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Survival of the Fittest

Habakkuk and the Changing Trail of the Prophetic Tradition

In Jeremiah 28, there is a dispute between the prophets Jeremiah and Hananiah over the (il)legitimacy of prophecies of salvation concerning Judah and prophecies of judgement regarding Babylon. On the eve of Jerusalem's fall to the Babylonians, the prophet Jeremiah, who proclaims judgement on Judah at the hands of Babylon, appears to be the true, genuine, canonical voice of God. While this text does not preclude the eventual authenticity of prophecies of salvation in the event that they are proven valid by being fulfilled, it nevertheless is rather strange that the book of Jeremiah ends with a collection of prophecies against the Chaldaeans. The anti-Babylonian statements in Jeremiah 50–51 are ascribed to the very same prophet who had once dismissed Hananiah for uttering similarly worded—and presumably uninspired—invectives before the people of Jerusalem.

Speaking favourably about the people of YHWH and condemning Babylon as an enemy also appears in other canonical prophecies (e.g. Isa 13–14; 21:1–10; 47). A particularly interesting case of this is the book of Habakkuk, which, in its current form, also proclaims judgement on the Chaldaeans. It apparently does this in a context where this world power is still supposed to be standing strong. Yet, when the prophecies of Jeremiah and Habakkuk are put side by side, a significant shift in the prophetic tradition—at least with respect to the line of tradition presented in Jeremiah 28:8—becomes evident. In fact, Habakkuk appears to have more in common with Hananiah's viewpoint than he does with Jeremiah's. Concluding his analysis of Habakkuk's prophecies and pointing out their intertextual allusions to the book of Jeremiah, Dominik Markl arrives at the following determination: ›Dabei verkehrt Habakuk die jeremianische Gerichtstheologie bitter ironisch zur Antitheologie, um

sich mit dem provokativen Thematik der feindlichen Haltung JHWHs bei Jeremia kritisch auseinanderzusetzen.‹[1] Was Habakkuk thus a critical opponent of the Jeremianic line of tradition? Is there a place for Hananiah's voice among the canonical prophets after all? Or should we rather accept the proposal of E. Otto, R.D. Haak and others who have argued that Habakkuk is simply another example of a prophetic book which demonstrates how an originally anti-Judaean and implicitly pro-Babylonian prophecy was ultimately transformed into an anti-Babylonian text (as also happened in the book of Jeremiah)?[2] It is essential—for the history of Old Testament theology and the formation of the Hebrew canon—to clarify how, when and especially why such a shift in tradition took place and how both voices ultimately survived. How did the later authors and editors of Old Testament prophecy manage to resolve the dichotomy of judgement versus salvation?

I shall argue that from a theological point of view, the book of Habakkuk reflects a significant instance of transition during the formation of the Hebrew canon. It echoes the first stages of the process of reinterpreting ancient prophecies of judgement. As an example of a theological treatise, the book of Habakkuk is not a collection of fragmentary prophetic speeches uttered before an audience; rather, it was conceived as a well-planned literary composition from the very beginning. The theology behind the formation of the book of Habakkuk is strongly reminiscent of the editorial agenda of the redactors who undertook the daunting task of re-editing earlier collections of prophecies of judgement, such as the ones that are found in the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, for a new generation of readers.

1 *The Origin and Structure of the Book of Habakkuk*

Simply put, in its present form, the book of Habakkuk is a literary composition proclaiming YHWH's judgement of the Chaldaeans and the deliverance of the oppressed nation of Judah. There has been some debate

[1] D. Markl, ›Hab 3 in intertextueller und kontextueller Sicht‹, *Biblica* 85 (2004), 106.

[2] E. Otto, ›Die Theologie des Buches Habakuk‹, *VT* 35 (1985), 179-181; R.D. Haak, *Habakkuk* (VTSup 44; Leiden, 1992), 151-155; I. Karasszon: ›Egy sohasem élt próféta súlyos öröksége. Habakuk-tanulmányok‹, in: *Az Ószövetség fényei. Veterotestamentica* (Budapest, 2002), 130-135.

about the date of this book and about the historical reliability of its only reference to the Babylonians, which occurs in Habakkuk 1:6.[3] However, the evidence appears to favour the analysts who locate Habakkuk in the neo-Babylonian era.[4]

The three chapters of this book can be subdivided into several blocks of text having various transition points, which are commonly recognised in studies dealing with this book. (1) Habakkuk 1:2–4 consists of a complaint by the prophet about the situation that he is witnessing in his world. He cries out to God at the sight of destruction and violence when he observes the wicked besetting the righteous. Exegetes disagree regarding whether the destruction and violence described in these verses refer to injustices committed by the Judaeans.[5] Some analysts contend that it is the foreigners who behave violently—with Judah actually being the victim.[6] The second subdivision of chapter 1—Habakkuk 1:5–11—is a divine utterance which begins rather abruptly by summoning the audience to look at the treacherous ones and be astonished by what God is doing.[7] This passage, which envisages the Chaldaeans' arrival as involving a merciless and fearful nation, is generally treated as a pericope that is independent of Habakkuk 1:1–4. The third subunit—Habakkuk 1:12–17—once again

