

HABAKKUK

Habakkuk 1:1–4

Habakkuk, who lived around 600 BC, was a prophet of Judah. He had been praying to God and was in a dialogue with Him concerning a burden that he had seen. (“Burden” in the King James Version is translated from the Hebrew word *massa*. In some other translations of the Bible, it is rendered as “oracle,” “prophecy,” or “message.”)

Habakkuk saw a burden that in Habakkuk’s mind, seemed to say that God was not listening or acting on his prayers about matters in Judah: “O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear!” (verse 1). Apparently, Habakkuk had been praying a long time about the iniquity, grievances, spoiling (destruction), violence, strife, and contention that he saw happening in Judah.

Habakkuk did not feel that his prayers were being answered concerning these wrongdoings: “Judgment doth never go forth” (verse 4). He also saw that wickedness seemed to prevail over righteousness: “Therefore wrong judgment proceedeth” (verse 4).

Does that not sound familiar in our day? We seem to be surrounded with burdens, things that give us anxiety. There seems to be more wickedness in the world than there is righteousness. For example, in the headlines we see all around us immorality, violence, and contention. We see contention between individuals and within families, communities, and nations. We also have personal burdens that we are trying to resolve. We pray that these burdens might be resolved and go away. Many of them are resolved, but it seems that an overwhelming majority of our burdens are not. It seems as if God is not listening, not responding to our fervent prayers.

Did God not hear Habakkuk's prayers, and did He not respond to them? Did God show "wrong judgment" toward the wicked people of Habakkuk's day? We will discuss that as we continue reading and studying Habakkuk's dialogue with God.

Source: Book of Habakkuk Minute by W. Breitenstein

Habakkuk 1:5–11

In these verses God responds to Habakkuk's complaint about the evil going on in Judah. God was listening to Habakkuk's prayers and encouraged him to be patient and "wonder marvellously." God had a plan, a purpose: "I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you" (verse 5).

God spoke of the "terrible and dreadful" Chaldeans, whom He was raising up to "march through the breadth of the land, to possess . . . places that are not theirs" (verse 6). God intended that the Chaldeans (often referred to as Babylonians) would punish the wrongdoings in Judah. The Chaldeans were a proud people: "Their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves" (verse 7). They did not attribute their strength and power to divine help but rather attributed "[their] power unto [their own] god" (verse 11). However, whatever pride the Chaldeans might have had in their own power, they were to be used as an instrument by God to punish Judah for its wicked ways. It was difficult for Habakkuk to comprehend why God was handling the situation in Judah in that manner. But God did have a purpose and a plan.

Source: Book of Habakkuk Minute by W. Breitenstein

Habakkuk 1:12–17

In response to verses 5–11, Habakkuk praised God but at the same time expressed his concern that God was allowing the sinful Chaldeans to "correct" Judah, a more righteous nation: "Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die . . . [but] thou hast established them for correction. . . . [T]he wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" Even though he did not like God's response to his "burden," Habakkuk still trusted in God: "We shall not die" (verse 12). The ancient covenant that God made with Judah had not been forgotten. Habakkuk trusted that God would protect and provide.

Despite that trust, Habakkuk had a natural fear of the Babylonians. The Babylonians were indeed powerful; they gathered fish (the people) in their "net" and rejoiced over that. That net (the might of Babylon) was their idol. But that pride and dependence on an idol would eventually be their downfall.

Source: Book of Habakkuk Minute by W. Breitenstein

Habakkuk 2:1

Habakkuk felt that he had complained perhaps too much. He would now sit patiently on his “watch tower” to await God’s response to his latest round of complaints. He also expected a reproof from God for having complained as he did.

We all complain in some form or another; it is only natural when things cause us anxiety, when they are a burden for us. As we work with God, however, we need to step back onto our own watch tower as Habakkuk did, be patient, and have faith. We need to trust that our prayers will be answered and that our burdens will be lightened.

Source: Book of Habakkuk Minute by W. Breitenstein

Habakkuk 2:2–5

God responded once again, asking Habakkuk as His prophet to write down plainly the vision that he was receiving (verse 2). The vision seems to refer to the judgment that would eventually be dealt upon wicked people—in this case Babylon. Proud Babylon would eventually fall. It wouldn’t happen just yet (it “is yet for an appointed time” [verse 3]), but it would come to pass. God asked Habakkuk to “wait for it” (verse 3). The righteous, however, would be protected: “The just shall live by . . . faith” (verse 4). As the footnote to verse 4 in the Church’s official King James Version states, the intent of the Hebrew word here rendered as “faith” is faithfulness, firmness, and steadfastness.

Source: Book of Habakkuk Minute by W. Breitenstein

Habakkuk 2:6–14

Verses 6–20 are what Habakkuk calls a “taunting proverb,” or taunt song, against Babylon.

A portion of those verses (6–14) contains three woes, or oracles (often defined as “divine utterances or statements delivered to humankind”). The footnote to 2 Samuel 16:23 in the Church’s official King James Version defines *oracle* as the “word of God.”

The first woe is found in verse 6: “Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his!” As the next two verses suggest, obtaining another’s property through violence and destruction will only come back to bite the perpetrating nation through insurrection (“Shall they not rise up suddenly . . . ?” [see verse 7]).

The second woe is in verse 9: “Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high . . . that he may be delivered from the power of evil.” Greediness will not deliver Babylon from evil. Verses 10–11 point out that Babylon’s own metaphorical house is corrupt (“hast consulted shame . . . and hast sinned”), making it impossible for them to be delivered from evil.

The third woe comes in verse 12: “Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!” As the saying goes, what goes around comes around. The wicked sow seeds of self-destruction. Babylon’s iniquity and brutality will come back to destroy them (“the people shall labor in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves” [verse 14]).

