

אֵשׁ מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם

THE HEAVENLY FIRE



אש מן־השמים

the heavenly fire

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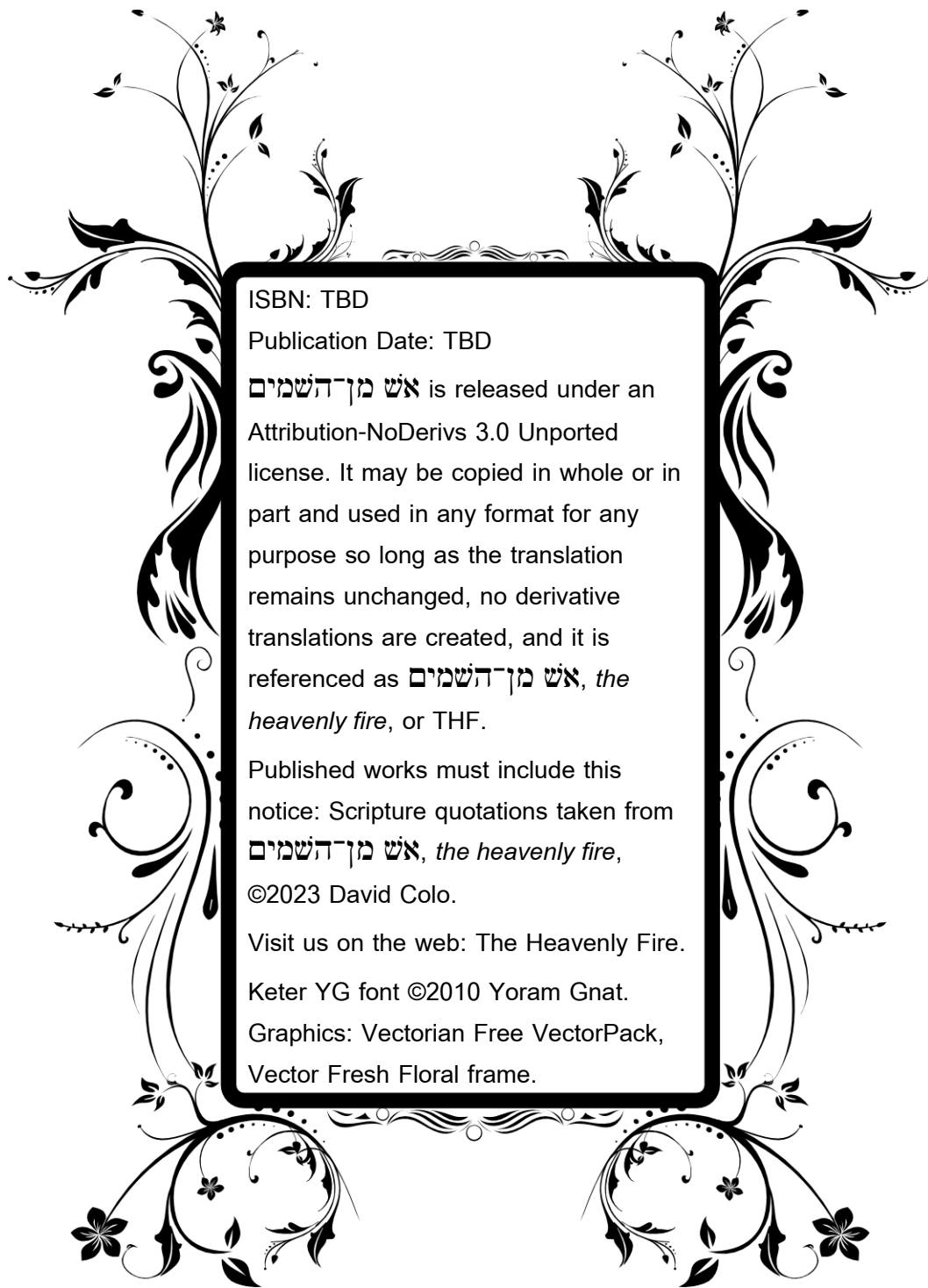
THE HEAVENLY FIRE

Habaqquq

version 1.0

DAVID COLO

אש מן־השמים



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ר' יהודה אומר המתרגם פסוק כצורתו הרי זה בדאי
והמוסיף עליו הרי זה מחרף ומגדף

Rabbi Judah says: “The one who translates a verse equivalent to its form—
that person is a liar. But the one who adds to it—
that person is a reviler and defiler.”

—*b. Kiddushin 49a*



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Sigla and Abbreviations

GENERAL

√	Verbal root
Ⲑ	Septuagint: Old Greek
ⲙ ^A	Masoretic Text: Aleppo Codex (circa AD 950)
ⲙ ^L	Masoretic Text: Leningrad Codex (AD 1008)
ⲙ ^P	Masoretic Text: Cairo Codex of the Prophets (AD 896)
Ⲥ	Syriac Peshitta
Ⲛ	Targum: Pseudo-Jonathan
Ⲟ	Vulgate (Stuttgart)
α'	Aquila
σ'	Symmachus
θ'	Theodotion
1QpHab	Habaquq <i>peshet</i> scroll from Qumran cave 1 (1 st century BC)
3FS	third feminine singular
3MP	third masculine plural
3MS	third masculine singular
8HevXII gr	Greek Minor Prophets Scroll, Nahal Hever (50 BC–AD 50)
b.	Babylonian Talmud tractate
Barb	The “Barberini” family of Greek MSS
BH	Biblical Hebrew
DSS	Dead Sea Scroll(s)
Hab	Habaquq
HB	Hebrew Bible
m.	Mishnah Tractate
Mek.	<i>Mekhila de-Rabbi Ishmael</i>
MH	Mishnaic Hebrew
MSS	manuscripts
MurXII	Hebrew Minor Prophets Scroll, Wadi Murabba'at (AD 75–100)
NE	near east
V-O-S	Verb-Object-Subject
V-S-O	Verb-Subject-Object

REFERENCE

AYB	The Anchor Yale Bible
AYBD	The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary
Barthélemy	Dominique Barthélemy's <i>Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament</i>
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs's <i>The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>
<i>BHQ</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Quinta</i>
BHRG	Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze's <i>A Biblical Hebrew Reference Guide</i>
<i>BHS</i>	K. Elliger and W. Rudolph's <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
CAD	Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
CAL	Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon project
COS	William H. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger's <i>The Context of Scripture</i>
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> (28 th Edition)
GLS	Takamitsu Muraoka's <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint</i>
HALOT	Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner's <i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
IBHS	Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor's <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Jastrow	Marcus Jastrow's <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature</i>
JM	Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka's <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i>
<i>KTU</i>	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit: einschließlich der keilalphabetischen Texte außerhalb Ugarits. Teil 1, Transkription</i>
LEH	Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and K. Hauspie's <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint</i>
LS	Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott's <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i>
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

TRANSLATIONS

AAT	J. M. Powis Smith's <i>The Old Testament: An American Translation</i> (1927)
Alter	Robert Alter's <i>The Hebrew Bible</i> (2019)
ASV	American Standard Version
CEV	Contemporary English Version
DRC	The Douay-Rheims Vulgate translation, Challoner version
ESV	English Standard Version
Fenton	Ferrar Fenton's <i>The Holy Bible In Modern English</i>
Geneva	Geneva Bible (1560)
Goldingay	John Goldingay's <i>The First Testament</i> (2018)
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
ISV	International Standard Version
JPS	Jewish Publication Society Bible (1917)
KJV	King James Version
LEB	Lexham English Bible
Leeser	Isaac Leeser's translation of the Hebrew Bible (1853)
Moffatt	<i>The Bible: James Moffatt Translation</i>
NAB	New American Bible (3 rd Edition)
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1997)
NET	New English Translation (NET Bible), 1 st Edition
NETS	Pietersma and Wright's <i>A New English Translation of the Septuagint</i>
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPST	New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
REB	Revised English Bible
Rotherham	Rotherham's <i>The Emphasized Bible</i> (1902)
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SAT	"Slightly Alive Translations" (https://mostlydeadlanguages.tumblr.com/)
SET	Stone Edition Tanach
Wycliffe ²	Wycliffe Bible, Revised Translation
YLT	Young's Literal Translation

Preface

The composer of Habakkuk was a master of rhetoric and poetic artistry. He wove sounds and syntax in unique, but decisive ways to prick the conscience of the Israelite deity, provoke an explanation, and precipitate divine action. In the latter half of the 1800s, Georg Heinrich August von Ewald said this: “Great as Habakkuk is in thought, he is no less so in language and literary skill; he is the . . . master of a beautiful style, of powerful description, and an artistic power that enlivens and orders everything.”¹ Yet most English translations fail to convey any of it! Despite countless publications on Habakkuk, for example, one can find only a few that try to represent more than a single word-play or sound-play in a text that is swimming in a sea of such sonority! According to William H. Ward, “It is impossible in translation to reproduce the abounding alliterations of the original.”² Such sentiment is pervasive. Although most will praise the text’s sonic artistry and note how vital that is to its message, none will try to represent it in English.³

Hebrew prophets used vivid language and words of power not only to transport their audience into newly imagined worlds, but to alter the present by merging human and divine realities. For translators, Ernst Wendland noted that “The constant challenge, . . . is to convey sacred Scripture as accurately as possible, yet at the same time with at least some of the great power, appeal, persuasiveness, beauty, and grandeur that it possesses in the original language.”⁴ Unfortunately, translators seem content to treat prophetic oracles like lifeless artifacts. Little has changed in the century since a conscientious observer wrote, “It is a pity our translators allowed themselves to be influenced so little by the animation of the original.”⁵ Virtually all translators, for example, render Habakkuk’s “woe” oracles as though they were proverbial or moralistic statements. Yet in Habakkuk’s time, such oracles were part of Israel’s arsenal in the fight against Babylonian oppression. By crafting his cries with coded words or ciphers, Habakkuk intended to subversively flip the Tyrant’s evil actions back on himself. O. Palmer Robertson said it well: “It will be difficult indeed for the oppressor to escape these phrases once they have been hung around his neck.”⁶ From reading a typical English translation, however, one would have no clue that such words were actually ushering in the Oppressor’s ruin.⁷

1 Georg Heinrich August von Ewald, *Commentary on the Prophets of the Old Testament. Vol. 3. Commentary on the Books of Nahûm, Ssephanya, Habakkûq, “Zakharya” XII.-XIV., Yéremyá with Translation*. Trans. J. Frederick Smith. London: Williams and Norgate, 1878, p. 32.

2 William Hayes Ward, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Habakkuk*. ICC. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911, p. 7. Just you watch, William Ward, and then be dazzle-dazzled, as a translation is translated after your days that you would not believe was possible!

