

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK
“The Judgments of a Merciful God”
Habakkuk 1:12-17

Review

1. Jeremiah and Habakkuk were contemporary pre-exilic prophets (before the Babylonian captivity). Nahum and Zephaniah also prophesied at that time.
2. Politically, Judah was in disarray. Assyria and Egypt waned in power as Babylon rose. The “times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) were about to begin.
3. It was a dark day in the history of the Jewish people. They were unresponsive to God (1:2), unrelenting in sin (1:3) and uncontrollable as a society (1:4).
4. Into this complex geo-political situation, filled with sin among the Jews, God will allow the Chaldeans to overcome the people of Israel. Nothing would hinder this foreign power from complete victory. This kind of activity was difficult for Habakkuk to understand.
5. God’s revelation to his prophet in response to this perplexing situation are the following convictions:

1. WHO GOD IS v. 12

- a. He is the eternal One. There should be no question that God is “from before,” of “ancient age.” He is indeed the everlasting God.
- b. He is the Constant One. This is gained from the use of the tetragrammaton (four letter word for God i.e.). As such, He is the self-existing faithful LORD. Here is the peculiar Name for God in relation to Israel as a nation (Ex. 3:14).
- c. He is the Creator One. While this Hebrew term of God is used of false gods, in this context it is refined to signify a personal relationship. The possessive pronoun “my” is significant (cf. Ex. 19:4-6).
- d. He is the Holy One. No other phrase can indicate His absolute separateness from everything. He is perfect in holiness, hence absolutely pure.
- e. He is the Righteous One. Twice the vocative case (case of address) is used here: “O Lord” and “O mighty God” (literally “Rock”). With this sort of an address, it is recorded that God has: 1) Ordained the Chaldeans for (purpose) judgment and 2) established the Chaldeans for (purpose) correction. It is God Who has done these incredible acts because of the sinfulness of His people.

N.B. God’s infinite compassion must be seen in His righteous character. There is no suggestion of finality with Israel here. A future remains for them.

2. HOW GOD SEES v. 13

a. He sees purely. This cannot be missed. Two statements are made: 1) He is purer than “to see” evil. The common verb for “see” is here used, and the common word for evil. 2. He is so pure that He is “not able to look” (indifferently, hence patiently) upon trouble, vexation, sorrow, or weariness. What amazing vision the Lord has!

b. He sees honestly. Again Habakkuk is concerned how God sees: 1) He looks (same as second verb above) at those who act shamelessly, impudently, deceitfully. He knows! 2) He looks, but holds his tongue at the swallowing (!) of those who are righteous.

N.B. These are hard facts to face, but God is infinitely perfect, hence His perception of things must be right.

3. WHAT GOD DOES v. 14, 15

a. With Judah This is a direct “work” of God. He makes “men” (i.e. His people) as 1) fish of the sea and 2) as creeping things (either with four legs as mice, lizards or those which glide as worms and serpents). In either case, there is no ruler, hence they are bereft of God as Ruler.

b. With Chaldeans. Three statements are made as to their treatment of Judah: 1) They take them out of the water with a hook (angle). 2) They pull them together in a net (general term). 3. They gather them in a net (large fishing net). So effective are they that 1) they rejoice (move in a circle), 2) they are glad (full of joy). Success over God’s people causes the heathen to celebrate.

Conclusion

The text provides three items: 1) False worship (v. 16). The common verbs for “sacrifice” and “burn incense” are used. This is what the Chaldeans do. Why? Because they have a fat portion and fresh (so Hebrew) meat. Their nets (military power) become their gods (cf. v. 11). 2) False victory. It seems that the Chaldeans are victorious again and again (repeated emptying of the net) (v. 17). However, the use of “not spare” indicates that there is compassion and God will not allow this carnage to continue forever. Israel (Judah) cannot be destroyed out of hand. 3) False expectation. In view of who God is, what God sees, how God works, the prophet is able to affirm “we shall not die” (v. 12). This is not hortatory (a plea) but indicative (a solid assertion).

So, what can we learn from this section of the Scriptures? God is Who He says He is. He is intransigent in His being and nature. Sin must be judged -- even in His own people. Blessed be God, He will not utterly destroy His own. Glory to God.