

# OVERVIEW OF THE PROPHECY OF HABAKKUK.

## INTRODUCTION.

1. **The Man.** Of Habakkuk himself we know nothing. His name means “embracing”.
2. **Background.** He was possibly contemporary with Jeremiah, ministering at a time when the Babylonian invasion of Judah was imminent. (See ch.1.6. Chaldeans = Babylonians; they were the ruling class).
3. **Main Thought.** The prophet was perplexed by the injustices he observed, and the fact that apparently there was no intervention from God.
4. **Analysis.** Chapters 1 and 2 form a dialogue between the prophet and God. Chapter 3 is a psalm of praise as he comes to terms with the reality of God’s sovereign ways.

## Chapter 1.

V1. Introduction, in which he is presented as “the prophet”, one of three thus designated in first verses. (See Hag 1.1 and Zech 1.1). Very often the word “burden” conveys the idea of a message heavy with judgement.

VV2-4. Habakkuk speaks. The prophet expresses his frustration at God’s delay in intervening, when society’s violence resulted in civil unrest, with the law seemingly helpless, and justice being perverted.

VV5-11. God speaks. God indicates that He will intervene, and use the Chaldeans to judge His people. “I raise up the Chaldeans”.

The Chaldeans.

V6. Their Character. Bitter and hasty, covetous.

V7. Their Dominance. Pitiless, they enforce their laws on those whom they subjugate.

V8. Their Military Prowess. The advance of their cavalry, unusually swift.

V9. Their Object. Violence; they thrive on violence.

V10. Their Pride. They would disdain any impediment to their progress.

V11. Their Folly. They attribute success to their god! But see V6. Here we have the first hint that there will be divine retribution on them! See Zech 1.15.

VV12-17. Habakkuk speaks. He is further perplexed that God would use such a treacherous nation to discipline His people, a nation less righteous than those it oppressed! However, he was confident that Judah would not be exterminated; “we shall not die”, V12.

V12. His confidence that “we shall not die” was based on his understanding of God’s character. The God who was “from everlasting” had formerly made promises to the nation, and as the “Holy One” would never go back on His word. The “mighty God” = “Rock”, a title of God used frequently in Deuteronomy. The fact that God was their Rock gave the prophet assurance that they would not be wiped out, but it was this Rock who had established the Chaldeans “for correction”.

V13. It is here that Habakkuk expresses his surprise that God would tolerate such evil men as the Chaldeans. He sees it as inconsistent with His character as a holy God. What he failed to appreciate was that God would intervene in His own time, and in His own sovereign way.

V14. Habakkuk likens the Chaldeans to fishermen in the way they go about their expansionist military campaigns.

V15. They use a variety of tactics, angling and different kinds of nets.

They gloat over their catch.

V16. They deify their own power and prowess. Cf. Dan 11.38.

They enrich themselves by their military supremacy.

V17. They are insatiable in their expansionist ambitions, emptying the net to fill it again.

## Chapter 2.

V1. The prophet here likens himself to a watchman eagerly scanning the horizon, expecting God to speak. God did respond at V2. The vision would be a condemnation of the Chaldeans, recorded in VV4-20. VV2-3 are instructions to Habakkuk about how to deal with this vision.

V2. Others were told to write what they saw in a book, (e.g. Rev 1.11). This prophet had to write his message on tablets for public display. The message had to be written plainly, a lesson in lucid communication, for those who read it were to run with the tidings (Cf. 2 Tim 2.2).

V3. Habakkuk's concerns about God's non-intervention would be allayed, although he would still need patience! Retribution on the Chaldeans would be in God's own time.

VV4-5. The Chaldeans' present attitude. They were marked by a pride that evidenced their lack of righteousness, which in turn was a consequence of their lack of faith. This pride was enflamed by wine (V6), and expressed itself in their covetous insatiable expansionist policies.

From V6, the tables are turned, as the oppressed peoples anticipate the end of the Babylonian empire. This is the answer to Habakkuk's problem. God would move in His own good time to deal with the Chaldeans. Among other things, five woes are pronounced upon them.

