

TRACING THE PRE-MASSORETIC TEXT OF THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK¹

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Abstract. The Book of Habakkuk is well-known for using a very sophisticated language in terms of semantics, poetics, or rhetorical structure, causing tremendous difficulties to later interpreters, both ancient and modern. For this reason, from a diachronic perspective, textual deviations from the canonical Massoretic tradition could be mere relics of the perplexity of confused translators or scribes. This study argues, however, that there are cases where the independent, divergent textual traditions coalesce into a reading that could be considered a historically more reliable variant than the reading survived within the Massoretic Text. This appears to be the case with בְּגוֹיִם in Hab 1:5 and הִיִּן in Hab 2:5, for which three independent traditions presuppose a common pre-Massoretic ancient alternative reading.

Keywords: Book of Habakkuk; textual history; textual criticism; textual witnesses; Habakkuk 1:5; Habakkuk 2:5.

Although opinions differ, I am inclined to believe that the Book of Habakkuk is a literary composition in the fullest sense of the word. That is, unlike the work of many other “classical” prophets, the compositions in this book were probably never uttered in front of an audience, its literary form being the only one in which it ever existed. The Book of Habakkuk, composed at a writing table, has a well-defined structure. It is unlikely that this could be ascribed merely to a final act of redaction. Unlike other anthologies of prophecies (such as Isaiah or Jeremiah), Habakkuk was intentionally built as a logical, rhetorical progression from beginning to end.

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