

## Timeline / Overview

Habakkuk lived during the final decades of Israel's southern kingdom during a time of injustice and idolatry. He saw the rising threat of Babylon on the horizon and that was not good news for anybody. Unlike the other prophets, Habakkuk does not accuse Israel, he doesn't even speak on God's behalf to the people. All of his words are addressed to God, and the book tells about him trying to believe that God is good when there is so much evil in the world. Habakkuk's words are actually poems of lament and they are very similar to laments you can find in the book of Psalms.

## Argument Between Habakkuk and God (Chapters 1 to 2a)

**Complaint 1 (1:2-4)** – Life in Israel has become horrible. The torah is neglected, resulting in violence and injustice, and it is all being tolerated by Israel's corrupt leaders. Habakkuk is crying out asking God to do something, but nothing seems to change.

**Habakkuk 1:2 (ESV)** - *O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?  
Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?*

**Response 1 (1:5-11)** – He's very aware of the corruption of His own people and He is summoning the armies of Babylon to bring down His justice on Israel. Similar to the message of Micah or Isaiah, God says He will use this empire to devour Israel because of their injustice and evil.

**Complaint 2 (1:12-2:1)** – Habakkuk offers his second opinion. He says that Babylon is even worse than Israel. They are more corrupt, more violent, they've deified their own military power, they treat humans like animals, and they devour nations and people in order to build their own empire. Habakkuk asks how a holy, good God can use such corrupt nations as His instrument in history? He demands an explanation. He depicts himself as a watchman on the city walls, waiting for God's response, which eventually comes:

**Habakkuk 2:1 (ESV)** - *I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.*

**Response 2 (2:2-5)** – God tell Habakkuk to get out some tablets and a chisel and write down what he sees and hears. It's a vision about an appointed time in the future that even though it may seem slow in coming, it will eventually come. In fact, God says that the righteous person will live by their faith in this hope and vision:

**Habakkuk 2:4 (ESV)** - *"Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith. (see Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38)*

So what is this divine promise? God will bring Babylon down. God says that the violence and oppression of the nations creates this never-ending cycle of revenge. God will use this cycle to bring about the rise and fall of nations. The fact that God might for a time use a corrupt nation like Babylon does not mean that He endorses everything they do. He holds all nations accountable to His justice and so Babylon will fall along with any other nation that acts like them.

## Five Woes (Chapter 2b)

God's promise is then elaborated by a series of five woes that describe the kinds of oppression and injustice that is perpetuated by nations like Babylon. (1 & 2 / 2:6-11) The first two target unjust economic practices. (3 / 2:12-14) The third woe is a critique of slave labor. (4 / 2:15-17) The fourth woe targets the abuse of alcohol by irresponsible leaders. (5 / 2:18-20) The last woe exposes their idolatry.

## Prayer of Habakkuk (Chapter 3)

This is a prayer of Habakkuk, and it begins by Habakkuk pleading with God to act now in the present, like He has in the past bringing down corrupt nations (3:1-2).

**Habakkuk 3:2 (ESV)** - *O LORD, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.*

What follows is a poem that first describes a powerful, terrifying appearance by God (3:3-7). It is very similar to the opening poems of Micah and Nahum and similar to the appearance of God on Mount Sinai in the book of Exodus. There's cloud and fire and earthquake. Habakkuk then goes on to describe this future defeat of evil as a future exodus (3:8-15). Just like God came as a warrior and He split the sea in His battle against Pharaoh, Habakkuk says that God will once more bring His judgment down on the head of evil house.

**Habakkuk 3:13 (ESV)** - *You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck. Selah*

Pharaoh has become here an archetype of violent, human nations. In this poem, the Exodus story of the past has become an image of the future exodus God will perform. He will once again defeat evil and bring down the Pharaohs and Babylons of this world. He'll bring justice to all people and rescue the oppressed and innocent. It's this hope that enables Habakkuk to conclude the book with hopeful praise (3:16-19). Even if the world is falling apart with food shortage or drought or war or whatever, he will choose trust and joy in the covenant promises of God.

