

HABAKKUK

GOD IS GREAT AND GOOD

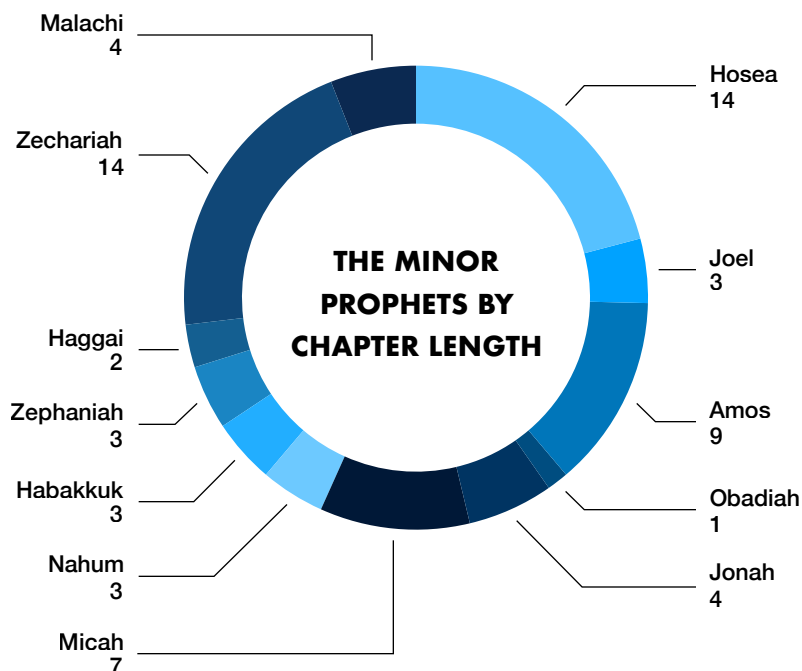
Injustice. Disease. Poverty. Disappointment. Terrorism. Oppression. Sound familiar? Everyone agrees: the world is not as it should be. We look at the evil in the world and it bothers us. This is why we avoid the evening news and have a love-hate relationship with Facebook and Twitter.

The suffering in the world leads many of us to ask: **Where is God?** If you've ever asked this question, you're in good company. Like you, Habakkuk saw the evil in his day and was deeply troubled.

Habakkuk took his frustration to God in prayer. Throughout the book, the prophet learns a lot about God's character and His work in the world. Reading the book of Habakkuk, you will be introduced to a God who is great—He orchestrates the affairs of nations and will make right all that is wrong in the world. You'll also see that God is good—He is righteous, kind, and trustworthy. He is deserving of your faith. In the midst of suffering, take heart. **God is great and good.**

READING HABAKKUK

Habakkuk is a little book about a big God. It will take you about fifteen minutes to read from start to finish. You can get started reading Habakkuk in your Bible or on the YouVersion Bible App, which has multiple translations and even has an audio Bible feature. Take a few minutes to read Habakkuk as a family after supper or listen to it on your morning commute.



THE MINOR PROPHETS

Habakkuk is just one volume in a collection of historic Jewish works called The Book of the Twelve, more commonly known among Christians today as the Minor Prophets. The Minor Prophets are minor in length, but not in significance. Think of the Minor Prophets as an action-packed, 12-part movie series. Each book in the series can stand on its own, but the books are best understood when read as a unified whole with a shared storyline and themes. So when you read Habakkuk, remember that it is just one "movie" in a 12-part series.

AUTHORSHIP, DATE OF WRITING, AND OCCASION

Before we read any kind of written communication—whether it’s a text message, email, or book—we want to know who wrote it. Fortunately for Bible readers, most of the sixty-six books in the Bible name the author right in the book itself. Certain Old Testament historical books and the New Testament book of Hebrews do not name the author, leaving biblical scholars only to make educated guesses. But hey, Bible nerds need *something* to do, right?

