



# THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK



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# INTRODUCTION

Like other Old Testament prophets, what we know about Habakkuk is very limited; in fact, we know almost nothing. We do know that his name means, 'to embrace' or 'to hold on' and he was probably a Levite who was a member of the Levitical choir, [Habakkuk 3:19](#).

His ministry probably spanned the reigns of Josiah, 640-609 B.C., Jehoahaz, 609 B.C., and Jehoiakim, 609-598 B.C., with the prophecy set in Jehoiakim's reign around 605 B.C.

There is a saying that says, 'a good man is hard to keep down,' but a better saying would be, 'hopeful people are hard to keep down.' Habakkuk was one of those people; he was a faithful man who loved God and his people.

He questioned God and complained to God, not out of anger, but out of deep compassion for his people and what was going on around him. He teaches us that it's not wrong to question God; in fact, God wants us to ask questions. His work coincided with Jeremiah and Zephaniah.

## THE DATE

The book was probably written around 605 B.C. The reason for this date is that around 610 B.C., it was the time of the Babylonians or Chaldeans. We know that in 614 B.C. Nabopolassar married his son Nebuchadnezzar to Ametius, the Median Princess, and so joined the Medians.

In 612 B.C. Nineveh was destroyed, and in 605 B.C., the Babylonian Kingdom under Nebuchadnezzar grew to its fullest extent and power. It was at his death that the Babylonian Kingdom fell. And so, Habakkuk was probably written when Babylon was at her prime.

## BACKGROUND

God is going to use the Chaldeans to bring about judgment on Judah. The Chaldeans refer to the Babylonian empire, which overthrew the Assyrian empire in 612 B.C. and defeated Pharaoh Necho of Egypt at Carchemish in 605 BC.

Pharaoh Necho also defeated and killed King Josiah of Judah at the battle of Megiddo, [2 Kings 23:29](#) / [2 Chronicles 35:20](#). After these victories, Judah was at the mercy of the Chaldeans.

Josiah had repented of the idol worship of Judah, but the reformation of Josiah had proved ineffective to stop the evil and disobedience of the nation of Judah. Now God must punish them, and so, He's stirring up and going to the Chaldeans to punish His people, just like He used the Assyrians to punish the Northern Kingdom, 722/21 B.C.

God had allowed the Assyrians to conquer the Northern Kingdom of Israel, this was during Habakkuk's ministry, and now He's brought the threat of the Babylonians to the Southern Kingdom.

## THE BOOK

The theme of the book is simply this: ‘the supremacy of God’s judgement on the wicked’. The book itself is unique in that it takes the form of a dialogue between Habakkuk and God. It concerns the Southern kingdom of Judah. We can’t say if it was specifically spoken to the people, but it was certainly recorded for the people.

## OUTLINE

Habakkuk’s First Complaint. Habakkuk 1:1-4  
 God Answers Habakkuk. Habakkuk 1:5-11  
 Habakkuk’s Second Complaint. Habakkuk 1:12-2:1  
 God Answers Habakkuk. Habakkuk 2:2-2:20  
 Prayer in song by Habakkuk. Habakkuk 3

## CHAPTER 1

### INTORUDCTION

‘The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received. How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore, the law is paralysed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.’ Habakkuk 1:1-4

### HABAKKUK’S FIRST COMPLAINT

The KJV uses the word ‘burden’ instead of the word ‘prophecy’, and notice that this burden was given to Habakkuk himself, not to God’s people, [Habakkuk 1:1](#). He was given the burden as a way of offering complaints to God concerning all the suffering His people were going through because of their own unbelief.

In the context of this suffering, what we need to remember is that God’s people are suffering simply because they rejected God, rejected His laws, and oppressed the poor among themselves. God had told them and warned them that if they turned away from Him, then He would turn them over to the nations.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘One of the functions of temple prophets was to give responses to worshipers who came seeking divine guidance: when the problem was stated, the prophet inquired of God and obtained an answer.’

Habakkuk’s first question to God is simply this: Why are the wicked people not punished? [Hosea 4:2](#) / [Micah 6:12-13](#) / [Revelation 6:10-11](#). He’s been praying a long time, and he thinks God doesn’t hear him, [Habakkuk 1:2](#).

He’s been crying out, ‘violence,’ but God didn’t save, [Habakkuk 1:2](#). To him, it looks as though God is inactive. He seems to be looking at things from a human perspective and seems to expect a human reaction from God.

Habakkuk needed to understand that God was working on His timetable, not man's, and God's ways are different from man's ways, [Isaiah 55:8-9](#). God was going to allow this to go on until He purified His people through captivity so that the promises which were made to Abraham could be fulfilled, [Genesis 12:1-3](#).

Habakkuk speaks up on behalf of the few righteous people who haven't given up on God or turned away from Him. He's speaking mainly to his own people, he recognises that they're surrounded by injustice, oppression, wickedness and bribery, [Habakkuk 1:4](#).

Habakkuk now outlines the sins of the nation.

1. Destruction, there's no respect for property, [Habakkuk 1:3](#).
2. Violence against other people, [Habakkuk 1:3](#).
3. Strife, arguing and conflict, [Habakkuk 1:3](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'The word violence occurs six times in Habakkuk, [Habakkuk 1:2-3](#) / [Habakkuk 1:9](#) / [Habakkuk 2:8](#) / [Habakkuk 2:17](#), (twice), an unusually large number of times for such a short book. The Hebrew word means more than just physical brutality. It refers to flagrant violation of moral law by which someone injures his fellowman, e.g., [Genesis 6:11](#).' Because of these sins, the law has lost its authority, and its application and people don't want to live up to the law anymore; there's no longer any justice, [Habakkuk 1:4](#). The righteous are kept down, being oppressed and wicked people don't want any do-gooders around to change anything.

