

Old Testament Survey—Habakkuk

His name fascinated me as a newly saved young person. I was just getting to know my Bible when I ran across his intriguing name tucked away in the latter part of the Old Testament. *Habakkuk*. I could hardly pronounce it, and understanding it was quite a challenge, too. What should we do with these curious men called the “prophets”? I wasn’t quite sure then. I am now. The prophets, including Habakkuk, although they lived centuries ago, have an amazingly relevant message for us today.

Discuss: What comes to mind first when you think about the book of Habakkuk?

Who wrote the book?

--Habakkuk, a prophet to the southern kingdom

--we know little about his personal life; because of the content of his book, he has been called the “first free thinker” of Israelite prophets (similar to Malachi); His book follows a different pattern than most prophetic books, and is actually a dialogue with God.

When was the book written?

--Generally dated a little before or after 605 B.C.

Note: We can piece together the time-frame from the following. One, 1:6 indicates that Habakkuk wrote this prior to the Babylonian invasion, which took place in 606 B.C. Yet since there is no mention of Assyria in the book, and since Assyria fell to the Babylonians in 612 B.C., we conclude that Habakkuk wrote after 612. Hence, between 612 and 606.

--The Background: The setting in the book fits the time under King Jehoiakim, just following the revival that occurred under Josiah. Pharaoh Neco went up to help the Assyrians against the Babylonians. Judah was caught in the middle of the battle. Do you remember what happened to Josiah? He was killed at Megiddo when he marched out in battle against Neco (2 Kings 23:29). Neco took Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, put him in chains and carried him off to Egypt where he died. Then Neco put in charge another son of Josiah, Eliakim, whom he renamed Jehoiakim (who reigned from 609-597 B.C.).

Jehoiakim was a bad king. He's the one who tore up the scroll that Jeremiah gave him.

--Habakkuk was a contemporary with Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Nahum.

Why was the book written?

Habakkuk prophesied to the southern kingdom during a period of anxiety and distress, with the Babylonian threat at hand. The days of peace, prosperity, and reform under Josiah were gone. It was a time of wickedness and stress (Wood, 325).

The book is a conversation between Habakkuk and God. It accomplishes two purposes:

1. *God gave the book to encourage Judah.*

The book begins with a complaint, but ends with an affirmation of faith. Yes, the Babylonian captivity is coming, and God will use it, but it will not last.

2. *God gave the book to teach us about Himself.*

Habakkuk addresses the tough questions about God, the questions some may feel uncomfortable asking. We'll see this as we examine the content of the book itself...

What is the outline of the book?

I. Habakkuk's First Complaint (1:2-4)

***"Lord, why don't You do something about the evil in Judah?"

II. God's Answer (1:5-11)

***"I will do something. I'll use the Babylonians to punish My people, Judah."

III. Habakkuk's Second Complaint (1:12-2:1)

***"Lord, how can a Just God like You use a wicked nation like Babylon to punish a more righteous nation like Judah?"

IV. God's Second Answer (2:2-20)

A. I will judge Babylon, too.

B. I will reward faith.

V. Habakkuk's Prayer of Faith (3)

Let's scan the book to follow the dialogue:

Q: Who does Habakkuk address in 1:2? The Lord

Q: What did Habakkuk say he saw around him, acc. to 1:3-4? Injustice, violence

Q: How did God say He would deal with the problem, acc. to 1:6? Raise up Babylon

Q: How did God describe the Babylonians in 1:7? Dreaded, a law to themselves

Q: How did Habakkuk respond to this prediction? 1:13 "Your eyes too pure..."

"Why silent...wicked swallow up those more righteous..."

Q: What did Habakkuk do after his second complaint, in 2:1? Took his seat (lit.?) on his watch, and waited for God to answer.

Discuss: What inconsistency do you see when you compare Hab's second complaint with his first complaint? In the first, he complained that God needed to do something about Judah's sin. In the second, he complained that God needed to recognize Judah's righteousness!

Q: What kind of answer did God give Habakkuk?

In 2:4? "The just shall live by faith"

In ch 2, God gives a series of "woes" against the Babylonians.

What Habakkuk needed to realize was that the Babylonians were not an end, but a means to an end. The fact that God used the Babylonians did not mean He endorsed their wickedness. The righteous will prevail in the end. And in the mean time, the righteous will live by faith.

Q: Having heard God's answer, how does Habakkuk respond in ch 3? With a prayer of trust.

See 3:2

Discuss: What affirmation does he make in 3:19?

Note: The conclusion (3:19) indicates this psalm was meant to be sung.

Summary: The book addresses some very perplexing questions. Like, how can God seem to ignore wickedness in the lives of His people? Why doesn't He do something? Another, how can God use a sinful nation to judge a less sinful nation?

Discuss: Is it ever appropriate for a Christian to doubt? God doesn't condemn questioning and doubt, but uses it to move Habakkuk along in his understanding of God.

Is there a difference between honest doubt and skeptical doubt?

What is the message of the book in one sentence?

In the book of Habakkuk we see how God took a person from doubt to faith.

What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?

(adapted from observations by Professor Leon Rowland, Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary)

1. Habakkuk stretches our concept of God.

Discuss: How so? Habakkuk was a man of God at the beginning of the story, but by the end of his encounter with God, he was a new man!

Are you learning new things about God? Have you put God in a box, like Habakkuk was trying to

do at the beginning, or are you willing to let God be God?

2. *Habakkuk teaches the survival of the righteous (not the "fittest").*

What does that mean?

See: 2:4 (quoted in Romans 1:17; Gal 3:11)

3. *Things are not always as they seem to us.*

Why not? Our perspective is limited. Habakkuk couldn't see the whole picture. Neither can we. For instance, consider those who suffer in the church. Why do they suffer? We may conclude God is judging them or they are in sin, and both conclusions may be erroneous (e.g. Job's friends)

4. *Evil has within itself the seeds of destruction.*

It was true for Judah and for the Babylonians.

Discuss: How does Habakkuk prepare us for Christ and the cross?

5. *We can see and understand God only when we rise above the fog of human doubt.*

Leon Rowland made this comment. What does it mean, and how does Habakkuk demonstrate its truth?

Note: The book began on a low note of complaint, and ended on a high note of affirmation. We learn from Habakkuk that our confidence must not be in circumstances, but in the covenant God.