

LIVING BY FAITH IN TOUGH TIMES
PREACHING THROUGH THE BIBLE: HABAKKUK
Habakkuk 2:4; 3:16-19

I. INTRODUCTION

A. BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Despite God's repeated calls for repentance, Judah is again rebelling against Him. Violence, iniquity, wickedness, strife, injustice, arrogance, dishonesty, sexual immorality, and idolatry are everywhere. The prophet Habakkuk asks God how long He will allow this situation to continue. God answers by describing how He will use the Babylonians to punish Judah. Habakkuk asks God to remember mercy, even in His wrath. After recalling how God has delivered His people in the past, Habakkuk yields completely to God's will: no matter how bad things will become in the wake of God's judgment, the prophet asserts he will exult in the Lord, rejoice God's salvation, and rely on Him for strength.

B. TITLE

1. HEBREW

- a. **Habaqqaq**—taken from the verb **habaq** = 'embrace'
- b. Meaning = 'one who embraces'—'one who clings'
 - Habakkuk 'clings' to the Lord—regardless of the circumstances—**3:16-19**

2. SEPTUAGINT

- **Αμβακουκ**

3. LATIN

- **Habacuc**

C. PLACE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

1. PART OF THE LATTER PROPHETS—THE TRULY 'PROPHETIC' BOOKS OF THE OT
2. EIGHTH OF THE TWELVE MINOR PROPHETS

D. AUTHOR

1. AUTHORSHIP

- **Habakkuk**—attributed in **1:1** and **3:1**

2. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

- a. Identified as *the prophet*—in both **1:1** and **3:1**
 - Special designation—suggests he might have been a professional prophet
- b. Also possibly a priest—serving in the Temple
 - 1. His psalm (chapter 3) begins and ends with musical instructions
 - a. **3:1**—*according to Shigionoth*—an emotional poetic form
 - b. **3:19**—*For the choir director, on my stringed instruments*

E. SETTING

1. JUDAH

- a. Again Judah was rebelling against God
 - A time of renewed social injustice and idolatry
 - Like the 8th century when Micah prophesied—during Ahaz's reign (735-715)
- b. God's judgment through Babylonian conquest was imminent
- c. These circumstances fit three situations
 - 1. *Possibly*—the reigns of Manasseh (687-642) and Amon (642-640)
 - a. Both were 'bad kings' who restored idolatrous worship
 - b. Problem with this theory
 - 1. Manasseh repented and restored worship of Jehovah
 - 2. Amon's reign was very short
 - 3. Under Hezekiah (640-609)—there was a religious revival and reformation
 - 2. *Possibly*—the reign of Jehoahaz (Shallum)—reigned 609
 - a. He also was a 'bad king'
 - b. Problem with theory

▲ He ruled just three months before deposed by Egyptian Pharaoh Necho II

3. *Most likely*—early in the reign of Jehoiakim (608-598)
 - a. He was a ‘bad king’—who did evil in the sight of the Lord
 - b. He became a vassal to the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II
 - c. In the third year of his reign (605), he rebelled against Assyria
 - d. Nebuchadnezzar II besieged Jerusalem—605
 - ▲ Jehoiakim submitted and paid tribute to Nebuchadnezzar
 - e. First deportations of Jews to Babylon occurred then
 1. Nebuchadnezzar deported 10,000 leaders from Jerusalem
 2. This group included those leaders guilty of oppressing the poor
 3. It also included other upper-class young men like Daniel

2. BABYLONIAN EMPIRE

- a. Babylonian King Nabopolassar took Nineveh (612) and defeated Assyria (609)
- b. Crown Prince Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians at the Battle of Carchemish (605)
- c. Nabopolassar died in August 605; Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon and was crowned
- d. Nebuchadnezzar II became king in 605 and ruled until 562

F. DATE

1. Possibly—as early as 687-640
2. More likely—later—about 609-605

G. STYLE AND GENRE

1. NARRATIVE PRESENTATION OF DIVINE ORACLE FROM A VISION
 - 1:1—*The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.*
2. PLUS POETIC PRAYER—PSALM—COMPOSED BY THE PROPHET—**chapter 3**

H. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

1. A KEY VERSE IS **–2:4b—***But the righteous will live by his faith.*

2. FOUND IN THREE NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS

- [Rom 1:17](#)
- [Gal 3:11](#)
- [Heb 10:38](#)

I. THEMES

1. IT IS ALL RIGHT TO QUESTION GOD AND EXPRESS FEAR OF HIS PLANS
 - How long will the evil prosper?—[1:2ff](#)
 - I have heard the report about You, and I fear—[3:2](#)
2. GOD WILL NOT FOREVER TOLERATE THE REBELION OF HIS PEOPLE
3. ‘GODLESS’ PEOPLE CAN BE USED AS AN INSTRUMENT OF GOD’S JUSTICE?
4. THE SAME WRATH GOD USED TO FREE HIS PEOPLE CAN BE TURNED ON THEM
5. THE JUST PERSON LIVES BY FAITH—REGARDLESS OF THE CIRCUMSTANCE

J. OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION—[1:1](#)

THE PROPHETS TWO PROBLEMS—[1:2-through chapter 2](#)

HOW LONG WILL THE EVIL PROSPER?—[1:2-4](#)

GOD’S REPLY—[1:5-11](#)

HOW CAN GOD USE EVIL PEOPLE TO BRING JUSTICE?—[1:12-2:1](#)

GOD’S REPLY—JUDGMENT WILL COME TO BABYLON—[2:2-20](#)

THE PROPHET’S PRAISE—[chapter 3](#)

PRAYER FOR MERCY—[3:1-2](#)

RECALLING HOW GOD USED HIS POWER TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE—[3:3-15](#)

TRUSTING IN GOD FOR SALVATION—[3:16-19](#)

II. BIBLICAL TEXT

[2:4](#)—*Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith.*

3:16-19—**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.*

III. EXPOSITION

A. THE RIGHTEOUS WILL LIVE BY HIS FAITH—**2:4**

2:4—*Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith.*

1. THE LORD ANSWERS HABAKKUK'S SECOND QUESTION

- a. Prefaced by this re-assurance—God is in control

2:20—*But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him.*

- b. The question—Why do an even more wicked people prosper [at Judah's expense]?

- c. Answer given in **2:1-5**

- Habakkuk awaits the Lord's reply—**v1**
- God tells Habakkuk to record this message—**vv2-3**
- Message—**vv4-5**

- d. Followed by prophecy of Babylon's coming judgment—**2:6-20**

2. GOD'S REPLY—THE MESSAGE

- a. **The proud/arrogant one**—will die—**4a**

1. The proud of Judah and Babylon alike—**1:4, 7, 11, 13**

2. Not stated explicitly—but implied—they will die

- a. His soul is not right within him—**4a**

- b. He is like death—**v5**

- c. Pride leads to death—**Pr 14:12; 16:25**

- d. Contrasted with the 'righteous'—who *lives* [by his faith]—**4b**

b. **The righteous one**—will live—by faith

1. One aspect—trust

- a. Contrasts with the proud/arrogant—who is self-reliant
- b. The ‘righteous’ relies on God
- c. Believing and putting ‘faith’ in God

2. Another aspect—[more important?]
—faithfulness

a. **emuwnah** = loyalty—fidelity, firmness, steadfastness

- ▲ An inner stability that flows into loyalty
- ▲ Means that a person is therefore—reliable, genuine, conscientious

b. Emphasizes covenant relationship—of trustworthiness

c. Two implications

- 1. Faithfulness that is thoroughly loyal
- 2. Faithfulness that is patient

c. **Faithfulness that is thoroughly loyal**

1. God is faithful—and working His redemptive history—even if it is not evident

- Even when justice is perverted—1:2-4
- Even when God chastens His people—1:5-11
- Even when we cannot understand His ways—1:12-17

2. In a world filled with sin/problems

- We continue to follow God—loyally believing His word and that He is at work

d. **Faithfulness that is patient**—2:3

- 1. God exhorted Habakkuk to remain patient
- 2. Someday even the proud [Babylonian oppressor] will be brought down
- 3. Even when God seems distant and detached—He is still at work and cares

