

# When God Seems Silent: A Study of Habakkuk

## Lesson Two: An Ancient Book with a Current Query

### Misc Texts from Habakkuk

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#### Introduction:

I. A theological student once went to his lead professor and discussed the difficulties the student had with the divinity of Christ. The teacher listened patiently and then said, "My dear young friend, your difficulties are of the head. If I should answer them, new ones would suggest themselves. The best way to remove them and guard yourself from future and similar troubles, is to have Christ within you. Learn His life; learn to trust in Him more; and your doubts will disappear." The young student followed that advice and his doubts fled. (Foster, #1626).

The ☞ cure for doubting is knowledge. ☞ Once knowledge is obtained, doubt is dispelled. Such is the situation with Habakkuk.

Here is one who ☞ confessed his doubts, and his doubts were significant, about the nature of God. His ☞ journey from perplexing doubt to enthusiastic understanding is the basis for a very rewarding study.

II. Our Bibles are open to one of the ☞ most obscure prophets on the Old Testament.

1. ☞ Historians tell us nothing about Habakkuk.
2. ☞ Scripture is silent about this man except for 1:1.
3. ☞ He "is one of the prophets often lost in the archives of the Old Testament" (Ungerer,11).
4. This small book is a valuable resource for saints. ☞ "There is no Old Testament book that is able to do more for the burdened souls of men or to raise them to higher levels of hope and confidence than the brief prophecy of Habakkuk."

#### Body:



I. The book's introductory matters.



A. ☞ The PROPHET introduced

1. Our next lesson will present a more focused examination of this man.
2. ☞ His name is non-Israeli. Some suggest it has Assyrian roots and refers to a flower. The older views suggest that its root is from a verb meaning "to embrace; press to the heart" (Farrar, 159) if we view his name in this meaning Habakkuk is portrayed as "embracing" two groups:
  - a. The JEWS who struggled with the question of God's goodness and why that goodness allowed evil to beset them.
  - b. The PROPHET who struggled with an attitude regarding God. Habakkuk steadfastly embraces and clings to God but he struggles to resolve the dilemmas of life.
3. From the notation in 3:19 it is suggested that Habakkuk was ☞ a Levite and even the choirmaster in the Temple. Thus, he possessed great lyrical skills (Biblical Illustration, iv).
4. His role is that of ☞ a "prophet" (1:1; 3:1). This indicates that he was a well-known and prominent citizen of Jerusalem.
5. Above all, Habakkuk was ☞ a man of great faith. "A man of reverent spirit, with keen, sensitive, highly developed faculties, he was more seriously troubled than any other man in the kingdom" (Yates, 151).








B. ☞ The PROPHECY introduced

1. This obscure book has a contemporary message that is ☞ relevant and urgently needed in our present culture.
2. Some unique aspects of this prophecy:




- a. There is  little Messianic messaging
- b. He is  speaking TO God instead of FOR God.
- c. "He is far more a moral seer and a deep theologian than a herald of the future" (Farrar, 160).
- d. "Short as it is, it is one of the sublimest books in the Old Testament. It speaks a great and lofty language. It throbs with an intense and ardent feeling" (Biblical Illustrator, iii).

3. This prophecy is able to  offer divine comfort to anyone who is struggling with injustices in life.  "There is no Old Testament book that is able to do more for the burdened souls of man or to raise them to higher levels of hope and confidence than the brief prophecy of Habakkuk" (Norden, 12; Ungerer, 15b).

#### C. The TIMES of the prophecy discussed

1. The culture of Habakkuk's time was  chaotic and wicked.  Religion had become a pretense and was modified to accommodate any personal whim.  Spiritual anarchy reigned.  Insensitivity controlled behavior.  All aspects seemed hopelessly out of control.
2. The exact date of his prophecy is uncertain. Some date it as early as Manasseh's evil reign. Others place it in Jehoiakim's reign (Norden, 9-10). In whatever time it is placed, the society was grossly immoral and totally calloused to Jehovah's boundaries.
3. "It was a time of chaos, frustration, national deterioration, and political conflict" (Ungerer, 14).
4.  "What a terrible picture! Sin, immorality, and vice were rampant, while those in authority and entrusted with government were slack and indolent. They did not apply the law equitably and honestly. There was lawlessness everywhere...serious religious falling away...a general moral and political decline" (Lloyd-Jones, 11).
5. Habakkuk's times were so similar to our current times! Injustice, immorality, violence, crime and a host of other violent fruits plagued the lives of innocent, God-fearing people. The nation was collapsing from within and a harsh enemy was advancing from without (1:2, 4-6).  
 "Local aberrations of justice as well as the tolerance of licentiousness, immorality, and the introduction of idolatry, no doubt all contributed to Judah's problems, which in Habakkuk's time had become incurable" (Yates, 154).
6. In Habakkuk's time, gross evil had become "respectable"! (2:4,5,15,16).