3 The award for most diligent attempt goes to an anonymous graduate student (posting “Slightly Alive Translations” at mostlydeadlanguages.tumblr.com) who represented word-plays or sound-plays in Hab 1:6 (x2), 8, 10, 14; 2:18; 3:2, and 9. Compare that to THF: Hab 1:5 (x2), 6 (x2), 8 (x2), 10, 11, 12, 14 (x2), 15; 2:1, 3 (x3), 5, 6, 7, 8 (x2), 9 (x2), 12, 15, 16, 17, 18 (x3), 19; 3:2 (x4), 6, 7 (x2), 8 (x2), 9, 11, 13 (x2), 15 (x2), 16 (x4), 17 (x3), and 18-19 (x1).

4 Ernst R. Wendland, “‘May the Whole World Hush in his Presence!’ (Habakkuk 2:20B): Communicating Aspects of the Rhetoric of an Ancient Biblical Text Today.” *JNSL* 27.2 (2001), p. 114.

5 T. Johnstone Irving, “Habakkuk.” *BW* 31.1 (1908): p. 53.

6 O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*. NICOT. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990, p. 188.

7 Additionally, whereas commentators and translators routinely describe these oracles as “riddles,” one is always left wondering in what sense the term “riddle” could even apply!

To remedy such issues, we submit to you a brand-new English translation that conveys aspects of the Hebrew text overlooked, ignored, or misunderstood by both ancient and modern translations. Translation Notes follow, which bring out the text's semantic nuances, reveal interpretive cruxes, and explain the choices of other English versions. Click on the verse number to go straight to the notes (and click on the number to go back again). Throughout the process, we hope not only to confront longstanding prejudices, but offer alternative possibilities to capture, in unprecedented fidelity, the form and content of Habakkuk's prophetic pronouncements.

Introduction

A translation is just that. We do not presume to replace the original text with our own. Yet we do not believe the original so lofty or sacrosanct that it cannot be represented vividly and accurately in another language. If the biblical texts are to be believed, YHWH both *spoke* and *wrote*—the purpose of which must surely be *understanding*. The Rabbis, without anticipating its greater application, left us a saying that illustrates this well: דְּבַר תּוֹרָה כְּלָשׁוֹן בְּנֵי אָדָם, “Scripture speaks in human language.” What follows, therefore, is a discussion of human language and its comprehension. We begin with a look at the various names and terms that are most pertinent.

(A) Names and Terminology

1. Of the Translation

אֵשׁ מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם (*’ēš min-haššāmayim*) means “the fire from heaven,” or, more simply, *the heavenly fire* (THF). Such language is drawn from theophanic imagery, which likens the presence of YHWH to various manifestations of fire, and from an ancient Jewish conception of YHWH’s word as fire. Early Rabbinic tradition equated the fire that fell from heaven on Sinai with scripture itself. This can be seen, for instance, in the following midrash, which uses word-play to phonetically link “Torah” (תּוֹרָה) with “its flame” (אֵשׁ): “Because YHWH descended upon it in fire (Exod 19:18). This shows that the Torah [is] fire, was given from fire, and is comparable to fire. . . . One can do nothing but warm himself [with] its flame” (*Mek. Bahodesh* 4).

2. Of the Israelite Deity

By way of piety and tradition, the scribes who placed vowel points in the Hebrew manuscripts obscured the name of God by placing under its consonants the vowels of words like Elohim (God), Adonai (My Sovereign/Lord), and Ha-Shem (The Name). Some translations create the hybrid “Jehovah” out of this heterogeneous mix, while others translate the vowels. Still others trace the name back to a hypothetical form of the verb “to be” (Yahweh). Like translations of other religious texts, THF replicates the deity’s name when that name is used. Since, however, its pronunciation was lost, we render the name as we have it and how scribes have written it for the last three millennia: **YHWH**. Much like how ancient Jews might use the paleo-Hebrew script to indicate the name’s sacred status, we use a font quite different than the rest of the text. So too we use “**Elohim**,” “**El**,” and “**Eloah**” instead of “God,” but “**The One God**” when a definite article precedes it. Where the text intends to communicate something other than the deity’s name or title, we follow intently.

3. Within Habacquq

A number of specialized words, phrases, or literary devices occur in Habacquq (Hab), which warrant initial comment. They are provided below with their English rendering as used herein and a discussion of their respective meanings.

TERMS	DESCRIPTION
הכשדים	<p>the [tribes of] Kaldu — Traditionally rendered “the Chaldeans.” Mesopotamia saw many ethnic groups migrating into it from other lands (Amorites, Kassites, Aramaeans, etc.). One West-Semitic people-group, the Chaldeans, entered Babylonia and came to be known by the territory they occupied and their social structure. Wallenfels and Sasson described them this way: “The name <i>Chaldeans</i> comes from a Greek word for the people who lived in a region of southern Babylonia known as Kaldu in Akkadian. This region lay along the southern reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers where they flowed into the Persian Gulf. . . . Because the Chaldeans had their own leaders and were somewhat nomadic, they were hard for the central Babylonian government to control.”⁸ Brinkman said this about them: “There were three major and two minor Chaldaean tribes, . . . each under the control of a single chieftain. . . . Local government in Babylonia was administered through a province (<i>pīhatu</i>) system. . . . The tribes seem generally to have remained outside the province system and to have operated under their own leaders. The Chaldaean tribes Bit-Yakin and Bit-Dakkuri and the Aramaean tribes Gambulu and Puqudu were politically the most powerful groups in the land; what prevented them from dominating the entire country was that they seldom agreed to work under common direction for a common purpose. When an exceptional leader such as Merodach-baladan or Mushezib-Marduk appeared and personally won their allegiance, the disparate tribes could work together with the rest of Babylonia and offer surprisingly effective resistance to the militarily superior Assyrians.”⁹ In other words, the tribes of Kaldu were a distinct ethnic group with a separate social organization with respect to the rest of Babylon, yet they were able at specific points in history to rise in political and military power. To reflect the fact that Hab is speaking about the rise of this geographically and socially distinguished ethnic group as opposed to the rise of the Babylonian nation itself, we render הכשדים as “the [tribes of] Kaldu.”</p>
הוי	<p>Oh [no]! — Traditionally rendered “woe” or “alas,” הוי is an independent interjection that was originally part of funeral laments (see, for instance, 1 Kgs 13:30 and Jer 22:18-9), but was then adapted as an opening remark in other types of speeches (curses, oracles of execration, and wisdom cries). Lim described it as “an exclamation of pain or dissatisfaction . . . , something akin to the Scottish expression ‘och, no!’”¹⁰ NJB’s rendering “Disaster!” captures the nuance well. Gerstenberger thought that there was “no willful intent in the woes to call down destruction upon the people concerned. The misdeeds . . . bear the impending misfortune in themselves.”¹¹ However, it is important to understand that the execration oracle is actually a <i>speech act</i>—a form of utterance that</p>

8 Ronald Wallenfels and Jack M. Sasson, *The Ancient Near East: An Encyclopedia for Students*. Vol. 1. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2000, p. 158.

9 J. A. Brinkman, “Babylonia in the Shadow of Assyria.” Quoted portions on pp. 9-11 in *The Cambridge Ancient History*. 2nd Edition. Vol. 3. Part 2: *The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.* Eds. John Boardman, I. E. S. Edwards, N. G. L. Hammond, E. Sollberger, and C. B. F. Walker. Cambridge: University Press, 1991.

10 Timothy H. Lim, *The Earliest Commentary on the Prophecy of Habakkuk*. OCDSS. Oxford: University Press, 2020, p. 116.

11 Erhard Gerstenberger, “The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets.” *JBL* 81.3 (1962): p. 251.

is believed to *do* something when spoken within the proper social context. For example, when a baseball umpire calls “Safe!”, “Strike!”, or “Out!”, those calls are neither description nor commentary, but declarations that actualize a ballplayer’s status (and can enable one team to win and another to lose!). For more on “speech acts,” see Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* and Searle’s *Speech Acts*. The execration oracle is similar to a funeral lament. As explained by Horine, “The prophets were mourners hired by Yahweh. They were the first on the scene to announce the condition of the ill subject . . . who was about to die. The prophet lets out the first wail (*hoy*) to announce the impending death.”¹² Therefore, NET’s expression “X is as good as dead!” is quite appropriate. Although the exclamations **הוי** and **אוי** are sometimes used interchangeably in biblical texts, there is a fundamental difference between them: **אוי** is almost always followed by a *lamed* with pronominal suffix to pronounce the execration directly at the subject (Woe to X!), whereas the subject of a **הוי** oracle is almost always mentioned indirectly by means of a participle. Contrary, therefore, to most translations, we clearly separate the **הוי** exclamation from the following content.

סלה

Exalt! — Or “Lift up!” Goldingay preferred “Rise!” **סלה** has proved an enigmatic term due to its sporadic usage, curious spelling, and seemingly arbitrary placement. Most translations, therefore, transliterate it: *selah*. Fortunately, time and circumstance have left enough clues to piece together its form, function, and meaning with relative certainty. Considering the period during which the Psalter was translated into Greek, it is highly unlikely that its translators would have forgotten what was meant by the term (especially since they were adding more *selahs* to their text!). Therefore, **ס** provides a valuable foundation on which to understand the term. Its translators rendered **סלה** fairly consistently as διαψαλμα, which consists of δια (through/between) and ψαλμα (song). It is reasonable to assume that the term was a notation for a break or interval in a song or prayer (i.e., “interlude”). Such interludes were not always meant to coincide with the natural opening and closing sections of the text itself; they often served other purposes. Sometimes, for example, **סלה** introduced a break between content that could be interpreted as a citation or repetition of other scriptural passages and the rest of the text. After the superscription in Ps 67, for example, the very first verse of the song draws from the Priestly Blessing in Num 6:24-5; it is followed immediately by **סלה**. We also find **סלה** after Ps 89:5, which alludes directly to 2 Sam 7:16. In Habakkuk, **סלה** occurs after content in 3:3 that has obvious parallels with Deut 33:2, the **סלה** in 3:9 precedes a verse (3:11) that sounds like an event in Josh 10:13 (the sun and moon standing still), and the final **סלה** in 3:14 comes right after a reference to “bashing the head” and right before a reference to “impaling the head,” which could be viewed as parallels to Gen 3:15 (he will strike you—head[wise]!). Of course, not every **סלה** introduced a break due to a possible scriptural citation or allusion. According to Rabbinic tradition (*m. Tamid* 7:3), the Levites sang psalms during the morning sacrifice that had three

