

# STUDIES IN THE MINOR PROPHETS

The Book of *Habakkuk*

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HABAKKUK  
THE PROPHET OF FAITH (Hab 2<sup>4</sup> → Ro 1<sup>7</sup> Ga 3<sup>11</sup> Hb 10<sup>38</sup>)

**HABAKKUK** "Ardent Embrace" (embracer, wrestler, to cling) - a man of faith.  
Contemporary of Jeremiah. Has been called the "Freethinker among the Prophets," and the "Father of Israel's Religious doubt."

**HOME:** Unknown, although generally assumed to have worked and lived in Jerusalem. One of the Levitical Choristers (3:19).

**DATE:** 612 - 605 BC. The historical background is found in 2 Kings 22:1-24:16; 2 Chronicles 34:1-36:10.

**THEME:** Punishment of Judah and Babylon. Tyranny, strife and lawlessness were prevalent in Judah. *Habakkuk could not square his faith in a good and righteous God with the facts of life as he saw them.*

**MESSAGE:** Habakkuk experienced a particular disturbing problem. He saw the prosperity of Babylon, and its great measure of sin. All around he saw injustice, oppression and suffering of all his own people at the hands of Babylon. He was perplexed in the "inactivity" of God in this respect. He posed questions to God. He received the following answer: "Though evil seems to prosper for a while, the righteous alone have permanent life." Habakkuk differs from his predecessors in that the former prophets had addressed the people FOR God, but in this work, God is addressed ON THE PART of the people. *The door of evil and entrance is Habakkuk 2:4. The questions are TO God - not against God.*

**CHARACTERISTICS:**

Strongly lyrical character, pre-eminent for its literary beauty. The style is nearer the Psalms than any other prophetic writing. the book opens in gloom and closes in glory. It opens in mystery and questioning, and closes in certainty and affirmation. It is remarkable for its moral and spiritual insight.

**VERSES TO MARK:**

1:2,4,13; 2:3,4,8,12,14,20

**KEY WORDS:**

"Why" "Woe" "Wait"

**OUTLINE:**

Sign of the Prophet (1:2)  
Silence of the Prophet (2:20)  
Song of the Prophet (3:18)

**LESSONS:**

God can be trusted (in every crisis and circumstance)  
The "short" view is apt to be the false view (in the overall perspective, only the righteous prosper)  
We may see and understand God only when we rise above doubt  
We are to address our problems to God, and not against Him  
Evil is self-destructive

## **HABAKKUK: A Teaching Outline**

- . The Questions of Habakkuk** 1:1—2:20
  - A. The First Question** 1:1-4
  - B. God's First Reply** 1:5-11
  - C. The Second Question of Habakkuk** 1:12—2:1
  - D. God's Second Reply** 2:2-20
- I. The Praise of Habakkuk** 3
  - A. Habakkuk Prays for God's Mercy** 3:1-2
  - B. Habakkuk Remembers God's Mercy** 3:3-15
  - C. Habakkuk Trusts in God's Salvation** 3:16-19

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The value of the prophets to us is that the problems and principles discussed are still with us. (Romans 15:4).

**THE PROPHET'S PERPLEXITY (1:2-4).** "How long?" Why hasn't God done something? Why does He let such evil go on unchecked?

Whether we are looking at society at large, or at a certain individual, why does God appear to let evil prevail?

God's answer is that punishment is on the way. It may sometimes appear that God is doing nothing, but He always acts in due time.

**THE PROPHET'S PROTEST (1:12-17).** He could not understand how God could use a nation worse than they were. "How can God use a nation deserving of punishment than we are?" Such situations are always hard to accept.

"I just don't see how God who is so good and just can do this."

**THE PROPHET'S PATIENCE (2:1-4).** He did not delve into human philosophy, instead he would patiently wait for God's answer.

Most of us think we need to explain everything. When people ask, "Why did this happen?" we think we are obligated to propose an answer.

God showed him that He would give an answer in due time.

**THE PROPHET'S PRAYER (3:1,2).** "Shigionath" - emotional strain. He neither doubts God, nor the justice of what God would do; but he prays for mercy. This is life's constant need.

**THE PROPHET'S PERSUASION (3:17-19).** This is one of the strongest statements of faith in the Bible. No matter what happens he would count on God.

Thus, we have the prophet's progress from perplexity to persuasion, for uncertainty to certainty, from dismay to steadfast conviction.

## **SILENCE BEFORE GOD**

**THE SILENCE OF REVERENCE.** When we consider God as we should our minds will silence the "noise" of mundane activity as we feel the awe of His greatness. The emphasis is on the attitude of heart.

**THE SILENCE OF TRUST.** Faith is tested when circumstances suggest reasons for doubt and when burdens are heavy. My failure to grasp the purposes of His providence will not keep me from trusting His love and power.

**THE SILENCE OF SUBMISSION.** Sometimes we "talk back to God." How could any presume to argue with Him? The person who says, "I can't see..." or "I don't think..." needs to consider this verse.

**CONCLUSION:** The great need of our age is for men to respect that God is still God, and we are only His creatures.

Complaint of violence, destruction  
And contention (1-4)

Hab 1:1

"The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received."

Reply To The Prophet (5-11)

1. Raising up Chaldeans for judgment
2. Describes their character and Fierceness

Hab 1:2

"How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not save?"

INDICATES A REPLY IN ACTION

WRONG EXERCISED BY MEN ON THEIR FELLOWS

The Prophet Is Still Perplexed (12-17)

1. Second Complaint
2. "How can God use these people?"

Hab 1:3

"Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong?"

Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict  
abounds."

"HOW CAN GOD LOOK WITHOUT PUNISHING IT?"

Hab 1:4

"Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted."

Hab 1:5

"Look at the nations and watch-- and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told."

