

**IN WRATH REMEMBER MERCY . . .  
THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH --  
COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK**

by Paul G. Apple, Dec. 2006 (Revised Dec. 2025)

**THE LONG TERM CONVICTION OF FAITH EXULTS IN THE GOD  
OF OUR SALVATION DESPITE THE PERPLEXING QUESTIONS  
OF THE PAIN AND APPARENT INJUSTICE OF OUR PRESENT  
CIRCUMSTANCES**

*“In wrath remember mercy.”  
“The just shall live by faith.”  
(Habakkuk 3:2; 2:4)*

For each section in the Book of Habakkuk:

- Thesis statement                   ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline                 ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions           ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations       ... to stimulate deeper insight

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## BACKGROUND NOTES

### GENERAL:

**J. Sidlow Baxter:** This prophecy of Habakkuk puts into words a **struggle and triumph of faith** which took place in the soul of the prophet himself. It begins with a sob, and ends with a song; and it is in the process from the one to the other that the little book discloses the heart of its meaning to us.

**Ch. I.** A “BURDEN”: FAITH GRAPPLING WITH PROBLEM.

**Ch. II.** A “VISION”: FAITH GRASPING THE SOLUTION.

**Ch. III.** A “PRAYER”: FAITH GLORYING IN ASSURANCE.

The key verse to Habakkuk is **chapter ii. 4** – “*The just shall live by his faith*”; and around this truth precious lessons for faith are written. The living message of the little book is clear. Faith has still its problems. If Habakkuk’s days seemed draped with dark enigmas, even more do our own. But this book tells us not to judge merely by the appearances of the hour. God has given us great promises, and is working out great purposes. He cannot tell us the whole in so many words; but He has revealed enough to make faith intelligent, and to give it scope for development.

**David Malick:** The **surprising judgment** which the Lord is going to bring upon wicked Judah through the evil, idolatrous Babylonians does not compromise His goodness, but engenders faith because He will one day also judge the Babylonians and deliver His people as their mighty warrior

**O. Palmer Robertson:** Remarkably, the reader is allowed the unique privilege of witnessing the progress of the prophet himself in submitting to a new concept of the Lord’s purposes among Israel and the nations. The idea of growth or maturing in faith is essential to appreciating the genius of this prophecy. Trust in the purposes of the Lord despite confusing perceptions of precisely what he is doing lies at the center of the thought of Habakkuk. Broader intentions of the Lord come to the fore as the prophet wrestles with progressive disclosures.

**Frank Gaebelin:** There is profound significance in the fact that God gave one of the very greatest of all spiritual insights – “*the just shall live by his faith*” (Hab. 4:2b) – to a man who cried out to Him against injustice and violence. For Habakkuk there was no incompatibility between impassioned concern for social righteousness and the faith by which a man is justified. In this prophet’s perplexity, God revealed to him the moral pattern of history that **tyranny and oppression are self-destroying but that faith in the Lord is life-giving**. God showed this concerned man how He would use the Babylonians as a scourge to punish the wickedness of His people and then how He would require the Babylonians for their cruelty. His ultimate response to Habakkuk’s perplexity about the problem of evil came through the great theophany described in the third chapter of the book. In it God showed the prophet something we too need to know – that **the divine logic in answering our profoundest problems transcends our human reason**.

**Michael Goodfellow:** What do we know about the prophet Habakkuk? Evidence seems to suggest that he wrote in the 7th century BC, just as the Babylonians were emerging as a world power. The Assyrians who had threatened Judah for so long were but a memory. And in Judah itself, a religious revival had begun, but in many ways it was only a superficial one. The high places and the idols were destroyed, but still there was injustice and there was an oppression of the powerless in society.

We have noted in the prophets so far that they are directing their words, or God's words, to the people. Now those people have been from Israel, Judah, Nineveh, and other places. But the direction of prophecy has always been words from God directed to the people, friends and enemies alike. But in Habakkuk we see a different dynamic. In chapter one of the book, the dialogue is in a different manner. The chapter is a **discussion between the prophet and God**. Habakkuk is a skeptic prophet. He looks around his society, he looks upward to God, raises his hands, and offers his complaint.

Habakkuk's words are perhaps the most truly human of all the prophets. Habakkuk recognizes the difficulties of belief in troubling times. He looks around and sees all the problems that plagued his prophetic predecessors. Moral outrage, oppressive leadership, religious superficiality, strife and violence are on every corner. And Habakkuk lifts his voice to God and says, "O Lord how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous – therefore judgment comes forth perverted." **How long?** That is Habakkuk's basic message to God, how long?

And that is a proper question. It is a question we have all faced and tried to deal with. How long, O Lord, will injustice reign? How long, O lord, will sin rule in the world? How long, O Lord, will we be faced with pain, and trial, and temptation? How long must we bear the burden of suffering? How long will the righteous be overcome by the wicked? And with each time the question is asked, it seems as though it is left unanswered. And Habakkuk's anger wells up as he raises his hands to God. Will you not listen? Will you not save? We wonder about the Lord's indifference.

There are some who think we should not question God. There are those who think God should not be prayed to in anger and complaint. But Habakkuk's prayers are not from anger, but from anguish.

**James Bruckner:** The conversations that constitute the book are remarkable for their length and progression of thought. Habakkuk's questions, God's surprising response, Habakkuk's reaction to the response and his rephrasing the question, God's further answer, and Habakkuk's responses in his song of worship constitute a convincing human-divine dialogue. Habakkuk's faithful incredulity is common to the humanity and hopes of people of faith.

**Hampton Keathley IV:** Warren Wiersbe entitles his book on Habakkuk as “**From Worry to Worship.**” **Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones** calls his, “**From Fear to Faith.**” While Habakkuk begins by wondering or worrying about the world around him and God’s seeming indifference, he ends by worshipping God. When he heard who was coming **3:16** says he trembled, but he certainly ends up expressing faith by the end of the book. What they are trying to capture in the titles of their books is the **progression** Habakkuk makes from questioning God to trusting God.

**G. Campbell Morgan:** Today there are two principles of life in the world and only two.

- The principle of the “puffed-up,” who are self-centered and conditioned by circumstance;
- and the principle of the righteous by faith, who are God-centered and God-circumferenced.

Centered in God and circumferenced of God? Yes, for He is the sphere in which you live and move and have your being. That is the truth about the life of faith. When a man has his faith in God, God is at the center of his being and is at the circumference of his being. He is everywhere. Men who are self-centered and circumstance-conditioned may seem to succeed, and the men who are God-centered and God-circumstanced often seem to be in extremis. How often for the saints the fig tree has not blossomed, and there has been no herd in the stall! How often the wicked has been seen spreading himself like a green bay tree! But this book teaches us that the true viewpoint is that obtained when the discussion of these problems is carried into the presence of God, giving to Him the opportunity to tell us His secrets; then we shall find that in the green bay tree is the worm that dieth not which is already sapping away its life, and also that in the barrenness of today’s outlook for the people of God are the fertilizing forces that will bring a harvest for tomorrow. You cannot be a man of faith and live in a day. You do not live in a day if you are a man of faith. When Habakkuk tried living in a day, he wailed, “O God, you are doing nothing!” But when he began to breathe the sub-consciousness of eternity and touched the infinitude of deity, then he said: “God is doing everything, and if I have any one fear it is lest his wrath which is to overwhelm is too terrible. O Lord, remember mercy.” **The problems of faith must be submitted to God for His answer;** and whenever a soul does that, there will come such revelations as shall create a **song of triumph** even while the heart abides in the presence of a present sadness.

**Walter Kaiser Jr.:** The most striking aspect of this compact manual is the way it places God in the center of history and of personal consciousness. The theme of a worshipping heart that has found its rest in the living God brings us to the spiritual reason for our study of this book. Habakkuk teaches us how to rejoice when the lid has blown off everything and nothing that we once counted on as a reference point remains fixed: everything is gone, including the food that we once took for granted. “What we will do then?” asks Habakkuk. He knows, for he has been there and has learned from the inner councils of revelation and the hard knocks of experience. Not that Habakkuk was a plaster saint or an unusually strong and courageous character; on the contrary, he was just as frightened as the next person, if not more. But balancing his outward fear and realistic assessment of the fact that his whole nation and its temple, army, and citizens, and all that he held dear, were to be lost to one of the most despicable, godless, and unmerciful

conquerors known on earth to that time, he had a peace in his heart that passed all understanding. How he maintained a sense of peace in the face of such savagery, brutality and shocking demolition of everything he had held dear (not to mention everything that God had built up through the nation of Israel over the last millennia and a half) is a lesson worth learning in our own day.

Habakkuk, then, will teach us how to live by faith in a God who is alive and active in the current affairs of life, distasteful and unappealing as those affairs seem at times. His is a most succinct message for both good and bad times. As **Raymond Calkins** summarizes it:

There is no Old Testament book that is able to do more for the burdened souls of men or to raise them to higher levels of hope and confidence than the brief prophecy of Habakkuk. . . . Hardly a book in the Bible is constructed on such simple and majestic lines. These three chapters stand like three august columns, side by side, each complete in itself, unparalleled in their power and appeal. . . . Search the Bible through and you will find nothing so matchless in concentrated power as these three chapters of the Book of Habakkuk. Of the outward circumstances of the prophet's life we know nothing. But here was a man with a soul sensitive to evil, yet firm in his faith in an omnipotent God. And this faith he has uttered with a force, an eloquence, a literary power which has caused his words to become a permanent part of the literature of the soul.

[**Raymond Calkins**, *The Modern Message of the Minor Prophets* (New York: Harper, 1947), pp. 92–93.]

**J.J.M. Roberts**: The prophet is deeply concerned about the injustice he sees in Judean life, and he is dissatisfied with prophetic theologies of history that resolve that injustice through the use of foreign agents as God's chastening rod. To Habakkuk, such a solution simply appears to compound the problem. Such a response could at best be only a partial answer. There must be something beyond punishment for the people of God. Habakkuk finds his answer in the powerful testimony of the ancient communal hymns of his people. One such hymn provides the catalyst for the prophet's own powerful vision of the coming intervention of Yahweh on behalf of his people. Habakkuk's vision of God as the mighty conqueror of chaos endows him with hope for the future and instills within him the triumphant courage to endure a dismal present in the joyous confidence that this vision of God will prove reliable.

Habakkuk's stance in the interim between Yahweh's ancient victories and his coming intervention, between vision and fulfillment, is strikingly similar to that of the Christian. The Christian lives after God's victory over evil in Jesus' death and resurrection but prior to his final victory at Jesus' second coming and the general resurrection. Thus it is no accident that **Hab. 2:4** has become a key text in describing the Christian's eschatological lifestyle. Nor have the intervening centuries robbed the book of its ability to give new courage to the modern believer in his or her struggle to live in the present. Its vision of the awesome divine warrior whose will is to save his people can and does still serve to refocus the modern believer's perceptions, enabling the believer to see through appearances and to fix his or her gaze on ultimate reality.

## AUTHORSHIP, BACKGROUND, SETTING, DATE

**Steven Duby:** Some have surmised that the name is connected to the Hebrew verb (*'clasp', 'embrace'*) or to an Akkadian word used to signify a plant, but recent commentators generally do not find any particular significance in the name. . .

In the book of Habakkuk itself it is evident that the prophet was disturbed by the circumstances in which he found himself and was not prepared to ignore the prevalence of evil or the affliction of the godly. In accord with the theology and spiritual comportment of the psalmists, Habakkuk asks, *'How long, YHWH, will I cry out, and you will not hear?'* (1.2). 'This prophet assumes the authority to act on behalf of the righteous and recounts public acts, requesting a response from YHWH and posting himself to await this response.' He is acutely aware that YHWH is the everlasting and holy God who, one might think, would not allow himself to be associated with the wicked in any way (1.12-13). Over the course of the book, Habakkuk's perspective is changed through his prayerful interaction with YHWH and his reception of the word of YHWH. After receiving God's response to his complaints, Habakkuk meditates on God's acts throughout the history of Israel in chapter three and, like the psalmists (e.g., **Ps 77**), finds in this history of God's beneficence and holy judgment the basis for a firm hope in God's plan for the future.

**Ray Stedman:** The prophet Habakkuk was a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah, who is known to us as the weeping prophet, because he ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah in the darkest days of its national history, just before the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and carried the people into captivity. Habakkuk (his name means, "*the embracer*") also was in Jerusalem at that time, so he too saw all that went on.

**John Piper:** The situation which Habakkuk faces is the imminent invasion of the southern kingdom of Judah by the Chaldeans (who are the same as the Babylonians). This invasion eventually happened at the end of the sixth century B.C. and Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. The Lord revealed to Habakkuk beforehand that Judah was going to be punished for her sin by the Chaldeans. Unlike Joel and Zephaniah and Amos, Habakkuk does not even mention the possibility that destruction could be averted. He does not call for national repentance. It is too late. Instead, he predicts the destruction of Judah and beyond that the doom of the Chaldeans themselves. And he promises that the only way to preserve your life through the judgment is by faith. So even though destruction is decreed for the nation, there is hope for individuals who hold fast their confidence in God.

**Hobart Freeman:** The **style** of Habakkuk is unique. Instead of addressing the people directly as the Lord's spokesman, Habakkuk imparts his message as a **dialogue** between himself and God based upon certain questions which perplex him. The prophecy is divided into two parts. The first part, consisting of **chapters 1-2**, is the dialogue between the prophet and God concerning the Lord's announcement of the approaching judgment

upon sinful Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. The second section, **chapter 3**, is a prayer in the form of a psalm. The psalm is a remembrance of the mighty works of the Lord in the past for His people, and a prayer for the Lord to revive His work on behalf of Israel.

**Cyril Barber:** The power of Assyria had collapsed. Political supremacy belonged to Egypt. Strong political ties, however, had been established with the emerging kingdom of Babylon. Because she was a vassal of Egypt and a friend of Babylon, it seemed as if nothing could threaten the progress of Judah's prosperity.

The nation owed its prosperity to God's favoring of one man, Josiah (**2 Kings 22:1, 12-17**). Josiah had led the nation in several notable reforms. Although those reforms touched only the outward observances of the people, God said He would honor Josiah for his faithfulness (**2 Kings 22:18-20**).

The leaders of the people ignored the spiritual reasons for their material prosperity and thought God's favor could be enjoyed without interruption. **J. Gresham Machen** once remarked, "America is running on the momentum of a Godly ancestry. When that momentum goes, God help America!" The same could be said of Judah in Habakkuk's day. It was not long before greed and avarice became prevalent. The rich exploited the poor. "Justice" favored the wealthy. Those who were God-fearing found themselves oppressed by an ever-increasing number whose desire for power led them to secure, by one means or another, those positions that met their personal (and often pathological) needs.

It was amid such conditions that God revealed His will to Habakkuk. **Turbulent times** lay ahead for the Lord's people. The message Habakkuk was told to proclaim was one that would please neither the Left nor the Right. The delusions of the decision makers were to be dashed to pieces before the harsh reality of God's sovereign justice.

**Kenneth Barker:** **Jehoiakim** was certainly not a worthy successor to his father. **Second Kings 24:4** describes him as a tyrant who shed innocent blood in Jerusalem. Jeremiah described him as an unjust and brutal despot whose chief interest was in the sumptuous enlargement of his palace (**Jer 22:13-19**). Available records show him as the only king of Judah who put a prophet of Yahweh to death. Not even wicked Manasseh could claim such notoriety.

Stephen Miller: **Historical Background:**

- Habakkuk's message addressed conditions in his country, ancient Judah.
- By Habakkuk's day the Northern Kingdom (Israel) had fallen to Assyria (721 B.C.). Although the Southern Kingdom (Judah) survived, it remained a vassal state of the evil Assyrian Empire until the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. Egypt then dominated Judah until Babylon defeated Pharaoh Neco II at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. Babylon immediately moved to subdue Judah and the surrounding area. Judah then became a vassal state of the Babylonian Empire.

- The nation of Judah consisted primarily of the tiny tribe of Benjamin and the much larger tribe of Judah.
- Habakkuk had witnessed Judah fall from a spiritual high point under King Josiah (640-609 B.C.) to the depths of wickedness under Josiah's son, King Jehoiakim (609-597 B.C.).

## PURPOSE OF WRITING

**Thomas Constable:** The people to whom Habakkuk ministered were Judeans who apparently lived under the reign of King Jehoiakim. During his reign the Israelites were looking for help in the wrong places, Egypt and Assyria, in view of growing Babylonian power. They should have been looking to the Lord primarily, and their failure to do so was one of the burdens of Jeremiah, Habakkuk's contemporary. Habakkuk's concerns were more philosophical, however. What disturbed him was that the sovereign Lord was not responding to Habakkuk's evil generation and its internal injustices. He voiced his concern to Yahweh in prayer (1:2-4). The Lord replied that He was working. He was raising up a nation that would punish His people for their covenant unfaithfulness (1:5-11). This raised another problem for Habakkuk, which he also took to the Lord in prayer. How could He use a wicked nation than Judah to punish God's chosen people (1:12—2:1)? The Lord explained that He would eventually punish the Babylonians for their wickedness too (2:2-20). The final chapter is a hymn of praise extolling Yahweh for His wise ways. The purpose of the book, then, was to vindicate the justice of God so God's people would have hope and encouragement.

**Steven Duby:** a statement of Habakkuk's **purpose** along these lines: Immediately, Habakkuk's message is given by the Spirit of God to announce the judgment of God upon the ungodly in Judah and upon the Babylonians. Ultimately, it is given to proclaim the wise, just, and trustworthy providence of God and to strengthen our faith and hope in God and his Messiah.

**Cyril Barber:** Habakkuk centered his prophecy on a question that all of God's people have asked at one time or another: **Why do the wicked flourish while the godly are oppressed?** In a real sense, therefore, the book of Habakkuk constitutes a **theodicy**, or a defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of evil. It also illustrates the ways in which the just may live by their faith. That concept, as **Gaebelein** points out, constitutes one of the most dynamic ideas in world history.

In developing his theme, Habakkuk structured his material around two dialogues, with a concluding psalm of praise.

In the first dialogue (1:1-11), the prophet voiced his complaint over the sins of God's people and God's apparent indifference (1:1-4). He described graphically and yet concisely the unscrupulous conduct of those who oppressed the godly. He also described the violence that had come to characterize Judean society. In the midst of that description

of lawlessness, Habakkuk asked why God had caused him to look upon such affliction and yet seemed to be indifferent to his prayers.

In answer to His servant's complaint (1:5-11), God showed Habakkuk that He was not indifferent to the plight of His people. In fact, He had been at work raising up the Chaldeans, whom He would use to chasten His people. Their conquest was soon to begin (605 B.C.).

That response to his prayer caused Habakkuk further agony of heart, leading to the second dialogue (1:12—2:20). God's plan of action seemed to contradict the prophet's theology (1:12-17). The prophet had looked upon God as an eternally holy Person who must judge the unjust and acquit the righteous. Why, then, did God seem to be involving Himself in a compromising situation? The Chaldeans were far more wicked than Judah, and much more in need of judgment. How could God justify chastening Israel at the hands of those who were more culpable? As Habakkuk wrestled with that dilemma, he waited upon the Lord to reveal His will to Him (2:1).

In revealing His will to Habakkuk, God showed that His righteousness would be vindicated in the downfall of the Chaldean (or Babylonian) empire. His answer was in three parts. First there was reassurance that He was in control of the situation (2:2-3). Then there was recognition on the part of God of the wicked character of the Chaldeans and of the faithful character of the righteous remnant (2:4). Finally, there was divine reason for the judgment of the Chaldeans (2:5-20). That reason included indictments for five distinct sins:

- proud ambition (2:5-8),
- covetousness (2:9-11),
- ruthlessness and cruelty (2:12-14),
- debauchery (2:15-17),
- and idolatry (2:18-19).

Finally, God's holiness was vindicated, and the prophet was able to reconcile his theology with God's actions (2:20).

Habakkuk devoted **chapter 3** to **praise**. The prophet's **vision of God's plan and purpose** had been broadened. It included not only the immediate future but also the fuller scope of God's dealings with His people as well as with the nations of the earth. In the final section, therefore, Habakkuk consoled his people, who were suffering from violence and injustice, and encouraged them with the same confidence God had inspired in him. He reviewed God's faithfulness by drawing illustrations from Israel's past history (3:3-15).

In the conclusion (3:16-19), Habakkuk caught a glimpse of the glorious faithfulness of God and brought it into living focus so that he and those in Jerusalem with him would rely upon the Lord during the coming time of tribulation (see especially 3:16, 19). In doing so, he showed that trials and perplexity were not incompatible with trust in God.

**James Bruckner:** The subtitle of Habakkuk could be, “*Yahweh Prepares His People for a Hard Change.*” Anyone who experiences terrible difficulties in life will benefit from studying this book. Yahweh tells the prophet that his people will experience the end of prosperity, the end of their political autonomy, the increased success of the “more wicked,” and the withdrawal of Yahweh’s protection. What will remain for them? Yahweh promises it will get better after it gets worse. They can cling to their memory of Yahweh’s faithfulness, as in Habakkuk’s song (3:1–15). They have the benefit of a forewarning from Yahweh and the witness of a faithful and believing prophet, committed to joy (3:17–19).

Habakkuk is a **microcosm of faith**. Its fifty-six verses express many facets of Israel’s rich heritage. The early faith of Abraham is echoed in 2:4 (cf. **Gen. 15:6; Rom. 1:17**). The song (**Hab. 3**) is full of the historical reflection on the Exodus, desert wandering, and entrance to the Promised Land. It stands in the biblical tradition of dialogue between God and the prophets (as in **Gen. 18**). It also reflects biblical wisdom literature in its struggle with the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked (lamented in the Psalms and discussed in Ecclesiastes and Job). It is also a bridge to the enduring post-temple faith of a people in exile in Babylon and during the time of the second temple.

## **MAJOR THEMES AND THEOLOGY**

**J Vernon McGee:**

In the book of Judges there is put down a great principle of government, a principle which is also stated very clearly in the prophecy of Isaiah. All of the subsequent prophets simply bear out and apply this principle which has already been stated. The principle is this: There are three steps in the downfall of a nation.

- First of all, there is religious apostasy.
- The second step is moral awfulness.
- And the third step is political anarchy.

These are the three steps by which nations pass off the stage of human history. That has always been the way that it has moved. You see, the primary problem never was political anarchy. The primary problem never was moral awfulness. As bad as these are, the root problem goes back to religious or spiritual apostasy, a turning away from the living and true God.

**J.N. Boo Heflin:** It is better to live in faith than in rebellion, trusting God when answers are not to be found, living a life of faithfulness even when evil seems to have the upper hand. This approach to life is wise because God is the omnipotent ruler; He will ultimately prevail over evil.

### **Major Theological Themes:**

The great issue with which Habakkuk struggles is **theodicy**. How could a just and holy God allow evil to exist? How could He remain inactive and silent in the face of brutality, injustice, and atrocious inhumanity? Though intellectual answers for the problem

ultimately give way to experiential answers, Habakkuk does in fact learn several significant theological truths:

- 1) First, he learns that God and good will inevitably triumph. . . God's people must be a waiting people, living with the certain hope that eternity will clarify the issues, revealing the triumph of right.
- 2) Second, Habakkuk learns that evil contains the seed of destruction (**2:4-20**). Individuals and nations who live in pride, arrogance, and self-sufficiency find in the end these very attitudes are their undoing. Though on occasion evil appears to have the upper hand, it is really filled with death and destruction. It cannot and will not endure in God's moral universe. Its transitory nature is an unalterable fact of history.
- 3) Third, the prophet learns that those who are right with God are to live by their faithfulness (**2:4**).
- 4) Fourth, Habakkuk learns that while intellectual answers to the enigmas of history may not be available, God is good and He is enough. Accordingly, His people rejoice in His salvation and strength. They await with confidence the triumphant end, even in the midst of oppression and deprivation (**3: 17-19**).

