

Habakkuk's Prophecy to Judah—The Rise of the Chaldeans [Babylonians] (c. 650 BC)

Habakkuk 1–3

1:1 The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.

Habakkuk's First Question—How Long Will You Let Judah's Wickedness Continue?

- 2 How long, O LORD, will I call for help,
And You will not hear?
I cry out to You, "Violence!"
Yet You do not save.
- 3 Why do You make me see iniquity,
And cause *me* to look on wickedness?
Yes, destruction and violence are before me;
Strife exists and contention arises.
- 4 Therefore the law is ignored
And justice is never upheld.
For the wicked surround the righteous;
Therefore justice comes out perverted.

God's Answer—Be Amazed: I Am About to Use the Babylonians to Judge Judah

- 5 "Look among the nations! Observe!
Be astonished! Wonder!
Because *I am* doing something in your days—
You would not believe if you were told. [[Acts 13:41](#)]
- 6 "For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,
That fierce and impetuous people
Who march throughout the earth
To seize dwelling places which are not theirs.
- 7 "They are dreaded and feared;
Their justice and authority originate with themselves.
- 8 "Their horses are swifter than leopards
And keener than wolves in the evening.
Their horsemen come galloping,
Their horsemen come from afar;
They fly like an eagle swooping *down* to devour.
- 9 "All of them come for violence.
Their horde of faces *moves* forward.
They collect captives like sand.
- 10 "They mock at kings
And rulers are a laughing matter to them.
They laugh at every fortress
And heap up rubble to capture it.
- 11 "Then they will sweep through *like* the wind and pass on.
But they will be held guilty,
They whose strength is their god."

Habakkuk's Second Question—How Could You Use the Wicked Babylonians to Judge Judah?

- 12 Are You not from everlasting,
O LORD, my God, my Holy One?

We will not die.

You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge;
And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.

- 13 *Your* eyes are too pure to approve evil,
And You can not look on wickedness *with favor*.
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?
- 14 *Why* have You made men like the fish of the sea,
Like creeping things without a ruler over them?
- 15 *The Chaldeans* bring all of them up with a hook,
Drag them away with their net,
And gather them together in their fishing net.
Therefore they rejoice and are glad.
- 16 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.
- 17 Will they therefore empty their net
And continually slay nations without sparing?

Habakkuk Awaits God's Answer

- 2:1 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 reprov'd.

God's Answer—I Will Use Babylon and Then It Too Will Be Judged

- 2 Then the LORD answered me and said,
"Record the vision
And inscribe *it* on tablets,
That the one who reads it may run.
- 3 "For the vision is yet for the appointed time;
It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail.
Though it tarries, wait for it;
For it will certainly come, it will not delay. [[Heb 10:37](#)]
- 4 "Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith. [[Rom 1:17](#); [Gal 3:11](#); [Heb 10:38](#)]
- 5 "Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man,
So that he does not stay at home.
He enlarges his appetite like Sheol,
And he is like death, never satisfied.
He also gathers to himself all nations
And collects to himself all peoples.
- 6 "Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him,
Even mockery *and* insinuations against him
And say, 'Woe to him who increases what is not his—

- For how long—
And makes himself rich with loans?’
- 7 “Will not your creditors rise up suddenly,
And those who collect from you awaken?
Indeed, you will become plunder for them.
- 8 “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.
- 9 “Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house
To put his nest on high,
To be delivered from the hand of calamity!
- 10 “You have devised a shameful thing for your house
By cutting off many peoples;
So you are sinning against yourself.
- 11 “Surely the stone will cry out from the wall,
And the rafter will answer it from the framework.
- 12 “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed
And founds a town with violence!
- 13 “Is it not indeed from the LORD of hosts
That peoples toil for fire,
And nations grow weary for nothing?
- 14 “For the earth will be filled
With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,
As the waters cover the sea. [\[Isa 11:9\]](#)
- 15 “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!
- 16 “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.
- 17 “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.
- 18 “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.
- 19 “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.
- 20 “But the LORD is in His holy temple.
Let all the earth be silent before Him.”

Habakkuk's Prayer (arranged for singing)

3:1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.

- 2 LORD, I have heard the report about You *and* I fear.
O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years,
In the midst of the years make it known;
In wrath remember mercy.
- 3 God comes from Teman,
And the Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah.*
His splendor covers the heavens,
And the earth is full of His praise.
- 4 *His* radiance is like the sunlight;
He has rays *flashing* from His hand,
And there is the hiding of His power.
- 5 Before Him goes pestilence,
And plague comes after Him.
- 6 He stood and surveyed the earth;
He looked and startled the nations.
Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered,
The ancient hills collapsed.
His ways are everlasting.
- 7 I saw the tents of Cushan under distress,
The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.
- 8 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?
- 9 Your bow was made bare,
The rods of chastisement were sworn. *Selah.*
You cleaved the earth with rivers.
- 10 The mountains saw You *and* quaked;
The downpour of waters swept by.
The deep uttered forth its voice,
It lifted high its hands.
- 11 Sun *and* moon stood in their places;
They went away at the light of Your arrows,
At the radiance of Your gleaming spear.
- 12 In indignation You marched through the earth;
In anger You trampled the nations.
- 13 You went forth for the salvation of Your people,
For the salvation of Your anointed.
You struck the head of the house of the evil
To lay him open from thigh to neck. *Selah.*
- 14 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.

