

Chapter 38

God's Explanation of Coming Punishment

Habakkuk

AUTHOR

Of Habakkuk we know nothing except his name. We cannot even tell precisely when this prophecy was uttered. In Habakkuk 1:5, 6, God speaks of raising up the Chaldeans. This probably points to a date in the time of Manasseh just before the Babylonians overthrew the Assyrian empire. Both Kings and Chronicles tell of God raising up prophets at that time who warned of the evil to come to Judah because of Manasseh's sins. Habakkuk may have been one of these prophets.

OUTLINE

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| I. Habakkuk's conversation with God | Habakkuk 1, 2 |
| II. Habakkuk's prayer to God | Habakkuk 3 |

PURPOSE

Habakkuk's little prophecy presents beautifully the absolute righteousness of God in His government of the nations. He is a God who punishes iniquity without partiality. Though it may seem to men that the great King is acting unjustly, the course of events will prove the justice of His government. It is this absolute righteousness and justice of God that gives the Christian true comfort and confidence in Him.

ANALYSIS

Habakkuk's Questions and God's Answers

Habakkuk has been called a philosopher. If a philosopher is one who asks questions about life and wants to understand why things happen as they do, then Habakkuk is a philosopher. He looks at his people. He sees the sinfulness of the nation. He cries out to God. "O Jehovah, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear? I cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save" (Hab. 1:2). God answers Habakkuk. "Behold ye among the nations, and look, and wonder marvellously; for I am working a work in your days, which ye will not believe though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that

bitter and hasty nation, that march through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling-places that are not theirs" (Hab. 1:5, 6).

If this answer of God solves one problem for Habakkuk, it raises another problem which is even greater. How can God do this? "Thou that art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that canst not look on perverseness, wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he?" (Hab. 1:13) How can God use the wicked Chaldeans to punish the people of God, who by comparison are more righteous? This the prophet cannot understand.

Again God answers, and this answer has echoed and re-echoed down through the centuries. "Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him; but the righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4). In these words we find a contrast. The wicked are proud and puffed up. The result of this pride will be destruction. But the true people of God live by faith. And their faith will be rewarded with life—even eternal life. This is the answer to the prophet's problem. The wicked, proud Chaldean nation cannot last; it too will be punished for its sin. Only those who are righteous by faith shall live before God. What a comfort to those true people of God in Judah! Those who trust in Jehovah shall never be moved.

The fate of the Chaldeans is expressed in a series of woes. The various sins of the Chaldeans are called to mind, and woe is pronounced upon those who commit those sins. The multiplication of Judah's sins led God to use Babylon as His instrument to punish Judah. But the sins of Babylon will not be overlooked by God. Upon Babylon will be visited the punishment which is her due.

Habakkuk's Psalm

The last chapter of Habakkuk's prophecy is a beautiful psalm, which is even furnished with musical instructions for singing. It is the only such psalm found in the prophets. The theme is confidence in God. In answer to the prophet's prayer that God will revive His work, he sees a vision of God coming and fighting against His enemies.

The prophet is aware of what lies ahead. Yet he has learned to trust in God through all circumstances.

*... I must wait quietly for the day of trouble,
For the coming up of the people that invadeth us.
For though the fig-tree shall not flourish,
Neither shall fruit be in the vines;
The labor of the olive shall fail,
And the fields shall yield no food;
The flock shall be cut off from the fold,*

Habakkuk

187

*And there shall be no herd in the stalls:
Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.*

— Hab. 3:16-18

EXERCISES

Factual questions

1. When do we think Habakkuk prophesied?
2. What is the purpose of the book of Habakkuk?
3. Write out four verses from Habakkuk 1 and 2 which summarize Habakkuk's two questions and God's two answers.
4. Describe the Chaldeans who will punish Judah. Hab. 1:5ff.
5. For what sins will the Chaldeans be punished? Hab. 2:4ff.

Thought questions

1. What effect has Habakkuk 2:4 had on the history of God's church?
2. What application may Habakkuk have to the world scene today?

Memory

1. Outline of Habakkuk.
2. Habakkuk 2:4.
3. Habakkuk 2:20.
4. Habakkuk 3:17, 18.