**James Montgomery Boice:** But for the most part the questions have shifted, and the problems bothering most thinking people today are what we would call personal and historical. They boil down to the individual's involvement in history. On the personal level, they express themselves in such questions as: Who am I? Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? On the historical level, they emerge as: What is the meaning of history? **What is God's involvement with history?** Why is there evil in history? Why doesn't God do something about wickedness? How can I believe in a loving, personal God when He allows bad things to happen to me?

Habakkuk raises these questions too. He asks, "**Is God in charge of history?**" and, "If He is, why do things happen as they do?" In dealing with these questions he speaks as directly to our own times as any comparable portion of the Word of God.

[Quoting the four lessons from **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones**:]

- 1) First, history (regardless of how it seems to us) is under God's control.
- 2) Second, history follows a divine plan.
- 3) Third, history follows a divine timetable.
- 4) Fourth, history is bound up with the divine kingdom.

**Steven Duby:** First, central to Habakkuk's prophecy is the **wisdom and justice of God**. The prophet's assumptions about what God's perfection would entail for God's outward action are what leads to his first exchange with God. But in the course of the book the revelation of God reframes the justice of God in some important respects. He is the God of transcendent wisdom whose ways and works are in accord with his justice and yet not subject to the preferences of creatures (**1.5-11**). He is the holy God before whose majesty

creatures' appropriate posture is one of reverent silence (2.20). He is the sufficient God whose presence and fellowship are ultimately enough for the saints (3.17-18).

Second, Habakkuk deals with the **justice and providence of God** in his acts of judgment and salvation. The providence and judgment of God are inexorable, making the nations tremble (3.6). Habakkuk's doctrine of divine providence affirms God's work through secondary (i.e., creaturely) causes, particularly the Babylonians (1.5-11). In what way does God act through the Babylonians without himself being the author of sin or being untrustworthy? In what way might the judgment of God be a comfort to the people of God? Habakkuk invites us to attend to these questions throughout this volume.

Third, Habakkuk deals with **human nature**. He gives us a powerful description of the depravity and arrogance of the human heart (e.g., 1.6-11; 2.6-20). Perhaps his realism presses American Christians in particular to examine the extent to which we have taken up a sanitized, naïve view of the human condition and, correspondingly, a mistaken tendency to see divine judgment as cruel or unwarranted – a tendency that would bewilder many suffering saints in past generations and around the world today. Habakkuk also reminds us of the finitude of humanity and thus the foolishness of human arrogance in the face of God's judgment (e.g., 2.12-14, 15-17; 3.3-15).

Fourth, Habakkuk's prophecy teaches us about **faith's role** in the believer's standing before God. It does this to some degree within its own scope but also in concert with the teaching of Paul and Hebrews on justification, faith, and perseverance. The book as a whole portrays the nature and operation of faith in Habakkuk's reliance upon YHWH. The crucial statement '*The righteous by his faith will live*' in 2.4 and the enlargement of it in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews will require us to interpret Habakkuk's understanding of faith in connection with the relevant New Testament sources. Recent debates about the biblical meaning of justification and of faith itself illustrate the importance of this subject for Christian theology and life.

Fifth, Habakkuk treats **hope** as a theological theme – theological because it is handled with reference to who God is and what God does. In Habakkuk hope is bound up with watchfulness and attentiveness to God and the works of God. Our reading of the book of Habakkuk will thus involve a consideration of how its teaching presents God as the source and object of hope and how Christian believers might learn from Habakkuk's movement from disquiet to restful hope in God.

Finally, Habakkuk puts the issue of **suffering** before us as a theological matter, which is to say a matter that must be understood in relation to the being and works of God and the creature's telos in God. The suffering of the godly is never overlooked by God even when it might appear to be (1.5). It has its appointed end in the counsel of God and will in fact come to its end by the revelation of God's justice at the right time (2.2-3). In Habakkuk's case, the Lord uses suffering to bring about patient endurance and to help Habakkuk grasp the necessity and the satisfaction of communion with God.

### **Kenneth Barker: Nature of God**

“Habakkuk is above all else a book about the purposes of God and about the realization of his will for his world. ... In short, Habakkuk is a book about the providence of God; that is, it is primarily concerned with how God is keeping his promises to his chosen people Israel and through them to humankind.” [Achte-meier, *Nahum—Malachi*, 31-32.] God's nature is Habakkuk's problem and yet his one certainty. Because he knows God so well, the prophet stands on his watchtower perplexed and amazed at God's actions, actions that defy his nature. His bewildered negative statements reveal his expectations and beliefs about God.

#### God in normal times:

- listens when his helpless people call (1:2)
- saves when his people suffer violence (1:2)
- removes injustice (1:3,5)
- tolerates no wrong or treachery (1:3,13)
- ensures that his Torah is protected and maintained (1:4)
- makes justice prevail among his people (1:4)
- delivers the righteous from the wicked (1:4)
- protects his people from ruthless enemies (1:5-11,17)
- protects his holy city from enemy armies (1:10)
- acts when the wicked seem to triumph (1:15)
- acts immediately without waiting (1:2; 2:6)
- reacts against worthless idols (2:18-19; cp. 1:11)

Positive statements, even statements that do not reflect present reality, share the prophet's personal confession about the nature of God. God is:

- the Creator (1:14)
- eternal (1:12)
- a personal God, related in a personal relationship with the prophet (1:12)
- an awesomely holy God, pure and distinct from all creation (1:12)
- sovereign over history and all its nations (1:12; 2:13)
- a rock that can never be moved or changed (1:12)
- one who punishes disobedient people (1:12; 2:16)
- one whose purity makes him avoid all appearances of evil (1:13)
- one with no tolerance level for evil and wrongdoing (1:13)
- one who speaks with his prophets and reveals his plans (2:1)
- one who brings woe and destruction on all evil (2:6-19)
- planning salvation for the earth so that he can fill all his creation with his presence (1:14)
- at home in his temple on earth and in heaven (2:20)
- so awesome that people must be silent when he is present (2:20)

God speaks to his prophet and his people and reveals things about himself.

#### God shows that he is:

- planning to act in unbelievable ways (1:5)
- able and willing to use enemies for his purposes even when they are wicked (1:6)

- able and willing to reveal himself and his purposes to his people (2:2-3)
- Lord over his revelation and will bring it to pass in his own time (2:3)
- the one who always speaks the truth (2:3)
- the God of the righteous who serve him faithfully (2:4)

Meditation on God's past history also reveals much about the divine nature. He is:

- famous so that people talk about what he has done for them (3:2)
- active with deeds that silence people awestruck (3:2)
- a God of wrath (3:2,12)
- one who comes to his needy people from his ancient dwelling place (3:3)
- the glorious one whose acts bring forth praise that fills the universe (3:3)
- so splendid in appearance that he dims the dawning sun (1:4)
- powerful (3:4)
- in control of all diseases (3:5)
- in control of all history, all nature, and all people (3:6-7)
- willing and able to show his anger against sinful peoples as exemplified in the exodus from Egypt (3:8-15)
- in control of all the chaotic waters and deeps (3:8-10)
- uses even the heavenly bodies for his purposes (3:11)
- our Savior from the enemy and the protector of our anointed leader (3:13,16)
- the source of all our strength (3:19).

**S.D. Snyman:** The book offers a rich harvest of **theological insights**. God is portrayed as the Lord of world history. He is capable of doing the impossible, such as

*raising up the Babylonians,  
that ruthless and impetuous people (1:6)*

to act against the injustices, destruction and violence, strife and conflict characteristic of his people (1:2-4). The woe oracles (2:5-19) are further evidence of God's power to control world affairs and to act against any nation. In **chapter 3** God is presented as the God who reveals himself in a theophany in which his sheer power and might are simply overwhelming.

God is portrayed as the God of justice. God's answer to the initial complaint of the prophet is indicative of the fact that God cares about justice and righteousness. Justice and righteousness are the pillars of human society. Because God is the Lord of world history, injustices beyond the boundaries of Judah are also his concern. Therefore the injustices of foreign nations are brought to light and they are judged for their greed, plunder, bloodshed, crime, violence and general disregard for human dignity. There is no conflict between ethics and religion in this book. Injustices and violence brought about by human beings in any society are unacceptable, and because God is the God of justice he is approached to act upon this state of affairs.

God is portrayed as the God of mercy. Habakkuk is allowed to voice his questions, discomfort and perhaps even anger against God. Never in the book is Habakkuk reprimanded for questioning God and his actions or his apparent lack of action. In 3:2 the prophet calls upon yhwh to remember his mercy when he is about to judge the wicked.

The prophet is also well aware of yhwh's acts of deliverance in the history of his people, when the people experienced his mercy time and again. In fact, the prophet's prayer is that yhwh's deeds in the past may be renewed in his time.

The book also addresses the issue of theodicy. Habakkuk asks the age-old question, 'Why, God?' The answer that Habakkuk gets is a complicated one. The first part of the answer is that human beings are incapable of understanding God's ways of handling world affairs. When God reveals to Habakkuk that he is about to raise up the Babylonians in response to his complaint, Habakkuk finds it simply incomprehensible. The prophet's attention was focused on the situation in Judah, but God widens his perspective to a worldwide vision. That solution to the problem is, according to the prophet, no solution at all. It is just not possible or sensible for violence and injustice to be rectified by more violence and injustice. Yet even when Habakkuk confronts God, taking him up on this matter, the answer remains the same (2:5–20). The second part of the answer is that the righteous must keep faith, even in the trying times they are living through. Over against the wicked who will not endure, the righteous will live through faith.

God's response is in no way a direct answer to Habakkuk's complaint. Habakkuk's question was 'Why, God?' and God's answer is 'Keep faith'. God does not provide Habakkuk with an explanation as to why the Babylonians will be the next world power and why injustices and violence will be met with more injustices and violence. The question of theodicy is answered but in a different way from what Habakkuk expected.

The book of Habakkuk reminds believing human beings that the way in which God directs world history is not revealed to us, nor can we comprehend God's control of history. In the end very little is said about the fate of the righteous in these troubled times. The answer that Habakkuk receives is actually quite vague. The prophet is reassured that yhwh is not inactive but will act against the injustices the prophet has observed. Yet the way in which yhwh will do that is out of line with what the prophet expected. To wait upon yhwh is another important theme in the book. After his second complaint the prophet awaits the response of yhwh (2:1), and in 3:16 he declares that he

*will wait patiently for the day of calamity  
to come on the nation invading us.*

In the interim, before the prophecy is fulfilled, the righteous must keep faith because ultimately the injustices will be overcome. In a strange way, the vague answer proves to be enough for the prophet. He yields to the superior power of yhwh and his complaints turn to a joyous confession of faith and renewed trust in God at the end of the book, even though the hard times persist.

## **STRUCTURE**

**J Vernon McGee:** This little book opens in gloom and closes in glory. It begins with a question mark and closes with an exclamation point. Habakkuk is a big **WHY?** Why

God permits evil is a question that every thoughtful mind has faced. I think that this book is the answer to that question. Will God straighten out the injustice of the world? This book answers that question. Is God doing anything about the wrongs of the world? This book says that He is. In my opinion it is possible to reduce the doubt of Thomas in the New Testament, of Habakkuk in the Old Testament, and of modern man into the one word: Why? It is the fundamental question of the human race.

## **OUTLINE:**

### **I. PERPLEXITY of the Prophet (Chap. 1)**

#### **1. First Problem of the Prophet, 1:1-4**

*Why does God permit evil?*

#### **2. God's Answer, 1:5-11**

*God was raising up Chaldeans to punish Judah (v.6)*

#### **3. Second Problem of the Prophet (greater than the first), 1:12-17**

*Why would God permit His people to be punished by a nation more wicked than they? Why did He not destroy the Chaldeans?*

### **II. PERCEPTION of the Prophet (Chap. 2)**

#### **1. Practice of the Prophet, 2:1**

*He took the secret problem to the secret place.*

#### **2. Patience of the Prophet, 2:2,3**

*He waited for the vision.*

#### **3. Pageant for the Prophet, 2:4**

*The great divide in humanity: One group, which is crooked, is flowing toward destruction; the other group, by faith, is moving toward God. This is inevitable.*

#### **4. Parable to the Prophet, 2:5-20**

*The application is self-evident from the vision. The Chaldeans, in turn, would be destroyed. God was moving among the nations.*

### **III. PLEASURE of the Prophet (Chap. 3)**

#### **1. Prayer of the Prophet, 3:1,2**

*The prophet, who thought God was doing nothing about evil, now asks Him to remember to be merciful. Was he afraid that God was doing too much?*

#### **2. Program of God, 3:3-17**

*God rides majestically in His own chariot of salvation (v.8)*

#### **3. Position of the Prophet, 3:18-19**

*He will rejoice (v. 18). He has come from pain to pleasure.*

**Walter Kaiser Jr. AN OUTLINE OF HABAKKUK**

**I. Waiting for God's Intervention in History 1:1–2:1**

- A. Our Distress Over Our Moral Condition **1:2–4**
  - 1. In Our Sensitivity to Wrong **1:2–3a**
  - 2. In Our Helplessness in the Presence of Wrong **1:3b**
  - 3. In Our Frustration Over the Loss of Law and Justice **1:4**
- B. Our Amazement Over the Divine Intervention 1:5–11
  - 1. In His Unbelievable Work **1:5**
  - 2. In His Use of Such Unlikely Instruments **1:6–11**
- C. Our Distress Over God's Use of the Wicked **1:12–17**
  - 1. So Contrary to His Name **1:12a**
  - 2. So Contrary to His Nature 1:12b–13
  - 3. So Contrary to His Justice **1:14–17**
- D. Conclusion **2:1**

**II. Learning to Live by Faith 2:2–20**

- A. The Proclamation of Faith **2:2**
- B. The Implementation of Faith **2:3**
- C. The Revelation of Faith **2:4–5**
  - 1. The Scope of this Revelation
  - 2. The Principle of the Revelation
  - 3. The Contrast to this Principle
- D. The Vindication of Faith **2:6–20**
  - 1. Inordinate Greed **2:6–8**
  - 2. A Hunger to Dominate **2:9–11**
  - 3. Atrocities **2:12–14**
  - 4. Debauchery **2:15–17**
  - 5. Idolatry **2:18–20**
- E. Conclusion

**III. Explaining God's Presence in History 3:3–15**

- A. God's Past Actions Proclaim His Coming **3:3–7**
  - 1. The Theophany at Sinai **3:3a**
  - 2. The Theophany in all Creation **3:3b–4**
  - 3. The Theophany in the Plagues of Egypt **3:5**
  - 4. The Theophany Before the Nations **3:6**
  - 5. The Theophany in the Days of Othniel and Gideon 3:7
- B. God's Future Actions Foretell His Coming **3:8–15**
- C. Conclusion

**IV. Rejoicing in Tribulation 3:1–2, 16–19**

- A. Let Us Begin Our Worship in Adoration **3:2a**
- B. Let Us Focus Our Worship on the Kingdom of God **3:2b**
- C. Let Us Confess Our Fears in Our Worship **3:16**
- D. Let Us Celebrate the Joy of the Lord in Our Worship **3:17–19**
- E. Conclusion

<b>HABAKKUK</b> ("Embrace" or "Wrestle") <b>THE RIGHTEOUS LIVE BY FAITH</b> <b>"From Worry to Worship"</b> (Title from Dr Warren Wiersbe) "Solution to Confusion"				
<b>HABAKKUK 1-2</b> <b>WORRY</b>			<b>HABAKKUK 3</b> <b>WORSHIP</b>	
Problems of Habakkuk <a href="#">Hab 1:1 -2:20</a>			Praise of Habakkuk <a href="#">Hab 3:1-19</a>	
Opens in Gloom: Begins with an Interrogation Mark?			Closes in Glory: Ends with an Exclamation Mark!	
Faith Troubled: A Wail An Inquiry			Faith Triumphant: A Song An Affirmation	
What is God Doing? ("Doubts")			Who God Is ("Shouts")	
What is God Doing?			Song of Salvation	
Perplexity of the Prophet <a href="#">Hab 1:1-17</a>		Perspicuity of the Prophet <a href="#">Hab 2:1-20</a>		Pleasure of the Prophet <a href="#">Hab 3:1-19</a>
Habakkuk Complains <a href="#">Hab 1:1-17</a>		God Replies <a href="#">Hab 2:1-20</a>		Habakkuk Sings <a href="#">Hab 3:1-19</a>
Watch and See		Stand and See		Kneel and See
Habakkuk Troubled		Habakkuk Taught		Habakkuk Triumphant
The Prophet Wondering & Worrying		The Prophet Watching & Waiting		The Prophet Worshiping & Witnessing
Habakkuk's First Question <a href="#">Hab 1:1-4</a>	God's First Answer <a href="#">Hab 1:5-11</a>	Habakkuk's Second Question <a href="#">Hab 1:12-2:1</a>	God's Second Answer <a href="#">Hab 2:2-2:20</a>	Habakkuk's Prayer of Praise
Habakkuk Speaks: Why Does God not Punish Wicked Judah?	God Speaks: Judah Will Be Punished!	Habakkuk Speaks: Why Will God use Pagans to Punish Judah?	God Speaks: Yes Pagans Will Punish Judah!	Word of Praise 1-15 Words of fear & faith <a href="#">Hab 3:16-19</a>
Prophet Speaks to Judah ca 607BC				

## OVERVIEW OF BOOK OF HABAKKUK

### INTRODUCTION

We have covered a lot of ground in our study of the Minor Prophets – not minor in significance, but smaller in size. We have not spent much time in review of past book studies since each book stands on its own.

### **QUICK REVIEW: Dual themes: Deserved Judgment with Call for Repentance / Restoration and Blessing in future Messianic Kingdom**

Look at the Key Theological Question addressed in each book and the Main Theme:

#### **1. Hosea — “What does God’s covenant love look like in the face of unfaithfulness?”**

**Theme:** God’s unconditional loyal love despite unfaithfulness

#### **2. Joel — “How should God’s people respond to the Day of the Lord?”**

**Theme:** The coming **Day of the Lord** and the call for Repentance leading to Future Blessing

#### **3. Amos — “How does God judge a nation’s social injustice?”**

**Theme:** No Escape Clause from God’s judgment for injustice, oppression, false worship, and superficial religion.

#### **4. Obadiah — “How does God respond to pride and hostility toward His people?”**

**Theme:** God’s judgment on Edom for arrogance and cruelty; God vindicating His covenant people.

#### **5. Jonah — “How should we respond to God’s mercy extended to our enemies?”**

**Theme:** Mercy Triumphs over Judgment; God’s extension of Grace and Mercy to Gentiles

#### **6. Micah — “Who is a God like Yahweh and What does He require of His people?”**

**Theme:** God is Holy, Righteous and Forgiving and demands Justice, Mercy and Humility

#### **7. Nahum — “What is your Destiny when God is Your Enemy?”**

**Theme:** God’s wrath against His enemies (Assyria) brings comfort to His people

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### **OVERVIEW:**

The dialogue between Habakkuk and God wrestles with the fundamental question of “How can God remain silent in the face of evil and even use wicked instruments as His tools to discipline His own people?” The prophet seeks deliverance for the people of Judah; but God responds with the promise of judgment in the form of the wicked Babylonian empire. We see the struggle in Habakkuk’s mind as he moves from a state of perplexity and confusion as he openly questions the wisdom of God to a settled conviction that the just must live by faith. God remains sovereign as the Righteous Judge and works out His plan according to His timetable. We need to wait on the Lord with perseverance with the expectation of long term deliverance and justice.

## **ILLUSTRATION: The Chess Master's Strange Sacrifice (Habakkuk 1:5–11)**

A young chess student watched a grandmaster play against a world-class opponent. Early in the match, the grandmaster sacrificed a major piece—a move the student thought was absurd.

“Why would he do that?”

To the student, it felt like losing on purpose.

But many moves later, the board suddenly shifted:

the sacrifice set up a complex trap that would eventually lead to a brilliant checkmate.

Only when the game ended did it become clear that the “loss” was actually the **key strategy** all along.

### **Habakkuk Connection:**

When God told Habakkuk that He was raising the **Babylonians**—a violent empire—to judge Judah, Habakkuk was horrified.

It looked like God was sacrificing His people to an evil opponent.

But God was working through a **larger strategy**—one that would expose injustice, humble nations, purify His people, and ultimately bring about restoration and hope.

**Divine moves often look wrong until the endgame.**

Habakkuk's short book is a record of a man learning to walk by faith when he couldn't see what God was doing.

When circumstances confuse us, when evil seems to triumph, and when God's timing puzzles us, the righteous must live by faith in the unchanging character of God.

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### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:**

- Author: The prophet Habakkuk, likely a contemporary of Jeremiah. Less known about him than Nahum – name probably means “*to embrace*” – some have suggested that there may be an analogy to Jacob wrestling with God for a blessing – just as Habakkuk wrestles with God for his answers regarding **God's Justice ???**
- Date of Writing: Assyria has passed from the world stage. Babylon (Chaldeans) rose to dominance after 627 BC.  
**1:6; 3:16** – only date reference is to the imminent coming Babylonian conquest and captivity of Judah  
Does not fit the situation of the reign of **Josiah** with his moral and spiritual reforms – 640-609 BC  
Probably **608 BC** or later – reign of ungodly king Jehoiakim (**2 Kings 23:34ff**)

- Context: Judah is morally collapsing. God is preparing to judge His own people by using the violent Babylonian empire. Nation has been resisting God’s warnings and calls for repentance. No longer any pleas for repentance in Habakkuk’s message.
- Uniqueness: Unlike most prophetic books, Habakkuk is a dialogue between the prophet and God initiated by the prophet, not primarily a message directed to the people initiated by God. Importance of being honest in our dialogue with God – voicing our doubts and confusion and listening to His revelation. (cf. Job and Jonah)

**BIG IDEA:**

The Long Term Conviction of Faith Exults in the God of Our Salvation Despite the Perplexing Questions of the Pain and Apparent Injustice of Our Present Circumstances

**Habakkuk 3:2** *“In wrath remember mercy.”*

**Habakkuk 2:4** *“The just shall live by faith.”*

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**STRUCTURE OF PASSAGE**

**Twofold Division:**

- I. (1-2) COMPLAINTS AGAINST GOD’S JUSTICE (2 Questions)
- II. (3) CONFIDENCE IN GOD’S JUSTICE

**Threefold Division:**

- I. (1:2-11) PERPLEXING PARADOX = JUSTICE LONGED FOR
  - A. (:2-4) Question: Is God’s Justice Postponed?
  - B. (:5-11) Lord’s Response: Shocking Discipline Strategy
- II. (1:12 – 2:20) PERMANENT PRINCIPLE = GOD IS A RIGHTEOUS JUDGE
  - A. (1:12 – 2:1) Question: Is God’s Justice Perverted?
  - B. (2:2-20) Lord’s Response: Make no Mistake – The Wicked Will Be Punished in a Righteous Manner
- III. (3:1-19) PERSEVERING PERSPECTIVE = GOD WILL DELIVER HIS PEOPLE
  - A. (3:1-2) Prayer for Merciful Revival -- In Wrath Remember Mercy
  - B. (3:3-15) Portrait of God’s Power and Glory -- Historical Remembrances of God’s Sovereign Power and Majestic Glory
  - C. (3:16-19) Profession of Joyful Confidence of Faith – Choose abiding Joy regardless of present circumstances

## **I. (1:2-11) PERPLEXING PARADOX = JUSTICE LONGED FOR**

### **A. (:2-4) Question: Is God's Justice Postponed?**

#### **COMPLAINT OF THE PROPHET -- DELAY OF THE LORD IN RESTORING JUSTICE TO THE LAND – THE LAMENT OF A DISTURBED SOUL**

Throughout history, unbelievers have scoffed at the inevitability of accountability before a sovereign God and coming judgment.

