

# Habakkuk

## 1

**Summary:** *Habakkuk 1 presents a bold dialogue between the prophet and God — one of the most unusual structures in prophetic literature. The prophet opens with a lament: 'How long, LORD?' — violence, injustice, and lawlessness surround him, and God seems silent. God answers with a shocking revelation: he is raising up the Chaldeans (Babylonians), a ruthless and terrifying nation, as his instrument of judgment. But this answer provokes a deeper question from Habakkuk: how can a holy God use a nation more wicked than those being punished? The chapter ends with the prophet's anguished protest still unresolved.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Habakkuk is distinctive among the prophets because he does not speak to the people on God's behalf — he speaks to God on behalf of the people (and himself). His complaint is not a lack of faith but the expression of deep faith that expects God to act justly and demands an explanation when he appears not to. The divine response (vv. 5-11) is one of the most vivid descriptions of Babylonian military power in the Hebrew Bible. The theological problem Habakkuk raises — why does God use evil to punish lesser evil? — is never fully resolved in the book; instead, it is transcended by the call to faithfulness in chapter 2.*

**Translation Friction:** *The phrase 'among the nations' in verse 5 appears as 'among the heathen' in the KJV and as 'among the nations' in the LXX variant; Acts 13:41 quotes a form closer to the LXX. We follow the MT. The rapid shifts between Habakkuk's speech and God's speech required clear identification. The word qadishah ('holy') in verse 12 combined with the assertion that God has 'appointed' the wicked for judgment creates the central theological tension of the book.*

**Connections:** *Habakkuk's opening cry 'How long?' places him in the tradition of lament psalmists (Psalms 13, 74, 89). The Chaldean description connects to Jeremiah's prophecies about Babylon (Jeremiah 25, 27). God's answer that he is 'doing a work' (v. 5) is quoted in Acts 13:41. The theological problem of divine justice anticipates Job's protests and Paul's wrestling in Romans 9. The fisherman metaphor (vv. 14-17) for Babylonian conquest is unique to Habakkuk.*

<sup>1</sup>The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received in a vision. <sup>2</sup>How long, LORD, must I cry for help and you do not hear? I cry out to you, 'Violence!' — but you do not save. <sup>3</sup>Why do you make me see wrongdoing and force me to look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife arises and conflict abounds. <sup>4</sup>Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore justice comes out perverted. <sup>5</sup>Look among the nations and

observe — be utterly astounded! For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe even if it were told to you. <sup>6</sup>For I am raising up the Chaldeans — that fierce and impetuous nation that marches across the breadth of the earth to seize dwelling places that are not their own. <sup>7</sup>They are dreaded and terrifying. Their justice and their authority originate from themselves alone. <sup>8</sup>Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their horsemen charge forward; their cavalry comes from afar. They fly like an eagle swooping to devour. <sup>9</sup>All of them come for violence. The thrust of their faces is forward, and they gather captives like sand. <sup>10</sup>He mocks kings; rulers are a joke to him. He laughs at every fortress. He heaps up earth and captures it. <sup>11</sup>Then he sweeps on like the wind and passes through — guilty, for he makes his own strength his god. <sup>12</sup>Are you not from of old, LORD my God, my Holy One? We will not die. LORD, you have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, you have established them for correction. <sup>13</sup>Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. So why do you look on the treacherous in silence? Why are you silent when the wicked swallows up one more righteous than himself? <sup>14</sup>You have made people like fish in the sea, like crawling things with no ruler over them. <sup>15</sup>He drags them all up with a hook; he catches them in his net and gathers them in his dragnet. Therefore he rejoices and celebrates. <sup>16</sup>Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, because by them his portion is rich and his food is plentiful. <sup>17</sup>Will he then keep emptying his net, slaughtering nations without mercy forever?

