

“THE RIGHTEOUS LIVE BY THEIR FAITH” IN A HOLY GOD: COMPLEMENTARY COMPOSITIONAL FORCES AND HABAKKUK’S DIALOGUE WITH THE LORD

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I. INTRODUCTION

The three Hebrew words of Hab 2:4b (וְצַדִּיק בְּאִמּוּנָתוֹ יֵחִי *wəṣaddīq beʾēmūnātō yhyh*) constitute the best-known and theologically most significant statement in the poetic book of this late seventh-century BC prophet. However, as set within its original textual environment, the utterance appears at first glance to be not much more than an aside,¹ a fleeting positive contrast that occurs within a strong word of divine denunciation. The aim of this essay is to advance the proposal that, contrary to its surface appearance, this concise expression forms the thematic core of Habakkuk’s entire message. It thereby functions as the semantic kernel from which the complete text may be organized and interpreted with respect to structure, style, content and purpose.

I will begin by examining the two major compositional constituents of syntagmatically oriented “progression” in much Hebrew poetic discourse. These are the *thematic* line, which is highlighted by a text’s overall structural arrangement, and the *dramatic* line, which realizes its various rhetorical motivations, both large and small. Such forward progression is, in turn, balanced and defined by the accompanying paradigmatic forces of internal textual “cohesion,” which is effected largely by various types of repetition, both formal and semantic. As far as the “prophecy” of Habakkuk is concerned,² the compositional interaction of progression and cohesion is viewed as being generated and governed by the work’s thematic nucleus, namely, the final three words of chap. 2 v. 4: “the righteous man—by his steadfast faithfulness—he lives!” This terse utterance is crucial in pointing toward a resolution of the great theodidic debate in which the prophet is engaged: How and why does a just and holy God continue to do business in an unjust, iniquitous world?

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¹ As suggested, for example, by the punctuation of this verse in the NIV.

² While very little is known about the prophet himself or the precise social, political and religious situation in which he ministered, a considerable amount of information concerning the past and present import of his intensive dialogue with the LORD may be derived from a careful study of the text he left behind.

And what significance or implication does the answer have for those who put their steadfast trust in him? These are issues of timeless relevance, hence a message which needs to be communicated also in this new millennium in the most dynamic manner that modern media make possible.

II. PROGRESSION—THE FORWARD, CLIMACTIC MOVEMENT OF DISCOURSE

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. This essential forward movement of a text is not amorphous. Instead, it is carefully measured and shaped in order to present the reader/listener with a series of “bite-sized mouthfuls,” as it were, so that he or she can properly process the material and in turn respond appropriately.

In order to effect the desired progression in a given discourse, it must be segmented, or divided up, into a sequence of integral units.³ This operation creates the necessary discrete steps or stages that give the illusion, at least, of continuity and purposeful advancement. This also makes it possible for the author to modify or even to change the main thrust of his message en route as he moves from one section to another in the text. Normally such a rhetorically controlled advance builds up to an implicit or explicitly marked *peak* of significance or intensity either at or near the close of the composition. These segments are created by introducing points of *discontinuity* into the text—places where there is a definite gap or shift in the flow of form and/or meaning.⁴

The dominant characteristic of Hebrew poetry—typically cumulative, rhythmic, line-coupled (paired) *parallelism*—is a crucial factor in the process of segmentation. But the disjunction inherent in this mainly binary, incre-

³ For more details on this structure-functional manner of discourse analysis, see E. R. Wendland, *The Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Prophetic Literature: Determining the Larger Textual Units of Hosea and Joel* (Mellen Biblical Press Series, vol. 40; Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1995).

⁴ There are a number of ways in which such syntagmatic disjunction is effected in Hebrew poetry. Most of these involve some type of change or modification in the nature or material of the message, e.g. topic, speaker, addressee, time, mode of speaking (direct/indirect), connotative tone, functional type or utterance mood (declaration/affirmation, question, request/command). Frequently, one or more linguistic/literary markers also appear, serving to reinforce the relevant discourse break. Five common signals of a beginning (*aperture*) in biblical poetry are these: a formulaic opening (e.g. “thus says the LORD . . .”), an imperative, a vocative, explicit mention of the divine name and/or a rhetorical question. The markers that distinguish the corresponding close of a textual unit (*closure*) are less definitive. At these junctures one usually finds some manner of intensification or specification, which may be manifested by any of the following devices: direct speech, vivid imagery, a condensed utterance, asyndeton, exclamation, a reversal in word order, repetition, a verbless clause, monocolon or a sharp contrast. However, a diagnostic *convergence* of such features may also appear at an aperture or indeed at some point of segment-internal climax (“peak”). For this reason, the structure of a given text must always be considered in its entirety, that is, by examining the various correspondences and contrasts of the discrete parts in relation to one another and the compositional plan of the discourse as a whole.

mental mode of literary composition must also be bridged or traversed in order to create structural units of larger, more varied scope and complexity. Accordingly, this manifestation of the so-called “poetic principle” of equivalence (or similarity, i.e. paradigmatic clustering) superimposed upon contiguity (or combination, i.e. syntagmatic progression) is periodically supplemented by spatial displacement to effect what is sometimes termed “distant” or “remote” parallelism.⁵ This is not done arbitrarily or haphazardly, however. Rather, the deliberate recursion, or “paralleling,” of form and/or content is employed as a bounding technique in order to effect the marking of a specific textual border. This may occur at the close of the same unit (*inclusio*), the corresponding beginning of a subsequent unit (*anaphora*), the corresponding ending of a subsequent unit (*epiphora*), a juxtaposed ending plus new beginning (*anadiplosis*), and various multiples or combinations of the preceding (e.g. *chiasmus*). This multifaceted structural function of distant parallelism must always be examined and evaluated in conjunction with the diverse means of segmenting a progression (cf. n.4). I will now apply this analytical methodology to the text of Habakkuk, focusing in particular upon the book’s several distinct but related macrostructures, along with their respective constitutive compositional forces.

1. *Overall structural-thematic progression of the discourse.* The macrostructure of Habakkuk is one of the most clearly defined of all the prophetic books.⁶ This is because the textual organization is demarcated throughout by rather obvious changes in the speaking voice and associated subject matter, as shown in Figure 1 below.⁷ The way in which these constituent units of content are related to one another in terms of form and function is not so easy to discern, however, and this has given rise to a great deal of

⁵ On the notion of the “poetic principle” in literature, see R. Jakobson, *Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time* (eds. K. Pomorska and S. Rudy; Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) 42, 144.

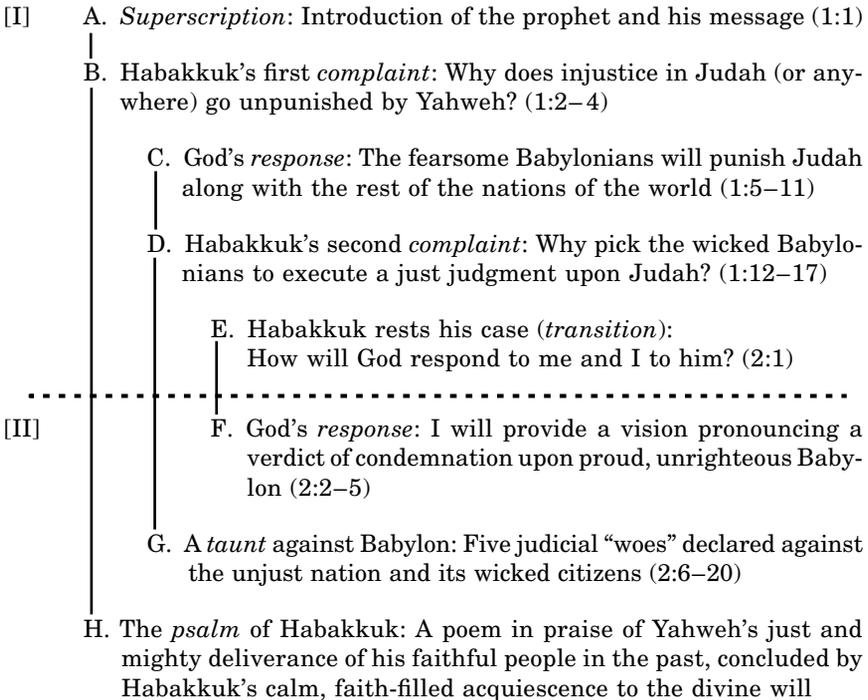
⁶ My conclusion, which is substantiated by the following analysis, contrasts with many other assessments of the compositional nature of this text. For example, although Peckham asserts that “the book of Habakkuk is a composite unity” (B. Peckham, “The Vision of Habakkuk,” *CBQ* 48 [1986] 617), his typically disruptive source-critical analysis contradicts the very unity that it proposes to uphold. Thus, in the process of describing the discourse as “a composition of text and commentary,” the analyst engages in a great deal of imaginative and usually unsubstantiated speculation as he attempts to demonstrate how this alleged “commentary changed the lament into a book by modifying some stanzas and adding others” (618, 621). Even the discerning reader soon becomes lost in the effort to untangle the complex “network of sources” which the analyst posits as underlying both the initial “artistic” lament as well as the subsequently composed “ponderous” commentary (635–636). Unfortunately, the overall impression that one is left with after plowing through such a study is anything but unity!

⁷ It is clear that a proposed exploration of what I am calling “compositional forces” is a gratuitous exercise if it is carried out on a text that is either made up of an edited patchwork of sources or one that requires generous external emendation in order to raise it to an acceptable literary standard. But more than that, as will be demonstrated in the analysis below, the entire book displays an intricately fashioned artistic unity as it makes a profound theological statement on the “holiness” of God (1:12; 3:3). Thus Yahweh demonstrates the true meaning of “righteousness/justice” (1:4, 13; 2:4) by executing “judgment” (1:4) and “deliverance” (3:13, 18) on behalf of his “faithful” people (2:4).

scholarly debate. I am under no illusion that my own study will turn out to be any less controversial, but it will hopefully present the major aspects of exegetical evidence in a manner that is both interesting and credible, if not fully convincing in every respect.⁸

The place to begin is with the discourse as a whole as shown on the following outline, which indicates certain structural-thematic parallels by means of corresponding degrees of indentation:

Figure 1



If the "superscription" (A) is combined with section B, we are left with seven major form-functional divisions (or forensic "moves") in the book, perhaps a significant number. A pair of short, but foregrounded, segments in the middle, i.e. E (2:1) + F (2:2–5), act as a structural pivot between the two unequal, but thematically balanced halves. Part I clearly reveals the theological and practical *problem* as far as Habakkuk was concerned—first of all, grave injustice in the land of Judah, and secondly Yahweh's apparently unjust plan to deal

⁸ I will restrict myself to a consideration of the complete text as it has been received and will not speculate concerning "the redactional process which brought [the various units of discourse] to their present order"; nor am I in a position to say much here about "the role and identity of the 'prophet' Habakkuk himself" (R. Mason, *Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Joel* [Old Testament Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994] 61).

with the situation by means of the evil Babylonian empire. Clearly, the righteousness of God and the justice of his dealings in the world were at stake as the prophet positions himself for a satisfying “answer” (2:1).

Part II provides a just *solution* of the entire matter, beginning with a promise of divine certainty (F). A typical compound, prophetic “woe” oracle of judgment upon all oppressors (G) then functions overtly as Yahweh’s response to Habakkuk’s second complaint about God’s chosen means of justice (C–D). A psalmic “prayer” (H) concludes the divine “oracle” that Habakkuk “saw” (A). It appropriately incorporates a powerful theophanic vision (3:3–15) coupled with the prophet’s personal reaction (3:16–19), which together provide a soul-satisfying resolution to the issue of widespread wickedness in the world (B). This psalm also puts to rest (for the believer) the book’s central theological-moral controversy concerning the manifest “holiness” and “power” (3:3–4) of the invisible but almighty “Sovereign LORD” (3:19).

2. *The center of the macrostructure.* It is important at the outset to note the elaborate manner in which the bifid medial bridge of the composition (2:1 + 2–5) is demarcated. The prophet is portrayed in his conventional role as a “watchman” standing high on the city wall (cf. Isa 21:8–12; Ezek 3:17–21; Hos 9:8). But there is a surprising reversal here—something which suggests that things are not what they may at first appear to be in terms of underlying significance. Instead of a proclamation to the nation, whether good or evil, on behalf of Yahweh, Habakkuk is preparing himself to *receive* a personal message from the LORD, a further answer to his ongoing complaint about proper standards of “judgment” on earth (1:2–4, 12–17). Moreover, he fully expects to respond in turn to what Yahweh is going to say (cf. Job 13:15–23; 23:1–7; 31:35–37). Thus he anticipates another occasion when he can press his case with God further, that is, to reply again to his “[my] complaint/rebuke” (תוכחה *tôkaḥtî*—a term that is probably ironically ambiguous in this context). Habakkuk’s eventual public response turns out to be quite different from what the prophet (or his audience) anticipates at this juncture; it takes the form of an ancient psalm in solemn praise of his “Savior-God” (3:18).

