

Habakkuk 1:1–17 – When God’s Answers Surprise Us

1. The Prophet and His Burden (Habakkuk 1:1)

The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. (Habakkuk 1:1, NKJV)

We know almost nothing about Habakkuk’s personal life. His name means “embracer,” and that is a good picture of this book: he wrestles with God, questions God, and yet clings to God in the middle of confusion.

The prophecy is called a “burden,” because what Habakkuk sees is heavy. He is not playing with religious ideas; he is crushed by what is happening to his nation and by what God tells him is coming. Most likely, Habakkuk ministered near the end of Judah’s decline—after some spiritual reforms under Josiah, but before Babylon finally conquered the land. Morally and spiritually, the nation was collapsing.

This book is essentially Habakkuk’s prayer journal: his honest complaints, God’s answers, and the prophet’s journey from confusion to confidence.

2. “Lord, Why Are You Silent?” – Habakkuk’s First Complaint (Habakkuk 1:2–4)

*O Lord, how long shall I cry,
And You will not hear?
Even cry out to You, “Violence!”
And You will not save.
Why do You show me iniquity,
And cause me to see trouble?
For plundering and violence are before me;
There is strife, and contention arises.
Therefore the law is powerless,
And justice never goes forth.
For the wicked surround the righteous;
Therefore perverse judgment proceeds. (Habakkuk 1:2–4, NKJV)*

Habakkuk looks around Judah and sees:

- Violence and corruption
- Injustice and crooked courts
- Wicked people surrounding and pressuring those who want to live right
- A legal system that no longer restrains evil

He has been praying about it—“How long shall I cry?”—but it feels like God is doing nothing.

You can hear the ache in his words:

“Lord, why do You let me see all this? How long are You going to let this go on? Why does evil seem to win while those who care about You get pushed aside?”

Many of us can relate. We see:

- Courts releasing people on technicalities even when guilt is clear
- Systems that let violence, exploitation, and corruption flourish
- Media that celebrates sin and mocks righteousness
- A culture where those who take God seriously are labeled narrow or outdated

It is easy to feel like Habakkuk: “Lord, I cannot take much more of this. Please do something.”

3. God’s Shocking Answer – “I Am Doing Something” (Habakkuk 1:5–11)

“Look among the nations and watch—

Be utterly astounded!

For I will work a work in your days

Which you would not believe, though it were told you.” (Habakkuk 1:5, NKJV)

God answers Habakkuk’s complaint. He basically says, “I am working. I am doing something so unexpected that you would not believe it if I laid it out fully.”

Then God explains:

“For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans,

A bitter and hasty nation

Which marches through the breadth of the earth,

To possess dwelling places that are not theirs.

They are terrible and dreadful;

Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves.” (Habakkuk 1:6–7, NKJV)

The “Chaldeans” are the Babylonians—brutal, fast, powerful. God says He is going to use them as His rod of discipline against Judah. While Habakkuk has been asking, “Why don’t You judge the evil in our nation?”, God has been arranging a judgment far more severe than the prophet imagined.

God describes Babylon’s power and speed:

Their horses also are swifter than leopards,

And more fierce than evening wolves...

They fly as the eagle that hastens to eat.

They all come for violence...

They gather captives like sand. (from Habakkuk 1:8–9, NKJV)

They crush kings, laugh at fortified cities, throw up siege ramps, and overwhelm everything in their path. Then God says something ominous:

Then his mind changes, and he transgresses;

He commits offense,

Ascribing this power to his god. (Habakkuk 1:11, NKJV)

Babylon will mistake God's permission for its own greatness. Instead of humbling themselves, they will worship their own strength and their false gods.

Practical Application

- God is often at work in ways we do not see and would not choose.
- Sometimes God's answer to moral collapse is not a gentle correction but a severe shaking.
- God can use even ungodly nations, leaders, and events to accomplish His purposes—but that does not mean He approves of their hearts or their actions.

This is uncomfortable. Habakkuk wanted God to deal with Judah's sin, but he never imagined God would use someone worse to do it.

4. "Lord, How Can This Be?" – The Prophet's Second Complaint (Habakkuk 1:12–17)

Habakkuk does not walk away from God. He brings his confusion back to God in prayer.

*Are You not from everlasting,
O Lord my God, my Holy One?
We shall not die.
O Lord, You have appointed them for judgment;
O Rock, You have marked them for correction.* (Habakkuk 1:12, NKJV)

He reminds himself who God is:

- Everlasting
- His God
- Holy
- The Rock

He trusts that Judah will not be completely wiped out ("We shall not die"), but he struggles deeply with how God is going to act.

*You are of purer eyes than to behold evil,
And cannot look on wickedness.
Why do You look on those who deal treacherously,
And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours
A person more righteous than he?* (Habakkuk 1:13, NKJV)

Habakkuk's problem is this:

"Lord, I know You are holy. I know You cannot look on evil with approval. So how can You use the Babylonians—who are even worse than we are—to judge us? How can You watch them devour people who, despite our sin, still have more light than they do?"