IT IS ALWAYS DIFFICULT FOR MEN TO SEE WHAT IS AT HAND

Hab 1:6

GOD'S SELECTION

"I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own."

Hab 1:7

FIERCE DISPOSITION

"They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor."

SELF-WILLED

Hab 1:8

RAPIDITY WITH WHICH THEY STRIKE

"Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like a vulture swooping to devour;"

VORACIOUSLY DEVOUR

Hab 1:9

"they all come bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand."

Hab 1:10

"They deride kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; they build earthen ramps and capture them."

Hab 1:11

"Then they sweep past like the wind and go on-- guilty men, whose own strength is their god."

Hab 1:12

"O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish."

TWO INFINITE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

FOUNDATION OF HOPE  
FORTRESS FOR REFUGE

Hab 1:13

"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?"

DEPRAVED AND GODLESS

AN INVARIABLE LAW OF GOD:

"THE RIGHTEOUS MUST SUFFER  
ALONG WITH THE GUILTY."

Hab 1:14

"You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler."

Hab 1:15

"The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad."

TOTALITY OF HIS CONQUEST

Hab 1:16

"Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food."

WORSHIP THEIR OWN POWER  
MIGHT IS HIS GOD

Hab 1:17

"Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?"

THE QUESTION BEING ASKED FOR CENTURIES  
(GOD ANSWERS THE QUESTION IN CHAPTER 2)

THE PROPHET WAITS FOR HIS  
ANSWER FROM GOD (1-3)

Hab 2:1

"I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint."

Hab 2:2

"Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it." *Public Places where People could Read them*

Hab 2:3

"For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay."

Hab 2:4 *DISTORTED BY PRIDE - BLOATED OUT OF PROPORTION*

""See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright-- but the righteous will live by his faith--" *Foundational ARGUMENT of Paul - Ro 1:15-17 GA 3:12 Hb 10:37-39*

Hab 2:5

"indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples." *INTOXICATED BY HIS OWN POWER - INSATISABLE*

Hab 2:6 *THE NATIONS*

""Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying, "Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on?"" *- NOT ANSWERED*

Hab 2:7

"Will not your debtors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their victim."

Hab 2:8

"Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them." *FULFILLED BY CYRUS (Medes / Persians) in 539 BC*

*The verdict because of three fold charge --*  
1. Plundered many nations  
2. Shed men's blood  
3. Destroyed lands + cities

Hab 2:9

""Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin!" *Babylon - huge walls 11 miles Long AND 85' thick*

*Thinks He is impregnable*

Hab 2:10

"You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life."

Hab 2:11

"The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it." *BUILT BY SLAVE LABOR*

Hab 2:12

""Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!" *TO HOLD LIFE AS CHEAP TO BUILD YOUR OWN*

*BUILT BY LABOR OF CONQUERED, subjugated People*



Hab 2:13

"Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?" (vanity)

NO FEELING OF COMPASSION - ONLY GREED

Hab 2:14

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

Hab 2:15

""Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies."

TO STRIP THEM OF THEIR POWER, POSSESSIONS,  
HONOR AND DIGNITY

Hab 2:16

"You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed ! The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory."

Hab 2:17

"The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them."

The Chaldeans held all creation of God  
IN CONTEMPT

Hab 2:18

""Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak."

JR 50<sup>38</sup>

FOR SARCASM OF IDOLS, SEE IS 44<sup>9-20</sup>

Hab 2:19

"Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!' Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it."

Hab 2:20

"But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.""

Ps 11<sup>4</sup>

THIS VERSE IS THE FINAL EXCLAMATION  
OF THE PROPHET IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S  
ANSWER TO HIS PERPLEXITY

Hab 3:1

"A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On *shigionoth*." → (TO REEL; TO STAGGER LIKE A DRUNKEN MAN)  
(IMPASSIONED STRAIN; RAPID CHANGE OF EMOTION COMBINED UNDER STRONG EMOTIONAL PRESSURE)

Hab 3:2

"LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD.  
Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy."

Hab 3:3

"God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah* His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth."

Hab 3:4

"His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden."

Hab 3:5

"Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps."

Hab 3:6

"He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble.  
The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal."

Hab 3:7

"I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish."

Hab 3:8

"Were you angry with the rivers, O LORD? Was your wrath against the streams? Did you rage against the sea when you rode with your horses and your victorious chariots?"

Hab 3:9

"You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows. *Selah* You split the earth with rivers;"

Hab 3:10

"the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its waves on high."

Hab 3:11

"Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear."

Hab 3:12

"In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations."

Hab 3:13

"You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. *Selah*"

Hab 3:14

"With his own spear you pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding."

Hab 3:15

"You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters."

The Prophet looks To THE FUTURE, AND  
RESTS IN THE ASSURANCE OF THE  
Principle, "The Righteous  
shall live by faith!"

Hab 3:16

"I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us."

A CHANGE IN TEMPO

CALMNESS AND FAITH

Hab 3:17

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,"

EVERY AVENUE OF FOOD

Hab 3:18

"yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior."

ONE OF THE GREATEST EXPRESSIONS OF FAITH

Hab 3:19

"The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments."

SWIFT AND SURE

"THE FAITH BY WHICH HE CAME THROUGH  
VICTORIOUS, IS THE FAITH BY WHICH ALL  
WILL TRIUMPH!"

## HABAKKUK, BOOK OF

A short prophetic book of the Old Testament that deals with the ageold problems of evil and human suffering. The book is named for the prophet Habakkuk, who received this message from God in the form of a vision.

**For an outline of the book see Habakkuk**

**Structure of the Book.** Habakkuk's book contains only three short chapters, but they present a striking contrast. In the first two, Habakkuk protests, complains, and questions God. But the final chapter is a beautiful psalm of praise. Habakkuk apparently used this complaining and questioning technique to drive home his powerful message about the approaching judgment of God.