[3] Some exegetes date the prophecy of Habakkuk much later in the Hellenistic period. Cf. B. Duhm, *Das Buch Habakuk* (Tübingen, 1906); W. Herrmann, Das unerledigte Problem des Buches Habakkuk, *VT* 51 (2001), 481–496. However, Duhm's emendation of כַּשְׂדִּים in Habakkuk 1:6 to כִּתִּים, supposed by him to allude to the Greeks, is questionable (cf. 1QpHab ii 11). Similarly, Herrmann's theory that that ›Chaldaea‹ could refer to any post-Babylonian world power is based solely on examples taken from the New Testament (Herrmann, ›Habakkuk‹, 489–490). Moreover, his conclusion that קָדִימָה in Habakkuk 1:9 means ›eastwards‹ is far less convincing than ›east wind‹. Cf. Revised English Bible; D.T. Tsumura, ›Polysemy and Parallelism in Hab 1:8–9‹, *ZAW* 120 (2008), 198–199.

[4] See for instance J.J.M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY, 1991); M.A. Sweeney, ›Structure, Genre, and Intent in the Book of Habakkuk‹, *VT* 41 (1991), 63–83; Haak, *Habakkuk*.

[5] In particular, the exegetes who consider these subsections to be more or less independent pericopes argue that Habakkuk 1:4 describes circumstances within Judah (cf. D.W. Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (TOTC; Leicester, 1988), 45–46; Haak, *Habakkuk,* 151–155). Viewing verses 5–11 and 12–17 as fragments that originally were independent of 1:1–4 may also result in the hypothesis that the wickedness in Habakkuk 1:13 involves atrocities in an international context. For an overview of reactions to this interpretation, see O. Dangl, ›Habakkuk in Recent Research‹, *CRBS* 9 (2001), 139–144.

[6] This position is generally adopted by those who regard Habakkuk 1–2 or 1–3 to be an original literary unit. See Sweeney, ›Structure‹, 73–78.

[7] There is strong evidence that the Massoretic Text is corrupt at this point, and that בַּגּוֹיִם should be emended to בֹּגְדִים (see 1QpHab, LXX; Acts 13:41; Hab 2:5; Ps 119:158). בַּגּוֹיִם also makes less sense from a contextual point of view.

features a dispute with God, which addresses him in the second person and wonders how long evil will prevail.

(2) Habakkuk 2 begins with a personal note about the prophet's intention to stand his watch and wait for a divine answer to his rebuke, while simultaneously expressing his intent to respond to God's revelation (Hab 2:1–2a).[8] This preface is followed by YHWH's command to the prophet to take a tablet and record the oracle in which he will provide his reply to the earlier complaint. YHWH urges Habakkuk to look forward to the fulfilment of this oracle (Hab 2:2b–3). Habakkuk 2:4–20 appears to be the actual content of the message that is to be recorded. Like Habakkuk 1:5–11, this passage is also a divine speech, which includes a citation—a מָשָׁל—formed of a list of ›woe-cries‹ that have been put in the mouths of nations which were previously destroyed by Babylon (Hab 2:6c–20).

(3) Chapter 3 is identified as a psalm by Habakkuk and has its own superscription (3:1). Habakkuk 3:2 begins with another personal note by the speaker (similar to the one in 2:1), which addresses YHWH and looks back at Habakkuk 2:4–20. The subsequent poem about YHWH's salvation is often assumed to be composed of two parts: a theophany in verses 3–7 and a hymn in verses 8–15. The chapter concludes with an interpretive note (Hab 3:16–19c) that reflects on the preceding poem and assumes that the deliverance by YHWH which is described there should be understood in relation to the ›nation which raids it/us‹ (עַם יְגוּדֶנּוּ; 3:16). In the context of this book, these words could hardly refer to anyone except the Babylonians.

Judah's deliverance from Babylon and the ultimate punishment of that foreign nation is an overarching theme of the entire book. Taken together with the fact that this book is dated during the Babylonian period, this anti-Babylonian focus raises an important issue, insofar as it apparently moves away from the classical line of prophetic tradition that is referred to in Jeremiah 28:8–9.

2 *Habakkuk among the Prophets*

In studies of Habakkuk, there are basically three distinctive approaches regarding the source of this anti-Babylonian and pro-Judaean message. (1) One group of scholars assumes that Habakkuk is a clear representative

[8] Regarding this interpretation of Habakkuk 2:1, see note 19.

of a particular line of tradition, i.e. of a cultic or nationalistic type of prophecy (like that of Hananiah, for example). This line stands over against the less institutionally bound and generally more anti-Israelite or anti-Judaean type of prophesying exemplified by Amos, Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah. The cultic background of the book of Habakkuk is thought to be demonstrated by formal elements, such as its adoption of the genre of lamentation (which is often associated with the Temple) for prophetic purposes (Hab 1:2–4.12–17); the insertion of a psalm in Habakkuk 3;[9] and the apparent characterization of the prophet Habakkuk as a cultic functionary.[10] For those who regard authentic Judaean prophecy as essentially being a prophecy of judgement, Habakkuk's anti-Babylonian and pro-Judaean stance singles him out as being an adherent of an alternative prophetic tradition. Nevertheless, an intriguing question still remains: how can two apparently contradictory traditions coexist, while both of them claim the right of canonicity and divine origin?

