

INTRODUCTION TO 35TH BIBLEBOOK

HABAKKUK (608-605 B.C.)(11th)

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A. THE WRITER, RECIPIENTS AND DATE OF THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK.

Habakkuk is the eighth of the twelve Minor Prophets. The name ‘Habakkuk’ means ‘*the one embraced*’ or ‘*the special beloved*’. We do not know more about the prophet Habakkuk. He probably worked in Judah and what he proclaimed and wrote was intended for the people of Judah. Nevertheless, in this short prophecy he addressed the Lord.

In chapter 1:5-6 the Lord says that in the prophet’s time he was going to raise up the Chaldeans, that is, the Babylonians and they would conquer and devastate many nations. When the Assyrian Empire began to crumble, the Chaldeans under the leadership of Nabopolassar (625-605 B.C.) fought the Assyrians. Nineveh fell in 612 B.C. Nabopolassar’s son, Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.), became the ruler of the Babylonian Empire and inherited Western Asia. *From that time onwards, the Chaldeans were called Babylonians.*

In chapter 3:16b, the prophet was still waiting for the invasion of the Babylonians to take place. This is a reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s first invasion into Judah, which took place in 605 B.C. According to 2 Kings 22:18-20, the Lord promised king Josiah (639-608 B.C), that the Babylonian invasion would not take place during his lifetime. Therefore, with a view to chapter 1:5-6, the prophet Habakkuk probably prophesied during the reign of Jehoiakim before Nebuchadnezzar’s first invasion into Judah, that is, he prophesied between **608-605 B.C.**

B. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK.

The book of Habakkuk may be given the title, “**The righteous will live by his faith.**”

It has two parts:

1. Habakkuk chapter 1 and 2. Faith tested.

The prophet’s questions and objection and the Lord’s answers.

2. Habakkuk 3:1-19. Faith strengthened.

The Lord appears in answer to the prophet’s prayer and the prophet responds in a psalm of trust and rejoicing.

- The prophet’s prayer (3:1-2).
- The Lord’s appearance (3:3-16).
- The prophet’s response (3:17-19).

C. THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK.

The rich and powerful in Judah were still exploiting and oppressing the poor. The prophet complains that it seems as if they are getting away with it. It seems as if the Lord is tolerating the exploitation and oppression of the needy people. It seems as if the Lord is doing nothing about injustice (1:2-4)!

While in the other prophetic books the Lord addresses the prophet, in Habakkuk the prophet first addresses the Lord. Habakkuk complains to the Lord, asks questions, advances objections and waits for the Lord’s answer.

Habakkuk’s first question is, “Why does the Lord allow the wicked in Judah to oppress the righteous?” (1:2-4).

The Lord’s answer: “The Chaldeans, that is, the Babylonians, will come as a punishment for the wicked in Judea” (1:5-11).

Habakkuk second question (an objection), “Why does the Lord allow the people of Judah to be punished by the Chaldeans, who are more wicked than the Judeans?” (1:12-17). The prophet stations himself on his watchtower and waits for the Lord’s answer (2:1).

The Lord’s answer, “The Chaldeans will also be punished. As a matter of fact, all the wicked will be punished (2:4-20).

But the righteous will live by his faith (2:4).” It is the duty and glory of the righteous to trust, even when he is not able to figure out the justice of the Lord’s actions. In this humble trust and quiet confidence the righteous will live¹.

A vision of God’s coming in glory. The Lord does more than answer Habakkuk’s questions and objections. He not only tells him to exercise faith, but strengthens his faith by means of a vision of the Lord’s coming in glory to destroy the Chaldeans and to deliver his own people (3:1-15).

The prophet’s response. The appearance of the Lord has a great effect on the prophet. He trembles in every part of his body (3:16). Nevertheless, he no longer questions the ways of the Lord’s providence, but waits patiently for God to act. Finally, Habakkuk expresses his gratitude for God’s unmerited grace in a psalm of trust and rejoicing (3:17-19).

¹ Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11