

HABAKKUK

- 1) – Nothing known about Habakkuk. /// First two chapters probably Mesopotamia in Exile c 550 BC and the last chapter was probably added by another writer later. The commentary in the Dead Sea Scrolls stops at end of Chapter 2. But see 1:6 which may indicate that this book was written c 605 BC. /// The central theme is a belief in God's just rule in an unjust world. /// The literary structure is a debate between the prophet and God.
- 2) 1:3-4 – Probably not the Assyrian or Babylonian threat, but an internal turmoil and lack of justice in Judah under Hehoiakim.
- 3) 1:5-11 – Habakkuk joins the mainstream prophets who believed that God used foreign nations as instruments of punishment for another nation's injustice to its people. God was in control of the world.
- 4) 1:9 – NIV: "Their hordes advance like a desert wind."
- 5) 1:13 – The wicked here are the Chaldeans, not the court of Jehoiakim (see NIB, p 638, for evidence to support this). Habakkuk now recognizes that the instrument of God's punishment of Judah is itself corrupt and oppressive. He laments the unimportance of human life – landed, snared, dragged to their death. Habakkuk may have seen this if he wrote after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and carried off its people. Habakkuk, like Job, is questioning the biblical theology of justice, that God punishes the wicked and protects the righteous.
- 6) 2:1 – The Hebrew word translated here as "complaint" is usually much stronger: "reproof," or "rebuke."
- 7) 2:2-4 – Thought by most scholars to be the vv quoted in Hebrews 10:36-38, Galatians 3:11, Romans 1:17. Also, probably referred to in Rev 10:6, especially the third verse. One of the two texts in Habakkuk selected for the Lectionary. /// v. 4 is rendered in the KJV as "the just shall live by faith." /// The Hebrew translated here as "faith" actually refers to the quality of firmness, steadiness, fidelity, with fidelity being paramount. When Paul used v2:4 in Galatians and Romans, he translates it in terms of faith and belief in Christ, which was not the way Habakkuk used it.
- 8) 2:5-20 – Focuses on the traits of Babylonian imperialism: 6b-8: accumulation of wealth; 12-14: use of violence; 15-17: pursuit of fame and honor; 18-20: confidence in idols. In each case, a reversal of fortune is described, i.e. the accumulation of wealth will be reclaimed by those from whom it was taken. /// Interpretation v 17 by the Dead Sea Scrolls: Lebanon is the city of Jerusalem and its council. The beasts are the people of Judah who keep the law. The Wicked Priest committed abominable deeds (killed Jesus). So this is Messianic prophecy from the Essenes at Qumran. But Theodore Hiebert (NIB) says that this refers to the destruction of Lebanon's forests in antiquity, a crime attributed to the Babylonian empire in Isaiah 14:18.
- 9) **Chapter 3** – This chapter is read in synagogues at Pentecost. The comparison of this superscription to psalm titles is not coincidental since 3:1 contains a musical notation in the Hebrew: "to a plaintive tune" is literally "on a shigionoth," a stringed instrument of some kind. The phrase is noted in Psalm 7. Also the use of "Selah" in three places is common to Psalms. (In the language of the Mizo tribe in northwest India, Selah means "Say it again." This tribe may be descendants of half of the tribe of Manasseh which migrated there in antiquity.

10) 3:2-19 – Thought first to be added a century after Habakkuk wrote the first two chapters, then thought to be written by Habakkuk himself. Now thought to have been composed as early as the pre-monarchic era, because of the archaic style and content. /// Parallels Exodus 15 (Moses’s song to the Lord after the Egyptian army died in the Red Sea), Deut 33 (The blessing of Moses on the Israelites just before he died), and Judges 5 (song of Deborah after the defeat of Sisera from the Canaanite capital of Hazor). /// vv. 9-11 – Rivers and Sea – Nahar and Nam in Hebrew – two supernatural beings that Baal fought and conquered, an obscure acknowledgment that some ancient sources indicate was a precursor to Yahweh (Robert Wright – Evolution of God, p. 121)