

The Prophecy of Habakkuk

Habakkuk 1:1

Read Habakkuk 1:1-3:19

Habakkuk 1:1 The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received.

The name Habakkuk is translated from the Hebrew *Chabaqquwq* (חַבְקוּק), meaning 'embrace'. He was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. An oracle, from the Hebrew *massa'* (מַשָּׂא), meaning a load, or burden, is a prophecy of threatening character which lies heavily on the heart of the prophet. Nothing is known of the prophet himself apart from this prophecy. It cannot be dated as those of some of the other prophets, as no kings or historical events are mentioned, such as in Isaiah 1:1; 6:1; Amos 1:1 and Zephaniah 1:1.

Background and Date

The background of Habakkuk is clear from the internal data, which points to the decline and fall of the Southern Kingdom (Judea). It seems as if the Assyrian threat has passed. Assyria laid siege to Jerusalem in 701 BC, but after that, its power waned, and in 612 BC, Nineveh was defeated by Babylon. The Babylonian power increased, and in 605 BC, the first group of exiles were deported to Babylon, with a second deportation in 597 BC. In 586 BC, the city of Jerusalem fell after a one-and-a-half-year siege. The walls were breached, and the Temple was destroyed.

Internal evidence from Habakkuk indicates that the prophet wrote after 612 BC, when Nineveh was defeated, and Habakkuk 3 sounds as if the prophet personally experienced the siege of Jerusalem (3:16-19).

Habakkuk 1:5-11 represents a period before 605 BC, when the Babylonians took the first wave of Jews into exile, and also probably before the 612 destruction and fall of Nineveh.

Considering 1:12-17 and 2:6-20, these passages probably reflect a period after 612 B.C., when the power and destruction of the Babylonians had become common knowledge to the prophet.

Between 612 and 605 BC, Judah probably enjoyed its last bit of prosperity under Josiah (deceased 609 BC).

Conditions during the life of the prophet would have progressed from excellent—with considerable material prosperity and even promise of spiritual revival under Josiah—to the height of desperation as the net was drawn closer and closer around the hapless capital (cf. 3:16-19).

The Babylonian Empire rose and flourished for almost 70 years, from 605 to 539 BC. It established its dominance over Judah, with Jerusalem a casualty and its people taken into exile in waves in 605 BC, 597 BC and 586 BC.

Considering all the internal evidence, Habakkuk definitely wrote from a time before 605 BC, most likely also during the time Jehoiakim, the puppet king of Judah who reigned for 11 years, until at least the siege of Jerusalem and the horrors that came with it.

Occasion and Purpose

Habakkuk was unique among the prophets, as he did not speak for YAHWEH to the people but to YAHWEH about his people. The similarity with the other prophets is found in the circumstances of violence, false worship and covenant violations. The LORD should have punished the nation to correct the situation, but it did not happen, and the prayers of the righteous seemed to be in vain.

As the Assyrian kingdom, which had been a threat to Judah, waned in power, a new threat arose, that of the Babylonians. This nation threatened Judah with awful consequences, and there was no clear vision of when and how the LORD would continue his covenant faithfulness to the chosen line. Initially, Habakkuk was more concerned with internal injustices and the LORD's apparent complacency toward the evil generation; however, it was God's reply (1:5-11) that moved the prophecy onto the international and eschatological level.

The Future

Chapters 2-3 carry us well beyond the last days of Judah to the future. Habakkuk himself was never told when or exactly how it would end, but 2:14, 20 assured him of the ultimate triumph of YAHWEH, and the Psalm in Habakkuk 3 shows that he learned to live in the light of this fact.

Theological Values

Habakkuk's message (esp. 2:3-4) forms a basic point in three NT books (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11-12; and Hebrews 10:37-38).

The theological value of Habakkuk, however, cannot be limited to a few, though crucial, NT quotations.

The prophet asked deeply penetrating questions, and the answers are basic to a proper view of God and his relation to history. If God's initial response sounded the death knell for any strictly nationalistic covenant theology of Judah, his second reply outlined in a positive sense the fact that all history was hastening to a conclusion that was as certain as it was satisfying. In the interim, the righteous are to live by faith. The faith prescribed is still called for as a basic response to the unanswered questions in today's universe, and it is this theology for life that stands as Habakkuk's most basic contribution.

Reflection & Application _____

What do you think is the message and value of Habakkuk for today, especially considering Habakkuk 2:4 quoted in Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11-12; and Habakkuk 2:3-4 in Hebrews 10:37-38?

YAHWEH's Mysterious Ways

Habakkuk 1:2-11

A Theology of Suffering

Some observations raise great and perplexing questions to which we need answers from the Word of God:

- Extreme violence in the world, against all peoples, but especially the persecution of Christian believers. Although violence is not only aimed at Christians, as many have died in various conflict zones of the world, we want Biblical answers for ourselves as Christians. Why are we suffering? Are Christians not supposed to experience peace, welfare and blessing?
- Extreme confusion in the church. Why are people being misled? Why is God allowing false teachers, cults and prophets using the name of Jesus freely to promote falsehood or as Paul calls it, the *doctrines of demons*? Why are they allowed to deny everything Christ stood for, seemingly without punishment?
- Is God not supposed to be all-powerful and all-loving? If he is all-powerful, why does he not stop the violence, especially against Christians? Or strike down the false teachers in their tracks? And if he is all-loving, why does he allow all the evil and pain in the world?

This has been the believer's age-old questions, since the time of Abel, and this was Habakkuk's problem too.

Habakkuk wrote from some time before 605 BC, probably during the last days of Josiah, the last godly king, and Jehoiakim, the puppet king of Judah who reigned for 11 years, and did much evil in the eyes of the LORD. He continued until the time of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. He knew that the people of Judah were very evil and pleaded with the LORD to intervene.