**Habakkuk 3:17-18 (ESV)** - *Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.*

So, by the end of the book, Habakkuk becomes a shining example of how the righteous live by faith. Habakkuk recognizes just how dark and chaotic the world and our lives can become and he invites us into a journey to of faith, of trusting that God loves this world more than we do and that He will one day deal with its evil.

## Teacher's Notes

Handout notes are adapted from The Bible Project

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPMaRqGJPUU>

## Text

### Habakkuk 1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

<sup>2</sup> O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,  
and you will not hear?

Or cry to you "Violence!"  
and you will not save?

<sup>3</sup> Why do you make me see iniquity,  
and why do you idly look at wrong?  
Destruction and violence are before me;  
strife and contention arise.

<sup>4</sup> So the law is paralyzed,  
and justice never goes forth.  
For the wicked surround the righteous;  
so justice goes forth perverted.

<sup>5</sup> "Look among the nations, and see;  
wonder and be astounded.  
For I am doing a work in your days  
that you would not believe if told.

<sup>6</sup> For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,  
that bitter and hasty nation,  
who march through the breadth of the earth,  
to seize dwellings not their own.

<sup>7</sup> They are dreaded and fearsome;  
their justice and dignity go forth from themselves.

<sup>8</sup> Their horses are swifter than leopards,  
more fierce than the evening wolves;  
their horsemen press proudly on.

Their horsemen come from afar;  
they fly like an eagle swift to devour.

<sup>9</sup> They all come for violence,  
all their faces forward.  
They gather captives like sand.

<sup>10</sup> At kings they scoff,  
and at rulers they laugh.

They laugh at every fortress,  
for they pile up earth and take it.  
<sup>11</sup> Then they sweep by like the wind and go on,  
guilty men, whose own might is their god!”  
<sup>12</sup> Are you not from everlasting,  
O LORD my God, my Holy One?  
We shall not die.  
O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgment,  
and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.  
<sup>13</sup> You who are of purer eyes than to see evil  
and cannot look at wrong,  
why do you idly look at traitors  
and remain silent when the wicked swallows up  
the man more righteous than he?  
<sup>14</sup> You make mankind like the fish of the sea,  
like crawling things that have no ruler.  
<sup>15</sup> He brings all of them up with a hook;  
he drags them out with his net;  
he gathers them in his dragnet;  
so he rejoices and is glad.  
<sup>16</sup> Therefore he sacrifices to his net  
and makes offerings to his dragnet;  
for by them he lives in luxury,  
and his food is rich.  
<sup>17</sup> Is he then to keep on emptying his net  
and mercilessly killing nations forever?

### **Habakkuk 2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> I will take my stand at my watchpost  
and station myself on the tower,  
and look out to see what he will say to me,  
and what I will answer concerning my complaint.  
<sup>2</sup> And the LORD answered me:  
“Write the vision;  
make it plain on tablets,  
so he may run who reads it.  
<sup>3</sup> For still the vision awaits its appointed time;  
it hastens to the end—it will not lie.  
If it seems slow, wait for it;  
it will surely come; it will not delay.  
<sup>4</sup> “Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,

but the righteous shall live by his faith.

<sup>5</sup> “Moreover, wine is a traitor,  
an arrogant man who is never at rest.

His greed is as wide as Sheol;  
like death he has never enough.

He gathers for himself all nations  
and collects as his own all peoples.”

<sup>6</sup> Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say,

“Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own—  
for how long?—  
and loads himself with pledges!”

<sup>7</sup> Will not your debtors suddenly arise,  
and those awake who will make you tremble?  
Then you will be spoil for them.

<sup>8</sup> Because you have plundered many nations,  
all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you,  
for the blood of man and violence to the earth,  
to cities and all who dwell in them.

<sup>9</sup> “Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house,  
to set his nest on high,  
to be safe from the reach of harm!

<sup>10</sup> You have devised shame for your house  
by cutting off many peoples;  
you have forfeited your life.

