

**THE VISION IN HABAKKUK:
IDENTIFYING ITS CONTENT
IN THE LIGHT OF THE FRAMEWORK
SET FORTH IN HAB. 1**

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ABSTRACT

The book of Habakkuk is traditionally divided into five sections: the prophet's two laments, Yahweh's two responses and a concluding psalm. The first three of these sections are found in ch. 1 and are typically interpreted according to a question-and-answer format. That is, the prophet complains, Yahweh answers, and the prophet complains again. Many scholars suspect that this dialogue continues into the first half of ch. 2, saying it contains Yahweh's second answer, and some scholars go so far as to say the dialogue persists into ch. 3, saying it contains the prophet's final response.

Even though the majority of scholars agree that at least the first half of Habakkuk represents a dialogue between the prophet and Yahweh, there is very little consensus regarding the identity of a vision which Yahweh briefly mentions in ch. 2. This vision appears to be a matter of great importance for the prophet, and thus it seems reasonable to presume that properly identifying its content is crucial to the interpretation of the book. Hence, it is surprising that many commentators, rather than acknowledging the inconsistencies in scholarly opinion, give quick treatments of the vision, only offering their versions of the vision's content.

Three of the most popular options are Hab. 2:4 (or 2:4-5), Hab. 2:6-20, and Hab. 3:3-15. Each of these possibilities makes good sense in the context of the book, but each one also generally follows from the presumption that the record of the vision must fit into the dialogue framework. The following thesis will determine if this is a reasonable presumption to make and, on the basis of that finding, will propose a fourth possibility for identifying the vision. That is, when Yahweh commands the prophet to "Write (the) vision" (Hab. 2:2), he is referring to the oracle recorded in Hab. 1:5-11.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed: _

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

My early exposure to the prophetic books was typical of the average, church-going American. It was next to nothing: an occasional homily on the “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God” (Isa. 9:6) at Christmastime or a token sermon on the prophets from the book of Jonah. Roberts describes what the predicament was then and what remains the predicament today: “For many readers ... the prophetic literature of the Bible has become a closed corpus, incomprehensible and therefore largely neglected except as a quarry from which to mine a few choice messianic nuggets or moral admonitions.”¹

The first real introduction to the prophetic books that I had was a one-semester seminary course titled “Isaiah – Malachi”. The more I learned about the prophetic literature, the more frustrated I became at the lack of attention that these books received, inside and outside of the church. “A major reason for this difficulty,” says Roberts, “is that modern readers are most at home with narrative literature or expository writing, both of which normally develop a story line or an argument sequentially, chapter after chapter. This way of reading works well enough with the narrative literature in the Bible or with the Pauline letters but not with most prophetic books.”²

How then is the on-going task of familiarizing modern readers with the prophetic books to be accomplished? It can begin (though it need not begin) with biblical scholars. That is, first, the academics need to read the Prophets differently from the way they read the rest of the OT literature, write in such a way as to be understood outside their narrow, scholarly circle, and thus put the Prophets back into the hands of the preachers. Second, preachers need to venture outside the comfortable prophetic texts, preach and teach the difficult ones, and thus put the Prophets back into the hands of the people. Third, the people in the church pews of America and Britain (if not also those on the dirt floors of India and Iraq) need to hear the message of the Prophets, read the texts for themselves, and thus discover the instruction, the encouragement, and the hope that these ancient books still offer today. The present study in Habakkuk certainly provides more insights for the academic than it does for the preacher or the lay person. Even so it is my hope that this thesis will, in some small way, draw everyone's attention to the treasures to be found in this complex but very readable book.

¹ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 9

² *Ibid.*

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------------|---|
| A | codex Alexandrinus (Greek manuscript) |
| <i>ABD</i> | <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> |
| B | codex Vaticanus (Greek manuscript) |
| BDB | <i>The New Brown – Driver – Briggs – Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> |
| <i>BHS</i> | <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> |
| <i>CAD</i> | <i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> |
| ESV | English Standard Version |
| GKC | <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> (E. Kautzsch [ed.] and A.E. Cowley [tr.]) |
| <i>ISBE</i> | <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> |
| JB | Jerusalem Bible |
| KJV | King James Version |
| LXX | Septuagint |
| MT | Masoretic text |
| NASB | New American Standard Bible |
| NEB | New English Bible |
| <i>NIDOTTE</i> | <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> |
| NIV | New International Version |
| NJB | New Jerusalem Bible |
| NKJV | New King James Version |
| NLT | New Living Translation |
| NRSV | New Revised Standard Version |
| Q | codex Marchalianus (Greek manuscript) |
| RSV | Revised Standard Version |
| RV | Revised Version |
| S | Syriac (Peshitta) codex Sinaiticus (Greek manuscript) |
| T | Targum |
| <i>TDOT</i> | <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> |
| <i>THAT</i> | <i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> |
| = <i>TLOT</i> | <i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> |
| <i>TWOT</i> | <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> |
| V | Vulgate codex Venetus (Greek manuscript) |
| W | Washington papyrus (Greek manuscript) |

TRANSLATION OF HABAKKUK

The translation provided below is an attempt to render the MT as literally as possible and, therefore, is unpolished and awkward at times. Nevertheless, a word-for-word translation of the Hebrew – insofar as this is feasible – sometimes reflects the thrust of the Hebrew text better than a smooth finished product which has been adjusted to the sensitivities of an English-speaking reader. The various textual issues regarding the translation of Habakkuk will be discussed in the body of the thesis. In addition to this, numerous, less cumbersome English translations, which are yet faithful to the MT, are readily available and referred to when necessary. Unless otherwise noted, biblical references outside of Habakkuk are taken from the NASB.¹

1 ¹The oracle which he saw, Habakkuk the prophet.

²How long, Yahweh, have I cried-out-for-help but you did not hear?
(How long) have I cried-out to you “Violence” but you did not deliver?

³Why do you cause me to see evil and (on) trouble (why do) you look?

And destruction and violence (are) before me; and there is strife and contention lifts itself up.

⁴Therefore *tôrâ* grows numb, and *mišpāt* never goes forth;

because a wicked one is surrounding the righteous one, therefore *mišpāt* goes forth twisted.

⁵See the nations and look, and astound yourselves – be astounded;

for a work (being) worked in your days you will not believe though it will be told.

⁶For behold I am causing the Chaldeans to rise, the bitter and the impetuous nation;

going towards expanses of earth, to take possession of dwelling places not (belonging) to it.

⁷Terrible and feared is it; from itself its *mišpāt* and its dignity will go forth.

⁸And its horses are swifter than leopards, and they are sharper than wolves of evening,

and its steeds spring about; and its steeds from afar will come,

they will fly as an eagle hastening to eat.

⁹Each one, for violence he will come, the multitude of their faces is forward;

and he will gather like the sand captives.

¹⁰And he, at the kings, he will mock,

and commanding ones (will be) an object-of-laughter for him;

he, at each (city of) fortification, he will laugh, and he will heap-up dust and he will capture it.

¹¹Then he will pass on (like) wind and he will pass through,

and he will be guilty; he whose strength is for his god.

¹²Are you not from of old? Yahweh, my God, my Holy-One, you will not die.

Yahweh, for *mišpāt* you appointed him and, Rock, to correct you established him.

¹³Too pure of eyes to see distress and to look to trouble you are not able;

Why do you look on ones acting treacherously?

(Why) are you deaf when a wicked one swallows one more righteous than himself?

¹⁴And you make man as the fish of the sea, as moving things,

which (he) no (longer) rules over.

¹ The following points are keys to understanding particular features of this translation. (1) Expressions containing one or more hyphens represent one word in the MT (e.g. *cried-out-for-help* in Hab. 1:2). (2) Words inside of brackets are not present in the MT (e.g. *each (city of) fortification* in Hab. 1:10). (3) When possible, the disjunctive marker *’atnāh* is noted by a semi-colon (e.g. *A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet; upon šigyōnôt* in Hab. 3:1).

¹⁵Each one, with a hook he brings up, he will drag it away in his net,
and he will gather it in his fishing-net; therefore he will be glad and he will rejoice.
¹⁶Therefore he will sacrifice to his net, and he will make-sacrifices-smoke to his fishing-net;
for by them rich is his portion, and his food is fat.
¹⁷Therefore will he empty-out his net;
and (from) repeated killing of nations will he not refrain?

2 ¹Upon my post I will stand, and I will station myself upon a watchtower;
and I will look-about to see what he will speak to me,
and what I will reply concerning my argument.

²And Yahweh answered me and he said,
“Write (the) vision, and expound (it) upon the tablets;
in order that one proclaiming from it may run.
³For still (the) vision is for the appointed-time,
and it will breathe to the end, and it will not lie;
though it tarries, wait for it, for it will surely come, it will not delay.
⁴Behold! He is swollen, he is not upright in himself;
but a righteous one, in his faithfulness, he will live.”

⁵And furthermore the wine continues to act treacherously
– a proud man – and he does not rest;
he makes himself large like Sheol, and he is like death and he is not satisfied,
and he gathers to himself all the nations, and he collects to himself all the peoples.

⁶Will not these, each of them, against him a poem lift up,
and a mocking-parable (and) riddles against him? And he will say:

“Woe to the one who continues to increase (what belongs) not to him – how long? –
and one who continues to make pledges heavy upon himself.

⁷Will not suddenly the ones giving you interest rise,
and the ones violently shaking you awake? And you will be for their prey.

⁸Because you plundered many nations, all remaining peoples will plunder you;
on account of blood of man and violence of earth, a town and all those dwelling in it.”

⁹“Woe to one who continues to gain-wrongfully a wrongful-gain
– ruin is for his house –; to put on the height his nest,
to be delivered from (the) grasp of ruin.

¹⁰You plot shame for your house; (by) cutting-off many peoples
and you continue to sin.

¹¹For a stone from a wall will cry-out; and a rafter (made) from wood will answer it.”

¹²“Woe to one who continues to build a city with blood;
and one who continues to establish a town with injustice.

¹³Is it not – Behold! – from Yahweh of hosts?

‘And peoples will toil for fire, and populaces for emptiness will be weary.’

¹⁴‘For the earth will be filled, (with) knowing the glory of Yahweh;
as the waters will cover over (the) sea.’”

¹⁵“Woe to one who continues to give his fellow-citizens drink
– from the goblet of your rage and anger – to make (them) drunk;
in order to look upon their nakedness.

¹⁶You are satisfied (with) dishonor above glory,
drink – also you – and be counted uncircumcised;
the cup of the right hand of Yahweh will come round upon you,
and disgrace upon your glory.

¹⁷For the violence of Lebanon will cover you, and destruction of cattle will terrify;
on account of blood of man and violence of earth, a town and all those dwelling in it.”

¹⁸“How does a carved-image benefit, for its creator carves it, a molten-metal (image) and one who continues to teach deception?

For the creator of his creation trusts in it to make dumb worthless-idols.

¹⁹Woe to one who continues to say to wood ‘Awake’,

‘Rouse yourself’ to a stone of silence; (or) ‘He will teach’

– Behold it! – sheathed (in) gold and silver, and there is no breath at all within it.

²⁰But Yahweh (is) in the temple of his holiness; hush before his face, all the earth.”

3 ¹A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet; upon *šigyōnôt*.

²Yahweh, I hear your report. I fear, Yahweh, your work.

While years draw near let him live. While years draw near you will make (him) understand.

In trembling, to-have-compassion you will remember.

³God from Teman came, and (the) Holy One from the mountain of Paran – *selah*;
his splendor covered heavens, and his praise filled the earth.

⁴And brightness was as the light, horns from his hand (were) for him;
there (was) a hiding-place of might.

⁵Before him pestilence went; and a fire-bolt went out at his feet.

⁶He stood and he measured earth, he saw and he caused nations to start up,
and mountains of past-time were shattered, hills of eternity were bowed down;
goings of eternity (were) for him.

⁷Under trouble, I saw the tents of Cushan; the curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.

⁸Against rivers did Yahweh burn-in-anger or against the rivers (was) your anger,
or against the sea (was) your fury; for you rode upon your horses, your chariots of salvation?

⁹(In) nakedness your bow was exposed, oaths (were) rods of speech – *selah*;
(with) rivers you cleaved earth.

¹⁰They saw you mountains writhed, rain-storm water passed over;
deep gave its voice, on-high its hands it lifted.

¹¹Sun (and) moon stood (in) a lofty-abode;
for light your arrows went, for brightness the lightning of your spear.

¹²In indignation you marched (the) earth; in anger you threshed nations.

¹³You went out for the deliverance of your people, for deliverance of your anointed;
you smote through a head from a wicked house, to bare (from) foundation until neck – *selah*.

¹⁴You pierced with his rods the head of his warriors, they stormed to scatter me;
their exultation, (was) as to eat (the) poor in the hiding-place.

¹⁵You trod on the sea (with) your horses; a heap of many waters.

¹⁶I hear and my belly trembles, at (the) voice my lips quiver,

decay goes into my bones and under myself I tremble;

I who have rest during a day of distress,

concerning the withdrawal of a people who invade us.

¹⁷Though a fig-tree does not bud, and there is no produce on the vines,
work of an olive-tree deceives, and fields do not make food;

sheep (are) cut-off from the fold, and there are no cattle in the stables.

¹⁸But I, on Yahweh, I will exult; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

¹⁹Yahweh my Lord (is) my strength, and he places my feet as the does,
and upon my battle-heights he causes me to tread.

For the one-acting-as-overseer with my music (of stringed instruments).

INTRODUCTION

The book of Habakkuk has been described by scholars as “one of the problem children among the prophetic books”,¹ “the Old Testament’s *maverick* prophecy”,² and “a veritable minefield for critical study”.³ These sentiments bear witness to the difficulties that plague the interpretation of the book’s three chapters. One of the most controversial issues in past and present studies of Habakkuk serves to illustrate this complex history of interpretation: the identification of the wicked. In a complaint to Yahweh the prophet cites an unidentified evil-doer as the source of his grief when he says: *because a wicked one is surrounding the righteous one, therefore mišpāt goes forth twisted* (Hab. 1:4b). Numerous identities are suggested for this wicked character and, as Sweeney notes, “[each] identification proposed by scholars is accompanied by arguments for textual emendations, transpositions, and literary development which continue to provoke disagreement”.⁴ Complicating the issue further is the fact that the date and setting of the book are typically a direct result of one’s view of the wicked.⁵ Thus, if scholars cannot agree on the identity of the evil-doer, there is little hope that they will agree on the date and setting of the book. And if scholars cannot agree on matters of historical background, then interpretation is bound to take a variety of forms. It is, therefore, little surprise that no general consensus regarding the book seems to have been reached in the past, and only marginally so has it been reached in the present.

Though it is far from an exhaustive review of the history of Habakkuk’s interpretation, the following discussion serves to introduce the readers of this thesis to the labyrinth of hermeneutical difficulties that have been encountered in the study of this relatively short prophetic book. To this end there are three headings. The first reviews several options for naming the wicked in Hab. 1:4. Identification is considered under three broad categories: the wicked as foreigners, as natives, or as deliberately ambiguous characters. The second section briefly reviews the dating issue. The arguments for an early date are ironically similar to those for a late date. The third section considers the application of two interpretive strategies to the text. Form-critical and redaction-critical approaches are examined in terms of their hermeneutical contributions and their unanswered problems.

¹ Prinsloo, p. 515

² M. Thompson, p. 53

³ Mason, p. 60. The full quotation serves as an appropriate summary of the book’s interpretive difficulties. After stating that the sections of Habakkuk are relatively clear and uncontroversial, Mason says: “The interpretation of these units, however, their relation to each other, their form and function, their historical context or contexts, the redactional process which has brought them to their present order, the role and identity of the ‘prophet’ Habakkuk himself, have all proved a veritable minefield for critical study. Any critic bold enough to step out firmly across this danger area is likely to find hidden traps or, at least, to come under a fusillade of crossfire from scholarly peers.”

⁴ Sweeney, “Structure”, p. 64

⁵ See e.g. Bailey, p. 257 and Johnson, p. 529.

1. Identifying the wicked

Because the identification of the evil-doer serves as a reference point – if not the very starting point – for most critical interpretations of the book, a review of the debate is in order for the purpose of orientation. (The matter is, of course, taken up again when the relevant verses are analyzed.) However, before the wide range of scholarly opinions regarding the identification of the wicked can be reviewed, at least one parameter must be given to the discussion. In Hab. 1:6 Yahweh says: *For behold I am causing the Chaldeans to rise, the bitter and the impetuous nation ...*

Whatever the final evaluation of the historical setting of this work, it seems to be clear that the reference to the Chaldeans in 1:6 must be taken seriously. This reference is the one clear historical allusion in the book and should not be dismissed lightly. Unless there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary, those approaches to Habakkuk that dismiss the historical relevance of this reference must be rejected.⁶

Most scholars agree that Chaldea is a character in the book of Habakkuk, but they nevertheless differ on several particulars of interpretation. Depending on one's view of the wicked, for example, the Chaldean is viewed either as the hero or the tyrant in the unfolding drama of ch. 1. Depending on one's interpretive strategy the Chaldean is assigned either an original or a secondary role in the composition of the book.

One scholar whose opinion ventures outside this so-called Chaldean parameter deserves mention. Duhm substitutes *kittîm* (or Greeks) for the MT's *kaśdîm* (or Chaldeans) and interprets the term as referring to the Macedonians of Alexander the Great. This view was popular until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Quite interestingly, the Qumran commentary on Habakkuk interprets [1:6] as referring to Kittim, apparently applying the term to the Romans of their own day; but they *retain* the reading *kaśdîm* in their representation of the text of Scripture. The fact that the Qumran scribes felt compelled to retain *kaśdîm* while interpreting its meaning as Kittim would appear to indicate that they had no textual tradition supporting the reading *kittîm*.⁷

There are others besides Duhm who doubt the MT on this point, but the mention of their proposals will be held until the exegesis of Hab. 1:6. The following, thus, regards the

⁶ Haak, p. 108. Nielsen (p. 56) describes the confused state of interpretation in spite of this historical reference. "Few will deny that the oracle in Ch. I, 6 ... contains an allusion to a very important political event or development at the end of the 7th century B.C. At the same time it is evident to anyone who tries to penetrate into the problems of the book, that we are dealing with a prophet belonging to a cultic environment. Hence it is scarcely surprising that precisely this book has been more divergently expounded by the leading interpreters than perhaps any other book of the Old Testament."

⁷ O.P. Robertson, p. 37. Andersen (p. 122) provides a nice balance to the critics of the Qumran scribes. "For a long time, modern criticism searched for the original historical references of these terms in Habakkuk's contemporaries and disdained the sectaries' preoccupation with their own struggles as paranoid. Yet the application of the passage to the players in their own drama at Qumran brought the prophecy to life, and might even be accepted as a valid option for recycling 'the wicked' and 'the righteous' as the good and bad of our own day."

Chaldeans as the only relatively concrete historical element in the consideration of the wicked in Hab. 1:4.

As mentioned above, scholars generally fall into three broad camps when naming the wicked. Either the evil-doer is foreign to the prophet's people, a native among them, or deliberately ambiguous as intended by the author.⁸ The most common foreign possibilities highlighted here – the Assyrians, the Egyptians and the Chaldeans (or Babylonians) – are arranged chronologically according to their movements onto the international scene, rather than according to any perceived shifts in scholarly opinion.

1.1 The wicked as foreigners: Assyria

The Assyrians are probably the most popular of the foreign options.⁹ Budde, one of the first to advance this theory, identified the wicked in Hab. 1:2-4 with the Assyrians and took the Chaldeans in Hab. 1:5-11 as the instrument to bring about their downfall. However, to account for the inconsistency between 1:4 and 1:13, where the wicked are mentioned a second time, he placed 1:5-11 after Yahweh's words in 2:4. "Budde supposed ... that the removal of Hab 1:5-11 to its present place was an attempt by a later reviser of the book to cast the Chaldeans in the role of oppressor, rather than avenger."¹⁰ Even though Budde's rearrangement of the text lost favor after its early popularity, several scholars today still regard the Assyrians as the wicked party in Hab. 1:2-4. Childs, for example, thinks that this theory allows for a consistent historical dating of the oracles, however he acknowledges that there is no explicit mention of Assyria in the text itself. "To identify Assyria in 1.1-4 is to find the key to the book's interpretation by means of a logical, but fragile historical deduction."¹¹

Another difficulty with this theory, as noted by Budde at the start, is the inconsistency between Hab. 1:4 and Hab. 1:13. If the wicked are taken to be the Assyrians in both passages, then the promised coming of the Chaldeans has had no positive effect for the righteous. To account for this difficulty Budde rearranged the text. Another option is to identify the

⁸ Bailey (p. 302, footnote 73) summarizes the possibilities according to Jöcken's exhaustive study. "Scholarship has wrestled endlessly with the identification of the wicked enemy. P. Jöcken organizes his 524 pages of description of the history of Habakkuk research around theories of the wicked. Each theory must identify the people about whom Habakkuk complained in 1:2-4 and the wicked nation described in 1:5-11. Theories identify the two as Judah, Babylon; Assyria, Babylon; Judah, Scythians; Babylon, Babylon; Judah, powerful opponent of Babylon; Egypt, Babylon; Jewish prince in Nineveh, Medes; Judah, Egypt; Arabia, Arabia; Babylon, Persia; Seleucids of Syria, eschatological battle; Greece, Greece. In most of these cases the interpretation can be directed against both countries or against the first country and in favor of the second, seen as the great deliverer from the conditions of 1:2-4" See Sweeney, "Habakkuk" in *ABD* 3, p. 3 for a concise summary of the debate.

⁹ See e.g. Budde, 1893; Cornill, 1896; G.A. Smith, 1929; Weiser, 1961; and Childs, 1979.

¹⁰ Andersen, p. 224

¹¹ Childs, p. 449

Chaldeans, the means of Assyrian judgment, with the wicked in 1:13. However, according to Nielsen:

This hypothesis is ... founded on a false interpretation of I, 11 which is made to mean that the Chaldeans, once the instrument of Yahweh, in their lust of power *exceeded their competence* and thus became Yahweh's enemies instead. ... But as to I, 11, the final statement in the first oracle of *salvation*, an unbiased exegesis must understand this speech as a prophecy of the fate of the tyrant, when Yahweh uses his instrument, the Chaldeans, against him ...¹²

Andersen also finds fault with the Assyrian line of thinking. His search for the evil-doer includes two conditions: (1) the righteous in Judah must have experienced the activities of the wicked and (2) the wicked must have been open to punishment through the agency of the Chaldeans. Though the Assyrians satisfy Andersen's second condition, they do not satisfy his first.¹³ In addition to that, Andersen adds: "If this theology of history [i.e. Assyria as the wicked and Babylon as the punisher] had not been present already in Isaiah [10:5], it is doubtful whether anyone would have found it in Habakkuk."¹⁴

1.2 The wicked as foreigners: Egypt

The next nation to have some measure of influence in the political scene is Egypt. There are few scholars who hold to the view that the Egyptians represent the wicked, but they are worth mentioning nonetheless. G.A. Smith (1899), for example, before he was persuaded some thirty years later to regard the Assyrians as the wicked in Hab. 1:4, noted that the Egyptians were responsible for the death of righteous king Josiah and thus were deserving of punishment at the hands of the Chaldeans. More recently Andersen (2001) acknowledges that the Egyptians are a legitimate possibility for the wicked. As mentioned above, any candidate-nation must satisfy two conditions: it must have oppressed Judah at the domestic level and must have maintained a political role at the international level.

This [domestic and international] combination is found in the early part of the reign of Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 23:31-37). As an Egyptian puppet, he was obliged to collect tribute. This was regarded as oppressive, and it led to a reaction, with some Judeans looking to Babylon to deliver them from Egypt. And, in the event, the Chaldeans did get rid of the Egyptians who were behind this (2 Kgs 24:7).¹⁵

Andersen admits that Egypt is a better candidate for the wicked in Hab. 1:4 than Assyria, but even he does not think that Egypt is the best choice. First, Egypt did not play as crucial a role in the history of Judah as Assyria or Chaldea, thus questioning the need for the prophet's complaint in the first place. Second, the same inconsistencies between Hab. 1:4 and

¹² Nielsen, p. 75

¹³ Andersen, p. 25

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 24

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 25

Hab. 1:13, brought to light under the Assyrian option, hold for the Egyptian option. Either Egypt is the evil-doer in both passages or the Chaldean is assigned the role of evil-doer in the latter passage. Both ways of viewing the text bring their share of difficulties.

1.3 The wicked as foreigners: Chaldea

A third nation to move decisively onto the political world stage is Chaldea. Several scholars have identified this nation with the wicked of Hab. 1:4 and Hab. 1:13, such that each of the major sections of ch. 1 refers to Chaldea.¹⁶ Various explanations have been presented over the years to account for the difficulty of the oracle's presence between two laments.¹⁷ Giesebrecht, for example, proposed that Hab. 1:2-2:8 be assigned to the exile, minus the problematic 1:5-11, which he assigned to an earlier period. Similarly, Wellhausen believed that 1:2-4 and 1:12-17 represented a single speech and that 1:5-11, having nothing to do with this complaint, should be removed. He asked: "*Wie kann die Ankündigung, daß die Chaldäer erscheinen werden, die Antwort auf die Klage sein, daß sie seit lange das Volk Jahves bedrücken?*"¹⁸ Hoonacker took a slightly different approach and placed the oracle at the beginning of the book, while Sellin felt that 1:5-11, after 1:2-4, served as a prediction of more distress to come. More recently, Sweeney and Floyd view the Chaldeans in 1:5-11 not as the means for correcting the injustice but as its cause. Floyd maintains that "the developments described in 1:5-11 are logically the presupposition on which the questions in 1:2-4 are based".¹⁹

The major difficulty with the Chaldean view is one of logic. Giesebrecht was one of the first to point out this problem. "The foreign oppressor could not be the Babylonians in 1:2-4 if the Babylonians are the punisher of the oppressor in 1:5-11."²⁰ Giesebrecht, Wellhausen and Hoonacker account for this problem by rearranging the text in various ways and thus can be criticized along the same lines as Budde. Andersen disputes Hoonacker, who perhaps can be regarded as taking a more positive view of rearrangement (i.e. the oracle preceding the complaint). "[The] prophet's first protest is directed not against the LORD's forecast, but against his silence; and it would seem from the language of vv 15-17 that the predictions made in vv 9-11 had already come about when that second prayer was made."²¹ The burden of scholars who hold to a Chaldean identity of the wicked is to explain the relationships between the various sections in Hab. 1. This is not easily or consistently

¹⁶ See e.g. Giesebrecht; 1891; Wellhausen, 1893; Hoonacker, 1908; Sellin, 1930; Sweeney, 1991; and Floyd, 2000.

¹⁷ R.L. Smith (p. 94) reviews the opinion of Giesebrecht, and Andersen (pp. 26, 223) reviews the opinions of Wellhausen, Hoonacker and Sellin.

¹⁸ Wellhausen, vol. 5, 2^d ed., p. 162 as quoted by Andersen, p. 223

¹⁹ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 96. See also Sweeney, "Structure", p. 67.

²⁰ R.L. Smith, p. 94

²¹ Andersen, p. 223

accomplished. Even Sellin, Sweeney and Floyd, who also hold to the final form of the text, each have their own theories for how these sections relate to one another.

Grouping the various candidates for the wicked in Hab. 1:4 into three broad camps – foreign, native and deliberately ambiguous – is a helpful way to present an incredibly complex issue, but it creates the impression that all scholars who fall into the foreign camp, for example, can generally be regarded as thinking alike, differing only in the particular option of Assyria, Egypt or Chaldea. As has been demonstrated above, this is far from true. In terms of historical background, related interpretive issues, and ways of resolving textual difficulties, the proponents of the foreign category (and even those within each of the three options under this category) are often more different than they are similar. Likewise, as the following discussion will show, comparisons cut across category boundaries in much the same way that contrasts do.

1.4 The wicked as natives: Judah

One of the more popular views is that the wicked in Hab. 1:4 represent one or more persons within the Judean community. According to Haak: “It is more likely that Habakkuk is using stereotypical language in the reporting of the breakdown of ‘the whole fabric of human society’ prior to invasion by foreign armies.”²² The announcement in Hab. 1:6 of the Chaldeans’ coming is thus typically interpreted as the judgment upon the prophet’s own people.²³

The scribes at Qumran, whose pesher (1QpHab) was likely written some time around the second half of the first century B.C., were some of the first to interpret the wicked as natives. “In the Habaquq commentary the wrong-doer does not primarily denote a foreign tyrannical power. At least in the important part of Ch. II ‘hā-Rāshā’ is interpreted as an apostate, ‘hak-kōhēn hārāshā’ (col. VIII), or the entire priesthood of Jerusalem (col. IX), and the essential accusations are levelled against them.”²⁴ Even though the Qumran scribes’ interpretation of Habakkuk is often dismissed by scholars today, Nielsen, nevertheless, notes that:

The preoccupation of post-exilic Judaism with tradition makes it highly probable that it possessed a tradition of interpretation that was evolved in connection with the transmission of the sacred writings. And so, if a historical interpretation is to be attempted at all, the explanation of Habaquq’s prophecy as referring to a Judean tyrant deserves more serious consideration than would appear at the first glance.²⁵

²² Haak, pp. 33-4

²³ See e.g. Rothstein, 1894; S.R. Driver, 1906; Cannon, 1925; Nielsen, 1953; Brownlee, 1971; Otto, 1977; R.L. Smith, 1984; Achtemeier, 1986; Patterson, 1991; Baker, 1988; O.P. Robertson, 1990; Haak, 1992; Bruce, 1993; Bailey, 1999; and Andersen, 2001.

²⁴ Nielsen, p. 58

²⁵ Ibid.

At the very least the Qumran interpretation is of interest because “[it] shows that the sectaries were already facing some of the questions ... which have exercised commentators of all times”.²⁶

Many modern scholars who identify the wicked in Hab. 1:4 with an individual in Judah no longer look to the priest as the source of the prophet’s grief but to the king. Nielsen argues that the definition of “righteous” is suitable for a kingly figure and consequently identifies the righteous character in 1:4 as the Judean king Shallum. “He, Shallum, is the lawful ruler, haṣṣaddīq, the righteous man, whereas the brother [Jehoiakim], the usurper, is hārāshā, the wrong-doer, the conceited one, who is not to prosper, while ‘the righteous man shall live by his faith (or his steadfastness).’”²⁷ Haak also takes a royal view of both the wicked and the righteous in Hab. 1:4, and agrees, along with many other scholars, that Jehoiakim is the “primary candidate as antagonist”.²⁸ He says: “The direct responsibility for the establishment of ‘law’ and ‘order’ rests with the king (cf. Is. 42:4; 51:4; etc.). Thus Habakkuk’s immediate concern is with the effectiveness of the king of Judah and not with the foreign oppressor as such.”²⁹

However, Haak goes decidedly against the mainstream opinion when, based on his estimation of Hab. 1:5-6, he assigns the prophet Habakkuk and his book a pro-Chaldean stance. Three elements must hold according to Haak’s view of the historical setting. (1) The righteous and the wicked are both royal figures. (2) The pro-Chaldean righteous will be restored and the wicked will be overthrown. (3) The Chaldeans will be the ones to overthrow this wicked character.³⁰ Haak concludes: “It is suggested here that the best solution is to understand the antagonist(s) as Jehoiakim *and* those who placed him in power and encouraged him in an anti-Babylonian stance. This would have included Egypt and, until its demise, Assyria.”³¹ This statement brings the present discussion full circle back to the foreign options for identifying the wicked in Hab. 1:4 and well illustrates the difficulty of the interpreter’s task.

²⁶ Mason, pp. 65-6

²⁷ Nielsen, p. 77. See pp. 64-6 for his definition of “righteous”.

²⁸ Haak, p. 134

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34. Some suspect the Judean evil under consideration is prior to the time of Jehoiakim. Bullock (pp. 181-3) proposes the early years of Josiah before his reform, while Patterson (*Habakkuk*, pp. 115-7, 139-40) looks back even further to the time of Manasseh. In this regard Bailey (p. 259) raises a significant question. “Namely, must prophecy have a strong predictive element pointing years ahead of itself as Bullock and Patterson argue, or does prophecy relate much more closely to the historical events of its time so that the contemporary audience has the opportunity and information to understand and identify with the message the prophet is delivering?”

³⁰ Haak, p. 113

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 138. In the introduction to his discussion of setting Haak (p. 108) highlights an interpretive trap: “In most cases the perceived unevenness [of the text] has been due to difficulty in understanding the language of the text or unnecessary assumptions about the subject and the political attitude of the author.” Haak seems to be falling into the same interpretive trap when he assumes a pro-Chaldean view.

There are other problems with the view that the wicked are represented by a Judean king or, more generally, an evil Judean faction among the people. Assuming (1) the more traditional interpretation of the Chaldeans as God's instrument of judgment against the wicked in 1:4 and (2) that the wicked in 1:13 are those same Chaldeans, how then can Habakkuk complain in 1:12-17 about what he desired in 1:2-4? Early scholars such as S.R. Driver and Cannon correct the inconsistency by dating the sections of ch. 1 differently. More recent scholars take up this same view, but according to Mason this is no solution to the problem.

It simply means that the prophet came to see somewhat later that his hoped-for deliverers were unacceptable. Such a lack of prevision would not have been likely to commend a Hebrew prophet to his contemporaries and successors. But, in any event, the material itself does not provide enough indications to fix the individual units ... precisely in a succession of historical events ...³²

Childs concurs and says that "solid literary evidence for seeing a process at work is lacking".³³

Looking to the language of the book, Johnson criticizes those who argue that the Hebrew terms for law (*tôrâ*) and justice (*mišpāt*) in Hab. 1:4 can refer only to internal crimes.

The identification of the supposed transgressors as certain anonymous Judahites depends entirely on the mistaken assumption that transgressions of specific commandments are intended. But Habakkuk does not say that the *tôrâ* has been broken and *mišpāt* transgressed; he says that the *tôrâ* has been paralysed and warped. These terms suggest that the prophet was thinking of the nonfulfillment of specific promises found in the *tôrâ* which was known to him.³⁴

Judah, then, can be added to the list of possibilities for the identification of the wicked in Hab. 1:4, and though it has enjoyed much popularity, this view, like the others, has its difficulties.

1.5 The wicked as deliberately ambiguous

Some scholars, who may also suggest a particular identity for the evil-doer in Hab. 1:4, acknowledge that the author of the book could have intentionally left the reference to the wicked open to multiple interpretations.³⁵ Childs, for example, suspects that "the author has arranged the material of chs. 1-2 in such a way as to disregard the complexities of the original historical setting of these oracles".³⁶ Achtemeier says: "The original core of the work undoubtedly comes out of a concrete historical situation ... [but] both Habakkuk himself and later editors have given the work a universal and timeless validity ...".³⁷

³² Mason, p. 68

³³ Childs, p. 450

³⁴ Johnson, p. 262

³⁵ See e.g. Staerk, 1933; Childs, 1979; and Achtemeier, 1986.

³⁶ Childs, p. 453

³⁷ Achtemeier, p. 32

Staerk goes one step beyond the notions of ambiguity and timelessness and argues that the book of Habakkuk is an example of OT eschatology. “*Der Mythos ist die Sprache des Glaubens an das Kommen der Gottesherrschaft in der Wende der Zeiten.*”³⁸ Nielsen summarizes:

For this faith every period of history is a struggle between God and Satan Thus, according to Staerk, it is a matter of indifference whether Habaquq is referring precisely to the Chaldeans as the representatives of Antichrist, and as a matter of fact Staerk believes that textual criticism can remove the troublesome Chaldeans from Hab. I, 6.³⁹

Nielsen counters Staerk, particularly in reference to his removal of the reference to the Chaldean: “This operation is not much more readily justifiable than Duhm’s textual emendation. Yet we must admit that Staerk has made a valuable point: Every period of history becomes in the language of faith a struggle between God and Satan, and every thing occurs in the last hour.”⁴⁰

Floyd regards the generalization of the historical references as unacceptable. “Since the imperial power in the first section is explicitly identified as the Babylonians (1:6; *RSV* ‘Chaldeans’), and since the otherwise unnamed imperial power in all three sections is one and the same, the historical reference of the book as a whole becomes particularized in terms of Judah’s Babylonian crisis”⁴¹ Even if the Chaldean parameter mentioned at the start of this discussion is maintained, Floyd’s second point (i.e. one evil-doer for all of ch. 1) is debatable. In fact, the scholars today who regard the Chaldeans as the wicked in Hab. 1:4 represent the minority. Floyd nevertheless draws the most reasonable conclusion that can be drawn, namely that the broad historical context is that of the Chaldean crisis. This, however, still does not satisfactorily explain the identity of the wicked in Hab. 1:4. Nielsen, as well, opposes a marginalization of the historical references in the text. He asks:

Do not these laments and indictments [the woe oracles in ch. 2] draw a distinct outline of a concrete historical person, or alternatively, a foreign tyrannical power, which at a certain period threatened the ruin of the people of Judah? Certainly, the history of exegesis shows that this question has generally been answered in the affirmative, but this makes it all the more remarkable that so far it has proved impossible to reach agreement as to who this so concretely depicted personality may be.⁴²

Nielsen notes what is perhaps the only consistent element in the history of Habakkuk’s interpretation: the hermeneutical need to identify the wicked.

Two concluding observations can be made in terms of Habakkuk’s interpretive history, especially as it relates to the identification of the wicked in Hab. 1:4. First, there has

³⁸ Staerk, p. 21

³⁹ Nielsen, p. 57

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Nielsen adds that: “Whether this should be called eschatology is another matter.”

⁴¹ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 82

⁴² Nielsen, p. 72

been very little perceived movement in scholarly opinion. That is, there was no predominantly held view that was proven to be unlikely or altogether false by later generations of scholars and thus superseded by a more acceptable option. Many of the same pros and cons for each option are as relevant today as they were over one hundred years ago. Second, only a handful of options have been totally ruled out as possibilities. The main contenders of a century ago are, for the most part, the main contenders of today: Assyria, Egypt, Chaldea and Judah/Jehoiakim. While the latter option seems to hold the modern distinction of being the most popular, it by no means represents a general consensus among critical scholars. The interpretive field remains open.

2. Dating the book

Closely related to the identification of the wicked in Habakkuk is the date of the book. Most scholars assign the date either to the early years of Josiah's reign over Judah (641-609 B.C.) or to the subsequent rule of Jehoiakim (608-597 B.C.). Many proponents of the former view regard the wicked as foreign and many of the latter view regard the wicked as native. This, however, is not a firm rule.

When attempting to put a date on Habakkuk scholars in both camps regularly turn to Hab. 1:5. This verse describes the coming of the Chaldeans as something the Judeans will not believe and as something that will occur in their own days. According to O.P. Robertson, a proponent of the Jehoiakim dating: "The judgment on Judah must fall soon enough to be observed by Habakkuk's contemporaries, since the word of the Lord says this judgment would come 'in your days' (1:5). ... Yet before the battle of Carchemish in 605, Babylonia's dominance in Syro-Palestine had not been clearly established."⁴³ Most supporters of the Josiah dating would take issue only with O.P. Robertson's second qualification. Indeed, the battle of Carchemish is a significant point of divergence for the two camps. Whereas the Josiah-date supporters recognize the conflict as the latest date for the book of Habakkuk; the Jehoiakim-date supporters see it as the earliest date. For the former group a date *after* 605 B.C. is not possible because Chaldea *has already established* its dominance in the region and its attack on Judah is to be a surprise. For the latter group a date *before* 605 B.C. is not possible because Chaldea *has not yet established* its dominance and hence is not in a position to attack anyone.

Even the strictly textual arguments fail to make either side of 605 more or less likely. Nevertheless scholars appeal to passages such as Hab. 1:2-4 that describe the current state of affairs for the prophet. Some, for instance, note the similarities between the setting of Habakkuk and the context of 2 Kgs. 21:10-16. *Because of what Manasseh king of Judah did*

⁴³ O.P. Robertson, p. 14

– *these abominations ... Behold I am bringing evil upon Jerusalem and Judah ...* (2 Kgs. 21:11-12, translated literally) Some presume these abominations reflect the “social and religious conditions as described by Habakkuk [which thus] demand the dating of his activity in the early years of Josiah”.⁴⁴ However, this is the exact same argument used to support the Jehoiakim dating. Many say unequivocally that Habakkuk’s description of violence must correspond to the time of Jehoiakim. “The incisiveness of the references to the condition complained of makes it certain that the prophet has in mind the conditions in the Judah of Jehoiakim’s reign (608-597 B.C.).”⁴⁵ Indeed the description of violence that the prophet provides is general enough to characterize any number of periods in the cruel and tainted history of Judah.

A handful of supporters from both camps suggest a third option, namely that the several parts of Habakkuk were composed at different times. Eaton, of the Josiah camp, suspects that the whole book grew over a number of years with the pieces eventually forming a coherent whole.⁴⁶ Roberts, of the Jehoiakim camp, thinks “there are clear indications that the individual oracles that make up this compositional whole were originally given at widely separated times in the prophet’s ministry”.⁴⁷ Junker perhaps states it best, noting that

*man nicht einen einzigen Zeitpunkt als Hintergrund des ganzen Buches nehmen dürfe. Vielleicht braucht man aber deshalb nicht mit ihm eine sukzessive Entstehung der einzelnen Teile des Buches anzunehmen. Das Buch kann einheitlich niedergeschrieben sein, aber es gibt prophetische Erlebnisse Habakuks aus verschiedenen Zeiten wieder. ... Aber alle diese verschiedenen Erlebnisse werden zusammengehalten dadurch, daß der Prophet in ihnen das Walten der göttlichen Gerechtigkeit verfolgt, und von diesem einheitlichen Gesichtspunkt aus hat er sie in der Zeit der Bedrängnis des Landes zurückschauend und zusammenfassend dargestellt.*⁴⁸

On whatever point (or points) of the timeline that Habakkuk falls, the arguments regarding date are not sufficient. Given the few clues provided in the text, one view is as reasonable (or as unreasonable) as the other. Thus, the date of Habakkuk is no more established than the identity of the wicked. This should come as no surprise, for if either one of these issues could be determined with certainty, then the other would most likely follow.

3. Applying an interpretive strategy

As mentioned at the start of this discussion, one’s view of the wicked character in Hab. 1:4 is often the starting point for critical interpretations of the book. To a certain extent at least, it appears that a methodology is then employed on the basis of how well it accounts

⁴⁴ Laetsch, p. 316

⁴⁵ J.G. Harris, p. 22

⁴⁶ Eaton, *Habakkuk*, p. 84

⁴⁷ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 82

⁴⁸ Junker, p. 35

for the difficulties arising from a given identification of the evil-doer. Bailey observes: “The identification and resultant interpretation have determined the approach to the remainder of the book.”⁴⁹ One’s choice of interpretive strategy could be the key to unlocking the mystery of the wicked and the even greater mystery of the book of Habakkuk, or it could be the deadbolt lock.

Presenting a history of interpretive methodologies is no easy task. Mason says, almost by way of warning: “Where there is such a welter of conflicting critical opinions about the book of Habakkuk it is often difficult to label different points of view systematically.”⁵⁰ Thus, in a chapter titled “The History of Criticism”, Mason abandons a thoroughly chronological review and instead organizes the material according to arguments for and against the *unity* of the book. Under these two sub-titles he addresses the form-critical and redaction-critical approaches respectively, as well as other interpretive strategies applied to the book over the years.⁵¹ Prinsloo likewise dismisses a chronological survey of the hermeneutical history. He observes: “During the course of the long history of interpretation of the book of Habakkuk, three different reading strategies have been applied to the text.”⁵² Prinsloo defines these reading strategies: Habakkuk as liturgical unit, diverse anthology and literary unit. The first two of his categories more or less define the form- and redaction-critical approaches respectively. These two historical-critical methodologies continue to dominate the interpretation of Habakkuk. The following discussion examines their contributions along with their difficulties.

3.1 The form-critical approach

The form-critical approach, according to Floyd, is based on two of Gunkel’s insights, namely that an understanding of a text is based on genre and that the genres of the OT are closely related to oral literature. “From the ideal form of the genre one could supposedly deduce what the original, presumably oral form of the text must have been.”⁵³ As for Habakkuk, “[in] the early stages of this kind of research, the book was read as a collection of short ‘more or less disconnected’ (Pfeiffer 1952:597) prophetic utterances”.⁵⁴ Subsequent generations of form-critical scholars have convincingly demonstrated that this is an inadequate estimation of the text. Speaking of the methodology in general Floyd says:

All quests for the original forms of biblical texts have rightly been called into question, but this does not discredit Gunkel’s basic insights. In fact,

⁴⁹ Bailey, pp. 257-8

⁵⁰ Mason, p. 75

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-80

⁵² Prinsloo, p. 516. See pp. 516-9 for the full discussion.

⁵³ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. xvi. Andersen (p. 19) as well notes: “The discipline of form criticism has contributed generously to the appreciation of the literary craftsmanship of the book of Habakkuk.”

⁵⁴ Andersen, p. 19

biblical scholarship's shift from a predominantly historical to a predominantly literary approach does nothing to diminish the importance of form criticism's main concerns.⁵⁵

When the book of Habakkuk is regarded from a form-critical perspective, scholars often identify the *Sitz im Leben* of its forms within the cult. The book, therefore, is a cultic liturgy and its author, a cultic prophet. This is one of the more prevalent form-critical views.⁵⁶ However, as Floyd outlines it below,

[there] is a diverse and wide range of opinion with regard to the nature of this connection [to the cult]. Critics variously hold that the book in its entirety is a prophetic liturgy ...; that the core of the book is a prophetic liturgy for the proclamation of divine judgment (1:2-17) that has been supplanted and redacted in accord with a rather different liturgical concept ...; that the book is in part a liturgy (1:2-2:4) with other materials appended ...; that the book contains no liturgy per se but cultic materials arranged for liturgical reading ...; that the book is a loose collection of diverse materials, some of cultic origin, that have been brought together by virtue of their common theme, namely, the downfall of the godless ...; that although the book has the form of a simple complaint, it is a literary imitation of a liturgical form rather than an actual liturgy ...; etc.⁵⁷

In spite of the diverse ways of understanding the cultic aspect of the book of Habakkuk, the form-critical view addresses an important interpretive concern. If all or part of the book of Habakkuk is taken as a cultic liturgy, then questions regarding the historical chronology of its sections are eliminated and rearranging the text is unnecessary. However, Nielsen notes that

if we attempt a cultic interpretation of an Old Testament text, the temptation to reject a priori a historical interpretation is at hand. ... we cannot dismiss the possibility that a text, which in phraseology and content reveals itself as a cultic text, may at the same time contain a concrete, historical message, intelligible when related to the historical situation of the writer.⁵⁸

Unfortunately a cultic approach to the text has not conclusively determined what that historical situation is. “[The] variety of theories offered by the proponents of a cultic interpretation of historical contexts and cultic events ... does not inspire confidence in the method.”⁵⁹

In addition, there is no scholarly consensus that either the book is a cultic liturgy or that Habakkuk is a cultic prophet.⁶⁰ Prinsloo summarizes the work of scholars who claim that laments, woe oracles, and theophanies do not necessarily have a connection to the cult. “Even

⁵⁵ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. xvi

⁵⁶ See e.g. Sellin, 1929; Humbert, 1944; Elliger, 1956; Eaton, 1961; Horst, 1964; Jeremias, 1970; and Brownlee, 1971.

⁵⁷ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, pp. 84-5. See the reference for notation of the particular scholars who hold to each view.

⁵⁸ Nielsen, p. 55

⁵⁹ Mason, p. 71. This is particularly apparent in the problem of identifying the wicked in Hab. 1:4. Sellin, for example, named Chaldea as the wicked party and Brownlee, Judah.

⁶⁰ Andersen (p. 19) notes that either hypothesis relies on or fosters the other through circular reasoning.

if some *Gattungen* were originally connected to the cult, a prophet could disconnect them from their original *Sitz im Leben* in order to convey his message (Bellinger 1984: 85-86).⁶¹ Childs likewise acknowledges the liturgical material in the book but rejects the idea that its present shape is influenced by the cult. “The autobiographical shaping moves in quite the opposite direction. The cultic influence is to be assigned a role in an earlier stage of development in providing traditional forms, but not in constructing the final literary composition.”⁶² “When the *formkritische* approach to Habakkuk is evaluated, it must be said on the positive side that this approach emphasised that relationships exist between the various parts of the book. On the negative side, it should be pointed out that the unity of the book does not lie in the alleged cultic origin of the various parts.”⁶³

Perhaps because of these difficulties at least two scholars, Haak (1991) and Floyd (2000), describe Habakkuk’s form (or genre) as something other than cultic. Haak begins his discussion by noting a problem with the widely accepted forms in the text of Habakkuk – the complaints (1:2-2:5), the woe oracles (2:6-20), and the psalm (3:2-19). “While these categories have been widely accepted, considerable debate has been generated concerning the status of the connections between these forms. ... This lack of clear delineation suggests that a sharp distinction between these three forms may not be appropriate in the prophecy of Habakkuk.”⁶⁴ Thus Haak proposes that the single genre which defines the entire book of Habakkuk is the lament. Applying Koch’s terminology he categorizes each section of text according to the elements of the lament, resulting in two cycles.⁶⁵

| | | | |
|--------|--------------------------|----------|--|
| 1:1-4 | invocation and complaint | 1:13-2:1 | grounds for deliverance, complaint, petition |
| 1:5-6 | salvation oracle | 2:2-4 | salvation oracle |
| 1:7-11 | expression of certainty | 2:5-20 | expression of certainty |
| 1:12 | hymnic element | 3:1-19 | psalm of lament |

Haak summarizes each of these sections according to his view of the historical setting, which was mentioned earlier.⁶⁶ The breakdown of society, which prompts the prophet’s first complaint in 1:2-4, is caused by the Egyptian’s removal of a rightful king (Jehoahaz) and the subsequent installation of an illegitimate king (Jehoiakim). The oracle in 1:5-6 reaffirms that the Chaldeans will successfully dispossess king Jehoiakim. Habakkuk responds to this news with a positive description of the Chaldeans in 1:7-11 and his

⁶¹ Prinsloo, p. 518. He cites such scholars as Westermann, Gerstenberger and Otto.

⁶² Childs, p. 452

⁶³ Prinsloo, pp. 518-9. After expressing his opinion that none of the familiar genres supplies the model for the whole book of Habakkuk, Andersen (pp. 21-2) says rather pessimistically: “We find it anachronistic that so much faith can still be placed in form criticism long after Muilenburg (1969) inaugurated the age ‘beyond form criticism.’”

⁶⁴ Haak, p. 11

⁶⁵ See Haak (pp. 13-9) for the full discussion.

⁶⁶ Haak, pp. 138-9

affirmation of Yahweh's appointment of them in 1:12. The second complaint cycle begins in 1:13 and elaborates upon the first.

Even if one were to accept the pro-Chaldean stance that Haak assumes in Hab. 1:5-6, there are still problems with his approach. Mason notes at least three of them.

[1] It seems unlikely that any critic would read 1.7-11 as 'an expression of certainty' without a predisposition to do so on other grounds. ... [2] Haak cites Psalm 60 as an example of an answering oracle's being followed as well as preceded by complaint. He might have added, however, that this is virtually the only example of a psalm of lament in the Psalter in which we find such an oracle at all. ... [3] Further, it is a pity that Haak did not pay heed to his own warning that in such psalms the presence of traditional elements may well mean that we cannot find detailed historical contexts for them. If Habakkuk were really a prophet in the way Haak suggests, and if the book should be seen as conforming to the pattern of the psalms of lament, a detailed historical application is the last thing that we should expect to have survived.⁶⁷

A more recent attempt at uncovering the single genre of Habakkuk is authored by Floyd. Like Haak's, Floyd's discussion begins with a look at the three major sections of the book and how they relate to each other. In his opinion Habakkuk "contains liturgical materials without assuming the form of a liturgy".⁶⁸ He suspects that the first and last sections (1:2-17 and 3:2-19a) are probably liturgical but notes that the middle section (2:1-20) does not fit the description of this genre. "The question is whether the three sections of the book, related as they are in theme and sequence, assume some form that is not of the same genre as any of the individual sections themselves."⁶⁹ Floyd finds the answer to his question in Hab. 1:1, which titles the book as a *maśśā* 'or oracle. The book, when taken as a whole, contains three of the elements necessary in defining a *maśśā* '. They are: "(a) a speech of Yahweh disclosing how his will is becoming manifest in human affairs; (b) directives concerning behavior or attitudes that are appropriate in response to what Yahweh is doing; and (c) a grounding of these directives in human acts or events that manifest Yahweh's activity or purpose."⁷⁰ "The basic elements of the *maśśā* ' are evident in 2:1-20, but the form is more fully developed in the interrelationship of the whole book's three main sections,

⁶⁷ Mason, p. 75

⁶⁸ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 85. In the preface to his commentary Floyd (p. xvii) clarifies his own approach to form criticism. "Although I take a primarily literary approach to form criticism, I have not found it possible to make a radical distinction between literature and history. Unlike the early form critics, I do not see the quest for the original form of the text as an integral part of the discipline. Unlike many contemporary literary critics, however, I do not see how an interpreter can avoid the historical questions that are inevitably raised by literary analysis itself. If language is always understood with reference to some social context, so is literature; and in the case of ancient documents literary interpretation thus entails some kind of historical investigation. Such historical investigation is the means to a literary end, however, not an end in itself."

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

particularly in the relation of 1:2-17 to 2:1-20. The book as a whole can thus be classified as a *MAŠŠĀ*’, in accord with its superscription (1:1).”⁷¹

Though the interpretive results of Floyd’s study are well worth investigating, his application of the genre of *maššā*’ could be called into question. Floyd maintains that *maššā*’, as a genre term, can be applied to a prophetic speech, sections of a prophetic work, or the work in its entirety, as in the case of Habakkuk.⁷² The former two categories are certainly more frequent in OT literature, and few find fault in defining portions of Habakkuk in this way (e.g. 1:5-11 and 2:6-20). However, in his application of the third category Floyd confesses that the genre has “considerable flexibility of form” and mentions only those elements “that are particularly relevant to the case of Habakkuk”.⁷³ Does the form define the book or the book, the form? Whether Habakkuk is defined as a cultic liturgy, a lament or a *maššā*’, the application of a form-critical strategy is far from solving all of the book’s interpretive problems.

3.2 The redaction-critical approach

The second historical-critical methodology which is popular among scholars of Habakkuk is the redactional approach.⁷⁴ Generally speaking, this sort of strategy seeks to understand the final form of the book in terms of how one or more redactors have edited the original work. According to Mason’s categorizations mentioned previously a redactional methodology is generally used in arguments *against* the original unity of the book. That is, “older material was assigned a new role by a final redactional stamp which fashioned earlier parts into a literary unity”.⁷⁵

An editorial re-working of older material is seen by many to relieve specific tensions within the text, especially in relation to the identity of the wicked. This allows scholars to identify virtually anyone as the wicked in Hab. 1:4 (e.g. Rothstein’s Jehoiakim, Budde’s Assyrians, or Otto’s Judeans), because Habakkuk’s original work was eventually edited to give the book its anti-Chaldean perspective. “Elliger, for example, thought that the wicked whose oppression was the theme of the complaints were the Egyptians, from whom the Babylonians were seen as the divinely sent deliverers ... [and] allowed that later redaction may have given it an anti-Babylonian thrust.”⁷⁶

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 86

⁷² Ibid., p. 85. He (p. 631) also includes Nahum and Malachi under this latter definition. See Bailey, p. 272, footnote 103.

⁷³ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 85

⁷⁴ See e.g. Rothstein, 1894; Budde, 1930; Weiser, 1967; Otto, 1985; Seybold, 1991; and Roberts, 1991.

⁷⁵ Childs, p. 454. See Bailey (pp. 266-7) for a table of selected redaction theories, including which verses particular scholars regard as late. As an extreme example of editorial practice Bailey (p. 268) notes Marti (pp. 326ff.) who reduced the authentic sections of Habakkuk to eight verses (1:5-10, 14-15).

⁷⁶ Mason, p. 76

Mason, however, views Elliger's approach pessimistically.

The obvious objection to such arguments is that no reference to ... the Egyptians [or anyone else] remains in the text as we have it. Yet it is supposedly on the basis of the text as we have it that such arguments are constructed. This is always the weakness of redaction-critical theories In any event, hope in the Babylonians as deliverers would have been short-lived; and, since in 1.5-11 their character is already well known, it is strange that they should have been so thought of. And if they had been so thought of, what effect would this be likely to have on the credibility of the prophet who made such an announcement in the first place?⁷⁷

Mason further describes the difficulties with a redactional approach to the book of Habakkuk.

[There] is a considerable element of subjectivity involved. There is a risk of circular argument if redactional layers are isolated only or primarily on the basis of a prior conviction as to what can and cannot be original to the prophet. There clearly are tensions within the text which require explanation; but we may find after redaction-critical analysis that it is difficult to interpret the text at all, if it appears as the result of such a complex process that no consistent voice can be discerned. We should examine other avenues of analysis before accepting such a negative conclusion.⁷⁸

Prinsloo concludes similarly. "When the different analyses are evaluated, it becomes clear that no consensus exists of the redactional history of the book. All too often the exegete's presuppositions determine his analysis."⁷⁹

Neither form- nor redaction-critical strategies convincingly unlocks the door to an interpretation of Habakkuk. Both approaches, in all their various forms, certainly provide instructive insights into understanding the text, but they do not satisfactorily answer the particular question of the wicked in Hab. 1:4 or the general question of historic setting. Neither method results in an interpretation of the book which the majority of today's scholars adopt. Childs believes that a "doctrinaire application of historical criticism not only fails to find an access into the heart of the book, but by raising a series of wrong questions it effectively blocks true insight".⁸⁰ Andersen, as well, notes in the introduction to his commentary: "Since the rise of modern critical biblical scholarship and the commitment of historical and literary interpretation, these questions – date, author, composition – have been at the top of the agenda. That enterprise seems to have exhausted its resources, and no consensus has emerged."⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 76-7

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 79

⁷⁹ Prinsloo, p. 517. He says: "A new approach is needed – an approach which does not deny the history of the text, but takes the text in its final form as its point of departure."

⁸⁰ Childs, p. 455. Childs maintains that "the key to Habakkuk's canonical role lies in understanding rather than resolving these very [historical and literary] tensions." According to Childs' (p. 454) canonical approach to the OT: "In Habakkuk the historical sequence is replaced by a new theological pattern of redemptive history which blurs the original historical settings to make its theological point." Though a full review of Childs' methodology has not been addressed, its *blurring* of the historical background could be called into question.

⁸¹ Andersen, p. xiv

4. Conclusion

Is Prinsloo justified in calling Habakkuk a problem child among the prophetic books? According to the history of interpretation just presented, he probably is. Many of the hermeneutical difficulties from over a century ago are the same as those of today. One generation of scholars has not necessarily answered the questions or corrected the errors of the previous generations, especially as they relate to naming the wicked, assigning a date to the book, and applying an interpretive methodology. Habakkuk, however, like the child, may not be a problem book so much as it is a misunderstood book. This thesis is an attempt to correct some of the possible misunderstandings that accompany interpretations of the book of Habakkuk.

The primary aim of what follows is to identify the content of the vision mentioned in Hab. 2. To which section of text is Yahweh referring when he commands the prophet to *write (the) vision (2:2)*? Even though most scholars rightly acknowledge that Hab. 2:2-4 is one of the most crucial passages in the entire book, the matter of the vision generally receives less attention than other interpretive problems. This is unfortunate, for it seems that no two scholars agree on the vision's content. However, in order to address this issue it is first necessary to evaluate the legitimacy of using the dialogue hypothesis as a framework for Hab. 1. Are the prophetic complaint in 1:2-4 and the divine oracle in 1:5-11 best understood as a question and its subsequent answer? An affirmative response, which is typically provided by those who hold to the dialogue theory, tends to drive the interpretation of the rest of the book and consequently affects how one understands the vision in 2:2. If, however, the response is negative, then an alternative to the dialogue framework is necessary. Applying a rhetorical point of view to the understanding of the book and its composition is one such possibility. Is there a greater chance of accurately identifying the vision when the book as a whole is described according to the perspective of the original audience for whom it was written?

The aim of this thesis then is three-fold. Above all it seeks (1) to identify the content of the vision in Habakkuk; but this cannot be accomplished before (2) evaluating the popular theory of the dialogue as a framework for Hab. 1 and then (3) testing a rhetorical alternative to the book as a whole. In the end, this thesis hopes to demonstrate that the book of Habakkuk, far from being a problem child, is an exquisite example of prophetic literature.

EXEGESIS AND INTERPRETATION

Habakkuk 1

1. Hab. 1:1

The oracle which he saw, Habakkuk the prophet.

A title of non-distinction

That the book of Habakkuk is unique among the Prophets is apparent from its first verse. Unlike the introductions to other books Hab. 1:1 provides no information regarding the author's heritage, his place of residence, his audience, or even the specific content and date of his message.¹ Of the author one can only be certain of his name and designation. Speculating from there, some scholars attempt to determine the root from which the name is derived, but this, in no way, contributes to the understanding of the book. Others maintain that his title, a relatively rare formal designation in the OT, indicates that Habakkuk was a cult prophet, but as already discussed, many disagree with this sentiment, even when it is based on more substantial evidence than the information provided in 1:1. Of the message one can only be certain that Habakkuk saw it. "The fact that Habakkuk *saw* his message probably stresses more the revelational character of the vision than the mode by which it was communicated."²

The only term in 1:1 that could be of some interpretive value is נִשְׁמָע, translated above as "oracle". According to its first definition, "burden", the term represents a literal or figurative load to be carried (e.g. Exod. 23:5; Num. 11:17). Hab. 1:1 is an example of its second definition which is typically understood as a technical term for a prophetic utterance (e.g. Isa. 13:1; 23:1; Zech. 9:1). There are several scholars, however, who maintain that the former definition is the best rendering even in the context of Habakkuk.

De Boer notes that the term is often translated "utterance, oracle," in view of the phrase *nāsā' qôl*, "to raise one's voice." But in examining the more than 60 times that the word *maśśā'* occurs in the OT, he makes a rather convincing case in favor of the meaning "burden." Exploring the earliest versions as well, he concludes: "The earliest exegesis does not support a distinction of two Hebrew words *maśśā'* with a different sense" (p. 209).³

¹ Compare the title of the book of Micah: *The word of the LORD which came to Micah the Moreshite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.*

² O.P. Robertson, p. 136. According to *ISBE* 4, p. 994: "Although the various Hebrew and Aramaic terms translated 'vision' refer primarily to the faculty of sight, auditions are usually assumed as well. This is clear from Am. 1:1, which refers to the *words* that Amos *saw*." Floyd (*Minor Prophets*, p. 91) also understands the verb as referring to "perception of revelation in general". In addition, Floyd (p. 92) observes that "the terms for seeing are so prominent throughout Habakkuk as to constitute a leitmotif". See also Andersen, p. 88 and Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 108.

³ O.P. Robertson, p. 55, footnote 1

In spite of this, most scholars still recognize two definitions for מִשָּׁנָה, “burden” and “oracle”. “[The] fact that the same word was used for both those meanings easily led to the conception that Yahweh had placed the ‘burden’ of the message on the prophet.”⁴

Regardless of how the term is understood in the context of Habakkuk the crucial question is whether or not it indicates anything about the content of the prophet’s message. Two observations need to be made. First, scholars rightly note that, when used in a prophetic context, מִשָּׁנָה is typically spoken against a foreign nation (e.g. Isa. 13:1; 19:1; 21:13; Nah. 1:1).⁵ This, however is not always the case (e.g. Ezek. 12:10, the prince of Jerusalem; Zech. 12:1, Israel). In regards to the text under consideration R.L. Smith notes: “The burden of Habakkuk is not directed primarily to a foreign nation but it does assert that the foreign tyrant will ultimately be overthrown (2:4, 16-17).”⁶

Second, the content of מִשָּׁנָה usually follows the prophet’s announcement of it (e.g. Isa. 14:28ff.; 15:1ff.; Zech. 12:1ff.). The exceptions to this rule are found in the books of Nahum and Malachi. In the former מִשָּׁנָה is followed by a general description of Yahweh as an avenging and wrathful God (Nah. 1:1-8), and in the latter, by an imagined conversation in which Yahweh confesses his love for Jacob over Esau (Mal. 1:1-5). As a further exception Hab. 1:1 is followed by a prayer (Hab. 1:2-4). These three exceptions constitute the only prophetic books that contain מִשָּׁנָה in their first verses. Thus, it seems possible that in a title verse, מִשָּׁנָה is more than an announcement of disaster. Floyd, in fact, defines the term, when designating an entire book, as a “prophetic *interpretation* of revelation”.⁷ Weis indicates that “a translation for *maśśā*’ such as ‘prophetic *exposition* of divine revelation’ would be preferable to ‘oracle.’ ... A *maśśā*’ responds to a question about a lack of clarity in the relation between divine intention and human reality.”⁸

In regards to Habakkuk, many scholars nevertheless conclude that “the designation ... of [the prophet’s] message as a *maśśā*’ does not add much to [the] understanding of the book”.⁹ Given the widely accepted view that prophetic superscriptions are late additions and

⁴ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 86. Andersen (p. 88) concurs: “The report of the LORD’s proclamation is then the burden to be carried by the prophet to the people from his meeting with Yahweh. Even so, the message could be conveyed in the form of a physical object actually carried.” Müller (“*maśśā*” in *TDOT* 9, p. 23) states: “The overwhelming preponderance of disaster oracles may be due to overtones of the meaning ‘burden,’ as in Jer. 23:33-38. It would be inappropriate, however, to argue on these grounds against the denotation ‘utterance’ in all cases, precisely because such an argument would destroy the contrast between *maśśā*’ II, ‘utterance,’ in 23:33 versus *maśśā*’ I, ‘burden,’ in vv. 34,36,38, depriving 23:33-38 of its linguistic and literary appeal.”

⁵ The use of this term in Jer. 23 (eight times) and Lam. 2:14 is distinctive. The prophet is clearly speaking of *false* prophecy.

⁶ R.L. Smith, p. 98. Müller (“*maśśā*” in *TDOT* 9, p. 23) confesses that he does not know whether the prophetic oracle in Habakkuk is directed against a foreign nation or Judah.

⁷ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 91 (italics added)

⁸ Weis, “Oracle” in *ABD* 5, p. 28 (italics added)

⁹ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 86. Haak (p. 29) agrees: “Thus, the term *ms*’ is not helpful in determining either the general content or the form of the following prophecy.”

a lack of consensus regarding the nuance of the term as used here, this sentiment could be true. However, the definitions provided by Floyd and Weis are worth serious consideration. If מִשְׁפָּט indicates that an *interpretation* of some sort is to follow, then the book of Habakkuk goes beyond a mere declaration of doom.

Unfortunately little more can be gleaned from the first verse about Habakkuk, either the man or his message. Elliger suggests pragmatically: “*Aus der Tatsache, daß in der Überschrift jegliche Zeitangabe fehlt, kann man jedenfalls den Schluß ziehen, daß die Sammlung (wenigstens in ihrem Kern) schon zu des Propheten Lebzeiten entstanden ist, wo eine Zeitangabe überflüssig war.*”¹⁰

2. Hab. 1:2-4

²How long, Yahweh, have I cried-out-for-help but you did not hear?
 (How long) have I cried-out to you “Violence” but you did not deliver?
³Why do you cause me to see evil and (on) trouble (why do) you look?
 And destruction and violence (are) before me;
 and there is strife and contention lifts itself up.
⁴Therefore *tôrâ* grows numb, and *mišpāt* never goes forth;
 because a wicked one is surrounding the righteous one,
 therefore *mišpāt* goes forth twisted.

An extreme introduction

The broad context of Habakkuk’s *masšā*, according to Hab. 1:2-4, must in some way be related to the grief of the prophet. This first major section of ch. 1 opens with a series of questions which Habakkuk puts to Yahweh. The initial Hebrew interrogative עַד־אֵנָה, which is understood to cover both expressions in v. 2,¹¹ probably expresses the extended duration of the prophet’s anguish.¹² A lexical review of the verbs contained in these inquiries proves to be even more instructive in illuminating one’s understanding of this grief. The first verb, for example, שָׁעַ (“to cry-out-for-help”), found only twenty-one times in the OT, is typically seen in the context of a cry made to Yahweh. However, of the six times that it is seen in conjunction with the verb שָׁמַע (“to hear”¹³), the latter is only negated in Hab. 1:2 (cf. Pss.

¹⁰ Elliger, p. 24, footnote 1

¹¹ See e.g. Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 88 and Andersen, p. 101. Andersen, however, goes one step further in applying the principle of double duty. “The interrogation, in fact, continues through the whole poem. It is reactivated by *lāmmā* in v 3, and this interrogative blankets the rest of the speech. So v 4aB means ‘And [why] has (my) judgment never come forth?’” Andersen’s rendering communicates virtually the same message as the more traditional rendering.

¹² Henderson (p. 293) notes that the interrogative’s influence modifies the Preterite and Future tenses “as to give them the force of a present time, though the one includes what had taken place down to such time, and the other, the possibility of its being still carried forward into the future”. Andersen (p. 103), however, thinks otherwise. “In Hab 1:2-4 the occurrence of an opening *qāṭal* form (*šiwwā ’î*) and a later *wayyiqṭōl* (*wayēhî*) anchors the discourse in past-time reference and coerces the *yiqṭōl* forms into the same tense.”

¹³ According to Bailey (p. 296): “In the Old Testament, ‘hearing,’ like most mental functions, implied more than simple hearing. It meant to hear and to respond.” See also Andersen, p. 112.

18:7; 22:25; 28:2; 31:23; Jonah 2:3). In fact, the Psalter contains no negated examples of שָׁמַע when Yahweh is the subject, except for Ps. 66:18 where the statement is conditional. The introduction to Habakkuk's prayer negates the verb without apology. Yahweh did not hear.¹⁴

This first verb deserves a closer look. Particularly in the Psalms and in Job, שָׁמַע is found in connection with other verbs of divine response (e.g. נָצַל, רָפָא). In the nine times that שָׁמַע is seen in the Psalms, five show that Yahweh (or the king, Ps. 72:12) responds favorably to cries for help (e.g. Ps. 30:3 [2], *O LORD my God, I שָׁמַע to Thee for help, and Thou didst heal me*), and two portray the psalmists as requesting Yahweh's response (e.g. Ps. 28:2, *Hear the voice of my supplications when I שָׁמַע to Thee for Help*). In Ps. 18:42 Yahweh does not answer, but the psalmist speaks in the third-person of the *enemies* who are crying out for help. (Earlier in Ps. 18:7 the psalmist himself cries out and Yahweh *does* answer.) Only one time in the book of Psalms is there a negative, divine response to a righteous one's cry. In Ps. 88:14-15 [13-14] the psalmist inquires of Yahweh: *But I, O LORD, שָׁמַע to Thee. ... O LORD, Why dost Thou reject my soul? Why dost Thou hide Thy face from me?* Apart from this instance, the psalmist's cry for help is generally met with a favorable, divine response.

