

Commentary on Habakkuk Chapters 1 and 2 by Chuck Smith 6.19.24

Pastor John Donovan, cell phone 508-380-0471

Pastor Terry Gerlarneau, cell phone 603-455-4399

Web site todbc.org email us at opendoorbiblechurch@todbc.org

May memory verse Romans 6:8 (NKJV)

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

June memory verse Romans 6:9 (NKJV)

knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more.

Death no longer has dominion over Him.

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Includes John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions - Habakkuk

Very little is known concerning the personal background of Habakkuk. We don't know really anything about his background. There are indications from the book itself that he was of a priestly family, perhaps one of the priests in Israel. He addresses the last chapter, which is a psalm, he addresses it to, "the chief singer on my stringed instrument." And that was usually the place of the priests, whom God had called for the purpose of providing music in the temple. So Habakkuk could've been just one of the temple priests.

The time of his prophecy is not declared, as so often at the beginning of a prophecy the prophet will declare, "Who prophesied during the reigns of Josiah, and Jehoiakim," and so forth. He doesn't tell us the time of his prophesies. But, again, from the prophecy itself, from the book itself, we realize that there is a great spiritual decline and the impending invasion of Babylon. Many put the prophecy during the reign of Josiah, however, during the reign of Josiah there was more or less a spiritual revival in Judah. After the evil, wicked reign of Manasseh, Josiah came along and instituted many spiritual reforms. The discovery again of the law of God, the instituting again of the Passover festivals, and there was a great spiritual revival under Josiah.

In chapter 1, Habakkuk is complaining against the tremendous spiritual decline, and thus, probably towards the end of the reign of Josiah, and then, of course, the reign of Jehoiachin and Jehoiakim. It is in the final period of the national deterioration prior to falling to Babylon. And, of course, Habakkuk is prophesying of Babylon's coming invasion and being used as a rod of God to punish God's people.

Chapter 1

The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see ([Hab 1:1](#)).

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It begins with a cry unto the Lord. Now Habakkuk had a very beautiful and close relationship with God. The word *Habakkuk* means embracer, and Habakkuk embraced the Lord and was embraced by the Lord. So he begins with a prayer unto the Lord.

O LORD, how long shall I cry, and you will not hear! even cry out unto you of the violence, and you do not save! Why do you show me iniquity, and cause me to behold these grievances? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are those that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment never goes forth: for the wicked encompass the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceeds (Hab 1:2-4).

So the complaint against God because of the deteriorating conditions of the country, the land. It seems as though the stem of evil, or the tide of evil, is not being stemmed by God. "Lord, how long will I cry to You of these things that are taking place, and You don't answer, You don't hear, You don't respond? God, there's such a horrible deterioration in the land. There is such moral corruption. There's such an overwhelming tide of evil, and the whole nation is just going down so rapidly. God, You don't seem to be doing anything about it. We pray; we cry unto You, but it seems like evil is prevailing, and that the evil persons are prevailing. As the result, righteous judgment no longer proceeds."

The effect of the moral declension of the nation is reflected in the judicial system. So that the law is slacked and judgment does not go forth. I think of things that are going on in our own area here. I am deeply concerned for the judicial system.

I was reading where this big drug bust in Newport Beach recently where a million dollars worth of cocaine was recovered from a house up in Spy Glass Hill. Though they found the cocaine there and everything else, they did not have a proper reason to search them. Therefore, they've been dismissed and are now scott free, out buying more drugs, and back into their trade.

Something's wrong with the judicial system that releases known criminals who have even confessed their crimes, but just because of a failure to inform them of their rights before their confession, they're allowed to go free. Or because they were accomplices together in the murder, and though they admitted, both of them, to being involved, each one said the other one did it. And because they can't testify against each other in such a case, they let them both go free. There's something wrong. The law is slack; judgment does not go forth. That is a mark of a declining moral state, a weakness of a nation.

"The wicked compass about the righteous." It would seem that the humanistic, liberal concepts are being embraced by the majority of the people. That those who would dare to stand up for morality and righteousness and pure living are considered as archaic, Victorian, and all of the other names that they call it.

