

THE PROPHET HABAKKUK

J. A. Reynolds, for 2014 Fairview Memorial Winter Bible Study

Habakkuk contemporary with Jeremiah. Probably written after Josiah was dead?

In Verses 1-4 Habakkuk complains of his grief at the vision he foresees regarding God's coming judgment upon His people for their sins, acknowledging that that judgment is just because of their sins and rebellion. Isaiah was seeing this a century before, when Judah and Israel seemed to be dwelling in comparative safety.

"Behold ye (Israelites) among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs. (Habakkuk 1:4-5) (The Jews were incapable of believing that God would employ Babylon's Pagan Chaldean rulers to conquer them, and destroy Jerusalem with their temple. It appears that some Jews may have been already in Babylon "among the heathen" when Habakkuk wrote this, from the third year of Jehoiakim (Daniel and companions), and the first year of Jehoiachin (Ezekiel and companions). It is certain that many Israelites were yet dispersed among the nations from the time of the Assyrian captivity, whose remnants had not wandered back into Judah for refuge as some already had. Surely none of those would believe what Habakkuk and Jeremiah were predicting!

It appears that the Jews and King Josiah had previously thought of the Chaldeans (with their capital at Babylon) as friends and allies. Good King Josiah had gone out to battle in support of them against the Egyptians. 2nd Kings 23:29 says, "In his days Pharaohnechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and King Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him." Apparently, this "King of Assyria" was at that time a Chaldean. Josiah apparently tried to intercept the Egyptian Army as it passed through his country of its way into a city of Syria formerly held by the Assyrians and now subject to a Chaldean ruler. Pharaoh had warned him not to interfere, so he had gone into battle in disguise. Still, like Ahab before him, an enemy archer's fatal arrow, whether coincidental or Providential, found him and he died prematurely. (2nd Chronicles 35:20-24 helps to clarify this incident.) Within three months Pharaoh deposed Josiah's son and Judah's crown prince Jehoahaz and took him captive into Egypt after setting up his brother Jehoiakim as king of Judah instead. During Jehoiakim's eleven year reign, Babylon demanded Judah's subjection, and Jehoiakim's rebellion in his third year resulted in the first wave of captivity, in which Daniel and his companions and others were taken to Babylon. Jehoiakim's further rebellion despite Jeremiah's warning to the contrary, resulted in the captivity of his crown prince, Jehoiachin, immediately after Jehoiakim's death. Ezekiel was writing his prophecy from Babylon five years after Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar set up Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle and his father's brother in his place, and Zedekiah was enthroned in Jerusalem for eleven years after Jehoiachin was taken captive to Babylon along with many of the choice youth of the nation. After Zedekiah's eleven year reign, his rebellion against Babylon, despite Jeremiah's repeated warnings to the contrary, brought the utter destruction of his throne and all of his sons, and the **utter ruin of Jerusalem and the temple**. Many more Jewish captives were carried away as slaves to Babylon at that time.

As a warning to the unbelieving Jews in the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia, Paul applied Habakkuk's prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction by Babylon in 606 B.C. or forecast its impending second destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D., which would bring the final doom of Jerusalem with the scattering of the unbelieving Jews. *"Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you. (Acts 13:40-41)*

More than 600 years after Habakkuk's prophecy was fulfilled, Paul quoted this warning to the unbelieving Jews in the Jewish synagogue at Antioch in the Roman province of Pisidia during his first missionary journey to the Gentile nations. *"Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you."* (Acts 13:41) **What had happened to Jerusalem and Solomon's temple, utter destruction by the hands of the Chaldeans who were being used as the chastising instrument of God to correct a remnant of the Jews, was about to happen again by the chastising hands of the Romans.** This would be the last time, and would be a lasting and permanent destruction (now 2000 years old without remedy!) Paul was also preaching to the Jews *"among the heathen,"* similar to those addressed by the prophet Habakkuk with similar warnings six centuries before. **The warning was met with the similar, and perhaps more adamant, skepticism. About forty years later, in 70 A.D., that final destruction happened without remedy!** The short-lived independent nation of Judah, whose hard-won independence had been briefly gained from the Syrian Greek rulers, had somewhat willingly accepted the Roman yoke about 60 years before Jesus came, in order to gain their protection from other and worse conquerors. Many of them were dispersed among cities of the Roman Empire by the time of Jesus and Paul. The early Caesars were relatively good emperors compared to others, and the "Roman peace" their legions maintained was used by God as a vehicle for very rapid spread of the Christian gospel. It was also accepted and tolerated by many widely dispersed Jews *"among the heathen"* where they had built their synagogues and maintained their customs within their enclaves. **Who would have imagined that 40 years in the future the Romans would utterly destroy Jerusalem and its temple to subdue and scatter radical Jews rebelling against the empire? We understand that this final destruction was God's punishment against those Jews who remained determined to deny their crucified and risen Messiah by maintaining their obsolete blood sacrifice of animals in their temple in symbolic denial of "the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world."** Paul later issued a very similar warning from Isaiah to the Jewish leaders in Rome to whom he preached upon his first arrival there: *"Well spake the Holy Ghost by Isaiah the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it."* (Acts 28:25-28)

In Verses 1:6-11, Habakkuk vividly and painfully describes Judah's Chaldean conquest and in verse 1:12 he acknowledged that the Chaldeans are merely God's tool of judgment to chastise Judah.

