

Reading Guide for Habakkuk

Superscription (1:1)

I. Dialogue Between Habakkuk and Yahweh (1:2-2:20)

The first two chapters consist of a set of two complaint/response dialogues between God and Habakkuk (similar to Jer. 11:18-12:6 and 15:10-21) followed by a collection of five woe oracles.

A. Complaint and Response (1:2-11)

Habakkuk's Complaint (1:2-4)

The book begins with a short but powerful prayer from Habakkuk to God in the form of a complaint. Habakkuk feels that God is unconcerned and unfeeling regarding the evil around him. Additionally, the prophet questions God's administration of justice since the rampant violence and wickedness are seemingly left unpunished.

Divine Response (1:5-11)

The Lord's response reveals that He is not unaware of the injustice and evil in the land. In fact, God is preparing judgment upon Judah using the Chaldeans (i.e. the Babylonians) as his instrument to do so.

B. Complaint and Response (1:12-2:5)

Habakkuk's Complaint (1:12-2:1)

The prophet responds to God with more questions, namely, how God can use an even more wicked nation like Babylon to punish Judah. Habakkuk knows the Lord is everlasting, pure, and holy, yet how can he look on while the wicked swallow up a more righteous nation? Habakkuk knows that God created humanity like fish, yet Babylon will become as merciless fisherman, conquering not only Judah, but all nations. Habakkuk has no choice but to sit and wait for an answer to these questions.

Divine Response (2:2-5)

The Lord's response to the prophet is an assurance that Babylon will be punished, but only until the appointed time—first they must serve their purpose. As for Habakkuk, he must wait patiently, trusting in God's redemptive plan and the eventual vindication of the righteous.

C. Five Woe Oracles (2:6-20)

These five woe oracles clarify and affirm God's judgment not only on Babylon, but on all the wicked of the earth. Like Habakkuk, we are to trust in God and wait faithfully for our vindication.

1. Woe to Those Who Plunder: They Will Be Plundered (2:6-8)
2. Woe to Those Who Greedily Seek Security: They Will Be Found Out (2:9-11)
3. Woe to Those Who Build Up by Violence: They Will Be Overcome by Righteousness (2:12-14)
4. Woe to Those Who Shame Others: They Will Be Shamed (2:15-17)
5. Woe to Those Who Make Silent Idols: They Will Be Silenced (2:18-20)

II. A Prayer of Faith and Trust (3:1-19)

The second part of the book is a hymn that brings resolution to Habakkuk's earlier complaints. When he calls to mind God's awesome power and past victories, it causes him to shudder in fear. He resolves to wait patiently for God's vindication despite the current hardships.

1. Superscription (3:1)
2. Petition (3:2)
3. God's Past Judgments and Victories (3:3-15)
4. Response: Waiting for Future Vindication (3:16-19a)
5. Subscription (3:19b)