

Habakkuk

“Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in Him;
But the just shall live by his faith.” (Hab 2:4)

The problem of evil is faced on different fronts. For Habakkuk the problem consisted in why God would let it go on so long among His own special people. But then it became how God could use a people more wicked than His own as instruments of discipline and judgment. The prophets bold sincerity in tracking out the matter with His God has left the believer an invaluable perspective on how to live in the presence of wickedness while maintaining confidence and joy in the holy God who alone determines the work of justice.

Authorship

The book is named for its author; but apart from his designation as a prophet and what can be determined from the message itself regarding his struggle in the faith nothing is known about him. He was obviously very sensitive to Judah’s sin and very open in his pursuit of the truth about God’s nature.

Date

There is nothing explicit by which to date Habakkuk’s ministry. Mention of the Chaldeans being raised up to judge Judah suggests a time just prior to the Babylonian captivity. The social conditions mentioned (1:2–3) suggest a time during the kings following Josiah, who died in 609 B.C. Since Babylon’s first incursion into Judea took place in 605 B.C. the prophecy and writing would likely have been between 609 and 605 B.C.¹

¹ Charles Dyer and Gene Merrill, *The Old Testament Explorer* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001), 803.

Historical Setting

Judah had continued to slide into the sins of Israel following her captivity in 722 B.C. until God found it necessary to judge the southern kingdom as well. Though there had been a brief revival under Josiah (640-609 B.C.) it was not long before idolatry and personal wickedness flourished. Assyrian domination had been broken by the Neo-Babylonian Empire, the instrument that God was now going to use to discipline His people.

Original Readers / Occasion

Since the book is not addressed to Judah, but is rather the record of Habakkuk working out the ramifications of God's righteous judgment, it must be assumed that the author intended his work for those who like himself were concerned with the wickedness around them.

Message

God is righteous in His judgment even when His instrument is itself wicked; therefore the upright must live by faith and trust God with the outcome.

Outline

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| I. | Introduction: Habakkuk shares the oracle which he saw. | 1:1 |
| II. | Habakkuk's complaint: How can a holy God use a wicked instrument to accomplish justice?. | 1:2-17 |
| | A. The initial question: How can God overlook the iniquity of His people? | 1:2-4 |
| | B. The Lord's response: He is raising up an instrument of judgment. | 1:5-11 |
| | 1. It will be a surprise. | 1:5 |
| | 2. It will be the Chaldeans. | 1:6-11 |
| | a. They are a fierce people. | 1:6-9 |
| | b. They are a proud people. | 1:10 |
| | c. They are a godless people. | 1:11 |
| | C. The prophet's reaction: How can God use a more unrighteous nation to judge Israel? | 1:12-17 |
| | 1. In view of the fact that God is holy. | 1:12-13 |
| | 2. In view of the fact that evil appears to be overcoming good. | 1:13 |

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| | 3. | In view of the fact that the Chaldeans are certainly more evil. | 1:14–17 |
| III. | | Yahweh’s answer: Wickedness is always judged eventually, even when the wicked is used as an instrument of righteous judgment. | 2:1–20 |
| | A. | The attitude of Habakkuk: He waits for Yahweh’s answer. | 2:1 |
| | B. | The answer of Yahweh: Wickedness is always judged. | 2:2–20 |
| | 1. | The judgment of the wicked is appointed. | 2:1–3 |
| | 2. | The response of the just is faith. | 2:4 |
| | 3. | The principles of retribution are just. | 2:5–20 |
| IV. | | Habakkuk’s prayer: He will trust and wait for Yahweh’s deliverance. | 3:1–19 |
| | A. | He petitions Yahweh to complete His work with His people. | 3:1–2 |
| | B. | He praises Yahweh who will act as He has in the past. | 3:3–15 |
| | 1. | There will be redemption as in the Exodus. | 3:3–9 |
| | 2. | There will be victory as in the Conquest. | 3:10–13 |
| | 3. | There will be deliverance as from the Captivity. | 3:14–15 |
| | C. | He purposes to live by faith in Yahweh’s strength and salvation. | 3:16–19 |

Argument

I. Introduction: Habakkuk shares the oracle which he saw (1:1).

The prophet Habakkuk carries on a dialogue with God that is everyone’s at some time. His basic concern is how a holy and just God can allow unrighteousness and injustice to prevail over the truly just and good. The Lord’s answer revolves around the statement of 2:4 “The just shall live by his faith.” The practical answer to Habakkuk’s question is that a person must trust God in the face of the apparent victory of evil over good because the wicked will always receive his just due.

II. Habakkuk’s complaint: How can a holy God use a wicked instrument to accomplish justice? (1:2–17).

The dialogue begins with the prophet questioning God about the apparently unhindered spread of wickedness in Judah. He asks, in effect, just how it is that God, who is perfectly holy, can put up with such behavior (1:2–4). The Lord’s answer is that He will not very much longer; He is raising up the Chaldeans as an instrument of judgment

(1:5–11). This perplexes Habakkuk even more since this was a notoriously wicked people. It is not the instrument that he would have chosen (1:12–17).

III. Yahweh's answer: Wickedness is always judged eventually, even when the wicked is used as an instrument of righteous judgment (2:1–20).

Habakkuk reacts in the correct manner. Instead of hardening himself to God's way he stations himself to see what will happen and how God will respond to his objection (2:1). Habakkuk is a man of faith and is, thereby, in a position to be taught and molded. The Lord's response is three-fold. First, he affirms that the judgment of the wicked is firmly appointed; there is no use in debating the fact (2:1–3). Second, He states that the one who would contend with God (the proud) is mixed up inside. The proper response for the righteous person is to accept God's work of judgment and trust Him with the results—"the just shall live by his faith" (2:4). Finally, the Lord sets forth the principles of retribution for the wicked (2:5–20). Using terminology that refers to the consequences that an individual experiences when he uses and abuses others, Yahweh describes the nation of Babylon in its treatment of conquered peoples, thus assuring Habakkuk that they too will receive their just retribution when it is the appointed time. In the meantime Habakkuk must live by faith. Even in the face of an apparent breakdown of God's judicial system, the life of faith is the only safe way to live, for the purpose of all things, even the judgment of the wicked, is Yahweh's glorification (2:20). This is the lesson that Habakkuk is to learn; God is in control of everything and it will all work to the end of His exaltation in glory.

IV. Habakkuk's prayer: He will trust and wait for Yahweh's deliverance (3:1–19).

Habakkuk accepts the Lord's word and responds in believing prayer. First, he

petitions Yahweh to complete His work with Israel, realizing that at the present that will mean judgment at the hands of the Chaldeans (3:1–2). Second, he praises the Lord for the fact that He will act in the future as He has in the past on behalf of the nation (3:3–15). Israel is secure in their future because Yahweh has already demonstrated His power and grace on their behalf and can therefore be expected to do so again. Third, Habakkuk purposes to rejoice in Yahweh and to live by faith in Him who provides salvation and strength, regardless of how bleak the immediate circumstances may become (3:16–19). Habakkuk will live by faith.

Conclusion

Habakkuk's immediate contribution was to arm the righteous of Judah with the perspective they would need to face the awful days of judgment that were just ahead. Such men as Daniel, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah would face similar challenges to their faith and would be in a position to influence others to put their confidence in God whether or not they fully understood His program of justice. The only thing that would get them through such an ordeal was their faith.

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