

# The Book of Habakkuk

## Chapter 1: God, I don't understand - 1:1- 2:1

Pastor Andy Shanholtz

### INTRODUCTION:

Habakkuk 1:1, *"The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received."*

Habakkuk's name comes from the Hebrew root that means to 'Embrace.' Ancient rabbinical teaching connected this with 2 Kings 4, the Shunammite's son, whom Elisha prophesied that she would embrace a son one year from the day. The son died and was raised from the dead by Elisha.

He was a prophet, a contemporary of Zephaniah and Jeremiah, who prophesied the invasion of Judah by Babylon and the destruction of Jerusalem. Habakkuk may have been connected with the temple singers making him a Levite (Hab 3:19). The setting is around the 7th or 6th century BC.

The style of Habakkuk is unique. Instead of addressing the people directly as God's spokesman; Habakkuk imparts his message as a dialogue between himself and God based upon certain questions that perplexed him.

The prophecy is divided into two parts:

1. Chapters 1-2, is the dialogue between Habakkuk and God concerning the Lord's announcement of the approaching judgment upon sinful Judah at the hands of Babylon.
2. Chapter 3, is a prayer in the form of a Psalm. The Psalm is a remembrance of the mighty works of God in the past for His people and a prayer for the Lord to revive His work on behalf of Israel.

As we go through Habakkuk, the Main Truths we will see are:

1. This is a moral universe. Sin will be judged. Even God's chosen people are responsible for their acts. (Galatians 6:7, sowing and reaping)
2. Even in this fallen world, God is still in control of events. He uses evil for His purposes, but it will also be judged.
3. It is acceptable to question God. However; often it is God's presence, not rational answers, that satisfy. (Book of Job)

4. Habakkuk is the source of the Apostle Paul's theological theme of "Justification by Faith" (Hab 2:4). Evil will destroy itself eventually. God's people must exercise faith in the midst of evil days. Faith must not be linked to current circumstances (Hab 3:17-19).

*Habakkuk 1:2-4, "How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted."*

Habakkuk is anxious to reconcile what he sees with what he believes. Many of us struggle with this as well, especially about the being and character of God. Habakkuk saw Israel in a backslidden condition. She had turned away from God and given herself over to false gods and sin.

### **There are two things Habakkuk couldn't understand:**

1. Why God was Inactive

Why is it that God permits certain things to happen? Why doesn't God just strike evil people dead? Why hasn't God answered the prayers of His faithful people?

God sometimes gives unexpected answers to our prayers - Habakkuk 1:5, *"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."* We all tend to prescribe to God how we want Him to answer our prayers. We think that God can only come in one way. Sometimes God answers our prayers by allowing things to get worse before they get better.

*Habakkuk 1:6-11, "I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own. They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor. Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle swooping to devour; they all come intent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. They mock kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; by building earthen ramps they capture them. Then they sweep past like the wind and go on - guilty people, whose own strength is their god."*

The plain teaching of Habakkuk is that God may use very strange instruments and at times the very last instrument we could have expected. The Babylonians also completely failed to realize that they were being used by God thus imputed all their success to their own god. (v11)

2. How is all this reconciled with the Holiness of God?

To help answer that we need to review some general Biblical principles:

- a. God is sovereign, He is over everything. God started the historical process, He is controlling it and He is going to end it.
- b. God who sees the end from the beginning has a purpose in it all and knows the time and the seasons.
- c. God does not stop to consult with us; everything takes place according to the counsel of His own will.

God sometimes delays His answer in order to deal with selfishness or things in our lives that should not be there.

After stating his difficulties and listening to God's reply, Habakkuk declares:

Habakkuk 1:12-16, *"Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, you will never die. You, Lord, have appointed them to execute judgment; you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. After declaring the divine attributes of God and His character; Habakkuk reminds God as to how evil the Babylonians are. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? You have made people like the fish in the sea, like the sea creature that have no ruler. The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so rejoices and is glad. Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest foods.*

Habakkuk again states his perplexity as to how a Holy God can use someone as evil as the Babylonians. Habakkuk 1:17, *"Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?"*

Let me close with this question: **What do we do when no answer is given and we are still perplexed?** I must commit the unresolved problem to God and leave it with Him as I call to remembrance the character and nature of God.