So the prophet Habakkuk sees all these things. He cries out unto the Lord, but it seems like God isn't doing anything about it. It seems like things are just getting worse, there's

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no change. It seems like their nation is just sliding down more rapidly all the time. So he is distraught. He says, "Lord, I'd just as soon You not show me anything else."

I've really gotten to that place almost myself. Someone came up this morning and said they now have X-rated radio in several of the major cities of the United States. Some radio stations have gone to what they call X-rated programming, in which they use all kinds of filthy language and get into all kinds of filthy type of stories and everything else. It says that they are such a tremendous success and have such a large listening audience among the young people, that it's about the greatest success story that's come in radio for a long time, X-rated radio.

I said, "Lord, please don't let me know anything else. I can't take it. Lord, this whole corrupt system seems to be getting worse all the time, and You're not doing anything about it."

"Lord, I cried unto You," he said. "How long shall I cry and You don't seem to hear me?" So the Lord responded to Habakkuk, verse 5, and He said,

Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days, which you will not believe, though it be told you ([Hab 1:5](#)).

Now the prophet was saying, "God, please don't show me anything else, because the whole thing is deteriorating so rapidly, and You're doing nothing about it." God in essence responded, "I am doing something. I am working. I'm doing a work in your day, and if it were told to you, you wouldn't believe it." The prophet more or less said, "Try me." And so the Lord went on. He said,

For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every stronghold; for they shall heap dust, and take it. Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god ([Hab 1:6-11](#)).

So the Lord said, "I am working, and what I am doing is I am gathering together the Babylonian nations, the Chaldeans, and they are going to come with their swift army. They are going to move through the breadth of this land and conquer it, and destroy the houses of these people."

So he predicts the impending invasion and victory of Babylon over Judah. But then he says when they have conquered, then they are gonna make a mistake, and they are

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going to attribute the fact that they had been able to conquer Judah to their god being superior to the God of Israel.

Now when God revealed His plan to Habakkuk to use the evil nation of Babylon as an instrument to bring defeat to God's people, to destroy their land, it was true, Habakkuk couldn't believe it. As God said, "I am working, but if it were told to you, you wouldn't believe it." Habakkuk answers God. In his answer to God, he again expresses his not understanding the ways of God. He said,

Are you not from everlasting (Hab 1:12),

Have you not always existed?

O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, thou hast said (Hab 1:12)

That is, as a nation surely we will not die.

O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou has established them for correction. But Lord, you are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and you cannot look on iniquity (Hab 1:12-13):

Very interesting verses. God is of purer eyes than to behold evil. That is, to behold in the sense of approval. "You cannot look upon iniquity with approval."

Now the prophet has a problem. "Lord, You are of pure eyes to behold evil, You cannot look upon iniquity,"

how come, Lord, you're looking on those who deal treacherously [That is, the Babylonians], and you hold your tongue when the wicked devours the man that is more righteous than he? (Hab 1:13)

What the prophet is basically saying is, "Hey, God, we are bad, I recognize that. But they are worse than we are. I don't understand, Lord, why You would use a nation that is even more corrupt than we are to judge us, or to bring judgment on us. I don't understand this." Speaking of the Babylonians, he said,

They make men as the fish of the sea, as creeping things, that have no ruler over them. They take up all of them with their hooks, and they catch them with their nets, and they gather them with their drag: and therefore they rejoice and are glad. Then they sacrifice unto their nets, and burn incense to their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous. Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations? (Hab 1:14-17)

"God, I don't understand why You would use the Babylonians. They're pagans; they are idolaters. They are like fishermen, who, after they have taken a great multitude of fish, they then offer sacrifices to their nets, burn incense to them and all, and they're

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worshiping the wrong god. They're not worshiping You. Why would You prosper them? Why would You allow them to have victory? Why would You allow them to have such great spoil?" In other words, "Why would You bless the ungodly and prosper the ungodly?"

Chapter 2

So the prophet declares,

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, I will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd (Hab 2:1).

He knew that he had said too much, and yet, sometimes we don't understand God. And sometimes we say things in our emotional fervor, where we're sort of challenging God, and then all of a sudden, "Ooh I've gone too far. I'll just go to the tower and wait to see what God has to say to me in reprov'ing me for the things that I've said." Go up in the tower and wait. "God, I cried unto You. I told You I didn't understand why You weren't working. You said You're working, and I wouldn't understand it, and God, I don't understand it. Why would You use the Babylonians? They're more evil than we are. I'm just gonna go and sit in the tower, and I'm gonna wait and see what You have to say." So the Lord answered in verse 2.