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Massa ('oracle, burden') is rendered consistently as 'oracle' in prophetic superscriptions throughout the project. The verb *chazah* ('to see, to perceive in a vision') indicates that this oracle was received visually, not merely audibly. The name Habakkuk (*chavaquq*) may derive from a plant name or from the Akkadian word for a garden plant; its meaning is uncertain.
2. The opening '*ad-anah* ('how long?') is the classic lament formula found throughout the Psalms (13:2, 74:10, 89:47). *Shivva'ti* ('I have cried') is a *piel* intensive — this is not a casual complaint but an anguished, sustained cry. The word *chamas* ('violence, wrongdoing') is the same word used to describe the pre-flood world in Genesis 6:11, suggesting that Habakkuk sees his society as having reached that level of corruption.
3. Habakkuk's protest is directed at God, not at the wicked — why do 'you' (God) make me see this? The four terms — *aven* ('wrongdoing, iniquity'), *amal* ('trouble, misery'), *shod* ('destruction, devastation'), and *chamas* ('violence') — paint a comprehensive picture of social collapse. *Riv* ('strife, legal dispute') and *madon* ('conflict, quarrel') add the dimension of legal and social dysfunction.
4. *Torah* here means 'law, instruction' in its broadest sense — the entire legal and moral framework of society has become inoperative. *Taphug* ('paralyzed, numb, chilled') suggests the law has gone cold, lost its force. The verb *maktir* ('surrounds, encircles') creates the image of the righteous person hemmed in by the wicked, unable to obtain justice. *Mishpat me'uqqal* ('perverted justice') — the very institution meant to protect the righteous has been twisted into a weapon against them.
5. God's response begins. The imperatives are plural — addressed to Habakkuk and his generation. The emphatic *hitammahu temahu* ('be astounded, be astounded') uses an infinitive absolute for maximum intensity. The work God is doing is so unexpected that it would be dismissed as unbelievable even if reported in advance. Paul quotes this verse in Acts 13:41 (from the LXX) to warn the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch against rejecting God's new work in Christ.
6. God's answer is the opposite of what Habakkuk expected. The Chaldeans (*Kasdim*) are the Neo-Babylonians who rose to power after the fall of Assyria. *Mar* ('bitter, fierce') and *nimhar* ('impetuous, hasty, reckless') characterize them as both cruel and unstoppable. The phrase 'dwelling places not their own' (*mishkanot lo-lo*) defines imperialism — taking what belongs to others. God claims direct agency: 'I am raising up' (*hineni meqim*).
7. *Ayom venora* ('dreaded and terrifying') describes the psychological impact of Babylonian power on other nations. The critical phrase 'their justice and authority originate from themselves' (*mimmennu mishpato use'eto yetse*) means they are a law unto themselves — they recognize no higher authority, no divine standard. This is the seed of the problem Habakkuk will press: how can God use a nation that acknowledges no one above itself?
8. Three animal comparisons capture different aspects of Babylonian cavalry: leopards (speed), evening wolves (ferocity — wolves hunt aggressively at dusk after a day of hunger), and eagles (aerial perspective and precision strike). The verb *pashu* ('spread out, charge') suggests the cavalry disperses across a wide front. The eagle (*neshar*, which can also mean 'vulture') swooping to eat combines speed with predatory intent.
9. *Chamas* ('violence') reappears — the same word Habakkuk used in his complaint (v. 2). The irony is sharp: Habakkuk complained about violence, and God's answer is more violence. *Megammat penehem qadimah* ('the thrust/eagerness of their faces is forward/eastward') suggests relentless advance. 'Captives like sand' (*shevi kachol*) echoes the Abrahamic promise of descendants like sand (Genesis 22:17) — but here the image is inverted: sand-like numbers of prisoners, not descendants.
10. The singular 'he' likely refers to the Babylonian king or the nation personified. The verbs *yitqallas* ('mocks') and *yischaq* ('laughs') portray contempt for all human authority. The siege tactic of heaping earth (siege ramps) is described with dismissive brevity — 'he heaps up dirt and takes it,' as if the capture of fortified cities is trivially easy. Archaeological evidence confirms the Babylonian use of massive siege ramps.

