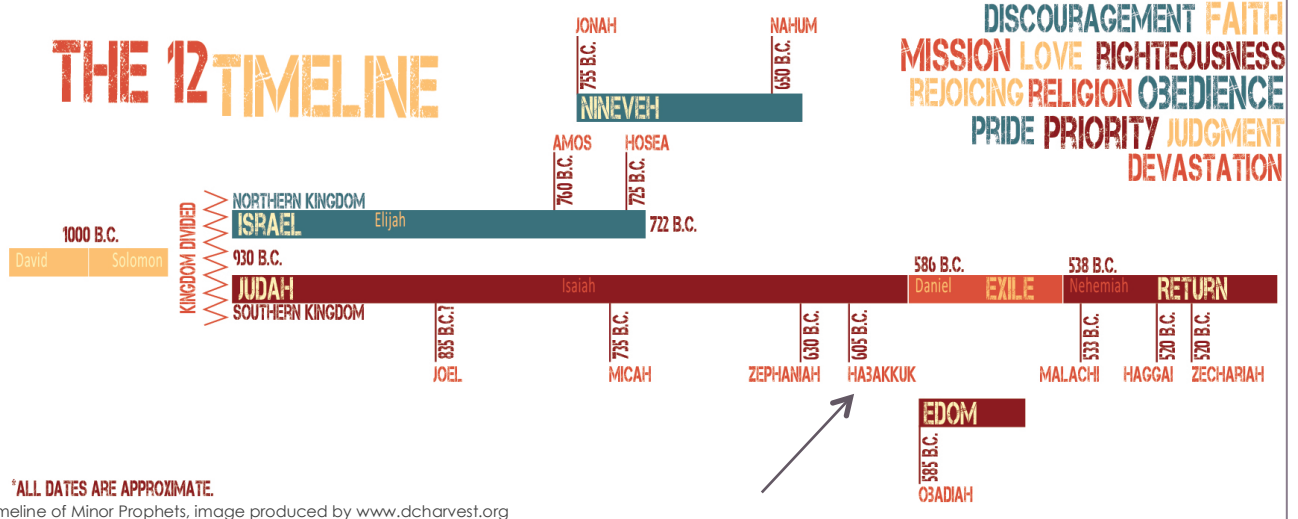
First, this book is prophetic – pointing toward the impending judgment coming to Judah but also to the Babylonians ("Chaldean" is a synonymous term here) (1:5-11; 2:2-20). But, second, unlike any other prophetic book, the people groups are never directly addressed. Instead we find an intriguing dialogue between Habakkuk and God.⁴ Lastly, the third chapter is an exquisite composition of song/poetry.

A BOOK OF QUESTIONS & CONTRASTS

No punches are pulled here. All Habakkuk's fears and frustrations pour out in a volley of hard-hitting, honest questions: "How long...will I call for help? ...will you not hear? ...why do you make me see iniquity? ...why are you silent?" Why, why, why??!!

Yet God also answers... and we, along with Habakkuk, learn to move from fear to faith, from sobs to songs. Worry is exchanged for worship. Distress turns to peace.





Your Questions?

What questions might you have for God? Be honest. Habakkuk had serious questions for God and so do we... we feel worn, torn, and beleaguered. Take a moment to write a few down...then voice them to God:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

How Bad was Babylon?

After God revealed His plan to use the Babylonians (Chaldeans) as the tool of judgment upon Judah (1:5-11), Habakkuk was devastated (1:12-17). How could God use such a wicked, violent nation to bring punishment on a seemingly far less wicked nation, i.e. Judah? The Babylonians were quickly gaining a reputation for shocking brutality as they swiped down nation after nation across the Ancient Near East and northern Africa. Certainly word had reached Habakkuk about their treachery and idolatry.

What can you unearth from chapters one and two that describe the wickedness of the Babylonians? List here:

Bad to the Bone Babylonians:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Outline of Habakkuk

- I. Dialogue of Distress about Judah (1:1-2:1)
 - A. Habakkuk Questions God: Where is Your justice? (1:1-4)
 - B. God Answers Habakkuk: Observe...judgment is coming! (1:5-11)
 - C. Habakkuk Questions God: Why judge this way?! (1:12-17)
 - D. Habakkuk Waits for God's Response: I will keep watch (2:1)
- II. God's Impending Judgment of Babylon (2:2-2:20)
 - A. God Answers Habakkuk (2:2-5)
 1. Record the Vision (2:2)
 2. Judgment will not Delay (2:3)
 3. The Righteous will live by Faith (2:4)
 4. The Proud will face Death (2:5)
 - B. God's Five Judgments: Woe! (2:6-20)
- III. Habakkuk's Song of Faith (3:1-19)
 - A. Praying for Future Mercy (3:1-3)
 - B. Praising God's Majesty (3:5-7)
 - C. Praising God's Power (3:8-15)
 - D. Praying for Present Strength of Faith (3:16-19)

"The bottom-line of faith is not to silence all our doubts, but to make us sure of God." ~ Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Points for Action

- Q:** What recent news items have shaken up your faith or made you afraid? How should you now respond?
- Q:** Have you tried to ignore or hide your questions or doubts rather than honestly bringing them to God? How can you change that today?
- Q:** How could Habakkuk's final response in chapter three change the way you respond to life next week?

Selected Bibliography

¹ Michael Rydelnick, "Habakkuk" in *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2014), 1387-1388.

² Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk through the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 273.

³ J. Ronald Blue, "Habakkuk" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: an Exposition of the Scriptures*. Old Testament ed. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 1505-1507.

⁴ Robert B. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 433ff.