

Habakkuk ...



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Preface

Introduction

Habakkuk is a unique book. Unlike other prophets who declared God's message *to* people this prophet dialogued with God *about* people. Habakkuk wasn't at peace within himself. The local, national and international landscape was chaotic and way-out of control - evil had the upper hand and righteousness was in serious decline. This little book records an intriguing interchange between a perplexed prophet and his Maker. Where is God in all of this? Is He aware of what is taking place? Does He care? Is He able to do anything about the situation? Will He act? When will He act? Such were the penetrating questions Habakkuk sought answers from his God.

The Author

Little is known of Habakkuk the prophet. The book simply records his name and his profession. Most scholars trace the name "Habakkuk" to the Hebrew verb *habaq*, "*to fold one's hands or to embrace.*" It has been suggested by Rabbinic tradition that Habakkuk was the son of the Shunammite woman mentioned in 2 Kings 4, who Elisha restored to life. This is based solely on the meaning of Habakkuk's name, "embrace," and Elisha's words to the Shunammite, "You shall embrace a son" (2 Kings 4:16, NASB). Habakkuk was well educated, deeply sensitive, and in his literary style was as much a poet as he was a prophet. Above all, he was God's choice servant who penned one of the most penetrating books of the Old Testament.

The Date

It is generally accepted that the reference to the Babylonians (Hab. 1:6) places the book within the seventh century B.C. More precise dating of the prophecy has provoked controversy. The dates proposed fall into three time periods: the reign of Manasseh (697-642), the reign of Josiah (640-609), the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598). That the Babylonians had already attained renown for their power seems evident from the description recorded by Habakkuk in verses 7-11. Thus, the most likely date falls between 606 and 604 B.C., sometime around Babylon's victory at the battle of Carchemish (605).

The Setting

While the stage is set for a global holocaust, an unsuspecting Israelite audience fiddles a happy tune. The nation's moral fibre is being eaten away by a 'flesh' appetite. Homes crumble as crime soars. Divorce and debauchery prevail and decency dies. Frivolity dances in the streets. Faith is dead. In such a world of crisis and chaos, Habakkuk speaks with clarity.

The Message

In the dark days of Jehoiakim's reign the Prophet Habakkuk penned an unusual message of hope and encouragement for God's people. Though doubts and confusion reign when sin runs rampant, an encounter with God can turn those doubts into devotion and all confusion into confidence. Habakkuk's book begins with an interrogation of God but ends as an intercession to God. Worry is transformed into worship. Fear turns into faith. Terror becomes trust. Hang-ups are resolved with hope. Anguish melts into adoration. What begins with a question mark ends in an exclamation point. The answer to Habakkuk's "Why?" is "Who!" His confusion, "Why all the conflict?" is resolved with his comprehension of who is in control: God!

Investigation with great expectation avails much!

Complaining Prayer

Introduction

The Book of Habakkuk is a message received from God in a vision (1:1). Habakkuk was perplexed. Wickedness and violence seemed to be going unchecked. Would there be no end to the rising tide of sin? Habakkuk took his complaint to God. "Why don't You do something?" God answered, "I am doing something. Judah will be punished by Babylon." Then the prophet was *more* perplexed. Habakkuk's distress deepened to a profound dilemma. So, he continued his conversation with God. "Why would You use those wretched Babylonian barbarians to judge Your people, Judah?"

Investigation **Impact**

It doesn't matter how familiar you are with Scripture - the motive behind your investigations is what really counts - the right motivation is to become a better worshiper and servant of God.

A. Habakkuk's distress (1:1-4)

Q1. What was Habakkuk's *complaint* and *concern*? (v. 2a-b)

Q2. What was Habakkuk's accusation of God? (v. 2c)

Q3. What questions did Habakkuk direct to God? (v. 3a)

Q4. What did Habakkuk see that horrified him? (v. 3b)

Q5. What two reasons did Habakkuk give for *the perversion of justice* that prevailed? (v. 4)

(With wicked men in power, twisted justice became injustice. The situation in Habakkuk's day was evil and perilous.)

a.

b.