Habakkuk 2:1, *“I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.*

Next week we will look at God’s answer to Habakkuk!

## Chapter 2: The Just Shall Live by Faith - 2:2-20

Habakkuk 2:1, *"I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint."* Unable to reconcile the problem, the prophet prepares himself to await further revelation concerning God's purpose in the use of the Babylonians against Judah.

God answers him in a vision, Habakkuk 2:2-3, *"Then the Lord replied: 'Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and not delay.'" The vision is to be written down as a permanent record for others to read, as well as to confirm that Babylon's overthrow when it occurs, was foretold by God.*

God answers Habakkuk's question by declaring that judgment is coming and YHWH (God) will act.

The phrase in (v2), *'so a herald may run with it'* - the Hebrew for run is used in the sense of run and announce the divine revelation. God is telling Habakkuk to make the message so plain that all who who read it may run to tell of the coming overthrow of Babylon and the deliverance of the faithful in Judah.

(v3) gives the reason for committing the prophecy to writing: it's fulfillment is yet future; it is yet for the appointed time. It's certainty of fulfillment is stressed by the Lord, who encourages Habakkuk, as well as the faithful in Judah, not to be discouraged by any apparent delay in its accomplishment, for though it linger, wait for it; because it will surely come and not delay (Heb. fail to be realized).

DELAY IS NOT DENIAL!

The author of Hebrews alludes to Hab 2:3-4 in Hebrews 10:37-38; applying its sense to encourage those Jews, who were being tempted to give up their faith due to persecution, to hold fast.

Habakkuk 2:4, *"See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright - but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness -"* After God gives the prophet instruction about writing the vision; He unveils the message of consolation; the righteous person will live by his faithfulness (**some translations read the just shall live by faith**); whereas the proud and wicked shall perish as verses 4-20 will show.

Thus, the revelation unfolds as a universal, spiritual principle, which is applicable to all men in every dispensation. The essence of sin is pride! After the sins of Judah have been punished, God will turn His attention to their oppressors, the Babylonians (Chaldeans) and punish that wicked nation. The Babylonian nation, although seeming to prosper in its course of ruthless conquest for the present, is merely executing God's righteous judgments. The righteous shall be delivered and live by virtue of their faithfulness.

The Apostle Paul cites Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17 translating it, "*the righteous shall live by faith.*" This verse in Romans became the basis of Protestantism led by Martin Luther.

When the scriptures inform us that "the righteous shall live by faith" (Hab 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11), this is not meant to be limited to the initial salvation experience but implies that the believer has been called to "live by faith" in regard to his daily life as well, trusting God in every way and for everything. Hebrews 11:6, "*...without faith it is impossible to please God.*"

God's reply to Habakkuk teaches, that the righteous man exercises an abiding trust in God in the face of adversity and trials, as well as in every circumstance of life.

The life of faith is based upon the confidence that God is faithful to do all that He has pledged Himself to do in His word. (Numbers 23:19; Hebrews 10:23)  
When we understand God's character then we can rest in His promise of deliverance.

Habakkuk 2:5, "*Indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.*" This describes the Babylonian military machine in its pride and greed. The imagery of wine is descriptive of how their military conquest has become an intoxicant to them.

Habakkuk 2:6-20 addresses the five woes. The five woes are true not only with respect to the Babylonians, but as a universal principle in history. Everything that is evil is under the judgment of God who is sovereign over all.

Maybe not in our way or timing but in God's perfect timing and way.

The 5 Woes:

1. Woe to him who increases what is not his.

Habakkuk 2:6-8, *“Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying, Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on? Will not your creditors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their prey. Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed human blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.”*

2. Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house.

Habakkuk 2:9-11, *“Woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain, setting his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin! You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your house and forfeiting your life. The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.”*

3. Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed.

Habakkuk 2:12-14, *“Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by injustice! Has not the Lord Almighty determined that the people’s labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

Evil conquest will be temporary but God and His purposes will fill the earth - this is a future reference to the Millennial Reign of Christ upon the earth, where He will literally reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords for 1000 years.