VV6-8. The first woe is on account of their **Dishonesty**. They would reap what they had sown as far as misappropriation was concerned.

VV9-11. The second woe is in connection with their **Covetousness**. They had ambitions for fine secure homes (nests). These houses were built by trampling down others. The fabric of these buildings would be a testimony against them.

VV12-14. The third woe has to do with their **Violence and Oppression**. They were using "disposable" captives to build their cities, and yet their building projects were destined for the fire. They were labouring "for the fire" RV. Be warned against pouring energy into something which God has destined for destruction.

In contrast to earth's proud passing empires, the golden age of the Theocracy will dawn (V14).

VV15-17. The fourth woe is linked with their **Debauchery**. Note the part that strong drink played as they used it to destroy the inhibitions of others. The lesson is illustrated in the experiences of Noah and Lot, and is highlighted in Romans 13.13.

Another of their misdemeanours was to plunder the forests of Lebanon for their building projects, thus impairing the environment of the animals. These wild beasts would now cause them fear (V17).

VV18-20. The fifth and final woe relates to their **Idolatry**. The futility of idolatry is seen in that these images are dumb, they give no guidance, and they are lifeless despite being ornamented with gold and silver. By contrast, the Lord lives, and a silent earth will allow Him to be heard (V20).

### Chapter 3.

The Lord had responded to Habakkuk's complaint. The Chaldeans would be dealt with ultimately, so now the prophet responds in prayer and praise. The notation at the end is typical of the Psalms: this was a song to be sung.

V1. Introduction. **A** prayer, not **the** prayer, as if it was the only time he prayed! He is "the prophet", so he preached, but preaching must be accompanied by prayer! "Shigionoth" perhaps indicates a tune which should be sung in great excitement and triumphantly.

V2. Prayer. What God had revealed inspired awe. Cf. Dan 8.27. "Revive thy work". In the past, God has worked in His people's interests: Habakkuk appeals for a fresh manifestation of that power. He longs for God to work NOW. He acknowledges that God's discipline is just, but longs for it to be tempered with mercy.

VV3-15 is the record of a vision of God marching through the earth in power. Remember it is poetry, with figurative language employed. The description is that of a great thunder storm with God behind it: V4 "the hiding of his power".

V3. The storm sweeps up from the south, Teman and Paran.

V4. Horns = rays, possibly a reference to thunder bolts.

V5. In advance of the storm, pestilence. Bringing up the rear, burning coals, (margin Burning diseases, i.e. fevers).

VV6-7. Poetical description of an earthquake which terrified the nations.

V8. Question. Was it God's displeasure against the rivers that moved Him to send such a tempest? No: it was for the salvation of His people.

V9-10. God is now depicted as a man of war. Bow and arrows = thunderbolts? Such was the storm that torrents would cleave the earth.

V11. Such is God's power in moving in judgement that even the sun and moon would stand back in awe. (Poetical language).

V12. The illustration is now that of a threshing floor, a figure of the severity of God's judgement against the nations.

V13. This severe judgement against the nations was for the preservation of His own people. (This has a future application too).

V14-15. Those who had their sights set on plundering Israel would be pierced through by the One whose power is such that he walks through the sea. (Reminiscent of what happened at the Red Sea).

V16. Habakkuk's reaction to the vision. The sight of the majesty of God, and the severity of His judgement upon the nations reduced the prophet to trembling.

The rest of the chapter is taken up with Habakkuk's confidence in God. Although the vision demonstrates that ultimately God's people would be preserved, and saved from their enemies, he realises that the discipline at the hands of the Chaldeans would come first.

V17. As a consequence of the Babylonian invasion, every aspect of the life of an agricultural and pastoral nation would be affected. Their food and drink, as seen in the figs, grapes, olives, and corn: their clothing as seen in the flocks and herds. They would be stripped of everything.

V18. YET. In such dire circumstance, the prophet would find his joy in the Lord, the God of his salvation. (Cf. 1 Sam 30.6, Neh 8.10, Acts 16.25, 1 Thess 1.6, Heb 10.34).

V19. In such a difficult situation, God would provide strength, and make him as surefooted as a hind walking on high places. (See Is 40.31).