Habakkuk begins his book with a cry of woe. Injustice is rampant, the righteous are surrounded by the wicked, the law is powerless, and God doesn't seem to care about the plight of His people (1:1-4). Habakkuk's prophecy is even introduced as a "burden" which the prophet saw (1:1). He wonders why God is allowing these things to happen.

God's reply brings little comfort to the prophet. He explains that the armies of Babylon are moving throughout the ancient world on a campaign of death and destruction. At the time when Habakkuk received this vision, the Babylonians had already defeated Assyria and Egypt. The implication is that Habakkuk's nation, Judah, will be the next to fall.

The prophet was shocked at the news. He reminded God of His justice and holiness (1:12-13). How could He use the wicked Babylonians to destroy His Chosen People? Surely He realized the sins of His people were as nothing, when compared to the pagan Babylonians (1:13). "Why do you...hold your tongue when the wicked devours one more righteous than he?" he asks (1:13). This direct question indicates Habakkuk's great faith. Only a person very close to God would dare question the purposes of the Almighty so boldly. God assures Habakkuk that the Babylonians will prevail not because they are righteous but because they are temporary instruments of judgment in His hands (2:4). Then he pronounces five burdens of woe against the Babylonians (2:6,9,12,15,19). God will not be mocked; the end of the Babylonians is as certain as the judgment they will bring on Judah. In all of this, God will vindicate His righteous character: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (2:14).

After this assurance, Habakkuk breaks out with the beautiful psalm of praise to God contained in chapter 3. This is one of the greatest testimonies of faith in the Bible.

**Authorship and Date.** Nothing is known about the prophet Habakkuk except his name. But he was surely a sensitive poet as well as a courageous spokesman for God. His little book is a literary masterpiece that points people of all ages to faith in God and His eternal purpose. Since the book speaks of the coming destruction of Judah, it had to be written some time before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC. The most likely time for its composition is probably about 600 BC.

**Historical Setting.** The Book of Habakkuk belongs to that turbulent era in ancient history when the balance of power was shifting from the Assyrians to the Babylonians. Assyria's domination came to an end with the destruction of its capital city, Nineveh, by the invading Babylonians in 612 BC. Less than 20 years after Habakkuk wrote his book, the Babylonians also destroyed Jerusalem and carried the leading citizens of Judah into captivity. God used this pagan nation to punish His Covenant People for their unfaithfulness and worship of false gods.

**Theological Contribution.** The question-and-answer technique of the prophet Habakkuk teaches a valuable lesson about the nature of God. That God allows Himself to be questioned by one of His followers is an indication of His long-suffering mercy and grace.

The theme of God's judgment against unrighteousness also is woven throughout the book. God soon will

punish his wayward people for their transgression, but he also will punish the pagan Babylonians because of their great sin. God always acts in justice. He will not forget mercy while pouring out his wrath (3:2). His judgment will fall on the proud, but the just will live in His faithfulness (2:4). God's acts of judgment are in accord with His holiness, righteousness, and mercy.

***Special Considerations.*** The Protestant Reformation under Martin Luther was influenced by the Book of Habakkuk. Luther's discovery of the biblical doctrine that the just shall live by faith came from his study of the apostle Paul's beliefs in the Books of Romans and Galatians. But Paul's famous declaration, "The just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17), is a direct quotation from Hab 2:4. Thus, in this brief prophetic book, we find the seeds of the glorious gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Also see HABAKKUK.

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## HABAKKUK

## The Prophet of Faith

We know but little about the man Habakkuk except by inference from his book. It is generally assumed that he lived and worked in Jerusalem. We know that he lived in the eventful years at the close of the seventh century before Christ (610-600 B. C.). He could see the passing of Assyria and the coming of Babylonia to the place of supremacy in his world. He probably was an eye witness to the first ravages of Jerusalem by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>1</sup>

This book, with its strongly lyrical character, is preeminent for its literary beauty. The prophet himself, who was one of the Levitical choristers (3:19), had (a style nearer The Psalms in structure than any of the prophetic writings.) Opening in gloom and closing in glory, the best part of the book is made up of a conversation between God and Habakkuk, who has been called "The Prophet of Faith," (2:4 with Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). Yet, somehow Habakkuk could not square his faith in a good and righteous God with the facts of life as he saw them. Hence his "Why?"<sup>2</sup>

## His Times

Again, we find that God is dealing with a faithless, rebellious people. During the reign of Josiah there had been a measure of restoration, but this had really proven superficial. Now, likely during the reign of Jehoiakim, Judah had again returned to their pernicious ways. If Habakkuk prophesied about 600 B. C. he lived under

King Jehoiakim. The pious and well-meaning Josiah had been slain in an attempt to stop the advance of Egypt against Assyria. With his death the brief era of reform came to an end. After a reign of three months, Jehoahaz was deposed by Pharaohnecho, who placed Jehoiakim on the throne. The latter was selfish, tyrannical and godless. In a short time the deplorable conditions of Manasseh's reign returned. It was this situation that caused the prophet's first perplexity: "O Jehovah, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear? I cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save" (1:2).<sup>3</sup>

This book of prophecy is here presented as a single literary composition which may be entitled, "A Rhapsody of the Chaldeans." The historical situation needs no further defining than the recognition of the political horizon of the Chaldeans as a world power trampling down the nations. To the pious Israelite the first suggestion this brings is of a power for judgment on the unpunished sin around him. But the reflecting prophet sees a further mystery: How can a righteous God use an impious conqueror for the punishment of sin less wicked than his own? The divinely given solution of this problem is the same thought which Jeremiah expresses by calling Babylon the "hammer" of God (50:23), an instrument of providence for the destruction of evil, to be itself destroyed when its work is done.<sup>4</sup>

#### The Book

In this book we have a man of faith asking questions and receiving answers. A comparison of 1:2 with 3:19 will give an indi-

cation of the true value of this book. Opening in mystery and questioning, it closes in certainty and affirmation. The contrast is startling. The first is almost a wail of despair, and the last is a shout of confidence. From the affirmation of faith's agnosticism we come to the confirmation of agnosticism's faith. The book is a movement from one to the other. The door of exit and entrance is 2:4. The former part is a pathway leading thereto, and the latter is the highway leading therefrom.<sup>5</sup>

The book opens with the prophet in perplexity over the mystery of unpunished evil in the world.

