

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Habakkuk the Prophet

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: December 2

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IN BRIEF

Saint Habakkuk the Prophet

Eighth of the twelve minor prophets of the Bible, author of the verse "the righteous shall live by faith".

Feast day	December 2
Era	6th century BC

In this booklet

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Novena to Saint Habakkuk the Prophet

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Habakkuk the Prophet

Saint Habakkuk is one of the twelve "minor prophets" of the Bible, the author of a short book of three chapters written on the eve of the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. His book is a bold dialogue with God in the face of evil, and from it springs a sentence that runs through the whole of Christian history: "The righteous shall live by faith." The Church commemorates him on December 2.

Who was Saint Habakkuk?

We know almost nothing about the man himself. His Hebrew name, *Habaqquq*, is often linked to a verb meaning "to embrace." The book gives neither his family nor his town. From its content, he preached in Judah at the end of the seventh century before Christ, around 608-598 BC, under King Jehoiakim, at the time when the Babylonian empire, then called Chaldean, was taking control of the Near East.

His book is the eighth of the twelve minor prophets, between Nahum and Zephaniah. It is called "minor" only because of its length, not its importance. In three chapters, Habakkuk moves from complaint to vision, and from vision to a song of trust.



The prophet Habakkuk, known as the Zuccone, by Donatello (Florence).

Key dates of Habakkuk's time

No date in his life is known with certainty. His ministry can be placed among the following events:

- **609 BC**: Death of King Josiah; Jehoiakim comes to the throne of Judah.
- **605 BC**: Victory of Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish; Babylon dominates the region.
- **c. 608-598 BC**: Probable period of Habakkuk's preaching.
- **597 and 587 BC**: The Babylonians capture Jerusalem and the Exile begins.

"How long, O Lord?"

The book does not open with an oracle but with a complaint. Habakkuk sees violence and injustice all around him, and he questions God: "How long, O Lord, must I cry for help, and you will not hear?" (Habakkuk 1:2). God

answers that he is raising up the Chaldeans to punish his people. The prophet protests again: how can the holy God make use of a people even more cruel?

Then Habakkuk takes his stand on the watchtower to wait for the Lord's reply. The answer is the heart of the book. God tells him to write the vision down plainly on tablets, because it will come in its own time: "If it seems slow, wait for it." The proud will fall, "but the righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). The Hebrew word can also be translated "faithfulness": the just person holds on, trusting God through the dark. In this way Habakkuk gives words to every believer who wonders why evil seems to win.

The second chapter continues with a series of "woes" against greed, violence and idolatry, and ends with two great affirmations: one day the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, "as the waters cover the sea" (2:14), and "the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" (2:20).

A verse at the heart of Christianity

Saint Paul quotes this verse twice, in the Letter to the Romans (1:17) and the Letter to the Galatians (3:11), to show that a person becomes righteous before God through faith. The Letter to the Hebrews also takes it up (10:38). Few verses of the Old Testament have shaped Christian thought so deeply.

The third chapter, a canticle of great beauty, begins with a plea, "in wrath remember mercy" (3:2), and ends with an act of trust: even if the fig tree does not blossom and the stalls are empty, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation" (3:18). The Church sings this canticle in the Liturgy of the Hours, at Morning Prayer.



Habakkuk and the Angel, by Bernini, in Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome.

Habakkuk in tradition

The Book of Daniel, in its Greek section recognized as Scripture by the Catholic Church, tells how an angel carried Habakkuk from Judea to Babylon to bring a meal to Daniel in the lions' den (Daniel 14, the story of Bel and the Dragon). This account, legendary in style, inspired Bernini's famous sculpture group in Rome. The historian Sozomen reports that his relics were found in Palestine in the fourth century, under Emperor Theodosius. The former Roman Martyrology commemorated him on January 15, together with Micah; the current Martyrology places him on December 2.

Why pray to Saint Habakkuk?

Habakkuk has no traditional patronage, but his book makes him a companion for particular moments of the spiritual life. He can be prayed to:

- in times of doubt, when God seems silent and prayers seem unanswered;
- in the face of injustice and violence, when evil seems to triumph;
- in hardship and poverty, with his song of joy "even if the fig tree does not blossom";
- to learn patience, waiting for God's time.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Habakkuk in art

- **A scroll**, like the other prophets, often bearing a verse of his book.
- **A basket of bread or a meal**, from the story of his journey to Daniel.
- **An angel holding him by the hair**, as in Bernini's sculpture in Rome.
- **A bald head and gaunt face**, in Donatello's statue for the bell tower of Florence, nicknamed the Zuccone ("big pumpkin").



The prophet Habakkuk in Christian art.

What his holiness teaches us

Habakkuk is the prophet of honest questions and stubborn trust. He dares to ask God for an accounting, then learns to wait and to believe without seeing. His prayer is a model for anyone who struggles with suffering: he does not hide his anger from God, but he brings it to God, and he ends in praise.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Habakkuk and the novena to Saint Habakkuk, prayed from November 23 to December 1.

Where to pray to Saint Habakkuk

- **Rome**: the Chigi Chapel in the Basilica of Santa Maria del Popolo, with Bernini's statue of Habakkuk and the angel.
- **Florence**: Donatello's Zuccone, made for the bell tower of the cathedral and now kept in the cathedral museum.
- **Anywhere**: by reading his short book of three chapters, or by praying his canticle in the Liturgy of the Hours.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Habakkuk in Times of Doubt

The most beautiful prayer linked to the prophet Habakkuk is his own: the canticle that closes his book, which the Church still sings in the Liturgy of the Hours. You will find its final verses below, with their biblical reference, followed by an original prayer to Saint Habakkuk for times of doubt and waiting.

