HABAKKUK

*Questions about God's justice*

TIME PERIOD

Sometime in the latter half of the 6th century BC.

KEY VERSE

*"See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright— but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness"*

2:4

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As we read through the OT, we may begin to question the way God does things, and indeed Habakkuk does too. His questions are also relevant to the so-called "problem of evil", i.e., if God is good and all-powerful, why doesn't he stop evil? Is it because he is not good? Or because he is not omnipotent? God gives us a third option in Habakkuk.

No king is mentioned, but we can probably date the book to the latter half of the 6th century. It consists of a dialogue between Habakkuk and God in chapters 1 and 2 and a psalm in chapter 3, which is Habakkuk's response to what he has understood from God's answer.

The dialogue opens with Habakkuk being frustrated by all the evil he sees around him, and he asks God why he doesn't do anything about it. God responds by saying that He will raise up the Babylonians, and they will then execute his judgment on the wickedness of Judah. This answer makes Habakkuk a little confused, and he thinks these are not correct propositions. The Babylonians are even worse than the Israelites. How can God, who is holy, use such evil people to judge his people, who are better than the Babylonians after all? And he asks if God is just going to let the Babylonians go on like this all the time. God's answer to this can be paraphrased like this: "Yes, they will be allowed to hold on for a while, but you must keep your faith in me, and I will judge them too, even if it takes a long time." It would take at least 70 years until the year 539 BC, when God judged Babylon with the help of the Persians.

In chapter 3, Habakkuk asks God to act again in a magnificent way, as he did earlier in Israel's history, especially under Moses and Joshua. But in the end, he says that he will wait calmly for the Babylonians to be judged and that even when all else fails, he will still "rejoice in the Lord". And this becomes, in a way, a practice of what is written in 2:4: *"the righteous shall live by his faith (by his faithfulness)"*. That's what this means – trusting God no matter what the circumstances are.

The book ends with Habakkuk having regained faith in God's justice and faith that God knows what he is doing. He knows that God can do great things, as seen earlier in history, and he has been faithful to them in the past, but the most important thing for Habakkuk is to always trust God.

The third alternative to the problem of evil is that God knows what he's up to. That we must trust Him and wait, and even though it may take a long time, He is going to sort things out. And then we will also understand why he has done it that way.

This verse in 2:4, *"the righteous shall live by faith"*, is quoted 3 times in the NT, and it is probably where Jesus is most evident, even if it is a bit indirect. Paul quotes it in Rom 1:17 in relation to the fact that the gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. In Gal 3:11, he quotes it to emphasize that it is not the law that saves but faith. Lastly, it is quoted in Heb 10:38 to indicate that it is our faith that carries us through the difficulties of life. There are some nuances in all three quotations, so this verse takes on a new meaning in the light of Jesus, who is now the one we should believe in.

**Chapters 1-2: A dialogue**

Habakkuk: Why don't you stop the evil (1:2-4)?

God: The Babylonians will soon execute my judgment on evil (1:5-11)

Habakkuk: How can you, who is holy, use the wicked Babylonians to judge your people, who are, after all, better than the Babylonians? And how long are you going to let them continue like this? (1:12-17)

God: They will hold on for a while but believe in my promise that they will also be judged (2:2-20).

**Chapter 3: A psalm**

Habakkuk is trusting in God's justice.