(2) A number of scholars maintain the opposite of the view presented above; namely, that whatever Habakkuk's cultic connections may imply, this book can be readily viewed as belonging to the mainstream prophetic tradition. Richard Coggins argues that ›Habakkuk... stands in the prophetic tradition represented earlier by Isaiah (10:5–15) and later by Jeremiah (27:6) that foreign oppressors must be seen as being under God's control, not only as a means of asserting the total sovereignty of Yahweh, ... but also as a means of punishing His own people for their failures in obedience‹.[11] However, Coggins' opinion is based on a disputable interpretation of Habakkuk and the parallel texts that he mentions. Coggins' suggestion that the description of the Babylonians in Habakkuk 1:5–11 illustrates YHWH's sovereignty (rather than the prophet's discomfort with YHWH's plans to make use of Babylon to achieve his goals) has elicited much debate. In this respect, it is not unlike the view that

[9] See P. Humbert, *Problèmes de livre d'Habacuc* (Neuchâtel, 1944); I. Engnell, ›Prophets and Prophetism in the Old Testament‹, in: *Critical Essays on the Old Testament* (London, 1960), 167; J. Jeremias, *Kultprophetie und Gerichtsverkündigung in der späten Königszeit Israels* (WMANT 35; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1970), 108–110. Cf. also Otto, ›Theologie‹, 282; Karasszon, ›Egy sohasem élt próféta‹, 109, 111. For a contrasting point of view, see I. Karasszon, ›Habakuk 3‹, in: *Az Ószövetség varázsa* (Kréné 3; Budapest, 2008), 266–267.

[10] In *Bel and the Dragon*, Habakkuk appears to be a Levite. The term מִשְׁמֶרֶת in Habakkuk 2:1 is associated with the Levites in 2 Chronicles 7:6; 8:14. Cf. Sweeney, ›Structure‹, 70.

[11] R. Coggins, ›An Alternative Prophetic Tradition?‹, in: R. Coggins, *et al.* (eds), *Israel's Prophetic Tradition. Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd* (Cambridge, 1982), 88.

ascribes Isaiah 10:5–15 (which proclaimed the fall of the proud Assyria) to the same prophet who perceived that empire to be the means through which YHWH would establish his rule in this world.

(3) The coexistence of pro- and anti-Babylonian voices in the book of Habakkuk is analyzed by most scholars from a literary or redaction critical point of view. They argue that Habakkuk is not a coherent text; rather, it consists of several textual strata. To put it simply, scholars see one layer that announces judgement at the hands of Babylon as a consequence of the social injustice in Judah and another layer that denounces Babylon itself for the injustice that is produced by its actions. It is argued that the prophecies which criticise Judah and those that refer to the wrongs committed by Babylon belong to different textual strata. Habakkuk 1:5–11 and 2:6d–8 may serve as illustrations of this.

Hab 1:5 Look at the treacherous ones, and see!
Be astonished! Be astounded!
For a work is being done in your days
that you would not believe if you were told.
1:6 For I am rousing the Chaldeans,
that fierce and impetuous nation,
who march through the breadth of the earth
to seize dwellings not their own.
1:7 Dreaded and fearsome are they;
from themselves their justice and dignity proceed.
1:8 Their horses are swifter than leopards,
more menacing than wolves at dusk are their horsemen.
Their horsemen come from far away;
they fly like an eagle swift to devour.
1:9 They all come for destruction,
all their faces are like the east wind,[12]
gathering captives like sand.
1:10 At kings they scoff,
and the rulers are a laughing [stock] to them.
They laugh at every fortress,
and they heap up earth and capture it.
1:11 Then they sweep by like the wind and go away,
and ... this [people], whose might is its god![13]

[12] Regarding this rendering, see note 3.

[13] Deriving וְאָשֵׁם from אשם (›to become guilty‹) remains highly uncertain.

It is maintained that Habakkuk 1:5–11 — with its reference to the Babylonians — belongs to the most ancient stratum of the book.[14] Although scholars occasionally differ on how this text is to be interpreted, especially in relation to the verses that precede and follow it (vv. 2–4 and 12–17), it is common to argue that originally, Habakkuk 1:5–11 was not an anti-Babylonian text. Instead, the coming of the Babylonians was a cautionary response to the injustice in Judaean society that is described in Habakkuk 1:2–4. It was only at a later stage that this anti-Judaean function came to be discounted in favour of another view that pronounced judgement on that great world power.[15]

In its current form, the woe-cries in Habakkuk 2:6–20 proclaim YHWH's judgement on an imperial power. Although no geographical name is mentioned, Babylon is a supposition that certainly is more than probable. Nevertheless, it is often maintained that originally, this text also referred to Judaean social problems. With the addition of various amplifications of the text, which functioned as commentary, these utterances were later converted into anti-Babylonian speeches, as the following example illustrates:[16]

Hab 2:6 Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own – for how long?
who loads himself with goods taken in pledge?
2:7 Will not those who bite you suddenly rise,
and those who make you tremble wake up?
Then you will become a booty for them.
2:8 Because you have plundered many nations,
all survivors of the peoples shall plunder you -
because of human bloodshed,
and violence against the country,
against the city and all who live in it.

Exegetes consider Habakkuk 2:6 to be an anti-Judaean text that initially dealt with social problems within Judah and was later expanded to include the purportedly ›Babylonising‹ emphases in verses 7–8. A pertinent

[14] Otto, ›Theologie‹, 281.

