

Pre-Exilic Prophet: **HABAKKUK**

INTRODUCTION

The book of Habbakuk is a reminder to trust and rest in the Lord, even when his ways are not what we expect or understand. Habbakuk was known as the “prophet of transition” because he prophesied during a time of transition from Assyrian to Babylonian domination. Habbakuk prophesied toward the end of the reign of Judah’s last good king (Josiah in 640-609 B.C.) and the remaining kings of Judah who were all evil (Jehoahz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah).

This prophetic book is different from the others because it records a dialogue between Habakkuk and God himself. Habakkuk is seen struggling to understand how God is allowing Judah’s sin and injustice to go unpunished, along with allowing the evil ones to prosper over the righteous. Habakkuk approaches God in boldness and faith, questioning his plan and purpose for his people.

God faithfully reassures Habakkuk that he sees the injustice and sin among his people and will punish them by allowing Babylon to invade Judah and overcome it. Habakkuk continues to wrestle with God, questioning how God could use an evil nation to condemn an evil people, resulting in Babylon to credit its false gods for the victory. God continues to reassure Habakkuk that he knows and will also condemn Babylon for its sin, but asks Habakkuk to trust him and live by faith.

Habakkuk chooses to trust God’s plan even when it didn’t make sense to him. God promises to condemn the sin of Judah and Babylon, and asks Habakkuk to rest, rejoice, and rely on him. This book is a reminder that the prophets, while they were God’s mouthpiece and instrument, also had doubts and struggles with God’s plan. We are not alone in struggling with God’s plan and will. But just as God reassured Habakkuk, he reassures us of who he is and how his ways are higher and better than ours. God sees the full picture and asks us to faithfully trust him.

IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING

Have you ever used your GPS in a new location and trusted it to lead you to your desired destination? Whenever we travel to a new city or state, we often rely on technology to get us there. We have to trust the GPS’s directions because we know it sees the full picture through satellite imaging. But many times we often veer off its path, thinking we know a better way, just to find ourselves lost and using the GPS once again.

In the same way, Habakkuk’s GPS was God’s plan for Judah. Habakkuk wrestled with how God planned on condemning Judah’s sin and his method of doing so. But Habakkuk choose to trust in the Lord, despite not understanding God’s direction. Habakkuk knew that God is above all things and sees exactly how his plan will turn out.

It's hard for us to trust what we do not understand or see. But to live life with Christ is to surrender control and trust that his way are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). When we trust God even when we don't understand, it forces us to rely on him alone and grows our faith in him.

BOOK ORGANIZATION

Chapter 1: Habakkuk Questions

Chapter 2: Habakkuk Listens

Chapter 3: Habakkuk Prays

JESUS IN THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

Even though Habakkuk prophesied before Christ was born, future glimpses of Christ's work of justice, mercy, and salvation are evident. Judah had broken its covenant promise with God (injustice, idolatry, corruption) and deserved to receive the judgment that God will administer through the Babylonian invasion. Habakkuk was heartbroken not just to see Judah's sin, but also the judgment it receive because of its sin. But Habakkuk choose to life by faith and remember how faithful God had been to Judah in the past and depend on how he will remain faithful in the future. Habakkuk 3:13 contains a foreshadowing of Jesus, the Anointed One. God will bring future salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ. God will one day bring justice to the sin of Judah; but, through the death of Christ, God will also bring salvation and new life if the people choose to put their faith in him. Jesus is the fulfillment of justice and salvation for Judah.

BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW TO APPROACH THE BOOK OF Habakkuk

OBSERVATION

- Identify the speaker. Since the book is in dialogue form, identify who is currently speaking (God or Habakkuk).
- Understand the two major questions Habakkuk brings to God: Why does God tolerate injustice in Judah (1:1-4), and why would God use a more wicked nation (Babylon) to punish Judah (1:12-2:1)?
- Observe where within the outline you are currently reading. Are you reading Habakkuk's complaint to God regarding his "absence," Habakkuk's complaint regarding God using an evil people for Judah's judgement, God's responses to Habakkuk, or Habakkuk's prayer of praise to God?
- Outline the theological center of the book: Habakkuk 2:4. The hope found in the middle of the book is that the righteous shall live by faith. Faith in the future Messiah will bring salvation.
- Notice the various sins that Habakkuk observes that Judah is committing against God.
- Identify the five "woes" God has against Babylon, confirming that God sees wicked nations and will judge them: greed (2:6-8), injustice (2:9-11), violence (2:12-14), debauchery (2:15-17), and idolatry (2:18-20).

