

HABAKKUK

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BACKGROUND

Israel's northern kingdom had fallen to Assyria in 722 B.C., leaving only the tiny southern kingdom of Judah in the Promised Land. In 612, Assyria was itself conquered by Babylon, the new masters of the ancient Near East. Now, Babylon was threatening to invade Judah. Even worse, the reforms of the good King Josiah, begun in 621, were losing their influence, and Judah's spiritual condition was at an all-time low (see [Habakkuk 1:2-4](#)). Into this situation came Habakkuk, recording for his people what God taught him about his coming judgment of both Judah and Babylon, his sovereignty over human affairs, and his loving faithfulness toward his own.

AUTHOR

Habakkuk ([Habakkuk 1:1](#)) was apparently a Levite with experience in the music ministry of the Temple ([Habakkuk 3:1, 19](#)).

DATE

The prominence of Babylon in Habakkuk indicates a post-612 B.C. date, but Babylon apparently had not yet invaded Judah, placing the book before 605. Though no kings are mentioned, the nation's sad spiritual condition suggests a date near the end of Josiah's reign, perhaps after the wicked Jehoiakim replaced him in 609 (see [2 Chron. 36:8](#); [Jeremiah 22:18-19](#)).

RECIPIENTS

Habakkuk probably focused his ministry on the "just" among Judeans ([Habakkuk 2:4](#)) rather than on the wicked ([Habakkuk 1:2-4](#)), upon whom he wished only swift judgment.

PURPOSE

- To announce that
 - the sinful in Judah will be punished
 - though Babylon will be God's instrument for punishing Judah, it too will be punished in due time
 - God will preserve Judah's faithful remnant ([Habakkuk 2:4](#))
- To help Habakkuk himself (as well as his readers) be patient with God's sovereign working in history

UNIQUE FEATURES

- Habakkuk is the only OT book consisting entirely of a dialogue between God and a human individual. (Parts of Jonah, Job, and a few other books feature such dialogues.) All other prophetic books consist mainly of records of the prophets' preaching.
- Habakkuk and Jeremiah were the last prophets to the southern kingdom before the Babylonian captivity—thus Habakkuk's 11th-hour explanations as to why God was using the Babylonians and whether or not a remnant would survive.
- Habakkuk saw one of the greatest manifestations of God's glory recorded in Scripture ([Habakkuk 3:3-15](#)).

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

Isaiah:

- Both taunt the proud Babylonians ([Habakkuk 2:6-20](#); [Isaiah 14](#)).
- Both include "woes" ([Habakkuk 2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19](#); [Isaiah 5:8-23](#) and other scattered occurrences).
- Both speak of the "righteous" or the "just" who trust in the Lord ([Habakkuk 2:4](#); [Isaiah 26:1-10](#)).
- Both record a theophany, a visible manifestation of God ([Habakkuk 3](#); [Isaiah 6](#)).

New Testament:

- The NT quotes [Habakkuk 2:4](#) three times, each time with a slightly different emphasis:
 - "the righteous" ([Romans 1:17](#))
 - "will live" ([Galatians 3:11](#))
 - "by faith" ([Hebrews 10:38](#))

OUTLINE

I. THE DOUBTS ([Habakkuk 1-2](#))

1. Question: Why does Judah go unpunished? ([Habakkuk 1:1-4](#))
2. Answer: Judah will be punished ([Habakkuk 1:5-11](#))
- C. Question: Will pagans be allowed to punish Judah? ([Habakkuk 1:12-17](#))
- D. Answer: Yes, but they too will be punished ([Habakkuk 2](#))

II. THE SHOUTS ([Habakkuk 3](#))

- A. Words of praise ([Habakkuk 3:1-15](#))
- B. Words of fear and faith ([Habakkuk 3:16-19](#))

TIMELINE

621 B.C.: Rediscovery of Law sparks Josiah's revival

612 B.C.:	Fall of Nineveh
c. 609 B.C.:	Josiah dies, Habakkuk prophesies
605 B.C.:	Babylon's 1st invasion of Judah
586 B.C.:	Fall of Judah
538 B.C.:	1st exiles return

Habakkuk 1:1-4 *"I'm confused!"* Habakkuk began his book with a question for the Lord: For many years he had observed Judah's worsening moral condition and had asked God to intervene, yet God had seemingly ignored the situation. Would God do nothing about Judah's great wickedness?

Habakkuk 1:5-11 *"Don't worry, I'm doing something about it."* God replied that, even as Habakkuk made his inquiry, he was preparing Babylon (also called the Chaldeans, [Habakkuk 1:6](#)) to bring judgment against Judah ([Habakkuk 1:5-6](#)), just as he had used them to judge many other nations, including Assyria and Egypt ([Habakkuk 1:7-11](#)).

Being only human, Habakkuk had suffered from tunnel vision as he considered Judah's situation. God invited him to "look at the nations" ([Habakkuk 1:5](#)) and view the world through God's eyes. From that viewpoint, all nations both great and small are merely tools in God's hands ([Habakkuk 1:5-6](#)).

Habakkuk 1:12-17 *"Now I'm really confused!"* Surprised that God was planning to use wicked Babylon to judge his own people, Habakkuk reminded the Lord of his righteousness ([Habakkuk 1:12-13](#)) and of Babylon's brutality ([Habakkuk 1:14-17](#)). Rather than questioning God outright, Habakkuk simply presented the facts as he saw them and left it up to God to answer his unspoken question: Why should *they* punish *us*?