The use of שָׁמַע in the book of Job (eight times) tells a different story. In 19:7 and 30:20 Job blatantly denies that Yahweh hears his cries for help. Both references bear a striking resemblance to Hab. 1:2. *Behold, I cry, "Violence!" but I get no answer; I שָׁמַע, but there is no justice.* (Job 19:7) *I שָׁמַע to Thee for help, but Thou dost not answer me; I stand up, and Thou dost turn Thy attention against me.* (Job 30:20) As if to generalize his argument Job says: *And the soul of the wounded שָׁמַע; but God does not pay attention to folly.* (Job 24:12¹⁵) Elihu, as well, states: *Because of the multitude of oppressions they cry out; they שָׁמַע because of the arm of the mighty. ... There they cry out, but He does not answer because of the pride of evil men.* (Job 35: 9, 12) However, in his address to Job God himself asks rhetorically: *Who prepares for the raven its nourishment, when its young שָׁמַע to God ...?* (Job 38:41) The implied response is, of course, that *God* answers the cry of the raven and, arguing from the lesser to the greater, so must he also answer the cry of man. Prior to Yahweh's speech, however, the book of Job generally portrays a human perspective, which is that Yahweh does not respond to man's cry for help.

¹⁴ Aitken ("שמע" in *NIDOTTE* 4, p. 180) notes that "in prophetic passages there are a number of references to Israel's futile entreaty of God", but in the references he provides it is God himself who claims not to hear (cf. Ezek. 8:18; Isa. 1:15; Jer. 7:16; 11:11, 14). Even in Isa. 59:1-2, where it says that Yahweh can hear but in this case does not hear, the prophet lays the blame squarely on the people's iniquity.

¹⁵ Gowan (*Triumph*, p. 37) calls Job 24:12 "one of the most terrible statements to be found anywhere in the Bible".

The only other occurrences of שׁוֹעַ in the OT are Isa. 58:9; Lam. 3:8 and Jonah 2:2. The first and last of these are, like most of the examples in the book of Psalms, examples of cries for help which are followed by Yahweh's answer. In Lam. 3:8, however, the lamenter speaks differently: *Even when I cry out and שׁוֹעַ, He shuts out my prayer.* Though this illustration is not worded as strongly as the psalmist's prayer (Ps. 88) or Job's direct addresses to Yahweh (Job 19, 30), it nevertheless illustrates the apparent divine neglect of man's cries. It is worthy to note at this point that the broader context of each of these three neglected cries for help describes Yahweh's abuses, not man's. The psalmist, for example, catalogues in detail the divine, rather than human, offenses against him. *Thy burning anger has passed over me; Thy terrors have destroyed me. They have surrounded me like water all day long* (Ps. 88:17-18 [16-17]) Job, as well, regards God as the source of all grief. *Thou hast become cruel to me; with the might of Thy hand Thou dost persecute me.* (Job 30:21) Finally, the mourner of Lamentations says: *I am the man who has seen affliction because of the rod of His wrath. He has driven me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. ... He has besieged and encompassed me with bitterness and hardship.* (Lam. 3:1-2, 5) The source of grief for the psalmist, for Job and for the lamenter is Yahweh.

The preceding discussion demonstrates that Habakkuk speaks with extreme language. Of the examples mentioned above, only Job and one psalmist, with direct addresses to Yahweh, match the severity of the prophet's tone. That Habakkuk's intense interrogation is so rarely equaled, especially among the psalms of lament, bears testimony to the passion with which he utters the first question of Hab. 1:2. Furthermore, the language suggests that Habakkuk's complaint is directed more against Yahweh than against any unnamed wicked party.

The second question in Hab. 1:2, which functions parallel to the first, confirms this supposition. *How long have I cried-out to you "Violence" but you did not deliver?* The verb קָעַז ("to cry-out"), a more general term than its parallel in the previous question, is not regularly found in the context of a first-person call to Yahweh. On the occasions when it does designate a call to God (even if in the third-person), the cries are met both positively (e.g. Jud. 3:9; 1 Sam. 12:8; Ezek. 9:8) and negatively (e.g. 1 Sam. 8:18; Jer. 11:11-12; and Mic. 3:4). However, in the four instances, outside of Habakkuk, in which קָעַז is paired with the verb יִשַׁע ("to deliver"), Yahweh's response is always a favorable one (1 Sam. 7:8; 2 Chr. 20:9; Ps. 107:13, 19). In fact, יִשַׁע (184 times in the OT) is overwhelmingly positive in the context of Yahweh's responding to his people. Of the historical books, only Jud. 10:13 hints that Yahweh will not save his people. In Ps. 18:42, also mentioned earlier, Yahweh does not save, but it is the enemy who is crying out to him. Finally, in the prophetic books the very few times that יִשַׁע is negated occur when the subject is an idol, another god or a foreign nation

(e.g. Isa. 45:20; Lam. 4:17; Hos. 14:3). Citations with Yahweh as the subject constitute the majority of prophetic references and are either positive (i.e. he does deliver) or phrased as commands (i.e. Yahweh, please deliver).

Hab. 1:2, with its two-fold negation of the divine response (i.e. Yahweh did *not* hear and he did *not* deliver), is a shocking and perhaps even blasphemous beginning to Habakkuk's prayer. Most commentators fail to note adequately this aspect of Habakkuk's opening inquiries, except perhaps in measuring the faith of the prophet. O.P. Robertson, for example, asks if Habakkuk remains "within the bounds of propriety" when he interrogates Yahweh in this manner.¹⁶ Yet the interpretive issue is not one of propriety but one of appreciating the prophet's disposition. Junker describes Habakkuk's attitude as one of "lively impatience",¹⁷ but this expression is certainly too mild to describe the harsh accusations of Hab. 1:2. Of the interrogative expression that begins v. 2 Andersen says that outside of the postexilic works of Nehemiah and Daniel,

[questions] asked with ... 'ad-māṭay or 'ad- 'ānā [which are synonyms] ... are always rhetorical and, moreover, accusatory. ... It is therefore natural that a human would chide another human in this way (Exod 10:7; Josh 18:3; ...). It is understandable that God would denounce a human with such language, directly (Exod 10:3; 16:28; ...), or in an oracle (Jer 4:14; 23:26; ...), or as Wisdom speaking to the fool (Prov 1:22; 6:9). What is startling is that a human would dare to talk to God like that, mostly in Psalms (6:4; 13:2a; 2b, 3a, 3b; 74:10; 80:5; 90:13; 94:3a, 3b), but prophets pray that way too (Isa 6:11; Jer 12:4; Hab 1:2).¹⁸

Even among Andersen's illustrations from the psalmists and prophets, few can match the intensity of Habakkuk. Only in Pss. 13:2; 80:5 and 90:13 do these particular inquiries directly address the actions of Yahweh. *How long, O LORD? Wilt Thou forget me forever? How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?* (Ps. 13:2 [1]) The remaining examples are interested in other issues. *How long is the land to mourn and the vegetation of the countryside to wither?* (Jer. 12:4) The present study, therefore, emphasizes that the inquiries of Hab. 1:2 are clearly among the most accusatory in the OT.

The prophet's prayer continues in Hab. 1:3 with additional questions and accusations. While maintaining Yahweh as the focus of his attention, Habakkuk begins to describe the circumstances around him. *Why do you cause me to see¹⁹ evil and (on) trouble (why do) you look?* Unlike the first two questions of v. 2, these two are not entirely parallel according to the MT. Yahweh is the antecedent of both second-person subject pronouns, and the

¹⁶ O.P. Robertson, p. 138

¹⁷ Junker, p. 41. "Mit lebhafter Ungeduld sehnt er dieses göttliche Einschreiten herbei"

¹⁸ Andersen, p. 108

¹⁹ Two points deserve attention in regards to the *hip 'il* stem of the first verb (הִיאֵר). (1) The simple translation "to cause one to see" can be rendered "to cause one to experience" (Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 89). The prophet, then, is not just witnessing evil as a bystander; he is living in the midst of it. (2) The *hip 'il* stem of the first verb implies causation. Thus, the prophet continues to blame Yahweh for the grief around him (Bailey, p. 297).

synonymous און and עמל are the objects of the two *hip 'il* verbs, but in the first clause the prophet sees and in the second Yahweh sees. Some translations (e.g. KJV, NASB and RSV; Bruce and O.P. Robertson) add the first-person direct object to the *hip 'il* stem of נבט (“to look”) in the second expression so that Habakkuk is the one who regards trouble – “why do you, Yahweh, cause *me* to look on trouble”. This rendering is probably a consequence of misunderstanding the verb’s stem. Sixty-eight out of a total sixty-nine references in the OT occur in the *hip 'il* stem, and, according to many scholars, it is never rendered in the causative sense “to show” but always “to behold, to look attentively with satisfaction or complacency”.²⁰ Retaining the normal active translation of נבט establishes that both the prophet and Yahweh are fully knowledgeable of the trouble that abounds.²¹

If v. 2 of Habakkuk’s cry is arresting in its negation of certain verbs, then v. 3 has the same effect for its repetition of synonyms which reflect wrongdoing. Each negative noun – “evil”, “trouble”, “destruction”, “violence”, “strife” and “contention” – serves to make more explicit the grave situation out of which the general call of חמס (“violence”) is made (v. 2), the call from which Yahweh is not delivering.²² In this context the cry of חמס is parallel to the cry for help. Indeed, Haag compares חמס with the literal cry “Help!”,²³ and Roberts says that it is the equivalent of someone screaming “Thief” or “Fire” where time is of the essence.²⁴

For the present study, particular definitions of these terms are not as important as the picture they describe collectively: a widespread and all-encompassing evil. In the space of one verse Habakkuk employs six terms, taken in three pairs, which define this circumstance. First, as mentioned above, the prophet sees און (“evil”) even as Yahweh sees עמל (“trouble”). “The close connection between *’amal* and *’aven* is particularly clear in the

²⁰ See Laetsch, p. 318; Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 88; and Haak, pp. 31-2, who concludes: “The theme is that of Yahweh, not the author, ‘looking at’ or ‘showing regard to’ (BDB 613b) various evils. The author is here stating that Yahweh is aware of the various evils which are present.”

²¹ Roberts takes a different approach to the translation of Hab. 1:3 but nevertheless maintains that both Habakkuk and Yahweh see the evil and trouble. He says (*Habakkuk*, pp. 87-8): “If one takes ‘trouble’ ... as the object of ‘you watch’ ..., following the traditional division of the text, the resulting parallelism between a causative and simple transitive verb is awkward. There is no clear evidence that the hiphil of the root *nbṭ* ever has a causative sense, however.” Roberts’ (p. 87) final translation of 1:3 is: “Why do you make me see iniquity and trouble? [Why] do you idly watch, while plunder and violence are before me? While there is strife and contention arises?” Andersen, however, recognizes a discrepancy between v. 2 and v. 3 (i.e. Yahweh is not listening but is watching). He reasons (p. 102): “Four double-duty influences thus feed into *wē ’āmāl tabbîṭ* (v 3aB): (1) interrogation, (2) negation, (3) adverbial function for *’āmāl* in line with *hāmās* and *’āwen*, (4) the pronoun object from *tir ’ēnî*. When all these elliptical elements are made explicit, the clause means ‘And [why] hast thou [not] looked [at me] [in] [my] trouble?’”

²² The noun חמס plays a crucial role in the text of the entire book. The word is found six times in the first two chapters of Habakkuk: twice in the prophet’s lament, once in Yahweh’s oracle, and three times in the woe oracles. No other prophet besides Ezekiel employs the word as many times as Habakkuk does.

²³ Haag, “*chāmās*” in *TDOT* 4, p. 484

²⁴ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 88

figurative expression ‘they conceive *’amal* (mischief) and bring forth *’aven* (iniquity)’ (Isa. 59:4 ... cf. further Job 4:8: ‘plow *’aven* [iniquity]’ and ‘sow *’amal* [trouble]’).²⁵ In other words, they refer “to the wrongs done to the prophet or other righteous individuals in his society and the resulting hardships that he and they had to endure”.²⁶ The next word pair – שר and חמס – adds a more violent aspect to the evil. *And destruction and violence (are) before me.* Keil and Delitzsch distinguish between שר and חמס, defining the former as “violent treatment causing desolation” and the latter as “malicious conduct intended to injure another”.²⁷ Finally, as if some doubt still remains as to the extent of the prophet’s lamentable situation, he continues in v. 3 with yet another pair of synonyms: מרון and ריב. *And there is strife and contention lifts itself up.* “‘Strife’ (*rīb*) and ‘contention’ (*mādōn*) are both terms derived from the legal sphere; while they could refer to actual litigation, they could also refer more generally to conflict that had not reached the level of the courts.”²⁸ Harris adds: “Both terms denote conditions bred of inner spiritual deviance ... and are its outward manifestation”²⁹ Thus with three pairs of words Habakkuk embraces the many manifestations of חמס, his cry in v. 2. These acts probably include physical, ethical, emotional and even verbal abuses.

There is at least one more point in regards to the vocabulary of Hab. 1:3 which deserves attention. The terms, in and of themselves, say nothing definite about the identity of the wicked; they could easily be used to describe either a foreign or a native evil-doer.³⁰ Several commentators, however, turn to the vocabulary of 1:3 to defend their identifications of the wicked. Bailey, for example, says: “The passage contains four nouns that indicate the problems in Judah during the reign of Jehoiakim. Jerusalem and Judah under the leadership of Jehoiakim could be described as a city of destruction and violence where contention and strife abound.”³¹ Bailey’s description of Judah during the rule of Jehoiakim is most likely accurate, but the terms, in and of themselves, do not imply that the wicked party in Habakkuk must be Jehoiakim. Floyd’s observations serve to counter such an interpretation. Of Hab. 1:2-4 he says:

Its focus on the local scene is often contrasted with the focus elsewhere on Babylon and the international scene. The crisis that occasions this complaint is certainly described as having a direct and devastating impact

²⁵ Bernhardt, “’āven” in *TDOT* 1, p. 142. As explained by Andersen (p. 115): “Trouble (*’āmāl*) is experienced by a victim of the iniquity (*’āwen*) of a wrongdoer (NRSV).”

²⁶ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 89

²⁷ Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 56-7. Haag (“chāmās” in *TDOT* 4, pp. 480-1) says: “The pair ... seems almost to have been felt to constitute a single concept. ... It would be difficult to maintain the distinction between *shōdh*, which means violence against property and possession, and *chāmās*, which signifies an attack on human life.”

²⁸ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 89. See also Andersen, p. 118.

²⁹ J.G. Harris, p. 24

³⁰ See e.g. Haak, p. 32; Vasholz, p. 51; and Gruenthaner, p. 136.

³¹ Bailey, p. 297

on the prophet and his immediate surroundings, but nothing suggests either that the crisis is confined to the local situation or that its genesis lies there. ... The description of trouble is phrased in the stereotypical terminology of the complaint (Humbert, 10-11), and although this description undoubtedly came to expression in response to some particular historical circumstances, the same description could well apply to any situation in which legal norms and customary standards of decency have broken down.³²

This thesis holds that the vocabulary of Hab. 1:3 simply cannot be used as substantial evidence to decide whether the wicked in the passage is either native or foreign.

Andersen observes that the emphasis in v. 3 is on “the plight of the righteous rather than on the criminal activities of the wicked”.³³ It seems, then, that the role of the wicked party, who is not even mentioned until v. 4, is a slight one. The prophet’s prayer focuses first on Yahweh’s neglect and then on the predicament in which Habakkuk finds himself, the former expressed with rhetorical questions and the latter, with the repetition of particular terms. The desperation of the prophet thus results as much (if not more) from Yahweh’s neglect as from the activities of the wicked. “Verses 2-3 lay the blame squarely and exclusively on God. And it is precisely because of God’s delinquency that humans get away with so much wrongdoing.”³⁴ “Yahweh’s unresponsiveness to this supplicant’s cry ... implicates him in the spread of strife throughout the society (v. 3). Yahweh is therefore evidently to blame for the current breakdown of social norms (v. 4a).”³⁵

The first two verses of Habakkuk’s prayer leave no doubt as to the desperation of his cry. However, if Yahweh needs to be persuaded further to give attention to his prophet, then Hab. 1:4 provides such a motivation. The prophet skillfully draws the law into his plea, because “[in] prophetic thinking the breakdown of justice is the ultimate in social depravity”.³⁶ Indeed, the prophet seems to be shifting attention away from himself (four first-person pronouns in vv. 2-3) and towards the concepts of תורה and משפט. A paraphrase of Habakkuk’s logic in Hab. 1:2-4 might be “Yahweh, I personally am suffering from your neglect, but so are your law and your justice”.

³² Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 103. It is worth noting how Habakkuk uses these terms elsewhere in the book. (1) In the theophany of Hab. 3:7 און describes the tents of Cushan. (2) In Hab. 1:13 the prophet refers again to Yahweh’s looking on עמל. (3) חמס is found a further four times in the book. In Hab. 1:9 the Chaldean comes for חמס. In Hab. 2:8 and 17 the addressee (probably the one who gathers to himself all the nations, 2:5) is condemned because of חמס־ארץ. Just prior to that statement in Hab. 2:17 the addressee’s sentence is that the חמס of Lebanon will cover him and the שר of cattle will terrify him. (4) ריב and מדון are only found in Hab. 1:3.

³³ Andersen, p. 115. He concludes: “This ... supports our claim that the prayer is a complaint (against God) following a failed protest (a demand for punitive justice against the wrongdoer).”

³⁴ Ibid., p. 133

³⁵ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 102

³⁶ J.G. Harris, p. 24

According to the MT the first half of v. 4 reads: *Therefore tôrâ grows numb, and mišpāt never goes forth.*³⁷ The first phrase is difficult to interpret because the subject is as frequent (220 times) as the verb is infrequent (four times). The Hebrew תורה is so broadly used in the OT and carries such great theological weight that it is difficult to assign a distinctive significance to its use in this context. For example, Armerding claims: “When used in the singular without clear definition, as here, ‘law’ signifies God’s covenantal code established with Israel, given through Moses and set forth particularly in the Book of Deuteronomy”³⁸ Andersen, on the other hand, maintains: “here is no indication that [Habakkuk] has in mind a written body of instruction – the Law of Moses or a portion of it – that served as the primary means of access to the mind of God. Habakkuk’s concerns, theological or ethical, are not those of Deuteronomy. They are more in the tradition of Isaiah and Micah.”³⁹ Given this lack of consensus a simple, contextual definition of *tôrâ* as “the major force which should hold [the injustices of Hab. 1:3] in check” is probably the most helpful.⁴⁰

The rare verb פוג, translated above as “grows numb”, is no easier to understand. Three of the four references (Pss. 38:9; 77:3; Gen. 45:26) are of human suffering or inability to function physically.⁴¹ Habakkuk, however, speaks of *tôrâ*’s growing numb. According to Haak this means that “the law did not properly order the country”.⁴² Roberts understands this phrase as the crippling of the “law’s effectiveness as a tool for justice in Judean society”.⁴³ Johnson interprets the verb specifically as a “paralysis” of *tôrâ*. He states: “Thus the essential thrust of *tāpûg* in Hab i 4 is not that of transgression of specific commandments but rather that the torah has become ineffective”⁴⁴ Johnson goes on to say that since Habakkuk employs a term that depicts paralysis, rather than brokenness or transgression, the prophet is referring to the non-fulfillment of specific promises (i.e. blessings which include land retention, security from foreign oppression, security of the king, and divine *hesed*) that are

³⁷ Haak (p. 32) notes: “The legal nuances of these terms [מורה and פוג] are confirmed by the close connection of v. 4a with v. 3. This brings the term ‘law’ to the fore at the climax of this unit.”

³⁸ Armerding, p. 500. Bailey (p. 298) believes Armerding is “importing too precise a definition from the Pentateuch into prophecy”. See also Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 90 and Johnson, p. 262 for *tôrâ* in Habakkuk as Deuteronomy. Achtemeier (pp. 34-5) defines *tôrâ* more broadly as “the whole religious tradition of Israel, including her Deuteronomic law, her traditions of what God has done in her past life, and the on-going guidance afforded her day by day through the preaching and teaching of priests and prophets”.

³⁹ Andersen, p. 118

⁴⁰ Baker, p. 52

⁴¹ The broader contexts of the two Psalms, incidentally, closely reflect that of the prophet’s cry in Hab. 1:2-4.

⁴² Haak, p. 34

⁴³ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 90

⁴⁴ Johnson, pp. 259-60

found in תורה (which Johnson understands as Deuteronomy).⁴⁵ Understood in this manner פוג creates a graphic picture of *tôrâ*'s being unable to function. Add to this that *mišpāt*⁴⁶ never goes forth or is not currently in practice and the first part of Hab. 1:4 makes it abundantly clear that something has gone amiss in the administration of the guidelines and policies of the people. According to Junker, "*Habakkuk kennt also eine göttliche thora als Grundlage der sozialen Gerechtigkeit unter den Menschen.*"⁴⁷ The prophet is grieving over the breakdown and collapse of this foundation.

The remainder of v. 4, which follows the Hebrew *'atnāh*, serves as a synopsis of what precedes it. The initial clause (*because a wicked one is surrounding the righteous one*⁴⁸) summarizes the record of violence in v. 3, and the final clause (*therefore mišpāt goes forth twisted*) summarizes the argument made in v. 4a. Except for the participial qualifier⁴⁹ this last expression is seen twice in verse 4, the one instance seeming to contradict the other. First the prophet says that *mišpāt* never goes forth, and then he says that *mišpāt* does indeed go forth, albeit in a perverted manner. This is probably the prophet's way of expressing that a twisted or perverted *mišpāt* is no *mišpāt* at all.

Because Yahweh does not answer or save the prophet (v. 2) and because the conditions of violence persist (v. 3), therefore the *tôrâ* is paralyzed and *mišpāt* is perverted (v. 4). The introductory "therefore" in v. 4, according to Johnson, "indicates that the basis of the charge of nonfulfillment of the torah is the list of evils in vv. 2-3."⁵⁰ This, however, seems to miss Habakkuk's main point. His problem is not so much with the evil deeds of v. 3 as with the divine neglect of v. 2. Thus Andersen and Henderson, for example, suggest that the

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 262-3. Andersen also offers an interesting option for understanding פוג. He (p. 118, italics added) says that "the intended reference eludes us ... [but it] ... might imply *failure by God* to supply Torah". "The parallelism of Mic 4:2 shows that the *tôrâ* of Yahweh is issued in Jerusalem as a prophetic 'word,' and the *mišpāt* in Hab 1:4 is the same. ... So it is more likely that what Habakkuk calls the slackening of the *tôrâ* is not the neglect of their teaching duties by the priests (Jer 18:18; cf. Hos 4:6), or the failure of human judges to apply *tôrâ*, but the silence of God." (p. 119) "Indeed, [Habakkuk's] choice of the unusual verb *pwg* suggests something dysfunctional in the *tôrâ* itself To see this breakdown as unresponsiveness in God is in keeping with the rest of Habakkuk's prayer." (p. 121)

⁴⁶ As for משפט, Keil (vol. 2, p. 57) defines it simply as "a righteous state of things, objective right in the civil and political life".

⁴⁷ Junker, p. 41

⁴⁸ According to Andersen (p. 121): "If [the verb] means 'surround' in a hostile (Ps 22:13) or military (Judg 20:43) sense ... it is hard to see how the verb could describe a miscarriage of justice in the courts More likely, it describes the success of criminals in society. To interpret it as 'gets around' (that is, circumvents the law) is really another picture." Besides Ps. 22:13, Judg. 20:43, and Hab. 1:4 כתר only occurs one other time in the OT (Ps. 142:8 [7]). David prays: *Bring my soul out of prison, so that I may give thanks to Thy name; the righteous כתר me, for Thou wilt deal bountifully with me.*

⁴⁹ As a hapax legomenon מעקל is not very helpful in elucidating the understanding of the text. When the Syriac cognate verb, which means "twist", and the translations of the Hebrew cognate adjectives, each of which occur in negative contexts, are considered, then the traditional rendering of "twisted" in Hab. 1:4 is reasonable. See Bruce, p. 845.

⁵⁰ Johnson, p. 260

“therefore” refers back to v. 2 and not to v. 3.⁵¹ Yahweh’s disregard of the prophet and his circumstances has very real and devastating effects on *tôrâ* and *mišpāt*.

The final point to be made in regards to Hab. 1:4 is the same one that was made in regards to the prior verse: the key terms, in and of themselves, say nothing definite about the identity of the wicked. Nevertheless scholars attempt to defend their various identities for the wicked on the basis of this verse. O.P. Robertson states the most typical argument for native evil-doers: “The abuse of *torah* points to God’s own people oppressing one another.”⁵² Bailey similarly states: “The terms ‘law’ and ‘justice’ would apply to Judah more naturally than to Babylon.”⁵³ However, Mason effectively counters this sort of thinking.

Some have argued that the reference to the breach of Torah suggests an inner-Judaeian situation, but it is by no means impossible that foreigners also could be seen as breaking God’s law (compare the opening oracles against the nations in the book of Amos); and, as some have suggested, it was often when under foreign domination that native leaders were either careless or impotent with regard to their responsibility to establish ‘justice’ in society.⁵⁴

Johnson, whose primary concern is on the *paralysis* of *tôrâ*, concurs: “There is no indication in this phrase that the workers of violence, troubles, wrongs, and destruction are inhabitants of Jerusalem”⁵⁵ Johnson believes, “on the contrary, [that] the very occurrence of violence and destruction at the hands of foreigners was seen by Habakkuk as the paralysis of *tôrâ* and *mišpāt*.”⁵⁶ In his summary of Johnson’s view, Mason alludes to both the foreign and native possibilities: “such conditions may have been due to the damaging effects of *foreign domination*, under which the proper maintenance by *native leaders* of Yahweh’s will for his people became impossible.”⁵⁷ Though the vocabulary of Hab. 1:4 can be interpreted to suit either a native or a foreign oppressor, it conclusively points to neither internal nor external corruption as the source of violence.

Even if the reasoning were more convincing, the interpretations of one rare verb (פּוֹג) and two common nouns (מִשְׁפָּט and תּוֹרָה) are not strong enough to support the full weight of an argument for naming the wicked in this passage. The history of Habakkuk’s inconsistent interpretation, reviewed in the introduction to this thesis, is proof enough that the matter is not as easy as this. Some scholars conclude that the “wicked” and “righteous” are to be regarded

⁵¹ Andersen, p. 123 and Henderson, p. 294. Andersen claims: “It’s not the triumph of the wicked, but the inactivity of God that tests Habakkuk’s faith.”

⁵² O.P. Robertson, p. 139

⁵³ Bailey, p. 298. Haak (p. 34) also identifies the wicked with Judah, particularly the Judean monarchy. “The direct responsibility for the establishment of ‘law’ and ‘order’ rests with the king (cf. Is. 42:2; 51:4; etc.). Thus Habakkuk’s immediate concern is with the effectiveness of the king of Judah and not with the foreign oppressor as such.”

⁵⁴ Mason, p. 86

⁵⁵ Johnson, p. 260

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Mason, p. 83 (*italics added*)

generally and not specifically. “The verse is far more likely to bear a general sense here – *all* the righteous are beset by the many wicked.”⁵⁸ “*,Frevler‘ und ,Gerechter‘ sind zunächst moralische Bezeichnungen und gehen an sich nicht direkt auf eine bestimmte Persönlichkeit.*”⁵⁹ The accusatory manner in which Habakkuk prays and the graphic picture of wrongdoing that he paints, however, are evidence against such a vague understanding. Habakkuk’s cry to Yahweh must have been prompted by actual circumstances, but this thesis nevertheless maintains that his words recorded in vv. 2-4 reveal nothing about the specific identity of the instigator.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing exegetical discussion of Hab. 1:2-4. (1) There is nothing in these verses that conclusively determines whether the wicked party is foreign or native. In fact, the wicked play a very minimal role in the prayer. (2) Habakkuk’s manner of addressing Yahweh is shocking and offensive. He prays in such a way as to accuse Yahweh of wrongdoing. Regardless of any expectation that one might have regarding the book of Habakkuk, especially given the designation “oracle” in the title verse (1:1), the prophet’s prayer in 1:2-4 is anything but expected.

The prominence of questions in Habakkuk’s prayers, and the absence of moving descriptions of the prophet’s inner state of mind (contrast the “confessions” of Jeremiah), place [Habakkuk’s] prayers in the category of “complaint.” Bentzen (1959 I:157) sees the “reproachful questions” as a determinative part of the complaint, but Habakkuk’s prayer is nothing but questions and outright accusation of God. It has gone beyond complaint. It is an indictment. ... This prayer is not a lamentation in the sense of bewailing one’s misery in order to move God to compassion ... Habakkuk’s outburst is more like a protest, an accusation that Yahweh has failed to live up to his covenant commitment. However distressed Habakkuk may be about the wickedness rampant in his day, it is the inactivity of God that exasperates him even more.⁶⁰

The real problem for Habakkuk is Yahweh, in particular Yahweh’s neglect. The earthly consequences of this neglect are only secondary.

3. Hab. 1:5-11

**⁵See the nations and look, and astound yourselves – be astounded;
for a work (being) worked in your days you will not believe
though it will be told.**

**⁶For behold I am causing the Chaldeans to rise,
the bitter and the impetuous nation;**

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 85. Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 90) similarly concludes: “Habakkuk is probably using both the terms ‘wicked’ and ‘righteous’ in their generic senses well attested in psalmic and wisdom literature. It is doubtful whether he has in mind a particular individual for either figure, though he clearly sees himself as a righteous person.”

⁵⁹ Junker, p. 42

⁶⁰ Andersen, p. 125. Similarly Gowan (*Triumph*, p. 33) says: “Habakkuk’s book begins abruptly, with no hint of what has gone wrong or in what situation the prophet is raising the complaint. ... here [is] simply ... an attack directed against God himself.”

going towards expanses of earth,
to take possession of dwelling places not (belonging) to it.
⁷Terrible and feared is it; from itself its *mišpāt* and its dignity will go forth.
⁸And its horses are swifter than leopards,
and they are sharper than wolves of evening,
and its steeds spring about; and its steeds from afar will come,
they will fly as an eagle hastening to eat.
⁹Each one, for violence he will come, the multitude of their faces is forward;
and he will gather like the sand captives.
¹⁰And he, at the kings, he will mock,
and commanding ones (will be) an object-of-laughter for him;
he, at each (city of) fortification, he will laugh,
and he will heap-up dust and he will capture it.
¹¹Then he will pass on (like) wind and he will pass through,
and he will be guilty; he whose strength is for his god.

A divine deed

Hab. 1:5-11 is no less emphatic than Hab. 1:2-4, but it is obviously distinct from it. That v. 5 begins a new section of text is apparent from the plural imperatives at the start, indicating a change in audience, and from the content through v. 11, indicating a change in speaker.⁶¹ Though no introductory expression akin to “Thus says the LORD” is present, other parts of the passage make clear that these verses represent a divine speech. Yahweh, in fact, goes from addressee in 1:2-4 to addresser in 1:5-11. Yet before the relationship between these two passages can be discussed, a review of vv. 5-11 is in order.⁶² The focus of this section is on a divine deed. In v. 5 Yahweh calls attention to it, in the first portion of v. 6 he announces it, and in the remaining verses he describes it.

The preface to Yahweh’s speech takes the unusual form of a four-fold command, which begins: *See ... look ...* More frequent among the prophets are expressions that call upon the auditory rather than visual senses, but the effect is the same. *Hear this, O elders, and listen, all inhabitants of the land.* (Joel 1:2) *Hear, O peoples, all of you. Listen, O earth and all it contains.* (Mic. 1:2) The second two imperatives in Hab. 1:5 – *astound yourselves – be astounded* – repeat the verbal root *תמה*.⁶³ The verb is only found ten times in all of the OT, but the context of each is one of fear, usually a fear of Yahweh. There is trembling (Job 26:11), terror and alarm (Ps. 48:6), pain and anguish (Isa. 13:8), failed hearts and appalled

⁶¹ See e.g. Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 94 and O.P. Robertson, p. 142.

⁶² This particular exegetical method is employed so as better to evaluate the dialogue theory. That is, each section of Hab. 1 is first analyzed in and of itself and then tested to see how well it fits into the role that has been assigned to it by the dialogue framework.

⁶³ Bruce (p. 847) says that the “combination of the hiphil [*sic, hitpa ‘el*] imperative ... and the qal imperative of the same verb ... sharpens the command by virtue of the repetition of the verbal idea”, but Andersen (p. 141) calls the progression from *hitpa ‘el* to *qal* “problematic”. Isa. 29:9, the only other reference where the verb is repeated in both stems, is not necessarily much help. The content of the passage is not entirely clear and translations do not agree on the root of the verb. (Cf. KJV, NASB, NEB and RV who render “to linger” from *מהה*.)

priests (Jer. 4:9). Likewise in Habakkuk this is probably not an amazement of wonder but one of dread. According to Roberts: “It is rather the astonishment of dismay as in Isa. 29:9-12 and Jer. 4:9, because this is in fact a word of judgment.”⁶⁴ The very least that can be said of this opening expression is that the four-fold repetition of the imperative heightens the import of what follows.

Though Yahweh emphatically attempts to gain the attention of his audience, the addressee in vv. 5-11 is not made explicit. One can presume only that the audience includes more than one person, since each of the four imperatives is found in its plural form. (Cf., for example, the specific identities of the audiences in the references cited previously: elders and inhabitants in Joel 1:2; peoples and earth in Mic. 1:2.) Some translations depart from the MT in order to further qualify this audience. The Hebrew term in question is בגוים. Some Greek manuscripts and most modern translations retain this word and define it “among the nations” (or the like). However the LXX, 1QpHab, Acts 13:41, and even some modern commentators such as Bruce emend the term to read בגד׳ים (see Hab. 1:13 and 2:5) and render it as a vocative expression akin to “you despisers”.

One must consider what influenced the authors of the LXX and 1QpHab to emend the MT here.⁶⁵ Regarding the Greek translation Andersen suggests that “the change was motivated by the need to know whom Yahweh is addressing”.⁶⁶ To make this even clearer, the LXX authors added the Greek for “and perish” after the four imperatives. “The introduction of these words may indicate that the Greek translators had sensed an incompleteness in the thought of the passage as they had rendered it apart from this addition.”⁶⁷ This suggests that neither the emendation nor the addition better reflects the original autograph. As for the Qumran commentary: “It ought to be underscored at this point that the reading *baggôyim* is the only extant representation of the text in Hebrew. 1QpHab reads *bwgdym* in its interpretive remarks, but the text itself is missing at this point.”⁶⁸ O.P. Robertson reminds scholars that “it is fairly clear that in their zeal to contemporize the message of Habakkuk, the Qumran scribes often departed rather radically from the text of the prophecy in their interpretations”.⁶⁹ Since neither satisfying an interpretive need nor making an old message more up-to-date is a legitimate justification for emending the MT, there seems no compelling reason to change the text or the translation.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 95

⁶⁵ Referring to Acts 13:41 O.P. Robertson (p. 144) says: “A quotation from the LXX by the NT does not involve intentional endorsement of the Greek text as representing the more faithful witness.”

⁶⁶ Andersen, p. 140. See footnote 70 below for the full quotation.

⁶⁷ O.P. Robertson, p. 143

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 144

⁷⁰ Andersen (pp. 140-1) summarizes the debate. “The change *bgwym* \leftrightarrow *bwgdym* could have taken place in either direction. On the one hand, if *bgwym* is original, reading *bwgdym* for *bgwym* within the transmission of the Hebrew text requires the transposition of *w* and addition of *d*. It is possible that the

The first half of Hab. 1:5 effectively and dramatically gains the attention of Yahweh's congregation, while the last half of the verse heightens the expectation of the listeners by alluding to an inconceivable deed. *For a work (being) worked in your days, you will not believe though it will be told.* A good number of translations (e.g. JB, KJV, NASB, NIV, RSV and RV) and commentators (e.g. Andersen, Bailey, O.P. Robertson and Ward) supply the first-person singular pronoun, indicating that Yahweh, as the speaker, is the one executing this act, and consequently they take the nominal form of פֶּעַל as the direct object of the sentence. "I am working a *work* (or doing a *deed*) in your days." Andersen defends the addition of the first-person subject this way: "The pronoun may be rightly understood from the parallel participle clause in v 6a. This double action of *hinēni* is important evidence that the principle of double duty can operate retroactively (NJB)."⁷¹ Yet even though the particle *can* operate retroactively, it must not do so necessarily. Given the first-person pronominal suffix on הִנְנִי in v. 6 – "Behold I" – Yahweh is certainly responsible for the deed referred to in v. 5.⁷² However, to add prematurely such information obscures the primary focus of v. 5, which is the deed itself. The grammatical structure of the verse makes this readily apparent.

For the sake of discussion, Hab. 1:5b is divided into three phrases. The somewhat wooden rendering of the first phrase – *for a work (being) worked in your days* – attempts to reflect the repetition of the root פֶּעַל in its nominal and verbal forms.⁷³ The translational problem in this emphatic expression, rather than being the lack of a subject, is the proper rendering of the verb or, more precisely, the pointing of the MT which indicates an *active* participle. This difficulty is noted in the ancient versions: while the LXX and S reflect the active participle (with the added subject pronoun), T and V reflect the passive.⁷⁴ Likewise, modern commentators differ. Roberts notes that the active participle is difficult since one expects a pronominal form to indicate the subject, and therefore he corrects the pointing such that a passive participle is read. "For a work is about to be done in your days ..."⁷⁵ Floyd,

change was motivated by the need to know whom Yahweh is addressing (the verbs have no subject in the MT). ... The choice of *bwgdym* could have been prompted by its similarity to *bgwym* and by influence from the words with \sqrt{bgd} that occur later in the book (the spelling of the participle is *plene* in Hab 1:13 and Hab 2:5). ... On the other hand, if (*h*) *bwgdym* was original, we have to explain how it became *bgwym*. That word is common and might have been written by pure carelessness. A third possibility (suggested by David Noel Freedman) is that both words were originally present (in either order), and one was lost by word haplography. ... In the context of the book, the MT is a suitable reading. Habakkuk's vision is set on the world stage ..."

⁷¹ Andersen, p. 143

⁷² Speaking of the LXX, which also adds the pronoun in v. 5, Floyd (*Minor Prophets*, p. 104) rightly observes that it is "not amiss in assuming that this 'work' is attributable to Yahweh, but in the MT Yahweh's involvement remains implicit until v. 6".

⁷³ Ps. 44:2 [1] is the only other instance where the nominal and verbal forms of פֶּעַל are seen together, but in this verse the subject ("Thou") of the verbal form is stated explicitly. *O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, the פֶּעַל that Thou פֶּעַל in their days, in the days of old.*

⁷⁴ See Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 91.

⁷⁵ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 91. See Gen. 20:9b and Isa. 14:3b, where cognates are used in passive constructions. GKC (p. 360, §116s) notes that the subjective pronoun in a participial clause is often

however, referring to the active participle, observes that “the MT actually uses the impersonal expression *pô ‘al pō ‘ēl*, which means in effect that ‘a work is in progress’ (Bratcher, 141, n. b; Keller [*Habacuc*, 149] adduces other ancient versions in support of a similar sense).⁷⁶ The ultimate hermeneutical difference between the two participles (“a work being worked” versus “a work working”) is probably too slight to warrant further discussion. Either way Yahweh, it seems, is calling attention to a deed that is currently happening or is about to happen.

The second phrase in v. 5b completes the thought begun in the first phrase. In fact, when the verse is rendered literally (that is, without the added divine subject) the grammar holds together quite well. *For a work (being) worked in your days you will not believe ...* . The true subject of this sentence is the plural “you”, the audience; the verb is “to believe”; and the direct object, emphatically placed at the beginning of the sentence, is “a work”. This follows from v. 5a; the audience is to give its undivided attention to the announcement of “a work”. The grammatical features of v. 5b illuminate rather than obscure the interpretation. Unfortunately many commentators miss this observation; they prematurely make Yahweh’s role more explicit and thus conceal the emphasis on “a work (being) worked”.

The third and final phrase of v. 5b – *though it will be told* – functions as a dependent clause. A few translations (e.g. JB, NASB, NIV and Bailey) render the expression to read something like “though *you* were told”, replacing the third-person pronoun with the second-person. Though this seems an insignificant alteration to the text, it nevertheless obscures once again the emphasis indicated by the Hebrew. The meaning of the sentence is no better understood by this change in pronoun, and the emphasis on “a work” is lost. The phrase reads literally: *you will not believe though it will be told* – i.e. though *a work* will be told. The Hebrew sentence structure of the entire verse places great stress on “a work” and, therefore, skillfully sets up the audience for the high point of the oracle.

This pinnacle is reached in the beginning of Hab. 1:6 where the unbelievable deed is finally designated. *For behold I am causing the Chaldeans to rise*. Verse 5b predicts that the audience’s response to the announcement of this work is disbelief, but what exactly is the unbelievable aspect? Is it the fact that Chaldea is being raised or the fact that Yahweh is causing it?⁷⁷ On the one hand, Bruce says: “This new state of [political] affairs was the work

omitted but also expresses uncertainty that this is the case in Hab. 1:5. Rudolph (p. 203, footnote 5) suggests: “[*Man müßte*] entweder אִנִּי *einfügen* oder אֶפְעַל *lesen, also den Konsonantentext ändern, ohne den jetzigen Stand erklären zu können, deshalb ist mit Σ Part. Pass. אֶפְעַל zu punktieren (van Hoonacker).*”

⁷⁶ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 104. Andersen (p. 139, italics added) adds: “Although the oracle begins with a prediction of what Yahweh is about to do, it is mainly about what the Chaldeans *have already done*.”

⁷⁷ As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, scholars often look to the coming of the Chaldeans as unbelievable in order to date the book of Habakkuk, but one must consider that this is not necessarily the only unbelievable element of the “work” in Hab. 1:5b. O.P. Robertson (p. 146) offers several possibilities. “Many facets could be noted, including the rapidity of the rise of power of God’s instru-

of God that the scoffers ‘would not believe if told.’”⁷⁸ Baker tentatively agrees: “The surprising event ... apparently refers to the swift rise to power of the ‘Chaldeans’”⁷⁹ On the other hand, Rudolph says:

*Das eigentlich Erstaunliche und Unglaubliche an diesem Gottesbescheid ist aber noch gar nicht die Eröffnung, daß dieses Volk, das neu die Weltbühne betritt, mit Wissen and Willen Jahwes kommt. Denn daß Jahwe, der Herr der Welt und ihrer Völker, auch heidnische Nationen in seinen Dienst stellen und als Zuchtruten für sein eigenes Volk gebrauchen kann, hatten auch andere Propheten verkündigt. Vielmehr ist es die geflissentliche Hervorhebung der Art, wie dieses Volk vorgeht, was geradezu anstößig wirkt und die Behauptung, daß hier Jahwe am Werk sei, unglaublich macht*⁸⁰

O.P. Robertson as well suspects: “The particular event for which Israel was to be astonished had to be viewed ultimately not as an example of human brutality but of the awesome work of God.”⁸¹

It is difficult to prove either option as altogether false, for there is probably a measure of truth in both. However, three grammatical observations can be made in support of the latter option, namely that the unbelievable aspect of the “work” named in Hab. 1:6a is that Yahweh is causing it. (1) Attached to the causal link (כי) by a *maqṣep* is הנה. Lambdin calls this demonstrative particle a predicator of existence that emphasizes the immediacy of a situation.⁸² When the pronominal suffix is added to the particle (הנני), then Yahweh himself is the first piece of information provided in the definition of the unbelievable work. (2) The verb is in the *hip ʿil* stem (מקים); Yahweh is *causing* this work to come to pass. The same information could have been expressed with an active verb – “For behold the Chaldeans are rising” – but the use of the *hip ʿil* stem further highlights Yahweh’s place in the drama. As suggested previously, importing the fact of Yahweh’s role to v. 5 actually takes away from the impact of its bold and surprising announcement in v. 6. (3) Andersen suggests that this passage is to be understood in the past tense. “If the evident reading of the verbs as past tense is valid, this is a recital of the deeds the Chaldeans have already performed, as the audience can confirm by gazing around among the nations (v 5aA).”⁸³ Unfortunately, there is no scholarly consensus as to whether or not the Chaldeans are already present on the political

ment for judgment, the intensity of the judgment that is to come, and the fact that God himself is to be involved in this action. But most incredible is the fact that God’s own people could be cast off” Andersen (p. 148), however, claims that “it is not at all clear what it is about the LORD’s action that will not be believed”.

⁷⁸ Bruce, p. 848

⁷⁹ Baker, p. 53

⁸⁰ Rudolph, p. 207

⁸¹ O.P. Robertson, p. 145. Andersen (p. 144) adds: “[This] expected disbelief is not so much a difficulty in accepting the reported fact ..., as in acknowledging (*hʿmn* means “affirm”) the events as acts of God perceived to have a just purpose. ... This ‘deed’ of God constitutes a crisis of faith for the believer, not an invitation to faith for the unbeliever.”

⁸² Lambdin, p. 168

⁸³ Andersen, p. 139

and military scenes when the divine message of 1:5-11 is received. If they are not yet on the scene, then the announcement of their coming could certainly be regarded as unbelievable. However, if they are on the scene, as Andersen suggests, then the announcement of Yahweh's role could be regarded as unbelievable.

However this aspect of unbelief is to be understood, the heart of Yahweh's message is found in v. 6a. After gaining the fearful attention of his audience by commanding them to look on the nations (v. 5a) and after speaking emphatically of a deed that no one will believe (v. 5b), Yahweh then, without further delay or preamble, reveals this deed. According to Andersen the verb here ("to cause to rise") does not mean "to bring a new nation into existence" but "to appoint to a task".⁸⁴ Verses 6b-10 of Yahweh's message define this task in horrific detail. They illustrate who the Chaldeans are and how they behave.

Before the interpretation of this large section of text is addressed, brief mention must be made of the textual history regarding **הַכְּשָׁרִים** ("the Chaldeans"), which refers to the Neo-Babylonian Empire (c. 626-539 B.C.) and "designates an ethnic group located in the southern part of Mesopotamia".⁸⁵ As mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, this term forms the foundation of most theories regarding the historical background of the book, though a handful of scholars do not regard the term as original. Roberts summarizes the debate and is quoted below at length.

Some Greek manuscripts, including A, Q, and W, add *tous machētas*, "the warriors," after "the Chaldeans," and the Göttingen edition of the Septuagint accepts this as the original reading, bracketing *tous Chaldaious*, "the Chaldeans," as a secondary gloss. This can hardly be correct. Other Greek manuscripts, including B, S, V, and a group of Lucianic texts, lack *tous machētas*, and the reading is not attested in the other versions V, S, or T. As Rudolph has convincingly argued (pp. 203-204), it is far more likely that the less well-attested *tous machētas* (= Heb. *gibbôrîm*) is the secondary gloss.^[86] It was presumably introduced in the exegetical tradition when, in later historical situations, readers felt compelled to apply this old description of the Babylonian enemy to a more contemporary enemy power. One can see the hints of this development in the Habakkuk peshet from Qumran, where the reference to the Chaldeans in this verse is interpreted as referring to "the Kittaim (= Romans) ... who are swift and mighty warriors (*gbwrym*) in battle" (col. II).⁸⁷

Roberts argues well that "Chaldeans" should be retained in the rendering of Hab. 1:6.

However, he adds later that the "description of this nation's character and prowess in war

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 148. See Hab. 1:12. *Yahweh, for mišpāt you appointed him.*

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 145

⁸⁶ According to Rudolph (pp. 203-4) it is unlikely that *gibborim* is original, "denn die Apposition »das starke und ungestüme Volk« mit ihrem bestimmten Artikel verlangt als Beziehungswort einen bestimmten Namen, nicht das verschwommene »die Helden«".

⁸⁷ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 92. For further discussion see Elliger (pp. 31-32), who supports **הַגְּבוּרִים** as the original reading, and Andersen (p. 146), who summarizes Cannon's (pp. 77-83) arguments against tampering with **הַכְּשָׁרִים**.

continues a well-known tradition in prophetic oracles of judgment In other words, the description probably owes more to the literary conventions than it does to any firsthand knowledge ... concerning the Babylonian army.”⁸⁸ Whether the listening audience identifies this description in Hab. 1:6b-10 specifically with Chaldea or regards it formulaically, it must have a profound impact on them nonetheless.

Much could be said about vv. 6b-10, especially in regards to the various textual difficulties,⁸⁹ but for the most part the description speaks for itself.⁹⁰ Chaldea is a cruel and greedy nation (v. 6b), which operates as a law unto itself (v. 7); its war horses swiftly carry (v. 8) a violent and merciless regiment (v. 9) to its military goal (v. 10). One phrase, however, in v. 9 – מגמת פניהם קדימה (*the multitude of their faces is forward*) – receives much attention in the commentaries and so deserves mention here. Almost parenthetically it seems to describe exactly how the Chaldean regiment will come for violence. The translation of these three Hebrew words is not an easy one, as is demonstrated in Table 1, and the rendering given above is, by no means, certain. Though the second word (פניהם) is relatively straightforward, there is little consensus as to how the first word (מגמת), a *hapax legomenon*, should be translated.⁹¹ Thus the final term (קדימה) generally dictates the understanding of the prior two and is usually translated in one of two ways, directionally (e.g. Andersen, Haak and O.P.

⁸⁸ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, pp. 95-6. See Isa. 5:26-30; 13:17-18; Jer. 4:7, 13; 6:22-23.

⁸⁹ These problems generally do not prevent one from accurately interpreting the text. For example: (1) In v. 7 there are two possible difficulties: gender agreement and subject-verb agreement. First, the Hebrew noun ושאתו (“and its dignity”) is feminine but the following verb יצא (“will go forth”) is masculine. Second, the subject is compound (“*mišpāt*” and “dignity”) and the verb is singular. The *BHS* apparatus suggests that ושאתו be deleted, but a singular verb with a compound subject (“*mišpāt*” [masc.] and “dignity” [fem.]) is not unusual in Hebrew grammar. (2) Some think there is a textual problem with the expression “wolves of evening” (ערב) in v. 8 and opt to translate it “wolves of the desert” (ערבה). Both phrases are found elsewhere in the Hebrew OT (see Zeph. 3:3 for the former expression and Jer. 5:6 for the latter) and both communicate virtually the same message. (3) Also in v. 8, the *BHS* apparatus and most commentaries note some textual difficulty with the back-to-back repetition of פרשיו (“its steeds”) and suggest that it possibly represents a dittographic error. However, the duplication of the word, even if it is unintentional, does not hinder one from interpreting the clause accurately. (4) There is a gender contradiction in v. 10b between the feminine suffix on the verb לכד (“to capture”) and the most likely antecedent, מבצר (“fortification”), which is masculine. According to Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 93) either the antecedent is elliptical for the feminine phrase עיר מבצר (e.g. 1 Sam. 6:18; Jer. 1:18; Ps. 108:11) or the suffix needs to be emended according to a masculine antecedent (with the Habakkuk peshet).

⁹⁰ These verses abound in poetic devices which, though evident in the original Hebrew, are often lost in the English translations. Some examples are: (1) a word play in v. 6b, המר והנמהר (“bitter” and “impetuous”); (2) repetition of sound in v. 6b, לא לו (“not [belonging] to it”); (3) another word play in v. 8a, ופשו פרשיו (“and its steeds spring about”); and (4) numerous similes and metaphors, especially in v. 8 where the Chaldean horses are compared to various animals of prey.

⁹¹ According to Haak (p. 44): “The Versions offer no help. The text reflected by the LXX ... is uncertain. ... Other versions either omit (Vulgate) or seem to be guesses based on the context. ... [Many commentators] have emended to *mgmt* ... [which finds] a measure of support in the LXX Other emendations appear less likely. In fact, the appearance of *mgmt* at Qumran is a strong argument in favor of retaining the MT.”

Table 1: Translations of Hab. 1:9

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Anderson (p. 135) | ... the <i>mgmt</i> of their faces is to the front ... |
| Bailey (p. 304) | ... their hordes advance like a desert wind ... |
| Bruce (p. 846) | ... the multitude of their faces is like the east wind ... |
| Haak (p. 41) | ... The multitude of their faces are forward. ... |
| O.P. Robertson (p. 150) | ... the assembling of their faces is forward ... |
| JB | ... their faces scorching like an east wind ... |
| KJV | ... their faces shall sup up as the east wind ... |
| NASB | ... their horde of faces moves forward ... |
| NEB | ... a sea of faces rolls on ... |
| NIV | ... their hordes advance like a desert wind ... |
| RSV | ... terror of them goes before them ... |
| RV | ... their faces are set eagerly as the east wind ... |

Robertson; NASB, NEB and RSV) or metaphorically (e.g. Bailey and Bruce; JB, KJV, NIV and RV).

First, O.P. Robertson represents the directional view and speaks specifically of the “faces” when he says that the Hebrew “probably refers to the front ranks of the advancing troops of the Chaldeans”. He explains further that if the last word is rendered “eastward”, the Chaldeans are coming from the Mediterranean coast, as “[this] route would be the normal path for an army invading Palestine”, but the more likely translation is “forward”.⁹² Either is a possible rendering given the directional ה on קדִימָה . Second, the broader context of the passage is replete with analogies, and therefore some scholars presume a metaphorical understanding of the expression and compare “the מגמת of their faces” to the east wind. “East wind”, even though it is not the most likely rendering of קדִימָה ,⁹³ suits the presence of the term רוח in v. 11. Speaking of this east wind Henderson says: “Nothing could more appropriately describe the terrific appearance of the destructive Chaldaean army, than this phenomenon, which occasions awful devastation in the regions over which it passes.”⁹⁴ Roberts adds that: “Despite the difficult crux ... the first two parallel lines of v. 9 convey the thought that every horse and rider in the Babylonian cavalry is pressing forward for the

⁹² O.P. Robertson, pp. 153-4. Drinkard (“east” in *ABD* 2, p. 248) says: “Literally, [the Hebrew word root] *qdm* referred to what was before or in front of one. Thus east was the direction a person faced in order to get his/her orientation.”

⁹³ See BDB, p. 870.

⁹⁴ Henderson, p. 297. See also Drinkard, “east” in *ABD* 2, p. 248.

kill.”⁹⁵ Whatever else this difficult expression is meant to convey, one thing is certain: the Chaldeans only come with evil intentions.

Though the basic understanding of vv. 6b-10 is well communicated, there is at least one feature that is altogether undetected in many English translations and often neglected by commentators. After the initial mention of the (plural) Chaldeans and the immediate qualifier of them as a (singular) nation (v. 6a), every other relevant pronoun in the passage is singular. Nevertheless, a good number of translations (e.g. ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV and NRSV) render these pronouns as plural. The message of this particular passage is no clearer with the plural pronouns (“they” and “them”) as opposed to the singular pronouns, but the notion of the individual has great implications for the book of Habakkuk as a whole, as will be demonstrated later.⁹⁶

Roberts is one scholar who translates the Hebrew as personal, singular pronouns. He defends his rendering grammatically and hermeneutically.

The third masculine singular suffix here refers back to the noun “nation,” so normal English usage would require “it” rather than “him,” but the lack of the neuter in Hebrew makes possible a certain fluidity between the nation, personified as a male, and the nation’s king, as the embodiment of the character of the nation. ... The general tendency of the standard translations to render these forms with plural pronouns obscures this feature of the original text.⁹⁷

Andersen also maintains the singular translation, but he prefers the impersonal antecedent. “The literal translation ‘he’ gives the impression that an individual person is in mind – one particular Neo-Babylonian king. This could be so; but the pronoun objects are likewise singular, so it is more likely that the nation is viewed as a collective entity.”⁹⁸ It could also be that both the personal and impersonal understandings are appropriate in the context of Hab. 1:5-11. The nation (“it”) appears to be the best antecedent for the singular pronouns in vv. 6b-8, but vv. 9-10 more appropriately describe the actions of an individual (“he” or “him”).⁹⁹

The subtle shift in emphasis from the collective nation (“it” in vv. 6b-8) to an individual (“he” in vv. 9-10) seems to be triggered in v. 9 by כלה, which can be translated “the whole of it” (as in “the whole of the people”), “all of them” or “everyone”. It seems,

⁹⁵ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 97. See also Roberts, p. 93; Andersen, p. 155; and Haak, pp. 44-5 for fuller discussions.

⁹⁶ This is perhaps overstating what is merely an inconsistency between Hebrew and English grammars, but uniformity in translation should nevertheless be maintained. The woe oracles in Hab. 2, for instance, speak of the downfall of a single haughty man. *Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him ...?* (2:6a) Many translations retain this singular pronoun in ch. 2 even though they opt for the plural in ch. 1. Discrepancies such as this neglect the potential connections between Hab. 1:5-11 and other portions of the book. Habakkuk is, after all, the record of the prophet’s personal complaint to Yahweh that a wicked one (singular) surrounds the righteous one (singular; Hab. 1:4).

⁹⁷ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 92

⁹⁸ Andersen, p. 152. Andersen’s final translation, however, shows the masculine singular pronoun (“he”) for every pronoun in question after v. 6b.

⁹⁹ Andersen (p. 166) notes that the “description of this nation ... begins in general terms (vv 7-8) and then goes on to describe ... what sounds like more particular events (vv 9-11)”.

though, that the Hebrew could also be expressed “each one”, i.e. “each person from among all the people”. According to Gesenius, “before an indeterminate genitive כל is used in the more indefinite (individualizing) sense of *of all kinds, any ...*, or distributively *each, every ...*. It is, however, to be observed ... [that] the meaning *every* is frequent even before singulars used collectively”¹⁰⁰

Two OT references help to illustrate the possibility that this term could legitimately be translated as an emphatic singular as well as a collective. Isa. 1:23 reads: *Your rulers are rebels, and companions of thieves; כלו loves a bribe, and chases after rewards. They do not defend the orphan, nor does the widow’s plea come before them.* Apart from the two singular verbs in the middle of the verse (“loves” and “chases”), every other reference to the rulers – whether predicate nominative, verb, or object – is plural. Is this singular expression כלו better translated collectively (i.e. *all of the rulers* love a bribe and chase after rewards) or individually (i.e. *each of the rulers* loves a bribe and chases after rewards)? In similar fashion, Jer. 8:10 repeats the term in question twice: *Therefore I will give their wives* (i.e. the wise men’s wives) *to others, their fields to new owners; because from the least even to the greatest כלה is greedy for gain; from the prophet even to the priest כלה practices deceit.* The participles modifying כלה, referring to the wise men in particular capacities, are singular while the earlier references to the wise men in general are plural (“*their wives*” and “*their fields*”). Are all the wise men, considered collectively, greedy and deceitful, or is each one of them greedy – the least and the greatest – and each one of them deceitful – the prophet and the priest? Neither of these illustrations is better understood if כלה/כלו is translated as “each one” individually rather than “everyone” collectively, but with the emphatic singular a subtle accent on the guilt of *each* ruler and *each* wise man is conveyed. The same can be said of Hab. 1:9; each and every Chaldean soldier¹⁰¹ will be held responsible for the actions described in vv. 9-10. *Each one, for violence he will come.*¹⁰²

The emphatic singular is more clearly illustrated in v. 10. Both halves of the verse, in fact, begin with the singular subject pronoun הוּא. “The use of the free form of the pronoun subject with the prefixed verb is very striking, and its repetition even more so.”¹⁰³ Not only should Chaldea be feared, nation against nation (vv. 6b-8), but so should the Chaldean himself be feared, man against man (vv. 9-10). Regardless of how one finally renders the pronouns in this section – nationally (i.e. collectively), individually, or a combination of both

¹⁰⁰ GKC, p. 411, §127bc

¹⁰¹ A representative soldier seems a better understanding here than the representative king, since כלה implies that there are more than one of these characters.

¹⁰² Andersen (p. 155) notes the repetition of כלה in Hab. 1:15 and compares its presence there to its presence in Hab. 1:9, saying that it is in “the same strategic position”. Unfortunately he does not elaborate further, except to say that both represent archaic spellings (p. 185).

¹⁰³ Andersen, p. 157. Likewise Ward (p. 9) observes that: “The emphatic position of the pronoun in both couplets must be observed in translation.”

– no one can deny that the Hebrew consistently reflects a singular subject. This grammatical point is stressed now, as it is a pattern that continues throughout the book of Habakkuk.

According to the translation provided above Hab. 1:11 is the last verse in Yahweh's speech. *Then he will pass on (like) wind and he will pass through, and he will be guilty; he whose strength is for his god.* The difficulties in this verse unfortunately go beyond the translation of the pronouns. (Table 2 lists only some of the most extreme translations.) Three different speakers, for example, are imagined as uttering the words of v. 11b: the Chaldean (see Henderson), Habakkuk (see Roberts) and Yahweh (see the others). Roberts rightly observes that: "This verse is a very difficult crux, but the difficulty is largely exegetical rather than textual" ¹⁰⁴ This notoriously troublesome verse deserves systematic attention.

Table 2: Translations of Hab. 1:11

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Haak (p. 41) | Then he sweeps along (like) the wind and passes by. This, his power, devastates for his god. |
| Henderson (p. 297) | Then it gaineth fresh spirit; It passeth onward, and contracteth guilt, [saying,] Is this his power through his God? |
| Roberts (p. 91) | Then the spirit passed on, it departed, and I was astonished: "This one (takes) his might as his god!" |
| O.P. Robertson (p. 150) | Then his spirit changes, and he becomes angry and sins. This his strength is his god. |
| Ward (p. 9) | Then his purpose changeth and he passeth along, And setteth up his altar to his god. |
| KJV | Then shall <i>his</i> mind change, and he shall pass over, and offended, <i>imputing</i> this his power unto his god. |

The first major problem in v. 11 is the word רוח , which is usually translated either as a simile (e.g. NASB, NEB, NIV, RSV and RV) or as the subject of the sentence (e.g. KJV ["mind"] and JB). Some of the earliest translations also opt for רוח as subject.

The ancient versions apparently all take *rûah* as the spirit of the Chaldean king, but they differ radically in their treatment of the rest of the verse. LXX ... seems to imply that the Chaldean king will repent and make propitiation for his sins. V implies that the spirit of the Chaldean king will be changed, pass from him, and he will fall. ... [The emphasis of S and T] is on the guilt the king will incur by his pride and, in the case of T, by the honor he ascribes to his idols. ¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 97. The exception is אשם , which, according to Roberts, almost all exegetes regard as textually corrupt.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-8

Roberts therefore concludes: “None of these renderings appears very convincing, though a few modern exegetes follow LXX in assuming that *hālap rūah* means ‘(his) mind changes.’”¹⁰⁶ A popular argument against this view involves gender. Many believe that “wind” or “spirit”¹⁰⁷ cannot be the subject because the verb is masculine and רוּחַ is usually feminine. Andersen, however, vehemently argues against this sort of reasoning.

When a word such as *rūah* has two attested genders, it is poor method to report only one gender (in this instance, feminine) as normative, and the other (masculine) as exceptional. It is mischievous to absolutize this classification as a grammatical rule: *rūah* (feminine) is correct, *rūah* (masculine) is incorrect. Then the theory is defended by declaring texts in which *rūah* is evidently masculine to be corrupt and in need of emendation or to resort to some other parsing that makes *rūah* feminine.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps demonstrating his own inability to decide between the two options, Andersen translates רוּחַ as the subject (“Then the spirit swept on and passed by”), but he provides an equally good defense for taking the noun as a simile. He says: “It is commonly recognized that the word ‘wind’ in v 11a is part of a simile (‘like the wind’ in many translations), but there is no need to restore *k-* to the text (BHS).”¹⁰⁹ His argument is five-fold.

1. The pericope abounds in comparisons, with leopards, wolves, eagle, sand, dust.
2. A simile can be made without *k-*, “like,” as with “(like) dust” in v 10bB.
3. By structural analysis, we have already linked v 9aB [קִדְיָמָה] with v 11aA, as the first and last colons in an introverted unit [see p. 155].
4. “East wind” is a well-known phrase, and the adjective shows that *rūah* has its usual gender. ... It could be ... that it was the familiarity of the usual phrase *rūah qādīm* that invited splitting it up and spreading it. [See Job 15:2.] ...
5. The simile is apt; the east wind is swift and destructive, like the Chaldeans.¹¹⁰

Few would call Andersen’s first and last arguments into question.¹¹¹ Yet even if one takes for granted that the second is true, the third and fourth must be held with some

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 98. See KJV in Table 2. Isa. 21:1 has a comparable subject-verb combination – *as windstorms* [סִוּפָה] *in the Negev sweep on* [חִלְרָף] – which suggests that this understanding (i.e. רוּחַ as subject) is not entirely out of the question.

¹⁰⁷ The difference in translation between “wind” or “spirit”, according to Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 99), “is in many ways a modern and largely irrelevant objection, because the ancient Hebrew did not make that sharp distinction; to the ancient the ‘wind’ could be the sign of the presence of the ‘spirit’ (cf. Acts 2:1-4)”.

¹⁰⁸ Andersen, p. 163

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 157

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 158-9. In regards to point 2 Andersen (p. 157) notes: “Hebrew poetry made little or no use of the particles *h-*, *’āšer*, and *’et*. ... It has been recognized to a lesser degree that compactness in poetry was achieved by similar omission of other ‘particles,’ notably conjunctions and prepositions (*k-*, ‘like,’ in v 9b ...).” However, see also GKC, p. 375, §118r, who warns that this should not be assumed in all cases.

¹¹¹ One may rightly question his reference to “dust” in v. 10. Andersen (p. 157) suggests that v. 10b is parallel to v. 9b where the comparison (“like the sand”) is explicit. The “dust” in v. 10, however, could refer to the building of siege ramps.

suspicion, as they are based on the difficult portion of text in v. 9. Regarding argument three, Andersen's analysis of the structure assumes that קרימה in v. 9 is to be translated as "east wind", but, as was demonstrated previously, "forward" or "eastward" are also legitimate possibilities. By the same token, Andersen assumes in his fourth argument that קרימה is the feminine qualifier of רוח, but even he admits that it is "straining the language to its limit to have an attributive adjective ... separated from [its noun] by such a distance".¹¹²

Therefore, one can conclude that understanding רוח as a simile is only slightly more convincing than understanding it as a subject. By virtue of Andersen's stronger arguments for the former (see e.g. ESV, NASB, NIV and NSRV; Bailey and Haak) and the continued emphasis on the aforementioned singular subject ("he"), the first two phrases are translated: *Then he will pass on (like) wind and he will pass through.* "[The] invaders ... go off in another direction, changing course like the wind, to reduce the next fortress that stood in their way."¹¹³

Worth mentioning at this point is Roberts' somewhat unique understanding of Hab. 1:11. In his opinion רוח forms the obvious subject of the verb, but he does not relate that noun to the Chaldean nation.¹¹⁴ Based on Job 4:15 and 1 Kgs. 22:24, which similarly juxtapose the noun רוח and the verbs הלך and עבר respectively, Roberts points out that the spirit's passing "is the indication of the presence of a spiritual reality through which the revelation is given".¹¹⁵ He concludes: "In view of these parallels, it is best to take v. 11a not as a continuation of the description of the Babylonians but as a notice by the prophet that the revelation ... ended at this point."¹¹⁶ In other words: "[The] first part of [v. 11] is probably to be understood as marking the end of Yahweh's oracular response to Habakkuk, and the last part of the verse records the prophet's shocked response to Yahweh's word."¹¹⁷ Roberts thus regards the words in v. 11 as being spoken by the prophet himself: "Then the spirit passed on, it departed, and I was astonished: 'This one (takes) his might as his god!'"¹¹⁸

Roberts' understanding is contingent upon the re-pointing of אשם. Rather than reading it as the third-person singular perfect of אשם ("he was guilty"), he reads it as the first-person singular imperfect of שמם ("I will be astonished"). The latter verb does make for a nice inclusio with v. 5 (*astound yourselves – be astounded*), but the impact of this is lessened,

¹¹² Andersen, p. 159

¹¹³ Bruce, p. 850

¹¹⁴ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 97

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91. In defense of this rendering, Roberts raises the issue of verb tense. After noting that vv. 6-10 are generally perfects or converted imperfects (and thus present or future tenses), he (*Habakkuk*, p. 98) says: "Verse 11, however, is introduced by a temporal adverb that suggests a change in the sequence, and it is followed by a perfect and a converted imperfect, both past tense forms." Roberts (p. 99) concludes: "If one adopts this interpretation, one does not have to emend the tenses of the first two verbs, assume an unusual prophetic perfect, or explain *rûah* as the equivalent of *kârûah*."

if not altogether negated, because the Hebrew roots are not the same.¹¹⁹ Though this pointing of the text may have some merit, as will be demonstrated below, Roberts' view is difficult to maintain in its entirety. In regards to קוּר, even though "the identification of the *rúah* as the source of prophetic inspiration is common to the Deuteronomistic History ... and to classical prophecy",¹²⁰ this does not necessitate that the term is used this way in Hab. 1:11. Roberts' two Scriptural illustrations (Job 4:15 and 1 Kgs. 22:24), which are most comparable to Hab. 1:11, do not carry the weight of his view. Finally, though Roberts admirably takes great pains to maintain the consonantal MT, he assumes a great deal when he changes the speaker from Yahweh to the prophet. Admittedly, Hab. 1 does not clearly mark the transitions in speakers (cf. 1:5 and 1:12), but the contexts always make them evident. A shift between vv. 10 and 11 is probably not warranted.

Nevertheless, אָשָׁם, which is the second major problem in v. 11, requires further attention. There are actually two difficulties with the MT at this point: the understanding of the verb אָשָׁם and the disjunctive marker, *'atnāh*, which divides the verse *after* אָשָׁם. Most scholars who emend the verb follow one of two emendation routes. Based on the Qumran reading (אָשָׁם), either they emend the term to the *hip il* form of אָשָׁם and maintain the verse division after the verb ("and he will pass through and he will *devastate*"), or they emend it to the *qal* form of אָשָׁם and divide the verse before the verb ("and this one *makes* his strength his god").¹²¹ Both re-worked verbs are certainly possible, especially given the testimony of 1QpHab, and both translations make good sense in the context, but until more conclusive arguments are made it is best to maintain אָשָׁם ("and he will be guilty"). Sweeney defends this traditional rendering on the basis of a word play with the first verb in v. 11, חָלַף. "The verb means not only 'to pass through' as of wind, but also 'to transgress, overstep bounds', as indicated by its use in Isa. xxiv 5 where it refers to covenant violations."¹²² Both עָבַר and אָשָׁם thus subsequently specify the double entendre. These four options – אָשָׁם as a particular form of "to be astonished", "to devastate", "to make" or "to be guilty" – certainly do not account for each of the translations offered by scholars over the years, but they do help to illustrate how problematic the verb and, consequently, the entire verse can be.

