

Habakkuk: The Sovereignty of God

Introduction

Habakkuk is the eighth prophetic book in the section of the Hebrew canon referred to as “the twelve” or the Minor Prophets. These include Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Habakkuk is positioned between Nahum and Zephaniah which reflects the position that they all prophesied during the last quarter of the 7th century and/or the first quarter of the 6th century (625 BC to 575 BC). This indicates that they were contemporaries of Jeremiah.

There is no personal information available about Habakkuk. The traditional meaning of the prophet’s name was “to caress” or “to embrace”. Perhaps the name reflected the parents’ wish that their son would embrace Yahweh and/or his fellow men.

This was a difficult period in the life of the Jewish nation. The northern Kingdom, Israel, had fallen to the Assyrians and now the Assyrians were conquered by the Babylonians who eventually advanced as far westward as Egypt. Judah was at risk.

Internal problems also existed. Judah had enjoyed a long period of reform under King Josiah (640-608 B.C.) but subsequent rulers allowed those reforms to lapse. They had little interest in the moral and religious concerns of Josiah. Those, like Habakkuk, who strove to call the nation back to God did so at grave personal risk.

Habakkuk voiced his questioning asking God why he stood by and did nothing. Understanding God as a God of justice led him to wonder why evil would flourish and righteousness be ignored. It is a question as relevant to us today as it was to Habakkuk.

Most prophets spoke God’s words to the people. Especially in Chapter 1, Habakkuk spoke the people’s words and thoughts to God. He questioned why God would use the godless military machine of Babylon to bring God’s judgment on God’s own people.

Habakkuk waited and listened and prayed and began to understand God’s sovereignty. He understood that God always works for our good in the world.

It may be a comfort to us to realize that these great theological questions have existed throughout history. The short book of Habakkuk may help us understand better how God works in the world.