The situation was much like the situation in our own country today. There is violence everywhere in terms of murder, rape, abortion, housebreaking, hijackings, drug addiction, prostitution, and porn. Likewise, the structures of society are falling apart because of corruption and graft. There is no justice in the law courts. In fact, many politicians and policemen have criminal records.

The situation is similar in many conflict zones in the world, where Christians are violently persecuted, slaughtered, raped, beheaded, executed, and even crucified. Has God forgotten them? Added to all of this, we are flooded with counterfeit gospels, supposedly accompanied by great signs and wonders.

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Habakkuk 1:1-11

1. What was Habakkuk's cry against the LORD? 1:2
2. Did Habakkuk understand why the LORD did not answer his cry for help? 1:3
3. What was Habakkuk's conclusion? 1:4

Suffering

Suffering is never easy, and neither is it pleasant. Habakkuk experienced this in his own life, and as he looked around, he was devastated in his soul. Around Habakkuk, Jerusalem was filled with: Injustice, wrongdoing, destruction, violence, strife, and conflict. There was no justice; the law was paralysed.

Powerful and wicked people just did as they pleased. The wicked were hemming in the righteous, so that justice was perverted.

4. What was Habakkuk's main problem? 1:2
5. Why would the LORD not act and put an end to the violence? Would he not thwart the wicked? Would he not save the oppressed?

The Lord's Answer

The LORD then proceeded to answer Habakkuk in a totally unforeseen way. Nothing could have prepared him for the LORD's answer.

6. What was the LORD's unbelievable answer? 1:5-6
7. How are the Babylonians described? Name ten characteristics.
1:7-11
 - v.7
 - v.7
 - v.7
 - v.8
 - v.9
 - v.9
 - v.10
 - v.10
 - v.10
 - v.11
8. Was the LORD's answer to evil a greater evil?
9. What was the LORD's answer to how he was going to deal with wickedness? 1:6

Application

This could as well have been a description of a group such as ISIS. They are described as fierce and bloodthirsty people. They sweep across the land like the wind. Gathering prisoners as sand. Their strength alone is their god. They laugh and scoff at those they overrun. We see the smiling, laughing faces of the ISIS killers as they execute people, even children. Whether it is the ISIS killers sweeping across the plains of Nineveh today, or false teachers in the church, their only god is their strength.

10. Do we have any indication of what the Babylonians did to the Jews?
cf. Lamentations
11. What was the reason these things came upon Judah?
12. What good will come out of all this?
13. What did Habakkuk need to learn about the LORD's dealings with the nations? 1:5-6
14. Do bad circumstances mean that the LORD has lost control?
15. Does this mean that God is not all-good, or not all-loving?
16. What is the conclusion regarding suffering and glory that we can learn from this?
17. What can the believer know through suffering? Matthew 5:10-11
18. Is justice deferred or justice denied? cf. Revelation 6:9-11
19. Will God's plans be thwarted?

Reflection & Application

1. Will we have peace in our day? Matthew 24:6-7
2. What does Jesus mean by, "*I have come not to bring peace but the sword?*" Matthew 10:34
3. What shall the believer do without ceasing?
4. What can we be absolutely sure of?
5. What do crucified lives tell the world?

YAHWEH's Answer to Evil: a Person**Habakkuk 1:12-2:5****Habakkuk's Confusion**

Habakkuk had cried out to the LORD in confusion and frustration. Why did he not deal with the wickedness of the people of Judah?

Habakkuk 1:2 How long, O 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 wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. ⁴ Therefore the law is paralysed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

Then the LORD answered him with a totally unexpected answer.

Habakkuk 1:5 "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 dwelling-places not their own.

Habakkuk was then even more amazed and confused than before. Why would God use a nation even more evil than Judah to punish his covenant nation?

The Application Today

There are many sinful people in the world, which may even include ourselves. However, often those who are far more wicked than us are exploiting or abusing us and others. Even in the church of Jesus Christ, we have false teachers and charlatans exploiting and abusing people, and leading them to destruction. Why is that so? Why does God allow this? What is the answer? This was Habakkuk's frustration as well, almost 2600 years ago, and he laments his plight before YAHWEH! Will the LORD provide any answer to this problem of evil?

Habakkuk 2:3-4 is one of the most remarkable prophetic passages in all of the OT scriptures, and the significance and its implications are often missed and overlooked.

The fact that three books in the NT quote Habakkuk 2:3-4 should prime us to look very closely at this passage (Romans 1:17 (2:4); Galatians 3:11-12 (2:4); Hebrews 10:37-38 (2:3-4)).

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Habakkuk 1:12-2:5

1. What was Habakkuk's response to the LORD's answer regarding the Babylonians? 1:12
2. What is always a good place to start when facing suffering? Which attributes of YAHWEH does Habakkuk recognise? 1:12-13

YAHWEH is
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YAHWEH is
3. Considering the attributes of God, what is Habakkuk's conclusion? 1:12
4. Does this solve Habakkuk's perplexity? 1:13
5. Regarding God's character and what is happening, what does not seem to add up? 1:13
6. What happens to men when the wicked flourish? 1:14-15

7. To whom does the wicked ascribe his success? 1:16
8. What was Habakkuk's confusion? 1:17
9. What was Habakkuk waiting for? 2:1

Waiting for YAHWEH's Answer

Habakkuk says that he will wait for the answer, but he also knows he will be making a fool of himself by saying this. Because when YAHWEH speaks to Habakkuk, he knows that he would be in trouble. But as he can't figure out what God is doing, he will wait for God to answer. Once he receives God's answer, he will try to wiggle himself out of the mess he is in. Have you not experienced this in your own life? You look at the future, and it looks bleak, and you do not know how God will deliver you from your predicament. The LORD did answer in the past, and He still does answer today, and this is God's ultimate answer to how he will deal with evil.