Yahweh’s climactic (second and final) “answer” is preceded by the book’s only explicit quote margin, literally: “and-he-replied-to-me Yahweh and-he-said . . .” (2:2). This appears to mark the onset of the second, resolutive half of the debate. The LORD announces a certain “revelation” (הַזְוֶה *ḥāzôn*, repeated 2:2, 3) that will clarify things not only for Habakkuk, but also for the entire nation—and for every subsequent receptor (group). This follows starting in 2:4 (appropriately, with הִנֵּה *hinnēh* “just look!”), namely, a complete denunciation and condemnation of the wicked, especially all unjust oppressors. The vision here is in fact what Habakkuk declares that “he has seen” (חָזָה *ḥāzāh*) as the prophecy (“oracle” מַשָּׂא *massā*) opens (1:1), hence a prominent instance of structural *anaphora*. The intervening material, i.e. 1:2–17, constitutes a rhetorically motivated *flashback*, as it were, a dialogue between the prophet and God, which both provides the essential background for what Habakkuk says in 2:1 and also leads up to the second half of the book, the larger portion beginning in 2:2.

Part II is considerably more difficult to demarcate with certainty than the first half of Habakkuk. The latter is fairly straightforward, consisting of four relatively homogeneous poetic units, or “stanzas,” the middle pair containing several included “strophes”: [B] 1:2–4; [C] 5–11 (5–6, 7–8, 9–11); [D] 12–17 (12–13, 14–17); and [E] 2:1. But a complete and detailed subdivision of the discourse is necessary if we are to correctly follow the book’s underlying structural argument, which reinforces what we read on the surface of the text, and thus to fully experience the cumulative rhetorical impact of both the overt and the latent levels of communication.

3. *The problem of 2:5.* 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)? 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? Alternatively, does it constitute an introduction to a completely independent segment, namely, the compound judgment oracle of five “woes”? Related to this is the question of who is actually speaking the words of v. 6—Yahweh, Habakkuk, or some unknown redactor?

After a careful weighing of the structural evidence, it seems best to adopt a mixed perspective on this problem, which in the end provides the most natural solution. Accordingly, 2:2–5 should be viewed as a complete discourse unit, one in which Yahweh himself takes up his prophet’s bold challenge (2:1) and confronts the text’s central controversy, that is, concerning the subject of *divine justice*. After this forceful introduction to the matter, the theme of righteous judgment is then eulogistically elaborated upon starting from v. 6 and continuing on to the end of the book.

This transitional section may then be divided into two strophes: The first (vv. 2–3) acts as a prologue which gives the contextual background (pertaining to the speech setting), namely, to the “vision” that Yahweh is about to reveal, especially its complete certainty of fulfillment. The emphazier “behold” then fittingly announces an onset to the introductory portion (vv. 4–5) of that compound vision, which fully replies to both of Habakkuk’s complaints (chap. 1)—but in reverse order. The “woe” oracles of the remainder of chap. 2 thus 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. Then in the closing prayer of chap. 3 Habakkuk himself, under inspiration of the divine theophany (vv. 3–15), quietly responds to his initial complaint with regard to the manifest injustice of his own society (1:2–4). Both constituent elements of this dual “vision” (i.e. 2:6–20 + 3:1–19) therefore serve to uphold the “faith” of those righteous individuals who remain forever “faithful” to their covenant vows with Yahweh (2:4b).

Several commentators⁹ and major versions (e.g. GNB, CEV) separate vv. 4 and 5 and begin a new pericope with the latter. However, there are a number of reasons for keeping these two crucial passages together. First, they are linked by the triple transitional conjunctive וְאִיךָ כִּי *wə'ap ki-*, literally, “and-also indeed! [asseverative],” i.e. “furthermore, surely! . . .” Second, a censorious description of the proud, greedy person (or group/nation) proceeds from v. 4 (itself a response to the prophet’s final protest of 1:17) into its expansion in v. 5. This is signaled by the repeated polysemous term נַפְשׁוֹ *napšô*, “his soul (life, desire, greed).” Associated with this lexical continuity is the central thematic contrast between the “righteous person” and someone whose “soul” is “faithless,”¹⁰ and not “upright.” The former “will live” before the LORD “by his faith/steadfast trust,” but the latter will not “abide/endure.”¹¹

This initial portion of the divine apologetic discourse concludes at the end of v. 5 with several structural indicators (a distinct concentration) of closure. First, there is a final bicolon in strict formal and semantic parallelism, literally:

and-he-gathers to-himself all=the-nation
 and-he-collects to-himself all=the-peoples.

This grave divine indictment further contains two key terms “nations” and “peoples” which appear in boundary positions elsewhere in the book, notably, at the end of the next strophe (2:8, i.e. compositional *epiphora*; cf. 1:5–6). The condemnation, though somewhat muted here, is about to be spelled out in detail in the following series of “woe” (הוֹי *hōy*) oracles. The preliminary word of judgment found in vv. 4–5 is a pointed reply to the several unit-closing rhetorical questions of 1:13 and 17 (another instance of *epiphora*): Indeed Yahweh does not “tolerate the treacherous” (cf. 1:3), and he will not allow them to keep on “destroying nations without mercy.” The “Holy One” (קִדְשׁוֹ *qēdošî*; 1:12, 2:20) will surely deal in punitive justice not only with unrighteous Babylon but also with any other nation on earth that impiously displays such pride-filled “Babylonian” characteristics!

4. *A taunt of five “woes” against the wicked.* The preceding decision regarding discourse demarcation helps in the interpretation of the following principal text unit, 2:6–20. First of all, it is necessary to determine who speaks these mocking words of “woe.” Many commentators and versions simply ignore the issue,¹² while others are equivocal or non-committal. After a discussion of the various issues involved, Smith, for example, concludes that “we cannot be

⁹ For example, P. C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1985) 94; F. F. Bruce, “Habakkuk” (ed. T. E. McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, vol. 2: Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993] 858); T. Hiebert, “The Book of Habakkuk: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections” (ed. L. E. Keck, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. VII [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996] 640).

¹⁰ For text-critical comments on this difficult word (עַפְלָה), see *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Project* [HOTTP], vol. 5 (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1980) 356; cf. Bruce, “Habakkuk” 860. My understanding of v. 4a views נַפְשׁוֹ as being the subject of both verbs, יִשְׂרָאֵל and עַפְלָה .

¹¹ Notice the rhyme here, the phonological similarity perhaps highlighting the semantic antithesis between this focal pair of finite verbs in vv. 4–5: יִדְוֶה (*yihyeh*) and יִנְוֶה (*yinveh*).

¹² For example, Bruce, “Habakkuk” 863–865.

certain about the speaker in this section,"¹³ and the GNB distinguishes the unit from "Habakkuk's complaints and the Lord's replies 1.1–2.4" with the unattributed title, "Doom on the unrighteous 2.5–20." Some scholars see a "new speaker" and a different perspective here, namely, that of "the nations who have been overrun and who now break their silence to address their oppressor."¹⁴ Others, however, posit a continuation of the divine speech begun in 2:2 (cf. NIV: "The LORD's Answer" [2:2–20]).¹⁵ Robertson comments on the possible incongruity here:

It might appear beneath the dignity of God to embarrass the proud before the watching world. But a part of his reality as the God of history includes his public vindication of the righteous and his public shaming of the wicked.¹⁶

There are several pieces of literary evidence that would support this last construal, which assumes a cohesion of speaker throughout chap. 2 (except for v. 1).¹⁷ First and most obvious is the fact that no shift in speaker is indicated, that is, after the prominent quotative margin at v. 2 (the book's structural midpoint): "And Yahweh answered and he said." On the contrary, the third plural pronominal references of v. 6a—emphasized by "all of these"—find their natural antecedents at the end of v. 5, i.e. "the nations/the peoples." It is most logical to assume, therefore, that the LORD carries on in v. 6 with a formal sentence that follows naturally after the initial accusation of v. 5. In ironic fashion he puts a judgment oracle into the mouths of the victims who had previously been themselves ravaged by the Babylonians (cf. 1:6)—and probably did not live to be able to enjoy the present period of divine retribution. 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. It forcefully announces the public verdict to the preceding indictment of this infamous tormentor of the world. However, the entire section, starting from v. 2, is all part of the LORD's instructive and consolatory "revelation" to Habakkuk (2:2).

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). But Habakkuk, no doubt speaking for many fellow believers, had asked for an answer (2:1); so this time the LORD gives him (them/us) a revelatory oracle both in reply and also to proclaim in turn. The 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. However, the same prophetic pattern of *accusation* alternating with *condemnation* is followed (e.g. A = vv. 6, 8; C = v. 7), for the decree is surely Yahweh's own. His authority and the guarantee of certain fulfillment backed up every word (2:3). It is no wonder, then, that the

¹³ R. L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC 32; Waco, TX: Word, 1984) 111.

¹⁴ Hiebert, "Habakkuk" 646.

¹⁵ For example, C. E. Armerding, "Habakkuk" (ed. F. E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985] 510).

¹⁶ O. P. Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990) 185.

¹⁷ This is one of those relatively rare instances where a chapter break in the traditional text cannot be supported; i.e. chap. 2 should begin at 2:2.

subdued prophet responds as he does in Job-like fashion when he takes up his final “turn” in the basic dialogue that structures this book (3:2).¹⁸ Frequently it is not possible in the Hebrew poetic literature to clearly distinguish between the words of Yahweh and those of his prophets; they typically speak “with one voice.” But in this case, a deliberate variation seems to have been introduced—in keeping with both the rhetorical organization of the work as a whole and also to allow the message being conveyed to make a greater communicative impression.

The prophecy of judgment, or proverbial “dirge,”¹⁹ which comprises the remainder of chapter two, thus consists of five distinct “woe oracles” which follow a typical discourse-introducing rhetorical question (2:6a): 6b–8, 9–11, 12–14, 15–17 and 18–20. They all display a similar pattern which includes four basic elements: an opening, genre-signaling “*woe*” (or “*ha!*”;²⁰ cf. NRSV: “*alas!*”; GNB: “*you are doomed!*”) + a participle describing some typical *crime* + a word of *denunciation* + “*for/indeed!*” (כִּי *ki*) specifying a divinely ordained *reason* for the punishment to be meted out. The structural reiteration serves to underscore the inevitability of the prediction being made. There is some stylistic variation in the individual composition, especially in the final, climactic stanza, which begins in reversed fashion with the denunciation instead of the “*woe*” (2:18–20). Here Yahweh derides the underlying motivation for all unrighteousness, namely, idolatry, which was the driving force behind Babylon’s ruthless wickedness, as figuratively described in the earlier parable of the fishermen (1:14–17).²¹ There is thus a sarcastic tone that accents the point of this last portion: 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 a concrete and certain revelation from the LORD himself (2:2–3, forming an implicit *inclusio* for this section).

The taunt speech as a whole is divided into two by an elaborate pattern of recursion. Part one consists of the first three woe oracles and part two by the final pair. An indictive refrain concludes the first unit of each half (*epiphora*): “For you have shed man’s blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everything in them” (2:8b, 17b, NIV). More significantly, the close of each

¹⁸ The correspondence here to the arrangement of the *theodicy* that drives the book of Job is probably no coincidence. In a similar chastened manner Job responds to the two speeches of the Sovereign LORD, Creator of the universe (38:1–40:2 ⇒ 40:3–5; 40:6–41:34 ⇒ 42:1–6; cf. Hab 2:18–20, which enunciates the ironic inversion of creation with reference to the lifeless gods of paganism). Habakkuk’s first complaint also closely resembles that of Jeremiah, e.g. Jer 12:1–4, and it too elicits an immediate prophetic reply from the LORD (12:5–17).

¹⁹ D. W. Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988) 62.

²⁰ Robertson, *Habakkuk* 189.

²¹ It is important to observe the double level of application that is implicitly conveyed by the accusations of these woe oracles in chap. 2. The primary plane of reference clearly concerns the Babylonian imperialists (e.g. 2:8–9, 10, 17). But the language that is used, especially at the beginning of each segment, subtly suggests an underlying level of significance, namely, with regard to the local social and religious injustices that Habakkuk lamented in his opening speech, e.g. the greedy accumulation of power and wealth through extortion (6), profiteering (9), violent crime (12), exploitative oppression (15), and worst of all, the self-serving pursuit of personal spiritual security (18; cf. Mason, *Habakkuk* 91).

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):

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD (v. 14, NIV). But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him (v. 20, NIV).

Verse 20 then forms an appropriate transition to chapter three and the “prayer of Habakkuk” in joyous celebration of the “Holy One” of Israel (3:3, cf. 1:12). The “righteous person” who requires some explanatory “answer” from the LORD can but “hush” (סח *has!*—an onomatopoeic interjection) and wait “in faith” for his God to act (cf. 2:1,4; 3:3–15).²²

It is interesting to observe the verbal symmetry that heightens the poetic nature of the original Hebrew and helps to distinguish its compositional arrangement. Each of the two utterances of closure cited above consists of six “words” (accent groups)—the first (v. 14) ending with the divine name יהוה, the second (v. 20) beginning with it. More important perhaps is the relative “weight” of the LORD’s “burden” (cf. 1:1) against his enemies: Each half of the taunt, i.e. vv. 6b–14 (excluding the final monocolon of similitude) and 15–20, is balanced in terms of the number of lexical units that compose it, namely, 71 apiece. Thus 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.

