

## **Habakkuk – Wrestling with God.**

Habakkuk is a short book but stands apart from all other prophetic works. A kind of reverse of what we know about Old Testament prophets. The Old Testament prophets normally spoke God's word to his people. Habakkuk speaks the people's words to God.

Habakkuk lived during very difficult times. Huge upheaval, political change, violence, blatant immorality and paganism. During Ha back cooks time Judah was invaded. The destruction of Jerusalem took place by the Babylonians.

This time was so dark that God sent many prophets to his people during this time. The time of Habakkuk was also the time of Nahum Zephaniah and Jeremiah. All these prophets were contemporaries of each other.

We don't know that much about Habakkuk. Don't know his lineage or family details. We know he was a prophet from the text itself. His name means to *embrace or to wrestle*. We will find out as we go through this book, that he did both.

While today his writings are overlooked, people in the past did not. Considered one of the crucial books of the Old Testament. It is quoted three separate times in the New Testament. In Romans, Galatians and Hebrews. So with all that in mind lets jump into the text beginning with his first complaint

### **Habakkuk's Complaint**

<sup>2</sup>How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save. <sup>3</sup>Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing. Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abound<sup>4</sup>Therefore the law is paralyzed and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

This is a serious complaint. In verse two the words 'cry out', in Hebrew means literally 'I screamed'. He could not contain himself anymore. Then he lays out his feelings and concerns in two key phrases. He says, how long and why. Further, violence was a key word for him. He refers to it six times in his writings. He uses this term in a broad way. Relational violence, legal violence, economic violence. Any way you can do violence to somebody.

What does Habakkuk with all this? He takes it straight to God. In the bible people who sought blessing, left the kind of blessing up to God. Habakkuk isn't running away from his faith. He's actually running to it. So, in Habakkuk two we have God's answer.

<sup>5</sup> "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. <sup>6</sup> I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own.

<sup>7</sup> They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor.

**8** Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like a vulture swooping to devour; **9** they all come bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. **10** They deride kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; they build earthen ramps and capture them. **11** Then they sweep past like the wind and go on— guilty men, whose own strength is their god."

This is not what Habakkuk had in mind? God is going to use their worst enemy to ravage Judah and that is exactly what happened. Babylon invaded Judah and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. This sent the entire nation into exile. God had warned his people time and again but they wouldn't listen. He had sent them prophet after prophet but they still wouldn't listen.

So, the prophet responds to this terrible news in 1:12 – 2:1. He can't understand how God will use such a vile people to bring justice. God is well aware of Babylon's greed, injustice and violence. God says to the prophet that he knows about Babylon's depravity and although he will use them, they too will be punished.

Verse twenty is significant. **20** But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him." After Habakkuk's interaction with God, his complaints and God's response we are left with this verse. In other words, its time to stop that talk now and accept that God is on his throne and has spoken. The prophet acknowledges God in this prayer,

Chapter three, **3** God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. (Selah) His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth.**4** His splendor was like the sunrise rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden. **5** Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps.**6** He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal. **7** I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish. **8** Were you angry with the rivers, O LORD? Was your wrath against the streams? Did you rage against the sea when you rode with your horses and your victorious chariots?

**9** You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows. You split the earth with rivers; **10** the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its waves on high.**11** Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear. **12** In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations.**13** 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 **14** 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.**15** You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters.

Here Habakkuk hits the scroll button about who God is and how he has acted and the people of Israel's experience with their God. The final part of the prayer is personal.

**3: 16** 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.**17** 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,**18** yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.**19** The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

So how does this ongoing dialogue end? We see a dramatic end. Here at the end of the conversation. No more questions, no more complaints, no more concerns. Habakkuk falls on his knees and prays.

As I studied this book this really gripped me. If you knew in advance as Habakkuk does that your life was going to be hard. Full of suffering and hardship. Would you then praise him and write a worship song about him? That's what Habakkuk did.

I am in awe of him. He knew exactly what was coming. The terror he and Israel faced with the coming Babylonians. If you knew all that would your response, be to say what an incredible God you are. No matter what happens I will have confidence in you and hope that good will eventually prevail.

**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28**