

# An Introduction to the Book of HABAKKUK

## The prophet's cry for justice (1:1-4)

Injustice fills the land. How long must we wait before God deals with it?

- To what extent do the conditions described in these verses apply to our own country?

## God's answer (1:5-11)

"I will raise up an 'evil empire' to judge the nation." God warned the prophet that he would be surprised at the way he was going to respond (1:5)!

- Read the description. This nation is even worse than the nation they are judging!
- If God were to judge our own nation, how might he do it? (Might he do it in a way that we didn't expect?)

## The prophet's perplexity (1:12-2:1)

How can a holy and pure God use an even worse nation to judge us?

- The end of verse 13 summarizes Habakkuk's question.
- Note the contrast between the description of God (1:12-13) and the actions of this evil people (1:14-17).

There are different ways that a person can ask such a question. Habakkuk asks with a spirit of trust, knowing that God is pure and righteous. Because of this, he expectantly waits for an answer (2:1)... and God does answer.

- When you have questions, or when you don't understand something, how do you respond? Do you question God, in the sense of accusing him of wrongdoing? Or in the sense of trusting him, knowing that whatever he does is ultimately right?
- Suppose he *didn't* answer you... would you still trust him?

## God's answer (2:2-20)

The evil empire will also be destroyed; for what he does is done with evil motives.

- First, God assures Habakkuk that judgment is guaranteed: the "destroyer" will come. What God has said he would do will *definitely* happen (2:2-3).
- Second, we are assured that judgment and destruction will also come upon the destroyer... because he destroys with evil intent (2:4-5). What he has done to others will also be done to him.
- The remainder of the chapter (2:6-20) lists 5 "woes" pronounced against this evil nation. Examine these "woes." What are this nation's sins? What are the judgments pronounced against it?
  1. Woe #1 (2:6-8)
  2. Woe #2 (2:9-11)
  3. Woe #3 (2:12-14)
  4. Woe #4 (2:15-17)
  5. Woe #5 (2:18-20)
- To what extent is our own nation guilty of similar types of sins (whether now or in past centuries)?
  1. Some of the possible questions might include: Have we ever exploited people of other nations, for our own profit? Have we ever shed the blood of innocents? Have we ever delighted in (enjoyed) things that God describes as "shameful"? Have we ever engaged in widespread destruction of nature - which is *God's* creation (compare to verse 17a)? Have we ever trusted in anything else, other than God? [Hint: If you are familiar with past history and present events, you will discover that our nation is guilty of *all* of these - and more.]
  2. If we have been guilty of any of these, what do we deserve?

This is a dark scene. Yet in the midst of this, we find some "shining lights" that form a beautiful contrast to all the darkness and evil.

- Regarding God and his glory, what will be the outcome? (See verses 14 and 20.)

The things mentioned in these verses are the ultimate desire of the person who loves God. Such a person *wants* to see God honored and glorified. Only then will he be satisfied.

Though these statements may have been fulfilled to a limited extent, at various times in history, there is an "ultimate" fulfillment that is yet to come. At the final Day of Justice, all humanity will bow before God and acknowledge him for who he is. Even now, as

the good news is being taken all over the world, the "knowledge of the glory of the Lord" is increasing worldwide - and it will continue to increase.

- Regarding God's true people - the "righteous" - what will be the outcome? (See verse 4b.)

This statement, that the righteous will "live by faith" is the foundation to much for what is found in the New Testament. It is quoted in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:37-38. Even though the righteous may have to go through some of the same trials (such as when a nation is overthrown by another nation), they will ultimately be the victors. They, not the conquering nation, will be the ultimate "overcomers." Habakkuk got a glimpse of what this meant, but the New Testament explains it more fully.

So how should we respond? This is seen in chapter 3.

## **The prophet's prayer of praise and trust (3:1-19)**

Two main themes (3:2):

- Remembering God's past works of power, in judgment and deliverance.
- A plea for God to act once again. The prophet makes this request, as one who is "living by faith" - knowing full well that judgment will have to come with (or before) the deliverance. So he asks for *mercy* to come along with the necessary *wrath*.

Reflecting on God's past works (3:3-15)

- Poetic imagery is used to describe God's awesome power in delivering his people out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan. Some of the comments may be general statements, but others may make reference to specific events that occurred during that deliverance. (Do you recognize any?)
- Some of these verses may have an underlying theme, that God often uses nature to accomplish his purposes. (Do you recall any such events in the historical accounts of the Old Testament, in which God used nature to accomplish his purposes?)
- Two more comments:
  1. Another underlying theme - hope in the midst of judgment.
  2. Today, some of these verses might remind us of things Jesus did, when he accomplished an *even greater* deliverance (one of eternal significance), on our behalf.

The expression of a "living faith," when judgment is at hand (3:16-19)

- The prophet realizes that disaster *must* come. In one sense, it is terrifying; but in another *more important* sense, his "living faith" will be strong enough to take him through it (3:16).
- "Come what may, I will rejoice in God, who gives me strength" (3:17-19).

This is an active trust, a confident hope, based on his knowledge (and acceptance) of who God is.

- QUESTION: Suppose judgment fell upon our nation, or suppose you experienced some other type of disaster or calamity... HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND? Most likely, something *will* happen to you, sometime and somewhere... and your response will reflect the type of faith you have.

## **Additional thoughts from other Scriptures**

The attitude of others who were about to experience the "day of calamity":

- Daniel 3:17-18 - God can deliver us (from the fiery furnace), but even if he doesn't, we will still refuse to bow down to false gods.
- Matthew 26:39 - "Not my will, but yours be done."

The attitude of one who *did* experience the "day of calamity" that Habakkuk referred to. [The prophet Jeremiah not only warned the people what would happen (if they refused to change their ways), but witnessed the very judgment he warned them about.]

- Lamentations 3:19-24 (especially 22-23) - Because of God's great love, we are not *totally* destroyed (as we deserve). Every new day is an expression of God's faithfulness and compassion. [Yes, there is mercy, even in judgment.]

The attitude of people who trust God - knowing that God will be with them through the calamity and will use it to accomplish good.

- Psalm 23:4 - God's comfort, even in "the valley of the shadow of death."
- Romans 8:28 - God will use *all things* to accomplish good in the lives of those who love him. See also 8:31-39. [Sad to say, there is no such guarantee for those who are unwilling to love him.]
- 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 - God's strength will be revealed through our weakness.