12 Steven Horine, “A Study of the Literary Genre of the Woe Oracle.” *CBTJ* 5.2 (1989): p. 82.

“divisions” (פרקים) in them. Whenever they reached a “division” (פרק), they stopped singing, blew trumpets, and the people were supposed to bow in worship. In other words, Rabbinic tradition indicates that it was customary to break psalms into parts for liturgical purposes. Since סלה breaks apart the psalms, it makes sense that it would represent ש’s “interlude” and the Mishnah’s “division.” When we look at how סלה was translated in ט and α’ (see also ט), we see that it was thought to represent the term “forever.” Briggs (“סלה”) showed that the term could not mean “forever” because (1) there is no etymological support, (2) in many places such a meaning would make no sense, (3) if one connected the word with previous content, it would interfere with that content in most places, and (4) to treat the term as part of the text would run against the evidence of ש, which treats it quite differently (adding and subtracting *selahs* spontaneously). The term “forever” must refer instead to a declaration or doxology containing the word “forever” that was pronounced during the break in the psalm or prayer. The most obvious statement would be one that recurs in the fifth psalms scroll: לעולם חסדו (Perpetual [is] his fidelity!). Snaith (“Selah”) argued that the doxology that ends the psalm in 1 Chr 16:34 (Give honor to YHWH because excellent—indeed, perpetual—[is] his fidelity!) could be what was pronounced in the interludes. Virtually the same statement occurs in 2 Chr 5:13: “giving praise to YHWH because excellent—indeed, perpetual—[is] his fidelity!” 1 Chr 16:41 says that certain people were specifically chosen “to give honor to YHWH because perpetual [is] his fidelity.” Since the Chronicler’s understanding of Israelite history was colored by his own interests, biases, and ideologies, it is quite likely that his reflections do not adequately represent the original historical situations. On the other hand, it is quite likely that they represent realities that were current when he was compiling his alternative history. Therefore, something very much like his doxology must have been spoken between the psalmic “divisions.” סלה would represent a breaking point in a psalm or prayer during which the people would either lift up their voices to YHWH and/or the Levites would lift up their trumpets to sound. In both cases, סלה would function as a Qal imperative of סלל (to build up/raise up) with paragogic *heh*: סללה (*sōllāh*). The plural form occurs in Ps 68:5: שירו לאלהים זמרו שמו סלן לרכב בערבות (Hymn to Elohim! Sing of his name! Exalt the Cloud-rider!). Since *sōllāh* was such a specialized term, its specific nuance was forgotten by the time of the Masoretes. Yet they still remembered that it involved a spoken utterance involving the word “forever.” Therefore, they supplied the vowels for נצח, which also meant “forever.” When the *patach* lengthened to *qamets* before the *heh*, we were left with סלה (*selāh*).

DEVICES

Extended Word-plays

Habaquq features numerous word-plays. Usually, such word-plays are located within close proximity of each other, which makes them easy to identify. In a few cases, however, a word-play may span different textual units or chapters. In that case, the

word-play may be missed even when it is carefully represented in English. To make those word-plays evident at a glance, we place the specific words in *italics> and list them here for easy reference:*

1.	כוח	+	הוכיח
	Literally “strength/power,” but rendered “sway”		literally “to correct/set right,” but rendered “to sway [behavior]”
		+	תוכחת
			literally, “correction/reproof,” but rendered “swayer”
2.	חכה	+	חכה
	a fishing “hook”		literally, “wait/be patient,” but rendered “stay hooked”
3.	פשו	+	תפוש
	“they stomp/tread,” but rendered “stampede”		“being taken/seized/captured,” but rendered “stamped [on]”

Anagrams

Habaqquq takes three sets of consonants and remixes them to produce a swirl of similar sounds throughout ch. 3. To take a word and then reverse or rearrange it for dramatic effect is not unknown in biblical literature (see, for instance, Ruth 3:21). In this case, however, the sheer number of rearrangements gives the utterance a magical quality. Since Hebrew is so different from English, it is virtually impossible to replicate the rearrangement of consonants while also capturing their sense. Yet to ignore the sound-plays is to strip the words of their divine power. Therefore, we utilize rhymes or near-rhymes to stand in for the anagrams and place them in *italics> to make their emphatic nature evident.*

Set I (anagrams of *resh, gimel, zayin*)

רגז	to tremble
ירגזון	they trembled (<i>yiqtol</i> preterit with paragogic <i>nun</i>)
ותרגז	it trembled (inverted imperfect)
ארגז	I trembled (<i>yiqtol</i> preterit)
גזר	“to divide/separate/cut off” but translated “not assembled”

Set II (anagrams of *qoph, resh, bet*)

קרב	battle (see Translation Notes)
ברק	“thunderbolt/lightning,” but translated “rattle”
רקב	“rot/decay,” but translated “addle” (see Translation Notes)
בקר	cattle

Set III (anagrams of *resh, het, mem*)

רחם	womb (see Translation Notes)
הבנהרים חרה	“because of rivers it really did burn,” but translated “because of rivers it really did fume”
חמר	“to churn/foam,” but translated “spume”

(B) The Angry God: Interpretive Prejudice and Divine Caricature

1. The Problem

In Hab 1, the deity is absent (from the perspective of the speaker) except for a divine utterance that seemed incompatible with current circumstances and, therefore, gave rise to the prophetic complaint. In Hab 2, the deity responds with oracles that not only justify judgment against Judah, but are part of a corrective measure against Israel's oppressor. Those oracles culminate in Hab 3 with a pronouncement that attempts to summon the Divine Warrior from past action and prophetic vision into current and/or future conflict. The deity is portrayed like a king on his chariot, brandishing weapons and charging into battle to overthrow personified and/or mythic elements. So great is the Power rushing to Israel's aid that neither those things fixed in the earth below nor stationed in the heavens above are able to stand before it. The reader of any English translation would almost immediately conclude that the third chapter describes the anger or wrath of God. Three verses in particular would seem to substantiate that understanding. We provide them below with some representative translations.

Hab 3:2by	NASB	NJPST
ברגז רחם תזכור	In <u>wrath</u> remember mercy.	Though <u>angry</u> , may You remember compassion.
Hab 3:8a	NASB	HCSB
הבנהרים חרה יהוה אם בנהרים אפך אם־בים עברתך	Did the LORD <u>rage</u> against the rivers, Or was <u>Your anger</u> against the rivers, Or was <u>Your wrath</u> against the sea?	Are <u>You angry</u> at the rivers, LORD? Is <u>Your wrath</u> against the rivers? Or is <u>Your rage</u> against the sea?
Hab 3:12	NASB	NRSV
בזעם תצעד־ארץ באף תדוש גוים	In <u>indignation</u> You marched through the earth; In <u>anger</u> You trampled the nations.	In <u>fury</u> you trod the earth, in <u>anger</u> you trampled nations.

Since Hab 3:2 begins the prophetic oracle (the first verse is a superscription), it not only sets the tone for all that follows, but influences how one thinks about the whole. Verse 8 is also situated prominently; it begins the structural core of the poem (vv. 8-15). By repeating one of the terms from v. 8, verse 12 takes what was previously stated and expands on it. As evident above, English translators tend to render רגז, חרה, אף, עברה, and זעם in ways that are unambiguously about anger. The result is a text that begins by appealing to an angry God for help and who answers by (re)directing his rage against the forces that threaten Judah. The problem is that none of those verses say that. Anyone who heard the

the heavenly fire

description might presume that the deity was angry, but the text itself does not specify what emotion the deity is or should be experiencing. If correcting the account were as simple as showing what the words do or do not mean, our task would be simple. In this case, however, such renderings are motivated by a longstanding and culturally widespread prejudice that views YHWH as an angry or wrathful god who only acts in judgment when he is enraged. In order to free the text and its image of the deity from translational distortion, we need to understand the distance between us and the ancient Israelite audience, the limits of our knowledge, the ambiguities in the Hebrew language, and the way that divine anger is portrayed in the HB.

2. Avoiding Pitfalls

When reading biblical texts, it is important to consider how vastly *different* another culture's perception and/or conception of emotions may be from our own. "Something as fundamental as anger can vary significantly from culture to culture."¹³ That is because "Emotions have an extremely complex conceptual structure."¹⁴ The network of associations and expressions about basic emotions in one culture are not easily lifted out of that context and placed into another one. "When English speakers fail to recognize the degree to which emotion terms can vary across cultures, they reify, as Wierzbicka puts it, 'inherently fluid phenomena which could be conceptualized and categorized in many different ways.'"¹⁵ In other words, one can force a conception of emotion in a foreign language to align with one's own understanding of that emotion when there is a high probability that such conceptions are not the same. "Unfortunately, many analyses of anger in the Hebrew Bible make precisely this mistake."¹⁶

One way that happens is by presuming that English and ancient Israelite expressions for anger are the same. In English, for example, it is common to speak of anger in terms of heat. Expressions for anger may include references to things like burning, smoldering, losing one's cool, adding fuel to the fire, making inflammatory remarks, or venting. Due to the prevalence of such terms, Lakoff and Kövecses argued that one of the most general conceptual metaphors for anger in American English is ANGER IS HEAT (i.e., qualities and associations related to heat are applied to speech about anger). They believed that the rationale for that metaphor was tied to physiological effects in the human body (like rising body heat, facial reddening, or increased blood pressure). In other words, such language was motivated by perceptible physiological changes. Therefore, it would be natural for language about such symptoms to be equated metonymically with anger. When bible scholars and translators see what seem to be physiological indicators associated with heat, they move quickly from language about heat to language about anger. In the HB, for example, one encounters the verb **סָרַח** (to burn/fume), which may be paired with the noun **אָזְן**, resulting in a statement like "his nose/countenance burned." In Lundbom's discussion below, note how he transitions from "burning" to "anger" without any explanation or argumentation:

13 Matthew R. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis*. Siphut 7. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011, p. 14.

14 George Lakoff and Zoltán Kövecses, "The Cognitive Model of Anger Inherent in American English." Page 195 in *Cultural Models of Language and Thought*. Eds. Dorothy Holland and Naomi Quinn. Cambridge: University Press, 1987.

15 Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, p. 28. Quoting Anna Wierzbicka in "Everyday Conceptions of Emotion: A Semantic Perspective." Pages 17-47 in *Everyday Conceptions of Emotion: An Introduction to the Psychology, Anthropology and Linguistics of Emotion*. Eds. James A. Russell, José-Miguel Fernández-Dols, Antony S. R. Manstead, and J. C. Wellenkamp. NATO ASI Series. Series D: Behavioural and Social Sciences, 81. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2010.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

“The verbs *hārâ* and *hrr* have the basic meaning ‘burn.’ Both most probably derive from a biliteral *hr* in Old Hebrew. Ugaritic *hrr* means ‘burn,’ ‘scorch,’ or ‘roast.’ Akkadian *erēru* and Arabic *harra* also mean ‘burn’ (although Rabin takes *wahara* to be the real Arabic cognate). The Aramaic *hrr* of the Targumim (Ps 2:12; 102:4[3]; Ezek 15:4-5) has the meaning ‘burn’ or ‘be blackened, charred.’ . . . The verb *hārâ* occurs mainly in the qal with ‘ap as the expressed or implied subject: *hārâ ‘ap* ‘(someone’s) nose / anger burned hot.’ . . . Without ‘ap, *hārâ* + *lē* means simply ‘(he) was angry.’”¹⁷

Lundbom makes numerous unsubstantiated assumptions: (1) ancient Israelites used the same metaphor for anger as English speakers (ANGER IS HEAT), (2) that metaphor has the same associations among ancient Israelites as it does among English speakers, (3) other emotions are not part of that metaphor, (4) “burning” is a physiological indicator, and (5) “burning” is a metonymical expression of the aforementioned metaphor. Even though there are enough links between anger and heat in the HB to suggest that the same metaphor was operative in ancient Israel (1=Yes), there is little reason to think that ancient Israelites perceived of heat the same way that we do in a modern, scientific, industrialized society. In other words, their metaphor most likely had very different cultural and cognitive associations (2=No). “Although the perception of warmth in the face was probably prototypical among the perceived physiological symptoms of anger, there is no reason to see it as being universal.”¹⁸ A person’s nose (i.e., face) could be said to “heat up” for many reasons—many of which have nothing to do with anger (3=No). In fact, the verb חרר isn’t associated with any body-part in numerous places throughout the HB (the subject is impersonal), which indicates that it wasn’t necessarily a physiological indicator (4=No). But if the verb does not necessarily describe a visible physiological response, then it is not necessarily a metonymical expression either (5=No). If interpreters want to treat biblical texts with dignity and respect, they need to stop making modern notions reflected in the English language define how ancient Israelites thought and wrote about their feelings.