In verses 1:13-17, he lamented that judgment, and questioned the time of God's retribution upon Babylon.

In verse 2:1 he asked for a revelation from God, even expecting it to reprove him.

In verses 2:2-12, God answered him with a vision predicting his ultimate retribution upon Babylon and the Chaldeans. In this he compared the intoxication produced by wealth, power, and conquest to that of wine and its ultimate downfall. In verse 2:4 we have that verse quoted in the New Testament *"the just shall live by his faith"* in contrast to the Babylonian's trust in their own power. In verse 2:11, God declares that even the inanimate items of Babylon's destruction will cry out against its destroyer. In verse 2:13-14, God declared that all of this destruction, power, and conquest is ultimately in vain, because *"the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of thy LORD, as waters that cover the sea."*

The rest of the chapter, Verses 2:15-20, predicts that despite Babylon's corrupting influence, conquering idolaters shall ultimately fail.

Chapter 3, is Habakkuk's prayer in psalm. Verses 3:1-11 recall God's marvelous miraculous deliverances of His people as they came from Egypt through the lands to the south to occupy their "promised land." Destruction of their opposers demonstrated His power and glory along the entire way. Like many Psalms, this one is punctuated with "Selah's," the meaning of which is not completely understood, except it is for emphasis on what has just been sung, demanding a pause to deeply consider it.

In Verses 3:14-19, the prophet vows that regardless of the temporary catastrophes which may accompany the coming judgment, he will not stop rejoicing that God will save him and His faithful people

Other jewels from Habakkuk's prophecy are:

"Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? ..." (Habakkuk 1:12)

"Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: ..." (Habakkuk 1:13)

It is worthy of note that all of the Old Testament prophets surround the captivities of Israel and Judah. Even Jonah's though earlier than the others, is relevant because God used it to preserve Nineveh and Assyria long enough to use them as His chastising instrument upon Samaria and Israel.

Its relevance of today lies in the similarity of our own nation and society in its decline toward whatever ultimate judgment God prescribes. While outward circumstances still appeared well enough, Isaiah's vision often spoke as if these woes were already upon Judah: *"The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. (Isaiah 1:1-9)*

The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: (Isaiah 40:6)

Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. (Isaiah 58:1)

KINGS OF DIVIDED ISRAEL AND JUDAH

40 Solomon | 22 Jeroboam I | 2 Nadab | 24 Baasha | 2 Elah | 7 days Zimri | 12 Omri | 22 Ahab | 2 Ahaziah | 12 Jehoram

ISRAEL 18 20 | | | | 4 | 5

PROPHETS: → → Jonah? Elijah & Elisha

JUDAH | 2 3 26 27 31 38 | 17 18 |

Solomon | Rehoboam | Abijam | Asa | Jehoshaphat | J...

40 18 3 41 25

12 Jehoram | 29? Jehu | 17 Jehoahaz | 16 Jehoash | 41 Jeroboam II | 6 months Zachariah | 1 month Shallum

5 11/12 | 7 | 2 | 27 |

PROPHETS: → Elisha Amos, Hosea, Isaiah

| | | 23 37 | 15 38 39

| Jehoram | Ahaziah | Athaliah | Jehoash | Amaziah | Azariah (Uzziah)

8 1 6 40 29 52

10 Menahem | 2 Pekahiah | 20 Pekah | 9 Hoshea | Assyrian Captivity of Samaria and Israel -----→
 | | 17 | 9 →
 | | |

PROPHETS: → Hosea, Isaiah & Micah -----→ NONE named / Nahum?, Zephaniah, Jeremiah

39 Azariah (Uzziah) | 50 | 52 Jotham | 12 Ahaz | 6 Hezekiah | Manasseh | Amon | Josiah | Jehoahaz |
 52 16 16 29 55 2 31 3 months

----- Assyrian Captivity of Israel -----

Habbakuk , Joel?, Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Obadiah? ← PROPHETS→ Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Jehoiakim | Jehoiachin | Zedekiah | 70 yr. Babylon exile of Judah to 536 B.C. | After Exile
 11 3 months 11