

EXPOSITION OF HABAKKUK

I. HABAKKUK'S 1ST PROTEST AND GOD'S RESPONSE 1:1–11

A. Habakkuk's Protest

1. About whom do you think Habakkuk is speaking in 1:1–4?

- He is speaking about his people, Israel/Judah.

2. What specific things does Habakkuk cite?

a. 1:3 | Destruction shod (שָׁד) can be rendered “violent action or oppression.” is used elsewhere to speak of oppressing the poor, (Psalm 12:6), violent acts of wicked people (Psalm 21:7), attempted murder (Jeremiah 6:7, 20:8), even mistreatment of animals (Habakkuk 2:17).

b. 1:3 | “Strife exists, and contention arises.”

- “Strife” is *riv* (רִיב), elsewhere used to speak of lawsuits.

c. 1:3 | He must see it all and live in the midst of it all.

3. What seems to be Habakkuk's emotional reaction to it all?

- His emotions are expressed in the ways he cries out to the Lord in 1:2.

a. 1:2 | Habakkuk calls out to God for *deliverance*.

The Hebrew word is a familiar one to many of us. It is from the verb *shu'a*, שוּעַ, the same word from which we get the noun “salvation.” The NASB says that this was a “cry for help.” It implies that Habakkuk understood their desperation. He could do nothing about their situation and understood that only God could deliver them. It is a cry for salvation.

b. 1:2 | Habakkuk cries out to God from *distress*.

The Hebrew term is *za'ak*, זָעַק. This word means “cry,” but a cry that was a distressful alarm. BDB says it pictures an “utterance of horror, anxiety, alarm, distress, or sorrow.”¹ He was sounding a distress signal, but who paid attention? Did anyone take note of their call? Did God notice, he wondered.

4. How does Habakkuk summarize the situation in 1:4?

- His people ignored the Torah 1:4
- The wicked surround the righteous.
- Perverted justice (comes out crazy or confused)
- The righteous are pushed down.

B. God's Response 1:5–11

At last, the Lord did answer, but the answer was an unexpected one and gave Habakkuk new and even greater problems. The response is so surprising and awesome in a negative way that Habakkuk announces God's response telling them that they will “Be astonished! and Wonder!” (1:5). These terms mean that they will freeze with fear, be horrified² **What were some reasons that God's answer was an unexpected one?**

¹ HALOT, 277.

² HALOT, 1744

1. **Unexpected** because it did not offer comfort to Habakkuk nor his people. **1:5**
The prophet and people together are called to look in amazement among the *nations*, where an unprecedented event is about to take place by the hand of God.
 - *Look* and *observe* associate God’s response directly with Habakkuk’s lament, where the same two verbs are used (**1:3**).
2. **Unexpected** because who it was that God was sending: **The Babylonians/Chaldeans. What are their characteristics?**
 - A fierce and impetuous people
 - They seize dwelling places which are not theirs.
 - They are dreaded and feared
 - Their justice and authority originate with themselves — nor from God
 - Their horses are swifter than leopards and keener than wolves
 - Their horsemen fly like an eagle swooping *down* to devour.
 - All of them come for violence.
 - They collect captives like sand.
 - They mock at kings and rulers are a laughing matter to them.
 - They laugh at every fort and heap up rubble to capture it.
 - They draw strength from their god.

In short, (**1:8**) The Babylonians were arrogant, setting themselves up in God’s place even as far as promulgating their own *law* and honoring themselves. Power and pride often go together.

3. **Unexpected** because it brings more violence to the already surplus of violence!
4. **Unexpected** because God said that *He* is doing it. (**1:5**)
5. **Note the Hebrew of 1:5** | “Shock yourselves and be shocked!”
 - a. The imperatives here have the force of an emphatic assertion.
 - b. The play on the word for “work” פָּעַל פִּיעֵל — “for a work working in your days.”

C. Habakkuk’s Reaction to God 1:12–17

1. **A Description of what Habakkuk knows about God 1:12**
What does Habakkuk know about God and how does he apply it to his situation? **1:12**
 - Because of Him and his character, the prophet, and Israel whom he represents, *will not die*, lest the covenant be broken.
2. **Mention of the “Rock” 1:12**
 - a. When Habakkuk refers to God as a “rock” to which passage in the Torah is he alluding?
 - b. What image is conveyed. By the word “rock”?
 - “Rock” conveys the image of strength and indicating his changeless stability.
3. **Habakkuk’s Moral Problem with God 1:13–17**
 - a. **What moral problem is Habakkuk expressing in 1:13–17?**
The actual content of his moral problem is detailed in **1:13–17**. What astonishes Habakkuk is that God seems *silent* at this new, unjust turn of events. Habakkuk thought God in the light of his character as understood by Habakkuk, ought to be doing something to right them. But not only does God allow evil to happen to the righteous (1:13), He seems actively to make preparation for it, according to the imagery used here.

b. Who is the subject of 1:12–17? Judah or the Babylonians?

4. *The Fish Illustration*

What is the purpose of Habakkuk's fish illustration in 1:14–17?

- a. Habakkuk uses fish and fish net as symbolic of judgment and conquest.
- b. Not only in the Tanakh but also in the Ancient Near East, where one finds depictions of defeated captives taken into nets.
- c. Wrestling captives from their own environment, their native land, and exiling or transplanting them into a foreign region was a common practice among the Assyrians and the Babylonians.
- d. “He believes that his god is his net, with which he gathers all the nations under his rule and therefore he sacrifice es to it. When he returns to his city laden with spoils and accompanied by many captives, he offers up sacrifices as tokens of thanks to his god.”³
- e. “The oppressor seemed to be having everything his own way, and for a time there was no prospect of a halt being called to the expansion and consolidation of his power.”⁴
- f. The following mention of unmerciful, unsparing slaughter (AV, JB) is thus a summary of the literal treatment meted out by Babylon which was previously expressed in the fishing imagery.⁵

³ A. J. Rosenberg, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, Vol. Two. 263.

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *Habakkuk (The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary)*, 895.

⁵ S. D. Snyman, *Habakkuk (Tyndale Commentaries)*, 56.