B. God's disclosure (1:5-11)

Q1. What did God disclose to Habakkuk? (v. 5b)

Q2. God had a plan. How was He going to discipline His willfully sinful people? (vv. 6-11)

Choosing the barbaric Babylonians was not a disproportionate measure by God in disciplining His people. God's discipline (loving correction) is always precisely proportionate to every sin.

C. Habakkuk's dilemma (1:12-17)

God's choice of using the barbaric Babylonians created additional, disturbing 'why's' for Habakkuk: Why would God employ a people of iniquity? Why would God endorse a people of injustice? And, why would God excuse a people of idolatry?

Q1. What fearful question did Habakkuk express to God? (v. 12a)

Q2. What purpose does Habakkuk give for God's sending of the Babylonians? (v. 12b)

Q3. What two rhetorical questions does Habakkuk direct to God? (v. 13b)

a.

b.

Q4. How did Habakkuk compare the plight of his people with the Babylonians? (vv. 14-15)

Q5. In verse 17, now feeling quite confused, what question does Habakkuk ask God?

Do you interpret the local, national, and international landscape from your perspective or from God's?

Complaining Prayer (Cont.)

Introduction

Habakkuk's dilemma deepened. Why would God use an ungodly nation such as Babylon as the instrument of judgment on His own people, Judah? Habakkuk had boldly lodged his contentions and now he waited for God's reply. Surely some logical explanation would be given.

Investigation Impact

Total submission of life and humility of heart are the prerequisites of successful Bible-investigators. Impacting disciples of Jesus see themselves as life-long learners.

A. Habakkuk's anticipation: "Watch" (2:1)

Habakkuk had registered his complaint with God and now he resolved to "position himself" to receive God's response.

Q1. When Habakkuk said, "I will climb up to my watchtower," to hear from God, are we to understand this as a *physical* positioning or having an *attitude* of expectation? (v. 1a)

Q2. Having "climbed the watchtower," what was Habakkuk determined to do? (v 1b)

B. God's admonition: "Write" (2:2-5)

Habakkuk 'waited' for God's message, not simply for his own satisfaction. He was ready to convey God's message to his people - that was his divine calling. Habakkuk waited; God spoke.

Q1. Concerning the recording of God's answer, what was Habakkuk's instruction? (v. 2a)

Q2. God's revelation was 'certain'... the events foretold would happen - the only question was 'when?' In two-words, what were the receivers of God's message instructed to do? (v. 3b)

Q3. In verse 4, God contrasts "the proud" (Babylonians) with "the righteous" (those who live by their faithfulness to God). In whom do "the proud" place their trust?

Q4. How does God describe "the arrogant" (Babylonians)? (v. 5)

C. Habakkuk's annotation: "Woe" (2:6-20)

The destruction of Babylon conveyed in God's message to Habakkuk was announced in greater detail in a song of woe (sorrow) in five stanzas of three verses each (vv. 6, 9, 12, 15, 19). Biblical "woes" were divine indictments directed against unrighteousness.

Q1. Woe for "**plunder**" - What fate is announced against the Babylonian's in v 8a? (vv. 6-8)

Q2. Woe for "**pride**" - How did the Babylonians seek their own exaltation? (vv. 9-11)

Q3. Woe for "**iniquity**" –

a. By what means were the Babylonian cities built? (v. 12)

b. What would be the end results of their ambitious work? (v. 13b)

Q4. Woe for "**indignity**"-

a. What undignified treatment did the Babylonians do to their captives? (v. 15)

b. What will the Babylonians be expected to drink? (v. 16)

Q5. Woe to "**Idolatry**" - What does God say in verse 18 that constitutes idolatry? (vv. 18-20)

**God's message to Habakkuk was clear: Stop complaining! Stop doubting!
God is not indifferent to sin.**

Composed Praise

Introduction

Chapter 3 is not a postscript; it is a pinnacle of praise. For Habakkuk, it was the mountaintop destination of a journey that began in a valley of distress.