- Days of Noah
- Prideful Assyrians
- Now the Babylonians
- Look at the scoffers in the last days who now mock the promise of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming

But God's people as well have made the wrong application from God's longsuffering

- Fall of Northern Kingdom in 722 BC
- Imminent Fall of Judah which will come in 586 BC

Delay in Judgment does not always mean denial of justice

#### 1. (:2) Delay in Deliverance Disturbs the Soul

##### a. When Will the Lord Hear?

*"How long, O Lord, will I call for help, And you will not hear?"*

**John MacArthur:** The phrase, reflecting the prophet's impatience, is frequently used by the psalmist to express similar thoughts of perplexity (cf. **Pss 13:1,2; 62:3; Jer 14:9; Mt 27:46**).

The perceived silence of God tests our faith in perplexing times. What is going on?

##### b. When Will the Lord Deliver?

*"I cry out to you, 'Violence!' Yet you do not save."*

Speaks to the prevalent social injustice and moral decay in the land

Tension between God's promises of protection for His people and the reality of present suffering

#### 2. (:3) Culture of Corruption Disturbs the Soul

##### a. Pervasive Corruption

*"Why do you make me see iniquity,  
And cause me to look on wickedness?"*

Sounds like **Psalm 73** where the psalmist struggles with the prosperity of the wicked  
**Job 21:7-15** – questioning why the wicked live prosperous lives

##### b. Escalating Conflict

*"Yes, destruction and violence are before me;  
Strife exists and contention arises."*

#### 3. (:4) Perversion of Justice Disturbs the Soul

##### a. Disregard for Covenant Standards

*"Therefore the law is ignored And justice is never upheld."*

Speaks to the corruption of the political leaders and judges = a sign of the collapse of Judah's society

b. The Righteous End Up the Victims

*“For the wicked surround the righteous;  
Therefore justice comes out perverted.”*

Not only is justice absent, but it is actively being twisted to serve the interests of the wicked.  
Need for divine intervention

**ILLUSTRATION: The Slow-Growing Bamboo**

In parts of Asia, farmers plant **Chinese bamboo** knowing they'll see almost nothing for years.  
For **four years**, the seed pushes only a tiny shoot above the surface—just inches.  
But underground, massive root systems are forming.  
Then, **in the fifth year**, the bamboo suddenly shoots up to nearly **80 feet in six weeks**.

People often ask, “Did it grow 80 feet in six weeks?”  
The real answer is, “It grew 80 feet in **five years**—most of it invisible.”

**Point:**

We often conclude that God is doing nothing against injustice because **we see no vertical growth**.  
But His work—like the bamboo roots—is real, deep, and hidden until the moment He acts

**B. (:5-11) Lord's Response: Shocking Discipline Strategy  
CONSTERNATION OF THE PROPHET -- DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD BY USING  
CRUEL CHALDEANS AS INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT –  
THE ASTONISHMENT OF A SHOCKED PROPHET**

**1. (:5) Unexpected Discipline Strategy**

a. Amazing

*“Look among the nations! Observe! Be Astonished! Wonder!”*

b. Unbelievable

*“Because I am doing something in your days –  
You would not believe if you were told.”*

This emphasizes the extraordinary nature of God's plan, which would be difficult to accept even if explicitly revealed. It highlights the **challenge of faith** and the need to trust in God's wisdom and timing.

**2. (:6-10) Unrestrained Cruelty of the Chaldeans**

a. (:6-7) Summary Qualifications of the Chaldeans for This Mission

1) Divinely Appointed for Instrument of Discipline

*“For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,”*

Main qualification = chosen by God for the task

2) Proven Aggressiveness of Spirit

*“That fierce and impetuous people”*

3) Unquenchable Appetite for Conquering New Territory

*“Who march throughout the earth*

*To seize dwelling places which are not theirs.”*

Their military campaigns were extensive, and they were known for their ability to conquer and control large territories.

4) Reputation Acknowledged – Strike fear in the hearts of their enemies

*“They are dreaded and feared;”*

Ruthless, barbaric

5) Completely Autonomous – Don’t care what other nations think

*“Their justice and authority originate with themselves.”*

This self-governance is indicative of their self-reliant pride and autonomy, often leading to moral relativism and tyranny. They establish their own standards for conduct – no outside objective standard like the law of God.

b. (:8) Superior Military Resources

1) Their Horses

*“Their horses are swifter than leopards*

*And keener than wolves in the evening.”*

**Blue:** Both leopards and wolves are fierce, fast, and excellent hunters. At dusk, wolves are hungry and ready to pounce on prey. The Babylonians’ voracious speed in conquest was also likened to a vulture swooping to devour.

2) Their Horsemen

*“Their horsemen come galloping,*

*Their horsemen come from afar;*

*They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour.”*

**Biblehub.com** -- The **vulture** is a scavenger bird known for its keen eyesight and ability to swiftly descend upon its prey. This imagery conveys the idea of the Babylonians as opportunistic and ruthless, ready to exploit any weakness and consume what remains. The vulture's flight suggests both speed and inevitability, reinforcing the theme of impending judgment.

c. (:9-10) Swaggering Confidence in Victory

1) Bent on Violence

*“All of them come for violence.”*

2) United in Aggression

*“Their horde of faces moves forward.”*

3) Merciless in Enslavement

*“They collect captives like sand.”*

4) Brazen in Arrogance

a) Mock at Any Royal Authority

*“They mock at kings*

*And rulers are a laughing matter to them.”*

The Babylonians' contempt for kings indicates their belief in their own superiority and invincibility.

b) Make Fun of Any Feeble Defense

*“They laugh at every fortress*

*And heap up rubble to capture it.”*

3. (:11) Ultimate Accountability – the Chaldeans Will Be Judged Themselves

a. Their Dominance will only be Temporary

*“Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on.”*

b. Their Cruelty will be Condemned

*“But they will be held guilty,”*

**Biblehub.com:** Despite being used by God as a tool for judgment, they are not exempt from guilt. Their actions, driven by pride and violence, are inherently sinful. This reflects a broader biblical theme where God can use even unrighteous nations to fulfill His purposes, as seen in **Isaiah 10:5-7** with Assyria. The concept of divine sovereignty over human actions is a recurring theme in scripture, highlighting God's ultimate control over history while still holding individuals and nations accountable for their sins.

c. Their Idolatry will be Exposed

*“They whose strength is their god.”*

**John MacArthur:** Though the Chaldeans were God's instruments of judgment, their self sufficiency and self-adulation planted the seeds for their own destruction (described in **2:2-20**), as they stood guilty of idolatry and blasphemy before the sovereign Lord.

**II.(1:12 – 2:20) PERMANENT PRINCIPLE = GOD IS A RIGHTEOUS JUDGE**

**A. (1:12 – 2:1) Question: Is God's Justice Perverted?**

**DEPENDENCE ON THE LORD DESPITE PERPLEXITY OF INCOMPREHENSIBLE TACTICS - - THE HOPE OF A PERPLEXED PROPHET**

1. (:12-17) COMFORT/CONFUSION OF THE PROPHET –

a. (:12) Perspective Based on Eternity

1) Character of God

*“Are You not from everlasting,*

*O Lord, my God, my Holy One?”*

**Hampton Keathley:** He began in **verse 12** by claiming that God is **eternal**. I think the idea of **immutability**, that God does not change, is included here. The fact that God does not change is important because it means God keeps His promises and He has made promises to Israel.

Habakkuk knows that God will not totally destroy Israel because of his covenantal promises. That is why he says, *“We will not die.”*

2) Confidence in Deliverance  
*“We will not die.”*

3) Control of the Discipline  
*“You, O Lord, have appointed them to judge;  
And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.”*

**Biblehub.com:** The term "Rock" is a metaphor for God's strength, stability, and faithfulness, often used in the Psalms (e.g., **Psalm 18:2**). It conveys trust in God's unchanging nature amidst turmoil. The phrase "established them for correction" indicates that the Babylonians' rise to power is not random but part of God's corrective plan for His people

b. (:13) Perspective Based on Holiness – Paradox  
**Faith grows when the believer looks from earth’s chaos to God’s character.**

1) You Don’t Approve of Wickedness – God’s Holiness and Purity  
*“Your eyes are too pure to approve evil,  
And you cannot look on wickedness with favor.”*

2) You Seem to be Favoring the Wicked over the Less Wicked  
*“Why do you look with favor  
On those who deal treacherously?  
Why are you silent when the wicked swallow up  
Those more righteous than they?”*

c. (:14-17) Perspective Clouded by Unrestrained Cruelty of the Chaldeans

1) (:14) Vulnerability of Men to Such Unrestrained Cruelty  
*“Why have you made men like the fish of the sea,  
Like creeping things without a ruler over them?”*

The reference to "creeping things" further emphasizes the idea of insignificance and lack of guidance.

2) (:15a) Vultures Take Advantage of Such Vulnerability  
*“The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook,  
Drag them away with their net,  
And gather them together in their fishing net.”*

3) (:15b-16) Victory Celebrations of the Wicked are Especially Galling  
*“Therefore they rejoice and are glad.  
Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net  
And burn incense to their fishing net;  
Because through these things their catch is large,  
And their food is plentiful.”*

4) (:17) Vexing Question: How Long?? (back to question of vs 2)

*“Will they therefore empty their net  
And continually slay nations without sparing?”*

**J Ronald Blue:** The action depicted signified a seemingly perpetual operation. They emptied their net so they could fill it again, again, and again. When would God put a stop to the Babylonians’ greed for conquest? How could He let a people continue in power when they so openly worshiped that very power as their god? Habakkuk was confused.

2. (2:1) Waiting for a More Definitive Answer

*“I will stand on my guard post  
And station myself on the rampart;  
And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me,  
And how I may reply when I am reproved.”*

Habakkuk climbs the watchtower—symbolizing expectancy, patience, and surrender. He waits for God’s correction.

Application:

- Christians need “watchtower moments”—intentional pauses where we wait on God rather than rush to conclusions.

**B. (2:2-20) Lord’s Response: Make no Mistake – The Wicked Will Be Punished in a Righteous Manner**  
**PERPLEXITY REGARDING GOD’S WAYS AND GOD’S TIMING SHOULD NEVER SHAKE OUR FAITH IN GOD’S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS OR FAITHFULNESS TO HIS PROMISES**

1. (:2-3) DON’T BE SHORT-SIGHTED OR IMPATIENT REGARDING THE LORD’S LONG TERM PROGRAM –  
PROPHETIC REVELATION PROMISES THE CERTAINTY OF FULFILLMENT ACCORDING TO GOD’S TIMETABLE

a. (:2) The Lord Goes on Record

1) Charge to Faithfully Record God’s Revelation

*“Then the Lord answered me and said, ‘Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets,’”*

**John MacArthur:** Habakkuk was to record the vision to preserve it for posterity, so that all who read it would know of the certainty of its fulfillment (cf. similar language in Da 12:4, 9). The prophecy had lasting relevance and thus had to be preserved. Although a period of time would occur before its fulfillment, all were to know that it would occur at God’s “*appointed time*” (cf. Is 13; Jer 50, 51). Babylon would fall to the Medo-Persian kingdom of Cyrus ca. 539 B.C. (cf Da 5).

2) Charge to Faithfully Communicate that Revelation to Others  
*“that the one who reads it may run.”*

**J Ronald Blue:** the point is that the messenger [herald] would read it and then run to spread the news to others.

b. (:3) The Prophecies Will Not Fail

1) The Deadline Has Not Passed

*“For the vision is yet for the appointed time;”*

2) Rapid Progress is being Made (from God’s Perspective)

*“It hastens toward the goal”*

3) Fulfillment is Certain

*“and it will not fail.”*

4) Patience is Needed (Because there is an appearance of delay)

*“Though it tarries, wait for it;”*

**Biblehub.com:** The notion of lingering suggests a delay from a human perspective, yet it calls for patience and faith. This echoes the biblical principle of waiting on the Lord, as seen in **Psalm 27:14**. The call to "wait for it" encourages believers to trust in God's timing, even when immediate circumstances seem unchanged. This patience is a recurring theme in Scripture, as seen in **James 5:7-8**, which urges believers to be patient for the Lord's coming.

5) Fulfillment is Certain (In actuality there is no delay)

*“For it will certainly come, it will not delay.”*

2. (:4-5) KEY PRINCIPLE: GOD WILL ALWAYS MAKE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE PROUD AND THE RIGHTEOUS

a. (:4a) The Unbelieving Proud – Needs a Soul Adjustment

*“Behold, as for the proud one,  
His soul is not right within him”*

b. (:4b) The Believing Righteous – Needs to Stick to His Guns

*“But the righteous will live by his faith.”*

Faith endures when God’s actions are confusing.

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**Ray Stedman:** It is interesting that in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews there is a kind of **divine commentary** on this verse:

1. Romans stresses what it means to be "righteous." There we are told that the righteousness of Christ is imparted to us by the gift of God. Righteousness is handed to us. We don't earn it; we have it the minute we believe.

2. Then the words, "shall live," are interpreted in Chapter 5 of Galatians, the great chapter on the life in the Spirit. What does "to live" mean? It means to walk in love, and joy, and peace, and longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self control.

3. Then the words, "by faith," are interpreted in Hebrews, the great letter on faith. What does it mean to have faith? It means to trust that the invisible God is working, despite

present appearances.

**John MacArthur:** The emphasis in both Habakkuk and the NT references goes beyond the act of faith to include the **continuity of faith**. Faith is not a one-time act, but a way of life. The true believer, declared righteous by God, will persevere in faith as the pattern of his life (cf **Col 1:22, 23; Heb 3:12-14**).

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c. (:5) Three Summary Charges Against the Proud Chaldeans

1) Deceived into Discontentment by Strong Drink

*“Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man,  
So that he does not stay at home.”*

**J Ronald Blue:** The treachery of wine is described in Proverbs 23:31-32. It looks so inviting in the glass but *“in the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper.”*

2) Devoted to Greed and Covetousness

*“He enlarges his appetite like Sheol,  
And he is like death, never satisfied.”*

3) Driven by Ambition and Lust for Conquest

*“He also gathers to himself all nations  
And collects to himself all peoples.”*

**3. (:6-20) PRONOUNCEMENT OF FIVE WOES AGAINST THE PROUD CHALDEANS**

**John MacArthur:** Five woes, in the form of a taunt song, were pronounced upon the Chaldeans in anticipation of their eventual judgment. Presented in 5 stanzas of 3 verses each, the 5 woes were directed at 5 different classes of evildoers.

**J Ronald Blue:** **Woe** is an interjection of distress pronounced in the face of disaster or in view of coming judgment (e.g., **Isa. 3:11; 5:11; 10:5**) because of certain sins.

This expression is a warning to those who act unjustly, indicating that their actions will lead to their downfall.

a. (:6-8) **Woe #1 – Extortion / Greed** -- The Looter Will Be Looted

1) Pronouncement of Woe – Extreme Usury

*“Woe to him who increases what is not his – For how long –  
And makes himself rich with loans?”*

**Biblehub.com:** This rhetorical question expresses the frustration and impatience of those suffering under injustice. It echoes the cries of the oppressed throughout Scripture, such as in **Psalm 13:1**, where David asks, *“How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?”* It reflects a deep yearning for God's intervention and justice. The question also implies that the current state of affairs is unsustainable and that divine judgment is inevitable. This anticipation of God's righteous action is a recurring theme in the prophetic books, where the ultimate hope is in God's deliverance and the establishment of His kingdom.

2) Painful Taunt Song

*“Will not all of these take up a taunt -song against him,  
Even mockery and insinuations against him ”*

3) Promise of Retribution – The Looter Will Be Looted

*“Will not your creditors rise up suddenly,  
And those who collect from you awaken?  
Indeed, you will become plunder for them.  
Because you have looted many nations,  
All the remainder of the peoples will loot you –  
Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land,  
To the town and all its inhabitants.”*

**Theo Laetsch:** The first woe refers to the rapacity of the Chaldean, his eagerness to enrich himself at the expense of others by conquest of their home countries, making vassals of the nations, extorting from them huge contributions of materials, money, and men, bleeding them white.

b. (:9-11) **Woe #2 – Exploitation / Injustice** -- Ill-Gotten Gains Will Cry Out Against You

1) Pronouncement of Woe – False Security

*“Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house  
To put his nest on high,  
To be delivered from the hand of calamity!”*

The "*hand of disaster*" represents impending judgment and calamity, which is inevitable for those who trust in their own strength and wealth rather than in God.

2) Painful Taunt Song

*“Surely the stone will cry out from the wall,  
And the rafter will answer it from the framework .”*

**J Ronald Blue:** Even if every single enemy were exterminated, the very stones and lumber would testify against the rapacious and cruel hands of the Babylonians that had fashioned these building materials to show off their empire’s strength and glory. The stones and timber with which the houses and palaces were built had been obtained through plunder and injustice.

3) Promise of Retribution – Turning the Tables on Their Pride and Sin

*“You have devised a shameful thing for your house  
By cutting off many peoples;  
So you are sinning against yourself.”*

c. (:12-14) **Woe #3 – Exaltation / Violence** -- Ruthless Kingdom Building Will Be Frustrated By the Dominion of the Messiah

1) Pronouncement of Woe – Malicious Power Play

*“Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed  
And founds a town with violence!”*

2) Painful Taunt Song

*“Is it not indeed from the Lord of hosts  
That peoples toil for fire,  
And nations grow weary for nothing?”*

**John MacArthur:** Like a fire that burns everything given to it, their labors would all be futile, having no lasting value (v. 13; cf. **Mic 3:10**).

3) Promise of Retribution – Kingdom Reversal

*“For the earth will be filled  
With the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,  
As the waters cover the sea.”*

**Biblehub.com:** The "knowledge of the glory of the LORD" implies an intimate understanding and recognition of God's majesty and holiness. This is not merely intellectual knowledge but a deep, experiential awareness of God's presence and power. The glory of the LORD often refers to His manifest presence, as seen in the tabernacle and temple. This knowledge is transformative, leading to worship and reverence.

d. (:15-17) **Woe #4 – Excessive Debauchery / Immorality – The Shamers Will Be Exposed to Public Shame**

1) Pronouncement of Woe – Shameful Exploitation

*“Woe to you who make your neighbors drink,  
Who mix in your venom even to make them drunk  
So as to look on their nakedness.”*

2) Painful Taunt Song

*“You will be filled with disgrace rather than honor.  
Now you yourself drink and expose your own nakedness.  
The cup in the Lord’s right hand will come around to you,  
And utter disgrace will come upon your glory.”*

3) Promise of Retribution – Reaping Violence and Devastation

*“For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,  
And the devastation of its beasts by which you terrified them,  
Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land,  
To the town and all its inhabitants.”*

**Charles Ryrie:** The *violence done to Lebanon* by several rulers in cutting down its great forests and killing its cattle would be done to Judah (see **Isa. 14:7-8**).

e. (:18-20) **Woe #5 – Extreme Idolatry – The Worshipers of Idols Will Be Mocked**

1) Pronouncement of Woe – Foolish Loyalty

*“Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, ‘Awake!’  
To a mute stone, ‘Arise!’  
And that is your teacher?  
Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver,*

*And there is no breath at all inside it.”*

**John MacArthur:** Compare the sarcasm with that of Elijah’s words to the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (1 Ki 18:27; cf. Jer 2:27).

2) Painful Taunt Song

*“What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it,  
Or an image, a teacher of falsehood?  
For its maker trusts in his own handiwork  
When he fashions speechless idols.”*

3) Promise of Retribution – Conclusion --

Stand in Awe of the Lord of History

Who Judges Righteously From His Holy Temple

*“But the Lord is in His holy temple.*

*Let all the earth be silent before Him.”*

God is sovereign, enthroned, and in control—even when nations rage.

**Biblehub.com:** This phrase emphasizes the sovereignty and majesty of God. The "holy temple" refers to the heavenly sanctuary where God dwells, signifying His ultimate authority and purity. In the context of Habakkuk, this statement contrasts the impotence of idols and the futility of human efforts against the divine power of God. The temple in Jerusalem was a central place of worship for the Israelites, symbolizing God's presence among His people. The temple imagery points to Jesus Christ, who referred to His body as the temple, indicating that He is the ultimate dwelling place of God among humanity.

**III. (3:1-19) PERSEVERING PERSPECTIVE = GOD WILL DELIVER HIS PEOPLE**

**THE PERSEVERING PERSPECTIVE COMBINES THE SHORT TERM PAIN OF DISCIPLINE WITH THE TRIUMPHANT RESOLVE TO REJOICE IN GOD’S LONG TERM DELIVERANCE**

A. (3:1-2) Prayer for Merciful Revival -- In Wrath Remember Mercy

**CHANGED PERSPECTIVE OF THE PROPHET –**

**COMBINES ACCEPTANCE OF DISCIPLINE WITH HOPE FOR THE FUTURE**

1. (:1) Posture of Prayer

*“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.”*

No longer arguing and complaining because of his perplexities

**John MacArthur:** The precise meaning is unknown (its singular form occurs in the heading to Ps 7). In light of the musical notation at the end of chap. 3, it is thought that it has a musical-liturgical significance, and that this chapter was sung.

2. (:2) Plea for Revival and Mercy

a. Foundational Attitude of Fear of the Lord = The Beginning of Wisdom

*“Lord, I have heard the report about You and I fear.”*

b. Plea for Revival

*“O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years,  
In the midst of the years make it known;”*

c. Plea for Mercy – While Accepting Discipline

*“In wrath remember mercy.”*

One of the key phrases in the book

This tension between **wrath** and **mercy** is ultimately resolved in the person of Jesus Christ, who embodies both God's justice and His grace.

B. (3:3-15) Portrait of God's Power and Glory -- Historical Remembrances of  
God's Sovereign Power and Majestic Glory

COMBINES THE OUTPOURING OF GOD'S WRATH WITH THE REPEATED  
DELIVERANCE OF HIS PEOPLE

(Primarily looking at God's Deliverance of His People from Egypt and the giving of the  
Law)

A poetic theophany describing:

- God marching in judgment.
- His splendor, power, and sovereignty over nations and nature.
- God's past faithfulness becomes the anchor for present faith.

