

## The Prophet's Burden

1  **Habakkuk**

Why don't you answer me God?

2  **Habakkuk 1:1-4**

*The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw. <sup>2</sup> 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? <sup>3</sup> Why do you cause me to see evil [while] you look at trouble? Destruction and violence happen before me; contention and strife arise. <sup>4</sup> Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice does not go forth perpetually. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore justice goes forth perverted.*

3  **The unknown prophet**

- A prophet named Habakkuk
  - No other mention in the Old Testament
  - No mention of his hometown like Nahum (Nahum 1:1)
  - No mention of lineage (cf. Zephaniah 1:1)
  - No information about dating
  - No real information about audience (cf. Amos 1:1, Micah 1:1; Isaiah 1:1)

4  **Habakkuk's questions and complaints**5  **The BURDEN is the Big Deal**

- "Oracle" or "burden" (*maśśā'*) is a common way to describe prophetic material, especially material that deals with prophecy against foreign nations.
- Habakkuk was burdened with the message he received from the Lord.
- He received a divine revelation and the message shocked him.

6  **Habakkuk received God's revelation**

- The title here might be more literally translated, "The burden that Habakkuk the prophet saw." The same two Hebrew words, "burden" and "saw," are used in Isaiah 13:1.
- The word "saw" (*hāzāh*), when used of the prophets, often means to see in a vision (cf. Isa. 1:1; 2:1; Ezek. 12:27; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1).
- Receiving glimpses from God into the future (i.e., "visions") the prophets were sometimes called God's "seers" (*hōzeh*).

7  **How ORACLES happen**

- A person, or persons, in the prophet's community asks a question about God's intervention or lack of it in some experience of the community.
- God gives the prophet the oracle as the response.
  - An oracle is thus based on revelation concerning a forthcoming divine action.
  - The oracle may give either insight into the future or directions for the audience's present actions

8  **Bad news**

- Judgment is coming against God's people
- The ungodly Chaldeans will be the instrument of God's judgment
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9  **Old questions we are still asking**

- The prophet's long-standing concern which finally erupted into a volcanic complaint was twofold.
  - First, he wanted to know why God seemed so indifferent: Why doesn't God hear?

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- Second, he wanted to know why God seemed so insensitive: Why doesn't God help? Habakkuk's words *How long* show his agony over God's seeming delay in responding to the prophet's concerns.
- Many Christians today sense the same problem. They wonder why God seems silent when they pray.

10  **Habakkuk's complaints**

- He described the injustice that was rampant around him and then asked "How long?" (Hab. 1:2) and "Why?" (v. 3). These questions occur again later.
- Habakkuk's concern was not only that his cries went unheeded but that the corruption continued unchecked.
- He cried out to God, *Violence!* but God seemed to do nothing. The stark word "violence" sums up all the chaos Habakkuk witnessed around him. The word is sprinkled throughout the book (1:2-3, 9; 2:17) like inkblots on a crumpled page in history.

11  **Why does God tolerate injustice?**

- Sin was abounding and God seemed both indifferent and idle.
- Habakkuk put the blame on God with his penetrating question, *Why do You make me look at injustice?* Then he asked an even greater question: *Why do You tolerate wrong?*
  - God caused Habakkuk to witness injustice (lit., "iniquity"), but He Himself also tolerated (lit., "beholds"), the very same wrong.
  - It is bad enough that a weak sinner should have to behold wickedness. But to have a righteous God see the evil and do nothing about it seemed beyond comprehension (cf. v. 13).

12  **A bleak picture**

- The picture was bleak indeed.
- Destruction and violence were coupled with strife and conflict (cf. "violence" in v. 2, 9; 2:17).
- "Destruction" (*šōd*, "violent treatment causing desolation")
- "Violence" (*hāmās*, "malicious conduct intended to injure another") frequently appear together (e.g., Jer. 6:7; 20:8; Ezek. 45:9, "violence and oppression"; Amos 3:10, "plunder and loot"; in each case here the two words in Heb. are in the reverse order from their order in Hab. 1:3). Habakkuk described the scene well.