[15] Scholars argue for the original independence of Habakkuk 1:5–11 in relation to Habakkuk 1:2–4.12–14 (15–17) and Habakkuk 2. Cf. Otto, ›Theologie‹; Karasszon, ›Egy sohasem élt próféta‹, 130–135; K. Seybold, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephaniah* (ZBK 24:2; Zürich, 1991), 44–45, 56–60.

[16] For different opinions regarding the original strata — and later augmentation — of the woe-cries, see E. Otto, ›Die Stellung der Wehe-Worte‹ in der Verkündigung des Propheten Habakuk, *ZAW* 89 (1977), 73–107; Idem, ›Theologie‹, 281; Karasszon, ›Egy sohasem élt próféta‹, 110–111.

question at this point might ask which layer of the text can actually be ascribed to the prophet Habakkuk. Is he the one who complains in 1:2–4 and 12–17)? Was he interested in social issues? Did he protest because of the injustice in Judah, and see Babylon as a punishing tool in the hands of God? Or did he hide his personal convictions behind the anti-Babylonian passages? Should his contribution actually be sought at some other redactional layer?

At the end of a study of Habakkuk which distinguishes at least seven different fragments that were part of the composition of this book, Karasszon arrives at a rather sceptical conclusion: ›Whichever layer is connected with [the actual author of] Habakkuk, it is clear that the work of this author is quite insignificant on the colourful palette of the rich history of tradition‹.[17] Nevertheless, such a complex theory regarding the compositional history of the book disregards the critical factor of time. It fails to explain how during a relatively short period of about 100 years, so much editorial work could have been accomplished. However, even a simpler redaction critical model, which argues for the existence of an early pro-Babylonian (and implicitly anti-Judaean) layer at the genesis of this book—which could eventually be connected to the prophet Habakkuk around the turn of the seventh and sixth centuries—flies in the face of some basic considerations.

First, it is important to note that the passages which are said to have been anti-Judaean and pro-Babylonian texts in their original form (Hab 1:2–4; 1:5–11; and the earliest layer of 2:4–20) are not coherent literary compositions. Unlike the books of Isaiah or Jeremiah, Habakkuk is not composed of self-contained ›discourse units‹ that have a coherent message. One may say that from a form critical point of view, verses 2–4 are part of a prophetic complaint; verses 5–11 begin as a divine speech; and verses 12–17 form another fragmentary complaint. However, it is clear that these subdivisions acquire meaning only within their larger context. It is difficult to suppose that both Habakkuk 1:4 and 1:11 are closures of a coherent textual unit. Second, there is hardly any convincing evidence that the fragments throughout the book which are characterised as being anti-Judaean can be traced back to a common author or a common source. In light of such difficulties, the hypothesis that a previous collection of genuinely ›Habakkukian‹ (anti-Judaean, pro-Babylonian) prophecies underlie the book becomes all the more improbable.

At the same time, it is striking that in its current form, the book of Habakkuk has a logical literary structure. I would even dare to say that

[17] Karasszon, ›Egy sohasem élt próféta‹, 137.

quite unlike most other prophetic books, Habakkuk has an obvious plot. Its structure is much clearer than what later redactors of prophetic books managed to achieve by rearranging and editing already existing individual utterances or earlier ›proto-collections‹ of prophecies. The entire book has the tone of a personal reflection that is structured as a dialogue between YHWH and the prophet.

Indeed, the entire first chapter of Habakkuk is a complaint to God.[18] This section is intentionally connected to YHWH's response to Habakkuk's particular complaint (2:2–20) by means of the explanatory note in 2:1–2. Furthermore, Habakkuk 2:1 already anticipates Habakkuk 3 which implies that this final chapter is the answer which the prophet gives regarding his complaint (cf. עַל־תּוֹכַחְתִּי in Hab 2:1) after he hears YHWH's response concerning the destruction of Judah's enemy.[19] Similarly, Habakkuk 3:2 looks back to YHWH's words in Habakkuk 2:4–20 and presupposes the divine response to the prophet.[20] The destruction of the enemy that is devouring Judah — which is announced in the divine oracle in Habakkuk 2:4–20 — is reaffirmed at the end of Habakkuk's prayer in 3:16–18. The literary style of the prophetic comments in 3:13–18 is comparable to that of the lamenting voice in 1:2–4 and 12–17, and reminds the reader of psalms of complaint that contain all three of the elements mentioned here: a prayer of complaint; an oracle reassuring the righteous one of divine support; and a declaration of confidence that YHWH will take action in behalf of the believer.[21]

[18] I shall return to the structure of Habakkuk 1 in more detail below.

[19] Following the Peshitta, the first person singular form of the verb שׁוּב in the phrase וּמָה אָשִׁיב עַל־תּוֹכַחְתִּי is often emended to יָשִׁיב, which means ›what *he* [God] would answer concerning my reproof‹. However, this emendation is contradicted by more reliable textual evidence, which favours the Massoretic version (›what I shall answer concerning my reproof‹). Cf. the LXX (τί ἀποκριθῶ) and Targ. (אתיב.). 1QpHab is fragmentary at this point.

