

OT-OV

Lesson 135

1. Last week I completed our overview of Nahum and when time expired we were reviewing the Book of Habakkuk.
2. We need to review some of that learned before continuing our analysis of the complaining Habakkuk and his message to Judah about the coming of the Babylonians. We will pick up with new material on page two.

Habakkuk was written by Habakkuk from Judah. The prophet identifies himself with the condition and circumstances of the people of God. It is Habakkuk who wonders why the evil prosper and the righteous suffer. God rebukes him for his self-serving message.

1. The Author

1.1 Nothing is known of Habakkuk except what may be inferred from this book which bears his name. He is described as "the prophet," and it is possible, therefore, that he not only had the gift of prophecy but that he was one of a professional group of prophets.

1.2 Certain musical notations to the psalm in chapter 3 suggest that he may have prophesied in the Temple, like the men who are mentioned in 1Ch 25:1.

1.3 It is precarious to say much about the prophet's character on the basis of his writing. His name seems to derive from a Hebrew root meaning "to embrace." Jerome (fifth century A.D.) stated that the prophet was called "The Embracer," either because of his love for God or because he wrestled with God.

1.4 This is purely fanciful, of course, and unless it be granted that the prophet's name, like that of Jesus, was given in anticipation of his ministry (Mat 1:21), any conjectures as to its meaning, though interesting, are futile.

1.5 A rabbinical tradition tells us that Habakkuk was the son of a Shunammite woman. Shunam was a town located 7 miles east of Megiddo near Mount Gilboa.

1.6 Habakkuk is mentioned in the Apocryphal legend of Bel and the Dragon as rescuing Daniel from the lion's den. No credence need be given to this or to certain other traditions which state that Habakkuk fled to Arabia when Jerusalem fell and returned to Palestine after the Babylonian exile. The stories do, however, point to the approximate time in which the prophet ministered.

2. Date of Writing

2.1 The exact time of the writing of the prophecy has been as much a subject of conjecture as has the person of the prophet. Dates ranging from 650 B.C. to 330 B.C. have been suggested.

2.2 For various reasons the first date seems to be somewhat too early, since it occurs in the time of Assyrian domination of Judah; while the latter date assumes the invading hosts described in the first chapter of the prophecy are not the Chaldeans but the Greeks under Alexander the Great.

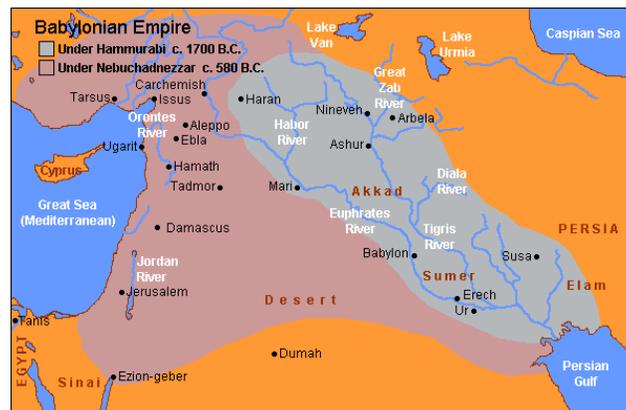
2.3 Note the Babylonians are specifically mentioned in Hab 1:6. Which Babylonians however is not established in the passage.

Hab 1:6 I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own.

2.4 The most satisfactory conclusion seems to be that the prophecy was written at a time when the Chaldeans or Babylonians were beginning to become restive against the Assyrian power. Let me review the **Doctrine of Babylon**.

1. In the accounts of ancient history, the name "Babylon" occurs again and again, usually as a reference to a specific geographical location in the area of Iraq.

2. Historical Babylon is situated approximately sixty miles south of Baghdad on the banks of the Euphrates River near the present town of Al Hillah. The city of Babylon was the ancient capital of the Babylonian Empire.



3. The word "Babylon," as found in Scripture, has several connotations.

4. Not only does it refer to a particular city but also to a religious system so abhorrent to God that He will eventually destroy it completely (Rev 17, 18 and 19).

5. In the Old Testament, the term "Babylon" is given as "Babel," a derivation of the Hebrew root Balal, and means "to confound" or "to confuse".

6. God did not see fit to disclose their specific locations in Scripture; yet we are told that both had been built in the land of Shinar (Gen. 11:2), more commonly known as southern Babylonia.

7. The oldest extant tower has been excavated at Erech (Gen. 10:10) and dates from the latter part of the fourth millennium B.C. Although the Bible does not identify the original Tower of Babel as a temple tower, later such edifices were used as such.

8. From archaeology and extant Babylonian cuneiform we know that the concept of religious Babylon has existed since the time of the great Flood.

