

1. Date of Habakkuk's prophecy.

The reference to the Chaldean [Babylonian] invasion of 1.6 makes for an earliest date of about 625 BC for that is when Nabopolassar seized the Babylonian throne and with him began the rise of the Neo-Babylonian empire.

The latest date would be the about 598 just before Nebuchadnezzar's retaliation on Judah in the reign of Jehoiakim [609-598]. So as to a range of time when this prophet was operating we really have a period similar to Jeremiah between 627-586 BC.

The graphic description of the Babylonian armies abilities [Ha1.6-11] could point to a date of 605 BC when, at the battle of Carchemish Nebuchadnezzar's forces routed the armies of Egypt.

2. Outline of the Book:

The book consists of three chapters which may be broken into three sections.

[a] Ha1.2-2.4 [or 8] which is a piece in dramatic form where the prophet poses a question to God against the wrong and the violence which he sees wherever he looks. The Lord provides his answer, Ha2.1-4.

[b] Ha2.5[or 9]-20 which is a taunt song containing a series of Woes upon the wrongdoer.

[c] Ha3, which is part psalm, part prayer and describes a theophany that expresses Israel's faith in God.

3. The argument flow.

The argument is as follows:

Ha1.2-4 Habakkuk asks the Lord how long are the wicked to terrorise the righteous, shutting down the revelation of His Law and the making judgment futile. This appears to be speaking of the internal situation within Israel at the time - simply because the Lord, in the next section directs Habakkuk to look around at the nations outside.

Ha1.5-11 The Lord answers that the Habakkuk should look around among the heathen, because He is about to raise up the Chaldeans to do his work. They are a self-reliant and swift people who are irresistible. This sense that the Lord is raising up the Babylonians to punish the sins of Judah is consistent with Jeremiah's message.

Ha1.12-17 Habakkuk renews his question; how long will God suffer a tyrant like them who sweep up the peoples into a net like fish? Is God to go on with this forever?

Ha2.1 Habakkuk prepares for an answer.

Ha2.2-4 The Lord instructs him to write down the vision so that it may be read at a glance. Let the prophet wait for the vision even though it waits; the proud oppressor cannot last - he lacks any assured future - but the righteous shall live in constancy, or faithfulness.

Ha2.5-20 - A series of taunt-songs which after an introduction from 6b, begin a series of woes [9,12,15 and 19].

[a] Ha 2.5-6a In contrast to the one who will live by faith, the conceited, teacherous and arrogant will certainly not reach his goal, as he, like Death and Sheol themselves, gathers up the nations to himself.

Surely what will happen to him is that those captives of his will turn upon him and address him with the 'woe' because he amasses wealth that is not his. Like debtors that turn up they will shake him till he is empty - they will exact from him everything he has; because he plundered nations.

[b] Ha 2.9-11 His unjust schemes - to overthrow many nations, through which he has brought gain to his own house will ultimately dishonour his house.

[c] Ha 2.12-14 He has built a city on bloodshed and injustice, so that nations toil for a pittance. This will be a woe to him. However, such injustice

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Outline of the book.

The argument flow of the book

1. How long shall the wicked terrorise us?

2. The Chaldeans as God's instrument of discipline

3. The vision which Habakkuk must wait for.

4. Living by trust in God meanwhile.

5. Taunt songs

even the Lord will deal with the perpetrator of it, just as He can use the toil of the subject nations to be a discipline to them. His glory will be seen and known all over the earth.

[d] Ha 2.15-18 Woe to the one who, in violence done to Libanon and other nations, to say nothing of idolatry, actually embroils his companions in this plundering of the nations in his own drinking of the wrath of God.

[e] Ha 2.19-20 Woe to the man who must say to his dumb idol "Wake up" simply because it is foolish, there is no breath in it. Rather, as Israel knows, the Lord is in His holy temple and the whole earth should keep silent in his presence.

Ha 3.1-19 A prayer of Habakkuk

[a] Habakkuk is in awe of God because in his wrath he remembers also to have mercy. [3.1-2]

[b] The wrath of God, who is so full of splendour, shakes the earth as he traverses it and so the nations panic [3.3-7]

[c] It is not the streams and the natural elements that He is angry with, they simply respond to Him as his creatures. It is the nations that are the butt of his anger as he goes forth to shatter the house of the wicked [8-15].

[d] Habakkuk is bodily weak as he longs for disaster to overtake the assailants of Israel [16] and as he looks around at the devastation of the olive crop and the orchards and the absence of cattle still, he will rejoice in God who saves him. The Lord is his strength and makes him to be as sure-footed as a gazelle in the heights. Precariousness is a situation in which the prophet finds the Lord can cause him to walk with confidence and surety [16-19].

5. Taunt songs [continued]

Habakkuk's prayer