

Habakkuk 1:1

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/hab/hab-1/habakkuk-11/>

The prophet Habakkuk receives a revelation from God in a vision.

The book of Habakkuk begins with a title verse identifying the nature of the prophecy as *the oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw*. The Hebrew word translated as *oracle* is “massa” in the Hebrew text. In some passages, “massa” refers to a burden as when an animal carries a load (Exodus 23:5; 2 Kings 5:17). In other passages, it denotes a revelation of some sort (Proverbs 31:1). In prophetic literature, the term “massa” usually refers to a proclamation of disaster directed against foreign nations, as in the book of Nahum (cf. Isaiah 13:1; 15:1). In Habakkuk, however, the term is used in a general sense to refer to God’s revelation to humanity. In this instance, the instrument of God’s revelation will be the prophet *Habakkuk*.

The recipient of the divine revelation was *Habakkuk*. Who was he? Where did he come from? When did he live? We are told nothing about *Habakkuk*’s personal life and family. But the content of his message helps us to determine when he lived. In 612 BC, Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian empire, fell to the Babylonians and Medes, as prophesied by Nahum (Nahum 3). In 722 BC, Assyria had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, also called Samaria. Most of the inhabitants were exiled and did not return. Judah was miraculously spared from falling to Assyria, during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:9; 19:5-7).

After Nineveh’s destruction, and the resulting fall of the Assyrian empire, Egypt and Babylon battled for supremacy. The Egyptians allied with the remnant of the Assyrian empire against Babylon. In 609 BC, Josiah king of Judah (640 to 609 BC) decided to stop the Egyptians in the valley of Meggido. Pharaoh Necho of Egypt warned Josiah not to fight against him, but Josiah refused to listen. Consequently, Josiah, the leader who initiated the religious reform in Judah, was killed by an archer at the battle of Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29).

After the death of Josiah, king of Judah, the people of the land anointed Josiah’s son, Jehoahaz, and made him king in place of his father (2 Kings 23:30). But the Egyptians took the new king prisoner and exiled him to Egypt. Egypt then appointed Jehoiakim as king, another of Josiah’s sons (2 Kings 23:31–34). During Jehoiakim’s reign (609–598 BC), Judah plunged into idolatry and persisted in disobedience and lawlessness. This situation put Judah in violation of the covenant they had made with God, making them subject to the enforcement provisions to which they had agreed ([Read our article on Suzerain-Vassal Treaties](#)). The enforcement provision called for Israel/Judah to fall under a curse, and be overtaken by a foreign power (Deuteronomy 8:19-20; 28:47-49).

Consistent with the provisions of the treaty to which Israel had agreed (including the enforcement provisions for disobedience) God was about to deal with the nation due to their violation of the covenant. The Mosaic covenant called for Israelites to deal justly with one another, and care for one another as they cared for themselves (Leviticus 19:18). What Habakkuk observed was just the opposite. Judah had fallen into the pattern of the neighboring nations,

where the strong exploited the weak. This violated the covenant, and Habakkuk cried out to God for justice.

Thus, it would seem that Habakkuk's ministry can be placed at the time of the rise of the Babylonian empire, but just before the Babylonians first invaded Judah in 605 BC. This would place the likely date of the prophet's writing some time between 609 and 605 BC.

The biblical text tells us that *Habakkuk* was a *prophet*. The term *prophet* translates the Hebrew word "nābî," whose primary meaning is "proclaimer" or "forth-teller." The term describes someone who receives a call from God to be God's spokesman. Simply put, a *prophet* was an authorized envoy for God with a message that originated with God, as indicated by the frequent prophetic formula "Thus says the LORD" (e.g. Jeremiah 11:3; Jeremiah 33:2; Isaiah 48:17). It is worth noting that the Hebrew term "nābî" can be used for true and false prophets alike (Jeremiah 6:13; 26:7–8; 27:9; 28:1; Zechariah 13:2). But we know that *Habakkuk* was a true *prophet* because he *saw* God's revelation.

The verb translated as *saw* is "chāzāh" in Hebrew. It refers to a revelation of the divine word, usually during a night of deep sleep (Genesis 15:1; Micah 3:6). It is often associated with emotional agitation (Job 4:12–16). The verb is related to the noun "vision" (Obadiah 1:1). According to Hosea, a vision was one of the means through which God spoke to His prophets (Hosea 12:10; cf. Jeremiah 14:14; Ezekiel 12:27; 13:16). As such, it tells us that the *prophet Habakkuk saw* and heard what God communicated to him.

Biblical Text

¹The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.