8.1 All temple towers were dedicated to the various guardian deities in an attempt to assure their protection or to placate hostile gods of the pantheon.

9. Throughout its long history, Babylon has been the political center of many Gentile nations, and its prominence can be traced to approximately 2000 B.C.

9.1 As near as can be determined, the Sumerians were the first major inhabitants of Babylonia after the early descendants of Nimrod and Cush.

10. The most important ruler of the First Dynasty of Babylon was the remarkable Hammurabi (1728-1686 B.C.). Prosperity, as well as advances in literature, astronomy, mathematics and architecture, characterized his reign.

11. As was the case of Jerusalem, Babylon had its share of conquerors. Several generations after Hammurabi, came under the rule of first the Hittites, then the Kassites, and later the Elamites.

12. In 745 B.C. the yoke of the Assyrian Empire was felt, and the city itself was sacked and looted by Sennacherib in 689 B.C. Esarhaddon, Sennacherib's son, rebuilt the city about eleven years later.

13. When the Chaldean Empire was united under Nabopolassar in 625 B.C., Babylon became its capital city.

14. Under his heir, Nebuchadnezzar, this oft fought-over piece of real estate reached the height of its glory and became the most glamorous city of the ancient world.

14.1 In his turn, Nebuchadnezzar contributed vast fortifications, wide streets, canals, stunning temples and palaces.

14.2 Not the least of his beautifications were the Ishtar Gate and the famous Hanging Gardens (considered by the ancient Greeks to be one of the seven wonders of the world).

15. Yet the future of this once magnificent city was far from secure; it would be vanquished again and again.

16. On October 13, 539 B.C. Babylon fell to the army of Cyrus the Great of Persia. Later it was partially destroyed by Xerxes I of Persia (486-465 B.C.) in retribution for their continued rebellion.

17. I have described for you briefly how the Medo-Persians conquered the "impregnable" city. Before leaving our study of Babylon the Great let me provide a series of points from Merrill F. Unger's Bible Dictionary which will document much of that which I have earlier related.

18. All of this to answer the question "how could Babylon be taken without a shot being fired?" I shall quote from Unger's Dictionary:

"First to be considered was the geographical fact that the Euphrates River flowed through the center of Babylon. According to the Greek historian, Herodotus, a large bridge spanned that river and connected the eastern and western sections of the city. Another Greek writer, Diodorus Siculus, reveals that a tunnel had been laid under the river bed. Numerous canals which existed on the outskirts of the city were used for irrigation purposes and also constituted a part of the defense system.

"In fact, all of southern Babylonia was laced with these canals whereby water could be diverted at will for the needs of the people. Second, was the engineering feat which Herodotus records of the Persians rerouting the Euphrates by constructing a dam some distance from the city. Thus the river was caused to flow around Babylon rather than through it. After this daring exploit, the Persian Army approached the fortifications by night. Because of the general state of lethargy which had lulled the population into a false sense of security, the army slipped past the sentries without difficulty. As you may recall from Daniel, Chapter 5, Belshazzar's notorious banquet culminated in the shocking events of the handwriting on the wall.

"The evening had been characterized by debauchery and drunkenness, a condition which had permeated every social milieu in Babylon. Thus because of a distracted citizenry and a relaxed military vigilance, it was a simple task to march by way of the riverbed into the city proper! Babylon had once more been conquered. A decadent national entity and its ruler had been judged and replaced by another (Dan. 2:21)."

Now let's return to our study of the book of Habakkuk and the time of Habakkuk's book.

2.5 To place the writing of the book much later than this would be to assume that the prophecy is not really a prediction of the invasion of Judah by the Chaldeans but a reference to what had already taken place and is merely an explanation of the presence of the Babylonians in the west as the instruments of the Lord.

2.6 Wycliffe writes: “The best conclusion seems to be that the prophecy was written toward the end of the reign of Josiah (640-609 B.C.), preferably after the destruction of Nineveh by the combined forces of the Babylonians, Medians, and Scythians in 612 B.C.”

2.7 This time seems plausible for two reasons.

2.7.1 One is that the prophet seems surprised to learn that the Chaldeans are God's choice to punish disobedient Judah; after all, was not good King Josiah pro-Babylonian in his political sympathies in that he sought to hinder Pharaoh-necho's march to fight against the Babylonians in c. 609?

2.7.2 The other reason is that the rise of Chaldean power would be sufficiently evident that the prophet's description would have meaning for his hearers. Certainly the book should be dated before 609, when Nebuchadnezzar made his first invasion of Palestine and took Daniel and others as captives to Babylon.

3. The problem of Chapter 3 must be discussed.

3.1 It has sometimes been argued that chapter three, which is a psalm, was not written by Habakkuk.

3.2 The musical notations found in the chapter point to its being designed for use in temple worship. This has led some scholars to think that the purity of the temple worship practices which developed in Nehemiah's Temple would demand a dating of the chapter during the post-Exilic period.