Divine anger was also understood differently by different groups in the ancient world. Although anger was a typical characteristic of ancient NE deities, some were associated more with anger than others. In Babylon and Assyria, for example, Ishtar was known for her rage. War, plague, famine, death, or oppression were often associated with the anger of one or more of a people’s gods. Note, for example, what the Moabite inscription says about Kemosh, chief deity of Moab (KAI §181:4-6): עמרי מלך ישראל ויענו את מאב ימן רבן כי יאנף כמש בארצה (Omri [was] Israel’s king. He oppressed Moab [for] a long time because Kemosh was angry with his country). That same perspective is found in Yonah; Nineveh’s king thinks that doom was proclaimed against his city because of the “fuming rage” (חרון אף) of Israel’s deity. Since the assumptions reflected above were commonplace in the ancient world, one might expect that any ancient Israelite would consider divine judgment to be an expression of divine anger. It is surprising, therefore, to find that the HB often has very different things to say on the matter.

Take Yonah as an example. Even though some scholars would have us believe that “Yahweh is described as angry at Nineveh,” but “Yahweh restrains His anger at Nineveh out of sentiment for His creations,”¹⁹ the text never tells us that YHWH is angry. It is a non-Israelite king, the

17 Jack R. Lundbom, “Burning Anger in the Old Testament.” Quoted portion on pages 21-2 in *Theology in Language, Rhetoric, and Beyond: Essays in Old and New Testament*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014.

18 Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, p. 83.

19 Deena Grant, “Divine Anger in Biblical Literature” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2009), p. 485.

representative member of a group who are so clueless that they don't know their right from their left (4:11), who thought that YHWH was angry. When the text itself informs us about YHWH's temperament, not only does it affirm that he is ארך אפים, or "long-suffering" (the opposite of angry or wrathful), but that he was הוס (distressed/grieved) over Nineveh, not angry with it (4:2, 11). Yonah is not a story about an angry god who lashes out at wicked people; it is the story of a god who brings deliverance to those who don't deserve it. Those who translate Yonah in such a way that the deity is portrayed as angry not only misrepresent the purpose of the story, but the very character of God.

When we look at some of the most violent acts of divine judgment in the HB, any notion of divine anger is utterly lacking. In the story of the deluge that wipes out almost all of humanity—a judgment that could hardly be more severe and destructive—we read nothing about God being angry; only that "he was shook to his core" (וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֱלֹהִים לְבָבוֹ) because of human wickedness and "regretted" (וַיִּנְחַם) making humankind (Gen 4:6). Throughout the long story of Egypt's plagues—including the slaughtering of the firstborn and drowning of Pharaoh's army in the sea—there is no indication that God did such things because of anger, wrath, or indignation; rather, it was to proclaim his identity both to his people and to the nations, to confute the gods of other nations, to show his people to what extent he would go on their behalf, and to provide them with a powerful and dramatic story that they could turn to as they grew in their relationship with him. And when it comes to that most symbolic act of heavenly destruction, which is brought up again and again in the HB—the overthrow of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain in Gen 19, any reference to divine anger is conspicuously absent. Instead, the text goes out of its way to show us how easy it would be to persuade God to do nothing against those cities because of a handful of good people within them—no matter how evil its inhabitants. To presume that YHWH must be angry because he engages in violent action against any people-group—whether Israelite or pagan—is not just an extreme prejudice, it is simply not a defensible position in many biblical texts. Habakkuk, as we will see, may be one of them.

Emotions are difficult concepts to convey in any language. In the English-speaking world, we often depend on things like tone and body-language to understand the emotional content of a communication. Yet even then, there is always the chance that we got it wrong. When it comes to understanding an emotion like anger among ancient Israelites, our investigation is mostly limited to a small library of texts written at different times and from different perspectives. It is impossible to know whether those texts convey much or little of what there is to say on the matter, but what they tell us is something wholly other than what we might expect. As one example, "Non-biblical ancient Semitic texts ascribe anger terms to individuals of all classes of people and gods. In contrast, the Bible does not ascribe anger terms to the powerless. Instead, the Bible reserves anger terms for Yahweh and for the few humans who are in positions of authority."²⁰ In other words, the evidence indicates that an ancient Israelite would not conceive of anger as an emotion experienced by everyone; only someone in an authoritative or superior position could become angry—and usually only at someone subordinate to them. As for YHWH's anger, we will see shortly that it was not usually understood as an emotion; rather, it was understood as a weapon or force that was elementally discharged. Like the verb ברא, which is used exclusively to describe a creative act of

20 Grant, "Divine Anger in Biblical Literature," pp. 52-3.

the deity, there are terms used exclusively to describe divine anger: the verb **אָנַף** (seen in the Moabite inscription above with reference to the chief Moabite deity)²¹ and the noun **חֲרוֹן**. The verb that definitively indicates divine anger in the HB doesn't occur that often.²² **חֲרוֹן** is far more common—particularly in prophetic texts. Neither **אָנַף** nor **חֲרוֹן** occur in Hab. Of course, it does not follow that the deity is not angry if the few terms that specifically describe divine anger are not present. Yet the simple fact is that emotions are not always clearly communicated—both inside and outside biblical texts. Therefore, we need to understand how the HB speaks about divine anger. Then we can see how that matches up with what we find in Habaquq.

3. Divine Anger in the Hebrew Bible

Divine anger isn't always described the same way. There are, however, terms and ideas that routinely occur, which make the notion of divine anger evident. By looking at an assortment of texts (wisdom literature, prophetic literature, psalms, and historical narratives) in both prose and poetry, those terms and ideas will become clear.

Example 1 (Ps 79:5)

Long enough, YHWH! Must you be angry forever?

[Forever] must it burn like fire, your zeal?

Several things are notable here. First, the text contains the divine verb **אָנַף** (see the discussion in section B2), which explicitly tells us that YHWH is angry. Another indicator of divine anger is “fire” (**אֵשׁ**). When the deity becomes angry, that anger is almost always manifest as an element like fire or heat. Sometimes when the deity is angry, he is also “jealous/zealous/passionate/envious” (**קִנָּא**). God doesn't have to be angry every time he is zealous or zealous every time he is angry. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to find the notions in parallel.

Example 2 (Jer 21:12)

Davidic dynast, so says YHWH:

“Decree by the morning a verdict
to rescue [the] pilfered from [the] oppressor's grip.
Otherwise it will emerge like fire, my heat.
It will burn without containment.”

Even though the deity is not explicitly described as angry, the notion is conveyed by specific terms and notions. First, the text uses **חֶמֶד** (heat) and **אֵשׁ** (fire) as indicators of YHWH's anger (see Example 1). Second, when YHWH is angry, his anger actually does something. That something is usually violent and/or destructive. In this case, it “emerges” (from the verb **יָצָא**) and “burns” (from the verb **בָּעַר**)

21 The one deviation from the typical usage of **אָנַף** in Ps 2:12 is the exception that proves the rule:

the Davidic King can **אָנַף** (become angry) because he is the earthly representative and/or embodiment of the deity.

22 Fourteen times in six texts: Deut 1:37; 4:21; 9:8, 20; 1 Kgs 8:46; 11:9; 2 Kgs 17:18; 2 Chr 6:36; Ezr 9:14; Ps 2:12; 60:3; 79:5; 85:6; Isa 12:1.

“without containment.” The cause of YHWH’s anger is injustice. Like any ancient NE ruler, the king of Judah (Davidic dynast) was expected to uphold justice. If he failed to do so, YHWH was expected to respond. “Many Judahite prophetic texts from the late monarchic and exilic period link Yahweh’s expressions of anger to His role as king.” Verses like this one “illustrate how Yahweh’s anger facilitates His fulfillment of royal responsibilities.”²³

Example 3 (Ps 38:2)

YHWH, do not, in your rage, rebuke me,
nor in your heat, discipline me.

The fact that חמה is an indicator of divine anger can be seen in this verse, which places God’s “heat” (חמה) in parallel with God’s “rage/fury/anger” (קצף) to show that they are synonymous. Nouns and verbs from קצף explicitly describe anger throughout the HB.

Example 4 (Ps 59:14)

Terminate with heat—terminate till they are naught.
Then they will know that Elohim is ruler of Jacob
as far as the earth stretches.

Like Examples 2 and 3, divine anger is manifest as “heat” (חמה). The notion of anger is also expressed by the repeated use of the verb “to finish [off]/put to an end/terminate” (כלה). “Many words referring to extreme forms of violence appear frequently with terms for anger. This correlation is present not only with the word הרג ‘kill.’ One also finds it with the terms שמר, חרם, and כלה, which can refer to utter destruction, the complete extermination of others, and the killing of people that leaves no survivors.”²⁴ As in Example 2, divine anger arises as part of YHWH’s effort to reinforce his divine rule.

Example 5 (Exod 15:7-8)

You unleashed your fury. It devoured them like chaff.
Yes, with a blast of your nose, repelled were [the] waters.

Another way to explicitly say that YHWH is angry is to use the divine noun חרון, “fury/rage/anger” (see discussion in section B2). When YHWH is angry, that anger is often elementally manifest. In this case, it takes the form of “wind/breath” (רוח)—i.e., a “blow” or “blast” of air. The fact that YHWH’s anger is “sent out” or “unleashed” (from the verb שלח) shows that divine anger can be weaponized. “In the Bible’s early poetry, Yahweh’s anger is portrayed as the weapon of the divine warrior that is wielded against His provokers.”²⁵ Divine anger is not passively experienced; it acts violently and/or destructively. In this verse, it “devours/consumes” (from the verb אכל). We see later (Exod 15:18) that divine anger is used to establish YHWH’s “rule” or “reign.” Note that YHWH’s “nose/nostril” (אף) is mentioned. Since the אף is one of the primary places from which anger emerges, it may be used as a

23 Grant, “Divine Anger in Biblical Literature,” p. 270.

24 Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, p. 68.

