

Habakkuk

Overview and Summary

Author:

- ⇒ The self-stated author of this book is Habakkuk, whom we know only from this book.
- ⇒ Like Nahum, the book of Habakkuk does not date itself by listing the relevant kings who reigned during his prophetic ministry.
- ⇒ The name Habakkuk means “to embrace” or “to caress.”
- ⇒ Because Habakkuk ends his writing with a psalm, there are some who believe Habakkuk to be a Levitic singer, who helped worship in the temple complex.
- ⇒ Since not much is known about the person of Habakkuk, fabricated legends arose around his life, which include:
 - Being the son of the Shunammite’s son in 2 Kings 4, that was promised to the woman and then who was raised from the dead.
 - Being the watchman of Isaiah 21:6 who was to wait and watch for the downfall of Babylon.
 - Being a man who carried food to Daniel while he was in the lion’s den (this comes from the apocryphal book Bel and the Dragon).

Date:

- ⇒ Because Habakkuk does not date himself, we must infer a potential date of composition through a careful study of the text. There are three clues that help us come up with a date for this prophecy:
 - Clue #1 – In 1:6-10 the Lord tells Habakkuk that he is raising up the Chaldeans (Babylonians) to come judge Judah for her sin. This implies that Babylon has yet to make siege in Judah, which we know to have happened in three successful waves (605, 597, 586BC). Therefore, the date must be before 605BC.
 - Clue #2 – Assyria is completely absent from Habakkuk’s prophecy, which suggests that either their power is waning or they have been conquered by Babylon. We know Ninevah to be destroyed in 612BC, which means the date of this writing must take place after 612BC or shortly before.
 - Clue #3 – Habakkuk describes the sin of Judah in very harsh ways (violence, iniquity, wickedness, destruction, strife, contention, etc.). This suggests that the condition of Israel is in a state of sinful rebellion. History tells us that Judah experienced a revival under the reign of King Josiah (640-609BC), which means that Habakkuk is most likely describing a time immediately

before Josiah or after Josiah. With clue #1 & #2 in place, we could assume safely that Habakkuk is describing the time following Josiah's rule.

- ⇒ With the following clues in place, we can assume that Habakkuk wrote this prophecy sometime between 609-605BC.

Context:

- ⇒ In 696, under the height of Assyrian tyranny in the region, Manasseh became king over Judah. Manasseh was an exceptionally evil king (2 Kings 21:1-9) who rebuilt the high places for pagan worship which were destroyed by his father Hezekiah. Manasseh's also offered his son as a sacrifice to pagan gods while at the same time colluding with necromancers and mediums. During the 55 years of his reign, Israel drifted further and further from Yahweh and committed evil acts before the Lord.
- ⇒ Amon reigned for two years continued the evil which had been started by his father Manasseh.
- ⇒ In 640, at the ripe old age of 8, Josiah (the son of Amon) became king over Israel. Unlike his fathers, Josiah pursued the Lord, enacting large reforms across Israel. These reforms were spurred on by the fact that Assyria had begun to wane in their regional power. Barker Kenneth suggests there are three components to Josiah's reforms: "a consistent purge of foreign cults and practices, destruction of the high places in the territory of the former Northern Kingdom as well in the south, and centralization of public worship in Jerusalem."
- Josiah's reforms were honored by God and Judah experienced a time of economic, political, and religious blessing.
 - In 2 Kings 22, the book of the law is found in the temple (i.e. the book of Deuteronomy). Josiah read the words of the law and committed himself, along with the rest of Israel, to follow and do the words of God.
- ⇒ While Israel experienced decades of blessing under the leadership of Josiah, Babylon was quickly gaining prominence and power on the world stage. The Chaldeans leveled Assyria's remaining stronghold in Haran in 610 and now set their eyes on Judah and Egypt.
- Seeking to stop Babylon from gaining more control over the region, Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt sent his forces to Carchemish (on the border of Turkey and Syria). King Josiah sought to stop Pharaoh Neco II as he passed through Megiddo but was killed by the Egyptian forces.
- ⇒ Following the death of Josiah, Jehoahaz was set as king over Israel. Jehoahaz was the second born son of Josiah, skipping the first born Eliakim. Jehoahaz was captured by Pharaoh Neco II in Hamath and was taken away to Egypt where he died.

- ⇒ After the capture of Jehoahaz, Pharaoh Neco II set Eliakim over Judah and changed his name to Jehoiakim. In the eyes of the Lord Jehoiakim was an evil king.
- ⇒ While Pharaoh Neco's puppet king, Jehoiakim, was ruling in Judah, the Egyptians continued their march to Carchemish, where they eventually met defeat from the Babylonian forces.
 - This defeat of the Egyptians at Carchemish officially enshrined Babylon as the world superpower of the time.
- ⇒ It was at this time of immense political upheaval and spiritual deadness, that Habakkuk writes this prophecy.

Structure & Content:

- ⇒ Habakkuk's writing differs from other prophets in that it is not a word of the Lord to the people, but it is primarily a dialogue between Habakkuk and the Lord, ending with a hymn of praise.
 - The structure of the dialogue involves a complaint by the prophet followed by the Lord's response. This pattern is then repeated again at the end of chapter one, flowing into chapter two.
 - In God's second reply to Habakkuk, there are a series of five woes which list the sins of Babylon for which they will eventually be condemned for.
 - The final chapter of Habakkuk differs sharply from the rest of the minor prophets as it looks more like a psalm than prophecy.
- ⇒ Chapter 1: Speaking to the Lord, Habakkuk laments the violence and iniquity that are rampant throughout Judah. In his perspective, the righteous are being persecuted while the wicked seem to prosper. Habakkuk pleads for justice. God's response is simple, in Habakkuk's day God will raise up Babylon to judge Judah for their sin. Babylon is compared to several wild animals which will soon come to devour Judah entirely. At the end of chapter one Habakkuk asks how in the world can God use such a godless nation to judge the people of God. In Habakkuk's mind, it is totally unthinkable for God to use with wicked to swallow the ones who are more righteous. Babylon is compared to fishermen who relentlessly destroy nations without reservation.
- ⇒ Chapter 2: While still speaking, Habakkuk ends his dialogue to God by saying that he will wait faithfully for God to respond, to which God does in verse two. God's first instructions to Habakkuk are to write this down on tablets so that when the prophecy comes true he and the people will know that it was done by God's hand. The message that Habakkuk is to write down comes in the form of five woes to the nation of Babylon which all revolve around their perpetual sins and coming

destruction. The sins described by Yahweh revolve around the greed, violence, pride, and idolatry of Babylon.

- ⇒ Chapter 3 – God’s response to Habakkuk leads Habakkuk to sing a song of praise. If read by itself, chapter three look like many of the psalms. Habakkuk praises God for his mercy and pleads to God to remember his mercy toward His people. God then is pictured as a conquering warrior who flattens the earth under his feet. Verse 12-13 says, “You marched through the earth in fury; you threshed the nations in anger. You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed one.” After hearing from the Lord in chapters 1 and 2, Habakkuk says, “Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.” The prophecy ends with a message of trust in the plans of Yahweh, where no matter what befalls Judah or himself, Habakkuk is determined to rest and rejoice in the Lord.

Message:

- ⇒ In the middle of chaos and anxiety believers are encouraged to turn to the Lord.
- ⇒ While we may not be able to make sense of all that is going on around us, we can rest assured that God has planned the events of the world in eternity past, and not one happening will occur without God’s divine sovereignty already having ordained it.
- ⇒ The events of our world often bring anxiety and trouble, yet believers can state “yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s; he makes me tread on my high places.”