The distressed prophet, who complained over the unchecked sin in his country, was amazed at God's disclosure that He had already prepared an instrument to judge Judah, namely, Babylon. Habakkuk was shocked. He expressed his dilemma to God and waited for an answer. That came in the form of a 'song of mourning' that Habakkuk was instructed to record. Learning of God's just-plan to destroy Babylon, Habakkuk bowed in humble adoration. His majestic prayer and hymn of praise followed.

Investigation **Impact**

Human sight is limited - God's sight is not! Through the Holy Spirit you can expect to see more from your investigative efforts.

A. Habakkuk's prayer for mercy (3:1-2)

After the Lord's response in chapter 2, Habakkuk repositioned his attitude from *protest* to *prayer* and *praise*.

Q1. Having been filled with anxiety, what now filled Habakkuk? (v. 2a)

Q2. What did Habakkuk petition God for? (v. 2b)

Q3. Habakkuk's second petition was for mercy. The petition is an admission of what? (v. 2c)

B. God's presence of majesty (3:3-15)

In chapter 1 Habakkuk "speaks" to God; in chapter 2 Habakkuk "hears" God, and now, in chapter 3 Habakkuk "sees" God! (v 3). Habakkuk sees the majesty of God - in His *arrival*, His *appearance*, and in His *actions*.

Arrival (v. 3a)

Q1. Habakkuk's likens God's arrival to what past event in his nation's history? (Deut. 33:2)

Appearance (vv. 3b-7)

Q2. With what does Habakkuk compare God's splendor (v. 4)

Q3. How powerful is God's appearance? Note what caused the nations to tremble? (v. 6)

Q4. What did it take to *distress* the people of Cushan, and cause the Midianites to *tremble* in terror? (Ex. 15:14-16)

Actions (vv. 8-15)

Q5. God's use of nature was a tool to demonstrate what? (vv. 8-11)

Q6. Against what is God's anger vented? (v. 13b)

C. Habakkuk's peace in ministry (3:16-19)

Q1. How did Habakkuk's encounter with God impact him? (v. 16)

Q2. Habakkuk's weakened physical state contrasted with his incredibly strong spiritual state. What was his determined resolve (v 18) should the worst possible scenario result?

Q3. What amazing, personal declaration does Habakkuk make? (v. 19)

**Is the sovereign Lord your strength? Does He make you as surefooted as a deer -
able to tread firmly upon the heights?**

Epilogue

Summary

Habakkuk was about to "go under" before he started this book. Destruction, violence, strife, conflict, injustice, and wickedness were all he could see. But he cried out to God and his cry did not go unheeded. The Lord not only answered his complaint but also provided the confidence needed to lift him from the quagmire. Habakkuk started in the pits, but ended on the mountaintop. His journey was not exactly an easy one, but it was certainly worth it.

God directed Habakkuk through the *dialogue* (chap. 1) in which He revealed His plans for disciplining Judah and destroying Babylon. Then at God's command Habakkuk recorded a woeful *dirge* (chap. 2) that further justified God's judgment on Babylon.

Finally, the prophet reached a pinnacle of praise in which God revealed Himself in all His glory and power. The *doxology* (chap. 3) concluded with Habakkuk's unwavering trust in the Lord.

The prophet's complaints were swallowed up by confidence. His fear turned to faith. Habakkuk was transformed from a sour, jittery prophet weighed down with burdens to a secure, preacher uplifted with blessing. The just, the upright, the happy, the contented, the victorious live by their faith. Yes, faith is the victory that overcomes the world! (1 John 5:4)

Where to now?

Electronic copies of investigation guides of other Books of the Bible are available free of charge through contacting me on: billyj1949@outlook.com

Best wishes in your ongoing investigations of the Lord's most wonderful Library of Truths.

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Acknowledgment of thanks

I extend my deepest thanks to the following sources from which I have drawn valuable insight, as expressed in my "Habakkuk, an Investigation" discovery guide:

1. Blue, J. Ronald. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Habakkuk*, Editors: John F. Walvoord and Roy Zuck, SP Publications, Victor Books, 1983.
2. *The Bible*. New Living Translation, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Illinois, 1996.

Investigations continue...