And he said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it (Hab 2:2).

Now notice, "he may run that readeth it," not that he that readeth it may run, but, "he may run that readeth it." That is, "Write the vision; make it plain so that when people read it, they will run to share it with others."

For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie (Hab 2:3):

Now it's gonna happen; it's gonna happen in its appointed time.

and though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry (Hab 2:3).

Now the vision for the appointed time is really looking down to the time of the coming of the Messiah. "And though it tarry," he said, "wait for it, because He will surely come and not tarry." The church has been waiting for Jesus to come for almost two thousand years of man's time.

Behold, his soul which is lifted up [the Lord says] is not upright in him (Hab 2:4):

Again, this thing of pride, any man whose soul... of course, it was probably directed at Nebuchadnezzar who was the leader of Babylon when they conquered over the land and fulfilled this prophecy. Then old Nebuchadnezzar lifted up with pride, going around,

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parading around the city of Babylon, that fabulous city, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, enjoying these hanging gardens and all. The watchers watching from heaven gave a warning to him. He came to Daniel, and he said, "I had this weird dream, and I want you to tell me what it's all about. I saw this tree, it grew up and it was mighty, and all the birds were lodging in it, and then someone came and cut the tree down." He said, "I heard them say, 'Cut it down.' And the tree was cut to the ground, but then new branches began to grow out of the roots. What does it mean Daniel?"

He said, "Oh Nebuchadnezzar, it's a bad dream. Your enemies are gonna rejoice when they hear this, because you have become great; your kingdom is great and covering the earth, and all of the people have found refuge in your kingdom. But pride has lifted up in your heart, and the watchers from heaven, when they have seen that pride, they've ordered, 'Cut the tree down.' You're gonna be cut down, but yet you'll begin to grow again. Oh Nebuchadnezzar. Hey, man, take it easy. Walk softly before the Lord. Walk carefully; don't let this pride take over."

For about a year old Nebuchadnezzar walked softly. As he was walking in that city of Babylon looking around, he said, "Is this not the great Babylon that I have built?" The watchers from heaven said, "That's it, cut him down." He went insane. So here is sort of a little warning, "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him."

Now Nebuchadnezzar, after this experience of insanity and living with the animals until seven seasons were passed over him, as again his mental faculties were restored to him, he made a very interesting proclamation in which he acknowledges much of what the Lord had already said. He declared in coming out of this mad state, "And at the end of the days," that is, of my madness, "I, Nebuchadnezzar lifted up my eyes unto heaven, and my understanding returned to me. I became sane again, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored Him that lives forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All of the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing. And He does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, 'What are You doing?' And at the same time my reason returned unto me, for the glory of my kingdom, and my honor, and my brightness returned unto me, and my counselors and my lords sought unto me, and I was established in my kingdom. An excellent majesty was added to me, now I, Nebuchadnezzar praise, extol, and honor the King of heaven, whose works are truth, and His ways are judgment. And those," notice, "that walk in pride, He is able to abase" ([Daniel 4:34-37](#)).

Before this ever happened to Nebuchadnezzar, Habakkuk had warned in the prophecy, "Behold his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him," but then in contrast,

the just shall live by faith ([Hab 2:4](#)).

Herein is a glorious truth of God that is proclaimed three times over in the New Testament. "The just shall live by faith." Justification through faith in Jesus Christ. Justification through the principal of faith and not of works.

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Yea also, [the prophet declares] because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither he keeps at home, who enlarges his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathers unto him all nations, and heaps unto him all people (Hab 2:5):

Shall not all of these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay! Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be booties unto them? (Hab 2:6-7)

"You've conquered Babylon, you've taken the land, you've taken the prey. You're never satisfied. You're always wanting more. You've got more than you could possibly spend, but you're not satisfied. But one day you yourself will become a prey."