5. *Chapter 3 in relation to the rest of Habakkuk.* The final third of the book, the psalm of trust in 3:1–19 (cf. 1:1–2:1, 2:2–20),²³ presents the core of the argument concerning the primary issue that Habakkuk “the prophet” (3:1, cf. 1:1) had raised with Yahweh. How does divine justice relate to human

²² Mason suggests that סח “was a familiar cultic cry for ‘silence’ before a theophany” (*Habakkuk* 62; cf. Zech 1:7, 2:13 [17]). But this proposal, if granted, does not support a further conclusion that v. 20 is an “addition” to the original text (ibid. 91).

²³ Various hypotheses regarding the supposed disparate, multi-authored nature of the book are usually supported with reference to chap. 3. Hiebert, for example, asserts that this “hymn in Habakkuk 3 is an archaic composition, added to the corpus of Habakkuk in the post exilic period in order to emphasize God’s final victory over evil” (“Habakkuk” 626). As if the prophet himself could not have conceived of such a glorious outcome! A methodological error that is almost as great as that of presuming to recompose the original work (via source/redaction criticism), is the more artful one of freely offering to alter its received form. For example, in an effort to show how “inclusion functions to mark the discrete sections of Habakkuk 3 and to give shape to the poem as a whole,” Hiebert finds it expedient to emend the Masoretic text 41 times in 18 verses (T. Hiebert, “The Use of Inclusion in Habakkuk 3” [ed. E. Follis, *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, JSOTSup 40, Sheffield: JSOT, 1987] 120–122). This is not to say that all such proposals for improvement have no merit and are not worthy of consideration. The point is simply that “the Masoretic Text, especially its consonantal framework, should not be abandoned without good reason” (Bruce, “Habakkuk” 835). Thus, other things being equal, the credibility of a close discourse study of the original Hebrew stands in inverse proportion to the number of changes that are made to it in one’s analysis and interpretation, especially those which affect the consonantal text (MT). Any critical alteration in this respect, no matter how seemingly valid in terms of theoretical principles, always weakens one’s argument in relation to the textual organization as a whole.

injustice, on the one hand, and the righteousness of God’s faithful people on the other? Though a personal “prayer” (תפילה *tēpillah*) may seem to be a rather strange way to end a prophetic work—indeed, it is unique in the Hebrew corpus—this is no reason to consider it a later accretion or worse, an unwarranted addition to the text.²⁴ On the contrary, due to its prominent theological content it 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). It is a profound lyric reply that verbalizes the result of his intervening leap of faith. We might also view the psalm as being the chastened prophet’s rejoinder to his own challenging “complaint” registered against Yahweh in 2:1 (at the close of Part I). Similarly, these words fittingly express his awe-filled reaction to the LORD’s mighty vision of the great woes that will most certainly topple proud Babylon—after the fall of his own nation. Therefore, from any of these logical or literary perspectives, it is clear that some fundamental compositional forces converge to firmly integrate chapter three into the rest of the work.

There is also a form-critical argument that would lend support to this conclusion. Claus Westermann, for one, considers the first chapter of Habakkuk to be a good illustration of what he terms “the community psalm of lament.”²⁵ It is rather strange, however, to observe that both of the prophet’s complaints in chap. 1 (1:2–4, 12–17) manifest only the first several of the typical constituent elements of such a composition. In fact, it is clear that one needs to incorporate the entire book in order to fit the organizational pattern that is proposed. The overall correspondence is striking indeed, as can be seen by the following summary (using Westermann’s categories):²⁶

- a) opening *address*, here combined with an initial appeal to help (1:2)
- b) *complaint*, with all three of its primary components being included:
 - i. a “you” facet, directed against God (e.g. 1:3,12–13a)
 - ii. a “we” facet, detailing the suffering of the righteous (e.g. 1:4, 13b)
 - iii. a “they” facet, depicting the cruel acts of the enemy (e.g. 1:15–17)
- c) *profession* or recital of God’s past deeds of deliverance, a slot admirably filled by the theophanic-military eulogie of 3:3–15
- d) *petition* or request for divine intervention, in this case focally placed in 3:2, a verse which serves as “an encapsulation of the message of the book”²⁷
- e) divine *response*, an element which Westermann observes is only rarely incorporated into community laments of the Psalter, but which is uniquely expressed in incremental multiples within the framework of Habakkuk, i.e. 1:5–11, 2:2–20, 3:3–15 (thus a double-duty constituent, cf. [c])

²⁴ Proponents of deletion include: Marks, “Twelve Prophets” 218; and Peckham, “Vision” 635.

²⁵ C. Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content & Message* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1980) 29.

²⁶ Westermann, *Psalms* 35. As Mason notes, there is no *confession of sin* in the book, but this is not a diagnostic feature of the “lament psalm” (Mason, *Habakkuk* 89).

²⁷ Baker, *Habakkuk* 70.

- f) the *vow* to praise or to serve God, characteristic of individual-laments but rare in their communal counterparts,²⁸ acts as the conclusion of both the prophet's prayer (chap. 3) and the book as a whole, i.e. 3:16–19

The preceding generic evidence, when considered together with the structural analysis presented earlier, leaves little doubt that chapter three functioned as an integral and indispensable part of the "rhetoric" of Habakkuk from the very beginning of the book's compositional history. His prophecy would simply not be the same—either without it, or with it being regarded as some sort of later, supplementary appendix.

6. *A closer look at the prayer of Habakkuk.* The psalm-prayer of Habakkuk 3 is the most difficult portion of the book to delineate structurally and hence also to integrate in terms of its progression of content. That is shown by the great diversity of schemes which are displayed in the various translations. As Clark and Hatton observe, "It is not easy to make paragraph divisions within the chapter, and modern versions are all different in this respect."²⁹ Thus several valid ways of demarcating the psalm and interrelating its parts are possible, depending upon how one chooses to handle the data. The following proposal for segmentation makes use of the diagnostic criteria outlined above as well as the structural evidence to be discussed yet below within the framework of the entire discourse.

Though it is usually classified generally as a lament,³⁰ the lyric of chap. 3 freely incorporates stylistic elements from other psalmic genres, such as a historical recital, a royal eulogie, a profession of trust, and a hymn of divine praise-thanksgiving. In its broad outline, the organization is not difficult to perceive, but the internal segments are rather more controversial. The psalm begins with a typical editorial superscription (3:1) and ends with a corresponding subscription, or colophon (v. 19d). These musical notations thus circumscribe the whole within a liturgical frame of reverent worship. This perspective is reinforced by the rhyming technical terms שגינות *šigyōnôt* (v. 1) and נגינות *nəginôtāy* (v. 19), which, despite their uncertainty in meaning, serve to heighten the devotional atmosphere of the entire pericope.

²⁸ Westermann, *Psalms* 43.

²⁹ D. J. Clark & H. A. Hatton, *A Translator's Handbook on the Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1989) 114. However, this is not to say that our current problems in this regard stem from either an artistically inferior or a textually corrupt discourse. Thus, while welcoming the "new approach" toward analysis offered by Margulis, for example, I do not agree with his reason for proposing it, namely, "that the text of this poetic composition is seriously disturbed" (B. Margulis, "The Psalm of Habakkuk: A Reconstruction and Interpretation," *ZAW* 82 [1970] 411). The difficulties are due rather to our lack of an adequate contextual background to be able to interpret its many archaic allusions and unfamiliar lexical usages, on the one hand, and our inability to fully delineate the compositional complexity of the work on the other.

³⁰ For example, Margulis, "Psalm" 437; Armerding, "Habakkuk" 523; and M. A. Sweeney, "Structure, Genre, and Intent in the Book of Habakkuk," *VT* 41 (1991) 78. This characterization may be due to the fact that the terms "prayer" (תפילה) and "*shigionoth*" (שגינות) in v. 1 are employed in the Psalter to refer to other psalms of "lament" (e.g. 7, 17, 86, 90, 102, 142).

The psalm proper opens with a short strophe which enunciates the work's only explicit petition (or “prayer”) in a balanced cadence of rhythmically uniform utterances (i.e. 5 tri-accented cola in v. 2). This is a general plea based upon Yahweh's covenant commitment, namely, that as in the past in times (cf. v. 2c–d) of “trembling,” or agitation and turmoil (cf. vv. 7, 16), he will “remember mercy” (the final, climactic utterance of this verse) by intervening both to deliver and to vindicate his afflicted and suffering people. It is a humbled Habakkuk who is speaking here, that is, in contrast to the bold but frustrated complainant of chapter one. These words characterize the man of faith who was highlighted in 2:4; it is he who should now “live” (חַיִּיהוּ *ḥayyêhû* “enliven him,” 3:2c) according to the prophet's request of Yahweh (a secondary, but possible interpretation of this verb + suffix).³¹ Therefore, his present prayer—on behalf of the nation (first person singular and plural references)—typifies a “righteous” response to both the historical truth and also the future potential of the awesome works (lit., “your deed”) of an active, almighty LORD God (cf. the divine promise of 1:5—“I will surely do,” i.e. an instance of *anaphora* with 3:2).

Habakkuk proceeds to praise that memorable past by means of a composite synopsis and compilation of the LORD's manifestation of his glorious nature and wonderful deeds of deliverance on behalf of his covenant people (vv. 3–15). In effect, through this eulogy the prophet is divinely inspired to respond to his own plea of the preceding verse (2). This large central portion 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).

The pericope may be divided into two constituent sections, or “stanzas,” the second of which (vv. 8–15) complements the first (vv. 3–7) in the style of additive “heightening” within poetic parallelism to rise to a peak of intensity, significance, and relevance for the people of God. Both units portray Yahweh in a conventionalized figurative stance by means of a complex *theophany*, or “divine appearance,” first of all (3–7) in a vividly graphic piece which displays the transcendent majesty of Deity via the visible medium of nature (e.g. a thunder-storm, earthquake, volcanic eruption). This is closely associated with traditional heroic military imagery that depicts a cosmic battle between storm and sea (8–15). Both stanzas, which combine familiar poetic images from the spheres of creation and combat, serve as a dramatic reflection and remembrance of some of the prominent events associated with Israel's story of salvation.³²

The opening stanza consists of two tightly interwoven strophes. The first (vv. 3–4) describes the initial appearance of Yahweh in a radiance that permeates the entire universe, surpassing even the brilliance of lightning (in a reverse fulfillment of 2:14). The LORD's glorious splendor is lauded in a series

³¹ This is suggested in Robertson, *Habakkuk* 218.

³² Hiebert's comment is noteworthy: “By employing the imagery of this traditional [creation] motif and interweaving it with the political imagery of the warrior, the poet has founded God's control of historical affairs within God's control of cosmic orders” (“Habakkuk” 654).

of seven trimeters, which recall his frightening revelation during the giving of his “covenantal instructions” at Mount Sinai (cf. Deut 32:2). The progression ends “there!” (עַשׂוּ *šām*) in a dramatic monocolon that personalizes the locus of God’s surpassing “power” as anthropomorphically emanating “from his hand.” This divine might is then manifested in the second strophe (vv. 5–7) as God rocks the earth with his devastating movements which announce the onset of divine judgment for all covenant violators as well as the contemporary persecutors of his people (cf. Ezek 14:21). There is another swift progression of seven trimeters which lead up to a final bicolon that brings the strophe and the stanza to a chilling conclusion—with terror written in the faces of Yahweh’s foes (v. 7). Closure is marked by the shift in rhythm (i.e. a longer 5 + 4 bicolon), the introduction of a first-person reference (“I saw,” i.e. this “vision,” cf. 2:2), and an *inclusio* formed by the rhymed pair of parallel proper names, all of which are in some way associated with the wilderness of Sinai where the theophany is set (i.e. v. 3: “Teman”/“Paran”—v. 7: “Cushan”/“Midian”).

The second stanza, starting in v. 8, may be divided into three strophes. They are all closely connected by means of a common allusion to Yahweh who, as the Warrior-Lord, is coming out to fight on behalf of his defenseless people (cf. v. 13). A sudden shift to direct address coupled with a three-fold rhetorical question in synonymous parallelism with an emphasis on the LORD’s “anger” announces the beginning (aperture) of this section in v. 8. Why is the almighty LORD on the move (vv. 3–7), a “one-man” demolition army as it were? The answer becomes increasingly clear as this climactic stanza unfolds. Another strong *inclusio* delimits its external boundaries and establishes a probable historical setting, namely, God’s rout of the hostile forces massed at the (Red) “sea”—against which “you (O LORD) rode with your horses” (cf. vv. 8, 15).