25 Grant, “Divine Anger in Biblical Literature,” p. 48-9.

metonym for anger. However, the metonymic sense of אף is not limited to anger. One example of the problem is in the classic description of YHWH as “slow to anger” (ארך אפים)—part of an early creedal statement that finds repeated expression in the HB. ארך אפים literally means “long/extended of nostrils.” “Nostrils” (the dual form of אף) is a metonym that refers to the air passing through the nose. Therefore, the term actually means “deepness of inhaling” or “long of breath.” But what does that mean? Like one who takes “long breaths,” it means that YHWH is “long-suffering” and/or “imperturbable” (neither impulsive nor temperamental). Someone with that characteristic would certainly be “slow to anger,” but they would also be “slow to irritation,” “slow to distress,” “slow to offense,” “slow to worry,” “slow to displeasure,” or “slow to judgment.” There is no rational reason to limit the sense only to anger. The same expression occurs in Prov 16:32: “Better [is] forbearance (ארך אפים) than a warrior or mastering one’s impulse than capturing a city.” While controlling one’s anger would certainly qualify as “mastering one’s impulse” or learning “forbearance,” that emotion is not a necessary or even principal aspect of the statement. In Ps 10:3-4, we find אף referring to one’s “demeanor” or “attitude,” which is linked to arrogance or haughtiness, not anger: “he spurns YHWH, the wicked [one], according to the haughtiness of his attitude” (or, “he spurns YHWH, the wicked [one], so high [is] his nose”). These examples show that “nose” may be utilized in ways that not only involve notions other than anger, but have nothing to do with anger at all. Therefore, it is hazardous to presume that אף refers to anger unless there are significant indicators elsewhere.

Example 6 (Job 20:23)

Then, while his belly fills,
he will unleash against him his fuming rage.

Divine anger is explicitly indicated by means of the noun חרון. Like a weapon, it is “sent out” or “unleashed” (שלח). As in Example 5, God’s “nose” (אף) is not the anger itself; it is the place from which his anger emerges—most likely in elemental form. If the terms חרון and שלח had not been used, the emotional content of the phrase would be difficult to ascertain.

Example 7 (Exod 32:12)

Why should the Egyptians say, “With harmful [intent] he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to annihilate them from the earth’s surface”? Turn from the rage of your nose!

Again, divine anger is explicitly mentioned (חרון) and God’s “nose” (אף) is not a metonym for anger, but the place from which it originates. The text does not explicitly identify the “rage” as the thing that “kills” (הרג) and “annihilates” (כלה); the subject is YHWH. Nevertheless, the way divine anger is described elsewhere (see כלה in Example 4 and אכל in Example 5) shows that the two subjects are blending together in the narrative (“killing” and “annihilating” are the effects of God’s “rage”).

Example 8 (Deut 32:22)

Because a fire ignites in my nose.
It scorches to the [very] bottom of [the] Underworld,
devours earth and its produce,
sets ablaze the foundations of the mountains.

the heavenly fire

Although divine anger is not explicitly mentioned here, a number of things make it evident. First, we see “fire” (אֵשׁ), which has God’s “nose” (אַף) as its origin. Usually, “when God is angry, he breathes fire that burns his enemies.”²⁶ In other words, God’s elementally manifest anger is weaponized. In this verse, it “scorches” (קָדַח), “devours” (אָכַל), and “sets ablaze” (לָהִט). We noted in Example 1 that when God is “jealous/zealous/passionate/envious” (קִנָּא), it is not uncommon to find divine anger mentioned in a parallel statement. In Deut 32:21, God says, “I am *envious* of a no-god, . . . So I will make them *envious* of a nobody!” The previous verse also spoke of God being “distraught/vexed/troubled” (כָּעַס). Like the verbal and nominal forms of קִנָּא, which do not indicate anger, but are not uncommonly used in connection with it, so the verbal and nominal forms of כָּעַס are not uncommonly used alongside notions of anger. Therefore, there is much to make us think that God is angry in this verse.

Example 9 (Lam 2:4)

He bent his bow like an enemy,
positioned his right hand like a distressor.
He killed all who were precious in [his] sight.
In Lady Zion’s tent,
poured like fire his heat.

This verse talks about the deity as if he were a warrior—just like Hab 3. Therefore, it gives us a good idea how the anger of the divine warrior might be described. We know that the deity is angry because it uses the anger term “heat” (חֹמֶה), which is likened to “fire” (אֵשׁ). The divine warrior weaponizes his anger: he “pours” (שָׁפַךְ) it out. Just as divine anger may be “sent out/unleashed” (see Examples 5 and 6), it may be “poured” out. “In all of the cases where this association between *pouring* and *anger* is present . . . , the anger described is divine wrath.”²⁷ The result of divine anger is usually violent and/or destructive. As in Example 7, it “kills” (הָרַג) everyone. The previous verse also mentioned a “conflagration of nose” (חֲרִי-אַף). God’s “nose” (אַף) is the origin of חֲרִי. The noun חֲרִי is a synonym of חֲרוֹן (an explicit indicator of anger). Unlike חֲרוֹן, however, חֲרִי can be applied to humans.

Example 10 (Isa 42:25)

So he poured on them the heat of his nose and the savagery of war.
It set him ablaze all over, but he did not realize,
burned him [up], but he did not pay attention.

Here, anger is explicitly indicated by means of “heat” (חֹמֶה), which, like many of the previous examples, has God’s “nose” (אַף) as its origin. Divine anger is also weaponized. Like Example 9, it is “poured out” (שָׁפַךְ)—an indicator that this is divine, not human, anger. God’s anger actively brings about violence and/or destruction. As in Example 8, it sets ablaze (לָהִט). As in Example 2, it burns (בָּעַר).

Example 11 (Num 11:1)

When YHWH heard, his nose fumed. YHWH’s fire burned some of them [and] consumed some of the camp borders.

26 Deena Grant, “God’s Flaming Fiery Anger.” Published Sept 22, 2015 on TheTorah.com.

27 Schlamm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, p. 71.

In this verse, divine anger is elementally manifest as “fire” (אש). It is violent and/or destructive. As in Examples 2 and 10, it “burns” (בער). As in Example 8, it “devours/consumes” (אכל). Like many of the previous examples, God’s “nose” (אף) is mentioned. It is the subject of the verb חררה (to burn/fume). As mentioned in section B2, translators regularly presume that חררה (or חררה + אף) is a metonymical expression for the metaphor ANGER IS HEAT; they do not allow for other emotions or metaphors to be indicated by the phrase. In this example, the associations above make it evident that “his nose fumed” relates to divine anger. One could interpret the phrase as “his anger burned” (if אף alone is the metonym) or “he was angry” (if חררה or חררה + אף is the metonym). In other contexts, however, that interpretation would not apply. To get a better sense of the issues, we need to look closer at חררה.

Excursus 1: חררה

In the HB, there are several words that are typically associated with anger, but actually refer to more than one type of emotion. חררה is one of them. From a grammatical standpoint, that fact is obvious. In Jer 12:5, for example, חררה (in the Hithpael) is parallel to “running” and refers to “stoking oneself up” or “energizing oneself” for a race; there is no indication of anger. In Neh 3:20, חררה (in the Hiphil) has to do with fortifying a section of Jerusalem’s wall and must refer to “ambition” or “aspiration”; there is no indication of anger. In Prov 24:19, חררה (in the Hithpael) is parallel to “envy” and refers to “enticement” or “attraction”; there is no indication of anger. The question then is not whether חררה indicates emotions other than anger, but whether חררה in the Qal is limited to anger.

One place where people often look for an answer is in the first use of חררה in the HB: the tale of Cain and Abel. In traditional folk tale fashion, the names of the characters tell us something about them. Abel’s name is actually Hevel (הבל), a “breath/mist/vapor”—i.e., something fleeting and transient. It comes as no surprise, therefore, when Hevel’s life is cut short (vapors don’t last long). Cain’s name is Qayin (קין), which comes as a word-play on קנה (to craft/fashion/create). We anticipate that Qayin will create great things, but then Qayin strikes Hevel down because the deity took notice of Hevel’s offering and not his own. There is no indication that Qayin was angry at Hevel; rather, Qayin wanted the attention that Hevel had received. In other words, the character of קין has been redefined as קנא (to be envious/jealous). We are told in v. 5 how Qayin responded when the deity did not notice his offering: “it burned (ויחר) in Qayin severely and his countenance fell” (for the impersonal use of חררה, see the discussion in section B2). The phrase “it burned in Qayin” is traditionally understood as “Cain became angry.” However, we learned that anger in the HB is only ascribed to someone in an authoritative position and is characteristically directed at a subordinate. “The biblical paradigm for anger is almost always that of an authority figure who expresses anger when a subordinate – or an outsider – behaves in a way that threatens his power or undermines his control.”²⁸ It is quite improbable, therefore, that “anger” would be the emotional content of חררה in the tale of Cain and Abel.

But if Qayin was not angry, what does “it burned in Qayin” mean? Gruber noted that the phrase “his face fell” is an idiom both in the HB and in the ancient NE for grief. He argued, therefore, that חררה in Gen 4:5 described depression. “Once we understand that being rejected by

28 Grant, “Divine Anger in Biblical Literature,” p. 13-4.

the Lord results in Cain's suffering a loss of self-esteem, we have successfully explained . . . the psycho-analytic view of depression."²⁹ In fact, it is a well-known physiological response for one's face—particularly one's eyes and nose—to redden when they are sad. That is because blood rushes up into the nose and face. And because the skin is thinner in the nose, the inflammation is more evident there. It is no wonder that we have sad clowns with puffy red noses—a grotesque caricature of a real phenomenon. So even if חרה + אף functioned as a metonymic expression, it would still be unclear what emotion it represented. Gruber argued that there were many places where חרה in the Qal meant “to be depressed.” Ancient translators agreed. The Jewish translators of the Greek Septuagint sometimes represented the Qal of חרה with the verb λυπεω (to be grieved/distressed) or a related term instead of “to be angry” (see, for instance, Gen 4:5, 34:7; 45:5).

Like the tale of Cain and Abel, there are numerous places where “anger” simply doesn't fit the context. If we look again at the story of Yonah, we see that “it fumed” in Yonah (the Qal of חרה) because God would not destroy Nineveh, yet let the plant that sheltered him die (4:1, 4, and 9). It fumed in him so much that Yonah wished that he would die too! The kind of burning that involves an eager desire for self-destruction doesn't fit the profile of anger; it fits the profile of deep distress, anguish, or despair. This is another place where ancient Jewish translators understood חרה in the sense of grief or sorrow, not of anger. Even in post-biblical Hebrew, the Qal of חרה is not limited to anger. In Sir 51:19, the sage praises Wisdom and says חריתי נפשי בה, “I fumed [in] my desire for her” (11QPs^a). If חרה was only or primarily about anger, it could, by no means, transition so easily to *impassioned desire*. When we accept the fact that an ancient Israelite would not conceive and talk about his emotions the same way that we do (see section B2), we are forced to conclude that translators who always render the Qal of חרה in terms of anger (as opposed to distress, shame, disappointment, grievance, despair, passion, or anything else) do so only because of their prejudice.

