

Habakkuk

What kind of prophet is he?

OT prophets can be divided (roughly speaking) into three overlapping categories:

1 Narrative Prophets

Stories about prophets and their activities.

Collected from the 10th to the 5th centuries BC then edited.

Eg Nathan, Elijah and **Jonah**

2 Crisis or Protest Prophets

Prophetic oracles interpreting historical events.

Collected from 8th to end of 6th centuries BC then edited.

Eg **Amos**, **Hosea**, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai and Zechariah

3 Liturgical Prophets

Prophets leading worship alongside priests.

Collected from 7th to 5th centuries BC then edited.

Eg Zephaniah, Nahum, **Habakkuk**, Malachi, Obadiah, Joel.

What does a liturgical prophet do?

Like priests, prophets were a 'guild', trained to preserve tradition and using that tradition, perform a liturgical function.

- They had a **pastoral role**, seeking answers from God on behalf of individual worshippers.
- They had a **liturgical role** in the Temple as Habakkuk 3 shows. Visions and oracles were mixed with prayers and hymns, spoken, dramatized and sung, with instruments and choirs, particularly at royal festivals which lasted days:
 - i. The LORD enters the Temple.
 - ii. The presence of the LORD is celebrated.
 - iii. The Day of the LORD - judgment is pronounced.
 - iv. The covenant is renewed with the King and Israel.
 - v. The LORD's intention to rule over the nations through King and Israel is announced.
- Prophets could vary the form, introduce new and inspired 'words' for each celebration, draw on the stock of earlier oracles, or weave the two together. NB Much was remembered orally. This made for creativity and originality. Notwithstanding Jeremiah's critique of Temple (false) prophets, 'good' ones were preserved in the OT books of Minor Prophets. See Hab 2.2 'tablets'; Jeremiah 36.1-6, 10 'secretary'; Ezekiel 2.8f 'scroll'.

Habakkuk's Timeline

Prophets	Kings of Judah (See 2 Kings 18-25)	Foreign Nations and Events in Judah
<p>First Isaiah?</p> <p>Habakkuk 1-2 (1.6 = c.625? or 1.12-17 = 609- 598)</p> <p>Nahum Zephaniah Jeremiah</p>	<p>Hezekiah (726-687)</p> <p>Manasseh (687-642) Amon (642-640)</p> <p>Josiah (640-609)</p> <p>Jehoiakim (609-598)</p> <p>Jehoiachin (598-597) Zedekiah (597-587)</p> <p>END OF MONARCHY</p>	<p>Resists Assyrian hegemony. 721 Israel/Samaria destroyed. 701 siege of Jerusalem fails, just.</p> <p>Judah pursues policy of submission.</p> <p>Assyria weakens. Judah pursues independence. 612 Fall of Nineveh to Babylonians.</p> <p>Egypt protects Judah until defeated by Babylon 605 Battle of Carchemish</p> <p>597 Jerusalem surrenders to Babylonians. 1st deportation. 588 Rebellion is a disaster. 587 Siege ends. Jerusalem destroyed. 2nd deportation.</p>
<p>Ezekiel? Second and Third Isaiah?</p>		<p>THE EXILE</p> <p>539 Persian conquest of Babylon. 538 Return of Jews to Jerusalem.</p>
<p>Haggai, Zechariah (520-515?) Habakkuk 3?</p>		<p>515 Temple stands in ruins of Jerusalem (Ezra 4).</p>
<p>Obadiah, Malachi, Joel, Jonah?</p>		<p>445 Nehemiah brings reform and order to Jerusalem. Walls rebuilt.</p>

What is the book of the prophet Habakkuk about?

Habakkuk is a man like Abraham, Moses or Job, who dares to argue with God about justice. Instead of telling God's people they have broken the covenant, the prophet addresses God directly. What is God up to?

Two questions are put to God by Habakkuk, each of which is followed by God's response. The first question concerns Yahweh's apparent toleration of sin, especially injustice in Judah (1.2-4).

About what would we like to say, 'How long, O LORD'?

God's answer is that it will be dealt with by the Chaldeans or Neo-Babylonians (1.5-11). See the events of 597-587.

How would it feel to ask for salvation only to be told that judgment is coming?

This answer also raises a serious moral problem for Habakkuk. Hence his second question, 'How can God use a violent, pagan people who are even more cruel and inhumane than those being punished (1.12-17)?'

What is revealed in these verses about the character of God?

God's second answer is a vision that promises judgment for Babylon too (2.2-20). See the events of 539.

'The righteous shall live by faith' (2.4). Who lives, who dies?

Habakkuk responds to this assurance of God's justice with worship. His prayer recalls God at Sinai (3.3-7), God acting as a warrior on Israel's behalf (3.8-15) and closes with Habakkuk expressing his trust in God (3.16-19a).

Christians can look back, not only to the events of the Exodus, but also to those of the NT. How often must we give ourselves in fearful but joyful submission into the hands of God (3.17-19)?

Where are we on the two axes of fear (3.2) and faith (2.4)?

For Further Discussion

1. Habakkuk demands to know whether God is in control of the world. Dare we make the same protest as part of our worship? What if we suspect that we are among those 'whose soul is not upright' (2.4)?
2. God's answer to Habakkuk's first question was to say that the cure would be worse than the illness. Dare we pray for God to deal with what ails our world? How might God answer?
3. What is God's plan?
4. How might we worship or pray differently after reading Habakkuk?