

# **Habakkuk**

## **Introduction**

Song: The Lord Is in His Holy Temple (*Habakkuk 2.20*)/#685, Praise for the Lord

Song: Living by Faith/#400, Praise for the Lord (*Habakkuk 2.4*)

- What is the significance of these two songs?** Both are based on the book of *Habakkuk* (not known to most Christians)
- Most people might think that Habakkuk is a strange kind of vegetable, or a German name, or the name of a Russian general, but...

Habakkuk is the 8<sup>th</sup> of the twelve Minor Prophets

- Why are they called “minor”?** Not because of less significance, but because they are shorter
- The arrangement of the twelve minor prophets: Before 586: longest to shortest/after 586 BC: longest to shortest
- In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the scroll of *Habakkuk* was the first to be found in 1947 – It was found in Cave 1 of Qumran – a commentary on *Habakkuk*
- See any standard Bible encyclopedia for a beautiful photograph of the *Habakkuk* scroll

## **Background to Habakkuk:**

- Assyria took over Northern Ten Tribes in 721 BC
- The Assyrian Empire fell in 612 BC to the neo-Babylonians (with the defeat of Nineveh)
- The Egyptians killed good king Josiah of the Southern Kingdom in 609 BC
- Babylonians defeated the Egyptians in 605 BC at the Battle of Carchemish (with Nebuchadnezzar rising to power)
- This was a time of great political turmoil in the Middle East
- Babylonians made three attacks on Jerusalem: 606/597/586BC (final defeat)
- 539BC – Babylonians were defeated by Medo-Persian Empire (remember statue Daniel talked about – *Daniel 2*)
- 536BC – Jews first returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel – 70 years after 606BC (as Jeremiah had said)

This was a very, very tumultuous time in world history – nations were rising and falling

## **Time for Habakkuk:**

- Probably 612-607 BC (just before the first attack on Jerusalem by the Chaldeans)

The details of *Habakkuk* correspond to *Jeremiah 22* and the reign of Jehoiakim (608-607 BC)

- The name "Habakkuk" means "embracer" or "comforter"
- We know very little about Habakkuk the man (his name is mentioned only two times in the Bible (*Habakkuk 1.1, 1.3*))
- But the messages of *Habakkuk 2.20* and *Habakkuk 2.4* were very influential on the New Testament writers

## **This book is the only one of its kind in the entire Bible**

- The other books of prophecy all were speaking on behalf of God to the people (in other words, God had a message that the prophet was to deliver to the people – that they needed to repent, or that their evil neighbors were about to be destroyed, or that the Messiah was coming)

But the book of *Habakkuk* is about the prophet who debated God about what was happening in the world – in other words, he spoke for humans and questioned God about the situation that the prophet saw taking place

**-Can you think of any other man of God who debated with God?** Moses – over saving Sodom/Gomorrah, and over destroying the Israelites in the wilderness

-Also, John the Baptist wanted to know if Jesus really was the Messiah – *Matt. 11.3-5*

But as a book of prophecy, the book of *Habakkuk* is totally unique in all the Bible

## **Habakkuk 1.1-4**

**V1** – **What is an oracle?** A “burden” (as in older translations) or message from God

-In other words, this is going to be a deep message, hard to write about, a theological discourse

**-How did Habakkuk identify himself in v 1?** A prophet

-In other words, he was from the tribe of Levi – a professional prophet – a priest at the temple in Jerusalem (not like Amos)

-According to *Habakkuk 3.19*, it seems as if he was also a musician, maybe a “song leader” in the temple

**V2** – **What had Habakkuk been doing?** Calling to God for an answer (prayer to God)

-Habakkuk seems to be upset with God; he thinks that God has not heard his prayers

**-Common today?**

**-What reply had Habakkuk gotten from God?** Nothing (yet) – so Habakkuk was getting frustrated

**-What was the subject of his prayers?** You are not doing anything about the evil in the Southern Kingdom of Israel (tribes of Judah and Benjamin)

**-What kind of evil?** Violence

-In other words, the good people are getting killed by the evil people, and you are not saving anybody

-So, why don't you do something? What is going on is terrible, but you won't do anything!

-This is very, very up-to-date – many times we think that maybe God didn't hear our prayers, and we get frustrated

**V3** – **What specific situations are listed in v 3?** Iniquity, wickedness, destruction, violence, strife, contention – sort of sounds modern, doesn't it?

-So here is the basic question: If you are a just God, then how can you allow this all to continue?

-Same question today: Why doesn't God do something about suffering in the world?

-Why doesn't He do something about the starving people in Ethiopia and Somalia?

-Why didn't He stop the tsunami that hit South East Asia and killed hundreds of thousands of people?

