

Commentary on Habakkuk

(1QpHab)

well-preserved and detailed exposition of the first two chapters of the Book Habakkuk comes from Cave 1 and was published in 1950 (M. Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St Mark's Monastery*, I, New Haven, 1950, pls. LV-LXI).

The palaeographical dating of the manuscript (30-1 BCE) has been confirmed by radiocarbon tests (120-5 BCE; cf. above, pp. 12-13). The Habakkuk Commentary is one of the main sources for the study of Qumran origins, as well as Essene Bible exegesis and the sect's theology regarding prophecy. The historical and doctrinal aspects of the document are analysed in Chapters III and IV.

I [*Oracle of Habakkuk the prophet. How long, O Lord, shall I cry for help and Thou wilt not [hear]?*] (i, 1-2).

[Interpreted, this concerns the beginning] of the [final] generation ...

[*Or shout to Thee 'Violence', and Thou wilt not deliver?*] (i, 2b) ...

5 [*Why dost Thou cause me to see iniquity and to look upon trouble? Desolation and violence are before me*] (i, 3).

... God with oppression and unfaithfulness ... they rob riches.

[*There is quarrelling and contention*] (i, 3b).

...

So the law is weak [and justice never goes forth] (i, 4a-b).

[Interpreted] this concerns those who have despised the Law of God

[*For the wicked encompasses*] *the righteous* (i, 4c).

[*The wicked* is the Wicked Priest, and *the righteous*] is the Teacher of Righteousness ...

[*So*] *justice goes forth [perverted]* (i, 4d).

...
[*Behold the nations and see, marvel and be astonished; for I accomplish a deed in your days, but you will not believe it when*] II told (i, 5).

[Interpreted, this concerns] those who were unfaithful together with the Liar, in that they [did] not [listen to the word received by] the Teacher of Righteousness from the mouth of God. And it concerns the unfaithful of the New [Covenant] in that they have not believed in the Covenant of God [and have profaned] His holy Name. And likewise, this saying is to be interpreted [as concerning those who] will be unfaithful at the end of 5 days. They, the men of violence and the breakers of the Covenant, will not believe when they hear all that [is to happen to] the final generation from the Priest [in whose heart] God set [understanding] that he might interpret all the words of His servants the Prophets, through whom He foretold all that would happen to His people and [His land].

For behold, I rouse the Chaldeans, that [bitter and hasty] nation (i, 6a).

10 Interpreted, this concerns the Kittim [who are] quick and valiant in war, causing many to perish. [All the world shall fall] under the dominion of the Kittim, and the [wicked ...] they shall not believe in the laws of [God ...]

[*Who march through the breadth of the earth to take possession of dwellings which are not their own*] (i, 6b).

... III they shall march across the plain, smiting and plundering the cities of the earth. For it is as He said, *To take possession of dwellings which are not their own.*

They are fearsome and terrible; their justice and grandeur proceed from themselves (i, 7).

5 Interpreted, this concerns the Kittim who inspire all the nations with fear [and dread]. All their evil plotting is done with intention and they deal with all the nations in cunning and guile.

Their horses are swifter than leopards and fleetier than evening wolves. Their horses step forward proudly and spread their wings; they fly from afar like an eagle avid to devour. All of them come for violence; the look on their faces is like the east wind (i, 8-9a).

10 [Interpreted, this] concerns the Kittim who trample the earth with their horses and beasts. They come *from afar*, from the islands of the sea, to devour all the peoples *like an eagle* which cannot be satisfied, and they address [all the peoples] with anger and [wrath and fury] and indignation. For it is as He said, *The look on their faces is like the east wind.*

[*They heap up*] *captives [like sand]* (i, 9b).

15 ...

IV *They scoff [at kings], and princes are their laughing-stock* (i, 10a).

Interpreted, this means that they mock the great and despise the venerable; they ridicule kings and princes and scoff at the mighty host.

They laugh at every fortress; they pile up earth and take it (i, 10b).

5 Interpreted, this concerns the commanders of the Kittim who despise the fortresses of the peoples and laugh at them in derision. To capture them, they encircle them with a mighty host, and out of fear and terror they deliver themselves into their hands. They destroy them because of the sins of their inhabitants.

The wind then sweeps on and passes; and they make of their strength their god (i, 11).

10 Interpreted, [this concerns] the commanders of the Kittim who, on the counsel of [the] House of Guilt, pass one in front of the other; one after another [their] commanders come to lay waste the earth. [*And they make of their strength their god*]: interpreted, this concerns [... all] the peoples ...

