**Habakkuk Bible Study – May, 8, 2020**

**General Information**

* Habakkuk is a unique prophetic book. Rather than speaking to the people on God’s behalf, Habakkuk spoke to God on behalf of the people (typically, this would be descriptive of a priest, but Habakkuk is deemed a prophet because of his unique encounter with God and his writing of proclamation and woes).
* Habakkuk is a prophet of the Neo-Babylonian Era, which are prophets that prophesy after the Assyrian conquering of Israel, and around the Babylonian Conquest of Judah.
* The book of Habakkuk looks at an issue that often people are left confused: trying to discern God’s purpose in the midst of this world and its circumstances. We ultimately live abundantly only through faith. Habakkuk’s message that the righteous will live by faith prepared the way for the greater understanding of this truth in the New Testament, which emphasizes salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ.

**Historical Background**

* Author: Habakkuk. He is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. Name may be non-Hebraic, but may come from the Hebrew word “to embrace.”
* Background: Habakkuk predicted the invasion of Judah by the Chaldeans (1:6). The term Chaldean originally was a term used to describe an ethic group of people originating in Southern Babylon. By the time Habakkuk is writing, Chaldean came to be synonymous with Babylon.
* Date: Habakkuk probably wrote his prophesy during the time of trouble after the death of King Josiah of Judah in 609 BC but before the capture of Jerusalem in 587 BC and the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. That places Habakkuk’s date during the reign of Jehoiakim, probably in the period of the Egyptian domination before Babylon invaded Judah in 609-605 BC.
* Message and Purpose: Habakkuk deals with the problem of understanding God’s ways: Why does God allow injustice to prevail? How can God use the more wicked to punish the less wicked? How long will God allow evildoers to dominate the world?
  + God did not give a clear answer to the question Habakkuk raised. Instead **He called on the godly to have faith.** When Habakkuk declared he would rejoice in God no matter what, he showed that he had accepted this message to his own life.
  + Habakkuk shows the greatness of God. He is eternal, unlike any other gods. He raises up nations to accomplish his purposes and shakes the world through pestilence and war.
  + Habakkuk declares God as holy and expected Him to oppose injustice immediately. It may something be hard to see the justice of God working through the events of human history, but though God may use the wicked acts of men for his good purpose and allow evil to prevail for a time, ultimately the wicked will pay for their crimes and God will come to save his people and crush the wicked.
  + The key verse of Habakkuk is 2:4. Though we find it difficult to fathom the ways of God with man, we can learn, as Habakkuk did, to trust and exult in God’s goodness despite our imperfect understanding.

**Habakkuk 1:1-11**

**The Place of the Passage**

Habakkuk cries out to God for help (1:2–4), but God responds that He has already begun answering Habakkuk’s prayer (vv. 5–11). Indeed, he responds to Habakkuk, “I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told” (v. 5). God is raising up foreign powers as instruments in his hand to bring justice and peace[1](https://www.esv.org/#lamentations-habakkuk-and-zephaniah-week-6-gods-answer-to-prayer-fn1) to his people.

**Habakkuk 1:1-11**

**1**The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

**Habakkuk’s First Prayer**

**2** O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,  
    and you will not hear?  
Or cry to you “Violence!”  
    and you will not save?

**3** Why do you make me see iniquity,  
    and why do you idly look at wrong?  
Destruction and violence are before me;  
    strife and contention arise.

**4** So the law is paralyzed,  
    and justice never goes forth.  
For the wicked surround the righteous;  
    so justice goes forth perverted.

**God’s First Answer**

**5** “Look among the nations, and see;  
    wonder and be astounded.  
For I am doing a work in your days  
    that you would not believe if told.

**6** For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,  
    that bitter and hasty nation,

who march through the breadth of the earth,  
    to seize dwellings not their own.

**7** They are dreaded and fearsome;  
    their justice and dignity go forth from themselves.

**8** Their horses are swifter than leopards,  
    more fierce than the evening wolves;  
    their horsemen press proudly on.  
Their horsemen come from afar;  
    they fly like an eagle swift to devour.

**9** They all come for violence,  
    all their faces forward.  
    They gather captives like sand.

**10** At kings they scoff,  
    and at rulers they laugh.  
They laugh at every fortress,  
    for they pile up earth and take it.

**11** Then they sweep by like the wind and go on,  
    guilty men, whose own might is their god!”

**Critical Questions**

1. Why does Habakkuk cry out to God in the first few verses? What is his complaint?
2. How does God describe the Chaldeans in V6-11? How do they match up with God?
3. In what did the Babylonians worship (v. 11)? They have been raised up by the Lord to judge his people, but he will still deal with them for their own transgressions. How does the Babylonians’ worship foreshadow their future? Does their future look similar to that of the wicked rulers of Judah itself?

