

Habakkuk

The short book of Habakkuk in Hebrew would have been included with the collection of 11 other books of the prophets on a single scroll, the Book of The 12, which we tend to call the minor prophets, Hosea-Malachi.

Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and probably Obadiah and Nahum. He apparently prophesied in Judah/Jerusalem, but we know nothing of the man or his circumstances except that he was a prophet (1:1, 3:1). The timing seems to be about when Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army first came to Jerusalem in 605 BC.

The first 2 chapters of Habakkuk are a dialogue between the prophet and the LORD. Like Jeremiah, and like Job, Habakkuk had questions, issues, about God's policies. Chapter 3 is a poetic prayer (psalm) glorifying God and affirming utter trust in the LORD even in times of great distress, finding joy in the LORD.

First, 1:2-4, the prophet wonders why God allows injustice and violence to continue. This was the situation in Jerusalem observed by Jeremiah. The wicked seemed to have the upper hand and no one followed the law or brought out justice.

Then in 1:5-11 the Lord replies that is chasten Judah and Jerusalem, and others, with the might of Babylon. Babylon was God's instrument for punishing the wicked and the unjust.

Habakkuk wasn't happy with God's answer, didn't see it as making sense, and so he questioned the LORD again in 1:12-2:1 about using wicked Babylon to punish wicked Judah. How could God tolerate Babylon's excesses and wickedness to use them against the wickedness of his own people? He saw the disparity of power and understanding between Creator and creation (1:14), and highlighted the cruelty of man, Babylon in particular, preying upon other men and then glorifying things he has made as objects of worship (1:15-17). Idolatry justifies cruelty. Why would God allow and even use such evil? Habakkuk waited for a response (2:1).

The LORD's answer was to be written down (2:2), as Jeremiah's prophecies were (Jeremiah 36). The LORD's answer includes a time element (2:3), things happen in God's chosen time, including the judgment of Babylon after she had served God's purposes in that generation. The LORD in this response states that "the righteous will live by faith" (2:4) which became a central theme in Paul's Roman and Galatian letters (see Romans 3:28, 5:1, Galatians 3:11, also Hebrews 10:38).

God's reply to Habakkuk in 2:6 has the general truth that greedy people who take from others will lose everything, and that's applied to greedy nations like Babylon in v8. Shed blood and violence demand an accounting, in any generation 2:8, 12, 17.

Notice 2:14, in the midst of assurances of divine justice in its time is the promise of glory when God's kingdom is fulfilled.

Like Jeremiah and other prophets, including John in Revelation, God's impending judgment was

seen as a cup of wrath passed to those who abuse alcohol and abuse others with it (2:15-16). The LORD's case against idolatry is highlighted as in Isaiah and Jeremiah in 1:15-17, 2:18-19. By contrast, in another memorable turn of phrase, "The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" (2:20). Not so much an emphasis on the temple in Jerusalem, which Jeremiah at the same time was preaching against for the abominations associated with it, but God's real dwelling place over all the earth.

God's answer to Habakkuk's complaints are analogous to his reply to Job. Basically, God told the prophet he knew all that, and he knew what he was doing. His plan would unfold in due season. Habakkuk responded with a prayer, a psalm of praise and petition, in chapter 3. He asked for God to work in his time as he had in the past, with recollections of the Exodus events and other mighty deeds in behalf of his people among the nations. The reference to horses and God's chariot of salvation (3:8) look back to Elijah and Elisha, but also Ezekiel's vision of God in Ezekiel 1 & 10 a few years after Habakkuk's prophecies. The theme of salvation through God's work is highlighted again in 3:13, with reference to the Davidic line of anointed kings leading up to the coming of the Lord himself.

Habakkuk understood what Isaiah had said in Isa 40:31, that strength and renewal are found in waiting on the LORD (3:16b-19). No matter what is happening in the world around God's people, even in midst of chaos and deprivation, the upright can trust the LORD and rejoice in him, taking joy in the God of our salvation. Indeed, the just shall live by faith.