- 15 You trampled on the sea with Your horses,
On the surge of many waters.
- 16 I heard and my inward parts trembled,
At the sound my lips quivered.
Decay enters my bones,
And in my place I tremble.
Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,
For the people to arise *who* will invade us.
- 17 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,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
And there be no cattle in the stalls,
- 18 Yet I will exult in the LORD,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
- 19 The Lord GOD is my strength,
And He has made my feet like hinds' *feet*,
And makes me walk on my high places.

For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.

Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation La Habra, Calif. Used by permission. All rights reserved. For Permission to Quote Information visit <http://www.lockman.org>.

Chronological Notes

1) Habakkuk.

A) The reference in Habakkuk 1:6 to the “Chaldeans” (*kasdim*) is generally accepted as evidence for a date in the 7th century BC.¹ Attempts to assign a more precise date have fallen into three time periods: Manasseh’s reign (697t–643t), Josiah’s reign (641t–610t) and Jehoiakim’s reign (609t–598t).

- (1) Currently, the majority view is that Habakkuk was written during Jehoiakim’s reign (e.g., Archer, Freeman, Hailey, Harrison, Hummel, Young, Robertson, and Blue).
- (2) Others (e.g., Bullock, Laetsch, Pusey, Unger) propose a date in the reign of Josiah before the finding of a copy of the law in 621. They argue that the desperate moral conditions denounced by Habakkuk could well be reflective of that period (cf. Jer 1–6) and relate Habakkuk’s prediction of the coming Chaldeans to the transitional nature of the period near the end of the Neo-Assyrian era.
- (3) Still others (e.g., Keil, Patterson, Couch) defend a date in the time of Judah’s most wicked king, Manasseh.² They cite the degraded moral and spiritual level of that time (2 Kgs 21:1–16; 2 Chr 33:1–10), an era whose debauchery was so pronounced that it drew God’s declaration that He would effect a total “disaster on Jerusalem and Judah” (2 Kgs 21:12).

¹ For a good survey of arguments for later dating among non-evangelical scholars, see R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 932–36.

² Mal Couch, “Inerrancy and the Minor Prophets,” *CTJ* 03:10 (Dec 1999): 380.

B) Internal evidence.

- (1) God tells Habakkuk that he will be amazed at what God plans to do—he would not believe it unless God told him (1:5).
- (2) God tells Habakkuk that at some point in the future He is going to use the Babylonians to judge Judah (1:6).
- (3) God’s judgment will fall on Judah in Habakkuk’s “days,” that is, within his lifetime (1:5).³
- (4) The condition in Judah at the time of the prophecy was: “destruction and violence confront me; conflict is present and one must endure strife. For this reason the law lacks power, and justice is never carried out. Indeed, the wicked intimidate the innocent. For this reason justice is perverted” (1:3b–4, NET).

C) External evidence.

- (1) The Jewish historical treatise *Seder ‘Olam Rabbah*, written in the 2nd–3rd century AD, dates Habakkuk to the reign of Manasseh.⁴
- (2) Some scholars feel that both Zephaniah and Jeremiah knew and utilized Habakkuk’s prophecy (cf. Hab 1:8 with Jer 4:13; 5:6; Hab 2:10 with Jer 51:58; Hab 2:12 with Jer 22:13–17; Hab. 2:20 with Zeph. 1:7).⁵ Since Zephaniah and Jeremiah both ministered during Josiah’s reign, Habakkuk should be dated earlier in Amon’s or Manasseh’s reign.
- (3) The first prominent king of Babylon, Nabopolassar, rose to power in 626. Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, fell to the Chaldeans and the Medes in 612. Prior to this, during Manasseh’s reign, Assyria was the preeminent power in the Middle East under the rule of Ashurbanipal.

D) My personal view at this time is that an early date has the most explanatory power—that is, it can best answer all of the internal and external evidence. Thus I have chosen to place Habakkuk within the reign of Manasseh.

³ This seems to imply that God’s judgment was not going to happen immediately but at some unspecified time in the future. If Habakkuk was 20 at the time of this prophecy (c. 650), he would have been 65 at the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s first siege of Jerusalem (605), 73 at the second siege (597) and 81 at the third and last siege (589)—thus placing Habakkuk within Manasseh’s reign does not preclude his being able to witness the fulfillment of the prophecy (contra Blue).

⁴ *Seder ‘Olam Rabbah*, 20.

⁵ C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, “Minor Prophets,” *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 10, pp. 387-390; Patterson, pp. 110–111.