**Truth for Today**

**SURPRISING GRACE.** God’s grace transcends our understanding. He challenges Habakkuk to “wonder and be astounded,” for he is “doing a work . . . that you would not believe if told” (Hab. 1:5). A temptation in prayer that we might struggle with is trying to tell God how he should answer. This presumes that we know what we need in any given circumstance. However, in Isaiah the Lord declares, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8–9). We cannot comprehend God’s ways. Since he is kind and compassionate toward his people, we cannot comprehend the manifold ways in which he desires to bless us. God surprises his people and exceeds their greatest expectations. Paul cites Habakkuk 1:5 in Acts 13:41 as he preaches the marvelous work of Christ. Grace is receiving that which we do not deserve, and, when received from God, it is also that which we cannot fully comprehend. (Camden Bucey)

**DIVINE VS HUMAN KNOWLEDGE.**God is omniscient and incomprehensible. Human knowledge is real and true, but it differs from God’s knowledge in significant ways. God is the original and ultimate knower, whereas humans are finite and creaturely knowers. Rather than rushing to judge God, we must consider our relation to him as creatures. We must also consider the “big picture” in relation to God’s promises. Sometimes it looks like the wicked are “winning,” but God has a plan, which he has revealed to his people through creation (Ps. 19:1–2), his Word (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:16–21), and, ultimately, in his Son, Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1–4).

**GOOD FROM EVIL.** Habakkuk’s experience is another example of how the Lord uses the wicked to accomplish good. In Genesis 50:19–20, Joseph spoke with his brothers, who had previously sold him into slavery. Now that he was a powerful and influential leader in Egypt, they feared he might bring retribution upon them and their families. “But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.’” Joseph was a type of Christ. His life foreshadowed and prefigured the sufferings of Christ and his subsequent exaltation to bless his people. While others meant evil against Jesus, God meant it for good. Christ was crucified only to be raised from the dead for the salvation of his people. In the midst of suffering, it appears that the wicked have triumphed. But the Lord uses the wicked as an instrument to accomplish his plans. He moves mysteriously but always succeeds in his time, according to his plan.

**Habakkuk 1:12-2:20**

## The Place of the Passage

## Having learned of God’s plan to use the Babylonians to bring justice to Judah, Habakkuk struggles to understand how God could use a wicked nation to judge a nation that is seemingly less wicked. The Lord’s righteousness is vindicated as he punishes the wicked and justifies the one who lives by faith.

## The Big Picture

## While it appears that evil is going unpunished, in his time the Lord brings justice to all by sparing the ones who live by faith in him.

**Habakkuk 1:12-2:20**

**Habakkuk’s Second Prayer**

**12** Are you not from everlasting,  
    O Lord my God, my Holy One?  
    We shall not die.  
O Lord, you have ordained them as a judgment,  
    and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.

**13** You who are of purer eyes than to see evil  
    and cannot look at wrong,  
why do you idly look at traitors  
    and remain silent when the wicked swallows up  
    the man more righteous than he?

**14** You make mankind like the fish of the sea,  
    like crawling things that have no ruler.

**15** Hebrings all of them up with a hook;  
    he drags them out with his net;  
he gathers them in his dragnet;  
    so he rejoices and is glad.

**16** Therefore he sacrifices to his net  
and makes offerings to his dragnet;  
for by them he lives in luxury,   
    and his food is rich.

**17** Is he then to keep on emptying his net  
    and mercilessly killing nations forever?

**Habakkuk Waits for God’s Response**

**2:1** I will take my stand at my watchpost  
    and station myself on the tower,  
and look out to see what he will say to me,  
    and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

**God’s Second Answer**

**2** And the Lord answered me:

“Write the vision;  
    make it plain on tablets,  
    so he may run who reads it.

**3** For still the vision awaits its appointed time;  
    it hastens to the end—it will not lie.  
If it seems slow, wait for it;  
    it will surely come; it will not delay.

**4**“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,  
    but the righteous shall live by his faith.

**5** “Moreover, wineis a traitor,  
    an arrogant man who is never at rest.   
His greed is as wide as Sheol;  
    like death he has never enough.  
He gathers for himself all nations  
    and collects as his own all peoples.”

**The Five Woes Oracles**

**6** Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say,

“Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own—  
    for how long?—  
    and loads himself with pledges!”

