

# The Prophet Habakkuk

## “In Wrath Remember Mercy”

### Introductory Details

**Author:** The Prophet Habakkuk

**Subject:** YHWH works even through evil nations like Babylon to accomplish His good purposes

**Date:** c605 (Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem in 605)

**Mission Field:** The Nation of Judah

**Current Kings:** Jehoahaz (609), Jehoiakim (609 – 598); Israel has already been defeated by Assyria.

**Contemporary Prophets:** *Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel*

**Style:** The whole book is poetry. Habakkuk's complaints sound much like the many “Complaint Psalms.” The poetic section of “Woes” takes on the lamenting tone of other prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah). And Habakkuk's final prayer (ch 3) includes many features only found in the Psalms.

**Luther on Habakkuk:** This Habakkuk is a prophet of comfort, who is to strengthen and support the people, to prevent them from despairing of the coming of Christ, however strangely things may go. This is why he uses every device and stratagem that can serve to keep strong in their hearts the faith in the promised Christ.

### Difficulties for Readers

*The Problem of Evil-* Habakkuk is similar to the Book of Job in questioning why evil exists and why God would allow His people to suffer. God's answers may not always seem fair or just to us. We must realize that God's ways transcend ours.

### Structure of the Book

- I. The Debate between Habakkuk and God (1:2 – 2:5)
- II. YHWH's Justice is Certain: Woes to the Arrogant Oppressors (2:6 – 20)
- III. Habakkuk's Psalm of Submission (3:1-19)

1:1 “Oracle”- *Nahum* was also called an oracle, but Habakkuk is not completely directed at the Chaldeans

#### **I. The Debate between Habakkuk and God: The Problem of Evil (1:2 – 2:5)**

1:2-4 Habakkuk's first complaint: There's a lack of justice in Judah

This complaint sounds almost identical to modern debates about Theodicy (The Problem of Evil)

1:5-11 YHWH's response: His plan for avenging evil

This is the key section for understanding the rest of what comes in the book

1:5- “I am doing a work”- even the political and military happenings are under God's guidance

1:6- “Chaldeans”- Aramaic tribes from lower Mesopotamia, main element in Neo-Babylonia

Even a wicked and violent nation like this can be used by God to punish Judah for her apostasy.

Yet Babylon is still a wicked nation and like Assyria, their time for judgment will come too.

1:12 – 2:1 Habakkuk's second complaint: How can God watch as “the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he (1:13)?”

1:12- “you have ordained them as a judgment”- confirming YHWH's words earlier

1:13- Asks why God allows the righteous to suffer and the wicked prosper, a common question today!

1:17- Asks God when this bloodshed and judgment will cease

2:1- “Station myself on the tower”- perhaps literally, waiting on YHWH to reveal His answer

2:2-5 YHWH's response: He will judge the wicked in His own time

2:2- "make it plain on tablets"- same word for the 10 Commandments' tablets (Ex 20:12)

2:4- "but the righteous (one) shall live by his faith"- quoted in Rom 1:17, important to Luther

*Luther: The godly people are waiting for the Lord; therefore they live, therefore they are saved, therefore they receive what has been promised. They receive it by faith, because they give glory to the God of truth.*

*How can we best describe God's response to Habakkuk's complaint? Does it apply to our Problem of Evil?*

## **II. YHWH's Justice Is Certain: Five "Woes" to the Arrogant Oppressors (2:6-20)**

2:6- "all these"- the oppressed nations; "taunt against him"- the Babylonian Empire

2:6-8 Woe to the plunderer, he will be plundered

2:9-11 Woe to the fortified, he will be dismantled

2:12-14 Woe to the builders, their work will be destroyed

2:15-17 Woe to the shameless, they will be put to shame

2:18-20 Woe to idol-worshippers, they will be silenced

## **III. Habakkuk's Psalm of Submission (3:1-19)**

3:1 a superscription like you find in most of the Psalms

"prayer"- Hebrew word appears in the heading for Psalms 17; 86; 90; 102; 142

"Shigionoth"- likely a musical or liturgical term, it appears to be the plural of the term in Ps 7

3:2 "in wrath remember mercy"- the theme of the book, our only response in evil times is *Kyrie Eleison!*

3:3 "*Selah*"- a musical or choral term used only in the Psalms, here and in verses 9 and 13!

3:8 "Chariot of salvation"- remember the Hebrew word for salvation (*yeshu'ah*) is Jesus' name!

3:10 The personified earth watches with fear and trembling as God punishes the wicked, saving the righteous

3:13 Salvation necessitates destroying the enemy; "to save your anointed"- *Messiah*- the king bore this title  
"crushed the head of the house of the wicked"- **Genesis 3:15!!!!**

3:16 Here we see Habakkuk's submission, his faithful trust in YHWH embodied in patience during trial

3:17-19 Now Hab uses contemporary Hebrew language, probably to clarify the idea of rejoicing in such times

3:17- warfare strips the land bare of produce and livestock

3:18- What a response! Rejoice in YHWH, take joy in the God of my *yeshu'ah*!

3:19- "YHWH, my Lord (*adonai*), is my strength"- often this strength is used of military strength

Based on *Habakkuk*, how should Christians respond to suffering (illness, disaster, or warfare)?