[*Art Thou not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my Holy One? We shall not die.*] *Thou hast ordained them, [O Lord], V for judgement; Thou hast established them, O Rock, for chastisement. Their eyes are too pure to behold evil; and Thou canst not look on distress* (i, 12-13a).

5 Interpreted, this saying means that God will not destroy His people by the hand of the nations; God will execute the judgement of the nations by the hand of His elect. And through their chastisement all the wicked of His people shall expiate their guilt who keep His commandments in their distress. For it is as he said, *Too pure of eyes to behold evil*: interpreted, this means that they have not lusted after their eyes during the age of wickedness.

O traitors, why do you stare and stay silent when the wicked swallows up one more righteous than he? (i, 13b).

10 Interpreted, this concerns the House of Absalom and the members of its council who were silent at the time of the chastisement of the Teacher of Righteousness and gave him no help against the Liar who flouted the Law in the midst of their whole [congregation].

Thou dealest with men like the fish of the sea, like creeping things, to rule over them. They draw [them all up with a fish-book], and drag them out with their net, and gather them in [their seine. Therefore they sacrifice] to their net. Therefore they rejoice [and exult and burn incense to their seine; for by them] 15 their portion is fat [and their sustenance rich] (i, 14-16).

... VI the Kittim. And they shall gather in their riches, together with all their booty, *like the fish of the sea*. And as for that which He said, *Therefore they sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their seine*: interpreted, this means that they sacrifice to their standards and worship their weapons of war. *For through them their portion is fat and their sustenance rich*: interpreted, this means that they divide their yoke and their tribute – *their sustenance* – over all the peoples year by year, ravaging many lands.

Therefore their sword is ever drawn to massacre nations mercilessly (i, 17).

10 Interpreted, this concerns the Kittim who cause many to perish by the sword – youths, grown men, the aged, women and children – and who even take no pity on the fruit of the womb.

I will take my stand to watch and will station myself upon my fortress. I will watch to see what He will say to me and how [He will answer] my complaint. And the Lord answered [and said to me, 'Write down the vision and make it 15 plain] upon the tablets, that [he who reads] may read it speedily (ii, 1-2).

... VII and God told Habakkuk to write down that which would happen to the final generation, but He did not make known to him when time would come to an end. And as for that which He said, *That he who reads may read it speedily*: interpreted this concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of 5 His servants the Prophets.

For there shall be yet another vision concerning the appointed time. It shall tell of the end and shall not lie (ii, 3a).

Interpreted, this means that the final age shall be prolonged, and shall exceed all that the Prophets have said; for the mysteries of God are astounding.

10 *If it tarries, wait for it, for it shall surely come and shall not be late* (ii, 3b).

Interpreted, this concerns the men of truth who keep the Law, whose hands shall not slacken in the service of truth when the final age is prolonged. For all the ages of God reach their appointed end as he determines for them in the mysteries of His wisdom.

Behold, [his soul] is puffed up and is not upright (ii, 4a).

15 Interpreted, this means that [the wicked] shall double their guilt upon themselves [and it shall not be forgiven] when they are judged . . .

[But the righteous shall live by his faith] (ii, 4b).

VIII Interpreted, this concerns all those who observe the Law in the House of Judah, whom God will deliver from the House of Judgement because of their suffering and because of their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness.

Moreover, the arrogant man seizes wealth without halting. He widens his gullet like Hell and like Death he has never enough. All the nations are gathered 'm and all the peoples are assembled to him. Will they not all of them taunt 'nd jeer at him saying, 'Woe to him who amasses that which is not his! long will he load himself up with pledges?' (ii, 5-6).

Interpreted, this concerns the Wicked Priest who was called by the name of truth when he first arose. But when he ruled over Israel his heart became proud, and he forsook God and betrayed the precepts for the sake of riches. He robbed and amassed the riches of the men of violence who rebelled against God, and he took the wealth of the peoples, heaping sinful iniquity upon himself. And he lived in the ways of abominations amidst every unclean defilement.

15 *Shall not your oppressors suddenly arise and your torturers awaken; and shall you not become their prey? Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you* (ii, 7-8a).