**7** Will not your debtors suddenly arise,  
    and those awake who will make you tremble?  
    Then you will be spoil for them.

**8** Because you have plundered many nations,  
    all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you,  
for the blood of man and violence to the earth,  
    to cities and all who dwell in them.

**9** “Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house,  
    to set his nest on high,  
    to be safe from the reach of harm!

**10** You have devised shame for your house  
    by cutting off many peoples;  
    you have forfeited your life.

**11** For the stone will cry out from the wall,  
    and the beam from the woodwork respond.

**12** “Woe to him who builds a town with blood  
    and founds a city on iniquity!

**13** Behold, is it not from the Lord of hosts  
    that peoples labor merely for fire,  
    and nations weary themselves for nothing?

**14** For the earth will be filled  
    with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord  
    as the waters cover the sea.

**15** “Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink—  
    you pour out your wrath and make them drunk,  
    in order to gaze at their nakedness!

**16** You will have your fill of shame instead of glory.  
    Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision!  
The cup in the Lord's right hand  
    will come around to you,  
    and utter shame will come upon your glory!

**17** The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,  
    as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them,  
for the blood of man and violence to the earth,  
    to cities and all who dwell in them.

**18** “What profit is an idol  
    when its maker has shaped it,  
    a metal image, a teacher of lies?  
For its maker trusts in his own creation  
    when he makes speechless idols!

**19** Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake;  
to a silent stone, Arise!  
Can this teach?  
Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver,  
    and there is no breath at all in it.

**20** But the Lord is in his holy temple;  
    let all the earth keep silence before him.”

**Critical Questions**

1. What does Habakkuk’s second complaint disclose about his knowledge of God’s character (vv. 12–13)?
2. Why is Habakkuk troubled by the Lord’s decision to use Babylon to bring judgment on Judah (vv. 15–17)?
3. Where has Habakkuk stationed himself in 2:1? What is he doing, and what does this indicate about his hope and expectations?
4. What does the Lord’s response beginning in verse 2 indicate about his intended audience? To whom is he speaking, ultimately?
5. What does it mean for the righteous to “live by his faith” (2:4; see also Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38)?
6. In what do the wicked ultimately trust (v. 18)?
7. Why does Babylon deserve its coming punishment (vv. 6, 9, 12, 15, 19)?

Truth for Today

**THE LORD’S PLAN.** The fulfillment of God’s prophecy would not come immediately; it awaited “its appointed time” (Hab. 2:2–3). Therefore, Habakkuk was to be patient (v. 3). Judah would be judged soon, but judgment upon the Babylonians would come later. God is gracious to reveal his plan to Habakkuk. As it did generations ago, God’s Word calms our restless hearts and provides comfort today.

**DIVINE CHASTISEMENT.** God treats his people according to his covenant love. He chastises his people for sin, and the judgment he sends at the hands of the Babylonians is meant to move his people to trust in him rather than in themselves. Even though it is meant for good, however, chastisement is still painful. Habakkuk had asked for the Lord’s justice, but the Lord’s response seems too strong. To Habakkuk, this appears to be an entire reversal of God’s covenant mercies toward his people. A nation seemingly more wicked than Judah will carry Judah away. And yet, divine chastisement must be received in humility; the recipient must acknowledge that the ways of the Lord are good and wise. The Lord is gracious even to correct the sins of his people.

**LIVING BY FAITH.** Habakkuk may be understood to be asking for preferential treatment for the people of God. While they experience a special relationship to the Lord, no one deserves preferential treatment in terms of God’s justice, for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). The discriminating factor in how God treats mankind is their relationship to the Savior, Jesus Christ. Those who believe upon him for salvation have a righteousness not their own. More than that, they have a fundamentally different way of life: “The righteous shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4). The apostle Paul refers to this passage several times in his epistles. Far from being an incidental statement in Habakkuk, this passage declares the profound truth of the believer’s new mode of life in Christ. He or she lives by faith (2 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 2:4–10). People speak often of faith in general as referring to believing in something we cannot perceive with the senses. Faith is only *saving faith* if it has the proper object. That is, it truly matters only if it is faith *in Christ*. Saving faith is an abiding trust in God that he will accomplish all that he has promised to do. Jesus Christ is the object of saving faith, for he has been faithful to establish a new covenant in his own blood, having died for the sins of his people and having been raised for their salvation. The one who believes on Jesus will be spared from judgment, for he shares the perfect righteousness of Christ (Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9).

