



BOOK OF HABAKKUK FACT SHEET

1. **The Prophet.** The name Habakkuk is unique to this prophet and its form is unique among names in the Hebrew Bible. Despite much speculation, there is no definitive evidence for what the name means or even the language from which it derives. More important than the meaning of the name is the title, “the prophet” (Hab 1:1; 3:1). Habakkuk is the only book among the prophets to have two headings listing him as “the prophet.” Whoever preserved his words put more weight on his prophetic role than his personal biography.

2. **The Setting.** The only clue to Habakkuk’s historical context is the single word “Chaldeans” in Hab 1:6. God announced to Habakkuk that he is rousing the Chaldeans, a fearsome and brutal military power that will overwhelm the nations of the eastern Mediterranean. The Chaldeans were the central tribe in the kingdom of Babylon, which conquered the Assyrian Empire in 612 BCE and became the dominant power in the ancient Near East. Habakkuk’s response to God’s announcement suggests that he was familiar with Babylon’s brutality, idolatry, and ruthless violence. The decade or so following Babylon’s rise in 612 BCE provides the most likely setting for the message preserved in the book, making Habakkuk a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah.

3. **Habakkuk’s Complaints.** In addition to speaking for God to the people, Habakkuk also spoke to God on the people’s behalf. In two bitter laments (1:2-4 and 1:12-17), he questioned God’s silence in the face of “destruction and violence” (Hab 1:3) and asked why justice and the law fail while the wicked overwhelm the righteous. In response to God’s announcement about the Babylonians, Habakkuk questioned how a righteous God could allow such evil and be “silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?” (1:13). Habakkuk raised the question of God’s justice in ways that were similar to his contemporary Jeremiah, Psalm 73, and the book of Job. It is important to note that Habakkuk received a response and not a rebuke from God to both of his complaints (1:5-11 and 2:2-5). The book of Habakkuk portrays a dialogue between the prophet and God concerning the most urgent questions of his day and ours.



BOOK OF HABAKKUK FACT SHEET CONTINUED

4. **God's Answer.** Habakkuk received a message from God about a vision for the future (2:2-3) and a choice for the present (2:4). The vision was for an appointed time known only by God for which the prophet and his community must wait. The choice was whether to be like "the proud, [whose] spirit is not right," or like "the righteous person [who] by his faithfulness will live" (2:4). It is possible to complain to God like Habakkuk did and still remain faithful. To conclude, however, that God is not faithful or worthy of faithfulness is to take a stand with the proud. This message, read through the events of Jesus' death and resurrection, became an important part of the apostle Paul's theology (Rom 1:17).

5. **Habakkuk's Prayer.** Chapter 3 has the heading "a prayer of Habakkuk the prophet." In many ways it is more like one of the psalms than a prophetic message. Yet it also provides a fitting conclusion to the book. Like chapters 1 and 2, it includes a prayer of the prophet (vv. 1-2) and a response from God (vv. 3-15). God's response was not a message, however, but a vision! Habakkuk "saw" God approaching in judgment to conquer his enemies and "save his people" (3:13). Chapter 3 fits expectations of what God's promised vision to Habakkuk might look like. Habakkuk responded with awe and determination to praise and serve God no matter what comes (vv. 16-19). Like Job and the author of Psalm 73, Habakkuk's complaints were transformed by a mystical experience of the presence of God.

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