

Bible Study Guide– Book of Habakkuk

Saturday, September 1, 2012

Background on Habakkuk

Habakkuk's name means to "embrace" or "wrestle." As is usually the case, his name has something to do with the message of the book. I think it relates to the fact that he was wrestling with a difficult issue. If God is good, then why is there evil in the world? And if there has to be evil, then why do the evil prosper? What is God doing in the world? Little is known about Habakkuk except that he was a contemporary of Jeremiah and a man of vigorous faith rooted deeply in the religious traditions of Israel.

Principles of Habakkuk

- (1) **God sometimes seems to be inactive, but He is involved.** 1:12 showed that the Babylonians were under God's control, and He was using them to achieve His purposes.
- (2) **God is holy.** In 1:13 Habakkuk said that God could not approve evil. This should be a sobering thought to us as we struggle with temptations, sins, bad habits (which is a euphemism for sins), etc.
- (3) **God hears and answers prayers.**
- (4) **God sometimes gives unexpected answers to our prayers.** When we pray, we usually have in our minds the way we want God to answer. When He answers differently, we think He hasn't answered at all.
- (5) **God is Just and God is Good.** He will judge the wicked and he is concerned for the righteous.
- (6) **The righteous live by faith and faithfulness.** This means we really believe that God is Good and God is just. And we live accordingly. What are some situations where you might need to do that?

Timeline of Habakkuk

The prediction of the coming Babylonian invasion (1:6) indicates that Habakkuk lived in Judah toward the end of Josiah's reign (640–609 b.c.) or at the beginning of Jehoiakim's (609–598). The prophecy is generally dated a little before or after the battle of Carchemish (605), when Egyptian forces, which had earlier gone to the aid of the last Assyrian king, were routed by the Babylonians under Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar and were pursued as far as the Egyptian border (Jer 46). Habakkuk, like Jeremiah, probably lived to see the initial fulfillment of his prophecy when Jerusalem was attacked by the Babylonians in 597.

Habakkuk's Message

Among the prophetic writings, Habakkuk is somewhat unique in that it includes no oracle addressed to Israel. It contains, rather, a dialogue between the prophet and God. (The book of Jonah, while narrative, presents an account of conflict between the Lord and one of his prophets). In the first two chapters, Habakkuk argues with God over his ways that appear to him unfathomable, if not unjust. God's answers therefore spoke to all who shared Habakkuk's troubled doubts. Habakkuk was perplexed that wickedness, strife and oppression were rampant in Judah but God seemingly did nothing. When told that the Lord was preparing to do something about it through the "ruthless" Babylonians (1:6), his perplexity only intensified: How could God, who is "too pure to look on evil" (1:13), appoint such a nation "to execute judgment" (1:12) on a people "more righteous than themselves" (1:13)? God makes it clear, however, that eventually the corrupt destroyer will itself be destroyed. In the end, Habakkuk learns to rest in God's sovereign appointments and await his working in a spirit of worship. He learns to wait patiently in faith (2:3-4) for God's kingdom to be expressed universally (2:14).

******* Notes To Be Considered In Your Bible Study Of The Book Of Habakkuk *******

(Use Them Only As Thoughts; Not A Direct Translation Of God's Word)

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-Aramaeans 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)

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)

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)

Sources

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