¹¹⁹ Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 100, italics added) says: "One should note that the prophet's reaction is precisely what the opening words of the revelation (v. 5) said that the reaction of its recipients would be, *though different vocabulary is used.*"

¹²⁰ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 99

¹²¹ Haak (pp. 46-7) reveals his bias when he says: "The Versions, with the exception of the Vulgate, misunderstand, taking this word as if from $\sqrt{\text{šm}}$ ('to be guilty'). The correct understanding is indicated by 1QpHab, which reads *wyšm*. ... [G.R. Driver ("Confused Hebrew Roots", pp. 75-7)] argues that $\sqrt{\text{šm}}$ is a variant of $\sqrt{\text{yšm}}$ and that both are dialectical variants of $\sqrt{\text{šmm}}$. [See Isa. 24:6; Hos. 14:1; and Ps. 34:22.] ... Based on this same understanding, W. Brownlee [*Text*, p. 24] concludes, 'In fact, if אָשָׁם = אָשָׁם here, there is not necessarily any variant as to tense or sense.'"

¹²² Sweeney, "Structure", p. 68

As it is, the traditional understanding of חַשְׁאָ (‘‘to be guilty’’) may suit the context of vv. 5-11 better than many think it does. First, few would claim that vv. 6b-10 describe an innocent nation or a blameless soldier, and second, the last half of v. 11 – *he whose strength is for his god* – may provide the real reason for the Chaldean’s guilt.¹²³ According to Ringgren חַשְׁאָ denotes human strength or ‘‘the power that someone thinks enables him to acquire wealth’’.¹²⁴ ‘‘In reality, however, it is God who gives the power to obtain wealth (Dt. 8:18). It is therefore the ultimate hubris when the Chaldeans ‘make their own ‘‘strength’’ their god’ by scoffing at all resistance (Hab. 1:11).’’¹²⁵ Perhaps Yahweh’s estimation of guilt is not so much a result of the Chaldean’s merciless acts against humanity as it is a result of his putting his own strength in the place of God. This, of course, brings the entire discussion back to Hab. 1:6 – *For behold I am causing the Chaldeans to rise*. The Chaldean certainly does not regard himself as the instrument of Yahweh, but he is just that nonetheless. In the context of v. 7 Andersen says: ‘‘There is ... an ironic contradiction between the Chaldean’s belief that he plans his own campaigns and the truth of the matter, which is that Yahweh is raising him up.’’¹²⁶

In conclusion, Hab. 1:5-11 is all about an unbelievable deed, which is the divine appointment for a merciless nation. Verse 5 emphatically (and grammatically) calls attention to it. Yahweh is the obvious speaker, but the audience, apart from the plural imperatives, remains unnamed. Then v. 6a immediately announces the deed. Its unbelievable aspect is either that the Chaldeans are being raised or that Yahweh is causing it (or a combination of both). Finally, vv. 6b-11 describe the deed in detail. The emphasis throughout this lengthy section is on a singular subject, each Chaldean as it were. Notwithstanding the few textual and interpretive difficulties, Yahweh’s message in Hab. 1:5-11 is relatively straightforward. Yet, how exactly is its relation to the prior passage to be understood? The answer to this question is mostly taken for granted, as will soon be demonstrated.

4. The dialogue theory: Hab. 1:5-11 and its prior context

‘‘Most commentators have recognized that the understanding of the relationship of i 2-4 with i 5-11 is a determining factor in the interpretation of the book as a whole.’’¹²⁷ Of course, the converse could be true as well: misunderstanding the relationship could be a determining factor in the misinterpretation of the book. Indeed, it is the connection between

¹²³ This discussion has neglected to address the puzzling presence of חַשְׁאָ in v. 11b but has rather assumed that it refers to the guilty character in v. 11a (i.e. the Chaldean, cf. NASB). This is in keeping with the emphasis on the singular character throughout this entire section. Another possible translation could be: ‘‘This, his strength, is for his god’’.

¹²⁴ Ringgren, ‘‘kōah’’ in *TDOT* 7, p. 123

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125

¹²⁶ Andersen, p. 152

¹²⁷ Johnson, p. 261

these first two passages that often sets – correctly or incorrectly – the framework into which at least the first chapter of Habakkuk fits. The task, then, is to appropriately define that framework based on the information provided. For the majority of modern commentators and even many translations, as evidenced by the sub-headings within several editions (e.g. ESV, JB, NIV [Study Bible], NASB [Ryrie Study Bible], NEB and NKJV [MacArthur Study Bible]), this framework is the dialogue. That is, in Hab. 1:2-4 the prophet questions Yahweh about a wicked party (typically regarded as Judean), and in 1:5-11 Yahweh responds to Habakkuk by outlining the form of punishment – namely, the Chaldean nation – to which he will subject this evil party. Roberts reflects this type of understanding. “Taken in isolation, Hab. 1:5-11 could be read as a simple oracle of judgment addressed to Habakkuk’s contemporaries, but its literary placement between two laments of the prophet (1:2-4; 1:12-2:1) forces one to read it as God’s response to Habakkuk’s first lament.”¹²⁸ This kind of thinking, however, begs the question: Is a dialogue framework flowing out of one’s interpretation of the book or is the interpretation being forced into a dialogue?

A secondary goal of this thesis is to evaluate the legitimacy of using the dialogue hypothesis as a framework for Hab. 1. There are at least four problems. The first and most obvious difficulty with the dialogue theory is the unidentified plural audience in Hab. 1:5-11. Unfortunately this observation goes unnoticed in most English translations, yet the Hebrew makes apparent that Yahweh does not address a single lamenting prophet.¹²⁹ In order to maintain a conversational connection between the two texts, many commentators who address this detail of the Hebrew say that Habakkuk is merely representing the people in his lament, so that Yahweh’s addressing his response to more than one person is quite logical. This, however, does not necessarily account for the juxtaposition of a personal lament in vv. 2-4 and plural imperatives in v. 5. O.P. Robertson represents a psychological sort of reasoning:

This divergence of addressees is appropriate to the perspective of both God and the prophet. Habakkuk suffers with a sense of aloneness as a consequence of the estrangement created by the violence God’s people have experienced at the hands of one another. He addresses God as an isolated voice, although he speaks on behalf of others in his position as prophetic mediator. So the Lord returns answer, not in a way that bypasses his agonizing prophet, but only by including him among those others scattered throughout Israel that remain steadfast in faith despite their perplexity.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 94. Roberts goes on to say: “One could argue that this arrangement represented a secondary, compositional unity, though that would be hard to prove, and if the prophet himself were responsible for such compositional unity, the fact that it may have been historically secondary would be largely irrelevant to the interpretive task.”

¹²⁹ Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 94) observes: “Even though v. 5 lacks any transitional formula to indicate the shift in speaker, the same could also be said of God’s response (Jer. 12:5-6) to one of Jeremiah’s laments. ... In contrast to the Jeremiah parallel, however, Yahweh’s response to Habakkuk’s lament is not addressed to Habakkuk as an individual.” The contrast seems to weigh as much as, if not more than, the similarity.

¹³⁰ O.P. Robertson, pp. 136-7

The possibility that 1:2-4 represents some sort of a communal lament (rather than an individual one), with Habakkuk speaking as a representative of the people, is certainly not out of the question.¹³¹ In fact, given the descriptions of the all-encompassing evil in vv. 3-4, it is actually quite possible. Nevertheless, the presence of the plural imperatives in v. 5 and the lack of any singular reference to Habakkuk himself in the passage cannot go unnoticed. Habakkuk's prayer, even if spoken on behalf of a suffering community, is a harshly worded, personal complaint, which seems to deserve a personal response.¹³²

The second problem with the dialogue theory is that it assumes that Chaldea is the punisher of Judah. This thesis has already made plain that the text of 1:2-4 simply does not provide enough information to equate the wicked in these verses with Judah (specified either as the king or as an evil faction). Besides that, neither does the text of 1:5-11 provide enough information to define Chaldea as the punisher of the wicked, be it Judah or not. "The inference so frequently made by commentators that the Chaldeans are God's chosen instrument for judgment on the deserving wicked (Assyria, Egypt, or the godless in Judah) finds no support in the passage itself."¹³³

Roberts nevertheless defends the assumption. "Even though Hab. 1:6 does not *explicitly* state that the purpose for God's raising up the Chaldean nation is to punish Judah, the numerous parallels to the motif make that obvious."¹³⁴ He defends his argument scripturally. (1) Besides similar passages in Isaiah (Isa. 5:26-30; 9:9-10 [10-11]; 10:5-6), Roberts finds the closest literary parallel in Amos 6:14 (referring to the Assyrians). (2) "[The] concept of enemy nations as agents that Yahweh could raise up to punish his own people was incorporated into the Deuteronomistic History (e.g. 1 Kings 11:14, 23)"¹³⁵ (3) Jeremiah identifies the invading northerners with the Babylonians (Jer. 25:1, 9; 46:24).¹³⁶

Roberts' defense, however, can be criticized. First of all, Amos 6:4 reads: "*For behold, I am going to raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel, declares the LORD*

¹³¹ Westermann (p. 173, footnote 22) observes that Hab. 1:2-4 is formally an individual lament, but within the context of the whole book, it is better described as a communal lament (which, incidentally, is characterized by the complaint against God). Habakkuk's words can also be described as a lament of the mediator. According to Westermann (pp. 275-6): "*The lament of the mediator* is a rare but important intermediate form. It is a personal lament but one which deals with matters facing the nation. The individual brings before God not his own personal suffering but, through his mediation, the suffering which affects the nation." See also Dhanaraj, pp. 21-2, for a discussion of the differences between individual and communal laments.

¹³² Early in the discussion of Hab. 1:5-11 it was mentioned that the LXX and 1QpHab add "you despisers" to the text in v. 5 to further identify the audience. Even though this emendation was determined to be inappropriate, it does suggest that both the Greek authors and the Qumran scribes excluded the prophet from Yahweh's audience (see O.P. Robertson, p. 144) and hence that neither understood Hab. 1:2-11 as a proper dialogue.

¹³³ Andersen, p. 143. See also Sweeney, "Structure", p. 68 and R.L. Smith, p. 101 (italics added), who says: "One is left to *assume* that the coming of the Chaldeans is to punish Judah for the evil described in 1:2-4."

¹³⁴ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 95 (italics added)

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ See Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 95 for the full discussion.

God of hosts, "and they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of the Arabah." The second-person references, specifically defined as Israel, make the notion of punishment explicit in the Amos text. Any such clues are absent in Hab. 1:5-11.

Furthermore, Roberts' second and third points are not disputed as biblical facts, but they are irrelevant in the discussion of a potential dialogue in Hab. 1. Even though other portions of the OT make plain that Yahweh raises up nations such as Chaldea to punish Judah, Hab. 1:2-11 does not explicitly state this.

It seems clear that in an effort to understand the relationship between vv. 2-4 and vv. 5-11 many scholars turn to the next passage where Habakkuk states outright: *Yahweh, for mišpāt you appointed him and, Rock, to correct you established him.* (1:12b) Reading ahead, as it were, to v. 12 results in a logical interpretation. That is, in vv. 2-4 Habakkuk complains about his own people who deserve punishment, and in vv. 5-11 Yahweh subsequently announces that punishment. However neither passage makes such claims. Hab. 1:12 is ambiguous, but by virtue of the information provided in Hab. 1:6a Yahweh probably is raising the Chaldean for *mišpāt* and correction. However, it does not necessarily follow that he is raising this Chaldean to punish the wicked character in vv. 2-4 or that the wicked character is Judah. Nevertheless, those are the assumptions built into the dialogue framework theory. Assuming the information in v. 12, which in itself is unclear, when defining the relationship between vv. 2-4 and vv. 5-11 tends to force this sort of thinking which could be, in this case, inappropriate.¹³⁷

The third problem with the dialogue theory is that it underestimates the emphasis placed on Yahweh in the first two passages of Hab. 1. As demonstrated by the tone of his language, Habakkuk's prayer in 1:2-4 is primarily a complaint against Yahweh's apparent neglect of the prophet and his circumstances. The dialogue theory, however, stresses by default that the main purpose of the prayer is to draw attention to the fact that an unnamed wicked party is deserving of punishment; Yahweh's prominence in the complaint is virtually ignored. Furthermore, in his announcement of the divine deed in 1:5-11 Yahweh boldly declares at the start that he is the cause of the havoc that the Chaldeans wreak. The dialogue theory, however, stresses the assumed disciplinary role of the Chaldean; Yahweh's culpability in the deed receives little attention. Placing these two passages into a question-and-answer format inappropriately highlights the activities of an anonymous wicked character and his presumed punishment at the hands of a foreign nation, all the while downplaying the more certain prominence of Yahweh, who is indirectly liable for the wickedness and ultimately responsible for the punishment.

¹³⁷ This is much like the difficulty encountered in Hab. 1:5 when the first-person divine pronoun is assumed prematurely. No one disputes that Yahweh is responsible for the deed he is about to announce, but to import that information from 1:6 to 1:5 obscures the emphases in both verses.

Fourth and finally, the dialogue theory generally dismisses the fact that vv. 5-11 do not directly or even indirectly address the queries and doubts of vv. 2-4. Yahweh never mentions how much longer the prophet will have to wait for him to respond and to deliver. Yahweh never explains why the prophet is forced to see this evil. Yahweh never attempts to justify his own actions (or lack thereof). Yahweh never even rebukes the prophet for his harsh language. Quite simply, vv. 5-11 provide neither an explanation for the prophet's present suffering nor hope for his future salvation. "There is no hint ... of comfort or assurance that [God] is with the righteous to save them. The tone throughout is intended to terrify."¹³⁸ Andersen sarcastically says that Yahweh's oracle "is hardly a fitting response to the prayer that Habakkuk has just offered in vv 2-4, unless one reads a great deal between the lines, as commentators usually do. Hence one may gravely doubt that vv 5-11 are intended to be a response to Habakkuk's prayer in any cogent sense."¹³⁹ "If we have correctly recognized vv 2-4 as the prophet's complaint against God, then there is no basis for the theory that the LORD's response that follows in vv 5-11 is a plan for punishing the injustice within Judah by sending the Chaldeans" ¹⁴⁰ It must be granted, of course, that a lack of specific answers to Habakkuk's questions does not mean that vv. 5-11 can be no response at all. Yahweh is under no obligation to directly address the prophet's concerns (cf. God's responses to Job and to Jeremiah), but the observation that he does not do so is worth mentioning nevertheless.

In summary, there is much to speak against the dialogue theory at this stage in the study of Habakkuk. The plural imperatives in v. 5 do not coincide with the singular, prophetic addresser in vv. 2-4; the assumption that the Chaldeans are to discipline the wicked Judeans finds no support in either passage; Yahweh's prominence in the prophet's prayer and his role in the divine deed are mostly neglected; and finally vv. 5-11 simply do not address the concerns of vv. 2-4. Yet rather than immediately refuting this interpretive framework, this thesis maintains that the relationship between Hab. 1:2-4 and Hab. 1:5-11 simply cannot be determined after reading only the first eleven verses. Before one can claim that the first chapter of Habakkuk falls into the format of prophetic question followed by divine response, further evidence is needed.

Now that some negative observations regarding a potential dialogical relationship between 1:2-4 and 1:5-11 have been rehearsed, a more positive one deserves attention: the

¹³⁸ Gowan, *Triumph*, p. 35

¹³⁹ Andersen, p. 167. O.P. Robertson could be accused of reading between the lines. Speaking of the "total absence of rebuke to the complainer" in vv. 5-11, he (p. 141) concludes that the "Lord himself is fully in sympathy with the prophet's agony over the suffering righteous. ... the Lord perceives the problem even more deeply than does the prophet. His resolution of the problem therefore appears overwhelming."

¹⁴⁰ Andersen, p. 123. Based on his estimation of the verbs in vv. 5-11, Andersen (p. 139, as quoted earlier) believes that "[although] the oracle begins with a prediction of what Yahweh is about to do [v. 6aa], it is mainly about what the Chaldeans have already done".

repetition of vocabulary links the two passages literarily. (1) The two seeing verbs of v. 3 (ראה and נבט) are also found in v. 5, in the same poetic sequence.¹⁴¹ In his complaint the prophet asks why he (and even Yahweh) must look upon the evil, and in Yahweh's message the listening audience is directed to look upon the surrounding nations. (2) "Violence" (חמס), which figures so predominantly in the prayer, is repeated in the oracle. Habakkuk grieves over the violence he sees (vv. 2, 3), and Yahweh warns of the nation (or its representative soldier) who will come for violence (v. 9). (3) The twice-repeated *mišpāt* in v. 4 is also found in v. 7. With the former Habakkuk describes the effects of the wicked one's surrounding the righteous one, and with the latter Yahweh describes the arrogance of the Chaldean nation.

These particular observations can be made to serve the dialogue hypothesis. Those who presume that 1:5-11 is the answer to 1:2-4 justify the repetition of חמס, for example, by noting the principle of retribution. "So now as a just recompense these sinners [the wicked in v. 4] shall experience *violence* at the hands of a brutal invader [the Chaldean in vv. 6-11]."¹⁴² "This is part of the surprising response to Habakkuk's prayer regarding violence (vv. 2-3) – more violence. It is an example of *lex talionis*, the punishment fitting the crime (cf. Gn. 9:6; Lv. 24:19-20; Ps. 7:16)."¹⁴³ These linguistic and thematic threads are vital in relating vv. 2-4 and vv. 5-11, but in and of themselves they do not demonstrate retributive punishment or, for that matter, the presence of a dialogue. It does not necessarily follow that the arrogant *mišpāt* of v. 7 and military violence of v. 9 are the answers to the complaint regarding the twisted *mišpāt* of v. 4 and the cry of violence in v. 2. Could the self-serving justice of the Chaldeans be equivalent to the perverted justice of the wicked? Could the violence of v. 9 be one and the same as the violence of v. 4? Unfortunately, the answers to these questions presume that one is certain of the relationship between the prophet's prayer and Yahweh's announcement, but this connection cannot yet be determined.

The traditional dialogue theory is not the only scholarly explanation for the relationship between vv. 2-4 and vv. 5-11. The views of three scholars deserve brief mention at this point. Haak's framework resembles a question and answer format, but his division of the text differs from the traditional breakdown. Yahweh responds to the prophet's invocation and complaint (1:1-4) with an oracle of salvation, but this oracle, according to Haak, is contained only in vv. 5-6. Verses 7-11 make up Habakkuk's expression of certainty. "This is a natural outgrowth of the preceding oracle of salvation. Habakkuk states his knowledge of

¹⁴¹ One should note that in v. 5 the verbal form of ראה is followed by the כ preposition, whereas in v. 3 it is not. In order to maintain a consistent translation of the verb as "to see", the preposition in v. 5 has been omitted from the English rendering.

¹⁴² O.P. Robertson, p. 153. See also e.g. Achtemeier, p. 38 and Bailey, p. 304.

¹⁴³ Baker, p. 54

the overwhelming power of the Chaldeans. This leads to his expression of confidence that this power has truly been established by Yahweh for the salvation of the people”¹⁴⁴

Johnson, however, explicitly denies the traditional interpretation. He believes that the dialogue framework is driven by the “exegetical need”¹⁴⁵ to see vv. 5-11 as an answer to vv. 2-4, and says instead that “i 2-4 is a general statement of the injustice experienced for generations by Judah at the hands of foreign nations ... [and that] i 5-11 functions as a heightened form of the very complaint in i 2-4”.¹⁴⁶ “Yahweh, rather than bringing an answer to the generations-old problem of theodicy, is making the problem more acute by a non-fulfillment of his promises which appears to be a paralysis of *tôrâ*.”¹⁴⁷ Also refuting the dialogue theory, Floyd defines the first chapter of Habakkuk as a complaint concerning the fulfillment of a prophecy. “The overall structure of Habakkuk is indeed characterized by a kind of implicit narrative progression ..., but the lack of any explicit or implicit indication of sequencing at 1:5 suggests that the relationship between 1:5-11 and its context is more of an interruption than a progression.”¹⁴⁸ “Moreover, the developments described in 1:5-11 are logically the presupposition on which the questions in 1:2-4 are based, rather than conclusions to be drawn from them.”¹⁴⁹ In other words, the prophet’s complaint in 1:2-4 is a “means of reflecting upon the viability of a revelation whose authenticity has proved questionable”.¹⁵⁰ A full discussion of these three views is inappropriate at this stage in the thesis, since the scholars interact with other portions of the Habakkuk text. Nevertheless, their immediate consideration is worthwhile, as they demonstrate that there are other ways of understanding the relationship between Hab. 1:2-4 and 1:5-11.

Roberts rightly observes that Habakkuk is unlike any other prophetic book. “[These] oracles have been arranged in the book of Habakkuk to develop a coherent, sequentially developed argument that extends through the whole book and to which each individual oracle contributes its part.”¹⁵¹ However, the two passages examined thus far simply do not provide enough evidence to define the format of that argument as the dialogue.

5. Hab. 1:12-17

**¹²Are you not from of old? Yahweh, my God, my Holy-One, you will not die.
Yahweh, for *mišpāt* you appointed him**

¹⁴⁴ Haak, p. 14. Andersen (p. 166) refutes Haak’s estimation of vv. 5-11.

¹⁴⁵ Johnson, p. 261

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. Johnson (p. 258) says: “[The] prophet in no way presents the Chaldeans in a favorable light and therefore could scarcely have interpreted their coming as the answer to his complaint in i 2-4.”

¹⁴⁸ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 95

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 96. Similarly, Sweeney (“Structure”, p. 67) suggests that the Chaldeans are not the *means* for correcting injustice but its *cause*.

¹⁵⁰ Floyd, “Prophetic Complaints”, p. 397. See also Gowan, *Triumph*, p. 36; Bratcher, pp. 72-4; and Sweeney, “Structure”, pp. 66-8.

¹⁵¹ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 81

and, Rock, to correct you established him.

**¹³Too pure of eyes to see distress and to look to trouble you are not able;
Why do you look on ones acting treacherously?**

**(Why) are you deaf when a wicked one swallows
one more righteous than himself?**

**¹⁴And you make man as the fish of the sea,
as moving things, which (he) no (longer) rules over.**

**¹⁵Each one, with a hook he brings up, he will drag it away in his net,
and he will gather it in his fishing-net;
therefore he will be glad and he will rejoice.**

**¹⁶Therefore he will sacrifice to his net,
and he will make-sacrifices-smoke to his fishing-net;
for by them rich is his portion, and his food is fat.**

**¹⁷Therefore will he empty-out his net;
and (from) repeated killing of nations will he not refrain?**

An apparent contradiction

A plethora of divine vocatives distinguishes Hab. 1:12 from the preceding verses and signals a new section of text. Once again Habakkuk is praying to Yahweh. According to the traditional dialogue theory, which has taken firm hold on most interpretations of Hab. 1, vv. 12-17 contain the prophet's second complaint and respond specifically to Yahweh's announcement of judgment in vv. 5-11. However, so that it can be determined if this is a legitimate estimation of the text, Hab. 1:12-17 will first be examined independent of its prior context and, hopefully, independent of the assumptions that define the dialogue framework. The intention of this thesis is to force its readers to become a blank slate, as it were, assuming nothing of vv. 12-17 except that Habakkuk is their author.

The passage is clearly divided into two parts. Habakkuk first draws attention to Yahweh, the addressee of the prayer. This is readily apparent from the second-person pronoun, which is the subject of every clause in the first three verses,¹⁵² and the numerous divine titles (qualified above as vocatives), each of which highlights a certain aspect of God's nature.¹⁵³ The focus of the prayer begins to shift in v. 14 where the prophet elaborates, by way of comparison, upon his assertion that a wicked one swallows a righteous one (v. 13b). The subject of nearly every verb in vv. 15-17 is a metaphorical fisherman. However, Hab. 1:12-17 is more than a theological treaty followed by a fisherman's tale; it is a carefully constructed argument that Habakkuk raises against Yahweh. After an opening statement (v. 12a) and a series of facts regarding Yahweh's character and purpose (vv. 12b-13a), the prophet demonstrates through the use of rhetorical questions (v. 13b) and a common

¹⁵² The perplexing expression in v. 12a – *לֹא נִמְוֶרֶת*, according to the MT – is a possible exception and will be dealt with in detail shortly.

¹⁵³ Alluding to the subsequent content of the prayer Andersen (p. 175) says: "The attributes chosen do not include the justice and power that one might expect Yahweh to display in governing the world The attributes chosen are more fundamental, dealing with character and ultimate being rather than activity."

illustration (vv. 14-17) that his current circumstances contradict the divine certainties. The prophet knows his God and he knows his own situation, and there is the contradiction. The one does not follow from the other. “Not a weak faith but a perplexed faith torments Habakkuk.”¹⁵⁴

The prophet’s prayer opens with a peculiar rhetorical question. *Are you not from of old?* Scholars debate over the intention of his inquiry. According to Harris: “In style and theme the opening phrase of this lament is akin to a formal confession of faith and is an apt prelude to what follows.”¹⁵⁵ Andersen, on the other hand, says: “Habakkuk’s first words sound like an act of adoration at the commencement of a prayer unrelated to the statements that follow, but Habakkuk’s unique use of a rhetorical question to begin a prayer has the flavor of reproach, of perplexity, of doubt. His prayer is a complaint against God rather than a lament of a sufferer.”¹⁵⁶ Even if the prophet’s design is not entirely clear, the grammatical use of the rhetorical question is relatively straightforward. According to Baker:

Unlike a regular question, which is soliciting information, a rhetorical question assumes the answer is already known by both the asker and the asked. Instead of the statement which could have been used in its place, the rhetorical question forces the hearer to get actively involved in the discussion.¹⁵⁷

Of course Yahweh is *from of old*. He is from eternity.¹⁵⁸ Habakkuk, then, is praying to the God of old, to the God who has already proven himself faithful.

Another distinctive feature of Habakkuk’s opening line (v. 12a) is that it contains one of the eighteen so-called *tiqqûn sôpêrîm* (“scribal corrections”). *Yahweh, my God, my Holy-One, you will not die.* The text of the final two Hebrew words has bothered translators for centuries. In fact, the MT, which is followed by the LXX and implied in the comments of 1QpHab,¹⁵⁹ reads *לֹא נָמוּת* (“we will not die”) rather than *לֹא תָמוּת* (“you will not die”). “Ginsburg’s (1897:358) notes show that the old scholars were unanimous that *tāmût* is the proper reading. Because the *sôpêrîm* did not argue their case, we are not sure what they felt to be the problem at this point.”¹⁶⁰ “[The] supposition is that the original author *intended* to write ‘not shall *you* [i.e., God] die,’ thereby developing his assertion, ‘You are from eternity.’

¹⁵⁴ O.P. Robertson, p. 156

¹⁵⁵ J.G. Harris, p. 27

¹⁵⁶ Andersen, p. 190. “Nothing could be more abrupt than the beginning of Habakkuk’s second prayer. There is nothing like it anywhere else in the Bible. God is not approached with courtesy and respect by reverent invocation, as in more decorous prayers.” (p. 175)

¹⁵⁷ Baker, p. 29. Similarly Andersen (p. 175) says: “Such questions are called rhetorical because they do not function as a request for information, but rather to make an incontrovertible assertion.” See Bellinger (pp. 83-4) for a discussion of rhetorical questions in laments.

¹⁵⁸ Andersen (p. 176) notes that “*qedem* does not strictly mean ‘eternity,’ an idea not yet within the range of Israelite speculative thought. It refers to the earliest times, going back to stories about the creation of the world.” See also Bailey, p. 311 and R.L. Smith, p. 103.

¹⁵⁹ See Haak, pp. 48-9.

¹⁶⁰ Andersen, pp. 176-7

But because this statement would not have maintained the proper lines of decorum in speaking of God in this manner, the author wrote instead, ‘not shall *we* die.’¹⁶¹ “So unacceptable was the idea that the living God could die that even to contradict it (and thus suggest it, even negatively) was felt to be improper.”¹⁶²

The issue facing scholars today is not necessarily one of reverence but one of originality. Which words did Habakkuk actually conceive when he first uttered his prayer? Several modern translations (e.g. ESV, KJV, NASB and NIV) accept the MT as it stands and translate the phrase “we will not die”. The rendering is defended along at least two lines. Textually, the MT is one of the most faithful witnesses to the original autograph. For this reason alone the possibility cannot be readily dismissed. Theologically, the phrase gives expression to a prophet who is confident in his covenantal God. “Linking himself with the eternity of God which he had just developed, the prophetic mediator conjoins the covenant people with himself. Yahweh is their God. Therefore it is impossible that they could perish.”¹⁶³

There are equally strong arguments for holding to the corrected text. (1) “You will not die” maintains the poetic balance of the prayer’s first line by functioning as the parallel to the prior assertion that “You are from of old.”¹⁶⁴ As Yahweh has no beginning, so also does he have no end. (2) This rendering also preserves the consistency of second-person pronouns. As mentioned earlier, “you” is the subject of every clause in vv. 12-14 only if the accepted text is תמורת. (3) The plural pronoun “we” does not correspond to the singular pronoun “my” of the previous vocatives. (4) The assertion that “we will not die” is inappropriate in the prophet’s argument. Given the context of vv. 13 and 17, the prophet is more likely to exclaim in v. 12, “We *are* dying!” He appears to hold no conviction that his life or the lives of the people are secured. Andersen notes: “‘We shall not die’ is quite meaningful, but we cannot see its point in this prayer.”¹⁶⁵ Though the first-person rendering has some merit, “you will not die” better conforms to the literary style and argumentative flow of the passage as a whole.

There is, however, a third possibility that is noted by only a few scholars. “The question concerning the status of the tiq. soph. in this particular verse is further complicated by the fact that two possible ‘original’ readings are found in the lists. The majority seem to indicate a reading of *tmwt* but some list *ymwt*.”¹⁶⁶

Rudolph (p. 208) and Van der Woude (p. 28) have argued that “Yahweh”

¹⁶¹ O.P. Robertson, p. 157, footnote 2

¹⁶² Bruce, p. 853

¹⁶³ O.P. Robertson, p. 157

¹⁶⁴ See e.g. Bailey, pp. 312-3 and Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 102.

¹⁶⁵ Andersen, p. 177

¹⁶⁶ Haak, p. 48

is the predicate, not a vocative, which results in a translation such as the following: “Are you not Yahweh from of old, my God, my Holy One, who does not die?” ... If either “Yahweh” or “my holy God” is the predicate, the logic would be that God’s action in using the Babylonians as his tool is inconsistent with his character revealed in the name Yahweh or in his being as holy God.¹⁶⁷

Although Andersen regards the MT as the preferred text, he argues for translating it in a manner similar to that of Rudolph and Van der Woude.

It is possible that *nāmût* is a genuine alternative reading with the same meaning: not first person, but a *Nip ‘al* with middle meaning. While no *Nip ‘al* of \sqrt{mwt} has been recognized ... nevertheless the existential *hāyâ* has a *Nip ‘al*, scarcely distinguishable from the *Qal* in meaning. A significant number of its occurrences are ... negated ... or questioned By analogy, a negated middle *Nip ‘al* of \sqrt{mwt} is not impossible. ... The meaning “we will not die” could, then, be a misinterpretation of the intention of the scribes.¹⁶⁸

Assuming the initial interrogative extends to the clause in question Andersen renders v. 12a: “Art thou not eternal, Yahweh, my God, my Holy One, who never dies?” This understanding is actually quite appealing, but perhaps only for the “middle ground” that it takes between the textual and hermeneutical extremes of “we will not die” and “you will not die”. Neither the few *tiqqûn sôpêrîm* records that list *ymwt* nor Andersen’s *nip ‘al* argument warrants a definite rendering of the text as “who/he does not die”. Though the conclusion to this matter can only be tentative, the second-person appears to be the best option given the immediate context of the prophet’s prayer.

The opening of Habakkuk’s prayer, then, is a testimony to an infinite God. Though the intention of the initial rhetorical question and the text of the final assertion (v. 12a) are not entirely clear, when taken in the manner suggested above they both highlight this unique aspect of Yahweh’s character. The first half of the verse asserts that God is from the beginning and the last half, that he will never end. The next several lines of the prayer make additional claims of Yahweh. *Yahweh, for mišpāt you appointed him and, Rock, to correct you established him. Too pure of eyes to see distress and to look to trouble you are not able.* The first two parallel expressions in v. 12b prove to be quite problematic for many scholars, but for the moment, nothing more will be said other than that Yahweh has appointed an unnamed person for justice and correction. Habakkuk seems to be stating this simply as a given piece of information. Besides that, the prophet asserts that his God is unchangeable

¹⁶⁷ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 102. Rudolph (p. 208) translates v. 12a as: “*Bist du nicht von jeher Jahwe, mein Gott, mein Heiliger, (der Unsterbliche)?*” He (pp. 208-9) also acknowledges the scribal correction: “[Aus] Scheu, den Tod auch nur in Gedanken mit Jahwe in Beziehung zu bringen, wurde ein ursprüngliches ... »du stirbst nicht« in [»wir werden nicht sterben«] »korrigiert«.”

¹⁶⁸ Andersen, p. 178

(“Rock”) and ethically pure (“Too pure of eyes”), completely separate from sin and evil.¹⁶⁹ It thus follows that he is unable to regard evil.¹⁷⁰

Thus far in vv. 12-13a Habakkuk has presented nothing that is distinctively argumentative (unless one takes the first rhetorical question as an accusation of sorts). He has merely presented, somewhat fervently, information regarding Yahweh’s being and activity. Yahweh is eternal, holy, unchangeable and pure, unable to look upon evil; and he is the God who has appointed someone for a task of judgment. It is not until v. 13b that one begins to recognize the tension in Habakkuk’s prayer. *Why do you look on ones acting treacherously? (Why) are you deaf when a wicked one swallows one more righteous than himself?*¹⁷¹ Here the prophet credits Yahweh with activities that contradict his divine character and punitive design. Contrary to vv. 12b-13a, there is no justice and there is no judgment; there is only Yahweh’s acceptance of the treacherous and wicked.

The identity of this evil character is not made explicit in v. 13b, or anywhere else in Habakkuk’s prayer.¹⁷² Rather, the prophet’s focus is on the discrepancy between the nature of God and the divine actions. In one breath he exclaims that Yahweh is *not* able to look (נבט) upon trouble, and in the next breath he asks Yahweh why he *is* looking (also נבט) upon the treacherous ones. No more than five Hebrew words come between the two occurrences of this verb, highlighting the inconsistency. In addition to this Habakkuk accuses Yahweh of being deaf and dumb (חרש). This verb not only portrays the deafness of his ears but also the silence of his lips, thus adding two more dimensions to Yahweh’s disregard. Habakkuk’s use of this verb is quite striking. Of its eight occurrences in the book of Psalms, for example, five are negative petitions directed at Yahweh (i.e. Yahweh, be not silent), one records the psalmist’s silence, and one is a declaration that God is *not* silent. Only in Ps. 50:21 does Yahweh admit to his own silence, but here he withholds speech from the wicked. Likewise,

¹⁶⁹ Baker, p. 55

¹⁷⁰ According to the Hebrew sentence structure, the relationship between טהור עינים (“Too pure of eyes”) and the rest of the verse is not entirely clear. Nevertheless most translations logically establish the connection between the initial Hebrew expression and the rest of the sentence as one of cause and effect. *Your eyes are too pure to look on evil.* (NIV) That is, *because of* Yahweh’s pure eyes, he is not capable of looking upon evil and trouble. Without surrendering the causal relationship, טהור עינים could, however, function as another vocative – “O one with pure eyes!” Even though his final translation does not reflect this proposal, Andersen (p. 181) suggests “that the accumulation of titles and attributes and acts of God at this point is part of a long invocation, and that all six colons in vv 12-13a are vocative”. If this proves to be true, then the two lines of v. 12b and the one line of v. 13a are all in parallel construction, each vocative being followed first by one or more qualifying phrases and finally by a second-person verbal expression.

¹⁷¹ The LXX lacks מִמֶּנּוּ (“more ... than himself”) and some commentators (e.g. Ward and Andersen) suggest that it is an added gloss. Anderson (p. 183) notes that even though other Greek translations and the Vulgate contain the expression, “it overweights the construction and actually weakens the impact. For ‘the righteous’ (absolutely) is a stronger expression than ‘the one who is more righteous than he’ (relatively).”

¹⁷² The biblical usage of the root בגר, in its verbal or nominal forms, can refer either to the people of God (e.g. Isa. 48:8; Jer. 3:8ff.; Ps. 78:57) or to their enemies (e.g. Isa. 21:2; 24:16; Ps. 25:3).

the only prophetic use of שָׁרָה that speaks of Yahweh's actual silence is found in Isa. 42:14, but in this case the quietness of Yahweh is his mercy.

According to Habakkuk's estimation, Yahweh looks upon the activities of the wicked, all the while refusing to address or even hear cries for help. What Yahweh apparently refuses to acknowledge is the total destruction of the righteous by the wicked. "The descriptive imagery of the wicked 'swallowing up' the righteous portrays an utter annihilation."¹⁷³ "Habakkuk is not discussing abstract questions about the existence of evil in the world. He is speaking out of a concrete and intensely personal situation."¹⁷⁴ "[Habakkuk's mood] is one of questioning and horrified amazement at what the God he knows is doing rather than acting like the God of his confession of faith."¹⁷⁵ This cannot be the Yahweh of old. This cannot be the unchangeable Rock. This cannot be the one with pure eyes. Yet in the immediate experience of Habakkuk it is, and this is the prophet's complaint.

Verse 14 serves as a transitional verse between the two parts of Habakkuk's prayer, for it maintains the second-person subject of vv. 12-13 while introducing the fishing terminology of vv. 15-17. *And you make man as the fish of the sea, as moving things, which (he) no (longer) rules over.*¹⁷⁶ In this new section of text Habakkuk illustrates his prior metaphorical claim that a wicked one is swallowing a righteous one, all the while blaming Yahweh for this state of affairs. *And you make man as the fish ...* "This statement probably represents the prophet's most pointed accusation against the Almighty. In recognizing the sovereignty of God among the nations, he must conclude that God himself is ultimately behind this massive maltreatment of humanity."¹⁷⁷

The interpretation of the last portion of this verse, *לֹא-מִשַׁל בּוֹ*,¹⁷⁸ is mostly assumed by commentators: the fish and moving things (and now, by analogy, man) have no ruler over them. "Contrary to the creational order in which man was to have dominion over the totality of the world, he is now brought low, treated as the nondescript mass of the ocean's bounties, *having no ruler to protect or to guide.*"¹⁷⁹ Bruce adds that "[the creeping things] *have no one to organize or protect them* and so are defenseless against any predator".¹⁸⁰ However, this

¹⁷³ O.P. Robertson, p. 160

¹⁷⁴ Andersen, p. 171

¹⁷⁵ Bailey, p. 309, footnote 106. Bailey (p. 284) also notes that "God's nature is Habakkuk's problem and yet his one certainty".

¹⁷⁶ Some translations, assuming the principle of double duty (לְמַה in v. 13b), turn v. 14 into a question. Bailey (p. 315, footnote 130), however, concludes: "The continuation of the question from v. 13 as in NJB, NEB, NASB, KJV, and NKJV is not necessary and misses the new direction of the prophet's argument as the change to narrative in [Revised English Bible] as opposed to its NEB source shows." Even if the question had been intended by the original author, the effect is the same. In asking "why" the prophet asserts that Yahweh has indeed made men as fish.

¹⁷⁷ O.P. Robertson, pp. 161-2

¹⁷⁸ *לֹא-מִשַׁל* is pointed in the MT as a participle.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 162 (italics added)

¹⁸⁰ Bruce, p. 854 (italics added). See also Bailey, p. 315. Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 104), who presumes that the righteous one is Judah, takes the interpretation one step further and identifies man's ruler with

kind of understanding may be missing the point of the analogy drawn between man and the fish. These sea creatures, according to the creation account (see Gen. 1:26 below), do have a ruler over them: man! The metaphor in Hab. 1:14 could be better understood when מַשֵּׁל is regarded as a third, climactic descriptor of how Yahweh makes man. That is, man is now (1) like the fish and (2) like the moving things, and hence (3) he is no longer ruling over the fish and the moving things. In recent events Yahweh has made man *as* the fish, removing him from his original position as *ruler over* the fish.¹⁸¹

In v. 14 Habakkuk probably alludes to the creation event.¹⁸² Andersen notes that “every word in Hab. 1:14 is found in Genesis 1”.¹⁸³ In fact, each verbal and nominal root in v. 14, save one, is found in Gen. 1:26. Even the exception, מַשֵּׁל (“to rule”, eighty times in the OT), has its less common synonym, רָדָה (twenty-three times), in Gen. 1:26.¹⁸⁴ *Then God said, “Let Us make [עָשָׂה] man [אָדָם] in Our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule [רָדָה] over the fish [דָּג] of the sea [יָם] and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing [רֶמֶשׂ] that creeps on the earth.”* In Gen. 1:26 man is made to rule over all living creatures, including the fish; in Hab. 1:14 man has lost this privileged position. Man, once having dominion over the fish, is now like the fish and under the dominion of another creature. A righteous one, rather than lacking a ruler (as most commentators interpret Hab. 1:14), is now being ruled by a wicked one. The full impact of Habakkuk’s charge against the God of creation is lost if one misunderstands the analogy of v. 14.

Verses 15-17 follow this harsh accusation with a seemingly innocent depiction of a fisherman’s typical day. It opens with the fundamental aspects of fishing (v. 15a). *Each one, with a hook he brings up, he will drag it away in his net, and he will gather it in his fishing-net.* Then, as indicated by the three-fold repetition of “therefore”, the fisherman responds to his work: he rejoices in an abundant catch, worships that which brings him wealth, and empties his net¹⁸⁵ to begin the process again (vv. 15b-17a).

Yahweh. “[The] treatment meted out to Judah suggests that they are without a ruler, that Yahweh their real king who delivered them from their enemies ... has either died or deserted his people.”

¹⁸¹ Baker (p. 56) hints at this possibility: “[The prehuman creations of God] not only *have no ruler* from among themselves (*cf.* Gn. 1:26, 28), but are under the rule of others, namely man (*cf.* Gn. 9:2; Ps. 8:6-8).”

¹⁸² This complements his opening address to the God “of old”, which recalls the time of creation.

¹⁸³ Andersen, p. 184. Haak (pp. 50-1, italics added) notes the correlation between Habakkuk and Genesis, but he still seems to miss the point of the analogy. “The claim in Habakkuk is that Yahweh has made man like these swarming creatures, *with no ruling structure*. This theme seems to be a reversal of the creation theme in which man is given dominion over all creatures, including the fish of the sea (*cf.* Gen. 1:26, 28 and Ps. 8:7-9).”

¹⁸⁴ Ps. 8:7-9 [6-8], which poetically recounts Gen. 1:26, contains the verb מַשֵּׁל.

¹⁸⁵ Some translations replace “empty the net” with “draw the sword”. According to Patterson (*Habakkuk*, p. 167, as quoted in Bailey, p. 317, footnote 144): “The translator probably should retain the Masoretic reading because of the continuation of the fishing motif. Both readings convey the same image with the MT using figurative language instead of the nonfigurative language of Qumran and the LXX.”

The fisherman's tale, however, is redefined in v. 17b, such that it is no longer a simple account of a daily routine but a metaphorical report of merciless brutality. O.P. Robertson calls it "a holocaust that cannot be comprehended".¹⁸⁶ Harris believes that v. 15a refers to a method of deportation, where "the hook was used to drag away corpses or to fasten captives together in line for the march into captivity (cf. Amos 4:2; Ezek. 29:4)."¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, referring to the fisherman's worship in v. 16a Baker says:

The particular forms of the two verbs found here ["to sacrifice" and "to-make-sacrifices-smoke"] are often used of false idolatrous worship ..., though not always Each time the two verbs are used together, it is invariably involving pagan worship in almost a fixed formula of condemnation (cf. 2 Ki. 12:3; 14:4; 2 Ch. 28:4; Hos. 4:13; 11:2). Therefore, simply by his choice of words, Habakkuk is condemning the ... practice.¹⁸⁸

Several commentators also note that in this part of the prayer the prophet's concern is universal and extends to include all of humanity.¹⁸⁹ Earlier he mentioned only the righteous (v. 13), but now he speaks of mankind (אדם in v. 14) and of nations (גוים in v. 17). The allusion to creation discussed above further emphasizes this comprehensive outlook. Referring to ch. 1 as a whole Floyd suggests: "The basic organizing principle of the compositional structure is its progressive widening of the scope of description from the local level to the international level, and finally to the cosmic level."¹⁹⁰ Habakkuk is possibly, for effect, just overstating his case, but the fisherman's story in vv. 15-17 at least alludes to a destruction that goes beyond the borders of the righteous.

Before the discussion can proceed, it is worth mentioning that there is some debate concerning the interrogative ה at the beginning of v. 17. "Although MT, the Nahal Hever scroll, and the Targum include the interrogative, the rest of the Versions (including LXX) and 1QpHab omit it. It would be possible to explain the initial *he* as a dittography of the last letter of v. 16."¹⁹¹ The better defense, however, is in favor of retaining the ה. "The understanding of the phrase adopted here is based on the tendency of Habakkuk to use rhetorical questions as a method of stating the emphatic."¹⁹² Furthermore, Andersen states:

The interrogative form of v 17 can be salvaged if it is seen to be a

¹⁸⁶ O.P. Robertson, p. 164

¹⁸⁷ J.G. Harris, p. 28. Baker (pp. 56-7) adds that "dragging" and "gathering" are "symbolic of judgment and conquest not only in the Old Testament but also in the ancient Near East, where one finds depictions of defeated captives taken into nets". See also O.P. Robertson, p. 162.

¹⁸⁸ Baker, p. 57

¹⁸⁹ See e.g. O.P. Robertson, p. 162 and Andersen, p. 184.

¹⁹⁰ Floyd, "Prophetic Complaints", p. 406. He (pp. 403-6) defends this "progressive widening of the scope of description" by referring to the various terms seen throughout the chapter ("violence", the seeing verbs, and "justice").

¹⁹¹ Haak, p. 51. Haak adds that "[because] of the ambiguity of the evidence, the MT is retained as the more difficult reading".

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 52. Haak (footnote 138) adds: "On the emphatic use of the interrogative *he* see BDB 210a: 'it is used in questions which, by seeming to make doubtful what cannot be denied, have the force of an impassioned or indignant affirmation.'"

conclusion to the second part of the prayer (vv 14-17), matching the question that concludes the first part of the prayer (vv 12-13). Swallowing the righteous and slaying the nations unsparingly are similar ideas. The prophet's central question is "Why do you look on silently?" (v 13aA). ... So Habakkuk asks, "Is that why ...?" Is it because God looks on silently that he (the tyrant) does not spare to slay nations?¹⁹³

Whether v. 17 is best regarded as a statement or a question, Roberts notes that: "In either case God is held responsible for the activity of the [wicked]."¹⁹⁴

Though half of Habakkuk's prayer is taken up with a description of the wicked, the prophet's primary complaint is against Yahweh. The holy, unchangeable, pure God of creation regards the wicked impassively (v. 13ba), fails to intervene on behalf of the righteous (v. 13bb), and subjects all of mankind to merciless killings (v. 17b). "It is the apparent indifference of God (v 3b [*sic*, 13b]), in spite of his decree of judgment (v 12b), that perplexes the prophet."¹⁹⁵ Dhanaraj speaks generally of psalmists in comparable situations, but he well describes Habakkuk.

Since it is the same suffering that is represented in three perspectives [psalmist, enemy and God], Yahweh's forgetting him and the enemy's rising against him are not two different things, but one and the same. ... The enemy's rise constitutes the actual, visible, concrete and empirical side of the suffering, which in the opinion of the Psalmist is itself indicative of the other side, namely, the absence of God's intervention.¹⁹⁶

Broyles categorizes prayers such as Habakkuk's into two sub-genres: lament and complaint. This distinction, when applied to Habakkuk's prayer, further emphasizes the prophet's problem with Yahweh. Broyles states: "Lament can be addressed to anyone; complaint must be addressed to the one responsible. A lament focuses on a situation; a complaint focuses on the one responsible. A lament simply bemoans the state of things; a complaint contains a note of blame and rebuke."¹⁹⁷ Broyles additionally qualifies some complaints as God-laments. This form depicts God as the grammatical subject of the sentence and the primary target of the psalmist's complaint.¹⁹⁸ According to his explanation, Habakkuk's prayer is appropriately titled a complaint or, more particularly, a God-lament.

Even though Yahweh is the focus of Habakkuk's complaint, his problem with the wicked deserves some clarification at this point. Scholars typically turn to the parallel statements made in v. 12b when taking up this issue. *Yahweh, for mišpāt you appointed him, and, Rock, to judge you established him.* This half-verse prompts many questions. First, whom did Yahweh appoint? Habakkuk does not say specifically in this prayer, but one can

¹⁹³ Andersen, p. 187. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that, except for Hab. 1:17, *Yahweh* is the grammatical subject of every other question in the prophet's prayer (cf. also 1:2-4).

¹⁹⁴ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 105

¹⁹⁵ Andersen, p. 180

¹⁹⁶ Dhanaraj, pp. 62-3

¹⁹⁷ Broyles, p. 40

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2

reasonably assume that it is the wicked character seen throughout the passage. Second, whom is this appointed one to judge? Again, Habakkuk does not say, but the answer is probably the victim, defined respectively as the righteous one (v. 13), as man (v. 14) and then as the nations (v. 17). Many scholars would agree with these points in general, even though some further qualify the specific identities, the wicked as Chaldea and the righteous as Judah, for example.

Then the next question is: Does Habakkuk disapprove of Yahweh's method of justice or does he disapprove of the manner in which the appointed one carries out that justice? If this question can be answered at all, the answer is probably to be found in Hab. 1:12b. Andersen, however, doubts that this is the case. Assuming that Chaldea is the appointed one but not the wicked one, Andersen says: "If the prophet believes that Yahweh is using the Chaldeans to accomplish his righteous purposes, by judging the wicked on his behalf, why does he not consent? He is not protesting against this arrangement; he is not asking for its justice to be explained to him. He does not accept the fact while denying its justice."¹⁹⁹ "The logical connections of v 12 with its context are not clear. Its statements of facts are not grounded in any information about where such knowledge comes from."²⁰⁰ Andersen speaks further about Yahweh's method of appointing one nation to correct another:

Because this device was well known in Israel's thought, in itself it could not have been objected to. What Habakkuk is complaining about must be the disproportionate scale or a belief that his circumstances are different from those behind the events reported in the Song of Moses. Yet he does not say this; so v 12b does not clarify the prayer, and in what follows it is the event itself, not simply its scale, that he complains about. Far from being a key to the pericope, the supposition that v 12b is based on ancient tradition throws it all into distorted perspective.²⁰¹

Andersen could be correct in thinking that Habakkuk is not objecting to Yahweh's appointment of one people to correct another. Justice and judgment, in this case, are seen as positive means of discipline. However, Andersen may be underestimating the possibility that the prophet's complaint regards the "disproportionate scale" of the event. It seems that Habakkuk's dilemma is indeed that Yahweh's remedial design in v. 12b does not correspond to the swallowing of v. 13b, and the persistent, ruthless killings of v. 17b. The appointed one exceeds the divine boundaries in the degree and extent of his discipline.²⁰² "It may be ordered

¹⁹⁹ Andersen, p. 179

²⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 180-1

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 179. The NRSV (cf. also KJV) renders 1:12b: *O LORD, you have marked them for judgment; and you, O Rock, have established them for punishment*. Claiming that the "relationship of this assertion to the whole speech is not clear", Andersen (p. 188, italics added) says: "It could mean that God has already marked out the [wicked] for retribution that will fall *on them* in due course. This act would then represent the verdict of God as judge of the world in the light of their conduct in history."

²⁰² O.P. Robertson (p. 156) regards the prophet's complaint from a covenantal point of view. "If the Chaldean conqueror is ordered by God to treat Israel with the same ruthlessness with which it shall

in the nature of things that some nations will dominate others, but it does not necessarily follow that Yahweh legitimizes every bullying oppressor.”²⁰³ Thus, the parallel statements in v. 12b are not merely the prophet’s acknowledgment or confession of a divinely appointed punishment; they are crucial testimony in his argument against Yahweh.

Habakkuk’s argument is a carefully formulated one. First he sets up his case by alluding to God’s nature and stating God’s retributive design. Then he describes the current situation by asking rhetorical questions regarding Yahweh’s neglect, insinuating that man has been demoted in the creational order, and comparing the wicked to a merciless fisherman. In short, the prophet claims in Hab. 1:12-17 that his present circumstances contradict the God he knows, and this he blames on Yahweh himself.

6. The dialogue theory: Hab. 1:12-17 and its prior context

Now that Hab. 1:12-17 has been thoroughly examined outside of its context, which was deemed necessary so as to avoid any inappropriate assumptions, it is essential to the final interpretation of Hab. 1 that it be placed back into its context. How exactly do these verses relate to the announcement of a divine deed in 1:5-11 and to the prophet’s complaint against Yahweh in 1:2-4? The more immediate context will be dealt with first.

6.1 The dialogue theory: Hab. 1:12-17 and 1:5-11

Brief mention was made at the start of this discussion regarding the traditional dialogue theory. As summarized by Sweeney: “Hab i 12-17 relates the prophet’s dissatisfaction with YHWH’s answer to his initial complaint. If YHWH has established the Chaldeans, they certainly do not recognize YHWH’s sovereignty nor do they recognize a responsibility to rule justly.”²⁰⁴ In other words, Habakkuk complains about the wicked Judeans in vv. 2-4; Yahweh announces his divine means of punishment – the Chaldeans – in vv. 5-11; and Habakkuk complains a second time in vv. 12-17 that Yahweh’s solution to the problem is worse than the problem itself. However, it has already been established that the notion of a dialogue between Habakkuk and Yahweh must be questioned for the first two sections of text, vv. 2-4 and 5-11. Is the same true of vv. 5-11 and 12-17? This thesis proposes (1) that vv. 12-17 are, indeed, the prophet’s individual *response* to Yahweh’s deed made public in vv. 5-11 but (2) that nothing suggests vv. 12-17 are the second (or third, given

man-handle other nations, then what will have happened to the distinctive role of Israel as God’s covenant people?”

²⁰³ Floyd, “Prophetic Complaints”, p. 406. O.P. Robertson (p. 157) says similarly: “Corrective justice indeed the prophet desired for Israel. But utter devastation ... seemed to be far too much.” See also e.g. Bruce, p. 853.

²⁰⁴ Sweeney, “Structure”, p. 69

vv. 2-4) part of a *dialogue* between the prophet and his God. That is, Habakkuk's concerns address Yahweh's deed, not his words.

This then prompts the question, what is the precise nature of the prophet's response? This thesis suspects that Floyd describes it accurately as a complaint about the fulfillment of Yahweh's announcement. He elaborates on this designation.

The speech of Yahweh in 1:5-11 is an oracle that prophesies neither punishment nor salvation, but rather attempts to discern how Yahweh is involved in the course of events. This prophecy became problematic when it was fulfilled in a way that forced those who accepted its basic premise – that Yahweh ordained the rise of Babylon as a world power – to draw negative conclusions concerning him. The complaint that cites this prophecy represents an attempt to defend its accuracy while also apologetically countering these negative conclusions. It may thus be described as a prophetic complaint concerning the fulfillment of an oracle.²⁰⁵

Several observations are worth noting in regard to Habakkuk's complaint being a response to the fulfillment of Yahweh's announcement that he is going to raise the Chaldeans. First, if there is to be any relation at all between the two passages, then it should be acknowledged that vv. 5-11 supply a crucial piece of information which is missing in vv. 12-17. They identify the unnamed, appointed punisher of v. 12b as the Chaldean. Verses 12-17 simply have no meaning in the context of Hab. 1 otherwise. Most scholars who hold to the dialogue theory recognize this as well. Armerding, for example, demonstrates the "extensive continuity" between vv. 12-17 and vv. 5-11, which suggests that the enemies in these two passages are one and the same.

The image of fishing corresponds to that of hunting (v.8; cf. Jer 16:16). The express purpose is to consume the prey (vv.8, 16; the root *kl* ["eat"] occurs in each verse). This is motivated by a boundless greed, gratified without principle and pursued by means of a far-flung, international aggression (vv.6-10, 13-17; the root *sp* ["gather"] occurs in vv.9, 15, and the noun *gôyîm* ["nations"] in vv.5, 17). This greed entails the overthrow of all opposing human authority (vv.10, 14) and the deification of the aggressor's own power (vv.7, 11, 16). Both passages attribute this tyrannical imperialism to God's initiative in judgment (vv.5-6, 12, 14), yet without condoning it (vv.11, 13).²⁰⁶

Additional points of contact suggest that the metaphorical account of the fisherman replays, to a certain extent, Yahweh's description of the Chaldean invasion in vv. 6b-11.

(1) Both v. 9 and v. 15 begin with כלה. Previously it was suggested that the use of this term in v. 9 draws attention to the individual responsibility of each Chaldean soldier. *Each*

²⁰⁵ Floyd, "Prophetic Complaints", pp. 406-7

²⁰⁶ Armerding, pp. 506-7. Armerding goes on to say that the wicked in vv. 2-4 is distinct from the wicked in vv. 6 and 13. O.P. Robertson (p. 164, footnote 4) also acknowledges this possibility: "This description of the victim of the oppressor as including a multitude of nations suggests that it was not merely an internal oppressor that the prophet was describing; but neither does it exclude the possibility that the first oppressors mentioned by Habakkuk in his dialogue with the Lord (1:2-4) came from Judah itself."

one, for violence he will come. The effect in v. 15 is similar. Each fisherman takes to his task and is, in the end, responsible for the repeated killings mentioned in v. 17b. The Hebrew construction of the two expressions in vv. 9 and 15 (כלה + qualifier + verb) suggests that the antecedents are the same, the fisherman being the metaphorical equivalent of the Chaldean.²⁰⁷

- (2) Attention must also be drawn to the singular pronouns of vv. 15-17, referring to the individual fisherman. As Bailey rightly observes: “Verse 15 ... returns to third-person singular describing the Babylonians, repeating the grammatical constructions of God’s speech in 6b-11.”²⁰⁸ As mentioned in the discussion of vv. 5-11, many translations obscure this point with a plural reference to the Chaldeans.
- (3) The mention of the Chaldean’s gladness and joy in v. 15 recalls the mockery and laughter at the expense of kings, commanders and fortified cities in v. 10.
- (4) There is a curious emphasis in vv. 15-17 on the fisherman’s tools: a hook, his net (repeated three times), and his fishing-net (repeated twice). This echoes the final words of Yahweh in v. 11: *he whose strength is for his god.* As the fisherman worships his tools, so does the Chaldean worship his principal weapon of war, which is himself. “The absurd picture of the fisher offering divine honors to the net is designed to parody the invaders ascribing all their victories to their own strength.”²⁰⁹

Another point regarding the above proposal that vv. 12-17 are the prophet’s response to the fulfillment of the deed in vv. 5-11 is perhaps more difficult to sustain, but it is worth mentioning nonetheless. Habakkuk’s argument against Yahweh in vv. 12-17 may confirm that the surprise element in the divine deed of vv. 5-11 is not the rise of the Chaldeans, but the fact that Yahweh himself is causing them to rise. Habakkuk is demonstrating in vv. 12-17 that he himself does not believe (v. 5). He cannot believe that his God is responsible, not necessarily for the rise of the Chaldeans (v. 6) or even for their appointment to judge (v. 12), but for the merciless manner in which they carry out the divine purpose (vv. 9-11 and vv. 13b-17).

In summary, vv. 5-11 and vv. 12-17 are related to each other in that the latter is a response to the former, but this does not necessitate that together they constitute a dialogue between Habakkuk and Yahweh. The prophet’s response does not so much relate to the announcement of the divine deed as it does to the fulfillment of that deed. Habakkuk

²⁰⁷ It is grammatically possible to read כלה in v. 15 as the direct object of the sentence (i.e. each fish) rather than as the subject (i.e. each fisherman). O.P. Robertson (p. 163), for example, regards the term as the direct object. “Every single one of the captives was to be favored with a hook” However, the grammatical similarity between v. 9 and v. 15 and the subsequent emphasis on the fisherman in vv. 15-17 suggest that it is better to regard כלה as the emphatic, singular subject of the sentence.

²⁰⁸ Bailey, p. 315

²⁰⁹ Bruce, p. 854

complains not about Yahweh's plan but about how Yahweh is permitting the Chaldean to execute that plan.

6.2 The dialogue theory: Hab. 1:12-17 and 1:2-4

Hab. 1:12-17 and 1:2-4 are typically described as the prophet's two prayers of complaint. However, in a quotation cited earlier Floyd refers to Habakkuk's singular complaint as one "that cites this prophecy"²¹⁰ of Yahweh. In other words, the complaint contains within it a record of Yahweh's oracle. A fuller presentation of his view follows, but suffice it to say for now that Floyd considers 1:2-4 and 1:12-17 as two parts of the prophet's single prayer. Even the untrained eye notes the resemblance between the two passages. A comparison between them is therefore worthwhile. The repeated vocabulary, highlighted in Table 3, provides the framework for addressing these similarities, some of which have already been intimated.

- (1) Yahweh is the main focus of Habakkuk's attention in both speeches. Verses 2-4 add one vocative and five second-person pronouns to those already mentioned in the discussion of vv. 12-17.
- (2) Yahweh is the primary object of Habakkuk's complaint in both speeches. The impudent manner in which Habakkuk prays, which was demonstrated to be relatively rare in the OT, is consistent from one prayer to the other. Both passages are replete with questions that, in effect, accuse Yahweh of neglect and hold him ultimately responsible for the prophet's dire circumstances. The two למה—clauses essentially ask the same question.

Table 3: Vocabulary from Habakkuk's two prayers

| | vv. 2-4 | vv. 12-13 |
|----------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| (1) יהוה (Yahweh) | v. 2 | v. 12 (twice) |
| (2) למה (why) | v. 3 | v. 13 |
| (3) ראה (to see) | v. 3 | v. 13 |
| נבט (to look) | v. 3 | v. 13 (twice) |
| (4) עמל (trouble) | v. 3 | v. 13 |
| (5) משפט (<i>mišpāt</i>) | v. 4 (twice) | v. 12 |
| (6) רשע (wicked) | v. 4 | v. 13 |
| צדיק (righteous) | v. 4 | v. 13 |

²¹⁰ Floyd, "Prophetic Complaints", p. 406

- (3) In both complaints the prophet employs an uncommon number of “seeing” verbs.²¹¹ The divine inconsistency established in vv. 12-17 between Yahweh’s not being able to look on trouble and his looking on treacherous ones, can thus be linked to his looking on trouble in vv. 2-4. Andersen suggests: “The use of the same vocabulary in this verse [13b] and in v 3 shows that there is little difference between the prophet’s problem in both prayers.”²¹²
- (4) A significant portion of the prophet’s initial complaint describes his present situation (cf. v. 3 in particular). Habakkuk repeats עמל in v. 13, which recalls every other term in v. 3, and then adds another synonym, ער (“distress”).
- (5) Though not as obvious a connection, each of the two passages essentially describes perverted forms of *mišpāt*. In vv. 2-4 the prophet says this explicitly, but in vv. 12-17 he does so more indirectly. He first acknowledges *mišpāt* as something appointed by God, presumably for a corrective purpose, but what he then goes on to depict can only be a perverted form of the divine intention.
- (6) The parallel of opposites, “wicked” and “righteous”, is found in both passages. Andersen notes: “The same problem is described in v 4b in the statement that the wicked surround the righteous, and in v 13 in the statement that the wicked swallow the righteous – using the same nouns.”²¹³

Given the above parallels between vv. 2-4 and 12-17, it is entirely possible that the prophet’s two prayers actually represent one original complaint. Though his breakdown of the book differs from the traditional, Haak notes this prospect.

As understood here, the object of the complaints in 1:2-4 and 1:13-2:1 is the same. They may, in fact, refer to the same general historical situation. The complaint form is not a chronological account within itself. There is no formal reason why a single complaint may not have multiple sections, use a variety of images, and even have an oracle of salvation intervening (cf. Ps. 60 and Jer. 11:18-12:6). Note that the object of the complaint is specified as ‘the wicked’ in both 1:4 and 1:13.²¹⁴

Andersen, however, disagrees with this view, in spite of his observations (noted above) regarding the similarities between the two prayers.

It is precisely because Habakkuk’s position in this second prayer has not changed significantly from his position in his first prayer that some scholars have felt that the intervening material (vv 5-11) is intrusive. We suggest, on the contrary, that Habakkuk’s persistence indicates that the response from Yahweh has not been found satisfactory; indeed, it has made things worse.²¹⁵

²¹¹ This pattern persists throughout the entire book (see also 1:5; 2:1, 15; 3:6, 7, 10).

²¹² Andersen, p. 181

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Haak, p. 15. Wellhausen (1892), Duhm (1906) and Nowack (1922) also regard vv. 2-4 and vv. 12-17 as one speech.

²¹⁵ Andersen, p. 171. Andersen (p. 16) summarizes the debate in the introduction to his commentary. “To support this [single-speech] argument, it was pointed out that the complaint in vv 12-17 is very little different in content and concern from that in vv 2-4, as if the oracle in vv 5-11 had made no

On this particular point, at least, this thesis agrees with Haak and proposes that vv. 2-4 and vv. 12-17 actually constitute one formal prayer of complaint. Habakkuk opens his prayer in v. 2a by questioning Yahweh's neglect: *How long, Yahweh, have I cried-out-for-help but you did not hear?* He ends his prayer in v. 17b by questioning Yahweh in regards to the effects of his neglect: *(From) repeated killing of nations will he not refrain?*²¹⁶ Andersen is right when he says that the position of the prophet in the second prayer has not changed from the first; Habakkuk is essentially arguing the same case. However, beyond that Andersen's comment from above can be critiqued on three points. First, given the graphic language and accusatory tone of vv. 2-4, it is questionable whether the second passage depicts a situation worse than the first. Second, it has already been demonstrated that it is doubtful that vv. 5-11 make up Yahweh's dialogical response to vv. 2-4. Finally, vv. 2-4 and 12-17 as one prophetic complaint does not necessitate that Yahweh's announcement in vv. 5-11 is intrusive, in the negative sense of the word. It is also worth noting in this regard that, even though, according to the dialogue hypothesis, Habakkuk is not satisfied with the response, one would still expect the prophet, at the very least, to acknowledge in his second complaint (vv. 12-17) that he gets what he wants in the first (vv. 2-4): an answer or a reaction from Yahweh (vv. 5-11). Instead the prophet continues to complain.

Gowan summarizes the interpretations just mentioned: that is, ch. 1 as two complaints (cf. Andersen) and ch. 1 as one complaint (cf. Haak).

(a) We admit that vss. 5-11 are no satisfactory answer to the complaint in vss. 2-4. Then:

(b) *either* Habakkuk complained about the injustice in the world in which he lived and God responded with the threat that the Chaldeans were coming; then at some time, either immediately or only at an interval after they had come, Habakkuk recognized that the Chaldeans had only aggravated the problem and responded with the second complaint;

(c) *or* Habakkuk first received an oracle (vss. 5-11) threatening the arrival of the Chaldeans as God's agents to punish the wicked in Judah, just as other prophets had; but for him this threat created a serious theological problem because he saw that the wickedness which already troubled him would thereby be compounded. So he directed to God a complaint composed of the entire present first chapter and as a part of the complaint *quoted* God's oracle as one of the things that had created his problem. In this case the oracle was never in any sense an answer to his dilemma but was a part of the problem from the beginning.²¹⁷

difference – almost as though Yahweh's response had not been given. This reasoning is not entirely cogent. The description of the Chaldeans' action in vv 15-16 has a resemblance to Yahweh's predicted activity in the oracle of vv 5-11 – gathering people like fish is similar to collecting people like sand. This is a thematic or rhetorical link, certainly. But the protagonists and the perspective are different. The two developments are theologically connected – Yahweh sends the Chaldeans and is responsible for what they do. The concept is almost a commonplace of the theology of the Hebrew Bible, so its expression in two places does not prove that they belong to a single speech.”

²¹⁶ Andersen (p. 188) says: “Just as Habakkuk began by asking ‘How long ...?’ (v 2), now he asks whether this slaughter and enslavement will ever come to an end (v 17).”

²¹⁷ Gowan, *Triumph*, p. 36

A summary of the discussion of the relationships between the three passages of Hab. 1 is in order. Thus far, this thesis maintains:

- (1) that the dialogue theory is not the most obvious explanation for the relationship between vv. 2-4 and vv. 5-11,
- (2) that vv. 12-17 are the individual, prophetic response to the fulfillment of the divine deed announced in vv. 5-11,
- (3) that the prophet's two prayers in vv. 2-4 and vv. 12-17 could constitute one complaint, and
- (4) that vv. 2-4 could, therefore, also constitute the response of Habakkuk to the fulfillment of Yahweh's deed mentioned in vv. 5-11.

In other words, Yahweh warns his audience of coming judgment (vv. 5-11) and Habakkuk complains (vv. 2-4 and 12-17) when that judgment comes to pass. This explanation does not account for the structure of Hab. 1 – a topic to be addressed shortly – but it does offer the possibility that the chapter represents something other than a dialogue between Habakkuk and Yahweh.