Because thou hast spoiled many nations, and all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein. Woe to him that coveteth with an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil! Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, you've sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it. Woe to him that builds a town with blood, and establishes a city by iniquity! Behold, it is not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labor in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for the very vanity? For the earth (Hab 2:8-14)

And, of course, he speaks, and this is all directed to Babylon and to their conquering, and to subsequent nations that would seek to gain by war, and to conquer by war, and to subdue others, and to use bloodshed and iniquity to establish themselves. But then verse 14 speaks of a glorious day that is coming.

For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14).

Now the Lord pronounces a

Woe unto those that would give his neighbor a drink, giving him a bottle, to make him drunk, so that he can behold his nakedness! Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, that you might be uncovered: the cup of the LORD'S right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be your glory (Hab 2:15-16).

You'll vomit all over yourself, and let that be your glory.

For the violence of Lebanon (Hab 2:17)

That is, the way they violently destroyed Lebanon. "The violence that you exercised against Lebanon," and of course Babylon, when they took the city of Tyre there in Lebanon, just destroyed it so utterly.

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and the spoil of the beasts, which made them afraid, because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein. What profiteth the graven image (Hab 2:17-18)

Now, remember the mistake of Babylon was that they were going to attribute their victory to their gods, though God was using them and allowed them to be His instrument to bring judgment against His people, they in turn were going to mistake it as a victory of their gods, and going to worship their gods.

So here the prophet speaks about the graven images that they were worshiping in Babylon. "And what profiteth the graven image,"

that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols? (Hab 2:18)

That is, idols that can't speak. The carving out of an idol as an object of worship has to be one of the most stupid things that man has ever done in his history. Isaiah speaks of the utter stupidity of it. The guy takes a piece of wood, and he starts to carve an idol out of that piece of wood. Now the chips that he carves off, he throws into the fire and burns to keep him warm. Other parts of this piece of wood he uses in his oven to bake his bread. The other part he sets it on a table and he bows down and prays to it and worships it. Same piece of wood. Part of it was used in the fireplace to keep him warm, part in the oven to bake his bread, and the other part of it is his god that he worships, that he gives homage to. How ridiculous.

Then he makes a very interesting observation, and he said, "They that have made them have become like unto the gods that they have made." You see, the first observation is that men have to have a god, and many men make their own gods. But when a man makes a god, he makes his god like himself. The anthropomorphic concepts. Because I have eyes, I put eyes on my little god. Because I have ears, I carve ears on the little god. Because I have a nose, I carve a little nose. Because I have feet, I carve the feet. Because I don't have any hair, I leave him bald. But though I may take great care in carving out the eyes on my little god, those eyes never do see anything. Though I carve a mouth on my little god, the mouth can't speak. Though I may carve feet on it, it can't walk. It's a dumb little idol.

But tragically, a man becomes like his god. If your god is a dumb stupid little idol, you are becoming like your god. Insensate, where soon you no longer hear the voice of God; you no longer see the glory of God; you no longer feel the presence of God. You've become like your gods, insensate to God. A man becomes like his god. That can be a glorious blessing, or a glorious, I mean a horrible curse. It all depends on who your god is. A man becomes like his god. "And we with open face beholding the glory of the Lord are changed from glory to glory, even into the same image by the power of His Spirit within us" (II Corinthians 3:18). Hey, I'm becoming like my God. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God. It doesn't yet appear what we're gonna be, but we know when He appears we're going to be like Him, for we will see Him as He is" (I John 3:2).

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You see, you have two things. You have one, a man making his god less than himself, and becoming like his god. That's why idolatry is always a debasing, degrading experience. You're going down anytime you get involved in idolatry. It's a step down, because if an idol is your god, you're becoming like your god, but your god is actually less than you. Because you have eyes and can see; you have ears and can hear; you have a mouth, and you can talk. See, your god is less than you, but you're becoming like your god. So it is a degrading experience always, downward experience to worship idols.

But to worship the true and the living God, you see, God is making man now back again into His image, into His likeness. God is restoring that which was lost through the fall. Through the power of His Spirit within us, He is bringing us back into the image of God. When God made man, He made him in the image of God. When man fell through sin, he came from that image of God, he went down. Now God is remolding and reshaping you back into the image of God, back into God's first intent and purpose. God's purposes are being restored in the lives of His people.

