

# Habakkuk

## 1. The Man

### A. Habakkuk has been called...

1. Prophet of the Watchtower (Smith)
2. Prophet of the Faith (Elliott)
3. The Optimist (Ward)
4. The Philosopher (Robinson)

### B. The man

1. Virtually nothing is known about his personal history. His name occurs nowhere in history outside of this book.
2. His name can mean “embraced” or can be derived from the name of an Assyrian flower or plant.
3. Nothing is said of his parents or his hometown.
4. There are many legends:
  - a. He is said to be a prominent character in Bel and the Dragon, an apocryphal addition to the book of Daniel. According to this legend he was carried by the hair of the head to take food to Daniel while he was in the lion’s den.
  - b. In rabbinic tradition he is said to be the son of a Shulamite woman (2 Kgs. 4:16ff.). Supposedly, he fled to Egypt after Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem in 586 B.C.
5. Because of this lack of evidence, some deny Habakkuk lived at all and claim that the book was later compiled by some post-exilic editor.
6. What we do know about him comes from the text itself
  - a. He was concerned about the moral status of his society (1:3-4).
  - b. He knew that God had the answer for the problems (1:2).
  - c. He had a knowledge of and great respect for God’s character (1:12-13).
  - d. He is confused about God’s use of a heathen nation in carrying out His will (1:13-17).
  - e. Through it all, he manifests hope, confidence and faith in God (3:17-19).

## 2. The Date

- A. Unlike the other prophets we have studied thus far, there is no historical reference point (kings, etc.) to use in arriving at an accurate date. There is therefore a great deal of debate on the subject of dating.
- B. Jack P. Lewis indicates that he must have prophesied shortly before the rise of Babylon to power. The wrongs suffered under Jehoiachin (608-597 B.C.) have been thought by some to be those about which Habakkuk complains (cf. Jer. 22:13-19).
- C. He is said to be contemporary with Jeremiah and Zephaniah and only slightly later than Nahum.
- D. Dates suggested range from 620-606 B.C. This would make Habakkuk one of the last prophets to write before Babylonian captivity.

## 3. Historical Background

- A. Habakkuk prophesied during Judah's last day. Habakkuk 1:5-11 seems to represent a period before 605 B.C., the year Babylon rose to power. The Chaldeans were a Semitic group from southern Babylon. It was probably written prior to the 612 B.C. destruction of Nineveh.
- B. By contrast it is argued that 1:12-17 and 2:6-20 must point to a time after 612 B.C., when the concept of Babylonian power had become more commonly known. Some have sought to bridge the gap by seeing sections of the dialogue as representative of Habakkuk's spiritual struggle over a long period of time, possibly as early as 626 B.C. and continuing to a date as late as 590 B.C. or later (Expositor's Bible Commentary).
- C. During this period Judah enjoyed its final bit of prosperity under Josiah (died in 609 B.C.). Nineveh's fall (612 B.C.) had brought an end to Assyrian control and Babylon's dominance was then seen. Judah was taken into captivity in three waves of Babylonian attack (606, 597, 586 B.C.).
- D. The Chaldeans freed themselves from Assyria in 625 B.C. under the leadership of Nabopolassar. They became rulers of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. They joined with the Medes and Scythians and destroyed Nineveh in 612 B.C. Josiah lost life in 609 B.C. at Megiddo while attempting to block Pharaoh Necho from aiding the Assyrians (2 Kgs. 23:29-30). A date as early as 620 B.C. is seen in Habakkuk's reference to God raising them up (1:6).
- E. At Carchemish in 606 B.C. (cf. Jer. 46:2) the remnant of Assyria and Pharaoh Necho were defeated by Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar may have marched right into Jerusalem at that time, but his father died. This required his return to Babylon to secure the throne.

- F. When Cyrus defeated Babylon in 536 B.C., he also provided for the end of Judah's captivity. Therefore Habakkuk prophesied of the rise of Babylon (1:6) and also for its demise (2:2-20).
- G. During Habakkuk's life conditions could have moved from excellent to the depths of depression. There is no direct evidence that he lived past the destruction of Jerusalem, though some believe 3:16-19 indicates that he did.

#### 4. The Message

- A. Habakkuk's immediate purpose was to foretell Judah's punishment and pronounce doom on the Chaldeans. The ultimate purpose is to teach the truth that the just shall live by faith and the wicked shall be punished.
- B. The book of Habakkuk is a dramatic dialogue between he and God which climaxes in a prayer of praise (or psalm) by the prophet.
- C. There are four prophecies in the book comprising just over 40% of the text:
1. The expansion of the Babylonian empire through the Ancient Near East (1:5-11)
  2. The Babylonian attack on Judah and the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (1:12; 3:16b)
  3. The fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. (2:6-19; 3:16a)
  4. The new heavens and new earth (2:14)
- D. Smith's "Structure of Habakkuk":

The Structure of Habakkuk		
A Burden	A Vision	A Prayer
Habakkuk Complains	Habakkuk Listens	Habakkuk Prays
Punishment of Judah	Punishment of Babylon	Power of God
Ch. 1	Ch. 2	Ch. 3
Faith Focus A Problem	Faith Finds A Solution	Faith Full Of Assurance

#### 5. Overview

- A. Paul R. House: Habakkuk unfolds in four distinct sections.
1. 1:2-11 demonstrates that God will punish Israel by sending Babylon to chastise them.