1. (:3-5) Vision of the Glory and Power of the God of Wrath

a. His Coming

*“God comes from Teman,  
And the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah.”*

**John MacArthur:** Teman, named after a grandson of Esau, was an Edomite city (**Am 1:12; Ob 9**). Mount Paran was located in the Sinai peninsula. Both allude to the theater in which God displayed great power when He brought Israel into the land of Canaan (cf. **Dt 33:2; Jdg 5:4**).

b. His Manifest Glory

*“His splendor covers the heavens,  
And the earth is full of His praise.  
His radiance is like the sunlight;  
He has rays flashing from His hand,”*

c. His Hidden Power Demonstrated in Wrath

*“And there is the hiding of His power.  
Before Him goes pestilence,  
And plague comes after Him.”*

2. (:6-11) The Outpouring of God's Wrath

a. (:6A) His Piercing Gaze

*“He stood and surveyed the earth;  
He looked and startled the nations.”*

b. (:6B) His Eternality Contrasted with Mortal Fragility

*“Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered,  
The ancient hills collapsed.  
His ways are everlasting.”*

c. (:7) His Terrified Witnesses – En Route to the Promised Land

*“I saw the tents of Cushan under distress,  
The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.”*

d. (:8-11) His Power Demonstrated in Nature – But His Wrath  
Not Directed Against Nature

1) (:8) Waters of Turmoil – But Goal of Bringing Deliverance

*“Did the Lord rage against the rivers,  
Or was your anger against the rivers,  
Or was your wrath against the sea,  
That you rode on your horses, on your chariots of salvation?”*

2) (:9) Weapons of Wrath

*“Your bow was made bare,  
The rods of chastisement were sworn. Selah.  
You cleaved the earth with rivers.”*

3) (:10-11) Witnesses of Destruction

*“The mountains saw You and quaked;  
The downpour of waters swept by.  
The deep uttered forth its voice,  
It lifted high its hands.  
Sun and moon stood in their places;  
They went away at the light of your arrows,  
At the radiance of your gleaming spear.”*

3. (:12-15) God’s Wrath Set in the Context of God’s Mercy and Deliverance

a. (:12) Mission of Wrath Against the Nations

*“In indignation You marched through the earth;  
In anger You trampled the nations.”*

b. (:13A) Goal of Deliverance for God’s People

*“You went forth for the salvation of Your people;  
For the salvation of Your anointed.”*

c. (:13B-15) Execution of the Wicked Who Had Oppressed God’s People

*“You struck the head of the house of the evil  
To lay him open from thigh to neck. Selah.  
You pierced with his own spears the head of his throngs.  
They stormed in to scatter us;  
Their exultation was like those who devour the oppressed in secret.  
You trampled on the sea with Your horses,  
On the surge of many waters.”*

**C. (3:16-19) Profession of Joyful Confidence of Faith – Choose abiding Joy  
regardless of present circumstances**

**TRIUMPHANT RESOLVE OF THE PROPHET –  
COMBINES THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD WITH  
THE UPLIFTING RESOURCES OF THE JOY AND STRENGTH OF THE LORD**

1. (:16A) Foundational Attitude of Fear of the Lord = the Beginning of Wisdom

*“I heard and my inward parts trembled,*

*At the sound my lips quivered.  
Decay enters my bones,  
And in my place I tremble.”*

2. (:16B-17) Persevering Acceptance of the Discipline of the Lord

a. (:16B) Expectation of the Inevitability of the Discipline of the Lord

*“Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,  
For the people to arise who will invade us.”*

b. (:17) Anticipation of the Bleakest of Times

1) No Food From the Fields

*“Though the fig tree should not blossom  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
Though the yield of the olive should fail  
And the fields produce no food,”*

2) No Food From the Flocks

*“Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
And there be no cattle in the stalls”*

3. (:18-19) Abiding Confidence in the Sufficiency of the Joy and Strength of the Lord

a. (:18) The Joy of the Lord

*“Yet I will exult in the Lord,  
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.”*

**Biblehub.com:** This phrase reflects a profound declaration of faith and joy in God despite adverse circumstances. The prophet Habakkuk, after expressing his concerns and witnessing the impending judgment on Judah, chooses to find joy in the LORD. This decision to exult is significant, as it demonstrates a deep trust in God's sovereignty and goodness, even when the situation seems dire. The term "*exult*" implies a triumphant and exuberant joy, suggesting that Habakkuk's faith transcends his immediate circumstances. This mirrors the attitude of other biblical figures, such as Job, who maintained faith despite suffering.

b. (:19A) The Strength of the Lord

*“The Lord God is my strength,”*

c. (:19B) Victory in the Lord

*“And He has made my feet like hinds' feet,  
And makes me walk on my high places.”*

**CONCLUSION — A FAITH THAT FINDS ITS FOOTING**

The book that began in **confusion** ends in **confidence**.

The prophet who began with complaints ends in praise.

Why?

Because Habakkuk looked from his circumstances to his God.

**Ken Boa:**

Progression of Habakkuk's faith reflected in his dialogue with God:

- From Mystery to Certainty
- From Questioning to Affirming
- From Complaint to Confidence
- From Burden to Blessing
- From Wondering to Worship
- From Restlessness to Rest
- From a Problem to God's Person
- From a Complaint to Consolation

**Three closing challenges:**

**1. Trust God's Plan—even when you don't understand it.**

God uses strange messengers and surprising methods.

**2. Trust God's Promises—the righteous shall live by faith.**

Faith is not merely belief but steadfast obedience.

**3. Trust God's Person—the Lord is in His holy temple.**

He is sovereign, holy, wise, and good.

**Habakkuk teaches believers to live by faith when God's timing is mysterious, when evil seems to prosper, and when life appears to unravel—because God remains sovereign, righteous, and worthy of praise.**

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**J.N. Boo Heflin:** It is better to live in faith than in rebellion, trusting God when answers are not to be found, living a life of faithfulness even when evil seems to have the upper hand. This approach to life is wise because God is the omnipotent ruler; He will ultimately prevail over evil.

**Major Theological Themes:**

The great issue with which Habakkuk struggles is **theodicy**. How could a just and holy God allow evil to exist? How could He remain inactive and silent in the face of brutality, injustice, and atrocious inhumanity? Though intellectual answers for the problem ultimately give way to experiential answers, Habakkuk does in fact learn several significant theological truths:

1) First, he learns that God and good will inevitably triumph. . . God's people must be a waiting people, living with the certain hope that eternity will clarify the issues, revealing the triumph of right.

2) Second, Habakkuk learns that evil contains the seed of destruction (**2:4-20**). Individuals and nations who live in pride, arrogance, and self-sufficiency find in the end these very attitudes are

their undoing. Though on occasion evil appears to have the upper hand, it is really filled with death and destruction. It cannot and will not endure in God's moral universe. Its transitory nature is an unalterable fact of history.

3) Third, the prophet learns that those who are right with God are to live by their faithfulness (2:4).

4) Fourth, Habakkuk learns that while intellectual answers to the enigmas of history may not be available, God is good and He is enough. Accordingly, His people rejoice in His salvation and strength. They await with confidence the triumphant end, even in the midst of oppression and deprivation (3: 17-19).

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- 1) Go to the website main page – BIBLEOUTLINES.COM
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### HABAKKUK – IN WRATH REMEMBER MERCY

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**OVERVIEW**

**BIG IDEA**

**BASIC OUTLINE**

**WHY STUDY THIS BOOK?**

**NOTABLE QUOTES**

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# OUTLINE OF HABAKKUK

## IN WRATH REMEMBER MERCY . . . THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

**THE LONG TERM CONVICTION OF FAITH EXULTS IN THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION DESPITE THE PERPLEXING QUESTIONS OF THE PAIN AND APPARENT INJUSTICE OF OUR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES**

### **(1:1) INTRODUCTION:**

- The Message – Description of the Content
- The Messenger -- Identification of the Prophet
- The Medium -- Mode of Revelation

### **I. (1:2-11) PERPLEXING PARADOX – JUSTICE LONGED FOR**

#### **A. (:2-4) QUESTION -- COMPLAINT OF THE PROPHET – IS GOD’S JUSTICE POSTPONED? THE LAMENT OF A DISTURBED SOUL**

1. (:2) Delay in Deliverance Disturbs the Soul
2. (:3) Culture of Corruption Disturbs the Soul
3. (:4) Perversion of Justice Disturbs the Soul

#### **B. (:5-11) LORD’S RESPONSE – CONSTERNATION OF THE PROPHET -- SHOCKING DISCIPLINE STRATEGY**

1. (:5) Unexpected Discipline Strategy
2. (:6-10) Unrestrained Cruelty of the Chaldeans
3. (:11) Ultimate Accountability – the Chaldeans Will Be Judged Themselves

### **II. (1:12 – 2:20) PERMANENT PRINCIPLE – GOD IS A RIGHTEOUS JUDGE**

#### **A. (1:12 – 2:1) QUESTION – IS GOD’S JUSTICE PERVERTED**

1. (1:12) Perspective Based on Eternity
2. (1:13) Perspective Based on Holiness -- Paradox
3. (1:14-17) Perspective Clouded by Unrestrained Cruelty of the Chaldeans
4. (2:1) Waiting for a More Definitive Answer

#### **B. (2:2-20) LORD’S RESPONSE – MAKE NO MISTAKE – THE WICKED WILL BE PUNISHED IN A RIGHTEOUS MANNER**

1. (:2-3) Certainty of Judgment
  - a. (:2) The Lord Goes on Record

- b. (:3) The Prophecies Will Not Fail
- 2. (:4-5) Key Principle: God Will Always Make a Distinction between the Proud and the Righteous
  - a. (:4a) The Unbelieving Proud – Needs a Soul Adjustment
  - b. (:4b) The Believing Righteous – Needs to Stick to His Guns
  - c. (:5) Three Summary Charges Against the Proud Chaldeans
    - 1) Deceived into Discontentment by Strong Drink
    - 2) Devoted to Greed and Covetousness
    - 3) Driven by Ambition and Lust for Conquest
- 3. (:6-20) Pronouncement of 5 Woes Against the Proud Chaldeans
  - a. (:6-8) Extortion – The Looter Will Be Looted
  - b. (:9-11) Exploitation – Ill-Gotten Gains Will Cry Out Against You
  - c. (:12-14) Exaltation – Ruthless Kingdom Building Will Be Frustrated by the Dominion of the Messiah
  - d. (:15-17) Excessive Debauchery – The Shamers Will Be Exposed to Public Shame
  - e. (:18-20) Extreme Idolatry – The Worshipers of Idols Will Be Mocked

### **III. (3:1-19) PERSEVERING PERSPECTIVE – GOD WILL DELIVER HIS PEOPLE**

#### **A. (:1-2) PRAYER FOR MERCIFUL REVIVAL – IN WRATH REMEMBER MERCY -- COMBINES ACCEPTANCE OF DISCIPLINE WITH HOPE FOR THE FUTURE**

- 1. (:1) Posture of Prayer
- 2. (:2) Plea for Revival and Mercy

#### **B. (:3-15) PORTRAIT OF GOD’S POWER AND GLORY – HISTORICAL REMEMBRANCES OF GOD’S SOVEREIGN POWER AND MAJESTIC GLORY**

- 1. (:3-5) Vision of the Glory and Power of the God of Wrath
- 2. (:6-11) The Outpouring of God’s Wrath
- 3. (:12-15) God’s Wrath Set in the Context of God’s Mercy and Deliverance

#### **C. (:16-19) PROFESSION OF JOYFUL CONFIDENCE OF FAITH – CHOOSE ABIDING JOY REGARDLESS OF PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES**

- 1. (:16A) Foundational Attitude of Fear of the Lord = the Beginning of Wisdom
- 2. (:16B-17) Persevering Acceptance of the Discipline of the Lord
- 3. (:18-19) Abiding Confidence in the Sufficiency of the Joy and Strength of the Lord

TEXT: Habakkuk 1:1-11

TITLE: PERPLEXING PARADOX – JUSTICE LONGED FOR

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE PROPHET WRESTLES WITH THE APPARENT DELAY OF THE LORD IN ALLOWING EVIL TO GO UNPUNISHED – HOW LONG?**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Cyril Barber:** How can a message over twenty-six hundred years old impact our contemporary world?

- (1) The prophetic message continues to speak to us because it is the message of God. Because it comes from God, it continues to communicate the ways of God to modern people.
- (2) The prophets forged their message in historical circumstances. The message of God came to real people in the everyday experiences of life as well as in times of crisis.
- (3) Though society has changed, human nature has not changed. People still need to know that God is at work in the historical situation. People continue to face the problem of sin and the necessity for repentance.

**Eric Redmond:** Even though the prophet cries out for rescue, the God of salvation refuses to save. Relief from the violence does not seem to be forthcoming. We can sense the deep frustration and perplexity in these words of lament. How long must the spiritual and social disintegration of society continue before the Lord does something to stop it? This plea is reminiscent of King David in **Psalm 13:1** when he pleads, “*Lord, how long will You forget me? Forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?*” David’s agony is real, and so is Habakkuk’s agony.

The prophet has continually sought the Lord for relief from the burden of human misery piled up every day in the streets of the cities of Judah and in the halls of justice in the land. He has witnessed a society that had been falling apart in terms of its moral fabric. From the political leaders to the common people, everyone seems to have plunged themselves into moral madness. Everyone seems to have forsaken the Lord and His covenant with His people. Everyone seems to be striving for personal pleasure and self-promotion. At every level of Judahite society, sin is rampant. There is doctrinal and covenantal unfaithfulness.

The leaders of the nation have forsaken the law of the Lord and instituted their own false righteousness. They have backslidden into idol worship—a pattern that had repeated itself throughout Israelite history. After the demise of King Josiah, both priesthood and political leadership had again become corrupt. The spiritual reforms instituted by King Josiah had been short-lived after his death in 609 BC (**2 Kgs 23:29-30**). The failure to observe and obey the covenant of the Lord would be the primary reason for the eventual downfall of Judah.

The moral and spiritual bankruptcy of the nation's leadership also sent the people into the downward spiral toward spiritual and moral disintegration. There was a culture of immorality, greed, deception, hatred, injustice, hypocrisy, oppression, and much more. Habakkuk further expresses his agony when he says, "*Why do you make me see iniquity and cause (me) to look at trouble?*" (author's translation). The words translated "*iniquity*" and "*trouble*" are in parallel and indicate the general depravity of the society in the eyes of the prophet. This pair of words is found in **Isaiah 59:4** where the prophet exposes the chronic injustice in Judah a century before the time of Habakkuk: "*No one makes claims justly; no one pleads honestly. They trust in empty and worthless words; they conceive trouble and give birth to iniquity.*" Habakkuk is vexed at having to look at trouble and iniquity every day when God does not appear to be doing anything about it.

### **(:1) SUPERScription:**

A. The Message – Description of the Content  
    "*The oracle*"

**Steven Duby:** Without assuming that etymology alone determines the sense of a word, it is not difficult to identify a link between the sense of 'burden' and the sense of '*oracle*' and to avoid driving an unnecessary wedge between the two (see the wordplay in **Jer. 23.33**). It seems reasonable to say that YHWH places something upon a prophet such as Habakkuk that is a 'burden' to be borne, but in this case it is not a material object but rather an authoritative message, an oracle or prophecy that must be spoken with urgency to the people of God.

B. The Messenger -- Identification of the Prophet  
    "*which Habakkuk the prophet*"

C. The Medium of Revelation  
    "*saw*"

**Mark Copeland:** Concerning his MESSAGE: the book easily falls into three sections

- 1) A "burden" - **Hab 1:1-2:1**
- 2) A "vision" - **Hab 2:2-20**
- 3) A "prayer" - **Hab 3:1-19**

## **I. (:2-4) QUESTION #1: COMPLAINT OF THE PROPHET -- DELAY OF THE LORD IN RESTORING JUSTICE TO THE LAND – THE LAMENT OF A DISTURBED SOUL**

A. (:2) Delay in Deliverance Disturbs the Soul

    1. When Will the Lord Hear?

        "*How long, O Lord, will I call for help, And you will not hear?*"

**John MacArthur:** The phrase, reflecting the prophet's impatience, is frequently used by the psalmist to express similar thoughts of perplexity (cf. **Pss 13:1,2; 62:3; Jer 14:9; Mt 27:46**).

## 2. When Will the Lord Deliver?

*"I cry out to you, 'Violence!' Yet you do not save."*

**Cyril Barber:** His cry "violence!" was an adverbial accusative. It placed justifiable emphasis upon the intensity of the prophet's petition. He had observed the appalling conditions of God's people and could no longer tolerate the cry of the oppressed. Therefore, he poured out his heart to the Lord, beseeching Him in the most fervent of terms to intervene on behalf of His people.

Habakkuk's prayer revealed his true humanity. He was frustrated and bewildered. Daily he saw the plight of the poor. He had petitioned the Lord to help them, and now, in frustration, he reproved God for not intervening and vindicating the righteous (**1:2d**).

## **B. (:3) Culture of Corruption Disturbs the Soul**

### 1. Pervasive Corruption

*"Why do you make me see iniquity,  
And cause me to look on wickedness?"*

### 2. Escalating Conflict

*"Yes, destruction and violence are before me;  
Strife exists and contention arises."*

**Steven Duby:** In view of God's righteousness, Habakkuk, like the psalmists, asks God how long he will allow evil to persist and afflict the godly. The prophet is apparently permitted to ask without fear of being struck down by God. . . . Recent commentators typically do not take issue with the tone of Habakkuk's questions and assume or affirm the uprightness of his interaction with God. . . .

Habakkuk moves quickly from complaining in **1.2** that God is inactive to complaining in **1.3** that God is actively making him look at disaster and trouble all around him. The hiphil verb signifies a causative kind of action: 'Why do you cause me to look at disaster and trouble?' The LXX brings out the force of the verb by asking why God shows (ἐδειξας; cf. the Vulgate *ostendisti*) trouble and grief. This may illustrate a common human tendency that comes out in the midst of suffering – a tendency to alternate between thinking that God does not care and thinking that God is involved but is also somehow at fault.

The prophet immediately switches back to lamenting God's apparent idleness and wonders why God just 'watches'. The verb translated 'you watch' can sometimes suggest attentiveness (e.g., **Num. 12.8; 21.9; 1 Sam. 17.42; Ps 142.5 MT**) or a positive regard and readiness to act and help (e.g., **Ps 13.4 MT; Isa. 66.2; Lam. 5.1**). But instead of expressing positive regard or readiness to act in this text, the 'watching'

supposed to take place here is being distinguished from true action. From Habakkuk's perspective, this is an idle watching on God's part that implies too great a tolerance for sin and seems to hold no promise of deliverance. 'There is an *"iniquity and ... perverseness,"* which ought never to have been seen in Israel.' Accordingly, 'why, then, the prophet asks, dost thou show them to me, and look on them thyself'?

### C. (:4) Perversion of Justice Disturbs the Soul

#### 1. Disregard for Covenant Standards

*"Therefore the law is ignored And justice is never upheld."*

#### 2. The Righteous End Up the Victims

*"For the wicked surround the righteous;  
Therefore justice comes out perverted."*

**Steven Duby:** The prophet also laments the apparent absence of just judgment. It '*never goes forth*', or, more woodenly, judgment does not go forth '*to forever*'. Like the English noun 'justice', the Hebrew can be used to signify the rendering of a verdict or the rectitude and conformity to a rule according to which such a verdict should be rendered. It seems, given Habakkuk's lament that does not 'go forth', that his emphasis is on the former here (the rendering of correct legal verdicts in Judah's society), though there is no need to separate the two senses of the word. The point is that those whose God-given responsibility is to ensure that there will be proper legal consequences do nothing. They deny justice to the afflicted and increase their suffering.

**Kenneth Barker:** "The result of the abandonment of God's *mishpat* (*justice*) in Judean society is chaos": the law is numbed, justice does not go out, the wicked surround the righteous, and justice is perverted. No wonder the prophet complained about such a sorry state of affairs. With the breakdown of the social order, the nation lacked the elemental necessities for existence. When law is paralyzed and justice perverted, the righteous become the pawns of the wicked.

Who were the wicked? Although some interpreters have looked to identify the wicked with Babylon, most modern biblical scholars see the wicked as **inhabitants in Judah**, probably during the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.). There is nothing in this passage that points to a foreign nation. . .

**Righteousness** meant that a person met the demands of a relationship. Righteousness toward God meant meeting the demands of the relationship with God; righteousness toward a fellow human being meant meeting the demands of the relationship with another. Justice carried righteousness into the legal sphere. The prophets demanded righteousness in the gate, the place where justice was dispensed. In prophetic contexts such as the one under discussion, ethical and legal standards are the same. Justice and righteousness "were the quintessence of the divine will. They embodied the central authority from which the coherence of the social order stemmed." Law was "paralyzed" most extensively by "corruption of the religious and civil leadership of the nation" and not by foreign powers.

## **II. (:5-11) LORD’S RESPONSE: CONSTERNATION OF THE PROPHET -- DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD BY USING CRUEL CHALDEANS AS INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT – THE ASTONISHMENT OF A SHOCKED PROPHET**

**Steven Duby:** In this section God does not disagree with the prophet’s assessment of Judah’s state. Nor is God distant from the situation. He is active and bringing about his good and just (albeit mysterious) purposes. In analyzing **Habakkuk 1.5-11**, it will be helpful to consider

- (i) God’s instruction to the prophet and the people of Judah in **1.5a** and
- (ii) God’s description of his own activity and of the people (the Chaldeans) through whom he will work in **1.5b-11**.

These elements of the text involve the use of striking language and some grammatical and theological questions that need addressing. After the exposition of **1.5-11**, an excursus follows dealing with questions of divine justice and providence in the midst of evil.

### **A. (:5) Unexpected Discipline Strategy**

#### 1. Amazing

*“Look among the nations! Observe! Be Astonished! Wonder!”*

**John MacArthur:** The series of commands is plural, indicating that the wider community of Judah and Jerusalem was to take note of this imminent invasion. Paul quotes this text in **Ac 13:41**.

#### 2. Unbelievable

*“Because I am doing something in your days – You would not believe if you were told.”*

**Cyril Barber:** We should remember that God has not lost control. He is still in command of events. It is only a lack of perception that makes Him seem inactive. His activity extends from one generation to the next, and as Habakkuk was soon to find out, will culminate in the millennial kingdom.

**Kenneth Barker:** Habakkuk's questions reflect the questions of many people. Especially when we deal with personal affronts, difficulties, and disappointments, we desire to know where God is and what he is doing. Habakkuk reminds us that God is at work. He is the Lord of the universe who works to accomplish his purpose in his world and in our lives.

### **B. (:6-10) Unrestrained Cruelty of the Chaldeans**

#### 1. (:6-7) Summary Qualifications of the Chaldeans for This Mission

##### a. Divinely Appointed for Instrument of Discipline

*“For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,”*

Main qualification = chosen by God for the task

b. Proven Aggressiveness of Spirit

*“That fierce and impetuous people”*

**Eric Redmond:** They were evidently unconcerned about diplomacy. They were instead **hostile** toward other nations. The words *bitter and impetuous* describe the imperial policies and practices of the Neo-Babylonian Empire under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar II who ruled from 605 to 562 BC. The Babylonian military had evidently become battle-hardened and experienced warriors during their years of protracted war with the Assyrians from 626 to 609 BC that finally resulted in the demise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. They knew how to inflict intense harm on their enemies and had developed a reputation for doing so. The word *bitter* translates a Hebrew word that could also be understood to mean “*fierce*.” This reflects the imagery of the savagery of a wild animal that will attack anything (**Andersen**, Habakkuk, 149). The parallel word *impetuous* probably doesn’t mean they would act without first thinking or planning, but rather it most likely describes the **speed and efficiency** with which the Babylonian military was capable of deploying its troops (*ibid.*). This is a very unsettling prospect for Habakkuk and his homeland, Judah. The Babylonians take whatever they want because they have the power to do so. They seize lands they have no right to.

c. Unquenchable Appetite for Conquering New Territory

*“Who march throughout the earth  
To seize dwelling places which are not theirs.”*

**Steven Duby:** The message here is that the Chaldeans are an inexorable people who come and take homes and livelihoods, leaving their former occupants destitute. Israel had once inherited from God what they did not build (**Deut. 6.10-11**), and now they themselves, having deserved the judgment of God, will become subject to a people who will take what is not theirs. To grasp something of the psychological effect of this prophecy, contemporary readers would have to imagine an armed force about to take away their homes, their stability, and all their earthly hopes and comforts.

d. Reputation Acknowledged – Strike fear in the hearts of their enemies

*“They are dreaded and feared;”  
Ruthless, barbaric*

e. Completely Autonomous – Don’t care what other nations think

*“Their justice and authority originate with themselves.”*

2. (:8) Superior Military Resources

a. Their Horses

*“Their horses are swifter than leopards  
And keener than wolves in the evening.”*

**J Ronald Blue:** Both leopards and wolves are fierce, fast, and excellent hunters. At dusk, wolves are hungry and ready to pounce on prey. The Babylonians' voracious speed in conquest was also likened to a vulture swooping to devour.

b. Their Horsemen

*"Their horsemen come galloping,  
Their horsemen come from afar;  
They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour."*

**Biblehub.com** -- The **vulture** is a scavenger bird known for its keen eyesight and ability to swiftly descend upon its prey. This imagery conveys the idea of the Babylonians as opportunistic and ruthless, ready to exploit any weakness and consume what remains. The vulture's flight suggests both speed and inevitability, reinforcing the theme of impending judgment.

