

Habakkuk
Fall 2008 Adult Bible Classes, Sunday Morning

prepared by Bob Young

Introduction

Living messages of the OT prophets

Background of text, social setting, and prophet provides parallels in our day

Points of interest

Habakkuk is the third of the seventh-century prophets and eighth in the collection of the Book of the Twelve.

His name, not of Hebrew origin, may come from a root meaning “to embrace”. The name does not occur outside this book.

We know nothing of Habakkuk as a person. He describes himself as “the prophet”.

Historical setting

We are not absolutely certain of the date of his prophecy, although his message concerning the Chaldeans (Babylon) suggests he may be a contemporary of Jeremiah and Zephaniah, slightly later than Nahum.

Textual considerations

The book has excellent poetic form, written in complaint/answer style.

The prophet addresses himself to God on behalf of the people.

The question is how the actions of God can be justified to human beings.

The book may be considered a book of consolation.

Outline

- Title, 1:1
- Problem and answer, 1:2-11. Problem: How can God allow lawlessness to go unanswered? Answer: God is raising up the Chaldeans to take care of evildoers.
- Problem and answer, 1:12-2:20. New problem: How can God use such cruel power to punish a people less wicked than the Chaldeans? Answer: Wickedness will not last since evil is self-destructive, but righteous people live by faithfulness. This section concludes with a series of woes on the aggressors—plunderers, those who seek individual gain, oppressors, violent, and the idolaters.
- Poem/psalm, 3:1-19. Section One: vision of God’s appearance for judgment. Section Two: hymn of faith.

Contemporary lessons

How does one understand the justice of God in the midst of adversity? (parallel to the question raised in the book of Job)

How does one connect the nature of life with the concept of an all-powerful and just God who is active in history and the events of history?

How does one deal with the understanding that sin must bring retribution, regardless of the source of that retribution?

How does one respond when God seems inactive?

Questions

Why do you make of Habakkuk's question, "How long?" instead of "Why?"

What do we expect about God's intervention?

Have you ever asked Habakkuk's question? What were the circumstances?

Do you ever wonder why God allows certain things to continue unchecked?

Why would God at times appear to us to be inactive?

Does God punish nations today? Does God punish individuals today?

What song do you know that comes from Habakkuk 2:20? What do the words mean in the context of Habakkuk?

Do you believe that evil is self-defeating? In what ways do you agree or disagree?

What aspects of God's nature contribute to our questioning? What aspects of God's nature do we tend to hide from our view?

Is it wrong for us to raise questions about why God does or does not do certain things?