## GOD'S ANSWER

'Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own. They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honour. Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle, swooping to devour; they all come intent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. They mock kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; by building earthen ramps, they capture them. Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—guilty people, whose own strength is their god.' Habakkuk 1:5-11

God's answer to Habakkuk's question is simply this, 'I'm working on it, you may not see it, but trust Me, I'm working,' [Revelation 6:10-11](#).

Garland, in his commentary, says the following.

'The words of [Habakkuk 1:5](#) are building up to a conclusion which the people would not believe if told. The work to be performed is so incredible that they would not think it possible, even if they were told. Such an extraordinary event must be seen to be believed.'

Kerr, in his commentary, says the following.

'The apostle Paul quoted [Habakkuk 1:5](#), applying the principle of God's dealings in Habakkuk's day to the situation in the church in his own day, [Acts 13:41](#). God's work of calling the Gentiles into his church would be just as astonishing as his work of using the Babylonians to punish Judah.'

God is the One who is raising up the Babylonians, [Habakkuk 1:6](#). It was Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar, who succeeded his father as king of Babylon, and it was during this time that Habakkuk made his complaints to God concerning the suffering of God's people, [Ezekiel 28:7](#) / [Ezekiel 30:11](#) / [Ezekiel 31:12](#) / [Ezekiel 32:12](#).

Deane, in his commentary, says the following concerning [Habakkuk 1:6](#).

‘This signifies the soldiers or inhabitants of Babylon, which won its independence and commenced its wonderfully rapid career of conquest after the fall of Nineveh between 626 and 606 B.C. At the time when Habakkuk wrote, the Chaldeans had not appeared in Judaea.’

God is directly involved in the Babylonians’ growing in strength to dominate the world, Habakkuk 1:6, although Nebuchadnezzar thought he did it all by himself, Daniel 4:30. The world and everything in it are under God’s control. God made the Babylonians ruthless and impetuous; they were colonists and uncontrollable, Habakkuk 1:6. Judgement would come from Babylon, Habakkuk 1:6.

And just like many people today, ‘self’ was their god and millions of people worship themselves daily. Christians, too, can at times be so inwardly looking that they are absolutely selfish; they think of no one but themselves, Philippians 2:4. They had a well-trained army that was bent on evil, and they were valiant warriors with no respect for other nations, Habakkuk 1:6.

Armerding, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If God’s people refuse to fear him, they will ultimately be compelled to fear those less worthy of fear, Deuteronomy 28:47-48 / Isaiah 28:58-68 / Jeremiah 5:15-22.’

They were a guilty people who had great confidence in their own ability, Habakkuk 1:7. The Babylonians were so full of pride that they became a law unto themselves, Habakkuk 1:7, invading nation after nation as their gods directed them, Habakkuk 1:8.

They were like ‘leopards’, Habakkuk 1:8, waiting patiently to conquer the nations, they were like fierce ‘wolves’, Habakkuk 1:8 / Jeremiah 5:6, as they ravaged anyone they conquered and they were like the ‘eagle’, Habakkuk 1:8, eager to sweep down to capture their prey, Isaiah 5:26-30 / Jeremiah 4:13 / Jeremiah 5:17 / Lamentations 4:19.

They were like the ‘desert wind’, Habakkuk 1:9, they would come and take God’s people into captivity and leave the land a dry derelict place.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘They were as effective at collecting captives from other countries as the sirocco winds from the East were at driving dust before them, Jeremiah 18:17 / Ezekiel 17:10 / Ezekiel 19:12 / Jonah 4:8. This enemy was advancing like a whirlwind and gathering captives as innumerable as the sand.’

Notice they mock kings and scoff at rulers, Habakkuk 1:10 / 2 Kings 25:7.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Jehoiachin and Jehoiakim, both kings of Israel, suffered the greatest indignities at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, 2 Chronicles 36:6 / 2 Kings 24:14-15 / Jeremiah 22:19.’

They would build ramps against the cities they conquered, and no one could stop them, Habakkuk 1:10 / 2 Kings 19:32 / Ezekiel 4:2 / Ezekiel 21:22 / Ezekiel 26:8-9. If they could capture and conquer the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh, Habakkuk 1:10, then no nation was too big for them.

They trusted in their own strength, Habakkuk 1:11, but what they didn’t know was that God was using them, God was going to use them to bring about judgment on Judah.

They gave their own gods all the credit when in reality it was all God’s doing, Habakkuk 1:11. God was working in and through them to bring about His purpose.

When we look at Habakkuk’s first complaint to God, and when we read God’s answer to His complaint, it’s easy to see that he doesn’t understand why God would work through the evil Babylonians in order to oppress His own people.

# HABAKKUK'S SECOND COMPLAINT

‘LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, you will never die. You, LORD, have appointed them to execute judgment; you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? You have made people like the fish in the sea, like the sea creatures that have no ruler. The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so, he rejoices and is glad. Therefore, he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food. Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?’ Habakkuk 1:12-17

Habakkuk’s faith in God is revealed here because He knows that God’s people wouldn’t be wiped out of existence, like so many other nations before. He knows God’s people would continue, regardless of the suffering that they would endure at the hands of the Babylonians, [2 Samuel 7:16](#). He knows all of these things because he knows that it was God who raised up the Babylonians in order to discipline His people, [Habakkuk 1:6](#).

