

Minor Prophets...

THE MINOR PROPHETS

The Book of Habakkuk

Hab. 1:1-4

...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

Hab. 1:1 The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.

2 O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!

3 Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention.

4 Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

TITLE AND WRITER

- The name “Habakkuk” means *to embrace*, or *to wrestle*.
- The simple designation, “the prophet,” with no other identifying description, characterizes only two other prophetic books: Haggai and Zechariah.
- According to rabbinic sources, Habakkuk was the son of the Shunammite woman whom Elisha restored to life (2 Kings 4). The basis for this theory is that Elisha's servant told the woman that she would “embrace” a son (2 Kings 4:16), and Habakkuk's name is similar to the Hebrew word for “embrace.”

2 Kgs. 4:16 And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt **embrace a son**. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid...**Major Message**

Minor Prophets...

UNITY

The major challenge to the unity of the book has come from liberal scholars who view psalmic material such as chapter 3 as postexilic.

DATE

References in the book help us date it approximately, but make it impossible to be precise or dogmatic.

- The Lord told Habakkuk that He was raising up the Chaldeans (Neo-Babylonians), the fierce and impetuous people who were already marching throughout the whole earth, and that they would expand their territory even farther (1:6).

- The first of the Neo-Babylonian kings was Nabopolassar (627-605 B.C.). This reference points to a time before 605 B.C., when Babylon defeated the united forces of Egypt and Assyria at the battle of Carchemish, and became the major power in the ancient Near East.

...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

- It may even point to a time before 612 B.C. when the Babylonians (with the Medes and Scythians) destroyed Nineveh. However, other references in the book, that describe conditions in Judah and the ancient Near East, support a date between 608 and 605 B.C. (cf. 1:7-11).
- King Jehoiakim ruled Judah from 609 to 598 B.C., so it was apparently during his reign that Habakkuk prophesied (cf. 2 Kings 23:36—24:7; 2 Chron. 36:5-8). This is the opinion of most evangelical scholars.
- The background to Habakkuk is the decline of the Judean kingdom that began with the death of King Josiah in 609 B.C.
- Leon Wood dated this book more precisely at about 605 B.C. Richard Patterson favored a date of composition about 655-650 B.C., during Manasseh's reign.

...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

PLACE OF COMPOSITION

- Since the Chaldeans were on the rise when Habakkuk wrote, the prophet must have lived in Judah.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel had passed out of existence in 722 B.C. with the Assyrian invasion.

- Habakkuk was a prophet of the Southern Kingdom who lived in times of increasing degeneracy and fear.

AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

- The people to whom Habakkuk ministered were Judeans who apparently lived under the reign of King Jehoiakim.
- During his reign the Israelites were looking for help in the wrong places, Egypt and Assyria, in view of growing Babylonian power.

...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

- They should have been looking to the Lord primarily, and their failure to do so was one of the burdens of Jeremiah, Habakkuk's contemporary.
- Habakkuk's concerns were more philosophical. What disturbed him was that the sovereign Lord was not responding to Habakkuk's evil generation and its internal injustices.
- He voiced his concern to Jehovah in prayer (1:2-4). The Lord replied that He was working.
- This raised another problem for Habakkuk, which he also took to the Lord in prayer.

...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

- How could He use a more wicked nation than Judah to punish God's chosen people (1:12—2:1)? The Lord explained that He would eventually punish the Babylonians for their wickedness, too (2:2-20).
- The final chapter is a hymn of praise extolling Jehovah for His wise ways.
- The purpose of the book was to vindicate the justice of God so God's people would have hope and encouragement.

LITERARY FORM

This book employs a variety of literary forms.

- The first part of the book contains a dialogue between Habakkuk and his God that alternates between lament and oracle (1:2—2:5).

...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

- The second part is a taunt or mocking song that the prophet put in the mouths of the nations that had suffered under Babylon's oppression. It consists of five "woes" (2:6-20).

Hab. 2:6 Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, **Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his!** how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!

Hab. 2:9 **Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house**, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!

Hab. 2:12 **Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood**, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!

Hab. 2:15 **Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink**, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!

...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

Hab. 2:19 **Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake**; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.

- The third part is a psalm, complete with musical directions (ch. 3).

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

Habakkuk is a unique book.

- Unlike other prophets who declared God's message to people this prophet dialogued with God about people.
- Most Old Testament prophets proclaimed divine judgment.
- Habakkuk pleaded for divine judgment.

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Minor Prophets...

- In contrast with the typical indictment, this little book records an intriguing interchange between a perplexed prophet and his Maker.
- The righteous ones are to live by faith.
- The faith prescribed is still called for as a basic response to the unanswered questions in today's universe; and it is this, a theology for life both then and now, that stands as Habakkuk's most basic contribution.

MESSAGE

- Habakkuk is unusual among the prophetic books in that it tells a story. In this, it is similar to Jonah, which is also the record of a prophet's experience.
- Jonah gives the account of a prophet's failure to *sympathize* with God.

...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

- Jonah deals with a problem posed by *Nineveh*, and Habakkuk deals with a problem posed by *Babylon*.
- Habakkuk, like Jonah, also records one major event in the life of the prophet.
- Most of the other prophetic books record the messages and activities of a prophet over an extended period of years. Habakkuk does contain prophecies, so it is like the other prophetic books in this respect.
- The key verse in the book is 2:4 – “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but **the just shall live by his faith.**”
- This verse suggests the difficulty that Habakkuk faced, and it contains his declaration following his struggle with faith.

...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

- Habakkuk is a book in which a man, the prophet, asked questions and received answers.

- Habakkuk is quoted in the New Testament:

Hab. 2:4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but **the just shall live by his faith.**

Rom. 1:17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, **The just shall live by faith.**

Gal. 3:11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, **The just shall live by faith.**

Heb. 10:38 Now **the just shall live by faith**: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

•Habakkuk, by faith, realizes that unknown challenges must be faced by trusting in God.

Rom. 8:28 And we know that **all things work together for good to them that love God**, to them who are **the called according to his purpose**.

Prov. 3:5 **Trust in the LORD with all thine heart**; and **lean not unto thine own understanding**.

6 In all thy ways **acknowledge him**, and **he shall direct thy paths**.

Hab. 3:17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.
...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

Conclusion

There are several lessons of timeless importance that Habakkuk teaches its readers.

- One abiding lesson of this book is that people of faith sometimes have trouble continuing to trust God.
- If we look at what is happening in our world, we may come up with the same questions Habakkuk voiced at the beginning of the book.
- But if we continue to listen to the Word of God, we can have peace in our hearts and songs on our lips, while we wait for God to reward the righteous with life for their faith.
- This principle is true on two levels: justification and sanctification.

...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

- The only way to obtain a proper legal standing before God (justification) is by trusting Him. And the only way to continue to live in that righteous standing before God (sanctification) is to continue to trust Him, in spite of appearances.
- We can do so because God has established a flawless record of faithfulness to His promises, and the Bible is the record of that faithfulness.
- We must live in the light of Scripture, rather than in the light of experience. God's promises and covenants are a better indication of reality than circumstances.
- The best place to take our questions is to God in prayer.
- And the best place to find answers from God is in His Word.
- Living by faith means becoming people of prayer and the Word.
- The inner attitude always manifests itself in outward action.

...Major Message

Minor Prophets...

Psa. 119:105 **Thy word is a lamp** unto my feet, and **a light** unto my path.

Psa. 119:130 The entrance of **thy words giveth light**; it giveth **understanding unto the simple**.

2 Pet. 1:19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto **ye do well that ye take heed**, as unto **a light that shineth in a dark place**, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

...Major Message