

Habakkuk

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Habakkuk gives the account of a spiritual journey, telling of one man's pilgrimage from doubt to worship. The difference between the beginning of the book (1:1-4) and the end of the book (3:17-19) is striking.

In the first four verses Habakkuk is overwhelmed by the circumstances all about him. He can think of nothing except the iniquity and violence he sees among his people. Although Habakkuk addresses God (1:2), he believes God has removed Himself from the earthly scene: His words are forgotten; His hand is not manifest; God is nowhere to be found. Men are in control, and evil men at that. And they act just as one would expect men to act without God's restraint. These words and phrases describe the scene: "iniquity ... trouble ... plundering ... violence ... strife ... contention ... law is powerless ... justice never goes forth ... wicked surround the righteous ... perverse judgment proceeds."

How different is the scene in the last three verses of the book (3:17-19)! All has changed. The prophet is no longer controlled by or even anxious over his circumstances, for his sights have been raised. Temporal affairs no longer fill his thoughts, but his thoughts are on things above. Instead of being ruled by worldly considerations, Habakkuk has fixed his hopes on God, for he realizes that God does take an interest in His creatures. He is the Source of the prophet's strength and joy. Habakkuk has discovered that he is made for higher ground: "He will make me walk on my high hills" (3:19). The words in the last paragraph contrast sharply with those in the first: "rejoice in the LORD ... joy in the God of my salvation God is my strength ... feet like deer's *feet* ... walk on my high hills" (3:18, 19). So Habakkuk has gone from complaining to confidence, from doubt to trust, from man to God, from the valley to the high hills.

If the heart of the gospel is change and transformation, the Book of Habakkuk demonstrates evangelical renewal. At the center of the change and at the center of the book stands this clear credo of faith: "The just shall live by his faith" (2:4). For the prophet, the promise is for physical protection in time of great upheaval and war. When the predicted invasion by foreign armies becomes a reality, that righteous remnant whose God is the Lord, whose trust and dependence is in Him, will be delivered and they will live. For New Testament writers, such as Paul and the author of Hebrews, this statement of confident faith becomes demonstration of the power of the gospel to give assurance of eternal salvation. For Martin Luther, Habakkuk's theme becomes the watchword of the Reformation.

(Spirit Filled Life Bible's Introduction to Habakkuk, Sam Middlebrook)

Habakkuk 1:1-17

Habakkuk lived in the period of the rise of the neo-Babylonian Empire (625 B.C.), for the Chaldean invasion of Judah was threatening (1:5-6) and the iniquity of Judah was mounting. Habakkuk's theme centers in the theological question of how God's patience with evil can square with His holiness. The answer the prophet received is valid for all time. A sovereign God has the incontestable prerogative of dealing with the wicked in His own time and way. "But the righteous shall live by his faith" (2:4, RSV).

The Chaldeans were aggressive Semitic-Aramaean nomads who gradually settled in southern Babylonia (Chaldea from Akkadian *Kaldu*). Nabopolassar (625-605 B.C.) was the founder of the Chaldean Empire, inherited by his son Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 B.C.). Verse 10 accurately portrays the military practice of the Chaldeans in throwing up earthen ramparts to take fortresses.

Problem: Why the Wicked Chaldeans Were Used to Punish Judah, 12-17. How could the Lord employ people more wicked than His own sinning people as a rod of punishment? The question of God's holy character is discussed in the light of His silence in this matter, 12-13. The ruthless savagery of the Chaldean is pictured. Like a fisherman with rod and net, the Babylonian sat beside a pond which God had abundantly stocked with human fish, 14-15. Pulling up fish after fish, and eating to heart's content, he dumped out the surplus on the bank to die, 17. How long would this outrage of waste of human life go on and this brutality go unchecked by God's righteous intervention, 17?

(Unger's Bible Handbook, Merrill F. Unger)

Habakkuk reminds us that the question "Why?" can, should, and must be asked. His circumstances demanded that he ask God about the apparent reign of unrighteousness around him. Because he believed in God, he believed that God had an answer to his problem. His questions demonstrated the presence of faith, not the lack of it. For an atheist the question "Why?" has no meaning; for a believer the question "Why?" finds its ultimate answer in God. (Sam Middlebrook) **Why does Habakkuk have the right to ask the "why" question?**

Hab. 1:5-11

Habakkuk 2:1-20

A Righteous Remnant to Be Preserved, 1-5. The prophet takes his stand to watch and stations himself on "the tower" (place of quiet solitude where God could break in upon his listening soul and answer his perplexities), 1. The Lord's answer: "Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets, so *he may run* who reads it," 2 (RSV), i.e., as a messenger of the vision (cf. Zech 2:4-5). Those not upright in soul, 4, shall fall, "but the righteous shall live by his faith" (the godly remnant).

The Chaldeans Themselves Shall Be Punished, 6-19. The five woes of this indictment fall upon the nation that plunders "peoples," 6-8; obtains gain by violence, 9-11; erects "a town with blood," 12-14; debauches its neighbors, 15-17; and trusts in idols, 18-19. Noteworthy is the fact that in the midst of these woes the prophet catches a glimpse of the future Kingdom Age, 14, when all these evils will be extirpated (cf. Isa 11:9, which fixes the fulfillment of this prophecy when David's righteous Branch [Christ] has set up the kingdom). The transfiguration in Luke 9:26-29 was a preview of this happy event. "The glory of the Lord," 14, will be Christ revealed in kingly splendor (Mt. 24:30; 25:31).

The Sovereign Lord Is Ruling, 20. This is part of the Lord's answer to the prophet. The Lord has not absconded His holy temple (cf. Zeph 1:7; Zech 2:13.), nor does His habitation cease to be holy. This is sufficient for the entire globe to be silent before Him, because His sovereign power and righteousness are operative in *all* the earth.

(Unger's Bible Handbook, Merrill F. Unger)

Paul the apostle takes the statement of Habakkuk 2:4 and makes it the heart of the gospel. The righteousness of God is attained only through faith, so that the right way to live is to trust. Habakkuk calls all believers in all times to trust God, to be faithful to Him, and so to find life as God means it to be lived. (Sam Middlebrook) **Is Habakkuk 2:4 the answer to Habakkuk's "why" question?**

How important is it to wait upon God for the answers to questions we have regarding our circumstances, the ungodly, the wisdom of this world, etc. ?

Hab. 2:1 Hab. 2:20 Rom. 1:16-32 Gal. 3:11

Habakkuk 3:1-19

The Prophet's Prayer, 1-2. The prophet is thankful for the revelation of God's work and stands in awe of it. In anticipating the final consummation in the day of the Lord, he pleads for mercy in the midst of wrath. "Shigionoth," 1, is unknown.

The Coming of the Lord as Judge and Warrior, 3-15 (cf. Deut 33:2; Ps 18:8-19; 68:8; 77:17-20; Isa 63:1-6; Rev 6:1—19:16).

The Effect of the Theophany upon the Prophet, 16-19. His reaction and quiet trust reflect the attitude of the future godly remnant during the Great Tribulation, 16. He professes his deep faith in God, despite outward sufferings to be endured, 17-19.

(Unger's Bible Handbook, Merrill F. Unger)

The final verses of this prophecy teach that it is possible to rise above circumstances, and even to rejoice in them, by focusing on God who stands above all. Habakkuk does not deny his problems, nor does he treat them lightly; instead, he finds God sufficient in the midst of his troubles. (Sam Middlebrook) **In what words does the prophet express the strength of his faith in God?**

Hab. 3:18-19

How does the spirit of the first part of the book differ from that in the last part of the book?