Verse 14 makes a more positive declaration. In the end, “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” God’s glory will eventually dominate the earth, overtaking the violence, greediness, and iniquity mentioned above.

Source: Book of Habakkuk Minute by W. Breitenstein

Habakkuk 2:15–20

This portion of the taunt song contains two additional woes.

The first is in verse 15: “Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!” Humiliate others, and that humiliation will only come back to you, as verses 16–17 tell us. Babylon will indeed be shamed and humiliated!

And the next, in verse 19: “Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.” Dumb, lifeless, unholy idols are useless and would not benefit Babylon—nor will they benefit us. The world will benefit only from a living God: “But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him” (verse 20). Silence implies reverence. Let us, too, reverence our Lord!

Source: Book of Habakkuk Minute by W. Breitenstein

Habakkuk 3:1–2

Habakkuk composed a psalm, a sacred song or *shigionoth*. This psalm could even have been accompanied by instruments (see verse 19).

The entire book of Habakkuk is considered poetry, but the third chapter is an exceptional piece of poetry—a song, a prayer put to music. The word *shigionoth* is transliterated in verse 1, probably because the translators did not know its meaning. However, we now know that the word is the plural form of *shiggaion*, a word seen in Psalm 7. In the heading to that psalm, we read, “Shiggaion of David, which he sang unto the Lord.”

Both Psalm 7 and the psalm of Habakkuk portray pictures of trouble but end by praising the Lord for deliverance from that trouble.

Habakkuk’s psalm starts by praising God for the mercy shown to His people in ancient times and pleads with God to “revive [that] work” in the present (verse 2).

Source: Book of Habakkuk Minute by W. Breitenstein

Habakkuk 3:3–7

Praying, again in song, Habakkuk remembered the deliverance of his people from pestilence and other afflictions. The song is interspersed with the word *selah* (again transliterated) almost as a kind of pause. The word gives direction to Habakkuk’s music (the book of Psalms uses the word seventy-one times).

Several locations are mentioned in these verses: Teman, Paran, Cushan (possibly a poetic form of Cush), and the land of Midian. These locations were the setting of Moses’s Exodus.

Source: Book of Habakkuk Minute by W. Breitenstein

Habakkuk 3:8–10

Habakkuk in his prayer song continued to make references to Moses and the Exodus to create an image of God’s wrath and mercy in the past. Now, Habakkuk seemed to be asking God to demonstrate those attributes once again as He dealt with the unrighteous people of Judah and with their impending punishment (the Babylonian invasion).

During the Exodus from Egypt, God revealed His power by controlling rivers and seas as He brought deliverance to Judah. Note in verse 8 Habakkuk’s masterful poetry as he described God’s horses and chariots of salvation. See Exodus 7:14–24; 14 to witness how God turned the Nile into blood and how God parted the Red Sea to allow His people to pass through it.

We can see the image of God as a powerful warrior with arrows and spears. Several different interpretations of these images exist. For instance, the International Standard Version of the Bible renders verse 9 as, “Your bow was exposed, and your arrows targeted by command.” Some scholars even interpret “bow” as “lightning”—a reference to God’s wrath. Either way, using the images of bows and arrows or lightning, Habakkuk painted a poetic picture of God’s anger. Using that power, God divided the earth and made way for rivers, caused mountains to tremble, rivers to rage, and high seas to flood the land.

Source: Book of Habakkuk Minute by W. Breitenstein

Habakkuk 3:11

Verse 11 references Joshua’s victory at Gibeon, in Canaan (Joshua 10:12–13). Joshua had previously been Moses’s assistant. After Moses died, Joshua led the Israelites in the conquest of Canaan. Joshua 10:12–14 reads, “Joshua [spake] to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel.” The sun and moon provided light for a whole day so that Joshua and his army could fight the enemy.

Source: Book of Habakkuk Minute by W. Breitenstein

Habakkuk 3:12–15

In anger, God fought for His covenant people, Israel. He fought for their salvation. At the same time, He punished the wicked enemy. Some scholars believe that “thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked” refers to the pharaoh of Egypt or Canaanite leaders and that their wounding, or defeat, was thorough (from “foundation to neck” [verse 13]). In verse 14, we see further reference to the Canaanite defeat. This verse, like the others here, has several scholarly renderings. The New American Standard Bible interprets the verse this way: “You pierced with his own arrows the head of his leaders. They stormed in to scatter us; their arrogance *was* like those who devour the oppressed in secret.” Verse 15 is obviously a reference to the past parting of the Red Sea. The following verse (16) reveals Habakkuk’s anxiety as he waited for the approaching enemy (the Babylonians) to attack. As they attacked, God would unleash His power upon them.

Source: Book of Habakkuk Minute by W. Breitenstein

Habakkuk 3:16–19

At the beginning of the book, Habakkuk talked of his burden—his fear that God did not seem to be answering his prayers concerning the state of Judah and the impending attack by the Babylonians. Up to this point, throughout the book Habakkuk exhibited great anxiety over this burden. In verse 17, he saw difficult times ahead, with the loss of crops and livestock. However, by verse 18, Habakkuk started to let go of his fear and trembling despite the anticipated troubles ahead. Faith, trust, and rejoicing replaced his fears. Habakkuk remembered God’s hand in delivering ancient Israel out of Egypt, and he had sure-footed (“like hinds’ feet” [verse 19]) trust and faith that God would deliver the righteous people of Judah once again, this time out of Babylon.

Habakkuk, through his song and indeed throughout his entire prophecy, was saying that righteousness inevitably conquers evil ways. Wickedness, the enemy in our lives, will never prevail over righteousness. Faith and trust in God give us cause to rejoice!

Source: Book of Habakkuk Minute by W. Breitenstein

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