

## Habakkuk

Habakkuk 1:6 indicates that when the book was written God was raising up the Babylonians. So, the time of the book must be between 626 when Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar, initiated Babylon's independence from Assyria and 605 when Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians pushing them back from Carchemish on the northern Euphrates through Palestine to their homeland (to the brook of Egypt).

### 1A. Outline

Dialogue (between the prophet and God), 1-2:5

Essentially "Why, Lord"?

Woes (to the oppressor), 2:6-20

Prayer (prophet's psalm of submission), 3

### 2A. The Problem of Evil

The message of the book is an answer to the problem of evil. Why does God tolerate wrong given that he is too pure to look on evil (1:3, 13)? Why do the wicked harm the righteous, so that justice is perverted (1:4)?

It should be noted that no philosophical answer is given. There is no straightforward "here is why."

So let's see what details are attended to in reply to the question. Then we can formulate a bottom line.

When Habakkuk first raises the question of God's toleration of evil, God replies by saying I am raising up the Babylonians who sweep across the earth (1:6), are a law unto themselves (1:7), and are guilty people "whose strength is their god" (1:11).

### Question rephrased

What is the answer to the question of God's toleration of evil in Judah where the law is paralyzed (1:4) and the righteous are swallowed up by the wicked from outside the nation (1:13)?

1) The answer is I do not tolerate it.

I will bring the guilty Babylonians against Judah for her sins (1:6, 11); that they are ordained to punish appears to be Habakkuk's acknowledgment as he opens his second complaint (1:12).

2) I will do this in my own time table but it is certain (2:3). The woes of chapter 2 outline the fact that God will judge the unrighteous Babylonians, his tool of judgment on the unrighteous of Israel.

3) The righteous will live by his faith (2:4; why not faithfulness? Dillard has "faithful confidence," p. 412). Thus even though evil is tolerated for a time in which the righteous are oppressed, evil is not ultimately tolerated and the faithful will live in spite of outward appearance. The righteous who are caught in the crossfire will live by faith.

### 3A. Justification by faith and Habakkuk 2:4

Paul looks to Habakkuk 2:4 when he argues for justification by faith (Rom. 1:17).

How do we get this from Habakkuk? Where get the notion of justification, especially since "live" is not equivalent to "justified" (or righteousness of God in Rom. 1:17).

Justified goes with being righteous prior to living through the hard times. Those who are righteous live through the judgment on Israel and the nations by faith deeds. But they are already righteous in God's sight when their faith deeds are manifested. They live and are not consumed for their wicked deeds because their deeds are faith deeds.

This is how they are spared temporal judgment for their sins; even if they suffer in the crossfire, a) it is not for their sins, they live by faithful deeds, b) they live (even if swallowed up by the wicked, 1:13) and c) they display the faith acts of patience, joy, and strength (3:16-19).

The righteous are thus people of faith who display their faith. Thus it is not that they are righteous by their faith deeds because it is *life* that they have by faith deeds not the standing as righteous. This suggests that they are deemed righteous through their faith that gives them life when it manifests itself in faith deeds: the righteous [by faith] live by their faith deeds.

Is this a valid inference? According to Paul it is. In Romans 1:17, Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 in support of justification by faith (cf. righteousness from beginning to end by faith, 1:17 with Rom. 3:21-26,

righteousness and justification apart from law defined deeds). He is expounding on the "righteous" so he drops the emphasis on deeds and stresses the faith: the righteous live through God's judgment by faith which equals "are justified and not condemned by faith."

#### Two strands

So two strands are in Habakkuk 2:4.

1) First, there is the living of the righteous by faith deeds through which they are spared God's judgment against unrighteous deeds.

2) Second, there is the being righteous by faith through which they are spared God's judgment against unrighteous deeds.

Paul cites the second strand in support of justifying righteousness apart from good deeds.

The gospel of how people are righteous before God was given by Habakkuk: the righteous have life, they live, they are restored from the fall, by faith. These are the true people of God in the midst of the nations; they are not forgotten. Though hemmed in (Hab. 1:4) and swallowed up by the wicked (1:13), they live.

How they live the new life they have is righteously. Two things are tied together here. How does one become righteous? It is by faith. How does the believer live? He lives righteously.

So, what is the life gained by faith? It is both the standing in righteousness that is needed for restoration from death to life and the outworking of righteousness in a life lived according to concrete principles of moral uprightness.

#### Our duty

Our duty is to patiently wait for God's purposes to unfold through times of oppression until God brings an end to it (3:16). For now, while 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, yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior (3:17-18). This attitude expresses the life lived by faith.

In the meantime, the Sovereign Lord is my strength (3:19).

#### 4A. Theme

God will not tolerate evil in Judah but will raise up the Babylonians as instruments of His justice; meanwhile, the righteous shall live through God's just judgment, and they shall do so by their faith displayed in faith deeds.

They are righteous in life in contrast to the lack of uprightness of the wicked but they live through God's just judgment not by their uprightness of conduct but by faith.

Thus, like with Abraham, it is their faith that is counted for righteousness before God's holiness and justice and not their good conduct. The good conduct is not sufficient to justify. It does not match up. So, justification is by faith.

But faith does not ground justification either. Faith is the means by which we live, by which we are declared righteous before God.

The ground is the work of Christ who bears the punishment of our sin and who lives the righteous life we need. Both of these are given to us. Through His work, God is just in justifying those who believe.

What kind of conduct do these people display: righteous conduct. Those who have righteous conduct before God live through His wrath (are justified) by faith (not by their conduct). Paul can thus cite this text to teach justification by faith without the law and without righteous deeds. The doers of righteous deeds are justified from first to last by faith not by their deeds. Those who have this justification by faith alone are people who display a life of righteous conduct.

#### 5A. Job and Habakkuk

On the problem of evil: Job verses Habakkuk.

Concisely, what answer is given to the problem of evil in Habakkuk compared with Job?

Job teaches that we cannot understand the suffering of evil by the righteous because God's wisdom far surpasses ours but God is righteous and will accomplish all that He plans.

Habakkuk teaches that God only tolerates the suffering of evil by the righteous (who are hemmed in by the wicked) for a season but the appointed time will hasten toward its goal and not fail.

In both God is accomplishing His purposes through His control of evil; Job emphasizes our inability to grasp it all (but it is sure) and calls for humble repentance. Habakkuk emphasizes the certainty of God's time table of judgment and calls for faithful and joyful endurance.

6A. Grace and Law, the message for us.

1) We have justifying righteousness by faith alone.

By trusting in God and not in any conduct we do, we live, are saved, and justified or declared righteous in Christ. If we trust in what we do to any degree, thus placing our faith in ourselves, we nullify the gospel of saving grace. To be saved you must trust in Christ alone.

2) And those who have this life by faith live a practical righteousness of the law that is inworked gradually by the Holy Spirit who leads His children (Rom. 8:4; 14; Gal. 5:18). While not justified by good works, the justified are active in doing good works.

Study questions

1. Concisely, what answer is given to the problem of evil in Habakkuk compared with Job?
2. How can Paul (Rom. 1:17) use Habakkuk 2:4 to support justification by faith without good deeds (by faith alone) when Habakkuk says the righteous will live by his faithful deeds?
3. What is a balanced way to summarize the grace and law message for us by reference to Habakkuk?
4. What answer is given to the problem of evil in Habakkuk compared with Job?