13  **The people were affected**

- The greatest tragedy, however, was the people's neglect of God's Law.
  - Habakkuk described the consequence: *Therefore the Law is paralyzed* (lit., "becomes cool, numbed").
  - The Law seems to be useless. Civic justice, Habakkuk said, never prevails, or never came forth to fight (cf. "injustice," v. 3).
  - It appears that wickedness was the uncontested victor.
    - The wicked hem in the righteous. The righteous were locked up and the wicked vigilantes had thrown away the key.
    - Therefore justice was perverted (from 'āqal, "to bend or twist out of shape," a word used only here in the OT). With wicked men in power, justice was twisted and turned till it came out injustice! The situation in Habakkuk's day was perilous.

14  **God's Answer**15  **God DOES know and He DOES care**

- Though the prophet was engaged in a typical Jewish lament and was asking essentially rhetorical

questions, God answered his complaint.

- The Lord was neither indifferent nor insensitive.
- God was not idle; He was already at work on specific plans to discipline erring Judah. He revealed those plans to the distressed prophet.

#### 16 **God's Intent to Discipline (1:5)**

#### 17 **Habakkuk 1:5**

- *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.* (Habakkuk 1:5, LEB)

#### 18 **Look and Watch**

- *Look at the nations and watch* was God's reply.
- God replies to both Habakkuk and the people.
  - The change in speakers is apparent from the verbs "look" and "watch," which in Hebrew include the plural "you."
- Habakkuk had complained about being made to look at injustice. But the prophet and people suffered from myopia. They were too nearsighted.
  - God instructed them to get their eyes off the immediate havoc and look out on the international horizons.
  - They needed to develop a world view that included "the nations." As they did so, they would be utterly amazed.
- The political developments about to be revealed to Habakkuk and the people would stun them (the verb *tāmâh* means "to be astounded, bewildered, or dumbfounded"). In fact, Habakkuk was dumbfounded (vv. 12, 17).

#### 19 **God's Instrument of Discipline**

#### 20 **Habakkuk 1:6-11**

- *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.*
- *They are dreadful and awesome; their justice and their dignity proceed from themselves. 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.*
- *All of them come for violence, their faces pressing forward. They gather captives like the sand. 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. Then they sweep like the wind and pass on; they become guilty, whose might is their god!"* (Habakkuk 1:6–11, LEB)
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#### 21 **Destruction by the Chaldeans (Babylonians)**

- God dropped a bombshell: I am raising up the Babylonians.
  - Granted, sin had abounded all too long in Judah. But the sinners of Judah were but soiled saints next to the barbaric Babylonians.
  - Babylon was a nation known for its violent impulses. Its people readily committed atrocities without forethought or remorse. The historical records present the Babylonians as a fierce and pitilessly cruel people. And God affirmed it to Habakkuk by calling them that ruthless (mar, "bitter," i.e., bitter in temper, or fierce) and impetuous (lit., "swift") people.
  - Ezekiel too called Babylon a ruthless nation (though he used the Heb. word *'ārîš*, meaning "terror-striking," Ezek. 28:7; 30:11; 31:12; 32:12). Furthermore, their conduct matched their

character. They swept across the whole earth to plunder and possess. No doubt "the whole earth" meant much of the then-known world, for Babylon did conquer many of the nations including Assyria, Judah, Egypt, and Edom. Judah was just a speck of loose dust before this gigantic vacuum cleaner. (BKC)



## 22 Description of the Babylonians

### 23 Their history and status (1:7)

- Their history:
  - The Babylonians, also known as Chaldeans, lived in southern Mesopotamia and were called "an ancient ... nation" (Jer. 5:15), a primeval people.
  - Abram, of course, migrated from Ur of the Chaldees to Canaan. God had called a people out of this increasingly savage populace.
- Their status:
  - Without rival. *A law unto themselves. They promoted their own honor.*

### 24 Their speed (1:8)

- People with horses swifter than leopards (fierce, fast, excellent hunters)
- Fiercer than wolves (at dusk wolves are hungry and ready to pounce on prey)
- A vulture swooping to devour. (Probably a reference to the griffon vulture).

