

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

Habakkuk 1–3

### Title

1:1 The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

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

- 2 O Yahweh, how long shall I cry for help  
and you will not listen?  
*How long* will I cry out to you, "Violence!"  
and you will not save?
- 3 Why do you cause me to see evil  
*while* you look at trouble?  
Destruction and violence happen before me;  
contention and strife arise.
- 4 Therefore the law is paralyzed,  
and justice does not go forth perpetually.  
For the wicked surround the righteous;  
therefore justice goes forth perverted.

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

- 5 "Look among the nations and see;  
be astonished and astounded.  
For a work *is about to* be done in your days  
that you will not believe if it is told. [[Acts 13:41](#)]
- 6 For look! I am raising up the Chaldeans,  
the bitter and impetuous nation,  
the one who walks through the spacious places of earth  
to take possession of dwellings not belonging to it.
- 7 They *are* dreadful and awesome;  
their justice and their dignity proceed from themselves.
- 8 Their horses *are* more swift than leopards;  
they are more menacing than wolves *at* dusk.  
Their horsemen gallop; their horsemen come from afar;  
they fly like an eagle *that is* swift to devour.
- 9 All of them come for violence,  
their faces pressing forward.  
They gather captives like the sand.
- 10 And they themselves scoff at kings  
and rulers *are* a joke to them.  
They laugh at every fortification,  
and they heap up earth and take it.
- 11 Then they sweep *like the* wind and pass on;  
they become guilty, whose might *is* their god!"

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

- 12 Are you not from of old,  
O Yahweh my God, my Holy One?  
You shall not die.  
O Yahweh, you have marked them for judgment;  
O Rock, you have established them for reproof.
- 13 Your eyes *are* too pure to see evil,  
and you are not able to look at wrongdoing.  
Why do you look at the treacherous?  
*Why* are you silent when the wicked swallows up  
*someone* more righteous than him?
- 14 You make humankind like fish of the sea,  
like crawling creatures that have no ruler among them.
- 15 He brings up all of them with a fishhook;

he drags them up with a fishnet;

he gathers them in his dragnet.

Therefore, he rejoices and exults.

16 Therefore he sacrifices to his fishnet  
and makes offerings to his dragnet,  
for by them he makes a good living  
and his food *is* rich.

17 Will he therefore empty his fishnet  
and continually kill nations without showing mercy?

#### **Habakkuk Awaits God's Answer**

2:1 I will stand at my post,  
and station myself on *the* rampart.  
And I will keep watch to see what he will say to me,  
and what he will answer concerning my complaint.

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

2 Then Yahweh answered me and said,  
“Write *the* vision and make *it* plain on the tablet  
so that it might be read quickly.

3 For *there is* yet a vision for the appointed time;  
it will give witness to the end, and it will not lie.  
If it tarries, wait for it,  
for it will surely come and not delay. [[Heb 10:37](#)]

4 Look! His spirit within him is puffed up;  
it is not upright.  
But the righteous shall live by his faithfulness. [[Rom 1:17](#); [Gal 3:11](#); [Heb 10:38](#)]

5 How much less the defiant;  
*the* arrogant, treacherous man?  
He who broadens his throat like Sheol,  
and who, like death, is not satisfied,  
and who gathers to himself all the nations,  
and harvested for himself all the peoples,  
will not succeed.

6 Shall not all of these take up a taunt against him,  
with ridicule and riddles against him, saying,  
‘Woe to him who heaps up what is not his’?  
*For* how long?  
And, ‘*Woe to him* who makes himself heavy with pledges’?

7 Will not your creditors suddenly rise up  
and awaken those who make you tremble?  
Then you shall be as plunder for them.

8 Because you plundered many nations,  
all the remaining nations will plunder you  
on account of the blood of humanity  
and violence *against the* land,  
*and against* cities and all who live in them.

9 Woe to *him who* obtains profit *from* evil gain for his house,  
to set his nest on high,  
to be saved from the hand of misfortune!