Words from the Book of Habakkuk to meditate on

> *"How long, O Lord, must I cry for help, and you will not hear?"*

Source: Book of Habakkuk, chapter 1, verse 2 (Saintspedia translation). The prophet's first cry, the prayer of everyone who suffers and does not understand.

> *"Though the fig tree does not blossom, and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields yield no food, though the flock is cut off from the fold and there are no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will exult in God my savior. The Lord God is my strength."*

Source: Book of Habakkuk, chapter 3, verses 17-19 (Saintspedia translation), part of the canticle sung at Morning Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours.



The prophet Habakkuk.

Prayer to Saint Habakkuk in times of doubt

Saint Habakkuk, you who dared to ask God, "How long?", teach me to bring him my questions and my anger instead of turning away from him.

You who saw violence and injustice all around you, pray for those who suffer oppression, war and abuse, and for all who wait for justice that does not seem to come.

You who stood on the watchtower to wait for the Lord's answer, give me patience when God seems silent, and the faith to believe that his vision will come in its time.

You who sang your joy in God even when the fields were empty, help me to trust him in poverty, illness and loss. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

May I live, as you announced, by faith, until the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

The Roman Martyrology commemorates the prophet Habakkuk on December 2, at the beginning of Advent, a season of waiting that suits his message well. You can also pray with him:

- when you are going through doubt or a crisis of faith;
- when you see injustice and feel powerless;
- when a prayer seems to go unanswered and you need patience;
- in material hardship, to learn to rejoice in God despite everything.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Habakkuk, and read the life of Saint Habakkuk.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Habakkuk the Prophet

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, built on the words of the prophet Habakkuk. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his commemoration, begin it on November 23 and pray the last day on December 1, so that you reach December 2 with him, at the threshold of Advent. Because Habakkuk is the prophet of waiting, this novena can also be prayed at any time when God seems silent.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and, if you can, the verses of the Book of Habakkuk it refers to. Then say the prayer of the day and an Our Father. The small act suggested for the day helps you carry the prayer into your life. The whole book is only three chapters long, so you can read it through during these nine days.

You may begin each day with this opening prayer: "Lord, through the intercession of the prophet Habakkuk, who questioned you, waited for you and rejoiced in you, I bring you this intention. Increase my faith, and teach me to wait for your hour. Amen."

Day 1: The cry of "How long?"

Habakkuk begins with a complaint: "How long, O Lord, must I cry for help?" (1:2). The Bible does not forbid us to question God. It teaches us to bring our questions to him.

Prayer: Lord, here is what I do not understand. I bring it to you instead of keeping it to myself. Saint Habakkuk, pray for us.

Today: Write down honestly, as a prayer, a question you would like to ask God.

Day 2: Seeing injustice

The prophet sees violence, strife and the law ignored (1:3-4). He does not look away from the suffering of others.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to the injustice around me, and do not let me grow indifferent. Saint Habakkuk, pray for us.

Today: Learn about a situation of injustice in your area or in the world, and pray for the people involved.

Day 3: When God's answer is hard

God answers that he will use the Chaldeans, a cruel people (1:5-11). Habakkuk is shaken. God's ways are not always ours.

Prayer: Lord, when your answer surprises or troubles me, keep me from turning away from you. Saint Habakkuk, pray for us.

Today: Accept with peace one thing that did not go the way you wanted.

Day 4: On the watchtower

"I will take my stand on my watchpost and see what he will say to me" (2:1). The prophet chooses to wait and listen.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to keep watch in prayer and to listen for your word. Saint Habakkuk, pray for us.

Today: Spend ten minutes in silence, simply listening.

Day 5: Write the vision

God tells Habakkuk to write the vision plainly, so that anyone can read it, because it will come at the appointed time: "If it seems slow, wait for it" (2:2-3).

Prayer: Lord, give me patience with your timing, and confidence that your promises do not fail. Saint Habakkuk, pray for us.

Today: Write down a promise of God from the Bible and keep it where you will see it.

Day 6: The righteous shall live by faith

This is the heart of the book (2:4), the verse Saint Paul would take up. To live by faith is to hold on to God when we cannot see.

Prayer: Lord, I believe; help my unbelief. Let me live each day by faith in you. Saint Habakkuk, pray for us.

Today: Make an act of trust in a situation where you would rather control everything.

Day 7: Against greed and violence

The "woes" of chapter 2 condemn those who build on plunder, bloodshed and idols. God is not indifferent to how we treat others.

Prayer: Lord, free me from greed and from every idol, and make me just in my dealings. Saint Habakkuk, pray for us.

Today: Give something to a person in need, generously and without calculation.

Day 8: In wrath, remember mercy

Habakkuk's canticle begins with a plea: "In wrath remember mercy" (3:2). Even in judgment, he appeals to God's heart.

Prayer: Lord, have mercy on me, on my family and on the world. Remember your mercy. Saint Habakkuk, pray for us.

Today: Go to confession if you can, or make a careful examination of conscience.

Day 9: Joy even when the fields are empty

The book ends in praise: even if the fig tree does not blossom and the stalls are empty, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord" (3:17-18). This joy does not depend on circumstances, but on God.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Habakkuk, give me a joy that nothing can take away. Amen.

Today: Thank God for three gifts, especially in an area of life where things are hard.

Closing prayer

Saint Habakkuk, prophet of faith and patience, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you the intention I have placed before you. Pray for all who doubt, for all who suffer injustice and for all who wait for an answer from God. Obtain for us the grace to live by faith and to rejoice in the Lord, our strength, whatever happens. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Habakkuk and pray the prayer to Saint Habakkuk.

CREDITS

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