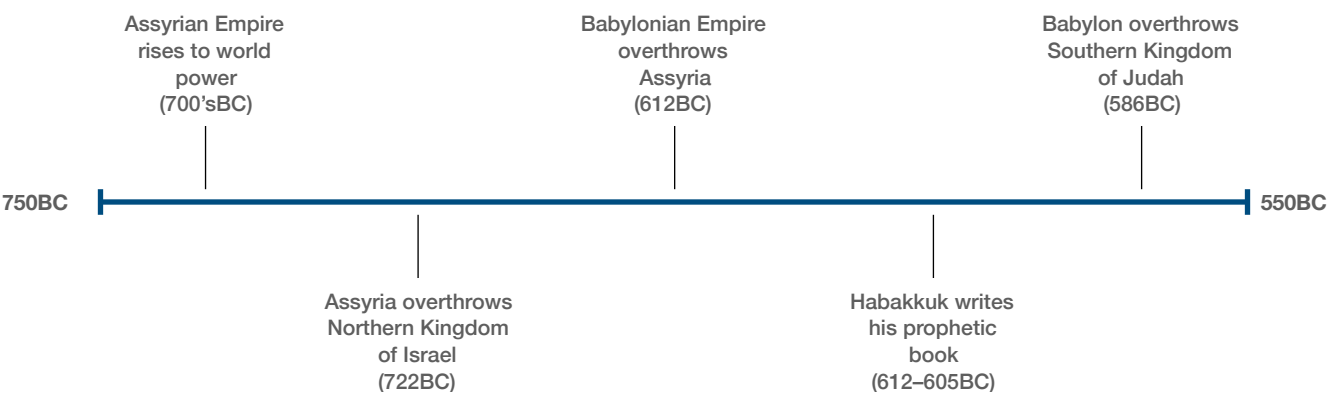
Author: The Prophet Habakkuk. All twelve of the Minor Prophets name the author directly in the opening verses of the book. Habakkuk stands out among the Minor Prophets in that his introduction is very brief (Hab 1:1) compared to the others in the Book of the Twelve. For example, the book of Zephaniah gives us the prophet’s family lineage (Zeph 1:1), Amos’ prophecy is accompanied by a historical date (Amos 1:1), and Jonah is referenced elsewhere in the Bible as a prophet who lived during the time of King Jeroboam II (2 Ki 14:25). We can be sure of two things concerning Habakkuk: (1) that he is certainly the author of the prophetic book bearing his name (1:1; 3:1), and (2) he was a prophet in the Southern Kingdom of Judah who prophesied around the time of Jeremiah and during the the reign of King Josiah (2 Ki 22:1-2). As a prophet, his role was to be a spokesman to Israel on God’s behalf, communicating divine messages of judgement, warning, and encouragement. Essentially, the prophet’s job was to call God’s people back to covenant faithfulness.

Date: 612–605BC. Remember that the Bible is a real book, recording real historical events, written in real time. While most of

the biblical story follows a people group in the isolated region of Palestine, other major world empires were thriving throughout the Near East (i.e. Egypt in Africa, Assyria to the North, Babylon to the East of Palestine). Habakkuk lived during a major power-shift among world empires. Assyria, which rose to power throughout the Near East in the eighth and seventh centuries BC, was weakening and then finally taken out by the mighty Babylonian empire in 612BC. Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar, would eventually carry out judgement on the Southern Kingdom of Judah, taking God’s people as exiles and destroying their city in the years 597BC and 586BC (2 Ki 24:10-17). The emphasis on the Babylonian empire rising to power and their impending invasion into Judah throughout Habakkuk (Hab 1:6-11; 2:6-20) gives us good reason to date the book anywhere from 612–605BC.

Occasion: God’s People in Rebellion. Habakkuk was a faithful Jew who lived during a time of great religious rebellion among God’s people. God had already carried out judgement on the Northern Kingdom for their covenant unfaithfulness just a century prior to Habakkuk’s time. Now the Southern Kingdom of Judah was in moral decline. In Habakkuk’s day, Judah instituted Baal worship, practiced child sacrifice, and neglected the temple under the leadership of the most evil of the nation’s kings. As a prophet, Habakkuk would have called the people to repentance before God. Habakkuk’s book is unique in that it records his conversation with God concerning the state of his people rather than the public call of Israel to repentance (compare with the prophets Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos, who record public ministry among the people).

TIMELINE OF HISTORICAL EVENTS AROUND THE TIME OF HABAKKUK



LITERARY STRUCTURE AND FEATURES

Many great figures throughout history have kept personal journals. Men such as Beethoven and President Washington were rarely seen without their trusty pocketbooks. In many ways, the book of Habakkuk reads like a personal prayer journal. As Habakkuk was communing with God in prayer, God instructed him to “write the vision . . . on tablets” (Hab 2:2). In other words, Habakkuk put his prayer to paper. Think about how incredible this is. We have the prayer journal of a fellow God-worshipper, dated to around 600BC, translated to English, preserved through history, and in our Bibles! Throughout the book, we see Habakkuk experience all kinds of emotions as he wrestles with God on his faith journey. From frustration (1:2-4), to questioning (1:12-13), to real worship before a great and good God (3:17-19), Habakkuk processes his grief and confidently rejoices on the pages of his journal.

Like the Psalms, Habakkuk is written as Hebrew poetry. Unlike English poetry, which mainly uses rhyming in form, Hebrew poetry uses a literary device called *parallelism*, or language pairing. In poetic language pairing, the author will essentially communicate

the same message in two different ways to make for the reader a more concrete mental picture. Look at this example from Habakkuk 3:12:

“You marched through the earth in fury; you threshed the nations in anger.”

