

# H A B A K K U K

## “ardent embrace”

—prophet to Judah, late seventh century

### 1. Date and historical background

date not stated directly (similar to Obadiah and Joel)

1:5-6, places the Babylonian conquest of Palestine in their time

fulfilled in 605 BC and afterwards

Huldah said it would not happen during Josiah’s life (2 Kings 22:19)

1:5, it was to be an “incredible” event

cf. Jer. 36:29

Keil places Habakkuk during the reign of Manasseh (2 Kings 21:10-16; 2 Chron. 33:10) as one of the unnamed prophets mentioned.

evidence seems to favor date early in reign of Jehoiakim, 1:6-10, (cf. 609-605 BC), or perhaps early in the reign of Josiah (ca. 640-630 BC) since 1:6-10 views Babylon as a world threat

For historical background, see under Jeremiah. Apparently Habakkuk wrote his prophecy during the turbulent years before Nebuchadnezzar’s great victories of 605 BC.

### 2. The prophet Habakkuk

not much known about the prophet personally; his name means, “Ardent Embrace”

3:19 - some suggest he was a temple official or singer

The apocryphal story of “Bel and the Dragon” says that Habakkuk was carried by an angel to bring pottage and bread to Daniel in the lions’ den (this would be too late for Habakkuk, 538 BC).

Daniel 14:33-39 <sup>33</sup> Now, the prophet Habakkuk was in Judaea; he had been making a stew and breaking up bread into a basket. He was on his way to the fields, taking this to the harvesters, <sup>34</sup> when the angel of the Lord spoke to him, 'Take the meal you are carrying to Babylon, and give it to Daniel in the lion pit.' <sup>35</sup> 'Lord,' replied Habakkuk, 'I have not even seen Babylon and know nothing about this pit.' <sup>36</sup> The angel of the Lord took hold of his head and carried him off by the hair to Babylon where, with a great blast of his breath, he set Habakkuk down on the edge of the pit. <sup>37</sup> 'Daniel, Daniel,' Habakkuk shouted, 'take the meal that God has sent you.' <sup>38</sup> And Daniel said, 'You have kept me in mind, O God; you have not deserted those who love you.' <sup>39</sup> Rising to his feet, he ate the meal, while the angel of God carried Habakkuk back in a moment to his own country.

Habakkuk seems to be a contemplative and philosophical prophet, with a strong sense of justice. The question of God's justice is developed under the rubric of "THEODICY."

Unlike the other prophets that speak to the people for God, Habakkuk is the only writing prophet to speak at length to God for the covenant people.

### **3. The DSS Habakkuk Commentary**

(see Menahem Mansoor, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 89-94; Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 365-70)

dated about the time of Christ, one of the latest scrolls

confirms the MT text type

shows fanciful interpretation, but "literal" for their own time (see examples in Burrows or Gaster's translation)

The absence of chapter 3 in the DSS commentary is used to argue against the unity of Habakkuk.

but cf. the psalm in Jonah 2

Hab. 3:16 alludes to the Babylon invasion too

The commentary is sectarian, and ch. 3 did not supply it with verses against the "Kittim," or Romans.

Also, ch. 3 was written for the temple worship, which the Qumran community opposed. See verse 19.

### **4. Outline of Habakkuk**

1) Questions about Judah's sin, 1:1-11

vv. 1-4, sin seems unrestrained

vv. 5-11, God's answer: punishment will come, by means of the Babylonians (Chaldeans)

2) Questions about Judah's punishment, 1:12 - ch. 2

1:12-17, another problem: Chaldeans are wicked idolaters; they don't give God glory. How can God exalt them to judge his own people?

1:12, note *qere-kethib* variant: "my God who will not die"

1:13 - note the age-old concern about the existence of evil in God's creation

ch. 2, God's answer: he will punish the Babylonians afterwards, and deliver his righteous remnant

v. 4, "the righteous will live by his faith/faithfulness"

In context, the "righteous" must be defined, not as the "faithful" as opposed to the "faithless," but rather as the "righteous" as opposed to the "proud."

quoted three times in NT, each with separate emphasis:

Ironside { Rom. 1:17 ("the righteous")  
Gal. 3:11 ("shall live")  
Heb. 10:37-38 ("by his faith")

"Moses gave Israel 613 commandments; David reduced them to 10, Isaiah to two; but Habakkuk to one: the righteous will live by faith" —Talmud, Makkot 23b

woes against Babylon, vv. 6, 9, 12, 15, 19

3) Habakkuk's prayer-psalm of expectation, ch. 3

v. 1, *shigionoth*, musical term; could mean "loud cry in adversity," cf. Ps. 7 title

cf. ending in v. 19; note theory of James W. Thirtle, *The Titles of the Psalms* (specifically musical notations occur at the end, and thus belong with the previous psalm in the book of Psalms)

v. 3, Numbers 10:12 is a connection to the region (and event?) of Paran

Habakkuk's vision: a theophany marching from the south, bringing salvation to beleaguered Israel (for a novel idea, see Peters, *Theocratic Kingdom*, III, prop. 166, 192; esp. pp. 21, 392-98)

much of the imagery rehearses that of the wilderness wanderings, v. 6, and the crossing of the Red Sea and Jordan, vv. 8-10, and Joshua's long day, v. 11

vv. 16-19 - Habakkuk's reaction to the vision; doubt turns to faith (2:4)

Doubt, as opposed to faith, is not removed by the introduction of new facts (e.g., God will punish the wicked by the Babylonians), but rather by the refreshed perspective of belief in order to see the world through God's eyes.

note progression:

dread

resignation

joy

strength