I. INTRODUCTION

A. The 8th book of the Minor Prophets

B. Medieval and early scholars thought the name derived from the Hebrew ħḇq, ħbq, “to embrace.

C. Most modern scholars follow Noth who derives it from the Akkadian ḫabbaqūqū/ ḫambaqūqū, which refers to a garden plant.

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, 1st century CE, follows this dating but identifies as Simeon (Life of Habakkuk 1-9)

   c. Midrashic Seder ʾ Olam Rabbah, 2nd-3rd century CE, dates as in the reign of Manasseh (S. ʾ Olam 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)


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, 8th century, to Alexander the Great’s conquest in 4th century.4

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 7th century, from the latter years of Josiah (640-609) to the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598) or perhaps Jehoiachin (598).”5

3. Recently Haak argued that Habakkuk was a pro-Babylonian supporter of king Jehoahaz.6

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.7

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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5Brache, “Habakkuk,” 2.

6R. Haak, Habakkuk Among the Prophets, Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Chicago: 1986).

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 Pesher 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](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.

5. *The Greek Scroll of the Minor Prophets* from Nahal Ḥsever, probably hidden during the Bar Kokhba revolt.

6. *The Barberini Greek version of Habakkuk* appears in 6 medieval manuscripts from the 8th to the 13th centuries.


**IV. LITERARY ISSUES AND AUTHORSHIP**

A. The Book as a Whole

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8J. Ziegler, *Duodecim prophetae* (Göttingen: 1943).

1. Structure adhered to by most scholars:
   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.
B. The Pronouncement of Habakkuk

1. The superscription identifies chapters 1-2 as “The Pronouncement which Habakkuk the prophet saw.”

2. This pronouncement, הָמָּסָּה, hammaśāh, “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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Bible 3236/3336 The Minor Prophets; "Introduction to Habakkuk";
Professor: Randall C. Bailey, Ph.D.; Faulkner University; 2010

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.11

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

1. Begins with the superscription “The Prayer of Habakkuk the Prophet concerning שגיאון, šīgōnōt, which has been puzzle to scholars.

a. The term, which was associated with šegû ("to howl") by Mowinckel, but rejected by Seux,12 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. . . .”13

c. Others, based on its mythic themes of divine combat against the


forces of cosmic chaos view it as a song of triumph or victory.14

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 report15 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.


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 the second day of the Festival of Shavuot, which commemorates the revelation of the Torah at Sinai (b. Meg. 31a).”\(^{16}\)

\(^{16}\text{Sweeney, “Habakkuk,” 5.}\)