

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

- Habakkuk 1:1-4
 - The prophet cries out to God because he sees violence and injustice in Judean society. The poor are oppressed by the wealthy and powerful and Habakkuk wants God to listen to their cries and act.
- Habakkuk 1:5-11
 - God responds that the corrupt society of the people of Judah will be punished. God is sending in the Babylonian army to conquer Judah. (Babylon is strong and scary. They believe in their own might and their own justice.)
- Habakkuk 1:12-17
 - Habakkuk is shocked that God would use a wicked nation to punish the people of Judah. How can God bear to see Babylonians prospering from evil? Habakkuk wants to know: what will become of the world if Babylon keeps gaining riches by destroying nations? Will they never be stopped?

HABAKKUK 2:1 – THE PROPHET WAITS ON THE LORD

2 I will stand at my watch post,
and station myself on the rampart;
I will keep watch to see what God will say
to me,
and what God will answer concerning my
complaint.

The watch post might have referred to a site on the city walls or within the Temple or its walls. In the Temple, these posts were places where Levites played instruments and prophets received visions.¹



"Solomon's Temple (Outer)" by Jeremy Park of Bible-Scenes.com

1. When Habakkuk talks about standing watch and stationing himself, he's using military language. Why do you think he uses military language? Is it fear of the Babylonians? Fear of God? A general sense of loss of safety for him and his people?
2. Keeping watch to see what God is doing in the world and communicating to us is a big theme for Advent. The Bible often describes faith, hope, and discernment using the metaphor of one who keeps watch through the night so that others can sleep soundly. In Psalm 130:5, "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in God's word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning."

What does it mean to you to wait for the Lord? Does discernment feel like keeping guard at a watch post or do you experience it differently?

3. The word for “complaint” in Hebrew means “reproof,” “rebuttal,” or “correction.” So, another way to translated the verse would be, “I will keep watch to see what God will say against me.” Habakkuk has used his prophetic voice to attempt to correct God and he expects that he might be in trouble. Does God retaliate when we pray in anger?

HABAKKUK 2:2-5 –THE LORD RESPONDS TO THE PROPHET



Recreation of the Ten Commandments by A.E. Tracy Potts

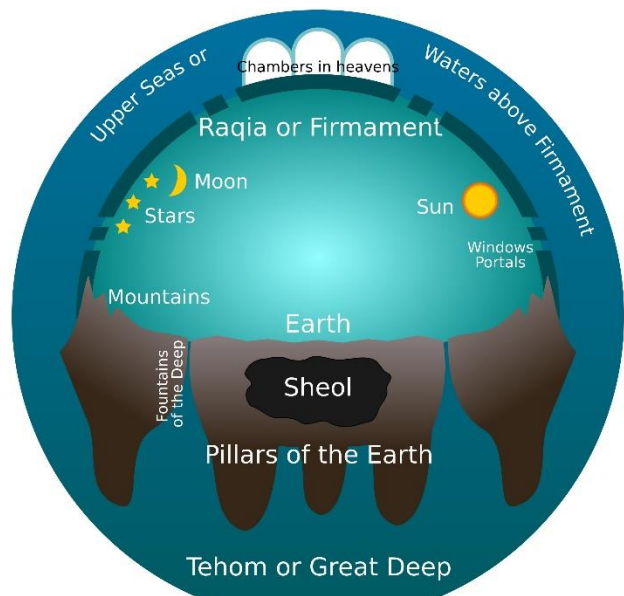
²Then the LORD answered me and said:
Write the vision;
make it plain on tablets,
so that a runner may read it.

³For there is still a vision for the
appointed time;
it speaks of the end, and does not lie.
If it seems to tarry, wait for it;
it will surely come, it will not delay.

⁴Look at the proud!
Their spirit is not right in them,
but the righteous live by their faith.

⁵Moreover, wealth is treacherous;
the arrogant do not endure.
They open their throats wide as Sheol;
like Death they never have enough.
They gather all nations for themselves,
and collect all peoples as their own.

God responds by giving Habakkuk a vision, but rather than describe the vision, first we find instructions about the vision. It needs to be so big that a herald who is running past can see and understand it without stopping. That's BIG!



