

A Visitor's Guide to the Old Testament

The Book of Habakkuk

- I. The state of things in Habakkuk's day
 - A. Some things remained the same
 - 1. Moral and spiritual decline
 - 2. God's warnings and faithfulness
 - B. Some things had changed
 - 1. A glimpse of reformation under Josiah faded quickly
 - 2. God's patience soon coming to an end
 - 3. The surprising rise of the Babylonian Empire
- II. Who is Habakkuk
 - A. The man
 - 1. Of unknown origin... not even sure about his name!
 - 2. A prophet... of legendary status
 - 3. Appears to live at the end of Josiah's reign and beginning of Jehoiakim's reign
 - 4. A man of lively faith and steeped in the religious traditions of Israel
 - B. The message
- III. The Uniqueness of the prophet Zephaniah
 - A. Contemporary of Nahum, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah
 - B. Written in dialogue form
 - C. Famous passage: "the just shall live by faith!" (2:4) – Reformation "battle cry"
 - D. Only prophet who never addresses God's people directly
 - E. Only place in which the word "selah" appears outside the Psalms

Outline of the Book of Habakkuk

Theme: *The Righteous Shall Live by His Faith*

Title (1:1)

I. The Dialogue between Habakkuk and God (1:2-2:5)

- A. The first argument, about divine justice (1:2-11)
 - 1. Habakkuk's first complaint: lack of justice in Judah (1:2-4)
 - 2. The LORD's response: I have a plan for avenging evil in Judah (1:5-11)
 - a. Preparations for retribution (1:5)
 - b. Means identified as the Chaldeans/Babylonians (1:6)
 - c. The Chaldeans/Babylonians described (1:7-11)
- B. The second argument, about divine methods (1:12-2:5)
 - 1. Habakkuk's second complaint: God, how could you? (1:12-2:1)
 - a. First question: Are you not God? (1:12)
 - b. Second question: Why is this true? (1:13-16)
 - c. Third question: How long will this continue? (1:17-2:1)
 - 2. The LORD's response: His rule is sure, and he will judge the wicked in his own time (2:2-5)

II. The LORD's justice is certain: Five woes to the arrogant oppressors (2:6-20)

- A. Woe One: The plunderer plundered (2:6-8)
- B. Woe Two: The fortified dismantled (2:9-11)
- C. Woe Three: The violent crushed (2:12-14)
- D. Woe Four: The Shameless put to shame (2:15-17)
- E. Woe Five: The Idolater silenced (2:18-20)

III. Habakkuk's psalm of faith (3)

- A. Heading of the psalm (3:1)
- B. Habakkuk's petition: LORD, work mightily as you did in the past (3:2)
- C. The LORD described as a mighty warrior (3:3-15)
 - 1. The LORD has shown his splendor in the past (3:3-7)
 - 2. The LORD has revealed his rule over the universe (3:8-15)
 - a. The LORD overcame rivers (3:8,9)
 - b. The LORD overcame mountains (3:10)
 - c. The LORD overcame the sun and moon (3:11)
 - d. The LORD overcame the nations (3:12)
 - e. The LORD delivered his people from the nations (3:13-15)
- D. Habakkuk's confidence and joy: Based on God's Word and the LORD's actions in the past, Habakkuk can rejoice and exalt in God, by faith (3:16-19)

(Edited and expanded from the Lutheran Bible Companion, vol 1, p. 950)

Questions for the Book of Habakkuk

I. The Dialogue between Habakkuk and God (1:2-2:5)

1. What was bothering Habakkuk? (1:1-3)
2. What does Habakkuk mean when he says that “the law is paralyzed” (1:4)?
3. The Lord answers Habakkuk by pointing to a nation who would put a stop to Judah's wickedness. Why does he say that people would not believe what he was about to say? (1:5)
4. How does the Lord describe the Babylonians?
5. Although the Babylonians would serve the Lord by suppressing Judah, they were not righteous people. How does the Lord describe them in 1:11?
6. 1:12-17 contain Habakkuk's second complaint. Summarize his complaint.
7. Habakkuk complained to the Lord. Yet once he had made his complaint, he did something that every Christian should do. What was that? (2:1)

