

Habakkuk

Title

This prophetic book takes its name from its author and possibly means "one who embraces" (1:1, 3:1).

Author and Date

Nothing is known about this prophet except that which can be inferred from the book. Any conclusions about his identity and life are purely opinion.

We know that Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zephaniah.

The book's mention of the Chaldeans (1:6) suggests a late seventh century B.C. date.

Background and Setting

This book seems to be contemporary with Nebuchadnezzar. He commenced his military march through Nineveh (612 B.C.), Haran (609 B.C.), and Carchemish (605 B.C.) on his way to Jerusalem (605 B.C.). Habakkuk's bitter lament (1:2-4) may reflect a time shortly after the death of Josiah (609 B.C.), days in which the godly king's reforms (2 Kings 23) were quickly overturned by his successor, Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 22:13-19).

Habakkuk prophesied during the final days of the Assyrian Empire and the beginning of Babylon's world rulership under Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar. When Nabopolassar ascended to power in 626 B.C., he immediately began to expand his influence to the North and West. Under the leadership of his son, the Babylonian army overthrew Nineveh in 612 B.C., forcing the Assyrian nobility to take refuge first in Haran and then Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar pursued them, overrunning Haran in 609 B.C. and Carchemish in 605 B.C.

The Egyptian king Neco, traveling through Judah in 609 B.C. to assist the fleeing Assyrian king, was opposed by King Josiah at Megiddo (2 Chronicles 35:20-24). Josiah was killed in the ensuing battle, leaving his throne to a succession of 3 sons and a grandson. Previously, Josiah rediscovered the Book of the Law in the temple (622 B.C.). Josiah then had instituted significant spiritual reforms in Judah (2 Kings 22, 23), abolishing many of the idolatrous practices of his father Amon (2 Kings 21:20-22) and grandfather Manasseh (2 Kin. 21:11-13). Upon his death, as observed, the nation quickly reverted to her evil ways (Jeremiah 22:13-19.) This appears to be the reason why Habakkuk is lamenting to God in this book.

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Outline

- I. A prophetic conversation (1:1-2:20)
 - a. His first complaint (1:2-4)
 - b. God's first response (1:5-11)
 - c. His second complaint (1:12-2:1)
 - d. God's second response (2:2-20)
- II. The prophet's prayer (3:1-19)
 - a. Petition for God's mercy (3:1, 2)
 - b. Praise of God's power (3:3-15)
 - c. Promise of God's sufficiency (3:16-19)

Structure

Habakkuk is a blend of prophecy and poetry. In 3:1 – it states “according to Shigionoth,” a type of Hebrew poetry or musical mood (Psalm 7).

Theme

The opening verses reveal that justice has disappeared from the country; violence and wickedness were seemingly unchecked by God. The prophet cried out for divine intervention (1:2-4). God responded that He was sending the Chaldeans (Babylonians) to judge Judah (1:5-11), and creates an even greater theological dilemma for Habakkuk: Why didn't God purge His people and restore their righteousness? How could God use the Chaldeans to judge a people more righteous than they (1:12-2:1)? God's answer that He would judge the Chaldeans also (2:2-20) did not fully satisfy the prophet's theological quandary; in fact, it only intensified it. In Habakkuk's mind, the issue crying for resolution is no longer God's righteous response toward evil (or lack thereof), but the vindication of God's character and covenant with His people (1:13). Like Job, the prophet argued with God, and through that experience, he achieved a deeper understanding of God's sovereign character and a firmer understanding of the nature and way of God (Job 42:5-6; Is. 55:8-9). Ultimately, Habakkuk realized that God was not to be worshiped merely because of the temporal blessings He bestowed, but for His own sake (3:17-19).

5 woes –

Habakkuk 2:6 – Woe to him who increases what is not his— For how long— And makes himself rich with loans?

Habakkuk 2:9 – Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house to put his nest on high, to be delivered from the hand of calamity!

Habakkuk 2:12 – Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed And founds a town with violence!

Habakkuk 2:15 – Woe to you who make your neighbors drink, Who mix in your venom even to make them drunk so as to look on their nakedness!

Habakkuk 2:19 – “Woe to him who says to a *piece of wood*, ‘Awake!’ To a mute stone, ‘Arise!’ And that is your teacher? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all inside it.

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Theological Importance

The queries of the prophet represent some of the most fundamental questions in all of life, with the answers providing crucial foundational principles on which to build a proper understanding of God's character and His sovereignty throughout history. The core of his message is found in Habakkuk 2:4, "The righteous shall live by his faith." The NT references ascribe high importance to this verse in Habakkuk. The Apostle Paul, on the other hand, employs the verse twice (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11)—once to emphasize that one who is declared righteous by faith shall live, the other is to accentuate that the fact that righteousness is provided by God through faith. The writer of Hebrews quotes Habakkuk 2:4 to amplify the believer's need to remain strong and faithful amid affliction and trials (Hebrews 10:38). There need not be any interpretive conflict, however, for the emphasis in both Habakkuk and the Greek Scriptures references goes beyond grace through faith for justification before God to include the continuity of faith. Faith is not a one-time act but should be a way of life.