[Interpreted, this concerns] the Priest who rebelled [and violated] the

precepts [of God . . . to command] IX his chastisement by means of the judgements of wickedness. And they inflicted horrors of evil diseases and took vengeance upon his body of flesh. And as for that which He said, *Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you:* interpreted this concerns the last Priests of Jerusalem, who shall amass money and wealth by plundering the peoples. But in the last days, their riches and booty shall be delivered into the hands of the army of the Kittim, for it is they who shall be the *remnant of the peoples*.

Because of the blood of men and the violence done to the land, to the city, and to all its inhabitants (ii, 8b).

Interpreted, this concerns the Wicked Priest whom God delivered into the hands of his enemies because of the iniquity committed against the Teacher of Righteousness and the men of his Council, that he might be humbled by means of a destroying scourge, in bitterness of soul, because he had done wickedly to His elect.

Woe to him who gets evil profit for his house; who perches his nest high to be safe from the hand of evil! You have devised shame to your house: by cutting off many peoples you have forfeited your own soul. For the [stone] cries out [from] the wall [and] the beam from the woodwork replies (ii, 9-11).

[Interpreted, this] concerns the [Priest] who . . . X that its stones might be laid in oppression and the beam of its woodwork in robbery. And as for that which He said, *By cutting off many peoples you have forfeited your own soul:* interpreted this concerns the condemned House whose judgement God will pronounce in the midst of many peoples. He will bring him thence for judgement and will declare him guilty in the midst of them, and will chastise him with fire of brimstone.

Woe to him who builds a city with blood and founds a town upon falsehood! Behold, is it not from the Lord of Hosts that the peoples shall labour for fire and the nations shall strive for naught? (ii, 12-13).

Interpreted, this concerns the Spouter of Lies who led many astray that he might build his city of vanity with blood and raise a congregation on deceit, causing many thereby to perform a service of vanity for the sake of its glory, and to be pregnant with [works] of deceit, that their labour might be for nothing and that they might be punished with fire who vilified and outraged the elect of God.

For as the waters cover the sea, so shall the earth be filled with the knowledge the glory of the Lord (ii, 14).

Interpreted, [this means that] when they return . . . **XI** the lies. And onwards, knowledge shall be revealed to them abundantly, like the waters of the sea.

Woe to him who causes his neighbours to drink; who pours out his venom to take them drunk that he may gaze on their feasts (ii, 15).

Interpreted, this concerns the Wicked Priest who pursued the Teacher of Righteousness to the house of his exile that he might confuse him with his venomous fury. And at the time appointed for rest, for the Day of Atonement, he appeared before them to confuse them, and to cause them to stumble on the Day of Fasting, their Sabbath of repose.

You have filled yourself with ignominy more than with glory. Drink also, and stagger! The cup of the Lord's right hand shall come round to you and shame shall come on your glory (ii, 16).

Interpreted, this concerns the Priest whose ignominy was greater than his glory. For he did not circumcise the foreskin of his heart, and he walked in the ways of drunkenness that he might quench his thirst. But the cup of the wrath of God shall confuse him, multiplying his . . . and the pain of . . .

[For the violence done to Lebanon shall overwhelm you, and the destruction of the beasts] XII shall terrify you, because of the blood of men and the violence done to the land, the city, and all its inhabitants (ii, 17).

Interpreted, this saying concerns the Wicked Priest, inasmuch as he shall be paid the reward which he himself tendered to the Poor. For *Lebanon* is the Council of the Community; and the *beasts* are the simple of Judah who keep the Law. As he himself plotted the destruction of the Poor, so will God condemn him to destruction. And as for that which He said, *Because of the blood of the city and the violence done to the land*: interpreted, *the city* is Jerusalem where the Wicked Priest committed abominable deeds and defiled the Temple of God. *The violence done to the land*: these are the cities of Judah where he robbed the Poor of their possessions.

Of what use is an idol that its maker should shape it, a molten image, a fatling of lies? For the craftsman puts his trust in his own creation when he makes dumb idols (ii, 18).

Interpreted, this saying concerns all the idols of the nations which they make so that they may serve and worship them. But they shall not deliver them on the Day of Judgement.

Woe [to him who says] to wood, 'Awake', and to dumb [stone, 'Arise']! Can such a thing give guidance? Behold, it is covered with gold and silver but there is no spirit within it. But the Lord is in His holy Temple]: XIII let all the earth be silent before Him! (lii, 19-20).

Interpreted, this concerns all the nations which serve stone and wood. But on the Day of Judgement, God will destroy from the earth all idolatrous and wicked men.