The initial strophe of stanza two (vv. 8–10) is held together (cf. “cohesion” below) by repeated references to various bodies of water into which the poem’s first martial imagery is introduced. Whether or not this has a mythic background or origin, e.g. to the unruly waters at creation or to the pagan god of the ocean,³³ is beside the point. The function of such references here is to evoke familiar scenes of the LORD’s sovereign intervention into human history—for universal judgment during the Flood, but to deliver his chosen people at the Nile (i.e. by the plagues), the Red Sea, and the Jordan River. Yahweh’s saving “faithfulness” in the past will surely encourage the “faith” of his people in the present about their certain blessed future (cf. 2:4b; 3:3, 13, 19).

The salvific theme of cosmic warfare initiated by Yahweh is prominent in strophe two (vv. 11–13a) which leads off with a highly condensed allusion to an eclipse, literally: “sun moon it-stood-[still] [in-the]-heavens” (v. 11a; cf. Josh 10:12–13). This segment (and perhaps the psalm as a whole; see below) peaks out in the triumphant affirmation of v. 13a with its pair of key soteriological

³³ Bruce aptly observes that all these mythological terms functioned as mere “figures of speech” in Hebrew heroic poetry (“Habakkuk” 886). Their only religious significance was to underscore the total superiority of יהוה over all pagan deities.

terms: “you came out to deliver *your people*, to deliver *your anointed one!*” (i.e. Israel/Moses/the reigning Davidic monarch/the future messianic king?—or perhaps, all of the preceding).³⁴ Here at last we have an explicit divine “answer” to Habakkuk’s agonized complaints of 1:3–4, 13 and 17, all of which are amplified by the psalmist’s challenge in 2:1 and his rhetorical query at the head of this stanza (v. 8, forming an *inclusio*). The purpose of the LORD’s mighty battle—of his furious charge against all his enemies, as epitomized by the “sea” (cf. v. 15)—is to save the covenant nation, thus vindicating the fervent faith of his righteous people (1:2; 2:4) according to promise (2:3, 14, 20).

The third strophe (vv. 13b–15) then acts as a denouement that sketches in the details of God’s past and promised deliverance. It foregrounds the smashing defeat and devastation inflicted by the LORD upon “the head of the house of wickedness.” This is a prediction of the certain fall of the oppressor Babylon (like its analogue Egypt at the original exodus event)—along with each and every foe who dares to oppose Yahweh or his covenant people. As is the case in strophe two, this third segment consists of seven lines, but several of these are longer tetrameters, notably at its very beginning. The strong literary marks of closure for this strophe and the entire stanza have already been noted. The deeply introspective, sensual, first-person speech of v. 16 is another clear indication of a new discourse beginning.

The final stanza of the song (vv. 16–19) is a fitting reply to its prologue and the psalmist’s petition in v. 2. Furthermore, it is a cumulative response to everything that has been said (and seen!) in the book as a whole. At the onset of his action-packed “prayer,” Habakkuk’s faith is incipient, as it were: “I heard your report” (שמעתי שְׁמַעְתִּי *šāma^ctī šim^cākā*), and he asks that the LORD’s works would be renewed—or made to “live”—in the experience of his people (v. 2). Now, as a result of the confirmatory theophany, his trust is confidently anticipatory: “I have heard” (שמעתי *šāma^ctī*; i.e. the intervening divine vision), and he reacts with fear and trembling to what he now knows will certainly come to pass (cf. vv. 2, 7 = an instance of structural *exclusio*). The lengthy v. 16 would therefore best be construed as constituting a transitional strophe on its own, while the following material acts as a commentary on the positive nature of Habakkuk’s commitment to “patient waiting.” Verse 16 also complements 2:1 as faith finally overcomes frustration in the prophet’s steadfast hope for the LORD to act in the best interests of his people (cf. also 1:13). “Habakkuk obtained what he had prayed for—the assurance that the vindication of divine righteousness was on its way.”³⁵

A series of chiasmically arranged syntactic constructions (four paired bicola, but only one sentence in Hebrew) is begun in v. 17. This builds up to the second, now emotive, climax of the psalm in the rhyming trimeter of v. 18 (marked by emphatic cohortative verbs; cf. v. 13a for the initial, theological peak). The key term “my salvation” (שְׁעִי *yīš‘ī*) resonates not only with religious significance (e.g. Pss 62:1–2; 88:1; 89:26; 118:14, 21; 140:7), but also

³⁴ For a discussion of the various hermeneutical possibilities, see Armerding, “Habakkuk” 531; Robertson, *Habakkuk* 238.

³⁵ Bruce, “Habakkuk” 893.

with literary import as an echo of structurally parallel forms in vv. 8 and 13. It would be possible then to regard the prayer's final tricolon in v. 19 as another independent strophe, especially due to its clear dependence upon Ps 18:32–33. Here we have a firm indication in turn of the psalmist-prophet's renewed dependence for his "strength" not only upon God, but also on his Word (cf. "your report," v. 2). These closing words are a resounding proclamation of unwavering trust on the part of the righteous suppliant and an unshakable confession of his/her faith in the ultimate justice of the Sovereign LORD. Yahweh makes it possible for the believer to endure the depths of despair in anticipation of an ultimate enjoyment of the "heights" of blessing (v. 19c). The theodicy of Habakkuk is thus complete in the utter contentment expressed here by its lyric voice—no matter who happens to articulate it, or when.³⁶

7. *Rhetorical-dramatic progression in Habakkuk's poetic-prophetic discourse.* The compositional force of "progression" may be viewed as including several other basically linear literary arrangements that are interwoven with and run parallel to the structural-thematic (ST) organization of Habakkuk discussed in Part 1. They are of course part of one and the same all-inclusive and comprehensive syntagmatic formation. But it is helpful for the purposes of analysis to distinguish what we might term the "rhetorical-dramatic" format (RD) from the structural-thematic framework. This is because the latter (ST) development focuses upon the form and content of a literary work, whereas its RD counterpart concerns the pragmatic communicative aims and dynamic effects of the discourse—its principal constituent units as well as the work as a whole. In its most basic form, the RD configuration realizes the three nuclear elements that underlie every "hortatory" text, namely, problem \Rightarrow appeal \Rightarrow motivation. In Habakkuk, these rhetorical constituents may be expressed in summary form as follows:

- a) *problem:*
 - i. the prevalence and predominance of evil in a world created and controlled by "God" (3:3);
 - ii. the wicked continue to persecute the "righteous" followers of "the Sovereign LORD" (3:19).
- b) *appeal:*
 - i. initial—to the ultimate justice of "the Holy One" (3:3), i.e. "Do something about it!";
 - ii. final—to the "faith-fulness" of his righteous ones (2:4b), i.e. "Put your complete trust in the just judgment of Yahweh!"

³⁶ The preceding structural-thematic overview is necessarily longer than any of the following analytical descriptions because it forms the basis upon which all of the others are built. In other words, it acts as the overarching architectural framework into which each of the other parallel, text-spanning constructions may be fitted to form a single, multi-storied and mutually reinforcing compositional arrangement. This is partially based in turn upon a "propositional" analysis of the organization of chap. 3, which provides a possible logical-semantic confirmation of the preceding literary-structural analysis, particularly with regard to the major discourse breaks that are posited. A diagrammatic display of this propositional sequence was omitted here due to space restrictions.

- c) *motivation*: i. who our God is—the “Rock,” the “almighty LORD” (1:12b, 2:13, i.e. his theological credibility);
 ii. what he has done for his people as their eternal “Savior” (1:12a, 3:18, i.e. his historical reliability).

In the following overview of more detailed aspects of this hypothetical RD construct, I will try to avoid undue repetition with what has already been said about the larger fabrication of the book. However, I will draw special attention to several crucial points where the ST and RD progressions strongly converge and interact to convey the prophet’s message in an especially significant way.

As noted above, the overall “oracle” (or “burden”) of Habakkuk assumes the basic literary form of the traditional lament, or “prayer,” genre which provides the formal, semantic and emotive backbone for the entire discourse. Though the structure varies from psalm to psalm, the key compositional elements appear to be seven in number: invocation, plea to God for help, complaint(s), confession of sin [or] protestation of innocence, imprecation upon enemies, reaffirmation of faith in God, and a joyous response to the Lord’s (assumed) deliverance, e.g. words of praise, vow of service.³⁷ Each of these specific motivations finds implicit or explicit expression in Habakkuk, most evidently at the very beginning (1:2–4 + 1:12–13) and again at the close of the book (3:2 + 16–20), thus forming a generic *inclusio*. Coinciding with these two framing liturgical sections, a succession of other poetic types is artistically introduced to dramatize and give a more varied and compelling dimension to the discourse, i.e. a prophetic prediction (1:5), descriptive panegyric (1:6–11), parable (1:14–17), preface to revelation (2:2–3), oracle of censure/indictment (2:4–5), woe/taunt oracles of judgment (2:6–19), liturgical chorus (2:14/20), and finally, a complete psalmic prayer, consisting of a lament (3:2/16–18), theophanic hymn (3:3–7), salvation-history/royal recital (3:8–15), and a concluding confession of faith (3:19).

Within this shifting arrangement of poetic-prophetic genres as outlined above, the overt message of the book of Habakkuk is projected on several literary planes within the overall framework. This formation involves three closely interrelated sequences or patterns of structural development: narrative, disputational and emotive. These three elements are skillfully interwoven so that they continually resonate off one another, both semantically and pragmatically. They may be described in the following terms:

a. *Narrative*. The presence of “narrative,” or story, is perhaps not immediately apparent in this prophetic compilation, but a careful consideration of the book as a whole clearly reveals the characteristic sequence of a simple “plot,” at least in rudimentary form: problem/conflict ⇒ complication ⇒ climax ⇒ resolution/outcome. The initial predicament confronting the prophet was

³⁷ For a discussion and illustration of these poetic compositional elements, see E. R. Wendland, *Analyzing the Psalms: With Exercises for Bible Students and Translators* (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1998) 33–36.

local and social in nature, namely, an unbounded oppression of the poor and weak by the nation's rich and powerful. Yahweh's proposed international solution in the form of a punitive invasion by a mighty Chaldean army that would destroy the Judean state along with its land posed an even greater moral and spiritual dilemma for Habakkuk. For all its faults, Judah was still "more righteous" in comparison with the pagan, imperialistic nation of Babylon (1:13)—and besides, this simple plan seemed to be unfair in that it failed to provide for either a reprieve or an ultimate restoration. So Habakkuk boldly seeks to back Yahweh into a moral corner, as it were, over what now seemed to be an irreconcilable difficulty—a fundamental contradiction in God's nature/person and also in his behavior/purpose (2:1).

The basic, now prophetically anticipated narrative thread goes on in chapter two to build up to a climax of intensity as the LORD proceeds to reveal, in vivid visionary detail, the ultimate and total destruction of Babylon, the world's violent, idol-worshipping arch-enemy (symbolic of any and all such a-theistic forces; cf. Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2). This progression reaches its peak in 2:20 with Yahweh appearing majestically "in his holy temple," obviously in complete sovereign control of the cosmos. Habakkuk's psalm then acts as a lyric denouement that celebrates God's great and glorious victories in the past on behalf of his covenant people. The central core of this hymn (3:3–15) contains its own mini-narrative development (complete with a climax [14a] and a flashback [14b]) in which "the leader of the land of wickedness" (v. 13b) is utterly vanquished by the omnipotent Warrior-God, invincible Ruler of heaven and earth.

b. *Disputational.* The second and more apparent thread of the syntagmatic cord of discourse organization is the text's prominent dialogic manner of construction. In fact, the narrative or plot line discussed above is manifested in its entirety by the reverent debate between Yahweh and his prophet, with a heterogeneous gentile "chorus" suddenly introduced (by Yahweh) for dramatic effect in 2:6–20. This interlocutory pattern is realized in seven discursual "moves" which follow the regular alternation of speakers as outlined in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2

HABAKKUK			YAHWEH	
A.	1:2–4 (3a)	⇒	B.	1:5–11 (6a)
Ca.	1:12–17 (13c/17a)	⇐	Da.	2:2–5 (4)
Cb.	2:1 (1c)	⇒	Db.	2:6a [⇒] 6b–20 (14/20)
E.	3:1–2 (2b)	⇒	F.	3:3–15 (13a)
G.	3:16–19 (16c/18a)	⇐		

This type of interactive construction effectively keeps the discourse moving forward as each speech incorporates a certain peak or challenge (sometimes twofold) that calls for a response from the other party. These key elicitive and responsorial passages, or “triggers,” are indicated in parentheses on the table above. At the structural pivot, or midpoint, of the whole, i.e. 2:1 (cf. the ST analysis of Figure 1), an extended “turn” on the part of each of the interlocutors is interjected. This takes the form of a prolonged “speech event” that is compound in formation and complex in functional intent, i.e. Yahweh (2:2–6a + 6b–20) → Habakkuk (3:1–2 + 3–15 + 16–19).