[20] Cf. שָׁמַעְתִּי שִׁמְעֲךָ (›I have heard your message‹) in 3:2. One of the most disputed questions in Habakkuk studies concerns the relation of Chapter 3 to the rest of the book. (For an overview, see Dangl, ›Habakkuk‹, 145–146.) However, the second superscription which appears in 3:1 can hardly be taken as evidence for the secondary origin of Habakkuk 3 (cf. Isa 1:1; 2:1; 13:1; Jer 1:1; 46:1). It is probable that מַשָּׂא in Habakkuk 1:1 identifies the genre of Habakkuk 1–2, while תְּפִלָּה in 3:1 designates Habakkuk 3. Furthermore, the absence of Habakkuk 3 from the Qumranic pesher also provides unlikely support for this hypothesis. The pesher delves into a reinterpretation of the predictive prophetic sections of Habakkuk that can be found in the pronouncements (מַשָּׂא) in Habakkuk 1–2 (and not in Habakkuk 3, which is explicitly identified as תְּפִלָּה, a prayer). Regarding the coherence of these three chapters, see Sweeney, ›Structure‹, 79–81.

[21] H. Schmidt and K. Seybold argue that structural features of a post-exilic psalm of lamentation appear throughout Habakkuk 1–3. In spite of major difficulties — and

Therefore, one may conclude that this book should be read as a coherent piece of writing, and not merely as a collection of fragmentary prophecies. Beyond that, the logical structure; reflective personal character; and scribal notes that create the impression of internal consistency clearly indicate that the book of Habakkuk was conceived as a literary work from the very beginning. Here, I would like to emphasise the written character of this text, which had hardly ever been proclaimed as an oral prophecy to any audience in any previous form. I surmise that the book's current arrangement is the only one in which this text has ever existed and the only one that can be connected to a prophet named Habakkuk.

3 *Habakkuk's Fragments: Snapshots of an Earlier Tradition*

These arguments for the literary unity of Habakkuk's current form do not mean that every single verse was composed by the author for its present context. Indeed, in spite of the book's thematic coherence, one cannot deny that passages such as Habakkuk 1:5–11 or 3:3–15 still sound foreign in their existing literary context. They appear to have been derived from other sources, and as such, they clearly are fragments. However, in contrast with earlier analyses, I hold that these fragments do not represent the imprint of an earlier Habakkukian tradition; they are not traces of a previous form of the book. If we take the literary and thematic coherence of Habakkuk's current form seriously, there is another, more convincing way to explain the presence of these fragments. They were adopted by the book's author for a specific purpose; namely, to illustrate the text's central ideas. They are quotations from miscellaneous sources, some of which we can identify and others that we cannot pinpoint.

It is characteristic of Habakkuk's author to make use of earlier texts. The dialogical structure that I mentioned previously means that the prophet engages in a dialogue with other authors, prophets and poets. He does that by inserting earlier texts into his own literary composition.

a significant degree of arbitrariness—in their attempts to reconstruct these, the authors' main contention that the book is built around a central theme, which overarches all three of its chapters, is valid. H. Schmidt, ›Ein Psalm im Buche Habakuk‹, *ZAW* 62 (1950), 52–63 and Seybold, *Habakuk,* 44–45.

Following the woe oracle in Habakkuk 2:12, i.e. at a point where exegetes working with a redaction critical model would expect an elaborate explanation of the early woe-cry from a later hand, Habakkuk 2:13–14 contains the following quotations:

Hab 2:13 Is this [oracle] not from YHWH of hosts:
The peoples labour only to feed the flames,
and nations weary themselves for nothing?[22]
2:14 Indeed:
The earth shall be filled with awe for the glory of
YHWH, as water covers the sea.

The first citation is almost exactly the same as Jeremiah 51:58, which appears there in a collection of several anti-Babylonian oracles (Jer 50–51). The second citation comes from Isaiah 11:9, where it is the concluding sentence of an anti-Assyrian prophecy. It is striking that the author is acquainted with two different earlier writings. Moreover, it is remarkable that he interprets Isaiah's anti-Assyrian prophecies in relation to the Chaldaeans.

However, it is not only such word-for-word citations that Habakkuk borrows from earlier prophets. Isaiah is the most likely source of several other expressions and metaphors. In Habakkuk 2:17, חֲמַס לְבָנוֹן—the violence against Lebanon for which the Chaldaeans will be punished—apparently also alludes to Isaianic prophecies which are the only place that ›Lebanon‹ is employed as a distinctive mythological/poetical reference to Jerusalem.[23] Habakkuk obviously had access to earlier Isaianic texts and

[22] The NRSV is among the versions which translate this passage in a different way: ›Is it not from the LORD of hosts that...‹. However, it obviously is not the author's intention to say that fruitless labour is from YHWH; instead, the text is meant to acknowledge that the prophecy cited here comes from YHWH. An earlier oracle thus confirms Habakkuk's argument. This text is explicitly identified as a citation. See Isaiah 29:17 for a closely related example. Cf. also W.A.M. Beuken, ›Isaiah 29:15-24. Perversion Reverted‹, in: F. García Martínez, *et al.* (eds), *The Scriptures and the Scrolls* (VTSup 49; Leiden, 1992), 44, 53-54; Cs. Balogh, ›Blind People, Blind God: The Composition of Isaiah 29:15-24‹, *ZAW* 121 (2009), 52-53, 63.