Habakkuk’s second question is simply this: How can you punish unrighteous Judah with more unrighteous Babylon? It’s almost as though he’s saying to God, ‘You cannot get your holy hands dirty’, [Habakkuk 1:12](#). He asked the LORD, Is He not from everlasting? [Habakkuk 1:12](#), to which the answer is yes, He is, [Isaiah 40:28](#) / [Psalm 90:2](#). Notice, He answers his own question, he says, My God, my Holy One, you will never die, [Habakkuk 1:12](#). Note the word ‘you’ in the Masoretic text is the word ‘we’.

Garland, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The meaning of the Hebrew here (Masoretic text) is that ‘Since Jehovah ever has been and ever shall be, he will in some way spare Judah from total destruction.’

God is so holy, [Habakkuk 1:12](#) / [Psalms 5:4](#) / [Psalms 34:16](#) / [Psalms 34:21](#). He cannot look at anything which is unholy, and so Habakkuk is asking God, ‘How could you look to an unholy nation like Babylon to accomplish your work of disciplining your holy nation?’

Habakkuk understands that the LORD has appointed the Babylonians to execute judgment, and he understands that his Rock has ordained the Babylonians to punish, [Habakkuk 1:12](#) / [Jeremiah 51:20-21](#) / [Isaiah 7:20](#).

He asks God, if His eyes are too pure to look on evil and He cannot tolerate wrongdoing, then why does He tolerate the treacherous? Why is He silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? [Habakkuk 1:13](#) / [Zephaniah 3:3](#).

Kerr, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is one thing to face the problems that confront everyone who believes in a good and omnipotent God and ask why things are so, or how they can be so. It is something quite different to question the Divine goodness or justice, or the very existence of God, simply because one cannot answer these questions.’

Habakkuk saw the righteousness of God, [Habakkuk 1:13](#), but it blinded him to the truth that God could indeed get involved with the Babylonians and raise those people to the power that He did. Habakkuk saw Judah just below Babylon on his scale of badness, and asks, how can you look upon those people, God? Look at what they do! Judah as a nation had seriously become unrighteous, and it was because of their unrighteousness that God allowed the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. It’s a sad truth that even though some of Judah were righteous, they too would have to suffer the consequences along with the unrighteous.

He described people of the world whom God made as fish, [Habakkuk 1:14](#), and the wicked foe Babylon as fishermen, who use hooks, then nets, then dragnets, [Habakkuk 1:15](#), which shows progression.

Imagine the fisherman returning from a good day's catch, he unloads the fish and piles them up, he rejoices and is glad, [Habakkuk 1:15](#). This is God's people caught, helpless and thrown into a pile.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Big fish eat little fish, and bigger fish eat the big fish. The same thing was happening in Habakkuk's world. Babylon was gobbling up the smaller nations, and Yahweh was not intervening to establish justice.'

Then comes the sacrifices and the burning of incense, and it's clear they worship materialism, always wanting more, [Habakkuk 1:16](#). The 'net', [Habakkuk 1:16](#), is the Babylonian gods to whom they give credit, but as I mentioned earlier, they didn't realise that it was God who was working in and through them to accomplish His purpose.

Habakkuk asks, Are the Babylonians to keep on emptying their net, destroying nations without mercy? [Habakkuk 1:17](#). And so, Habakkuk's second question is about to be answered, how long will you use these people? How long is God going to use such a violent nation to judge the sins of His people?

## APPLICATION

As Christians, we think we see God's heart so clearly, but sometimes we're blinded because we don't see or don't want to see the coming future judgement for some. But Hell exists, and people need to know that it's real, [Matthew 25:46](#) / [2 Thessalonians 1:9](#).

There are times when we may not see God at work but whenever we're tempted to think God isn't working, we need to remember that God isn't indifferent, He isn't inactive, [Psalm 121:4](#).

We must remember that God doesn't create evil, but He does use evil to accomplish His will, [Romans 8:28](#). We see this in the Babylonians, and we see this in the New Testament with Judas, Pilate, and the Jewish leaders.

People do ask, why does God create so much suffering and pain in the world? And the answer is, He doesn't. If people are honest enough with themselves, they will see that all the wars, oppression and suffering are usually done by the hands of men, but God allows it to happen, why? Who knows! Maybe He wants the created to know that He is the Creator and they need to turn to Him in obedience, [Psalm 81:12](#) / [Romans 1:24-25](#).

## CHAPTER 2

### INTRODUCTION

'I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.' Habakkuk 2:1.

Here, Habakkuk says he will be the watchman and wait for the answer.

Keil, in his commentary, says the following.

'The figure is taken from the custom of ascending high places for the purpose of looking into the distance and simply expresses the prophet's spiritual preparation of the prophet's soul for hearing the word of God.'

Maybe by now Habakkuk has learned to be patient, as he awaits God's response to his question regarding God's using an unholy nation like Babylon to discipline His own people, **Habakkuk 1:17**. We have to admire Habakkuk's honesty with God; he simply couldn't understand why God allowed His own people to suffer.

## GOD'S ANSWER

‘Then the LORD replied: ‘Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. ‘See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness.’ Habakkuk 2:2-4

God answers Habakkuk in the form of a vision, He says, ‘write the revelation down’ **Habakkuk 2:2**, which means the revelation will have its time. The whole revelation needed to be written down, not just for Habakkuk's sake but for the sake of the nation.