The penultimate pericope, 3:3–15, is particularly interesting in that although it is uttered, or “prayed,” by Habakkuk, it actually represents Yahweh’s reply to several triggers that have preceded it in the discourse, namely, the prophet’s challenge in 2:1, God’s promise in 2:3, and Habakkuk’s contrastive petitions in 1:2 (confrontational) and 3:2 (confessional). Thus on one level of communication, Habakkuk provides in these words his own, faith-based resolution for the problematic theological issue that he raised at the very beginning of the book (1:2–4). But from another, more significant perspective, it is really the LORD who is doing all the talking—and the teaching. Thus this divine epiphanic segment consists of a verbal tapestry, or pastiche, of various interconnected quotations, allusions and reflections taken from the sacred tradition of Scripture, probably both oral and written—God speaking in effect through his own prophetic Word (see the intertextual documentation below).

c. Emotive. In addition to the individual peaks that appear as the discourse unfolds, there is also a cumulative progression of dramatic tension and emotive intensity as one exchange builds upon and augments that which has gone before. Indeed, the technique of dialogue serves to heighten the sequence of illocutionary (intentional) forces and their associated psychological attitudes, which are manifested as the text develops from point to point. Since this aspect of the text is not often considered, it may be worth a somewhat closer look.

Habakkuk leads off with a bitter complaint—including an implicit rebuke for the LORD—as he sees blatant injustice, involving both social corruption and spiritual apostasy, go unpunished all around him in the land of Judah (1:2–4). This is followed by Yahweh’s shocking revelation that he is going to make use of the pagan Chaldeans to exercise divine discipline (1:5–6). It is indeed ironic to hear God himself intone what amounts to a descriptive paean in praise of an ungodly adversary (1:7–11).

This unexpected revelation throws Habakkuk into serious emotional turmoil, and in a string of emphatic, vocative-initial utterances (which could all be interpreted as rhetorical questions, 1:12) he accusingly draws the LORD’s attention to the incongruity of the situation: the divine end does not justify a diabolical means (1:13)! The prophet’s incredulous dismay coupled with “righteous” anger (from his own biased perspective) is further intensified by his barbed little parable of the ravenous net of a rapacious enemy (1:14–17). He closes on a note of peevish pique as he throws up an even more defiant challenge to the LORD to go ahead and demonstrate his holiness (2:1; cf. 1:13).

In apparent acquiescence and accommodation to the introverted point of view of his messenger, Yahweh solemnly prepares Habakkuk for a special vision with the reiterated assurance that a day of retribution for the enemy and vindication for his people will most surely come (2:2–5). This ultimate revelation is preceded, however, by an invectively uttered prediction of punitive reversal which is so awesome in its rhetorical force, international repercussions and theological implications (2:6–20) that it leaves the prophetic spokesman temporarily speechless (2:20). This graphic woe-sequence gradually ascends to its own internal apex with the graphic liquid imagery of total condemnation in set four (2:15–17). The final segment of this oracle-set defuses the emotive tension somewhat by means of a more reasoned, didactic approach expressed as a sarcastically barbed homily against the utter foolishness of idolatry (2:18–19).

After recovering his composure, so to speak, after Yahweh's terrifying pronouncement of judgment upon the wicked, Habakkuk realizes that he has been dealing with a divinely controlled destiny that he has no right to delve into. He therefore responds appropriately in humble, awestruck worship. His psalm evinces an attitude and tone which is completely different from that of his previous speeches; indeed, his opening words sound almost Job-like in their penitent chagrin (3:2a–b; cf. Job 42:2–6). But he quickly rises to the occasion to fulfill his prophetic role as a mediator between God and his people with a plea on their behalf for mercy (3:2c). The brilliant, highly evocative scenes of an ancient theophany follow as Yahweh first displays his wondrous creative majesty (3:3–7), which is then manifested in a fierce and furious defense of his people (3:8–15). 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. The emotive high point of this picturesque divine vignette cannot be missed; it comes with the crushing of the supreme adversary and epitome of iniquity along with all his proud forces of oppression (3:13b–15).

This moving portrayal of God's "trembling anger" manifested in judgment, in contrast to the mercy of his "deliverance" (cf. vv. 2c, 13a), stimulates such a profound physiological and psychological reaction within the prophet (and those in the audience who empathize with him) that he too starts trembling—now in fear of the awesome majesty of the almighty "Holy One" (3:3, 16a). But this shaky feeling is quickly dispelled and replaced by a paradoxical calm that leaves Habakkuk serenely at peace (16b) despite the threat of impending war and total economic disaster (17). The troubling issue of the theodicy is thus settled at last in a personal resolution of patient trust in the ever-relevant and reliable word of the LORD (i.e. what he "heard," 16). At last, the final emotive peak of the psalm, and indeed the entire book, is reached in the two closing verses with their strongly optimistic affirmations of rejoicing (18) and a triumphant faith in the gracious provision of Yahweh (19). Though expressed in the singular, the obvious implication of the prophet's message is plural, a joyous invitation to all listeners (readers) to join in—that is, intellectually, emotionally, volitionally and spiritually!

8. *Theodicy realized in theophany.* In a number of important ways the urgent issues raised in Habakkuk’s initial lament (1:2–4) are ultimately resolved in his devout prayer of chapter three—a word of worship that was stimulated by the LORD’s twofold revelation of himself as an almighty God of just judgment (2:6–19 + 3:3–15). There is no doubt that a dramatic alteration has occurred in the prophet’s thinking and outlook on life, as expressed, for example, in polarities such as the following:

Figure 3

<i>Habakkuk’s initial situation</i>	⇒	<i>Habakkuk’s final situation</i>
he has no apparent answer (1:2a)	⇒	he has been answered (3:2, 16)
salvation is lost (1:2b)	⇒	salvation is assured (3:13, 18)
injustice goes unpunished (1:3a)	⇒	wickedness is defeated (3:8–12)
conflict is everywhere (1:3b)	⇒	he is at peace (3:16b)
no hope of justice (1:4)	⇒	restoration will come (3:2, 17–18)

Thus the main message of the “oracle” of Habakkuk is simply, but most significantly, this: The same sort of worldview transformation (or confirmation, as the case may be) awaits every one of those righteous individuals—past, present or future—who faithfully live out their faith (2:4) in life-fellowship with their Savior, the Sovereign-LORD (3:18–19). It depends on their recognition (and acceptance) of the fact that, despite all appearances to the contrary, God’s immutable justice continues ever to operate in a world that is seemingly filled with evil and bent on self-destruction. Even partial explanations of the individual events of personal or corporate (national) history, especially the disasters, are not always possible or desirable. For the most part then the LORD’s will and his manifold ways must remain shrouded in mystery—yet with the assumption and assurance that they are ultimately always “right” and graciously soteriological in relation to each and every believer. Accordingly, the following four central principles of divine justice, as poetically enunciated and dramatically visualized in the book of Habakkuk (especially in its second “half”), stand inviolate forever:

- i. God’s judgment upon the proud and wicked of this world will inevitably be carried out in just accordance with his perfect holiness (2:2–5; 3:3–7);
- ii. the faith of the righteous people of God will be ultimately vindicated when earth’s oppressors are punished once and for all (2:6–19; 3:8–15);
- iii. the Holy Sovereign LORD (Yahweh) is also a merciful God, who will finally deliver all those who put their trust in him, if not in this life, then most certainly in the life to come (2:4b; 3:2b, 13a);³⁸

³⁸ The belief in a life (after death) in eternal fellowship with the LORD God is of course not explicitly stated in the book of Habakkuk, but it seems to be definitely implied within the universal, cosmic, and everlasting framework of divine justice that is so poetically expressed in chaps. 2–3, for example, in passages such as 2:3, 2:14, and 3:17–18. As is typical in Hebrew prophetic literature,

- iv. the “righteous believer” is one who lives his/her faith in joyful, confident and reverent expectation that the future is secure in a living, loving God who cares, in keeping with his eternal covenant promises (2:4b, 14, 20; 3:2, 16–19).

For those who trust in the God of timeless Scripture, the appropriate response to the troubling vicissitudes of life will be that of the prophet recorded in 3:16–19, or rephrased in modern theological prose:

Thus through God’s sovereign goodness evil is overcome, not theoretically, so much as practically, in human lives. This [perspective] leaves with God the secret things (cf. Dt. 29:29) . . . glorifies God for what is revealed, calls forth wonder and worship, and resolves the feeling, “This ought not to be,” into the contented cry, “He does all things well!”³⁹

The basic point and purpose of Habakkuk’s *theodicy*—his prophetically expressed justification of the justice of God to mankind—thus foregrounds a fundamental message that has equally as much relevance for people today, wherever they may happen to live, whatever their sociocultural background may be, and however they may be living in terms of economic standing or political status. This is true whether they happen to realize it or not, for the book deals with a matter of universal human concern, namely, the relationship between good and evil in the world, with reference to the past, present and future. It also proposes a solution of lasting validity, that is, in the glorious *theophany* of the saving LORD who is ever ready, willing and able to fight on behalf of his faithful flock (3:3–15).

III. COHESION—THE INTERNAL, CONNECTING TISSUE OF DISCOURSE

The compositional “forces” of syntagmatic progression are necessary to move a text forward in manageable portions so as to accomplish an author’s specific goals of communication. Accordingly, some corresponding means are also needed to bind the discourse together so that it does not fragment and result in a message that is disparate, diffuse or obscure. Thus in order for the whole to be effective, each of the individual structural-thematic and rhetorical-dramatic arrangements discussed above must manifest its own internal unity, a coherence that for the most part meshes harmoniously in turn with that of the others.⁴⁰ This essential task of conjunction is carried out largely

the notion of a future afterlife is conveyed in concrete, down-to-earth imagery, so common, for example, in the prophecy of Isaiah: 2:1–5; 9:6–7; 11:1–16; 25:1–12; 27:1–13; 42:1–9; 49:1–7; 54–56; 60–62; 65:17–25 (note: throughout this clearly *unified* text). The “good news” of Habakkuk was undoubtedly based upon and presupposed the more elaborate message of his prophetic predecessor (e.g. 3:18 ⇒ Isa 61, esp. vv. 1, 8, 10–11).

³⁹ J. I. Packer, cited in *New Dictionary of Theology* (eds. S. Ferguson & D. Wright, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988) 679.

⁴⁰ There are two principal compositional factors that contribute to the essential integrity of a Hebrew poetic text. One, *progression*, is in Grossberg’s terms “centrifugal” (outward/forward-moving) in nature, the other, *cohesion*, is “centripetal” (inward/backward-moving) (D. Grossberg, *Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures in Biblical Poetry* [SBLMS 39; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press,

through *recursion*—that is, reiteration of all types: exact, synonymous, and contrastive; macro- and micro-structural; phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic. The placement of familiar transitional connective particles (*conjunctions*) and phrases on structural boundaries is the second important method of producing such *cohesion*, although these are frequently omitted in poetic discourse.

The skilled use of repetition in one form or another always functions to provide a text with a certain perceptible degree of unity and wholeness. This is true whether or not the composition is complete with regard to a particular theme or purpose, that is, whether it contains a discernible development of ideas and implications or not. In significant literary works the two forces of progression and cohesion will of course mutually enhance and balance each other, and such a convergence of function is evident also in the book of Habakkuk. Having taken his message apart, so to speak, through an analysis of its syntagmatic organization (i.e. the various compositional units and their interrelationships), we now want to put it back together again—that is, to work towards a meaningful “synthesis.” We will do this by considering a number of the ways in which repetition in particular effects such connection or bonding on the various strata of discourse.

The cohesive structures formed by recursion in literary, and especially poetic, discourse are primarily *paradigmatic* in nature, that is, they are based upon analogy or some overt correspondence (similarity/contrast), rather than on spatial juxtaposition and linear development as in the case of purely syntagmatic structures. Of course, these two principles and their textual outputs cannot really be separated, for they invariably depend and impinge upon one another. The techniques of cohesion provide a progression with its integrity, unity and harmony, while the diverse elements of a progression simultaneously help to forge several types and levels of cohesion within a text. A number of important reiterated features have already been pointed out during the preceding consideration of the major discourse progressions in Habakkuk. In this section then I wish to focus upon the recursive process itself and how it helps to convey as well as to highlight some of the prophet’s main theological motives and notions. It is convenient to separate the different forces of cohesion into two types: intratextual, which is of primary importance within the individual composition, and intertextual, which is secondary in terms of local significance, but of great relevance on a global scale in relation to the canon of Scripture as a whole.

1. *Intratextual Cohesion.* This type of text-internal connectivity is most commonly generated by means of a linguistic recursion based on some crucial similarity with respect to sound, sense and/or syntax. Such repetition may

1989] 5). Though different in their discourse operation, these forces are not antithetical or contradictory with respect to one another. Rather, they are fully complementary, and though existing in dynamic tension within the poetic text, their effect is that of mutual reinforcement or enhancement. By their interaction they serve both to organize the structural forms of biblical poetry and also to promote its primary communicative objectives as intended by the original poet-prophet.

perform one or more of three overlapping functions in the text: *demarcative*, i.e. it is used to segment a given progression, as was noted earlier (especially *inclusio*, *anaphora*, *epiphora*); *intensive*, i.e. it may emphasize or foreground a certain concept or theme; and *integrative*, that is, it serves to lend a greater measure of coherence to the content within a specified textual unit. This third type of verbal recursion plays an especially important role in the book of Habakkuk—in fact, it is one of the dominant features of his poetic style. Though it is prominent throughout the entire discourse, I will focus my attention upon the prophet’s prayer in order to illustrate how this portion forms a distinct text-within-a-text.⁴¹ Chap. 3 of Habakkuk is by no means detached structurally (nor was it composed in isolation) from the two initial chapters, as the wider pattern of lexical reiteration itself will also demonstrate. But the psalm is clearly distinguished as being a special constituent of the work in its totality.