*“Early Hebrew Conception of the Universe”
by Stephen L. Harris, 2003.*

1. In verse 3, we see that God takes the time to explain that there is a vision before explaining what it is. This verse emphasizes that the vision is true and real even if it doesn't come as soon as we want it to. Do you think this verse is talking about only Habakkuk's vision or other visions for the future of the people of God? Do you see a vision from God for our time? What do you think God wants from us today?

Verse 4 is a really big deal for us! It reaches backwards and forwards in scripture, was crucial in the Reformation, and holds big sway for us to this day. First, it looks back to Genesis 15:5-6. The wording in Hebrew is really similar. This is the story of God's first covenant with Abraham (still called Abram at this point). Abram is concerned that he is still childless and God says:

"Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then God said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶And Abram believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Paul picked up on these two verses in a big way. In Romans 1:16-17, he quotes it directly to talk about the importance of faith for any who would follow Jesus.



Large Magellanic Cloud taken by the ESA/Hubble Space Telescope

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

2. Verse 4 begins by saying that when we look at the proud or the arrogant, we see that, "their spirit is not right within them." What do you think that means?
3. What do you think is the relationship between belief/faith and righteousness? Do you see them as separate or as interrelated? What does it mean to see that, "the righteous will live by their faith"?
4. In verse 4, the word for "faith" used here is "*emunah*." The core sense of the word means "steadfastness," "fidelity," and "faithfulness" rather than referring to a specific belief. Its root word, "*aman*," is also the word that "amen" comes from and the same root as the biblical word that means "truth."ⁱⁱ Look at the verse using these different senses of the word "*emunah*": "the righteous will live by their steadfastness," "the righteous will live by their faithfulness," "the righteous will live by their truth." Does that change the meaning for you?

5. Verse 5 returns to the dangers of wealth and the temporary power of the arrogant. Sheol is a place of darkness where the dead go. The two middle verses are a parallelism (a form of Hebrew poetry that links similar ideas in paired verses – open throats/never have enough & Sheol/Death). Do you see desire for wealth and pride as an insatiable hunger?

HABAKKUK 2:6-8 – THE FIRST WOE ORACLE

⁶Shall not everyone taunt such people and, with mocking riddles, say about them,



Roman silver ingots from late 4th century to early 5th century AD

“Alas for you who heap up what is not your own!”
How long will you load yourselves with goods
taken in pledge?

⁷Will not your own creditors suddenly rise,
and those who make you tremble wake up?
Then you will be booty for them.

⁸Because you have plundered many nations,
all that survive of the peoples shall plunder you—
because of human bloodshed, and violence to the
earth,
to cities and all who live in them.

Now there are five “woe oracles.” These occur lots of places in the Bible and refer to any prophetic message that starts with “hoy,” the Hebrew word meaning woe (here translated as “alas.”)

1. Verse 6 introduces the woe oracles by asking: “shall not everyone taunt such people?” What do you make of this? Is there a holy or righteous way to taunt the arrogant and the oppressor? Or is this instruction about how to deflate the seeming power of sin and evil as Thomas More wrote, “The devil...that proud spirit...cannot endure to be mocked”?ⁱⁱⁱ
2. The first woe oracle warns about people who lend the poor money by taking their goods as collateral. It continues on, challenging people who build their wealth through violence. In both cases, God says the unjust lender will be taken down by their own creditors and those who plunder nations will be plundered by their victims. Does evil contain the seeds of its own undoing? Always or sometimes?

HABAKKUK 2:9-11 – THE SECOND WOE ORACLE

- ⁹“Alas for you who get evil gain for your house,
 setting your nest on high
 to be safe from the reach of harm!”
- ¹⁰You have devised shame for your house
 by cutting off many peoples;
 you have forfeited your life.
- ¹¹The very stones will cry out from the wall,
 and the plaster will respond from the
 woodwork.



A reconstruction of the Ishtar Gate, the northern entrance to Babylon

1. This woe criticizes those who amass wealth by evil means and then build up security for themselves. What should we do with unjust gain?
2. Some scholars think that this verse sees the house as a metaphor for the empire of Babylon.^{iv} They have built their houses and their walls with the slave labor and goods of conquered peoples. That would mean that the stones that cry out and the plaster that responds are the conquered people themselves. What happens when the oppressed cry out from seemingly stable and secure structures and institutions that surround every bit of an empire?