II. The LORD's justice is certain: Five woes to the arrogant oppressors (2:6-20)

1. The five woes of 2:6-19 are examples of how important it is to walk by faith and not by sight. It may appear that the unjust people are getting by with their sinful ways. In the end, however, they will be disgraced. Use the outline below to examine the five woes God speaks against the future world power, Babylon.
 - “Woe to him . . .” (2:6-8)
 - “Woe to him . . .” (2:9-11)
 - “Woe to him . . .” (2:12-14)

- “Woe to him . . .” (2:15-18)
 - “Woe to him . . .” (2:19)
2. What does it mean that “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD” (verse 14) and “the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him” (2: 20)?

III. Habakkuk’s psalm of faith (3)

1. What is the main request Habakkuk offers in this prayer?
2. Habakkuk pictures the Lord coming from Mount Sinai to deliver his people. This scene pictures God’s acts of deliverance of all ages. What does God do for his people? How does he act against his enemies? (3:3-7)
3. The Lord acted to protect his people and destroy his enemies. He often used nature to do this, such as when he made a path in the sea to allow Israel to walk through or when he made the sun stand still so his people could finish defeating their enemies. He was not angry with the forces of nature (3:8). What was he using the forces of nature to do? (3:9-13a)
4. All God’s battles culminated in the great battle between God’s Anointed One (Jesus) and the “leader of the land of wickedness,” Satan. How did Jesus crush this wicked leader?
5. What did Habakkuk resolve to do in view of God’s promise? (3:16) How can we put his resolve into practice in our lives?
6. We must often suffer through the punishments God brings on the wicked of this world. How did Habakkuk express this fact in 3:17? Why is his attitude the only right attitude for us to have? (3:17-19)

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Majoring on the minors

Habakkuk: You're going to do . . . what?!?

"You're going to do what?!?" Perhaps we expect that surprised question from the parents of a teenagers who announce their latest "plans." But we wouldn't expect it to come from a prophet addressing God, would we? Yet Habakkuk directed that sort of question to God himself. (by Prof. Thomas Kock)

God has a plan

Here's how it happened. Habakkuk was discouraged. He saw evil; he failed to see good. He laments: "Therefore, the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted" (1:4). And, to Habakkuk, it seemed God was doing nothing about it! (cf. 1:2,3).

Oh, but God had a plan! He tells Habakkuk, "I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own. They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor. . . . They fly like an eagle swooping to devour; they all come intent on violence (1:6-9).

At that point Habakkuk basically says, "You're going to do . . . what?!?" This "solution" sounded worse than the problem! Destruction and judgment would come. God responds to Habakkuk, "But the righteous will live by his faith" (2:4 NIV84). To Habakkuk, all looked disjointed, random, even crazy! To God, the plan was crystal clear. And then God adds, "The Babylonians will be punished eventually too."

In short, God is saying, "Trust me, Habakkuk; I've got this." He will bring judgment, but salvation was the best part of his plan.

God's plan assures our salvation

In Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11,12, God quotes Habakkuk 2:4 to emphatically make the point that salvation is his work and his work alone. So "the righteous will live by his faith." Or to put it colloquially, as God said to Habakkuk, so God says to us: "Trust me; I've got this."

Perhaps we're tempted to say, "You're going to do . . . what?!? You're going to do all the work of salvation?" After all, as we look at our own lives we see the same problems Habakkuk did: violence, injustice, strife, and wickedness. When we hear God will send judgment, we understand that we are guilty and deserve judgment. We can't understand how we could possibly hope to stand "right" in God's sight, since we've failed so much! But God will do what we cannot do. He will save us.

Why would he want to do that?!? God's answer? "Trust me; I've got this." The salvation plan may not make human sense, but it makes perfect sense to God.

So Habakkuk was assured! He may not totally understand the plan, but he was assured that God did. He, therefore, concluded his book with a psalm, including these moving verses: "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, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (3:17,18). "Trust me," God says. "I've got this." That's true, no matter what.