[23] See F. Stolz, ›Die Bäume des Gottesgartens auf dem Libanon‹, *ZAW* 84 (1972), 41–156; Balogh, ›Blind People‹, 51–52. See also ›the city‹ (singular!) in Habakkuk 2:8.17. A contrary opinion is expressed by Seybold in *Habakuk* (73) and Sweeney in ›Structure‹ (77), where it is argued that Nebuchadnezzar's Phoenician campaign is in the background of this metaphor. Other scholars contend that Habakkuk may have been an independently minded ›disciple of Isaiah‹. See M.E.W. Thompson, ›Prayer, Oracle and Theophany: The Book of Habakkuk‹, *TynB* 44 (1993), 33–53, and W. Dietrich, ›Habakkuk: ein Jesajaschüler‹, in: H.M. Niemann *et al.* (eds),

reinterpreted prophecies related to Assyria in the new Babylon-focused context.

The ancient poem in Habakkuk 3:3–15 has long been identified as a foreign element in the book of Habakkuk.[24] Although we do not know the origin of this poem (or poems), it clearly is a quotation.[25] The poetic text is older than the framework provided by 3:1–2 and 16–19, and was not composed for its current location. It is equally obvious that verses 1–2 and 16–19, which frame the text, were written with knowledge of—and in reference to—verses 3:3–15 and the rest of the book. The author of 3:1–2 and 16–19 reuses and revises an ancient text in terms of the destruction of Babylon that is announced in 2:4–20.

I would suggest that recognising a similar phenomenon may clarify the much-discussed structural irregularities in Habakkuk 1, and may especially shed light on the role that 1:5–11 plays in this context. As noted above, when a connection is sought between Habakkuk 1:5–11 and the previous complaint in 1:2–4, it is frequently argued that 1:5–11 is a prophetic vision—a divine response to the evil committed by the Judaeans (which is often the way that verses 2–4 are interpreted).[26] However,

Nachdenken über Israel, Bibel und Theologie: Festrschrift für K.-D. Schunck zu seinem 65. Geburtstag (BEATAJ 37; Frankfurt a. M., 1994), 197–215. J.T.A.G.M. van Ruiten rightfully criticises Dietrich for his sweeping conclusions in »»His Master's Voice?« The Supposed Influence of the Book of Isaiah in the Book of Habakkuk‹, in: J.T.A.G.M. van Ruiten & M. Vervenne (eds), *Studies in the Book of Isaiah* (BEThL 132; Leuven, 1997), 397–411. However, the derivation of Habakkuk 2:13–14 from earlier prophetic sources is beyond any doubt. (Cf. Van Ruiten's contrasting view in ›Influence‹, 409–410.) Habakkuk's interest in Jeremianic texts is also obvious. The motif of ›the cup in the hand of YHWH‹ in Habakkuk 2:16 was probably derived from Jeremiah 51:7, and Habakkuk 2:13 was also taken from that context.

[24] J.W. Watts, ›Psalmody in Prophecy. Habakkuk 3 in Context‹, in: J.W. Watts, *et al.* (eds): *Forming Prophetic Literature. Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honour of John D.W. Watts* (JSOTSup 235; Sheffield, 1996), 219–221; J.E. Anderson, ›Awaiting an Answered Prayer: The Development and Reinterpretation of Habakkuk 3 in its Contexts‹, *ZAW* 123 (2011), 57–71.

[25] The poem's strong mythological connotations may be an indication of its ancient origin. See W.F. Albright, ›The Psalm of Habakkuk‹, in: H.H. Rowley (ed.), *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy Dedicated to Th. H. Robinson* (Edinburgh, 1950), 1–18; T. Hiebert, *God of my victory: the ancient hymn in Habakkuk 3* (HSM 38; Atlanta, 1986); J. Day, ›Echoes of Baal's Seven Thunders and Lightnings in Psalm xxix and Habakkuk iii 9 and the Identity of the Seraphim in Isaiah vi‹, *VT* 29 (1979), 143–151; Idem, ›New Light on the Mythological Background of Allusion to Resheph in Habakkuk iii 5‹, *VT* 29 (1979), 353–355; Anderson, ›Answered Prayer‹, 61–62.

[26] See for instance Th.Ch. Vriezen & A.S. van der Woude, *Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish Literature* (Leiden, 2005), 392.

such a conclusion is very implausible. The complaint does not appear to come to an end in verse 4. There is no connective line of reasoning introducing verse 5 which could relate verses 2–4 and 5–11 in the sense discussed above.[27] The addressee in verses 2–4 is YHWH, but that situation changes abruptly in verse 5, which presupposes that the audience is a larger group of people. The problem of injustice, which the prophet laments in 1:2–4, increases, rather than being resolved, in verses 5–11. In those verses, the enemy is deliberately portrayed as being a cruel and godless foreign nation, as if the prophet intends to illustrate the injustice that he is talking about with concrete examples. Verses 12–17, which are strongly reminiscent of the complaining tone of verses 2–4, clearly do not identify the unjust as the Judaeans, but as the enemy described in verses 5–11, i.e. the Chaldaeans.

In light of these considerations and in line with the previous characterisation of the book of Habakkuk as a literary composition that makes frequent use of quotations from earlier texts, it is tempting to conclude that Habakkuk 1:5–11 is also a citation from an earlier, pre-Habakkukian source. During the process of composing his book, the author inserted a quotation to clarify the type of evil he was talking about at the point where he began to complain about injustice. Moreover, he continued his lamentation with motifs that referred back to the ›foreign‹ text.[28] Such an interpretation of 1:5–11 is in keeping with scholars' remarks concerning the apparent coherence of the complaints in verses 2–4 and 12–17.[29] It also is in line with the close thematic connection between verses 12–17 and 6–11 and with the unity of the entire book. Therefore, Habakkuk 1:5–11 is a passage that is similar to 3:3–15 by virtue of the fact that it comes from an earlier source and receives a secondary function in its new context through the addition of clarifying notes, 1:2–4 and 12–17.

