

Who is Habakkuk in the Bible?

Habakkuk was a prophet who penned the biblical book called by his name. His book is among the minor prophets and is unique in including a doxology (Habakkuk 3). Very little is known about Habakkuk and his life except for what is mentioned in his short book. There is even disagreement over the meaning of his name, whether it means “embracer” or “embraced.” Some commentators have conjectured that Habakkuk is the Shunammite woman’s son, whom Elisha said she would “embrace” (2 Kings 4:16, ESV) and who was later raised from the dead (verses 32-37). Although it is an interesting theory, there’s no way to prove that the Shunammite’s boy grew up to become the prophet we know as Habakkuk.

Since Habakkuk prophesied about the Babylonians and the destruction of Jerusalem (Habakkuk 1:6), most biblical scholars believe that the book of Habakkuk was written sometime in the 600s BC, possibly around 605. Based on the content of his prophecy, many scholars place him around the same time as Jeremiah, who also prophesied about the coming Babylonian Captivity. It is possible that, like Jeremiah, Habakkuk lived to see the destruction of Jerusalem.

Not only was he a prophet, but Habakkuk was also a skilled poet. In the book of Habakkuk, the prophet shows great literary prowess in recording a dialogue between himself and God, as well as including a psalm-like song intended to be performed with instruments (Habakkuk 3:19). Whether or not he played music himself is unknown, but it is a possibility.

Habakkuk was saddened by the rampant injustice and violence occurring around him, and he was puzzled by God’s toleration of it. In his questioning of God, the prophet asks, “Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and

violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds” (Habakkuk 1:3). Clearly, Habakkuk was not afraid to ask the Lord questions, which shows that the prophet had a strong relationship with Him. Habakkuk’s questions of why God would allow suffering and let evilness go unpunished are answered; the Lord declares He would bring judgment on the people through the Babylonians (verse 6).

God’s choice to use Babylon puzzled Habakkuk even more, and he again questioned God: how could God use such a violent, idolatrous group of people to carry out a righteous judgment (Habakkuk 1:12-13, 16)? God answered Habakkuk by assuring him of the judgment the Babylonians themselves would face at a later time (Habakkuk 2:8, 16).

Habakkuk accepts God’s answers and shows himself to be man of great faith. Despite the fear, suffering, and trouble the prophet faced, Habakkuk proclaims, “I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior” (Habakkuk 3:18). Like Habakkuk, we can ask God about events happening in our lives, and like Habakkuk, we can conclude that “the Sovereign LORD is my strength” (verse 19).