HABAKKUK 2:12-14 – THE THIRD WOE ORACLE

- ¹²“Alas for you who build a town by bloodshed,
 and found a city on iniquity!”
- ¹³Is it not from the LORD of hosts
 that peoples labor only to feed the flames,
 and nations weary themselves for nothing?
- ¹⁴But the earth will be filled
 with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,
 as the waters cover the sea.
1. Verse 13 shows us a glimpse of God’s intention for human labor. According to this verse, what is good labor and what is bad labor?

2. Verse 14 points beyond the meaninglessness of oppression to God's glory expressed in creation. How does knowing the glory of the Lord change us? How does it change our perspective?
3. In Habakkuk 1:14, the prophet challenges God, "You have made people like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler." Do you think Habakkuk 2:14 is a response to the prophet's despair? How so?

HABAKKUK 2:15-17 – THE FOURTH WOE ORACLE

¹⁵ "Alas for you who make your neighbors drink,
pouring out your wrath until they are drunk,
in order to gaze on their nakedness!"
¹⁶ You will be sated with contempt instead of glory.
Drink, you yourself, and stagger
The cup in the LORD's right hand
will come around to you,
and shame will come upon your glory!



"Isaiah's Vision of the Destruction of Babylon (Is. 13:1-22) by Gustave Dore, 1866.)

¹⁷ For the violence done to Lebanon will
overwhelm you;
the destruction of the animals will
terrify you—
because of human bloodshed and
violence to the earth,
to cities and all who live in them.

1. It's not entirely clear what is meant in the first few verses. It could refer to sexual assault by Babylonian soldiers or drugging guests who attend Babylonian feasts.^v Either way, it is a way of discussing the brutality of the Babylonians. As before, the crime fits in the punishment – those who abused others will be made drunk and stagger and expose themselves unwittingly. Is shaming wrongdoers the best way to address their misdeeds? Is it the only way for them to understand the shame and pain that they have caused their victims?

2. In verse 17, Habakkuk is likely referring to the total warfare that the Babylonians had waged in Lebanon as well as Israel. Lebanon was a place with many forests that the Babylonian's probably harvested for wood for their temples and other city expansions without regard to the land's sustainability.^{vi} God is saying that Babylon's total war will be met with similar violence to the Babylonians. God specifically says that the Babylonians will be punished not only for violence to the people but for violence to the land and to the animals. What is God's attitude toward creation?

HABAKKUK 2:18-20 – THE FIFTH WOE ORACLE & CODA

¹⁸ What use is an idol
 once its maker has shaped it—
 a cast image, a teacher of lies?
 For its maker trusts in what has been made,
 though the product is only an idol that cannot speak!
¹⁹ Alas for you who say to the wood, "Wake up!"
 to silent stone, "Rouse yourself!"
 Can it teach?
 See, it is gold and silver plated,
 and there is no breath in it at all.



²⁰ But the LORD is in his holy temple;
 let all the earth keep silence before him!

1. Now we turn to a warning against those who worship idols. Apart from worshipping false gods, what forms of idolatry have been mentioned so far in Habakkuk?
2. Why is idolatry dangerous?
3. Verse 20 is a famous one that has inspired several hymns. What does it mean to you to meditate on God being in the holy temple? How do you keep silent before the Lord since God can hear our thoughts and desires before we utter them?
4. Verse 20 is also the close of the chapter. Chapter 3 is a different genre entirely – a psalm that continues Habakkuk's prophecy. With this verse, his time of complaint is over. What do you make of this? Is his complaint being shut down? Is this a sign that his concerns have been heard and that God is

giving the final response? Is this God pointing out Habakkuk's limitations as a human or elevating them since God has been listening and responding?

ⁱ James D. Nogalski. *The Book of the Twelve: Micah-Malachi* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 667.

ⁱⁱ <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/530.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Thomas_More

^{iv} Nogalski, 670-1.

^v Nogalski, 672-4.

^{vi} Ibid.