11. This verse marks the pivot from description to indictment. The Babylonian's power becomes his religion — 'his strength is his god' (zu kocho le'eloho). This is the essence of imperial idolatry: worshipping one's own power. The word ve'ashem ('and becomes guilty, and offends') indicates that this self-deification is the precise point where legitimate power becomes criminal. Ruach ('wind, spirit') describes the Babylonian sweeping across nations like a wind — unstoppable but also insubstantial.
12. Habakkuk's second complaint begins. He reaffirms God's eternal nature (miqqedem, 'from of old') and holiness (qadosh) as the basis for his protest. 'We will not die' is either a faith confession or a rhetorical question expecting a negative answer. Tsur ('Rock') is a divine title emphasizing stability and reliability (Deuteronomy 32:4). The claim that God has 'appointed' (samto) and 'established' (yesadto) the Babylonians for judgment creates the theological crisis: if God is using them, God is responsible for what they do.
13. This is the sharpest verse in the book. Habakkuk takes God's own character (purity, holiness) and turns it into an accusation: if you cannot tolerate evil, why are you tolerating this? The word bogedim ('treacherous, faithless') describes the Babylonians. The verb bala' ('swallow up') depicts the Chaldeans consuming Judah whole. The comparative 'more righteous than himself' (tsaddiq mimmennu) is the crux — Habakkuk does not claim Judah is innocent, only that Judah is less guilty than Babylon.
14. The fisherman metaphor begins. Habakkuk accuses God of reducing humans to the status of fish — creatures without a ruler or protector, vulnerable to anyone with a net. The word remesh ('crawling things, swarming creatures') recalls the lowest tier of creation in Genesis 1. The absence of a moshel ('ruler, protector') means God has abandoned his creatures to the predator.
15. Three fishing implements — chakkah ('hook'), cherem ('net'), and mikhmereth ('dragnet') — describe the Babylonian's systematic harvesting of nations. The verbs 'drags up,' 'catches,' 'gathers' suggest methodical, industrial-scale conquest. The joy and celebration that follow are obscene — the conqueror celebrates the destruction of peoples as a fisherman celebrates a large catch.
16. This is the climax of the fisherman metaphor and a devastating theological observation. The Babylonian worships his own military apparatus — the net (his army, his strategy) becomes his god. The sacrificial language (yezabbeach, 'sacrifices'; yeqatter, 'burns incense') is liturgical vocabulary applied to instruments of conquest. This connects back to verse 11: 'he makes his own strength his god.' The idol is not a statue but a system of power.
17. The chapter ends with an unanswered question — Habakkuk's protest hangs in the air. The verb yariq ('empty') depicts the fisherman dumping his catch and throwing the net again — an endless cycle of conquest. Tamid ('continually, forever') and lo yachmol ('without mercy, without sparing') underscore the relentless, compassionless nature of imperial violence. The question implies: when does it end? Chapter 2 will provide the answer.

## 2

*Summary: Habakkuk 2 begins with the prophet stationing himself on a watchtower to await God's answer. The answer comes: write the vision plainly, because it is for an appointed time. Then the pivotal declaration — 'the righteous shall live by his faithfulness' (v. 4). This is followed by five devastating woe oracles against the Babylonian oppressor, condemning plunder, unjust gain, bloodshed, debauchery, and idolatry. The chapter climaxes with one of the most majestic declarations in Scripture: 'The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea' (v. 14). It closes with the command: 'The LORD is in his holy temple — let all the earth be silent before him.'*

*What Makes This Remarkable: Habakkuk 2:4 is one of the most consequential verses in the entire Bible. 'The righteous shall live by his faithfulness' (be'emunato) is quoted three times in the New Testament — Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38 — and became the theological engine of the Protestant Reformation. The Hebrew emunah means covenantal faithfulness lived out in action, not mere intellectual belief. The five woe oracles (vv. 6-20) form one of the most sustained indictments of imperial greed in prophetic literature, and their structure — each beginning with hoy ('woe') — creates a liturgical rhythm of condemnation. Verse 14's vision of universal knowledge of God's glory is the prophetic hope at its most expansive, echoing Isaiah 11:9.*

*Translation Friction: The key translation decision in verse 4 centers on be'emunato — does it mean 'by his faith,' 'by his faithfulness,' or 'by his fidelity'? The Hebrew clearly points toward active covenantal loyalty rather than passive belief, and we render it 'by his faithfulness' with a full expanded rendering treatment. The five woe oracles contain difficult imagery, including the cup of wrath metaphor (v. 16) and the reference to uncovering nakedness. The relationship between the 'vision' of verses 2-3 and the content that follows is debated — we take verses 4-5 as the vision proper and the woes as its elaboration.*

*Connections: Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38 — each NT author emphasizes a different aspect of the Hebrew original. The woe oracle form connects to Isaiah 5:8-23 and Nahum 3:1. The vision of earth filled with knowledge of God's glory (v. 14) parallels Isaiah 11:9 and Numbers 14:21. The watchtower motif (v. 1) connects to Isaiah 21:6-8 and Ezekiel 3:17. The closing temple silence (v. 20) parallels Zephaniah 1:7 and Zechariah 2:13.*