Example 12 (Zeph 3:8)

Because my intent [is]
for a mustering of nations;
for a gathering of kingdoms;
for pouring over them my scourge—
all my fuming rage;
when, by my fervid fire,
the whole land will be consumed.

Here we see the divine anger indicator חרון. The anger originates in YHWH's “nose” (אף). Divine anger takes the elemental form of fire (אש) and is linked to YHWH being jealous/passionate/zealous (קנא). It is violent and/or destructive. As in Examples 5, 8, and 11, it is the subject of אכל (to devour/consume). Parallel to divine anger is the term “scourge” (זעם). Just like divine anger, the deity “pours” it out (שפך). Because זעם is associated in texts like this with anger, most people believe that it is a synonym of anger. To get a better sense of its meaning, we need to look closer at זעם.

29 Mayer I. Gruber, “The Tragedy of Cain and Abel: A Case of Depression.” *JQR* 69.2 (1978): p. 94.

Excursus 2: זעם

In his monograph on anger in the HB, Schlimm defined זעם not just by the *type or use* of speech it represented (cursing), but by the *emotion* within or behind it (anger).³⁰ Grant wrote that זעם refers to angry speech when its subject is the deity, but not when its subject is a human.³¹ In many places, however, those interpretations don't make sense. One of the most obvious is Ps 7:12 (v. 11 in some translations). Note how the Hebrew is typically rendered by English translators:

Ps 7:12 (11)	אלהים שופט צדיק ואל זעם בכל-יום
NRSV	God is a righteous judge, and a God who has <u>indignation</u> every day.
NET	God is a just judge; he is <u>angry</u> throughout the day.
NAB	God is a just judge, who <u>rebukes in anger</u> every day.
NIV	God is a righteous judge, a God who <u>expresses his wrath</u> every day.
ESV	God is a righteous judge, and a God who <u>feels indignation</u> every day.

This short aphorism begins with the statement “Elohim [is] a just judge.” It then includes a parallel statement that describes what it means to be a just judge. Let us presume that the Masoretic vocalization is correct (אל, “a god who,” not אל, “certainly not one who”). In that case, not only is there a lack of correspondence between statements (the rightness of a judge has nothing to do with his level of anger), but God is insultingly portrayed as one who continually flies into fits of rage! The translators of the KJV tried to get around the problem by inserting an object that isn't there: “God is angry *with the wicked* every day.” Even if we overlook its blatant manipulation, the problem is still present: having righteous anger is not the same as enacting justice or punishing injustice. YLT presents an altered form of the text: “He is *not* angry at all times.” Unfortunately, that rendering still results in a *non sequitur*; the presence of anger has nothing to do with being a good judge. The substantive participle in the parallel statement shows that זעם functions *judicially* and must refer to “passing sentence,” “executing justice,” or “condemning” the guilty. In other words, God is a just judge not because he is angry or indignant all the time, but because *he is constantly executing justice*: “God is a righteous judge, and a God who executes justice every day” (HCSB). The judicial sense of זעם is also clear in Prov 24:24, which says that the one who tells the innocent that they are guilty will be treated as זעם (he or she will be treated as guilty/convicted in their stead). There is nothing there to indicate anger or indignation. In Mik 6:10, זעומה is parallel to רשע ([the] wicked/criminal) and must, therefore, mean “[the] guilty/convicted.” There is nothing there to indicate anger or indignation. The judicial interpretation makes sense of זעם as a necessary or consequential response to sin (Ps 38:4 and Mal 1:4) or God's enemies (Isa 66:14). It is no wonder that Isa 10:5 would use it with the sense of “punishment” or “affliction” and Ps 78:49 would place it next to the noun צרה (distress/trouble/suffering).

The inadequacy of “anger/indignation” as a rendering for זעם can be seen in many prophetic contexts. In Num 23:7 and 8, Balaam is told to curse Jacob and זעם Israel. The imperative is clearly demanding a divinely initiated “denunciation” or “condemnation.” There is no indication of anger or indignation. In Jer 15:15-19, the prophet laments that he suffers insult or disgrace. He notes that all the

30 Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, p. 87 and Appendix B, p. 200.

31 Grant, “Divine Anger in Biblical Literature,” pp. 93-4 and note 119.

people have abandoned him. In v. 17, he says that God filled him with זעם. Although virtually all English translators say that Jeremiah was filled with “indignation,” there is nothing to suggest it. He had just “eaten” God’s words (v. 16), which gave him “joy and exultation” (a statement of hendiadys that is better rendered “unfathomable rapture”). In such a state, he can hardly be indignant! Clearly, Jeremiah is speaking about the humiliation and/or degradation of his social status. In other words, זעם refers to how other people view and/or treat Jeremiah (as if he were under God’s “condemnation” or “scourge”), not how Jeremiah feels about it. Isaiah 26:20-21 identifies the time of זעם as “YHWH going out from his place to set right the wrong,” which must convey the judicial sense as well. Even in places that feature clear indications of divine anger (like Zeph 3:8), it is impossible to know whether זעם was expected to convey the same emotion. If we have a hard time condemning the guilty without being angry, it doesn’t mean that the God of Israel and/or the ancient Israelites who described him had that difficulty.

SUMMARY

The Examples above show that there are many ways in which divine anger is clearly communicated in the HB. There may be explicit indicators of divine anger like אנף or חרון. Other explicit terms for anger, not limited to the divine (like קצף or חרי), may occur. God’s nose (אף) is the place from which his anger emerges. Divine anger itself is elementally manifest as fire (אש), heat (חמה), or even breath (רוח). Unlike an emotion that is felt, divine anger acts out in the world in a violent and/or destructive way. It may, for example, consume (אכל), burn (בער), kill (הרג), or terminate (כלה). God often uses it like a weapon. He may unleash it (שלח) or pour it out (שפך). The deity may, at the same time, be passionate/zealous/jealous (קנא) or troubled/disturbed (כעס). He uses his anger to restore his kingship, which is threatened by wickedness and/or injustice. Therefore, the reign or rule of YHWH is sometimes mentioned in the same context. There are also terms that can be used alongside notions of divine anger, but which communicate other notions/emotions as well—terms like זעם, חרה, אף, or חרה + אף. Where there are clear indications of divine anger in a text, we can be confident that words like זעם, חרה, אף, or חרה + אף have a supporting role in that description.

4. Divine Anger in Habakkuk?

Even though virtually all scholars, commentators, and translators say that YHWH is angry in Hab 3, little or no justification is ever provided to back up that claim. Such interpretation is consistently based on assumptions about the emotion that underlies the terms in the text or on a prejudice that requires the Divine Warrior to be angry if he acts in judgment. With the help of previous sections, we will show the inadequacy of that interpretation. To make the analysis easier, we will revisit each problematic verse from section B1 along with its representative translations.

Hab 3:2by	NASB	NJPST
ברגז רחם תזכור	In <u>wrath</u> remember mercy.	Though <u>angry</u> , may You remember compassion.

English translators often render רָגַז in this verse so that it refers to divine anger. “3:2 creates the impression that the nation had for some considerable time been subject to Divine wrath . . . from which the psalmist in the name of the community prays that they may be delivered.”³² However, there are substantial problems with that interpretation. First, רָגַז does not refer to divine anger or wrath in other texts, which makes that interpretation highly unlikely here. Second, the verbal forms in Hab 3 (once in v. 7 and twice in v. 16) describe the speaker’s and/or a people group’s “agitation/trembling/turmoil,” not God’s “anger/wrath.” We would expect similar terms to be used similarly in the same text unless a shift in meaning was clearly indicated. But that is highly unlikely in this case. Hiebert noted that the root *rgz* is one of several “key words” in the chapter. Terms from that root are used to bind the text together. “It is used four times to describe the turmoil created by the divine power in a theophany. Its four occurrences show a careful progression of increased specificity. . . . till it affects the individual worshipper [sic] of Yahweh.”³³ George Smith summarized the issues well: “To render *turmoil* by *wrath*, as if it were God’s anger against which the singer’s heart appealed, is not true to the original word itself, affords no parallel to *the midst of the years*, and misses the situation.”³⁴ The situation with which Hab deals is the deadly threat of enemies and how God is going to respond to it. That can only be confused with God’s anger/wrath if one presumes that God must be angry to allow such events, to initiate them, or to work against them. Margulis noted another problem: “No classical Hebrew author . . . would have expressed the thought ‘in wrath remember mercy’!”³⁵ Rather, a Hebrew author—particularly the composer of a psalm, prophetic oracle, or poetic plea like in Hab 3—would have asked God to remember *his people, their deeds, their persecution, the deeds of the wicked, his covenant, his love, or his promises*.³⁶ Jeremiah 31:20 is just one place where God was expected “to be merciful” (רַחֵם) because he remembered his relationship with his people (not because he remembered mercy). Ultimately, therefore, Möller’s conclusion is inescapable: “Given the lexical and textual evidence it seems more reasonable to render רָגַז in Hab 3:2 according to a fearful prophetic trembling rather than a vengeful divine wrath.” To translate this in a way that indicates divine anger is not only to import into the text what is simply not present, but to distort the very character of God.

Hab 3:8a	NASB	HCSB
הַבְּנֵה־רִים תִּרָּגַז יְהוָה אִם בְּנֵה־רִים אֶפֶךְ אִם־בַּיִם עֲבַרְתָּךְ	Did the LORD <u>rage</u> against the rivers, Or was <u>Your anger</u> against the rivers, Or was <u>Your wrath</u> against the sea?	Are <u>You angry</u> at the rivers, LORD? Is <u>Your wrath</u> against the rivers? Or is <u>Your rage</u> against the sea?

32 George G. V. Stonehouse, *The Book of Habakkuk: Introduction, Translation, and Notes on the Hebrew Text*. London: Rivingtons, 1911, p. 123.

33 Theodore Hiebert, *God of my Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3*. HSM 38. Ed. Frank Moore Cross. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986, p. 80.

34 George A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets, Commonly Called the Minor. In Two Volumes with Historical and Critical Introductions*. 2nd Edition. New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1898, p. 150. Italics original.

35 Baruch Margulis, “The Psalm of Habakkuk: A Reconstruction and Interpretation.” ZAW 82.3 (1970): p. 412.

36 Examples are ubiquitous. See, for instance, Yob 14:13; Ps 20:4 (v. 3 in some translations); 25:7; 74:2, 18, 22; 89:51 (v. 50 in some translations); 106:4; 119:49; 132:1; 137:7; Isa 38:3; Jer 2:2; 14:21, 15:15, 18:20; Ezek 16:60; Lam 5:1.