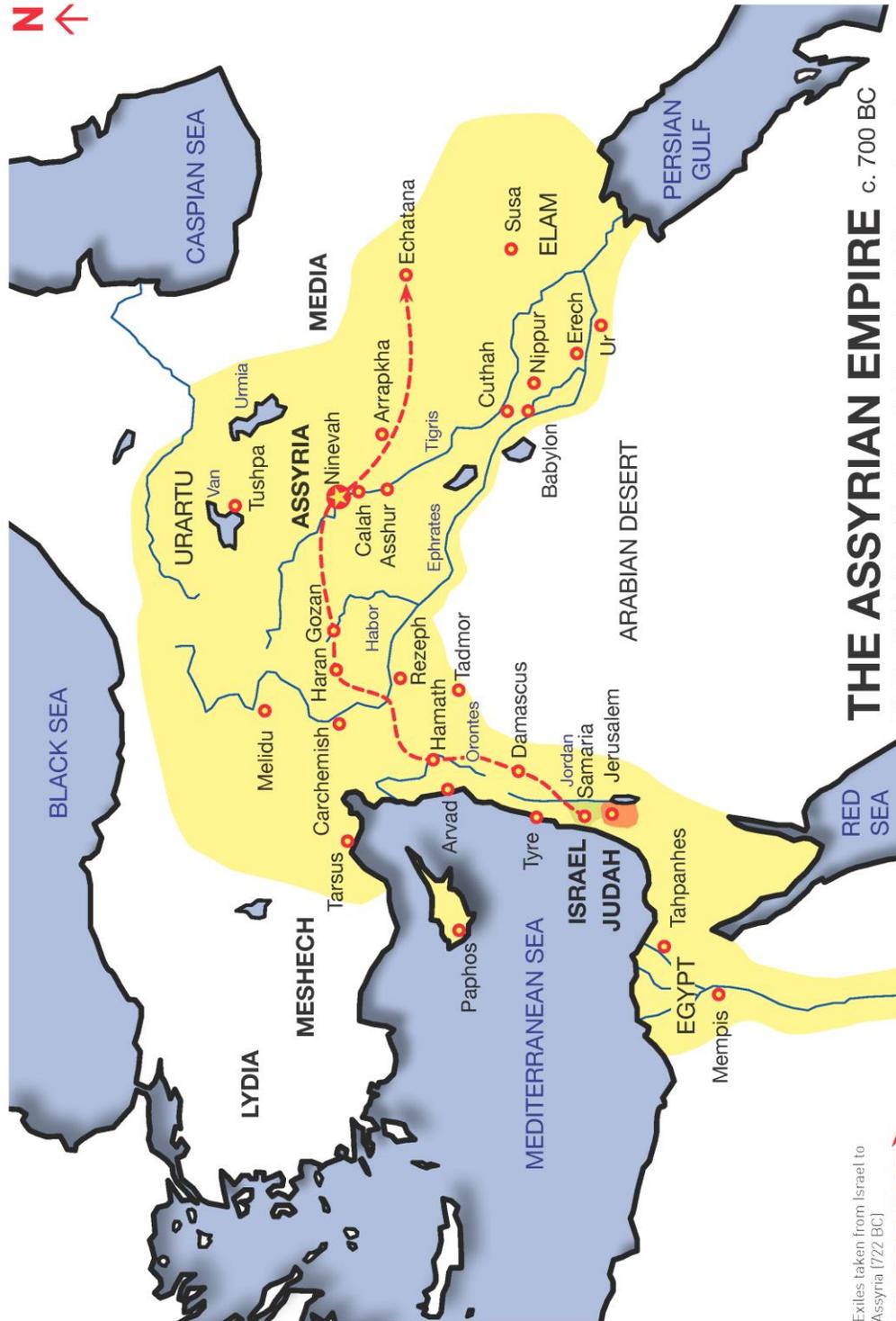
Hometown/lineage: Unknown.

Date: Not long before 605 B.C. (c. 610? 620?)