10. What will the LORD provide as an answer? 2:2
11. Which three things must be noted regarding this revelation? 2:3
12. What is the content of this revelation? 2:3

The Revelation

The revelation that is awaited is logically translated as 'it'! But look closely! There are two verbs in the first part of 2:3: *speak* and *not prove false*. There are three verbs in the second part of 2:3: *linger*, *come* and *delay*.

In Hebrew, the verb corresponds to the pronoun of the person! All five of these verbs are third-person masculine singular.

Speak/breathe	פִּוּחַ	3rd person masculine singular
Deceive/prove false/lie	כִּזֵּב	3rd person masculine singular
Linger/tarry	מָהָה	3rd person masculine singular
Come	בֹּא	3rd person masculine singular
Delay	אַחֵר	3rd person masculine singular

So, the translation could read as follows:

He will speak of **the end**, and **he will not prove false**.

Though **he** lingers, wait for it (**to come**/to be brought); **he** will certainly come, and **he** will not delay.

For a full discussion on the translation, see the appendix:

THE TRANSLATION OF HABAKKUK 2:3

13. What is God's ultimate answer to evil? 2:3b cf. Hebrews 10:37

14. How does the LORD describe the wicked? 2:4a, 5

15. In contrast to the wicked, what will happen to the righteous? 2:4 cf. Hebrews 10:38

A Correct Translation

Another, and in the context perhaps better translation, keeping the sense of the original is as follows: *the righteous one, by his faith, shall live!*

How do we know that it is correct?

Note the LXX rendering of Habakkuk 2:4:

ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεώς μου ζήσεται (Habakkuk 2:4)

Which can be translated as: *But my righteous one, by his faith, shall live.*

The NT has the following:

ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται (Romans 1:17; Hebrews 10:38)

Which can be translated as: *But the righteous, by his faith, shall live.*

YAHWEH's Answer

YAHWEH speaks: *"This, Habakkuk, is the answer! Write it down as on an advertisement board. May a herald run with it through the streets. Make sure that everyone sees it."*

The revelation of God's answer to evil is coming, and the revelation is a Person! Those who are *righteous by faith*, that is, in God's answer to evil as God told Habakkuk, *shall not die, but live!*

16. When will this be fulfilled? 2:3

YAHWEH's Answer is a Person

God's answer to evil is a person! He is **Jesus Christ!**

Habakkuk was waiting for God's answer to evil to come for the first time. In the letter to the Hebrews, we are waiting for the Lord's answer to return! The evildoer, the wicked, may be puffed up and arrogant because of his seeming success, his doing well for the moment. He may be as greedy as death, as the grave, which is never satisfied! But it is the righteous by faith, who shall live.

Reflection & Application _____

1. What can the believer know about suffering? Hebrews 10:32-34
2. What must we do when facing suffering? Hebrews 10:35-36
3. Why must we not give up?
4. Which two possible outcomes are there for every person on earth? Hebrews 10:39

YAHWEH's Answer to Evil: Three Woes**Habakkuk 2:4-14**

We are confused and perplexed by the suffering and injustice in the world.

Internationally

We see the atrocities of terrorist groups. Rapes are rampant, girls are abducted, people lose their property, and then, many are killed via mass executions, public beheadings and even crucifixions. We know that, somehow, life may never get better for many of our Christian brothers and sisters in some lands. Around 1915, for example, an estimated 1.5 million Armenian Christians were killed in Iraq. Since the turn of the 21st century, thousands of believers have been martyred in Nigeria. Every fibre of our being cries for justice.

Personally

We may have suffered injustice. Maybe at work, in our relationships, in our business dealings, or medically through sickness or negligence. We may even feel that the way life has turned out for many of us has not been good. We want justice.

Justice

God says that every human being will receive justice, but we know this is not always good news. What if I have caused harm to others?
Or if I have done or am doing what God loathes?

Reality

The wrath of God is real. God makes it clear in Habakkuk that He is going to judge Judah. And God will also judge the Babylonians. It is clear that God is going to judge sin no matter who is involved. And in effect, God is saying this: *"My moral judgment will fall whether it's on Judah or Babylon or, as a matter of fact, on anybody else that sins."*

God has a moral order in the world, and if you break the moral order, God's judgment and wrath will follow. It is just that simple. God always punishes sin, no matter who it is! The only issue is when He does it and how He does it.

Remember

What have we learned so far in the prophecy of Habakkuk?

Habakkuk is frustrated by Judah's wickedness, and then he is perplexed by God's solution to Judah's evil, namely, the even more wicked Babylonians. For this reason Habakkuk needs answers. We hear his frustration in the words:

Habakkuk 1:13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? Habakkuk needs an answer, and he waits for the LORD.

Habakkuk 2:1 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.

What will the LORD answer?

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Habakkuk 2:4-14

1. What was the LORD's answer to evil? 2:3; Hebrews 10:37
2. What will happen to those who have faith, or put their trust in the LORD's answer; those who would place their trust in God's solution? 2:4b
3. What is the LORD's description of the wicked, i.e. those who do not trust in the LORD's answer? 2:4a, 5
4. Which two attitudes can one have towards the LORD's answer? 2:4

The Sins of Judah

There were the typical sins of Judah; these were also typical sins of wicked oppressors in the past, and also typical sins of people today. It all starts with *pride*.

Since the time of the Fall in the garden of Eden, there was the false promise, "You shall be like God!" This reminds us of John's summary of what is wrong with the wicked:

1 John 2:16 For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world.

The lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life.

Five Woes

The LORD pronounces his sentence on the wicked, on rebels, the evil ones. The sentence is pronounced in the form of 5 woes in Habakkuk. The first 3 are closely linked together.