**1**I will stand at my watchpost and station myself on the rampart. I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what answer I will receive to my complaint. **2**Then the LORD answered me and said: Write the vision; inscribe it clearly on tablets so that a herald may run with it. **3**For the vision is for an appointed time; it testifies to the end and will not prove false. If it seems slow, wait for it — it will surely come; it will not delay. **4**Look — the arrogant one, his soul is not upright within him; but the righteous shall live by his faithfulness. **5**Moreover, wine is treacherous — the arrogant man who never rests, who opens his appetite wide as Sheol, who is like death and is never satisfied, who gathers all nations to himself and collects all peoples for himself. **6**Will not all of these take up a taunt against him, a mocking riddle about him, and say: Woe to the one who heaps up what is not his own — how long? — and loads himself down with pledges! **7**Will not your creditors suddenly rise up, and those who make you tremble awake? Then you will become plunder for them. **8**Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples will plunder you — because of the blood of humankind and the violence done to the land, to the city, and to all who dwell in it. **9**Woe to the one who cuts unjust gain for his house, setting his nest on high to escape the reach of disaster! **10**You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples, forfeiting your own life. **11**For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the timber will answer it. **12**Woe to the one who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by injustice! **13**Is it not from the LORD of Hosts that peoples labor only for fire, and nations exhaust themselves for nothing? **14**For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. **15**Woe to the one who makes his neighbor drink, pouring out your wrath and making them drunk, in order to gaze on their nakedness! **16**You are filled with shame instead of glory. Drink, you yourself! Expose your own uncircumcision! The cup in the LORD's right hand will come around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory. **17**For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and the destruction of its animals will terrify you — because of the blood of humankind and the violence done to the land, to the city, and to all who dwell in it. **18**What use is a carved image, that its maker should carve it — a cast idol, a teacher of lies? For the craftsman trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols. **19**Woe to the one who says to wood, 'Wake up!' — to silent stone, 'Arise! Teach us!' Look at it — overlaid with gold and silver, but there is no breath in it at all. **20**But the LORD is in his holy temple — let all the earth be silent before him.

#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

- 1.** Habakkuk positions himself as a watchman — the prophetic sentinel who watches for God's word (cf. Isaiah 21:6-8, Ezekiel 3:17). Mishmarti ('my watchpost') and matsor ('rampart, siege-work') are military vocabulary repurposed for spiritual vigilance. The word tokhachti ('my complaint, my argument') indicates Habakkuk expects a response to the case he has laid before God — this is a legal metaphor, the prophet filing a brief and awaiting the court's ruling.
- 2.** God commands the vision to be written and made plain (ba'er, 'make clear, explain distinctly'). The luchot ('tablets') are likely large public posting boards, not private scrolls. The phrase 'so that a herald may run with it' (lema'an yaruts qore bo) has been debated — it could mean 'so that whoever reads it can run' (i.e., understand it quickly) or 'so that a runner/herald can carry and proclaim it.' We follow the herald reading because the context emphasizes public proclamation.
- 3.** The vision has a divinely appointed schedule (mo'ed, 'appointed time, set time') — it is not late, even if it appears so to human perception. Yaphech laqqets ('it testifies/hastens to the end') means the vision itself strains toward its own fulfillment. Lo yekhazzev ('will not prove false, will not lie') assures that the vision is trustworthy. The verbs bo yavo ('it will surely come,' emphatic infinitive absolute) and lo ye'acher ('will not delay') counter the human temptation to abandon hope.
- 4.** This is arguably the most consequential verse in the Minor Prophets. The contrast is between the 'puffed up' (uppelah, from a root meaning 'to swell') person — whose soul is crooked — and the tsaddiq ('righteous person') who lives by emunah. We render emunah as 'faithfulness' rather than 'faith' because the Hebrew clearly denotes active covenantal loyalty, not passive belief. The LXX translated emunah as pistis, which carries both 'faith' and 'faithfulness' in Greek. Paul's use of this verse in Romans 1:17 ('the righteous shall live by faith') emphasizes the trust/faith dimension, while the Hebrew emphasizes the faithfulness/loyalty dimension. Both are legitimate readings of the semantic range.