The following chart (Figure 4) provides a cumulative summary of the main aspects of recursion as considered from the perspective of Habakkuk three. It is only a sample, however, for the corpus of passages cited is only illustrative and not exhaustive in nature. The key reiterated *lexical* items, both exact and synonymous (i.e. terms within the same lexical field) are given in literal English translation for the sake of convenience. This inventory is organized sequentially, that is, roughly according to the verbal order of occurrence (in Hebrew) and following the line-up of strophic units which constitute the psalm. Three types of repetition with regard to scope or distribution are noted, namely, that which is found: within a given strophe, elsewhere in chap. 3, or earlier in the preceding two chapters (only a selective listing of exact matches is recorded). This reflects the three basic hierarchical levels at which integrative, or cohesive, recursion operates in poetic-prophetic discourse, i.e. strophe ⇒ stanza ⇒ psalm/oracle. An asterisk denotes those instances of reiteration which appear to have an additional, locally intensive purpose or a significant demarcative function with reference to a distinct discourse segment.

Figure 4

3: verse(s)		other, strophe-external references	
<i>strophe</i>	<i>recursive concepts</i>	<i>inside</i> —CHAPTER 3— <i>outside</i>	
2	Yahweh . . . Yahweh	8*, 18*, 19*	1:2*, 12*; 2:2* 13, 14*, 16, 20*
	I heard your hearing	16*	1:2*
	your deed		1:5*
	in midst of years . . . in midst of years		
	make him/it live		2:4
	make him/it know		2:14
	in trembling	7*, 16*	

⁴¹ For another example, we may note how the verses of 1:5–11 “echo focal concepts from vv. 2–4” in the first dialogic exchange (Armerding, “Habakkuk” 502).

Figure 4 (cont.)

3-4	God . . . even the Holy One he came his glory . . . and splendor it filled the earth	18*	1:11, 12* 2:3 2:14 2:14
5-7	before him . . . before his steps he saw . . . I saw plague . . . pestilence earth . . . mountains . . . hills . . . land long ago . . . eternity . . . eternity	10*	1:3, 5, 13, 2:1* 1:6; 2:8, 14*, 17, 20*
8-10	rivers . . . rivers . . . sea . . . rivers . . . torrent of waters . . . the deep . . . waves (hands) you rode . . . your riding things (chariots) he raged . . . your anger . . . your wrath salvation uncovered it is uncovered	15* 12 13*, 18*	1:14; 2:14*
11-13	sun . . . moon . . . light . . . flash . . . lightning your arrows . . . your spear . . . to save . . . to save nations . . . your people	9, 14 8, 18* 6, 7, 16	1:5, 6, 7, 17*; 2:5*, 8*, 10, 13, 16*
12-15	head . . . thigh . . . neck . . . head your horses the sea . . . the waters	8* 8*	1:8 1:14; 2:14*
16	it trembled . . . I trembled my belly . . . my lips . . . my bones	7*	
17-18	not . . . there is no . . . not . . . there is no fig tree . . . fruit on the vines . . . crop of olives . . . fields . . . food . . . sheep . . . cattle I will rejoice . . . I will be glad	1:16 1:15	
19	Yahweh my Lord he makes me walk upon	2*, 3*, 18* 15*	

The preceding chart gives one an approximate idea of the considerable amount of recursion that binds together the several compositional units (strophes/stanzas) of Habakkuk three both formally and semantically into a cohesive and coherent whole. Furthermore, it indicates the extent to which this psalm is integrated on a purely lexical level with chapters one and two. It is also interesting to observe the multifunctionality of this extensive reiteration: Not only does such recursion serve to unify the text and its constituent segments, but it also helps to delineate structural boundaries and to emphasize important aspects of the prophet's message.

In addition to the manifold semantic recurrence exhibited by the verbal reiteration noted above, the text displays several other types of cohesion-creating repetition that are characteristic of Hebrew poetry. First of all, there is a significant amount of *phonological* recursion, including paronomasia, present to complement the lexical variety. An outstanding instance of this occurs in 2:18 where in contrast to Yahweh, the only true “God” (אלהים *ʾlhm*, left implicit throughout the strophe), pagan idols are pejoratively described as “dumb dummies” (אלילים *ʾlylym ʾlmim*). Habakkuk likes to pair together nouns and verbs that are close sound-alikes, for example, to characterize the wicked Babylonians, i.e. “the fierce” (המר *hmmr*) and “the impetuous” (הנמהר *hnnmhr*) people (1:6) who “give [others] intoxicating drinks” (משקה *mašqēh*) and indeed “make them drunk” (שכר *šakkēr*) unto destruction (2:15).

At other times, only certain key morphemes are reproduced to make the connection across a stretch of text, often forming emphatic assonance and/or alliteration, e.g. הלוא־אֶלֶה כָּלֶם עָלָיו מִשָּׁל (hlw²-ʾllh kllm ʿlyw mšl) “Will these [peoples] not all [take up] a taunt against him . . . ?!” (2:6). Such oral-aural accentuation is particularly effective in the several instances of divinely initiated *lex talionis* that are manifested in the “woe” oracles, e.g. (2:8):

כי אָתָּה שָׁלוֹת גּוֹיִם רַבִּים	Because you plundered many nations,
לְשׁוֹד כָּל־יִתְרָךְ עַמִּים	they will plunder you all the peoples who are left!

Usually such sound repetition is manifested in pairs, but a number of longer patterns also occur, for example, in the strophe covering 2:12–14 which is stitched together by this alliterative rhyming sequence: . . . עַל־יַם . . . בְּדַמִּים . . . עַמִּים . . . לְאֻמִּים . . . כַּמַּיִם (ʿl-ym. . . kmym. . . lʾmym. . . ʿmym. . . bdmym) “with bloods . . . peoples . . . to nations . . . like waters . . . upon the sea.” A number of passages are quite saturated with such phonological play which, in addition to its connective function, undoubtedly also had an engaging connotative effect upon listeners even as it amplified the prophetic message, e.g. with respect to the boundless greed of the oppressor (2:9):

הוּא בִצָּע בְּצָע רַע לְבֵיתוֹ	Woe to the one gaining evil gain for his house,
לְשׁוֹם בְּמִרוֹם קָנוֹ	to place it [up] in the heights of his nest.

Or the utter confused folly of idolatry, since an image is nothing more than the inert product of its maker (2:18): יִצָּר . . . יִצָּר . . . יִצָּרוּ . . . פָּסְלוּ . . . פָּסְלוּ (psl . . . pslw . . . ysrw . . . ys . . . ysrw) “his-formation one-forming . . . one-forming-him he-carved-him . . . a-carving.”

In addition to these varied lexical-semantic and phonological means, cohesion in poetic discourse is often produced also by the symmetrical *syntactic* structures created by manipulating the word order within adjacent cola. This is an especially prominent feature of the psalm of Habakkuk, where such patterned parallelism serves to demarcate as well as to unite certain strophes, e.g. 3:5–7, given in literal translation below (Figure 5):

Figure 5

Before him	it went a plague,	
	and it followed a pestilence	
before his steps.		
He stood	and he measured	[the] earth,
he looked	and he startled	[the] nations.
And they crumbled	the mountains of long ago,	
and they collapsed	the hills of eternity.	
	<i>The ways of eternity [are] his!</i>	
In distress I saw		the tents of Cushan,
they were trembling		the tent curtains
		of the land of Midian.

In tightly constructed poetic passages of this nature, any (mono)colon that stands outside the overall pattern is usually of special significance, like the utterance of divine attribution above (*italics*). A combined chiasmic-terraced sequence distinguishes the text’s penultimate strophe, which itself peaks out both formally and semantically in the final bicolon (3:17–18):

Figure 6

Though [the] fig tree	it does not blossom,	
	and there is no grape	
on the vines;		
	[though] it fails	
the crop of olives,	and fields not	
they produce food;	[though] he cuts off	
from the fold flocks,	and there is no	
cattle in the stalls;		
<i>nevertheless I</i>	<i>in Yahweh</i>	<i>I will rejoice,</i>
		<i>I will be joyful</i>
	<i>in the God of</i>	
<i>my salvation.</i>		

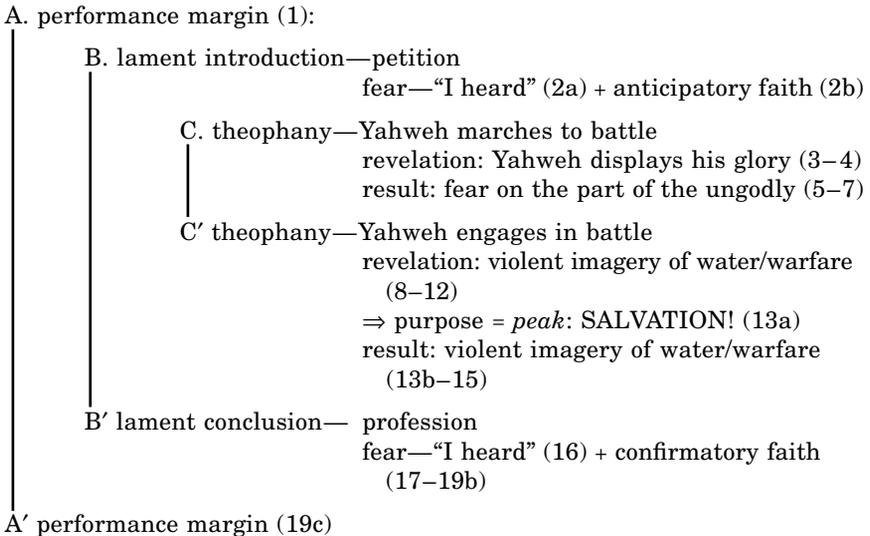
Sound may be combined with syntax to create an especially emphatic linkage, such as the passage that brings the first stanza of chapter two to a rousing conclusion (2:5, closure). The total unrighteousness of Babylon is thus foregrounded just before Yahweh begins his righteous condemnation of that wicked nation (and all others like it):

Figure 7

... he enlarges	like sheol	his soul, and he himself
he is never satisfied.	like death	
And he gathers	unto himself	all the nations,
וַיִּאַסֶּף	אֵלָיו	כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם
and he collects	unto himself	all the peoples.
וַיִּקְבֹּץ	אֵלָיו	כָּל-הָעַמִּים:

Recursion on a much more generic, conceptual level may be evident in the reversed construction that encompasses Habakkuk’s prayer of chap. 3. In this case, the linear syntagmatic development of the discourse (i.e. “progression”) simultaneously articulates a concentric paradigmatic recycling of the psalm’s principal structural-thematic units (i.e. “cohesion”) as the text unfolds. This symmetrical compositional construct, which exhibits a special focus at its center and conclusion (i.e. vv. 13a, 18–19) is illustrated in Figure 8 below:

Figure 8



Whether or not the preceding structure is a completely valid representation of the development of chap. 3, it does serve to highlight the primary semantic and pragmatic nodes of the poem. Verse 13a with its highly poetic style and cluster of key words, i.e. “deliver,” “your people,” “your anointed one,” and vv. 18–19a with its concentration of terms referring to the Deity, would certainly appear to represent the twin emotive-thematic peaks of the prayer as

whole. This profession of faith in Yahweh’s power to perform saving works lays the foundation for the psalmist’s personal faith, as expressed in the similarly emphasized borders of the psalm, i.e. B and B’, the latter in particular, which obviously is rhetorically “heightened” (cf. v. 19c) in comparison with the former. The LORD’s actions demonstrate his glorious nature on the one hand (C) and his commitment to do justice on the other, namely, through his punishment of the ungodly and vindication of all the “righteous” ones (cf. 2:4b) who rely upon him (C’).

2. *The “thematic polarity” of Habakkuk.* The foregoing observations apply to the rest of Habakkuk as well as to his concluding psalm. The charts given below provide a rough indication of the text-spanning cohesion that is generated by the book’s principal thematic polarity, one which aptly befits its classification as a “theodicy.” The two paradigms concerned contrast the manifold *injustice* of humanity with the constant *justice* of Yahweh. In other words, the chart lists those verses that express the various concepts pertaining to righteousness and unrighteousness which cluster around the divine-human axis of attitudes and activity in the world.