The first two chapters are mainly composed of a dialogue between Habakkuk and Jehovah:

(1) The prophet complains to God that he sees sinful violence on every hand, yet no punishment is visited upon the evildoers, 1:1-4.

(2) He receives a reply revealing the divine plan of using the Chaldeans as a swift and terrible instrument of judgment upon the wicked nations, 1:5-11.

(3) Still the moral problem is unanswered in the mind of the prophet. How can a holy God use these wicked heathen to waste and continue forever? 1:12-17.

(4) The prophet ascends his watch-tower to look over the world. He receives the reply of Jehovah, and is told the Purpose of God is soon to be fulfilled, and is encouraged to wait for it, 2:1-3. Then follows the sentence that has been a watchword in the church; "but the just shall live by his faith." 2:4.

(5) Content with the new light received, the prophet utters a series of five woes against "the dishonesty" (2:6); "the covetous-



ness (2:9); "the bloody building enterprises" (2:12); "the Debauchery" (2:15), and "the idolatry" (2:18-20) of the great world-power.

(6) Finally he utters a sublime prayer (or psalm of praise), speaking of the majesty and glory of Jehovah and declaring his unwavering trust in the divine plans, ch. 3:1-19.<sup>6</sup>

### His Permanent Teaching

The two facts emphasized by this prophet are the doom which ultimately overtakes the tyrant, and the moral security enjoyed by the righteous. This prophecy is remarkable for its moral and spiritual insight, and its rich and varied beauty of form and expression.<sup>7</sup>

Habakkuk was content to enunciate one single great truth, but one so great that it has since become not only the motto of Judaism but also of evangelical Christianity--the doctrine of justification by faith (2:4). It may be resolved into several component elements.

1. The fact of divine discipline. The constant riddle of the Old Testament is "not the survival of the fittest but the suffering of the best." In Job it was the suffering of an individual; in Habakkuk, that of a nation.

2. The fact that evil is self-destructive. With singular arrogance the Chaldeans were blind to the fact that they were but the rod of Jehovah's vengeance. Tyranny always carries within it the seeds of its own destruction.

3. The fact that faith is the condition of life. "The righteous shall live by his faith." This is the great teaching of Habakkuk. "Faith" to the prophet meant more than simple trust. The form..conveys, as the use of the word elsewhere in the Old Testament warrants, the idea of the temper which trust produces,

namely, faithfulness, steadfastness, firmness, persistency, endurance, patience, even loyalty. And "life" to Habakkuk meant not mere national prosperity, but moral security, even in the midst of calamity. In other words, a living faith determines destiny: abiding in life and surviving in judgment. Habakkuk as a philosopher travelled all the way from doubt to a higher faith.<sup>8</sup>

Habakkuk has been called the prophet of faith. He possessed a strong, living faith in Jehovah; but he, like many other pious souls, was troubled and perplexed by the apparent inequalities of life. He found it difficult to reconcile these with his lofty conception of Jehovah. Nevertheless, he does not sulk. Boldly he presents his perplexities to Jehovah, who points the way to a solution, and the prophet comes forth from his trouble with a faith stronger and more intense than ever. It is in conneciton with his attempts to solve the perplexing problems raised by the unpunished sins of his countrymen and the unlimited success of the Chaldeans that Habakkuk gives utterance to two sublime truths:

1. Jehovah is not interested in Israel only. The Chaldeans are punished not merely for their sins against Judah, but for the oppression of other nations as well. Being the only God, He cannot permit the worship of other deities. Temporarily the Chaldeans may worship idols, or make might their god, they may "sacrifice unto their net," and burn incense "unto their drag," because by them "their portion is fat and their food plenteous"; but Jehovah is from everlasting, the Holy One, and He will attest His supremacy by utterly destroying the boastful conqueror with his idols.

2. Faithfulness assures permanency. Faithfulness is with the prophet an external thing; it signifies integrity, fidelity, steadfastness under all provocations; but this implies, in a real sense, the New Testament conception of faith as an active principle of right conduct. (A living faith determines conduct; religion and ethics go hand in hand, and especially in the hour of adversity a belief in Jehovah and unflinching reliance upon Him are the strongest preservers of fidelity and integrity.) Faith without works is dead; faith expresses itself in life. As an expression of living faith, 3:17-19 is not surpassed in the Old Testament.<sup>9</sup>

*Lesson  
to be  
learned*

## HABAKKUK

*Although . . . Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will joy in the God of my salvation*

3:17, 18

Such is the faith and confidence of the prophet that although he foresees that there might well be a time of barrenness, need and distress, when the fig tree and the vine will not yield, and the labor that is expended on the fields and the flocks will bring no return, yet he will still rejoice in the Lord. He will joy in the God of his salvation, in the God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Circumstances may change, people may change, but the Lord remains the same. If He is the One in whom we have put our trust, and if He is the One who is central in our life and affections, then come what may, we can ever rejoice in Him because He is the eternal, unchanging One. He is the great "I am," eternally the same and ever present. As certainly as God abides, so also will His salvation be permanent. There may be disappointment to be faced from many different directions, but the Lord is never a disappointment — He cannot fail, for He is God.

### THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

As you read the Book of Habakkuk you will find it particularly helpful to focus your attention upon chapter 3. The historical background to the prophet and his writing will be found in II Kings 22:1-24:16 and II Chronicles 34:1-36:10. In all probability Habakkuk ministered during the latter part of the reign of Josiah and possibly in the reigns of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim. It will, therefore, be seen that he is a Pre-Exilic prophet.

The condition of the nation of Judah and the reference to the coming invasion by the Chaldeans indicates that the prophet wrote and spoke after the reformation which had been brought about by

*historical background  
2 Kings 22:1-24:16  
2 Chronicles 34:1-36:1*

Josiah had begun to die out. Furthermore, it is clear that at the time of the prophecy, the power of the Assyrians had been broken and a new empire, the Babylonian Empire, was rising rapidly and the invasion of Judah was imminent. The overall dates of such a time would be 620-598 B.C. The prophet Jeremiah would be contemporary with Habakkuk.

#### THE PROPHET AND HIS MINISTRY

The name Habakkuk means "embracer," "wrestler," or "to cling." True to his name, Habakkuk clung to God in prayer for the answer to the problems with which he was confronted.

From 3:1 and 3:19 it is suggested that he was a Levite engaged in leading the temple singing. Habakkuk has been called "an Interpreter of Providence" and "the Prophet of Faith." He was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

It will be observed that approximately two thirds of the book is taken up by conversation between the prophet and the Lord. The prophet states his problems, and raises questions to which the Lord replies.

The prophet's first problem is concerned with the apostasy of Judah (1:1-4). The Lord's reply is given in 1:5-11 in which He states that He is raising up and sending the Chaldeans on the people of Judah in judgment. This gives rise to the prophet's second problem, stated in 1:12-2:1. Habakkuk is perplexed as to how a pure God can use a cruel, ruthless foe as an instrument in His purposes. The Lord's reply is contained in 2:2-20. It is an answer which men must know, therefore, make it plain (2:2). In the first instance, the just will be vindicated and the victory of the Lord will be complete (2:14). Then further, God's sovereignty is supreme and He cannot and will not do that which does not accord with His love and holiness (2:20).

#### MEMORIZE

<i>Key Words</i>	"why, woe, wait"
<i>Key Verses</i>	1:13; 2:4; 2:20
<i>Number of Chapters</i>	3
<i>Period in Hebrew History</i>	Prior to the Exile

#### OUTLINE

The following is suggested as a brief outline:

- I. *Conversation (1:1-11)*
- II. *Conversation (1:12-2:20)*
- III. *The Prophet's Prayer, Praise and Doxology (3:1-19)*

A further outline of the book can be drawn up on the following lines:

- I. *The Sign of the Prophet in Chapter 1* (Key verse 1:2)
- II. *The Silence of the Prophet in Chapter 2* (Key verse 2:20)
- III. *The Song of the Prophet in Chapter 3* (Key verse 3:18)

#### OUTSTANDING PASSAGES

There are several choice passages which deserve special thought and your attention is drawn in particular to the following verses: 1:13a; 2:1-4, 18-20; 3:2, 17-19.

The description of the might, majesty and revelation of the Lord God in chapter 3 is one of the great passages of the Old Testament, therefore read it and reread it as often as possible.

Your attention is also directed to the five "Woes" pronounced against the Chaldeans in chapter 2.

#### POINTS TO PONDER

Among the passages to which your attention has been drawn in the paragraph above, you will observe the phrase in 2:4 — "The just shall live by his faith." This must have been one of the Apostle Paul's favorite quotations, for we find him using it in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. It is also quoted again in Hebrews 10:38. Turn to these three New Testament passages and observe that in Romans 1:17 the word emphasized is *just*; in Galatians 3:11 the emphasis is on *faith*; and in Hebrews 10:38 the emphasis is on *live*.

Paul also quotes Habakkuk 1:5 in delivering his warning to unbelieving Jews in Antioch in Pisidia as recorded in Acts 13:41.

Martin Luther acted upon the quotation from Habakkuk "the just shall live by faith" in Galatians 3:11. It will be seen therefore that the message of the Book of Habakkuk had an important part in bringing about the Reformation.

In this book the prophet's faith is revealed as being tested, taught and finally triumphant. (Read and reread 3:17, 18.) The nation was going from bad to worse. The invading armies would soon march through the land and judgment from the Lord would come, yet it was still true that the Lord was in His holy temple. Therefore, the just shall be kept and shall live by his faith, and in view of this the prophet says, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Ro 1:17  
Ga 3:11  
Hb 10:38

## “ HABAKKUK ”

IN “PARACELUS” ROBERT BROWNING SAYS:

*If I stoop  
Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,  
It is but for a time; I press God's lamp  
Close to my breast; its splendor, soon or late,  
Will pierce the gloom: I shall emerge one day.*

It is sometimes difficult to understand and justify God's ways. Habakkuk was greatly perplexed and worried over the confused issues about him, as men today are confused and bewildered. Why does God allow the devastating ruin to go unchecked? Why does a whole world have to continue to suffer while ungodly criminals plunge us deeper into the abyss? When will God lift His hand to change the tide and cause justice to reign on the earth? The careful study of the message of Habakkuk will help toward a sane solution of questions that have baffled men for centuries.

### THE TIMES

The prophet had witnessed the reformation under the dynamic leadership of Josiah, the last good king of Judah. He watched the fading glow of the setting sun of Assyria. A great world kingdom was dying before his eyes. Egypt and Babylon were fighting to take the place of the departing lord. In a vain attempt to frustrate the plans of Necho of Egypt Josiah was killed at Megiddo. The issue was finally decided in 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon drove the Egyptians back in defeat and took over the civilized world as his kingdom. As Habakkuk saw such mighty upheavals and realized the tragic consequences of the struggles that were going on around him, he was greatly perplexed.