2. 1:12-2:11 states that God expects faith from the faithful as Babylon is punished for their sins.
3. 2:12-20 makes it clear that God crushes idolaters. Neither Babylon nor Israel can stand against God by serving idols.
4. 3:1-19 claims that God always acts on behalf of the faithful.

#### B. Denny Petrillo: Habakkuk's Problems:

1. Habakkuk deals with a problem that has faced most of God's children at some time in their lives. The prophet questions how one can understand and justify the ways of God.
2. Unlike other prophets, Habakkuk was NOT concerned with warning the Jews of the need for repentance. The prophet had a problem in his own mind and the answer to his question is the theme of the book: How can God allow evil to triumph over Good? (1:1-4)
3. Many times he had prayed and cried to God about the oppression of good, but he felt it had been to no avail. The prophet wondered why God allowed ungodly people to continue in their wickedness. He wondered when God would lift his hand and cause justice to reign on the earth. Would it ever? Does it now?
4. This book is different from other prophetic books. In the other books we have the words of God addressed to the people. In Habakkuk the prophet represents the people; he addresses and challenges God. He speaks to God on behalf of the people while the other prophets spoke to the people on behalf of God. In this book we see the problems that confront faith, but are made to see God is active on behalf of His own.
5. Habakkuk is concerned with finding out why tyranny and wrong are allowed to continue. He sees the problem of life and goes to the source of life for an answer. We have in Habakkuk the fact of discipline carried out against a nation. God is in active control, and makes clear that suffering in some cases is disciplinary.

#### C. Denny Petrillo: Teachings of the Book

1. The universal supremacy of God's judgment on the wicked
  - a. Judah by the Chaldeans
  - b. The Chaldeans because of their wickedness

2. Faithfulness is the guarantee of permanency. Faithfulness means integrity, fidelity, and steadfastness under all provocation.
3. Evil is self-destructive; tyranny is intolerable. In the nature of things it cannot endure but works out its own penalties.
4. To solve the problem of divine discipline for his unfaithful fellow countrymen is the great aim of the book.
5. The courage that the righteous can have in time of crisis
6. The fact of divine discipline (the nation suffering)

D. Denny Petrillo: Practical Lessons of Permanent Value

1. In every crisis God can be trusted.
2. Evil has within itself the germs of death.
3. We can see and understand God only when we rise above human doubt.
4. The real purpose of religion is not to have all doubts removed but to be sure of God.

## Habakkuk – Outline

### I. Faith Out of Focus (1:1-2:1)

#### A. A Prayer of Complaint (1:1-4)

1. Complaint about prayer (vs. 1-2)
2. Complaint about his vision (vs. 3)
3. Complaint about injustice (vs. 4)

#### B. God's Answer (1:5-6a)

1. Preparation for the revelation (vs. 5)
2. A shocking announcement (vs. 6a)

#### C. God's Agent Described (1:6b-11)

1. The infantry (vs. 6b-7)
2. Their cavalry (vs. 8-9)
3. Their leader (vs. 10-11)

#### D. A Second Complaint (1:12-17)

1. His confidence in God (vs. 12)
2. His questioning of God (vs. 13)
3. His challenge of God (vs. 14-17)

#### E. Habakkuk's Watch (2:1)

### II. Faith in Corrected Focus (2:2-20)

#### A. God's Gentle Word (2:2-5)

1. The importance of the vision (vs. 2)
2. The character of the vision (vs. 3)
3. The substance of the vision (vs. 4-5)

#### B. Description of God's Judgment (2:6-20)

1. The plunderer plundered (vs. 6b-8)
2. The secure exposed (vs. 9-11)
3. The expansionist thwarted (vs. 12-14)
4. The shameless defamed (vs. 15-17)

5. The idolatrous powerless (vs. 18-20)

III. 20/20 Faith (3:1-19)

A. Prayer for God's Intervention (3:1-2)

1. Introduction to the prayer (vs. 1)
2. The prayer proper (vs. 2)

B. A Vision of God's Coming (3:3-7)

1. The fact of His coming (vs. 3a)
2. The glory of His coming (vs. 3b-4)
3. The effects of His coming (vs. 5-7)

C. An Acknowledgement of God's Victory (3:8-15)

1. Impact on nature (vs. 8-11)
2. Explanation of the disaster (vs. 12-15)

D. A Commitment to God (3:16-19)

1. Present anguish (vs. 16)
2. Anticipated adversity (vs. 17)
3. Resolute commitment (vs. 18-19a)
4. Superscription (vs. 19b)