#### D. The STRUGGLE of Habakkuk discussed

1. Habakkuk did not lack faith—his faith was strong. His problem was that  his faith failed to explain his culture and society.
2. He looked around at the hopeless confusion and asked  why God did not do something. It seemed as though God was not making His presence known. He knew how great God was, but why did not God do something? Evil was winning and righteousness was losing. And this was happening in a nation that had been specifically chosen by God! WHY???
3. "It was a daily grief to him, he says, to see the violence and opposition and strife and plunder which prevailed around him, the powerlessness of the law, the crookedness of justice, the entrapping of the righteous by the wicked. He finds it hard to understand why God does not interpose to take vengeance on the evil and to diadem the right" (Biblical Illustrator, v).
4. Habakkuk knew that  God had intervened in the past—God would NOT allow evil to win in the past. But why is evil winning now? How can God continue to tolerate the presence of evil and permit it to become worse?
5. Habakkuk struggled with three specific questions about God (Wiersbe, 8-9):

- a. 🕊️ Was God indifferent? (1:2). There was deep distress because it appeared that God did not care about the righteous who were innocently suffering.
- b. Was God inactive? (1:3-4). It seemed as if God was doing nothing while the prophet was doing everything. Habakkuk felt that it was all on him!
- c. Was God inconsistent? (1:12-17). How could God use the wicked Babylonians to punish His chosen people? How can a holy God execute fairness by using the evil nation of Babylon? Is such moral, ethical or honest?
- d. 🕊️ "Sometimes we have made the same accusations against God. We have said, 'God, how long am I going to have to pray about this? How long am I going to have to talk to You about this? Are You indifferent to my prayers? God, are You inactive'" (Wiersbe, 9).

## II. The Book surveyed

The prophecy is brief and can be read at one sitting. It is written in a question and answer format.

A. 1:1-4 Habakkuk's struggle with God tolerating Judah's evil.

1. Habakkuk's faith could not understand why so much evil and violence was tolerated.
2. Habakkuk is perplexed because of sin's triumph.

B. 1:5-11 God's first answer shows that sin will be punished. God is strengthening Babylonia to punish Judah.

C. 1:12-2:1 Habakkuk's struggle with God's use of Babylonia's excessive evil to punish Judah. How could God use one more wicked than Judah to destroy the righteous?

D. 2:2-20 God's second answer reveals that all sin will be punished.

1. Justice will be meted to the proud and the righteous (2:4).
2. The proud will suffer five woes as penalties for their evil.

E. 3:1-19 reveal Habakkuk understands of the dilemma

1. 3:1-15—There will be a universal judgment on evil.
2. 3:16—Understanding the Almighty's power led Habakkuk to be fearful because he had dared doubt the Sovereign's justice.
3. 3:17-19—The triumphant resolution is announced. Security is found by resting upon the sovereign will and authority of Jehovah God.

## III. The book's focus

A general survey of this prophecy reveals that five significant lessons emerge. These have a direct bearing on Christians today.

A. 🕊️ Jehovah is the absolute Sovereign (2:20).

Jehovah will judge ALL. No one will escape His notice. He judged Judah by Babylonia, but Babylonia will be judged for her evil. Earthly monarchs may reign but it will be brief. Their reign will be judged by God and justice will be vindicated. Only Jehovah God is able to vindicate all! (1:13).

B. 🕊️ Faithfulness to Jehovah assures safety (2:4b)

If you want to gain a permanent secure standing with God, you must be faithful to His commands. Those who trust in God will survive troubled times. Even if everything essential to life is removed, one's fidelity to God should remain.

C. 🕊️ Divine discipline is guaranteed—judgment IS coming! (3:3-15). God blows many trumpets of warning prior to sending His wrath. Those who trust in God will be delivered from the judgment (Ezekiel 9:4-6).

*"Though the mills of God grind slowly, Yet they grind exceeding small:  
Though with patience He stand waiting, With exactness grinds He all."  
(Longfellow, "Retribution")*

D. ☞ Tranquility can exist in the midst of distress.

1. The secret lies in a conviction and trust in God's sovereignty. This assures us that God has dealt wonderfully in the past and He will do so now! (Job 13:15; Psalm 73:26-28)
2. Trust yields tranquility because God's trustworthiness is proven! The same God who proved trustworthy to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, is still in command! Because of this he is working out His own purpose. Even in the midst of destruction and ruin, Habakkuk can trust God implicitly!
3. ☞ Habakkuk struggled with the question of "How long?" rather than "Why?" His answer was found in "trust." Trust that God is not idle. Trust that God is doing a wondrous work in the midst of tribulation that will at long last become clear (Revelation 6:10, 11; Isaiah 5:9, 10).

### Conclusion:

I. Habakkuk was a prophet who wrote an ancient book with a current query. ☞ Who has never asked God, "How much longer will You wait?" "Why don't You hear my prayers?" This prophet struggled with serious questions and arrived at an amazing conclusion. Even though all of life falls apart, ☞ his heart is fixed. He rests in a trusting hope. He patiently waits for the Lord to perform His marvelous work!

II. Do you need the trusting faith of Habakkuk? Have you allowed the tumults of earthly life to persuade you to leave the faith of 3:17-19? How confident is your trust in Jehovah God?

When you are bewildered by the "unfairness" in the world, ☞ remember that ultimately the Bible's message concerns the entire world, the individual nations, the accepted allowances for sin. The problem with seeking "fairness" is that we look exclusively at our personal issues, but the Bible places every issue within the world's parameters. The Bible has a profound impact on civilization's history. History enables us to understand what is happening today in the context of the Divine program. Habakkuk treats the problem of history by focusing attention on how man fails to function within God's parameters. Consequently he looks only at personal issues and not regional, national, or universal. The simple answer to the issue of "fairness" is the problem of history—understand this and you understand "WHY."

☞ Jeremiah 5:30-31: "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it this way! But what will you do when the end comes?"

☞ Our focus of study for the next class is: "The Danger of Despair" (1:2-4)