INTERPRETATION

- Literary context: The book of Habakkuk is in the prophetic genre of the Bible. But while the other prophetic books are about how God uses the prophet to speak to God's people, Habakkuk speaks to God on behalf of the people. Chapters 1-2 present a dialogue between God and Habakkuk, while chapter 3 consists of a psalm or prayer.
 - Ch. 1: Lament and dialogue—Habakkuk questions God's justice.
 - Ch. 2: Vision and woe oracles—God answers: Babylon will be judged.
 - Ch. 3: Psalm/Prayer—Habakkuk's prayer and praise of God.
- Narrative context: The prophet Habakkuk is the author of this book and is prophesying to the people of Judah through recounting his dialogue with God. Habakkuk's private struggle was intended for public expression. The message of the book is "submissive faith is the proper response to the seeming injustice of this world because God is sovereign and will accomplish his perfect will."¹
- Historical context: Habakkuk was written during a time of extreme turmoil in Judah. Assyria had just fallen (612 B.C.), Babylon was the next rising empire, and Judah was experiencing political instability, moral and spiritual corruption and threats of foreign invasions.
- Cultural context: The nation was full of injustice, idolatry, and oppression (1:2-4). By the time Habakkuk writes, the nation had turned from King Josiah's initiatives to honor the covenant promise with God and had fallen back into sin and idolatry.

APPLICATION

- God is not threatened by our questions and doubts. Habakkuk was bold enough to come to the Lord with his concerns. God didn't condemn him, but reassured Habakkuk that he (God) was in control and Habakkuk could trust him. We can pray honestly even when we're angry, confused, or afraid.
- REPENT and RUN from sin. Turn to the Lord. Justice is a part of God's nature. He cannot coexist with sin. God wants to live in fellowship with us and has given us a way through his Son Jesus to be cleansed from sin and live life with him.
- Even when you don't see results, God is still at work. Habakkuk was discouraged to see the wicked prosper in Judah before God's judgment and didn't know how God was going to save his people from Babylonian destruction and exile. But what Habakkuk didn't know was that God would one day bring his people out of exile (through the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah) and back to their homeland.
- Sometimes God uses unexpected tools (like Babylon) to bring about his purposes. Habakkuk didn't like the idea of God using an evil people to condemn the sin of his people. Habakkuk didn't want Babylon to credit its victory to its false gods. God's plan wasn't what Habakkuk expected. Nonetheless, he submitted to God's plan and trusted him.

¹ Stephen J. Bramer, "Habakkuk" BE5107: Prophets, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1.

PRAYER

- Trusting in God's Plan & Timing
 - "Lord, help me to trust in your perfect timing, even when I feel anxious or stressed. Teach me to wait with hope and patience, knowing that you are always at work."
- God's Justice to Prevail
 - "Lord, we cry out for justice in our world and in our communities. Intervene in places of violence, corruption, and oppression. Let your justice roll like a river."
- Deeper Faith in Difficult Seasons
 - "God, strengthen my faith to live righteously even when I don't understand what you're doing. Help me walk by faith, not by sight."
- Rejection of Sinful Temptations
 - "Lord, give me the strength by your Spirit to reject every sinful temptation and choose what pleases you. Help me walk in the Spirit and not be led by the desires of the flesh."

CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

"Of what else than the advent of Christ, who was to come, is Habakkuk understood to say, 'Write the vision openly on a tablet . . . if it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, and will not be delayed?'"

– St. Augustine (*City of God*, Book 18, Chapter 31).

"Then I grasped that the righteousness of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us by faith Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise." – Martin Luther (*Luther's Preface to the Latin Writings*, 1545)

"By faith the righteous lives, and the righteousness of God is revealed – faith to faith."

– Augustine of Hippo (*On the Spirit and the Letter*)

