

Habakkuk

Introduction

Habakkuk



Why read this book?

Have you ever wanted to ask God, “If you’re in control, why does evil so often win?” If so, you’ll identify with Habakkuk, who entered into a great debate with God. Habakkuk, whose name may mean *wrestler*, grappled with God about questions still relevant today: How can a just God ignore injustice? Why does God allow the wicked to prosper? And how can a good God use evil to accomplish his purposes? Habakkuk struggled to understand how God works, but in the end he became convinced that he could trust God no matter how bleak or confusing the present circumstances appeared to be.

Who wrote this book?

Habakkuk, a prophet in the nation of Judah.

When was it written?

Around 610 to 605 B.C.

What was happening during this time?

Sin was rampant in Judah. The people worshiped idols, sacrificed their children to pagan gods and ignored God. The wicked King Jehoiakim not only refused to listen to God’s prophets, but he also burned their writings, arrested several of them and even murdered one. Jehoiakim foolishly aligned Judah between two warring superpowers—the declining Assyrian empire and the rising Babylonian empire. The historical background to the book of Habakkuk is found in 2 Kings 23:31–24:7 and 2 Chronicles 36:1–8.

What to look for in Habakkuk:

Most prophets speak to the people on God’s behalf. Habakkuk was unique in that he spoke to God on behalf of the people. As you read, notice his complaints to God, God’s unexpected (and unwelcome!) answer, and the hope Habakkuk finally discovered.

—From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)

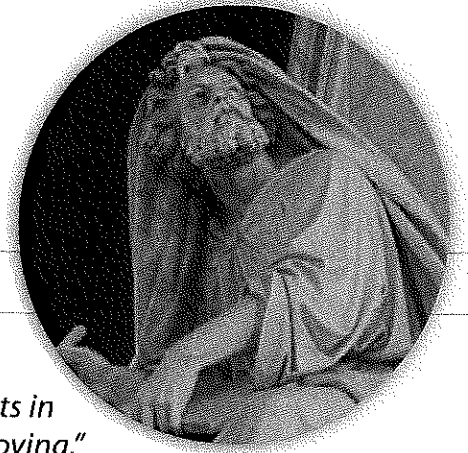


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Leader's Guide

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Dear God, I have a question . . .

"If you don't have any doubts, you are either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving," wrote author and pastor Frederick Buechner. If you have ever thought or asked, "Why does God do this?" or, "That is not fair," then you must read the Book of Habakkuk. This prophet goes to God with his doubts and faith struggles. For a book that was written in Judah more than 2,500 years ago, Habakkuk has a contemporary message that addresses modern problems.

Scripture: Habakkuk

Based On: "The Minor Prophets: God Still Speaks to Us Today," by Tom Cowan



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Part 1 Identify the Issue

Little is known about Habakkuk except that he was a contemporary of Jeremiah, and that he was a man of deep faith. Unlike all the other prophets who had a message for Israel or Judah, Habakkuk wrote about a dialogue between God and himself.

Habakkuk presents God with several questions that trouble him. As he looks at life, it seems that what God does is not always fair. Habakkuk loves justice and can't reconcile the many inequities which he sees in life. His questions to God are also our questions.

Habakkuk is a profound book, one that delves into the heart of God. It gives us answers to some of the most puzzling questions in life.

[Q] What questions do the people you know have for God?

[Q] What kinds of issues or questions still remain unanswered for you? Do you think they ever can or will be answered? Explain.

[Q] Is it okay to question God? Why or why not?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: The all-wise and all-powerful God can handle our doubts.

There are two main questions about life which Habakkuk brings to God. They are the perennial questions of humankind. The first question is: Why does evil go unpunished?

Read Habakkuk 1:1–11.

[Q] What are some of the other ways in which we may ask the same question?

[Q] How does God answer Habakkuk in 1:5–11?

Habakkuk's second question to God is: How can a just God use wicked Babylon to accomplish his judgment and punish a people more righteous than they are?

Read Habakkuk 1:12–2:20.



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[Q] Have you ever said, “Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? Life is not fair!” If so, what caused you to say this?

[Q] How does God answer Habakkuk in 2:2–20?

Habakkuk 2:4 is a vital verse for the New Testament teaching on faith. It became a rallying cry for the Protestant Reformation. Read Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. How does Paul use it in these verses?

[Q] God doesn't promise that life will be fair, but he does assure us that he is love. What is the difference?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To bring our doubts and faith struggles before God.*

Activity: *Give your group members index cards and pencils and ask them to write down their honest questions to God. Collect and read them without naming names. If your group is mature enough to discuss the questions without being condescending to the authors, then go for it! Otherwise, it may be encouraging enough just to know that others have similar doubts and questions, so simply ask God for enlightenment and say a prayer of praise to the all-powerful, all-wise God.*

Teaching Point Two: The all-wise, all-powerful God is to be trusted and praised.

Habakkuk begins his book with questions, but concludes it with a psalm of praise to God. He realizes God's wisdom and power and places his trust in him. We can do the same in a conflicted world. Read Habakkuk 3.

[Q] What attitude does Habakkuk display at the start of his prayer?

[Q] What does Habakkuk pray for?

[Q] Comparing the first question he presented to God and the end of this prayer, in what ways do you sense Habakkuk has changed?

[Q] How does what Habakkuk learned challenge a popular emphasis today—that God will give us health, wealth, etc. because we are his children?

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Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Theologian James Montgomery Boice comments on the last section of Habakkuk 3 in his *Minor Prophets* commentary:

The last section of this chapter contains some of the most moving verses in all the Bible. On one occasion it was used by Benjamin Franklin, who was not a Christian, to confound some of the sophisticated, cultured despisers of the Bible whom he met in Paris when he was serving as United States Plenipotentiary to that country. The skeptics were mocking him for his admiration of the Bible. So he decided to find out how well they knew the book they professed to scorn. One evening he entered their company with a manuscript that contained an ancient poem he said he had been reading. He said that he had been impressed with its stately beauty. They asked to hear it. He held it out and read this great third chapter of Habakkuk ending with: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights" (vv. 17–19).

The reading was received with exclamations of extravagant admiration. "What a magnificent piece of verse!" they cried. Where had Franklin found it? How could they get copies? They were astonished when he informed them that it was the third chapter of Habakkuk's prophecy.

What is it that makes this chapter, and particularly the final verses, so forceful? In my judgment it is the courageous way in which Habakkuk embraces all the calamities he can imagine and nevertheless triumphs over them in the knowledge and love of his Savior.

[Q] What does the Book of Habakkuk tell you about God?

[Q] How does it address faith struggles you may be having?

Action Point: Habakkuk had some questions that troubled him deeply. What troubles you about how life works? How have you brought that to God? Search the Scriptures and bring these deep questions of the soul to prayer this week.

—Study by Tom Cowan, with Kyle White