

The Book of Habakkuk

The Name	The name “Habakkuk” means “to embrace.” His name is significant in light of the contents of his message. Habakkuk displays much frustration towards God in this book. Yet it ends with a powerful confession about the embrace of Lord: <i>“the Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.” (3:19).</i>
When He Wrote	Habakkuk lived during the final stages of Israel’s Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was already no more (722 BC) because of immorality and injustice among God’s people. Habakkuk saw the same thing in Judah. He also saw Babylon becoming to Judah what Assyria was to Israel: the empire that would remove Judah from the Promised Land.
Why He Stands Out	Unlike the other prophets, Habakkuk does not accuse Judah, nor does he even speak on God’s behalf to them. Instead, <u>all</u> of his words were addressed personally to the Lord. Consequently, the book is Habakkuk’s personal struggle. He believes that God is good. Yet, he also sees so much evil and tragedy in the world (in Judah and in Babylon).
How It Reads	Because the book details Habakkuk’s personal struggle with God about the issue of the goodness of God vs the issue of the evil he sees, the book reads similar to the <u>Lament Psalm</u> that you read in the Book of Psalms (also the Book of Lamentations). Habakkuk states a complaint towards God and then beckons Him to draw his attention to suffering or injustice in the world. He demands that God to do something!
The Theological Issue He Raises	Habakkuk addresses the issue of what theologians refer to as <u>theodicy</u> . In a nutshell, it’s the issue of how a good God can permit evil and injustice to run rampant without doing something about it (at least from the writer’s perspective). In this vein, Habakkuk is similar to the Book of Job, though the content is much different.
Where Habakkuk Fits Among the Prophets	Habakkuk isn’t the only Minor Prophet to express frustration at God. Jonah did. Habakkuk, however, deals with his frustrations in a more productive way. He doesn’t run from God in the midst of his frustration. He runs to Him, daring to question Him. Habakkuk serves as a great example for how to deal with spiritual frustrations directed at God. He channels them into prayers and eventually praise, not disobedience.
Main Verse	<i>“How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save? (1:2)</i>
Structure	Because of the subject matter, Habakkuk is relatively easy to understand. He lodges two complaints against God. Each complaint is then followed by an answer from God. Then he concludes with a prayer that is altogether different from the complaints. The prayer shows what Habakkuk has learned from God’s answers.

Complaint 1

Life in Judah has become horrible. The Word of God is neglected. The results that neglect produced are violence and injustice. What makes it worse is that it’s all being tolerated by Judah’s corrupt leaders. As a result, Habakkuk cries out for God to do something. But nothing seems to change.

² *How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save?*³ *Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.*
⁴ *Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted. (1:2-4)*

Response 1

God responds by essentially saying that he is very aware of Judah’s injustice and evil. He also tells him that he will respond to this by sending Babylon as his instrument of judgment because of all of it.

⁵ *“Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. ⁶ I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own. ⁷ They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor. ⁸ Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle swooping to devour; ⁹ they all come intent on violence. (1:5-9a)*

Complaint 2

If Babylon is the answer to Judah's evil, then what about Babylon? They are even worse than Judah! Why are you using evil to stamp out evil? Their military slaughters people. They treat people like animals, gathering them up and then devouring them like fish in a net. So, Lord, how can you, a God who is good and holy use such evil nations as your instruments in history to do your bidding? (A most important question). He demands an explanation and depicts himself like a watchman on the wall waiting for God's response.

12 Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, you^l will never die. You, Lord, have appointed them to execute judgment; you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish. 13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? 14 You have made people like the fish in the sea, like the sea creatures that have no ruler. 15 The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad. (1:12-15)

I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint. (2:1)

Response 2

God gives him a vision that he commands him the chisel in stone tablets. It's the idea of a decree that will be "written in stone" with regard to the way nations rise and fall. God essentially tells him that he will do something about Babylon as well. Just because God might for a time use a corrupt nation like Babylon does not mean that he endorses everything that they do. As a result, Babylon will fall along with any other nation that acts like they do. Consequently, this response becomes a blueprint for nations that will be judged by God. He does this through 5 woes:

- (1) **Exorbitant Interest as Extortion:** "Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on?' (2:6)
- (2) **Profiting from Unjust Gain:** "Woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain, setting his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin! (2:9)
- (3) **Using People to Do It:** "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by injustice! (2:12)
- (4) **Then Leaders Living "High on the Hog" Overcome with Sensuality While Doing the Above:** "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies! (2:15)

God will bring down every nation who acts like that eventually. They will be no more, just like Babylon.

Prayer and Praise

After God's responses, Habakkuk concludes with worship. He came to the Lord on his knees in frustration. He receives God's illumination and his tone changes. It's a demonstration of how God wants wrestling with him to work. Unlike Jonah, we go to God in frustration. We wrestle with Him, and he teaches us in the process. As a result, we are changed and wait patiently for the Lord to act as He has revealed.

Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy. (3:2)...¹⁶ I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. ¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. ¹⁹ The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights. (3:16-19)

Main Takeaway

It's ok to be frustrated at God. What's not ok is to be disobedient in your frustration. Instead, wrestle with God in your frustrations. He will answer and you will be changed.