Virtually all English translators render *חַרָּה*, *אַף*, and *עִבְרָה* in this verse so that they refer to divine anger. Virtually all English commentators agree. Andersen, for example, declared: “The question is not whether Yahweh was angry.”³⁷ For those who approach the text with an *a priori* assumption, there can be no question. But Andersen is in good company. Ewald had already said, “Yahvé [sic] comes this time also as in wrath.”³⁸ Sinker summarized the sense this way: “Surely that power manifested on Sea and on River was the outcome of God’s wrath.”³⁹ Hiebert said that YHWH “turns his anger against his foe.”⁴⁰ In his “close reading” of the text, O’Neal declared that this section of Hab “describes the anger of Yahweh”⁴¹ (we would say that it describes the *vindication* of YHWH by declaring how he will bring *יִשׁוּעַ*, or *rescue/victory*, to his people). Unlike the others, Deena Grant provided rationale from the text for her assertions. She stated that “The connotation of anger is conveyed by the synonym *‘ebrâ*, which also means anger, and the destruction that occurs in the next verses.”⁴² She went on to say, “Just as Yahweh’s bow and maces assault the earth (3:9), Yahweh’s anger confronts the rivers (3:8).”⁴³ Finally, she argued that the references to “light” (*אֹר*) and “lightning” (*בֶּרֶק*) in v. 11 align with the description of YHWH’s anger as fire.⁴⁴ Let us see if such statements hold up to scrutiny.

We learned in our study of divine anger (section B3) that “Unlike human anger, Yahweh’s anger is wielded as a tangible instrument of destruction.”⁴⁵ In other words, where there is divine anger, it is the subject of an active and violent verb. It is usually characterized as fire or heat. Because it is wielded as a weapon, it may be unleashed or poured out. YHWH’s “nose” is the location from which his anger emerges—it is not the anger itself. Yet none of those indicators are present in Hab 3. There is no indication that his nose or its fuming is wielded as a weapon or that it actually does something destructive. No one is consumed, killed, terminated, burned (*בָּעַר*), or in any other way assaulted by the fuming of his nose. Rather, Hab 3 has the deity bringing real-world weapons to bear against the wicked (bow and arrows, spear, war horses, and staff).⁴⁶ There is no reference to fire, heat, or any other typical elemental manifestations of divine anger. The references to “light” and “lightning” in v. 11 are not applied to any word that could possibly be construed as “anger”; they are applied to actual weapons. Contrary to Grant, his anger does not “confront” anything. Contrary to Hiebert, his anger does not “turn against” anything. Such verbs do not occur either in this verse or in the surrounding context.

37 Francis I. Andersen, *Habakkuk: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. AYB 25. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001, p. 316.

38 Ewald, *Commentary on the Prophets of the Old Testament*, p. 45.

39 Robert Sinker, *The Psalm of Habakkuk: A Revised Translation, with Exegetical and Critical Notes on the Hebrew and Greek Texts*. Cambridge: Deighton, Bell and Co., 1890, p. 23.

40 Hiebert, *God of my Victory*, p. 72.

41 Michael G. O’Neal, *Interpreting Habakkuk as Scripture. An Application of the Canonical Approach of Brevard S. Childs*. SBL 9. Ed. Hemchand Gossai. New York: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 114.

42 Grant, “Divine Anger in Biblical Literature,” p. 57.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 591.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 667.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 260.

46 *בֶּרֶק* functions as an adjectival modifier of “spear,” not as a separate weapon, which is why English translators render it “flashing,” “gleaming,” or “shining” (see also Deut 32:41, where it modifies “sword”).

The most immediate verb in this verse is **חרה**. In order to justify their interpretation of divine anger, interpreters must treat prepositional *bet* as a verbal complementizer for **חרה** so that the “fuming/burning” of God’s nose is said to be directed “against” people. However, verbal complementizers follow the verb they modify; they do not begin brand-new situations. That is especially true with **חרה** + *bet*. Note, for example, Gen 30:2 (**וַיַּחַר־אֵף יַעֲקֹב בְּרַחֵל**), Gen 31:35 (**אֶל־יַחַר בְּעֵינֵי אֲדָנִי**), Gen 44:18 (**אֶל־יַחַר אִפְךָ בַּעֲבֹדְךָ**), or Gen 45:5 (**אֶל־יַחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם**). The same syntax occurs in poetic texts. Note, for instance, Yob 32:2 (**וַיַּחַר אֵף אֱלֹהִים בֶּן־בְּרַכְאֵל הַבּוּזִי מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת רֵם בְּאִיּוֹב**), Ps 37:1 (**חַרָּה אֶף־יְהוָה בַּעֲמּוֹ**), or Hos 8:5 (**חַרָּה אֶף־יְהוָה בַּמִּרְעִים**). Yob 32:3 is the exception that proves the rule; *bet* only comes before **חרה** because the verb had already been introduced in the previous verse (see above). In this case, therefore, it is more likely that *bet* functions as a stand-alone preposition indicating *cause*. Even if we accept that *bet* is a complementizer, it is questionable whether *bet* has the sense “against” (as in “hostile opposition/resistance toward”) when paired with **חרה** anyway. Since the *lamed* in the construction **חרה** + *lamed* identifies the origin of fuming as the person themselves, the *bet* in **חרה** + *bet* probably identifies the origin of fuming with someone other than the person themselves. In other words, **וַיַּחַר־אֵף יַעֲקֹב בְּרַחֵל** probably means “Jacob’s nose fumed *because of* Rahel” (not “Jacob’s nose fumed *against* Rahel”). In Ps 37:1, for example, **אֶל־תִּתְחַר בַּמִּרְעִים** is parallel to **אֶל־תִּקְנֵא בַּעֲשֵׂי עוֹלָה**, which means “do not be envious *because of* wrongdoers,” not “do not act in jealousy *against* wrongdoers” (the parallel *bet* is causal).

Let us presume for a moment that “against” is a valid interpretation. In that case, we learned from section B2 and Excursus 1 in section B3 that the emotional content of **חרה** is still too ambiguous to pin an entire interpretation upon (the Qal of **חרה** is not limited to a single emotional state); one must depend for that on context. When we look at the subject of verbal action both in this verse and throughout this section, it is *God himself* who does things, not his anger. It is God who “rides” with his horses in v. 8 and “stomps” on the sea with them in v. 15. It is God who “sunders” the rivers in v. 9, “treads” on earth and “tramples” nations in v. 12, “advances” to “bash” the head and “bare” the body of the foe in v. 13, or “impales” the head and “scatters” the people in v. 14. Even the passive verbs have YHWH as the implied subject. None of the verbs in all those instances are indicators of divine anger (see Examples 1-12 in section B3). Terms that often accompany the notion of divine anger (like nouns or verbs from **קנא**) are entirely absent. Furthermore, divine anger is often manifest when YHWH is acting to restore his divine rule, yet there is no indication in Hab 3 that YHWH is acting in his role as “king.” Someone else plays that role (v. 13). We are left either with the mere presumption that YHWH is angry because he is acting in judgment or with **עברה** as the key indicator of divine anger (as argued by Grant).

When it comes to **עברה**, virtually no commentator investigates it. They routinely treat it as a synonym of anger (“fury,” “rage,” “wrath,” etc.) and move on without comment. Since **עברה** is a singular noun from **עבר** (“to cross” or “go past a boundary”), some think that it refers to an “outburst.” It is then presumed that “anger” is the emotional content of that “outburst” because it reflects language

that is used in English for the metaphor ANGER IS HEAT. We need not rehearse the problems (identified in section B2) with assuming that ancient Israelites both thought and wrote about their feelings the same way we do. A better understanding of the term is gained by looking at its usage.

Proverbs 21:24 says “Arrogant [and] insolent [is] one who boasts [about] his name. He acts with an **עברה** of arrogance.” If **עברה** has to do with crossing a boundary/limit, it probably describes that which is “excessive” or “extreme.” Multiple English translations render it that way. Note, for example, HCSB (*excessive* pride), NJB (*overweening* pride), or NET (*overbearing* pride). Note also that the term is associated with pride or arrogance; there is no notion of anger. Jeremiah 48:29 contains a long string of synonyms referring to the pride of Moab—including a particle of intensity (**מאד**, “great/very much”). Then, in v. 30, the deity says “I know his **עברה**.” In that place, it is clear that **עברה** relates directly to the “excessiveness” of Moab’s pride. One might render **עברה** as “self-aggrandizement.” Multiple translations do, in fact, render it as a synonym of pride (see, for example, NRSV, NET, or NJB). Again, there is no notion of anger (see also Isa 16:6). In Isa 14:6, **עברה** is paired with *bet* to form an adjectival modifier: “striking the people in/with **עברה**.” If the notion of “excessiveness” is still operative, the term would indicate that the striking is “severe/fierce/violent.” In Isa 13:9, **עברה** is paired with **אכזרי** (cruelty) by the Masoretic accents. If the paired terms communicate a similar sense, **עברה** would probably indicate “severity/ferocity/violence.” In Ps 78:49, **עברה** is placed next to **צרה** (distress/trouble/suffering) and **זעם**, which, in that place, refers to an “affliction” or “scourge” (see Excursus 2 in section B3). A nuance like “affliction” or “violence” would fit well among those terms.

From the examples above, it is evident that **עברה** primarily denotes *the force or intensity of an action*; any emotional content is secondary. Furthermore, there are numerous places where **עברה** cannot refer to anger at all, which means that *its emotional content cannot be presumed*. To interpret Hab 3:8 in terms of divine anger, one must fail to appreciate the differences between perceptions of anger across cultures, import into the text ideas that are not present within it, ignore diverse literary contexts for the words that do occur, and elevate what is, at best, ambiguous emotional content over the primary semantic nuances of those words. The result is a distorted translation that not only assumes an angry or wrathful deity, but propagates that distorted view to English readers.

Hab 3:12	NASB	NRSV
בזעם תצעד-ארץ באף תדוש גוים	In <u>indignation</u> You marched through the earth; In <u>anger</u> You trampled the nations.	In <u>fury</u> you trod the earth, in <u>anger</u> you trampled nations.

English translators typically render **זעם** and **אף** in Hab 3:12 as something like “indignation” and “anger.” Avishur summed up what seems to be the universally agreed reading: “The warrior God . . . marches out in rage upon the earth and tramples the nations in His wrath.”⁴⁷ Grant interpreted the verse this way: “His anger assaults the land and the nations” and “Like weapons assault their objects, Yahweh’s anger crushes nations.”⁴⁸ However, the verbs in this verse are all second-person (referring to YHWH), not third person (referring to his anger or wrath). Furthermore, both verbs in v. 12 refer to the action

47 Yitzhak Avishur, *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms*. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1994, p. 184.

48 Grant, “Divine Anger in Biblical Literature,” p. 592.

of legs or feet, *not of noses*. The simple fact is that neither YHWH's אף nor his זעם do anything. One may contrast the situation here with the weaponization of anger in Ps 18. In v. 9, for example (v. 8 in some translations), we are told that “smoke” (עשן) “went up” (עלה) from God’s nose and “fire that consumes” (אש תאכל) came from his mouth. Then, in v. 16 (v. 15 in some translations), we are told in several ways how “the blast of the breath” of his nose (נשמת רוח) acted against his enemies. In other words, divine anger is physically manifest as an element that is the subject of verbs of violence or destruction.

