

Habakkuk

Habakkuk looks at his native country, Judah, observes the violence and injustice on every hand, and cries out to God with some perplexing questions: Why are the wicked prospering in the midst of God's people? Why are the righteous beaten down? And why is God seemingly inactive and indifferent in a day of wickedness? God's reply is even more shocking than the conditions in Judah. God assures His prophet He is doing something. The Chaldeans (a people even more corrupt than God's chosen nation) are about to descend as God's rod of chastening. When Habakkuk reacts with shock and dismay, God patiently instructs His messengers until at last the prophet is able to respond with a psalm of praise: "I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (3:18).

INTRODUCTION

Habakkuk ministers during the "death throes" of the nation of Judah. Though repeatedly called to repentance, the nation stubbornly refuses to change her sinful ways. Habakkuk, knowing the hardheartedness of his countrymen, asks God how long this intolerable condition can continue. God replies that the Babylonians will be His chastening rod upon the nation - an announcement that sends the prophet to his knees. He acknowledges that the just in any generation shall live by faith (2:4) not by sight. Habakkuk concludes by praising God's wisdom even though he doesn't fully understand God's ways.

Habaquq is an unusual Hebrew name derived from the verb *habaq*, "embrace." His name probably means "One Who Embraces" or "Clings." At the end of his book this name becomes appropriate because Habakkuk chooses to cling firmly to God regardless of what happens to his nation (3:16-19).

AUTHOR

In the introduction to the book (1:1) and the closing psalm (3:1), the author identifies himself as Habakkuk the prophet. This special designation seems to indicate that Habakkuk was a professional prophet. The closing statement at the end of the psalm ("To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments.") suggests that Habakkuk may have been a priest connected with the temple worship in Jerusalem. He mentions nothing of his genealogy or location.

DATE & SETTING

The only explicit time reference in Habakkuk is to the Babylonian invasion as an imminent event (1:6; 2:1; 3:16). Some scholars suggest Habakkuk was written during the reign of Manasseh (686-642 b.c.) or Amon (642-640 b.c.) because of the list of Judah's sins in 1:2-4. However, the descriptions of the Chaldeans indicate that Babylon had become a world power; and this was not true in the time of Manasseh when Babylon was under the thumb of Assyria. It is also unlikely that this prophecy took place in the time of King Josiah (640-609 b.c.), because the moral and spiritual reforms of Josiah do not fit the situation (1:2-4). The most likely date for the book is in the early part of Jehoiakim's reign (609-597 b.c.). Jehoiakim was a godless king who led the nation down the path of destruction (cf. 2 Kin. 23:34-24:5; Jer. 22:17).