

Book of habakkuk essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The prophet Habakkuk introduced in his Book is not considered a prominent figure, as he is considered to be one of the twelve Minor Prophets. There is no indication of his lineage and is just referred to as Habakkuk the prophet in the Biblical text, but due the liturgical nature of the verses in the book, some scholars have described Habakkuk as a cultic prophet. The apocryphal and post-biblical literatures do not reach a consensus to who he was.

Some say that he came from the tribe of Simeon and others in the tribe of Levi, and information as such is not regarded as true facts, rather as romanticized add-ons of the story, supporting the idea that these were just tacked on as later details. The estimated date that it was written in, was a time recent to the battle of Carchemish, which was the beginning of the 7th century BCE. The battle of Carchemish was a battle at the said site, and was the Babylonians versus the Egyptians and a band of Assyrians.

Both sides incurred heavy casualties, but it was unmistakable that the Babylonians had a resounding victory and the Assyrians were vanquished. In 604 BCE, the Chaldeans had declared their king Nebuchadnezzar II as the ruler of the neo-Babylonian empire. At this time, in the kingdom of Judah, the Jews were ruled under king Jehoiakim. While Judah had been paying tributes to Babylon, however, king Jehoiakim observed during a battle in 601 BCE, that there was a great loss on the Babylonian side against Egypt.

This convinced him that he should abstain from giving their due tribute to Babylon and ally up with Egypt. This proved to be disastrous, and caused the exile of the Jewish peoples to other lands. While there is no mention that the Babylonians would seize Judah, there is a clear point wherein the words of

Habakkuk would show to be true: the Babylonians are the ones that are gaining a lot of power and seizing nations. The book of Jeremiah is within the time of Habakkuk, and therefore their prophecies are a bit similar.

A sense of how the Babylonians were at the time is necessary, because it gives a sense to show the history of what the inhabitants faced. The Babylonians spoke a language within the similar frames as Arabic and Hebrew, and the people that hugely influenced the Babylonians in areas such as religion, education, and literature were the Sumerians, though their origin and parts of their language remains elusive. Before the neo-Babylonian empire, the first dynasty –although it appeared to be weak- grabbed power through Hammurapi the king, and established suzerainty over Mesopotamia in the 18th century.

The first dynasty ended in 1595 BCE, when the Hittites came in through from Syria and attacked through the Euphrates, sacking Babylon. The next centuries until the Assyrian occupation of Babylon, were other successive dynasties. When Assyrian power declined, the Chaldeans were quick to fill the role of political power and were people that lived in tribal regions near the swamps and lakes of the Tigris and Euphrates. They primarily spoke Babylonian, but had been fought the Assyrians control and also fought against each other.

This would develop the fervent Babylonian type of nationalism that the Chaldeans would influence in the Neo-Babylonian Empire, establishing Babylon to the height of fame. This does agree with the Bible, and its portrayal of the character of the people in Habakkuk 1: 7 of the mention that

“ they are a law to themselves. ” Many Chaldeans were descended from Babylonians, and made Babylon their capital, however, for distinction the denizens of the Neo-Babylonian Empire are called Chaldeans since they were not necessarily native Babylonians.

If read between the lines, this also foreshadows the doom and gloom that is going to happen among Judah, the southern kingdom. As mentioned before, the verses are not direct indicators of the besiegement of Judah, but rather show that God will empower the Chaldeans to conquer many lands. At this point of time, after Josiah ruled and had been successful in avoiding foreign intrusions, the kingship was given to Jehoahaz –who was deposed- then finally given to Jehoiakam. The king switched allegiances around, which makes an observer believe that this contributed to their downfall.

After seeing the harm that was done to Egypt, Jehoiakam decided to switch allegiances to Babylonian forces, and giving them a tribute. Before then, they were acting as a vassal to Egypt. However, when they took in account of the losses done by Babylon against Egypt, they decided to pay tribute to Babylon. When Babylon took a huge hit in a battle against Egypt, they switched allegiance again. Their flakiness and disloyalty to other bigger city-states are what played a role in their downfall.