<sup>11</sup> For the stone will cry out from the wall,  
and the beam from the woodwork respond.

<sup>12</sup> “Woe to him who builds a town with blood  
and founds a city on iniquity!

<sup>13</sup> Behold, is it not from the LORD of hosts  
that peoples labor merely for fire,  
and nations weary themselves for nothing?

<sup>14</sup> For the earth will be filled  
with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.

<sup>15</sup> “Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink—  
you pour out your wrath and make them drunk,  
in order to gaze at their nakedness!

<sup>16</sup> You will have your fill of shame instead of glory.  
Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision!  
The cup in the LORD’s right hand

- will come around to you,  
and utter shame will come upon your glory!
- <sup>17</sup> The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,  
as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them,  
for the blood of man and violence to the earth,  
to cities and all who dwell in them.
- <sup>18</sup> “What profit is an idol  
when its maker has shaped it,  
a metal image, a teacher of lies?  
For its maker trusts in his own creation  
when he makes speechless idols!
- <sup>19</sup> Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake;  
to a silent stone, Arise!  
Can this teach?  
Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver,  
and there is no breath at all in it.
- <sup>20</sup> But the LORD is in his holy temple;  
let all the earth keep silence before him.”

### **Habakkuk 3 (ESV)**

- <sup>1</sup> A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.
- <sup>2</sup> O LORD, I have heard the report of you,  
and your work, O LORD, do I fear.  
In the midst of the years revive it;  
in the midst of the years make it known;  
in wrath remember mercy.
- <sup>3</sup> God came from Teman,  
and the Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah*  
His splendor covered the heavens,  
and the earth was full of his praise.
- <sup>4</sup> His brightness was like the light;  
rays flashed from his hand;  
and there he veiled his power.
- <sup>5</sup> Before him went pestilence,  
and plague followed at his heels.
- <sup>6</sup> He stood and measured the earth;  
he looked and shook the nations;  
then the eternal mountains were scattered;  
the everlasting hills sank low.  
His were the everlasting ways.
- <sup>7</sup> I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction;  
the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

- <sup>8</sup> Was your wrath against the rivers, O LORD?  
Was your anger against the rivers,  
or your indignation against the sea,  
when you rode on your horses,  
on your chariot of salvation?
- <sup>9</sup> You stripped the sheath from your bow,  
calling for many arrows. *Selah*  
You split the earth with rivers.
- <sup>10</sup> The mountains saw you and writhed;  
the raging waters swept on;  
the deep gave forth its voice;  
it lifted its hands on high.
- <sup>11</sup> The sun and moon stood still in their place  
at the light of your arrows as they sped,  
at the flash of your glittering spear.
- <sup>12</sup> You marched through the earth in fury;  
you threshed the nations in anger.
- <sup>13</sup> You went out for the salvation of your people,  
for the salvation of your anointed.  
You crushed the head of the house of the wicked,  
laying him bare from thigh to neck. *Selah*
- <sup>14</sup> You pierced with his own arrows the heads of his warriors,  
who came like a whirlwind to scatter me,  
rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret.
- <sup>15</sup> You trampled the sea with your horses,  
the surging of mighty waters.
- <sup>16</sup> I hear, and my body trembles;  
my lips quiver at the sound;  
rottenness enters into my bones;  
my legs tremble beneath me.  
Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble  
to come upon people who invade us.
- <sup>17</sup> Though the fig tree should not blossom,  
nor fruit be on the vines,  
the produce of the olive fail  
and the fields yield no food,  
the flock be cut off from the fold  
and there be no herd in the stalls,
- <sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD;  
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
- <sup>19</sup> GOD, the Lord, is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the deer's;  
he makes me tread on my high places.

To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.

## Argument Between Habakkuk and God (1-2a)

### **Romans 1:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

### **Galatians 3:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”

### **Hebrews 10:38 (ESV)**

<sup>38</sup> but my righteous one shall live by faith,  
and if he shrinks back,  
my soul has no pleasure in him.”