3. (:9-10) Swaggering Confidence in Victory

a. Bent on Violence

*"All of them come for violence."*

b. United in Aggression

*"Their horde of faces moves forward."*

c. Merciless in Enslavement

*"They collect captives like sand."*

d. Brazen in Arrogance

1) Mock at Any Royal Authority

*"They mock at kings  
And rulers are a laughing matter to them."*

2) Make Fun of Any Feeble Defense

*"They laugh at every fortress  
And heap up rubble to capture it."*

**C. (:11) Ultimate Accountability – the Chaldeans Will Be Judged Themselves**

1. Their Dominance will only be Temporary

*"Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on."*

2. Their Cruelty will be Condemned

*"But they will be held guilty,"*

**Biblehub.com:** Despite being used by God as a tool for judgment, they are not exempt from guilt. Their actions, driven by pride and violence, are inherently sinful. This reflects a broader biblical theme where God can use even unrighteous nations to fulfill His purposes, as seen in **Isaiah 10:5-7** with Assyria. The concept of divine sovereignty over human actions is a recurring theme in scripture, highlighting God's ultimate

control over history while still holding individuals and nations accountable for their sins.

### 3. Their Idolatry will be Exposed

*“They whose strength is their god.”*

**John MacArthur:** Though the Chaldeans were God’s instruments of judgment, their self-sufficiency and self-adulation planted the seeds for their own destruction (described in **2:2-20**), as they stood guilty of idolatry and blasphemy before the sovereign Lord.

**Kenneth Barker:** Though ordained of God to carry out his purpose (**1:6,12**), the Babylonians worshiped only might and the strength of their hands. They bowed to no man and listened to no god. Thus the person coming under the sway of the army had little hope. This bitter and hasty army swept the earth like the wind and hurried on to plunder other nations. Such people acknowledge no accountability, seek no repentance, and offer no reparations, while violating the most fundamental order of created life.

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is God in control of all of the seemingly bad things that happen to God’s people?  
*“God is still in control, Almighty God is He;  
And He cares for His own through all eternity . . .”*
- 2) Does God get angry with us for expressing our true emotions and wrestling with Him in our prayers with all of our doubts and perplexities?
- 3) How would you compare the wickedness of Judah with that of the Chaldeans? Was there really a distinction between the righteous and the wicked in this context?
- 4) What events in our life or in current world affairs have evoked these same types of questions from our hearts?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Ray Stedman: History is in God’s Hands --**

Habakkuk, the embracer, is embracing the people of Judah, who are suffering under the injustice of the government of that day. He is crying out in protest against the apparent inactivity of God. . .

Now God answered Habakkuk, but not in the way the prophet thought he would. I’m not sure what he did expect. He probably expected a change of heart in the governing

powers in his land, or some rising tide of concern that would deal compassionately with the problems they were facing. God's answer, however, was totally unexpected. . .

Now Habakkuk really has a problem. And this time it is not with God's inactivity, but, rather, with God's inconsistency. How can a holy God let this kind of thing happen? Habakkuk wonders, "How can God use a ruthless and morally degraded people to punish a more righteous people?"

In the rest of **Chapter 1**, the prophet goes on to compare these Chaldeans to a greedy fisherman who sweeps through the seas and brings in a net full of fish. He has caught all he needs, but he is not satisfied. He casts his net again and again and brings back more and more fish and stacks them on the bank until they rot in the sun. That is the way Habakkuk sees the Chaldeans acting. They conquer people after people, country after country. Nothing stands in their way. . .

What do you do when God does not act the way you think he ought to? That is one of the hardest problems we face as Christians. And, especially, what do you do when he uses somebody whom you don't like to correct you? . .

When you face a problem in your life where you do not understand what God is doing, do not do what so many do, and say, "Oh, I've tried faith and it doesn't work," or, "I've tried God but that doesn't work," or, "I've tried prayer and it doesn't work." People who say those things really don't understand what they are saying, because what they are actually saying is, "God is a liar. There is no real God." What they are saying is, "The Word of God is not true, the Bible is a fraud. It ought to be thrown out." They are declaring that God is faithless to his own promises. But God cannot ever be faithless to his word. The problem is not God -- though we so often blame it on him -- the problem is us. We are so ignorant, we see so little, we understand such a minute fraction of the scope of any problem. We ought to do as Habakkuk did -- get out on the watchtower and wait to see what God is going to say. If we ask him, God will help us to understand something of what we are going through. That is what Habakkuk did, because he expected an answer.

### **Freddy Fritz: Making Sense of Today's News**

Among the questions that Habakkuk raised are these: "Is God in charge of today's news?" and, "If he is, why do things happen the way they do?" In dealing with these questions, the prophet Habakkuk speaks directly to our own times in light of today's news. . .

#### **I. God's Ways Are Often Mysterious (1:2a, 5-6)**

- A. God's Inaction (1:2a)
- B. God's Unexpected Providences (1:5-6)
- C. God's Unusual Instruments (1:6)

#### **II. God's Ways Are Often Misunderstood**

- A. By Careless Christians (1:5)

- B. By Non-Christians (1:11)
- C. By the Prophet Himself (1:2-4)

Today's news is bound up with God's kingdom. The key to the history of the world is the kingdom of God. The story of the nations in the Bible is only relevant as it bears upon Christ's Church. What really matters is God's kingdom.

**Paul Decker: A SIGHING FAITH (Habakkuk 1:1-2:1)**

Where is God when things go wrong?

WAIT ON GOD WHEN YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND HIM.

We will find three complaints that Habakkuk has about God. God is:

- I. INDIFFERENT (:2)
- II. INACTIVE (:3-4)
- III. INCONSISTENT (:12-17)

**Ken Gehrels:** It means - "*to embrace.*" Only, not the sort of embrace that one finds in affection. It's a wrestler's grip - hanging on and twisting in the hopes of winning. Habakkuk is the prophet who wrestled with God. . . .

James Dobson says that it's the confusion over "why" that so often shreds a person's faith to bits. He's right.

[Dobson, *When God Doesn't Make Sense*]

**John Piper:** In chapter one, then, Habakkuk protests first against the violence and injustice of his countrymen in Judah (1:1-4), and then against the violence and injustice of the Chaldeans whom God is sending to punish Judah.

**Hampton Keathley IV:** Warren Wiersbe entitles his book on Habakkuk as *From Worry to Worship*. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls his, *From Fear to Faith*. While Habakkuk begins by wondering or worrying about the world around him and God's seeming indifference, he ends by worshipping God.

[http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=975 - P12\\_1367#P12\\_1367](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=975 - P12_1367#P12_1367)

When he heard who was coming **3:16** says he trembled, but he certainly ends up expressing faith by the end of the book. What they are trying to capture in the titles of their books is the progression Habakkuk makes from questioning God to trusting God. . . . When you are talking with someone who has just experienced a tragedy, don't just tell them "God is good. He loves you and He will work things out for the best" and quote **Romans 8:28-29**. I think it is okay, maybe even necessary to cry with them, hurt with them, question with them. Help them work through the pain, not ignore it. Of course you don't want to stay there indefinitely, but it is part of the process. Too often, Christians think the questioning part of the process is wrong.

**Bob Deffinbaugh:** But Habakkuk's logic is wrong. The use of foreign nations as a chastening rod was not inconsistent with His character, and it was not something new. God had foretold this in the Mosaic Covenant:

*36 The Lord will force you and your king whom you will appoint over you to go to a people whom you and your ancestors have not known and you will serve other gods of wood and stone there. 37 You will become an occasion of horror, a proverb, and an object of ridicule to all the people among whom the Lord will drive you... . 49 The Lord will raise up a distant nation against you, one from the other side of the earth as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, 50 a nation of stern appearance that will have no regard for the elderly or consideration for the young (**Deuteronomy 28:36-37, 49-50**).*

The Book of Judges is filled with examples of God's use of foreign nations as His chastening rod:

*13 They [Israel] abandoned the Lord and worshiped Baal and the Ashtars. 14 The Lord was furious with Israel and handed them over to robbers who plundered them. He turned them over to their enemies who lived around them. They could not withstand their enemies' attacks (**Judges 2:13-14**),*

God is morally just in using the wicked to achieve His purposes:

*For the wrath of man shall praise You;  
With a remnant of wrath You will gird Yourself (**Psalm 76:10**, NAU).*

*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (**Romans 8:28**, NAU).*

God is righteous, and He is also sovereign. He is able to use the wicked, and even their wicked deeds to accomplish His purposes. For the moment, I will cite only one example – Pharaoh:

*For the scripture says to Pharaoh: “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may demonstrate my power in you, and that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth” (**Romans 9:17**).*

Pharaoh's oppression of God's people, and his refusal to let God's people go, became an occasion of blessing for the Israelite nation. It resulted in their release from slavery and their possession of the land of Canaan. Nevertheless, they did suffer under the hand of Pharaoh for a number of years. God used the wicked to accomplish His purposes. God used Pharaoh to bring Himself glory and to produce good for His people, Israel. Habakkuk was wrong. A righteous God can use wicked men to achieve His purposes.

I believe that Habakkuk's second argument is further flawed in that it is based upon the very questionable assumption that the people of Judah are more righteous than the Chaldeans.

*You are too just to tolerate evil;  
you are unable to condone wrongdoing.*

*So why do you put up with such treacherous people?  
Why do you say nothing when the wicked devour those who are relatively innocent?*

**(Habakkuk 1:13, emphasis mine)**

The NAU translates the last part of **verse 13** quite literally,

*Why do You look with favor  
On those who deal treacherously?  
Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up  
Those more righteous than they? (NAU, emphasis mine)*

This is a very dangerous argument, in my opinion, and one that almost all of us have employed at one time or another. We know that certain things are sin, but we generally have different categories of sin. The Jews of Jesus' day found Jesus guilty of blasphemy, an unpardonable sin to them, and yet they were self-righteous and greedy. They found ways to avoid their responsibilities to their parents and, according to Jesus, they stole widows' houses. They oppressed the poor in the process of making themselves rich.

**J Ronald Blue:** A Dialogue with God: Habakkuk Previewed God's Discipline of Judah

A. Habakkuk's distress (**1:1-4**)

1. Why is God indifferent to supplication? (**1:1-2**)
2. Why is God insensitive to sin and suffering? (**1:3-4**)

B. God's disclosure (**1:5-11**)

1. God's intention of discipline (**1:5**)
2. God's instrument of discipline (**1:6-11**)

C. Habakkuk's dilemma (**1:12-17**)

1. Why would God employ a people of iniquity? (**1:12-13**)
2. Why would God endorse a people of injustice? (**1:14-15**)
3. Why would God excuse a people of idolatry? (**1:16-17**)

**James Montgomery Boice:** [tracing the thought process of Habakkuk]

If God is the everlasting God – if He was here before anything we know came into existence and will be here after all our problems and enemies have faded away – then the Babylonian invasion is not His last word, however final that invasion may seem. His relationship to us is more important and more lasting. Again, if God is holy, as I know Him to be, then the outcome of this invasion (since it is being caused by God) will not be evil but good in the final analysis. It will accomplish some good purpose. If God is sovereign, then the invasion is not the result of mere chance. God is still in control. Finally, if God is faithful, then the victory of the Babylonian armies must be for the good of God's people. It does not indicate that God has changed His mind. He has not abandoned us. We are still His people.

**Cyril Barber:** **Why do people suffer?** Or more to the point, **if God is holy and righteous and good, why does he allow suffering and evil to continue in the world?**

On every hand there are good people who are exploited or oppressed while the unrighteous seem to prosper. As **Norman Anderson**, the British jurist and lay

theologian, has pointed out, it is virtually impossible to consider either the law of God or the love of God without reflecting upon the inevitability of human suffering. . .

The polytheist sees the world as dominated by gods and spirits, both good and evil, who coexist. The former are beneficent, the latter, malignant. If he keeps on good terms with the beneficent deities and spirits, all will be well. If he offends one of the malignant forces, then evil will befall him. His duty is to placate the latter gods and earn the favor of the former.

The pantheist sees Nature as being kind or cruel, tranquil or stormy, depending on the situation. By depersonalizing God, the pantheist removes himself from the position of believing that he must defend Him. The variegated experiences of life are accepted, therefore, without theological concern.

The dualist adheres to the belief that two co-eternal principles exist. The one is wholly good and the other is wholly evil.

Dualism finds divergent expression in Hinduism and Buddhism. Interestingly, in spite of their dualism both Hinduism and Buddhism have become exceedingly complex systems in the centuries they have existed. Basically, both groups view suffering as inevitable. They force a dichotomy between the body and the spirit, believing that the inner faculty of man grows until it lays aside the impermanent (i.e., the body and the world) and assumes the permanent (the final deliverance of the spirit). At that time, all suffering is believed to cease.

As one considers Christianity, he can observe in the Lord Jesus One who looked at suffering with clear eyes and calm confidence. He saw no reason to reject, refuse, or eliminate the cross. To be sure, He knew the horror of His approaching death (**Matt. 26:38, 39; Heb. 5:7**) and drank to the dregs the cup of sorrow that His Father had given Him (cf. **Matt. 20:22-23; Isa. 53:3-5, 10-12**). And having suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are afflicted (cf. **Heb. 2:18**).

Inasmuch as Christ has suffered, His disciples should not shrink from sharing that experience. The Scriptures even encourage the believer with the thought that suffering is one of the means God uses to further his growth and bring him to greater personal maturity (cf. **Heb. 12:2-6; James 1:2-4**). Suffering may be corrective also (cf. **Gal. 6:7**), and in such instances should be viewed as a discipline rather than a form of punishment. At other times, a person may bear hurts inflicted upon him solely on account of the malice of others. His response should be to draw closer to the Lord (cf. **Rom. 8:18**), knowing that Christ Himself, though sinless, was made perfect through the things He suffered (**Heb. 2:10; 5:8**). As a consequence, He can identify with the sufferings of men and can provide "*grace to help in time of need*" (**Heb. 4:15-16**). Then those He has aided may reach out and help others who are enduring times of adversity or affliction (**2 Cor. 1:3-7**).

To the believer, therefore, suffering is not only something to be viewed theologically, but is also something to be appreciated for its practical ramifications. In the final analysis, what Habakkuk revealed remains true today: “*The righteous will live by his faith*” (**Hab. 2:4c**, NASB).

### **Jerry Harmon: Why God?**

Introduction: I think that if we're honest, all of us had at some point in our Christian life have asked this question, why God? God, why are you allowing these things to happen to me? And if you've ever asked that question, you're not alone.

His name Habakkuk actually is from the Hebrew word, which means *to wrestle* or *to embrace*. And Warren Wiersbe said he's doing both of these in this book. He's wrestling with God, but ultimately he will come to embrace God. He's wrestling with the Lord at the very beginning because Habakkuk is looking at the world around him. and he sees a lot of things going on, and it's troubling his soul. He's not the kind of person that would walk through life with his eyes closed, blind to everything around him. What's the old expression? Ignorance is bliss. You know, not to know, I just don't want to know. Habakkuk wasn't that kind of person. No, he had his eyes wide open. . . Habakkuk had a very weighty burden that was that was weighing him down. You might say that he was a perplexed prophet. He was bewildered when he was looking around and seeing all these things that was going on. . . If you're a bit bewildered about things, if you're a bit perplexed about the happenings around you, then I hope that Habakkuk will be a lesson for you.

Big Idea: it's not unspiritual to ask God why. In fact, asking why is an opportunity to reassert your faith, to strengthen yourself in the Lord, to embrace the Lord.

**Three whys that Habakkuk asked God, and how these questions really provided an opportunity for him to strengthen his faith.**

#### **I. God, why don't you answer my prayer? Why are you not hearing me? 1:2**

- Political requests
- Personal requests

He was praying frequently; he was praying fervently.

Why was he praying fervently, passionately?

- “*violence*” – all around me is violence (cf. same word used for the conditions right before the flood in Gen. 6)

#### **II. God, why don't you judge sin and evil? 1:3**

It just seems like you're tolerating a lot of this sin that's going on around. Why are you inactive? Why don't you judge them?

A. Circumstances -- And notice in **verse 3** he describes the circumstances.

- Iniquity and grievance – trouble and wrongdoing
- Spoiling and violence – violent treatment; brutality and robbery
- Strife and contention – People just couldn't get along

B. Consequences of such circumstances – vs. 4

- 1) The law is **paralyzed**; can do nothing; look at our legal system – takes years for cases to move forward
- 2) The law is **perverted** – doesn't seem like justice is taking place

III. **God, why don't you act quickly? Vs. 2** – Questioning God's Patience

Our culture is an instant culture – text messages, weather alerts, etc.

God's purposes usually cannot be accomplished very quickly.

Response of God – **vs. 5**: he doesn't take time to answer each one of Habakkuk's why questions. He just assures Habakkuk, look, I am at work and the end is going to be good. And if I tried to explain it all to you, you wouldn't get it. He's calling us to live by faith, not by sight.

Application:

- 1) Faith believes that God is too wise to make a mistake.
- 2) Faith believes that God is too kind to be cruel.
- 3) Faith believes that God is in control, therefore we can rest in Him.

And so again, the book opens up with a question mark, but it closes with the exclamation point. It opens up with worry, and it closes with worship. It opens up with anguish, and all that melts into adoration. You see, because the way Habakkuk dealt with his Whys is to bring them before the Who.

TEXT: Habakkuk 1:12 – 2:20

TITLE: PERMANENT PRINCIPLE – GOD IS A RIGHTEOUS JUDGE  
(MAKE NO MISTAKE: THE WICKED WILL BE PUNISHED)

**BIG IDEA:**

**PERPLEXITY REGARDING GOD’S WAYS AND GOD’S TIMING SHOULD NEVER SHAKE OUR FAITH IN GOD’S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS OR FAITHFULNESS TO HIS PROMISES**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Eric Redmond:** Habakkuk is struggling to reconcile his theology of God with the word of God that has just been revealed to him by God. How does God appoint Babylon to execute judgment and punish Judah for its sins against God without violating God’s own standard of judgment, since God is holy and the Babylonians are worse sinners than God’s people, Judah? How can these things be reconciled theologically for Habakkuk? Habakkuk has deep theological questions for God in light of His revelation of the impending Babylonian invasion. These are not questions of doubt, but rather they are questions coming out of a deep faith seeking understanding of the deep things of God. Habakkuk first has to resolve in his own mind and heart that these things are real and that God has actually determined to employ Babylon against His people, Judah.

**I. (1:12 – 2:1) QUESTION #2: IS GOD’S JUSTICE PERVERTED?  
DEPENDENCE ON THE LORD DESPITE PERPLEXITY OF  
INCOMPREHENSIBLE TACTICS --  
THE HOPE OF A PERPLEXED PROPHET**

**A. (:12) Perspective Based on Eternity**

1. Character of God

*“Are You not from everlasting,  
O Lord, my God, my Holy One?”*

**Hampton Keathley IV:** He began in **verse 12** by claiming that God is eternal. I think the idea of immutability, that God does not change, is included here. The fact that God does not change is important because it means God keeps His promises and He has made promises to Israel. Habakkuk knows that God will not totally destroy Israel because of his covenantal promises. That is why he says, “We will not die.”

2. Confidence in Deliverance

*“We will not die.”*

**Stephen Miller:** Two points are relevant about the prophet's affirmation, we will not die. First, mighty Babylon could easily have annihilated tiny Judah, but Habakkuk was confident this would not happen because his omnipotent God would not allow it. Second, although the coming judgment was deserved, Habakkuk knew that God would

keep his covenant promises to Israel that his people would never be totally destroyed.

### 3. Control of the Discipline

*“You, O Lord, have appointed them to judge;  
And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.”*

**Biblehub.com:** The term "Rock" is a metaphor for God's strength, stability, and faithfulness, often used in the Psalms (e.g., **Psalm 18:2**). It conveys trust in God's unchanging nature amidst turmoil. The phrase "established them for correction" indicates that the Babylonians' rise to power is not random but part of God's corrective plan for His people

## **B. (:13) Perspective Based on Holiness -- Paradox**

### 1. You Don't Approve of Wickedness

*“Your eyes are too pure to approve evil,  
And you can not look on wickedness with favor.”*

### 2. You Seem to be Favoring the Wicked over the Less Wicked

*“Why do you look with favor  
On those who deal treacherously?  
Why are you silent when the wicked swallow up  
Those more righteous than they?”*

**Steven Duby:** What particularly troubles Habakkuk here is that the wicked ‘swallows up’ the righteous. Forms of this Hebrew verb appear throughout the Old Testament and are used to portray, among other things, the destruction of the Egyptians in the exodus (**Exod. 15.12**), the dispersion of Israel among the Assyrians (**Hos. 8.8**), and the destruction of Zion by Nebuchadnezzar (**Jer. 51.34**). While there is, absolutely speaking, no one who is righteous before God (Ps 143.2), there are, relatively speaking, some more righteous than others, and Habakkuk laments that the wicked devour such righteous ones.

## **C. (:14-17) Perspective Clouded by Unrestrained Cruelty of the Chaldeans**

### 1. (:14) Vulnerability of Men to Such Unrestrained Cruelty

*“Why have you made men like the fish of the sea,  
Like creeping things without a ruler over them?”*

### 2. (:15a) Vultures Take Advantage of Such Vulnerability

*“The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook,  
Drag them away with their net,  
And gather them together in their fishing net.”*

### 3. (:15b-16) Victory Celebrations of the Wicked are Especially Galling

*“Therefore they rejoice and are glad.  
Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net  
And burn incense to their fishing net;*

*Because through these things their catch is large,  
And their food is plentiful.”*

**Kenneth Barker:** The symbolism is quite clear. The Babylonians lived by the plunder of helpless peoples. In effect, the net and the dragnet became their gods, supplying the people of Babylon with the finest things that plundering the world could bring. The Babylonian rejoices and shouts for joy because of his success. Then he worships those things that make him rich and successful. How prone are people today to worship whatever makes them rich and successful?

4. (:17) Vexing Question: How Long?? (back to question of vs 2)

*“Will they therefore empty their net  
And continually slay nations without sparing?”*

**J Ronald Blue:** The action depicted signified a seemingly perpetual operation. They emptied their net so they could fill it again, again, and again. When would God put a stop to the Babylonians’ greed for conquest? How could He let a people continue in power when they so openly worshiped that very power as their god? Habakkuk was confused.

**Eric Redmond:** The next question Habakkuk poses is whether the wicked Babylonians will be allowed to continue their brutal reign of dominance over the world. Will God continue to watch Babylon invade nation after nation, and especially God’s people, without intervening? The prophet is grappling with God’s apparent silence regarding their brutality. The question in **verse 17** is rhetorical. Will God continue to allow their wickedness to go unpunished while they punish everyone else, including Judah? It is clear that the prophet is having difficulty reconciling these realities in his mind and heart. Habakkuk is being tested to the core concerning everything he has believed about God. He is struggling to affirm that Babylon’s day of accountability and reckoning is not a matter of if, but only a matter of when. This takes us back to the first question in verse 2 where Habakkuk cried, “*How long?*” God will deal with the sins of Babylon, but only after He has dealt with the sins of His people, Judah. How can Babylon’s wickedness bring about God’s justice? This is Habakkuk’s main concern.

D. (2:1) Waiting for a More Definitive Answer

*“I will stand on my guard post  
And station myself on the rampart;  
And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me,  
And how I may reply when I am reproved.”*

Question: How can the Lord be a righteous Judge and allow the wicked Chaldeans to be used as an instrument of discipline against His own people?