Habakkuk 2:1-4 *On the watchtower: "The just shall live by faith."* Taking up a position in the "watchtower," Habakkuk waited humbly and patiently for God's answer ([Habakkuk 2:1](#)). God answered, instructing Habakkuk to write down his words plainly so that those who read them could quickly relay them to others ([Habakkuk 2:2](#)). The message would not be totally fulfilled right away, but the "righteous" would wait in faith for its fulfillment ([Habakkuk 2:3-4](#)).

Habakkuk 2:5-17 *Betrayed by their drunken pride.* The Chaldeans were drunk with wine and with power. They went on their military forays for the sheer thrill of it, "never satisfied," gathering up "many nations and peoples" ([Habakkuk 2:5](#)). Though they would be temporarily victorious over Judah and other nations, eventually they would fall, and their former victims would then ridicule them, as God illustrated with four "woes" ([Habakkuk 2:6, 9, 12, 15](#)). Those they had oppressed would rise up against them ([Habakkuk 2:6-8](#)). Their great cities, built by bloodshed, would not be enough to protect them ([Habakkuk 2:9-13](#)), for God would ultimately triumph ([Habakkuk 2:14](#)). They had made other nations "drunk" with their violence; now they would get a taste of their own drink ([Habakkuk 2:15-17](#)).

Habakkuk 2:18-20 *Their helpless idols, his holy Temple.* The Chaldeans would make the fatal mistake of trusting in their gods, which were nothing but mute, lifeless, helpless idols ([Habakkuk 2:18-19](#); compare exposition on ^s[Isaiah 44:6-28](#)). Israel's God, by contrast, sat securely in his heaven. Not only could he talk: He had already spoken! The only sensible thing for humans to do is to be silent and listen to him!

[Habakkuk 3:1-15](#) *His song of salvation.* Habakkuk responded to God's revelation concerning Judah and Babylon with a prayer evidently intended to be set to music. The original Hebrew and several translations include the term *Shigionoth*, which is similar to the term *Shiggaion* that appears in the title of [Psalm 7](#) (the NLT does not include this word, but it conveys the idea of music: "A psalm of David, which he sang to the LORD . . ."). The term *Selah*, common in the psalms, also occurs three times in this passage.

Calling on God to act quickly but with mercy ([Habakkuk 3:2](#)), Habakkuk recalled God's past actions on Israel's behalf:

First stanza: God's glory (3:3-4). Seeing what was apparently a theophany (see exposition on [Genesis 17:1-8](#)), Habakkuk likened God's glory to the brilliance of light rays emanating from the sun—an ever-present reminder of the glory and majesty of the only true God.

Second stanza: God's power (3:5-11). Throughout Israel's history—at the Exodus, in the wilderness, at the Jordan, during the days of Joshua—God had delivered them by his mighty power, and his power was fearsome to behold!

Third stanza: God's judgment (3:12-15). Just as God delivered his people from the Red Sea, so he would deliver them from the flood of the Chaldeans. Once again, however, God's judgment was presented as nothing to be taken lightly.

[Habakkuk 3:16-19](#) *The singer's reaction: Fear and faith.* Habakkuk had invited God to begin his judgment ([Habakkuk 3:1-2](#)). Having been reminded of what happened whenever God judged ([Habakkuk 3:5-15](#)), he now trembled with fear ([Habakkuk 3:16](#)). Still, having seen things from God's perspective, he could respond in submission, praise, and trust ([Habakkuk 3:17-19](#)). God would see his people through the coming crisis.

The benefit of prayer is not that it changes God, but that it changes the one who prays!

HABAKKUK

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM HABAKKUK)

Key Fact: Prophet who said "the righteous will live by their faith" ([Habakkuk 2:4](#))

Occupation: Prophet, musician ([Habakkuk 1:1](#); [Habakkuk 3:1](#), [19](#))

Total Bible References: 2

Key References: [Habakkuk 1-3](#)

Habakkuk Speaks

Let me just make one final notation to the choir director, so that they'll be sure to use stringed instruments when they sing this song. ([Habakkuk 3:19](#))

There, my composition is finished. I wonder how it will sound when sung by that marvelous Levitical choir. Actually, I wonder if they'll even want to sing it! One thing is sure—they won't be bored with the lyrics! Some of the stanzas resemble a funeral dirge, while others will probably come across like a glorious chorus of hallelujahs. ([Habakkuk 1:2-4](#); [Habakkuk 2:14](#); [2 Chron. 29:30](#))

But that's just how I've felt while writing it. I've experienced both frustration and faith. There was the frustration of witnessing both the growing cancer of moral decay among our own people and the growing Babylonian threat from without. ([Habakkuk 1:4, 6](#))

Then he assured me that judgment would fall upon both the Babylonians and the rebels within our own ranks. He would use Babylon to discipline us but then, in his own time, would deal with Babylon as well. ([Habakkuk 1:7-11](#); [Habakkuk 2:5-6](#))

How well I recall that day when I reached the end of my rope trying to figure out his will. I vowed to wait until I understood just what God had in mind. Then came his answer: "The righteous will live by their faith." So simple, but it made everything just sort of fall into place. Yes, our matchless God knows what he is doing. It's up to us to wait on his perfect timing, and live by faith. ([Habakkuk 2:1, 4](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Habakkuk

- Habakkuk has been called the Doubting Thomas of the Old Testament ([Habakkuk 1:1-3, 13](#)), yet his glorious statement on faith (the exact opposite of doubt) is quoted three times in the NT. The obvious lesson? God uses us in spite of ourselves!
- No matter how dark and desperate our circumstance, we can "rejoice in the LORD," as did Habakkuk ([Habakkuk 3:18-19](#)).

Key Verse

"The righteous will live by their faith" ([Habakkuk 2:4](#)).