These two antithetical categories are generalized for the purpose of this exercise so as to incorporate all concepts that belong to their wider semantic domains. For example, “[they] seize dwellings that are not theirs” (1:6) and “they are a law to themselves” (1:7) both fall within the field of “injustice,” while “my Holy One” (1:12) and “you cannot tolerate wrong” (1:13) belong with “justice.” An asterisk marks the occurrence of a topical *reversal*, that is, an expression that refers either to human justice/righteousness (e.g. 2:4b), on the one hand, or to an apparent (humanly perceived) instance of divine injustice, e.g. “why do you tolerate wrong?” (1:3). There are several instances of passages that incorporate a double or combined reference. In 2:7–8, for example, there is a prophecy that those who “plundered” (שָׁלוּת *šllwt*) others will be transformed into the booty as it were of their victims, who will in turn “plunder” them (שָׁלוּךְ *yšllwk*). A reversal of this nature is typical of the *divine irony* often expressed in such judgmental “woe” oracles. In the interests of space, only the verse references are included on the following figure (9).

Figure 9

<i>chapter</i>	<i>INJUSTICE (man)</i>	versus	<i>JUSTICE (God)</i>
I	2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13b, 17		2*, 3*, 12, 13a, 13b*
II	4a, 4b*, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17		7, 8, 10, 13, 16, 17
III	13b, 14		12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19

The preceding summary reveals a general topical development within the book of Habakkuk that moves from an initial emphasis on unrighteousness (even seemingly divine!), through the more spatially balanced, almost antiphonal, presentation of chap. 2, and on to the text’s predominant focus upon the justice of Yahweh in chap. 3. Now how do the gaps—the verses which

were not included—fit into this dominant thematic framework? If considered in isolation, these passages might be construed as having a different emphasis. But situated as they are in this particular discourse, it is not difficult to relate virtually all of the verses not listed above to the book's chief polarity. They may be less obvious or explicit, but in one way or another they manifest some aspect of (or association with) either human injustice/unrighteousness or divine justice/righteousness. The following (Figure 10) is a summary of this interactive manner of interpretation:

Figure 10

<i>Passage</i>	<i>Relationship to the thematic polarity</i>
1:1; 3:1	metatextual: an "oracle" of Yahweh's judgment upon injustice; the "prayer" of a just person in praise of God's holy/righteous being and salvific action
1:14–16	a parable depicting the ravenous appetite of the wicked/unjust/unmerciful person or people
2:1–3	preparation for the revelation of Yahweh's just condemnation of human injustice and his vindication of the righteous victims
2:14, 20	despite the apparent power of the wicked, a holy Yahweh reigns supreme in heaven and on earth in glorious majesty—attributes that presuppose his essential righteousness
2:18–19	idolatry is both the source and a symptom of base human unrighteousness in relation to God and man
3:2, 17–18	a fitting response of God's righteous people to a revelation of divine vindicating justice in action
3:3–7	God's righteousness is implicit in his glorious, omnipotent being
3:8–15	God's righteousness is active in the deliverance of his people throughout history

The two charts above delineating the pervasive recursion found in Habakkuk, when considered together with the structural-thematic arrangement discussed earlier, clearly demonstrate how tightly the book's three chapters are bound together. They suggest in particular the need for including the psalm of chap. 3 within the larger framework of the whole. Many commentators regard Habakkuk's prayer as being an obvious product of later redactional activity and hence little more than a liturgical addendum or a pious theological afterthought to chaps. 1–2. However, a careful study of the internal compositional dynamics of the discourse reveals that this magnificent salvation psalm is indeed the climax of the entire work and the culmination of its fundamental line of argumentation. 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. The supreme righteousness of Yahweh as evidenced in the dramatic deliverance of his people will naturally evoke a similar prayerful response on

the part of the faithful who recognize their own unrighteousness and hence rely completely upon his merciful provision to meet their spiritual needs.

3. *The “compositional core” of Habakkuk (2:4b).* The preceding discussion provides a good perspective from which to view the thesis that 2:4b constitutes the thematic nucleus of the entire book of Habakkuk. In other words, one may consider the discourse as a whole to be the product of a paradigmatic “generation” of its compositional core—the three words: “and-[the]-righteous-one-by-his-faith(fulness) he-will-live.” Within the context of this particular work—and indeed, the complete corpus of OT literature—this proposition carries a great deal of implicit meaning. For one thing, it is a profoundly *relational* statement. In other words, it can be properly understood only in relation to the person and character of its divine author, Yahweh. Secondly, the utterance presupposes its polar opposite, namely, the concepts of unrighteousness, infidelity, and death. Thirdly, the declaration is ethical as well as theological; it concerns one’s life as well as her/his faith. And finally, there is also a crucial *forensic* component, a normative principle, and a norm-evaluator, or judge, involved—that is, the LORD God and the *torah* of his gracious covenant with all people.

The “deep-structure” theological kernel of Habakkuk may therefore be provisionally expressed as follows:

The person who is regarded as being righteous by Yahweh, based on his or her faith or steadfast trust in the “Holy One,” lives her or his life in this world accordingly, that is, characterized by faithfulness to the just demands of a divine covenant of righteousness, and he or she will ultimately live in holy fellowship with God eternally solely as a result of the full salvation worked by the all-powerful, but merciful, Sovereign LORD.

Thus, although the descriptive statement of 2:4b appears at first glance to focus on man—the righteous individual in contrast to the unrighteous—it is really based upon a much more fundamental proposition. This is a spiritual axiom which foregrounds the righteous being and behavior of the supreme Holy One (1:12; 3:1), 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. Religious “currency” (a system of theological and moral principles and precepts) is only as good as the divine standard that backs it up. The rest of Scripture attests to the fact that Habakkuk 2:4b has enough in reserve upon which to stake one’s eternal life.

As we observed in connection with our discussion of the thematic polarity of righteousness/justice versus unrighteousness/injustice above, the discourse is developed with an initial stress on human injustice in the prophet’s complaint of chap. 1. This particular emphasis is evened out in the “revelation” of chap. 2 and then is strongly counterbalanced by the hymnic proclamation of divine justice in chap. 3. There is thus a definite progression in religious force from beginning to end as the critical issues pertaining to the theodicy, both personal and national, are first introduced in chap. 1 and then resolved

in the remainder of the book. The ultimate “answer” is given in 2:4b—an anticipatory apologetic response which is immediately substantiated in the series of woe oracles of chap. 2 and finally by the theophanic vision coupled with the heroic ode in praise of Yahweh in chap. 3.

There is also an implicit but multifaceted cohesion that complements the linear, progressive movement generated by the syntagmatic forces of the overt structural-thematic and rhetorical-dramatic levels of organization. As we have seen, this essential connectivity operates on both the micro- as well as the macro-level of discourse, radiating out, as it were, from the compositional pivot or content core at 2:4b in ever-widening circles of co-textual relevance with respect to the heart of this inspiring message. The major implication then of Habakkuk’s prophecy, stated in figurative terms, is simply this: The Cosmic Creator and Divine Warrior so wonderfully portrayed in 3:3–15 is an infinitely greater source or basis of faith than the wicked idol-worshipping enemy host about to overrun the land (1:5–17) was a cause for disbelief. And the rank socio-political injustice that seemed to prevail within the prophet’s own country (which is nowhere named in the book, e.g. 1:2–4)⁴² would one day pale to insignificance as the righteous LORD instituted irrevocable judicial proceedings against the wicked of all nations (2:6–20).

The promised “reply” (2:2–3) to Habakkuk’s “complaint” (2:1) comes specifically with Yahweh’s pronouncement of the basic principle of righteousness in relation to faith and life (2:4b)—in contrast to a godless, self-sufficient pride that ends in temporal and spiritual death (2:4a, 5). The supreme significance of this vital proclamation is both established and emphasized by a subsequent twofold response: one from the divine perspective (2:14, 20), the other from the refined and renewed point of view of the prophet himself (3:2, 16–19). For a mortal man so profoundly struck by his perception of the divine majesty (3:16), Habakkuk certainly did a masterful job of conveying the essence of his awesome experience for the future edification and encouragement of generations of similarly life-querying, often querulous, believers.

4. *Intertextual cohesion.* It is quite obvious that the text of Habakkuk was not generated in a literary vacuum. On the contrary, as might be expected in the work of a later prophet, one detects a great deal of dependence on the prior religious traditions of Israel in the form of a complex weave of direct citations, mixed paraphrases and multi-leveled allusions. These theological references, whether strong or weak—historical, hortatory or lyric in nature—operate in concert to integrate the book firmly into the developing canon that was later to emerge in the text of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Here then we have a unique, divinely motivated and guided (or, to risk the term, “inspired”) compositional force in action. It generated a long-transpiring

⁴² The people of “Israel” are never addressed directly in the entire book. In this respect then Habakkuk plays more the religious role of the priest than the prophet, i.e. he voices the concerns and needs of the people to their God. But of course his entire book constitutes a prophetic word of the LORD encouraging “the righteous” to live according to their “faith” (cf. D. L. Petersen, “The Book of the Twelve/the Minor Prophets,” in *The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues* [eds. S. L. McKenzie & M. P. Graham; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1998] 119).

communication event having much greater magnitude and significance, in terms of religious principles and spiritual values, than the book of Habakkuk would ever have on its own. This was a Spirit-led literary movement possessing both progression and cohesion that culminated in the composition of the Greek (New) Testament. Verse 2:4b, the preeminent text in Habakkuk, for example, continued to manifest considerable influence within ongoing Jewish rabbinical hermeneutics and later “peaked” in its theological relevance through its citation by several apostolic writers. Both aspects of its thematic import (discussed above) were applicable in early Christian thought: Paul stressed the *forensic* appropriation of righteousness by the believer through faith (Rom 1:17, Gal 3:11, Eph 2:8), while the writer to the Hebrews highlights its *ethical* aspect in the faithful perseverance of the righteous according to their faith (Heb 10:26–39, esp. v. 38a).

It is not possible to consider or even to list all of the citations, partial references, and allusions which permeate this book. I will therefore first present a selection of some of the main cross-scriptural semantic connections that underlie the chief discourse segments of the first two chapters, in particular, those which concern the basic thematic polarity of human injustice versus divine justice (Figure 11). I will then summarize the principal intertextual links that occur within the psalm of Habakkuk in chap. 3 (Figure 12).

Figure 11

HABAKKUK		semantic category of		intertextual cross-reference
verse		injustice ←	→ justice	
1:1		oracle/burden		Num 1:1; Ezek 12:10; Zech 9:1; Mal 1:1
1:2	violence			Ps 55:9; Jer 6:7
1:3	injustice . . . evil destruction . . . violence strife . . . conflict			Num 23:21; Ps 7:14 Ezek 45:9; Amos 3:10 Prov 15:18; Jer 15:10
1:4	no law . . . justice			Exod 18:16; Num 15:16; Isa 1:17; Mic 6:8
1:5		Look what I will do . . .		Isa 29:14
1:6		I am raising up a ruthless and impetuous people . . .		Amos 6:14; Jer 5:14–17; Deut 28:49–50
1:7		feared and dreaded . . .		Jer 5:15–22
1:8		like a leopard/wolf . . .		Jer 5:6; Deut 28:49
1:9		swift as a desert wind . . .		Isa 5:26–28; Jer 4:11–14
1:10		they capture cities		Deut 28:52–57; Isa 10:13
1:11	their strength is their god			Zeph 2:15; Isa 47:8

[Note: many of the references of chap. 1 deal with human “injustice,” but they apply in principle to the so-called “covenantal curses” that Yahweh promised would justly befall Israel if that nation repeatedly violated his holy *torah* (cf. Lev 26; Deut 28–32); thus passages depicting Chaldean aggression are listed under the category of divine “justice.”]

Figure 11 (cont.)