5. Against which wickedness is the first woe announced? 2:6
6. What will happen if you acquire wealth in an unlawful manner or at the expense of others? 2:7-8; James 5:1-6

The Tide Always Turns

The Babylonians will be plundered by others. They would cease to be an empire. Even today, the nation of Iraq is a dry desert land with little influence or status in the world. Just so it will be with the wicked rich who exploit others in the world today. They will lose it all. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount (Discipleship Discourse), "Do not gather for yourself riches on earth..."

7. Against which wickedness is the second woe announced? 2:9
8. Against which wickedness is the third woe announced? 2:12

9. How is this only fuel on the fire of God's wrath? 2:13

The first three woes are very closely related. The wicked here are oppressors and extortionists.

10. What will be the end result?

11. What will be the ultimate reality on earth? The revelation which was clear to Habakkuk? **2:14**

The Babylonian Example

Nebuchadnezzar built his city with the labour and the blood of his subjects. This great Babylonian king thought he had done it all.

Daniel 4:29 as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

The LORD made him eat grass like an ox. And in the end, his kingdom fell within less than 100 years. Nothing that is built by bloodshed, violence and oppression will stand in the end, and Babylon was no exception. God judged Israel in 722 BV. In 586 BC, He judged Judah. In 538 BC, he judged Babylon. And so, God will judge **every wicked empire**; we do not know when, but it will come. God is going to judge you if you are an unbeliever. It's inevitable if you don't know Jesus Christ, if you don't know God's way of escape.

Reflection & Application _____

1. How is YAHWEH's charge against the wicked a timely warning for us as well?
2. How does Revelation say it will all end for Babylon?

3. How can we escape judgement? Habakkuk 2:3-4
4. Which two possibilities alone are there in life and death?
5. What is faith?

YAHWEH's Answer to Evil: Two Woes**Habakkuk 2:4-5; 15-20**

Remember the context of Habakkuk 2:2-20. The LORD's answer to Habakkuk's complaint: "Will God bring about justice?" The LORD's answer was given, and the contrast painted between two groups of people:

- The wicked.
- The righteous by faith.

The LORD announced five woes against the wicked. It was presented in two parts, each with a concluding observation regarding some unalterable reality regarding the LORD. The first three woes were pronounced against their:

- Dishonest Gain (2:6)
- Covetousness (2:9)
- Violence (2:12)

In response to these three wicked characteristics, the reality regarding the LORD was stated as follows:

Habakkuk 2:14 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

The last two woes were spoken against their:

- Drunkenness (2:15)
- Idolatry (2:19)

Violence is once again connected to these two woes in 2:17.

In response to these two wicked characteristics, the reality regarding the LORD was stated as follows:

Habakkuk 2:20 But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Habakkuk 2:4-5, 15-20

1. How does the LORD describe the wicked? 2:4-5

Pride

It all starts with *pride*. Since the time in the garden, the lie was, “You shall be like God!” This reminds us of John’s summary of what is wrong with the wicked:

1 John 2:16 For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world.

The lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye and pride of life.

Ultimately, the end of the wicked will be judgement, wrath and destruction! We have to ask ourselves the question: “Are we not part of the wicked as well?”

But then there is another group, the righteous, and this leads to the other half of God’s answer. God offers a solution, an escape from our own sin, tendency to corruption and rebellion. We can escape the judgement the wicked will face. Some very powerful texts in Habakkuk describe God’s remedy to evil.

2. What is YAHWEH’s final solution to evil? 2:3
3. Who does the NT tell us this person is? Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38
4. What will be the reality at the end of time, according to YAHWEH? 2:14
5. What will the reality for the wicked be? Let us return to a description of the wicked...

Two Final Woes

There are 2 more woes that apply more in general, as not all people have enriched themselves by violence, dishonest gain and covetousness.

6. Against which wickedness is the fourth woe announced? 2:15

7. What does drunkenness lead to? 2:15

8. What is it about the use of wine that God hates? 2:15

Drinking and Intoxication

When people make others drink to learn secrets, gain control, make a mockery of them, lead them into sin, gain access to their money, or in order to get sexual favours from them, then it is an abomination in God's eyes.

"Gazing on the drunken person's nakedness," is not only applies to the physical sense, but also to see what is hidden in their minds. When someone is drunk, what he is really thinking is revealed.

Wicked and evil people do this when they want to gain information, or so that the neighbour may expose himself, talk foolishly or make himself ridiculous, disclose secret concerns, or even enter into a bad agreement such as a business deal.

9. Is YAHWEH against wine and celebration? Isaiah 25:6; Amos 9:13
Joel 3:18; John 2:1-11

10. Are there warnings in the Word against the dangers of wine?
Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-32

11. What does excessive drinking fuel and give rise to? Ephesians 5:18

12. Who is the prime example of this kind of behaviour in scripture? 2:15; cf. Daniel 5:1-4; 18-23
13. What will the judgement of God be on the drunken braggart? 2:16-17; cf. Jeremiah 25:15-17; 27-28
14. Against what wickedness is the sixth woe announced? 2:18-19
15. What is the sin of idolatry in essence?
16. How do drunkenness and idolatry connect? Daniel 5:4-5

Idols

The names of the gods are woven into the names of the Babylonian kings. It is interesting that his name and his father's name were derived from the gods. *Bel* (Baal) and *Nebu* were the main gods of Babylon. Notice the presence of the god's names in the names of the kings:

Nebu: *Nabupolassar*, *Nebuchadnezzar* and *Nabonidus*

Bel: *Belshazzar* – Bel protect the King. Even Daniel's name was changed to that of *Belteshazzar*.

17. What is the irony of this?
18. What is the ultimate reality which all of creation must realise? 2:20

Reflection & Application

1. What is the Temple of the LORD according to the New Covenant?
Ephesians 2:19-22
2. What is the Difference between an idol and the real God?
3. What is health, wealth and prosperity teaching in essence?