Like Habakkuk 3:3–15, Habakkuk 1:5–11 was not composed for its present context. Habakkuk is not the author of 1:5–11; rather, he is the author of 1:2–4 and 12–17, as well as the one who inserts 1:5–11 into his own composition. We do not actually know who the author of 1:5–11 was. D. Markl has pointed to close lexical similarities between Habakkuk

[27] For instance, the עַל־כֵּן or לָכֵן, which is so frequent at other points, is missing here.

[28] The function of Habakkuk 1:5–11, which involves illustrating the preceding verses, was also discussed by M.D. Johnson, although in a different sense (see ›Paralysis of the Torah in Hab i 4‹, *VT* 35 (1985), 26). Johnson proposed that the reference to the paralysis of the Torah in verses 2–4 alluded to the lack of fulfilment of divine promises of blessing and prosperity that were formulated in Deuteronomy some time after Josiah's reforms. However, Johnson's very specific interpretation of the term תּוֹרָה is questionable in the current context.

[29] Cf. Schmidt, ›Psalm: 52–53‹.

1:5–11 and the portrayal of Judah's northern enemy in Jeremiah 5:15–17. He notes that Jeremiah 5:15–17 and Habakkuk 1:5–11 begin in a similar way and that both texts use comparable images in their descriptions of the enemy.[30] In Markl's judgement, the presentation of the destroyer and the eradication of food sources in Jeremiah 5:17 calls Habakkuk 3:17–18 to mind. Markl suggests that presenting YHWH as coming from the south (Hab 3:3) counters the image of the enemy from the north that is so characteristic of the book of Jeremiah. Through these constant allusions to Jeremiah, Habakkuk actually distances himself from Jeremiah's theology and becomes his critical opponent.[31]

Even if intertextual links between Jeremiah and Habakkuk are insufficient to prove the Jeremianic origin of Habakkuk 1:5–11, this passage probably came into existence not far from that sphere of influence.[32] Nevertheless, I believe that it is too simplistic to conclude with Markl that Habakkuk was a critical opponent of Jeremiah's views. Whereas the arrival of Babylon in Jeremiah 5:15–17 is still a future event, the Babylon which Habakkuk talks about in his book is an empire that has already shown its cruelty toward other nations, including Judah. In other words, there is considerable temporal distance between Jeremiah 5 and Habakkuk 1. Moreover, as noted above, Habakkuk was acquainted with the book of Isaiah and with its revised seventh century edition. In that version of Isaiah, earlier texts, which viewed Assyria as an instrument of YHWH, were reinterpreted though the insertion of passages which proclaimed the fall of the haughty tyrant that Assyria had become. These anti-Assyrian modifications of the original utterances of the eight century prophet Isaiah could have provided Habakkuk with analogies for engaging in a similar rereading of Jeremiah's Babylon-related prophecies.

In conclusion, it is true that despite its thematic coherence, there are still several textual blocks in this book which create the impression of being fragments, and which—at first glance—seem to disturb the internal consistency of the text. Influenced by the compositional history of pre-exilic prophetic books, redaction critical studies view most of these passages as belonging to an earlier, authentic layer of the book of Habakkuk,

[30] Seybold also points to similarities between the oracle sections of Habakkuk 1–2 (which are identified as the book's earliest layer of tradition) and Jeremiah 2–4 (*Habakuk,* 46). He concludes that Habakkuk was a ›precursor of Jeremiah‹ (*Habakuk,* 49). Regarding this text's connections with Isaiah 5:26–28, see Van Ruiten, ›Influence‹, 401–402.

[31] See Markl, ›Hab 3‹, 106.

[32] See the rather stereotypical images of the enemy in Deuteronomy 28:49–52; Isaiah 5:26–30; 13:5, 15–18; Joel 2:2–11.

which later was overshadowed by post-exilic additions. However, these passages can more accurately be viewed as insertions that were made by the actual author of Habakkuk, who added these texts as illustrations designed to assist him in making his case.

4 *Habakkuk and the Editors of Pre-Exilic Prophetic Books*

In both form and content, the book of Habakkuk strongly reminds the reader of the compositional method and theological orientation of the exilic editors of the Old Testament prophetic corpus. I would like to illustrate this contention with an example from the book of Isaiah, which indisputably is one of Habakkuk's primary sources.[33]

Isaiah 29:15–24 has a complex history of composition.[34] At the beginning of this pericope stands a short woe-cry in verses 15 and 21, which probably goes back to the eighth century prophet Isaiah. This critical text denounced Judah because of its evil deeds, its social injustices and an ideology, which ultimately leads the Judeans to conclude that God is blind and does not see what they are doing. Yet, an exilic author dismantled the original oracle by inserting his comments between these two verses. Isaiah 29:16–17 radically reinterpreted verse 15; the statement about God being blind is now assumed to come from desperate (rather than ungodly) people experiencing the Babylonian deportations. These exiles were eager to believe that YHWH would look out for them, but ultimately, they were distressed by the fact that God did not appear to be considering their fate. Thus, Isaiah 29:15–24 takes the form of a debate in which the author attempts to convince the people that even after the Babylonian assault on Jerusalem, YHWH continued to be the God of his people. Similarly, earlier criticism of the unjust members of the Judaean society (v. 21) is transformed into an anti-Babylonian (!) speech by placing the content of verse 21 after verse 20 rather than after verse 15. Terminology that formerly had been used in connection with social disorder in Judah is applied to the Babylonians by the secondary interpreter.