4. Woe to him who makes his neighbors drunk

Habakkuk 2:15-17, *“Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies! You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and let your nakedness be exposed The cup from the Lord’s right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory. The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed human blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.*

Imagery of Babylon’s military expansion that is characterized as making nations drunk which causes actions that expose them.

5. Woe to him because of Idolatry

Habakkuk 2:18-20, *“Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman? Or an image that teaches lies? For the one who makes it trust in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life!’ Or to lifeless stone, ‘Wake*

*up!’ Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it. The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him.”*

The final woe is introduced with a question concerning the value of trusting in pagan gods of wood and stone.

Habakkuk in conclusion, contrasts the Living God of Israel who has power to save or destroy; with dumb idol gods of the heathen. Therefore, let all the earth give reverence to Him i.e, be silent in His presence.

Let us put our hands upon our mouths that are so ready to speak foolishly. Let us realize that God is there in the Temple of the Universe reigning over all. Let us magnify His grace, His might, His power, His goodness and in quiet peace of heart, mind and soul, **wait for Him!**



## Chapter 3: How to Pray - 3:1-2

We come to chapter 3, which is a prayer in the form of a Psalm. The Psalm is a remembrance of the mighty works of God in the past for His people and a prayer for the Lord to revive His work on behalf of Israel.

Habakkuk 3:1, *“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth.”* The exact meaning of shigionoth is uncertain, it is a musical term indicating the type of rhythm the Psalm is to be sung to; (in this instance, a song of triumph).

The whole chapter is a record of the prophet’s prayer. Prayer is more than petition; it includes praise, thanksgiving, recollection and adoration. **(We have to stop negativity and satan’s attack on our minds)**. The great prayers of the Bible are those men who reminded God of what He had done in the past.

What we see in Habakkuk 3:2 is a model of what the Christian’s attitude should always be at a time of trouble or crisis. *“Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.”*

### ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS IN TRUE PRAYER:

#### 1. Humiliation

We first notice the self humbling of the prophet or his attitude of humility. There is no longer any arguing with God or questioning His ways as at first.

We find now, a recognition that what God says He will do is perfectly right; that God is absolutely just, and that the punishment which is going to come upon Israel is well deserved - an attitude of complete submission to the will of God.

#### How was Habakkuk brought to such a position?

It was when he stopped thinking of his own nation, or the Babylonians, and contemplated only the holiness and justice of God against the dark background of sin in the world.

Our troubles can nearly all be traced to our persistence in looking at the immediate problems themselves, instead of looking at them in the light of God. He had to stop

thinking in terms of fact that the Babylonians were worse sinners than the Jews and that yet God was going to use them, perplexing though this problem was.

If our attitude is still one of, 'Why does God allow this?' 'What have we done to deserve this?' - Then we have not learned the lesson that Habakkuk did.

### 2. Adoration - *"...I stand in awe of your deeds..."*

This suggests awe in the presence of such a great God, worshipful adoration and wonder at God and His ways. God had told Habakkuk something about his historical plan, and the prophet, meditating upon the fact that God is in His holy temple and the world beneath His feet, stood in amazement with reverential awe.

In today's culture we have lost that sense of awe of the holiness and greatness of who God is. In past generations there was such a great respect and reverence toward the character and nature of God that when they had an encounter with God it left them speechless.

We must learn to see God in His holy temple above the flux of history and above the changing scenes of time. In God's presence the one thing that stands out is the holy nature of God and our own sin.

### 3. Petition

The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:6, *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* True prayer always includes these same three elements: humiliation, adoration and petition.

### **What is Habakkuk's petition?**

Not a petition for deliverance or ease, nor a petition that God will spare, nor that there may be no war against Babylon or for God to change His plans. The prophet's one burden now was a concern for God's cause, God's work and God's purpose in his own nation and in the entire world.

Habakkuk prayed for a reviving of God's cause in Israel; in verse 2, *"...I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our days, in our time make them known."*

Whenever God sends revival it is always accompanied by purification and correction to get rid of evil, sin and anything that would hinder God's cause.

While the church is being preserved, purified and corrected, she is at the same time being prepared for deliverance.