In classic Hebrew poetic form, Habakkuk says the same thing in two different ways to give the reader two ways to think about one central truth. As you read Habakkuk, make note of how language pairing strengthens your understanding of the book’s message.

OUTLINE OF HABAKKUK

- I. Habakkuk’s First Complaint (1:1-4)
 - A. God’s Response (1:5-11)
- II. Habakkuk’s Second Complaint (1:12-2:1)
 - B. God’s Response (2:2-20)
- III. Habakkuk’s Prayer & Praise (3:1-19)

THEOLOGICAL THEMES

Like any good book or movie, as you read Habakkuk you will see certain themes emerge. These theological themes include truths about God, ourselves, and others and are meant to shape the way we view the world around us. The themes listed here are not exhaustive, but will give you a place to start in your study of Habakkuk.

The Greatness of God. Habakkuk is a study in the attributes, or character qualities, of God. The greatness of God is closely related to the theological doctrine of God’s sovereignty. When we say God is great, or sovereign, we mean that He is the unmatched ruler over the created realm and nothing in the heavens or on the earth is superior to Him. He controls all things, and nothing is outside of His rule. One of the most pointed statements of God’s greatness is found in Isaiah 45:5-7:

*“I am the Lord, and there is no other,
besides me there is no God;
I equip you, though you do not know me,
that people may know, from the rising of the sun*

*and from the west, that there is none besides me;
I am the Lord, and there is no other.
I form light and create darkness;
I make well-being and create calamity;
I am the Lord, who does all these things.”*

In Habakkuk, God is shown to be sovereign over the affairs of nations. He raises up the Babylonians, the most powerful world empire of Habakkuk’s day, to fulfill His purposes (Hab 1:6). God orchestrates the nations. All rulers and leaders are subject to God and God alone. The theme of God’s greatness in Habakkuk should give the Christian great comfort. We serve a God who is over all things. God’s plan, not evil, will prevail in the end (Hab 2:3).

The Goodness of God. God is not only great, He is also good. If God is great but not good, He is nothing more than a power-hungry deity. If God is good but not great, He is robbed of His power and is no god at all. God is great and good. He loves His people and is rich in mercy and patience.

THEOLOGICAL THEMES CONTINUED

As Habakkuk brought his frustration to God in prayer, he knew God was great and confessed it (Hab 1:12). By the end of the book, however, Habakkuk was a changed man. Habakkuk not only knew of God's greatness, but personally experienced God's goodness (Hab 3:17-19). This transformed him. The closing verses of the book give us one of the clearest glimpses into the goodness of God in all the Bible. The theme of God's goodness in Habakkuk should lead the Christian to worship. Despite the evil in the world around us, despite the pain and suffering we experience, God is the strength and salvation of His people.

The Justice of God. One of the central qualities of God which Habakkuk calls into question is the justice, or fairness, of God. When Habakkuk cries out to God because of His apparent silence in the midst evil (Hab 1:1-4), God responds by sharing His plan to raise up the mighty Babylonian empire to bring judgement on the evil of His own people, Judah (Hab 1:5-11). The question of God's justice in Habakkuk is essentially this: How can a just God use Babylon (the archetype of biblical evil) to carry out judgement on Judah (which is presumably less evil)? God plans to use Babylon as an instrument of judgement on His people, then will judge

Babylon as responsible for the actions He ordained the nation to commit. Confused? So was Habakkuk. God's ways are higher than ours, and His plans often are beyond our understanding. Like Habakkuk, the Christian is called to "live by his faith" even when we don't fully understand God's work in the world (Hab 2:4).

Living by Faith. It could be argued that Habakkuk 2:4 is the theme verse of the entire book, and even the entire biblical story. The Apostle Paul quotes Habakkuk directly two times in the New Testament (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11) and makes numerous references to the theme elsewhere in his letters. The New Testament author of Hebrews also quotes the famous faith passage (Heb 10:38-39). This faith God commends to His people in Habakkuk is a relational trust. Like a couple in marriage who vows to remain faithful to one another through all circumstances, so too are God's people called to continue trusting in God's promises amidst suffering. Further, Habakkuk 2:4 looks forward to Jesus Christ, in whom all people are to place their faith and in whom all of God's Word and work is fulfilled and embodied (Eph 2:4-8; 2 Cor 1:20).

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

If you're wanting to go deeper in your study of Habakkuk, the ESV Study Bible by Crossway is a great resource with scholarly notes, full-color maps, and other study tools. The Bible Project is also a great resource for biblical study. The Bible Project is a non-profit digital animation studio that makes videos exploring the books and major themes of the Bible. You can watch "Habakkuk" and more at thebibleproject.com.