But he speaks of the folly of these who make these dumb little idols,

Woe unto him that says to the wood, Awake ([Hab 2:19](#));

Wake up little god. Talk to me.

who says to the dumb stone, Arise, teach me! Behold it is laid over with gold and silver, but there is no breath at all ([Hab 2:19](#)).

It can't breathe.

But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him ([Hab 2:20](#)).

Contrast with the gods of stone overlaid with gold, or wood overlaid with silver or gold. They can't speak, they can't breathe, but the living God is in His holy temple.

John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions - Habakkuk

Title This prophetic book takes its name from its author and possibly means “one who embraces” ([1:1](#); [3:1](#)). By the end of the prophecy, this name becomes appropriate as the prophet clings to God regardless of his confusion about God’s plans for his people.

Author and Date As with many of the Minor Prophets, nothing is known about the prophet except that which can be inferred from the book. In the case of Habakkuk, internal information is virtually nonexistent, making conclusions about his identity and life conjectural. His simple introduction as “the prophet Habakkuk” may imply that he needed no introduction since he was a well known prophet of his day. It is certain that he was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zephaniah.

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The mention of the Chaldeans ([1:6](#)) suggests a late seventh century B.C. date, shortly before Nebuchadnezzar commenced his military march through Nineveh (612 B.C.), Haran (609 B.C.), and Carchemish (605 B.C.), on his way to Jerusalem (605 B.C.). Habakkuk's bitter lament ([1:2-4](#)) may reflect a time period shortly after the death of Josiah (609 B.C.), days in which the godly king's reforms (cf. [2 Kin. 23](#)) were quickly overturned by his successor, Jehoiakim ([Jer. 22:13-19](#)).

Background and Setting Habakkuk prophesied during the final days of the Assyrian Empire and the beginning of Babylonia's world rulership under Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar. When Nabopolassar ascended to power in 626 B.C., he immediately began to expand his influence to the N and W. Under the leadership of his son, the Babylonian army overthrew Nineveh in 612 B.C., forcing the Assyrian nobility to take refuge first in Haran and then Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar pursued them, overrunning Haran in 609 B.C. and Carchemish in 606 B.C.

The Egyptian king Necho, traveling through Judah in 609 B.C. to assist the fleeing Assyrian king, was opposed by King Josiah at Megiddo ([2 Chr. 35:20-24](#)). Josiah was killed in the ensuing battle, leaving his throne to a succession of 3 sons and a grandson. Earlier, as a result of discovering the Book of the Law in the temple (622 B.C.), Josiah had instituted significant spiritual reforms in Judah ([2 Kin. 22, 23](#)), abolishing many of the idolatrous practices of his father Amon ([2 Kin. 21:20-22](#)) and grandfather Manasseh ([2 Kin. 21:11-13](#)). Upon his death, however, the nation quickly reverted to her evil ways (cf. [Jer. 22:13-19](#)), causing Habakkuk to question God's silence and apparent lack of punitive action ([1:2-4](#)) to purge His covenant people.

Historical and Theological Themes The opening verses reveal a historical situation similar to the days of Amos and Micah. Justice had essentially disappeared from the Land; violence and wickedness were pervasive, existing unchecked. In the midst of these dark days, the prophet cried out for divine intervention ([1:2-4](#)). God's response, that He was sending the Chaldeans to judge Judah ([1:5-11](#)), creates an even greater theological dilemma for Habakkuk: Why didn't God purge His people and restore their righteousness? How could God use the Chaldeans to judge a people more righteous than they ([1:12-2:1](#))? God's answer that He would judge the Chaldeans also ([2:2-20](#)), did not fully satisfy the prophet's theological quandary; in fact, it only intensified it. In Habakkuk's mind, the issue crying for resolution is no longer God's righteous response toward evil (or lack thereof), but the vindication of God's character and covenant with His people ([1:13](#)). Like Job, the prophet argued with God, and through that experience he achieved a deeper understanding of God's sovereign character and a firmer faith in Him (cf. [Job 42:5, 6](#); [Is. 55:8, 9](#)). Ultimately, Habakkuk realized that God was not to be worshiped merely because of the temporal blessings He bestowed, but for His own sake ([3:17-19](#)).