The nation needed to understand that God was working in and through this unholy nation, and so, when they eventually returned from captivity, they could read what God was doing in and through His own people.

God also tells him to write it down and make it ‘plain on tablets’, **Habakkuk 2:2 / Exodus 31:18 / Exodus 32:15-16 / Deuteronomy 9:10 / Deuteronomy 27:8**, which is a reference to writing in capital letters, so that's it's easy to read, advertise it like a notice board, the whole nation needs to read this, so that they too would understand what God was going.

Hodge, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The tablets mentioned here were the usual plates upon which writing was done. These were usually of clay in Babylonia, and in some instances were of wood or ivory.’

The vision was related to things in the future and had its ‘appointed time’, **Habakkuk 2:3**, but its fulfilment was coming without delay, **Habakkuk 2:3**.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The writer of the Book of Hebrews quoted this verse, **Hebrews 10:37**. He used it to encourage his readers to persevere in their commitment to Jesus Christ since what God has predicted will eventually come to pass, which in the context of Hebrews is the Lord's return.’

There's a sense of urgency about proclaiming the message of the vision because it concerned not only the Babylonians but also God's people. The time for Israel being a nation is coming to an end, and the time for the Babylonians to come and take God's people into captivity is about to begin. The good news is that this captivity would only last seventy years, **Jeremiah 25:11**.

Judgement may not be as immediate as Habakkuk wants it to be, but it's coming, **2 Peter 2:7 / 2 Peter 3:8-12**. God says that all the unrighteous, those who are puffed up and those whose desires are not upright, **Habakkuk 2:4**, will be punished regardless of who they are.

He will dish it out on His own scale because God knows when the time is right, but the righteous will live by his faith, **Habakkuk 2:4 / Romans 1:17 / Galatians 3:11 / Hebrews 10:38 / Revelation 2:10**.

God's people would certainly need faith to be able to walk by faith when they get captured and taken into captivity. It's time to trust God like never before, **Romans 8:28**.

The Hebrew word for faith, **Habakkuk 2:4**, is ‘emuwnah’, which means stability. The idea of stability is spoken of in **John 15:5**, where Jesus speaks about remaining in Him and bearing much fruit. James speaks of faith as more than just mental knowledge that God exists, **James 2:14-16**.

## **THE JUDGMENT UPON THE BABYLONIANS FOR NEVER BEING SATISFIED**

‘Indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and, like death, is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples. ‘Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying, ‘Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on?’ Will not your creditors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their prey. Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed human blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.’ **Habakkuk 2:5-8**

Notice how God personifies the Babylonians’ drunken behaviour, He uses the words ‘him’ and ‘he’. This is used to describe how they went about conquering other nations. God isn’t speaking about how evil wine is; He’s speaking about the evil effects of wine on the Babylonians themselves.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, in their commentary, say the following.

‘The reason for the choice of such a metaphor probably derived from the fact of, ‘drunkenness being a besetting sin of Babylon. It was, in the case of Belshazzar, the immediate cause of the fall of Babylon, **Daniel 5:2-5 / Daniel 5:30**.’ They are arrogant and never at rest, and everyone knows that people with alcohol problems rarely stay in one place; they never take responsibility for their own actions.

The Babylonians were always on the move, conquering nation after nation, never happy with their lot, **Habakkuk 2:5**. Just like an alcoholic, they can never have enough wine; they are never satisfied, **Proverbs 23:31-32**.

As death is never satisfied with enough dead, **Habakkuk 2:5**, so the Babylonians are never satisfied with enough conquests. Here we find the first woe, **Habakkuk 2:6**, which is in relation to never being satisfied. In the text, we find the first of five woes to ‘him’.

This is in reference to the Babylonians, who wanted to expand their kingdom by going about conquering other nations and taking everything they could along the way. They didn’t care what they did, and they certainly didn’t show any mercy towards their enemies.

They are like bankers who give out loans but charge extortionate amounts of interest, **Habakkuk 2:6 / Deuteronomy 23:20**; they abuse those they have conquered by demanding a heavy tribute.

The very people they were preying on and abusing financially, will turn on the Babylonians, and those same very people will prey on them, **Habakkuk 2:7**. The very people the Babylonians plundered will go on to plunder them, **Habakkuk 2:8**. This happened when the Medes and Persians rose up and overthrew Babylon in 539 B.C. **Daniel 2:29 / Daniel 5:2-5 / Daniel 5:30**.

God says the Babylonians will reap what they sow, **Proverbs 22:8 / Galatians 6:7-8**, those they mistreated and didn’t show mercy to, **Habakkuk 2:8**, will one day return the compliment, **Isaiah 33:1**, what they have done to others, will be done to them, **Obadiah 1-21**.

# THE JUDGMENT UPON THE BABYLONIANS FOR BEING GREEDY

‘Woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain, setting his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin! You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.’ Habakkuk 2:9-11

Here we find the second woe, which is in relation to covetousness, **Habakkuk 2:9**. There’s no doubt they felt invincible in their ‘high nest’, **Habakkuk 2:9**; they felt that their army was so powerful that no one could bring them down.

Jamieson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The image is from an eagle’s nest, **Job 39:27**. The royal citadel (of Babylon) is meant. The Chaldean built high towers like the Babel founders, ‘to be delivered from the power of evil’, **Genesis 11:4**.’