-So things were really falling apart in the Southern Kingdom– the country was unraveling

-Everywhere Habakkuk looked, people were disobeying God – the times were very wicked

See: *2 Kings 21* – reign of Manasseh – sacrificed his own son to idol Molech

**V4**– The list continues – **What else is Habakkuk upset about?** The law is ignored (in US today???)

-Justice is not upheld (judges take the law into their own hands)/the wicked people surrounded the righteous people, justice was perverted

-So this is why Habakkuk is so upset, that this is his “burden”: trying to understand why God hasn’t done anything about the terrible conditions in the Southern Kingdom

## **Habakkuk 1.5-11**

**V 5** – Notice the quotation marks around v 5-11 in the New American Standard Bible – **Who is speaking?** This is God speaking to Habakkuk

-God’s first message: Look around at the nations of the world (in other words, keep informed/look at what is happening)

-**Why should Habakkuk be astonished?** Because God was working among the nations of the world

-**Why had God not told Habakkuk these things in the past?** Because Habakkuk would not have believed what God was doing

-**Would we believe what God was working things out in the world today?** (A thought question)

-Major movements: rise of militant Islam/US national debt/tentative collapse of Euro//rise of China and India as would powers

-God is obviously doing something today

**V 6** – **What was God doing in about 606 BC?** He was raising up the Chaldeans (neo-Babylonians)

-**What kind of people were they?** Fierce (a little scary) and impetuous (define)

-**How did they behave when they attacked another country?** They marched and seized houses that they did not build – they liked to take land away from other people

**V 7** – **How did the other nations in the ancient world view the Babylonians?** They were dreaded and feared

-**Where did the moral system of the Babylonians come from?** Themselves

-**Technical name?** Situation ethics (humanism)

-**Do we know any country today that is practicing situation ethics?**

**V 8** – **How did God describe the horses of the Babylonians?** Swifter than leopards and keener (footnote: more eager) to attack than wolves

-in other words, Babylonians were known for their cavalry

-**Was distance a problem for the Babylonians?** No – their horsemen could come from afar

-They were like eagles that would swoop down on their enemies

-**How would you summarize the fighting ability of the Babylonians?** Fierce, brutal, no morals

**V 9** – **What was the main goal of the Babylonians?** Violence (sociopathic people – no qualms with violence)

-**Do they ever retreat?** No – they just move forward

-**How many captives had they made already?** Like the sand

Remember in *Daniel 5* about the handwriting on the wall in Babylon – when the nation fell, there were many nationalities that were sent home (including the Jews – sent back to Jerusalem)

**V 10** – **Did the Babylonians respect the rights of other nations?** No – had no regard for kindness

-**What was their attitude toward rulers in general?** Laughed at them

-**What was their attitude toward fortresses?** Laughed at them also

- What did they like to do with the fortresses of other countries?** Reduce them to rubble
- Sounds like the Nazis with their Blitzkrieg at the beginning of World War II

**V 11** – Two parts: **What is the summary about the Babylonians?** They come like the wind (Kamikaze = Divine Wind)

- But what would ultimately happen to the Babylonians?** They will face God in judgment, because their strength was their god (an ominous warning)
- See *Daniel 5* about the fall of Babylonians under the rule of Belshazzar

## **Habakkuk 1.12-17**

**V 12** – **Why are there no quotation marks for v 12-17?** Because this is Habakkuk replying to God

- What does Habakkuk see about the nature of God?** He is from everlasting (eternal)
- What is the point of that statement?** God knows more about things than we do
- What does Habakkuk conclude about the power of God?** They will survive
- Remember that when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586BC, they allowed the prophet Jeremiah to go free (and the few other righteous people left in the city)
- Did the Babylonians stop the Messianic line (genealogy of Christ)?** Absolutely not – it survived
- According to Habakkuk, why had God appointed the Babylonians as his agents?** To correct his people

**V 13** – But Habakkuk has a problem here

- What is his problem?** How can God use evil people to accomplish his will?
- in other words, God is too pure to use the Babylonians to punish the Jews

**Key point in the book of Habakkuk: v 13:** The Babylonians were more wicked than the Jews in the Southern Kingdom of Israel

- In other words, as bad as the Jews were, they were more righteous than the Babylonians (who were vicious, nasty, immoral dirty fighters)
- So what God said in *Habakkuk 1.5* is correct: If God told Habakkuk what He was doing, Habakkuk would not have believed it

**V 14** – Habakkuk: **Why did you even create people like the Babylonians, Lord?**

- How were the Babylonians like the fish of the sea?** Lawless, they go where they want to go, and no one stops them

**V 15** – **What else does Habakkuk think about the Babylonians?** They drag people away with hooks and nets

- Do the Babylonians ever show sorrow about their massacres of other nations?** No sorrow – they rejoice

**V 16** – **In a victory, who gets the praise?** The hook and the net

- Message here: they worship their strength and power – in fact, they were the superpower of the world in 606 BC

- Had the Babylonians ever suffered because of all their victories over weaker nations?** No – they were well-paid and well-fed

V 17 – Habakkuk still could not believe what God had planned

-**What was Habakkuk afraid of?** That the Babylonians would take over the world and never be stopped

-Habakkuk is really upset now; he is totally confused: **How could a just and righteous God use the Babylonians to defeat the Israelites, when the Babylonians are the most fierce and godless fighters on the planet?**

Revised 2012-09-15