# HABAKKUK

## Introduction

Author. Beyond speculative tradition, the nearest thing to personal information that we have about Habakkuk is that he was a "prophet" (1:1; 3:1).

Date. Although the date is not stated in the book, certain internal evidence suggests a fairly specific time period. First, "God's work" of raising up the Chaldeans was said to be something done "in your days" i.e., the lifetime of the prophet (1:5). Second, this work is something which "no one would have believed," indicating that the Neo-Babylonian power was not in control at the time of the prophecy. Thus a date during the early reign of Josiah, perhaps around 630 B.C. would seem appropriate.

Historical Background. The background necessary to understand this book is simply the future invasion of Judah by Babylon. This was not a message delivered to a people by the prophet on behalf of God. Rather it is a dialogue with God on behalf of the people.

Structure. The book is composed of prayers, prophetic oracles and prophetic woes. It can be outlined around Habakkuk's three prayers (1:2-5; 1:12-17; 3:1-2) and the responses to them.

Message Statement. The message of Habakkuk is a transitional work that bridges the gap between prophecy and wisdom literature. In contrast to his colleagues, Habakkuk does not address the people with the demands of Yahweh. Rather he addresses Yahweh with the dilemma of the people. He offers three prayers to Yahweh, the first two are actually questions and the final prayer is a request. He receives an answer from the first question and records it. He also receives an answer for the second and records it, adding to it five additional, explanatory "woes." In the final prayer, no answer is recorded outside of the divinely inspired musings of the prophet himself. Although it appears as though God has forsaken the nation Habakkuk reminds them that *In the darkest hours of the nation, the One Who sits on the moral throne of the universe has neglected neither justice (for Babylon) nor mercy (for Israel).*

Argument

1A HABAKKUK'S QUESTIONS 1:1--2:20

As Habakkuk first approaches God he comes with two basic questions. These questions concern the wickedness of both Judah and Babylon.

1B Question #1: Why Does God Allow Wicked Practices to Continue in Judah? 1:1-11

As he surveyed the present situation in Judah, Habakkuk wondered why the sovereign Yahweh would patiently endure sin in Judah. The response he received was that God would not endure forever and that he would in fact judge the nation by the wicked Chaldeans. This elicits yet another question from the prophet.

2B Question #2: Why Will God Use Wicked People to Punish Judah? 1:12--2:20

The prophet's question here receives the answer that he must, unlike the proud Chaldean, trust in God (2:4). Although it is difficult to know where God's words end and the prophet's begin, it appears that Habakkuk appends his own inspired and extended answer to vision he received from God. This answer involves five woes on Babylon covering various aspects of her crimes and punishments.

2A HABAKKUK'S REQUESTS 3:1-19

Habakkuk'a questions turn to prayers in this section. He first offers a prayer and then in a reflective state, answers his own questions.

1B The Prayer of Habakkuk 3:1-2

Having his questions answered Habakkuk's concern now turns to the fortunes of his people. The vindication of God's actions in the first two chapters of the book, although mentally satisfying, do not seem to improve the lot of the prophet's people. Here therefore offers one more prayer to God, this time a request for the revival of his people and mercy in judgment.

No direct answer of God is recorded here, but the reflection of the prophet on the work of God in past salvation history provide ample basis for rejoicing.

2B The Answer by Habakkuk: God's Previous Work in History: The Theophany of the Exodus 3:3-19

Habakkuk muses upon the active presence of God in the Exodus and at Sinai in glowing poetic terms (3:3-12). Reading through this expressive piece of poetry would inspire the most discouraged soul with the confidence of God's salvific power. Habakkuk carefully interprets these actions, though in 3:13-15, that they were intended for the salvation of His people. Thus armed, Habakkuk realizes that God will one day rescue His people again. Therefore, no matter what the circumstances at present may suggest, there is ample basis for overwhelming confidence in "the God of my salvation" (3:16-19). Habakkuk has made his own Exodus of sorts, from one of despair and question to confidence and triumph.

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