3.3 Further support to the argument seems to be found in the fact that the Habakkuk commentary found among the Qumran Scrolls makes no reference to the third chapter of Habakkuk.

3.4 This apparent ignorance of Habakkuk three may be explained, however, by the fact that the writers of the commentary were attempting to explain the first two chapters not in terms of a Chaldean invasion but in terms of the events of their own day.

3.5 They did not then find the psalm of Habakkuk germane to their purpose. The use of liturgical annotations in Hebrew poetic literature can scarcely be a deciding evidence in favor of a post-Exilic origin of any writing because some of the oldest of the Psalms bear such annotations, it seems that they were a part of such literature long before the Exile.

4. Uniqueness of the Book

4.1 Because the contents of the third chapter provide a triumphant climax to the problems posed in the first two chapters, chapter 3 seems to be part of Habakkuk's message.

4.2 The structure of this prophecy is common in the Old Testament, as is the theological content.

4.2.1 In the first two chapters there is a dialogue between the Lord and the prophet, in which the latter not only complains of evil, as do some of the Psalmist, but even challenges the Lord to indicate how He, the Holy One, can tolerate such evil.

4.3 This dialogue is to be thought of as transpiring in the realm of a vision (compare verses 1:1 and 2:2).

Hab 1:1 The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received.

Hab 2:2 Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.

4.4 The third chapter is a prayer, in which the prophet begins by asking the Lord to accomplish in history the purpose which he has announced, to make His work live in the midst of the years.

4.5 Following upon this prayer, Habakkuk is granted a vision of God exerting His power and manifesting His glory in the earth somewhat in the same fashion as He did in the Exodus experiences at Mount Sinai. The result of the vision is mingled with fear and confidence on the part of the prophet.

5. Outline

I. Introduction > 1:1

Hab 1:1 The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received.

II. The prophet's complaint of unchecked violence in Judah > 1:2-4

Hab 1:2 How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save?

Hab 1:3 Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.

Hab 1:4 Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

III. The Lord's answer: The Chaldean is his instrument of punishment > 1:5-11

Hab 1:5 "Look at the nations and watch-- and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.

Hab 1:6 I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own.

Hab 1:7 They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor.

Hab 1:8 Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like a vulture swooping to devour;

Hab 1:9 they all come bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand.

Hab 1:10 They deride kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; they build earthen ramps and capture them.

Hab 1:11 Then they sweep past like the wind and go on-- guilty men, whose own strength is their god."

IV. A second problem: The Chaldeans are more wicked than the Judeans > 1:12-2:1

Hab 1:12 O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish.

Hab 1:13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

Hab 1:14 You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler.

Hab 1:15 The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad.

Hab 1:16 Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food.

Hab 1:17 Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?

Hab 2:1 I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.

V. The Lord's second answer: The purpose is certain, and faith will be rewarded > 2:2-4

Hab 2:2 Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.

Hab 2:3 For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.

Hab 2:4 "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright-- but the righteous will live by his faith--

VI. Five woes upon iniquity, whether Jewish or Chaldean > 2:5-20

Hab 2:5 indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.

Hab 2:6 "Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying, "Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on?"

Hab 2:7 Will not your debtors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their victim.

Hab 2:8 Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.

Hab 2:9 "Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin!

Hab 2:10 You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life.

Hab 2:11 The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.

Hab 2:12 "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!

Hab 2:13 Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?

Hab 2:14 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

Hab 2:15 "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies.

Hab 2:16 You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the LORD'S right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory.

Hab 2:17 The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.

Hab 2:18 "Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak.

Hab 2:19 Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!' Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it.

Hab 2:20 But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."

VII. A vision of Divine judgment > 3:1-16

Hab 3:1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth (a musical note).

Hab 3:2 LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.

Hab 3:3 God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran (desert regions near Kadesh-Barnea). Selah His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth.

Hab 3:4 His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden.

Hab 3:5 Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps.

Hab 3:6 He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal.

Hab 3:7 I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish.

Hab 3:8 Were you angry with the rivers, O LORD? Was your wrath against the streams? Did you rage against the sea when you rode with your horses and your victorious chariots?

Hab 3:9 You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows. Selah You split the earth with rivers;

Hab 3:10 the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its waves on high.

Hab 3:11 Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear.

Hab 3:12 In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations.

Hab 3:13 You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. Selah

Hab 3:14 With his own spear you pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding.

Hab 3:15 You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters.

Hab 3:16 I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.

VIII. The triumph of faith > 3:17-19

Hab 3:17 Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,

Hab 3:18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

Hab 3:19 The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

Zep 3:20 At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes," says the LORD.

End Lesson