5. This verse bridges the vision (vv. 2-4) and the woe oracles (vv. 6-20), describing the Babylonian tyrant. The image of an appetite 'wide as Sheol' (hirschiv kish'e'ol nafsho) makes greed into a gaping underworld mouth. 'Wine is treacherous' (hayyayin boged) may refer to Babylonian banqueting culture or serve as a metaphor for the intoxication of power. Lo yinveh ('never rests, never stays home') describes imperial restlessness — the compulsion to keep conquering.
6. The first woe oracle begins. The conquered nations themselves will compose taunts (mashal, 'proverb, taunt-song') against their oppressor. Avtit ('pledges, thick clay') is debated — it may mean goods taken in pledge (extorted collateral) or metaphorically 'thick clay,' a burden that weighs the thief down. The interruption 'how long?' (ad matay) echoes Habakkuk's own cry in 1:2, now turned against Babylon.
7. The reversal principle: the plunderer becomes plunder. Noshkekheka ('your biters/creditors') uses the verb nashakh, which means both 'to bite' (like a snake) and 'to charge interest' — a double meaning perfectly suited to the context. The oppressor thought he was the creditor; suddenly the debtors rise up and reclaim what was taken. Meshissot ('plunder, spoil') is what Babylon will become.
8. The lex talionis principle governs: what Babylon did, Babylon will receive. The phrase demei adam ('blood of humankind') is comprehensive — not one nation's blood but humanity's. Chamas-erets ('violence of/to the land') may refer to both political violence and ecological destruction wrought by conquest. The fourfold scope — land, city, all inhabitants — is total.
9. The second woe oracle. Botse'a betsa ra ('cuts unjust gain') uses the verb batsa, which literally means 'to cut off a piece' — like cutting a slice of plundered wealth for yourself. The bird metaphor — setting a nest on high for safety — suggests the Babylonian king building impregnable fortresses and palaces, believing wealth can insulate him from judgment. Kaph ra ('the palm/grasp of disaster') is what he tries to escape — but cannot.
10. The irony intensifies: the unjust gain meant to secure the 'house' (dynasty) actually brings bosheth ('shame') upon it. Qetsot ammim rabbim ('cutting off many peoples') describes the extermination of nations. Chote nafshekha ('sinning against your own soul/life') means the violence rebounds — by destroying others, the tyrant has destroyed himself.
11. One of the most striking images in prophetic literature: the very building materials of the palace — stones and wooden beams — will testify against the builder because they were acquired through oppression and built with blood. Tiz'aq ('cry out') is the same verb used for the cry of the oppressed in Exodus. Kaphiss ('beam, rafter') answers the stone — the whole structure becomes a witness for the prosecution.
12. The third woe oracle. Boneh ir bedamim ('builds a city with blood') describes the literal use of forced labor and conquest to construct Babylon's monuments. The parallel koinen qiryah be'avlah ('establishes a town by injustice') shows that the entire urban project is founded on moral corruption. This connects to Nahum 3:1 ('woe to the city of blood') — what was said of Nineveh now applies to Babylon.
13. The rhetorical question asserts divine sovereignty over the futility of empire. All the labor of conquered peoples — forced into building Babylon's monuments — is ultimately for fire (bedei-esh, 'for the sake of fire'), because the city will burn. Le'ummim bedei-riq yi'aphu ('nations exhaust themselves for emptiness') means every imperial project ends in ash. The LORD of Hosts is the one who ensures this futility.
14. This verse closely parallels Isaiah 11:9 ('the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea') and Numbers 14:21 ('all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD'). Habakkuk's version uniquely combines 'knowledge' (da'at) and 'glory' (kavod) — the earth will not merely see God's glory but know it, understand it, be immersed in it. The comparison 'as the waters cover the sea' is not about partial covering but total saturation — there is no part of the sea that water does not fill.
15. The fourth woe oracle. The metaphor shifts to forced intoxication — the tyrant makes his neighbors (re'ehu, 'friends/companions' — the word implies a relationship of supposed equality) drink until they are exposed and vulnerable. Mesappeach chamatekha ('pouring out your wrath/poison') — chamat could mean either 'wrath' or 'venom/poison,' and the ambiguity may be intentional. The purpose clause 'in order to gaze on their nakedness' (lema'an habbit al me'oreihem) depicts the humiliation of conquered peoples.
16. The punishment fits the crime: the one who forced others to drink and stripped them naked will now drink and be stripped himself. 'Shame instead of glory' (qalon mikkavod) is a devastating reversal. He'arel ('show yourself uncircumcised, expose yourself') is a term of ultimate degradation in the ancient Near East. The 'cup of the LORD's right hand' (kos yemin YHWH) is the cup of divine wrath that nations must drink (cf. Jeremiah 25:15-28). Qiqalon ('disgrace, shameful vomiting') — the word may combine qalon ('shame') with qi ('vomit').
17. Lebanon's famous cedars were systematically harvested by Babylonian kings for their palace-building projects — the ecological destruction is treated as a moral crime. Shod behemot ('destruction of animals') suggests that the deforestation also devastated wildlife habitats. The refrain 'because of the blood of humankind and violence to the land' (middemei adam vachamal-erets) repeats from verse 8, creating a structural bracket around the woe oracles. The inclusion of land and animals alongside human victims is a remarkably holistic view of justice.
18. This verse sets up the fifth woe. The absurdity is stated plainly: the idol is made by the worshiper, so it cannot be greater than its maker. Moreh shaqer ('teacher of lies') is devastating — the idol does not merely fail to help, it actively deceives. Elilim illemim ('mute worthless things') — elilim is a contemptuous diminutive, possibly a wordplay on elohim ('gods'), meaning 'little nothings.' They are illemim ('mute, speechless') — they cannot answer, speak, or save.
19. The fifth woe oracle targets idolatry directly. The commands to the idol — 'Wake up! Arise!' — are absurdly addressed to inert materials (wood, stone). Dumam ('silent') describes the stone as fundamentally incapable of speech. The idol is taphus ('overlaid, plated') with precious metals — beautiful on the outside, empty within. The decisive condemnation: kol ruach ein beqirbo ('there is absolutely no breath/spirit within it'). Ruach ('breath, spirit, wind') is what the living God possesses and the idol lacks entirely.