He describes Babylon like fishermen and like idol worshipers:

*They take up all of them with a hook,
They catch them in their net,
And gather them in their dragnet;
Therefore they rejoice and are glad.
Therefore they sacrifice to their net,
And burn incense to their dragnet;
Because by them their share is sumptuous...* (Habakkuk 1:15–16, NKJV)

They treat nations like fish to be hauled in and then turn around and worship the tools of their success—their own power, their weapons, their systems. They are ruthless and idolatrous.

Habakkuk's question is honest and sharp:

*Shall they therefore empty their net,
And continually slay nations without pity?* (Habakkuk 1:17, NKJV)

“Lord, are You going to let them just keep doing this? Is there no limit?”

5. The Cross and the Holiness of God

Habakkuk's statement, “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness,” points us forward to the cross.

Centuries after Habakkuk, Jesus Christ hung on a Roman cross, not for His own sin, but for ours. Scripture says:

*But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* (Isaiah 53:5–6, NKJV)

On the cross, Jesus bore the accumulated guilt of human history—every act of violence, every betrayal, every hidden sin. The One who “knew no sin” was made “to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (Second Corinthians 5:21, NKJV).

In that moment, the holy Father turned His face away from the Son who was bearing our sin. That is why Jesus cried out:

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46, NKJV)

God is too pure to look approvingly on sin. Rather than simply overlooking it, He judged it in His Son. Jesus shed His blood on the cross to pay the penalty we deserved. The Father forsook the Son in that moment so that He would not have to forsake us forever.

Then, on the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection declares that Jesus is truly God, Savior, and Lord, and that His sacrifice was accepted.

Here is the staggering exchange:

He took our sin; He gives us His righteousness.

He became what we are, that we might become, by grace, what we could never be on our own—accepted and made right before a holy God.

6. Practical Application for Believers

Habakkuk's struggle and God's answers speak directly into our lives.

1. **Be honest with God.**

Habakkuk did not pretend everything was fine. He brought his questions and frustrations to God. God did not rebuke him for asking; instead, He answered and drew Habakkuk deeper. You can bring your confusion honestly to God.

2. **Do not confuse God's silence with indifference.**

When God seems quiet, He may still be working in ways you cannot see. His timing and methods may be surprising, but His character is always faithful.

3. **Take God's holiness seriously in your own life.**

If God forsook His own Son when He bore our iniquity, it is foolish to think we can cling to known sin and enjoy close fellowship with God at the same time. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (First Corinthians 6:19–20, NKJV). You cannot invite God to participate in sin. "Be holy, for I am holy" (First Peter 1:16, NKJV).

4. **Do not assume you understand all of God's ways.**

Habakkuk could not see how God's use of Babylon fit with His holiness and justice. Eventually, he learned to trust God's character even when he did not understand God's plan. That is often where God wants to bring us.

5. **Let the cross anchor you when nothing makes sense.**

When circumstances seem chaotic, go back to what you know:

- God loved you enough to give His Son for you.
 - Jesus shed His blood on the cross for your sins.
 - God raised Him from the dead, declaring Him to be God, Savior, and Lord.
- That settled reality can sustain you in any unanswered question.

A Challenge for Believers

If you already belong to Jesus Christ:

- Ask the Lord to show you if there is any area where you are asking Him to "go along" with sin in your life. Confess it and let it go.
- Choose to trust God's character when you cannot trace His hand. You may not understand what He is doing in your nation, your church, your family, or your personal situation—but you can cling to who He is.
- Let your heart stay soft. Do not let the increase of wickedness around you make you cynical, bitter, or hard. Keep walking closely with the Lord, and keep loving people in His name.

The world needs believers who are honest about their questions, anchored in the cross, and faithful in obedience even when they do not have all the answers.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

If you have never personally surrendered your life to Jesus Christ, Habakkuk's message is also for you.

God is holy. He does not compromise with evil. He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness" with approval. On our own, that is terrifying, because all of us have sinned (Romans 3:23, NKJV).

But the same holy God who must judge sin has already provided a way for you to be forgiven and made new.

Jesus Christ came into this world, lived a sinless life, and willingly went to the cross. There He shed His blood to pay for your sins and mine. On the third day, God raised Him from the dead, declaring that Jesus is God, Savior, and Lord.

You do not have to face God as a Judge only. You can know Him as your Father. You do not have to bear your own guilt. Jesus has already carried it to the cross.

God calls you to respond in repentance and faith—turning from your sin and self-rule and turning to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

If that is the desire of your heart, you might pray something like this:

*"Lord God, I confess that I have sinned against You.
I know You are holy, and I cannot make myself right before You.
I believe that Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross for my sins,
and that You raised Him from the dead, declaring that He is God, Savior, and Lord.
I turn from my sin and my self-centered way of living.
I ask You to forgive me, cleanse me, and make me new.
Jesus, I receive You as my Lord and Savior.
Teach me to follow You from this day forward.
In Your name I pray. Amen."*

If you prayed sincerely, begin reading the Bible (a great place to start is the Gospel of John), talk with God daily in prayer, and connect with a solid, Bible-teaching church where you can grow.

Habakkuk 1 ends with questions, not answers. But it sets the stage for a deeper trust. The God who was at work in Judah's confusion is the same God who worked your salvation through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. You can trust Him—fully, honestly, and for eternity.