Habakkuk's Prayer: Petition and Praise

Habakkuk 3:1-19

Justice

We all desire justice. We want God to act and make things right. We pray, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven." Especially when we look at the wicked and the rebellious people of this world.

The Unbelievers and the Backslidden

But what if our own lives are not in line with God's standard? What if the field of my life bears a crop of thorns and thistles? Then it is a dangerous thing to pray for, as there will be no rebels in God's Kingdom when his will is done on earth as in Heaven.

Believers

What if I do love the Lord and my life is characterised by godliness and holiness, through God's gracious work and the influence of the Holy Spirit? Even then, God's judgement on wicked rebels affects my life too.

Both Believers and Unbelievers

If calamity strikes with respect to poverty, sickness, broken relationships, etc., it affects those who trust in God as well as those who don't.

Habakkuk was gravely concerned about the evil in Judah and Jerusalem. He had questioned YAHWEH's silence and inactivity. Habakkuk wanted him to act, and eventually God replied, but not the way that he expected. YAHWEH said that he would act, but in a way that Habakkuk could not believe.

Their Ears Would Tingle

YAHWEH would judge the wicked in Judah with a nation even more wicked than themselves, the Babylonians. Habakkuk was confused and perplexed about this, and he questioned God again, who answered and promised that he would deal with evil and that there would be different outcomes for the wicked and for the righteous by faith. YAHWEH would judge the wicked in Judah, as well as the wicked Babylonians, and there would be judgement and woe for every sinner and rebel as well.

Habakkuk understood that God would not let the wicked go unpunished, but as the wicked and the righteous live next to each other in the same

city, the judgment of God on the wicked would affect the righteous, as well and severely so. When we read about the suffering in Judah and Jerusalem, e.g. in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, one understands that it was not easy for those who loved God. Habakkuk knew that the future looked bleak, and he was weak, and scared. However, he responded as a man of deep faith in an attitude of worshipful prayer or prayerful worship.

Habakkuk 3:1-19 includes a prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. It is called a shigionoth (Habakkuk 3:1). Shigionoth, in Hebrew *Shiggayon* or *Shiggayonah* (שִׁגְיוֹן or שִׁגְיוֹנָה), means a wild passionate song with rapid changes of rhythm. It is a prayer set to music, such as some of the Psalms of David, such as Psalm 7. We may learn a pattern from his attitude and prayer on how we should respond when the day of trouble and hardship comes.

A Psalm of petition and praise

Elements in this prayer are:

- A plea
- Remembrance
- A Hymn of Praise
- Future hope

Habakkuk prays as follows:

1. Your will be done, O LORD; but remember mercy!
2. Remember God's gracious deliverances in the past.
3. Despite trouble and hardship, praise the LORD.

Study Questions _____

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Habakkuk 3:1-19

1. What was Habakkuk's main concern? 3:2
2. How does Habakkuk's prayer correspond to the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:19ff), and the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39, 42)?

3. Why is it a dangerous thing to pray for God's will to be done?

Imprecatory Prayer

We may pray for the destruction of terror organisations, for abortion clinics to close down, and for orphans to have homes. That is all correct. But the main problem is that there is still no fear of God and no awe of his Name if only that which is externally wrong changes.

4. What does Habakkuk pray? 3:2
5. What element does Habakkuk know needs to be part of God's judgement? 3:2
6. What does Habakkuk call to mind from the past? 3:3-15
7. Which gracious deliverances in the past does Habakkuk call to mind? 3:3-4

This is a similar description to that which we find in Deuteronomy 33:2.

Deuteronomy 33:1 This is the blessing that Moses the man of God pronounced on the Israelites before his death. ² He said: "The LORD came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir; he shone forth from Mount Paran. He came with myriads of holy ones from the south, from his mountain slopes.

8. How does Habakkuk remember **Egypt**? 3:5
9. How does Habakkuk remember **Sinai**? 3:6

10. How does Habakkuk remember the **time of the Judges**, especially Othniel & Gideon? 3:7 cf. Judges 3:7-11; 6:13
11. How does Habakkuk remember the **Red Sea and the Jordan River crossings?** 3:8-10
12. How does Habakkuk remember **Joshua and the Conquest of Canaan?** 3:11-13
13. How does Habakkuk remember the **return to Egypt and the Exodus?** 3:14-15

God's Mighty Acts

Habakkuk remembers God's mighty acts of deliverance and his fame in Israel's past history. God took them all the way through into the promised land. The wicked were destroyed. That includes the rebellious in Israel. He remembers, and he praises God. This is the God that he is serving. But now the Babylonian destruction was imminent. It would be a terrible time...

14. What did Habakkuk decide, despite trouble and hardship, and his own fear? 3:16-18
15. Which calamity was on its way? 3:17
16. What did he know the LORD would do to the Babylonians?
17. What is Habakkuk's conclusion? 3:17

Reflection & Application

1. What is the lesson we can learn from Habakkuk's song?
2. What is the metaphor which Habakkuk uses? What will the LORD give you?
3. How does Habakkuk's prayer compare with Psalm 7, which is also a *shiggaion*.

1-2:

3-5:

6-9:

10-12:

13-16:

Psalm 7:1 *A shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjamite.* O LORD my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me, ² or they will tear me like a lion and rip me to pieces with no-one to rescue me. ³ O LORD my God, if I have done this and there is guilt on my hands--⁴ if I have done evil to him who is at peace with me or without cause have robbed my foe--⁵ then let my enemy pursue and overtake me; let him trample my life to the ground and make me sleep in the dust. Selah ⁶ Arise, O LORD, in your anger; rise up against the rage of my enemies. Awake, my God; decree justice. ⁷ Let the assembled peoples gather round you. Rule over them from on high; ⁸ let the LORD judge the peoples. Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High. ⁹ O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts, bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure. ¹⁰ My shield is God Most High, who saves the upright in heart. ¹¹ God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day. ¹² If he does not relent, he will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. ¹³ He has prepared his deadly weapons; he makes ready his flaming arrows.

