

Overview of Habakkuk

GENERAL

Habakkuk is unique among the prophetic books because usually the prophets spoke a word *from* God to the people of Israel. Here the prophet speaks *with* God, even “calling God to account when his actions did not seem to correspond to those demanded by the covenant.”¹ It is also unique because the prophet first addresses God; normally the prophetic process was begun by God revealing to the prophet.² Habakkuk 2.4 is one of the most well-known verses in Scripture (ESV: “the righteous shall live by faith”) and is thought by some to be a summary of all of the commandments of the Law.³ This book deals with the realities of living in a broken world; “Habakkuk’s message is set within a backdrop of real people facing real questions about real human suffering.”⁴

Habakkuk is what you might call a prophetic lament: he laments the injustices of his day (1.1-4), and when God responds that He will judge Judah using the nation of Babylon (1.5-11), he laments that God would use a wicked nation to judge His people (1.12-2.1). God responds that He will also judge Babylon (2.2-20). The book ends with a beautiful song/prayer of praise and trust in God (3.1-19).

¹ David W. Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 27, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 41-42.

² Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 2002), 275.

³ “In the Babylonian Talmud Hab 2:4 is identified as a summary of all the 613 commandments of the Law (b. Makkot 23b-24a).” | Merrill, Eugene H.. *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament*. B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Location 16451.

“In fact, many people believe that this verse expresses the central theme of the entire Bible. It has been called the John 3:16 of the Old Testament.” | Thomas Constable, <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/ot/habakkuk/habakkuk.htm>

⁴ Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, vol. 20, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 246

WHO WROTE IT? | AUTHORSHIP

Habakkuk is identified as the author of this book in 1.1 and 3.1. Also, much of the book is written in the 1st person (1.1-4; 1.12-2.1; 3.1-19), clearly referring to Habakkuk. The other sections are in 1st person, but they are Habakkuk transcribing the Lord's response to him.

WHEN DID THEY WRITE IT? | DATE

Habakkuk was probably written approximately in 607 BC. Habakkuk was clearly written before the Babylonians (also referred to as the Chaldeans) first invaded Judah, because in the book God promises that as a future judgement (1.5-11). We know this first invasion happened in 605 BC, (the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign). This was while the ungodly Jehoiakim was king of Judah (2 Kings 23.34-24.5, Jeremiah 22.17).⁵ Judah had already seen how God had punished Israel in the North for their sin, but as the situation that Habakkuk laments in chapter 1 reveals, Judah had not learned from this to turn from their own sin.⁶

WHO WAS IT WRITTEN TO? | ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

Habakkuk was written to the people of Judah before they were exiled to Babylon.

WHY DID THEY WRITE IT? | PURPOSE/THEME

Habakkuk was written to give the people of Judah a warning of their future judgement and to remind them that God was still just in His judgements - both on them and on Babylon.

WHAT'S IN IT? | THEMATIC OUTLINE⁷

⁵ Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible*, 273-274.

⁶ Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, 43.

⁷ Adapted from Merrill, *The World and the Word*, K.L. 16380-16392 and from Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible*, 276.

- I. Introduction (1:1)
- II. Questions and answers (1:2-2:5)
 - A. Why Do the wicked prosper? (1:2-4)
 - 1. God will send the Babylonians to judge the wicked (1:5-11)
 - B. How could God use the wicked Babylonians? (1:12-17)
 - 1. They are wicked, so God will judge them too (2:1-5, also 16-17)
- III. Five Woes against Babylon (2:6-20)
 - A. Woe to the violent extortioner (2:6-8)
 - B. Woe to the greedy (2:9-11)
 - C. Woe to the murderer (2:12-14)
 - D. Woe to the drunkard (2:15-17)
 - E. Woe to the idol-maker (2:18-20)
- IV. Habakkuk's prayer (3:1-19)
 - A. Habakkuk prays for God's mercy (3:1-2)
 - B. Habakkuk remembers God's mercy (3:3-15)
 - C. Habakkuk's trusts in God's salvation (3:16-19)