Unlike other nations, Babylon wasn’t an empire that grew because of the hard work of its own people; it grew because of all the things they plundered, **Habakkuk 2:10**.

Deane, in his commentary, says the following concerning **Habakkuk 2:11**.

‘This is a proverbial expression to denote the horror with which the savage cruelty of the Babylonians was regarded.’

The Babylonians used the stones, which were taken from previous battles, to build their own houses, **Habakkuk 2:11**. The very materials, the stone and the beams they plundered from the cities they conquered, would cry out for revenge, **Habakkuk 2:11**.

One thing they forgot about was that they were absolutely hated by the nations around them, and so, it was only a matter of time before those nations would rise up against them.

We know this was the case because later the Medes and Persians went up against them and totally destroyed the city of Babylon, **Daniel 2:29 / Daniel 5:2-5 / Daniel 5:30**. We remember that Jesus speaks of the stones crying out, **Luke 19:20**, and we remember that Peter tells us that Christians are living stones, **1 Peter 2:4-6**.

# THE JUDGMENT UPON THE BABYLONIANS FOR THEIR CRUELTY

‘Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by injustice! Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people’s labour is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.’ Habakkuk 2:12-14

Here we find the third woe which is in relation to cruelty, **Habakkuk 2:12**. The judgment here is the same as the one Jerusalem received, **Micah 3:10**, and the same as the one Jehoiakim received, **Jeremiah 22:13 / Jeremiah 22:17**.

The Babylonians were going to be condemned because they were building their empire on the lives of others, **Habakkuk 2:12**. Their works would turn out to be fuel for fire that would burn them up, the fire of His judgment, **Habakkuk 2:12 / Jeremiah 51:58**.

God says that all the effort it took for the Babylonians to build their empire is eventually going to go up in smoke; their efforts were a waste of time and for nothing, **Habakkuk 2:13**. They will be judged for it, they will be judged for their violence, **Habakkuk 2:14 / Genesis 6:5 / Genesis 6:11-13**.

Deane, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The mutilations of prisoners, the weary imprisonments, the massacre of non-combatants, the refinement of cruelty shown in the execution of children before the eyes of their fathers (and then blinding the fathers!), these and similar atrocities of the Babylonians are totally without excuse. We cannot be surprised that when the final judgment was denounced against Babylon, it was declared to be sent, in a great measure, because of men’s blood.’

Once again, we’re reminded that God is working on things and His glory shines through it all, **Habakkuk 2:14 / Numbers 14:21 / Psalms 72:19 / Isaiah 6:3 / Isaiah 11:9 / Jeremiah 31:34**. Some believe that phrase, ‘the earth being filled with knowledge,’ **Habakkuk 2:14**, possibly has a Messianic meaning, **Daniel 2 / Daniel 7 / Matthew 28:18-20**.

Hailey, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This knowledge is accessible to all men everywhere; its voice covers the earth as waters cover the sea, for there is no place where God’s fulfilled prophecies are not to be found.’

## THE JUDGMENT UPON THE BABYLONIANS FOR THEIR DRUNKENNESS

‘Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbours, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies! You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and let your nakedness be exposed! The cup from the LORD’s right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory. The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed human blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.’ **Habakkuk 2:15-17**

Here we find the fourth woe, which is in relation to drunkenness, **Habakkuk 2:15**. Everyone knows that the stronger the alcohol they drink, the faster they get drunk and lose their senses.

If you’ve ever been to a wedding where there’s a lot of alcohol on offer, it doesn’t take long for someone to get drunk and try to become the centre of attention. They think they’re being funny, but people are actually laughing at them, not with them, because of their drunken behaviour.

The effects of wine in the hands of a drunkard are used to describe the craziness of the Babylonians. God is saying, here is a picture of someone giving someone else a drink with the purpose of getting them drunk, **Habakkuk 2:15**.

This is what the Babylonians were doing metaphorically, they made the nations around them drunk so that they could expose their nakedness, **Habakkuk 2:15**, and once they did, they took full advantage of them by conquering them and raiding their cities for their wealth.

The Babylonians were inhumane; they had no respect for other people, and they played with the people they conquered, **Habakkuk 2:15**, but God says the same thing will happen to them, **Habakkuk 2:16**. Note that the KJV uses the words ‘let thy foreskin be uncovered’, **Habakkuk 2:16**.

Jamieson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This reference to the ‘foreskin’ as it is in the Hebrew, ‘expresses the most utter contempt.’

The Babylonians were violent and idolatrous, but now it’s judgement time for the Babylonians, who did nothing but oppress the nations around them, **Habakkuk 2:16**.

It’s time for them to face ‘the cup’, **Habakkuk 2:16**, which is the outpouring of God’s wrath, **Jeremiah 25:15 / Isaiah 51:17-23**. It’s time to reap what they had sown, **Galatians 6:7-8**.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning God’s right hand, **Habakkuk 2:16**.

‘Yahweh’s right hand is a figure for His strong personal retribution, giving back in kind what the person being judged had given, Isaiah 51:17-23 / Jeremiah 25:15-17 / Lamentations 4:21 / Matthew 20:22 / Matthew 26:42 / 1 Corinthians 11:29.’

Lebanon was famous for its mighty trees which stood strong, Habakkuk 2:17. Like everything else around them, the Babylonians cut them down to build their own empire, Isaiah 14:8.

