

## Article of the Month – June 2012

### Missions & Eschatology (5) – Habakkuk

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Habakkuk prophesied at the time that the Babylonians were an upcoming world power.<sup>1</sup> Before him, Nahum had prophesied judgment on Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire. After Nineveh fell<sup>2</sup> the Babylonian Empire became prominent – until it was defeated.<sup>3</sup> Habakkuk prophesied in the early years of Babylon during the last years of kings Josiah and Jehoiachim. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah and we see some of the latter's pain in Habakkuk: the deterioration of Judah and the upcoming judgment in

the form of the foretold exile.

His *name* means 'he who loves with his whole heart'. We see this love in his prayer life: the man and his God often conversed. For Habakkuk the relationship with his Lord took precedence over his ministry. His love is also expressed in his pleas for the people under threat of a Babylonian invasion,<sup>4</sup> although he does not close his eyes to Judah's unrighteousness.<sup>5</sup> His love is ultimately expressed in the words 'though' and 'yet',<sup>6</sup> reminding us of the words of Daniel's friends<sup>7</sup> and those of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> Our trust in God tells us that bad circumstances are not final, but that His sovereignty is, and the outcome will be more glorious than one anticipates.<sup>9</sup> Habakkuk lived by this faith.<sup>10</sup>

His prayers are not monologues. God answers by revealing His perspective behind earthly occurrences.<sup>11</sup> Through prayer He reveals the spiritual meaning of things that happen in the world. We see indirect but vital *missiological significance* in Habakkuk: love for the Lord and His people; a vibrant prayer life, where priorities between God and ministry are right; a cry against the threats of world powers; his unconditional trust in God and his understanding of God's higher purposes behind circumstances. Without such mature spiritual properties no modern missionary can function well.

With regard to the *eschatological aspects*, we read that 'the revelation ... speaks of the end'.<sup>12</sup> These words alert us that, in the text that follows, more is meant than the end of Judah's

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<sup>1</sup> Hab. 1:6

<sup>2</sup> In 612 B.C.

<sup>3</sup> In 539 B.C.

<sup>4</sup> Hab. 1:5-11,12b,13b-17

<sup>5</sup> 1:2-4

<sup>6</sup> 3:17,18

<sup>7</sup> Dan. 3:17,18 'The Lord is able to save us, *but even if He does not*, we will still not bow before your image...'

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 26:39,42 'Father, if it is possible, let this cup be taken from Me, *yet, not My will but Yours* be done...'

<sup>9</sup> Hab. 3:19; Rom. 8:18

<sup>10</sup> Hab. 2:4

<sup>11</sup> 1:5-11; 2:2-20

<sup>12</sup> 2:3

exile.<sup>13</sup> Additional value is found in the verse that ‘the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea’.<sup>14</sup> This promise still awaits fulfillment; it describes the coming Millennium when God’s Kingdom will be established on earth. The thought finds support in the preceding judgment over all the earth<sup>15</sup> and over Satan, the leader of the land of wickedness.<sup>16</sup>

There are also parallels between Habakkuk and the book of Revelation, with regard to how Babel’s spiritual (not military) behavior is described:<sup>17</sup> it sounds just like the complaints about the great whore of Babylon in the end times. We see the same principles in operation, of which I described the beginnings in the 10<sup>th</sup> issue of the twelve missionary themes in the book of Genesis.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, when we look at the third chapter – Habakkuk’s ‘Psalm’ – we cannot escape the impression that he writes mainly about the time of the Great Tribulation.<sup>19</sup> His choice of words and pictures here is too big for a normal chain of events – even the liberation out of Egypt cannot stand in the shadow of the major judgments taking place at the end of time. Habakkuk seems to describe the ‘night in which no one can work’.<sup>20</sup>

Paul tells us that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the spiritual powers and authorities in the heavenly realms.<sup>21</sup> In the book of Habakkuk we recognize the Evil One behind the Babylonian hordes in their inhuman military enterprises<sup>22</sup> and spiritual attitude.<sup>23</sup> Satan also fishes for men.<sup>24</sup> Several verses in the second chapter<sup>25</sup> remind us of the descriptions of Satan we read in earlier prophets, where a ruler, worse than the kings of Babylon or Tyre is described.<sup>26</sup>

This short prophecy is a book for missionaries who serve in the last days. It gives spiritual insight in the invisible forces behind Babylon, it encourages to prayerful dialogues with God in order to understand the signs of the times and to live by faith. It also subjects the demand for material wellbeing to the joy there is in God the Savior.

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<sup>13</sup> Referred to in 3:16b

<sup>14</sup> 2:14

<sup>15</sup> 3:6,12 reflected in Rev. 14:17-20

<sup>16</sup> 3:13,14 reflected in Rev. 20:1-3

<sup>17</sup> Compare Hab. 1:15-17 and 2:4a,5-12,15-19 with Rev. 17:1 – 19:3

<sup>18</sup> See the article of March 2010

<sup>19</sup> Hab. 3:5-15

<sup>20</sup> John 9:4

<sup>21</sup> Eph. 6:12

<sup>22</sup> Hab. 1:6b-11

<sup>23</sup> 1:15-17

<sup>24</sup> 1:14-17

<sup>25</sup> 2:4a,5-12

<sup>26</sup> Is. 14 & Ez. 28

