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## God at Work in Man's Dilemma Habakkuk - Part One

### **INTRODUCTION**

Habakkuk is a book for people who have unanswered questions.

Habakkuk was written near the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> Century B.C., sometime between 620 and 598 B.C. (probably between 608 - 605 B.C.). This was the period of the divided kingdom. Israel had already fallen to Assyria over a hundred years earlier (722 B.C.). Now Judah, too, was to meet her end. The Assyrian empire was crumbling and being surpassed by the Babylonians. Shortly after this little book was written, Judah was taken captive by Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar (605 B.C.).

The king of Judah at this time was wicked King Jehoiakim (see 2 Kings 23:35ff). Jehoiakim was a pawn of

the Egyptian pharaoh and a willing servant of Babylon for three years. When he rebelled, the Babylonians and their allies besieged Judah. It is recorded of Jehoiakim, "He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 23:37). Two other wicked kings succeeded him before God put an end to the sin He had so long endured and Judah fell to the Babylonian captors.

Another, better known prophet struggled to proclaim God's Word during that period also. His name was Jeremiah. He, too, met with the resistance of the authorities.

The times of Habakkuk were dark days indeed!

The literary style of the book is that of a dialogue between Habakkuk and God. It closes with a hymn of praise or a psalm. In its original, it was beautifully written and full of alliteration. As it is, the unique style may be lost, but its message for God's children in our time is as good as new - the message that, even in our dilemmas, God is at work!

*Read Habakkuk chapter one.*

## **HABAKKUK'S FIRST QUESTION (HABAKKUK 1:1-4)**

Habakkuk was a man with a burden, a divinely imposed concern. He faced an intellectual dilemma to which there was no apparent answer. The circumstances he saw around him troubled him. But he took the right action in that dilemma – he took his concern to God.

## *Silence, God Working*

In verses two through four, Habakkuk asks a two-fold question. Find the first part of the question in verse two: “How long must I call for help but you do not listen?” He says, in effect, “I’ve been crying out about the violence but you aren’t doing anything about it.”

Wait a minute! That sounds like something you and I would say. Already, we can identify with this man. I can hear myself asking, “How long do I have to keep praying for this without a solution? Why doesn’t God answer?”

David asked this in Psalm 13:1: “How long are you going to forget me, God? Forever?” In fact, we may be right in thinking God doesn’t always act promptly. He doesn’t. In John 11:6 we read that Jesus reacted to news of Lazarus’s illness by staying right where He was for two days! Though we may wonder why God doesn’t act, we have His promise that He does hear. (See Psalm. 34:15-17; Micah 7:7; Psalm 65:2 and others).

The second part of Habakkuk’s question was even more classic. **Read verses three and four and find the question he asked God.**

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This is the question of the ages. “Why all this unpunished wickedness?” We sometimes hear it phrased:

- “Why does God allow sin?”
- “Why does a loving God allow all the suffering and oppression in the world?”
- “Why doesn’t God do something?”

## *God At Work in Man's Dilemma*

Habakkuk was not just imagining things. He had reason to believe God should act. Look at the specific sins mentioned in verses three and four. Habakkuk concluded that evil always won (v. 4) because he had not seen justice. This is the very problem God's saints have struggled with over the centuries. Look at David in Psalm 10:1-12. From an anguished heart he groans, "Why are you hiding, God? Look what's going on! The wicked are taking over and dragging your name in the mud. Do something!"

Does Habakkuk's question here in verses two through four reflect something in your own experience? **Record something in your life for which you are seeking an answer.**

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### **GOD'S ANSWER (HABAKKUK 1:5-11)**

In this case God's answer to Habakkuk was clear, though not altogether comforting. **What was it? (See verses five and six.)**

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God was not blind to the sin Habakkuk saw. He had seen it and would respond in a way Habakkuk nor Israel

## *Silence, God Working*

wanted. He would be sending the wicked nation of Babylon to attack and punish His people.

**Verse 5:** It would be something unexpected and unbelievable. In fact, when Jeremiah prophesied the same thing to King Jehoiakim it seemed so incredible that he was suspected of treason and arrested (Jeremiah 36: 29-32, 37:15-21).

God warned Jerusalem of the same unexpected event through Isaiah and Jeremiah. In Acts 13:41 Paul warns the Jews of a similar fate from the hands of Rome if they didn't repent. Strange that God's people never seem to expect punishment for their sinful ways. We act amazed that God could be displeased with us! As a nation, a church, an individual, God warns us: "Repent, or you shall all likewise perish!" We answer shocked, "Who, me?"

**Verse 6:** The Babylonians were a ruthless and lawless bunch that conquered most of the Middle East! History tells us that they made a mockery of those they captured and conquered by piling up dirt to form ramps around city walls to enable them to scale them. What did God promise to do in verses 7-11?

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Every detail was eventually, amazingly fulfilled.

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But there was a ray of hope. Babylon would also fall. Read Habakkuk 1:11. **What is the clue to the Chaldeans' ultimate downfall?**

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With that in mind, read Isaiah 42:8. **Why would Babylon's pride make them prone to defeat? How do you think this warning could apply to nations, churches or individuals today?**

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God could use even wicked Babylon to punish His own people for their sin, but Babylon herself couldn't take the credit for their victory.

**Questions to discuss:**

1. What does God require in order for a nation or a church to experience revival?

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2. What specifics can you recall that caused Israel to suffer such a horrendous punishment?

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3. How would you react if you heard God tell you that He was going to bring revival to the US by destroying it? This is not just a thought-provoking question, it might be just what He is doing? If He is, would you said we deserve His judgment? Why?

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**For Next Time:**

1. Memorize Hab. 1:13a
2. Read Habakkuk 1-3.
3. Work through the next chapter and be prepared to answer the *Do You Remember?* questions.