He probably wrote the book about the time of the fall of the city of Nineveh in 612 B.C. or within the next few years before the actual victory of Babylon in 605 B.C.

Tyranny and strife and lawlessness were rife in Judah. Men raised up strife and contention (1:1), oppressed righteous people (1:2, 13), lived in open sin (2:4, 5, 15, 16), worshiped idols (2:18, 19), oppressed the poor and the defenseless (1:4, 14, 15). It was a dark day of sin, strife, lawlessness and imminent invasion. Greater disasters seemed to be in store for God's people in Jerusalem.

#### THE MAN

Very little is known of Habakkuk except that which comes from a thoughtful study of his words. Evidently he was a prominent citizen of Jerusalem who had the confidence and respect of the leaders of the city. He has been called the "freethinker among the prophets" and the "father of Israel's religious doubt," but we must realize that he was a man of clear faith and powerful hold on God. In a sense he is a spokesman for Israel to God. In spite of his strong faith, the facts of life were too much for him. He could not get his questions answered. A man of reverent spirit, with keen, sensitive, highly developed faculties, he was more seriously troubled than any other man in the kingdom.

Ward says of him: "He was given a recognized place among those who had received the oracles of God, and he assuredly is one of the finest writers in the Old Testament. The beauty of his language and his chaste style entitle him to a place in the front rank of the prophetic school."<sup>1</sup>

Robinson says of him: "He was a philosopher, earnest and candid, and possessed of unusual originality and force, sensitive, speculative, the suppliant among the prophets, and the preacher of theocratic optimism."<sup>2</sup>

He was a careful student of God's dealings with His chosen

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.



people through the years. The words and works of Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah were familiar to him. The precepts and promises given in the Law of Moses formed the basis for much that he said. In addition he was a careful student of life and the experience of men. It was at this point that his most serious problems arose, for he had great difficulty in harmonizing the rich promises and the dire threats of God with the actual happenings of his daily observation.

When his doubts arose and he could not reconcile a bad world with a good God and a righteous law, he refused utterly to dismiss his doubts without an answer. He was honest and fearless and dogged in his determination to find the solution to the perplexing and conflicting problem. We thank God for an honest searcher after truth who was willing to go directly to God for the answer.

#### THE BOOK

Habakkuk arranges his book in the form of a dramatic dialogue between the prophet and Yahweh. There follows a series of woes against the cruel Chaldeans and a beautiful poem expressing confidence in the God of his salvation.

1. *The prophet's passionate protest (1:2-4).* Why does God allow the wicked and lawless men of Judah to continue unpunished? How long will God allow the injustice, the brutality, the wrong to go on in Jerusalem? It is a definite complaint to God.

2. *The first answer of Yahweh (1:5-11).* God refuses to admit that he is inattentive or inactive or indifferent. He challenges his prophet to look beyond the limited borders of Israel. He is already working a work. He has already enlisted the Chaldeans in the work of chastising the people of Jerusalem. They are cruel, swift, deadly instruments who will cause a tragic scourge to sweep over the land. Judgment will come upon Judah.

3. *The moral problem (1:12-17).* The prophet has complained of God's indifference. He is now horrified to hear

the means God is using to bring about His purpose on Israel. How can God use such a cruel instrument to scourge Judah? How can a righteous God use the Chaldeans to punish his own neighbors and friends? How can He reconcile the cruelty and inhumanity of the enemy with His own purity and holiness? It is a real problem that confronts the pious old prophet. He boldly challenges God to defend His actions:

*Thou that art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that canst not look on perverseness, wherefore dost thou look upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy peace when the wicked swallows up the man who is more righteous than he? (1:13.)*

4. *An important decision (2:1).* The prophet finds the solution only when he obediently takes his place on the watchtower to wait expectantly for the true revelation from God. The world is in ruins about him and the hosts of Chaldea are coming to help destroy what is left, but he is finding the one source of solution to his problems. Reverently and expectantly he watches for the answer from God.

5. *God's second reply (2:2-4).* The deeper solution now follows. He admits the wickedness of the Chaldeans but declares that they will perish by the very explosive power of evil. The divine purpose is moving gradually but surely on to its certain fulfillment. Cruelty and pride must be destroyed, righteousness must triumph. The present situation requires patience. God does not feel any need for hurry.

*Though the mills of God grind slowly,  
Yet they grind exceedingly small:  
Though with patience He stands waiting,  
With exactness grinds He all.\**

Harrell says: "God has all the ages in which to demonstrate his justice. The testing of time will reveal what men are, as fire separates gold from the dross. The Chaldeans may pros-

\* Longfellow, *Retribution*.

per in their wickedness for a season, and seem to triumph over a people more righteous than they. Yet they carry in themselves 'the germs of certain ruin.' The years, which are the crucible of God, will make manifest the essential weakness of an ungodly people."<sup>4</sup>

Robinson says: "The future belongs to the righteous; whereas, those whose souls are *puffed up* and arrogant have no future! The Chaldeans are self-centered, and are therefore doomed; the righteous are God-centered and are therefore permanent."<sup>5</sup>

✓ 6. *A series of five woes* (2:5-20). The haughty conqueror is described and condemned. The indictment is terrific. 5-8, the lust for land and possessions. 9-11, the covetous desire for selfish gain. 12-14, the oppression that takes cities and buildings. 15-17, the godless banquets where God is dishonored and helpless people suffer. 18-20 the silly, irrational, foolish worship of idols. Before the unfolding of the divine glory all evil must perish. The criminals of Chaldea will be destroyed along with all others who oppose the will of Yahweh.