Today we have unbelieving skeptics and mockers who question the reality of the Second Coming of Christ. Peter warned us of their proud boastings:

*“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.’ For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”*

## **II. (2:2-20) LORD’S RESPONSE: MAKE NO MISTAKE – THE WICKED WILL BE PUNISHED IN A RIGHTEOUS MANNER**

### **A. (:2-3) Don’t Be Short-Sighted or Impatient Regarding the Lord’s Long Term Program – Prophetic Revelation Promises the Certainty of Fulfillment According to God’s Timetable**

#### **1. (:2) The Lord Goes on Record**

##### **a. Charge to Faithfully Record God’s Revelation**

*“Then the Lord answered me and said, ‘Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets,’”*

**John MacArthur:** Habakkuk was to record the vision to preserve it for posterity, so that all who read it would know of the certainty of its fulfillment (cf. similar language in **Da 12:4, 9**). The prophecy had lasting relevance and thus had to be preserved. Although a period of time would occur before its fulfillment, all were to know that it would occur at God’s “*appointed time*” (cf. **Is 13; Jer 50, 51**). Babylon would fall to the Medo-Persian kingdom of Cyrus ca. 539 B.C. (cf **Da 5**).

##### **b. Charge to Faithfully Communicate that Revelation to Others**

*“that the one who reads it may run.”*

**J Ronald Blue:** the point is that the messenger [herald] would read it and then run to spread the news to others.

**Walter Kaiser Jr.:** Thus the succinct statement in **verses 4–5** calls for:

- (1) a permanent record of the vision that was to come,
- (2) a proclamation of the vision to all, and
- (3) a life that was marked by the obedience of faith.

The command to preserve the vision on tablets and to proclaim it, presumably to all, suggests that the vision was intended to remain relevant for many a day and generation to come.

## 2. (:3) The Prophecies Will Not Fail

### a. The Deadline Has Not Passed

*“For the vision is yet for the appointed time;”*

### b. Rapid Progress is being Made (from God’s Perspective)

*“It hastens toward the goal”*

### c. Fulfillment is Certain

*“and it will not fail.”*

### d. Patience is Needed (Because there is an appearance of delay)

*“Though it tarries, wait for it;”*

**Biblehub.com:** The notion of lingering suggests a delay from a human perspective, yet it calls for patience and faith. This echoes the biblical principle of waiting on the Lord, as seen in **Psalm 27:14**. The call to *“wait for it”* encourages believers to trust in God's timing, even when immediate circumstances seem unchanged. This patience is a recurring theme in Scripture, as seen in **James 5:7-8**, which urges believers to be patient for the Lord's coming.

**Cyril Barber:** The predicament that Habakkuk faced was not an uncommon one. Instead of having his initial problem resolved, the revelation he was given only served to raise new questions in his mind. As will be evident, his views of God were right (cf. **Ps. 82; Isa. 57:15**), but his perspective was too limited. He had looked for the punishment of the wicked so that the prosperity of his people could be assured, but God, who knew the end from the beginning, looked for the punishment of Habakkuk’s people so that they could be restored to fellowship. The truths enunciated in Isaiah (cf. **Isa. 15:9; 60:18**) applied particularly to the millennial age as opposed to Habakkuk’s day. In time, the Lord would lead His prophet to an understanding of that perspective.

### e. Fulfillment is Certain (In actuality there is no delay)

*“For it will certainly come, it will not delay.”*

## **B. (:4-5) Key Principle: God Will Always Make a Distinction between the Proud and the Righteous**

### 1. (:4a) The Unbelieving Proud – Needs a Soul Adjustment

*“Behold, as for the proud one,  
His soul is not right within him”*

### 2. (:4b) The Believing Righteous – Needs to Stick to His Guns

*“But the righteous will live by his faith.”*

**Walter Kaiser Jr.:** The focal point of God’s revelation to Habakkuk is that *“the just shall live by his faith.”* It is clear from the structure of this clause in Hebrew that *“by his faith”* modifies *“shall live”* not *“the just.”* Justified persons receive the gift of life by faith.

The life referred to here is primarily our **day-to-day living**. In **chapter 3** of Habakkuk we shall see Habakkuk's joy and deep sense of peace even as he contemplated the imminent invasion of his nation by the ruthless Babylonians. Even as he faced certain national turbulence and terror, the **joy in the Lord** was as real to Habakkuk as it was for the apostle Paul, who wrote from prison, "*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice!*" (**Phil. 4:4**).

**Steven Duby:** Thus, the contrast between the righteous in **Habakkuk 2.4b** and the wicked in **Habakkuk 2.4a** has to be filled out by reference to the humility of the righteous and the arrogance of the wicked. Humility and arrogance can be contrasted as two opposing dispositions, so it is possible to argue that the righteousness of the righteous in **Habakkuk 2.4b** centers on the inward conformity of the heart to God's commands. Alternatively, because it is the humble person who receives salvation, vindication, or pardon from God throughout the Bible (see **Lev. 26.40-42; 2 Kgs 22.18-20; 2 Chron. 7.14; 12.7; 34.26-28; Ps 18.27; Luke 18.14**; cf. **2 Chron 33.23**), it is also possible to argue that the righteousness of the righteous in **Habakkuk 2.4b** centers on forensic justification. In addition, **Habakkuk 2.4b** may recall Abraham being '*counted righteous*' by believing in YHWH in **Genesis 15.6**, where the use of the verb signifies a reckoning or imputing of righteousness. Pondering **Habakkuk 2.4** by itself, then, may not drive us to a particular conclusion about the exact sense in which the righteous person is righteous, though the possible connection back to **Genesis 15.6** would lead to treating righteousness as a declaration of legal righteousness.

**Kenneth Barber:** God answered the prophet by means of a strong contrast. The first half of the verse apparently refers to the wicked described in **1:7,11,13** (without using the term) while the second statement explicitly describes the righteous person. By means of a strong contrast, the Lord answered the complaints of the prophet. The one whose life is puffed up in pride and arrogance will die; the righteous, in contrast, by his faithfulness will live. Whether in Judah or Babylon, those in rebellion against God would die. "Wherever human beings rely on something of this earth—whether it be intellectual achievement or wealth or military might or aesthetic ability and appreciation or pride of birth and status or even the ability to cope and solve problems and master the complexities of modern life—wherever confidence is placed in human prowess and not in God for the achievement of a satisfying and secure manner of living, there true life cannot be had." [**P. R. House**, *The Unity of the Twelve*, JSOTSup 97, Bible and Literature Series 27 (Sheffield: Almond, 1990), 92.]

\* \* \* \* \*

**Ray Stedman:** It is interesting that in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews there is a kind of divine commentary on this verse:

1. Romans stresses what it means to be "*righteous*." There we are told that the righteousness of Christ is imparted to us by the gift of God. Righteousness is handed to us. We don't earn it; we have it the minute we believe.

2. Then the words, "*shall live*," are interpreted in **Chapter 5** of Galatians, the great chapter on the life in the Spirit. What does "to live" mean? It means to walk in love, and joy, and peace, and longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control.

3. Then the words, "*by faith*," are interpreted in Hebrews, the great letter on faith. What does it mean to have faith? It means to trust that the invisible God is working, despite present appearances.

\* \* \* \* \*

**John MacArthur:** The emphasis in both Habakkuk and the NT references goes beyond the act of faith to include the continuity of faith. Faith is not a one-time act, but a way of life. The true believer, declared righteous by God, will persevere in faith as the pattern of his life (cf **Col 1:22, 23; Heb 3:12-14**).

3. (:5) Three Summary Charges Against the Proud Chaldeans

a. Deceived into Discontentment by Strong Drink

*"Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man,  
So that he does not stay at home."*

**J Ronald Blue:** The treachery of wine is described in **Proverbs 23:31-32**. It looks so inviting in the glass but "*in the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper.*"

b. Devoted to Greed and Covetousness

*"He enlarges his appetite like Sheol,  
And he is like death, never satisfied."*

c. Driven by Ambition and Lust for Conquest

*"He also gathers to himself all nations  
And collects to himself all peoples."*

**C. (:6-20) Pronouncement of Five Woes against the Proud Chaldeans**

**John MacArthur:** Five woes, in the form of a taunt song, were pronounced upon the Chaldeans in anticipation of their eventual judgment. Presented in 5 stanzas of 3 verses each, the 5 woes were directed at 5 different classes of evildoers.

**J Ronald Blue:** Woe is an interjection of distress pronounced in the face of disaster or in view of coming judgment (e.g., **Isa. 3:11; 5:11; 10:5**) because of certain sins.

**Steven Duby:** After Habakkuk has declared the main substance of the vision of God – that the righteous by faith will live and the wicked will not last – he elaborates in **2.6-20** on the ways in which Babylon and, by extension, those who resemble Babylon, will meet their end.

1. (:6-8) Woe #1 – Extortion -- The Looter Will Be Looted

a. Pronouncement of Woe – Extreme Usury

*“Woe to him who increases what is not his – For how long –  
And makes himself rich with loans?”*

**Biblehub.com:** This rhetorical question expresses the frustration and impatience of those suffering under injustice. It echoes the cries of the oppressed throughout Scripture, such as in **Psalm 13:1**, where David asks, *"How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?"* It reflects a deep yearning for God's intervention and justice. The question also implies that the current state of affairs is unsustainable and that divine judgment is inevitable. This anticipation of God's righteous action is a recurring theme in the prophetic books, where the ultimate hope is in God's deliverance and the establishment of His kingdom.

b. Painful Taunt Song

*“Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him,  
Even mockery and insinuations against him”*

c. Promise of Retribution – The Looter Will Be Looted

*“Will not your creditors rise up suddenly,  
And those who collect from you awaken?  
Indeed, you will become plunder for them.  
Because you have looted many nations,  
All the remainder of the peoples will loot you –  
Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land,  
To the town and all its inhabitants.”*

**Theo Laetsch:** The first woe refers to the rapacity of the Chaldean, his eagerness to enrich himself at the expense of others by conquest of their home countries, making vassals of the nations, extorting from them huge contributions of materials, money, and men, bleeding them white.

**Kenneth Barker:** The person who lives by extorting others will surely experience the judgment of God. The punishment is an “in-kind” punishment, one in which the person taking advantage of others will be taken advantage of by those he oppressed. The wicked eventually receive a strong dose of their own medicine.

**Cyril Barber:** The **ruins of Babylon** today bear testimony to the truth of God’s Word and to the fate that overtook the once proud city. As has been pointed out by different writers, various superstitions that prevent them from pitching their tents near the site of the ancient city are current among the Arabs. Furthermore, the character of the soil prevents the growth of vegetation suitable for the pasturing of flocks. The ruins that remain consist of caves and holes occupied only by wild animals. At night their cries reverberate between the walls, and human beings are seldom seen in the vicinity (**Isa. 13:17-22; 14:22-23; Jer. 50:29-32, 35-37, 39-40; 51:1-64**).

2. (:9-11) Woe #2 – Exploitation -- Ill-Gotten Gains Will Cry Out Against You

a. Pronouncement of Woe – False Security

*“Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house  
To put his nest on high,  
To be delivered from the hand of calamity!”*

**Kenneth Barker:** The “*nest*” symbolized the arrogance of the Babylonians. They built their nests “on high,” a symbol of invincibility. Of all animals the eagle seemed most impervious to harm. The eagle built its nest “*on high*” and seemed to reign as lord over all that it surveyed. Habakkuk saw the people of Babylon in this way. They ruthlessly took from others and built houses and fortunes that appeared invincible. In their arrogance the Babylonians felt themselves to be untouchable by ruin or judgment.

b. Painful Taunt Song

*“Surely the stone will cry out from the wall,  
And the rafter will answer it from the framework.”*

**J Ronald Blue:** Even if every single enemy were exterminated, the very stones and lumber would testify against the rapacious and cruel hands of the Babylonians that had fashioned these building materials to show off their empire’s strength and glory. The stones and timber with which the houses and palaces were built had been obtained through plunder and injustice.

c. Promise of Retribution – Turning the Tables on Their Pride and Sin

*“You have devised a shameful thing for your house  
By cutting off many peoples;  
So you are sinning against yourself.”*

3. (:12-14) Woe #3 – Exaltation -- Ruthless Kingdom Building Will Be Frustrated By the Dominion of the Messiah

**House:** In many respects **Hab 2:12-14** provides the **climax** of Hosea-Habakkuk.

- **First, 2:12** proclaims the fate of all who attempt to abuse others (cf. **Amos 1:1-2:3**) to achieve their own wicked goals, which summarizes the concerns of Hosea, Amos, etc.
- **Second, 2:13** demonstrates the sovereignty of God over the whole process of sin, punishment, and restoration described in the Twelve. ...
- **Third, 2:14** explains the purpose and end result of all Yahweh's work in creation. What is sin but the rejection of the knowledge of God (cf. **Hos 4:6**). ... Renewal is as inevitable a result of punishment as punishment is of sin.

Here the whole message of the Twelve hangs in the balance. Judgment is being poured out, the nations fall exhausted, the prophet bows in awe (**Hab 2:20**), and Yahweh reigns. What happens next hangs on the Lord's command.

a. Pronouncement of Woe – Malicious Power Play

*“Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed  
And founds a town with violence!”*

b. Painful Taunt Song

*“Is it not indeed from the Lord of hosts  
That peoples toil for fire,  
And nations grow weary for nothing?”*

**John MacArthur:** Like a fire that burns everything given to it, their labors would all be futile, having no lasting value (v. 13; cf. Mic 3:10).

c. Promise of Retribution – Kingdom Reversal

*“For the earth will be filled  
With the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,  
As the waters cover the sea.”*

**Biblehub.com:** The "*knowledge of the glory of the LORD*" implies an intimate understanding and recognition of God's majesty and holiness. This is not merely intellectual knowledge but a deep, experiential awareness of God's presence and power. The glory of the LORD often refers to His manifest presence, as seen in the tabernacle and temple. This knowledge is transformative, leading to worship and reverence.

4. (:15-17) Woe #4 – Excessive Debauchery – The Shamers Will Be Exposed to Public Shame

a. Pronouncement of Woe – Shameful Exploitation

*“Woe to you who make your neighbors drink,  
Who mix in your venom even to make them drunk  
So as to look on their nakedness.”*

**Cyril Barber:** The Lord used two figures of speech in **2:15** to describe the evils perpetrated by the Babylonians. On the one hand, they made their neighbors drunk; and on the other hand, they gazed shamelessly at their nakedness. As has been pointed out already, drunkenness was a particular sin of the Chaldeans. Not only did they drink to excess but they caused others to follow their bad example. As a consequence, a severe punishment would come upon them. They would be filled with disgrace rather than honor. Retribution would be in proportion to their sin (**2:16a**).

b. Painful Taunt Song

*“You will be filled with disgrace rather than honor.  
Now you yourself drink and expose your own nakedness.  
The cup in the Lord’s right hand will come around to you,  
And utter disgrace will come upon your glory.”*

c. Promise of Retribution – Reaping Violence and Devastation

*“For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,  
And the devastation of its beasts by which you terrified them,  
Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land,  
To the town and all its inhabitants.”*

**Charles Ryrie:** The violence done to Lebanon by several rulers in cutting down its great forests and killing its cattle would be done to Judah (see **Isa. 14:7-8**).

5. (:18-20) Woe #5 – Extreme Idolatry – The Worshipers of Idols Will Be Mocked

a. Pronouncement of Woe – Foolish Loyalty

*“Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, ‘Awake!’  
To a mute stone, ‘Arise!’  
And that is your teacher?  
Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver,  
And there is no breath at all inside it.”*

**John MacArthur:** Compare the sarcasm with that of Elijah’s words to the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (**1 Ki 18:27**; cf. **Jer 2:27**).

b. Painful Taunt Song

*“What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it,  
Or an image, a teacher of falsehood?  
For its maker trusts in his own handiwork  
When he fashions speechless idols.”*

**Kenneth Barker: What profit is an idol?** This is the fundamental question and should be asked by everyone tempted to worship that which is false. Habakkuk saw a number of problems with idolatry.

- First, an idol is only something made by human beings. In the Hebrew text the word for “*idol*” and the verb “*carved*” are related. Worship an idol, and you receive from it what human beings can accomplish; but worship the Lord God, and you receive what the creator of the ends of the earth can accomplish. . .
- Second, idols teach nothing but lies. Habakkuk agreed with Jeremiah that idols are deaf and dumb objects. They neither hear men’s petitions nor speak to human needs. They do nothing (**Jer 10:5**). Those who worship idols worship a lie. They are deluded by the ways of the world and deceived with false hope.
- Third, making an idol means that the worshiper has made a god in his own image. But the worshiper of the Lord God has been created in the image of God. Worshiping an idol or image means that our god always will be too small because it will conform to our own image.
- Fourth, the idol cannot speak or give guidance. Why should anyone cry out to that which is dumb? The idol cannot answer; it cannot save.
- The final word used for “*idols*” in the verse is a word meaning “nonentity” or “a nobody.” The idols were “nothings.” They could not speak, hear, guide, or save. Who, in his right mind, could worship an idol?

c. Promise of Retribution – Conclusion --

Stand in Awe of the Lord of History

Who Judges Righteously From His Holy Temple

*“But the Lord is in His holy temple.  
Let all the earth be silent before Him.”*

**Biblehub.com:** This phrase emphasizes the sovereignty and majesty of God. The "*holy temple*" refers to the heavenly sanctuary where God dwells, signifying His ultimate authority and purity. In the context of Habakkuk, this statement contrasts the impotence of idols and the futility of human efforts against the divine power of God. The temple in Jerusalem was a central place of worship for the Israelites, symbolizing God's presence among His people. The temple imagery points to Jesus Christ, who referred to His body as the temple, indicating that He is the ultimate dwelling place of God among humanity.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does God entertain our doubts and questions and the wrestlings of our faith or does He expect us to squelch all such tension?
- 2) How is our perspective altered when we understand that God's ways and God's timing are vastly different than ours?
- 3) What is the basis for our confidence that we will be able to persevere in living by faith?
- 4) What is our response to the revelation that "*the Lord is in His holy temple?*"

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Ray Stedman:** The man who thinks he has it in himself to live by his own abilities, his wits, his education, his own strength, etc., is the one who appears to be successful, but we are reminded that he will fail. He has the seeds of his own destruction within himself.

The rest of **Chapter 2** is a picture of how five different forms of pride by which men seek to live are shown to be self-destructive:

- The ambitious man (**Verses 7-8**) will be destroyed by his own ambition;
- The greedy man who overreaches (**Verses 9-11**) will try to reach too far and will lose everything;
- The violent man (**Verses 12-14**) will accomplish nothing; his own violence will turn people against him;
- The insolent man (**Verses 15-17**) becomes sated with his own contempt for others and loses everything; and

The idolator (**Verses 18-19**) begins to trust his own creation, and so, in the hour of desperation, he has no redeemer, no helper.

Thus the man of pride will fall apart, but the man of faith has present power to live. Not only will he wind up a victor, but even now he will live by his faith. That is the great lesson of this book.

**John Piper:** the great power of the Chaldeans will, in the end, come to nought. The nations weary themselves in vain to fill the earth with their fame and power. Why? Because (as **2:14** says), "*The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the water covers the sea.*" Habakkuk need not fear that a rebellious nation will have the last say. The earth is the Lord's and he will fill it with his glory. The chapter closes with these awesome words in **verse 20**: "*The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.*" Let all the nations be still and know that he is God. His glory will fill the earth, not the glory of the Chaldeans.

So in answer to Habakkuk's protests, God assures him that the pride of the Chaldeans will come to a woeful end (**2:6-20**) and that any in Judah who humbly trusts God will gain his life. "*The just shall live by his faith.*" (**2:4**).

**David Sylvester: WHEN TRAGEDY HITS HOME (1:12 – 2:4)**

I. WHEN TRAGEDY HITS HOME WE MAY ALWAYS QUESTION GOD'S FAIRNESS

II. WHEN TRAGEDY HITS HOME WE MAY BE ATTEMPTED TO ASSUME THAT GOD ENDORSES EVIL

III. WHEN TRAGEDY STRIKES HOME WE MAY WAIT FOR AN ANSWER

IV. WHEN TRAGEDY HITS HOME WE MUST SEEK GOD'S FACE

[www.todayspulpit.com](http://www.todayspulpit.com)

**Michael Goodfellow:** The Lord's answer is a **call to duty**. The first is "*write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it.*" God gave Habakkuk a vision that needed to be repeated. Such too is our call, a call to **repeat the vision** which we have received. And God says make it plain. I am as guilty as anyone of trying to complicate the gospel. We attach so many things to the records of Scripture, to the records of God's speaking to us, his people. We come to scripture with agendas, conservative or liberal, with the idea of inclusivity and political correctness, and we blindly build walls around scripture, walls to protect, not to protect scripture, mind you, but to protect from scripture. And does that make it plain? How can we reach the truth of God's vision, if we must travel a maze, hedged in on all sides by the judgments of the world? How can we stand and allow such a maze and hedge to grow around the plain vision of God.

The second duty called upon by God is the duty to **wait**. "*For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.*" God does not say wait in vain. God still has a vision. In the darkness, it is the vision of light. In coldness, it is the vision of warmth. In the depths of despair, it is the vision of joy. In death, it is the vision of life. In defeat, it

is the vision of victory. He knows it may seem to tarry, but he says it will surely come. This is the promise which reaches its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has made God's vision visible to us. He is the light. He is the warmth. He is the fount of joy. He is the giver of life. He is the victor over death, sin and the powers of hell. We must wait for the final fulfillment, but in God's own words, the promise which he makes that there is a vision, that promise is enough to make our waiting seem as nothing at all.

The third duty is the duty of **faith**. *“Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.”* This passage was quoted in St. Paul, and through those words, “the righteous live by their faith,” the reformation of Martin Luther began in earnest. The dread opposition between the proud and the righteous. The two are not the same. It all boils down to this statement. Do you live in the power of the world, or do you live in the power of faith in God? Do you put your trust in money, in property, in friendships, in health, in exercise, in diet? These are so many things that draw our attention, and they draw our passion. And oh, if only half that passion was spent in our faith. Jesus said if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can move mountains. We have planted our mustard seeds in too many parts of our lives, and it is time to uproot them from the world, and offer them again to almighty God.

It is time for us to take our places at the watch. To stand upon the tower and hold fast to the truth that we expect our God to answer, even that our God has already answered, answered in Jesus Christ. Are we prepared to take our place and fulfill our duties? Are we prepared to make record of the great things God has done, in history and in the pages of Scripture, in the lives of each and every one of us here? To make record of the fact that we have been delivered by God. Delivered in Jesus Christ. Are we prepared to wait for that which God is surely going to show us, a vision of a kingdom ruled by Christ, a vision of conquered sin, a vision of life eternal, a vision of saints gathered praising at the throne of God? Are we prepared to turn our backs on that which rules this world, turn our backs on those things which would hold us down, turn our backs on the darkness that draws us in, and say the righteous live by their faith? Live by your faith. Live in that power. And let us move the mountains that stand before us, between us and the kingdom, the vision of God. AMEN and AMEN.

**Warren Bird:** Importantly, Habakkuk doesn't let his confusion dictate his theology. He realizes that we know God by what He reveals to us, not by our own speculation about things and so he decides to patiently wait for what God will say to him about the situation. There's a lesson for all of us in And what God reveals is that because of His holiness, the Babylonians will themselves be punished. Five woes are declared against the Babylonians, on account of their:

- **Greed** – in **verses 6-8**, God condemns them for making their wealth by extortion and promises that they will be plundered
- **Arrogant self-assertion** – in **verses 9-11**, God condemns them for setting their nest on high and promises that shame will ultimately come to them

- **Violence** – in **verses 12-14**, God condemns them for their resort to bloodshed and promises that what they build by bloodshed will only fuel their own destruction
- **Inhumanity** – in **verses 15-17**, God condemns them for treating people disgracefully and promises that this will come back to haunt them
- **Idolatry** – in **verses 18-20**, God condemns them for failing to bow to the one true God and promises that their idols will fail them.

