

Bellows Family

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

In the introduction to Sefer Chavakuk there is no information about the identity or time period of the prophet. However, the book describes the rise of the Chaldeans (*Kasdim*), so that we can attribute the prophecy to the period of the rise of the new Babylonian empire, in the last third of the seventh century BCE. The central issue which arises from the book is the question of reward and punishment - when bad things happen to good people and when bad people have good things happen to them. This question arises because of the rise of the Babylonian kingdom which is described as an evil kingdom which enslaved and plundered many nations. However, unlike Yirmiyahu, who comes from the same generation as Chavakuk and who dealt with this issue on the private level, Chavakuk deals with the question on the universal level.

Perek 1

Perek 1 begins with a harsh complaint by the prophet against God because of the distortion of law and justice in the world (2-4). In the continuation of the perek Chavakuk describes the rise of the Chaldeans (5-11), who are the epitome of evil as described in general in the first section. The complaint of the prophet becomes harsher in the third section, in which he describes the world order under the rule of the evil Chaldeans (12-17).

1.

In the second section of the perek the puzzling and threatening rise of the Chaldean nation is described. What are the two main characteristics of the Chaldeans which we find in the pesukim? Examine the varied images which appear in the section and think about how they contribute to these characteristics. What is the connection between these two characteristics and the serious outcome which appears at the end of the description (11).

Chavakuk 1-3

2.

The question of the foundations of justice is found throughout the perek

a | In the first complaint (4) the prophet cries out about the distortion of justice and law in the world. In God's reaction, which describes the spread of the Chaldeans and their coming to power, the concept of justice appears as well. What is the basis for justice in pasuk 7, and how does it fit with the description of the Chaldean people?

b | What does the "judgment" in the third section (12) refer to? Pay attention to the contrast between the judgment in pasuk 12 and in pasuk 11. Terms of showing and seeing appear in the beginning of each section (3,5,13). How is the showing and seeing different and more serious in the third section?

3.

The third section compares the conduct of the world under Chaldean rule to the world of the fish of the seas (13-17):

How does this image comparing the human world to the world of fish contribute to our understanding of the twisted reality (14-15)? Another way to understand this image appears in the Babylonian Talmud **Massechet Avoda Zara 4a**:

Just as among fish of the sea, the greater swallow up the smaller ones, so with men, were it not for fear of the government, men would swallow each other alive. This is just what we learnt: R. Hanina, the Deputy High Priest, said, Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear thereof, men would swallow each other alive.

Perek 2


After the complaint and fierce outcry which we find in perek 1, Chavakuk waits for an answer from God (1), and receives it in pesukim 2-4. From pasuk 5 and on there is a series of 5 short laments about the downfall of the Chaldeans in general, and especially their evil king, which begin with the word "Woe" (in Hebrew - *Hoy*).

3.

God commands the prophet to write his vision on tablets. We will focus on three characteristics of the vision:

a | The type of writing (2) – Why is Chavakuk commanded to write and explain on tablets? This is similar to the writing in Devarim 27:8. Compare these two descriptions with the command to write about the end of days in Daniel (12:4).

b | In addition to the writing of the tablets, an additional instruction is added in pasuk 3. These words of the prophet are the basis for one of the basic tenets of faith – "I believe in the

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coming of the messiah...and though he may tarry, still I await him". To further understand this see the words of the Gemara in **Massechet Sanhedrin 97b**:

What is meant by *'but at the end it shall speak [ve-yafeach] and not lie?'* — R. Shmuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Yonatan: Blasted (*tifach*) be the bones of those who calculate the end. For they would say, since the predetermined time has arrived, and yet he has not come, he will never come. But [even so], wait for him, as it is written, *Though he tarry, wait for him*. Should you say, We look forward [to his coming] but He does not: therefore Scripture says, *And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you*. But since we look forward to it, and He does likewise, what delays [his coming]? — The Attribute of Justice delays it. But since the Attribute of Justice delays it, why do we await it? — To be rewarded [for hoping], as it is written, *blessed are all they that wait for him*.

c | "Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith." (4) The central pasuk in the vision contrasts between the wicked person and the righteous one: What is the basic difference between them and how does this answer Chavakuk's claim? [S. Achituv comments: The wicked one's soul has become weak, because the soul which is within him is not straight...but the righteous one lives by his faith. Faith gives stability, truth and justice] In the continuation of the perek the fate of the evil one is given in detail. How do the five laments develop this principle which we find in pasuk 4?

Perek 3

Perek 3 is a prayer, "A prayer of Chavakuk the prophet concerning the errors." Perakim 1-2 are universal in nature while perek 3 refers in part to Israel. The prayer opens with a description of the revelation of God at Mount Sinai during the giving of the Torah (3), and continues with a description of the revelation of God and the salvation of Israel at the sea (8-15).

4.

The beginning of the perek uses phrases which parallel some of the descriptions in perek 1:

Perek 1	Perek 3
How long will I cry and You will not hear! (2)	O Lord, I have heard the report of You, and am afraid (2)
for He is performing a deed in your days. You shall not believe when it is told (5)	O Lord, Your deed , in the midst of the years, revive it (2)
They shall all come to commit violence (9)	God came from Teman (3)
I cry out to You of violence, and You will not rescue! (2)	You went forth to rescue Your people, to rescue Your anointed. (13)

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In light of these parallel texts, what is the relationship between the two perakim? Focus on the difference between the description of the Chaldeans and their objective, and the description of God's arrival and His objective. Compare our perek to Devarim 33:2 and see **R Yosef Caspi**:

And he started with the more notable action which he did for us, which is the giving of the Torah and His revelation at that honorable event, the revelation at Mount Sinai.

APPENDIX – The uniqueness of the problem of justice in the book of Chavakuk (Y. Kaufmann, Toldot HaEmunah HaYisraelit)

Chavakuk is a prophet of the transition period between the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires. One could say that the prophecy of Chavakuk begins the Chaldean period. Chavakuk expresses the anxiety and astonishment of his generation at the rise of a new pagan empire in place of the empire which had just collapsed (Assyria). The prophet sees the Chaldeans as an evil nation of pagan bandits. This is the basis for his cry for help to God. This image of the Chaldeans is very clear, this is not just a description of an awesome and heroic nation, but rather the description comes to emphasize the evil: a nation who goes *to inherit dwellings that are not theirs* (6) - *They shall all come to commit violence* (1:9). Their success only increases their pagan arrogance (1:11). In all of perek 1 there is no mention of the enslavement of Judah, but it is clear that while Chavakuk is afraid for the fate of his own nation, he includes in his prophecy the fates of other nations as well. He complains about the rise of the new empire, not because he thinks that Israel is a nation clean of all sin, but because he thinks that all the nations are more righteous than the Chaldean bandits.

Sefer Chavakuk is the only book in the Tanakh which investigates the question of the success of evil in the historical sphere – why do tyrants rule the world?

...The wicked one in the wisdom literature of the Tanakh is a heretic, in his heart he says there is no God. The height of Chavakuk's anxiety is caused by the fact that the pagan bandit attributes his strength to his god. The success of the new tyrant nation increases pagan belief. This is what Chavakuk is struggling with.

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מאן

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