If the above hypothesis is true, then there is a significant, interpretive consequence relating to the identities of the wicked characters throughout ch. 1. It has been established that the identity of the wicked character in v. 4 simply cannot be demonstrated from the passage itself (vv. 2-4), and that the identity of the wicked character in v. 13, by virtue of the prior context in v. 6, is reasonably thought to be the Chaldean. It thus follows that if vv. 2-4 and vv. 12-17 constitute a single psalm of lament, then the wicked one in v. 4 is also the Chaldean. Based on his view of 1:4a (a paralyzed *tôrâ*) Johnson also concludes that the wicked characters in each of the three passages of ch. 1 are the same. He states generally that “the prophet in i 2-4 as well as i 5-11 and i 12-17 is thinking of foreign oppression and in no way of internal corruption”.²¹⁸

Nevertheless most modern scholars assume that the wicked one in v. 4 is an evil band of Judeans and that the wicked one in v. 13 is the Chaldean, even though neither passage makes such claims. Bruce, for example, says:

The language of verse 13 is quite similar to that of verses 2-4, and if verse 13 stood by itself it might refer to the oppressive rulers of Judah. But in its context it must refer to the Chaldeans. They display the same evil qualities as those against whom they were executing Yahweh's judgment, and on a greater scale.²¹⁹

Except for assuming the identity of the wicked character in vv. 2-4, Bruce makes all the right observations. He would like to take his assumption – that the wicked in v. 4 is Judah – and apply it to v. 13, but he knows that the prior context of v. 13 will not permit this. However,

²¹⁸ Johnson, p. 259

²¹⁹ Bruce, p. 853

the better practice is to take the more probable piece of information – that the wicked in v. 13 is the Chaldean – and apply it back to v. 4.²²⁰ This possibility is too often ignored, however, for it eliminates the dialogue framework in vv. 2-4 and vv. 5-11. That is, if the problem in Habakkuk's first prayer is the Chaldean, then the Chaldean cannot be the solution. If, however, the prophet's two prayers actually constitute one complaint, and if that complaint is a response to the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise to raise the Chaldeans, then the two wicked characters in v. 4 and v. 13 are one and the same.

7. The rhetorical implications of Hab. 1

The design of the discussion of Habakkuk's first chapter has been very careful to consider the parts before the whole, so as to facilitate a more accurate evaluation of the "rhetorical shifts"²²¹ between each of the sections. "Scholarly research ... has produced numerous historical reconstructions that are problematic precisely because they have failed to grasp the true nature of the relationship between the elements of oracle and complaint, that is revealed by attending to the final form."²²² In other words, the parts of ch. 1 do not necessarily equal its whole, rhetorically speaking.²²³

According to Floyd, one of the few who regards ch. 1 as a complaint about an oracle's fulfillment (cf. Gowan's second case from above), "the prophet first gives a description of his own particular situation and Yahweh's involvement in it, then presents the revelation from Yahweh that has led him to see his situation in this way, and finally gives a description of how such a pattern of divine action affects everyone in general".²²⁴ Floyd's analysis well defines the rhetorical units of ch. 1 and appropriately relates them to each other, but it seems to fall short of explaining the prophet's intention as it relates to his audience. One can better appreciate and comprehend the first chapter of Habakkuk by taking into account the prophet's original audience – the audience of the whole, that is, not of the parts. When regarded from this perspective Habakkuk composed this unit, neither as his prayer(s) to

²²⁰ Andersen also takes the wicked in v. 4 as Judah and the wicked in v. 13 as Chaldea, but he (p. 183) nevertheless notes: "The reactivation of ['wicked' and 'righteous'] in v 13bB is a significant link between Habakkuk's two prayers, and the simplest approach is to assume that the reference is the same in both places."

²²¹ Floyd ("Prophetic Complaints", p. 406) well defines the hermeneutical difficulty of Habakkuk's first chapter as one of understanding "the rhetorical shifts that demarcate the three main sections of the text".

²²² Floyd, "Prophetic Complaints", p. 418

²²³ Floyd ("Prophetic Complaints", p. 415) illustrates this well in his estimation of the dates of the parts versus the date of the whole. "The oracle of Hab 1:5-11 looks forward to the establishment of Babylonian hegemony over Judah and the surrounding nations. It thus reflects the historical situation of the late seventh or early sixth century, when the Assyrians' control of the region ceased and the Babylonians began to take over. In contrast, the complaint in 1:2-17 that contains this oracle reflects the establishment and maintenance of Babylonian hegemony and thus reflects the situation after their first direct intervention in Judah in 597 BCE."

²²⁴ Floyd, "Prophetic Complaints", p. 406

Yahweh, nor as a means of communicating a divine oracle. Therefore the supposition of this thesis is that Hab. 1, even in its final form, need not be read as a dialogue between the prophet and Yahweh. Rather, the chapter could be understood as one prophetic speech which includes the *rehearsal* of a personal prayer and of a context-defining oracle of judgment. In this case, Habakkuk (or a later redactor) intentionally and rhetorically arranged the material in ch. 1 – the oracle interrupting the prayer – in order to gain the attention of a reading or listening audience and to address its concerns.

The effect of Habakkuk's rhetorical design upon these readers and/or hearers can be described with the help of two modern illustrations. First, one can imagine Speaker's Corner in London and the topic of a forthcoming tax increase. The speaker is more likely to win a large audience of average taxpayers if he begins by lamenting the alarming effects that result from the government's neglect of their financial needs (cf. Hab. 1:2-4). However, so that the audience is fully aware of the context of his (and their) complaint the speaker rehearses the announcement of the official, governmental notice as a significant portion of his address (cf. Hab. 1:5-11). This, of course, leads to his specific arguments against the government (cf. Hab. 1:12-17). The tension and anger (and fear) of the audience build with each portion of the speech. Figuratively then, Habakkuk stands at Speaker's Corner. He addresses the concerns of his audience – namely, their fear of the Chaldean – by arguing his personal complaint against Yahweh and rehearsing the oracle that announced in the first place that the Chaldean would be coming.

The rhetorical design of Hab. 1 can also be compared to a court case. In the prosecutor's opening statement he gains the attention of judge and jury by first accusing the defendant of a crime and then describing the effects this crime had on the victims (cf. Hab. 1:2-4). Following that the advocate presents the crucial piece of evidence that implicates the defendant by demonstrating criminal intent (cf. Hab. 1:5-11). Next he develops his main arguments against the defendant (cf. Hab. 1:12-13), and finally he delivers his closing statement that is meant to arouse the pity of the judge and jury (cf. Hab. 1:14-17). The irony of Habakkuk's lawsuit is that Yahweh is judge, jury and defendant. As the accused, his crimes are neglect of the prophet and indifference towards evil. As the jury, he is meant to give his attention and to render a decision. As the judge, he is the one to whom Habakkuk appeals for justice.

According to the view of this thesis, the first chapter of Habakkuk is a skillfully crafted composition, which is meant to win an audience by addressing its concerns. To achieve this end, Habakkuk records and presents a very personal complaint, in the midst of which is the oracle that gives the context for the complaint. He accuses Yahweh of turning a deaf ear to his persistent cries and a blind eye to the injustice of the Chaldeans. Habakkuk's

complaint is the complaint of his congregation. Yet ch. 1 leaves this congregation with nothing resolved. The prophet's accusations, which are those of his readers and hearers, are simply too severe to leave unanswered. They demand a response from Yahweh.²²⁵ This divine response finally comes in Hab. 2, where the rhetorical intention of the prophet is broadened.

²²⁵ Gowan (*Triumph*, p. 28) suggests that there was "a common tradition in Israel of wrestling with God over the hard questions of life The prevalence of this kind of intellectual activity and the vigor with which it was conducted also teaches us that when Israel came to God with a question they expected, nay, demanded, an answer."

EXEGESIS AND INTERPRETATION

Habakkuk 2

1. Hab. 2:1-4

¹Upon my post I will stand, and I will station myself upon a watchtower;
and I will look-about to see what he will speak to me,
and what I will reply concerning my argument.

²And Yahweh answered me and he said,

“Write (the) vision, and expound (it) upon the tablets;
in order that one proclaiming from it may run.

³For still (the) vision is for the appointed-time,
and it will breathe to the end, and it will not lie;
though it tarries, wait for it, for it will surely come, it will not delay.

⁴Behold! He is swollen, he is not upright in himself;
but a righteous one, in his faithfulness, he will live.”

A divine command

The textual divisions in Habakkuk's first chapter are relatively straightforward, in spite of the lack of transitional indicators, but the sections of Hab. 2 are not so easily identified. Apart from vv. 6-20, there is no general, scholarly consensus regarding the breakdown of the chapter. The first problem of text division arises in v. 1. The prophet is obviously speaking, but is this verse the conclusion to his speech in Hab. 1:12-17 (e.g. ESV and Haak) or the introduction to another section of text, as indicated by the chapter division? Most scholars assume the latter. Hab. 1:12-17 is addressed directly to Yahweh; it is a prayer to which Habakkuk desires a response. Hab. 2:1, however, refers to Yahweh in the third-person; it is the prophet's description of how he waits for that divine response. The best that can probably be said is that the first verse of ch. 2 opens a new scene in the drama but is also an appropriate link back to the first chapter.

After this brief autobiographical introduction in v. 1 Habakkuk records the words of Yahweh, which prompt the second question of text division. Do Yahweh's words end after v. 4 (e.g. Elliger, Haak and Roberts), after v. 5 (e.g. Andersen, Deissler and Rudolph), or after v. 20 (e.g. Floyd¹)? Andersen confesses:

[Verses 2aB-5] seem to be disorganized and it is hard to find any coherent structure or continuous thematic development. ... The speech itself is not unified by a consistent theme or by internal organization. ... It is no wonder that many commentators have given up the search for coherence and have explained the passage as a gathering place for bits and pieces.²

¹ Though he counts all of vv. 2-20 as Yahweh's speech, Floyd (*Minor Prophets*, p. 112) regards the "reply proper" as ending in v. 5.

² Andersen, pp. 220-1

The most difficult verse in the chapter, structurally speaking, is the fifth, and thus it will be dealt with separately from its prior and subsequent contexts. Suffice it to say for now that at least vv. 2-4 of ch. 2 contain the words of Yahweh.

The opening verse of Hab. 2 records the prophet's preparation for an encounter with Yahweh, in particular his posture and his expectations. Though the first three Hebrew imperfect verbs are rendered in the future tense, the cohortative suffix on each of them expresses the prophet's "desire, intention, self-encouragement, or determination to perform a certain action".³ Floyd, who categorizes vv. 1-5 according to the form "report of an oracular inquiry", says:

The initial announcement of the prophet's intention to inquire of Yahweh is cast in a dramatic form (as Horst [178] has recognized in calling 2:1 a prophetic soliloquy [*Selbstgespräch*]), whereas the following report of Yahweh's reply is cast in narrative form. Although the unit as a whole is not pure narration, this combination creates in effect a narrative sequence. From the preliminary preparations to the resulting oracle, the action unfolds in accord with the sequence in which this kind of divination was actually carried out.⁴

The first step in this sequence of "oracular inquiry" – at least as far as Habakkuk emphatically records it – is for him to mount his post to perceive the response of Yahweh. *Upon my post I will stand, and I will station myself upon a watchtower; and I will look-about to see* The third verb **צָפָה** describes the military watchman as well as the prophetic watchman (e.g. 2 Sam. 13:34; Isa. 21:6; Ezek. 3:17; Hos. 9:8), and indeed it seems that the prophet is comparing himself to the sentinel.⁵ Given the three-fold attention to his vantage point and the probable military metaphor, Habakkuk's posture can be characterized as one of determined vigilance. The next expression in v. 1b qualifies exactly what it is that Habakkuk, the attentive watchman, is expecting; he is looking for what has thus far been denied him (cf. Hab. 1:2, 13): the voice of God. *I will look-about to see what he will speak to me.*

The last expression of Hab. 2:1 – **וְמָה אֲשִׁיב עַל-תּוֹכַחְתִּי** – is somewhat problematic, as is demonstrated by the various translations in Table 4. First of all, is the subject "he" or "I"? Secondly, how is the last word to be understood – as "complaint" or "reproof"? The latter question, which will be treated first, can be broken down into two issues: the definition of the Hebrew term and the understanding of the pronominal suffix attached to that term. Translations and commentators tend to understand Habakkuk's use of **תּוֹכַחְתִּי** in one of two ways. Either it pertains to the prophet's previous prayer in ch. 1 (i.e. "complaint") or to

³ Kelley, p. 132. See also Gibson, p. 82.

⁴ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 125. Floyd (p. 124) also says: "The prophet's divinatory procedures are described proleptically in the form of direct speech regarding what he is about to do, rather than retrospectively in the form of narration reporting what he has done. This device imparts a dramatic quality to the beginning of this unit (Eaton, *Obadiah*, 95-96)."

⁵ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 124. According to Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 108): "The language probably derives from a widespread self-understanding of the prophet as a spiritual watchman for the people."

Yahweh’s anticipated response in ch. 2 (i.e. “rebuke”). Upon close examination of the renderings listed in the table below, one sees that in several examples the translation of the term as “complaint” or “reproof” is dependent upon the understanding of the pronoun suffixed to it as a subjective or objective genitive, respectively. In other words, is תוכחתי the complaint that Habakkuk speaks or the reproof that he receives?

Table 4: Translations of Hab. 2:1b

| | |
|--------------|--|
| ESV | ... what I will answer concerning my complaint. |
| JB | ... what answer he will make to my complaints. |
| KJV | ... and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd. |
| NASB | ... and how I may reply when I am reprov'd. |
| NIV | ... and what answer I am to give to this complaint. |
| NIV footnote | ... and what to answer when I am rebuked. |
| NKJ | ... and what I will answer when I am corrected. |
| NRSV | ... and what he will answer concerning my complaint. |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Andersen (p. 191) | ... and what I will reply concerning my protest. |
| Deissler (p. 225) | ... <i>was er auf meine Klage entgegnet.</i> |
| Elliger (p. 38) | ... <i>was ,er‘ erwidert auf meine Beschwerde.</i> |
| Roberts (p. 105) | ... and what he will reply to my reproof. |
| O.P. Robertson (p. 165) | ... and what I shall answer to my rebuke. |

Before the discussion of *tôkaḥat*’s definition is resumed, the four other OT passages that contain the term with a pronominal suffix need to be addressed. How do these passages understand the possessive pronoun?

- (1) Job 13:6. Job desires to speak to and argue with God (cf. Job 13:3), but first to his friends he says in v. 6: *Please hear my תוכחתי and listen to the contentions of my lips.* By virtue of its context the pronominal suffix on תוכחתי must be a subjective genitive.
- (2) Prov. 1:23, 25, 30. In this passage Wisdom is calling the people to turn to her, but they ignore her. In v. 23 Wisdom says: *Turn to my תוכחתי, behold I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.* In vv. 25 and 30 “my *tôkaḥat*” is parallel to “my counsel”. Since the expressions here can only represent something that proceeds from Wisdom to the people and not vice versa, the three pronominal suffixes on תוכחתי must be subjective genitives.
- (3) Prov. 3:11. *My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD, or loathe his תוכחתי.* *Tôkaḥat*, the frequent parallel of “discipline” in the book of Proverbs, must be proceeding

from Yahweh towards the son, and not from the son towards Yahweh, and is therefore another subjective genitive.

- (4) Ps. 73:14. Here the psalmist laments the prosperity of the wicked and the futility of his own purity. *For I have been stricken all day long, and chastened [תוכחת] every morning.* According to this rendering of the NASB (cf. also ESV and NIV), the second half of v. 14 is the literary parallel to the first half, and therefore the psalmist's *tôkahat*, like his having been struck, is done to him by another. It is an objective genitive. However, this translation renders the noun תוכחת as a verb (יכח, "chastened"; cf. *BHS* apparatus). The verse is translated more literally: *And I was struck all the day; and my תוכחת was for the mornings.* The nominal rendering, like the verbal, could be understood as an objective genitive (i.e. "the chastening or rebuke done to me"), but if in v. 14b the psalmist utters some sort of a response to his misfortune in v. 14a, then his *tôkahat* could very well be his own cry of complaint. In this case, it is a subjective genitive.

Even with the questionable reference in Ps. 73:14, a possessive pronoun suffixed to תוכחת appears to be subjective more often than it is objective. Hence, when the statistics are applied to Hab. 2:1, *tôkahat* is more likely the complaint that Habakkuk speaks rather than the reproof that he receives. In this case, the prophet is not speaking of "(Yahweh's) rebuke of me" but of "my complaint (against Yahweh)", particularly that complaint which was presented in ch. 1. Andersen defines the term as "the prophet's own dispute".⁶ Elliger says: "*In V. 1 kündigt der Prophet an ..., daß er auf seine ‚Wacht‘ treten will, um die göttliche Antwort auf seine ‚Beschwerde‘, als die er ganz richtig den Inhalt des vorausgehenden Klageliedes kennzeichnet, zu erwarten.*"⁷

The debate over *tôkahat*, however, is not completely settled. Unlike many other commentators, Floyd takes neither the understanding of the pronominal suffix nor the definition of תוכחת for granted. He raises a noteworthy point regarding the rendering "complaint".

The *RSV* and other modern versions translate *tôkahtî* in v. 2b [*sic*, 1b] as "my complaint," apparently assuming that it refers back to the complaints in 1:2-17. This translation is problematic, however, for the word has this meaning nowhere else. ... The word ordinarily means "reproof" or "correction," and so on. It should be taken in this sense here, and its pronominal suffix is best understood as a so-called objective genitive.⁸

In response to Floyd one must first note that he rightly questions "complaint" as a valid translation of תוכחת. BDB lists three options for translating תוכחת: (1) argument,

⁶ Andersen, p. 194

⁷ Elliger, p. 39

⁸ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 111

impeachment (spoken by lips and mouth); (2) reproof, chiding; and (3) correction, rebuke.⁹ However, Floyd may too quickly draw the conclusion that תוכחה should thus be taken as “reproof” or, even better, “correction” in Hab. 2:1. He says:

This word can mean “rebuke” or “reproof,” i.e., criticism for doing something wrong; but it can also mean “correction,” i.e., reform of mistaken beliefs and behavioral habits. The term ... applies in the latter sense to the overall effect of Yahweh’s reply on the prophet and particularly to the persuasive effect of Yahweh’s citing the nations’ reproof of the Babylonians. The outcome of the oracular reply is thus being interpreted in terms of how it “corrected” the prophet’s former mistaken assessment of Yahweh’s complicity in Babylonian domination ...¹⁰

Floyd presents a convincing interpretation of this term as it relates to the entire book, but there is nothing else in Habakkuk’s speech to indicate that he expects Yahweh to correct his “mistaken assessment”. The ultimate effect of Yahweh’s response in Hab. 2:2-4 is certainly to adjust Habakkuk’s understanding of his present circumstances, but this is not what the prophet anticipates in 2:1. Rather, Habakkuk seems to be waiting for Yahweh to defend his character and actions, about which the prophet complained in ch. 1.

Therefore, it still seems better to understand תוכחה as Habakkuk’s “complaint” rather than Yahweh’s “rebuke” or “correction”.¹¹ Yet Floyd’s observation that the word has this former meaning nowhere else is a valid one. Hence, this thesis proposes that the best rendering for תוכחה, in the context of Hab. 2:1, is “argument”, the first option listed in BDB. *I will look-about to see ... what I will reply concerning my argument.* This is not the irrational, impromptu altercation of the domestic and social realms but the well-structured and well-devised statement of evidence that is prepared for the courtroom. “In forensic usage, *tôkahat* refers to a formal statement of one’s position (Job 13:6; 23:4; Ps. 38:15[14]; Hab. 2:1).”¹² Prior discussions have already demonstrated that Hab. 1:12-13, in particular, shows the prophet’s arguing with Yahweh in a legal, albeit figurative, manner. Thus it seems more probable – especially if 2:1 is regarded as a link between chs. 1 and 2 – that in his use of תוכחה Habakkuk is referring to his argument against Yahweh in ch. 1.

The discussion of Hab. 2:1b has, thus far, assumed that the prophet himself is the subject of the expression in question: *I will look-about to see what he will speak to me, and what I will reply concerning my argument.* Table 4, however, shows that this piece of

⁹ BDB, p. 407a. A study of each of the twenty-four OT references of this term shows that the differences in meaning can generally be categorized according to the books that contain them. תוכחה is thus an edifying correction (e.g. Ps. 39:12; Prov. 3:11; 15:31; 29:15) a juridical appeal (e.g. Job 13:6; 23:4), or a destructive rebuke (e.g. Ezek. 5:15; 25:17).

¹⁰ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 120

¹¹ Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 105) also translates תוכחה as “reproof”, but unlike Floyd he understands the pronominal suffix as a subjective rather than objective genitive. In this case the expression refers to Habakkuk’s reproof of Yahweh (from ch. 1), not Yahweh’s reproof of Habakkuk (from ch. 2).

¹² Mayer, “ykh” in *TDOT* 6, p. 70

information cannot be taken for granted. Is the subject of this final expression “he” (e.g. JB and NRSV; Elliger and Roberts) – how *Yahweh* would reply (to Habakkuk) concerning the prophet’s argument? Or is the subject “I” (e.g. ESV and NASB; Andersen and O.P. Robertson; cf. also the MT) – how *Habakkuk* would reply (to Yahweh) concerning his own argument?

The most convincing argument for a third-person subject is a literary one according to Andersen. “The repetition of *mh*, ‘what,’ encourages emendation of *’āšīb*, ‘I will return,’ to *yāšīb*, ‘he will return’ (Wellhausen 1893:163), supported by Syriac and widely accepted. ... The text would then mean, ‘What he will say in reply concerning my dispute,’”¹³ Even though Andersen ultimately chooses to translate the verb according to a first-person subject, he correctly observes the potential parallelism. Roberts emends the verb according to the third-person subject, saying: “It is clear from the context that the prophet is awaiting Yahweh’s response to Habakkuk’s reproof. ... It is likely that the text was altered to avoid the idea that the prophet could reprove God.”¹⁴

The evidence for a third-person subject is probably not strong enough to warrant an emendation to the text, especially when the first-person subject suits the context. This first-person rendering demonstrates a logical progression from (instead of a parallel to) the first half of v. 1b. That is, Habakkuk speaks of the rebuttal phase of his argument. After presenting his case in ch. 1, the prophet anticipates the response of Yahweh (v. 1ba), all the while preparing to defend himself and his position further, if the need arises (v. 1bb). In fact, when rendered in this manner – *what he will speak to me, and what I will reply concerning my argument* – v. 1b anticipates the rest of the book of Habakkuk. Yahweh speaks to Habakkuk in 2:2ff. and Habakkuk prays again to Yahweh in 3:2. This structural indicator could have been unintentional in the mind of the author – whether Habakkuk or a later redactor – but it is worth noting nonetheless, as it serves to unify the book. In conclusion, even though both the third- and first-person renderings are feasible in terms of interpretation, the witness of the MT favors the latter.

Hab. 2:1, then, can be summarized succinctly as Habakkuk’s preparation for an encounter with Yahweh. In terms of his posture, he is determined to perceive the divine word. In terms of his expectations, he anticipates that neither party has spoken its last word. Verses 2-4, then, record the next stage in the narration, the next word, as it were. What the prophet so anxiously anticipates and has been on the lookout for finally comes.¹⁵ “The

¹³ Andersen, p. 194

¹⁴ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 105

¹⁵ Regarding the revelation process, Habakkuk’s narrative leaves several questions unanswered. Floyd (*Minor Prophets*, p. 127) notes that this early portion of ch. 2 “was not designed to tell the whole story, but only to mention some facets of the process and to dwell at length on others – above all on Yahweh’s reply”. Elliger (p. 39) says: “Über den Vorgang selbst berichtet der Prophet nichts. Er teilt

precision with which the prophet specifies ‘he answered me’ shows that this is exactly an answer to his prayer, and not just another case of ‘the word of the LORD came to me.’”¹⁶ In these words Yahweh first commands the prophet to write down a vision (v. 2), which he further describes as being for a precise moment in time (v. 3),¹⁷ and then he reassures the prophet by presenting his view of the wicked and the righteous (v. 4).

Yahweh opens his answer with a two-fold command in Hab. 2:2.¹⁸ *Write (the) vision, and expound (it) upon the tablets, in order that one proclaiming from it may run.* The Amplified Bible paints the picture often associated with this verse: “and engrave it so plainly upon tablets that everyone who passes may be able to read (it easily and quickly) as he hastens by.” Bailey admits: “The traditional interpretation seems best: make the message plain enough so the person running (Hb. participle) may read the message.”¹⁹ The image usually associated with this interpretation is that of a billboard or a huge placard posted in a place for all to see. “Brownlee has proposed that the transcription of the revelation to Habakkuk can be understood as something analogous to Isaiah’s writing a motto on a sign ... (Isa 8:1-4). This copy of the prophecy would thus be an object of public display, somewhat like a poster carried in a picket line or a banner in a procession”²⁰ Though Andersen disagrees with it, he says that “this idea has generally held the field in interpretation”.²¹ Yet one must seriously consider whether or not this traditional understanding is the most appropriate in the context of Hab. 2. The following discussion will first examine one of the imperatives in v. 2a and then the qualifying expression in v. 2b.

No one questions the translation of the imperative כָּתַב (“write”) but the precise meaning of its literary counterpart, often translated “to make plain or distinct” (e.g. KJV, NIV, NKJ and NRSV), is more difficult to determine. Does בָּאֵר refer to clarity of writing or to clarity of content? The goal of the following analysis is to discover if בָּאֵר, in the context of Habakkuk, merely parallels כָּתַב or if it intimates something more.

Besides Hab. 2:1, there are only two other references to בָּאֵר in the OT, both of which are found in Deuteronomy. Deut. 1:5 is the introduction to Moses’ first sermon to the people

nur das Ergebnis der Offenbarung mit: ‚Der Herr antwortete mir.‘ ... Daß der Prophet den Schleier über dem eigentlichen Offenbarungsvorgang nicht lüftet, ist für uns ein Hinweis darauf, daß in der Tat die Kenntnis der Offenbarungspsychologie und -technik kein Kriterium für die Entscheidung der Wahrheitsfrage abgibt.”

¹⁶ Andersen, p. 194. The “precision”, as Andersen calls it, of the prophet’s transitional notation in Hab. 2:2 speaks *against* the dialogue theory in ch. 1 where such indicators are lacking.

¹⁷ With these two verses the discussion of the vision in Habakkuk (slowly) begins to take shape. Hab. 2:2, 3 are the only two verses which directly mention the vision and, therefore, they are the most likely to provide clues as to its content.

¹⁸ These singular imperatives, which are obviously spoken to Habakkuk, contrast the ambiguous plural imperatives of Hab. 1:5, thus weakening even further the suspicion that there exists a dialogue in ch. 1.

¹⁹ Bailey, p. 323

²⁰ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 127. See Brownlee, “Placarded Revelation”, p. 320.

²¹ Andersen, p. 203

of Israel before their entry into Canaan: *Across the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to באר this law saying ...* . In this context the verb probably means “to teach” (cf. Deut. 4:1). According to Lewis, this reference is a figurative example of the verb באר, “to make clear by explaining”, while Deut. 27:8, the second OT reference, is to be understood more literally as “to write clearly”.²² This latter reference concludes a scene in which Moses and the elders are emphatically directing their congregation: *you shall set up for yourself large stones, and coat them with lime and כתב on them all the words of this law ... you shall set up on Mount Ebal, these stones, as I am commanding you today, and you shall coat them with lime. ... And you shall כתב on the stones all the words of this law very distinctly [באר].* (Deut. 27:2b-3a, 4b, 8)

How, then, is Yahweh’s command to Habakkuk to be understood, literally or figuratively? *Write (the) vision, and באר (it) upon the tablets.* Either option is feasible. On the one hand, the literal translation is appropriate, especially given the parallel verb “to write” and the qualifying statement “upon the tablets”. According to this understanding Habakkuk is directed to copy the vision clearly (cf. Deut. 27:8). On the other hand, the figurative translation also suits the context. In this case, Habakkuk is not simply to write down the vision but also to record it in a manner that explains what it means (cf. Deut. 1:5). The former, literal option stresses legibility, while the latter, figurative option stresses instruction. Roberts suggests that a double meaning is intended. “[The] obvious sense of the command is simply to write the inscription clearly enough so that it will be easy to read. It is possible, however, that the command carries a second level of meaning, that is, make the import of the vision plain.”²³

At this point it is presumptuous to make a strong case for either a literal or a figurative understanding of באר in v. 2, especially given the testimony of only two other references to the word. However, the least that can be said is that the verb presumably contributes to the notion that this vision pertains to something significant and meaningful, for that is certainly true of both illustrations in Deuteronomy. O.P. Robertson may be overstating the case when he says that the “vision now revealed to Habakkuk compares in significance with the original giving of the law to Moses”, but he nevertheless appropriately notes the vision’s import.²⁴ The vision is so important that it must be either copied down with great precision or explained with the utmost clarity.

²² Lewis, “bā’ar” in *TWOT* 1, p. 87

²³ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 109

²⁴ O.P. Robertson, p. 169. He (p. 168) adds further that the “context suggests an intentional allusion to the inscribing of the original ‘ten words’ of the book of the covenant”. One can only say with certainty that both passages contain the words באר and לחות (“tablets”).

Attention must now turn to the qualifying expression in v. 2b – *in order that one proclaiming from it may run*. It is for this reason that the prophet is to document the vision. Holt maintains that this expression is not always properly understood. Translating the initial participle as “reader” (קורא), he says:

Even in the presence of acceptably accurate translations, exegesis has at times imposed upon the text an inversion of its emphasis so that a meaning foreign to the prophet’s statement has been forced upon him. ... In the Hebrew and the more accurate translations, the revelation is given so that a reader may run; in the less accurate translations, so that a runner may read. ... Translations that promote a participle [קורא] to the status of main verb [ירוי] and put the main verb into the participle’s place, if not produced by carelessness, must be influenced by an interpretation that does not follow the guidelines of the original.²⁵

Holt is most likely correct when he says that the attention of the clause is on the running of the reader and not the reading of the runner.²⁶ Deissler’s translation, for example, probably emphasizes the wrong aspect of the verse, the act of reading effortlessly. “*Schreib nieder, was du siehst, schreib es deutlich auf die Tafeln, damit man es mühelos lesen kann.*”²⁷ However, Holt may take this hermeneutical observation to unnecessary extremes, specifically in regards to his neglect of the subject and his eventual understanding of the verb.

In his effort to downplay its role in the clause, Holt gives too little attention to the subject. The traditional rendering of v. 2 translates the participle קורא as “reader”, which, in a modern context, is often taken for granted as one who silently reads the inscribed text of the vision. However, the OT concept of a “reader” is usually not one who reads to and for himself but one who reads aloud for the public hearing.²⁸ In this case “reader” is the translational equivalent of “proclaimer”. “The *qôrē*’ reads aloud; he is the herald, the announcer of an oracle. The vision is written down in order to be conveyed and

²⁵ Holt, pp. 298-9. He (pp. 299-300) notes further: “The popularity of this inverted exegesis is demonstrated by its frequent appearance in commentaries otherwise distinguished by their excellence. ... What we have here is a popular misinterpretation that, with some, persists even when they have a verbally correct translation before them and, with others, impels them to alter the perspective in their translations, regardless of the indignity done the original expression.” Andersen (p. 204) agrees with Holt’s estimation of the misinterpretation and says: “Why bring a runner into it as the intended reader of the vision? Is he the extreme case of a busy person, intent on some other matter, yet still unable to miss the plain inscription? But it is not a runner who reads; it is the reciter who runs – not reading as he runs, but running in order to read.”

²⁶ However, the final Hebrew word in the expression ירוי קורא בו further complicates the matter. Is בו to be understood with the participle (“in order that the one reading *it* may run”) or with the verb (“in order that the one reading may run *with it*”)?) And how exactly is the בו best translated – “from it” or “in it” or “with it” or “by it”? The image created depends, to a certain extent, on how one understands בו. See Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 109) who suggests that בו be construed with the verb.

²⁷ Deissler, p. 225

²⁸ Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 109) notes: “The verb *qārā*’, ‘to read,’ is often construed with the preposition *bē*- + the source from which one reads (Deut. 17:19; Jer. 36:8, 10, 13; Neh. 8:3, 18; 13:1; 2 Chron. 34:18). One should note that ancient readers read aloud, hence in all these examples one should render the idiom as ‘to read from,’ not ‘to read in.’”

proclaimed.”²⁹ When the קורא is better qualified as a “proclaimer”, the emphasis is on the transmission of the text to others.

This understanding of קורא well suits a literal understanding of the verb רוץ (“to run”). The messenger runs – perhaps from village to village – so that he can communicate the documented vision broadly and quickly. Holt, however, presumes that רוץ is to be understood as a common metaphor. “The main import of this figurative ‘running’ is doing a job, fulfilling an assigned task; in short, living one’s life with its decisions and actions.”³⁰ Holt’s is an attractive interpretation, but his estimation of the verb in this context seems to be driven in part by the view that the content of the vision which is to be copied down is found in v. 4, which speaks of one’s living in faithfulness.³¹ Holt himself confesses from the start: “It must be granted that Habakkuk is very economical with his language here, so that one must supply what is not completely expressed in the Hebrew”³² In his justified attempts to refute the common misinterpretation of v. 2b, Holt neglects the subject and too quickly dismisses the literal understanding of the verb. Ironically for Holt, it is this subject that essentially defines the verb. That is, Habakkuk is to write the vision so that someone can run with it; and someone runs with the vision so that he can proclaim it.³³

This thesis suspects that the qualifying expression about the proclaimer in v. 2b is meant to express the purpose of the vision’s wide distribution. How, then, does this understanding fit with the two-fold command in v. 2a? Contrary to the traditional interpretation, the prophet is to write down the vision so that, through the agency of a messenger, it will reach a broad audience. But is he to write this vision legibly (באר literally) or is he to explain it carefully (באר figuratively)? Both understandings of באר are still possible. That is, a herald can handle both a distinctly written message and a clearly explained message. However, the latter probably better reflects the import of the vision’s content. The main issue is not quality of penmanship but the effective distribution of a message that is to be understood by a broad audience.³⁴ “Heflin ... says the issue was not legibility of handwriting but ease of understanding for the audience.”³⁵ Though the intended audience of the vision’s hard copy is not specifically addressed in Yahweh’s command, the

²⁹ Andersen, p. 204. See also O.P. Robertson, pp. 169-70.

³⁰ Holt, p. 302. He (p. 301) paraphrases Hab. 2:2b: “so he who reads it may live obediently”.

³¹ Furthermore, Holt misrepresents the text, perhaps unintentionally, when he says, in the lengthy quote cited above (footnote 25), that “the revelation is given [presumably by Yahweh] so that a reader may run [or live obediently]”. Rather, the revelation *is written* by Habakkuk so that a reader may run.

³² Holt, p. 299

³³ Haak (p. 56) renders רוץ literally, but he omits the notion of a herald. “The emphasis is not on the fact that the reader *may* run, but rather that the message of judgment is to be so clear that the reader *will* run in terror. This fits will the content of v. 4.”

³⁴ See Floyd (*Minor Prophets*, p. 128) for a three point refutation of the more traditional interpretation, especially as it relates to Isa. 8:1-4.

³⁵ Heflin, p. 89 as quoted by Bailey, p. 322, footnote 166

implication is certainly that there is one. O.P. Robertson observes that “the repeated pattern of OT prophetic revelation suggests that God communicates vision to his prophet in his role as *mediator* of a divine message”.³⁶ If the vision is as important as suggested, then it is worthy of an audience greater than the one reader (at a time) intimated by the traditional interpretation.

Several commentators highlight the implication of the vision’s documentation for future generations rather than for an immediate audience. “Because God’s intervention is to take place in the future, the testimony about it is to be written down and preserved as a witness until the events of that day confirm it.”³⁷ That Yahweh commands Habakkuk to write down the vision so that it can be preserved as a testimony for future generations is, no doubt, part of the greater purpose, however, that is of little immediate comfort to the lamenting prophet and his equally distressed contemporaries. The command that Habakkuk receives from Yahweh to write down the vision is first and foremost for these people. Ungern-Sternberg and Lamparter note the uniqueness of Yahweh’s command in this context.

*Die prophetische Verkündigung ... erfolgt im Alten Testament nicht schriftlich, sondern in unmittelbarer Rede. Als eine Überlieferung für kommende Geschlechter wird die später aufgezeichnet. Geschieht ihre schriftliche Abfassung bereits für die lebende Generation, dann liegt eine besondere Maßnahme vor.*³⁸

Habakkuk is commanded to write down and explain the vision “für die lebende Generation”, for whom the production of the vision in written form must have special and presumably immediate significance.

The entire discussion up until this point begs the question which is at the heart of this thesis: What exactly is the content of this vision? What is it that must not only be written down but also explained clearly? What is it that a herald is to proclaim quickly and extensively? As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, on this matter it seems that no two scholars can agree. Seybold suspects that the vision refers to Hab. 1:6ff. and Hab. 1:14ff., what he calls the “*Reiter- und Fischervision*”.³⁹ Bailey, like Holt, proposes that the vision is contained in Hab. 2:4.⁴⁰ Andersen regards the vision as the woe oracles in Hab. 2:6-

³⁶ O.P. Robertson, p. 168 (italics added). See also Baker, p. 58.

³⁷ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 110. He says further: “[The] practice of writing down the prophetic message as a witness or testimony had two purposes. On the one hand, it was done because of the disbelief of the people who did not want to hear the message (Isa. 30:8-11). When the word was fulfilled, its testimony would leave the unprepared without excuse. On the other hand, the written word would serve in the meantime as a course of reassurance and guidance for those who believed (Isa. 8:16-17). It is this latter function which is highlighted in Habakkuk’s use of the motif.” See also Bailey, p. 323.

³⁸ Ungern-Sternberg and Lamparter, p. 30

³⁹ Seybold, pp. 63-4. Seybold (pp. 64-5) suspects that the command of Hab. 2:2 precedes the oracle of Hab. 1:5-11, so that when 1:5-11 finally comes to pass, it has already been documented long before its fulfillment.

⁴⁰ Bailey, p. 323

20.⁴¹ Bruce suggests that it is the theophany described in Hab. 3:3-15.⁴² Elliger suspects all of chapter 3.⁴³ Finally, Baker says: “Perhaps the entire prophecy now found in Habakkuk is in view”⁴⁴ To admit that the content of the vision is ambiguous may be appropriate, but it is hardly satisfactory. Indeed, properly identifying the content of the vision is crucial to the interpretation of the entire book. Yet this topic cannot be adequately taken up until other parts of Habakkuk are addressed. Suffice it to say for now that the prophet, at least, must know exactly what Yahweh is referring to when he says: *Write (the) vision and expound (it) upon the tablets.*

Even though v. 3 of Hab. 2 provides the most clues about the content of the vision, the discussion of these lines will be deferred until later. Nevertheless a brief summary of them is necessary now. The first half of the verse reads: *For still (the) vision is for the appointed-time, and it will breathe to the end, and it will not lie.* Yahweh pronounces with certainty that the vision is for a precise moment (מועד). The most troublesome word in the line is the verb פוח (“to breathe”). The translation provided is a literal rendering of the verb, but its exact meaning in this context is not clear, and the interpretation is, therefore, left unanswered. Some commentators (e.g. Bruce, “makes haste”) and translations (e.g. ESV, “hastens”) render the verb to suit an interpretation that Andersen finds highly questionable. “The interpretation that here *yāpēah* means ‘pant’ because the vision is breathless with hurry (BDB:806) is too fanciful to be taken seriously.”⁴⁵

Roberts suggests a reasonable interpretation for the entire half verse, but this does not come without textual emendation. First he repoints ער in the initial line so that the noun “witness” is understood, rather than “still”, and then he takes פח as a noun (“testifier”) rather than a verb.

The context makes clear that both terms are nouns meaning “witness,” further specified by the construct chain as either “witness of lies/false witness” or “witness of truth/truthful witness” (Ps. 27:12; Prov. 6:19; 12:17; 14:5, 25; 19:5, 9 ...). ... The word *yph* is also clearly attested in Ugaritic as a noun meaning “witness” ([*Ugaritic Textbook*], 413). It apparently dropped out of common Hebrew usage sometime after the exile, because none of the ancient versions recognized the word as a noun. Once *yāpēah* was misconstrued as a verb, the corruption of its synonym *‘ēd* into *‘ōd* was just a matter of time.⁴⁶

Roberts’ final translation of v. 3a is: “For the vision is a witness to the appointed time; it is a testifier to the end, and it does not lie.”⁴⁷ Roberts’ rendering of this half verse is certainly

⁴¹ Andersen, p. 202

⁴² Bruce, p. 859

⁴³ Elliger, p. 40

⁴⁴ Baker, p. 59

⁴⁵ Andersen, p. 206

⁴⁶ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 106

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105. Haak (p. 56) refers to this understanding as the “growing consensus” and cites Pardee’s study as its basis.

possible, but it can only be held tentatively as it lacks versional support. For the time being, therefore, the MT, along with its difficulties, will be retained in the translation.⁴⁸

To his description of a breathing vision that does not lie Yahweh adds in v. 3b: *though it tarries, wait for it, for it will surely come, it will not delay.* “It does not mean that the future events predicted in the vision will come soon, without delay. Only God knows the time for such events. The comment rather means that the fulfillment will not miss God’s scheduled time; it will not delay a moment beyond its appointed time.”⁴⁹ The penultimate verb, בִּרְא, repeated in the imperfect and infinitive tenses, “effectively underscores the certainty of an anticipated event”.⁵⁰

The translation and brief summary above assume one crucial piece of information: the identity of the third-person singular pronouns throughout the verse. It seems reasonable to assume that since the subject is explicitly mentioned in the first phrase as the “vision”, then the “vision” is the subject of each subsequent verb. However, there are problems with this view, which often go neglected. What is the logic in being told to write down a vision because (כִּי⁵¹) the appearance of that vision is designated for a determined point in time and it will not delay? Andersen expresses similar concerns. “Can a vision ‘hurry’ or ‘delay,’ ‘come’ or ‘be late’? Can a vision ‘deceive’? And, most curious of all, why is Habakkuk told to wait for the vision if he has already received it and written it down?”⁵²

Grammatically, the antecedent to one or more of the pronouns could be “(the) vision”, “the appointed-time” and/or “the end”. Some suggest that the antecedent is God or that the verse has a messianic intention.⁵³ According to Andersen, for example:

It would make sense if the subject of the verbs is Yahweh. Such a reading would fit into the tenor of the whole prophecy. Habakkuk has been irked by Yahweh’s apparent indifference to what is going on and

⁴⁸ Some see eschatological significance in this passage. “Heflin [p. 90, as quoted by Bailey, p. 323] notes that the end here ‘may refer to the termination of Babylonian power but, more likely, to the eschaton.’” See also Andersen, p. 205. O.P. Robertson (p. 171) says that “the reference to the *appointed time* of fulfillment that shall come after many messengers have run with the vision suggests that this *end* refers to the final stage in God’s outworking of a purpose of redemption for his people”.

⁴⁹ Heflin, p. 90 as quoted by Bailey, p. 234. Perhaps the most striking feature of v. 3b is that three of the four verbs are synonyms for “to tarry”. “Though it tarries, you tarry for it, for it will surely come and it will not tarry.” So, does it tarry or not? Haak (p. 57), on the one hand, suggests: “The solution seems to lie in the recognition of a special use of *m* (‘though’). As a hypothetical particle this word may function as an ‘emphatic negative.’ A paraphrase might be, ‘He tarries? You’ve got to be kidding!! He surely comes!’” John Calvin (pp. 65-6), on the other hand, explains the apparent inconsistency by referring to it as a question of perspective, the human versus the divine. “But delay, mentioned first, has a reference to our haste. ... God, then, is said on this account to delay in his promises; and his promises also as to their accomplishment may be said to be delayed. But if we have regard to the counsel of God, there is never any delay; for he knows all the points of time, and in slowness itself he always hastens, however this may be not comprehended by the flesh.” Gowan (*Triumph*, p. 41) concludes that “[at] this point we are frankly left with a mystery”.

⁵⁰ O.P. Robertson, p. 172

⁵¹ Bailey (p. 323) rightly notes: “Verses 2 and 3 prepared the prophet for the handling of the message. Verse 3 is the reason or motivation for v. 2.”

⁵² Andersen, p. 205

⁵³ See Janzen, “Eschatological Symbol”, p. 404.

his unresponsiveness to the prophet's protracted prayers. Now, at last, Yahweh has given him a vision, told him in a vision, and it is what the vision contains that will arrive on schedule. What can this be but a vision of the long-awaited intervention of Yahweh ... ? The certainty of its fulfillment comes from the reliability of Yahweh (*'ēmūnātō*, "his dependability"), who never lies.⁵⁴

Upon close examination of Andersen's statement, one sees that his opinion is not that much different from the mainstream view that the "vision" is the grammatical subject throughout v. 3. In the end, Andersen claims that the antecedent to the pronouns is "what the vision contains", which is "the long-awaited intervention of Yahweh". This is a subtle distinction perhaps, but it nevertheless leads Andersen to the same conclusion as many others, namely that "vision" is the antecedent.

A discussion of these ill-defined pronouns is not complete without mentioning the possible messianic implications. The LXX renders the pronouns of v. 3b as masculine ("though he should tarry, wait for him; for he will surely come, and will not tarry").⁵⁵ The author of Hebrews then quotes the LXX's rendering of Hab. 2:3, giving it a decidedly messianic interpretation. *For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, he who is coming will come, and will not delay.* (Heb. 10:36-37) According to O.P. Robertson: "By viewing Habakkuk's prophecy from this personal perspective, the writer to the Hebrews has not interjected an element foreign to the prophecy, even though he does make personal that which originally was stated in an impersonal way."⁵⁶ There is no disputing the messianic reference in the book of Hebrews, but to import that notion back to the text of Habakkuk is probably inappropriate. The basic principle is the same in both testaments – "patience on possessing the substance of the promises of God"⁵⁷ – but the contexts are different. Hebrews regards the promise of the Messiah; Habakkuk regards the promise of a vision.

Haak rightly notes: "To a large extent the problems of interpretation of the prophecy could be solved if the antecedents for the various ambiguous pronouns within the book could be determined."⁵⁸ For the time being, this thesis will tentatively presume, along with the majority of commentators and translations, that the antecedent of each third-person singular pronoun in v. 3 is the vision and, thus, that the verse as a whole addresses the timing of this vision. To suggest otherwise requires a determination of the vision's content, but a proper

⁵⁴ Andersen, p. 205

⁵⁵ In his evaluation of the LXX O.P. Robertson (pp. 172-3) says: "[at] first it appears that the LXX translation of this verse has modified the thrust of Habakkuk's prophecy by focusing the vision on the coming of a person. ... [However,] the personification of the hope of salvation by the LXX translators should not be viewed as a strange perversion of the words of Habakkuk, even though the Hebrew text does not appear to specify so pointedly a reference to a 'person' who will bring about the fulfillment of the prophecy."

⁵⁶ O.P. Robertson, p. 173

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Haak, p. 57

discussion of this crucial issue is best made after Hab. 2:4, 2:6-20 and 3:3-15 – the three most popular options for identifying the vision – have been thoroughly reviewed.

Therefore the present discussion finally turns to the last verse of Yahweh's response to the prophet, Hab. 2:4, which contains some of the most familiar words in all of Scripture. This fame, however, is not due to the place they occupy in the book of Habakkuk but to their subsequent applications. The last three words of the verse, for example, are the starting points for the doctrine of justification by faith presented by the Apostle Paul and for the call of endurance presented by the author of Hebrews.⁵⁹ As further illustration of this verse's historical import, Rabbi Simlay, who lived in Palestine in the third century A.D., reduced all of God's commandments to one aphorism, namely Hab. 2:4b (*Makkoth* 23b-24a). According to his exposition Moses received 613 precepts at Sinai. David reduced these to eleven (Ps. 15), Isaiah to six (Isa. 33:15), Micah to three (Mic. 6:8), and Isaiah (Isa. 56:1) and Amos (Amos 5:4) each to two. Habakkuk, however, reduced the 613 to one – *a righteous one, in his faithfulness, he will live*. “*Also die ganze Tora in einem einzigen Halbvers von drei Worten.*”⁶⁰

Unfortunately these later applications of Hab. 2:4 do little to illuminate the meaning of the complicated verse in its original, prophetic context, which, of course, is the task at hand. Seybold describes the hermeneutical frustrations of many scholars.

*2,4 darf nicht als dictum probans und theologisches Axiom verwendet werden, ehe man es aus seinem Kontext verstanden hat. Dieser direkte Kontext aber ist in Hab 2 literarisch verloren gegangen. Zwar ist deutlich, daß V. 4b in einem bestimmten antithetischen Verhältnis zu V. 4a steht, aber der direkte Anschluß von V. 4 an die Gottesrede 2,2f. wäre genauso unvermittelt wie der Anschluß an 2,5, der nur im Eingang («aber vielmehr») ansatzweise erkennbar ist und dann schroff zum Wehewort hin abbricht.*⁶¹

In spite of these difficulties, the goal of the following is to define that context and how Hab. 2:4 fits into it. The discussion will begin with v. 4b and then work backward to v. 4a. “It is expedient to examine the text of Hab 2:4b first. There are at least two good reasons for this tack: textual variants are minimal, and consequently, the line becomes a poetical reference point which provides important clues concerning the interpretation of the more difficult lines within the immediate context.”⁶² After v. 4 is dealt with as a whole, it will be

⁵⁹ Scholars differ in their opinions of whether or not the NT writers have appropriately applied the words in Habakkuk. On the one hand, O.P. Robertson (p. 183) says that “two diverse authors of the NT quote the same OT Scripture with a different emphasis to make significantly different points. Yet each author remains true to the essence of the OT Scripture as recorded by Habakkuk.” On the other hand, according to Trudinger (p. 282) Paul misquotes Hab. 2:4b in both Romans and Galatians. “[However, the] validation of the use to which later Christian interpreters put his verse ... is not part of [the] present task ...”, says Andersen (p. 216). Rather, the present task is to unfold the meaning of these words in their original, prophetic context.

⁶⁰ Gunneweg, p. 400. See also Andersen, p. 216.

⁶¹ Seybold, p. 66

⁶² Zemek, p. 44. His discussion follows a similar pattern.

examined within the greater context of Yahweh's response to the prophet. In the end, this discussion will hopefully demonstrate that understanding Hab. 2:4 in its literary context is not as impossible as some think.

No one reading Hab. 2:4b in the original Hebrew – וְצַדִּיק בְּאַמְּוֹנָתוֹ יַחִיהַ – can miss noticing its unusual grammatical structure. “The emphases resulting from this structure are noteworthy. *[The] justified* [or ‘righteous one’] receives a stress it could not realize in the simple sentence structure of verb followed by subject. *[By] his steadfast trust* [or ‘in his faithfulness’] is also emphasized due to the inversion of the expected word order in the predicate”⁶³ The verb, as well, is duly highlighted by virtue of the fact that it is last in the sentence, a position it rarely occupies in Hebrew. The English translation above unfortunately captures only a portion of this accented tone.

Though these grammatical observations alone distinguish the half-verse, the words themselves also set it apart as a crucial text within the book of Habakkuk. The subject of v. 4b is צַדִּיק (“a righteous one”). This character plays a key role in the earlier laments of Habakkuk. The prophet says in Hab. 1:4 that *a wicked one is surrounding the righteous one* and again in Hab. 1:13 that *a wicked one swallows one more righteous than himself*. This צַדִּיק is the victim of the Chaldean's violence and treacherous dealings in one, if not both, references.

Gowan believes that the term itself has a judicial nuance in the book of Habakkuk.

The *just* (Hebrew, *tsaddik*), the righteous one, is the one who has been vindicated, whom God has declared to be right. There is a legal background to this word; it denotes the winner in a case at law in some of its Old Testament uses. So it is not restricted in its reference to a purely internal quality of goodness which one may possess. It is used in situations of controversy to denote the side which is right. Its opposite is wicked (Hebrew, *rasha*), and we saw the two words paired in 1:4 and 1:13.⁶⁴

B. Johnson suggests that at least a portion of the term's definition can be found in Hab. 2.4 itself.

Several passages describe what it means to be *ṣaddîq*, ... [but] the descriptions vary widely. There are no fixed lists as such, but rather only collections of examples. Such enumerations often begin with the relationship to God ... and end with summary exhortations ..., and in this sense *ṣaddîq* can characterize the conduct of a person's life Hab. 2:4 associates “righteousness” and “life” much along these lines⁶⁵

But what does it mean for a righteous person to live?

To *live* is not merely to exist, in Hebrew thought. One is not really alive

⁶³ O.P. Robertson, p. 178. Robertson continues: “[*by his steadfast trust*] ... is further underscored by the variation of order of the elements in contrast with the order of the first half of the verse. While the parallelism is maintained, the inversion of word order stresses *by his steadfast trust*.”

⁶⁴ Gowan, *Triumph*, p. 41

⁶⁵ B. Johnson, “*ṣāḏāq*” in *TDOT* 12, p. 258

when sick, weak, in danger or with a damaged reputation. To be *alive* is to have vigor, security and honor. So this verse does not merely tell ... [of] some feeble thread of existence in times such as Habakkuk describes; no, it speaks of being richly and fully alive.⁶⁶

More appropriate to the context of Habakkuk, Roberts describes the verb as referring “to life in the interim before the time fixed for the fulfillment of the vision”.⁶⁷ Either way, it is a mind-boggling promise given the prophet’s current circumstance. “The problem that Habakkuk faced was the prospect of the devastation of Israel, signifying the end of life for God’s own nation.”⁶⁸ In v. 4b Yahweh assures the prophet that he, and his people, will live. “In this context, therefore, the life promised is political and national”⁶⁹ These two words – צדיק חיה – are the antithesis of Habakkuk’s previous descriptions of the righteous in ch. 1. In 2:4b Yahweh says that the righteous one will neither be forever surrounded nor forever swallowed; instead, he will live.

The middle word of Hab. 2:4b is the most difficult to comprehend in its context. It is generally seen as defining exactly how a righteous one will live. He will live “in his faithfulness”. These are not easy words to interpret, as there are many influences outside of the text, and even within the text, which can distort one’s understanding of the phrase and disguise its true meaning.

Outside of the OT, for example, it is possible to read the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith back into Hab. 2:4b. In both Rom. 1:17 and Gal. 3:11 Paul writes that *the righteous man shall live by faith*. He uses this text to explain that a man is declared righteous because of his faith. As the following discussion will show, it is unlikely that this is the primary purport of the expression in Habakkuk. Whether or not Paul uses the phrase correctly is immaterial for the present study, and as far as Hab. 2:4b is concerned, O.P. Robertson clarifies the issue well:

[Grammatically] this phrase more naturally connects with the statement *he shall live*, as indicated by the Massoretic accents. Instead of stating explicitly that the justified-by-faith shall live, the phrase asserts that the justified shall live-by-faith. ... The phrase explains the way by which the gift of life continues to be received rather than the way by which a sinner is declared righteous.⁷⁰

Many translations (e.g. ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV and NKJ) nevertheless render Hab. 2:4b similarly to Paul’s version of the text, something akin to “the righteous will live by *his faith*”.

Moberly says:

⁶⁶ Gowan, *Triumph*, pp. 42-3. Gowan adds: “That interpretation is confirmed by 3:17-18.”

⁶⁷ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 112

⁶⁸ O.P. Robertson, p. 183

⁶⁹ Baker, p. 60

⁷⁰ O.P. Robertson, p. 177. He adds: “The parallelism of the two clauses in Hab. 2:4 offers additional support to this reading of the Hebrew text.” Scott (p. 336) concurs: “As frequently in the Hebrew Bible, the preposition *b^e* modifies *hāyū*, denoting the means by which the righteous can live in divine prosperity.”

[This] rendering in the [OT] text seeks to maintain continuity with Paul's usage in Rom 1:17. There is here a difficult problem for the translator, for Paul appears to see Hab 2:4b as a statement pregnant with meaning that can be taken in more ways than one; the variations in wording – “his” in Heb., “my” in LXX, and no possessive pronoun in Paul – also suggest differing interpretations being given to the saying. In an OT context, however, “his faithfulness” is clearly preferable.⁷¹

The broader context of Habakkuk itself may also be used inappropriately to drive one's understanding of “faithfulness”, resulting in definitions that lack substance and ultimately miss the true sense of the word. Bruce, for example, says: “[The] quality [of אֱמוּנָה] emphasized in this context is that *patient and confident waiting* for God to act”⁷² Achtemeier adds: “Faithfulness is *life by God's power* rather than by one's own ...; and therefore it is *truly life*, because it draws its vitality from the living God who is the source of life.”⁷³ These statements are not meant to be lexical definitions of “faithfulness”, but they nevertheless neglect the basic sense of the term and, therefore, are inadequate. Roberts provides a more accurate definition in the context of Yahweh's response: “The noun *ʿmûnāh* means ‘firmness, steadfastness, fidelity, reliability, trustworthiness,’ not faith, and it refers to the reliability of the vision, and ultimately of God who gives the vision, not the reliability or the fidelity of the righteous person.”⁷⁴

Roberts' supposition that אֱמוּנָה refers to “the reliability of the vision” does not necessarily represent a scholarly consensus. The debate revolves, once again, around who or what is being represented by the masculine pronoun suffixed to אֱמוּנָה. In whose faithfulness will a righteous one live? There are at least three options. First, the LXX reads אֱמוּנָתִי (“my faithfulness”) for אֱמוּנָתוֹ (“his or its faithfulness”), so that God is understood as the antecedent of the pronominal suffix. “LXX ‘from my faith,’ indicates faith as source, rather than instrument. The righteous person will not live ‘in (or by) his own faith’ (Hebrew), but will derive life ‘from’ the faithfulness of God.”⁷⁵ There seems, however, to be no good reason to emend the text in this way.

⁷¹Moberly, “אֱמוּנָה” in *NIDOTTE* 1, p. 430. More generally, the NT understanding of “faith” can inappropriately govern one's explanation of Hab. 2:4b. Moberly (p. 427) cautions: “The language of faith/belief (*pistis, pisteuō*), which is of central importance in the NT, does not hold a position of similar importance in the OT. The difference, however, is perhaps more one of terminology than of basic outlook Nonetheless, the OT does also have the language of ‘believe’ and ‘faith’ in various forms of the Heb. root *ʿmn*”

⁷² Bruce, p. 861 (italics added)

⁷³ Achtemeier, p. 46 (italics added)

⁷⁴ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 111. See also BDB, p. 52. A verbal form of אֱמוּנָה is found in Hab. 1:5. See Zemek (pp. 50-4) for a discussion of how the noun אֱמוּנָה relates to the verb's (passive) *nip'al* and (active) *hip'il* forms.

⁷⁵ Andersen, p. 212

As a second option, Janzen, like Roberts, regards the pronominal suffix as referring to the vision.⁷⁶ He begins his lengthy discussion with Hab. 2:3b, which he translates: “The vision is a witness to an appointed time, a testifier to the end – it does not lie.”⁷⁷ He supposes that v. 4b is the positive way of stating that the vision, or witness, does not lie; that is, “where there is a concern for the reliability of a witness, one standard way to express that concern is to use some form of the root *’mn*.”⁷⁸ His translation of v. 4b is: “but the righteous by its reliability shall live”.⁷⁹ Viewing Hab. 2:2-4 as a tight, rhetorical unit, he quickly dismisses the criticism that צדִיק is in a better literary position to function as the antecedent in question:

Now, through this semantic field runs a specific rhetorical vector, which begins with the word *hāzôn* in 2:2b and continues in *pronominal* fashion throughout the rest of the passage, whether as pronoun suffix, pronoun subject of the verb, or implicit pronoun object of the verb. ... even if it momentarily disappears from sight in 2:4a ... the rhetorical momentum of this vector, combined with the specific concern pervading the semantic field through which it moves, suffices to juxtapose *hāzôn* quite as closely to *’ēmūnātô* (though in a different rhetorical mode of proximity) as *ṣaddīq*.⁸⁰

Even though the precise relationship between vv. 3 and 4 is not entirely clear, Janzen’s vector theory is open to criticism. The introduction to v. 4 – “Behold! He is swollen” – seems to mark a shift in the subjects (from the “vision” in v. 3a to two individuals in v. 4). If the pronominal suffix on אִמּוֹנָתוֹ refers back to the vision, one would expect that to be stated more specifically. Besides that, Jepsen notes that apart from the single exception in Exod. 17:12 (“his hands were *’ēmūnā*”), “[in] all other passages where *’emunah* appears, it refers to the conduct of persons, about the same number of times of God and of man.”⁸¹

Thus, given the syntax of the sentence, the third option – which is that the antecedent in question refers to “a righteous one” – is preferred. A righteous one will live in his own faithfulness. Jepsen comes to the same conclusion on the basis of the term אִמּוֹנָה.

This sort of connection between life and conduct characterized by *’emunah* is stated in different passages. ... Hab. 2:4 ... belongs to this group of passages, at least as it stands in the MT: “The righteous (*tsaddiq*) shall live *be ’emunah*.” Here *’emunah* hardly means merely “godly honesty” or even “faithfulness,” but it is that conduct which is in accordance with *’emeth*, which includes sincerity, faithfulness, reliability, and stability. Such *’emunah* is peculiar to the *tsaddiq* and brings him to life.⁸²

⁷⁶ Andersen’s choice falls somewhere between the first and second options. As mentioned previously, Andersen tends to equate God and the vision in the context of v. 3. He does the same in v. 4b. He says (p. 215): “The righteous will live because the vision is certain, God is reliable. The referent of ‘its,’ the pronoun in ‘in its (his) faithfulness,’ is ‘the vision,’ not ‘the righteous man.’ The topic of discourse in v. 3a is probably ‘the vision’ (or indirectly God); it is the subject of all the verbs and the referent of the pronoun in ‘wait for it.’ God is the most natural referent for the pronouns that follow in v. 4.”

⁷⁷ Janzen, “Habakkuk 2:2-4”, p. 57. See also Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 107.

⁷⁸ Janzen, “Habakkuk 2:2-4”, p. 61

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2

⁸¹ Jepsen, “’āman” in *TDOT* 1, pp. 316-7

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 318

Yet in spite of the preference for the latter, each of the options suggested above – God, the vision, and a righteous one – could possibly be regarded as coming to a singular conclusion (cf. Figure 1). That is, however one identifies the masculine singular antecedent, the interpretive result is generally the same: faithfulness, in the context of Hab. 2:4, probably regards the vision in one way or another.⁸³ This understanding follows from the prior context in vv. 2-3. Haak says:

It may be that the ambiguity of this and other third person pronouns ... is intentional, adding to the flexibility of the prophecy's later interpretation. In the present translation, the antecedent is understood as the vision, since it is the reliability of the vision which is in question (cf. 2:3a). It is difficult, and probably not desirable, however, to draw too sharp a distinction between the vision, the content of the vision ..., and the author of the vision (Yahweh). Their reliability is interdependent.⁸⁴

Yahweh emphatically commands the prophet to write down a vision and then describes this vision (and by implication, its fulfillment) as coming at an appointed time. In the context of Yahweh's response to the prophet, 2:4b is a promise to the righteous one that he will live because of the absolute certainty that the vision will be fulfilled.

Figure 1: Hab. 2:4b and the pronoun suffixed to אִמְרוֹנָה

| | |
|--|---|
| A righteous one, | |
| • in <i>my</i> (i.e. <i>God's</i>) faithfulness | (in causing the vision to come to pass), |
| • in <i>its</i> (i.e. <i>the vision's</i>) faithfulness | (in coming to pass), |
| • in <i>his</i> (<i>own</i>) faithfulness | (in trusting the vision will come to pass), |
| he will live. | |

At the outset of this discussion it was said that its particular goal would be to analyze the well known Hab. 2:4b in its original, prophetic context. The most relevant context is the first half of the verse. Unfortunately that text is riddled with difficulties. The verse's problems begin straightaway with הִנֵּה עֲפֹלָה. Scott calls עֲפֹלָה “the *crux interpretum* of the passage”⁸⁵ and Roberts says that any interpretation of v. 4a “will be clouded by a certain amount of hypothetical guesswork”.⁸⁶ Indeed, little can be said with absolute certainty in regards to עֲפֹלָה's translation, since the term is a *hapax legomenon* in the OT Scriptures. “The difficulty is to determine the meaning of the obscure word ... *and* to find the right way

⁸³ Janzen and Andersen allude to this. Andersen (p. 214) says: “[It] is more likely that 'emūnātō, 'his / its reliability,' refers to the dependability of the vision or the message given in the vision, guaranteed by the reliability of the God who gave the vision or to God's dependability in fulfilling a promise (the ideas are not much different).”

⁸⁴ Haak, p. 59

⁸⁵ Scott, p. 331

⁸⁶ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 11

of construing it with the other words in this part of the verse.”⁸⁷ Roberts outlines and evaluates how the ancient versions rendered this crux.

LXX reads the form as a 3 m. sg. verb, “if he shrinks back,” but it is unclear how it arrived at that meaning for the verbal root, and its construal of the rest of the line is improbable. S reads the form as an abstract noun, “wickedness,” which leaves the parallelism in the verse ambiguous T paraphrases the term as “wicked men,” but, apart from the recognition that one should expect a noun to contrast with “righteous man,” neither S nor T offers much help for correcting the text. V renders the form as *qui incredulus est*, “the one who is unbelieving,” which would be an appropriate contrast to *saddiq*, but it is not clear how V came up with this rendering.⁸⁸

Emerton critically reviews a number of scholarly theories regarding the mysterious עפלה and then offers his own solution. He divides the hypotheses into two categories: the MT without emendation and the MT with emendation. Emerton cites the RV as an example of the former category, which he quickly dismisses: *Behold, his soul is puffed up* [עפלה], *it is not upright in him*. He criticizes the translation on three points. (1) This rendering of עפלה lacks support. (2) It does not account for the antecedents of the pronouns. (3) It is awkward in the context and offers no antithesis to “will live” in v. 4b.⁸⁹

Emerton subdivides his second category into three general classes: הנה as a noun rather than “behold”, עפלה as a word denoting a blameworthy person, and עפלה as a word denoting the downfall of the wicked. The blameworthy-person theory assumes that עפלה is antithetical to the noun צדיק, and the downfall-of-the-wicked theory assumes that עפלה is antithetical to the verb יהיה.⁹⁰ As an example of the first class Emerton cites only Southwell, who reprints הנה and takes it as representing an “eminent man” of Judah. Emerton readily rejects this possibility. “The theory that there was a noun *nāh* is possible, but it does not have a very secure foundation in a *hapax legomenon* [נה in Ezek. 7:11]. . . . Moreover, if the eminent man is a wealthy man of Judah, how is verse 4 related to verse 5, which appears to refer to a foreign conqueror?”⁹¹ Of the second class (e.g. G.R. Driver’s “heedless man” and Elliger’s “*dem Vermessenen*”) Emerton says: “A difficulty with all theories of this class is that they are insufficient on their own to yield a suitable sense, for we expect to find in the verse, not only a mention of the evildoer, but a statement that he will be overthrown.”⁹²

⁸⁷ Emerton, p. 11 (italics added)

⁸⁸ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 106

⁸⁹ Emerton, pp. 11-2. Emerton also critiques and eventually dismisses the proposal of van der Woude (see “Habakkuk”, p. 282), namely that Hab. 2:4 is a rhetorical question. *Wenn leichtsinnig, nicht recht seine Seele in ihm ist, wird dann der Gerechte durch seine Treue leben?* Haak (p. 57) also maintains the MT without emendation. “Behold, swollen, not smooth will be his gullet [throat] within him”

⁹⁰ Zemek, p. 59

⁹¹ Emerton, p. 14

⁹² *Ibid.* The possibility offered by Roberts would probably fall into this category. He (*Habakkuk*, p. 107) says: “The original root behind the corrupt form *’ūpp’lāh* is likely to be *’lp*, *y’p*, or *’yp*, all of which imply exhaustion, weariness, or fainting away. Based on the idiom in Jer. 4:31, one could read the qal masculine singular participle of *’yp* and obtain an appropriate sense without changing the consonantal text: *hinnēh ’āp lōh*, ‘Now the one who faints before it’”

Emerton regards the third class with the most favor. In these theories the words לא־יִשְׂרָה נִפְשׁוּ בוֹ are treated as a relative clause and עִפְלָה is emended such that it describes the downfall of the wicked. He offers the RSV as an example of this type of emendation: “Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail.”⁹³

These suggestions have much to commend them. First, the relative clause serves as the equivalent of a noun denoting the evildoer, and provides a contrast to the righteous man later in the verse. Second, the verse now contains a statement that the wicked will meet with disaster, and there is thus an antithesis to ‘will live’. Third, the emendations proposed are small and graphically easy.⁹⁴

Not surprisingly, Emerton’s own theory fits into this third category. He suggests “that [עִפְלָה] should be split into two and read as עָף לֵה: first the active participle *qal* of ‘*ūp*, ‘to fly’ [or ‘pass away, perish’]; and, second, a preposition with the third-person masculine singular pronominal suffix, written in the archaic way with *he* instead of *waw* and serving as an ethic dative”.⁹⁵ His final translation is: “Behold, he whose personality within him is not upright will fly away.” In his criticism of Emerton’s translation Zemek concludes that: “Though there are advantages to his conjecture, its weakness is its novelty.”⁹⁶

Two more proposals for understanding עִפְלָה deserve mention. The first relates directly to a nominal form of the root in question, and the second relates indirectly to another nominal form. The two nouns derived from the verb עִפַּל are translated “mound, hill” and “tumor” respectively. Though the precise relationships between these nouns and the verb (“to swell”) are uncertain, it is conceivable that “mound” represents a figurative swelling of the land, while “tumor” represents a literal swelling of the body. The former is found a total of eight times in the OT. Once it refers to a hill in Israel (2 Kgs. 5:24), five times it designates a specific location in Jerusalem (a fortified hill within the city;⁹⁷ 2 Chr. 27:3; 33:14; Neh. 3:26, 27; 11:21), and it is used by two prophets in parallel with בַּחֵן (“watch-tower”, Isa. 32:14) and מִגְדָּל (“tower”, Mic. 4:8). Scott suggests that עִפְלָה in Hab. 2:4a is related to this noun; either it is legitimately formed from the masculine noun with the additional suffix of locale or, alternatively, it is a corrupted form of the noun itself. In either case Scott offers that the term is a toponym for Ophel, the fortified acropolis in Jerusalem.⁹⁸ Given the Masoretic accents, he says that, “it might be supposed that ‘*upp^elā* belongs to a clause of its own, whose verb must be supplied from context”.⁹⁹ Applying the principle of verbal ellipsis Scott furnishes in v. 4a the final verb from v. 5a, יָנוּחַ, another *hapax legomenon*, which he translates “to be laid

⁹³ Emerton, pp. 15-6

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 16

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Zemek, p. 60

⁹⁷ See BDB, p. 779a.