The violence they showed Lebanon will overwhelm them, the destruction they caused the animals will terrify them, Habakkuk 2:17. They had murdered many people and destroyed lands, cities and everyone in them, Habakkuk 2:17.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Creator of the world has a concern for what is nowadays called ecology; the cultural mandate that he has given to the human race includes the responsible stewardship of plant and animal life.’

## THE JUDGMENT UPON THE BABYLONIANS FOR THEIR IDOLATRY

‘Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman? Or an image that teaches lies? For the one who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life!’ Or to lifeless stone, ‘Wake up!’ Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it.’ The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.’ Habakkuk 2:18-20

Here we find the fifth woe, which is in relation to idolatry, Habakkuk 2:18. There is no value in an idol made by human hands, Habakkuk 2:18. To think that people trust them, even though they can’t hear or speak, Habakkuk 2:18, shows us how depraved the Babylonians were in their religious beliefs.

In effect, when someone speaks to an idol, they imagine the idol is speaking back to them, but the truth is the idol worshippers are only answering themselves, in their own minds. God is basically saying that idol worship is foolishness, it’s stupid, Romans 1:19 / Romans 1:22-25.

This is the way God sees idolatry: dead idols are better than they are, Habakkuk 2:19 / 1 Kings 18:26-29. Jeremiah and Isaiah also speak about this, Jeremiah 10:15 / Jeremiah 51:18 / Isaiah 40:18-20 / Isaiah 41:7 / Isaiah 42:17 / Isaiah 46:5-7. Notice that ‘the Lord is in His holy temple’, Habakkuk 2:20 / Isaiah 26:21 / Psalms 11:4 / Jonah 2:7 / Micah 1:2.

Baker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This contrasts with the frenetic activity of man to create ‘speaking’ gods, and the tumultuous cries of worshippers to make dumb idols respond. Lifeless idols approached in clamour are silent, while the living God, approached in silence and reverence, speaks.’

God is reminding them that, unlike those idols, He exists, and He reminds all those who are faithful that He is in control, and He is working for the good of His people, Romans 8:28 / 1 Corinthians 10:13 / Revelation 21:4.

Remember, His people were about to be taken into captivity, and they needed to know that God was in control; it was part of His plan. When God comes in judgement against a nation, all the other nations should sit back and watch and listen. They need to watch out and make sure they are being faithful to God, so the same won’t happen to them.

# APPLICATION

We must never fall into the trap of thinking it's wrong to ask questions of God. If we didn't ask God questions about what's happening in our lives or the world around us, there would be something wrong. Surely this tells us that we care about what's going on, and it helps us realise that most of the time we don't understand God and His ways, **Isaiah 55:8-9**.

We live in a world that likes to 'feel' and 'experience' religion. We live in a world where people want something they can touch and see before they will believe. Sadly, our feelings and experiences can lead us away from God if we rely just on those, **Proverbs 14:12**.

Even in the religious world today, people have the same mentality; however, God says, 'the righteous shall live by faith', **Romans 1:17 / Galatians 3:11 / Hebrews 10:38**, they will 'live by faith and not sight', **2 Corinthians 5:7**.

## CHAPTER 3

### INTRODUCTION

'A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth. LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD. Repeat them in our day, in our time, make them known; in wrath remember mercy.' **Habakkuk 3:1-2**

### HABAKKUK'S PRAYER

In this final chapter, we read Habakkuk's prayer in the form of a song, where he asks God to intervene in the affairs of the nations. It's taken some time, but he finally understands, as much as humanly possible, that God is actually working in and amongst the nations for the benefit of His own people. In his prayer, he basically asks God to go ahead and do what needs to be done.

No one knows what the word 'Shigionoth', **Habakkuk 3:1**, actually means, but some believe it's referring to some kind of musical instrument or musical term with the idea of a wild dance rhythm, **Habakkuk 3:19 / Psalms 7:1**.

Standing in awe of God certainly brings about fear, which in turn should bring about obedience. This was the main problem the nation of Israel had; they lacked a fear of the Lord, and as a result of having no fear, they got involved in all kinds of evil, including idolatry.

In fact, they had strayed so far away from the Lord that it forced God to discipline His people by sending them into captivity so that when they were freed from captivity, He could fulfil the blessing He promised Abraham, **Genesis 12:1-3**.

Habakkuk asks God to remember those who would come out of captivity, **Habakkuk 3:2**, and hence asks God to be merciful towards them. Even though God acts in judgment, we can always be sure His judgment comes with mercy.

'God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and his praise filled the earth. His splendour was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden. Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps. He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble.

The ancient mountains crumbled, and the age-old hills collapsed—but he marches on forever. I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish. Were you angry with the rivers, LORD? Was your wrath against the streams? Did you rage against the sea when you rode your horses and your chariots to victory? You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows. You split the earth with rivers; the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its waves on high. Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear. In wrath you strode through the earth, and in anger you threshed the nations. You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. With his own spear, you pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding. You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters. I heard, and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.’ Habakkuk 3:3-16

In the KJV, we find the word ‘selah’ in [Habakkuk 3:3](#) / [Habakkuk 3:9](#) / [Habakkuk 3:13](#). This word in the psalms means to pause, and it corresponds with [Habakkuk 3:19](#). This is a song of past glories, things God has done for His people in the past.

This is Habakkuk responding to God’s second answer: the unrighteousness within God’s people must be taken care of. He sees that God will take care of all the evil he sees in the country.

Notice that God is pictured as coming from Teman and Paran to deliver His people, and His glory covered the heavens, and his praise filled the earth, [Habakkuk 3:3](#) / [Deuteronomy 33:2-4](#).

