

General Comments on Habakkuk

This book is a series of psalm-like complaints against the Lord. Not a bitter faithless complaining, but the sort of complaining we see in Psalms and D&C 132:1-6. Habakkuk is a faithful believer, but wants to know how long things are going to be bad. Habakkuk complains twice (1:1-4, 1:12-2:1) and the Lord responds twice (1:5-11, 2:2-20), and then Habakkuk confesses in song the Lord is right in his Judgements (ch. 3).

Habakkuk was contemporary with Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and probably Nahum. It is possible he fell into a post-exile setting and was therefore contemporary with Ezekiel and Daniel, but it seems likely it is pre-exilic, as the conversation with the Lord is nowhere near as angry as in Ezekiel. Also, the presentation in 1:5-6 and ch. 2 suggests the invasion and exile has not yet occurred.

There is a Qumran scroll, likely written shortly before the time of Jesus' mortal ministry, commenting on the book of Habakkuk, wherein they interpret the text in a line-by-line "I did liken all scriptures unto us" (cf. 1 Ne. 19:23) fashion (Wise, Abegg, and Cook, Dead Sea Scrolls, 1996, Harper San Francisco, pages 114-122, 1QpHab). That commentary reads the text in a very contemporary manner wherein Babylon is interpreted to be "Kittim", likely Rome, and the wicked among Judah are interpreted as the contemporary Pharisees at Jerusalem.

Comments on Habakkuk 1

¹The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. ²O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! ³Why 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. ⁴Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

v1-4 Habakkuk's first complaint: Why isn't the Lord doing something about all of the wickedness among Judah? Habakkuk asks, how long will he have to plead with the Lord to save the righteous from violence (v. 2)? Why does he have to see such wickedness and destruction (v. 3)? The Law of Moses is ignored by the people, and the wicked outnumber and surround the righteous, so there is no justice (v. 4).

⁵ Behold ye 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. ⁶ For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not their's. ⁷ They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. ⁸ Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. ⁹ They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. ¹⁰ And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it. ¹¹ Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god.

v5-11 The Lord's first reply. I am bringing a foreign nation to invade wicked Judah.

The Lord tells Habakkuk to look out at the nations around him and see an unbelievable work He is about to do (v. 5). The Lord is summoning the Babylonians as conquerors (v. 6). All fear them, and they fear none (v. 7). Their cavalry is formidable (v. 8), and they love violence and pillage (v. 9), respecting none they conquer (v. 10). They will sweep through the land like wind, but they will be held accountable for their actions (v. 11).

Foreign invasion is a classic covenant curse, cf. Lev. 26:14-17, Deut. 28:25.

¹² Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. ¹³ Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? ¹⁴ And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? ¹⁵ They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad. ¹⁶ Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous. ¹⁷ Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?

v12-17 Habakkuk's second complaint, is presented as something of a surprised reaction on his part in the way the Lord answered his first question. Habakkuk complains about the wicked among Judah (cf. v. 1-4), so the Lord responds by saying He will send

a covenant curse of foreign invading armies (cf. v. 5-11). Habakkuk then asks the Lord why He would do such a thing.

Habakkuk says the Lord is holy, and Judah will not be annihilated because Babylon has been selected to punish Judah (v. 12). Habakkuk says the Lord is too pure for all of this, why would He show favoritism to a Gentile nation, when they are wicked. Why is the Lord silent when wicked Babylon swallows up righteous Judah (v. 13)? Why would the Lord let the men of Judah be treated no different than fish, who are caught up and dragged away (v. 13-15). The Babylonians rejoice at their success, and so much so that they are seemingly worshiping their nets (v. 16). Habakkuk then asks the Lord if the Babylonians will be permitted to continue slaughtering the nations around them (v. 17).

Copyright © 2022 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurt.neumiller@gmail.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.