

## **Habakkuk (December 17)**

### **Reading Habakkuk**

A scribe's nimble hand carves a row of letters into a sheet of beeswax, which adheres to a pair of boards bound with leather strips. He pauses, awaiting his lord's next sentence – an order for the watchmen along Judah's western border. As the scribe waits, an evening breeze blows from the coast of the Great Sea and up the Judean hills to their high fortress, which guards against the Assyrians. At the doorway stands a messenger, ready to receive the tablets the moment they snap shut and to run the message out to the next hilltop outpost.

The prophet Habakkuk waited like a patient scribe or messenger for a vision the Lord promised him. As he waited, he needed the Lord's encouragement and patience. Habakkuk's style is unique among the prophets in that he never addresses God's people directly. Yet his message would apply very directly, then and now. His homeland – the kingdom of Judah – had suffered grave threats from the Assyrian Empire. When the Lord's message came to Habakkuk, it called the Judeans to sober humility and sincere faith. Though the Lord would destroy the Assyrians, he would raise up the Babylonians to chasten wayward Judah.

### **Author and Date**

Little is known about Habakkuk except that he was a contemporary of Jeremiah and a man of vigorous faith rooted deeply in the religious traditions of Israel. The prediction of the coming Babylonian invasion indicates that Habakkuk lived in Judah toward the end of Josiah's reign (640-609 BC) or at the beginning of Jehoiakim's (609-598). The prophecy is generally dated a little before or after the battle of Carchemish (605), when Egyptian forces, who had earlier gone to the aid of the last Assyrian king, were routed by the Babylonians under Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar and were pursued as far as the Egyptian border. Habakkuk, like Jeremiah, probably lived to see the initial fulfillment of his prophecy when Jerusalem was attacked by the Babylonians in 597.

### **Message**

Among the prophetic writings, Habakkuk is somewhat unique in that it includes no oracle addressed to Israel. It contains, rather, a dialogue between the prophet and God. In the first two chapters, Habakkuk argues with God over his ways that appear to him unfathomable, if not unjust. Having received replies, he responds with a beautiful confession of faith in chapter 3.

This account of wrestling with God is, however, not just a fragment from a private journal that has somehow entered the public domain. It was composed for Israel. No doubt it represented the voice of the godly in Judah, struggling to comprehend the ways of God. God's answers therefore spoke to all who shared Habakkuk's troubled doubts. And Habakkuk's confession became a public expression.

Habakkuk was perplexed that wickedness, strife, and oppression were rampant in Judah but God seemingly did nothing. When told that the Lord was preparing to do something about it through the ruthless Babylonians, his perplexity only intensified. How could God appoint such a nation to execute judgment on Israel? God makes it clear, however, that eventually the corrupt destroyer will itself be destroyed. In the end, Habakkuk learns to rest in God's appointments and await his working in a spirit of worship.

### **Blessings for Readers**

As you read Habakkuk, the Lord will call you to steadfast faith, even in the face of persistent evil. The book describes how the Lord works through evil circumstances for our good, just as he worked through Jesus' suffering and death for our salvation. No matter what opposes you, take joy in the God of your salvation, who is your strength.