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning Teman and Paran.

‘It was in this area that Israel experienced the redemptive grace of God, entered into a covenant relationship with him, and it was also in these districts that some of the unbelieving generation perished.’

God’s glory was like the sunrise, and his rays flashed from His hand, [Habakkuk 3:4](#) / [Exodus 34:29-30](#) / [Exodus 34:35](#). The word ‘rays’ in Hebrew is actually the word horn. Despite His glory being so powerful, most of it remained hidden, [Habakkuk 3:4](#).

Plague went before Him and pestilence followed His steps, [Habakkuk 3:5](#) / [Exodus 9:9](#). He comes in a great storm cloud, and when the earth sees Him coming, they shake and tremble, and the ancient mountains crumbled, [Habakkuk 3:6](#). The KJV tells us that God ‘measured the earth’.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Some thirty-two kingdoms of Canaan were defeated in order for God to repopulate the land with Israel. God’s standing and measuring the earth appears to be a reference to the deliberate purpose and full intention before the event to remove the Canaanites and settle Israel in their place.’

Notice the reference to the age-old hills collapsed, but He marches on forever, [Habakkuk 3:6](#).

Deane, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This means, ‘As God acted of old, so he acts now. The ancient ways of acting are His, [Proverbs 31:27](#).’

Habakkuk saw the tents of Cushan in distress, and the dwellings of Midian in anguish, [Habakkuk 3:7](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Habakkuk saw the semi-nomadic Ethiopians and Midianites, who lived on both sides of Mt. Sinai, trembling with fear because they witnessed something of Yahweh’s power. The terms Midianite and Cushite both described Moses’ wife, [Exodus 2:16-22](#) / [Exodus 18:1-5](#) / [Numbers 12:1](#), so they may be synonyms here. Perhaps this is a reference to Yahweh parting the Red Sea. It is small wonder that these tribes trembled since His glance can cause mountains to melt, [Habakkuk 3:6](#).’

Habakkuk asks God if He was angry with the rivers? Was His wrath against the streams? Habakkuk 3:8. The answer to both of these questions is that God was angry with the sins of people, not the actual rivers and streams.

This is possibly referring to the parting of the Red Sea, and or the crossing of the Jordan, Exodus 14 / Joshua 3, but whatever it's speaking about, it's pointing to God's power.

Did you rage against the sea when you rode your horses and your chariots to victory? Habakkuk 3:8. This is a reference to Pharaoh leading his horsemen into the Red Sea to catch the Israelites; it was actually God who was riding upon the horses, Exodus 14:26-28 / Hebrews 11:29, and his chariots were his angels.

The clouds are the chariots of the Lord, Psalms 104:3, and angels are sometimes signified by horses and chariots, Psalms 18:10 / Psalms 68:17 / 2 Kings 2:11 / 2 Kings 6:17.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'In Canaanite mythology, Baal had confronted the personified god Yam (sea), alternatively called Judge River. Israel borrowed this motif but dropped any idea that natural phenomena are personified deities. Yahweh is presented as having engaged in combat with the sea at creation or at other unspecified periods, Job 26:12-13 / Psalms 29 / Psalms 89:9-10.'

God uncovered His bow and called for many arrows, Deuteronomy 32 / Psalms 7:12 / Jeremiah 47:6-7, and He split the earth with rivers, Habakkuk 3:9.

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

'God had enlisted weapons and pledged them on oath for the destruction of his enemies.'

Notice how Habakkuk personifies the mountains and describes them as shaking when they saw the Lord, Habakkuk 3:10 / Isaiah 37:23 / Isaiah 40:26. Torrential rain swept by, Genesis 7:11 / Genesis 7:19-20, and the sea lifts up its hands, Psalms 77:15-17 / Psalms 77:19.

The calamitous picture of the natural world Habakkuk gives us depicts the greatness of God. In other words, if God's coming causes so much calamity, then He's more than capable of delivering His people in the future.

The sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of His flying arrows, at the lightning of His flashing spear, Habakkuk 3:11 / Deuteronomy 32:23 / Deuteronomy 32:42.

This could be a possible reference to Joshua 10:1-15, when time stopped for Joshua so he could win the battle. Again, this is pointing to God's power, and if God did that back then, then He could do it again. In His wrath, God strode through the earth and in anger He threshed the nations, Habakkuk 3:12.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'This verse is clearly a direct reference to the displacement of the kingdoms of Canaan in order for Israel to be settled in the land they formerly occupied, that being the most prominent example in all history of God's 'threshing the nations in anger.'

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'The word 'tread' is used of very solemn manifestations of God, Judges 5:4 / Psalms 68:8, of the procession of the ark, 2 Samuel 6:13. It is denied as to the idols, Jeremiah 10:5, of His going to give to His own victory over their enemies Not the land only, as of old, but the earth is the scene of His judgments; the earth which was 'full of His praise,' which He 'meted out', Habakkuk 3:3 / Habakkuk 3:6, which contained the nations whom He chastened, the whole earth.'

God came out to deliver His people and to save His anointed one. He crushed the leader of the land of wickedness and stripped him from head to foot, Habakkuk 3:13.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the anointed one.