Habakkuk's final appeal; "...*in wrath, remember mercy.*" By wrath is meant God's perfect righteousness and justice. The only thing he does is remind God of His own nature, and of that other aspect of his holy being - His mercy!

The personal application of this principle leads us to ask ourselves; is there something in my life that merits the chastening hand of God? The trouble is that we always look at the situation and the problem instead of trying to discover whether there is anything in our souls that leads God to deal with us.

The moment I become really concerned about the state of my soul, instead of my affliction, I am on the high road to God's blessings.

We will wrap up our series next week by looking at how we can rejoice in the midst of tribulation!

## Chapter 4: How to Rejoice in Tribulation - 3:3-19

In answer to Habakkuk's prayer, he receives a glorious revelation of God.

Habakkuk 3:3-4, *"God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth. His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden."* This reveals the splendor of God's visitation from Sinai where He first entered into covenant with His people.

It is this revelation and calling to remembrance God's faithfulness, His just and righteous nature; that enables Habakkuk to rejoice in tribulation. Let's look at these principles as a basis for us to rejoice during our own trials.

### How to Rejoice in Tribulation?

1. Remember past victories of God's faithfulness

Whenever, in the Psalms, the writer faces trying situations, he invariably looks back at the history of God's dealings with men and then finds himself praising God and rejoicing.

After describing the glory and splendor of the appearance of the Lord, Habakkuk next turns to God's purpose: **God comes in judgment to deliver His people.**

Habakkuk 3:5, *"Plague went before Him; pestilence followed His steps."* This recalls the ten plagues upon the Egyptians in behalf of Israel's deliverance.

Habakkuk 3:6-7, *"He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed - but He marches on forever. I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish."* This recalls God's deliverance of Israel from the Egyptians, Amalekites, Palestine and nations east and west of the Red Sea.

(v6) *"...he marches on forever."* Signifies that as God acted in behalf of his people in the past in their deliverance from Egypt; so He will act in the future.

Habakkuk 3:8-10, *"Were you angry with the rivers, Lord? Was your wrath against the streams? Did you rage against the sea when you rode your horses and your chariots to victory? You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows, You split the earth with rivers; the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared*

*and lifted its waves on high.*” God demonstrates His power over creation in order to effect the salvation of his people.

Habakkuk 3:11, *“Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear.”* This recalls God’s intervention on Joshua’s behalf. God’s sovereign control over creation in order to deliver and protect his people. (Joshua 10)

Habakkuk 3:12-15, *“In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations. 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. 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. You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waves.”* God is portrayed as a great warrior leading His troops through the sea to the promised land.

## 2. God knows our frame

Habakkuk 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 days of calamity to come on the nation invading us.”* Being human and seeing the judgments that are coming, Habakkuk is filled with fear. He is honest enough to tell us that when he heard what God had to tell him, he trembled like a leaf. (ref. 1 Corinthians 10:13)

There is a distinction between lack of faith and the weakness of the flesh. Jesus had said to his disciples during a time of prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, *‘the spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak.’*

There are a number of examples of men of faith who grew weary or exhausted during times of testing; Elijah running from Jezebel after a great victory on Mt Carmel; David being hunted by King Saul; Apostle Paul asking that the thorn of the flesh be taken from him and God responding that my grace is sufficient during your time of weakness.

These examples assure us that God understands us and in mercy will show us a way out of our difficulties. ***(Elijah fed by ravens at the water brook; Zarephath widow oil & flour, son dies and is raised up by Elijah, Prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel)***

## 3. Offer a Sacrifice of Praise

Habakkuk 3:17-18, *“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, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in*

*God my Savior.*” In spite of the fact that the Babylonian invasion soon to come would leave the land bare and devastated, the prophet, in behalf of Israel, expresses hope of salvation and of ultimate restoration.

Habakkuk 3:19, *“The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.”*

Habakkuk having begun his prayer with fear and trembling as a result of the report which the Lord had given him concerning the nations punishment at the hands of the ruthless Babylonians, concludes on a note of triumph, confessing his faith in Israel’s final salvation and restoration to her land.

July 2017