<i>verse</i>	<i>injustice</i> ←————→ <i>justice</i>	<i>intertextual cross-reference</i>
1:12	for judgment you appointed them . . . to punish	Isa 11:3–4
1:13	Yahweh does not tolerate evil why is God silent in view of the wicked?	Pss 5:4–5; 34:16,21; Ps 74:11; Isa 42:14
1:15	a fishhook and a net of divine judgment wicked Babylon rejoices and is glad	Amos 4:2; Ezek 32:3 Ps 14:7; Joel 2:21
1:16	sacrificing/burning incense to idols	Hos 4:13–14; 11:2; 2 Kgs 12:3; 14:4; 15:4
1:17	the enemy destroys without pity	Deut 28:50; Jer 6:23
2:1	the prophet as a watchman of the LORD's just judgment; Yahweh will "rebuke" his prophet to establish justice	Ps 85:8; Ezek 3:17; Mic 7:4, 7; Isa 21:8, 56:10; Jer 6:17 Prov 1:23, 25, 30; 3:11
2:2	Yahweh commands that his just "revelation" be written down so Habakkuk can run with it	Deut 27:1–8; Isa 30:8 Jer 23:21
2:3	Yahweh's righteous judgment about "the end" will surely be revealed at the right time so the righteous must "wait"	Dan 8:19; 11:27, 29; Isa 58:11 Isa 8:17; 30:18; 64:4
2:4	the unrighteous are greedy and proud the righteous have/are faith/faithful before God	Num 14:44; Prov 14:12 1 Sam 26:23; Ps 33:4–5 Isa 26:2,5; Gen 15:6
2:5	drunken injustice, like the grave, never stops taking the innocent captive	Prov 30:15–16; 31:4–7; Isa 5:11–12, 14, 22
2:6–8	Yahweh's sentences of "woe" upon the wicked— murderers, extortioners, and exploiters;	Isa 5:8, 11, 18, 20–23; Jer 22:13; Amos 5:18 Num 35:33; Deut 23:19; 24:10–11
	former victims will become victors and "plunderers"	Jer 50:9–15; 51:6–9
2:9–11	those who "build a house" on "high" by injustice; Babylon cannot escape the just judgment of Yahweh	Jer 22:13–17; Obadiah 3–4 Isa 14:4, 13–15
2:12–13	Babylon will go up in smoke; the God of justice is Yahweh,	Jer 51:58; Mic 3:10 Num 14:21; Isa 6:3;
2:14	whose glory fills the earth	Isa 11:9; Ps 57:5, 11
2:15–17	Babylon also ravaged plant/animal life; Yahweh will make Babylon drunk from the cup of his wrath	Isa 14:8; 28:7–8; Jer 25:15–17, 49:12; Lam 4:21; Isa 29:9–10; 51:17–23
2:18–19	the unrighteous seek guidance from idols, but they receive no revelation	Ps 135:15–18; Isa 44:13–17, 46:6–7; Jer 2:27, 51:17–18, 47
2:20	the holy/righteous LORD alone can reveal what is the truth so be silent before him!	Pss 11:4, 60:6; 62:1; Mic 1:2 Isa 41:1; Zeph 1:7; Zech 2:13

Beginning in chap. 3 with Habakkuk’s thanksgiving psalm, the pertinent intertextual threads really become thick—closely attached as they are to the liturgical corpus and salvation-history of Israel. This is particularly true in vv. 3–15. There are four pericopes which provide an especially large number of parallels to some of the key segments of the prophet’s prayer, namely: Exodus 15 (= the *historical* source) and Psalms 18, 68, 77 (= the *liturgical* source). The thematic pole of “unrighteousness” greatly diminishes in overt importance as all attention is focused upon the awesome revelation of Yahweh, the invincible Soldier-King who is coming to fight for justice on behalf of his persecuted people. As was noted earlier, the poetic discourse takes the form of a mini-narrative, one that has its roots firmly planted in the epic-religious tradition of ancient Israel. Only the primary elements in this lyric story of the LORD’s manifestation of glory are listed below, along with their intertextual cross-references for the sake of comparison.⁴³

Figure 12

<i>verses</i>	<i>topic—narrative motif</i>	<i>cross-references</i>
2	<i>prologue</i> to the poetic-narrative revelation of the “deeds” of Yahweh, righteous in “anger” but great in mercy	Pss 68:28; 75:1; 77:11–12; 44:2, 10, 12, 24, 27
3–4	Yahweh appears on the scene from the desert south/Sinai in all his splendor and might	Exod 19:16–19; Deut 33:2; Pss 68:4–10, 32–35; 77:16–17
5–7	the effects of Yahweh’s advance are felt in the shocking/shaking of nations and nature	Exod 15:13–16; 19:18; Judg 5:4–5; Pss 18:7–15; 77:18; 78:43–51; 91:3
8–10	Yahweh vents his anger against the seas (= superiority over all pagan deities) as he rides to war on a chariot of clouds	Exod 15:8; Pss 18:9–12, 15; 68:4; 74:12–14; 77:16–19; 89:9–10; 104:3; Job 26:12–13; Isa 27:1; 51:9–10
11–13	<i>climax</i> : Yahweh, armed with the weapons of nature, battles and completely routs the enemy to deliver his people and anointed one	Pss 18:14; 68:7, 11–14, 17–18, 22; 74:13–14; 77:14–15, 17–18; 110:6; Deut 32:23, 40–42
14–15	<i>denouement</i> : with a flashback to the priortime of oppression; all enemies, both natural and supernatural, are impressively defeated	Exod 15:2–5, 9–10; Deut 32:43; Pss 68:21; 77:19; 93:4; 144:6–7
16–19	<i>conclusion</i> : a personal, meditative response to the narrative; patient and joyful hope for future deliverance and vindication	Deut 26:17–18; 32:13, 32–33, 41–43; 33:29; Joel 1:7–12; 2:23–24; Mic 7:7; Pss 4:7; 18:32–33, 47; 28:6; 31:7–8; 32:11; 35:9–10; Isa 8:17; 17:10

Thus Habakkuk and his “righteous” compatriots need “wait” no more (2:1). His (and our) “faith-fulness” has been fully vindicated as well as strongly reinforced (3:18–19) by this captivating vision of the Sovereign LORD and his mighty host in saving action.

⁴³ Armerding, “Habakkuk” 520–521; Baker, *Habakkuk* 70–75; also R. D. Patterson, “The Psalm of Habakkuk,” *Grace Theological Journal* 8 (1987) 176.

5. “*Mythopoetic*” allusion in *Habakkuk 3*. One could logically posit another, deeper (or more “distant”) level of intertextuality with respect to the theophany-victory song of 3:3–15, namely, an ancient mythopoetic corpus that forms the basis for a number of the archaic references, figurative allusions, and even certain terminology to be found in this section. Sawyer, for one, claims that “the brilliant imagery of chapter 3 has a long literary history, going back to pre-Israelite Canaan.”⁴⁴ A number of scholars have made this particular feature the focus of their analysis of *Habakkuk 3*.⁴⁵ Accordingly, they identify and attempt to elaborate upon the central motifs that were common in Canaanite and Ugaritic epics, which are summarized by Hiebert as follows:

This ancient pattern is made up of two segments or genres within which the theophany of the storm god is described in formulaic fashion. [First], the storm god marches out from his mountain to do battle with Sea [i.e. a major deity], in response to which nature is devastated. [Second], the storm god returns victoriously from the battle to take up kingship on his mountain, in response to which nature is renewed . . . The victory of the storm god celebrated in *Habakkuk 3* reflects not only the victory of Israel’s divine warrior over Israel’s historical enemies but also, and fundamentally, the victory of Yahweh over Sea, the ancient dragon of chaos.⁴⁶

From this point of view then, what we have in *Habakkuk’s* psalm is not only an instance of heavy intertextuality, but also a significant re-contextualization within the cognitive framework of the pagan mythic and/or secular-heroic worldview. It does not seem likely, however, that at the prophet’s time in the religious and literary history of Israel, the influence of such an alien and archaic conceptual environment would be nearly so prominent or prevalent in an apologetic work of this nature, namely, a theodicy on behalf of one God, Yahweh.

This is not to deny the considerable presence of ancient epic influence upon the composition of *Habakkuk three*. Such a background is reflected in the archaic poetic style, which differs notably from that of chaps. 1–2. For example, there are supposedly instances of internal defective spellings, absence of the definite article, the occurrence of an old pronominal suffix in ך—and the enclitic ם, frequent use of the preterite prefix conjugation in variation with suffixed verbals, climactic tricola in key structural positions (e.g. vv. 4, 8, 11, 13b–14a [?]), and word-pairs common to Ugaritic and older Hebrew poetry.⁴⁷ In addition, there is a certain amount of thematic correspondence of a largely indirect

⁴⁴ J. F. Sawyer, *Prophecy and the Prophets of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 119.

⁴⁵ For example: Albright, “Psalm”; U. Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies 2* (trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973); F. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973); J. H. Eaton, “The Origin and Meaning of *Habakkuk 3*,” *ZAW*, 76 (1964) 144–171; and W. A. Irwin, “The Mythological Background of *Habakkuk 3*,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (1942) 10–40.

⁴⁶ Hiebert, “Inclusion” 132.

⁴⁷ Patterson, “Psalm” 175–176; M. L. Barre, “*Habakkuk 3:2*: Translation in Context,” *CBQ* 50 (1988) 186–187. Bruce attempts to deal with some of the textual difficulties presented in chap. 3 with reference to “The *Habakkuk* commentary discovered in Qumran Cave 1 in 1947” (“*Habakkuk*” 835).

and general nature, as was noted earlier.⁴⁸ But all this, whether pertaining to form or content, is utilized by the present author only in a secondary, or even tertiary, sort of way, that is, for the rhetorical purposes of illustration and embellishment to create added impact and appeal. Such material was necessary on purely literary grounds because it was characteristic of the poetic genre which the author was clearly trying to evoke in order to provide a fitting climax to his work. Besides, it was undoubtedly familiar to his audience, having already been “de-mythologized” and extensively re-focused in favor of Yahwist orthodoxy by numerous texts in the corpus of Hebrew religious literature, both oral and written (even in a relatively old poem such as Exodus 15).

There may or may not actually have been an ancient Hebrew religious epic on the familiar salvation-history theme concerning the nation’s movement, under God (Yahweh), from Egypt (slavery) to Canaan (freedom), that is, from the Red Sea (via the exodus) to Sinai to the promised land across the Jordan.⁴⁹ The point is that the prophet Habakkuk obviously did make extensive use of the extant literature of Scripture in other parts of his text (cf. Figure 11) in order to found his theophany upon the very word of the LORD (cf. 2:1). So why not also in the climactic portion of his prophecy to contextualize his concluding “prayer,” specifically vv. 3–15, with reference to the well-known and proven past of Yahweh’s great deeds of deliverance on behalf of Israel? The former pagan myths were probably no longer a viable spiritual currency as far as their thematic or pragmatic (motivational) “buying-power” goes. That had been supplanted—not merely superimposed—first of all, in the liturgical tradition of worship (the Psalter, e.g. Ps 74:13–14). Heathen religious notions were also rendered impotent and useless by the messages that Yahweh communicated through his prophets, who revealed a monotheistic and merciful covenantal theology that was unique among the nations, both then and now. This dynamic tradition of a Savior-God actively moving in world history for the redemption of his chosen people provided, and still furnishes, the most viable frame of reference according to which Habakkuk 3 (and similar passages) may be understood and hermeneutically applied.

Within the very boundaries of his own prayer of thanksgiving then, Habakkuk’s request that the LORD mercifully “renew his works” of salvation (3:2) is granted in an anticipatory, but deeply satisfying, sort of way before his very eyes in the theophanic vision of vv. 3–15. The latter is also an initial fulfillment of the LORD’s promise to provide him with a certain revelation (2:2–3). The epic or heroic manner of composition, with its significant soteriological core (v. 13), epitomizes the central theme of the book as a whole, namely, Yahweh’s unflinching faithfulness to his people throughout the ages. This existential truth in turn provides the only sure foundation for the faith of the righteous, who live according to it (2:4b) and who patiently, yet joyfully, wait for the divine plan of deliverance to be worked out

⁴⁸ See also Cassuto, *Biblical Studies* 99–101.

⁴⁹ As argued by Patterson (“Psalm” 186–187); on the great differences between Near Eastern mythology and Hebrew narrative, cf. *ibid.* 189–190.

in their own lives (3:16–19). Such a vital literary and religious connection with the past provides an ever-present hope for the future.⁵⁰

Thus the prophet's extensive use of the rhetorical technique of intertextuality itself becomes an important aspect of the theme of his message—stylistic form transformed into theological significance. The redemptive deeds of Yahweh, whose very name (יהוה) connotes continuity, reliability, permanence and presence, provide that cohesive bond which gives sure meaning and purpose to the ongoing, ever-changing progression of human history. In specific terms, the exodus salvation event (gospel) lays the groundwork for the declaration of the LORD's covenant will at Sinai (law; cf. Exod 20:2), and this pattern of divine revelation continues throughout the Holy Scriptures, for example, in the life of Abraham (Gen 15:6; 17:1–14), in the teachings of Christ (Luke 7:39–50), and the writings of the Apostle Paul (Eph 2:8–10). Indeed, such steadfast continuity amidst discontinuity, cohesion underlying progression—the promise (and even realization) of salvation despite endless world crises and catastrophes—is a powerful compositional force and a crucial theme not only of Habakkuk and the two Testaments, but it remains a vital aspect of personal experience for all who by faith are integrated into the transgenerational, multicultural and polylinguistic family of God. It is also a valuable nugget of biblical truth that continues to inspire a verbal response on the part of the Lord's singing “prophets” throughout the ages, for example, in the well-known words of Isaac Watts (1719; cf. Psalm 90):

Our God, our Help in ages past,
Our Hope for years to come,
Our Shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home!

⁵⁰ Among a number of helpful applications of Habakkuk's message to the present age, Hiebert has this to say about the special relevance of the “apocalyptic hymn” of chap. 3: “According to the apocalyptic point of view, the injustices of history, such as those about which Habakkuk so eloquently complained, could be rectified only through a decisive intervention of God that would end history and inaugurate an age in which God's reign would be absolute. . . . The perspective from which the problem of injustice is viewed has been significantly broadened to include a new sphere of existence beyond this earthly life. In this context, the affirmation that ‘the just shall live by . . . faith’ takes on a new sense. It becomes an admonition not only to remain faithful within the injustices of this world but also to await the vindication God has promised the righteous in the next world” (“Habakkuk” 655).