



## Bible Study

# Habakkuk's Prayer For Revival: Living By Faith In Troubled Times

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*A whole-book overview – read it as an article, or use it section by section for personal study or group discussion.*


### HABAKKUK INTRODUCES HIMSELF (HABAKKUK 1:1)

Habakkuk was a prophet. That's all he tells us and all we really know about him. He seems to have lived and worked in the time leading up to Judah's fall to Babylon (see 2 Kings 25). His introduction tells us more, perhaps, about the Lord than it does about Habakkuk himself. He 'received' a 'prophecy'. The word 'prophecy' would more literally be translated 'burden'. This was a heavy load that he carried. The word 'received' is more literally translated 'saw'. In difficult days, he began to see through the Lord's eyes – just as the Apostle Paul did entering Athens 'greatly distressed' (Acts 17:16-34), and supremely as the Lord Jesus himself, looking down


over Jerusalem and weeping (Luke 19:41-44).

### SELAH: PAUSE AND PONDER

*Although not included in the NIV's most recent translation, Habakkuk uses the Hebrew word commonly found in the Psalms, 'Selah' (3:1). It may be an invitation to pause and ponder – and it is in that spirit that these Selah interludes are included in this study.*

 *The burden Habakkuk carried was a gift given to him by the Lord. We can often resent, resist, or seek to be relieved from the burdens we carry. Without in any way contradicting the invitation of Jesus (Matthew 11:28-30), are there burdens you carry which may be a gift from the Lord as a spur to join in his work?*



 *The beginning of Habakkuk's prophecy is given the heading in the NIV translation 'Habakkuk's complaint', which could be misleading. The prophecy was given by the Lord himself, who would enter this world and pray similar, even deeper, prayers: 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me ...' (Matthew 26:39); 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me ...' (Matthew 27:46). What fresh perspective might this offer to the difficulties you face and feel?*

## REVELATION (HABAKKUK 1:2-2:1)

Habakkuk was a prophet who pondered and prayed. Prompted by the burden the Lord has given him, he brought his questions to the Lord (1:2-4). We might be tempted to think that questions undermine faith, and yet Habakkuk's questions had the opposite effect. His questions proved his faith, because he brought them to the Lord, trusting his goodness and

wisdom, trusting that he would have the answers, trusting him to speak. In troubled times, filled with questions, Habakkuk doubted his understanding and trusted the goodness of God.

We often remind ourselves that prayer is a two-way conversation. Habakkuk discovered this truth: the Lord replied to Habakkuk's questions with revelation. On first reading, it might appear that he received the Lord's reply quickly. Yet his first question was 'How long?' This is a prayer that was prayed for a long time, in the face of God's seeming silence (1:2). Habakkuk persevered in prayer.


The Lord's revelation in response to the questions is something at which to 'be amazed' (1:5). At first, the Lord's response seems wonderful indeed (2:5) – think of all the amazing things Habakkuk would have known the Lord to have done in the pages of the Old Testament – the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah, the raising up of Joseph in Egypt, the later Exodus from Egypt ... To hear that the Lord was going to do something amazing in his own day that he would find difficult to believe must have set his mind racing.

What the Lord revealed next to Habakkuk was devastating. He was raising up the Babylonians (2:6). Habakkuk would surely have found that almost unbelievable. As the Lord himself made clear, the Babylonians were doing things far worse than anything Habakkuk had seen in his own country (1:6-11). Yet the Lord was actively 'raising' them up. Habakkuk's faith meant that he trusted the heart of God – his goodness, wisdom and power – even when he couldn't make sense of what the hand of God was doing.

When Habakkuk responded to the Lord in prayer a second time,

he began by speaking of God's character. It's an excellent example of persevering in prayer (see the parable of Luke 18:1-8, and the picture of Genesis 32:22-32) and of the power found in praying the promises and personality of the Lord. Again, he proved his faith – he trusted that the Lord would have the answers and would respond at the right time. His attitude should surely be ours too, especially in troubled times (2:1).

## SELAH: PAUSE AND PONDER

 *Far from undermining your faith, your questions prove your faith if you bring them to the Lord. What questions do you have to bring to him? Trust him and doubt your understanding! Be amazed by him, persevere in prayer, and wait for his response.*

## REVERSAL (HABAKKUK 2:2-20)

Having looked up to the Lord in troubled times, Habakkuk then looked to the future. His task was to receive revelation from the Lord and then to record it and make it known (2:2-3) – an excellent model for all Christians.

In another, briefer, description of the horrors of the Babylonian regime (2:4-5), the Lord made the statement that is the heart of the message of the book: 'The righteous person will live by his faithfulness' – a verse frequently quoted in the New Testament (Romans 1:7; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:37-38). Translators debate whether this refers to the Lord's faithfulness in keeping his people, or in the faithfulness of his people in holding on to him. The implication of the wider biblical message is that it could refer to either, and we would do well to understand it as referring





to both. We are called to live by faith in troubled times.


Habakkuk has already realised that what the Lord has foretold is judgement (Habakkuk 1:12 – see also the reference to judgement as a present, as well as future, reality in Romans 1:18). Judgement has frequently been misunderstood. It is a good thing, reflecting God’s good and loving character, putting right the injustice that Habakkuk saw all around him (1:4). The Lord does not, in any way, vindicate the evil behaviour of the Babylonians. Instead, he assures Habakkuk that he is in control of all things, and is working for good in all things, even this (see Romans 8:28).

For now, there will be present judgement on Judah as the Lord refines them through the great difficulties coming upon them, but there will also be future judgement for Babylon – and upon all who, like Babylon, live not by faith but as the Babylonians did: self-reliant, self-sufficient, self-righteous, self-seeking, self-serving.

Judgement is pronounced in a series of five ‘woes’ (2:6-8; 2:9-11; 2:12-14; 2:15-17 & 2:18-20). These are addressed to those who become rich at the expense of the poor, who are dishonest in their way of life, who

enforce abusive practices, who live drunken lives giving way to sexual immorality, and who worship idols in place of the Living God.

### SELAH: PAUSE AND PONDER

 *Identify the reversals in each of these woes and compare them with Mary’s song in Luke 1:46-55. In the light of eternity, we will never feel that the Lord has acted wrongly, unwisely or in any way that is unfair, but only ever in utter goodness. In what ways could looking to the future like this help you to live by faith in troubled times?*

### RENEWAL AND REVIVAL (HABAKKUK 3:1-19)


Having looked up to the Lord and ahead to the future, Habakkuk looks again at his present circumstances with new perspective. His final response is full of awe – his famous prayer for renewal and revival (3:2). It’s a wonderful prayer for us to pray too.

Habakkuk reminded himself, and his readers, of some past great acts of the Lord, most notably the Exodus, in a song characteristic of the Old Testament (3:3-15). He continued to wait patiently for the Lord’s good purposes (3:16), making

a profound statement of hope (3:17-18) and praise (3:19).

In troubled times, Habakkuk looked to the Lord with his questions, to the future with trust, and then again at his circumstances with renewed hope and strength, despite appearances, praying that the Lord would have mercy and move in great power in his generation. What a way to live by faith in troubled times! What a way to pray for renewal and revival!

### SELAH: PAUSE AND PONDER

 *Call to mind some of the great acts of God, both from scripture and from your own experience. Praise the Lord for who he is and what he has done, and plead with him for mercy and power.*

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