The relationship of Isaiah 29:15–24 and the book of Habakkuk is striking on at least four levels. (1) The editor of Isaiah 29:15 and 21

[33] For another, equally telling example, see Cs. Balogh, ›»He Filled Zion with Justice and Righteousness«: The Composition of Isaiah 33‹, *Biblica* 89 (2008), 477–504.

[34] For a detailed analysis, see Balogh, ›Blind People‹, 48–69.

relocates these verses and inserts his comments between them. From a methodological point of view, the author of Habakkuk 1:2–4 and 12–17 similarly adopts the notion that texts can be dismantled for the purpose of reinterpretation. Indeed, Habakkuk composes a coherent prayer of complaint by framing a foreign text of 1:5–11 with interpretive notes. (2) From a thematic point of view, the problem of justice and righteousness is applied concretely to the Chaldaeans' behaviour against Judah and Jerusalem in the passage from Isaiah and throughout Habakkuk 1–2.[35] The exilic reinterpretation of Isaiah's text clearly demonstrates that in that era, injustice — in any and all of its forms — could be viewed as epitomizing the behaviour of Judah's enemy. (3) It is striking that in Isaiah 29:17, it is precisely the textual layer of exilic reinterpretation which alludes to former prophecies (namely, to Isaiah 10:25) in order to make a case to the new readers of the Isaianic prophecies.[36] The commitment of the book of Habakkuk to earlier texts and its practice of using older texts as citations makes it all the more likely that there is a strong connection between the hermeneutics of these passages. (4) Finally, in Isaiah 29:17, the reinterpreter of the earlier Isaianic prophecy states that YHWH's deliverance, which will counteract his people's disbelief, is about to happen very soon. The imminent fulfilment of the earlier prophecy of salvation obviously reminds the reader of a similar focus in Habakkuk 2:3, and highlights one of the central concerns of the community that had survived the Babylonian assaults against Jerusalem.

The close methodological and thematic ties between the Isaianic text and the book of Habakkuk cannot be a mere coincidence. They suggest that Habakkuk came from an intellectual circle of the exilic period, i.e. from a group engaged in reinterpreting earlier prophecies in the context of new historical realities. Habakkuk can hardly be considered to be a ›Hananiah-minded‹ critic of Jeremiah's prophecies. Like the editors of the pre-exilic prophetic books, Habakkuk seeks — in a situation where Babylon no longer is a tool in which YHWH can delight — to make sense of the positive views of the mighty world powers that were expressed by the former prophets. The ambivalent language in Habakkuk 1:12 may be

[35] I doubt that the woe cries in Habakkuk 2 originally denounced Judaean social injustice, as some exegetes have suggested (see note 16). Legal terminology is used here in relation to Jerusalem's foreign oppressors, just as it is in Habakkuk 1:2–4 and in the secondary additions of Isaiah 29:15–24.

[36] See Balogh, ›Blind People‹, 63. Notably, Isaiah 29:17 reuses a prophecy from Isaiah 10:24, which originally was related to Assyria, in a new anti-Babylonian context. This practice was also mentioned previously with regard to Habakkuk 2:14 (see note 22).

regarded as a concise expression of the view of Babylon that lies behind this book:

יהוה לְמִשְׁפָּט שַׂמְתּוֹ	YHWH, you have made him for judgement,
וְצוּר לְהוֹכִיחַ יְסַדְתּוֹ	Rock, you have assigned him for punishment.

מִשְׁפָּט and הוֹכִיחַ are ambivalent terms, which can be understood in terms of Jeremiah's proclamation: Babylon is to be seen as the tool through whom YHWH will bring justice to the Judaean society. However, it can be also understood in the opposite sense. YHWH has destined Babylon to מִשְׁפָּט, i.e. God will call Babylon to account. Unlike Hananiah, Habakkuk has no doubt that it was YHWH who sent the Babylonians. He only doubts that Judah's experience in the early sixth century will be God's final revelation to his people. In a world which is troubled by a lack of righteousness, this is absolutely essential: the more righteous person—the fittest one—has to survive (Hab 1:13).

That is also true in a literary sense. In one way or another, such an impetus—such a passion for divine justice—explains the compositional history of the prophetic books. It accounts for why prophecies of judgement concerning Judah had to be reinterpreted in a new way and why the prophetic tradition had to make a pivotal turn. The book of Isaiah is a case where more recent reinterpretations of an ancient prophecy were preserved alongside, and in addition to, the prophet's original words. Habakkuk chose a different method, which is far less appreciated in current studies of the compositional history of biblical prophecy. Instead of adding his comments to earlier texts, he retold his message through a newly created, independent literary work, using citations from the older writings. However, the underlying ideas and methods of the editors of the pre-exilic prophetic books and those of Habakkuk, as the author of a short scroll, were essentially the same.