¹⁴ He who is pregnant with evil and conceives trouble gives birth to disillusionment. ¹⁵ He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made. ¹⁶ The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head. ¹⁷ I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.

שִׁגְיֹן or שִׁגְיָנָה (*Shiggayon or Shiggayonah*)

Meaning: Perhaps a wild passionate song with rapid changes of rhythm (BibleWorks).

The Prophecy of Habakkuk

The prophecy of Habakkuk is a small book with a huge impact. Its heart is Habakkuk 2:3-4. These verses have an impact far beyond what a superficial reading will uncover. The impact of these verses is so great that it is quoted twice by Paul and once by the writer to the Hebrews. One has to look carefully at these passages to realise the full theological scope of Habakkuk's prophecy.

The apostle Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 in his understanding of the gospel. That a righteousness of God is available for everyone who believes. He does not quote Habakkuk 2:3, but without it, it makes no sense. It would then seem that the ground of our salvation is the strength of our faith and not the person of Jesus. However, Romans 1:17 is the gospel conclusion to his argument in Romans 1:1-5.

Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, {Or is from faith to faith} just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." {Hab. 2:4}

In Galatians, Paul once again stresses that justification is not of works, but by faith alone in Christ alone. He makes it clear in Galatians 3:13 that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us.

Galatians 3:10 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." {Deut. 27:26} ¹¹ Clearly no-one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." {Hab. 2:4} ¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." {Lev. 18:5} ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

The last author who quotes Habakkuk 2:3-4 does so by connecting salvation through becoming righteous with the person of Jesus. He clearly believes that 2:3 is speaking about Jesus, by saying, "He who is coming

will come and will not delay”, and then concludes by saying, “But the righteous will live by faith.”

Hebrews 10:36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. ³⁷ For in just a very little while, *"He who is coming will come and will not delay."* ³⁸ But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." {Hab. 2:3,4} ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

I do believe that justice has not always been done nor clarity provided in many sermons and commentaries where Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:37-38 have been explained or preached.

Habakkuk 2:3 is often under-exposed as a prophecy regarding Jesus, and the connection to becoming righteous by faith (2:4) is not always clearly unpacked as originating from it.

I further believe that the correct interpretation of Habakkuk 2:3 needs to be derived from the understanding of the NT authors, not commentators, translators, church fathers or reformers, however valuable they may be. The NT authors are God's final messengers and interpreters, and they heard the teaching of Christ firsthand.

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THE TRANSLATION OF HABAKKUK 2:3

This document was generated with the help of AI.¹

All factual verification and final wording were performed by the author.

A **direct, fairly literal rendering** of Habakkuk 2:3 from the Hebrew:

*“For the vision is yet for the appointed time;
it pants (or hastens) toward the end and does not lie.
If it delays, wait for it; for it will surely come—it will not delay.”*

Notes on key Hebrew expressions:

- **“appointed time”** (מוֹעֵד / *mo‘ed*) — a fixed, set time determined beforehand.
- **“pants/hastens”** (יָפֵאָה / *yafeah*) — literally “breathes” or “pants,” conveying urgency or pressing forward.
- **“does not lie”** — the vision is trustworthy and will not prove false.
- The apparent tension:
 - “If it delays...”
 - “It will not delay.”

This reflects a Hebrew way of saying: *it may seem slow from your perspective, but from God’s appointed timeline, it is right on time.*

In Habakkuk 2:3 the key nouns—חֲזוֹן (*hāzôn*, “vision”) and קֵץ (*qēṣ*, “end”)—are grammatically **masculine singular**. Therefore, the verbs and pronominal suffixes attached to them are also **third person masculine singular**.

So why translate “it” instead of “he?”

Because in English, **inanimate or abstract nouns** (like *vision*, *time*, *end*) are referred to with **“it,”** not **“he.”**

Hebrew, however, assigns **grammatical gender** to *all* nouns—whether they are persons, objects, or abstract ideas. Masculine grammatical form does **not** imply personal masculinity.

¹ OpenAI, ChatGPT, GPT-5.5, May 14, 2026, <https://chatgpt.com>

What's happening in the verse

The verbs mentioned:

- וַיִּפַּח לֵקָץ — “it pants/hastens toward the end”.
- וְלֹא יִכְזֹב — “it does not lie”.
- אִם־יִתְמַהֲמָה... תְּבַהֲלוּ — “if it delays... wait for it”.
- כִּי־בֹא יָבֹא... לֹא יִאָּחַר — “it will surely come... it will not delay”.

All of these verbs agree with a **masculine singular referent**—most naturally “**the vision**” (**hāzôn**).

Could it be translated as “he”?

Grammatically, the forms are masculine singular. But contextually, translating “he” would **mislead an English reader** into thinking a **person** is being described, rather than a **prophetic vision/event**.

That said, there is an important interpretive layer:

- The **Septuagint (Greek OT)** and later **Hebrews 10:37** take this more **personally**:

“He who is coming will come and will not delay.”

This reflects a **theological reading** (messianic/personal fulfilment), not a strictly literal grammatical necessity of the Hebrew.

Bottom line

- Hebrew: masculine singular verbs → agree with **hāzôn (vision)**.
- English: “it” → because the referent is **impersonal/abstract**.
- “he” → possible grammatically, but **interpretive**, not strictly literal.

A **fully literal, word-for-word rendering** that keeps the masculine feel—even if it sounds awkward in English.