By this point, it resembled nothing like the Davidic kingdom, and this is what led to their exile. The Babylonians eventually gathered the elite of the Hebrews, and scattered the people into other lands. What makes Habakkuk a unique person in comparison to the rest of the prophets, is his willingness to bring God’s integrity of justice into questioning. Despite his complain about

this area of concern, Habakkuk is the one who also brings up the concept of absolute faith in Yahweh, because Yahweh is the God of absolute power and binds the universe together to the Jews of that time.

The structure of his book is constructed in the form of a dialogue through successive exchanges and declarations of woes. What should be known about this book is that there are many hard to translate verses and therefore the language has been a wrestle to interpret and translate accurately. Habakkuk starts off with a traditional complaint psalm that asks God's silence remains prevalent. There is chaos and violence surrounding him, claiming justice to be perverted, and that essentially, Yahweh is allowing the wrong to happen.

This is not uncommon for prophets to complain to God about their justified sense of pain. The thing that bothers Habakkuk is whether or not God wants to save them, or even can in order to show that he is a God true to his values of justice and righteousness. The main chunk of the prophecy is really delivered in Habakkuk 1: 5-11, through the voice of Yahweh. It is that the Babylonians, a people that God is not commending (Habakkuk 1: 6) is going to rise up and seize the lands, and that they are immensely powerful as well.

They mention that they are going to rule with some resemblance of justice, but it is justice according to their own standards, in response to Habakkuk's cry of justice. It is not the ideal solution that anyone would look for in this situation. During the second complaint that Habakkuk brings up, he says that God has made the people like fish, where there is no ruler, and it would be

contradictory to let the wicked -whom are designed by Yahweh for His purpose- to take over those who are more righteous.

Habakkuk says there is no warrant for them to continue to seize nations with nothing to rely on besides their own excessive strength and pride. However, God's response is to write down what he is going to say, in that God calls for patience and the righteous to persevere despite the fact that they will live by the wicked. The five woes are mentioned as such: woe against arrogance and greed, woe against presumption, woe against violence and illegitimate means to power, woe against human dignity, and woe against idolatry.

There are all examples to these, such as for the woe against presumption, a man builds his home high, and it is something that shows the assumption of infallibility, and goes against nature. The very last part of the book of Habakkuk is the prayer or praise that he offers to Yahweh. In this praise he mentions the scope of power that Yahweh has, such as powers over the sea and imageries of Yahweh as the great warrior. His praise is one of deliverance from evil through crushing the wicked and scattering their warriors.

The reaction of Habakkuk is to give Yahweh praise and to be patient and faithful to God despite the outward appearances of destruction and hopelessness. In the beginning verses, there is mention of the wicked, but none of whom are specific. While it might refer to a people within the Jewish community, Assyrians, or Egyptians, there are really no indicators that Habakkuk is referring to a specific group and the way that it is set up, one can conclude that this book portrays God's power contrasted to the scope of

humanity. The theme of the book brings to question the righteousness of God and whether or not He truly delivers.

Part of the message that might be dissatisfying is that God doesn't really tell them anything about the part where they get helped out specifically.

However, in beautiful imagery, Habakkuk's prayer that symbolically represents God shows him in his majestic glory over whoever the oppressors may be. The wicked, because they are identified solely as the people against righteousness makes this interpretation quite broad. Nowadays, the relevance to Christians and Jews these days can be attributed to Habakkuk 2: 4b " but the righteous shall live by his faith. For the Jewish person, its relevance is associated with the revelation of Sinai in the poem. For the Christian person, however, because the Greek word can be used for faithfulness or faith, the meaning conveyed is different. This meaning then is attributed to waiting and enduring patience in the sense of the coming one, or someone known as Christ. The historical setting allows us to see Judah in a light that shows the weakness of their ruler and the growing prominence of Babylon within the decades to come.

Habakkuk being one of the lesser focused stories, as it occupies a mere two pages in the most Bibles, is a significant one because it brings attention to God as humans of that time pondered, why and how God can allow immoral and unrighteous actions occur, and for the apparent lack of action displayed by God. It is a question that we can relate to. However as we ponder on the injustices of the world to our life, this is a point we should ask ourselves in our current position: " We ask God why we allow evil in our world, but seldom do we ask why we let them to occur in the world. "