### 25 Their success (1:9)

- There was no hope of stopping the Babylonians. Collectively they all came bent on violence. The nation's entire military force would be engaged in the invasion and would be irresistibly victorious.
- The second line in this verse, *their hordes advance like a desert wind*, consists of three words in Hebrew and conveys the idea of a fierce, scorching wind from the East. This kind of wind often devastated vegetation (cf. Jer. 18:17; Ezek. 17:10; 19:12; Jonah 4:8).
  - *Like the wind from the east, I will scatter them before the enemy. I will show them my back and not my face in the day of their disaster.* (Jeremiah 18:17, LEB)
  - *And look! Though it is planted, will it prosper? When the east wind strikes it, will it not dry up completely? On the garden bed of its vegetation, it will dry up!* (Ezekiel 17:10, LEB)
- The enemy was coming like a whirlwind and would gather prisoners like sand, a figure expressing numbers too vast to calculate.

### 26 Their scoffing (1:10)

- Confident in their strength, the Babylonians scoffed at kings and ridiculed rulers.
- It was their custom to exhibit captive rulers as public spectacles. Their brutality is seen in the way they treated Zedekiah after Jerusalem fell. They killed his sons before his eyes and then, with that awesome sight burned into his memory, they put out his eyes, bound him in shackles, and took him prisoner to Babylon (2 Kings 25:7).
- But not only did the Babylonians scoff at their foes; they also laughed at all fortified cities (lit., "every fortress").
  - They conquered walled cities considered impregnable.
  - They simply built earthen ramps (lit., "heaped up earth") against the walls of cities built on mounds, and raced up those ramps, attacked the cities easily, and seized the fortified strongholds.
  - This practice was fairly common in ancient warfare, but the "siege ramp" (2 Kings 19:32; cf. Ezek. 4:2) was more developed by the Babylonians.

27  **Their sacrilege (1:11)**

- *Then they sweep like the wind and pass on; they become guilty, whose might is their god!* (Habakkuk 1:11, LEB)
- Like the East wind, they were fast and powerful.
- But their major flaw is that they glorified their own strength.
  - You may have heard the saying, "Might is right"
  - But the Babylonians believed their might made them divine (just as Nebuchadnezzar was quick to glorify himself over his accomplishments)
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28  **What have we learned?**

- When we think God is ignoring the evil around us, He does in fact have a plan.
- However, His plan might involve using wicked men to accomplish His purpose.
  - A leader or party devoid of a moral compass
  - Judges who legislate rather than administer justice
  - A foreign nation who cares nothing for the lives of your nation or for the "rules of war."
- The enemy can be overwhelming and trust only in their own might. (But God is STILL ON THE THRONE!)

29  **Our problem**

- Sometimes the answers to our questions breed only more questions
- Habakkuk first asked why God was doing nothing about the evil in his own nation
- God answered that He would use the Babylonians to bring fast and quick destruction to Judah as judgment for their iniquity
- Now Habakkuk has another question: God, why would you use a people of such iniquity to accomplish your will? (for next time)

30  **Making it real in our lives...**

- We should be able to see that our nation is being chastised by the Lord
- People have become complacent in their materialism and in the pursuit of fleshly lusts
- Evil is tolerated and often even exalted
  - Abortion is an industry
  - Sodomy is in every sitcom or TV series
- The political system has abandoned the Constitution and been corrupted, yet corruption is ignored.

31  **Making it real (2)**

- Now we face a government that already has:
  - Granted immunity to 11 million illegal immigrants – many of whom have committed felonies including rape and murder
  - Stopped returning illegal immigrants to their country
  - Killed 11,000 jobs with one signature and ensured higher fossil fuel prices to come
  - Pursuing hate crimes legislation that will make Bible believing Christians unable to express many of their convictions in the future in a public forum
- But God is still on His throne. And He is still worthy of praise.