7. *A beautiful anthem of praise* (3:1-19). This poem has been called "Habakkuk's Pindaric Ode." Robinson says: "It is bold in conception, sublime in thought, majestic in diction, and pure in rhetoric."<sup>6</sup> After a fervent prayer the prophet is rewarded with an appearance of God himself. Through all the years God has been faithful and has responded to the cry for help that came from His followers. Each crisis has been met by the sovereign God who has revealed His infinite power. As the prophet looks he sees the onward march of God through the centuries and realizes that the same active God is in control and that He is working out His own purpose in His own good time. Even though disaster and destruction and ruin await him, Habakkuk comes to realize

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

that he can trust implicitly in Yahweh. He sees that only a small part of God's plan is visible at the time and that God would have him wait patiently for the fuller revelation.

*For though the fig-tree shall not flourish,  
Neither shall fruit be on the vines,  
The labor of the olive shall fail,  
And the fields shall yield no food;  
The flock shall be cut off from the fold,  
And there shall be no herd in the stalls:  
Yet I will rejoice in Yahweh,  
I will joy in the God of my salvation. (3:17f.)*

Ward says: "Out of his doubts, the prophet forged a new belief in the character of the Infinite. Against the dark background of human hatred, greed and aggression, stood forth the pure presence of the All-Holy. Where before he had been on the brink of despair, like a traveller lost in the trackless desert, like a shipwrecked mariner dying of thirst, now circumstances were subordinated to faith. We are the offspring of God. We are meant not for the valley of fears, but for the high place of faith; not for the slough of Despond, but for the Delectable mountains with their glimpse of the celestial city and the good yet to be!"<sup>7</sup>

#### PRACTICAL LESSONS OF PERMANENT VALUE

1. God never stifles a sincere questioner.
2. Some problems cannot have a definite, direct answer.
3. In every crisis God can be trusted.
4. The short view is apt to be the false view.
5. When faith is swept off its feet it finds that it has wings.
6. Evil has within itself the germs of death.
7. We may see and understand God only when we rise above the fog of human doubt.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 239, 241.

8. It helps us to understand something of the vast sympathy of God.
9. The real purpose of religion is not to have all doubts solved, but to be sure of God.
10. In dealing with doubt God invites us to turn to Him and wait for His answer.
11. Remember these verses:

*The righteous shall live by faith (2:4.)*  
*Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood*  
*(2:12.)*

*The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the*  
*earth keep silence before Him (2:20.)*  
*For the earth shall be filled with the knowl-*  
*edge of the glory of Yahweh, as the waters*  
*cover the sea (2:14.)*

# Background and Survey of Habakkuk

*HABAKKUK WAS THE LAST OF THE MINOR*

*PROPHETS OF JUDAH, AND WAS*

*TRULY 'A MAJOR MINOR PROPHET.'*<sup>1</sup>

His book is only three chapters long, but it is filled with many spiritual gems for the Bible student. Your study of Habakkuk's message should prove to be a very stimulating and profitable experience.

## I. BACKGROUND

We will approach the book of Habakkuk in the usual order of Bible study: first, background; second, survey; finally, analysis. This lesson involves background and survey. Before going any further in the lesson you may want to scan Habakkuk to catch something of its tone.

### A. The Man Habakkuk

The little we know about the man Habakkuk is inferred from his short book. The name Habakkuk means literally "embracer."<sup>2</sup> Of this Luther writes:

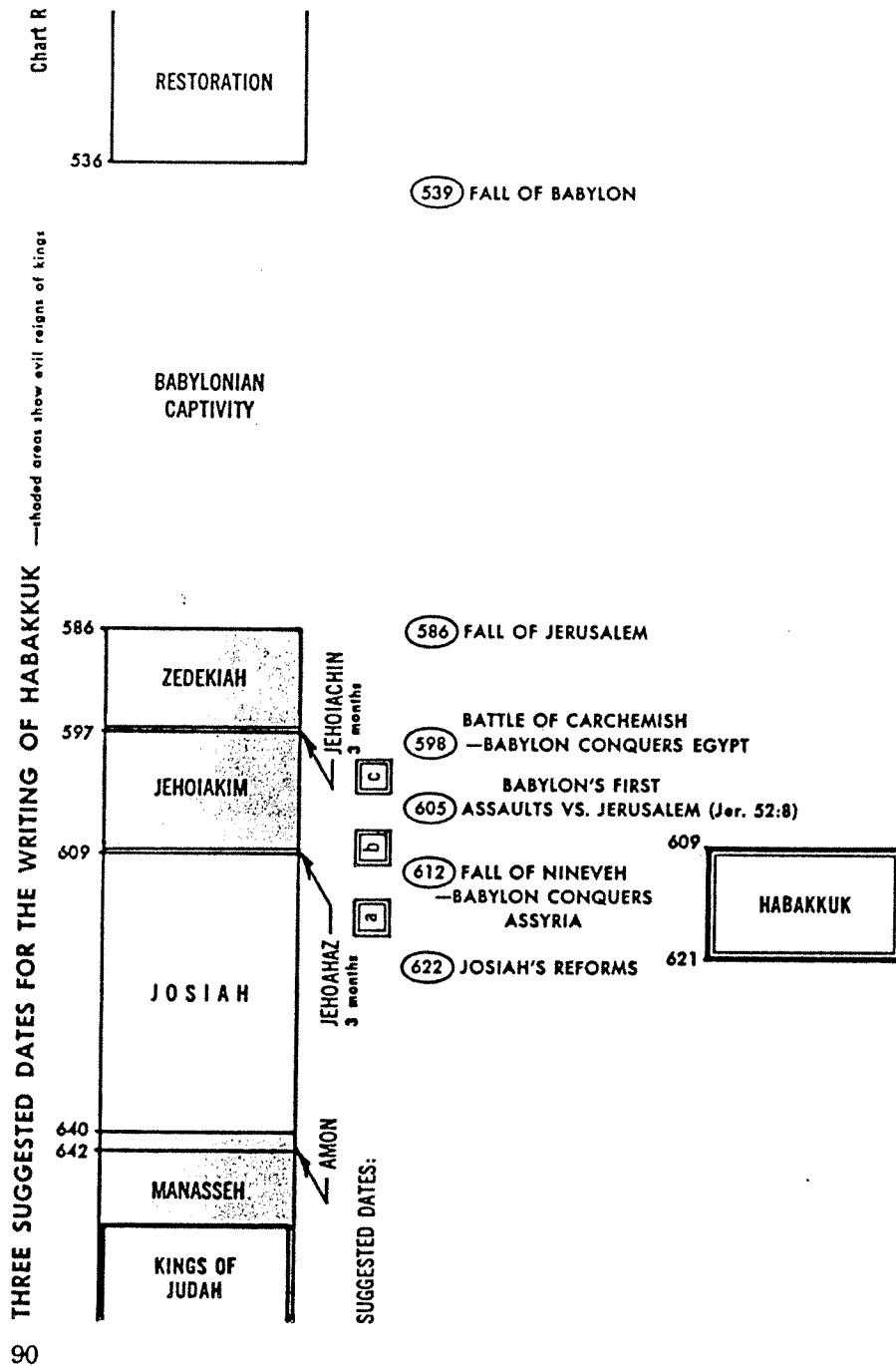
Habakkuk has a right name for his office. For Habakkuk means a heartener, or one who takes another to his heart and his arms, as one soothes a poor, weeping child, telling it to be quiet.<sup>3</sup>

