

# HABAKKUK

## STUDY GUIDE

### AUTHOR & DATE

Very little is known about **Habakkuk** and even the meaning of his name is up for debate. Some believe it to mean "to embrace," while others translate it as "to wrestle." Both are appropriate for Habakkuk's character as displayed in the book. Rabbinical tradition believes Habakkuk to have been the son of the Shunammite woman raised to life by Elisha (2 Kgs. 4:18-37), but this is completely unfounded.

Two kings of Judah have influence on the dating of Habakkuk: Josiah and Jehoiakim (also known as Eliakim). Josiah was a great reformer for Judah, but Jehoiakim continued evil in the nation. To properly date the book of Habakkuk, some key events with the Babylonians (Chaldeans) need to be considered.

1. 612 B.C. – Fall of Nineveh to Babylonians
2. 605 B.C. – Daniel and many nobles taken captive and exiled
3. 597 B.C. – Ezekiel taken captive
4. 586 B.C. – Jerusalem and temple destroyed

Some date the book **between 621-609 B.C.**, before any of the Babylonian invasions of Judah and during the rule of Josiah, and also cite that Zephaniah and Jeremiah use similar language as Habakkuk. Others date the book **612-587 B.C.**, during the rule of Jehoiakim and closer to the later Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem, partially based on the descriptive detail of violence by the Babylonians. Though we don't know the specific dates, the wickedness of Judah and coming judgment is clearly on Habakkuk's heart and mind!

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION



We know a fair bit more about the setting in which Habakkuk lived. The Assyrian Empire, a lengthy threat to Israel and Judah, was no longer the powerhouse of old. Following the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C., the Babylonians (also known as the Chaldeans) became the new threat to Judah. Assyria gained support from Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt, which brought Egyptian forces through Judah in 609 B.C., killing Judah's king Josiah when he stood against the army.

Read 2 Kings 22:1-23:27, making note of the changes Josiah brought to Judah.

Read 2 Kings 23:34-24:5, noticing how Jehoiakim's rule is described.

A few more things about the book of Habakkuk:

- It is the only Old Testament book consisting entirely of a dialogue between God and man. Most prophetic books are records of messages the prophets give to the people.
- The first chapter involves frequent speaker changes, since it is a dialogue. You are encouraged to watch carefully who is speaking in the text, maybe even marking in the margin who is talking to help you keep track.
- Remember that Babylonians and Chaldeans are the same.

Habakkuk reminds us that the question "Why?" can, should, and must be asked. His circumstances demanded that he ask God about the apparent reign of unrighteousness around him. Because he believed in God, he believed that God had an answer to his problem. His questions demonstrated the presence of faith, not the lack of it. For an atheist the question "Why?" has no meaning; for a believer the question "Why?" finds its ultimate answer in God.

-- Spirit-Filled Life Bible  
Habakkuk: Introduction

### MARTIN LUTHER AND HABAKKUK

Martin Luther was so affected by Habakkuk 2:4 that it became a foundation of his Reformation teaching: "The just shall live by faith."

In Rome there is a set of 28 white marble steps called the Lateran staircase which, according to tradition once led to the palace of Pilate at Jerusalem and which therefore, have been made sacred by the footsteps of Jesus. Throughout the history of the Catholic Church various indulgences (a forgiveness of sin or remission of punishment granted by the church) have been offered to devout pilgrims who ascend the steps after communion and confession. Many pilgrims ascend the steps on their knees hoping to attain forgiveness of sins. This is what Martin Luther was doing when he remembered Habakkuk 2:4!

Luther's son wrote: "As he repeated his prayers on the Lateran staircase, the words of the prophet Habakkuk came suddenly to his mind: 'The just shall live by faith.' Thereupon he ceased his prayers, returned to Wittenberg, and took this as the chief foundation of all his doctrine...Luther himself said of this text, 'Before those words broke upon my mind I hated God and was angry with him because not content with frightening us sinners by the law and by the miseries of life, he still further increased our torture by the gospel. But when, by the Spirit of God, I understood those words – 'The just shall live by faith!' 'The just shall live by faith!' -- then I felt born again like a new man; I entered through the open doors into the very Paradise of God."

-- James Montgomery Boice,

*The Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary*

## **LITERARY STRUCTURE**

Chapter 1	Habakkuk's Questions
Chapter 2	God's Response
Chapter 3	Habakkuk's Prayer

This book also reveals MUCH of the character of God! In fact, nearly 20 specific characteristics can be found in the first chapter alone! You may find some verses and descriptions which are quite familiar to you, but you probably don't realize they are found in this book.

## **OBSERVATION WORDS**

- **God / Lord**
- **Jesus**
- **Holy Spirit**
- **Habakkuk**
- **Chaldeans/Babylonians**
- **Wickedness/evil**
- **Woe**

## SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What is something the Lord taught you through this book? How will you apply this to your life?
  
- List all the various characteristics of God described in this book. What characteristic of God do you need to focus on in your life and why?
  
- How do you see Jesus represented in this book? The Holy Spirit?
  
- What do you learn about the Babylonians? List the “woes” and accompanying judgment.
  
- What would be a modern-day equivalent to the Lord’s use of a seemingly more wicked people to discipline His people? Why would the Lord be justified and right to do things this way?
  
- This book teaches we CAN ask the question “why” of God. What area(s) of your life are you asking that question about today and how has God responded? If He hasn’t yet responded directly, what can you learn from Habakkuk (because this book IS a response of God to you!)?
  
- How does moral corruption around you challenge your resolve to trust God?

- What can you do to keep your faith strong and active in a society flaunting immorality? How do you demonstrate faith and trust in a practical way?
  
- What difficulties do you see coming – or dread – that would stretch and strain your faith in the Lord? Are you willing to let your faith be stretched?

**KEY WORD:**

**KEY VERSE:**

**KEY CHAPTER:**