

## **I. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

- A. The 8<sup>th</sup> book of the Minor Prophets
- B. Medieval and early scholars thought the name derived from the Hebrew **חבק**, *ḥbq*, “to embrace.
- C. Most modern scholars follow Noth who derives it from the Akkadian *ḥabbaqūqū*/*ḥambaqūqū*, which refers to a garden plant.<sup>2</sup>

## **II. THE PROPHET**

- A. The book provides little personal information relative to Habakkuk.
  - 1. Identified as simply “Habakkuk the Prophet,” 1:1; 3:1
  - 2. This lack of lineage, etc., fueled number of apocryphal traditions
    - a. *Bel and the Dragon*, 2d century B.C., “Habakkuk, the son of Jesus, of the tribe of Levi (Bel 1:1 = LXX Dan 14:1)
    - b. *Lives of the Prophets*, 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, follows this dating but identifies as Simeon (*Life of Habakkuk* 1-9)
    - c. Midrashic *Seder ʿOlam Rabbah*, 2nd-3rd century CE, dates as in the reign of Manasseh (*S. ʿOlam Rab.*, 20)
    - d. Clement of Alexander, 2nd-3rd century CE, identifies as a contemporary with Jeremiah and Ezekiel; but also dates Jonah and Daniel as contemporaries (*Str.* 1:21)
    - e. Medieval kabbalistic commentary *Sefer ha-Zohar*, ca. 1300, identifies with the son of the Shunammite woman raised by Elisha (*Zohar* 1:7; 2:44-45)

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<sup>1</sup>Marvin A. Sweeney, “Habakkuk, Book of,” *ABD* 3 (1992): 1-6.

<sup>2</sup>M. Noth, *Die israelitischen Personenamen, Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament* 3:10 (Stuttgart: 1928; Reprint Hildesheim, 1966): 231; W. von Soden, ed., *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, 3 vols. (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1965-82), 1: 304.

- B. This absence of personal information continues to baffle modern scholarship, which has produced a wide range of individuals and dates.
1. From Senn's invasion, 8<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>3</sup> to Alexander the Great's conquest in 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>
  2. "On the basis of Hab 1:6, which mentions the establishment of the Chaldeans, most contemporary scholars maintain that Habakkuk lived during the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in the latter part of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, from the latter years of Josiah (640-609) to the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598) or perhaps Jehoiachin (598)."<sup>5</sup>
  3. Recently Haak argued that Habakkuk was a pro-Babylonian supporter of king Jehoahaz.<sup>6</sup>
- C. Relative to the prophet's vocation, most scholars follow Mowinckel, who, based on the liturgical forms in the book, argued Habakkuk was a temple cult-prophet.<sup>7</sup>

### **III. TEXTS AND VERSIONS.**

- A. The many problematic readings in the book cause several scholars to consider the MT to be corrupt.
1. Earlier scholars thought these represented variant Hebrew originals.

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<sup>3</sup>W. R. Betteridge, "The Interpretation of Prophecy of Habakkuk," *AJT* 7 (1903): 647-651.

<sup>4</sup>B. Duhm, *Das Buch Habakuk* (Tübingen, 1906); C. C. Torrey, "The Prophecy of Habakkuk," in *Jewish Studies in Memory of George A. Kohut*, S. Baron and A Marx, eds. (New York: 1935), 565-82.

<sup>5</sup>Brache, "Habakkuk," 2.

<sup>6</sup>R. Haak, *Habakkuk Among the Prophets*, Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Chicago: 1986).

<sup>7</sup>S. Mowinckel, *Psalmstudien*, 6 vols. (Kristiana: 1921-24), 3: 27-29. Cf. Sellin, *KAT* (1930), Eaton *TBC* (1961), Watts *CBC* (1975), Széles *ITC* (1987).