In the midst of these clear denunciations of evil, and His promise that “*the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God*”, is a very significant statement. In **verse 4** God tells Habakkuk that “*the righteous will live by his faith*”. No matter what is going on in the world around him, the person who puts their trust in God and who faithfully seeks to maintain a morally and spiritually steadfast life, will make it through; the person who believes that God will always be true to His character no matter how things are going in our lives or the world around us.

**Ken Gehrels:** The Lord says to Habakkuk – I want you to put faith in me. The rest of chapter two faces the issue of injustice and evil head-on. The Lord tells Habakkuk that’s He’s not lost control. The reins of the Cosmos have not slipped out of His holy hands. He’s still on course.

You may not understand it, Habakkuk.

You may not see the full picture.

You’ll have to trust me on this one.

### **Bob Deffinbaugh: God Silences a Protesting Prophet**

It looked to Habakkuk as though the Babylonian victory would be the end of all God’s people and of His promises to them. The vision Habakkuk received was a promise that God would judge those who were proud and arrogant, and who were sinners. What Habakkuk should also have known is that God’s promises to His people would be fulfilled. God would save a remnant of the righteous, as other prophets had indicated. Habakkuk had to believe this by faith, and he needed to endure the days ahead by walking in obedience to God’s Word.

**J Ronald Blue:** For Habakkuk, the message was clear. Stop complaining! Stop doubting! God is not indifferent to sin. He is not insensitive to suffering. The Lord is neither inactive nor impervious. He is in control. In His perfect time Yahweh will accomplish His divine purpose. Habakkuk was to stand in humble silence, a hushed expectancy of God’s intervention.

**James Montgomery Boice:** The challenge presented to us in this chapter is that choice. Will it be the world’s way, the way of the ungodly with its emptiness, frustration, and eventual ruin? Or will it be God’s way, the way of faith in Him who alone is worthy of that faith?

. . . Though the world should rise up against us, the righteous will live by faith. It is by faith in the righteous God alone that we can stand against it.

**Hobart Freeman:** Thus, the revelation unfolds a universal, spiritual principle, which is applicable to all men in every dispensation. The essence of sin is pride, especially as it expresses itself in self-exaltation and arrogant self-confidence; as in the case of the ruthless and powerful Chaldean Empire under Nebuchadnezzar, whom God used to punish Judah. Daniel records how that God humbled the great king, who boasted, “*Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the royal dwelling-place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?*” (**Dan 4:30**). Divine judgment fell upon the king, humbling and abasing him, until he was compelled to acknowledge that God ruled in the kingdoms of the earth, as well as in heaven, and that “*those that walk in pride he is able to abase*” (**Dan 4:37**).

**Jerry Harmon: Be Amazed! 1:5-15**

Introduction:

Have you ever heard the expression, *God moves in mysterious ways*? Yeah, we've heard that. That's a line from a hymn, and it was a hymn that was written by William Cooper. William Cooper was a contemporary of John Wesley and George Whitefield. And John Newton, actually the one who wrote *Amazing Grace*, was his pastor. But did you know that William Cooper was a man that struggled with deep, dark depression all of his life?

He had a very painful childhood. When he was six years old, his mother died. Later, three children in the family died, and then William's father sent him to a boarding school, so he had a very unhappy childhood. And so he struggled with depression.

When he was 21, he sank into his first paralyzing depression. It was so bad that he would just sit and stare out the window for weeks at a time. And finally, he decided that he was going to take his own life. So he took lognum, a poison trying to take his life. It didn't work. He tried to hang himself with a garter. Three times he tried to do that, and it broke each time. He hired a carriage driver to take him to the Thames River so he could jump in. But because of the thick London fog, the driver couldn't find his way to the river. And so he took him back to his home.

Later, he was finally put into an asylum, and he was there for six months. And he happened to see a Bible, and he picked up the Bible, and he read **John 11**, the story of where Jesus resurrected Lazarus. And in that story, he found hope for himself. If Jesus could resurrect a man from the dead, perhaps Jesus had the power to resurrect him out of his depression. And he continued to read the Bible until he read **Romans 3.25**, where he read where God set forth his son to be a propitiation, and if we can get saved through faith in the blood. And he wrote this, immediately I received strength to believe it. and the full beams of the Son of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the Atonement, and He had made a pardon and sealed in His blood all the fullness and completeness of His justification. In a moment, I believed. I received the gospel." And whereas before there was depression, now there was joy in his soul because he knew the Lord.

You know, God used that bitter circumstance and that brokenness to cause him really to be a blessing to others because he became a hymn writer. He wrote some of our great

hymns. He wrote one of my favorites, *There is a Fountain Filled with Blood*. And he also wrote the words,

*God Moves in Mysterious Ways. his wonders to perform.  
He plants his footstep on the sea, he rides upon the storm.*

There's one stanza that says this,

*judge not the Lord by feeble sense.*

We shouldn't judge God by our own feeble senses, our own reason, but trust him for his grace.

*Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face.*

And so William Cooper knew the mysterious ways of God, how that God used all of that, but brought him to faith. Well, Habakkuk is kind of a man who's introduced to the mysterious ways of God.

Big Idea: [This passage] describes the way and the work of God. It describes God's character and how God works. And really the whole idea, if you want to discern it in one sentence, but again, you have to stay for the rest of it,

**the mysterious works of God should deepen our worship of Him.**

### Three Affirmations

#### **I. God's works are marvelous 1:5**

God is always working. He's not inactive. There are some people that believe that God's kind of like, they have this deist idea of God. What is that? You know, the deist believes that God just created the world and then he has nothing more to do with it. Kind of like a clock maker who makes the clock, and then after he makes the clock, he winds it up, sets it down, walks away from it, and he no longer has anything to do with it. Friend, that's not how the Bible portrays God.

God is the Creator and He relates to His creation. In fact, the Bible says that God is exhaustively sovereign over His creation. He's constantly at work. His sovereign providence runs through the Bible. Like a strong river, it runs through the scripture, and it carries God's plans to fulfillment the way God has ordained them. And when we talk about sovereignty, what are we talking about? We're talking about really three ideas.

Ownership, Authority and Control.

**Ps. 24:1-2; 103:19; 115:3**

Even when things in our life look like they've jumped off track, And we're headed over a cliff. Actually, everything is moving according to God's plan and purpose in our life. That's the sovereignty of God. And providence is kind of the other side of the coin. What is providence? Providence is God's execution of his plan. **Sovereignty makes the plan. Providence executes the plan.** God will always accomplish his plan.

**Is. 46:10; Prov. 16:9; Job 24:14** -- **John Murray**, the theologian, summed it up like this, he said, the plan of God is perfect, The plan of God is exhaustive. The plan of God is for my ultimate good. The plan of God is secret. God hides it from me until it happens. I discover it day by day as it unfolds.

- God doesn't have to explain His plan to us because He is God
- If He tried to explain we are not capable of understanding

## II. **God's works are meticulous – vs. 5** --- *“I will work a work”*

This is a word that's used to speak of the diligent, careful, meticulous work of a man at his trade. It's a word used for a carpenter who's carefully making a piece of furniture, or it's used of a potter who is carefully molding a jar, paying attention especially to the details because part of the artistry and the craft is in the what? It's in the details, right? And this is the idea here. Just like the worker is careful in the details, even so God is careful even in the details of his marvelous plan.

We have a tendency to think that, you know, God is sovereign over the big things, but he allows us to be in control of the little things. God is in charge of the details. You ever hear the expression, the devil is in the details? Well, that's not true. God's in the details. The devil has nothing to do with that. It's God. You say, why? Well, because just like big doors swing on small hinges, big events swing on small details.

There's no such thing as chance or luck or coincidence. I like to say there are no accidents, only acts of providence. God is a micromanager. He plans everything out. And here from verses 6 down to verse 11, he's describing the battle-ready conditions of this invading army that he has raised up as an instrument of punishment to Israel.

Describes:

- Their infantry
- Their cavalry (**vs. 8**)
- Their leader (**vs. 10**)

These Babylonians are the instrument or rod of God's chastisement. They're ruthless. They are cruel. They are proud. They are merciless. They are swift in conquest. They are thorough in their destruction. They're like animals. They're like leopards. They're swift. They're like wolves. They're ravenous.

## III. **God's works are mysterious vs. 12**

A. Habakkuk's Confidence -- What does he affirm about God?

1. God is eternal.

**Verse 12**, thou art from everlasting. God, I know you're eternal. The idea here is you look at things from eternity. We see things from here in time. So you have an eternal perspective. We have an earthly perspective. God, I understand that. You see differently.

2. God is holy – vs. 13

3. God is faithful – vs. 12

4. God is Omnipotent

B. Habakkuk's Confusion

4 characteristics of the Chaldeans

- Cruel (**vs. 14**)
- Brutal (**vs. 15**)

- Idolatrous (**vs. 16**)
- Relentless (**vs. 17**)

And so the question is, Lord, why would you use these people? Why would you use evil, sinful man to do this to your people. And I think here Habakkuk is learning a theological lesson about one of the mysterious ways of God. And what is that? That God uses the sins and evil of man to accomplish his purposes.

Explanations given to explain Why God would allow evil – study of theodicy which seeks to defend the goodness and justice of God in the face of evil

- 1) There's no such thing as evil; it's a figment of your imagination
- 2) God is not omnipotent; there are some things he can't stop
- 3) God is not omniscient; He doesn't know everything -- Some things he doesn't see coming. He knows everything that can be known, but the future's still open. These are called **open theists**.
- 4) God is not good

God is not the author of sin, but God will use the sin of man to accomplish his own purpose. And that purpose is always good. Again, quoting from the Westminster Confession, God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass, yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin nor violence offered to the will of the creature. Nor is the liberty or contingency of the second causes taken away. God doesn't force anyone to do anything. God doesn't take away anyone's liberty or will. They do what they want to do. And yet God will use those secondary causes to accomplish his will.

**Rom. 3:5** -- Would you really be able to understand righteousness without unrighteousness? Man's righteousness does not cancel out God's plan. It serves to establish God's righteousness. So someone says, well, why does God allow evil? Why does God permit it? Number one, to demonstrate his righteousness. Because you won't really know righteousness unless there's the opposite. . . Sin and evil is an opportunity for God to demonstrate his righteousness. It's an opportunity for God to demonstrate his love. We really wouldn't know God's love unless there was sin.

**Rom. 9:22** -- God hates sin. He endures sin. But he endures it that he might demonstrate his wrath, his holy wrath. And he has as much right to put his wrath on display as he does to put his love on display.

**Rom. 11:33** -- We're not gonna figure it all out. I just know this, God knows what he's doing. And we can trust him. And like Paul, we should be in amazement. We should be in wonder. This is what God says to Habakkuk. Look, I've got a plan. It's a marvelous plan. You should be in wonder of it. You should be amazed. We're not going to figure everything out that God does. That's impossible. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. And his greatness is unsearchable. He reveals some things to us. He doesn't reveal all of it to us. And you can't always know all of God's ways or why. But what did God say to Habakkuk? The just shall live by faith. You can trust him.

## Dr. Jerry Harmon: The Just Shall Live by Faith – Chap. 2

### Introduction: Celebrating Reformation Day

An indulgence was really just a little piece of paper with the official seal of the Pope on it, where if a person bought that paper, they could buy their way out of purgatory or years in purgatory. There were two kinds of indulgences. There was a partial indulgence. If you bought that, you could spare some of the years of being in purgatory. There was also called a plenary indulgence. If you bought that indulgence, that means you wouldn't go to purgatory whatsoever. You would go straight to heaven. So it was really just buying your way to heaven. And the reason that Pope Leo had this special dispensation for indulgences was because they were building St. Peter's Basilica and they were short on money. So he decided to have a special sale on indulgences for that time.

This is why Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door on October 31st, 1517. And you say, well, what's a thesis? That's just simply a statement that was written down, a propositional truth and that he wrote down. And why nail 95 theses to a church door? Well, a church door back then was like the public bulletin board. He wanted to debate this whole idea of the sale of indulgences because it angered him that the church would teach that you could actually buy your way into heaven because that was false doctrine.

Where did Martin Luther learn that a soul is saved by faith alone? Look at Habakkuk 2, verse 4. We've looked at this verse before. *Behold, his soul, which is lifted up, is not upright in him, but the just shall live by his faith.* And so before this verse had an impact on Luther, it had an impact on Paul. This passage in Habakkuk helped Paul to understand this principle of faith in salvation. But before it had an impact on Paul, it had an impact on Habakkuk. Now, the first part of verse four is a reference to the pride of the Babylonians, but in contrast to that, *the just shall live by his faith.*

Now, **what is faith?** That's one of the things that we have to really ask ourselves when we come to a verse like this. What exactly is faith? Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Faith, in order to be real faith, has to be grounded in something. That faith has to be based or rooted in something, some substance. And the question is, **what do you put your faith in?** God is saying to that prophet? Habakkuk, put your faith in me. Put your faith in my character.

The circumstances for Habakkuk are not very easy. They're very hard. They're difficult. They're dark. And the question is, can he trust God during this time? Can you trust God when it's dark?

Big Idea: **Three areas where God is saying to Habakkuk, you need to have faith.**

### **I. Faith in God's Good Plan**

Now I'm going to go into my watchtower. I'm going to go up and I'm just going to be quiet. And I'm going to see actually we see three responses here.

- Watch -- Vision of God's future plan

- Write it down – nice and plain on these tablets – Post it
- Wait -- This revelation that God gave to Habakkuk is for a future time – immediate application was for the end of the Babylonian Captivity. But writer of Hebrews adapted it to when Jesus is going to come back again.

## **II. Have Faith in God's Governing Power 2:20**

The Babylonians might invade your earthly temple. They might plunder your earthly temple. But they're not going to plunder their temple in heaven. God is in that temple, and no man will ever plunder that temple. God is on the throne. He's not in a panic in heaven. He hasn't called an emergency session with the angels to figure out what to do. He is in absolute control.

God declaring His wrath on the Babylonians. A doomsday for them is coming.

Gives 5 Woes (:6-19):

- Woe on selfish ambition (:6)
- Woe of covetousness (:9)
- Woe of exploitation (:12-13)
- Woe on drunkenness (:15)
- Woe on idolatry (:18)

## **III. Faith in God's Glorious Purpose (:14)**

The glory of God is the sum of all of God's attributes manifested in some glorious light. The glory of God is not just the attributes of God, it's the characteristics of all of his attributes of God, all manifest in this glorious appearing. He's glorious in wisdom. He's glorious in power. He's glorious in grace. He's glorious in mercy.

All the earth will be filled with that glory. This is a wonderful promise to know that we will see his glory, we will dwell in his glory. That's gonna be part of heaven there, to dwell in the glorious presence of God.

Conclusion: In 1861, during the Civil War, there was an author and lecturer named Julia Ward How? She visited Washington, D.C. And one day she went outside the city and she saw a large number of soldiers marching. And so early in the morning, when she woke the next morning, there was in her mind words for a song. She was aware of all the ugliness of war, but her faith led her to write the words to a song. And you know it. *Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.* And then, of course, the song goes on to say, *our God is marching on.* And so there's a sense in which she saw a little bit of the glory of God by faith. And you see, this is what happened to Habakkuk. When Habakkuk had all these questions, he got up into his tower and God said, Habakkuk, let me show you something. And what God showed him was a little bit of the future glory.

TEXT: Habakkuk 3:1-19

TITLE: PERSEVERING PERSPECTIVE – GOD WILL DELIVER HIS PEOPLE

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE PERSEVERING PERSPECTIVE COMBINES THE SHORT TERM PAIN OF DISCIPLINE WITH THE TRIUMPHANT RESOLVE TO REJOICE IN GOD'S LONG TERM DELIVERANCE**

**REVIEW:**

We have seen the prophet wrestle honestly with the **perplexing paradox** of How could a righteous God let wickedness go unpunished for a season and then use a wicked nation as His instrument of discipline against His own people? (**Chapter 1**)

We have seen God answer by reinforcing the **permanent principle** that God is a righteous Judge and the wicked will by no means escape Judgment. (**Chapter 2**)

Now we see the prophet resting triumphantly in the **persevering perspective** that The joy and strength of the Lord can sustain the prophet through the short term pain of discipline in anticipation of God's long term deliverance. (**Chapter 3**)

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Steven Duby:** Habakkuk's prayer is the prophecy's **resolution**. It conveys God's response to the prophet's queries and expresses the prophet's own rest in God's holy providence. The prayer might be subdivided in a few different ways, but there is a certain flow of thought in which, after the superscription (**3.1**), the prayer goes from Habakkuk's initial address and request of YHWH (**3.2**), to Habakkuk's announcement of God's deeds (**3.3-7**), to Habakkuk's response to God (**3.8-15**), and to Habakkuk's resolution (**3.16-19**).

**Cyril Barber:** The prayer of Habakkuk is one of the finest Hebrew poems in the entire Old Testament. It was written in the form of a psalm and was probably designed to be sung by Levites in the Temple services (**1 Chron. 25:1-8**). . .

Viewed in light of the context, it becomes the capstone of the book and reveals the triumph of faith in the face of adversity. It is a fitting conclusion to the theme of the book. As such, it records a touching and heartwarming example of the manner in which the just can triumph over the adversities of life. Habakkuk looked beyond the vicissitudes of daily life and the threat of invasion to a time when God would right the wrongs of mankind and reward His servants for their faithfulness.

**Kenneth Barker:** The prayer recorded in **3:1-19** celebrates the satisfactory answers the Lord offers to Habakkuk's complaints. "**Habakkuk 1-2** appears to emphasize the human

agents in the outworking of this pattern; **chapter 3** reveals its inward dynamics in the sovereign agency of God, who implements the covenant through whatever earthly means he chooses. Together they form a compelling and tightly meshed testimony to the ways of God in judgment and in grace.” The Lord’s righteousness and power are no longer challenged, and the prophet has learned the lesson of **2:4**, as is evident in **3:19**. At all points God has proved faithful. Regardless of how bleak the national situation becomes, Habakkuk promises to watch, wait, and hope for the Lord to act (**3:16-18**). As **1:5** promises, the prophet is amazed at God’s answer (**3:16**), but this dismay is preferable “to a growing distrust in the sovereign God.” In this hymn of praise the prophet “extols the virtues of the Lord. God’s power (**3:2**), glory (**3:3**), splendor (**3:4**), wrath (**3:8**), mercy (**3:13**), and grace (**3:19**) are celebrated.”

**Eric Redmond:** The prophet Habakkuk offers a prayer wherein he resolves to trust in the sovereignty of God’s mysterious ways of dealing with the human predicament.

- I. The Priestly Convocation (**3:1-2**)
- II. The Psalm of Exaltation (**3:3-15**)
- II. The Prophetic Consolation (**3:16-19**)

**Waiting on the Lord** is often not easy for us because only the Lord knows exactly how long He will take to fulfill His promise. Since God is not confined to time and space as we are, it can be challenging for us to wait, not knowing how long. This is where our faith in God is tested the most. Do we trust God no matter how long it takes? Are we willing to persevere in faith to the end? Do we still trust God, even if the fulfillment of His promise doesn’t happen in our lifetime? Habakkuk has resolved in his heart that he will trust the Lord whatever happens.

**Walter Kaiser Jr.:**

**A. God’s Past Actions Proclaim His Coming 3:3–7**

1. The Theophany at Sinai **3:3a**
2. The Theophany in All Creation **3:3b–4**
3. The Theophany in the Plagues of Egypt **3:5**
4. The Theophany Before the Nations **3:6**
5. The Theophany in the Days of Othniel and Gideon **3:7**

**B. God’s Future Actions Foretell His Coming 3:8–15**

Habakkuk contains the best declaration of what it means for justified men and women to live by faith. That faith is an active trust in a Lord who is now working in the historic process as Lord of history. But it also includes God’s working in the future eschaton; the two works are joined by a now-and-not-yet type of inaugurated eschatology.

Habakkuk’s faith was not just salvific, redemptive and personal; it was practical and mundane in its implications. It could stand the test of total crop failure and the destruction of everything one held dear. It did not depend on God’s promise that He would always supply health, wealth and prosperity in order to earn Habakkuk’s trust, belief, and respect. He could still be loved and worshipped in the midst of tragedy. When the lid blew off everything, He was still the sole object of praise and adoration. The

reason was simple: He was Lord; He was in charge; He would remain true to His word even at the end of the historic process when all else had come and gone. Thus in the face of all the extremities of life, we can go on because He goes on. Justified people really live! And they live by faith!

**Stephen Miller:** What is **worship**? The English word worship is a combination of two Old English terms meaning “worthy” (or “worth”) and “ship.” Thus, worship is respect and service that we offer to God because we believe he is worthy of it. Although the specific word worship is not mentioned in this chapter, Habakkuk sets forth a general framework that is instructive for public and private religious worship today.

## **I. (:1-2) PRAYER FOR MERCIFUL REVIVAL – IN WRATH REMEMBER MERCY -- CHANGED PERSPECTIVE OF THE PROPHET – COMBINES ACCEPTANCE OF DISCIPLINE WITH HOPE FOR THE FUTURE**

### **A. (:1) Posture of Prayer**

*“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.”*  
No longer arguing and complaining because of his perplexities

**John MacArthur:** The precise meaning is unknown (its singular form occurs in the heading to **Ps 7**). In light of the musical notation at the end of **chap. 3**, it is thought that it has a musical-liturgical significance, and that this chapter was sung.

**Stephen Miller:** Music is not a peripheral enterprise but an integral part of worship. Songs should lift our spirits and proclaim a message that is biblically sound. Too often this is not the case. We should remember that the purpose of our music is not merely to make us “feel” good, but to glorify God. C. S. Lewis warns, “Nothing should be done or sung or said in church which does not aim directly or indirectly either at glorifying God or edifying the people or both” (**Water**, 1140). Congregational singing is an opportunity for all to participate in public worship. Everyone cannot preach the sermon or sing the solos, but all can join in praising God through song. God does not care if we have a beautiful singing voice. He only wants to hear us praise him. **Francis Schaeffer** declares: “One day all Christians will join in a doxology and sing God's praises with perfection. But even today, individually and corporately, we are not only to sing the doxology, but to be the doxology” (**Water**, 739).

### **B. (:2) Plea for Revival and Mercy**

#### 1. Foundational Attitude of Fear of the Lord = The Beginning of Wisdom

*“Lord, I have heard the report about You and I fear.”*

#### 2. Plea for Revival

*“O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years,  
In the midst of the years make it known;”*

#### 3. Plea for Mercy – While Accepting Discipline [Key Phrase in book]

*“In wrath remember mercy.”*

## II. (:3-15) PORTRAIT OF GOD'S POWER AND GLORY -- HISTORICAL REMEMBRANCES OF GOD IN HIS MAJESTIC GLORY AND SOVEREIGN POWER

(Primarily looking at God's Deliverance of His People From Egypt and the giving of the Law)

### A. (:3-5) Vision of the Glory and Power of the God of Wrath

#### 1. His Coming

*"God comes from Teman,  
And the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah."*

**John MacArthur:** Teman, named after a grandson of Esau, was an Edomite city (**Am 1:12; Ob 9**). Mount Paran was located in the Sinai peninsula. Both allude to the theater in which God displayed great power when He brought Israel into the land of Canaan (cf. **Dt 33:2; Jdg 5:4**).

**Cyril Barber:** In his prayer Habakkuk portrayed God as coming "*from Teman*," a district of Edom, and from Mt. Paran, a region south of Seir. Habakkuk amplified the word he used for God, 'Eloah, by the descriptive term "*Holy One*," emphasizing a specific aspect of God's deity in keeping with the judgment He was about to execute. The historic backdrop of the events described by Habakkuk were portrayed by Isaiah as having a future fulfillment. Isaiah described the Lord as advancing in judgment upon his enemies and coming "*from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah*" (**Isa. 63:1-6**). The context of Isaiah's prophecy definitely has application to the second advent of Christ and the events bringing to a close the Battle of Armageddon. That which Habakkuk saw, therefore, apparently had more than one fulfillment. It had an immediate context that foreshadowed a final, ultimate victory.