10 You have plotted shame for your house,  
cutting off many peoples  
and sinning against your life.

11 For the stone will cry out from the wall,  
and *the* plaster from *the* wood will answer it.

12 Woe to *him who* builds a city by bloodguilt,  
and *who* founds a city by wickedness!

13 Look! *Is it* not from Yahweh of hosts

- that people labor for mere fire,  
and nations exhaust themselves for mere vanity?
- 14 For the earth will be filled  
with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh,  
like the waters covering the sea. [\[Isa 11:9\]](#)
- 15 Woe to *him who* gives a drink to his neighbors,  
pouring out your wrath and also making *them* drunk  
in order to see their nakedness!
- 16 You will be sated with shame rather than glory.  
Drink also yourself, and expose yourself!  
The cup of the right hand of Yahweh  
will come around upon you  
and disgrace upon your glory.
- 17 For *the* violence of Lebanon will cover you,  
and *the* destruction of wild animals will shatter them  
on account of the blood of humanity,  
and *the* violence *against the* land,  
*against* a city and all the inhabitants in it.
- 18 What value *is* an idol  
when its carver has fashioned it,  
a molten idol, a teacher of lies?  
For *he who* fashioned his creation trusts in it,  
*though* making mute idols!
- 19 Woe to *him who* says to the wood, 'Wake up!'  
*And* to a lifeless stone, 'Arise!'  
Can he teach?  
Look, it is covered *with* gold and silver,  
and there is no breath within it.
- 20 But Yahweh *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 O Yahweh, I have heard the report of you;  
O Yahweh, I stand in awe of your works.  
In the midst of the years, revive it!  
In the midst of the years, make *it* known!  
In wrath, may you remember to show compassion.
- 3 God came from Teman;  
the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah  
His splendor covers the heavens,  
and his praise fills the earth.
- 4 And his brightness was like *the* light;  
flashing rays *came* from his hand for him;  
And there *is* the covering of his strength.
- 5 Before him went Disease,  
and Pestilence went out at his feet.
- 6 He stood and measured the earth;  
he looked and made the nations tremble.  
Then the mountains of old were shattered;  
the hills of old collapsed.  
The ways of old belong to him.
- 7 Under affliction I saw the tents of Cushan;  
the tent curtains of the land of Midian trembled.
- 8 Was the anger of Yahweh against the rivers?  
Was your wrath against the rivers,  
or your fury against the sea,  
when you mounted upon your horses,

- upon your victory chariot?
- 9 You laid bare the nakedness of your bow,  
swearing oaths *with the* arrows of *your* word.  
You split the earth *with* rivers.
- 10 *When the* mountains saw you they writhed;  
a torrent of waters swept by;  
the deep gave its voice;  
it raised its hands on high.
- 11 Sun *and* moon stood still in *their* place;  
at the light of your arrows they moved about;  
at the gleam of the flashing of your spear.
- 12 In fury 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 crushed the head of the house of wickedness,  
laying bare *from the* foundation to the top.
- 14 You pierced the head of his warriors with his own arrows;  
they came like a whirlwind to scatter me,  
their exultation like *one who* devours the afflicted in ambush.
- 15 You trampled upon the sea *with* your horses,  
the churning of many waters.
- 16 I hear and my stomach shakes;  
my lips quiver at the sound;  
infection enters my bones;  
that which *is* beneath me trembles;  
I wait quietly for the day of trouble  
to come upon the people attacking us.
- 17 Though the fig tree *does* not blossom,  
nor there be fruit on the vines;  
the yield of *the* olive tree fails,  
and the cultivated fields do not yield food;  
*the* flock is cut off from the animal pen,  
and there is no cattle in the stalls,
- 18 Yet I will rejoice in Yahweh;  
I will exult in the God of my salvation.
- 19 Yahweh, my Lord, *is* my strength;  
he makes my feet like the deer;  
he causes me to walk on my high places.  
To the choirmaster with stringed instruments.

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### **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 7<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>1</sup> 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) 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.<sup>2</sup> 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).

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).<sup>3</sup>

(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.<sup>4</sup>

(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).<sup>5</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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).

<sup>4</sup> *Seder ‘Olam Rabbah*, 20.

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