



Habakkuk

A swift, prophetic dialogue between an anxious prophet and his God in a time of political uncertainty and unrest.

Habakkuk consists of a conversation between Habakkuk and God about the injustice of the world. The book opens with a protest from Habakkuk about God's inaction in the face of so much evil. God responded by saying that he was sending the Chaldeans or Babylonians to punish the wicked. Habakkuk protested that this was using wickedness to punish wickedness; God responded again by promising that all the perpetrators of violence would eventually be punished. The book ends with a celebration of all God has done in the past and an expectation that God would act again.



How long will it take?

Reading time: about 9 mins
Short of time? Just read Habakkuk 1.1-11



Genre

Prophecy



Anything tricky?

This is a conversation between Habakkuk and God; it makes no sense until you make sure you know who is speaking at any one time. Hint: words in inverted commas are, in most translations, God speaking.



Inspiring quotes

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.
(Habakkuk 2.14)

GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights.
(Habakkuk 3.19)



About the Author

The prophet Habakkuk is mentioned twice in the book (1.1 and 3.1) so it makes most sense to think that he wrote it.

He is also mentioned a few times in the additions to the book of Daniel (found in the Apocrypha or deuterocanonical literature) in a section often called Bel and the Dragon (1.33-39). There Habakkuk took stew and some bread to Daniel in the lions' den.

Some point out that his name means 'embrace' or 'wrestle' and this seems to be what he is doing in the book.



What kind of Book is it?

Habakkuk is the eighth of the 12 books of the Minor Prophets.

As a work of prophecy, it is unusual since it is largely made up of a conversation between Habakkuk and God, rather than messages from God to God's people, about Habakkuk's fears for the world around him.



About the times

Habakkuk is set in the late seventh century bc, just before the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem at the start of the sixth century bc and took the Judeans into Exile.

What were people feeling?

From what we can tell – some people were very confident that God would save them as he always had; while others, like Habakkuk, were anxious about what was going to happen.

Other books set around this time

2 Kings 17-25, 2 Chronicles 29-36, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah and Isaiah



How is it structured?

1.1	Introduction
1.2-4	Habakkuk's first lament
1.5-11	God's first answer
1.12-2.1	Habakkuk's second lament
2.2-20	God's second answer
3.1-19	Habakkuk's prayer of praise to God



Look out for...

Habakkuk is frightened of the world in which he lives and feels as though God doesn't care, but by the end of the book, worships God before whom he stands in awe (3.1). Look out for this theme and ask why Habakkuk might have changed his mind.

In this book Habakkuk is worried about God's role in the violence that is breaking out all around, look out for the questions he asks God about this.



What could this mean for me?

If you were to ask God questions about what was going on in the world around you – what kind of questions would you ask? Would you be satisfied with the answers given in this book? If yes, why? If no, why not?



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- Habakkuk was deeply troubled by the violence in his world and God's apparent role within this violence. Were you satisfied by the questions he asked and the answers God gave? If yes why did they work? If no, what more would you have liked to have seen?
- Various people suggest that this book is about justice and God's role in justice. Would you agree or did you see another theme emerging as you read?
- The final chapter is a psalm of praise to God – why do you think it has been included here in the book? Did you feel it fitted with the rest?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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