2. New advances in text-critical methodology which emphasize the interpretative character and intent of many text witnesses call this judgment into question.
  3. The result is that some scholars have a favorable view of the text, while others make numerous revisions.
- B. *BHS* contains notes concerning the various medieval MT mss and versions, which include the following.
1. *The Habakkuk Peshet from Qumran*, 1QpHab, contains the text of chapters 1-2 with commentary interpreting the book in line with the Qumran community <http://www.ao.net/~fmoeller/habdir.htm>
  - 2.
  3. *The Scroll of the Minor Prophets* from Wadi Murabbaat dates the book to the 2d century CE and contains 1:3-2:11 and 2:18-3:19
  4. *The LXX and other greek versions* (Aquila, Theodotgion,k Symmachus) listed by Ziegler.<sup>8</sup>
  5. *The Greek Scroll of the Minor Prophets* from Naḥal Ḥsever, probably hidden during the Bar Kokhba revolt.
  6. *The Barberini Greek version of Habakkuk 3* appears in 6 medieval manuscripts from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.
  7. *Targum Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Prophets*, an Aramaic version, presupposes a Proto-MT Hebrew text.

#### IV. LITERARY ISSUES AND AUTHORSHIP<sup>9</sup>

- A. The Book as a Whole

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<sup>8</sup>J. Ziegler, *Duodecim prophetae* (Göttingen: 1943).

<sup>9</sup>For exhaustive survey of history of research through 1970s see P. Jöcken, "War Habakkuk ein Kultprophet?," in *Bausteine Biblischer Theologie*, H.-J. Fabry, ed. *BBB* 50 (Bonn: 1977), 319-32. For complete bibliography through 1987 see R. Weber, *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, rev. ed. (Stuttgart: 1975).

1. Structure adhered to by most scholars:
  - a. Dialogue between prophet and God, 1:1-2:4/5
  - b. Series of woe oracles, 2:5/6-20
  - c. Psalm, 3
  - d. There is little agreement relative to interrelationship of these units.
2. Others divide into two sections: Chs. 1-2 (pronouncement) and 3 (prayer).
3. The book is demarcated by superscriptions (1:1; 3:1) and technical terms (3:1, 3, 9, 13, 19).
  - a. **3:1** *A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk according to **Shigionoth**.*
  - b. **3:3** *God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. **Selah** His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.*
  - c. **3:9** *You brandished your naked bow, sated were the arrows at your command. **Selah** You split the earth with rivers.*
  - d. **3:13** *You came forth to save your people, to save your anointed. You crushed the head of the wicked house, laying it bare from foundation to roof. **Selah***
  - e. **3:19** *GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights. **To the leader: with stringed instruments.***
4. These sections have raised questions of literary integrity and authorship, none of which have reached a consensus
  - a. Stade argued that 2:9-20 and chap. 3 were later additions
  - b. Jöken argued that Habakkuk did not constitute a unified, coherent literary work
  - c. Mowinckel, Gunkel, and Humbart have agreed that, although the book was probably not entirely written by a single author, its present form constitutes a coherent literary history unity.

- d. Several scholars see the book as a liturgical or cultic composition ([Mowinckel, Sellin, Humbart, Elliger, Nielsen, Eaton, Jeremias, Watts, Haak, Széles).
- e. Others see it as a composition concerned with the prophet's visionary experience (Rudolph, Janzen, Peckham)
- f. A third view maintains the book is organized around the question of theodicy (Keller, Gowan, Bratcher, Otto, Gunneweg, Sweeney)
- g. Consequently, there is no consensus as to the nature of the final form of the book..<sup>10</sup>

B. The Pronouncement of Habakkuk

- 1. The superscription identifies chapters 1-2 as "The Pronouncement which Habakkuk the prophet saw."
- 2. This pronouncement, נְאֻם ה', hammaśśā', "pronouncement," "burden," etc., refers to a prophetic oracle of some kind, which remains an enigma.
- 3. The pronouncement contains 4 sections:
  - a. ***Complaint about the oppression*** of the righteous by the wicked, 1:2-4
  - b. ***God's response*** which announces the coming Chaldean threat, 2:1-20
  - c. ***A second complaint*** by the prophet concerning the oppressive nature of the Chaldeans, 1:12-17
  - d. ***The prophet's report*** of God's second response, 2:1-4
  - e. ***Prophetic commentary*** on God's response, 2:5-20.
- 4. Scholars have debated who the "righteous" and "wicked" are in 1:4, 13

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<sup>10</sup>Sweeney, "Habakkuk," 3.

and 2:4:

- a. Some take an external definition and identify the “wicked” as an external enemy which is threatening righteous Judah–Assyria, Egypt, etc.
- b. Others take an internal definition and identify an inner party conflict, making the “wicked” those Judeans who oppose a “righteous group.”
- c. Recently Johnson has argued that establishment of Chaldea should not be viewed as a solution to the oppression described in 1:2-4. Thus 1:5-11 does not solve the problem of theodicy, but constitutes a heightened form of complaint.<sup>11</sup>

C. The Prayer of Habakkuk, 3:1ff.

1. Begins with the superscription “ The Prayer of Habakkuk the Prophet concerning שִׁגְיֹנֹת, šigayōnôt, which has been puzzle to scholars.
  - a. The term, which was associated with *šegû* ("to howl") by Mowinckel, but rejected by Seux,<sup>12</sup> occurs in Psalm 7.
  - b. “The superscription, the technical music notations in 3:3, 9, 13, 19, and the situation of distress presupposed in the psalm have prompted many scholars to argue that Habakkuk 3 is a cultic song of lament sung as part of the temple liturgy. . . .”<sup>13</sup>
  - c. Others, based on its mythic themes of divine combat against the

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<sup>11</sup>M. D. Johnson, “The Paralysis of Torah in Habakkuk 1:4,” *VT* 35 (1985): 257-66.

<sup>12</sup>Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien*, 4:7; M.-J. Seux, “Šiggayôn = šigû,” 419-38 in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l’honneur de M. Henri Cazelles*, A. Caquot and M. Delcor, eds., *AOAT* 212 (Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1981).

<sup>13</sup>Sweeney, “Habakkuk,” 4.” Cf. F. Nielsen, “The Righteous and the Wicked in Hābaqqūk,” *ST* 6 (1953): 54-78; J. H. Eaton, “The Origin and Meaning of Habakkuk 3,” *ZAW* 76 (1964): 144-71; B. Bargulis, “The Psalm of Habakkuk,” *ZAW* 85 (1970): 409-42.

forces of cosmic chaos view it as a song of triumph or victory.<sup>14</sup>

- d. Others, due to its associations with theophanic texts of the Bible, its framing verses (3:2, 16), and the reference to the vision report (2:1-4), define it as a vision report<sup>15</sup> which contains a description of a theophany.
2. The structure of the song, lament, hymn, etc. is as follows:
    - a. Introductory section petitioning God to manifest divine acts in the world, 2
    - b. A description of a theophany, 3-15, consisting of:
      - (1) Description of the deity's approach, 3-6
      - (2) Depiction of God's victory over the enemy, 7-15
    - c. A concluding section expressing confidence that God will answer the petition, 16-19a
  3. Earlier scholars argued that Hab 3 was independent and not originally part of the book
  4. Contemporary scholars consider it as original, citing a number of reasons
    - a. Same general theme—God will bring oppression of his people to an end.
    - b. Similarity of language, as references to the “wicked,” cf. 1:4, 13 and 3:2, 13, 16.

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<sup>14</sup>W. F. Albright, “The Psalm of Habakkuk,” 1-18, in *Studies in OT Prophecy*, H. H. Rowley, ed. (Edinburgh: 1950); T. Hiebert, *God of My Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3*, *HSM 38* (Atlanta: 1986).

<sup>15</sup>G. Fohrer, “Das ‘Gebet des Propheten Habakuk’ (Hab 3,1-16),” 159-67, in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l’honneur de M. Mathias Delcor*, A. Caquot, S. Légasse, and M. Tardieu, eds. *AOAT 215* (Kevelaer and Neukirchen: 1985).

**V. SIGNIFICANCE IN LATER JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

- A. Hab 1-2 served as basis for a commentary interpreting the text in relation to the Qumran community.
- B. In NT plays a major role in the doctrine of justification—Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38-39.
- C. Talmudic Rabbi Simlai identified Hab 2:4 as summary of all 613 commandments of the Torah (*b. Mak. 23b-24a*)
- D. “In Jewish tradition Habakkuk 3 is understood as a description of the revelation at Sinai and is read as the Haphtarah section for thesecond day of the Festival of Shavuot, which commemorates the revelation of the Torah at Sinai (*b. Meg. 31a*).”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Sweeney, “Habakkuk,” 5.