

Introduction to Habakkuk

Where is it in the Bible?

Habakkuk is the thirty-fifth book in the Christian Old Testament and is found between Nahum and Zephaniah. It is the eighth book of the Minor Prophets; the term “minor” refers to the length of the books, not to their importance. In the Hebrew Bible, the minor prophets follow Ezekiel at the end of the Prophets section and are grouped together in the Book of the Twelve in the same order as found in Christian Bibles

Who wrote it?

The book identifies the author as “the prophet Habakkuk” (1:1 and 3:1). Nothing else is known about the prophet, other than a few things which can be derived from the book itself.

When was it written?

There is a reference in 1:6 to the coming of the Babylonians (Chaldeans). Most scholars agree that the book was written in the last quarter of the seventh century or the early years of the sixth century B.C., perhaps between the first Babylonian invasion of Judah in 597 and the destruction of Jerusalem in 587.

What is it about?

Habakkuk is concerned with the injustice and suffering that God's people are experiencing and wonders why God has done nothing to curb the wicked who are oppressing them. Hope comes from trusting in God's faithfulness and looking forward to the coming “day of the Lord” when the righteous will be delivered.

How is it structured?

- I. Superscription (1:1)
- II. Habakkuk's Dialog with God (1:2-2:20)
 - a. Habakkuk's Lament: Oppression by the Wicked (1:2-4)
 - b. God Responds: Babylonians will Punish the Wicked(1:5-11)
 - c. Habakkuk's Lament: Oppression by the Babylonians (1:12-2:1)
 - d. God's Response: God will Punish the Babylonians (2:2-20)
- III. Habakkuk's Prayer (3:1-19)

What are some things to look for?

- **Habakkuk 2:4:** This verse has had a significant influence on Christian thought, particularly for Paul. It is cited three times in the New Testament (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). “In Hebrew, the phrase ‘the righteous live by their (its) faith’ could either refer to the reliability of the vision that God gives or the faithfulness of the righteous person. Most scholars believe that Habakkuk affirms both readings and that either or both would be affirmed by Paul as well.”¹
- **Injustice and Suffering:** Habakkuk is related to a specific historical situation, but the questions it raises are applicable to other contexts. It does not answer the question of why God permits evil (theodicy), but it “puts forth a model for waiting in the time between the promises of God to deliver the righteous and the actual time of deliverance. Waiting does not silence the lament. Lament and exultation are coupled through candid speech about the present and a recognition of the heritage of deliverance witnessed in the received tradition.”²

1 Barry Bandstra, “Habakkuk” in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), Kindle.

2 Richard W. Nysse at <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=53>