**JUDGMENT.** A judgment is an assessment of something or someone, especially as a moral assessment. This occurs in various forms throughout salvation history. The Bible also speaks of a final day of judgment when Christ returns, at which all those who have refused to repent will be judged (Rev. 20:12–15). Through Christ, believers are not judged according to their own record. They are found to be in Christ, clinging to his righteousness. Unbelievers, however, are found to be sinners. In Revelation 18:1–19:4, John uses the fall of Babylon to point his readers toward further judgment on evil. The passage ends with a song of praise to the Lord on his throne. As the people exult over the downfall of their enemies, they consummate the taunt of Habakkuk 2:6–20.

## Habakkuk 3

## The Place of the Passage

## Habakkuk remembers God’s works in history and asks the Lord to reveal his wrath and mercy once again. He prays to the Lord, demonstrating his trust in him through confession of faith. This moves Habakkuk to rejoice in the Lord, for he knows the Lord is his strength (3:18–19).

## The Big Picture

## Habakkuk looks beyond his immediate circumstances to rejoice in the Lord, who provides strength.

## Habakkuk 3:1-19

## Habakkuk’s Third Prayer

## 1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.

## 2 O Lord, I have heard the report of you,     and your work, O Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it;     in the midst of the years make it known;     in wrath remember mercy.

## 3 God came from Teman,     and the Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah* His splendor covered the heavens,     and the earth was full of his praise.

## 4 His brightness was like the light;     rays flashed from his hand;     and there he veiled his power.

## 5 Before him went pestilence,     and plague followed at his heels.

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## 6 He stood and measured the earth;     he looked and shook the nations; then the eternal mountains were scattered;     the everlasting hills sank low.     His were the everlasting ways.

## 7 I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction;     the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

## 8 Was your wrath against the rivers, O Lord?     Was your anger against the rivers,     or your indignation against the sea, when you rode on your horses,     on your chariot of salvation?

## 9 You stripped the sheath from your bow,     calling for many arrows.  *Selah*     You split the earth with rivers.

## 10 The mountains saw you and writhed;     the raging waters swept on; the deep gave forth its voice;     it lifted its hands on high.

## 11 The sun and moon stood still in their place     at the light of your arrows as they sped,     at the flash of your glittering spear.

## 12 You marched through the earth in fury;     you threshed the nations in anger.

## 13 You went out for the salvation of your people,     for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked,     laying him bare from thigh to neck.  *Selah*

## 14 You pierced with his own arrows the heads of his warriors,     who came like a whirlwind to scatter me,     rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret.

## 15 You trampled the sea with your horses,     the surging of mighty waters.

## Habakkuk’s Confidence in God

## 16 I hear, and my body trembles;     my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones;     my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble     to come upon people who invade us.

## 17 Though the fig tree should not blossom,     nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail     and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold     and there be no herd in the stalls,

## 18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord;     I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

## 19 God, the Lord, is my strength;     he makes my feet like the deer's;     he makes me tread on my high places.

## To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.

**Critical Questions**

1. In his prayer, Habakkuk declares that he has heard of the Lord’s saving work. How does God deal with his people (v. 2)? Does he issue strict justice according to his people’s actions?
2. Compare 3:16 with 1:2. How has Habakkuk been changed by the Lord’s responses to his cries for help?
3. Does Habakkuk’s joy stem from his immediate circumstances (vv. 17–19)? What is the source of his joy?

**Truth for Today**

**GOD’S RECORD OF GRACE.** Habakkuk’s prayer is an example of how God’s history of grace informs our vision for the future. By looking back on what God has done in our lives and the lives of his people, we see his character. This strengthens our faith, and we can have confidence that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

**THE LORD’S VICTORY.** Habakkuk declares that the Lord has the victory: “You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck” (Hab. 3:13). Jesus is the Lord’s anointed (v. 13). He suffered at the hands of wicked men, though he did so willingly (Isa. 53:7; Matt. 26:39; John 10:18). Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Lord fulfilled the prophecy against the serpent in Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” In Christ, sin, death, and the Devil will be defeated forever.

**GOD’S FAITHFULNESS.** God is committed to his people. He promises never to leave or forsake them (Deut. 31:6). They may be confident in this fact, because the Lord is who he is. It does not depend on the will of man to keep this commitment. Human beings fail, but God always succeeds (2 Cor. 1:20). While God’s people endure suffering and hardship, the Lord is mighty and faithful to save. Jesus spoke of the man who built his house upon the rock: “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it” (Matt. 7:25–27). Jesus’ words are sure and sound. When our lives are built upon him and his precious and great promises (2 Pet. 1:3–4), we can be confident that we will endure any torment of suffering in this life.

**Appendix A: Kings Israel and Judah**