*“For yet the vision for the appointed time,
and he breathes/pants toward the end, and he does not lie.
If he delays, wait for him;
for coming he will come, he will not delay.”*

What to notice

- “he...him” reflects the consistent 3rd person masculine singular in the Hebrew verbs and suffixes.
- “breathes/pants” keeps the vivid, somewhat strange imagery of וַיִּפַּח (*yāfēah*).
- “coming he will come” (בֹּא יָבֹא) preserves the infinitive absolute + imperfect construction for emphasis.

- The result is intentionally awkward in English, because it mirrors Hebrew structure rather than smoothing it out.

A couple of technical observations

- יִתְמַהֲמָה (yitmahmāh) — the final הֵּ (“it”) refers back to *the vision*, even though the verb itself is masculine.
- תִּבֶּה-לּוֹ (“wait for him”) — the suffix לּוֹ (“him”) is masculine singular, again agreeing with *hāzôn*.
- The Hebrew flows with consistent masculine singular verbal energy, which is why the “he/him” rendering works grammatically—even though English normally smooths it to “it.”

This exact structure is picked up and slightly reinterpreted in the Greek of the Septuagint and then in Hebrews 10:37—that’s where things get quite theologically rich.

This is where the text takes a fascinating turn from **impersonal vision** → **personal coming one**.

1. The Hebrew (baseline)

From Habakkuk 2:3:

כִּי־בֹא יֵבֵא לֹא יִאָּחֵר

“for coming he will come, he will not delay”

- Form: **3rd person masculine singular**.
 - Likely referent in context: **“the vision”** (חֲזוֹן).
 - Still grammatically **masculine**, allowing (but not requiring) a personal sense.
-

2. The Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)

The Greek translators make a decisive interpretive move:

*“because ὅτι ἐρχόμενος ἔξει καὶ οὐ μὴ χρονίσῃ
the one coming will come and will certainly not delay.”*

What changed?

- ἐρχόμενος (“the one coming”) = a masculine participle.
- This is now explicitly personal.
- The subject is no longer “vision” but “the coming one.”

The ambiguity in Hebrew becomes personified in Greek.

3. The New Testament (quotation)

In Hebrews 10:37, the author quotes this line:

“For yet a very little while,

He who is coming will come and will not delay.”

What’s happening here?

- The writer follows the Septuagint, not the Hebrew wording directly.
 - The subject is clearly personalized.
 - In context, this refers to Christ’s return.
-

4. What this means (textually and theologically)

Textually:

- **Hebrew** → grammatically masculine, but tied to an impersonal noun (“**vision**”).
- **Greek** (LXX) → resolves ambiguity by making it a **person** (“the coming one”).
- **Hebrews** → embraces that reading and applies it **christologically**.

Theologically:

There’s a progression:

1. **Prophetic certainty** (Habakkuk):
God’s revelation *will* reach its appointed fulfilment.
 2. **Implicit personification** (allowed by Hebrew grammar):
The “vision” almost behaves like a living agent.
 3. **Explicit fulfilment** (LXX → Hebrews):
The “coming” is ultimately a Person.
-

5. Why this matters for the original question

The masculine verbs are important.

- In Hebrew, they are grammatical agreement.
 - They also leave the door open for later personal interpretation.
 - The Greek translators—and then the New Testament—walk through that door.
-

Bottom line

- A strictly literal reading: “**it will come**” (the vision).
- A canonically developed reading: “**He will come**” (the Messiah).

The Hebrew doesn’t force the personal reading—but it **beautifully accommodates it**, which is exactly what later Scripture draws out.

The Early Church Fathers and Reformers on Habakkuk 2:3

This part of the document was entirely generated with the help of AI. The author have not been able to verify these facts independently.²

This verse became a small but revealing test case for how readers moved between **Hebrew grammar, Greek translation, and Christological interpretation**.

We're still anchored in Habakkuk 2:3, but the reception history really unfolds through the Greek tradition and its reuse in Hebrews 10:37.

1. Early Church Fathers (reading through the Septuagint)

Most Church Fathers read Habakkuk 2:3 **through the Septuagint**, not the original Hebrew.

Key assumption:

The Greek is *normative Scripture*, so:

“the one coming will come” (ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἔξει)
is already interpreted as **a person**, not a “vision.”

Justin Martyr (2nd century)

Justin repeatedly uses Habakkuk 2:3 in his arguments with Jews.

- He reads “the coming one” as **Christ**
- The “delay” is Christ’s **first advent–second advent structure**
- He treats it as a **prophecy of the Parousia** (the return of the Lord).

For Justin, the logic is simple:

If Scripture says “the coming one,” it must be the Messiah.

No discussion of Hebrew grammar—just **Christological fulfilment reading the Greek text as final form**.

Irenaeus (2nd century)

Irenaeus of Lyons uses the same verse to defend the **faithfulness of divine timing**:

- The “coming one” = Christ.
- The “delay” = God’s patience in salvation history.
- The “vision” becomes effectively **the economy of redemption**.

² OpenAI, *ChatGPT*, GPT-5.5, May 14, 2026, <https://chatgpt.com>

He doesn't argue grammar; he argues **redemptive structure**:
God is never late; He is unfolding a planned history.

Origen (3rd century)

Origen is more aware of textual layers:

- He knows that **Hebrew** and **Greek** differ.
- He notes that “**vision**” in Hebrew could be **impersonal**.
- Still he defends the **spiritual sense** as higher.

His move:

- Literal sense: **prophetic vision**.
- Spiritual sense: **Christ coming in fullness**.

So, he preserves both, but privileges the **Christological reading** as the deeper truth.

2. Augustine (Latin West)

Augustine of Hippo reads from the Latin tradition (Vulgate), which follows the Greek sense:

“He who is coming will come and will not delay.”

For Augustine:

- Christ is the **delayed-but-certain fulfilment of history**.
- The “delay” is **mercy toward the Church**.
- Time itself is interpreted through **God's patience**.