⁹⁸ Scott, pp. 331-2

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 332

waste, destroyed”. In the end, Scott’s hypothesis is that the first clause of v. 4a is a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem (Ophel).¹⁰⁰

The second noun (“tumor”) occurs six times in the OT: once in Deuteronomy and five times in a single passage of 1 Samuel. In both of these contexts עפל is a physical affliction which represents the punishment of Yahweh. Though they do not refer to this particular noun, there are at least two scholars who emend עפלה such that the notion of punishment results. Rudolph transposes the first two consonants (עפלה to פעלה) and translates the term “punishment”. *Siehe, ‹verdiente Strafe erhält der Mann›, der nicht rechtgesinnt ist.*¹⁰¹ Seybold emends עפלה to read פלילה, which means “office of judge or umpire” (Isa. 16:3 only). *“Siehe das ‹Urteil›: Seine Seele ist (nicht) aufrichtig in ihm.”*¹⁰²

*Das Urteil im Ordalprozeß ergeht als Gottesspruch. Er wird in V. 4 vorgelegt: «Siehe das ‹Ergebnis› (das Urteil, die Entscheidung)»! Dann folgt zuerst die Verurteilung des offensichtlich falschen Zeugen und Anklägers nach dem Gesetz der Reziprozität (falsche Zeugen werden nach Maßgabe der (falschen) Anklage ihrerseits verurteilt): ... Der ‹Gerechte› aber ... wird von der Anklage freigesprochen.*¹⁰³

The image created in the introductory statement of Hab. 2:4 is, by no means, clear. Though the possibilities in Emerton’s latter category (emendation) have much to commend them – namely that the context of v. 4b seems to demand the downfall of a wicked party in v. 4a – it still seems possible to maintain the MT. Haak notes: “In spite of the difficulty of the words, the text of the MT is confirmed in the reading of 1QpHab and should be retained.”¹⁰⁴ This thesis, therefore, offers a translation of Hab. 2:4a that reflects the standard definition: *Behold! He is swollen* (cf. RV noted above). From this several commentators understand the character as one who is swollen, presumably with arrogance.¹⁰⁵ Equating the “swollen one” with an arrogant person is certainly not out of the question, for it easily fits the context of Habakkuk in which the Chaldean is portrayed as a proud man (cf. 1:7, 11; 2:5). This interpretation also well suits the modern notion of being puffed up in pride, but the ancients may not have had the same mental picture for conceit and haughtiness. There is a second attestation of the verbal root עפל, another *hapax legomenon* which, in the context of Num. 14:44, means “to be heedless or presumptuous”. This further supports the understanding of arrogance in the Habakkuk reference, but the evidence is still weak, at best.

Understanding the rest of v. 4a is difficult because so much of the half-verse’s final interpretation depends on how one regards עפלה. If the term is taken as a noun, then there

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 332-4

¹⁰¹ Rudolph, pp. 212-3

¹⁰² Seybold, p. 66

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 66-7

¹⁰⁴ Haak, p. 57, footnote 173. Haak concludes: “Once it is decided that the text of the MT should be retained, at least as far as the consonantal tradition is concerned, many of the proposals must be rejected in spite of numerous peripheral arguments which might be in their favor.”

¹⁰⁵ See e.g. Andersen, p. 209; Elliger, p. 40; and R.L. Smith, p. 106.

seems to be a verb missing in the sentence, but if the term is taken as a verb, then its explicit subject could be missing. In his resolution of the verse Zemek calls לֹא־יִשְׁרָה a metaphorical extension of עִפְלָה. “Considering the force of הִנֵּה and the concord of gender, it seems best to render it indefinitely as a maxim and appositionally with the climactic addition of the assertion which follows it: ‘Behold, it [...] is swollen, his soul within him is not level; but a righteous one should live by his faithfulness.’”¹⁰⁶ Zemek here touches on at least two other important issues related to the understanding of v. 4a: the gender of the terms and the qualifier that he translates as “level”.

When taken as a verb, the subject of עִפְלָה is feminine singular. Some commentators struggle with this, and rightly so; even *BHS* suggests in its apparatus that the verb should be masculine. However, as Baker proposes: “The feminine form of the Heb. word here could agree with ‘soul’, making the proposed emendation of *BHS* unnecessary.”¹⁰⁷ In this case the feminine נֶפֶשׁ, usually translated “soul”, is the subject of the second verb (יִשְׁרָה) in 2:4a and also of the first verb (עִפְלָה). This is a reasonable explanation for the feminine gender of עִפְלָה, yet it still does not account for the two masculine pronominal suffixes (נֶפֶשׁוֹ and בּוֹ).

There are several possible ways of understanding נֶפֶשׁ in the context of Hab. 2:4b. First, several translations (e.g. ESV, JB, KJV, NASB and NKJ) render נֶפֶשׁ according to one of its more popular usages, “soul”: that is, “his soul is not upright in himself”. According to Andersen, however: “The idea that the wicked person has a crooked soul might have some appeal, but no metaphysical meaning can be given to it.”¹⁰⁸ As a second option he renders נֶפֶשׁ as “throat”, the primary meaning of the Hebrew term. “Hence *napšô bô* does not mean ‘his soul (that is) in him’ but ‘his throat is twisted against it’ (that is, the vision). He speaks crookedly.”¹⁰⁹ This rendering makes good sense, but it complicates the gender issue by supposing two different antecedents for the masculine pronominal suffixes. Floyd offers a third possibility, that נֶפֶשׁ should be translated as “appetite” or “greed”, thus rendering “it has become enlarged, it has not gone straight, [i.e.] one’s greed within him”. He says: “The starting point for a solution to the philological problems of v. 4 is to recognize that in v. 4a *napæš* means the same thing that it means in v. 5b, rather than »soul«, etc., and that »greed«

¹⁰⁶ Zemek, p. 60. Southwell (p. 616) suggests that לֹא־יִשְׁרָה is an early pre-LXX gloss on the unusual עִפְלָה.

¹⁰⁷ Baker, p. 60, footnote 1

¹⁰⁸ Andersen, p. 209. Seebass (“nepeš” in *TDOT* 9, pp. 508-9) notes: “The more vaguely and naively this word [‘soul’] is used, the more correct and appropriate this translation becomes. ... Westermann [“nepeš” in *TLOT* 2, p.752] rightly notes several times that the specialized meaning ‘soul’ can be considered only in a relatively small number of passages.”

¹⁰⁹ Andersen, p. 208. Haak also holds to this rendering of נֶפֶשׁ. He (p. 59) concludes: “If the literal meaning of *napš* is adopted, the meaning ‘swollen’ for *plh* seems quite appropriate. The oracle ends by stating that the ‘throat,’ which Habakkuk had depicted as insatiable (1:13-17), will be swollen (shut) and will not be ‘free of obstacles.’ This is contrasted with the fate of the righteous one in the next line, for whom the oracle means life.”

is thus the common theme of both verses. They are related in that v. 5 further specifies what is only generally stated in v. 4a about greed's effects."¹¹⁰ This view has some appeal, but the relationship between vv. 4 and 5 may not be as tight as Floyd suggests.

As a fourth possibility, Waltke suggests another legitimate translation of נַפֵּשׁ. He explains that

in some contexts *nepesh* is best rendered by "person," "self," or more simply by the personal pronoun. Westermann says that it is best rendered by such English equivalents in casuistic law, in the enumeration of people, in the general designation of people and as a substitute for a pronoun. ... As a substitute for a pronoun it frequently occurs with the pronominal suffix. ... Although it appears to be an equivalent of the personal pronoun, its intensive, passionate sense peculiar to the word is always present. A.R. Johnson speaks of it as "a pathetic (i.e. in the sense of deeply emotional) periphrasis for a pronoun" (*The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel*, 1964, p. 22).¹¹¹

In the context of v. 4a, this option is a reasonable one. It accounts for the apparent inconsistencies in gender and yields a straightforward interpretation. *He is not upright in himself.* That is, this character's life, his individual being, is not upright.¹¹²

Though the verb יָשַׁר is more commonly rendered "to be upright", Brownlee offers the rendering "to be humble" and suggests that in the negative it is the opposite of עֲפֹלָה (when understood as indicative of pride).

One will observe ... that the translation "humble" ... is according to the context. The root idea in this figurative word is "level," not "vertical" – although the well-nigh universal English translation "upright" would seem to suggest the latter. The verb is used for the leveling of hills and valleys in Isa 40 3. In Hab 2 4, where levelness is antithetical to "puffed up," it is clear that the word means humility. The essence of sin according to all the Hebrew prophets is pride and rebellion, and righteousness is humility and obedience.¹¹³

Brownlee's translation is an attractive one, but when the proper rendering of עֲפֹלָה is so unclear, one can only tentatively base the translation of another term on it. The least that can be said, with some measure of certainty, is that the character in v. 4a is not a righteous man, which brings the discussion back to v. 4b. A close examination of Hab. 2:4 illuminates the understanding of its two halves and demonstrates that the impact of the verse is even more profound when viewed in its entirety.

¹¹⁰ Floyd, "Prophecy and Writing", p. 474

¹¹¹ Waltke, "nāpash" in *TWOT* 2, pp. 590-1

¹¹² In his introduction to the section on OT usages of the term נַפֵּשׁ Seebass ("nepeš" in *TDOT* 9, p. 504) advises his readers: "As the sections to follow cite the particular meanings of *nepesh*, we must always keep in mind that the more concrete meanings discussed at the beginning do not have a semantic preponderance. Much more typical of OT usage is the global understanding, which requires stereometrically a harmonization of all the meanings." These usages, according to Seebass, are: (1) throat, gullet; (2) desire; (3) vital self, reflexive pronoun; (4) individuated life; (5) living creature, person; and (6) the *nepesh* of God.

¹¹³ Brownlee, "Placarded Revelation", pp. 324-5

When taken as a whole, Hab. 2:4 is a striking parallel of opposites: good vs. evil, broadly speaking. Many scholars acknowledge the parallel construction. Bailey says simply: “God answered the prophet by means of a *strong contrast*. The first half of the verse apparently refers to the wicked ... (without using the term) while the second statement explicitly describes the righteous person.”¹¹⁴ Andersen expresses a similar sentiment: “The *antithetical parallelism* of v 4 predicts two possible responses to the message. The righteous will accept the message and rely on it; the wicked will pervert it (it will get stuck in his crooked throat).”¹¹⁵

Literarily and grammatically speaking, v. 4 is not a tight parallel, but that does not necessarily weaken the impact of the contrast. Floyd notes: “The MT has been made to seem more problematic than it actually is by the supposition that the antithesis expressed in 2:4 requires v. 4a to be formally analogous to v. 4b. Such antitheses do not necessarily entail strict parallelism, however, as countless examples in Proverbs attest.”¹¹⁶ The first thing to note in Hab. 2:4 is that “Behold” seems to govern the entire verse, not merely the first expression, and in so doing draws attention to the relationship between the two halves. Then come the verbs, which frame the entire verse (appearing at the beginning and end) and thereby stress the contrast. This contrast, however, is not so easy to recognize, given the difficulties in translating עפלה. Nevertheless, if the antithetical parallel is maintained and עפלה is regarded as a verb, then understanding this verb as indicative of judgment, rather than pride, makes more sense. The second character is promised life, but the first character is judged (presumably to death). O.P. Robertson holds to the notion of judgment in this verse, even though he renders עפלה as denoting arrogance. “So by these words of Habakkuk Scripture makes it plain that the proud [or swollen] cannot be upright. As a consequence, neither can they live. They must experience condemnation and judgment. ... Yet the fact that their soul *is not upright* in them should be an adequate indicator of their ultimate judgment.”¹¹⁷ However the first verb is finally understood, an interpretation along these lines best illustrates the parallel of opposites.

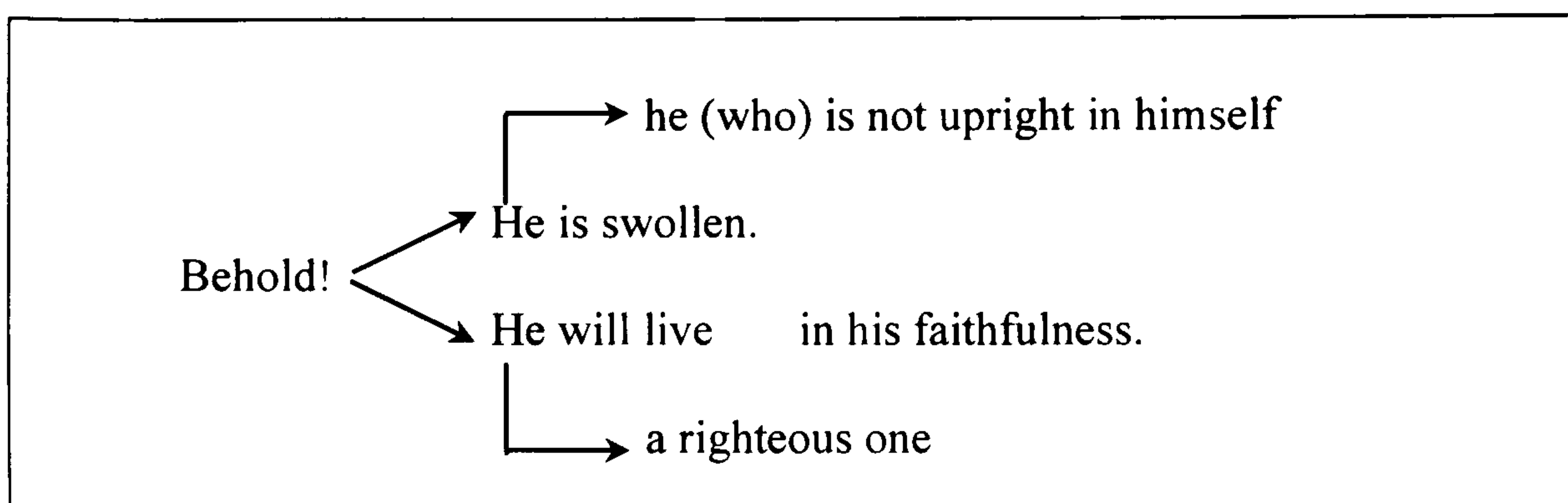
¹¹⁴ Bailey, p. 324 (italics added)

¹¹⁵ Andersen, p. 214 (italics added). Thus far, little has been said in regards to the identity of the wicked character in Hab. 2:4. Though it is not made explicit, most assume that the Chaldean is the one to whom Yahweh refers (e.g. Elliger and R.L. Smith). The reference to the “righteous” in the second half of the verse confirms this understanding. As was mentioned previously, the word pair “wicked” and “righteous” is found twice in the prophet’s laments (Hab. 1:4, 13), both times, this thesis suspects, the wicked referring to the Chaldean. Though the former term is not explicitly stated in 2:4, the parallelism in the verse strongly suggests that this is a proper interpretation.

¹¹⁶ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 122. Elsewhere Floyd (“Prophecy and Writing”, p. 475) adds: “When v. 4a and v. 4b are compared with respect to their differences in grammar and sense, it appears that they are not related to each other in terms of a strict antithetical parallelism. Though they describe contrasting realities and opposing tendencies, the one is not the exact converse of the other.”

¹¹⁷ O.P. Robertson, p. 175

Figure 2: A parallel of opposites in Hab. 2:4



Next come the subjects, whose contrast is more readily apparent. The adjective יָשָׁר is the most common synonym of צַדִּיק, according to Scott.¹¹⁸ The first person *is not* upright and the second person *is* righteous. The former is expressed by means of a clause (“he is not upright”) and the latter by an adjectival noun (“a righteous one”). The former is also further qualified with the prepositional phrase “in himself”. Some might suggest that the second prepositional phrase in v. 4 – “in his faithfulness” – functions parallel to the first, but this contradicts what was said earlier in regards to “in his faithfulness” modifying the verb (“he will live”) rather than the subject (“righteous one”). Even though a parallel of prepositional phrases would better highlight the antithetical construction of v. 4 as a whole, it is inappropriate and unnecessary. The illustration of Figure 2 suggests a flow of Hab. 2:4 according to its contrasting elements. In conclusion, even though the translation of v. 4 is difficult and even though there are a number of reasonable possibilities for emending various portions of the text, the MT yields a suitable understanding. *Behold! He is swollen, he is not upright in himself; but a righteous one, in his faithfulness, he will live.* Hab. 2:4 is Yahweh’s pledge to the prophet that the distinction between the destinies of the righteous and the wicked will be maintained.

It was stated earlier that the relationship between Hab. 2:4 and its prior context is not easy to discern. Speaking specifically of v. 4b Wendland says: “[As] set within its original textual environment, the utterance appears at first glance to be not much more than an aside, a fleeting positive contrast that occurs within a strong word of divine denunciation.”¹¹⁹ Verse 4 taken as a whole could probably be described in the same way, as a parenthetical remark in the context of Yahweh’s response to the prophet regarding a vision. “Behold” sets v. 4 apart from the very start with a theme and structure different from the prior context. Verses 2-3 speak of a vision; v. 4 compares the wicked and the righteous. Verses 2-3 contain three imperatives; v. 4 puts forth two statements. However, it was suggested earlier that “in his

¹¹⁸ Scott, p. 335

¹¹⁹ Wendland, p. 591. Later Wendland (p. 621) elevates the half verse (and with it, all of v. 4) to its proper position: “This is a spiritual axiom which foregrounds the righteous being and behavior of the supreme Holy One (1:12; 3:1 [*sic*, 3:3]), the almighty Yahweh of Hosts (2:13), the Sovereign LORD (3:19). It is this second presupposition which gives the former passage its credibility, or truth, as well as its reliability, or trustworthiness.”

faithfulness” (v. 4b) refers to the certainty that the vision mentioned in vv. 2-3 will be fulfilled. That is, the righteous one can stake his life upon the reliability of Yahweh’s vision, but the swollen one is defined by his reliance on himself (not on Yahweh or the divine revelation). On this count at least v. 4 flows logically from vv. 2-3.

In spite of the many translational and hermeneutical difficulties, scholars have rightly recognized the import of Hab. 2:1-4. According to v. 1, Habakkuk desires the attention of Yahweh and is actively and deliberately looking for it. Verses 2-4 record the satisfaction of the prophet’s desire. He finally gains the attention of Yahweh and hears the voice of the one who has been silent for so long. Verse 2 registers the command of Yahweh to write and expound a vision of great importance, while v. 3 records the emphatic promise that the aforementioned vision will come to pass at a precise moment in time. Yet the divine response does not address the specific queries that Habakkuk raises in his prayer.

*Gott antwortet Habakuk. Er gibt eine echte Antwort, aber sie fällt anders aus, als der Beter es erwartet haben mochte. Gott erteilt keine Rechenschaft darüber, warum er die Chaldäer, die die Völkerwelt mißhandeln, aufstehen läßt. Gott hat es sich vorbehalten, nicht ihrem Frevel, aber diesem gesamten Vorgang einen gerechten Sinn zu geben. Darein gewährt er niemandem Einblick und rechtfertigt sein Verhalten auch vor einem glaubenden Menschen nicht.*¹²⁰

Yahweh defends neither his character nor his deeds. Rather, in a climactic statement of nine words (v. 4) he announces the reversal of everything about which Habakkuk complains. The wicked will be judged; the righteous will live. In stating such he indirectly affirms his holy nature and pronounces his actions as just. Verse 4 is thus the climax and heart of Yahweh’s response and the answer Habakkuk seeks. *“Er enthält als Antwort eine Belehrung über Wesen und Schicksal des Gottlosen und des Gerechten.”*¹²¹ It is upon this hinge of Yahweh’s response that the book of Habakkuk turns.

2. Hab. 2:5

**And furthermore the wine continues to act treacherously
– a proud man – and he does not rest;
he makes himself large like Sheol, and he is like death and he is not satisfied,
and he gathers to himself all the nations,
and he collects to himself all the peoples.**

¹²⁰ Ungern-Sternberg and Lamparter, p. 30. Deissler (p. 226) adds: *“Dies ist die entscheidende Antwort Gottes auf die quälende Frage des Propheten und seiner gläubigen Gesinnungsgenossen. Sie enthüllt nicht die konkrete Motivation Gottes bei der Wahl seines Gerichtswerkzeugs für Juda-Jerusalem, wohl aber die Grundintention seines Geschichtswaltens und deren letztgültige Realisierung.”* See also Bailey, p. 322, who notes the similarities with Yahweh’s response to Job.

¹²¹ Seybold, p. 67. Elliger (p. 41) adds: *“Nicht eine theoretische Lösung des Problems der Theodizee ... hat er seinem Volke zu bieten. Aber die praktische Lösung der Not wird ihm in unmittelbarem Gotterleben geschenkt, und er gibt sie in Vollmacht seinem Volke weiter: glauben an Gott, der die Weltgeschichte durch alle Rätsel hindurch seinem Ziele zulenkt, der Vernichtung des Bösen und dem Leben des Gerechten!”*

An appetite for death

In the context of the book of Habakkuk, the characters in 2:4 are applied to the wicked Chaldean and the righteous man, both of whom represent their respective nations. What follows in v. 5 must also be a description of the wicked, but its relation to v. 4 is unclear. How does the prescription that answers the presence of evil in the world (v. 4) relate to the description of a proud man's insatiable appetite for death (v. 5)? Does Yahweh's response to the prophet continue in v. 5 or is this verse spoken by another? Gowan bemoans the predicament: "This is a really frustrating passage for an exegete, for it seems that now we have come to the pivotal point of the book, and we're not sure what verse 5a means!"¹²²

Wendland summarizes part of the problem.

The first major hermeneutical difficulty that one encounters with regard to the book's compositional organization arises in vv. 4-5 of chap. two. Is the characterization of v. 5 to be read as a unit closure (e.g. N/RSV, NIV), an aperture (e.g. GNB, JB), or as neither (e.g. NEB, TOB [*sic?*])? In other words, does this verse function together with four as part of the promised "vision" denouncing Babylon (cf. 2:2) or only as a prelude to the revelation, which then begins in v. 6?¹²³

The difficulty of Hab. 2:5 is two-fold: contextual and textual. Discussions regarding the latter generally feed into those regarding the former, such that some see the text as so corrupt that there is little hope of explaining how the verse fits with the rest of the chapter.

Beginning with the immediate context, the debate over how vv. 4 and 5 relate to each other appropriately begins with the initial expression in v. 5, וַאֲפִי כִי־. Those scholars who venture to make a judgment in the matter generally regard וַאֲפִי כִי־ either as the connector between vv. 4 and 5 or as the break between them.¹²⁴ Seybold and Elliger are, perhaps, extreme examples of the latter category, because they eliminate וַאֲפִי כִי־ from the text and emend the next word, from הַיַּיִן ("the wine") to הָרִי ("woe"), so as to coordinate with the same term repeated in 2:6b, 9, 12, 15 and 19.¹²⁵ Seybold translates: "«Wehe dem, der schindet und» täuscht den einfachen Mann, der gierig ist, dabei doch nicht satt wird ..."¹²⁶

Der erste Weheruf (V.5-6a) ist dadurch beschädigt worden, daß ein Teilstück des textbegleitenden Psalms in die Fuge zwischen Einleitung (V.1-3) und Darbietung der «Vision» (V.5ff.) im Aufbau der Prophetenschrift geraten ist. ... Man kann sich des Eindrucks nicht erwehren, daß in V.6a möglicherweise Reste der alten Überschrift der Wehespruch-

¹²² Gowan, *Triumph*, p. 44

¹²³ Wendland, p. 596. In the end, Wendland (pp. 594ff.) views Hab. 2:2-5 as a single unit, which functions at the center of his macrostructure for the entire book.

¹²⁴ Andersen (pp. 216-7), for example, notes: "Because of the finality of v 4, and the new beginning with *wē 'ap kî-*, some scholars have found a major break in the book at this point. Budde (*EB* II 1923) inserted Hab 1:5-11 here. ... Cannon (1924:75) explained the break as due to a time interval between the dialogue in Hab 1:2-2:4 and the 'woe oracles' that follow. But *wē 'ap kî-* is better taken as a link that secures continuity between v 4 and v 5."

¹²⁵ Haak (pp. 25-6) also regards v. 5 as part of the first woe, but he retains וַאֲפִי כִי־ and translates it as "Indeed, (and even more!)".

¹²⁶ Seybold, p. 67

*sammlung (auch auf Tafeln geschrieben?) vorliegen Sicher ist nur, daß es den Textverlauf an dieser Stelle stört.*¹²⁷

Seybold appropriately acknowledges the contextual difficulty with v. 5, but his shuffling of the text does not adequately solve it.

Elliger similarly translates v. 5a: “*Wehe’ dem Räuber, dem frechen Tyrannen, der nie ,sich satt trinkt’!*”¹²⁸ Emerton summarizes and critiques Elliger’s defense.

Elliger’s reasons, apart from his appeal to the versions ..., are that nothing more is expected after the oracle of verse 4, and that the 4 + 4 (or 4 + 3, or 3 + 4) metre of verses 2-4 contrasts with the 3 + 3 metre of verses 1 and 5 ff. The former argument is subjective The metrical argument is even weaker – and metrical arguments must often be treated with extreme caution.¹²⁹

The Peshitta and LXX, the versions referred to above, give evidence for a rendering that eliminates the troublesome כִּי וְאֵךְ. According to Emerton: “The value of the Peshitta here is questionable, because it ignores, not only *w^e ’ap kī* but also the next word *hayyayin*, and it is most unlikely that the original Hebrew text was so short.”¹³⁰ After reviewing the hypotheses regarding the final form of the LXX Emerton concludes:

The LXX, then, bears witness, *prima facie*, for a Hebrew text without *w^e ’ap kī*, but the possibility that its original text agreed with that of the Massoretes cannot be excluded. However, even if the LXX is based on a short Hebrew text, it would be rash to regard the words *w^e ’ap kī* as unoriginal without some reason other than the failure of the LXX (and the Peshitta) to represent them.¹³¹

If eliminating כִּי וְאֵךְ from the text is no more attractive an option than this, one must deal with the text as it stands. Yet the question remains: Does כִּי וְאֵךְ link verses 4 and 5 or divide them? Most scholars generally view כִּי וְאֵךְ as evidence that there is at least a thematic connection between vv. 4 and 5. Roberts says cautiously: “Very serious textual problems make the interpretation of Hab. 2:5a hazardous, but if v. 4 portrays the outcome of two possible responses to the vision, v. 5 seems to portray the outcome of a life not directed by God at all.”¹³² According to Zemek “v 4 can be understood as the crucial lesson of God’s disclosure which was to be recorded (i.e., the unrighteous one’s essence is perverted), and vv 5ff. could be conceived of as the consequent lesson (i.e., the unrighteous one’s actions are perverted)”.¹³³ Rudolph works from the general to the particular and says: “*Von dem allgemeinen Grundsatz, daß Unrecht bestraft wird, macht V. 5 nun die Anwendung auf den Chaldäer und bekräftigt damit, daß seine Rolle, Strafwerkzeug Jahwes zu sein, nur etwas*

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 70

¹²⁸ Elliger, p. 41. See also Wellhausen (1898), p. 168 and Weiser (1961), p. 262.

¹²⁹ Emerton, p. 2

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 1

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 2

¹³² Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 116

¹³³ Zemek, pp. 56-7

Vorläufiges ist und daß das letzte Wort über ihn noch gesprochen werden wird.”¹³⁴ Finally,

Gowan tentatively offers this prospect:

A contrast certainly is being presented between two ways: the way of vs. 4b and that of vs. 4a and possibly also 5a. So “life” in 4b is contrasted with the distortion of the person in 4a, and possibly also with the lack of endurance in 5a. “Righteousness” in 4b is contrasted with that negative quality of which we are uncertain in 4a and perhaps also with treachery and arrogance in 5a.¹³⁵

In explaining the relationship between Hab. 2:4 and 2:5 these relatively short citations offer reasonable arguments – more reasonable, at least, than those for eliminating אִי־כִי from the text altogether – but they still lack a certain rigor. Scott’s careful approach to the relationship, therefore, deserves consideration. He assumes “that verses 4 and 5 are bound together in a *qal wahomer* argument which proceeds from the minor premise, introduced by *hinnēh* (v. 4a), to the major premise, introduced by *w^e ’ap kī* (v. 5a): ‘If indeed ..., then how much more ...’”¹³⁶ His translation of vv. 4-5a is as follows: “If indeed Ophel [will be laid waste], unless its people are upright in it – now the righteous (nation) will live (with divine prosperity in the land) by means of its trustworthiness – how much more will the wine deal treacherously, and will not (the) haughty man be destroyed?”¹³⁷

In this [minor] premise, Yahweh is probably reiterating his prediction of the Chaldean invasion (Hab. i 5-11) as a judgment to be incurred because of Judah’s breach of covenant, not Yahweh’s. The Judeans may remain in the land and live in divine prosperity, but only if they abide by Yahweh’s commandments. As it stands, however, ... Jerusalem [Ophel] will be besieged, conquered, and razed¹³⁸

“The major premise seems to indicate that the Chaldeans will be punished for their treacherous dealing even more certainly than the Judeans will be punished for their infractions.”¹³⁹

Scott’s argument is well presented and defended, however, its most considerable liability is that it rests on a questionable rendering of v. 4a. (1) It has been noted previously that Ophel is not the most likely translation of the *hapax legomenon* עִפְלָה. (2) According to the principle of ellipsis Scott supplies the first verb in the minor premise – “to be laid waste” – from the verb in the major premise (translated there as “to be destroyed”). Even if the method were granted as acceptable in this instance, the verb he uses is another *hapax legomenon* and the definition he provides is new. (3) Scott also presupposes that Judah is the

¹³⁴ Rudolph, p. 216

¹³⁵ Gowan, *Triumph*, p. 45

¹³⁶ Scott, pp. 330-1. See Haak (p. 60) who describes this rendering as having an “intensifying function”.

¹³⁷ Scott, p. 340

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 337

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 339

wicked party in Hab. 1:2-4 and therefore deserving of the punishment described in Hab 2:4.

As discussed previously, these verses do not clearly identify Judah as the evil-doer.

Even though Scott's rendering is improbable in the final analysis, he does raise an interesting point regarding the relationship between *וַאֲף כִּי* and *הִנֵּה* and thus the connection between vv. 4 and 5. Roberts, however, uses the same grammatical logic and comes to a different conclusion, namely that *וַאֲף כִּי*, in effect, *divides* these two verses.

The opening expression *w^e 'ap kî* normally follows a clause introduced by *hinnēh* in a construction with the sense "behold, ... is so, then how much more will ... be so." Thus v. 5 appears to jump over the positive example in v. 4b and link up with the negative example in v. 4a. That may suggest that vs. 5-20 were not an original part of the same divine response to the prophet as vs. 2-4, but that they are a compositional expansion put together from other, perhaps earlier, oracles.¹⁴⁰

For the time being *וַאֲף כִּי* will be translated "and furthermore", even if the relationship between vv. 4 and 5 has not yet been satisfactorily explained.

A detailed investigation of v. 5 is required before the relationship to its context can be suggested. Unfortunately nearly every word of the first half of the verse is uncertain textually, further complicating its interpretation and therefore the explanation for its placement within Hab. 2. The investigation of v. 5a begins with the term joined to *וַאֲף כִּי* by the *maqṣep*. The MT reads *הַיַּיִן* ("wine"), but 1QpHab prefers *הַרְוֵן* ("wealth").¹⁴¹

It is not difficult to see how the error arose, whether the Qumran reading is a corruption of the reading of the Massoretes, or vice versa: the letters *waw* and *yodh* were sometimes written in a way that made them difficult, or even impossible, to distinguish; and there has been haplography (if the Massoretic Text is original) or dittography (if the Qumran reading is original), or perhaps *yodh* and *nun* have been transposed. There may thus have been a copying error, and it is unnecessary to suppose that the reading in the Habakkuk Commentary is to be attributed to the Qumran sect's ascetical interests ...¹⁴²

There are generally two lines of thinking when defending the rendering of the MT: a literal or a figurative wine. In regards to the first option, Zemek notes the proverbial connections (e.g. Prov. 20:1; Isa. 5:11; Jer. 23:9; Hos. 4:11). "Historically, a maxim concerning 'wine' would be particularly appropriate as its truth could be related to and illustrated by the Chaldeans (cf. Daniel 5)."¹⁴³ O.P. Robertson brings balance to the view and says: "It should not be supposed that Habakkuk's vision is singling out the sin of drunkenness

¹⁴⁰ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 116

¹⁴¹ Haak (p. 60) outlines the evidence: "MT, Targum, and the Vulgate witness a text with two *yods* ... 1QpHab appears to read a single *waw* ... the LXX and Syriac also appear to witness a text with a single *waw/yod*." Haak himself (p. 61) concludes: "the word is here understood as related to *yāwēn* ('mire,' BDB 401b). This word also occurs in Pss. 40:3 and 69:3. In both these psalms the themes are very similar to those found in Habakkuk. In both the word 'mire' seems to be associated with the underworld and death." Haak translates the expression: "since as the mire he deals treacherously".

¹⁴² Emerton, p. 8

¹⁴³ Zemek, pp. 61-2

as the chief transgression. ... Strong drink does not in itself engender the pride that is so obnoxious to God. But it serves as an agent by which latent human pride comes forth in all its ugliness.”¹⁴⁴

Figuratively the wine could be referring to the Chaldean as the divine instrument of judgment. Scott notes Jer. 51:7 in this regard. *Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the LORD, intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine; therefore the nations are going mad.* “Here *yayin* is put for the staggering effects of wine, which picture the effects of Yahweh’s judgement (cf. Ps lx 5, lxxv 9; Jer. xiii 12-14, xxv 15-29; Isa. li 17, 21-22).”¹⁴⁵ Scott also cites the context of Habakkuk as evidence for this view. (1) In Hab. 1:12 the prophet acknowledges that the Chaldeans are Yahweh’s instruments of judgment. (2) Hab. 2:15-17, the fourth woe, includes a reference to wine and probably judgment. (3) In Hab. 1:13 the Chaldeans are referred to as the ones who act treacherously, which is the same verb (בגד) that comes immediately after “wine” in Hab. 2:5.¹⁴⁶ Andersen, however, sees Chaldea as being judged herself rather than being the divine means of judgment for Judah. “In prophecy, wine is often the instrument of God’s judgment, infuriating the wicked to self-destruction. The Chaldean’s madness for conquest is like intoxication.”¹⁴⁷

Those who prefer “wealth” to “wine” similarly look to the context of Habakkuk for their defense. According to Bailey: “This change makes good sense, especially from the remainder of the verse [v. 5b], which describes the Babylonians as being as greedy as the grave.”¹⁴⁸ Emerton, as well, argues for this rendering at length, referring mostly to the context of Habakkuk and the proverbs that highlight wealth.

The passage speaks of a rapacious power The relevant part of verse 5 may be understood as a reference to the greed of the Chaldean A reference to wealth is as appropriate in a proverbial saying as is a reference to wine, and the former has the advantage that the application to the history of Habakkuk’s time is more direct.¹⁴⁹

He concludes: “The reading is not a conjecture, but is actually found in an ancient manuscript, and it therefore has an advantage over a conjectural emendation. It has also been seen that it yields a better sense than the reading of the Massoretic Text.”¹⁵⁰ Though Emerton’s first statement cannot be denied, his latter remark may legitimately be debated.

¹⁴⁴ O.P. Robertson, p. 184

¹⁴⁵ Scott, p. 338

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Andersen, p. 217. Andersen (p. 218) also addresses those who see a discrepancy between 1:13 (the *Chaldean* is treacherous) and 2:5 (the *wine* is treacherous): “These statements need not be incongruous, for the fourth ‘woe oracle’ denounces the person who deceives his neighbor, making him drunk in order to abuse him sexually.”

¹⁴⁸ Bailey, p. 327

¹⁴⁹ Emerton, pp. 8-9

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 10. Emerton’s negative arguments (i.e. those against “wine”) are neither convincing nor thorough (pp. 6-7). He only disputes the opinions of Koenig, who links wine to the myth of being swallowed by the underworld, and Schreiner, who regards the reference to wine as proverbial.

The wider context of v. 5 speaks of the sin of greed, as was just mentioned. The Qumran text's "wealth" feeds into this understanding, but the MT's "wine" may communicate the same. "The dominant metaphor ... relates to the treachery of an addiction to wine, which, like political and military ambition, is an addiction that knows no limit of fulfillment and to which all other interests are sacrificed."¹⁵¹ The Chaldean has a constant hunger for more: more nations, more plunder, more power. "Since wine and wealth are both addictive, it is not really possible to decide the text-critical question of *hayyayin* (MT) versus *hwn* (1QpHab) on semantic grounds alone."¹⁵² Simply because the MT is preferred over the Qumran commentary, the rendering "wine" is maintained in translation. Whether his lust is for wine or for wealth, the Chaldean's crime is his greed, as is made clear in the second half of v. 5.

The next expression in v. 5a – גבר יהיר – is not so much a problem of consonantal text as it is a problem of punctuation. *And furthermore the wine continues to act treacherously – a proud man – and he does not rest.* That is, a disjunctive marker is placed *after* the verb בוגד ("to act treacherously") and a *vav* conjunction is placed *before* the next negated verb ולא ינוח ("and he does not rest"), effectively isolating גבר יהיר ("a proud man"). Emerton summarizes the ways in which the half-verse can be translated.

- (a) Wine is treacherous, a proud man, and he will not be successful.
- (b) Wine deals treacherously with the proud man, and he will not be successful.
- (c) Wine is treacherous, and the proud man will not be successful.¹⁵³

The first option most literally represents the MT but does little to solve the problem of how "a proud man" functions in the verse. The second option supplies a preposition ("with"), assumes that the "proud man" is the object of that preposition, and links the expression to the first verb. The final option takes the "proud man" (in *casus pendens*) as the subject of the second verb and moves the conjunction. Emerton readily dismisses option (b) on poetical grounds and all but ignores option (a) because he believes it portrays the difficult personification of wine. After determining that "wine" should be replaced by "wealth", he concludes that option (c) is probably the best rendering.¹⁵⁴

Scott also translates v. 5a according to the grammatical understanding represented in option (c): "how much more will the wine deal treacherously, and will not (the) haughty man be destroyed?"¹⁵⁵ Reflecting his unique understanding of the verse, Scott says:

Although the two parts of the major premise [v. 5a] are united by a common subject (the Chaldeans), the second half is apparently emphasized by the placement of *geber yāhîr* in *casus pendens*. This would be an understandable point of emphasis, since the question here is not

¹⁵¹ Armerding, p. 514

¹⁵² Floyd, "Prophecy and Writing", p. 474, footnote 38

¹⁵³ Emerton, p. 6

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8

¹⁵⁵ Scott, p. 340

whether the Chaldeans have dealt treacherously but whether they would escape punishment¹⁵⁶

Andersen concurs: “The last three words in v 5a make a good poetic colon, as soon as the ‘and’ is recognized as a postpositive, a Hebrew construction that should not need argument.”¹⁵⁷ Even the apparatus of the MT suggests that the *vav* conjunction, which separates the verb (יָנוּחַ) from its supposed subject (גִּבּוֹר יִהְיֶה), should be deleted.

Although the evidence in favor of Emerton’s third option is relatively convincing¹⁵⁸ (“Wine is treacherous and the proud man will not be successful”), this thesis tentatively holds to the more literal understanding of the first option (“Wine is treacherous, a proud man, and he will not be successful”). The “proud man” probably is the intended subject of the second verb (cf. option (c)), but the unusual word order and punctuation of the MT (cf. option (a)) could be intentional. If so, the hermeneutical emphasis that is gained is worth the grammatical precision and literary smoothness that are lost. The discussion will return to the function of “proud man” in this verse after Hab. 2:5 has been dealt with in its entirety.

How, then, is one to understand the two words that make up the isolated expression “proud man”? גִּבּוֹר is found only 66 times in the OT. According to Kosmala גִּבּוֹר “contains the element of strength, especially in a general sense. A *gebher* without power is a self-contradiction, and is as good as dead (Ps. 88:5f. [4f.]).”¹⁵⁹ Andersen adds that the word has “connotations of great strength and also military associations”.¹⁶⁰ The context of the book of Habakkuk – especially the oracle of Hab. 1:5-11 that describes the invader’s military tactics – equates the גִּבּוֹר of Hab. 2:5 with the Chaldean soldier. The modifier יִהְיֶה in 2:5 helps to confirm this identification. Though the term is found only one other time in the OT, the definition “proud”, or the like, is widely accepted. Prov. 21:24 reads: “*Proud,*” “*יהיר,*” and “*Scoffer,*” are his names, who acts with insolent pride. The combination of the synonymous titles and the latter noun (a cognate of the first title) both serve to substantiate one’s understanding of the less frequent יִהְיֶה. Emerton adds that “a comparison with Mishnaic Hebrew and Aramaic suggests that it means ‘proud’ or ‘arrogant’, and the LXX and Vulgate in both passages, and Aquila and Symmachus in Proverbs, support that meaning.”¹⁶¹ “[The] expression *geber yāhîr* ... is a fitting description of the Chaldeans who mock kings (i 10), deify their own power (i 11), and arrogantly rejoice about their military exploits (i 15).”¹⁶²

As mentioned above, many scholars understand גִּבּוֹר יִהְיֶה as the subject of the following verb, נוּחַ, found only here in Hab. 2:5. Emerton cautions: “It is hazardous to

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 338-9

¹⁵⁷ Andersen, p. 218

¹⁵⁸ However, Waltke and O’Connor (pp. 76-7) and Gibson (pp. 180-3) provide no example of a noun in *casus pendens* that is separated from the rest of the sentence by a *vav*.

¹⁵⁹ Kosmala, “gābhar” in *TDOT* 2, p. 377

¹⁶⁰ Andersen, pp. 217-8

¹⁶¹ Emerton, p. 5

¹⁶² Scott, p. 338

emend the word simply because it is a *hapax legomenon*, and it is wiser to accept it as an authentic verb that simply does not happen to occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.”¹⁶³

Presented below are three suggested renderings, each of which relies on Hebrew’s similarity to other languages. None of these require an emendation of the text, and yet ironically each one is still very different from the other two. They are: Scott’s “to be laid waste”, Southwell’s “to be exalted”, and Emerton’s “to be successful”.

The most thorough defense for a recommended translation is offered by Scott. “[The] Hebrew verb *nāwâ* may have an almost exact cognate correspondent in the well-attested Old and Standard Babylonian verb *namû*, meaning ‘to be abandoned, to lie in ruins; to lay waste, to turn into ruins; to become waste, ruined’ (*CAD*, vol *N*, pt I, s.v. *namû*, p. 252).”¹⁶⁴ Scott defends this translation along three lines. (1) Phonologically the two verbs correspond (even though the Akkadian *w* is a less common correspondent than the *m*). (2) The substantive derivatives of both nouns (e.g. “pasture”) also correspond. (3) “[If] the Ugaritic verb *nawā* ‘to be desolated’ belongs to the same root as *nāwâ* and *nawû*, then *nawā* would perhaps be corroborative evidence that the Semitic root *nwh* belongs to a common lexical stock denoting destruction.”¹⁶⁵ Even if all of the above held true, a weakness in Scott’s argument is the negative which precedes the verb in the context of Hab. 2:5. According to Scott’s understanding the verse would read: “And he (presumably the ‘proud man’ or the Chaldean) will *not* be destroyed.” This contradicts the sentiment of v. 4 and that of all the up-coming woe oracles in 2:6-20. Scott does not neglect the problem, but his manner of correcting it is questionable. He says: “Perhaps *w^elō*’, which introduces the predicate, should be viewed as equivalent to *hālō*’, casting the hemistich into an interrogative clause expecting an affirmative answer [that is, ‘... will not the haughty man be destroyed?’].”¹⁶⁶

Southwell goes to even more extreme measures to demonstrate the likelihood of his translation. His explanation is actually an argument for a new rendering of הנה (typically rendered “behold”), the first word in v. 4. According to an Arabic word meaning “to be high” Southwell repoints הנה to read a hypothetical noun (“the eminent man”) which contrasts “righteous one” in v. 4b. He then proposes that ינוה in v. 5a be repointed as well, according to the same root, and that the expression be translated “the insolent man will not be exalted”.¹⁶⁷

Finally, Emerton hypothesizes that ינוה should be translated “to be successful”. He reaches his tentative conclusion by suggesting that the Hebrew verb is related to the Arabic *nawā(y)*, which is translated “he intended it, purposed it, designed it, aimed at it, proposed it

¹⁶³ Emerton, p. 5

¹⁶⁴ Scott, p. 333

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 339

¹⁶⁷ Southwell, pp. 616-7

to himself as the object of his aim”. If the Hebrew verb in v. 5 is read as a *pi ‘el* or *hip ‘il*, then the resulting translation is: “he will not reach his goal” or “he will not be successful”.

Emerton provides no further defense and appropriately concludes that the uncertainty about the meaning of this word must be acknowledged.¹⁶⁸

The more traditional and less daring translations of this unique term are “to keep at home” (e.g. KJV and NASB) or “to be at rest” (e.g. NIV and ESV). These renderings seem to be achieved through an investigation of the two Hebrew nouns related to the verb נָוָה. Both terms, found a total of 47 times, are usually translated “pasture”, “dwelling”, “home”, or the like. According to Coppes:

The verb *nāwâ* (Hab 2:5) signifies the state of being in a *nāweh*, from which noun it appears to have been derived. ... The noun *nāweh* represents the place a flock is kept, hence, either an open field or an enclosure. ... This is where the herd lies down ..., a place of safety and protection ... [or] the place where a shepherd follows sheep, causes them to lie down, where they can feed¹⁶⁹

“An aim of conquest is to find room to expand and settle one’s flocks and herds so they can multiply. ... This verb is unique in the Bible, but nouns of the same root denote pasturage and places of residence (*cf.* 2 Sa. 7:8; Ps. 23:2; Is. 32:18; Je. 10:25; Am. 1:2). These will be denied to Babylon.”¹⁷⁰ This understanding makes sense in the context of unquenchable greed. Indeed, greed deceives and acts treacherously so that no matter how much the greedy one amasses, it is never enough and he will never be at rest or have security. “The overall point ... is thus that the Babylonians have already forfeited their imperial legitimacy because of their overweening greed, and they are thus bound to fall.”¹⁷¹ According to this more traditional understanding of the *hapax legomenon*, the ironic verdict declared against the גִּבֹר יְהִיר is that he will not have a home or his rest.

Any part of the final translation of v. 5a is, at best, an educated guess. *And furthermore the wine continues to act treacherously – a proud man – and he does not rest ...* . The options presented for the final verb, in particular, are difficult to sustain. However, what scholars tend to overlook in their attempts to understand v. 5a is the text of v. 5b, except perhaps to defend thematically their eventual interpretations. The second half of the verse, which is relatively straightforward and easy to understand, is probably the best clue for interpreting the first half.

¹⁶⁸ Emerton, p. 5. Haak (p. 62) says that this is “[by] far the most common method of dealing with the word” and cites such scholars as Albright, Rudolph, Schreiner, and Koenig. See also Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 113.

¹⁶⁹ Coppes, “*nāwâ*” in *TWOT* 2, p. 561

¹⁷⁰ Baker, p. 62

¹⁷¹ Floyd, “Prophecy and Writing”, p. 476

Hab. 2:5b draws an explicit analogy between the subject, who is presumably the Chaldean, and Sheol/death. *He makes himself¹⁷² large like Sheol, and he is like death and he is not satisfied, and he gathers to himself all the nations, and he collects to himself all the peoples.* The Chaldean's appetite for conquest is as unquenchable as Sheol's appetite for the dead. By virtue of the verb אָסַף ("to gather") and the noun גּוֹיִם ("nations"), v. 5b recalls the Chaldeans' gathering of captives like sand in Hab. 1:9 and the fisherman's gathering of fish – otherwise defined as nations (Hab. 1:17) – in Hab. 1:15. There is no hint of condemnation or judgment for the oppressor in 2:5b. The verse portrays conditions as horrific as Yahweh's description of the Chaldean in 1:5-11 and Habakkuk's complaint about them in 1:12-17.

Given the picture of absolute destruction painted in 2:5b, it is possible that v. 5a is meant to have an equally unpleasant interpretation. If "wine" (or "wealth" for that matter) is a metaphorical expression for the Chaldean (see Jer. 51:7), then the first line of v. 5a simply says that the Chaldean continues to act treacherously (בּוֹגֵד, participle). This is the same verb that the prophet uses to describe the Chaldean in Hab. 1:13 when he asks Yahweh: *Why do you look on ones acting treacherously?* The isolated expression גִּבֹר יֵהִיר could, therefore, function in two directions. Looking backward it defines the metaphor; the wine is the proud man, who is, of course, the Chaldean. Looking forward it qualifies the subject of the second verb; the proud man does not rest. If this holds, then it could be possible to understand נוֹחַ, not as a verb of condemnation, but as a parallel to בּוֹגֵד ("to act treacherously"), a verb of evil action. This two-fold stress (i.e. *two-verb* stress) on the treachery of the proud man in v. 5a is then illustrated further in v. 5b.

Haak takes a similar position but finds the parallel to נוֹחַ in the second half of the verse.

Regardless of the etymology, the idea expressed appears to be parallel to *l'ysb* ('not be sated'). ... Both of these phrases would continue the theme of 'swallowing, devouring' seen throughout the first two chapters As is often the case, the identification of the 'he' is not immediately evident. Because of the similarity of theme (swallowing, nations, etc.), it is probable that the pronoun refers to the same entity as 1:13-17.¹⁷³

Haak's final translation of נוֹחַ is: "He surely does not stop!" In other words, the Chaldean does not stop gathering the nations (v. 5b). Haak claims that this translation is "ambiguous enough" to fit the various derivations proposed by scholars,¹⁷⁴ but it actually seems to communicate the exact opposite of most of these derivations. From the examples mentioned above, (1) Scott translates the second half of v. 5a as "Will not the haughty man be

¹⁷² "Himself" is a rendering of the Hebrew נִפְשׁוֹ (cf. Hab. 2:4). Seebass ("nepeš" in *TDOT* 9, p. 504) notes that "Isa. 5:14 speaks of the mouth of Sheol: 'Sheol enlarges its *nepeš*, opens its mouth beyond measure.' Hab. 2:5 transfers the image to the rapacious individual, who 'is like Death and never has enough.' The topos clearly centers on the throat, but it applies to the whole person."

¹⁷³ Haak, p. 62

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

destroyed?"; (2) Southwell, as "the insolent man will not be exalted"; and (3) Emerton, as "he will not be successful". Each of these renderings implies that there will be an eventual judgment for the Chaldean. Even the more traditional translations – "he will not be at rest" or "he will not keep at home" – can be understood as judgmental; that is, the Chaldean will have no peace or security, no home. However, that is not the meaning intended by this thesis, which translates the expression: *and he does not rest*. Rather, the Chaldean's not resting implies that he will continue to move on, from nation to nation, wreaking havoc.

If this interpretation of Hab. 2:5 holds, then nothing changes from ch. 1 to ch. 2. The wicked are apparently still surrounding and swallowing the righteous (Hab. 1:4, 13). Perhaps so few scholars consider this negative understanding of v. 5, because the circumstance it describes does not coincide with Yahweh's promise of hope in 2:4, his promise that the wicked will *not* survive. Verse 5, these scholars presume, should somehow speak of the judgment of the wicked. This thesis nevertheless maintains that the difficult interpretation of v. 5a is best driven by the plain understanding of v. 5b. The matter of Hab. 2:5 will be taken up again, but suffice it to say for now that even if the first half of the verse does not have as negative a tone as just suggested, few would disagree that the sentiment expressed in the second half is indeed negative. *He gathers to himself all the nations, and he collects to himself all the peoples.*

3. The content of the vision: Theory one (Hab. 2:4 or 2:4-5)

Hab. 2:2-4 was described earlier as the hinge of Habakkuk. That is, if one reads ahead to ch. 3, one can see that this passage marks the point in the book where the prophet's attitude shifts from fear and complaint (in ch. 1) to awe and praise (as will be shown in ch. 3). Presumably the vision mentioned by Yahweh in 2:2 and 2:3 has something to do with this transformation. The primary aim of the study at hand is to discover, if possible, of what exactly the vision speaks. Under four separate headings – corresponding to four different theories – the debate over the content of the vision will be addressed.

Though scholarly agreement upon the translation of Hab. 2:2-4 is seldom reached (especially in regards to vv. 2b and 4a), its basic understanding is relatively simple. Verse 2 speaks of a vision of some significance that is to be communicated clearly to others. Verse 3 goes on to describe the certainty of that vision's coming to pass. Finally v. 4 announces that the distinction between good and evil will be maintained. Presumably because of the arrangement of this short passage, a good number of scholars regard v. 4 as the substance of the vision itself. Then, in spite of the hermeneutical and contextual difficulties (or perhaps

because of them), many of these same scholars include v. 5 as part of the vision's content, saying that the verse contributes to the negative picture of the wicked in v. 4a.¹⁷⁵

Mason summarizes well the basic interpretation: “[the oracle] announces the ultimate vindication by God of those who trust in him, whatever present appearances there may be to the contrary Vindication of the ‘upright’ and the ‘just’ (or ‘innocent’) also implies judgment of the arrogant oppressor (v. 5).”¹⁷⁶ Floyd says, in similar fashion, that

the oracle ... [is] expressed in terms of a contrast between the fate of a person whose greed ... leads him astray and the fate of a person committed to justice, who still remains faithful to Yahweh
By virtue of both form and content, all of v. 5 is an integral part of Yahweh's oracular reply to the prophet. ... it elaborates on the theme of being led astray by greed (v. 4a) with a description of how this happens.¹⁷⁷

Compared to most of the other scholars who hold to this view, Floyd has a rather unique understanding of ch. 2. Reflecting his concern for genre he says:

[Chapter 2] consists basically of a brief announcement of the prophet's intention to await a revelation from Yahweh (2:1), followed by a lengthy report of Yahweh's reply (2:2-20). It thus retains the overall shape of a REPORT OF AN ORACULAR INQUIRY... . This particular example of the genre is somewhat unusual, however, because of the way in which the terse oracular reply (2:4-5) is nearly overshadowed by the directives and persuasive elements that frame it so extensively (2:2aβ-3 + 6-20).¹⁷⁸

That Hab. 2:4-5 is one of the most popular solutions for identifying the content of the vision is with good reason, for it is a very logical option. Yahweh commands the prophet to write down a forthcoming vision (2:2-3), and then, without further delay, he proclaims that vision (2:4-5). The traditional interpretation of these verses provides a suitable answer to the prophet's concerns regarding the wicked in ch. 1. Habakkuk complains to Yahweh in 1:13 that the wicked are swallowing the righteous, and Yahweh answers the prophet in 2:4 that the righteous will live but the wicked will not. R.L. Smith believes that: “This second oracle must be considered as God's answer to Habakkuk's second complaint about how a holy God

¹⁷⁵ Perhaps acknowledging the difficulty with 2:5, R.L. Smith (p. 107) states: “Evidently only 2:4 was written on the tablets. V. 5 is an additional explanation by the prophet.”

¹⁷⁶ Mason, p. 89

¹⁷⁷ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 113. See also e.g. Bailey, O.P. Robertson, R.L. Smith, and Ward. Achtemeier finds the content of the vision in 2:3-4, but she understands that content rather broadly. She (p. 43) defines the vision as “God's plan to restore his creation to the goodness he intended for it in the beginning, God's promise to bring blessing on all the families of the earth through the descendants of Abraham”. Verse 3 is “the promise of God to establish his Kingdom upon the earth” (p. 54) and v. 4 is “God's instruction as how to live ‘in the meantime’”(p. 44). Achtemeier (p. 48) concludes: “Everything that follows in Habakkuk's book is confirmation of the vision given him in 2:3-4.” For example, the hymn in 3:3-15 “concerns God's final reckoning with the wicked and the establishment of his order in all the earth. It therefore is the confirmation not of 2:4 but of 2:3 – of the time when God brings his purpose for the earth to completion.” (pp. 53-4)

¹⁷⁸ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 118. Floyd continues: “The relative prominence of these elements shows that this section is concerned not just with recounting the outcome of an oracular inquiry. A heavy apologetic emphasis is also evident. The oracle itself is apparently so problematic that considerable attention must be given to its authentication, not only in the process of reporting its revelation but also in the very process of its being revealed.”

can allow a wicked oppressor to continue devouring the righteous. Assuming that the wicked refers to the Babylonian ..., we understand that Habakkuk is looking for Yahweh to punish Babylon.”¹⁷⁹

In all likelihood Hab. 2:4 or 2:4-5 does satisfy the prophet’s expectations and, to a certain extent, does answer his complaint. However, some scholars take issue with the view that one or both of these verses comprise the actual substance of the vision. The woe oracles in Hab. 2:6-20 represent the second theory regarding the vision’s content. It is equally possible that this passage satisfies the prophet’s expectations and answers his complaint.

4. Hab. 2:6a

**Will not these, each of them, against him a poem lift up,
and a mocking-parable (and) riddles against him?
And he will say: ...**

An introduction to woe

Regardless of how one defines the relationship between Hab. 2:5 and its prior context, few deny that this verse provides the antecedents for its subsequent context, Hab. 2:6a, which is the introduction to the woe oracles. *Will not these* [the gathered nations and collected peoples], *each of them, against him* [a proud man] *a poem lift up ... ?* The first Hebrew clause of this verse is quite exceptional in its grammatical structure. The subject, indirect object, and direct object all precede the verb. An English rendition which rearranges these elements (e.g. “Will not each of them lift up a poem against him?”) certainly sounds smoother, but it neglects the emphases seen in the original Hebrew.

The first attention in 2:6a is unexpectedly drawn to the subject, the mocking nations. A few commentators have difficulty with the plural subject אלה (“these”) and the singular verb that follows in v. 6b, ויאמר (“and he will say”). As a rather unique solution to this problem Andersen keeps the singular verb but finds its antecedent well outside of the immediate context. He suggests that

it is more probable that the “woe oracles” are announced by the “reciter” of v 2, either the prophet or the person who runs with the tablets. This is why the first verb in v 6b is singular. Thus verse 6b has only loose links with what immediately precedes it, because the subject changes from colon to colon: in v 5, the conqueror, in v 6a, the nations, in v 6b, the “reciter.” ... there is a more distant link of v 6a with the language of v 2.¹⁸⁰

Andersen’s argument is far from convincing, especially when the grammar of 2:6 is shown to be relatively reasonable. The plural demonstrative pronoun of v. 6a is immediately followed

¹⁷⁹ R.L. Smith, p. 106

¹⁸⁰ Andersen, p. 230

by כלם, which could be understood in the context of Habakkuk as an emphatic singular qualifier. The כלם in 2:6a (“each of them” individually rather than “all of them” collectively) recalls the earlier uses of כלה in Hab. 1:9 and Hab. 1:15, where *each* Chaldean soldier violently gathers his captives and *each* fisherman brings up his catch with a hook. So too will *each* nation or people one day ironically ridicule its former captor. If this reasoning does not satisfy critics, then the final verb could legitimately be translated “it will say”, referring to the poem or mocking-parable itself. Or as O.P. Robertson suggests: “Most likely the change represents the common alteration in Hebrew between a group corporately considered and a single member of the group who speaks for the whole.”¹⁸¹ However one justifies the singular verb of v. 6b, the plural subject of v. 6a is probably the victimized nations. “Habakkuk 2:6-20 is a taunt or mocking song placed artistically and unexpectedly in the mouths of the nations who had suffered from Babylon’s excesses.”¹⁸² “The literary form manifested here is quite unusual, for such ‘woes’ of warning were normally pronounced on behalf of Yahweh by his prophet (e.g. Isa 5:8-23; Amos 5:18-20; Mic 2:1-5; Zeph 3:1-5). ... This twist occurs in that the message is supplied indirectly, as it were, through the words of those whom the prophet himself should have been preaching to.”¹⁸³

The next part of v. 6a highlights the indirect object, the one who will be mocked.¹⁸⁴ Though the Chaldean¹⁸⁵ is traditionally regarded as the addressee of the woes in Hab. 2:6b-20, other opinions are circulated.¹⁸⁶ One of the more popular suggestions is that the mocking poem is to be lifted up against Judah or Jehoiakim, her king. According to Mason:

Again we have here the same intermingling of characteristics of a foreign oppressor and of unjust native leaders which we met in the laments of ch. 1. Furthermore, the introduction of the series in v. 6 with the words ‘Shall not all these raise up against *him* a proverb, a satirical riddle?’ (where the ‘him’ must refer back to the ‘wicked’ and ‘arrogant’ of 2.1-5) suggests that the woes are meant to apply similarly to the wicked generally.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸¹ O.P. Robertson, p. 189

¹⁸² Bailey, p. 329. See also Bailey, p. 331 and O.P. Robertson, p. 185.

¹⁸³ Wendland, p. 598. Floyd (*Minor Prophets*, p. 115) qualifies the song as “a fictional representation of an expression of international opinion, not a report of what any particular group of Gentiles ever actually said”. This may be the best answer to R.L. Smith’s (p. 110) question: “[Is] it logical for the pagan nations to be pronouncing ‘woe’ on the guilty one in the name of Yahweh of hosts (v 13)?”

¹⁸⁴ Referring to vv. 6-20, Andersen (pp. 235-6) makes an interesting observation regarding the ridiculed one: “Only the first participle in the series [of woes] has the definite article. ... The definite article on the first participle blankets all ten, showing that all five woes are addressed to the same person. This observation agrees with v 6a, which says that the sayings are ‘about him.’”

¹⁸⁵ Andersen (p. 233) notes that “on the surface, many of the ‘woe oracles’ seem to be denunciations of persons who do things that are described as individual crimes. ... But underneath this language, it is easy to make the metaphorical application to a nation as an oppressor.”

¹⁸⁶ Bailey (p. 331) offers the possibility that: “The passage also could apply to any tyrant in any time period. ... The prophet probably had the Babylonians in mind, but the passage pronounces woe on any people who oppress others.” R.L. Smith (p. 111) succumbs to the frustration of the ambiguity and concludes: “It is impossible to determine at this point the identity of the oppressor.”

¹⁸⁷ Mason, p. 90

Several commentators note that the woes could apply to *both* Judah and Chaldea. “The localized nature of the crimes specified in these passages suggests to some scholars that they were originally directed against an internal Judean group before later editors reapplied them against Chaldea. Those who hold this position claim support from Jer. xxii 13-23 in which Jeremiah lambastes Jehoiakim for similar crimes.”¹⁸⁸ Barton, for example, suggests deliberate ambiguity as to the referent. “[This] condemnation of the Babylonian king may well be two-edged; for Jehoiakim himself, as we know from Jeremiah, had an obsession with building ‘houses’ (palaces) in the literal sense of the word.”¹⁸⁹

Gerstenberger’s theory regarding the literary development of the woe genre supports the notion of woe reapplication. He presupposes three things: (1) there existed independent woe forms, (2) these forms mostly concerned social justice, and (3) the prophets employed the forms and adapted them for their own purposes.¹⁹⁰ Gerstenberger says these original, socially inspired woe forms were the starting point for the prophetic authors who composed the woe oracles. “The prophets used, transformed, and expanded these forms. ... it is unlikely that they created such an impersonal, unhistorical instrument for their concrete preaching”¹⁹¹ If this holds true, then the original woe-sentences in Habakkuk could have been applied twice, first to the Judean, for example, and then to the Chaldean. Andersen concludes similarly:

The consensus seems to be that the whole set can be applied to the Chaldeans as the Judeans experienced them in the early sixth century B.C.E. more readily than it can be fitted into any other situation. But they need not have been freshly composed for this application. These “woe oracles” are so general, the crimes that they denounce are so perennial, that they could be appropriate in many times and situations. They could have been available as set pieces, part of the stock-in-trade of moralists, and in this sense “proverbs” already familiar to the hearers.¹⁹²

In the context of the book of Habakkuk, this is the most reasonable assumption to make in regards to the identity of the mocked one of 2:6a. In addition, if the Chaldean identification

¹⁸⁸ Sweeney, “Structure”, p. 77. He adds: “It is not unusual for prophets to refer to international events in terms of localized crimes. Furthermore, various statements in the woe oracles indicate that an international situation is presupposed” In the end Sweeney supports the Chaldean identity. In the English summary of his elaborate explanation of how the woe oracles, in their final form, came about, Otto (“Stellung”, pp. 106-7) suggests that: “The woe sayings in Habakkuk which are the work of the prophet (2 6b. 7. 9. 10a. b. 12. 11. 15. 16) are social criticisms of the members of the upper class of Jerusalem. ... [They were] reworked further in the exilic period by the insertion of the criticism of the Babylonians in ... 2 5b. 6a. 8. 10b. 13. 14. 17, possibly by a disciple of the prophet.”

¹⁸⁹ Barton, “Habakkuk”, p. 270

¹⁹⁰ Gerstenberger, pp. 252ff.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 254. This could explain several unusual features in the first woe of Habakkuk: the parenthetical question (“How long?” in v. 6), the shift from the third- to second-person address (vv. 7-8), and the final expression (v. 8b), whose relationship to the rest of the oracle is not readily apparent. Gerstenberger’s theory, however, does not necessarily account for all occurrences of הָרִי. See Isa. 55:1.

¹⁹² Andersen, pp. 233-4. Floyd (*Minor Prophets*, p. 82) adds: “Since the imperial power in the first section is explicitly identified as the Babylonians (1:6; RSV ‘Chaldeans’), and since the otherwise unnamed imperial power in all three sections is one and the same, the historical reference of the book as a whole becomes particularized in terms of Judah’s Babylonian crisis”

holds, then the singular pronouns in v. 6a – represented by the Hebrew עליו and לו – are consistent with the earlier use of such pronouns in ch. 1.

Verse 6a finally turns to the direct object of the sentence and defines the nations' message against the Chaldean as a משל ("poem"), מליצה ("mocking-poem"), and חידות ("riddles")¹⁹³ that will be lifted up. As riddles the woes in Habakkuk sometimes speak playfully. This, according to O.P. Robertson, is to enhance their memorableness. His description of the initial woe reflects his interpretation of the other four: "this first judgmental byword ... is replete with examples of literary devices proved effective in the construction of a proverbial saying. It will be difficult indeed for the oppressor to escape these phrases once they have been hung about his neck."¹⁹⁴ In his discussion he highlights no less than eight literary techniques employed in the woes of Habakkuk: assonance and alliteration, double meanings, appeal to proverbial truth, rhyming of phrases, parallelism, citation of ancient sayings, echoes of earlier proverbs, and word plays. Even though these literary devices are sometimes impossible to reproduce in a translation, they nevertheless play a key role in defining the woes as riddles.

Furthermore, חידות communicates the notion that these woes speak mysteriously. The Hebrew noun is found a total of seventeen times in the OT. Eight times in Jud. 14 it refers to an especially cunning riddle told by Samson: *Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet.* (Jud. 14:14) In Num. 12:8 Yahweh describes how he speaks with Moses, in contrast to the other prophets. *With him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in חידות.* The Queen of Sheba came to Solomon to test him with חידות (1 Kgs. 10:1; 2 Chr. 9:1).¹⁹⁵ As these illustrations demonstrate, it is by authorial design that the interpretation of a riddle is not always clear or straightforward. Floyd defines the חידות of Habakkuk as having "allusiveness" or "hidden significance" and says that "they are only implicitly directed against their imperialistic conqueror. They are formulated so as not to accuse anyone overtly. These speeches rather posit certain categories of negative behavior and then engage their addressee in such a way that he is led to implicate himself in

¹⁹³ The understanding of the final two nouns may be more difficult than is intimated by this translation. Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 113) says: "The asyndetic construction which juxtaposes the singular *m^elîṣāh*, 'satire,' ['mocking-poem'] with the plural *hîdôt*, 'epigrams, riddles,' and makes them both dependent on the verb in the first clause is difficult but not impossible." W. Watson describes the verse as parallelism with a simple semantic unit. He (p. 325) translates v. 6: "Shall not all these utter a taunt against him in *scoffing derision* of him?" He says that "the expression מליצה חידות, lit. 'scorn, riddles', is matched by the single term משל, 'taunt'. We can therefore understand the two terms in the second line as hendiadys (as the translation shows)." Haak (p. 63) goes an entirely different route and understands מליצה as "the relatively common Hiphil participle followed by the rare third masculine singular suffix *he*", which he translates "his ambassador".

¹⁹⁴ O.P. Robertson, p. 188

¹⁹⁵ In Dan. 8:23 Gabriel interprets the prophet's vision and says that a king skilled in חידות will arise. The only other occurrences of the term pair it with משל ("parable", Pss. 49:5; 78:2; Prov. 1:6; Ezek. 17:2).

such wrongdoing.”¹⁹⁶ Of what crime, then, is the Chaldean led to accuse himself? To the five-fold answer the discussion now turns.

5. Hab. 2:6b-20

A word of woe

After the brief introduction in v. 6a, the bulk of Hab. 2 is taken up with the record of five riddles which, in the context of the book of Habakkuk, are of the nations’ mocking-parable against the Chaldean. Hab. 2:6b-20 is traditionally known as the woe oracles.¹⁹⁷

“The ‘woe’ speeches of Habakkuk are primarily defined in terms of the way they combine a participially described bad action with its inevitably negative consequences”¹⁹⁸

Gerstenberger adds:

The words following the introductory woe have, with few exceptions, one purpose: they seek to describe a person or a group of persons in regard to what they are doing, their deeds being the cause for the foreboding woe-cry. ... There seems no willful intent in the woes to call down destruction upon the people concerned. The misdeeds as expressed in the participle constructions bear the impending misfortune in themselves.¹⁹⁹

This traditional designation views the oracles from the perspective of the condemned party: woe to the one who commits the crimes recorded in these verses. The classifications of most scholars thus typically focus on the criminal (e.g. the extortioner, the plotter), the crime (e.g. debauchery, idolatry), or the retributive effect of the crime (e.g. he will be defrauded; he will be demoralized). If used as sub-titles, these expressions accurately represent the contents

¹⁹⁶ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 136

¹⁹⁷ There is debate as to whether the woe oracles are a prophetic adaptation of mourning customs or of proverbial sayings. In other words, Otto (“Stellung”, p. 73) asks “*ob sich das prophetische Wehe-Wort aus dem kultischen Fluch, der weisheitlichen Belehrung, sei es einer »Sippenweisheit«, sei es der Weisheitsschule von Jerusalem, oder schließlich aus der Leichenklage ableite*”. Otto (p. 74) concludes, “*daß die prophetischen Wehe-Worte auf dem Hintergrund der Leichenklage formuliert wurden, die größte Wahrscheinlichkeit für sich [haben]*”. He (p. 84) reaches the same conclusion in the particular case of Habakkuk 2:6-20. “*Das Orakel [2:4] kündigt diesen Übeltätern den Tod an, über die dann anschließend der Prophet das Wehe der Leichenklage ausruft.*” R.L. Smith (p. 110) suspects the same but better qualifies the use of the term in the prophetic books. “The interjection הוי or אױ probably originated as an expression of grief in the funeral dirge (1 Kgs 13:30; Jer 22:18; 34:5), but in the prophets it introduced an oracle of judgment.” Gerstenberger (p. 250), however, dismisses this view: “This use of the exclamations may go back to very ancient animistic beliefs and is distinctly different from the prophetic usage as an indictment-cry.” Floyd (*Minor Prophets*, p. 133) concludes diplomatically: “Thus *hōy* is an exclamation that generally expresses a range of reactions appropriate to a calamity, or to the threat of a calamity. It expresses a range of sentiments including but not limited to funerary mourning.” See again footnote 191.