The text of 1:1 identifies Habakkuk as a prophet, which in itself reveals much about his ministry. Some think his call to be a prophet came while he was serving as a Leviti-

1. So called by Frank E. Gaebelein, *Four Minor Prophets*, p. 142.

2. Read these verses where the same Hebrew word appears: 2 Ki 4:16; Job 24:8; Ec 3:5; Song 2:6.

3. Quoted in Gaebelein, p. 142.



cal chorister in the temple.<sup>4</sup> This is suggested by the musical notations at 3:1 and at the end of the book:

"For the choir director, on my stringed instruments" (3:19, NASB).<sup>5</sup> The prophecy of 1:6 points to the fact that Israel, the Northern Kingdom, had already gone into Assyrian captivity, for now the Chaldeans (Babylonians) were threatening Judah. Thus Habakkuk was a prophet of Judah.

After you have analyzed the book of Habakkuk, write a list of the prophet's character traits which you have observed in his writing.

#### B. Times in Which Habakkuk Ministered

Refer back to Chart N, which shows Habakkuk to be a contemporary of Jeremiah. There are various views as to exactly when Habakkuk ministered as a prophet and wrote his book, because the Bible text does not give direct information on this. The historical setting of Chart R suggests various possibilities of the book's date.

The three strong options for the date of Habakkuk are *a*, *b*, and *c* shown on Chart R: *a*—after Josiah's reform program (622 B.C.) but *before* Babylon (Chaldea) emerged as the threatening world power (612 B.C.); *b* or *c*—*after* Babylon emerged as the threatening world power (612 and 605). Of the two, *b* is the preferred view.

The spiritual condition of Judah when Habakkuk was ministering was one of dark apostasy (1:2-4). The fruits of Josiah's reform program must have been very temporary if a prophet of God would complain about national corruption only a decade later. Observe on Chart N that the last three kings of Judah were evil rulers. Read 2 Chronicles 36:14-16 for a description of the people's heart just before the Babylonians conquered Judah. Also read Jeremiah 10, which reveals Judah's sin of idolatry at this time. (Jeremiah, a contemporary of Habakkuk, was Judah's last prophet before the Babylonian captivity.)

#### C. The Book of Habakkuk

##### 1. MESSAGE

Among the prominent teachings of the book are these:

4. Cf. 1 Ch 25:1. If this is so, his home was in Jerusalem.

5. Compare this reading with the paraphrase of *The Living Bible*.



- a) Iniquity does *not* triumph.
- b) God does not overlook sin.
- c) The righteous man lives by his faith.
- d) The Lord is God of the universe. Happy is the believer who waits patiently for the manifestations of His will.
- e) God wants His children to talk with Him.

## 2. FEATURES

Some interesting features of Habakkuk include:

- a) The book is similar to Jonah in that each book opens with the prophet plagued by a problem, and closes with the prophet having experienced God's solution.
- b) A large proportion of Habakkuk (about two-thirds) is devoted to conversation between the writer and God.
- c) A key verse of the book, 2:4, is quoted in three important New Testament passages. Read Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38.

The truth of these verses was a keynote of the sixteenth-century church Reformation, and it is for this reason that Habakkuk has been called the "Grandfather of the Reformation."

- d) The literary quality of Habakkuk is unsurpassed in the Hebrew Scriptures. Concerning chapter 3, Unger writes:

The magnificent lyric ode of ch. 3 contains one of the greatest descriptions of the theophany in relation to the coming of the Lord which has been given by the Holy Spirit, awaiting fulfillment in the day of the Lord (cf. 2 Thess 1:7-10).<sup>6</sup>

## II. SURVEY

A few suggestions for an overview of Habakkuk are given below.

1. Read through the book again, if you have not already done so. What words and phrases stand out as prominent ones?
2. Compare 1:1 with 3:1. Also compare 1:2 with 3:18-19. What are your observations?
3. Study the survey Chart S very carefully. The questions or suggestions given below are based on the chart.

6. *Unger's Bible Handbook*, p. 425. Definition: Theophany is an appearance or manifestation of God to man.

# HABAKKUK THE RIGHTEOUS LIVE BY FAITH

Chart S