‘Joshua is undoubtedly meant, who was God’s instrument to put the people in possession of Canaan’

Some commentators suggest that the ‘anointed one’ is a reference to Christ. Some commentators suggest that the words ‘crushed the leader’, Habakkuk 3:13, are a reference to what Jesus was going to do to Satan at the cross, Genesis 3:15.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This may refer to Moses in his battles with Israel’s enemies, or it may refer to a coming anointed one: Cyrus, Isaiah 45:1, or Messiah, Psalms 2:2 / Daniel 9:26, or more than one of these.’

With God’s spear, He pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding, Habakkuk 3:14.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘When the Midianites and Amalekites and the children of the east, Judges 6:3-4, wasted Israel in the days of Gideon ‘the Lord set every man’s sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host’, Judges 7:22, and when God delivered the Philistines into the hand of Jonathan, 1 Samuel 14:12 / 1 Samuel 14:16 / 1 Samuel 14:20, so it was with ‘Ammon Moab and the inhabitants of Mount Seir,’ at the prayer of Jehoshaphat and his army, 2 Chronicles 20:22-23.’

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Hebrew will bear this sense: ‘Thou hast pierced amidst their tribes the head of their troops,’ referring to Pharaoh and his generals, who came like a whirlwind to fall upon the poor Israelites, when they appeared to be hemmed in by sea, and no place for their escape. If we follow the common reading, it seems to intimate that the troops of Pharaoh, in their confusion (for God shone out upon them from the cloud) fell foul of each other; and with their staves, or weapons, slew one another: but the head of the villages or towns, i.e., Pharaoh, was drowned with his army in the Red Sea.’

Again, some commentators suggest that the words ‘pierced his head’ are a reference to what Jesus was going to do to Satan at the cross, Genesis 3:15 / Hebrews 2:14.

He trampled the sea with His horses, churning the great waters, Habakkuk 3:15, which may be a reference to the events of Exodus 14:19-20 / Isaiah 63:13 / Zechariah 10:11 / Exodus 15:8 / Psalms 78:13. Habakkuk envisions what it will be like when the Babylonians attack the Israelites, Habakkuk 3:16.

Notice his response to all this was so great that his ‘heart pounded’, his ‘lips quivered,’ ‘decay crept into his bones’, and ‘his legs trembled,’ Habakkuk 3:16. In other words, he was overwhelmed and in awe of God’s power, to the point of collapsing mentally and no doubt spiritually.

If God’s presence can cause such disturbance in the things that He created, then certainly He can control all that man does on the earth. Habakkuk learned to trust God and wait patiently for Him to work things out for the benefit of His people, Habakkuk 3:16.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Having been reminded of the infinitely more powerful Yahweh, he had nothing more to say, Job 42:1-6. God would handle the Babylonians. All Habakkuk had to do was wait.’

Amidst all the turmoil and trouble, there is some kind of comfort for God’s people. God is in control. God would send them into captivity, but God will free them later, only after they have been disciplined and learned from their mistakes.

This is what Habakkuk has concluded.

1. Babylon will judge Judah.

2. If God is behind Babylon, then Judah will need help, salvation.

3. Only God can help Judah.

‘Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails, and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.’ Habakkuk 3:17-19

As we come to the end of the book, we can’t help but notice the difference in Habakkuk’s thinking, [Psalms 18:46](#) / [Psalms 25:5](#). It’s clear his faith in God is growing despite the circumstances, [Philippians 4:4](#) / [1 John 5:4](#). What Habakkuk is describing here is what the land looked like when the Babylonians went around invading the nations, [Lamentations 2:12](#) / [Lamentations 2:20](#) / [Lamentations 4:4](#) / [Lamentations 4:9-10](#) / [Lamentations 5:17-18](#). People would starve, people would die because of them, and they would leave the land in such a condition that it would be impossible for anyone to live there anymore, [Habakkuk 3:17](#).

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is right and proper to voice appreciation of God’s goodness when he bestows all that is necessary for life, health, and prosperity. But when these things are lacking, to rejoice in God for his own sake is evidence of pure faith.’

But even still, Habakkuk will rejoice in the Lord and be joyful, [Habakkuk 3:18](#) / [Job 13:15](#) / [Daniel 3:18](#). He will remain faithful to God and rely on God’s strength instead of his own, [Habakkuk 3:19](#).

The ‘feet of a deer’ [Habakkuk 3:19](#), is probably the most skilled feet in the animal world when we think about the terrain, they live in. Habakkuk now believes that no matter how hard things get, no matter how rough his circumstances feel, he won’t fall and stumble to the ground. His faith is now totally in God.

Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Habakkuk teaches us to face our doubts and questions honestly, take them humbly to the Lord, wait for His Word to teach us, and then worship Him no matter how we feel or what we see.’

## APPLICATION

God’s patience with Habakkuk is very humbling. He allowed him to grow in his faith and taught him to be patient. As Christians, we often think that some Christians aren’t growing, but some Christians take a little longer than others, and some can only digest a little of God’s Word at a time. We too must be patient with them, as God is with us, as we all have a lot of growing to do, [2 Peter 3:18](#).

## CONCLUSION

If we learn anything from Habakkuk, it’s this: although at first, He didn’t understand why God could use an evil nation like Babylon to punish His own people, he went on to see the bigger picture. Judah needed to be disciplined for her unfaithfulness, and God was going to use the Babylonians to carry this out.

They needed to learn from their past mistakes so that God would later free them from their captivity. It’s interesting because Israel never committed idolatry again after they were freed from captivity.

When Habakkuk finally understood what God was doing and why, he had peace of mind and would go on to rely on God for the rest of his life. For Habakkuk, faith really was his victory, 1 John 5:4.