¹⁹⁸ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 137

¹⁹⁹ Gerstenberger, p. 251. Bailey (pp. 329-30) expresses a similar sentiment. “The word [הוי] carries the basic meaning of ‘judgment’ or ‘lament.’ ... Thus it shows that the action under prophetic condemnation has the seeds of death within it.” Nevertheless, lexically הוי may be no more than an exclamatory “Ahah” or an attention-getting “Hey”. (See O.P. Robertson, p. 189 and Roberts, *Habakkuk*, pp. 114, 118.) Gerstenberger (p. 250) says that “little information may be expected from an interjection or exclamation, which belong to a stratum of language very little supervised by rational thinking”.

of each woe. This thesis, however, categorizes the five woes of Hab. 2:6-20 according to the perspective of the accusers. These include: the victims of the criminal's own plunder (vv. 6b-8), the material of his own handiwork (vv. 9-11), the Spoiler of his own labor (vv. 12-14), the pleasure of his own sport (vv. 15-17), and the gods of his own hands (vv. 18-20). Taken as a whole the woes demonstrate that everyone and everything will testify against the wicked.

The remainder of this discussion is devoted to Habakkuk's series of woes.²⁰⁰ The discussion is divided into three sections, which can be summarized as follows: the woes as five individual texts, as one literary unit, and as part of the book of Habakkuk. First the main textual and hermeneutical concerns of each distinct passage are addressed. Then the discussion broadens to include how the woes themselves hold together. Finally the relation of Hab. 2:6-20 to its prior context takes precedent.

5.1 The woes as five individual texts

5.1.1 Hab. 2:6b-8

^{6b}And he will say:

**“Woe to the one who continues to increase (what belongs)
not to him – how long? –
and one who continues to make pledges heavy upon himself.
⁷Will not suddenly the ones giving you interest rise,
and the ones violently shaking you awake?
And you will be for their prey.
⁸Because you plundered many nations,
all remaining peoples will plunder you;
on account of blood of man and violence of earth,
a town and all those dwelling in it.”**

The victims of his own plunder

Though it is unlikely that the author of the woes intended them to be regarded as a scene in a courtroom drama, for the sake of discussion they will be described as such. Each speech portrays different characters who attest to the various crimes of the oppressor. The first witnesses to testify against the wicked individual are the people who suffer as a result of his economic practices. The topic of the first woe oracle is wealth. The crime is how wealth is acquired; the punishment, how it will be lost. The wicked one goes to sinful extremes in acquiring his riches from innocent victims, and for that those same victims will judge him.

The particular financial activities in this first woe are difficult to determine with certainty. According to Seybold: *“Die Rede ist offenbar von Pfandverleih oder Pfändung*

²⁰⁰ These are traditionally divided into vv. 6b-8, 9-11, 12-14, 15-17, and 18-20. Minor variations proposed by scholars will be dealt with in the course of the discussion. Haak, however, departs radically from this breakdown. He (p. 16) views 2:5a as Habakkuk's realization that the enemy will be destroyed, which then leads to the oracles describing the fate of this enemy. For Haak, these five woe oracles follow accordingly in vv. 5b-7, 8-10, 11-13, 14-17, and 18-20.

sowie von «zinsfreien Darlehen» und Obligationen, jedenfalls von den durch das Kreditsystem bewirkten besonderen Beziehungen unter Menschen.»²⁰¹ The real dilemma is identifying the creditors and debtors in these “special relationships” (*besonderen Beziehungen*). Is the oppressor borrowing from or loaning to the victim-nations?

Verse 6 is generally understood as the oppressor’s “‘amassing’ (JB) goods which are not his, either through robbery or fraud ... [or as his] extortion through accumulation of ‘pledges’”.²⁰² The latter category, which is based on the interpretation of vv. 6b-7a, is the most difficult to understand. The problem centers on two Hebrew words. עֲבֹטִיט (v. 6b) is a *hapax legomenon* usually translated as “weight of pledges” or “heavy debt”.²⁰³ These two definitions reflect the two different ways of understanding the passage. Is the oppressor the debtor (having debts himself; cf. Andersen, p. 234 and O.P. Robertson, p. 186) or the creditor (receiving pledges from others; cf. Bailey, p. 331)? The verb נִשַׁךְ in v. 7a contributes to the confusion; literally it means “to bite” (like an animal) and figuratively, “to pay, give interest”.²⁰⁴ However, in the context of Deut. 23:20-21 the understanding of נִשַׁךְ, in the *hip’il stem* is clearly one of *charging* interest or causing one to pay interest.²⁰⁵ If the *qal* in Hab. 2:7 is to be translated as the (causative) *hip’il*, then the participle in v. 7a represents the creditor-nations and the oppressor in v. 6b is the debtor. If the *qal* is to be understood as a simple active verb, then the participle represents the debtor-nations and the oppressor is the creditor.

Commentators’ explanations of this portion of the passage vary. The three highlighted below each present logical arguments, but none of their interpretations can be regarded as final. Bailey, who explains the customs of the day, acknowledges the difficulty in that he can only describe one interpretation as “more likely” than another.

In ancient society a system of collateral developed that involved the giving of a pledge to insure the repayment of a loan. If the borrower could not or would not repay the loan, the lender kept the item pledged. ... (see Deut 24:10-13). ... Those whom the Babylonians plundered possibly saw the Babylonians as “borrowers” who were giving pledges. Later, when judgment came to Babylon, the pledge would be called in. ... A more likely interpretation involves the crime of extortion. The Babylonians seized the pledges of its victims and either kept the pledges or made the victims pay what they did not owe.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Seybold, p. 71

²⁰² Baker, p. 63

²⁰³ BDB, p. 716. Baker (p. 63) notes that “‘pledge’ can be read as a combination of two Hebrew words signifying a ‘cloud of dust’ ..., a word play on the impurity of sin and the clinging mire that forced indebtedness leads to ...”.

²⁰⁴ BDB, p. 675. Seybold (p. 71) suspects the deliberate use of this term, so as to create a word play with the two definitions. “Ausgehend von dem Umstand, daß im Hebräischen «Zinszahler» und «Beißer» von homonymen Verben stammen, d.h. gleichlautend sind, konstruiert er den witzigen Satz, daß die Schuldner und Bettler wie wilde Hunde die Herren plötzlich anfallen, beißen und bellen (lautmalend) könnten und auf solche Weise die Gerechtigkeit ihren gefährlichen Lauf nimmt.”

²⁰⁵ נִשַׁךְ occurs four times in Deut. 23:20-21 (three of those four in the *hip’il stem*). These are probably the only figurative references of the verb outside of Hab. 2:5.

²⁰⁶ Bailey, p. 332

According to Andersen: “The idea is that the plunderer, enriching himself through his victims’ pledges, becomes a debtor to his victims. The victims are called his ‘creditors’ in v 7. What is ‘not his’ is not seen as stolen property to be returned, but as a debt to be paid.”²⁰⁷

Finally O.P. Robertson says:

The term ... “your creditors,” would appear at first to make more sense if it were rendered “your debtors.” For it seems more appropriate to consider the nations conquered by Babylon as its *debtors* rather than its creditors. But further consideration leads in the opposite direction, and supports the more natural meaning of the word. The prophet now is talking about the point at which justice finally shall be exacted on the Babylonians. At that time, it is not the oppressed nations that are debtors to Babylon, but Babylon who is their debtor. By oppressive brutality, it has robbed the nations of their personal wealth. But the day will dawn in which these oppressed nations will be in a position to demand of Babylon repatriation for all the damage done to them. In that day the little, defenseless nations of the earth will become the demanding creditors of a humbled Babylon.²⁰⁸

Whatever these verses specifically refer to, the overall sense is clear. The one committing financial misdeeds will be punished by his own victims. *Because you plundered many nations, all remaining peoples will plunder you.* According to the oracle this day will come suddenly (עַתָּה, v. 7). O.P. Robertson suggests that this adverb is the answer to the parenthetical question in v. 6b, *How long?*

This answer should not be perceived as polite evasion to the prophet’s direct query by answering in terms of “how” rather than “when.” For the answer of divine judgment in terms of the “suddenness” provides more information than the question asked. ... Divine retribution is sure to come, and it may come without additional prior warning.²⁰⁹

5.1.2 Hab. 2:9-11

⁹“Woe to one who continues to gain-wrongfully a wrongful-gain
– ruin is for his house –;
to put on the height his nest, to be delivered from (the) grasp of ruin.
¹⁰You plot shame for your house; (by) cutting-off many peoples
and you continue to sin.
¹¹For a stone from a wall will cry-out;
and a rafter (made) from wood will answer it.”

²⁰⁷ Andersen, p. 236

²⁰⁸ O.P. Robertson, p. 189, footnote 5. Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 119) suggests: “The ambiguity may be an intentional device of the prophet to show the sudden fall of Babylon from creditor to debtor, from conqueror to conquered.”

²⁰⁹ O.P. Robertson, p. 190. Bailey (p. 332) presents another interpretive possibility regarding the interrogative expression. “The position of the question in the middle of the woe may indicate the prophet’s own frustrated reaction to all this, asking, if this is to come, why not today? More likely, it is part of the woe oracle itself, showing the impatience of the nations as they wait for God to act against this dreaded, hated enemy.”

The material of his own handiwork (or the members of his own family)

The nations present enough evidence to convict the wicked, but the second woe provides additional witnesses: the material of the criminal's own handiwork. In this second woe the oppressor's own efforts to establish and secure his house are to blame for its ultimate collapse. According to O.P. Robertson, who identifies the oppressor as royalty, this second mocking poem describes the "agonizing process of self-destruction The king's dynasty crumbles despite all the efforts to secure the throne by amassing unlimited wealth."²¹⁰ Bruce adds: "An empire founded on violence, plunder, and exploitation ... is bound to collapse because it has no inner coherence."²¹¹

All illegitimate and even violent efforts to secure one's house will end in its very ruin and shame. That is the simple message of the second woe oracle, and even of the first line of text. The initial verb in v. 9 is emphatically followed by its cognate noun – *to gain-wrongfully a wrongful-gain*. This word pair occurs only five other times in the OT. Two of those references, Prov. 1:19 and 15:27, provide synopses of the second woe oracle in Hab. 2:9-11. Prov. 15:27 states concisely: *He who בצע בצע troubles his own בית, but he who hates bribes will live*. Prov. 1:19 fills out the principle. In the context of the first chapter of Proverbs Solomon is advising his son.

My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, "Come with us, ... let us ambush the innocent without cause ... we shall fill our בית with spoil ...", my son, do not walk in the way with them. ... they lie in wait for their own blood; they ambush their own lives. So are the ways of everyone who בצע בצע; it takes away the life of its possessors.
(Prov. 1:10-11, 13, 15, 18-19)

The Hebrew word בית (Hab. 2:9, 10) can be understood as a physical dwelling place or the people who occupy that dwelling place.²¹² The author of this second woe appears to be using the language of the literal structure to refer to the figurative family. "The *house* about which the Chaldean is concerned refers primarily to his dynasty, although it may apply to the commoner's family line as well", says O.P. Robertson.²¹³ As part of the analogy, then, the "stone" and "rafter" of v. 11 could represent the people who are part of the oppressor's family. According to Floyd "the various components of the house itself figuratively realize just how corrupt its makeup is (2:11). In other words, even those who make up the house recognize that attempts to secure it through ill-gotten gains are eventually self-destructing."²¹⁴

²¹⁰ O.P. Robertson, p. 193

²¹¹ Bruce, p. 867. According to Bailey (p. 334) the first verb of v. 9 "may allude to a weaver cutting off a piece of material for sale. An 'evil cut' was shorter than promised and so involved cheating the customer. It is used more widely of making profits by cheating and violence."

²¹² Floyd (*Minor Prophets*, p. 141) says: "When applied to a king, as it is by implication here, the word also comes to mean 'dynasty,' and hence to connote the whole imperial power structure on which dynastic control is based."

²¹³ O.P. Robertson, pp. 192-3. See also Baker, p. 64 and Bailey, pp. 333-4.

²¹⁴ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 142

In spite of his efforts to establish his dynasty or family line, even the oppressor's own kindred witness against him. The one building a house according to unauthorized specifications is doomed to watch his labor speak his shame.

Though the basic interpretation of this woe oracle is relatively straightforward, some scholars struggle to understand its literary structure. Otto, for example, believes that “v. 10ba hinter v. 10a zu spät kommt” and thus he proposes that “v. 10ba sekundäre Einfügung ist”.²¹⁵ He is also suspicious of v. 11's place in the second woe. “Dagegen paßt sich v. 11 lückenlos dem Aufweis der Übeltat in v. 12 als imperfektischer Aufweis der Tatfolge ein ... V. 11 also bezieht sich wie v. 12 auf die Zerstörung eines konkreten, mit Blutschuld erbauten Hauses. Somit ist v. 11 wohl der hinter v. 12 fehlende Aufweis der Tatfolge”²¹⁶ Few commentators uphold Otto's shift of v. 11 from the second to the third woe oracle,²¹⁷ as the verse fits well into the former woe's figurative notion of a house collapsing upon itself.

Though Otto's proposals for restructuring the second woe seem unnecessary, he rightly recognizes that some parts of the verse do appear to be out of place. Andersen corrects these difficulties with one literary observation. “The best clue to understanding the composition is supplied by the fact that every statement has a parallel, but many of the matching pairs are not contiguous.”²¹⁸ Part of the confusion regarding the text, he suspects, is that translators do not recognize “Evil²¹⁹ to his house!” and “Shame to thy house!” as two parallel parenthetical statements. He reasons: “It does not make sense to say ‘Thou didst scheme shame for thy house.’ It does make sense to say ‘Thou didst scheme ... to cut off many nations.’”²²⁰ However, the expression in v. 10 – *you plot shame for your house* – does make sense when one regards this verse as the unintentionally self-inflicted punishment for the crime of v. 9. In other words, in committing these criminal and selfish acts – *to gain-wrongfully a wrongful-gain ... to put on the height his nest, to be delivered from (the) grasp of ruin* – the wicked one ironically plots shame against his own house and sins. In short, he is self-destructing. The second woe oracle is another example of poetic irony and another witness who desires retributive justice.

²¹⁵ Otto, “Stellung”, p. 82

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 84

²¹⁷ Haak (p. 66) is one exception. For him the third woe is contained in vv. 11-13.

²¹⁸ Andersen, p. 239

²¹⁹ Andersen opts for the more common translation of עָוֶן (“evil”), but Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 114) observes that in the context of the second woe the noun is “designating the disastrous impact of this action [obtaining profits illegally] on the greedy man's house” and is to be translated “to the ruin of your own house”.

²²⁰ Andersen, p. 240

5.1.3 Hab. 2:12-14

¹²“Woe to one who continues to build a city with blood;
and one who continues to establish a town with injustice.

¹³Is it not – Behold! – from Yahweh of hosts?

‘And peoples will toil for fire,
and populaces for emptiness will be weary.’

¹⁴For the earth will be filled, (with) knowing the glory of Yahweh;
as the waters will cover over (the) sea.’”

The Spoiler of his own labor

The next to testify against the oppressor is the Judge himself. Yahweh of hosts steps down from his judicial bench and assumes the position of the witness. The crime of the third woe oracle is the unjust founding of a city. “The foundation of a city was often seen in the Hebrew Bible as an act of political arrogance, the act of a person who lives away from God, such as Cain (Gen 4:17) and Nimrod (Gen 10:11).”²²¹ However, the particular crime of Hab. 2:12-14 is not just the construction of an ungodly city, but also the violence and bloodshed employed in that construction. Bailey explains the logic according to OT law: “A land on which blood was shed could not be purified through sacrifice but only by shedding the blood of the murderer (Num 35:33). Thus a city or society built by bloodshed and oppression cannot endure.”²²² Verses 13-14, the indirect testimony of Yahweh himself, promise that the city of the wicked will not prevail.

The most unique feature of the third woe is its similarity to other parts of the OT. For O.P. Robertson this is a memory technique. “Especially noteworthy in the present section is the introduction of a device calculated to cause this denunciatory proverb to be remembered. Habakkuk now cites more ancient sayings than his own, incorporating them into his utterance and thereby contemporizing their message.”²²³ The quotations are introduced by the question: *Is it not – Behold! – from Yahweh of hosts?* Bailey points out that the negative, rhetorical question – the third in the passage (cf. vv. 6a, 7a) – makes for a powerful positive statement and that the הנה calls attention to this portion of text.²²⁴ However, another reasonable way of rendering the question in 2:13a is to repoint הנה (with LXX, V and S) such that it reads: “Is

²²¹ Ibid., p. 242

²²² Bailey, p. 337

²²³ O.P. Robertson, p. 195. Roberts, however, regards the quotations as added glosses. He (*Habakkuk*, p. 124) concludes: “With these glosses bracketed out, the third *hōy*-saying simply addresses the Babylonian tyrant as one who builds his city by oppressing others and so deprives them of the expected fruits of their own labor.” Andersen takes a pessimistic view of the entire woe. He (p. 243) says: “Only in a general manner can this ‘woe oracle’ be made coherent, and then a lot has to be supplied.” Andersen goes on to say that “what has come ‘from Yahweh *šēbā ’ôt*’ is the set of ‘woe oracles’ in which this question is embedded. But because Habakkuk does not otherwise use this name for God, the clause is rightly suspected of being a gloss.”

²²⁴ Bailey, p. 338

not *this* from Yahweh of Hosts” or “Are not *these things* from Yahweh of Hosts?”²²⁵

However one translates the question in the first half of the verse, few can deny that vv. 13b and 14 are found, almost verbatim, in other OT texts.

First, there are only slight differences between Hab. 2:13b and Jer. 51:58b: insignificant changes in verbal forms and the reversal of the two objects (“fire” and “emptiness/nothing”). The lengthy 51st chapter of Jeremiah addresses the judgment of Babylon, and the verse under consideration is the final word from Yahweh on this matter. *Thus says the LORD of hosts, “The broad wall of Babylon will be completely razed, and her high gates will be set on fire; so the people will toil for nothing, and the nations become exhausted only for fire.”* (Jer. 51:58) What follows the words of Yahweh are the instructions that the prophet Jeremiah gives to Seraiah: “As soon as you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words aloud” (v. 61) The destruction and desolation of Babylon is to be foretold to the doomed nation. So, too, are the woe oracles of Habakkuk to be announced mockingly to the oppressor (Hab. 2:6a). In regard to the broader contexts of each passage Andersen says: “If each quotation is apt, Jeremiah’s clearer association of the saying with the fall of Babylon supports our suspicion that Habakkuk is talking about the same thing.”²²⁶

Verse 14 records a second saying of Yahweh, found elsewhere in Num. 14:21 and Isa. 11:9.²²⁷ O.P. Robertson suspects an intentional conflation of two different sources, as Habakkuk duplicates neither source exactly. (See Table 5.) “Each of the three instances depicts the spread of the knowledge of God to universal boundaries. ... So far as precise phraseology is concerned, Habakkuk maintains his own independence at almost every point.”²²⁸

Scholarly opinions vary as to the appropriateness of Hab. 2:14 in the context of the third woe. Andersen says: “It is possible that v 14 does not belong in [the woe] at all. Its

Table 5: Hab. 2:14 in comparison

| | | | | |
|---------------|------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Num. 14:21 | את-כל-הארץ | | כבוד-יהוה | וימלא |
| Isa. 11:9 | | כמים לים מכסים | דעה את-יהוה | כי-מלאה הארץ |
| Hab. 2:14 | | כמים יכסו על-יים | לדעת את-כבוד יהוה | כי תמלא הארץ |

²²⁵ See Andersen, pp. 242-3 and Roberts, *Habakkuk*, pp. 115, 122-4, both of whom follow the emendation but suggest that the question is an added gloss. Haak (p. 66) raises two arguments for keeping the MT: there is a parallel expression in 2 Chr. 25:26 and there is no clear antecedent to “these things”. See Roberts, pp. 122-3, for a discussion of possible antecedents.

²²⁶ Andersen, p. 245. He also observes: “While certainty is unattainable in instances like this, the appearance of such a nice bicolon in two distinct contexts suggests that both Habakkuk and Jeremiah are quoting a byword, not that one is quoting the other.”

²²⁷ Ps. 72:19 also records a more modified version.

²²⁸ O.P. Robertson, p. 195

ideas are not used elsewhere in Habakkuk – the earth (meaning the whole world), the knowledge of God, the glory of Yahweh – and its weight is entirely eschatological.”²²⁹ Ward considers v. 14 as “merely a pious reflection thrown in at hazard”.²³⁰ O.P. Robertson, however, says “it is the oath of Yahweh himself that *the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh* that guarantees the vanity and futility of all efforts to the contrary”.²³¹ His line of thinking proves convincing.

This beautiful statement at first appears so unrelated to the consuming fires of God’s judgment that it has been regarded as ungentle among the original utterances of Habakkuk. Yet its previous contexts in both Numbers and Isaiah contain significant elements reflecting on human depravity that must be dealt with as a way of preparation for the inbreaking of the glory of God. The Lord swears to Moses that the earth shall be filled with his glory, because those who have tempted him in the wilderness “these ten times” shall not enter the land of promise (Num. 14:21-23). Isaiah prophesies that the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God when the descendant of Jesse slays the wicked with the breath of his lips (Isa. 11:4, 9).²³²

“The Lord declares that all punishment results as part of His plan to fill the earth with the knowledge of Himself. ... Because God is righteous and sovereign, no sin can go unpunished lest God’s glory be diminished and [His] name sink in esteem.”²³³

The evidence against the sinner of the third woe comes from Yahweh himself in the form of two quotations. For the one who builds a city according to the rules of violence and corruption, his efforts will be in vain; he is doomed to see his city come to nothing.

5.1.4 Hab. 2:15-17

¹⁵“Woe to one who continues to give his fellow-citizens drink
– from the goblet of your rage and anger – to make (them) drunk;
in order to look upon their nakedness.

¹⁶You are satisfied (with) dishonor above glory,
drink – also you – and be counted uncircumcised;
the cup of the right hand of Yahweh will come round upon you,
and disgrace upon your glory.

¹⁷For the violence of Lebanon will cover you,
and destruction of cattle will terrify;

²²⁹ Andersen, p. 242. Andersen (p. 245) adds later: “A place for Hab 2:14 in the book as a whole can be found once the occurrence of the same verbs (in chiasmus) is noticed in Hab 3:3. There, however, it is the sky that is covered with the LORD’s splendor (*hōd* matches *kābōd*). If v 14, embedded in the ‘woe oracles,’ is intended to supply a point to which Habakkuk 3 could be attached, then the fulfillment of the ‘woe oracles’ is to be achieved by a theophany of the kind described in the ancient poem that is reworked in Habakkuk 3.” Baker (p. 65) says similarly: “The ultimate triumph of this powerful God over wicked man starting here is detailed further in chapter 3.”

²³⁰ Ward, p. 17

²³¹ O.P. Robertson, p. 197

²³² Ibid., p. 198

²³³ House, *Unity*, p. 93 as quoted by Bailey, p. 340. Floyd (*Minor Prophets*, p. 143) says: “Those who grasp the underlying principle, that even a good end cannot be sustained by evil means, thus in effect have knowledge of Yahweh’s glory.” See also Bruce, p. 869.

**on account of blood of man and violence of earth,
a town and all those dwelling in it.”**

The pleasure of his own sport

The fourth woe is clearly another example of retributive justice: that which the oppressor does to others will also be done to him. In this case his own perverted forms of pleasure – forcing drunkenness upon others and sexual misconduct – testify against him and then ironically become his punishment.

It is difficult to see where the literal interpretation of this woe ends and the figurative begins.²³⁴ Bailey notes that in the OT Chaldea is known for its drinking parties (Dan. 5).²³⁵ Andersen also says: “Taken literally, [the woe] applies to the depravity that the Israelites saw at its worst in Canaanite custom and the twin vices of drunkenness and homosexuality (Genesis 9)”²³⁶ Yet later Andersen proposes a metaphorical understanding: “The making of one’s ‘neighbor’ drunk is, then, another way of describing the Chaldeans’ abuse of their victims, not perhaps to be taken literally.”²³⁷ Similarly with the latter of the two sins, “[the] gazing on ‘their’ nakedness could be gloating over the humiliation of naked prisoners of war, taken off as slaves, but something closer to sexual licentiousness seems to be in mind. It is not captivity, but similar exposure that punishes such a sin.”²³⁸ Thus, whether the sins are literal, figurative or a combination of both, the oppressor deserves punishment.

That punishment comes in v. 16; the wicked themselves will be forced to drink and will be exposed. Far worse than that is *the cup of the right hand of Yahweh* which will come upon the oppressor. “In the Old Testament, the cup often symbolized judgment while the right hand indicated power.”²³⁹ Yahweh’s cup of wrath far exceeds the oppressor’s goblet of rage in its devastating effects (cf. Jer. 25:15-16, 27). That which the oppressor did to others will come back on him many times.

²³⁴ The text of v. 15 has much to do with this difficulty. In particular, the expression *מִסֵּפֶחַ חֲמַתְךָ* (*from the goblet of your rage*) raises many concerns. The translation above follows the *BHS* apparatus, which suggests the final *ך* of the first word is a dittographic error, thus leaving the noun *סֵפֶחַ* with the prefixed *מִ* preposition. See Baker, p. 66 and Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 115. Otherwise the first word could be the participial form of a verb. Bailey (p. 342) mentions the alternatives and concludes that each one suits the context: “The figure of a drinking party is clear, but its exact translation is debated. ‘Pouring it from the wineskin’ is variously rendered: ‘mixing in your wrath’ (O.P. Robertson), ‘who mix in your venom’ (NASB), ‘pressing him to your bottle’ (NKJV; compare NLT), ‘pouring out your wrath’ (NRSV). It could be that the prophet intentionally played on the various possible meanings or associations of these words, all of which are appropriate in the drinking context.”

²³⁵ Bailey, p. 342

²³⁶ Andersen, p. 247

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 247-8

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 249. The *nifal* imperative *הִעֲרַל*, translated above as “be counted uncircumcised” (following BDB, p. 790b), can also be understood as “expose your uncircumcised member”. See Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 116 and Andersen, p. 250.

²³⁹ Bailey, p. 343

However this woe is not merely a declaration of judgment; it is a riddle that mocks the oppressor. This is illustrated particularly well by the richness of two Hebrew terms in v. 16 – קלון and קיקלון, translated above as “dishonor” and “disgrace”. “The [first] noun *qālôn* is a general term for ignominy in contrast to ‘honor.’ But it has associations with the shameful exposure of the sexual organs (Jer 13:26; Nah 3:5).”²⁴⁰ This appropriately links the crime in v. 15a, the nakedness of the citizen, and the corresponding punishment in v. 16b, the oppressor’s own exposed uncircumcision.²⁴¹ The second noun is believed by some to be a compound word constructed intentionally “to intensify the concept of disgrace to be experienced”.²⁴²

The first syllable of this word (*qî*) may be an abbreviation of *qî*’, meaning “to spew, to vomit” (Lev. 18:28; 20:22; Jer. 25:27; the noun form designates “vomit,” as in Isa. 19:14; 28:8; Jer. 48:26). The latter portion of the word (*qālôn*) reinforces the occurrence of this word in the first half of this same verse and means “shame, disgrace” (cf. Prov. 11:2; 12:16; etc.).²⁴³

Both O.P. Robertson and Andersen provide graphic descriptions of the state of the oppressor according to these two terms. “[He] lies drunk and naked in his own vomit.”²⁴⁴ “The *qālôn* is first consumed (v 16aA), and then vomited (v 16bB).”²⁴⁵ The pleasure of the criminal’s own amusement speaks against him.

Some commentators have noted that the final verse of this fourth woe is out of place. Otto says unequivocally: “*Das IV. Wehe-Wort ist durch einen Bruch zwischen v. 15f. und v. 17 gekennzeichnet. Das Thema der Ausplünderung des Libanon hat keinerlei Bezug zu der in v. 15f. voranstehenden Kritik an den Trinkgelagen der Oberschicht.*”²⁴⁶ Andersen, attempting to solve the apparent problem by focusing on the verb “to cover”, reaches two possible conclusions. On the one hand: “It is understandable that the theme of lawlessness has suggested to some investigators the removal of this verse to one of the other ‘woe oracles’ – near v 14, for instance – a proposal that also brings the two occurrences of the verb ‘cover’ together.”²⁴⁷ On the other hand: “The use of the verb ‘cover’ in v 17 could contrast with the

²⁴⁰ Andersen, p. 250

²⁴¹ See W. Watson (pp. 245-6) for a list of possible functions of a word play. He regards Hab. 2:16 as an example of a word play which links a poem or its parts. However, with the transposition of two letters the verb translated above as “to be counted uncircumcised” becomes “to stagger”. Andersen (p. 250) notes that the latter rendering is found in 1QpHab, LXX and other versions. O.P. Robertson (p. 202), however, prefers the MT: “But if the phrase intends to represent a reciprocal punishment for the sin of ‘looking on the nakedness’ of others, God’s demand that the Babylonian show himself to be uncircumcised seems quite appropriate.”

²⁴² O.P. Robertson, p. 204. See also Andersen, p. 250 and Bailey, p. 344.

²⁴³ O.P. Robertson, p. 204

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Andersen, p. 251

²⁴⁶ Otto, “Stellung”, p. 85

²⁴⁷ Andersen, p. 251. Elliger (p. 46), who also recognizes a connection between v. 17a and the third woe, suggests that the injustices of the city-builder (v. 12) included “*die ungeheuren Holzeinschläge am Libanon ... und die rücksichtslose Ausnutzung der dabei eingesetzten Zugtiere ...*”. Additionally he says: “*V. 17a steht zwar gegenwärtig sehr weit von V. 12-14 ab; aber einerseits stört er an seiner jetzigen Stelle formal und inhaltlich, andererseits läßt er sich am besten im Zusammenhang mit der*

theme of exposure in vv 15-16.”²⁴⁸ The one who finds amusement in the uncovering of others will himself be covered with violence. Seybold interprets the verse along those same lines.

After discussing v. 16 and the “*Becher aus der Rechten JHWHs*” he says:

*V.17a sagt nachträglich, was gemeint sein soll. Das Unrecht am Libanon und an den Tieren wird sich jetzt rächen. ... Bemerkenswert ist dieses Wort vom Unrecht gegen die Natur allemal. «Bedeckt» und «erdrückt werden» durch die Tatfolge ist das gedankliche Glied, das den Satz an das Bild des von Mist bedeckten Betrunkenen anschließt.*²⁴⁹

Finally, Floyd as well sees no problem with the references to Lebanon or to the cattle. He says that the oppressors have “drunkenly set their own downfall in motion not only because of the way in which they have mistreated fellow human beings from various regions (2:17aα), but also because of the way in which they have mistreated other creatures (2:17aβ)”.²⁵⁰

The debate over the aptness of v. 17 in the fourth woe is complicated further by its second half. Verse 17b repeats, word for word, v. 8b, which itself is difficult to explain. This twice-repeated refrain will be taken up later in the discussion, but for now it must be left as it is, the conclusion to the woe that denounces the one who forces drunkenness and sexual impurities upon fellow-citizens. Even these sins testify against the oppressor and ironically become his punishment.

5.1.5 Hab. 2:18-20

**¹⁸“How does a carved-image benefit, for its creator carves it,
a molten-metal (image) and one who continues to teach deception?
For the creator of his creation trusts in it to make dumb worthless-idols.**

**¹⁹Woe to one who continues to say to wood ‘Awake’,
‘Rouse yourself’ to a stone of silence; (or) ‘He will teach’
– Behold it! – sheathed (in) gold and silver, and there is no breath at all within it.**

**²⁰But Yahweh (is) in the temple of his holiness;
hush before his face, all the earth.”**

The gods of his own hands

Even though the purpose of this portion of the discussion is to examine the woe oracles as five individual units, one cannot help but recognize the difference between this fifth woe and the first four. That is, the statement of woe comes in the middle of the passage rather than at the beginning. A few translations and commentators therefore opt to rearrange vv. 18 and 19. Roberts for example says: “Verse 18 needs an introduction; it can hardly stand alone to mark the transition to a new line of thought. As such it would be both awkward and unparalleled. It must either be regarded as a misplaced gloss or transposed after v. 19, where

Bautätigkeit der Fremdmacht verstehen, so daß die fast allgemein geteilte Annahme seiner ursprünglichen Verbindung mit V. 12-14 richtig sein wird.”

²⁴⁸ Andersen, p. 246

²⁴⁹ Seybold, p. 73

²⁵⁰ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 144

it would fit well.”²⁵¹ However Bailey notes: “This takes form criticism too far as a text critical tool and ignores the creative use of forms by biblical writers. The blatant change of subject matter along with the intentional break of form catches the reader’s attention.”²⁵² “The prophet jumped right into idol worship without the pronouncement of judgment, giving the reader a sense of urgency and conveying the prophet’s indignation at the abomination of worshipping ‘lies.’”²⁵³ Regardless of this change in format, the fifth and final woe still speaks of a witness who testifies against the wicked. In this passage the silence of the man-made idols sarcastically speaks against the pagan oppressor.

The folly of the idolater is the topic of vv. 18-19 (cf. Isa. 44:9-17). The woe employs several literary techniques to enhance the expression of this foolishness. The passage opens with a rhetorical question which exposes the fatal weakness of all idols and images. They are creations of men and as such they can be of no real benefit to men; they have no breath and therefore they cannot speak. O.P. Robertson says that “[idol-making] had the effect of deluding even the maker himself. Although the image could not speak, it communicated a falsehood by giving the appearance that it had the power of a supernatural being.”²⁵⁴ Yet in reality idols are merely the carvings of a carver, the creations of a creator, and dumb worthless-idols. This three-fold pun, reflected in only the first two of the English expressions, memorializes the impotence of these idols.²⁵⁵ The Hebrew of the last descriptor is: **אלילים אלמים**. Apart from these two similarly sounding terms being a word play in and of themselves, Baker notes that the latter is a play on the ordinary Hebrew word for God, **אלהים**.²⁵⁶ The use of this literary technique is especially ironic, given the content of the woe oracle’s final verse.

One of the most difficult questions facing careful interpreters of the fifth woe is: To whom or to what does **מורה שקר** (*one who continues to teach deception*) refer? According to the translation just given it refers to a person rather than an inanimate object. Andersen suspects the same: “[It] is very doubtful if *môreh* refers to the idol at all. The term *šeqer* refers characteristically to false prophecy, fraudulently concocted. The *môreh šeqer* in Isa 9:14 is a prophet. If Hab 2:18 calls an idol a *môreh*, it is a unique instance.”²⁵⁷ The Hebrew verb **ירה** (“to teach” in the *hip il* stem) is found a total of 46 times in the OT. Except for Job 12:7, 8, which speak of the beasts and the earth, every other reference has God or human

²⁵¹ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 126

²⁵² Bailey, p. 346, footnote 6. Ever conscious of literary methods, O.P. Robertson (p. 207) adds: “More likely Habakkuk alters the order of the oracle simply as a literary device to provide variety and climax in his expression.”

²⁵³ Bailey, p. 346

²⁵⁴ O.P. Robertson, p. 208

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Baker, p. 67. See also Bailey, p. 348.

²⁵⁷ Andersen, p. 258

beings as its subject. The woe in Habakkuk, then, is probably denouncing not only idols but also those people who regard themselves as gods (cf. Hab. 1:11). In the end, these people can only teach deception (שקר). This understanding of מורה שקר also helps one to make sense of הוא יורה (*he/it will teach*) in v. 19. If the antecedent of the subject is an idol, the declaration contradicts all that has gone before it. If the statement is a gloss, “the origin of such a gloss is unaccountable”, says Andersen.²⁵⁸ If the statement is a question (cf. O.P. Robertson’s “Can it teach?”) the text lacks any indication of the interrogative. If, however, the emphatic pronoun הוא corresponds to a person who regards himself as a god, and if the statement is placed inside quotation marks, corresponding to “Awake” and “Rouse yourself”,²⁵⁹ then “He will teach” is the foolish remark that a worshiper makes to another human being.

This sarcasm is striking, especially as one moves to the final verse of the woe, where the sin of the idolater is finally, albeit indirectly, revealed (cf. Isa. 44:6-8). The one who worships graven images or other people affronts the holy Yahweh. “Lifeless idols approached in clamour are silent, while the living God, approached in silence and reverence, speaks.”²⁶⁰ “The idol sits where it is put without the ability to hear or to respond, but the Lord resides by his almighty power in his holy temple ready to respond to the needs of his people.”²⁶¹ In spite of the logical connection between vv. 18-19 and v. 20, a few scholars (e.g. Seybold) still question the role of v. 20 in the fifth woe. However, severing this last verse from the text would disrupt the contrast between dumb idols and a speaking God, even as the reversing of vv. 18 and 19 would.²⁶² Without v. 20 the fifth woe is merely mocking the stupidity of men; with v. 20 it attributes to the ignorant idolater a grievous sin – that of having other gods before Yahweh, be they crafted objects or human beings.

The lifeless idols of the final woe oracle are the last to testify against the oppressor. They join victim-nations; building materials; Yahweh, the Spoiler-Judge; and perverted forms of pleasure as the witnesses for the prosecution. As mentioned at the outset of this discussion, the woes demonstrate that everyone and everything will testify against the wicked. In other words, every aspect of his life will come to nothing. He is doomed to financial ruin (vv. 6b-8), familial ruin (vv. 9-11), vocational ruin (vv. 12-14), social ruin (vv. 15-17), and, worst of all, religious ruin (vv. 18-20). His condemnation is comprehensive.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ This understanding does not necessarily follow from the punctuation of the MT. The *’atnāh* divides the verse between “stone of silence” and “He will teach”.

²⁶⁰ Baker, p. 68. According to BDB (p. 245) חַהּ or “Hush!” is an interjection, which is only sometimes inflected as an imperative verb. Verse 20b is perhaps more properly rendered: “Hush! Before his face (is) all the earth.” This is in keeping with the theme in Habakkuk that Yahweh does see all the evil of which the prophet speaks. All the earth, in fact, is before the divine eyes.

²⁶¹ Bailey, p. 349

²⁶² See Andersen, p. 257.

5.2 The woes as one literary unit

The simple observation that these five individual woes are found in one place already intimates that they form a single literary unit.²⁶³ Scholars employ various strategies to explain exactly how the multiple texts hold together. These schemes include: pattern of elements, theme or content, and literary structure.

First, many commentators observe a regular pattern of elements in each of the woes. Though scholars employ their own particular classifications, the sequence can be summarized generally as three-fold: description of a crime, threat or denunciation, and reason for judgment.²⁶⁴ Hals, however, rejects this format and instead refers to a basic two-part structure: “(1) the exclamation *hoy* (‘woe’) followed by a participle denoting the criticized action or a noun characterizing people in a negative way, and (2) a continuation with a variety of forms, including threats, accusations, or rhetorical questions.”²⁶⁵ Gerstenberger, who deals with the prophetic woes in general, follows this same line of thinking and believes the “woe-sentence” itself is self-sufficient and additional elements, though possible, are not necessary. He says that the first element of the woe oracle, the indictment, frequently leads to a threat but that other continuations are possible, such as laments, ironical questions, proverbial sayings, new accusations, rhetorical questions, historical re-applications, and further indictments.²⁶⁶ Several of these continuations are seen in the woe oracles of Habakkuk. Thus, whether the basic elements are thought to be two or three, many agree that each woe of Hab. 2:6-20 contains them in regular fashion.

Second, scholars often appeal directly to the themes of the woes in their efforts to justify the unity of Hab. 2:6-20. Elliger, for example, recognizes a “*planvolle*

²⁶³ Hab. 2:6a could hint that the woes are to be regarded both as *five* woes and as *one* unit, for it speaks of a plurality of “riddles” (חידרות) and a singular “poem” (משל), subsequently qualified as a singular “mocking-parable” (מליצה). The former designation testifies to their individuality and the latter two, to their unity.

²⁶⁴ See e.g. Bailey, p. 331ff.; Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 135; Otto, “Stellung”, p. 87; Seybold, p. 69; R.L. Smith, p. 110; and Wendland, p. 599, who says that the “structural reiteration serves to underscore the inevitability of the prediction being made”.

²⁶⁵ Hals, p. 358 as quoted by Bailey, p. 329, footnote 1. Andersen (p. 225) finds only one element that all of the woes have in common: the הוי. “Apart from this common feature, no two of the ‘woe oracles’ are the same in literary design. ... There is no regular pattern into which all the statements can be put, and some of the components could be extraneous.”

²⁶⁶ Gerstenberger, pp. 252-3. According to Gerstenberger’s theory, then, it is not likely that prophets were the sole or original composers of the woe-sentences, taken together with their various continuations. He says (p. 253) that the “juncture of two or more so disparate forms can only be explained by postulating separate origin and growth before a combination took place”. Thus, what is possibly found in Habakkuk are five common woe-sentences (cf. vv. 6b, 9, 12, 15, 19) that have been supplemented by the prophet with various other forms, making them applicable to the current situation. Referring to Hab. 2:6ff. as a “preformulated” chain of woes, Gerstenberger (p. 263) says: “The way the woe-form changed from the mere foreboding announcement of bad luck to the wrongdoer to the pointed and Yahweh-centered indictment of covenantal apostasies, shows how free and how bound the prophet was over against this particular tradition. The ethical rules laid down in the woe-sentences, though coming from a private and unauthoritative sphere, have consistency, not only of form but also of content, which resists easy changes.”

Gedankenbewegung” beginning in 2:5, a verse he regards as the “*erste Spruch*” out of a total of six passages.

*Der erste Spruch schlägt den Grundton an, auf dem der Akkord der übrigen sich aufbaut Der zweite [traditionally the first woe] greift eine besondere Seite dieser Politik heraus Der dritte [second woe] knüpft an dieses Raubwesen an und geht in die Hintergründe Der vierte [third woe] vollzieht den Anschluß etwas äußerlicher; von den zerstörten Städten geht er weiter zu den Neugründungen. ... Wenigstens diese vier ersten Sprüche hängen also formal und inhaltlich einigermaßen zusammen. Ist auch nicht ein klarer Gedankenfortschritt festzustellen, so trägt doch trotz aller Überschneidung jeder Spruch einen besonderen Zug zum Gesamtbild bei, in dem das widergöttliche und widermenschliche Wesen des Weltreichs dargestellt wird.*²⁶⁷

Third, Andersen relies heavily upon the literary structure of the woes when he makes his case for their unity. “In spite of the variety in the shape of the ‘woe oracles,’ the prophet’s poetic intention is clear throughout. There are enough bicolons of familiar design to prove that.”²⁶⁸ Andersen also observes that the most significant element of each woe is intentionally placed at the center.²⁶⁹ According to this basic principle Andersen, therefore, puts added emphasis on the third woe. “In terms of the overall structure of the five ‘woe oracles,’ the monocolon that is the middle of the middle ‘woe oracle,’ ‘Isn’t this – Behold! – from Yahweh Sebaoth?’ with its arresting language and the impressive title for God, must be regarded as the climax of the entire set and the key theological statement of the whole.”²⁷⁰

Fourth, some scholars use a combination of strategies when defending the unity of the passage. Otto and Wendland, the two examples highlighted below, refer to the thematic *and* structural features. Otto’s foundational presupposition is that each woe is made up of original statements to which the prophet made “*Aufweitungen*”.

*Die Aufweitungen des dreiteiligen Grundschemas von Wehe-Ruf (I), Aufweis von Übeltat und Täter (II) und Aufweis der Tatfolge (III) sind nicht planlos erfolgt, sondern weisen auf eine bewußte Gestaltung der Reihe Dafür spricht auch die thematische Zusammengehörigkeit des I. und II. Wehe-Wortes; in beiden geht es um die Ausplünderung des sozial Schwachen durch den Stärkeren.*²⁷¹

Otto adds that “[in] den beiden letzten Wehe-Worten ... das verschwenderische Wohlleben der Oberschicht, aufgezeigt an gewissenloser Bautätigkeit und Trinkgelagen, [angeprangert

²⁶⁷ Elliger, p. 48. Though he does not neglect the final two woes in his summary of the unit, he sees in them a somewhat looser connection to the prior passages.

²⁶⁸ Andersen, p. 227

²⁶⁹ For Andersen these elements are: (1) “And thou shalt be loot for them” in v. 7b; (2) “Thou didst scheme! – Let shame come to thine estate!” in v. 10a; (3) “Isn’t this – Behold! – from Yahweh Sebaoth?” in v. 13a; (4) “Thou didst satiate thyself with shame instead of glory” in v. 16aa; and (5) “Woe to him who says to a tree, ‘Wake up!’ ‘Get up!’ to a dumb stone! He gives instruction” in v. 19. Andersen (p. 228) adds: “If [this feature] had been noticed and appreciated, scholars would not have worried about the deviation of the fifth ‘woe oracle’ from the usual pattern of having the word *hōy* first.”

²⁷⁰ Andersen, p. 227

²⁷¹ Otto, “Stellung”, pp. 87-8. He omits the fifth woe from his discussion.

wird]”.²⁷² And finally, he says: “*Durch die Zufügung eines Kehrverses im I. und IV. Wehe-Wort (v. 8b. 17b) ist die Sammlung gerahmt worden.*”²⁷³

Wendland suggests that the taunt speech is divided into two sections, the first having three woes and the second, two woes. “An indicative refrain concludes the first unit of each half (*epiphora*) More significantly, the close of each of the two larger portions is marked by a prominent theological affirmation, both of which proclaim the awesome majesty (glory + holiness) of the ‘LORD of Hosts’ (v. 13)”²⁷⁴ “[The] second portion of this larger judgment speech (2:15-20) builds upon and intensifies the first (2:6-14), much in the same way as the ‘B’ line of a poetic couplet elaborates upon and/or enhances its counterpart in ‘A’. This represents, in effect, a discourse level manifestation of the poetic principle of parallelism.”²⁷⁵ Wendland concludes: “This progression reaches its peak in 2:20 with Yahweh appearing majestically ‘in his holy temple,’ obviously in complete sovereign control of the cosmos.”²⁷⁶

Besides the elemental, thematic and/or literary relationships among the individual woe oracles, these five passages can also be described as *progressing* from the first to the last. This further demonstrates their unity. Though he is speaking generally Wendland acknowledges this idea.

Most recognized works of literary significance tend to manifest some sort of temporal, topical, spatial, or logical progression. This is perhaps not as obvious in non-narrative texts, but such development and its communicative consequences are normally present there as well. Thus in addition to an intelligible plan or a natural sequence of selection, ordering and arrangement, there will always be a certain goal, culmination, point or purpose that is achieved once the end of the composition is reached.²⁷⁷

The woes of Habakkuk can thus be regarded generally as a progression of crimes; that is, one offense builds upon the other. First the oppressor accumulates for himself an excessive amount of goods and plunder (vv. 6b-8). He then uses those illegally gained possessions to secure for himself an influential house and a family line that is protected from outside influences (vv. 9-11). With this power he extends his rule to the city, which he governs with violence and injustice (vv. 12-14). Finally he deceives the people of that city and abuses them cruelly for his own pleasure (vv. 15-17). The first four woes seem to be, in one way or another, dealing with misdeeds of violence. (Note e.g. דם in vv. 8, 12 and 17; חמס in vv. 8 and 17; קצה in v. 10; and ואף חמתך in v. 15). The ambiguous refrain, which closes the first and fourth woes – *on account of blood of man and violence of earth, a town*

²⁷² Ibid., p. 88

²⁷³ Ibid. It must be noted that Otto (p. 83) regards v. 17b as “*die ursprüngliche Fortsetzung von v. 12*”.

²⁷⁴ Wendland, pp. 599-600

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 600

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 608

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 592

and all those dwelling in it – could form an inclusio and hence underscore this theme.

Seybold suspects similarly. “*V.17b wiederholt V.8b, um ergänzend beizufügen, daß natürlich nicht allein jener Naturfrevel, sondern vor allem der Frevel an der Menschheit, dem heiligen Land, der Stadt und seiner Bewohner der Grund für den schmachvollen Untergang ist.*”²⁷⁸

The progression of evil activity continues in the fifth woe (vv. 18-20), which serves as the climax of the entire passage, as suggested by its unusual format.²⁷⁹ The oppressor’s violent crimes pale in comparison to the sin of idolatry. “Furthermore, the idolatry of the [oppressors] may have been viewed as the source of all the other atrocities previously mentioned. Because their religious orientation was wrong, their moral standards had to be perverted.”²⁸⁰ This fifth woe opens up the heart of the oppressor’s problem. In all his deeds, which in and of themselves are evil, he does not honor Yahweh. Floyd similarly observes development from the first four woes, taken together, to the final woe. “These progressions – from part of the cosmos to its whole, from future expectations to present immediacy, and from the beginning and middle of an action to its end – all show that the fifth and final ‘woe’ speech stands in relation to its four predecessors as their climax and conclusion”²⁸¹

Demonstrating the unity of Hab. 2:6-20 can take a variety of forms, some of which are more reasonable than others. Yet the combination of all these observations show that the five individual texts are best treated as one literary entity.

5.3 The woes as part of the book of Habakkuk

Speaking of the woes as a literary unity Andersen notes: “The set is unified by more than the fact that the five ‘woe oracles’ have been strung together editorially in one place in the finished book. ... They have links with the rest of the book. Some of these links are clearer than others. Some are verbal; some are thematic.”²⁸²

The most immediate context of Hab. 2:6-20 is Hab. 2:1-5, at least part of which represents Yahweh’s response to the prophet. Though the matter of how vv. 4-5 hold together is not entirely clear, observations can still be made in regard to how the passage as a whole

²⁷⁸ Seybold, p. 73

²⁷⁹ Scholars are far from unanimous in their opinions regarding the final woe. Sweeney, for example, believes that vv. 18-20 are not part of the taunt song at all but rather the “commentary” on the taunt song. He (“Structure”, pp. 72-3) gives several reasons for his view. (1) Verses 18-20 deviate from the form of the previous woe oracles. (2) They are cast in the 3rd person form, whereas the other woes are cast in the 2nd person (except for vv. 12-14). (3) They are outside the “literary envelope” of the refrain in vv. 8b and 17b. (4) Finally, they focus on idolatry instead of crimes of violence and robbery. None of Sweeney’s reasons convincingly sustain his view; in fact, earlier portions of this discussion refute several of his arguments. Sweeney (p. 73), however, does believe that vv. 18-20 “point to the root cause of the oppressor’s atrocities: its failure to recognize YHWH as sovereign”.

²⁸⁰ O.P. Robertson, p. 207. Wendland (p. 599) concurs: “Here Yahweh derides the underlying motivation of all unrighteousness, namely, idolatry, which was the driving force behind ... ruthless wickedness”

²⁸¹ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 116

²⁸² Andersen, p. 225

relates to the woes. Several commentators appropriately note that the woe oracles function as an elaborate illustration of the principle stated in 2:4. *Behold! He is swollen, he is not upright in himself; but a righteous one, in his faithfulness, he will live.* “The series of woes confirms the truth of the Lord’s message. The arrogant ultimately will fall under the weight of their sin; the righteous will live by faithfulness to God.”²⁸³ “Specifically, the series of woes in 2:6-20 is intended to reinforce the promise given in 2:4 by showing that those who rely on their own powers and not on God cannot sustain their self-contained life or find permanent satisfaction in it.”²⁸⁴ And finally: “Thus this sequence of ‘woes’ acts as a rhetorical elaboration in the form of a judicial consequence of the introductory summary statement given in vv. 4-5.”²⁸⁵ Wendland also notes the *inclusio* which encompasses all of chapter 2: “The Babylonians seek revelations from speechless idols (v. 18), lifeless wood and stone (v. 19) – all in sharp contrast to God’s people who receive concrete and certain revelation from the LORD himself (2:2-3, forming an implicit *inclusio* for this section).”²⁸⁶

Wendland goes on to relate the woes to Hab. 1 as well.

The “woe” oracles ... ostensibly summarize and intensify the basic content of the LORD’s answer to the prophet’s second complaint expressed in 1:12-17. This pericope, a graphic indictment and judgment of a dangerous but mortal Babylonian enemy, also effectively neutralizes the impact of the shocking divine prediction of 1:5-11 and reverses its ultimate communicative function.²⁸⁷

Andersen takes the relation back to the title of the book and identifies the woe speeches in ch. 2 with the “oracle” or “burden” (מִשָּׁאָה) mentioned in Hab. 1:1. “The ‘woe oracles’ are identified as the main matter of the prophecy. The remainder of the book supplies the context and circumstances from which this ‘burden’ emerges.”²⁸⁸

One cannot know for certain if the author of Habakkuk intended each of these proposed, intra-book relationships or not, but one thing seems quite certain: the woe oracles are an integral part of the book. This is demonstrated by the repetition of language and themes. First, the duplications of numerous words, some of which are surely incidental, help

²⁸³ Bailey, p. 330

²⁸⁴ Achtemeier, p. 48

²⁸⁵ Wendland, p. 598. As another example of similar thinking Otto (“Stellung”, p. 101) says: “Die Analyse hat gezeigt, daß die Orakelüberlieferung 2 4. 5a. ba, die durch v. 1-3 eingeleitet ist, und die Wehe-Worte in 2 6b-16 bereits in der Verkündigung des Propheten Habakuk eine Einheit gebildet haben.”

²⁸⁶ Wendland, p. 599. Andersen (p. 254) notes a less obvious connection between the emphatic description in the fifth woe of *dumb* worthless-idols and earlier portions of the book. “There is pathos in Habakkuk’s emphasis on this point, because much of his own agony is caused by the silence of Yahweh (Hab 1:13) (Roth 1975).”

²⁸⁷ Wendland, p. 596. Sweeney (“Structure”, p. 70) adds: “The contents of this sub-unit [2:1-20] relate directly to the issues raised in Habakkuk’s second complaint (i 12-17) in particular as well as the entire exchange in Hab. i 2-17 in general. Hab. ii 1-20 therefore comprises the prophet’s report of God’s second response in Hab. ii 1-4 together with his explanation of the meaning of God’s response in Hab. ii 5-20.”

²⁸⁸ Andersen, p. 88

to demonstrate the relationship between the woe oracles and their prior context, either by establishing a correspondence or an ironic reversal. (See Table 6.) For example, the two instances of לֹא-לִי (Hab. 1:6 and 2:6) correspond in that they both refer to the illegal acquisition of goods by the respective oppressors (which, incidentally, argues for their similar identity). As an illustration of ironic reversal, which is a main theme in the woes themselves, Yahweh announces in his oracle of judgment that Chaldea will rise (קָוָם) against the nations (Hab. 1:6), while the first woe declares that the nations will rise (קָוָם) against Chaldea (Hab. 2:7).

Second, thematic links between 2:6-20 and its prior context also prove constructive in tying together the entire book. Two of the Chaldean's primary sins are pride and greed (see e.g. 1:11 and 2:5). The woes quite dramatically illustrate these sins. Pride is seen as the motivation behind the crimes in the second and fourth woes, while greed is behind those of the first and third woes. In her discussion of the fifth woe Achtemeier says: "Those who practice violence and oppression and injustice in the earth have fallen victim to the primary sin of *pride*. They think themselves gods who can legislate over human life and use it as they will for their own selfish purposes of *greed* and might and glory."²⁸⁹

The earlier portions of Habakkuk clearly establish the situation out of which the woe cries in 2:6-20 emerge. Chapter 1 details the divinely-ordained rise and the inhumane rule of the prideful and greedy Chaldean. Chapter 2 predicts his fall. Even though the nature of 2:6-20's relation to its subsequent context in Hab. 3 is not as obvious as the relationship to its prior context, the woe oracles are not to be detached from what follows them. Chapter 3, in short, is the evidence that Habakkuk believes what is promised in the woe oracles, which clearly outline the fate of the evil-doer. The prophet no longer fears the wicked Chaldean who will come to nothing; he now fears Yahweh.

²⁸⁹ Achtemeier, p. 51 (italics added)

Table 6: Vocabulary common to the woes and their prior context

| The Woes | 1:2-4 | 1:5-11 | 1:12-17 | 2:1-5 |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2:6b-8 | | | | |
| “not to him” | | לא־לוֹ | | |
| “How long?” | עַד־אֵנָה ²⁹⁰ | | | |
| “rise” | | קוּם | | |
| “nations” | | גוֹי/ים (twice) | גוֹיִם | גוֹיִם |
| “peoples” (+ vv. 8, 10, 13) | | | | עַמִּים |
| “man” (+ v. 17) | | | אָדָם | |
| “violence” (+ v. 17, twice) | חַמָּס (twice) | חַמָּס | | |
| “earth” (+ vv. 14, 17, 20) | | אֲרֶץ | | |
| 2:9-11 | | | | |
| “ruin” (twice) | | | רָע | |
| “establish” | | | שִׁים | |
| “you” (2ms suffix) | | | | נַפְשׁ (twice) (3ms suffix) |
| “cry-out” | זַעַק | | | |
| “answer” | | | | עֲנָה |
| 2:12-14 | | | | |
| “Yahweh” (twice) (+ vv. 16, 20) | יְהוָה | | יְהוָה (twice) | יְהוָה |
| “emptiness” | | | רֵיק ²⁹¹ | |
| “sea” | | | יָם | |
| 2:15-17 | | | | |
| “look” | נִבַּט | נִבַּט | נִבַּט (twice) | |
| “satisfied” | | | | שָׂבַע |
| “destruction” | שָׂד | | | |
| 2:18-20 | | | | |
| “say” | | | | אָמַר |
| “breath” | | רוּחַ | | |
| “face” | | פָּנֵי | | |

²⁹⁰ The question in the woes (Hab. 2:6b) actually takes the form עַד־מָתֵי. Nevertheless Andersen (p. 236) says: “As an interjection, [these words] echo the concern expressed in the opening prayer.”

²⁹¹ Hab. 1:17 shows the verbal form of the root, while the third woe shows the nominal form.

6. The content of the vision: Theory two (Hab. 2:6-20)

Before the prophet's transformed attitude in Hab. 3 can be analyzed, the discussion of the vision mentioned in Hab. 2:2-3 must be briefly resumed. The woe oracles in Hab. 2:6-20 represent a second theory for identifying the content of this vision. For mostly the same reasons this option is as logical as the first which was offered (Hab. 2:4-5). In terms of the structure, the woe oracles come relatively close behind the initial mention of the vision in vv. 2 and 3. In terms of the message, the woe oracles provide a suitable answer to the prophet's complaint in ch. 1. Even though Baker confesses that the content of the vision is not stated explicitly, he does say that: "Yahweh tells of the pending destruction of Babylon ... through a vision (vv. 2-3) *which includes* five songs that taunt or deride the Chaldeans".²⁹²

Andersen is quite convinced that the vision is contained in vv. 6b-20. Taking a very high view of this passage as a whole (and hence of the vision), he describes the woe oracles as the "main matter of the prophecy".²⁹³ That which distinguishes Andersen's view is his explanation of how vv. 2-6 of ch. 2 relate to each other. As mentioned in the discussion of Hab. 2:6a, he first notes that the singular verb in v. 6b ("and he will say") cannot be the continuation of the plural verb in v. 6a ("they will lift up"). Instead, Andersen suspects that this singular subject is referring to the proclaimer of v. 2b.²⁹⁴ He concludes:

Linking v 6b with v 2 makes better sense of the language in v 2. The LORD's answer, which is called a "vision" (cf. Hab 1:1), is to be written down, taken by a runner, and read out. ... The connection between v 2 and v 6b shows that the five "woe oracles" are the product of the vision; they are the content of the LORD's second reply. They are the saving answer for which the prophet has hoped, even though they do not have the conventional form of a salvation oracle²⁹⁵

Andersen then adds that vv. 3-6a are "best viewed as an exhortation and a commentary on the message that is to follow".²⁹⁶

Thus far two passages have been suggested as comprising the content of this mysterious vision: 2:4-5 and 2:6-20. Perhaps the most significant difference between these two theories is to be found in one's view of where Yahweh's answer (i.e. the vision) ends and Habakkuk's supposed commentary begins. The structure of the passage – especially how vv. 4, 5 and 6 relate to each other – is a complicated matter. Nevertheless, proponents of the first view would normally say that the prophet's commentary is to be found in vv. 6-20 (after the

²⁹² Baker, p. 58 (italics added)

²⁹³ Andersen, p. 88. It was noted earlier that Andersen goes so far as to equate the woe speeches with the "oracle" or "burden" mentioned in 1:1.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 221

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 221-2. Andersen (p. 222) admits: "This analysis of vv 2-6a does not solve all the problems. The word of exhortation lasts only through v 3. Verses 4-5 contain assertions that contrast the righteous with the wicked. Verse 5b reverts to a concrete narrative form in the past tense and is so similar in thought, and even in vocabulary, to what has been said in Habakkuk 1, as to suggest that the proud deceiver is the Chaldean nation."

vision), while proponents of the latter view – Andersen in particular – suggest that Habakkuk’s commentary comes in vv. 3-6a (before the vision). Other than this distinction, however, both passages communicate essentially the same hopeful message: that is, Yahweh answers the prophet with a vision which promises that the wicked will be punished. The second theory (Hab. 2:6-20) elaborates on this point at length, and the first theory (Hab. 2:4-5) adds the assurance that the righteous will live.

7. The rhetorical implications of Hab. 2

A sharp distinction between Yahweh’s response and Habakkuk’s explanation of that response is, perhaps, a less crucial issue if ch. 2 is understood rhetorically. The first chapter of Habakkuk was described earlier as a skillfully crafted composition, which weaves an emotional and personal complaint (Hab. 1:2-4, 12-17) around a context-defining oracle of judgment (Hab. 1:5-11). The purpose of this design, it was suggested, is to win a large audience by addressing present anxieties regarding the silence of Yahweh and the invasion of the Chaldeans. Once the prophet has his audience, he answers their concerns; the second chapter of Habakkuk is the prophet’s account of his meeting with Yahweh. By explaining the episode to the members of his congregation Habakkuk is not just relaying a personal experience (which authenticates his words); he is also presenting vital information (which encourages his audience).

This second chapter of Habakkuk comes in two main parts. After a brief introduction in which he declares his resolve to have an answer from Yahweh (v. 1), the prophet first records Yahweh’s commands regarding a vision and his promise that the distinction between good and evil will be maintained (vv. 2-4). Habakkuk then presents the five woe oracles (vv. 6-20), which elaborately illustrate one of the main points of Yahweh’s message. From the perspective of the audiences who are listening to Habakkuk or reading his account, it makes little difference whether the words contained in vv. 6-20 originally came from the prophet or from Yahweh himself. Either way, these verses are the clarification of the promise that Yahweh made regarding the downfall of the wicked (v. 4a).²⁹⁷

If ch. 1 is Habakkuk’s complaint, presented rhetorically, then ch. 2 is Yahweh’s answer, also presented rhetorically. The possible effect that the rhetorical design of ch. 2 had upon the hearers and/or readers can be described with the help of the two scenarios introduced in the discussion of Hab. 1, the first taking place at Speaker’s Corner in London and the second in a modern courtroom. First, the speaker who was complaining about a tax increase

²⁹⁷ This does not necessarily make it any clearer whether the content of the vision is 2:4 or 2:6-20. Habakkuk (or Yahweh) could be illustrating a vision (2:4) by recording the woe oracles (2:6-20), or he could be illustrating the message (2:4) by recording a vision (2:6-20). In other words, vv. 6-20 are either a *visionary illustration* of v. 4, or they are an illustration of the *vision in v. 4*.

(cf. Hab. 1), as it turns out, already has the answer to his complaints. That is, he is on assignment by the government itself to assure the people that the tax increase is for their benefit. After stating his determination to have the government answer his concerns (cf. Hab. 2:1), he quotes the official answer prepared for him (cf. Hab. 2:2-4). Then at length he illustrates exactly what the ambiguous statement means (cf. Hab. 2:6-20). The speaker demonstrates that the government empathizes with the people (cf. Hab. 2), just as he himself does (cf. Hab. 1). In the analogy, then, Yahweh is represented by the government. He does, in fact, hear the complaints of Habakkuk and his people and he answers their immediate concerns.

Second, the rhetorical design of chs. 1-2 can be compared to a courtroom drama. After resting his case (cf. Hab. 1) the prosecutor awaits a verdict (cf. Hab. 2:1). The jury pronounces the defendant guilty, sentences him to death, and awards his victims compensation (cf. Hab. 2:2-4). Then, by way of clarification, the judge rehearses the crimes of the defendant and assures the entire courtroom audience that the sentence will certainly be fulfilled (cf. Hab. 2:6-20). In the discussion of Hab. 1 Yahweh was compared to the judge, the jury and the defendant. As the jury he pronounces the verdict and as the judge he explains the sentencing. However, the analogy can only be taken so far, for Yahweh is certainly not guilty. Indeed, Yahweh's answering the prophet indirectly declares him innocent of the charge of neglect. The Chaldean however – a co-defendant charged with a related crime, one could say – is guilty beyond a shadow of doubt.

The basic rhetorical design of Hab. 2 is quite simple to grasp, especially in terms of how it affects reading and listening congregations. However one crucial topic has been intentionally left out of the present discussion: the rhetorical role of v. 5 in this chapter. The most said thus far is that the plain understanding of the verse (at least in its second half) is negative; that is, the Chaldean is pictured as a greedy conqueror. This thesis maintains that a more thorough interpretation of v. 5 will probably follow from a proper understanding of the vision mentioned in vv. 2-3, but that vision cannot be rightly understood until its content has been identified. Two theories have been offered thus far (Hab. 2:4 and 2:6-20) and at least one still remains (Hab. 3:3-15). This thesis will return to the rhetorical implications of Hab. 2:5 once it has concluded the discussion regarding the vision's content.

EXEGESIS AND INTERPRETATION

Habakkuk 3

1. Hab. 3:1

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet; upon šigyōnôt.

A qualified title

If it were not for the transitional material in Hab. 2, one would hardly think that the same person is speaking in Hab. 1 and Hab. 3. The author of ch. 1 relentlessly complains to and argues with Yahweh; the author of ch. 3 humbly fears and praises him. In ch. 1 a defeated prophet laments: *How long, Yahweh, have I cried-out-for-help but you did not hear?* (v. 2a) *(Why) are you deaf when a wicked one swallows one more righteous than himself?* (v. 13b) In ch. 3 a triumphant prophet confesses: *Yahweh, I hear your report. I fear, Yahweh, your work.* (v. 2a) *I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.* (v. 18b) Wendland describes this remarkable change in attitude as a “worldview transformation (or confirmation, as the case may be)”.¹ Habakkuk’s prayer of petition in 3:2 and his confession of faith in 3:16-19 provide the evidence that this transformation has taken place. The exposition of these two sections of text will focus in particular on what exactly prompts the change in the prophet. Hab. 3, however, records more than a two-fold prophetic response. Verses 3-15, the passage which interrupts the words of the prophet, depict with unusually ancient language the saving intervention of Yahweh. The second portion of this discussion will focus on the debate over the time frame of these verses.

Yet before the bulk of ch. 3 can be addressed one must first take note of its leading verse. Most commentators say very little in regards to Hab. 3:1, except to designate it as the chapter’s title or superscription which is therefore indicative of liturgical material. That v. 1 is a title is hard to dispute, for it has all the appearances of such. That the entirety of the chapter was at some point used in a liturgical context is also hard to dispute. However, to assume either statement as the *starting point* for one’s interpretation of the chapter, especially as it relates to the book as a whole, could be misleading. Roberts notes:

The superscription, subscription, and musical rubrics do suggest that this chapter was at some point used in worship ... but just as the headings and rubrics in the Psalms are generally regarded as later additions to the text, so they should be regarded in the case of Habakkuk. They were presumably added when the text came to be used in communal

¹ Wendland, p. 611. He notes the dramatic alteration between (1) no answer (1:2) and answer (3:2, 16); (2) lost salvation (1:2) and assured salvation (3:13, 18); (3) injustice unpunished (1:3) and wickedness defeated (3:8-12); (4) conflict (1:3) and peace (3:16); and finally (5) no hope of justice (1:4) and coming restoration (3:2, 17-18).

worship (Rudolph, 240).²

A more careful approach to v. 1 could redefine and enhance the interpretation of Hab. 3, especially as it relates to Hab. 1-2. It could even correct any misinterpretations that result from limiting v. 1 to a mere title.

At least two interpretive pitfalls, both of which inappropriately (albeit sometimes indirectly) set ch. 3 apart from the rest of the book, tend to follow from such a narrow treatment of v. 1. First, the terms that begin the chapter govern the understanding of all that follows. Some commentators are inclined to focus their attention on the most obscure word in this first verse, *šigyōnôt*, and then to use that term as the foundation for a liturgical understanding of the whole chapter (if not the whole book). Andersen, for example, spends five pages of his commentary attempting to establish the meaning of the term used only here and in Ps. 7:1,³ hardly improving upon his initial proposal. He says at the start: “The preposition *‘al* suggests that Shigyonoth is the name of a melody (the first word of a lyric that names a melody?). In that case, it does not follow that the meaning of that word or the content of that song – which can hardly be recovered from one surviving word – provides any clue to the Prayer of Habakkuk.”⁴ The most reasonable assumption is, as Andersen and most others suspect, that *šigyōnôt* is some sort of musical or liturgical term. This, however, prompts scholars to note the subscription at the end of the chapter (v. 19b) – *For the one-acting-as-overseer with my⁵ music (of stringed instruments)* – and to conclude that the chapter was employed in a cultic setting. According to Wendland “[these] musical notations thus circumscribe the whole within a liturgical frame of reverent worship”.⁶ Though this conclusion is certainly reasonable (and probably accurate), it often distracts commentators and leads them to treat Hab. 3 as a unit in and of itself, structurally and practically distinct from the rest of the book. These liturgical notations should not be ignored, but conclusions and suppositions based on them should also not unduly influence one’s interpretation of ch. 3.⁷ How the last chapter of Habakkuk was or was not used later in the temple setting is not the primary concern of those interpreting the book as a whole.

² Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 148. Eaton (“Origin”, p. 159) counters Roberts’ statement regarding the supposed editorial additions and says: “Now it is sometimes assumed that such annotations derive only from late Jewish editors, but this is not necessarily so. For while the VSS in Habakkuk on the whole attest the firm textual tradition of these annotations, they seem to understand them even less than we do, so pointing us away from the usage of later Judaism to an earlier period.

³ *A Shiggaion of David, which he sung to the Lord concerning Cush, a Benjamite.*

⁴ Andersen, p. 269

⁵ One should note, however, that any first-person reference is absent in 3:1.

⁶ Wendland, p. 602

⁷ A related hermeneutical pitfall is that the “prayer” v. 1 mentions is often assumed to be everything recorded between vv. 1 and 19b. Bailey (p. 352 [italics added]), for example, says: “*The prayer recorded in 3:1-19* celebrates the satisfactory answers the Lord offers to Habakkuk’s complaints.” Similarly, though much more thoughtfully, Roberts (*Habakkuk*, pp. 149-50) considers the sections of ch. 3 – which he qualifies as invocation and statement of request, report of vision, and statement of confidence – as evidence that the chapter as a whole is an individual prayer of thanksgiving.

Eaton, however, suspects that Hab. 3 was *originally* used as a liturgical text. He argues his point on the basis of the chapter's rubrics, form and vocabulary.⁸ Each of these points correctly identifies the psalmic material in ch. 3, but none of them convincingly show that ch. 3 was originally part of the cultic service.⁹ Eaton summarizes the dubious notions of some interpretations of ch. 3: "The chapter has usually been regarded as resulting from a process of additions or adaptations, while a more severe approach has judged it to be a concoction of heterogeneous fragments."¹⁰ Even though his desire to correct misunderstandings such as these is an admirable one, Eaton may be allowing his own questionable presupposition – that Hab. 3 as a whole was at the start a liturgical text – to drive his discussion.¹¹

There is a second hazard one encounters when limiting the first line of ch. 3 to a mere title or superscription: Hab. 3:1 is often regarded as a *second* title, in comparison to the first title in Hab. 1:1. Subsequently ch. 3 is again set apart from chs. 1-2. Thus says Seybold: "*Eine neue Überschrift ... weckt den Eindruck, als handle es sich hier um einen selbständigen Text ohne direkte Verbindung mit Kap. 1 und 2.*"¹² Some of those who hold to this structural theory suspect that the chapter is "an obvious product of later redactional activity and hence little more than a liturgical addendum or a pious theological afterthought to chaps. 1-2".¹³ These sentiments were seemingly confirmed by the Qumran commentary which lacks the third chapter of Habakkuk. However, as Andersen observes: "The MS of 1QpHab we now have is not the original autograph, so we cannot be sure that this copy is complete. ... The next earliest evidence (MurXII and 8 HevXIIgr) indicates that Habakkuk 3 was part of the book."¹⁴ To that O.P. Robertson adds:

⁸ Eaton, "Origin", pp. 158-9

⁹ What Eaton ("Origin", p. 159) calls his "weightiest consideration" is "that the true unity of the chapter only appears when it is seen in the context of festival worship". This, however, implies that ch. 3 has no unity outside a liturgical context. The remainder of this discussion speaks to the contrary.

¹⁰ Eaton, "Origin", pp. 159-60

¹¹ Eaton himself demonstrates the interpretive debate over Hab. 3:1. In his commentary, which was published three years before the article quoted above, he (*Habakkuk* [1961], p. 108, italics added) says: "That the psalm is provided with so full a title of its own could point to its distinctness from the preceding chapters, suggesting that it was linked with them only because of the common association with Habakkuk. But since the psalm is such a perfect continuation and completion of the preceding chapters, it is preferable to see it as deliberately composed to be their crown. In this case the special heading may only indicate that a separate usage of the psalm arose in *later* times."

¹² Seybold, p. 75

¹³ Wendland, p. 620. Wendland himself, however, views the chapter as "the climax of the entire work". He (p. 620) says: "Without it, the vital message of the 'oracle' of Habakkuk would not really be complete, either formally, semantically or pragmatically in terms of its overall rhetorical effectiveness or communicative relevance."

¹⁴ Andersen, p. 259. By way of explanation he (p. 265) adds: "Two of the twenty-two columns of MurXII provide much of the text of Habakkuk. It is uncanny how precisely this scroll agrees with the MT in all but a few details. It even attests the antiquity of the traditional paragraphing For Habakkuk 3 (not attested in 1QpHab), MurXII differs from MT only in having two *plene* spellings ... and two different words." Furthermore Haak (pp. 7-8) says: "Among the *pesharim* from Qumran, no commentaries on complete books have been found. In at least some cases portions of books are omitted."

With respect to the absence of the psalm of Habakkuk from the Qumran scroll, it ought to be noted that this chapter is found in the LXX, a roughly contemporary document. It could be that the Qumran manuscript was never finished, particularly in the light of some significant evidence that the last three verses of the second chapter were completed by a second hand. At the same time, the omission may simply represent a process of selectivity that is manifested elsewhere in the Qumran scrolls.¹⁵

Even though most scholars finally and rightly acknowledge that ch. 3 is integral to the book of Habakkuk, practically speaking they still set it apart from the first two chapters, perhaps relying too heavily upon the presumed titles in Hab. 1:1 and 3:1 or on the liturgical understanding of Hab. 3 as a whole.

The two interpretive pitfalls discussed above prompt the following question: If v. 1 is not setting the material in ch. 3 apart from the first two chapters, then how is ch. 3 related to its prior context? The least that can be said thus far is that ch. 3, as a whole, is *thematically* related to chs. 1-2. Many commentators describe ch. 3 as a response to that which precedes it. Andersen, for example, says: "If Habakkuk 2 contains an oracle (or oracles) from Yahweh in response to the prayers in Habakkuk 1, the final prayer in Habakkuk 3 can be understood as the prophet's response to the vision in which the message of the 'woe oracles' was revealed to him."¹⁶ Wendland adds that "due to its prominent theological content [the prayer] forms a fitting liturgical response to the revelation of 'the LORD ... in his holy temple' (2:20). Furthermore, Habakkuk here provides a divinely-based, albeit indirect, answer to the questions that he raised at the very beginning of his verbal 'burden' (1:2-4)."¹⁷ The following discussion demonstrates that the links between chs. 1-2 and ch. 3 go beyond the thematic.

To summarize, this thesis does not dispute the liturgical intention of the superscription in Hab. 3:1 and its counterpart in 3:19b.¹⁸ Indeed, the probable cultic use of Hab. 3 is very telling of the importance that this chapter had for later worshipping communities. Nevertheless, a qualification of this title verse is necessary for a proper interpretation of the chapter as it relates to the book as a whole. That is, this thesis suspects that v. 1 is the title of ch. 3 only in terms of the chapter's later (presumed) liturgical use, not necessarily in terms of the interpretation of the book. Deissler says: "*Von Hause aus ist dieser »Psalm« aber kein Kultlied, sondern eine der Psalmodie entlehnte prophetische Verkündigungsform.*"¹⁹ When not regarded merely as the chapter's title and when distinguished from its musical instructions, v. 1 – if it has any non-liturgical function at all –

¹⁵ O.P. Robertson, p. 38. See also Brownlee, *Midrash*, p. 219 and Elliger, p. 55.

¹⁶ Andersen, p. 195

¹⁷ Wendland, p. 601

¹⁸ If Habakkuk is the author of 3:19b, then it seems that even he intended some portion of the chapter (or the book) to be used in a liturgical context. He refers to "my music (of stringed instruments)".

¹⁹ Deissler, p. 231

simply announces the prophet's responsive prayer²⁰ in the greater context of Yahweh's answer (Hab. 2) to the prophet's complaint (Hab. 1).

2. Hab. 3:2

**Yahweh, I hear your report. I fear, Yahweh, your work.
While years draw near let him live.
While years draw near you will make (him) understand.
In trembling, to-have-compassion you will remember.**

A prayer of petition

Some scholars note that the quiet reverence of Hab. 2:20 is an appropriate transition to the prophet's humble prayer in Hab. 3:2.²¹ As the climactic conclusion to the final woe oracle the following verse stands: *But Yahweh (is) in the temple of his holiness; hush before his face, all the earth.* Then Habakkuk, with presumed solemnity, prays: *Yahweh, I hear your report. I fear, Yahweh, your work.* As mentioned in the introduction to this discussion Hab. 3:2 provides the first piece of evidence that a change in attitude has taken place in the person of Habakkuk. His private prayer here is one of reverent fear rather than bold accusation (cf. Hab. 1).

The prophetic transformation is quite obvious, in spite of the difficulties in translating v. 2. Nearly every phrase has at least one word that is open to multiple interpretations. Barré capitalizes on the ambiguity and offers a translation of the last three lines of v. 2 which bears little resemblance to the traditional rendering. "In the battle of yore you declared it, / In the battle of yore you made it known, / In (your) ancient fury you proclaimed it."²² Barré assumes that Hab. 3:2-15 comprises a single unit or poem, with v. 2 functioning as the introduction to what follows.

The problem with most translations of v 2cde is that, so translated, the verse does not really function as part of an *introduction*, i.e., it has little or no connection with the body of the poem. ... in the interpretation I have proposed the introductory function of v 2cde is clear. Together with v 2ab it announces the leitmotif of the poem, the great battle which Yahweh fought in olden times and by which he established his awe-inspiring "reputation."²³

If Hab. 3 were a distinct piece of literary work, having no prior context, then Barré's estimation of v. 2 could prove to be quite reasonable. Unfortunately, Barré never mentions

²⁰ The ל-preposition (לחבבוק), which qualifies the relationship between Habakkuk and the prayer, is lexically open to multiple interpretations. Andersen (p. 268) observes: "The ascriptive /- could indicate authorship ('written by Habakkuk'), or purpose ('written for Habakkuk'), or subject matter ('written about Habakkuk'), or 'appropriated by Habakkuk.'" Most assume that at least the portions of ch. 3 which are spoken in the first-person (i.e. vv. 2, 16-19) are attributed directly to the prophet.

²¹ See e.g. Bailey, p. 349 and O.P. Robertson, p. 207.

²² Barré, p. 196. The particulars of his translation are addressed as part of the following discussion.

²³ Ibid., pp. 196-7

his view of how the verse relates to its prior context in chs. 1-2.²⁴ Yet even those who accept a more conservative rendering of v. 2 regard it as a prelude to the rest of ch. 3. Floyd says:

In this introductory verse the prophet also petitions Yahweh for two things (3:2aβ), and the two subunits that make up the rest of the poem proceed to illustrate Yahweh's acting in accord with these petitions. ... that Yahweh renew his activity and make himself known in the course of events (3:2aβ) ... that Yahweh remember to show mercy even in his anger (3:2b) ...²⁵

Given the thematic relationships between ch. 3 and chs. 1-2, already mentioned in the consideration of 3:1, one must consider the possibility that 3:2 is as closely connected to the two chapters that precede it as to the seventeen verses that follow it.

From a literary point of view v. 2 is made up of at least two parallel constructions. The framework of the first includes vocative, first-person verb, and direct object. *Yahweh, I hear your report. I fear, Yahweh, your work.* Some translations and commentators disregard the obvious parallel in the original Hebrew to explain the difficulty in the next part of the verse, namely the object of the verb קִיּוּ ("to live" or "to revive"). *LORD, I have heard the report about You and I fear. O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years* (NASB; see also KJV and NKJV).²⁶ Rather, "the poetic parallelism of the section as well as the pronoun attached to the verb in the second section of the verse ("make *him* live") suggest that *your work* should be taken in conjunction with the first half of the verse. The prophet has *heard* the *report* about the Lord, and has *feared* his *work*."²⁷

Once the structural matter of parallelism is settled, the more difficult contextual questions can be asked. To what is the prophet referring when he says "report" and "work"? Does the verse look backward or forward for the explanations of these terms?

The first half of this parallel literally reads: "I hear²⁸ your hearing". The verb and direct object are derived from the same stem, שָׁמַע. In the thirteen times the verb and noun are found together in the OT, the latter is generally taken to mean a report *about* someone or something (e.g. Gen. 29:13, about Jacob; Deut. 2:25, about Moses; Isa. 66:19, about Yahweh; and Nah. 3:19, about the Assyrian king). Most commentators assume the same for Hab. 3:2.

²⁴ This illustrates an interpretive consequence when one forces v. 1 into the role of chapter title or, more particularly in this case, when one regards the content of the "prayer" mentioned in v. 1 as the remainder of the chapter.

²⁵ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 15

²⁶ The NIV rightly acknowledges the parallel but also understands "your deeds" as the direct object of "to live/revive", substituting the Hebrew singular pronoun with a plural. *LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day.*

²⁷ O.P. Robertson, p. 216. In footnote 3 on the same page Robertson elaborates upon his explanation: "None of these versions [Authorized Version, NASB and NIV] actually translates the pronoun attached to the verb ('make *him* live'), although they do translate the pronoun attached to the noun (*your work*)." Andersen (p. 274) similarly describes the first two colons as a "complete synonymous parallelism".

²⁸ According to Eaton ("Origin", p. 147), whose understanding is adopted here: "It seems best to use the present tense throughout the chapter as being the least committed to the time-scale, and also nearest to the vivid 'actuality' suggested by the Hebrew verbs."

In other words, the noun simply refers to the report of Yahweh's mighty deeds, such as is found in Hab. 3:3-15. Floyd notes: "Judging from what the text itself says, the prophet's intuitions and hopes derive from what he has heard *about Yahweh*."²⁹ However, only in the instance of Hab. 3:2 does a *prophet* hear the שְׁמַע of Yahweh. The OT prophet is in the privileged position of literally hearing the voice of God, and so perhaps it is to the divine speech in Hab. 2:2-4 that Habakkuk refers when he says, *Yahweh, I hear (שְׁמַע) your שְׁמַע*. With hesitation O.P. Robertson notes the possibility: "The 'report' could refer to the words communicated from the Lord to Habakkuk. But the prevailing usage of the term refers to a report *about* someone ..."³⁰ That the prophet is referring to his hearing the voice of Yahweh is difficult to prove on the basis of this term alone, but it is worth considering as one progresses through the interpretation of the chapter.³¹ It is certainly more natural at this point to look forward (3:3-15) for the explanation of v. 2's שְׁמַע ("report"), but a backward (2:2-4) glance is also possible.

The next term to consider is "work" (פֶּעַל). What specifically is this work that the prophet fears? In defining the term Andersen assumes that it refers to the poem in the middle of ch. 3. "The 'work' or 'works' of God can describe almost anything he does – works of creation, judgment, and redemption. ... It can hardly be said than any one event qualifies as Yahweh's distinctive deed, and it is not certain that the *following poem* is restricted to any one moment."³² When referring to Yahweh's work the term פֶּעַל is found 14 times in the OT, over half of which are in the Psalms. In nearly every instance the term is either generic,

²⁹ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 153 (italics added)

³⁰ O.P. Robertson, p. 216, footnote 2

³¹ In the same regard it may be helpful to look at the verbs of this parallel: שָׁמַע and יָרָא. (But first, Eaton ["Origin", p. 147] notes: "Many critics adopt רָאִיתִי [from רָאָה] as a more obvious parallel to שָׁמַעְתִּי, and as an easier verb for the object פֶּעַלְךָ. However, ... 'hearing' and 'fearing' are precisely the themes resumed in v. 16. רָאִיתִי should therefore be regarded only as a marginal possibility.") According to Bailey (p. 356): "Deuteronomy shows that 'hearing and fearing' may be regarded as the natural reaction to an experience with God." This would nicely confirm what is tentatively suggested above, namely that Habakkuk hears the voice of Yahweh and subsequently fears. However in the examples that Bailey cites – Deut. 13:12; 17:13; 19:20; 21:21 – the Israelites are not necessarily having an experience with God, so much as they are witnessing the consequences of not obeying God. Deut. 21:21 is typical of the other three references. *If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son ... [then] all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall שָׁמַע and יָרָא*. (21:18a, 21) The book of Deuteronomy does not seem to prove Bailey's point, but it may demonstrate something else. In three of the five references when Yahweh is the object of these parallel verbs there is mention made of his voice (קוֹל). Adam says emphatically: *Your voice [קוֹל] I שָׁמַע in the garden and I יָרָא* (Gen. 3:10, translated literally). And Moses commands Israel: *You shall follow the LORD your God and יָרָא Him; and you shall keep His commandments, שָׁמַע His voice [קוֹל], serve Him, and cling to Him*. (Deut. 13:5 [4]) Finally, Samuel commands Israel: *If you יָרָא Yahweh and serve him and שָׁמַע his voice [קוֹל] ...* (1 Sam. 12:14) Even though שָׁמַע can be properly understood more figuratively as "obey", the mention of Yahweh's voice is still worth attention. (See קוֹל in Hab. 3:16.) Habakkuk has certainly heard the voice of Yahweh, according to his record of it in Hab. 2:2ff. It is, therefore, conceivable that in Hab. 3:2 he is referring to this encounter.

³² Andersen, pp. 276-7 (italics added)

referring to no work of Yahweh in particular (e.g. Deut. 32:4; Ps. 111:3), or it is referring to Yahweh's mighty works of old which benefited his people (e.g. Ps. 44:2, possession of the land; Ps. 64:10, defeat of enemies; Ps. 95:9, redemption from Egypt; Isa. 45:11, creation). From this one could quickly conclude that in Hab. 3:2 the prophet, as well, is referring to one or more of these mighty deeds of the past, especially since several of them are alluded to in Hab. 3:3-15.

Before one draws this conclusion one must examine another reference to פֶּעַל, which is ironically found in the book of Habakkuk itself. In the previous discussion of Hab. 1:5b, it was demonstrated at length that the structure of the original Hebrew sentence highlights the reference to פֶּעַל. Yahweh says: ... *for a פֶּעַל working (פֶּעַל) in your days you will not believe though it will be told* (Hab. 1:5b). The work or deed of Yahweh in this instance is likely the occasion for Habakkuk's complaint in 1:12-17, if not also his complaint in 1:2-4. If the two occurrences of פֶּעַל in the book of Habakkuk (Hab. 1:5 and 3:2) are meant to refer to the same divine deed, then that deed is probably Yahweh's causing the Chaldeans to rise in judgment. *For behold I am causing the Chaldeans to rise.* (Hab. 1:6a) O.P. Robertson thinks that "it is quite natural to see the reference to the *work (pō 'al)* of the Lord [in 3:2] as referring to the announcement given earlier to Habakkuk ... (Hab. 1:5). Now the prophet has come to understand just how awesome is that *work* which the Lord shall perform, and he fears."³³ Thus stands the interpretive query: Does פֶּעַל in Hab. 3:2 look forward to the theophanic description in 3:3-15 (the salvation of God's people) or backward to that same term used in 1:5 (the judgment of God's people)? Both options are possible, for both would stimulate fear in the prophet, whether a fear motivated by amazement or by dread. Thus, the examination of the first parallel of Hab. 3:2 has resulted in no definite conclusion regarding the relation of this verse to its preceding and succeeding contexts.

The second parallel construction in v. 2 – *While years draw near let him live. While years draw near you will make (him) understand* – contributes to this discussion, but it brings its own translation-related difficulties. When taken together, the two Hebrew words (בְּקֶרֶב שָׁנִים) that make up the first expression are found nowhere else in the OT. Scholars generally either accept the traditional understanding ("in the midst of years") or emend the MT so as to make the interpretation more sensible. O.P. Robertson represents the former when he says:

Most likely the *midst of (the) years* refers to the time between the two acts of judgment revealed to Habakkuk in the process of his earlier dialogue. In the time between the purging judgment that must fall on the house of God itself and the consuming judgment that must avenge God's elect – in that crucial period before the destruction of God's enemies – may the Lord be sure to preserve life.³⁴

³³ O.P. Robertson, pp. 216-7

³⁴ Ibid., p. 217

In other words, the expression reflects the present time of the prophet.³⁵ This interpretation makes good sense, but many academics who hold to it often ignore the textual difficulties.

Those who rework the MT usually begin their adaptations and emendations with the first word, בקרב. According to Barré, there are only three possible ways to render the term: (1) as the noun “midst”, (2) as the noun “battle”, or (3) as the infinitive construct “to draw near”.³⁶ The first is illustrated by O.P. Robertson (above) and Andersen; the second, by Barré; and the third, by Roberts and Margulis. As will be shown, one’s final rendering of בקרב prompts additional emendations of any number of subsequent terms, thus further complicating the translation and interpretation of Hab. 3:2.

First, בקרב can be rendered as the noun “midst”. Though Andersen accepts the Masoretic pointing and this traditional rendering, he recognizes that a temporal understanding of the expression as a whole represents a significant difficulty. “The noun *qereb* is never used as a preposition for time. ... ‘In (our) midst’ is more likely than the unexampled ‘in the midst of years,’ which has been made intelligible only by the most contrived exegesis.”³⁷ To that he adds:

Insuperable difficulties can be urged against this traditional reading. First, there is no proof that the stream of time was called “years” so that an intervention by God in the course of history takes place “in the midst of years.” The word “year” has two plural forms in Hebrew. The masculine form as used here, is nearly always used with numerals. The more abstract idea of a stretch of time is expressed by the *feminine* plural. Second, the idea of “the midst of the years” is a rather abstract one for a highly concrete and mythological composition such as this. If a decisive act of God is expected, matching the deeds of the *Urzeit*, we would expect the time reference to be eschatological, such as “the end of days.”³⁸

To account for the difficulties with the first word in the expression, Andersen proposes that the second word – שנים – be translated “once more” rather than the usual “years”. He achieves this rendering by starting with the root meaning of the Hebrew consonants (“two”) and from there inferring that the word means “a second time” or “once more”. Andersen’s final translation is thus: “In (our) midst, once more”. “Habakkuk hopes that God will do in his time deeds like those which made him famous of old.”³⁹

Barré represents a second translational option for בקרב (“battle”). His final rendering of בקרב שנים is “in the battle of yore”. As mentioned earlier, the premise behind Barré’s work is that v. 2 serves as the introduction to the verses that follow. He therefore concludes

³⁵ See e.g. Bailey, p. 356 and Baker, p. 69.

³⁶ Barré, p. 188

³⁷ Andersen, p. 275. Barré (p. 189) agrees that “the expression *bqrb* in Biblical Hebrew always has a spatial or ‘quasi-spatial’ connotation.” Barré (p. 189, footnote 24) illustrates with Biblical examples that the expression governs nouns that are used metaphorically or nouns that denote land, streets, buildings or people.

³⁸ Andersen, p. 278

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 280

that the expression should be translated so that it describes the content of vv. 3-15. He achieves his reading by first asserting that v. 2cde is a tricolon, such that “the three first words are parallel and synonymous (*qrb*, *qrb*, *rgz*), as are the three nouns in the second position (*šnym*, *šnym*, *rhm*) and the three verbs that conclude the respective cola”.⁴⁰ He defends the parallelism of the first column (and his rendering of *בקר*) by looking to other verses in Hab. 3. He claims that the repetition of the metathesized roots (*qrb* → *brq/rqb/bqr* in vv. 11, 16, 17 and *rgz* → *trgz/gzr* in vv. 16, 17) demonstrates that the poet shows a great interest in the first root (which is unlikely if the term is translated as a virtual preposition “in the midst”) and that the poet associates these two roots in more than one verse (vv. 2, 16 and 17).⁴¹ He concludes by suggesting that there is “a parallelism and indeed synonymity between *qrb* and *rgz*. This is not possible if the former term is understood as *qereb*, since no attested meaning of *rgz* corresponds to ‘midst.’”⁴² “The word in question, therefore, can only be the noun *qērāb*, ‘battle’... .”⁴³ “The poet’s use of the term ‘battle’ in the introductory verse is most appropriate, given the theme of the body of the poem – Yahweh’s battle(s) against ancient foe(s).”⁴⁴

Barré must also justify his rendition of *שנים*. He admits that the syntax of “in the midst of years” or “when the years draw near” is less strained than “in the battle of years”, and so he comes to a different understanding of *שנים*. “In certain expressions or under certain circumstances, Hebrew words denoting periods of time can refer to one end of the time continuum. ... ‘The battle of years (ago)’ would refer to a battle that took place in the distant past, most likely to the ancient battle with chaos described in Stanza III [3:8-15].”⁴⁵ Barré’s final translation – “in the battle of yore” – is, therefore, an accurate description of the verses that follow.

Roberts represents a third option for understanding *בקר*. Even though he maintains the traditional translation of *שנים*, Roberts – like Andersen and Barré – recognizes the difficulty with this expression. His solution to the problem is to revocalize the consonants, so

⁴⁰ Barré, p. 188

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 188-9

⁴² Ibid., p. 189

⁴³ Ibid., p. 190. He notes that this reading is accepted by Torrey, Irwin and O’Connor. However, he further notes (p. 191, footnote 39) that Torrey emends *שנים* to “peace” and Irwin emends it to “dragon”, neither of which correspond to his own rendition.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 190. After his lengthy discussion defining *qrb* as “battle”, Barré (pp. 190-1) admits that *rgz* (v. 2e) is not an obvious parallel to it. Thus, he further defends the first column of his tricolon by looking to the one passage, Isa. 28:21, in which *rgz* is found in parallel with a word (*qwm*) which “most likely bears its military connotation”. With that, and a few references to Akkadian expressions, Barré concludes that *rgz* should be translated “fury” and that it is “essentially synonymous” to *qrb*.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 192. This still leaves the problem of the parallel between “years (ago)” and *rhm* (traditionally translated as “mercy”). Barré (p. 192) postulates that the latter term was originally *yrhm* (i.e. *yērāhīm*) or “months”.

that the verbal form of the root (an infinitive construct) is read with its subject – “when the years draw near”.

If the MT vocalization were correct, the expression “in the midst of the years” might be taken by analogy with the expression *hah^asî yāmāw/y*, “in the middle of his/my days,” as a request to shorten the appointed time for Yahweh’s intervention (Mowinckel, *TZ* 9 [1953]: 10). ... It is better, however, to revocalize as the infinitive *biqrōb* with the LXX.⁴⁶

The verb קרב is used several times in the OT to denote the approach of a distinct event in time. Most often the time reference used is ימים (“days”). For example: *When the ימים for Israel to die קרב ...* (Gen. 47:29; see also Gen. 27:41; Deut. 31:14; 1 Kgs. 2:1; Lam. 4:18). However, the use of שנים / שנות (“years”) with קרב is not totally without parallel in the OT. In Moses’ instruction to the people he mentions that, *the seventh שנה, the שנה of remission, קרב* (Deut. 15:9). Ezek. 22:4 contains both temporal terms in parallel. The prophet Ezekiel accuses the “bloody city”: *You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and defiled by your idols which you have made. Thus you קרב your ימים and have come to your שנות; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mocking to all the lands* (Ezek. 22:4). “When the years draw near” or “while the years draw near”, then, is grammatically and lexically an acceptable option for the expression in Hab. 3:2.

Margulis, like Roberts, assumes the verbal notion of בקרב (albeit a different verb) and, like Andersen, acknowledges a numeric understanding of שנים. However, his final translation of this portion of 3:2 differs radically from any of those mentioned previously. Basing his reconstruction on the principle that “metric imbalance is one criterion among many – though often the tip-off – that produce a diagnosis of textual corruption or disturbance”,⁴⁷ Margulis reconstructs and, in fact, combines two lines of v. 2 (i.e. v. 2cd) to render “when a twin-life looms You appear”.⁴⁸ He says: “The textual deterioration in MT ... is traceable to two factors: (i) a mistaken resolution of abbreviated words:

שנים חייהו > שני חיי > שני חיי

[and] (ii) conflation of two, already disturbed, readings the second of which (שנים תודיע...) has lost the \sqrt{hyy} element.”⁴⁹ His translation of the last line of v. 2 conveniently parallels the prior: “When a womb throbs You remember.”⁵⁰ Margulis describes the scenario as “a multiple birth, endangering the life of mother and child(ren)”.⁵¹ “V. 2 recalls Divine mercy

⁴⁶ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 131. Roberts also notes that the LXX actually has a double reading for בקרב in 3:2, the first translated “in the midst of” and the second translated “when the years draw near”.

⁴⁷ Margulis, p. 412

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 413. That is: When (ב) a twin- (שנים) life (חייהו) looms (קרב) You appear (תודיע), literally ‘become known’).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Margulis (pp. 413-4) re-points רחם to render “womb”.

⁵¹ Margulis, p. 413, footnote 15

and intervention in a specific situation of personal distress (what Gunkel calls *Klagepsalm des Einzelnen*).⁵²

Five possible translations of **בְּקֶרֶב שָׁנִים** have been presented: (1) “in the midst of (the) years”, O.P. Robertson; (2) “in (our) midst, once more”, Andersen; (3) “in the battle of yore”, Barré; (4) “when the years draw near”, Roberts; and (5) “when a twin-life looms”, Margulis. One of these options comes the closest to offering an acceptable explanation of this difficult text. O.P. Robertson does not address the temporal difficulties with **קֶרֶב**. Andersen’s estimation of this expression is questionable when compared to the rest of his translation of the sentence. The many problems with Barré’s rendering are outlined in the footnotes. Finally, Margulis’ translation has very little to do with the context of the book. Roberts’ proposal, however, solves the temporal problem of the first Hebrew term (**בְּקֶרֶב**) and is yet able to maintain the MT and the most obvious understanding of the second Hebrew term (**שָׁנִים**). In addition, his interpretation of this expression better reflects the context of the book of Habakkuk.

The expression “when the years draw near” picks up on God’s promise to Habakkuk in 2:3. Yahweh had promised that the vision (*hāzôn*) would testify concerning a fixed point in the future and that the appointed time would not pass without the vision being fulfilled. When that time for the fulfillment of the vision draws near, Habakkuk asks Yahweh to once again display his mighty work as in the glorious days of old. This use of *qārab*, “to draw near,” is very similar to that in Ezek. 12:23, where it also refers to the approaching term for the fulfillment of a prophetic vision (*hāzôn*).⁵³

In other words, Habakkuk requests that his petitions, which follow in 3:2, be answered while he waits for the vision to be fulfilled. For Habakkuk, that is the present moment, his present time.⁵⁴

The next question one must ask when interpreting Hab. 3:2 is: what exactly does Habakkuk petition Yahweh to do? This question is no easier to answer than those prompted by the earlier exegesis of v. 2. Two verbs follow the twice-repeated qualifier *While years draw near*: **תִּזְכַּר** and **תִּיָּהוּ**. The first verb in particular raises several textual issues. What

⁵² Ibid., p. 438. Margulis concludes that Hab. 3 is a psalm of lament. He (p. 437) says that “the vocative (2nd pers.) address to the Deity; the term and motif \sqrt{zkr} ; and the recalling of former suffering followed by Divine succor are all well-known as basic to the liturgical Gattung designated *Klagepsalm*”.

⁵³ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 150. Yahweh speaks to the prophet in Ezek. 12:22-23: “*Son of man, what is this proverb you people have concerning the land of Israel, saying, ‘The יָמִים are long and every vision fails’? Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD God, ‘I will make this proverb cease so that they will no longer use it as a proverb in Israel.’*” But tell them, ‘*The יָמִים קֶרֶב as well as the fulfillment of every vision.*’”

⁵⁴ As seen earlier, this same interpretation is drawn by many of those who hold to the traditional rendering of **בְּקֶרֶב שָׁנִים** (“in the midst of years”). Both renderings then – the verbal and nominal understanding of **בְּקֶרֶב** – seem to come to the same, simple conclusion, namely that Habakkuk petitions Yahweh to act now. Nevertheless, the nuance of the verbal understanding better reflects a context in which Habakkuk is told to wait (2:3).

is the mood of the verb? What is the root of the verb? What if the Hebrew consonants do not represent a verb at all? To what does the pronominal suffix refer? According to the traditional understanding of the MT, חַיִּיהוּ is an imperative form of חַיָּה and is normally translated as something akin to “revive it”. It should be no surprise that many scholars disagree with all or part of this assessment. The following discussion will attempt to answer, as clearly as possible, each of the above questions.

The traditional way of understanding חַיִּיהוּ as a petition seems appropriate, given the designation of “prayer” in v. 1. Habakkuk petitions Yahweh to “revive it”. Though he ultimately disagrees with the sentiment, Barré summarizes the logic of this view: “No other verse in the poem contains a petition, so the parsing of the verbs in v 2cde is crucial for interpreting Habakkuk 3 as a prayer. If *hyhw* is an imperative, the other verbs in the verse – *yql* forms – could be understood as jussives, completing the sense of *hyhw*.”⁵⁵ Indeed, those who regard all or part of the book of Habakkuk according to the genre of lament believe this petitionary element is absolutely necessary. However, some exegetes suggest that this verb is not an imperative. According to Andersen, “a prayer at this point contrasts with the indicative mood of the context – two suffixed verbs in the preceding bicolon and two prefixed verbs in the following bicolon”.⁵⁶ Using a redactional argument, Hiebert comes to the same conclusion regarding the mood of the verb.

He notes that this ancient poem, originally a “hymn of victory,” has been recast as a prayer by later editors. This was accomplished by adding the superscription [in v. 1] ... and by reading the verb in question as an imperative [Hiebert, *Habakkuk 3*, p. 81]. ... But Hiebert argues that because the poem is a hymn of victory, the *qtl-yql* sequence should be translated as preterites, as in the body [p. 14]. Thus he reads *hyhw* as *hyt*, the 2d masc. sg. pf. piel of *hyh*.⁵⁷

Scholars on both sides of the argument – חַיִּיהוּ as imperative or indicative – make good cases. Perhaps the best determinant of which option is most reasonable is the answer to the related question. What is the root of the verb?

Barré builds the defense of his opinion on the work of Hiebert just mentioned, however, the two differ at the point of verbal root. Hiebert holds to the MT (חַיָּה) and translates it as a perfect verb (“you sustained life”), while Barré emends the text to read the relatively rare (five times in Job and once in the Psalms) חַוָּה , which means, in its first attestation, “to declare, announce”. “Reading the verb in v 2c as *hwytw*, the colon is not a prayer but a statement that Yahweh ‘declared’ (or revealed) his ‘work’ and ‘reputation’ preeminently in a battle that took place in the dim past.”⁵⁸ This understanding perfectly suits

⁵⁵ Barré, p. 194. Of course there is more to the definition of “prayer” than a petitionary element.

⁵⁶ Andersen, p. 280

⁵⁷ Barré, p. 194

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 195. See also Seybold, p. 76.

Barré's estimation of the tricolon in v. 2cde. He renders the final three verbs synonymously: "... you declared it ... you made it known, ... you proclaimed it." However, he bases his emendation of this first verb on two questionable sources. First, the LXX translates v. 2cd as "In the midst of two animals you will be known, / As the years draw near you will be recognized." Barré asks: "[What] Hebrew word stands behind ζῴων [animals]? The most likely answer is something like *hywt*, corrupted from an original *hwyt(w)-hiwwî(ô)*."⁵⁹ Barré attempts to back this up with a genizah MS "whose date and provenience are unknown".⁶⁰ Given the concerns raised earlier in regards to Barré's work, his proposed emendation of חייך does not carry much weight. Roberts refutes those who think like Barré on this matter.

Because the figure is so striking and not semantically parallel to the imperfect that seconds it in the following line, *tôdîa* ' "make it known," one may be tempted to correct *hayyêhû* to *hawwêhû*, "declare it." Such a temptation should be avoided, however. The imperative formulations of requests in laments often use striking imagery Moreover, Habakkuk's request is not that God should talk about his work, but that he should once again perform it so that it will become transparent to the eyes of the world⁶¹

Further complicating the translational options Andersen suspects that חייך is not a verb at all. "This word in Habakkuk could point to *hy-yhw*, '(by the) life of Yahweh,' which is attested in the Lachish Letters."⁶² The logic of Andersen's suggestion is only apparent in the light of how he understands all of v. 2. He translates the last three phrases, which he names v. 2aAγ, 2aB and 2b: "In (our) midst, once more, by the life of Yahweh, / in (our) midst, once more, thou didst reveal, / In (my) distress thou didst proclaim (thy name) – Compassionate."⁶³ He defends his rendition with a poetic argument:

By means of climactic parallelism, a fairly long clause can be realized. The total statement is built up stage by stage, with suspense in the early colons, and resolution in the last colon. In 2aAγ-2b the statement, as prose, would be: (A) In the midst (B) once more (C) by the life of Yahweh (D) when I was distressed (E) you declared your name (F) "Compassionate." ... These six items are distributed over the three colons as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | B | C |
| A | B | E |
| D | F | E |

The climax is reached in the name "Compassionate" (F), which has no parallel.⁶⁴

Andersen himself admits that "[this] translation is speculative",⁶⁵ and his explanation of the poetry is creative but far from convincing. Thus far there seems to be no compelling

⁵⁹ Barré, p. 194

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 194-5

⁶¹ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 150. See also Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, pp. 147-8.

⁶² Andersen, p. 281. If this is true, the MT is only missing a space and a final ך.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 273

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 274

⁶⁵ Ibid.

argument for regarding חַיֵּיהוּ as anything other than the imperative form of the verb חַיָּה which means “to live, revive”.

If such a rendering is presumed preliminarily, then what or whom does Habakkuk ask Yahweh to revive? Most commentators who hold to this traditional rendering of חַיֵּיהוּ name one of two possibilities. Either the pronominal suffix -הוּ refers to a noun in the nearby context or to one from somewhere else in the text. The former option is the most logical, and thus many scholars have reasonably proposed that the reference is to “your work” (פְּעֻלָּךְ) in the previous clause. The KJV, for example, says: *O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years.*⁶⁶ Defending this rendering, Mason says:

It is natural that, as in many psalms of the Psalter, Yahweh’s former glorious deeds are recalled with the prayer, implicit or explicit, that they be renewed (e.g. Pss. 75.1 [2]; 85.1-4 [2-5], and, on a personal level, 22.3-5 [4-6]). ... the whole purpose of recalling these deeds of Yahweh in the liturgy of the temple is to renew the experience of them in the present and to draw hope from them for the future ...⁶⁷

In the context of ch. 3 – especially vv. 3-15 – it is reasonable to presume that with the expression חַיֵּיהוּ the prophet is asking Yahweh to repeat his wonderful “works” of old. However, the lexical evidence does not confirm this forward-looking presumption. The principle behind what Mason says above is mostly true, but he may be misapplying it to Hab. 3:2. Even the psalms he cites include only *implicit* petitions that Yahweh renew or “revive” his works. Of the psalms which mention specifically the פְּעֻלָּה of Yahweh (i.e. Pss. 44:2; 64:10; 77:13; 90:16; 92:5; 95:9; 111:3; 143:5) only Ps. 143 contains a reference to the verb חַיָּה , but here the psalmist petitions Yahweh to preserve his own life (תְּחַיֵּנִי , Ps. 143:11), not Yahweh’s works.⁶⁸ In addition to this evidence, nearly every time the verb חַיָּה is used in the OT it refers to the life of a human being, as in Ps. 143:11 just mentioned. Even a good number of the exceptions imply a human reference: for example, a man’s spirit or heart or soul (e.g. Ps. 22:27; Isa. 55:3) or his family or seed (e.g. Gen. 19:32). Most of the remaining exceptions refer to animals (e.g. Gen. 6:19; 2 Sam. 12:3; Isa. 7:21). If Hab. 3:2 is a petition that Yahweh revive his work, it appears that it is a unique association in the OT between this verb and this noun.

O.P. Robertson notes that “it seems highly unnatural to imagine Habakkuk praying that this awesome ‘work’ of judgment shall ‘live.’”⁶⁹ If the direct object of חַיֵּיהוּ does not refer to Yahweh’s “work”, then to what does it refer? A few commentators propose that the

⁶⁶ This is a reasonable understanding so long as the parallelism in the first two lines of v. 2 is also maintained (contra KJV). See the previous discussion.

⁶⁷ Mason, p. 93. Bailey (p. 356) says similarly: “Based on the work of God in the past, the prophet called on God to ‘renew’ his deeds in the present.”

⁶⁸ Perhaps the closest parallel expression is found in Ps. 90:16, where the psalmist says: *Let your פְּעֻלָּה appear to your servants.* The verb here, however, is רָאָה .

⁶⁹ O.P. Robertson, p. 215, footnote 1

antecedent is to be found in Hab. 2:4b – “a righteous one”. They base their view on the fact that the verb *חיה* is repeated in both 2:4 and 3:2. The former reads: ... *a righteous one, in his faithfulness, he חיה*. Hence, the translation of *חייהו* would not be “revive it” or “let it live” but the more personal “revive *him*”, “let *him* live”. “Habakkuk’s prayer that the Lord would *make him live* may represent a deliberate reflection on [what] ... he had received earlier. The proud will not stand; but the just – he shall *live!* (Hab. 2:4) In other words, Habakkuk provides a prime example of one who is pleading the promises.”⁷⁰ Even Andersen, who would rather dismiss the verb altogether, says that “[as] an act of God, the verb ‘revive’ describes the resuscitation of a dead (or dying) person. This theme is absent from Habakkuk, except perhaps at Hab 2:4.”⁷¹ This matter will be revisited later, but suffice it to say for now that the latter option (i.e. a personal direct object with a backward-looking antecedent) seems slightly more probable than the former (i.e. an impersonal direct object with a forward-looking antecedent).

The interpretation of the next parallel verb *תודיע* – normally translated as a second-person *hip il* form of *ידע*, “to know” – generally follows from the understanding of *חייהו*. Andersen illustrates this principle and sets the traditional view against his own personal theory. “If the imperative *hayyêhû* is retained, the two following verbs could be jussive. In poetry of this kind, however, it is possible – indeed more probable, we think – that they are past tense, matching the suffixed verbs in the first bicolon.”⁷² Andersen rejects the notion that *חייהו* is a verbal expression and thus that it is the parallel of the verb *תודיע*. Consequently, he suspects that the implied object of the verb *תודיע* is discovered in the last line of the verse. He translates the last two lines: “... in (our) midst, once more, thou didst reveal [*תודיע*], / In (my) distress thou didst proclaim (thy name) – Compassionate.”⁷³

Andersen’s translation of 3:2 is difficult to sustain in its entirety. It seems more likely that *חייהו* is a verb and that its explicit direct object is the implicit direct object of the following verb *תודיע*.⁷⁴ According to Roberts: “The suffix on *hayyêhû* need not be repeated with the following verb that stands in parallel to it.”⁷⁵ As discussed previously, most take this

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 217

⁷¹ Andersen, p. 281. R.L. Smith (p. 114), though he suspects that the reference is to “work”, suggests that there could be a personal reference to the king.

⁷² Andersen, p. 281

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 273-4. This is Andersen’s *initial* attempt at a literal translation. Andersen (p. 283) sums up this portion of his discussion: “A possible reconstruction, using evidence from all the text traditions, [is:] O Yahweh, I heard your fame. / I revered, O Yahweh, your feat. / In (our) midst repeat it, O Life-giver / O Yahweh, in (our) midst repeat it. / You made yourself known [*ידע*] when we were upset. / You remembered us, O Compassionate one.”

⁷⁴ R.L. Smith (p. 114) notes an additional possibility: “one could read a nif. *תודע* with the LXX, ‘make yourself known.’”

⁷⁵ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 132

object as Yahweh's "work", but some take it as "a righteous one". As an example of the latter O.P. Robertson says:

Standing in parallel construction with *make him live*, this verb [תוֹרִיעַ] has the same object, although it must be implied by the context. By this petition, the prophet asks that the Lord will make known to the believing the program and plan that he has designed. Even as Habakkuk had agonized in coming to an understanding of the mysterious ways of God and finally had rested his case in the light of the revelation provided him, so he intercedes on the behalf of others that the Lord will make plain to them the understanding necessary for survival in the midst of calamity.⁷⁶

Taking these lines of v. 2 in parallel, then, either Habakkuk appeals to Yahweh to revive and make known his works of old described in 3:3-15, or he appeals for the life and understanding of the righteous one mentioned previously in 2:4. Except for the strength of the argument for a personal direct object, both options make good sense hermeneutically.

There remains one final sentence in Hab. 3:2. *In trembling, to-have-compassion you will remember*. Scholars usually propose translations of this line that somehow reflect or confirm their understandings of the previous lines. There is no need to rehearse the various proposals now, as several have been mentioned in the foregoing discussion. However, the translation of רָגַז, seen above as "trembling", does deserve immediate attention. In the context of v. 2 there are basically two ways that scholars understand this Hebrew noun (only seven times in the OT): it either refers to Habakkuk's רָגַז or to Yahweh's רָגַז. Roberts observes that the term could be regarded as "in (our) turmoil" or "in (your) wrath".⁷⁷ Andersen notes that "rgz means 'trembling' when applied to humans, but 'anger' when applied to God".⁷⁸ Most translations (e.g. ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NKJV and NRSV) and a few commentators (e.g. Baker and Bailey) assume the latter option and hence contrast the wrath of God with its theological counterpart that follows in v. 2, the mercy (רַחֵם) of God: "in wrath remember mercy." For those who hold to this view there still remains some ambiguity. "The clause can mean that the prophet wanted God (1) to show mercy even in the midst of his anger with Israel, or (2) to show mercy to Israel even when God was angry with Israel's enemies."⁷⁹

However, Margulis is suspicious of this traditional translation "if for no other reason than its being impossible Hebrew. No classical Hebrew author ... would have expressed the

⁷⁶ O.P. Robertson, p. 218. In this regard it is perhaps important to note that Jeremiah (e.g. Jer. 27:12; 38:2) teaches that those who allow themselves to be taken to Babylon as captives will live (חִיָּה).

⁷⁷ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 151. He suggests that the prophet intentionally omitted the suffix to create a double entendre.

⁷⁸ Andersen, p. 282

⁷⁹ Clark and Hatton, p. 116, as referred to by Bailey, p. 356

thought ‘in wrath remember mercy’ in this manner. Cp. Ps 25 6 Lam 2 1.”⁸⁰ According to other scholars רגז does not essentially mean “wrath”. O.P. Robertson, for example, says: “Instead, the word indicates a condition of agitation, excitement, or disturbance. ... [For Habakkuk it is] a time when foundations shall be shaken. God’s own people shall go into exile. Trembling shall characterize even the most stable of human institutions.”⁸¹ By implication רגז refers to the literal or figurative “trembling” of the prophet and his people, not to the wrath of God.

Lexically speaking רגז, whether understood as anger or trembling, is rarely used to describe God. Outside of the possibility in Hab. 3:2, in the six remaining references רגז is used only once to refer to Yahweh. Elihu describes for Job the incomprehensibility of God using the illustration of a thunderstorm: *Listen closely to the רגז of His voice, and the rumbling that goes out from His mouth.* (Job 37:2) Even the more frequent verbal form of the root (forty-one times) is rarely used to express Yahweh as one who displays anger or trembling (see e.g. Job 12:6; Isa. 28:21; Ezek. 16:43). It is more common that creation (e.g. Ps. 77:19), man (e.g. Jer. 50:34), and nations (e.g. Exod. 15:14) display רגז. Yahweh may be the cause of such emotion or action, but he does not necessarily feel or move in this manner himself. Thus, not only has the traditional translation of רגז (“wrath”) been seriously called into question, but doubts have been raised as to the attribution of this term to Yahweh.

Perhaps the most instructive pieces of evidence are the three other occurrences of the verbal form in Hab. 3 itself. These references clearly do not represent the anger or the trembling of Yahweh. Hab. 3:7 says: *Under trouble, I saw the tents of Cushan; the curtains of the land of Midian רגז.* In v. 16a the prophet describes his physical condition: *I hear and my belly רגז, at (the) voice my lips quiver, decay goes into my bones and under myself I רגז.* Andersen notes the repetition of the term רגז and therefore suggests that in v. 2 it refers to “the prophet’s agitation, or to the disturbances in the world into which God proclaims his name ...”.⁸²

The parallelism to “see” and “quake with fear” in v 7 and *rgz* again in v 16 suggests ... that *rōgez* is not God’s wrath, not “the disruption caused by the theophany” in the world (Hiebert 1986:14), but the prophet’s trembling. This is confirmed by the sequence “I heard and I trembled” in v 16 (cf. Exod 15:14; Deut 2:25). That is, v 16 constitutes an inclusio with v 2 ...⁸³

⁸⁰ Margulis, p. 412. As noted earlier, Margulis understands רגז as a verb, repoints רחם to read “womb”, and then translates the expression “when a womb throbs”.

⁸¹ O.P. Robertson, p. 218. Andersen notes (p. 282): “In the Hebrew Bible, \sqrt{rgz} is rarely used to refer to the wrath of God (Baloian 1994).” More common nouns for Yahweh’s wrath are חמה (e.g. Deut. 9:19; Ps. 79:6; Lam. 4:11) and עברה (e.g. Isa. 13:13; Ezek. 7:19).

⁸² Andersen, p. 275

⁸³ Ibid., p. 282. Andersen’s (p. 283) translation of v. 7 reads: “Under iniquity I saw [it]. The tents of Kushan were agitated, the curtains of the land of Midian.”

Given the lexical and textual evidence it seems more reasonable to render רגז in Hab. 3:2 according to a fearful prophetic trembling rather than a vengeful divine wrath. Thus, Habakkuk acknowledges twice in v. 2 his fearful reaction to the experience that prompts his prayer (ירא and ברגז), and subsequently he petitions Yahweh to remember mercy.

The motivation behind this lengthy discussion of Hab. 3:2 is to determine what prompts the prophet's prayer in this verse. Is it Yahweh's mighty works of old as recited in Hab. 3:3-15 (forward-looking) or Yahweh's response to the prophet as recorded in Hab. 2:2-4, especially as it relates to the divine work of judgment announced in Hab. 1:5-11 (backward-looking)? So far, both interpretations are possible. The former seems the more natural, especially when, for one reason or another, ch. 3 is set apart from the rest of the book. In this case the literal translation of the first part of v. 2 would read something like: "Yahweh, I hear the report about you. I fear, Yahweh, your work [of old]. In the midst of years revive it. In the midst of years make [it] known." These works of Yahweh aptly follow in vv. 3-15. However, given what has already been said about inappropriately severing Hab. 3 from the first two chapters of the book, and given the textual links between 3:2 and previous portions of text (especially פעל in 1:5 and חיה in 2:4), the latter interpretation is worth serious consideration. An equally literal translation of v. 2 could read: "Yahweh, I hear your report [lit. 'your hearing'; maybe even 'your voice']. I fear, Yahweh, your work [of judgment]. While years draw near let him [i.e. a righteous one] live. While years draw near you will make [him] understand." Though he is speaking more broadly of ch. 3, Margulis' words apply well to v. 2. "The numerous treatments of the [textual] problems ..., in whole or in part, attest scholarly interest while the serious divergences of opinion and conclusion indicate the need and desirability of a new approach."⁸⁴ Perhaps that new approach is to consider more seriously the two chapters which precede 3:2 as the immediate occasion for the prophet's private prayer.

3. Hab. 3:3-15

³God from Teman came,

and (the) Holy One from the mountain of Paran – selah;
his splendor covered heavens, and his praise filled the earth.

⁴And brightness was as the light, horns from his hand (were) for him;
there (was) a hiding-place of might.

⁵Before him pestilence went; and a fire-bolt went out at his feet.

⁶He stood and he measured earth, he saw and he caused nations to start up,
and mountains of past-time were shattered, hills of eternity were bowed down;
goings of eternity (were) for him.

⁷Under trouble, I saw the tents of Cushan;
the curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.

⁸Against rivers did Yahweh burn-in-anger

⁸⁴ Margulis, p. 411

**or against the rivers (was) your anger, or against the sea (was) your fury;
for you rode upon your horses, your chariots of salvation?**

**⁹(In) nakedness your bow was exposed, oaths (were) rods of speech – selah;
(with) rivers you cleaved earth.**

**¹⁰They saw you mountains writhed, rain-storm water passed over;
deep gave its voice, on-high its hands it lifted.**

**¹¹Sun (and) moon stood (in) a lofty-abode;
for light your arrows went, for brightness the lightning of your spear.**

¹²In indignation you marched (the) earth; in anger you threshed nations.

**¹³You went out for the deliverance of your people,
for deliverance of your anointed;**

**you smote through a head from a wicked house,
to bare (from) foundation until neck – selah.**

**¹⁴You pierced with his rods the head of his warriors, they stormed to scatter me;
their exultation, (was) as to eat (the) poor in the hiding-place.**

¹⁵You trod on the sea (with) your horses; a heap of many waters.

A poem of divine intervention

Hab. 3:3 obviously begins a new section of text. Habakkuk's prayer to Yahweh ends in v. 2 and is followed by an account of the coming of God that continues through v. 15. Though few dispute its basic content, scholars' literary classifications of this portion of text vary. Barré calls it a hymn of victory, which is either "a very ancient work (thus predating the prophet Habakkuk) or a very convincing job of archaizing".⁸⁵ Patterson calls it an epic, which he defines as "a long narrative poem that recounts heroic actions, usually connected with a nation's or people's golden age".⁸⁶ Achtemeier says: "The passage forms the most extensive and elaborate theophany to be found in the Old Testament."⁸⁷ Armerding views it as a history book, saying that "its few, compressed verses draw on the entire spectrum of salvation history, from Creation and Exodus to the final revelation of God's rule and judgment still awaiting fulfillment".⁸⁸

Most scholars agree in dividing this passage into two sections.

That there are two poems here can be seen both from their differing themes and the syntax of the respective material. Hab 3:3-7 describes God's leading of his heavenly and earthly hosts from the south in an awe-inspiring mighty theophany. ... Hab 3:8-15 comprises a victory song commemorating the conquest itself and points to the basis of that success in the exodus event, particularly in the victory at the Red Sea.⁸⁹

O.P. Robertson titles the two poems: "(1) The glory of the Lord in his coming (vv. 3-7); (2) Dialogue with the Lord at his coming (vv. 8-15)."⁹⁰ Wendland describes vv. 3-7 as "the

⁸⁵ Barré, p. 184, footnote 2

⁸⁶ Patterson, "Psalm", p. 178

⁸⁷ Achtemeier, p. 56

⁸⁸ Armerding, p. 520

⁸⁹ Patterson, "Psalm", p. 185. In regards to the three-fold סלה, Andersen (p. 293) notes that: "The positions of this musical annotation (vv 3, 9, 13) do not correspond to the divisions ... found in the poem. No explanation has been found for their placement at these points."

⁹⁰ O.P. Robertson, p. 220

transcendent majesty of Deity via the visible medium of nature” and vv. 8-15 as “a cosmic battle between storm and sea”.⁹¹

Time and space prevent this thesis from adequately addressing the many textual and interpretive difficulties in this passage. The next portion of the discussion, therefore, is devoted to only one of the more significant matters regarding Hab. 3:3-15: namely, its timing as past, present or future. Bailey summarizes the issue.

The main questions concern how Habakkuk used this picture of the Lord and whether Habakkuk saw a picture from the past or a vision for the future. ... For example, Roberts saw the prayer as a vision which Habakkuk saw. ... Patterson understood the prayer to be Habakkuk’s celebration of the Lord’s march from the south, an event which happened in the past.⁹²

Die hier gebrauchten modi der Verba lassen die eine wie die andere Auffassung zu: zum Perf. sowie Impf. consec. wechselnd mit Impf. von der Zukunft ...; zum Impf neben dem Perf. von der Vergangenheit. Eine völlig sichere Entscheidung ist kaum möglich, das hängt zum Theil damit zusammen, dass wir hier ein künstl. archaisirendes, mit Rücks. auf vorhegende Litteratur – erzeugnisse [*sic?*] verfasstes Lied vor uns haben, zum Theil aber auch damit, dass der ächte Schluss des Liedes wohl nicht erhalten ist.⁹³

Up until this point in the discussion a past tense interpretation of vv. 3-15 has mostly been assumed. In other words, Habakkuk incorporates an ancient poem portraying a divine theophany into the written record of his present experience. Is this assumption a legitimate one? The present tense interpretation, which is that Habakkuk records a divine theophany that he personally witnessed, is explained by Roberts.

It describes God’s march to Palestine from his ancient home in the southern mountains, a very popular motif in archaic Hebrew poetry (Deut. 33:2-5; Judg. 5:4-5; Ps. 68:8-9 [7-8]; cf. Ex. 15:14-16), but unlike his archaic models which portray this as a past event, Habakkuk portrays God’s march as though it were happening in the present, before his very eyes. ... This difference from the older models suggests that Habakkuk is reporting a visionary experience⁹⁴

The “difference” to which Roberts refers is that the passage in Habakkuk opens with imperfect Hebrew verbs – rather than perfects or infinitives – which set the action in the present tense. This has already been shown above by Nowack to be a questionable presupposition. Even Roberts himself admits that “imperfects often represent a simple narrative tense indistinguishable from the perfect in Hebrew poetry, particularly archaic poetry, when the two tenses are used interchangeably in parallel lines”.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Wendland, p. 603

⁹² Bailey, p. 363

⁹³ Nowack, pp. 266-7, as quoted by Andersen, p. 264

⁹⁴ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 151

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Roberts' summary of this section exposes other possible weaknesses in the present-tense theory. He says: "In short, Hab. 3:3-15 contains Yahweh's *last response* to Habakkuk, and that response is the *vision promised in 2:2-3*."⁹⁶ First of all, Roberts seems to be working under the assumption that the entire book of Habakkuk follows the dialogue format which began in ch. 1. Roberts explains: "Hab. 3:2 continues the pattern found earlier in the book of prophetic lament followed by divine response followed by a renewed lament. Despite God's instructions to Habakkuk in 2:2-20, the prophet is still not prepared to rest his case."⁹⁷ According to this pattern Hab. 3:3-15 follows as Yahweh's third response which comes in the form of his revealing himself to the prophet in a visionary experience. This is quite logical, except that it was suggested earlier that the dialogue hypothesis may not be the best explanation for the structure of Hab. 1. If this framework does not hold, then nothing demands that 3:3-15 be fit into some sort of a chronological exchange between the prophet and Yahweh.

Second, Roberts equates the "visionary experience" recorded in Hab. 3:3-15 with the vision (חִזְוֶן) mentioned in Hab. 2:2-3. According to Roberts' translation of 2:3 Yahweh says: "For the vision is a witness to the appointed-time; It is a testifier to the end, and it does not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it. For it will surely come; it will not delay."⁹⁸ Roberts subsequently understands Habakkuk's prayer in 3:2 as a petition for the fulfillment of the vision promised in 2:3. In the presumed, sequential course of events, this vision, according to his understanding, must be 3:3-15.⁹⁹ Yahweh himself, then, is the חִזְוֶן, the "witness", the one who "will surely come". There are at least two potential difficulties with Roberts' view of the text at this point. First, it is not at all clear that Yahweh himself is the antecedent (albeit indirectly) to the pronouns in 2:3 and therefore the embodiment, so to speak, of the vision. Nor is it clear that the vision is represented by 3:3-15. There are at least two other reasonable possibilities for its content (i.e. Hab. 2:4 and 2:6-20). Second, the petitionary element of 3:2 does not obviously regard the fulfillment of the vision. As suggested earlier, it is possible that either Habakkuk appeals to Yahweh to revive his works of old or he appeals for the life of the righteous one.

The evidence for Roberts' present tense interpretation of Hab. 3:3-15 – the grammar of the passage, the dialogical structure of the book, and identifying the vision as 3:3-15 – is not as convincing as it first might appear. However, Roberts is not the only scholar to hold this view. Eaton presents one of the most thorough arguments for a present tense understanding. He concludes: "While ... one may admit that reminiscences of God's ancient

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 149 (italics added)

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 148

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 105

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 150-1

work have (appropriately) affected the language and imagery, the interpretation of vv. 3-15 as primarily a narration of ancestral salvation must be rejected.”¹⁰⁰ Eaton follows the objections raised by Delitzsch (p. 137f.), each of which are outlined below and then refuted.

(1) “The first verb (v. 3 אָבָר) is determinative for those that follow, and being imperfect, favours the future or incipient present sense.”¹⁰¹ Eaton himself dismisses this argument, in accord with the previously quoted statements of Nowack and Roberts.

(2) “The length and position of the theophany-section imply an artistic and psychological function in the psalm as a whole exceeding that of a historical retrospect. It must rather be the «Kern und Stern des ganzen Liedes, das Ziel der Bitte (v. 2) und das Motiv der vv. 18-19 ausgesprochenen Freude und Zuversicht».”¹⁰² The artistry, at least, of vv. 3-15 is not disputed, but it is a matter of opinion that either the artistry or the psychology *exceeds* a historical perspective.

(3) “The extreme consternation of the psalmist in v. 16 results from the theophany and is inexplicable on the historical interpretation.”¹⁰³ Though this is a reasonable argument, it will be demonstrated that the physical state of the prophet as recorded in v. 16 could also be the result of his hearing the voice of Yahweh in 2:2-4.

(4) “Three expressions are unnatural on the historical view: v. 6 הַלִּיכּוֹת עוֹלָם לוֹ implies the *renewal* of ancient work, v. 7 רֵאִיתִי according to prophetic usage refers to a present vision with future implications, v. 14 לְהַפְּיִצְנִי expresses the speaker’s identity with the contemporary people.”¹⁰⁴ Arguments based on difficult sections of text must be treated with caution. The first expression (v. 6) is translated in a variety of ways. Eaton understands “His primeval march he takes!” Patterson, on the other hand, renders the Hebrew as “his eternal courses”, which suits the historical view quite well. Patterson says: “The meaning would be that the ancient hills and mountains, now convulsing before the approaching theophany, had formed the time-honored paths of God (cf. Amos 4:13).”¹⁰⁵ As for the final two expressions (vv. 7, 14), Bailey counters Eaton and comments that when the prophet speaks in the first-person he is “emphasizing that whether in the past or in the present the passage is a vision of some kind which reassured Habakkuk of God’s faithfulness”.¹⁰⁶ In addition Roberts cautions: “The extensive corruption in [v. 14] makes any discussion of it somewhat problematic.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ Eaton, “Origin”, p. 165

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 164

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 165

¹⁰⁵ Patterson, “Psalm”, p. 170

¹⁰⁶ Bailey, p. 364

¹⁰⁷ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 157

(5) “The historical references found in the related text Ps 77 are significantly absent here.”¹⁰⁸ Ward, however, notes that this psalm, which contains several parallels to the second half of Habakkuk’s theophany, “has a different purpose, that of recalling the escape of Israel from Egypt ... but [Habakkuk] simply presents a theophany of judgment under the figure of a storm”.¹⁰⁹ Andersen adds: “throughout Ps 77:17-20 there are parallels to Habakkuk 3, but at every point the wording is slightly different”¹¹⁰ An absence of historical reference is thus no surprise. Andersen describes the relation between the two texts as a “consistent divergence” and concludes: “Psalm 77 and Habakkuk 3 are personal prayers expressing the same anxieties. But Habakkuk 3 is more archaic (or more successfully archaizing)”¹¹¹

Eaton’s arguments seem to be motivated by his conclusion that “Hab. 3 was *from the first* a liturgical text, and ... that it was intended for the celebration of the Autumnal Festival”.¹¹² He appeals to Weiser and concludes that “the hymnic representations of the theophany in the Psalter are reflexes of an event which has just occurred in the course of the festival worship”.¹¹³ Eaton does not entirely neglect the prior context of Hab. 3, but his explanation of this chapter’s relationship to chs. 1-2 does not expand much on his summary of it as “the development and resolution of Habakkuk’s struggle with God”.¹¹⁴ In conclusion, Eaton’s consistent appeal to an inexplicable “historical retrospect”, as he calls it, is far from convincing. Arguing against this present tense interpretation, Floyd makes a simple observation. “The theory that the hymnic description in this unit is based on a prophetic vision is untenable for several reasons. ... The main problem with this view is that it goes against what the text explicitly says in this regard. The prophet’s discomfort is specifically attributed to what he has *heard*, not what he has seen.”¹¹⁵

How, then, does one prove that this passage represents the prophet’s effort to incorporate an older poem into the record of his personal experience? Andersen and Patterson do so by demonstrating the archaic nature of the poem itself. Andersen refers to the work of Cassuto (1975) and Albright (1950) and some of the oldest poems of theophany (e.g. Deut. 33 and Judg. 5) when he says:

[All] these supply some of the arguments that a traditional poem has been taken over with very little change: “The original text, linguistic

¹⁰⁸ Eaton, “Origin”, p. 165

¹⁰⁹ Ward, p. 23

¹¹⁰ Andersen, p. 328

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 329. This does not, however, settle the debate over which text is the original. For example Keil (vol. 2, p. 96) says: “Habakkuk evidently had the psalm in his mind, and not the writer of the psalm the hymn of the prophet, and the prophet has reproduced in an original manner such features of the psalm as were adapted to his purpose.”

¹¹² Eaton, “Origin”, p. 163 (italics added)

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 164, referring to Weiser, “Frage”, pp. 517-8

¹¹⁴ Eaton, “Origin”, p. 166

¹¹⁵ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 153. Floyd believes that Habakkuk heard the “mythic accounts of Yahweh’s great deeds” rather than Yahweh’s own voice.

features, literary form, historical allusions, and religious motifs all suggest that this poem was composed in the premonarchic era as a recitation of the victory of the divine warrior over cosmic and earthly enemies” (Hiebert 1986:1). The argument against its authenticity that emphasizes how different it is from the rest of the book, is, in fact, an argument for its existence and currency before Habakkuk’s time.¹¹⁶

With the exception of the personal framework, which is obviously contemporary, we can now be confident that all of the core of the poem (vv 3-15) is intended to be past tense. The use of both prefixed and suffixed verbs with this meaning is now better understood ([D.A.] Robertson 1972), and this makes clearer the archaic, not merely archaizing, character of the composition.¹¹⁷

Patterson formats his defense of the archaic nature of vv. 3-15 according to grammatical, literary and historical/theological reasons.¹¹⁸ First, he lists several antiquated grammatical features present in the text: numerous defective spellings, the lack of the definite article, the *t*-form imperfect used with duals or collectives, the use of the old pronominal suffix ׀, and the employment of enclitic *-m*. As for the vocabulary, he notices no less than eighteen Hebrew words or expressions that are commonly found in older poetic material in the OT. Second, he finds seven themes common to early OT poetic literature. They include: the Lord’s movement from the southland (cf. Deut. 33:1-2), the shaking of terrestrial and celestial worlds at God’s presence (cf. Judg. 5:4-5), and the Lord’s anger against sea and river (cf. Exod. 15:8; Ps. 18:8, 16). Third, Patterson recognizes the historical setting of vv. 3-15 as that of the exodus and Israel’s journey to the Promised Land. He adds that “the historical reflections and theological viewpoint are consistent with and, indeed, are dominant in the other early literature that forms parallels with these verses”.¹¹⁹ Patterson concludes his lengthy discussion by saying: “I am convinced ... that the substance of Habakkuk’s poetry, though doubtless reworked by the prophet ..., was directly part of a living epic material handed down since the days of the exodus and its related events and, under divine inspiration, was incorporated by Habakkuk into his prophecy.”¹²⁰

The debate over the time frame of the theophany-poem in Hab. 3:3-15 is a complicated one. Presuppositions and personal interpretations inevitably come into play when scholars attempt to make a determination. Nevertheless a past tense interpretation, as demonstrated above, is the more probable. That does not, however, deny the present effect this ancient poem has on the prophet. O.P. Robertson may say it best:

¹¹⁶ Andersen, p. 260

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 264

¹¹⁸ See Patterson (“Psalm”, pp. 175-8) for the following points.

¹¹⁹ Patterson, “Psalm”, p. 177. He does admit that “the highly figurative nature of the poetry does not allow a precise identification as to the time of its original composition”.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 177-8. Patterson (p. 177) only hints at a concession. “If not written in the same era as the other poetic material and handed down to the prophet’s day, the poetry found in Habakkuk’s prophecy here is at least written in a consciously archaistic manner. The utilization of earlier traditional material is championed by Cassuto; and archaistic style is favored by Albright.”

A collage, a collecting of many images to convey an impression both of past experience and of future expectation is the medium of the prophet. ... By such a method, Habakkuk does not dehistoricize the reality of God's coming for salvation. Instead, he colors the reality of the expectation of God's future manifestations by recalling the many concrete instances of his intervening in the history of the past. He does not place the coming of God in the realm of timelessness, but forces his readers to appreciate the magnificence and the imminence of his appearing again.¹²¹

4. The content of the vision: Theory three (Hab. 3:3-15)

Determining the time frame of Hab. 3:3-15 is closely related to the debate about the substance of the vision. Some of those scholars who regard vv. 3-15 as a present reality for the prophet also think that this same passage therefore comprises the content of the vision (cf. Roberts). Thus far, two theories have been offered as answering the question of the vision's content: Hab. 2:4-5 and Hab. 2:6-20. Both of these options find their appeal in their proximity to the initial mention of the vision in 2:2-3 and in their content, which answers the prophetic complaints with a word of hope. This third theory (Hab. 3:3-15), like the first two, is a suitable response of hope: Yahweh is coming for the salvation of his people.¹²² Yet unlike the first two passages it is far removed from the initial mention of the vision.

