

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

* * * **TRUSTING GOD IN INCOMPREHENSIBLE CIRCUMSTANCES** * * *

S.L.H.
Soli Deo Gloria!

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

AUTHOR: Habakkuk (c. 608-605 BC)

THE PROPHET HABAKKUK. Habakkuk does not appear in Scripture outside of his small book, so little is known about the man. It would appear that Habakkuk was a member of the Temple choir, in which case he would have been a Levite (Hab3:19). Habakkuk's name is derived from the Hebrew verb meaning "to embrace". A dubious Rabbinic tradition holds that the prophet Habakkuk was the son of the Shunnamite woman that Elisha raised from the dead, perhaps because Elisha's servant told this woman that she would "embrace" a son (2Kgs4:16).

DATE AND CONTEXT OF WRITING. Habakkuk prophesied in Judah after the death of King Josiah (609 BC), but before the first deportation of Jews to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar (605 BC); this would have been during the reign of King Jehoiakim (a.k.a. Eliakim), a son of Josiah whom Pharaoh Neco set up as his puppet king for Egypt (2Chr36:3-4). This would mean Habakkuk was a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah in his pre-exilic ministry. God had revealed in the days of King Hezekiah (more than 50 years previous) that Judah would be conquered by the Babylonians (Isa39:6-7). Because of revival under King Josiah, God revealed He would not bring the Babylonians until after Josiah's death (2Chr34:24-28). When Habakkuk writes, Josiah has died. Josiah died in battle with the Egyptians, who were in route to Carchemish (2Chr34:20); shortly thereafter, the historic battle of Carchemish (605 BC) would see the Nebuchadnezzar led armies of Babylon conquer the last vestiges of the Assyrian empire (allied with Egypt), at which time Babylon would ascend to a position of unrivaled dominance. Babylon's assault on Judah is no more than a few years in the future.

MESSAGE OF HABAKKUK. Habakkuk struggled with the forbearance and long-suffering of the LORD relative to the national sins of Judah. Why had the LORD not disciplined His people (Hab1:2-4)? Did not His holy character demand it? The LORD responded to Habakkuk that He was in the process of raising up the Chaldeans (i.e., the Babylonians; Hab1:6) to punish Judah. But the LORD's response to Habakkuk was incomprehensible to the prophet. How could the LORD use the Chaldeans, a people much more wicked than the Jews, as His instrument of judgment on Judah (Hab1:13)? Rather than answering this question directly, however, the LORD's response was that "the just shall live by his faith" (Hab2:4). That is, even in incomprehensible circumstances, believers must trust that our holy and righteous God, in His own perfect timing, will bring all things to their just and appointed end (Isa46:9-11).

UNIQUENESS OF HABAKKUK. Habakkuk is unique in several ways. Whereas other Old Testament prophets declared a message from the LORD to men or nations, the prophet Habakkuk entered into a personal dialog with the LORD concerning men and nations. Whereas other prophets either warned of or proclaimed the coming judgment of God for sin, Habakkuk actually entreated God to judge the nation of Judah.

OUTLINE OF HABAKKUK. The Book of Habakkuk can be outlined simply as:

- I. First Dialogue between Habakkuk and the LORD (Hab1:1-11)
- II. Second Dialogue between Habakkuk and the LORD (Hab1:12-2:20)
- III. Habakkuk's Psalm of Prayer and Praise (Hab3:1-19)

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS. Preachers today who sound a warning to American Christians that God will judge our nation for our national sins are often rebuked with an argument to the effect of, "America is still the 'best' nation in the world", as if that were a valid reason to dismiss a possible judgment. Like Judah, America has enjoyed rare and unique national blessings from God; for this reason, we can expect to be held to a much higher level of responsibility before Him (Luk12:48). We must not think that God cannot, or will not, use nations we might (rightly) view as more wicked than America as instruments of divine judgment upon us.

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CHAPTER 2

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CHAPTER 3

A PSALM

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