He explicitly uses Habakkuk to argue that:

apparent delay is not absence, but divine ordering.

So, the focus shifts from grammar to **theodicy and providence**.

3. The Reformers (returning to Hebrew + Christological reading tension)

Now the interesting reversal happens!

Martin Luther

Luther knew Hebrew better than most medieval theologians.

He recognises:

- Hebrew = “vision” (impersonal).
- Greek = “the coming one” (personal).

His approach:

- He does **not reject the Hebrew**.
- Still, he accepts the **Christological fulfilment via the Apostolic reading**.

So, for Luther: The Hebrew is promise; the New Testament is fulfilment.

He holds both without collapsing them.

John Calvin

Calvin is very explicit:

- Primary sense in Habakkuk: **the vision of judgment/salvation.**
- Apostolic use in Hebrews: **legitimate application, not original meaning.**

He is careful:

The prophet speaks of God's appointed work; the apostle rightly applies it to Christ's coming.

So Calvin distinguishes:

- **Sensus literalis (original meaning)** = prophetic vision.
- **Sensus plenior (fuller meaning)** = Christ.

This is a controlled theological expansion, not a replacement.

4. The key interpretive shift across history

Stage	Subject of the verb	Meaning
Hebrew	"vision" (רִיזָה)	God's appointed prophetic fulfilment
Septuagint	"the coming one"	Already personalised expectation
Fathers	Christ	Messianic certainty
Reformers	both layers held together	original prophecy + fulfilled Christology

5. The real takeaway

The original observation about **masculine singular verbs** is exactly where the interpretive fork happens:

- Hebrew grammar allows **impersonal "it."**
- Greek LXX translation leans into **personal "he."**
- Christian tradition reads it as **Messianic "He" (Christ)**

But importantly:

The shift is not caused by grammar alone—it is caused by **translation + theological reading of fulfilment in history.**

The Infinitive Absolute (בֹּא יָבֹא)

This document was generated with the help of AI.³

All factual verification and final wording were performed by the author

How the **infinitive absolute** (בֹּא יָבֹא) became a key argument in early Christian “certainty of the Parousia” interpretations.

This is where the argument actually gets technically interesting rather than just devotional.

We’re focusing on the Hebrew construction in Habakkuk 2:3:

בֹּא יָבֹא (bō’ yābō’).

1. What the construction actually is (Hebrew grammar)

This is the classic **infinitive absolute + finite verb** pattern:

- בֹּא (bō’) = infinitive absolute (“to come / coming”)
- יָבֹא (yābō’) = imperfect (“he will come”)

Standard function in Biblical Hebrew:

This construction is used for **emphasis**, not repetition.

So instead of: “he will come,” Hebrew intensifies it to: “coming, he will come,” or more idiomatically: “he will surely come.”

2. What the emphasis actually signals in Hebrew thought

The construction does **not** add new meaning like “certainty” in a philosophical sense.

It adds:

- **Inescapability,**
- **Irreversibility,**
- **fixed determination of action.**

So the semantic force is:

“this event is locked in; it will not fail to occur.”

But crucially:

- It is **aspectual emphasis**, not metaphysical commentary on time.
- It is about **verbal certainty**, not doctrinal speculation.

³ OpenAI, *ChatGPT*, GPT-5.5, May 14, 2026, <https://chatgpt.com>

3. How the Septuagint “freezes” the emphasis

The Greek translators render:

ἐρχόμενος ἥξει

“the coming one will come.”

Greek has no exact equivalent of the Hebrew infinitive absolute construction, so it compensates by:

- turning the verb into a **participle + future verb**,
- which naturally sounds **prophetic and definite**.

This already shifts the feel from:

- Hebrew: emphatic verbal certainty
→ Greek: **almost apocalyptic inevitability**.
-

4. Early Christian reading: how it became eschatological “certainty”

By the time of the New Testament, especially in Hebrews 10:37:

“He who is coming will come and will not delay.”

The emphasis of **bō’ yābō’** is now being read through a new lens:

Key interpretive move:

The repetition is no longer just stylistic—it becomes:

a guarantee of the Parousia’s inevitability.

5. How early Christian writers used the construction (conceptually)

They reasoned like this:

Step 1 — Hebrew intensification

“coming, he will come” = **absolute certainty of arrival**.

Step 2 — Septuagint personalisation

“the coming one” = **a determinate agent**.

Step 3 — New Testament application

Therefore: Christ’s return is not conditional or symbolic—it is **structurally guaranteed**.

6. The theological leap (important nuance)

Early Christian interpreters did NOT usually say:

“the infinitive absolute proves the doctrine of the Parousia.”

Rather, the logic was more subtle:

The construction became *supportive evidence* for:

- the **fixedness of divine promise**,
- the **non-contingent nature of eschatological fulfilment**,
- the **irreversibility of Christ’s return**.

So the grammar was used rhetorically as:
“Scripture itself uses the strongest possible linguistic form of certainty.”

7. A key misunderstanding to avoid

Modern readers sometimes overstate this as:

“Hebrew grammar teaches doctrinal certainty of the Second Coming.”

That is **not historically precise**.

What actually happened is:

- Hebrew grammar → signals **strong verbal assurance**.
- Greek translation → makes it **personal and prophetic**.
- Christian interpretation → reads it within **eschatological expectation**.

The doctrine does not come from grammar alone—it comes from:
grammar + translation tradition + theological reading of Christ-event
fulfilment.

8. The clean summary

The infinitive absolute in בָּא יָבֵא contributes three layers:

1. **Hebrew level**
→ “this will certainly, emphatically occur.”
2. **Greek level**
→ “the coming one is on the way (as a determinate figure).”
3. **Early Christian level**
→ “Christ’s return is guaranteed within God’s fixed redemptive plan.”