The advantage that this theory has over the first two is that vv. 3-15 have all the appearances of a proper visionary experience. According to Bruce:

The vision does not consist in a brief statement of verse 4, which is designed to encourage an attitude of patience and faith until the vision comes. The vision is most probably the theophany described in [3:3-15] The vision and its fulfillment may well be simultaneous: when God acts, the prophet's inward eye sees his action in the pictorial form so vividly painted in chapter 3.¹²³

Roberts describes these verses as "a vision of the march of the divine warrior to rescue his people"¹²⁴ and Elliger describes them as "*die Visionsschilderung in Form eines Hymnus*".¹²⁵ As further defense of this third theory, scholars appeal to the book's *need* of ch. 3. Bruce says that if the vision is 3:3-15, "then the two parts of the book of Habakkuk (the oracle of chaps. 1-2 and the prayer of chap. 3) are integral to each other".¹²⁶ That is, without ch. 3 "the book

¹²¹ O.P. Robertson, pp. 219-20

¹²² As quoted earlier Roberts (*Habakkuk*, p. 149) says that "Hab. 3:3-15 contains Yahweh's last response to Habakkuk". Bruce (p. 878) concurs: "[The psalm] describes, in the vivid picture of a theophany, how Yahweh comes to the aid of his people, routing their enemies and his, and thus answers the prophet's plea of 1:12-17"

¹²³ Bruce, p. 859. He (p. 882) says: "This description of a theophany follows the pattern of earlier descriptions ... an old, established form of language is pressed into service." To that he (p. 886) later adds: "This pictorial language was probably incorporated in Israel's national liturgy, where the rehearsal of Yahweh's mighty acts in the past provided a basis for the prayer that might be repeated in the future"

¹²⁴ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 81

¹²⁵ Elliger, p. 51

¹²⁶ Bruce, p. 859

remains a fragment with no resolution of the prophet's laments, and with no vision for the prophet to record as he had been commanded to do (2:2)".¹²⁷

As just mentioned, in Hab. 2:2 Yahweh commands the prophet: *Write (the) vision, and expound (it) upon the tablets; in order that one proclaiming from it may run.* The vision is presumably of great importance, as it needed to be communicated to a vast number of people. This makes the lack of scholarly consensus regarding the vision all the more frustrating for scholars. In defending their respective theories, for example, several commentators refer to the plurality of tablets upon which Yahweh commands the prophet to write. O.P. Robertson, representing theory one, states that "Habakkuk's 'vision', apparently contained in vv. 4 and 5 of [ch. 2], would not appear by its length to justify the need for a plurality of tablets"; instead he believes that this feature (along with the definite article) is meant to recall the tablets of the Sinai covenant.¹²⁸ However Elliger, who supports theory three, asks:

*Aber sollte wirklich nur das kurze Orakel V. 4 gemeint sein, wie viele Ausleger annehmen? Und sollten, selbst wenn V. 5 noch hinzugenommen werden müßte, mehrere Tafeln für die vier Stichen benötigt sein? Andererseits gibt es im Buche Habakuk ein Stück, das dem zu Erwartenden völlig entspricht. Das ist das als Kap. 3 mit besonderer Überschrift angefügt sog. Gebet Habakuks.*¹²⁹

Finally Andersen, in defence of theory two, says: "If, as we suggest, what was revealed and had to be read from the tablets, was 'the woe oracles' [2:6-20], two or three tablets of average size would have sufficed."¹³⁰ These arguments prove that the debate is far from being settled. Indeed, three very legitimate options have been put forth. However, before the treatment of the vision's content is resumed and concluded, the final passage of the book deserves attention.

5. Hab. 3:16-19

**¹⁶I hear and my belly trembles, at (the) voice my lips quiver,
decay goes into my bones and under myself I tremble;
I who have rest during a day of distress,
concerning the withdrawal of a people who invade us.**

**¹⁷Though a fig-tree does not bud, and there is no produce on the vines,
work of an olive-tree deceives, and fields do not make food;
sheep (are) cut-off from the fold, and there are no cattle in the stables.**

¹²⁷ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 149. Brownlee ("Placarded Revelation", p. 320) notes that Beyer "maintains that *hāzôn* ('vision') must be interpreted literally and the only vision in the book is the theophany of ch. 3. ... Consequently, he would insert ch. 3 between chs. 1 and 2. The present location of the 'vision,' in his view, was occasioned by its independent circulation and later incorporation in a book of psalms from which it was eventually extracted and restored to the book of Habakkuk." Brownlee adds: "If this view of the history of ch. 3 be regarded doubtful, then the 'vision' was lost and editors have tried to supply it by adding this psalm."

¹²⁸ O.P. Robertson, p. 169. See also Brownlee, "Placarded Revelation", pp. 320-1.

¹²⁹ Elliger, p. 40

¹³⁰ Andersen, p. 204

**¹⁸But I, on Yahweh, I will exult; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
¹⁹Yahweh my Lord (is) my strength, and he places my feet as the does,
and upon my battle-heights he causes me to tread.**

For the one-acting-as-overseer with my music (of stringed instruments).

A profession of faith

The introduction to the discussion of Hab. 3 noted the drastic change in the prophet's manner of addressing Yahweh, from defiant accusation in ch. 1 to willing submission in ch. 3. Hab. 3:2 and 3:16-19 both testify to this "worldview transformation", as Wendland called it. The former is the prophet's reverent and humble prayer of petition. The latter is a joyful profession of faith ironically set in the context of a frightful present reality. Both sections begin with the Hebrew verb שָׁמַע ("hear") and with the mention of the prophet's fear, stated simply in v. 2 with another verb (אָרַע) and more elaborately in v. 16 with a lengthy description of the physical symptoms (i.e. a trembling belly, quivering lips, decaying bones, and trembling legs). These literary links suggest that the same circumstance prompts both Habakkuk's prayer and his confession.¹³¹

It was offered previously that the incident prompting Habakkuk's prayer of petition (3:2) is probably either the theophanies in Hab. 3:3-15 or Yahweh's speech in Hab. 2:2-4. The same options apply to the prophet's profession of faith (3:16-19).¹³² Several scholars hold to the theory that 3:3-15, either as a recitation of the past or an occurrence in the present, prompts the reaction recorded in 3:16-19. According to Andersen: "The last four verses [of the chapter] ... represent the prophet's personal response to the theophany or, rather, to the recital of the poem in vv 3-15, which had been composed from 'report(s)' (3:2) of the epic deeds of Yahweh. The first part of his response has already been given in v 2."¹³³ Similarly Roberts presumes that the prophet's physical reaction is to what he calls "the visionary experience" of vv. 3-15. "Despite the promise of deliverance that it contained for Habakkuk's people and its king, the prophet's vision of the majestic power of the divine warrior remained a terrifying experience (cf. Isa. 21:3-4), as any visionary experience tended to be regardless of the content of the vision (Job 4:12-16)..."¹³⁴ Both Andersen and Roberts present very reasonable interpretations. There are, however, opinions to the contrary. O.P. Robertson

¹³¹ There is no reason, however, to think that these two passages were originally one prophetic address that was later divided by an editor (cf. the same suggestion made for Hab. 1:2-4, 12-17). In 3:2 Habakkuk addresses Yahweh directly; in 3:16-19 he does not.

¹³² O.P. Robertson (p. 242) speaks of both views. "Having heard the Lord's response to his complaint (2:2-20), and having seen a vision of the Lord drawing closer and closer in his approach to intervene ... (3:3-15), the prophet now records his reaction to this awesome interchange (3:16-19a)."

¹³³ Andersen, p. 342. Andersen (pp. 343-4) repeats this sentiment: "What is heard is not the voice of God in the revelatory vision (2:2). Nor is it the noises made in the theophany The connections of v 16 with Hab 3:2 show that what disturbs the prophet is hearing the report (*šēma*) of Yahweh's deed – that is, the recitation of the traditional poem(s) found in vv 3-15."

¹³⁴ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 157

legitimately translates קול in v. 16 as “voice” rather than “sound” – that is, “at the voice my lips quivered” – and then identifies this term with Yahweh. He says: “Particularly the Voice that is the occasion of the prophet’s trauma should be noted.”¹³⁵ This could lend weight to the theory that Habakkuk is responding to the voice of Yahweh recorded in 2:2-4. Even if קול is best translated as the more general “sound”, the two options still hold; the prophet’s lips could be quivering at the sound of Yahweh’s voice in 2:2-4 or at the sound of Yahweh’s theophany in 3:3-15, whether a recited poem or an actual experience.

Thus far a totally convincing argument has not been presented for the object of the prophet’s hearing and the occasion of his trembling, either in Hab. 3:2 or in Hab. 3:16a. Depending on the particular translations of various words, two interpretations can legitimately be offered. So, in which direction does v. 16b tip the hermeneutical scales? To what does the next line of Habakkuk’s profession refer? The prophet says: *Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.* (NIV)

Before the examination of Hab. 3:16b can properly begin, one must first note the interpretive problem of the initial word, the Hebrew אשר, which is often rendered as the causal link “because”.¹³⁶ O.P. Robertson accepts this translation and says unequivocally: “The last portion of v. 16 directly explains the reason for the prophet’s stunned awe.”¹³⁷ The truth of this statement is not readily apparent. That there is a relationship between both halves of the verse is true enough, but that it is one of cause and effect is far from certain. Roberts acknowledges the textual and interpretive ambiguities and offers the solution highlighted in the *BHS* apparatus, namely that the term be translated with the first half of the verse. “Read the dual *ʾšūray*, ‘my steps,’ as the subject of the verb in place of MT’s awkward relative pronoun *ʾšer*. LXX’s reading, ‘and beneath me my stance (*hexis*) was troubled,’ supports the correction, which clarifies an otherwise obscure text.”¹³⁸ This option could better suit the interpretation of v. 16, but it requires the additional emendation of the final verb in v. 16a (ארגז).

Before a final determination regarding אשר can be made, the remainder of v. 16b must be addressed. The following discussion will proceed by distinguishing between the more traditional translation of the half-verse and the altered version proposed by this thesis. To simplify a somewhat complicated comparison Table 7 displays the two translations, which have been divided into four, vertical columns (marked by Roman numerals).

¹³⁵ O.P. Robertson, p. 243. See Ps. 29.

¹³⁶ See BDB, p. 83b, #8c. Cf. NASB: *I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us.*

¹³⁷ O.P. Robertson, p. 243

¹³⁸ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 146. In similar fashion Eaton (“Origin”, p. 157) adds: “אשר is decidedly clumsy and the rhythm would be more regular if in some form this word were drawn back to the preceding phrase.”

Table 7: Hab. 3:16b

| | I | II |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| | אָנוּחַ | לְיוֹם צָרָה |
| Traditional translation | I wait quietly | for a day of distress |
| Proposed translation | I have rest | during a day of distress, |
| | III | IV |
| | לְעֹלוֹת | לְעַם יְגוֹרְנוּ |
| Traditional translation | to go up | to a people who invade. |
| Proposed translation | concerning the withdrawal | of a people who invade. |

The discussion begins with the first verb (column I). Should the MT be retained (נוּחַ, “to rest”¹³⁹) or changed (חָכָה, “to wait”) according to the *BHS* apparatus.¹⁴⁰ The appeal of the emendation is that the root is seen in its imperative form in the last portion of Hab. 2:3.

Possibly referring to the vision mentioned earlier in the verse, Yahweh commands Habakkuk: *though it tarries, wait (חָכָה) for it*. Roberts provides a typical interpretation:

Nonetheless, even in his terror, the prophet recognizes the promise implicit in the vision, and the response of his will to the vision is precisely what God demanded in Hab. 2:3. In light of the vision, Habakkuk is willing to cease from his complaints and *to wait quietly* for the vision’s fulfillment, for the day of judgment to come upon the Babylonian oppressor.¹⁴¹

Roberts, however, holds to the Masoretic נוּחַ, rather than the emended חָכָה. “Though there is a dispute about the original text, the MT of 1 Sam. 25:9 uses *nwh* in the sense of ‘to cease speaking while awaiting a set time in the future.’”¹⁴² This seems typical of the confusion in translation, at least practically so, between נוּחַ and חָכָה. Strictly speaking the former means “to rest” or “to be quiet” and the latter “to wait”, but often in the translation of Hab. 3:16b the

¹³⁹ Note that the verb here (נוּחַ) is different from the verb in Hab. 2:5 (נוּחָה, translated “and he does [not] rest”), though the translations are similar.

¹⁴⁰ Margulis’ unique rendition of v. 16b, which begins with an emendation to this first verb, looks nothing like the traditional translation. He (p. 431) begins his discussion by saying: “The truth of the matter is that the second hemistich (beginning לְעֹלוֹת) is all but unintelligible, while the initial hemistich, as vocalized by the Massoretes, yields the bizarre ‘I will rest on (or: in anticipation of) a day of trouble.’” Margulis emends נוּחַ (“to rest”) to אָנוּחַ (“to moan”) and then takes the first line of v. 16b (columns I and II) as parallel to the second (columns III and IV). “Lamenting (אָנוּחַ) on a day of distress / Doing penitence at a time of sorrow” (p. 431). Even though this emendation of the verb is a relatively reasonable option given the laments of ch. 1 and the prior context of v. 16a (see also Ward, p. 25), few modern commentators and translations hold to such a view. The latter portion of his translation is difficult to sustain, for it amounts to a series of questionable deletions and additions to the consonantal text – from לְעֹלוֹת לְעַם יְגוֹרְנוּ to עֲנוּת לְעַת יְגוֹן.

¹⁴¹ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 157 (italics added)

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 146 (italics added)

two meanings tend to be melded together (e.g. ESV, NASB, NIV and NRSV in Table 8) – “to wait quietly”.

Is the verb in the context of Hab. 3:16 better understood as “to rest / be quiet” or “to wait”? Even BDB confesses that the reference is a dubious one. It lists v. 16 under the second definition of נָח, “to have rest” but defines the reference as “I wait quietly”.¹⁴³ Andersen notes that: “The verb $\sqrt{nw\dot{h}}$ is so restful that the abrupt change of mood has perplexed commentators. ... The difficulty with the verb ‘I was at ease’ lies as much in bringing sense out of the remaining words of v 16.”¹⁴⁴ The obvious rebuttal to Andersen’s first remark is that all of ch. 3 represents an “abrupt change of mood”, as does even the juxtaposition of v. 17 and v. 18. The truth of his second remark, however, remains to be seen. What sense can be made of the rest of v. 16b if the initial verb is translated something akin to “I have rest” (נָח)?

Table 8: Hab. 3:16b

| | I-II | III-IV |
|-------------|--|---|
| ESV | Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble | to come upon people who invade us. |
| KJV | ... that I might rest in the day of trouble: | When he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops. |
| NASB | Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, | for the people to arise who will invade us. |
| NIV | Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity | to come on the nation invading us. |
| NKJV | That I might rest in the day of trouble. | When he comes up to the people, He will invade them with his troops. |
| NRSV | I will wait quietly for the day of calamity | to come upon the people who attack us. |

A lexically precise understanding of the verb is in order. נָח is found a total of 139 times, most of them *hip il*. In the *qal* stem (cf. Hab. 3:16) it is used in a number of different ways: to settle in the land (e.g. Isa. 7:19), to cease from labor (e.g. Deut. 5:14), literally to set something down (e.g. Gen. 8:4), and to be at peace from the invasion of enemies (e.g. Est. 9:16; Neh. 9:28; Isa. 14:7). As noted previously by Roberts, in the context of 1 Sam. 25:9 the *qal* form appears to take on the meaning of “to cease speaking”.¹⁴⁵ This could be the meaning of the *qal* in Hab. 3:16, but another possibility (or perhaps an added nuance) is that נָח is

¹⁴³ BDB, p. 628a

¹⁴⁴ Andersen, p. 345

¹⁴⁵ BDB (p. 628a) also suggests this understanding. Preuss (“nûah” in *TDOT* 9, p. 278) says: “There are 30 occurrences of the *qal* of *nûah*, meaning ‘settle down (to rest), become quiet and (consequently) rest.’”

used in Hab. 3:16b to reflect a state of rest from the enemies.¹⁴⁶ If one considers the whole prior context of the book of Habakkuk, then the enemy is invading the prophet's people and his land. This irony however could be the point. Habakkuk can rest, not in the absence of conflict but in the midst of it.¹⁴⁷ Understood as such, Hab. 3:16b gives evidence of a genuine faith. Taken in isolation, נוח's more popular translation "I wait quietly" communicates virtually the same thing as "I have rest". The former highlights Habakkuk's obedience (cf. 2:3) and the latter, his faith (cf. 3:17-19). Both possibilities have their advantages.

However, the translation of נוח greatly affects how one understands the following expression – ליום צרה – in column II. Is this a "day of distress" for the enemy-people or for the prophet's people? The ל preposition can be translated to suit either option. Bailey's remark reflects the preference of most of the translations listed in Table 8: "The NIV has interpreted the preposition in ליום as marking the object of the verb אָנַח, indicating what the prophet was waiting for, i.e., a day of 'calamity' to fall *on the Babylonians*."¹⁴⁸

Andersen, however, raises a significant objection to this line of thinking. He rightly observes that יום צרה "never describes the trouble experienced by the wicked when justice is done to them in retribution. It always describes the distress of the LORD's people, caused by an oppressor, a distress from which he should deliver them."¹⁴⁹ This brings one back to the proposed rendering of the נוח, "I have rest". No object is required for this verb, so an alternative understanding of the ל preposition in column II is in order.

If following Patterson the preposition is considered one of specification ("with respect to") it could refer to the coming "calamity" to come *on Judah* when the Babylonians invaded. Patterson translates, "I will rest during the day of distress (and) / during the attack against the people

¹⁴⁶ According to Preuss ("nûah" in *TDOT* 9, p. 280): "Like the qal, the hiphil A (*hēniāh*) of *nûah* is used primarily in theological contexts. It is Yahweh who gives his people or their king rest from their enemies: Dt. 12:10; 25:19; Josh. 21:44; 23:1"

¹⁴⁷ Though he is speaking of the *hip il* stem, Preuss ("nûah" in *TDOT* 9, p. 278) notes: "The opposite is not just motion, e.g., wandering, but (psychic) restlessness, so that sometimes (albeit rarely) the best translation is 'satisfy, bring joy, calm' (Ex. 33:14; Prov. 29:17)."

¹⁴⁸ Bailey, p. 374, footnote 132 (italics added)

¹⁴⁹ Andersen, p. 345. Even Andersen, however, regards יום צרה in Habakkuk as the one exception to this rule. He (p. 345) notes that if the day of distress describes the condition of Israel (as expected), that "would fit in with the book of Habakkuk as a whole ... [but] it does not fit with the rest of v 16. In v 16a, the prophet's anguish is entirely caused by the terror of the LORD. All this would be wasted if he reverts to the frame of mind of his first prayers. Hence, for once, 'the day of distress' can be taken as retribution by *jus talionis* 'for the people who raided us.'" Yet understanding יום צרה as something happening to Judah does not necessitate that Habakkuk is reverting to his old frame of mind. It could demonstrate the prophet's greater faith, faith in Yahweh no matter what his current predicament is. This thesis therefore holds to Andersen's general observation that "day of distress" in the Hebrew Bible never refers to the trouble experienced by the wicked. Perhaps recognizing this difficulty the NASB renders v. 16b: "Because I must wait quietly *for* the day of distress, *for* the people to arise who will invade us." It retains the first ל (column II) as indicating a direct object but appears to take the second ל (column IV) as parallel to the first. In this regard R.L. Smith (p. 117) asks: "Does it mean that Habakkuk is still waiting for the oppressor to attack him and his people again and again?" Besides not being the most straightforward rendering of the Hebrew, the invasion is described by Habakkuk in ch. 1 as already taking place. It seems unlikely that Habakkuk is waiting for the Chaldeans to invade.

invading us” (*Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 255). “In the midst of conflict and distress, the prophet rests securely in the knowledge of God’s purposes” (p. 259).¹⁵⁰

This thesis follows Patterson’s lead in rendering at least the *first* ל preposition as “during”.¹⁵¹ That is, Habakkuk has rest even in the midst of his *own* distress; he has peace even *while* the enemy invades.

The translation of the third column (III) mostly follows from one’s understanding of the previous column. In the traditional option the Hebrew term represents the infinitive form of עלה (“to go up”) prefixed with the ל preposition. It qualifies the day of distress (column II) as that which happens or “goes up” to the invaders (column IV).¹⁵² The proposed translation of v. 16b, however, understands column III differently. It takes the ל prefix as another preposition (“concerning”) and the verb עלה as “to withdraw or retreat”.¹⁵³ Habakkuk thus has rest (1) during the present circumstance of his own day of distress, from column II, and (2) concerning the future expectation that the invaders will one day withdraw, from columns III and IV.

To summarize thus far, according to the more popular translation of Hab. 3:16b the prophet is waiting for his enemy’s day of calamity to arrive. “I wait quietly for a day of distress to go up to a people who invade us.” However, according to the translation offered by this thesis, Habakkuk is resting in spite of his own personal day of calamity which is caused by the enemy. He has rest during a day of distress. Yet he also has rest “concerning the withdrawal of a people who invade us”. That is, Habakkuk knows that the enemy will one day be forced to retreat. On the one hand, both the traditional and proposed renditions express the same sentiment, namely that Habakkuk desires relief from his enemy. On the other hand, the latter rendition better handles Andersen’s observation that a יום צרה never refers to a wicked nation in this sense.

The translation proposed by this thesis also adds the element of faith in the midst of crisis, which is a vital part of Habakkuk’s confession, as will be soon demonstrated. This is not only expressed in the last half of the verse (“I have rest during a day of distress”) but perhaps also in the verse as a whole. The discussion therefore returns to the term which supposedly links the two halves of v. 16, אשר. This thesis suggests that the particle can be

¹⁵⁰ Bailey, p. 374, footnote 132 (italics added)

¹⁵¹ Note BDB, pp. 516-7, #6. The second half of Patterson’s translation of v. 16b, however, seems to communicate that the prophet rests not just during his own day of distress but also during the invader’s day of distress. “I will rest during the day of distress (and) / during the attack against the people invading us.”

¹⁵² BDB (p. 748b, #2c), for example, lists לעלה in Hab. 3:16 under the option “to go up (in war)”.

¹⁵³ See BDB, p. 514a, #5e and p. 748b, #2e. Regarding the latter (עלה), battle contexts are reflected in 2 Sam. 23:9; 1 Kgs. 15:19; and Jer. 21:2. In fact, the broader context of the Jeremiah passage is strikingly similar to that of Habakkuk: *Please inquire of the LORD on our behalf, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is warring against us; perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to all His wonderful acts, that the enemy may withdraw (עלה) from us.*

translated as a relative pronoun:¹⁵⁴ *I who (אשר) have rest during a day of distress.*¹⁵⁵ After the four-fold description in v. 16a of the fear that has taken hold of his body (note the six first-person pronouns), Habakkuk further defines himself in v. 16b as one who nevertheless has rest, rest that his enemies will one day withdraw. The prophet says somewhat paradoxically: *I hear and my belly trembles ... I who have rest ... concerning the withdrawal of a people who invade us.*

There is little more to say about column IV (“to/of a people who invade us”) than has already been said, except to make one crucial observation: the attention is subtly drawn back to the invaders (presumably the Chaldeans). This prompts one to consider again what motivated the prophet’s prayer in Hab. 3:2 and his profession in Hab. 3:16-19. The poems in Hab. 3:3-15 focus on the coming of Yahweh in all his glory. His defeat of the enemies is mentioned (e.g. 3:12-14) but only in the most generic sense. Hab. 2:2-4, however, is Yahweh’s speech in response to the prophetic inquiries regarding the current, divinely-ordained violence of a particular nation, Chaldea. A good case can be made for 3:3-15 being the motivation but, by virtue of the allusion to the Chaldean in 3:16b, the balance once again favors 2:2-4. That is, the prayer of petition and the profession of faith are more likely the prophet’s humble rebuttal of Yahweh’s direct words and not merely his emotional response to the stories of old about Yahweh. In fact, the prophet himself anticipates making this rebuttal in Hab. 2:1. *I will look-about to see what he will speak to me, and what I will reply concerning my argument (2:1c).*¹⁵⁶ Even if one elects to follow the traditional translation of v. 16b, the conclusion drawn by this thesis regarding prophetic motivation remains the same: the object of the prophet’s hearing and the occasion of his trembling are more likely the very words of Yahweh recorded in Hab. 2.

Considering all of Hab. 3:16 O.P. Robertson says: “The expression of the prophet concerning the effect of the Lord’s speech on him ought not to be taken merely as a dramatizing literary device. He describes instead an actual physical experience which he underwent *as the full weight of the significance of his vision dawned on him.*”¹⁵⁷ O.P. Robertson’s comment raises an interesting question. Does 3:16 help to identify the actual content of the vision mentioned in 2:2-3? Suffice it to say for now that if the prophet is

¹⁵⁴ BDB, p. 82a, #3

¹⁵⁵ BDB (pp. 83-4, note 1) says that אשר “being a connecting link, without any perfectly corresponding equivalent in Engl., its force is not unfreq. capable of being represented in more than one way. See e.g. 2 S 2⁵ ..., Is 28¹² unto *whom* he said, or *for that* he said to *them*.” See also Ps. 139:15 for which BDB (p. 82a, #3) offers two possible renderings: “*I who* was wrought in secret (= *though* I was wrought in secret.”

¹⁵⁶ O.P. Robertson (p. 242) notes that “Habakkuk earlier had set himself to ‘answer his rebuke’ (Hab. 2:1)”.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 242-3 (italics added)

responding to the speech of Yahweh in 2:2-4, as is suspected, then 3:16 could somehow speak to the content of the vision mentioned in that speech.

Habakkuk's profession of faith-in-the-midst-of-crisis continues in Hab. 3:17-19a. This is most clearly demonstrated in the juxtaposition of v. 17 and v. 18. The former is a six-fold description of the woeful state of the economy; the latter is the heart of Habakkuk's joyful confession of faith in Yahweh. *Though a fig-tree does not bud, and there is no produce on the vines ... But I, on Yahweh, I will exult ...* (vv. 17a, 18a). In spite of life-threatening circumstances, the prophet is able to rejoice and have confidence in his God. Verse 17 describes in detail the desperate situation of the prophet and his people.

The six clauses of v. 17 seem to be in ascending order of severity, with the loss of figs ranking least and the loss of the herd in the stalls causing the greatest economic hardship. ... The loss of any of these individually might be survived. Together, the losses spelled economic disaster and devastating loss of hope – loss of their daily provisions, loss of the economic strength, loss of the Lord's blessing due to their sin¹⁵⁸

The crucial question is: Does v. 17 describe a real situation or merely a worst-case scenario? "Though the six clauses are introduced by 'though [כי], suggesting possibility, the events described appear too real to be seen as mere possibility. ... Habakkuk demonstrated faith tested and refined by the genuine fires of life."¹⁵⁹ Andersen suspects that the verse describes "a realized, rather than a hypothetical, condition".¹⁶⁰ If one considers the prophet's words in the rest of the book, he is always speaking of a real-life tragedy.

However, is this failure of nature a result of the Chaldean invasion? Gowan thinks so: "[Habakkuk] is talking about the way invading armies live off the land, taking everything for themselves as they go and leaving the inhabitants behind to starve."¹⁶¹ Achtemeier also prefers this interpretation. "It may be that the failure of fig tree and vine, of field and flock are due to the invasion of the Babylonians, as in Jeremiah 5:17, and that Habakkuk is expressing his confidence in God's salvation of him in the face of the enemy."¹⁶² Jer. 5:14-17 records Yahweh's words of warning to his people. *Behold, I am bringing a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel And they will devour your harvest and your food; ... they will devour your flocks and your herds; they will devour your vines and your fig trees* (Jer. 5:15a, 17). Yet Achtemeier adds that: "Habakkuk may ... be referring not only to the historical threat of Babylonian invasion and destruction of the land, but also to God's final

¹⁵⁸ Bailey, p. 375

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Andersen, p. 343. See also O.P. Robertson, p. 245.

¹⁶¹ Gowan, *Triumph*, p. 83. O.P. Robertson (p. 245) agrees. "[The] ravages of war shall leave the land desolate. The consequent disruption of the basic structures of the family and other social orders shall eventuate in an unproductive land."

¹⁶² Achtemeier, pp. 58-9

reckoning with evil in his world.”¹⁶³ This introduces the second interpretive option for the cause of the natural disaster of v. 17 – Yahweh’s apparent neglect of his people. “[All] the problems listed in v 17 are due to a failure of nature (or of Yahweh as the God of farm and flock), not to the depredations of a conqueror.”¹⁶⁴ Andersen describes v. 17 as the withdrawal of “these most familiar and reliable tokens of God’s goodness”.¹⁶⁵ To that Roberts adds: “Habakkuk may have chosen to illustrate the apparent *absence of God* through crop failures and the loss of livestock rather than through specific references to Babylonian oppression, because Babylonian oppression was already a fact of life, and he wanted to paint a worst-case scenario.”¹⁶⁶

One more interpretive option for v. 17 deserves attention. If the conditions described in this verse are neither a direct result of the Chaldean invasion nor the effect of God’s withdrawing himself from his people, then perhaps they simply reflect the unbiased cruelty of nature. Eaton says v. 17 is “a summary description of the general condition of death which threatened the parched land of Palestine at the end of the long dry summer”.¹⁶⁷ Margulis also believes “the poet-prophet is praying against the background of a large-scale drought”,¹⁶⁸ and he quotes Mowinckel as an “eminent scholar” who concludes *mistakenly*: “die Not, aus der Jahwe zu retten kommt, ist die politische Not zur Zeit des Propheten Habakkuk”.¹⁶⁹ To support the drought theory Margulis turns to Hab. 3:10a, which speaks of the passing over of rain-storm waters.

Indeed, Mowinckel himself, while positing a political motivation, observed that “wenn Jahwe ... kommt, so kommt er auch um der Zeit der Dürre ein Ende zu machen, dann bringt er auch den Regen mit ... So gehört auch in Hab 3 der Regen mit zum Bilde des schreckenerregenden Erscheinens Jahwes zur Niederkämpfung der Feinde und Rettung seines Volkes”.¹⁷⁰

There is, of course, considerable overlap in the last two hermeneutical options, if not all three of them. There are also various nuances of interpretation. Floyd, for example, calls the elements of v. 17 “portents of salvation”. Rather than seeing them as evidence of Yahweh’s absence, he sees them as evidence of his presence. “Conditions of drought and famine are thus interpreted as signs of Yahweh’s involvement in the world situation on behalf of his people.”¹⁷¹ Whether the conditions described in this verse are real or hypothetical, caused by the enemy or caused by Yahweh, an incidental act of nature or an act of God, the

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 59

¹⁶⁴ Andersen, p. 345

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 157 (italics added)

¹⁶⁷ Eaton, “Origin”, p. 162

¹⁶⁸ Margulis, p. 438

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 439, quoting Mowinckel, “Zum Psalm”, p. 11

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., quoting Mowinckel, “Zum Psalm”, p. 16

¹⁷¹ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 152

picture they paint is a hopeless one. That is the point of v. 17, and that is the context in which Habakkuk cries the words of v. 18. *But I, on Yahweh, I will exult; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.*

In terms of this section's literary structure, v. 17 is the protasis and v. 18 is the apodosis.¹⁷² This, however, says nothing of the intensity communicated in these two verses. Verse 17 is emphatic by virtue of the repetitive manner in which it describes the undesirable living conditions. Given these circumstances the prophet declares in v. 18 the exact opposite of what one would expect: he expresses joy. To emphasize this contradiction nearly every word in v. 18 is highlighted in one way or another. (1) The prophet draws attention to himself by repeating the subject of the sentence. According to Andersen: "The use of the personal pronoun is very emphatic and indicates a tremendous assertion of faith."¹⁷³ (2) Grammatically Habakkuk highlights Yahweh by placing the prepositional phrase "on Yahweh" in front of the verb. (3) Both verbs are emphatic. "The words 'rejoice' and 'exult' each have the cohortative attached. This is the strongest possible way to say that one is determined to rejoice in the Lord regardless of what does or does not happen."¹⁷⁴ (4) Regarding the last divine designation, "the God of my salvation", Andersen notes: "This is the fourth time this root (יָשַׁע) has been used in Habakkuk 3. [See also 3:8, 13 (twice).] Habakkuk began his passion with a complaint that Yahweh had not delivered him (Hab 1:2); at the end, he acclaims Yahweh as 'the God of my deliverance,' ..."¹⁷⁵

Roberts calls v. 19 Habakkuk's "statement of confidence".¹⁷⁶ *Yahweh my Lord (is) my strength, and he places my feet as the does, and upon my battle-heights he causes me to tread.*¹⁷⁷ Several commentators note that the Hebrew לַיְהוָה, rendered above as "strength", is more commonly translated in a military context. Applying this information to the reference in Habakkuk, Achtemeier says: "The Lord is their strength – the Hebrew word can also mean 'army' – who not only sets them in the heights where no harm can reach them but who also sustains their lives."¹⁷⁸ Roberts even suggests that "[the] prophet may have chosen the more unusual word *hêlî* for the sake of a double entendre. ... Yahweh was Habakkuk's army."¹⁷⁹ This is certainly a real possibility given the description of the Chaldean military forces in Hab. 1:6-11. The Chaldean's physical strength is his god; that is, the Chaldean's god is

¹⁷² See e.g. Andersen, p. 343 and Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 157.

¹⁷³ Andersen, p. 347

¹⁷⁴ R.L. Smith, p. 117

¹⁷⁵ Andersen, p. 348

¹⁷⁶ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 158

¹⁷⁷ Andersen (p. 348) supports a slightly different translation of the first phrase. "The usual title is 'My Lord Yahweh.' The phrase 'the Lord of my strength' is indicated by the parallelism with v 18b. It requires repointing. The majestic plural of *'ādôn* is rarely used for God, except in suffixation, where it is ubiquitous." The same basic sentiment is communicated no matter how the first three Hebrew words are correlated.

¹⁷⁸ Achtemeier, p. 59

¹⁷⁹ Roberts, *Habakkuk*, p. 158

himself (1:11). In similar fashion, Habakkuk's strength is also his God, but his God is Yahweh.

However, there is another legitimate rendering of חיל. The second most common translation is "wealth" or "riches" (e.g. Gen. 34:29; Job 31:25; Isa. 8:4; Ezek. 28:5). Particularly interesting is Joel 2:21-23. *Do not fear, O land, rejoice (גיל) and be glad, for the LORD has done great things. Do not fear, beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness have turned green, for the tree has borne its fruit, the fig tree and the vine have yielded their חיל. So rejoice (גיל), O sons of Zion, and be glad in the LORD your God ...* Given the prior context of Hab. 3:19 חיל could have as much to do with wealth as it does with strength, military or otherwise. If it does, then the prophet says that in spite of the absence of material wealth (v. 17), he can still rejoice (v. 18, גיל) in Yahweh, because it is Yahweh who is his true wealth (v. 19).

Though the latter understanding of חיל ("wealth") seems to better suit the prior context in v. 17, the former ("army") serves as a more appropriate introduction to the next portion of Habakkuk's statement of confidence. This, however, is not readily apparent, for a somewhat romantic or idyllic picture is often painted by these words, at least in most English translations. A typical rendering looks something like this: *he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights* (NIV). Bruce's equally romantic comment on this portion of v. 19 says: "As the sure-footed hind makes its way in rocky and precipitous places without slipping, so the prophet's faith empowers him to surmount his adversities and live on that higher plane where the soul is in direct touch with God."¹⁸⁰ Though neither incorrectly translates the Hebrew, both the NIV and Bruce neglect the nuances of the Hebrew terms that help one to determine what this verse really means.

The first step in determining a proper understanding of Hab. 3:19 is to observe that it is apparently dependent upon one of David's psalms. The title verse of Ps. 18 provides the context of both the poem recorded there and the original account recorded in 2 Sam. 22. *A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD, who spoke to the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.* Even though Habakkuk records the words of David nearly verbatim, the slight differences are noteworthy. Andersen admits: "The affinities of v 19a with 2 Sam 22:34 and Ps 18:34 have long been appreciated, but the details are hard to work out."¹⁸¹ Table 9 displays these affinities and the "hard to work out" details.

Except for one defective spelling (במתִּי in Ps. 18) the only significant differences between the two passages are the verbs (underlined in Table 9). In the first half of the verse

¹⁸⁰ Bruce, pp. 893-4

¹⁸¹ Andersen, p. 348

Table 9: Ps. 18:34 vs. Hab. 3:19a

| | and he places / is placing my feet as the does | and upon my high places he causes me to stand/tread |
|-----------|--|---|
| Ps. 18:34 | מְשֹׁה רַגְלֵי כְּאֵילוֹת | וְעַל בְּמֹתַי יַעֲמִידֵנִי |
| Hab. 3:19 | וַיִּשֶׁם רַגְלֵי כְּאֵילוֹת | וְעַל בְּמוֹתַי יִדְרֹכֵנִי |

David employs a participial form of שׁוּה and Habakkuk, an imperfect form of שִׁים. The verb tenses merely reflect that which the previous context of each passage demands, and the two verbal roots are synonymous, Habakkuk using the much more common of the two (see also Hab. 1:12 and 2:9). But what exactly does it mean to have Yahweh place one's feet "as the does". In regards to this curious expression most commentators of Habakkuk describe a surety or fleetness in the prophet's feet. For example: "The hind (a female deer) was noted for its surefootedness in high places."¹⁸² "Not only does he provide stamina to endure hardship, God also provides vitality to walk on *heights* like a *deer*"¹⁸³ Andersen, however, offers an alternative interpretation. In his discussion of the prophet's physical condition described in 3:16, he makes a noteworthy observation: "There is a progression through the four symptoms, the collapse of the feet being the last and worst state. And it is to the feet that the cure is applied in v 19."¹⁸⁴ If Andersen's estimation of a "cure" is a correct one, then in v. 19 Habakkuk first declares that Yahweh is his strength, and then in the expression "he places my feet as the does" he acknowledges that Yahweh will restore his body which has literally been crippled by fear. This restoration of his trembling legs is necessary if the prophet is to climb the heights, whether like a surefooted deer or not.

This brings the discussion back to the comparison between Ps. 18 and Hab. 3. "And upon my high places he causes me to stand/tread." Unlike שׁוּה and שִׁים, this second set of verbs represents significantly different understandings. Habakkuk's use of דָּרַךְ is much more specific than David's use of עָמַד. BDB defines one option of דָּרַךְ as "to tread upon" and adds "of Isr. treading on heights of enemies, i.e. subduing them".¹⁸⁵ "By changing the verb, Habakkuk has changed the picture. ... David is sure-footed; Habakkuk tramples his enemies."¹⁸⁶ As recorded in Deut. 33:29, Moses gives his final words of encouragement to the sons of Israel. *So your enemies shall cringe before you, and you shall tread (דָּרַךְ) upon their high places (בְּמוֹת).*

¹⁸² Bailey, p. 377

¹⁸³ Baker, p. 77

¹⁸⁴ Andersen, p. 344

¹⁸⁵ BDB, p. 202a

¹⁸⁶ Andersen, p. 349. Koch ("derekh" in *TDOT* 3, p. 276) notes that the verb can mean "to tread = to draw the warrior's bow that has been placed on the earth". See also Sauer, "dæræk" in *THAT* 1, p. 459.

The meaning in Deut. 33 is clear. It speaks of Israel taking possession of the land of their enemies. This is communicated with the use of two Hebrew terms: בְּמִתָּה and בְּרִירָךְ . The latter term, usually translated “high place”, can designate a mountain, a battlefield, or, more commonly, a high place of worship. Referring to this second definition, “battlefield”, BDB says these are “the chief places of the land giving possession, victory, dominion”.¹⁸⁷ O.P. Robertson understands Hab. 3:19 in this way:

Like a female sheep, he shall mount with swift surefootedness to the heights of the mountains. ... Surefooted, untiring, bounding with energy, the Lord’s people may expect to ascend the heights of victory despite their many severe setbacks. The heights of the earth, the places of conquest and domain, shall be the ultimate possession of God’s people.¹⁸⁸

Because many readers, untrained in Hebrew, miss this crucial point in the prophet’s confession, this thesis uses the translation “my battle-heights” for בְּמִתָּה .¹⁸⁹ Thus, in addition to confessing that his strength is renewed, Habakkuk concludes that the victory will be his and the land will be restored to his people.

Apart from the musical instruction in the last half of v. 19 – *for the one-acting-as-overseer with my music (of stringed instruments)* – this victorious sentiment ends Habakkuk’s statement of confidence (3:18-19), his confession of faith (3:16-19), and his two-fold response (3:2, 16-19) to Yahweh. It also concludes the three chapters of the book that bears the name of the prophet. These words of Habakkuk are more than a conclusion however; many commentators view them as a resolution. O.P. Robertson, for example, says: “Finally a resolution of the conflict that began the book appears. The prophet now understands through divine revelation the justice of the ways of God with men, and the inevitable judgment that must come even upon the faithful remnant of Judah.”¹⁹⁰ Yet even though the text provides every indication that the prophet has resolved his conflict with Yahweh and that his inward worldview has been transformed, it must be noted that his outward circumstances do not appear to have changed. Chaldea, it is likely, still wreaks the havoc that prompts Habakkuk’s complaint in ch. 1. Yahweh shows himself faithful in answering the prophet, but the extent of that answer has not yet reached the point of Chaldean defeat. Habakkuk’s newly found faith is discovered, not after the crisis has been resolved, but in the very midst of it.

¹⁸⁷ BDB, p. 119a. According to BDB this is the understanding of the term as it is used in Hab. 3:19.

¹⁸⁸ O.P. Robertson, p. 247. Ward (p. 25) also observes that v. 19 “denotes possession and rule of the land”.

¹⁸⁹ Perhaps the first-person, possessive pronoun refers to Habakkuk’s regaining possession of his own land, since he is certainly not conquering someone else’s territory (cf. “their battle-heights” in Deut. 33:29).

¹⁹⁰ O.P. Robertson, p. 246

6. The rhetorical implications of Hab. 3

In several of the previous discussions this thesis has considered what the motivation is for the prophet's two-fold response found in Hab. 3. Most likely it is either the words of Yahweh, as recorded in 2:2-4, or the theophanies of Yahweh, as retold in 3:3-15. Even though the balance of evidence seems to slightly favor the former, in terms of the chapter's rhetorical intention the latter may be equally as valid. In other words, the reaction that 2:2-4 effects in the prophet is what 3:3-15 is to effect in his audience.

The third chapter of Habakkuk is generally divided into three main sections. The first and last of these sections are the evidence that a change in attitude has taken place in the prophet. The prophet first prays reverently to Yahweh (3:2) and then declares publicly that, in spite of the circumstances around him, his hope is in Yahweh (3:16-19). However, the literary presence of 3:3-15, in between this two-fold prophetic response,¹⁹¹ suggests that the transformation from grief to joy and from anxiety to contentment is not reserved for the prophet alone. That is, retelling the ancient stories of salvation serves to transform the attitude of Habakkuk's reading and/or hearing audiences. "The colorful but incisive imagery must strike a powerfully *responsive* chord in the hearts of all those who know its deep literary, historical and religious background as set forth in the sacred redemption history of Israel."¹⁹² The poems are to the people what Yahweh's voice is to Habakkuk. By placing vv. 3-15 before vv. 16-19, the prophet motivates his audience to repeat the declaration of faith to themselves even as he speaks it out loud.

In order to demonstrate the possible rhetorical effect that this chapter has on the prophet's audience, this thesis returns, for a final time, to Speaker's Corner and to the courtroom. In this first illustration, the speaker passionately presents his complaint regarding a tax increase (cf. Hab. 1), and then he quotes for his audience the administration's official response (cf. Hab. 2). After having read this wise answer, the speaker himself regards the government with awe (cf. Hab. 3:2). Then he turns his immediate attention back to the members of his audience and sings for them two stanzas of a familiar and patriotic chorus which tells of former glories (cf. Hab. 3:3-15). In effect he says that the administrative leaders of today are no different from those of the past; therefore, the drastic fiscal measures taken at present will certainly restore the economy to the prosperity of old. Finally the speaker acknowledges, once again, the uncertain circumstances of the present and

¹⁹¹ This is, incidentally, the same three-part, rhetorical pattern found in Hab. 1. That is, the records of the prophet's words in both chapters are interrupted by another portion of text. If intentional, this repeated design may be meant to further illustrate the prophet's change in attitude.

¹⁹² Wendland, p. 610 (italics added). O.P. Robertson (p. 220 [italics added]) says: "[The] prophet provides a framework of faith which will sustain him *as well as all those supplicants* that would join him through the ages. The Lord has come, and the Lord is coming. Therefore all who wait patiently for him shall live."

demonstrates that, in spite of these conditions, he has absolute trust in his government (cf. Hab. 3:16-19). The audience, if the speech has been successful, will respond in kind. Similarly, in Hab. 3 the prophet means to restore his audience's confidence in Yahweh by speaking an old, well-known hymn of salvation and a contemporary, personal testimony.

The courtroom illustration began with the emotional details of the case (cf. Hab. 1) and progressed to the chilling declaration of judgment (cf. Hab. 2). Now the prosecutor approaches the judge's bench and the jury members' box and humbles himself before them with a personal word of admiration for their wisdom (cf. Hab. 3:2). Then he moves outside onto the courthouse steps and reads for the assembled crowds two particularly emotional case studies from the past, so as to restore the public's confidence in the judicial system (cf. Hab. 3:3-15). Finally, the prosecutor publicly declares his own confidence in the current legal system, in spite of the criminal activity rampant in the city (cf. Hab. 3:16-19). Habakkuk, as well, hopes to convince his audience to have faith and confidence in Yahweh in the present time of distress, because he is the God of past salvation.

The above illustrations briefly outline the book of Habakkuk as a whole. However, a review of the book's rhetorical design is certainly in order. Even though this thesis has attempted to offer a framework for the book other than the dialogue theory, that is not to say that there is no verbal exchange between the prophet and Yahweh. Hab. 2:2 (*And Yahweh answered me and he said ...*) makes it plain that there is. However, the tightness of this exchange – prophetic prayer (1:2-4, 12-17), followed by divine response (2:2-4), followed by prophetic prayer and confession (3:2, 16-19) – is neglected in most interpretations (except as a derivative of the dialogue theory), because of the material that interrupts it. This thesis proposes that, for the benefit of his audience, Habakkuk inserts the supplemental material so as to better explain his three-part exchange with Yahweh. In other words, each of the three intervening texts have a rhetorical purpose. The oracle of judgment (1:5-11) *defines* Habakkuk's complaint (1:2-4, 12-17), the woe oracles (2:6-20) *illustrate* Yahweh's answer (2:2-4), and the ancient poems (3:3-15) *effect* a public reaction similar to Habakkuk's own reaction (3:2, 16-19).¹⁹³

As suggested earlier, the prophet's response and, presumably, that of his public are nothing less than a worldview transformation, but how exactly have perspectives changed? Quite simply, *fear* is re-directed. The entire book of Habakkuk illustrates this rhetorically

¹⁹³ These latter two supplemental passages (2:6-20 and 3:3-15) can also be viewed as the prophet's attempt to illustrate Yahweh's statement of hope in 2:4. As two sides of the same coin, so to speak, the former depicts the complete downfall of the Chaldean and the latter, the victorious coming of Yahweh.

Hab. 2:6-20

The Chaldean condemns himself.

The Chaldean goes.

Do not fear the Chaldean.

Negatively – defeat of wicked

Hab. 3:3-15

Yahweh condemns the Chaldean.

Yahweh comes.

Fear Yahweh.

Positively – salvation of righteous

through the eyes of the prophet. Chapter 1 focuses on his frightful complaint. Chaldea is on the verge of destroying him and his people, and Yahweh, by his neglect, permits it. Chapter 2 introduces the theme of hope by focusing on the forthcoming downfall of the Chaldean.

“[Already] the prophecy of Habakkuk encourages the faithful to assume a strange perspective. They must look at the strength of the enemy as the very source of their own protection. The stronger the enemy, the more sure its own self-destruction.”¹⁹⁴ Chapter 3 continues to speak of hope but now from a divine point of view. “[The] large central portion [of the third chapter] ... demonstrates in itself the altered perspective which the prophet has been led to adopt, that is, a shift away from provincial concerns, whether personal or national, to a preoccupation with ‘God ... the Holy One’ (cf. 1:12; 2:20).”¹⁹⁵ Understood rhetorically, the book of Habakkuk is a carefully-crafted and elaborate composition which describes, for the benefit of an audience, one prophet’s journey from despair of the Chaldean to joy in Yahweh.

¹⁹⁴ O.P. Robertson, p. 240

¹⁹⁵ Wendland, p. 603. Why does the prophet focus his audience’s attention on the human perspective before the greater divine one? By placing 2:6-20 immediately behind Yahweh’s response in 2:2-4 Habakkuk addresses his audience’s immediate concern first, the Chaldean. The audience can better fear Yahweh, only after it comes to realize that the Chaldean’s end is nothing and he is, therefore, nothing to fear. In other words, before the people can be convinced that Yahweh is the greater object of fear, they need to know that justice will eventually prevail and that the Chaldean will be punished for his crimes against them. The principle that Habakkuk employs in his literary work is perhaps best illustrated by the philosophy of many modern organizations that aid the homeless. These agencies base their work on the principle that one must minister to the body before one can most effectively minister to the soul. A homeless man is more likely to hear a message of hope if he has had a good night’s sleep and has food in his stomach.

EXEGESIS AND INTERPRETATION

The content of the vision: Theory four

As stated previously, this thesis has come to the conclusion that the most probable stimulus for the radical change in Habakkuk's disposition is Yahweh's speech recorded in Hab. 2:2-4. The motivation for Habakkuk's eventual praise in ch. 3 is (1) the fact that Yahweh responds at all to the prophet's complaint in ch. 1 and (2) what it is exactly that Yahweh has to say. Understanding the vision, which is mentioned twice in Yahweh's response, must therefore be crucial to the interpretation of this passage and even to the interpretation of the entire book. Unfortunately, a consensus regarding the vision's content has not been reached by the academic community.

1. Reviewing the first three theories

This vision is most often identified by scholars as either Hab. 2:4 (or 2:4-5), Hab. 2:6-20, or Hab. 3:3-15. Each of these three passages is very different from the other two in terms of length, content, speaker and audience, thus reflecting the confusion over the substance of the vision itself. Hab. 2:4 (and perhaps 2:5) is Yahweh's private word to the prophet regarding the wicked and the righteous. Hab. 2:6-20 is the condemning cry of victim-nations against an oppressive tyrant. Hab. 3:3-15 is a poetic (and probably archaic) depiction of the glorious rise of Yahweh and the subsequent defeat of his enemies.

In spite of their many differences, however, each of the three options generally presupposes two things about the vision. (1) The reception of the vision comes after Yahweh's mention of it in Hab. 2:2, 3. In other words the vision, whenever it comes, is at least part of Yahweh's solution to Habakkuk's problems in ch. 1. (2) The vision, therefore, must contain words of hope and assurance. Thus follow three possible themes: the life of the righteous in 2:4, the downfall of the wicked in 2:6-20, or the coming of Yahweh 3:3-15. There is, however, nothing in the book of Habakkuk which claims that the vision itself represents an assuring answer to the prophetic queries. Rather these presuppositions are generally, though not always (see e.g. Floyd), motivated by the dialogue hypothesis of Hab. 1, which presumes that the sections of this first chapter are arranged chronologically according to a question-and-answer format. Given this framework, which often flows over into Hab. 2 and sometimes Hab. 3, these three theories follow quite naturally and logically. However, if ch. 1 is something other than a dialogue, as has been suggested, then how does one identify the vision mentioned at the beginning of ch. 2? The three options outlined above are still valid possibilities, of course, but the field of choices is perhaps broadened. This thesis does not dispute the general interpretations of these three passages, in and of themselves (except

perhaps for 2:5); it only questions whether or not one of them represents the content of the vision.

2. Reinterpreting Hab. 2:3

Before the discussion can proceed, a clarification of terms is in order. What exactly is meant by the word “vision”, as it appears in scholarly discussions of Habakkuk? It could refer to the audible words (and eventually the written text), to the announcement of future things, or to the fulfillment of them. Thus in order to best understand the discussion that follows, one must recognize the distinction made by this thesis between (1) the content of the vision, (2) the delivery and reception of the vision, and (3) the fulfillment of the vision. *Content* refers to the text or record of the vision (e.g. Hab. 2:4 or 2:6-20). *Delivery* and simultaneous *reception* refer to the moment in time when Yahweh delivered the vision and Habakkuk (and/or others) heard or saw it (e.g. Wednesday at noon). *Fulfillment* refers to the period of time when the circumstances foretold in the vision actually come to pass (e.g. Nov. 1998 – June 2001).

The verses that say the most about the mysterious vision are Hab. 2:2-3, and so a second look at their understanding is necessary. Verse 2 specifically regards the *content* of the vision, which, according to the traditional interpretation, must include words of hope for Habakkuk and his people. *Write (the) vision, and expound (it) upon the tablets; in order that one proclaiming from it may run.* As translated earlier v. 3 reads: *For still (the) vision is for the appointed-time, and it will breathe to the end, and it will not lie; though it tarries, wait for it, for it will surely come, it will not delay.* Most scholars who follow the conventional understanding would probably say that this verse speaks of the *delivery and reception* of the vision, which are set for a time in the immediate future. That is, the prophet’s having to wait for a vision that tarries but does not delay simply means that the vision is slow to be given by Yahweh and perceived by the prophet. The *fulfillment* of the vision, one thus assumes, is to occur after an undetermined period of waiting.

This thesis, however, suggests that Hab. 2:3 refers directly to the fulfillment of the vision and not to the delivery and reception of it. Two simple changes in the translation of the first half of v. 3 (as noted by the underlined portions of text) dramatically alter how one understands the time of the vision’s fulfillment (from Habakkuk’s point of view, that is). *For still (the) vision is at the appointed-time, and it breathes to the end, and it does not lie.* The first change regards the ל preposition (למועד), which is rendered “at” instead of “for”.¹ In other words, the vision’s fulfillment is taking place at present. That the fulfillment began at

¹ See BDB (pp. 516-7, #6a) which highlights two other examples of the ל preposition affixed to מועד (Gen. 17:21; Exod. 23:15). The latter reads: ... *for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month Abib* ...

some point in the past and persists in the current day is reinforced by the adverb עוֹד (“still”) which expresses continuance. The second change in translation renders the final two imperfect verbs (יִכְזֹב and וְיִפָּחַ) in the present rather than the future tense. Translated in this way they communicate that the vision’s fulfillment, which is already in progress, will not expire or prove false before it reaches fruition.² The second half of v. 3 – *though it tarries, wait for it, for it will surely come, it will not delay*³ – reinforces the idea that the vision’s fulfillment will eventually reach its complete end. If this understanding of Hab. 2:3 holds, then one can conclude that the vision’s delivery and reception must have already taken place. One can also surmise that, given Habakkuk’s present situation (cf. ch. 1), the recorded vision does not necessarily contain words of hope.

3. Recommending a fourth possibility

This thesis proposes that the content of the vision, which Habakkuk is to copy down and to explain quickly and broadly (2:2), is Yahweh’s oracle of judgment in Hab. 1:5-11. *See the nations and look, and astound yourselves – be astounded; for a work (being) worked in your days you will not believe though it will be told. For behold I am causing the Chaldeans to rise ...* . When Yahweh speaks of the fulfillment of this vision in Hab. 2:3 he first acknowledges the present reality of the Chaldean’s reign of terror (v. 3a), and then he promises that the Chaldean will eventually see his downfall (v. 3b). That is, the Chaldean will not be on the scene one moment beyond the time appointed for him to be there.

If the vision mentioned in Hab. 2:2-3 is, in fact, the oracle of Hab. 1:5-11, then the presuppositions of the first three theories – the vision’s content as 2:4, 2:6-20, or 3:3-15 – no longer hold. (1) The content of the vision does not follow Yahweh’s mention of it and is therefore not part of the divine response. It had been delivered by Yahweh and received by Habakkuk prior to Yahweh’s answering the prophet in ch. 2. (2) The content of the vision speaks of judgment. The hope comes only indirectly; that is, hope is realized not in the

² Furthermore if Habakkuk is, indeed, speaking the prayer of Hab. 3:2 as a response to Yahweh’s words in Hab. 2:2-4, then the prophet’s twice-repeated phrase (*while years draw near*) may also suggest that the vision’s fulfillment is currently taking place.

³ In spite of the other grammatical and contextual possibilities (e.g. appointed-time, end, Yahweh, or the Messiah), most scholars still assume that the antecedent of the pronouns in the second half of the verse is the vision, in keeping with the first half of the verse. Another possibility is to understand these pronouns so that they coincide not with the prior context (the vision) in 2:3a but with the subsequent context (the swollen one) in 2:4a. It is widely accepted by scholars that the pronouns in 2:4a refer to a person, presumably the Chaldean. If this understanding holds for the pronouns of v. 3b, then it is the Chaldean who tarries and the Chaldean for whom Habakkuk must wait. That is, the Chaldean may be slow to complete the activities described in 1:5-11, but he will nevertheless come to his end. Given the emphasis on the masculine singular pronoun throughout chs. 1 and 2 (i.e. Hab. 1:9-11; 1:12-17; 2:6-20) and given the likelihood that the antecedent of most, if not all, of these pronouns is the Chaldean (see Hab. 1:6), a similar personal understanding in 2:3b is possible. Indeed this well suits the eventual interpretation provided by this thesis, but it cannot be reasoned how the Chaldean *will surely come* in the latter portion of the half-verse, as he is already on the scene.

coming of a vision of deliverance but in the fulfillment (or “end”) of a vision of doom.⁴

According to this theory, the dominance of Chaldea will come to an end. Is this not the same conclusion reached, in one way or another, by the other three theories? Yes, but the perspective of this fourth proposal is different. In Hab. 2:3 Yahweh directly acknowledges the real-life, present circumstances of Habakkuk by highlighting that the prophet is yet in the midst of judgment. At the same time Yahweh encourages the prophet by interpreting his current circumstances according to their eventual outcome. Explain and proclaim this vision, he says, not only as a prediction of what is to come but as an explanation of what is currently taking place.

Yahweh’s full response (Hab. 2:2-4) to Habakkuk’s complaint in ch. 1 regarding divine neglect and Chaldean violence takes on new meaning when read according to this fourth theory. Yahweh’s silence from ch. 1 ends when he says:

*“Write (the) vision [1:5-11], and expound (it) upon the tablets;
in order that one proclaiming from it may run.
For still [the fulfillment of] (the) vision is at the appointed-time,
and it breathes to the end, and it does not lie;
though it tarries, wait for it,
for it will surely come, it will not delay.
Behold! He is swollen, he is not upright in himself;
but a righteous one, in his faithfulness,⁵ he will live.”*

Suggesting that Hab. 1:5-11 represents the content of the vision does not negate the hope and assurance communicated to the prophet through Hab. 2:4, 2:6-20 and 3:3-15. Yes, the righteous will live, and the wicked will fall, and Yahweh will come, but in the meantime Habakkuk must endure the reign of Chaldean terror.⁶

⁴ Cf. Habakkuk’s own words in Hab. 3:16. *I who have rest ... concerning the withdrawal of a people who invade us.* Cf. also the end of Yahweh’s oracle in Hab. 1:11. *Then he will pass on ... and he will pass through, and he will be guilty ...* That is, the Chaldean may not be passing on (i.e. moving on) to judge others; he may be passing on (i.e. passing away) because he is being judged by Yahweh.

⁵ If the content of the vision is Yahweh’s oracle in 1:5-11, perhaps the nominal use of אֱמוּנָה in Hab. 2:4 is meant to recall its verbal use in Hab. 1:5. If so, it is possible that both references concern related objects. The object of *unbelief* in 1:5 is Yahweh’s raising of the Chaldean, and the object of *belief* (or faithfulness) in 2:4 is the certain and complete fulfillment of the vision (i.e. the downfall of the Chaldean).

⁶ Few modern commentators mention this theory as a possibility, even though the view was held by some scholars during the first half of the twentieth century. The interpretations of these early scholars, however, take a variety of forms, especially in terms of the identity of the wicked character(s) and the date of the vision’s reception (and consequently the date of the book). Brownlee (“Placarded Revelation”, pp. 319-20) summarizes the views of Karl Budde (1930-31) and George Adam Smith (1940). “[According to Budde the] background of the prophet’s complaint was oppression by Assyria, which is described in 1:2-4, 12-17, and which had frustrated the carrying through of King Josiah’s reforms. Habakkuk’s vision, which was granted him about 715 B.C., assured him that God was raising up the Chaldeans, not to punish Judah, but to deliver her from cruel Assyria. The taunt songs of 2:5-19 also relate to Assyria. The fragility of this view is that it was the weakening of Assyria which had made possible the reassertion of Judean nationalism and the execution of the reforms of King Josiah. Consequently George Adam Smith’s revised interpretation, whereby the oppressor was Egypt during the reign of Jehoiakim, prior to the battle of Carchemish, namely, 608-605 B.C. makes much more sense.” Brownlee himself, however, regards the vision (or revelation) as Hab. 2:4-5a, the order of which he rearranges (vv. 4a + 5b + 4b).

4. Revisiting Hab. 2:5

Hab. 2:3 says that the violence of the Chaldean will not reach its complete fulfillment before its appointed time. According to this thesis it is to this aspect of the vision that the enigmatic Hab. 2:5 speaks. By way of explanation Habakkuk follows up Yahweh's words with: *And furthermore the wine continues to act treacherously – a proud man – and he does not rest; he makes himself large like Sheol, and he is like death and he is not satisfied, and he gathers to himself all the nations, and he collects to himself all the peoples.* As reviewed earlier, many scholars attempt to render the first half of this difficult verse such that it speaks of the proud man's downfall.⁷ However given the understanding of the vision proposed above, it seems more likely that 2:5a speaks of the proud man's perpetual cruelty, paralleling the clear understanding of 2:5b.

As a whole this verse reinforces Yahweh's explanation of the vision's fulfillment: the time of the Chaldean has not yet reached its end. He must continue to gather the nations and to collect the peoples until the fulfillment of the vision – the oracle in Hab. 1:5-11 – is complete. Verses 5-20 of Hab. 2 then, in addition to being the illustration of v. 4a, may also be described as the prophet's clarification of v. 3. That is, Hab. 2:5 briefly explicates the first half of 2:3 (the vision is currently being fulfilled – i.e. the Chaldean terrorizes), and 2:6-20 elaborately explicates the second half of 2:3 (the vision will soon reach its complete fulfillment – i.e. the Chaldean's terror will end).

5. Relating the vision to other parts of the book

Hab. 1:5-11 is thus the thread that weaves its way through the entire book. It represents the present despair of the prophet (i.e. the Chaldean reigns) as well as his future hope (i.e. the Chaldean will not reign forever). In fact, understanding the oracle of judgment in 1:5-11 as the focal point of the book may help to resolve some of the problems relating to the rest of the book. As interpreted by this thesis, the oracle in 1:5-11 is more than the vision of 2:3. It is:

the **מִשָּׂא** of 1:1,
 the **חַמָּס** of 1:2-4,
 the **פֶּעַל** of 3:2, and
 the **צָרָה יוֹם** of 3:16.

(1) *The מִשָּׂא which he saw, Habakkuk the prophet.* (Hab. 1:1) Most interpreters conclude that **מִשָּׂא** adds little to one's understanding of the prophecy of Habakkuk. Floyd and Weis, however, define **מִשָּׂא** as a prophetic interpretation or exposition of a divine revelation.⁸

⁷ Scott translates the second half of Hab. 2:5a as “will not the haughty man be destroyed?”; Southwell, as “the insolent man will not be exalted”; and Emerton, as “he will not be successful”.

⁸ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, p. 91 and Weis, “Oracle” in *ABD* 5, p. 28

As applied to the text at hand, the book of Habakkuk is the interpretation or exposition and the oracle in 1:5-11 is the divine revelation. Thus, from its very start the book focuses on the oracle, which is later equated with the vision.⁹

(2) *(How long) have I cried-out to you “חמס” but you did not deliver?* (Hab. 1:2b) It has already been shown that 1:2-4 itself does not provide enough information to establish the identity of the evil-doer in these verses. However when 1:5-11 is understood as a literary and thematic focal point, then the context of the book easily defines the wicked in this opening passage. In this case, the חמס of 1:2-4 is most likely being committed by the Chaldean.

(3) *Yahweh, I hear your report. I fear, Yahweh, your פעל*. (Hab. 3:2a) The question posed earlier was: Does פעל look forward to the theophanies in 3:3-15 or backward to the same term used in 1:5? As a tentative conclusion, the balance slightly favored the latter. The proposal above – that 1:5-11 is a key to the interpretation of the entire book – certainly confirms this understanding. In his response (2:2-4) Yahweh reinterprets the current circumstances for the prophet, such that Habakkuk responds with reverent fear. That is, the prophet understands that the duration of the judgment oracle – Yahweh’s פעל – is determined not by the Chaldean but by Yahweh himself.

(4) *I who have rest during a צרה יום, concerning the withdrawal of a people who invade us.* (Hab. 3:16b) Though the interpretation of this verse is not an easy one, many scholars take for granted that the prophet is referring to a future day of distress that will come on the Chaldean. However it more likely refers to Habakkuk’s present distress as caused by the Chaldean.¹⁰ The prominent role of 1:5-11, the announcement of that distress, supports this view. After having heard Yahweh’s own interpretation of the present conditions the prophet can rest.

⁹ Even though Floyd does not regard the vision in Habakkuk as 1:5-11, a fuller definition of his understanding of the term מִשָּׁא is worth mentioning nonetheless. When regarded as a type of prophetic literature (rather than a type of prophetic speech) Floyd (*Minor Prophets*, p. 632) specifically defines מִשָּׁא as a reinterpretation of a previously communicated revelation. “Its form is defined by (1) citation of a previously communicated revelation either within the *masšā* ’itself or in the surrounding literary context; (2) additional prophetic discourse, including at least some oracular speech of Yahweh, disclosing the divine will or action; (3) reports of past and/or present human acts or events, showing the continuity of Yahweh’s involvement in both the past situation to which the previous revelation was addressed and the present situation to which the *masšā* ’itself is addressed; (3) [*sic*] directives addressed to the audience, describing appropriate ways of thinking and acting in view of how the previous revelation continues to take effect.” Furthermore, Weis (“Oracle” in *ABD* 5, pp. 28-9) suggests that Hab. 1-2 generally conforms to the pre-exilic pattern of *masšā* ’and that these texts “contain within themselves the revelation on which they are based”.

¹⁰ Perhaps the most persuasive evidence is Andersen’s (p. 345) observation that צרה יום “always describes the distress of the LORD’s people, caused by an oppressor”.

6. Regarding the vision rhetorically

What started out as a complaint against Yahweh has turned into a treatise on Yahweh, in particular his sovereign control over human affairs. As mentioned earlier, Hab. 3 gives no indication that the Chaldean has been defeated. In fact, the external circumstances experienced by the prophet do not seem to have changed from the beginning of ch. 1 (*And destruction and violence are before me ...* [v. 3b]) to the end of ch. 3 (*Though a fig tree does not bud ...* [v. 17a]). The above interpretations of Hab. 2:3 and 2:5 and the identification of the vision with Hab. 1:5-11 confirm and even emphasize this. The wicked one is still present and committing violence against Habakkuk. Yet that matters not to the transformed prophet. In spite of the Chaldean who continues to surround and to swallow him, Habakkuk's only fear and joy is Yahweh, the God of his salvation. The prophet portrays a faith deepened – if not born, to a certain extent – in the midst of the Chaldean crisis.

Thus the message of the book of Habakkuk, rhetorically speaking, is not just to have hope in the downfall of the enemy. The message is to have hope in Yahweh *even while* the enemy reigns. Yahweh is responsible for the Chaldean's rise to power, and therefore he is ultimately in control of how long the Chaldean will remain in power. Habakkuk learned this lesson firsthand; Yahweh himself responded to the prophet's prayer of complaint by reinterpreting the present circumstances for him. Habakkuk's audiences learned the same lesson secondhand; the prophet communicated the divine response to them by documenting his encounter with Yahweh, adding helps where necessary to explain the meaning of that response. Yahweh's message for Habakkuk and his people is one of patience and perseverance in the midst of crisis.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out with one primary goal: to identify the content of the vision mentioned in Hab. 2. In order to reach that goal it was necessary to evaluate the legitimacy of using the dialogue hypothesis as a framework for Hab. 1 and it was helpful to apply a rhetorical point of view to the understanding of the book and its composition. There was much overlap in accomplishing these three tasks. It was first demonstrated that the dialogical approach is not necessarily the best design for the book's first chapter. The divine oracle in Hab. 1:5-11 is not the obvious answer to the prophetic complaint in Hab. 1:2-4, especially given the mention of an ambiguous wicked party in v. 4. This thesis suggested that ch. 1 is better understood as a rhetorical composition that presents one cry of lament (vv. 2-4 and 12-17) that is interrupted by a previously-given oracle of judgment (vv. 5-11). Thus the present fulfillment of this oracle is the immediate occasion for, and not the answer to, the prophet's complaint.

In addition to being the reason for the lament in Hab. 1, this thesis finally proposed that 1:5-11 is also the vision to which Yahweh refers in 2:2-3. It was demonstrated that more hopeful passages are legitimate possibilities for identifying the substance of the vision, but that those who hold these views may be relying too heavily on their understanding of Habakkuk's framework as an extended dialogue into which each passage must fit. If the book is understood rhetorically, the content of the vision (not to mention its delivery/reception and fulfillment) can precede rather than follow the reference to it in a literary context.

The approach of this thesis has been to understand the book of Habakkuk from the perspective of the prophet's original hearing and/or reading congregations. But who exactly were the people who made up these congregations? The audience of the final form of the book, one must keep in mind, is not necessarily the audience of any of its component parts. Generally speaking, the audience of a prayer (e.g. Hab. 1:2-4, 12-17; 3:2) is Yahweh, the audience of an oracle of judgment (e.g. Hab. 1:5-11) is the people, and the audience of a private, divine response (e.g. Hab. 2:2-4) is, in this case, a prophet. However, when a book is a beautifully crafted compilation of all of the above (prayer, oracle and divine response), as one has in Habakkuk, who is the audience then? This thesis suggests that the prophet wrote for the believing remnant who lived during the time immediately prior to the Chaldean exile. Furthermore, this thesis suspects that the prophet wrote in order to fulfill an assignment. That is, the book of Habakkuk could represent the literary result of the prophet's effort to satisfy the command in Hab. 2:2: *Write (the) vision and expound (it) upon the tablets*. Habakkuk presents this vision – introduced (1:1), proclaimed (1:5-11), and interpreted (2:2-4)¹ – in

¹ Hab. 1:1 could suggest that the prophet complied with Yahweh's command in Hab. 2:2. Baker (p. 59, footnote 2) notes that the same root is used in the title of 1:1 and the command of 2:2 (the verb כָּתַב and

terms of his own personal experience. The exposition thus serves as a model of behavior for Habakkuk's audience, for those who lament as he does.

Seen rhetorically, the book of Habakkuk is a didactic tool meant to instruct and encourage the victims of the Chaldean crisis, in particular the Judeans. Its pages record the faith crisis and faith victory of one of their own prophets. However it is no less a piece of instruction to modern audiences, who find themselves in similar oppressive circumstances or who simply are in a situation where the involvement of Yahweh in political and religious affairs is hidden. The book's message for today is the same it was for Habakkuk and his original audiences: in the midst of personal, professional, national and even spiritual crises one can say, *But I, on Yahweh, I will exult; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.* (Hab. 3:18)

the noun יָרֵחַ , respectively). In this case, the book's first verse, which some might regard as insufficient, could be quite apropos. *The oracle (documented and explained as follows) which he saw, Habakkuk the prophet.*

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May each of us find the encouragement to persevere in the midst of our own crises and the voice to sing the words written by Maltbie Babcock in 1901:

*This is my Father's world
O' let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong
God is the ruler yet.*

In these times of international upheaval, what word could be more appropriate – for academics, preachers and lay persons alike – than the three chapters of Habakkuk.

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