3. PARALLEL PASSAGE IN OT

- **Gen 15:6**—Abraham believed and God counted it as righteousness

4. PARALLEL PASSAGES IN NT

- a. **Rom 1:17**—the role of faith in **salvation**
 - 1. Anyone who believes will be saved
 - 2. They are considered righteous because of their faith
 - 3. Key text for Luther—and the Reformation—justification by faith
- b. **Heb 10:38**—the role of faith in **eschatology**
 - 1. Even though the Parousia is delayed—the righteous live by faith
 - 2. They patiently continue to believe—that Christ will return
- c. **Gal 3:11**—the role of faith in **salvation**
 - 1. Only simple faith makes a person righteous—in right relationship with God
 - 2. Not pious acts and keeping the law

B. WHATEVER THE SITUATION—YET WILL I TRUST GOD—**3:16-19**

1. HABAKKUK AWAITS DELIVERANCE

3:16—*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.*

- a. He stands in fearful awe—**16a**
 - 1. After his vision of God’s power over nature (3-11)
 - 2. After his vision of God as the vengeful Warrior God (12-15)
 - 3. Habakkuk responded like Isaiah in the Temple—**Isaiah 6**
- b. He waits patiently—**16b**
 - 1. For the ‘day of distress’—calamitous judgment upon Babylon
 - 2. Which came in 539—defeat by Medes and Persians
 - 3. Answers his own introductory question
 - **1:2**—*How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and you will not hear?*
 - He will wait—as long as it takes for the Lord’s promised delivery—**3:2-15**

2. HABAKKUK'S UNFLAGGING TRUST IN THE LORD—**vv17-19**

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.*

a. He accepts God's plan—regardless of the coming destruction—**v17**

1. Six conditional clauses—prefaced by two 'thoughts'
2. Ascending order of severity
 - **Figs**—a delicacy—a non-essential luxury
 - **Grapes**—provided drink—could be replaced
 - **Olives**—oil needed for cooking and lamps
 - **Grain**—barley/wheat—staple food—bread
 - **Fields**—failure meant starvation
 - **Sheep/cattle**—wealth of land—sheep provided wool and meat—cattle tilled land
3. Complete economic disaster—and apparent loss of hope
4. Stated in similar terms by Jeremiah—**Jer 5:17**
5. Similar to Job's circumstances

Job 13:15—*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him*

6. Faith is truest—when tested in times of greatest adversity

b. He will exult in the Lord—**v18**

1. Because He knows the Lord will deliver—and bring salvation
2. Two expectation clauses—contrasted with six conditional clauses above
 - I will exult in Jehovah—[my covenant Lord]
 - I will rejoice in Elohim—God of my salvation
3. Contrasted with rejoicing of Chaldeans in their avarice—**1:14-15**
4. Worshipful trust—regardless of the present/coming circumstances

Illustrated by William Cowper's hymn (1779)

“Sometimes a Light Surprises”

**Though vine nor fig tree neither
Their wonted fruit shall bear,
Though all the field should wither,
Nor flocks nor herds be there;
Yet God the same abiding,
His praise shall tune my voice,
For while in Him confiding
I cannot but rejoice**

- c. Faith as personal relationship and trust
 - 1. He is the God of **my** salvation—**v18**
 - 2. He is the Lord God, **my** strength—**v19**
- d. Faith in God as Savior—Deliverer—**v19**
 - 1. Even in uncertain times
 - When the nation is weak—and faltering
 - When footing is uncertain
 - 2. The Lord God is our strength
 - Sovereign Lord—**Jehovah Adonai**—is my strength
 - Only place outside Psalms (5 times) where this combination is used
 - Emphasizes power and majesty of God
 - Another translation emphasizes more personal nature = **Jahweh, my Lord**
 - 3. He makes us sure-footed in the high places
 - a. **Psalm 18**—the source

Ps 18:31-33—*For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God, the God who girds me with strength and makes my way blameless? He makes my feet like hinds' feet and sets me upon my high places.*
 - b. The hind—mountain deer—known for its sure-footedness
 - c. David's picture of treading high places—from **Dt 32:13** and **33:29**
 - Symbolizing the victory of God's people