

## 1:1

**The burden which the prophet<sup>1</sup>Habakkuk saw.** Very little help is gained from this verse. We know virtually nothing about the timing or credentialing<sup>2</sup> of this prophecy other than, as will be seen, it was written before the Chaldeans came to Jerusalem (pre 605 B.C.).

“From the title verse the reader knows only that the message comes from a prophet named Habakkuk, who is otherwise unknown in the Old Testament. Neither the prophet’s hometown (see Nah 1:1) nor his lineage (see Zeph 1:1) is known. Information about dating the prophet also is missing,”<sup>3</sup>

It seems, given 3:1, that this verse is the introduction to just these first two chapters.<sup>4</sup>

## 1:2

**O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear?** As in 1 John 5:14-15, this has more than an actual vibrating of the eardrums. This is a “take it in and do something about it” much like the 9 times in Revelation where one is asked to “hear if they have ears.” **Even cry out to You, b“Violence!” And You will not save.** God sort of answers this with His answer: “No longer than it takes to send the Babylonians against Jerusalem.”<sup>5</sup> Now, we’re not saying that this prophet is wrong about asking God questions. It is strange, is it not, that the first recorded prayer in the Bible is Genesis 15 with a “how” question from Abram? It seems natural for God, who made us in His image, to expect us to use our...I hesitate to say it...god-like rationale to ask questions.

The amazing thing in all this is that “Habakkuk’s problem lay in what he knew about the Lord rather than in what he did not know. How could this holy, pure (v. 13) God leave the guilty in Judah and Jerusalem unpunished?”<sup>6</sup> We know the character of God through His Word and His Works...so why doesn’t He vindicate Himself?

## 1:5-11

**5 “Look among the nations and watch—Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you.** Now God hardly answers the prophets questions exactly. He does answer, though. Basically, He says, “hang on a little while.” Furthermore, we see that John 5:17 reality that God is working—always working.

Here we see that the thing God is “working” through Gentiles to correct disobedient Israelites. Strangely, this passage is found in Acts 13:41 where Paul is seeking to persuade those NT-era Jews that they are going to see God do His work in and through the Gentiles just as he did through the Gentile-Chaldeans. Only in Paul’s day, it was the Jews beholding the salvation of the Gentiles rather than experiencing God’s wrath through the Gentiles. This only goes to show that there is often a perfected, full sense of Old Testament passages—it also drives us to trust the Holy Spirit to tell us so (through the pens of the apostles). If God’s character doesn’t change between Testaments, it goes to show that His consequential Works are of the same nature.

**6 For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans,** As He did the Assyrians in the destruction of Israel (Isa 10:5–15); as He did Cyrus the Persian to deliver those exiled to Babylon (Isa 44:28–45:7).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “The Hebrew word for ‘prophet’ (*nābî*) has traditionally been interpreted as coming from a Hebrew root meaning ‘to bubble up,’ apparently indicating the overflowing message of the prophet;” Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, vol. 20, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 290–291.

<sup>2</sup>Unless you value apocryphal credentialing: “*In Bel and the Dragon* the prophet is called ‘Habakkuk, son of Jesus of the tribe of Levi,’ a tradition linking Habakkuk to the priesthood;” E. A. Leslie, “Habakkuk,” *IDB* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 503; R. L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1984), 93.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, vol. 20, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers), 288.

<sup>4</sup>Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, vol. 20, The New American Commentary, 289–290.

<sup>b</sup> Mic. 2:1, 2; 3:1–3

<sup>5</sup>Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 293.

<sup>6</sup>Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 295.

<sup>c</sup> Is. 29:14; Ezek. 12:23–28

<sup>7</sup>Barker, *Micah...*, 314.

**10**They scoff at kings, And princes are scorned by them. They deride every stronghold, For they heap up earthen mounds and seize it. This is how they would scale walls. **11**Then his mind changes, He finds himself increasingly and decisively harder than needed **and he transgresses; He commits offense, Ascribing this power to his god.**”

And now for Habakkuk’s response to God’s response:

**1:12-17**

**12** Are You not <sup>k</sup>from everlasting, O LORD my God, He uses *Jehovah* here—a derivative of the “I AM THAT I AM” in Exodus 3, and he uses that name because of the timeless nature associated with God and described in the term **everlasting**. “Since you’re timeless, you’re from somewhere else (**Holy**). Since you’re not from around here, you’re not like us to do something so foreign as to use sinners to punish your people...” And on that premise, he continues.

**We shall not die.** Many did. On the other hand, is he speaking of their nation? If so, what comfort was that to those who were to be murdered? It fits to have people who do **not die** being the people of the **everlasting One**. If he meant that none would be killed, was that merely wishful thinking?

This seems like a healthy time to discuss whether what these poets said was absolutely true...or rather, prayers for what they hoped was true. It doesn’t take long to see that David’s surety that “God hates workers of iniquity” (Psalm 5:5) seems somewhat opposed to John 3:16 at least in some way. So is it harmful to suppose that it is was the will of God for some to **die**? **O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction.** There it is again. The **we** who **shall not die**, and the **them** who are **appointed for judgment**.

We see that “the heart of the problem is that the outside world of history contradicts the interior certainty of the nature of God himself. A holy, righteous God cannot endure the godless acts of a ruthless oppressor, can he?”<sup>8</sup> And now He is going to use a nation even more wicked than Judah, in Habakkuk’s estimation, to wipe them out (1:13)? To be fair, since verse 12 I was wondering whether Habakkuk was complaining still about those whom the Chaldeans would crush or if he was complaining about the Chaldeans as God’s chosen vessel. The end of verse 17 seems to settle that it is the Chaldeans. Habakkuk is complaining because he knows they are so godless that they will continue to kill and plunder and hurt—even past Judah to all **nations**.

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<sup>k</sup>Deut. 33:27; Ps. 90:2

<sup>8</sup>Barker, 311.