20. This verse is the theological climax of the chapter. After addressing idols that cannot speak, Habakkuk declares that the living God is present in his temple. Has ('silence! hush!') is an interjection commanding absolute stillness — the same word used in Zephaniah 1:7 ('Be silent before the Lord GOD') and Zechariah 2:13 ('Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD'). The scope is universal: kol ha'arets ('all the earth'). The speechless idols are contrasted with the God before whom all speech must stop — not because he is mute but because he is overwhelmingly present.

### 3

**Summary:** *Habakkuk 3 is a prayer-psalm — a theophany poem in which the prophet calls on God to renew his mighty acts, then describes a terrifying vision of God marching forth as a divine warrior. The imagery draws on the exodus, the wilderness wandering, and cosmic combat: God comes from Teman and Mount Paran, his splendor covers the heavens, he strides through the earth in fury, he tramples nations. The chapter moves from terror to trust, closing with one of the most extraordinary confessions of faith in all Scripture: 'Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines... yet I will rejoice in the LORD.'*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *This chapter stands apart from the rest of Habakkuk in form — it has a superscription with a musical term (shigionot), embedded Selah markers, and a colophon assigning it to the choir-master with stringed accompaniment. This strongly suggests it was used liturgically as a psalm. The theophany in verses 3-15 is among the most powerful in the Hebrew Bible, rivaling Judges 5 (Song of Deborah) and Psalm 18 in its depiction of God as cosmic warrior. The concluding confession (vv. 17-19) transcends the entire complaint-dialogue of chapters 1-2: Habakkuk moves from 'How long?' to 'Yet I will rejoice' — not because his questions have been answered but because he has encountered the God who is worth trusting regardless of circumstances.*

**Translation Friction:** *The theophany language is archaic, allusive, and dense with mythological imagery. Place names like Teman, Paran, and Cushan require geographical notes. Some phrases are textually uncertain — the Hebrew of verses 13-14 is particularly difficult. Musical terms like shigionot and selah are of uncertain meaning, and we note this honestly. The shift from third-person description of God to second-person address within the theophany required careful tracking.*

**Connections:** *The theophany echoes Deuteronomy 33:2 (God coming from Sinai/Seir/Paran), Judges 5:4-5 (God marching from Seir), and Psalm 68:7-8 (God going before his people in the wilderness). The cosmic combat imagery connects to Psalm 77:16-19 and Isaiah 51:9-10. The concluding confession of faith anticipates Job's response (Job 13:15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him') and connects to Paul's declaration in Romans 8:35-39. The liturgical elements suggest this text was performed in worship, making it the congregation's response to the theological crisis of chapters 1-2.*

<sup>1</sup>A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionot. <sup>2</sup>LORD, I have heard the report of you and I stand in awe. LORD, renew your work in the midst of the years; in the midst of the years make it known. In wrath, remember mercy. <sup>3</sup>God comes from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His splendor covers the heavens, and the earth is full of his praise. <sup>4</sup>His radiance is like the light; rays flash from his hand, and there the veiling of his power. <sup>5</sup>Before him goes pestilence, and plague follows at his heels. <sup>6</sup>He stands and shakes the earth; he looks and makes the nations tremble. The eternal mountains are shattered, the ancient hills collapse — his ways are everlasting. <sup>7</sup>I see the tents of Cushan in distress; the tent curtains of the land of Midian tremble. <sup>8</sup>Was your anger against the rivers, LORD? Was your wrath against the rivers, your fury against the sea? For you ride on your horses, your chariots of salvation! <sup>9</sup>You bare your bow completely; sworn are the arrows of your word. Selah. You split the earth with rivers. <sup>10</sup>The mountains see you and writhe. Torrents of water sweep past. The deep raises its voice; it lifts its waves on high. <sup>11</sup>Sun and moon stand still in their dwelling at the light of your arrows as they fly, at the flash of your gleaming spear. <sup>12</sup>In fury you stride across the earth; in anger you thresh the nations. <sup>13</sup>You go out to save your people, to save your anointed one. You crush the head of the house of the wicked, stripping it bare from foundation to neck. Selah. <sup>14</sup>You pierce the head of his warriors with their own spears. They storm in to scatter us — their glee is like devouring the poor in secret. <sup>15</sup>You tread the sea with your horses, churning the mighty waters. <sup>16</sup>I heard, and my body trembled; my lips quivered at the sound. Decay crept into my bones, and my legs shook beneath me. Yet