**Kenneth Barker:** Teman designated a district of Edom, located to the southeast of Judah. Teman dominated the fertile, well-watered area and served as a crossroads for important trade routes. In this context, Teman probably stands for the area of Edom as a whole. Paran was a mountainous area southwest of Judah in the Sinai Peninsula and west of the Gulf of Aqaba. Together, the two areas refer to God's coming in the past when he gave the law and led the people of Israel through the wilderness. Both areas are to the **south of Judah**. When the people of Israel left Egypt, God led them through these areas. Thus, the passage reminded the hearers and readers of the work of God in the past and his majestic power in making a nation of the Hebrews.

#### 2. His Manifest Glory

*"His splendor covers the heavens,  
And the earth is full of His praise.  
His radiance is like the sunlight;  
He has rays flashing from His hand,"*

**Cyril Barber:** Having introduced the thought of the effulgence of God’s glory (cf. **Heb. 1:1-3**), Habakkuk then described the moral perfection of His Person and the power (symbolized in the King James by the word “horns”) He wields. In poetic imagery, Habakkuk spoke of rays of light “*flashing from His hands*” (**3:4**, NASB), symbolizing the moral perfection of His character and the authority with which He metes out justice. Yet even in the revelation God gave of His Person, there was the “*hiding of His power*,” for no human being can look upon the unveiled, infinite glory of God and live (**3:4**, NASB; cf. **Ex. 33:20**).

3. His Hidden Power Demonstrated in Wrath

*“And there is the hiding of His power.  
Before Him goes pestilence,  
And plague comes after Him.”*

**B. (:6-11) The Outpouring of God’s Wrath**

1. (:6A) His Piercing Gaze

*“He stood and surveyed the earth;  
He looked and startled the nations.”*

2. (:6B) His Eternality Contrasted with Mortal Fragility

*“Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered,  
The ancient hills collapsed.  
His ways are everlasting.”*

2. (:7) His Terrified Witnesses – En Route to the Promised Land

*“I saw the tents of Cushan under distress,  
The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.”*

3. (:8-11) His Power Demonstrated in Nature – But His Wrath  
Not Directed Against Nature

a. (:8) Waters of Turmoil – But Goal of Bringing Deliverance

*“Did the Lord rage against the rivers,  
Or was your anger against the rivers,  
Or was your wrath against the sea,  
That you rode on your horses, on your chariots of salvation?”*

b. (:9) Weapons of Wrath

*“Your bow was made bare,  
The rods of chastisement were sworn. Selah.  
You cleaved the earth with rivers.”*

c. (:10-11) Witnesses of Destruction

*“The mountains saw You and quaked;  
The downpour of waters swept by.  
The deep uttered forth its voice,  
It lifted high its hands.*

*Sun and moon stood in their places;  
They went away at the light of your arrows,  
At the radiance of your gleaming spear.”*

### **C. (:12-15) God’s Wrath Set in the Context of God’s Mercy and Deliverance**

#### **1. (:12) Mission of Wrath Against the Nations**

*“In indignation You marched through the earth;  
In anger You trampled the nations.”*

**Kenneth Barker:** From the description of the natural world, the prophet moved to the description of the inhabitants of the world. In synonymous parallelism, the prophet described God as moving across the earth in anger. The verb translated “*strode through*” can mean to “*march*,” as in **Job 18:14** where the wicked is “*marched off to the king of terrors*.” But when God is the subject, “he marches in indignation (**Hab 3:12**), to save his people (**Isa 63:1**) and to lead them through enemy territory toward the Land of Promise (**Judg 5:4; Ps 68:7[8]**).” According to the latter two passages, “God’s marching is to be celebrated.” “If the presence of God that spread across the sky sent the earth into cataclysmic upheaval, so much the more will God’s power moving through the area bring down the ungodly nations.”

#### **2. (:13A) Goal of Deliverance for God’s People**

*“You went forth for the salvation of Your people;  
For the salvation of Your anointed.”*

**Kenneth Barker:** Why did Habakkuk see the vision of the Lord’s majesty? It foreshadowed the redemption of God’s people. The purpose of the theophany is to provide assurance that God would crush the head of the wicked and deliver his people. . .

The theophany continues to communicate the providence of God. Habakkuk looked to the past to see the deliverance of God in the present. Using the analogy of Habakkuk, people in modern times can see the coming deliverance of God. The same God who led the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage and worked on behalf of the people of Judah will lead believers from the bondage of sin. Though times appear to be the worst imaginable, God will lead his people.

#### **3. (:13B-15) Execution of the Wicked Who Had Oppressed God’s People**

*“You struck the head of the house of the evil  
To lay him open from thigh to neck. Selah.  
You pierced with his own spears the head of his throngs.  
They stormed in to scatter us;  
Their exultation was like those who devour the oppressed in secret.  
You trampled on the sea with Your horses,  
On the surge of many waters.”*

**Cyril Barber:** Habakkuk continued his description of the destruction of God’s enemies in **3:14-15**. The description brought to a fitting conclusion the theophany that God had

given His prophet. Habakkuk portrayed the nations as mighty princes dressed in armor and prepared for combat (cf. Ps. 2). No opportunity would be given them to enter into a battle, however, for their weapons of destruction would be turned back upon themselves. Habakkuk pictured the Lord's adversaries as rushing in upon His people to destroy them. They had anticipated an easy victory, but would be utterly defeated. The tables would be turned against them, and their defeat would demonstrate that their confidence had been misplaced.

### **III. (:16-19) PROFESSION OF JOYFUL CONFIDENCE OF FAITH -- CHOOSE ABIDING JOY REGARDLESS OF PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES -- TRIUMPHANT RESOLVE OF THE PROPHET -- COMBINES THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD WITH THE UPLIFTING RESOURCES OF THE JOY AND STRENGTH OF THE LORD**

Stephen Miller: True worship deepens our faith in God and gives joy and strength even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

#### **A. (:16A) Foundational Attitude of Fear of the Lord = the Beginning of Wisdom**

*"I heard and my inward parts trembled,  
At the sound my lips quivered.  
Decay enters my bones,  
And in my place I tremble."*

**Cyril Barber:** Habakkuk's faith and trust in the Lord illustrate the way Christians today should face adversity. He did not give way to fatalism, nor did he adopt a stoic attitude. He avoided the pitfall of passive resignation as well. Though his inward parts trembled, his attitude was one of submission to the will of God, and he exercised active dependence upon Him. The vision he had seen had filled him with reverential awe and had lifted him beyond the adverse circumstances that prevailed around him. As Abraham had seen the Lord before leaving Chaldea (**Acts 7:24**), so Habakkuk was given a vision of God's greatness and glory before being taken to Chaldea.

#### **B. (:16B-17) Persevering Acceptance of the Discipline of the Lord**

##### 1. (:16B) Expectation of the Inevitability of the Discipline of the Lord

*"Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,  
For the people to arise who will invade us."*

**Steven Duby:** Habakkuk is anticipating both the attack of the Babylonians against Judah and the distress that will come in due course to the Babylonians themselves and lead to the deliverance of Judah. Presumably, waiting for the dreaded judgment and waiting for the eventual deliverance are both spiritually formative, but in different ways. On the one hand, Habakkuk and his fellow believers knew that their nation would deservedly face the wrath of God. Being in such a position would become an occasion for meditating on the justice and holiness of God and on the truly wicked and abominable state of sinful human beings. It would become an occasion for self-examination and for humbling

oneself before the holy and sovereign God. On the other hand, Habakkuk and his fellow believers could be confident that God would have mercy on them and remain true to his covenant promises by avenging his people and circumcising their hearts (**Deut. 30.1-10; 32.39-43**). Alongside sober-mindedness, then, there is always cause for cheerful hope in God. And the fact that Habakkuk's predominant response is not one of solving something himself but one of waiting upon God reminds us that we are dependent upon God to complete his work and to deliver us. Indeed, the waiting itself is not merely incidental but is an important part of the asceticism in which one learns that God is good, reliable, and sovereign. The people of God in exile would have time to assimilate their hearts to this truth as they went about the ordinary duties and tasks set before them, building houses and planting gardens in Babylon (**Jer. 29.4-7**).

## 2. (:17) Anticipation of the Bleakest of Times

### a. No Food From the Fields

*“Though the fig tree should not blossom  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
Though the yield of the olive should fail  
And the fields produce no food,”*

### b. No Food From the Flocks

*“Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
And there be no cattle in the stalls”*

**Kenneth Barker:** Of all the wonderful passages in the Old Testament, the climax to Habakkuk's psalm fits as one of the **great affirmations of faith**. His circumstances have not changed. The outer world with its evil conduct and rapacious warfare remains the same. God's people remain in time of lamentation. The prophet, however, turns to **praise**. Why? He has heard God's voice and seen God's vision. He knows the ultimate outcome of history. Thus vv. **17** and **18** serve as fitting climaxes to the psalm of Habakkuk and to the book as a whole. Here the prophet accepts God's program, thus resolving his contention with God expressed so strongly in **chaps. 1-2**. “Even with all the punishment imagery . . . , the fact that the book concludes with the prophet rejoicing in the saving power and strength of God indicates that Habakkuk felt Yahweh's impulse to judge in no way dismisses the Lord's loving nature.”

## **C. (:18-19) Abiding Confidence in the Sufficiency of the Joy and Strength of the Lord**

### 1. (:18) The Joy of the Lord

*“Yet I will exult in the Lord,  
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.”*

**Biblehub.com:** This phrase reflects a profound declaration of faith and joy in God despite adverse circumstances. The prophet Habakkuk, after expressing his concerns and witnessing the impending judgment on Judah, chooses to find joy in the LORD. This decision to exult is significant, as it demonstrates a deep trust in God's sovereignty and goodness, even when the situation seems dire. The term "*exult*" implies a triumphant and

exuberant joy, suggesting that Habakkuk's faith transcends his immediate circumstances. This mirrors the attitude of other biblical figures, such as Job, who maintained faith despite suffering.

2. (:19A) The Strength of the Lord  
*“The Lord God is my strength,”*

**Cyril Barber:** Habakkuk’s rejoicing was indicative of the attitude of his heart (3:19). It was one of worship. God was his strength. The demonstration of the power of the Almighty had filled Habakkuk’s heart with confidence. The Lord had not explained everything to Habakkuk, nor had He answered all his questions, but He had shown Habakkuk something of His greatness, and that was sufficient. Habakkuk was content. He no longer questioned God’s sovereign will. Instead, he willingly submitted himself to the will of God.

3. (:19B) Victory in the Lord  
*“And He has made my feet like hinds’ feet,  
And makes me walk on my high places.”*

**Patterson:** God's prophet had walked a precarious path. But lest we condemn Habakkuk too readily, we need to remember that the Lord did not do so; He merely corrected him. Ultimately Habakkuk's implanted faith bore spiritual fruit. ... When times of doubt and discouragement come, as they inevitably do, the believer needs to come to God ... and share his concerns with Him. Like Habakkuk, he needs to come to God's Word and get a fresh glimpse of who and what God is and so come to a place of renewed trust in the one who alone is truly God and therefore sufficient for all of life. May Habakkuk's test of faith and triumphant joy in his saving Lord be an inspiration and example to all who must travel life's road!

\* \* \* \* \*

**DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1) How can we expand our perspective in times of difficulty and hardship so that we are looking at the long term purposes of God rather than at our short term pain and perplexity?
- 2) What type of balance have we experienced in our own life between God’s discipline and His mercy?
- 3) How can we renew our vision of God’s majestic glory and His sovereign power? We appreciate the simplicity and spontaneity of prayer. Do we also recognize that prayer can be formal and carefully structured (as this prayer is)?
- 4) Are we living in the joy and strength of the Lord with that tone of confidence and ultimate triumph?

\* \* \* \* \*

## QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Ray Stedman:** This prayer is one of the most remarkably beautiful, poetic passages in all the Scriptures. Read it and see how the prophet is doing nothing more or less than going back and remembering what God has done in the past. That is what convinces Habakkuk that God can be trusted. He rests upon events that have already occurred, events which cannot be questioned or taken away or shaken in any way; the great fact that God has already moved in human history. And this is where faith must rest. We do not live by blind faith. We live with a God who has acted in time and space, who has done something, who has indelibly recorded his will in the progress of human events.

**Rodney Chestnut:** When you are through questioning God and you still aren't satisfied, what then? How will you respond in your life when terrible things happen and you don't understand what God is doing?

**David Holwick:** **YET I WILL REJOICE IN THE LORD" Habakkuk 3:17-18**  
**I. Obscurity of Habakkuk.**

### II. His important and relevant message.

- A. Habakkuk was confused, even irritated, with God.
  - 1) His way of doing things did not make sense.
  - 2) It did not seem just. **1:2-3**
  - 3) The Jews of his time were corrupt and God did nothing.
  
- B. God tells him what he will do about it. **1:6**
  - 1) The Babylonians (Iraq) will smash Judah.
  
- C. Habakkuk becomes more angry. **1:13**
  - 1) His sharp-edged response to God:  
"Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those  
more righteous than themselves?" **1:13**
  - 2) Babylonians were far worse than Jews.
  - 3) Absence of justice was bad; unjust justice is worse.

### III. How people get angry with God.

- A. Some conclude God isn't a good God after all
  
- B. Honest look at life leads to hard questions.
  
- C. Habakkuk makes no decision on matter, except to wait for God. **2:1**

### IV. God's answer.

- A. His judgment is selective.

- 1) Those who trust in God will be spared.     **2:4**
  
- B. His "instruments" of judgment will be judged themselves.     **2:16**
  - 1) The Babylonians thought they were following their own agenda.
  - 2) They were wrong.
  
- C. God is still in charge.     **2:20**
  - 1) Even when events seem out of control, God can be trusted.
  - 2) God is the ruler of history.
    - a) Not everything that happens is good.
    - b) But God can take everything that happens and turn it for good.
  
- D. Faith is required on our part.     **3:16**
  - 1) Sometimes we will see our vindication, sometimes not.
  - 2) God often works in round-about ways. (Babylonians)

**V. Habakkuk never got to see the results of his prophecy.**

- A. Israel kept on sinning and Babylonians came.
  - 1) Only years later did the Babylonians got theirs.
  - 2) In the end, the Jews came out purer and more dedicated to God.
  
- B. Nevertheless, Habakkuk was at peace with God.
  - 1) Genuine faith doesn't require loose ends to be tied up.
  - 2) Peace even in the midst of trouble.     **3:17**
  - 3) He was able to rejoice in God.     **3:18**
  
- C. Do we only believe when it "works"?     **3:17-18**
  
- D. With salvation, nothing should be able to stop us from rejoicing in God.
  - 1) We don't thank God for hard times.
  - 2) We thank God that he can bring good out of them.
    - a) Even if he hasn't done it yet!
  
- E. When God seems distant, he is often the closest.

**Hampton Keathley IV:** Habakkuk now understands and offers a prayer of praise because God is in control.

- He pleads for mercy in the midst of the judgment (**1-2**).  
He is afraid of what is coming. He knows it will be awful. Undoubtedly He will suffer too. Maybe personally, but at least through witnessing the death and destruction of those around him.
- He praises God's majesty and power (**3-15**).
- He promises to wait on the Lord (**16-19**).

What is coming is frightening, but he commits himself to wait and trust in God.

At the beginning of the book I mentioned that Habakkuk's name meant "embrace" or "wrestle." We've see him wrestle with the tough questions, but what is his final response? To embrace God and trust in Him.

### **Shawn Drake: CHANGE OF ATTITUDE -- Habakkuk 3:1-19**

Introduction:

1. We have heard Habakkuk's 2 complaints and God's 2 replies.
2. Habakkuk started in a valley, but he ended on a mountaintop.
3. Habakkuk went from watching and waiting to worshipping and witnessing.
4. How is this possible? -- **Habakkuk 2:4**
5. Look with me at the change in Habakkuk's attitude.

From Complaining To Praying -- Habakkuk 3:1-2

3 focuses of his prayer:

1. God's Word (Keyword: "*awe*").
2. God's Work (Keyword: "*renew*").
3. God's Wrath (Keyword: "*mercy*").

From Considering To Pondering -- **Habakkuk 3:3-15**

3 stanzas of his song:

1. God came (**Habakkuk 3:3-5**).
2. God stood (**Habakkuk 3:6-7**).
3. God marched (**Habakkuk 3:8-15**).

From Crying To Praising -- **Habakkuk 3:16-19**

3 praises from his experience:

1. I will rest in God.
2. I will rejoice in God.
3. I will rely on God.

Conclusion:

1. Focus on what God is doing!
2. Remember Who we follow.
3. Give God all your praise!

[www.sermoncentral.com](http://www.sermoncentral.com)

**Jan Johnson:** The details are the same as at the giving of the Ten Commandments (**Exodus 19:16-19**): thunder, lightning, a thick cloud over the mountain, a loud trumpet blast, everyone in camp trembling, Mt. Sinai covered with smoke, God descending in fire, mountain shaking violently, trumpet getting louder and louder. Cushan was a Midianite or Arabian tribe, and probably one of the nearby nations that was thrown into fear at God's mighty acts, especially the crossing of the Red Sea. If someone asks about Teman and Mt. Paran, they were both located in Edomite territory adjacent to Mt. Sinai.

**James Montgomery Boice:** (quoting **Lloyd-Jones**)

Our problems 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. So long as Habakkuk was looking at Israel and the Chaldeans, he was troubled. Now he has forgotten Israel as such, and the Chaldeans, and his eyes are on God. He has returned to the realm of spiritual truth – the holiness of God, sin in man and in the world – and so he is able to see things in an entirely new light. He is now concerned for the glory of God and for nothing else. . .

[Contrast the victory of faith of Habakkuk with the world’s approaches to fearful situations]

One of the world’s reactions is resignation. A person will say, “If this is going to happen to me, I suppose there is just nothing that can be done about it. . . This may be better than screaming in the face of misfortune, but it is not the Christian way. At best it is a grim Stoicism.

A second reaction of the world is detachment. A person will say, “I don’t want to think about such things. Every time I think about them I get depressed – when I think about my own personal future, when I think about the future of the country. . . A person who reacts this way may try to fill his life with amusements or even work hard to keep his mind occupied. But this view refuses to face reality, and reality, whether we like it or not, is still there. Moreover, it usually leaves its impact anyway. We try to detach ourselves from our problems, but they remain with us subconsciously and inevitably disturb the activities we are using to escape them.

A third approach is sheer bravado. People will tell us, “Pull yourselves together and face this with your chins up. Don’t let the future depress you. Don’t let anything get you down.” That would be all right if we could do it, for in the situations I am talking about our knees are already knocking together and our lips are quivering. Nobody would be in this state if he or she could help it. When you are terrified, all the pep talks in the world avail little.

The Christian way of dealing with fear is to rejoice in the God of salvation. . . When we rejoice in God, we are placing our confidence in one who acts powerfully and effectively on our behalf.

**Cyril Barber: Outline -- The Prayer of Habakkuk (3:1-19)**

A. Prayer for God’s Future Intervention (3:1-2)

B. Praise for God’s Past Intervention (3:3-15)

1. Praise for God’s Person (3:3-4)

2. Praise for God’s Power (3:5-15)

C. Response to God’s Faithfulness (3:16-19)

1. The Prophet’s Concept of Himself (3:16)

2. The Prophet’s Appraisal of the Situation (3:17)

3. The Prophet’s Confidence in God (3:18-19)

a. The Prophet’s Rejoicing (3:18)

b. The Prophet’s Rest (3:19)

**Steven Duby:** After crying out to God about evil and injustice in his own nation (1.2-4), receiving a harrowing answer from God about the coming Babylonians (1.5–2.1),

receiving the promise that the righteous by faith will live (2.2-5), denouncing the Babylonians on behalf of the peoples (2.6-20), and fearfully meditating on the holiness, justice, and faithfulness of God (3.1-15), Habakkuk is confident in God and knows that in God's salvation he will rise above the tyranny of sin and the enemies of God. The song ends with the note that it is '*for the director of music, on stringed instruments*'. Not unfittingly, though, the LXX finishes with God leading Habakkuk 'to conquer in [God's] song', while the Vulgate finishes with God leading Habakkuk 'in victory singing in psalms'. Though for the people of God there is what feels like 'perishing hundreds of times', 'nevertheless they will not perish, for the Lord will always suggest to them matter for joy, and this joy will support them so that they may be able to emerge from all adverse things'. Satan's works may temporarily obscure the grace and providence of God behind the 'clouds' of adversity, but like the sun the grace and providence are still there, and we must remember.

### **Dr. Jerry Harmon: Praise the Lord Anyway!**

Introduction: You ever

wonder how to get out of a valley? It may be that you're here tonight and you're in a valley and you need help getting out. Well, if that's your condition, then Habakkuk is for you because he's going to tell us in this final chapter how to get out and how he got out of a valley. [Review of Chaps. 1-2]

When you get to **chapter three**, he's on the mountaintop now. He's not in the valley anymore. I mean, all of the worry that he had kind of dissolves into worship. All the fears that he had is replaced by faith. The outlook might elicit terror, but the uplook when he sees God, that elicits trust. And he reaches a new level of faith where he learns to really trust in the Lord. Now the question is this, what happened? How did this happen in him?

Big Idea: **Three decisions that Habakkuk makes that helps him to climb out of the valley. and ends up on a high note on the mountaintop.**

#### **I. Pray (Seek God's Face)**

This chapter actually has been called a prayer psalm, and it has been used in temple worship in Jerusalem. Whereas chapter one was all about interrogation (argumentation), now chapter three is all about intercession. He does three things in this prayer.

##### A. Submits to God's Plan

I submit to your plan. I submit to what you're going to do. What did Jesus teach us to say when we pray, *thy kingdom come*, what's the rest of it? *Thy will be done*. That's an act of submission, isn't it?

##### B. Prays for God's Work (:2)

Now he just wants to see God work. Lord, make it happen.

##### C. He Pleads for God's Mercy (:2)

#### **II. Ponder – Meditate on God's Greatness (:3-16)**

Poem about the mighty power of God

There are three different places that he focuses on.

- Mt. Sinai – God came in splendor
- Egypt – God stood in power (**3:6**)
- Canaan – God marched in victory (**3:8-15**)

From verses 13 on down to verse 15, Habakkuk just lists the various ways God has defeated his foes and his enemies.

### **III. Persevere – Praise God no matter what (:17-19)**

His circumstance doesn't change. What changes is his heart.

I guess the illustration to use would be Paul. Paul was in some circumstances that wasn't too good. He was in a Roman prison. He was facing, perhaps, death. And yet in that circumstance, what did Paul say? I must not be walking with the Lord. I need to make sure of my salvation. Now, what did he say? *Rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I say rejoice.* I mean, he just kept saying it all through the book of Philippians. *Rejoice, rejoice always.*

And then in **Romans 9:2**, Paul says this, *I have continual sorrow and heaviness of heart.* And I want to say, Paul, wait a minute. How can you have continual sorrow and heaviness of heart and be rejoicing all the time? And that's not a real problem because that's the life of a Christian. Our outward circumstances can cause us at times to be really hurting and we can have real sorrow, yet at the same time, it doesn't touch inwardly our joy. That's totally different. I can have bad circumstances. that weigh me down, yet at the same time, on the inside, I can be rejoicing in the Lord. Both things happen at the same time. And that's what happened for Paul, and that's essentially what Habakkuk is saying here.

Look, the circumstances aren't all that great. If the worst things imaginable happen, if the economy fails, And the crops fail. These are all the things that they depended upon to live are named in **verse 17**. So he's imagining the worst possible scenario. And by the way, some of these things did happen when the Babylonians came in. But Habakkuk says, **no matter what, I am going to praise God.**

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