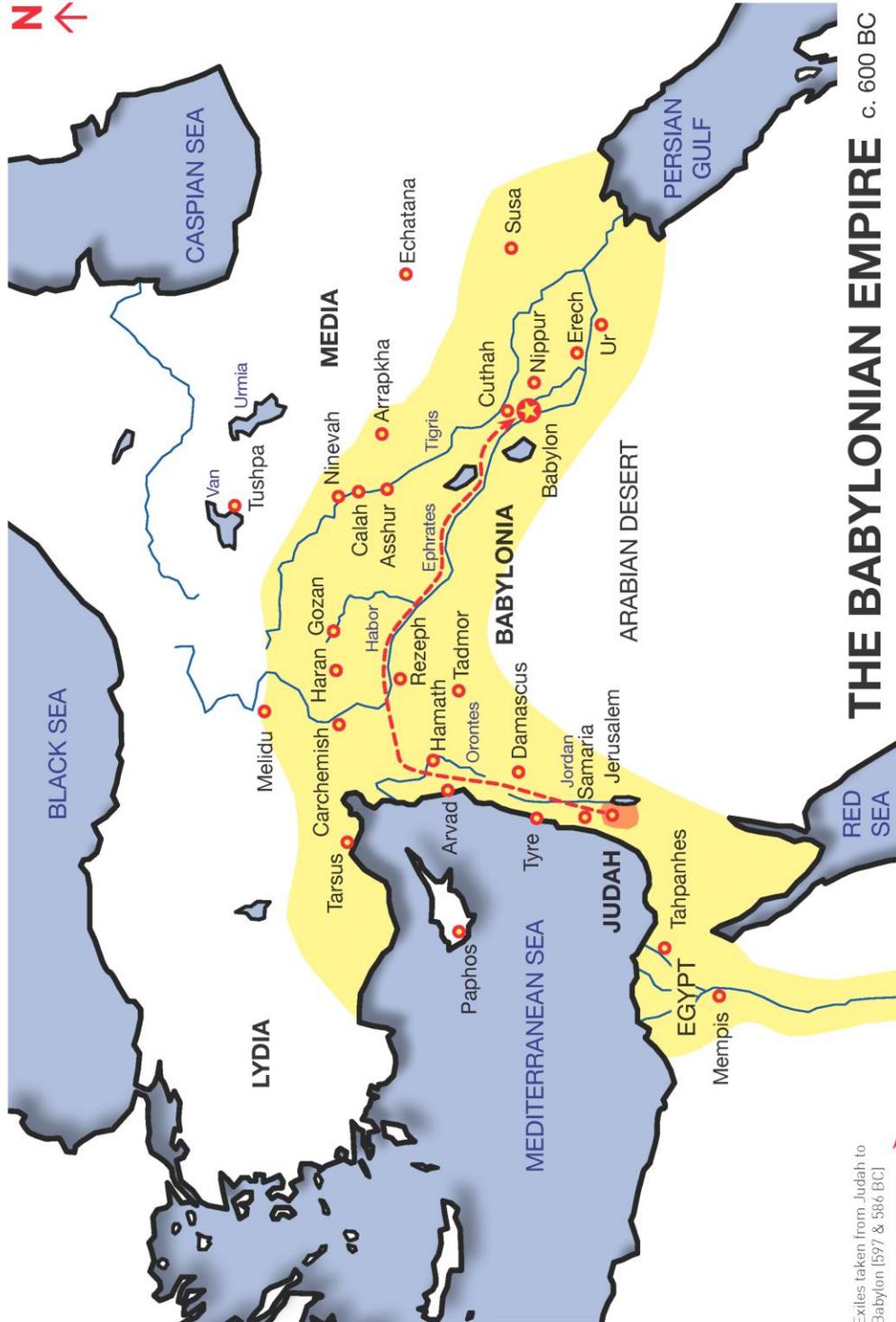
Unique feature: Two of the three chapters are a dialogue between one human and God.

Key verse: 2:4 "The righteous will live by his faith."

Map of Assyrian Empire



Map of Babylonian Empire



THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE c. 600 BC
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Exiles taken from Judah to Babylon (597 & 586 BC)

Habakkuk Quoted in the New Testament

Habakkuk	New Testament
1:5 – Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because <i>I am</i> doing something in your days– You would not believe if you were told.	Acts 13:41
2:3 – For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay.	Heb 10:37
2:4 – Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith.	Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38

Visual Outline of Habakkuk