I will wait quietly for the day of distress, for the attack on the people who invade us. <sup>17</sup>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 the flock is cut off from the fold and there are no cattle in the stalls — <sup>18</sup>yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. <sup>19</sup>The Lord GOD is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's and makes me walk on my high places. For the choirmaster, with stringed instruments.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription identifies this as a tefillah ('prayer'), a term also used in the psalm titles (Psalms 17, 86, 90, 102, 142). Shigionot (plural of shiggaion) is a musical or liturgical term of uncertain meaning — possibly related to shagah ('to wander, to reel'), suggesting a wild, passionate, or irregular musical style. The only other occurrence is in Psalm 7:1. The superscription confirms this chapter functioned as a liturgical composition.
2. Habakkuk has heard God's shim'akha ('report, fame, reputation') — the accounts of what God has done in the past — and responds with fear (yare'ti, 'I was afraid/I stand in awe'). His petition is twofold: (1) renew the mighty acts of old (chayyeihu, 'revive it, bring it to life') within the current crisis ('in the midst of the years'), and (2) berogez rachem tizkor ('in wrath remember mercy') — even while executing judgment, do not forget compassion. This single line holds the entire book's theology in balance.
3. Teman ('the south') is a region in Edom, and Paran is the wilderness between Sinai and Canaan. This echoes Deuteronomy 33:2 ('The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon them; he shone forth from Mount Paran') and Judges 5:4 ('LORD, when you went out from Seir'). Selah appears here and in verses 9 and 13 — its meaning is uncertain, possibly a musical interlude or a liturgical response marker. Hodo ('his splendor, his majesty') fills the heavens; tehillato ('his praise') fills the earth — a total cosmic manifestation.
4. Nogah ka'or ('radiance like the light') describes blinding brightness. Qarnayim miyado ('horns/rays from his hand') — qarnayim can mean either 'horns' (symbols of power) or 'rays of light' (as in Exodus 34:29-30, where Moses' face 'shone,' from the same root q-r-n). The phrase chevyon uzzo ('the hiding/veiling of his power') is extraordinary: what Habakkuk sees — the blinding radiance, the flashing rays — is actually the concealment of God's power. The visible glory is a veil; the full reality would be unbearable.
5. Dever ('pestilence') and resheph ('plague, burning fever') are personified as God's attendants — they march before and behind him like royal bodyguards. In Canaanite mythology, Resheph was a deity of plague and war; here, plague is demoted to God's footsoldier. The imagery is of a divine king processing with his retinue — but his retinue consists of the forces of death.
6. The verbs are devastating in their simplicity: God stands (amad) and the earth shakes; he looks (ra'ah) and nations tremble. Harerei-ad ('mountains of perpetuity') and giv'ot olam ('hills of eternity') — the most permanent features of creation — shatter and collapse before him. The concluding phrase halikot olam lo ('his ways are everlasting') contrasts God's permanence with the impermanence of everything else, even mountains. What seems eternal in human experience is temporary before God.
7. Cushan and Midian are peoples of the southern desert region — the same area God is advancing from (v. 3). Their tents shake as God passes through their territory. Cushan may be an archaic name for Cush (Ethiopia/Nubia) or a local Arabian tribe. Midian was located east of the Gulf of Aqaba. The nomadic imagery (tents, curtains) and the geographical references ground the theophany in the wilderness traditions of the exodus.
8. The rhetorical questions imply: No, God's anger is not against the rivers or the sea — they are merely the arena in which he demonstrates his power. The imagery of God riding horses and chariots echoes the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15) and Psalm 68:17. Markevotekha yeshu'ah ('your chariots of salvation/victory') transforms the war chariot into an instrument of deliverance — God's military might serves his saving purpose.
9. This verse is textually one of the most difficult in the Hebrew Bible. Eryah te'or qashtekha ('your bow is completely bared/uncovered') depicts God drawing a bow for battle. Shevu'ot mattot omer ('sworn rods/arrows of speech/word') is nearly untranslatable with certainty — it likely refers to the sworn decrees of God being compared to arrows launched from the bow. The splitting of the earth with rivers may recall the exodus crossing or the creation of waterways as God's feet impact the ground.
10. The personification intensifies: mountains 'see' God and convulse in pain (yachilu, from chul, 'to writhe, to be in labor'). The tehom ('deep, abyss') — the primordial ocean of Genesis 1:2 — responds to God's presence by 'raising its voice' (natan qolo) and 'lifting its hands' (rom yadeihu nasa). The image of the deep lifting its waves like raised hands may depict either surrender or acclamation — the ocean itself responding to its Creator.
11. This alludes to Joshua 10:12-13, where the sun and moon stood still during battle. Here the celestial bodies halt because God's weaponry outshines them — his arrows are brighter than the sun, his spear flashes beyond the moon's light. Zevulah ('exalted dwelling, celestial habitation') refers to the sky-realm where sun and moon reside. The heavenly bodies become irrelevant when the God who made them goes to war.
12. Tits'ad erets ('stride across the earth') depicts God covering vast distances in single steps — the earth is too small for his scale. Tadush goyim ('thresh the nations') is agricultural violence applied to warfare — threshing is the act of beating grain to separate the edible kernel from the husk. The nations are the grain on God's threshing floor.
13. The purpose of the theophany is revealed: yesha' ammekha ('salvation of your people') and yesha' et meshichekha ('salvation of your anointed'). The meshiach ('anointed one') likely refers to the Davidic king, though later readers saw messianic significance. Machats rosh mibbet rasha ('crush the head from the house of the wicked') echoes Genesis 3:15 (crushing the serpent's head). 'Stripping bare from foundation to neck' (arot yesod ad tsavvar) is the image of demolishing a building from its foundations up to its roofline — total destruction.

