

Habakkuk

Habakkuk's Prophecy

Habakkuk himself

All we know about Habakkuk is that he was a prophet and that he wrote this book.

Background

These prophecies were probably made about 605 B.C. and certainly before 597 B.C. when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah and would have lived around the end of the reign of Josiah (640 – 609 B.C.) and during the reign of Jehoiakim (609 – 598 B.C.). It was a time when Judah was caught between the declining power of Egypt and the rising power of Babylon. In 605 B.C. there was a decisive battle between Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylonia and Pharaoh Neco where the Egyptians were defeated. Power moved from Egypt to Babylon, in twenty years the Babylonians came from nowhere to defeat the Assyrians and Egyptians, taking Syria, Lebanon and the Holy Land as well.

Josiah was a king of Judah who followed God and it was in his reign that a book of the law was found in the temple, often thought to be Deuteronomy. Following this he instituted many reforms and got rid of idolatry from the land. 2 Kings 23:1-30, 2 Chronicles 34:1 - 36:1

Jehoiakim was one of Josiah's sons but was not the rightful king but was installed by Pharaoh Neco, King of Egypt and made to pay tribute to him. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD "including the shedding of innocent blood. For he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood and the LORD was not willing to forgive him." (2 Kings 24:4) After eleven years Jehoiakim was taken prisoner by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon and taken in bronze chains to Babylon. 2 Kings 23:36 – 24:7, 2 Chronicles 36:5-8

Habakkuk Debates with God

1:1 Verse 1 tells us all we know about Habakkuk. The Hebrew word for Oracle *massa* is the same word for burden. Is there a pun here, certainly Habakkuk was a burdened man. In Hebrew the word translated "received" in the NIV means "saw", he certainly felt it and was troubled by it.

1:2-4 In verses 2-4 Habakkuk complains to the LORD that he does not answer his prayers, he cries out for justice but there is violence and the law is ignored and justice is perverted.

1:5-11 Then in verses 5-11 God responds he will deal with the evil in Judah and it's going to be amazing. He is sending the Babylonians to punish, destroy and they will be incredibly violent and ruthless and sweep away the evil in Judah.

Habakkuk

1:12-17 Then in verses 12-17 Habakkuk complains again to the LORD, he is appalled, he is saying that the cure is worse than the disease and how can a God who cannot even look on evil use people who are so evil for his purposes. After all the people of Judah may be bad but the Babylonians are much worse. Notice though that Habakkuk says He is my God, but he blames God for making people like fish in the sea. The wicked hook them and scoop them up in there drag nets.

In verse 12 the text should probably read My God, my Holy One *you* will not die following an ancient text and the some of the most recent translations not *we* in the NIV. See TNIV, NRSV and NLT

2:1 Habakkuk decides to stand on the watch and wait to see what God will say to his questions. The watchman is a key concept in Old Testament Prophecy see Ezekiel 33:7-9, Hosea 9:8 the idea is of protecting Israel but this time it is looking to God to explain. Very often we need to watch and wait.

2:2-3 The LORD responds by giving Habakkuk a revelation, which he has to write down on tablets as a permanent record which will come true at an appointed time. What follows does not seem to be the complete revelation, however. It is directed against Babylon and its evils but also have an ongoing application which is applicable to every generation as well as Habakkuk's day.

Living by Faith

2:4 This is the key verse in the book and has been highly influential and much discussed. The first part of the verse is a criticism of arrogance but the second urges the Righteous, that is those who are right with God, to live by faith or faithfulness. Is it God's faithfulness or our faith? Faith and Faithfulness are so closely linked as to be inseparable. Of course we depend on God's faithfulness for everything but we live by our faith in God as Paul and the Hebrew writer make clear. The verse is quoted three times in the New Testament in Romans 1:17 (a verse that changed Luther's life and started the reformation), in Gal 3:11 and Heb 10:38.

2:5 This verse continues the criticism of the arrogant.

The Five Woes

The rest of the chapter is a series of condemnation of the evils of the Babylonians and indeed of many others in history right up to our own day.

2:6-8 **The First Woe.** A rebuke to those who steal, plunder and take people into excessive debt. The debtors will strike back and the plunderers will be plundered.

2:9-11 **The Second Woe.** A rebuke to those who build the wealth of a country by exploitation and dishonesty, the stones and the woodwork will cry out.

Habakkuk

2:12-14 The **Third Woe**. A rebuke to those who build their nation by bloodshed and quotes from Jeremiah 51:58 that their effort is just fuel for the fire, but that one the whole world will know the glory of God, Isaiah 11:9.

2:15-17 The **Fourth Woe**. Binge drinking and sexual excess in the ancient world. Some commentators have seen this passage as also a reference to being drunk on power and sexual violence.

2:18-20 The **Fifth Woe**. A rebuke to idolatry with mockery. But the LORD is his holy temple. Paul reminds us that covetous is idolatry in Col 3:5

A Psalm of Praise and Faith

3:1 This is Habakkuk's prayer of praise and declaration of faith. *Shigionoth* – Probably a musical term, this psalm would have been used in worship, note the use of *Selah* in verses 3, 9 and 13 the only place in the Old Testament the word is used outside the Psalms.

3:2 Habakkuk remembers all God's great acts of the past especially the exodus. He wants God to do it again in his day. He asks the LORD in his wrath to remember mercy – he still cares about people.

3:8 Were you angry with the rivers etc is a reference to the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus and the crossing of the Jordan in Joshua 3:12-17.

3:11 Habakkuk is remembering the time when the sun and moon froze at Gibeon. Joshua 10:12-15

3:14 There seems to be a reference to 2 Chronicles 20:20-30 in the first part of this verse when Jehoshaphat defeated the men of Moab, Ammon and Seir just by praising God.

3:16 Habakkuk physically feels God's presence as he prays and remembers what God has done. He hears from God and he waits patiently for God's promises to come true. Babylon was destroyed by Darius, King of the Medes in 539 B.C.

3:17 This is disaster on a total scale. No food, no drink, no clothes, how could life be sustained. This is a disaster beyond our imagination. Jeremiah predicted it would happen in Jeremiah 8:13 and 5:17.

3:18 Yet he will rejoice in the LORD, even then he will be joyful. His faith is that strong.

3:19 God is his strength and enables him to be fleet footed and to go where there is danger and survive. See also Psalm 18:30-35 especially verse 33.