

Of Prophets & Kings: Judean Period 2 “Living Fiercely by Faith”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden for FUMC
Grand Junction, Pentecost Sunday, July 17, 2022

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/worship-services>

Scripture Text:

Habakkuk 3:17-19 [NRSV]

OPENING

Figure 1: Chronology of the Writing Prophets

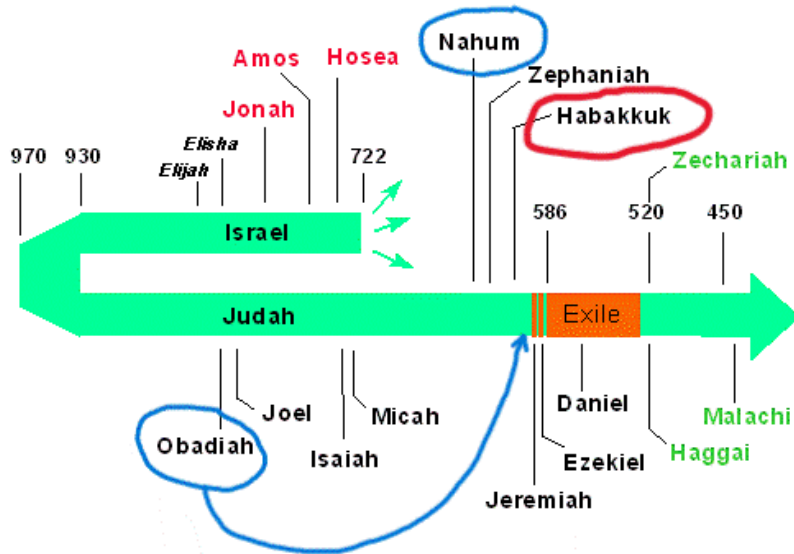


Figure 1: Chronology of the Writing Prophets

SERMON THOUGHTS

- Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972). (*Brief review of his life*)
- Heschel and the nature of the prophet as a human being (*Continuing from last Sunday’s list*)
 1. “An Iconoclast” (Heschel, pp. 12-14)

The prophet is an iconoclast, challenging the apparently holy, revered, and awesome. Belief cherished as certainties, institutions endowed with supreme sanctity, he exposes as scandalous pretensions.

Quote from Jeremiah:

...in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.
²³ *But this command I gave them, “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you.” (Jer. 7:22-23 [NRSV])*

What gave the strength to “demythologize” precious certainties, to attack what was holy, to hurl blasphemies at priest and king, to stand up against all in the name of God? The prophets must have been shattered by some cataclysmic experience in order to be able to shatter others.

2. “Austerity and Compassion” (Heschel, pp. 14-15)

The words of the prophet are stern, sour, stinging. But behind his austerity is love and compassion for mankind. Indeed, every prediction of disaster is in itself an exhortation

to repentance (*a lá C. Koester, PhD and Revelation*).

Like the God for whom the prophet speaks, “he begins with *a message of doom*; he concludes with *a message of hope*.

And, of course, we need to keep Heschel’s overarching theme in mind, that having to do with the Prophets’ internalizing of what he termed the *divine pathos* what I defined last Sunday as being:

The capacity for God’s heart to be wounded by human behavior and God’s full response to that: judgement AND mercy.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

- Habakkuk & living *fiercely* by faith
 - ✓ Hab. 1- 2:5 “*How long, O LORD?!*”
And the dialogue that follows, culminating in the famous 2:4 “Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.”
→ New Testament references: Galatians 3:11; Romans 1:17; Hebrews 10:38
 - ✓ “The 5 Woes (‘Alas for you...’ [NRSV])
thru the end of Chapter 2:
The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him! (Hab. 2:20)
 - ✓ Hab. 3 – His Prayer and statement of unwavering faith, 3:16-19, the meaning of 2:4.

CONCLUSION

The trajectory leads in a catastrophic direction, but one that is no surprise – The fall of the Kingdom of Judah and the Babylonian Exile

(*Summary telling of the sad story...*)

- Josiah(++), r. 640-609 BC; killed by Pharaoh Neco
- Jehoahaz(-), reigned only 3 months (609/608)
Pharaoh Neco replaced him w/ his brother, Eliakim/Jehoiakim.
- Eliakim/Jehoiakim(--), r. 608-598 BC
Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeated Neco; Judah became a vassal state of Babylon.
Jehoiakim eventually rebelled against Babylon but died “in office” before Nebuchadnezzar could make him pay for his treason.
- Jehoiakim’s son, Jehoiachin(--)
took over in 597 BC
- Jehoiachin(--), took over in 597 BC
3 months later, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem (but did not destroy the city); Jehoiachin surrendered and was taken into exile in Babylon with a large portion of his family.
- Mattaniah/Zedekiah, Jehoiachin’s uncle, took over in 597 BC, but rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar.

- Zedekiah(--), r. 597-586 BC
Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem and this time did destroy the city.
Zedekiah fled, captured near Jericho, witnessed his sons killed before his eyes, was then blinded and carried into exile in Babylon with the strength of the nation. He died in captivity.
- Prophets' warnings had finally come to fulfillment

The Prophets of the Exile – To Be Cont'd...

Close:

- 9 AM – Pastoral Prayer, then
 🎵 Reprise of “I Walk by Faith”, Chorus only, 2x
- 11 AM – Karen's Music for Reflection

REFERENCES

Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: HarperPerennial/Modern Classics, a div. of HarperCollins, 2001).

The Biblical books of Nahum, Obadiah, and Habakkuk with Introductions and notes in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible w/ Apocrypha* [NRSV], 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001)