- 14.** The text is very difficult here. Naqavta bematav rosh perazav ('you pierce with his staves/spears the head of his warriors') may describe God turning the enemy's weapons against them. Perazav ('his villagers/warriors') can mean either rural populations or warriors. 'Their glee is like devouring the poor in secret' (alitsutam kemo le'ekhol ani bamistar) compares the enemy's jubilation over conquest to the predation of the helpless — they take the same pleasure in destroying nations as the powerful take in exploiting the poor.
- 15.** The theophany concludes with a clear allusion to the Red Sea crossing: God's war-horses trampling through the sea, churning the great waters into foam. Darakhta ('you tread, you trample') is the language of the winepress — God treads on the sea as a vintner treads grapes. Chomer mayim rabbim ('heap/churning of many waters') captures the turbulence of waters parting and closing. The exodus is the paradigmatic act of divine salvation, and all future acts of deliverance are modeled on it.
- 16.** The prophet's physical reaction to the theophany: trembling belly (tirgaz bitni), quivering lips (tsalelu sephatay), bones feeling rotten (yavo raqav ba'atsamay), legs giving way (tachtay ergaz). This is not fear of judgment but the overwhelming terror of God's presence — even when God comes to save, his presence is almost unbearable. The pivot 'yet I will wait quietly' (asher anuach leyom tsarah) moves from terror to trust — despite the overwhelming vision, Habakkuk chooses patient waiting.
- 17.** This verse catalogs total agricultural collapse — every source of sustenance is eliminated. Fig trees (staple fruit), grapevines (wine), olive trees (oil), grain fields (bread), sheep (wool and meat), and cattle (dairy and labor) — the six pillars of Judean agricultural economy are stripped away one by one. The cumulative effect is a vision of absolute destitution: no fruit, no wine, no oil, no bread, no meat, no milk. The 'though... yet' construction that spans verses 17-18 is one of the most powerful expressions of faith in all Scripture.
- 18.** The conjunction 'yet' (va'ani, 'but I, as for me') sets up the contrast with the total loss of verse 17. E'elozah ('I will rejoice, exult') is a strong, demonstrative verb — this is not quiet resignation but active, vocal celebration. Agilah ('I will take joy, dance, spin') adds a physical dimension — joy expressed in movement. Elohei yish'i ('the God of my salvation/deliverance') makes God himself — not his gifts, not his circumstances, not his blessings — the object of joy.
- 19.** The closing verse combines declaration, metaphor, and liturgical notation. YHWH Adonai cheili ('the Lord GOD is my strength') — not merely a source of strength but strength itself. The deer-feet metaphor (raglai ka'ayalot) describes the sure-footedness of a mountain deer navigating cliff faces — a picture of confident, steady movement through treacherous terrain. Bamotay ('my high places') may refer to literal mountain heights or metaphorical places of triumph and security. The colophon lamnatseach bineginotay ('for the choirmaster, with my stringed instruments') confirms this chapter was performed in worship — the prophet's crisis of faith became the congregation's hymn.