Some people point to Isa 10:5 as an example of אף and זעם being used as a parallel word-pair to indicate God’s indignation. Grant noted, “Elsewhere, the term nose, *’ap*, connotes anger when it is accompanied by another term of anger, suggesting the emanations from Yahweh’s nose.”⁴⁹ If, however, זעם is about “condemning” injustice, not “anger” (see Excursus 2 in section B3), and there is no indication of an elemental emanation, then it is probable that אף has a similar sense. In other words, Assyria could be the rod/scepter of God’s “confrontation”—i.e., God positions his “nose” against those he opposes (for a wider semantic range of אף than is normally admitted, see Example 5 in section B3). There is no reason to view “anger” as the primary meaning of that verse unless one presumes that God can only use Assyria against a nation if he is angry.

Such interpretations do grave injustice to the image of the deity; they make it seem like YHWH is an angry or wrathful god. That caricature is not only verified, but perpetuated by translators in verses like this. The prophet’s complaint against the deity in the first chapter dealt with the deity’s unresponsiveness to injustice and, therefore, his culpability for it. Within the context of a response by the deity to the prophet’s accusation, it makes sense to view זעם as part of a reversal of that situation—an executing of justice, condemning of wickedness, or convicting of the guilty. Likewise, since Hab 3 is the culmination of several “execration” oracles, it would also make sense to view זעם as a prophetic/divine “condemnation.” Since there is so little in previous verses from which to argue for divine anger, the fact that almost no one translates אף and זעם as anything other than anger or indignation is indicative of the prejudice that influences translation and warrants an equally strong זעם (denunciation).

CONCLUSION

In the previous pages, we saw a widespread tendency to interpret the God in Hab 3:2, 8, and 12 as angry, indignant, or wrathful, and to produce translations that reflect and substantiate that view. However, we also saw that Hab 3:2, 8, and 12 do not align with the nature of divine anger as it is described in the HB in general or prophetic and/or poetic material in particular. Within the ancient culture in which Hab 3 was composed, a reader or hearer might believe that the deity was angry. If so, that belief would arise not from the text alone, but from the cultural and religious milieu in which that reader or hearer existed. Since we are separated from that milieu by thousands of years, by new cultural contexts, and by different forms of language and conceptions of emotion, it is difficult to know, without clear and unambiguous indicators, whether the emotional content we perceive is present. If we give up our preconceived notions and are willing to view the terms in Hab 3 in accord with their diverse semantic nuances, it is evident that the Warrior God does not bring victory/rescue by blowing up in anger at the wicked, *but by actively condemning and forcefully confronting them with his Power.*

49 Ibid., p. 661.

(C) Format

1. Lineation

Lineation is the arrangement of the lines of a text according to content and/or strophes. Although many poetic texts were written in a special format by the time of the Masoretes, it was not so in antiquity. The lineation herein is an interpretive measure meant to differentiate poetry from prose and to better elucidate textual content. It usually follows the accentual divisions used by the medieval synagogues and documented by the Masoretes. When it does not (the accents were placed in the texts to aid in oral recitation, not to demarcate distinct units of poetry or narrative), the reason(s) for that deviation may be indicated in the Translation Notes.

2. Separation

Unlike narrative, which is grouped into paragraphs, prophetic texts are often composed of independent oracles and short segments of prophetic commentary stitched together. When these oracles and/or commentary segments contain a clear beginning and end, the text is separated so that each self-contained unit may be read on its own. Oracles may open, for example, with imperatives (as in 1:5) or interjections (as in 2:4 or 2:9, 12, 15, and 19). Even though oracles and/or commentary segments were originally separate, they were arranged in an order that has its own internal logic. The opening prophetic commentary, for instance (1:2-4), asks YHWH why he “looks” and “watches” while wickedness and injustice occur. The first oracle (vv. 5-11) opens with the same terms (“look” and “watch”), which creates continuity between them. Continuity is likewise created between the first oracle (vv. 5-11) and the following commentary (vv. 12-17) by ending the former with “god” and starting the latter with a declaration about “god.” Rubrics or explanations are not inserted between individual textual units so that we may not interrupt the flow of the composite whole. Chapter indicators or actual breaks in the text due to a change in genre (see, for example, the superscription in 3:1) are the only exception to this rule.

3. Versification

Versification refers to the division of the text into verses. That division is ancient, but it was oral long before it was written. The earliest Rabbinic literature utilized verse division. By the time of the Masoretes, verse divisions were already standardized. Copiers counted the verses within a text in order to guarantee that the text was copied precisely. THF follows the verse division as documented in the Hebrew manuscripts. Most English translations follow the verse divisions created by Christians for the Vulgate half a millennium (or more) later.

4. Italics

Italics are used primarily to identify and separate **superscriptions** from the body of a text. They are used secondarily to indicate **quotations** within a text. Thirdly, they may be used in rare instances to highlight words or phrases with special significance (see Translation Notes).

5. Brackets

Square brackets indicate words that are not present in the Hebrew text itself, but which, nevertheless, are represented by the tone or context of the language, are required by English, or are included for reasons of style.

6. Forward Slashes

In extremely rare circumstances, where there is very good reason to believe that the Hebrew text has been corrupted, yet the text we propose has no manuscript or version support, we place the word between **/forward slashes/** to reveal that we have altered the text from something that exists to something that does not. This is only done in rare circumstances because we recognize a tendency among previous generations of scholars to dissect, alter, and jettison portions of biblical texts that they deemed unsuitable or unoriginal when, in fact, it was their own biases and assumptions that were problematic. The integrity of the consonantal text in the Masoretic tradition has proven itself with time and textual discovery. Most alterations and emendations proposed by scholars before the Dead Sea Scrolls, for example, were proven wrong when those scrolls either agreed with or showed the text in the Masoretic tradition to be even more ancient. At the same time, however, purposeful alteration is done by translators all the time. Sometimes that alteration is indicated by the use of footnotes or marginal notes. Most of the time, however, the reader of the English translation has no idea when the text is being intentionally manipulated. Since we do not wish to mislead our readers, we make such manipulations, however rare, very conspicuous.

7. Masoretic Notes

At the end of every text or scroll, the Masoretes kept notes of things such as the total number of verses, the number of sections according to the triennial reading cycle, or the number and types of paragraphs. Since each manuscript differs in the way it records that information, THF reproduces the notes at the end of every biblical text according to *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. For more on Masoretic notes, see Page H. Kelly, Daniel S. Mynatt, and Timothy G. Crawford's *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: Introduction and Annotated Glossary*.

Background

The Word of God is Faithful

What do we do when wicked people twist what is good and overturn what is just, when we are surrounded by enemies, when ruin and destruction seem certain, and when the word of God doesn't make sense or seems to conflict with our present circumstances? Perhaps many of us can't relate to those issues. But to those who are suffering and who cry out to a God that doesn't seem to answer, Hab shows a deity who sympathizes with their predicaments and who presents his divine word as a trustworthy witness and a precursory act in the establishment of his justice and in the bestowal of life to his loved ones. "Stay hooked on it!"

The War Prophet

The historical prophet was probably active during the final days of the southern kingdom of Judah before its collapse. The earliest oracle seems to originate at a time when Babylon wasn't yet a threat to Judah, which is why the idea that the tribes of Kaldû would rise up to conquer the nations seemed unbelievable. The bulk of Hab's complaint, as well as the execrations and psalm that follow, involve messages of war. Like Balaam, a prophet hired to initiate divine battles against an enemy people, Hab was probably a prophet hired to offer prayers on behalf of Israel and curses against her enemies. He "saw" Babylon appointed to wage war upon the earth, "watched" as it conquered and destroyed the nations, uttered retaliatory curses against it, and offered an incantation that would usher in YHWH's victory. A prophet like Hab "intended to assist in the battle of Yahweh, hastening on and ensuring the reality yet to come" through "dramatically imagined scenes of YHWH's warfare" and prophetic poetry that was "wielded as a weapon against oppressors."⁵⁰

50 John H. Eaton, "Festal Drama." Pages 247-51 in *The Place is Too Small for Us: The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship*. SBTS 5. Ed. Robert P. Gordon. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995. Excerpted from *Festal Drama in Deutero-Isaiah*. London: SPCK, 1979, pp. 110-14. Scholars have spent so much time trying to understand the prophet in a "cultic" context, mapping out the contours of a formal "lament," relegating the execration oracles to generalized "morality" or "wisdom" statements, and treating the final chapter as an extravagant "eschatology," that they have routinely overlooked the profoundly *militant* nature of both the prophetic text and the prophet therein. Very slowly, however, the interpretive tide is shifting. Very recently, for instance, Jeremias ("Habakuk – ein etwas anderer Prophet") reassessed the text and concluded that Habbaquq must have been a "professional" prophet (i.e., a prophet who served the state in an official capacity) and noted how the text uses "military terminology" to speak of him.

Form & Genre

Habaquq is a prophetic text. Most prophetic texts are composed of individual oracles that were collected and arranged thematically. This text, however, is different: a complaint by the prophet arising as a reaction to a previous oracle and seeking an explanation from the deity about how that oracle makes sense in light of current circumstances. In other words, a single oracle was expanded into a much larger text that broadened the scope and content of the original message. As such, Hab belongs to a sub-category of prophetic texts that ancient scribes called **משא**: a prophetic interpretation or elucidation. Its purpose was two-fold: to authenticate the previous oracle by declaring that YHWH had indeed raised up Babylon to deal with the rebellious one (Judah), but also to encourage those suffering unjustly that God would pay back their oppressor and bring life to those who were oppressed. “What Habakkuk does is . . . give support, encouragement, and guidance.”⁵¹ That imminent, non-eschatological intent can be contrasted with the commentary on Hab from Qumran, which was meant “to encourage the faithful to . . . not be discouraged by any apparent delay in the coming of the end-time.”⁵²

As noted by Balogh, “The book of Habakkuk . . . was conceived as a well-planned literary composition.”⁵³ Contrary, however, to scholarly consensus, the text was not composed as a dialogue between the prophet and the deity. Reading the text as a chronological back-and-forth has obfuscated its message and caused earlier generations of interpreters to expend great effort trying to integrate what seemed to be disparate blocks of text. Rather, the first chapter, which quotes an earlier oracle (vv. 5-11), was composed as a whole and the answer to Hab’s complaint is provided by both the prophet and the deity. Each oracle or section looks forward to the next and/or back to the last through the repetition of words, ideas, and well-integrated word-play. The beginning and end are balanced by two compositions: an oracle that describes, in theophanic imagery, the Babylonians storming into battle to sweep victoriously over the earth and a psalm that describes, in mythic imagery, Israel’s god storming into battle to sweep victoriously over the earth. Sandwiched between is either a soliloquy by the prophet or a report from the prophet to a governing authority, a string of five oracles that call down divine retribution on Babylon using coded language, and a declaration by the deity that provided hope for the suffering in its earlier

51 David Cleaver-Bartholomew, “An Alternative Approach to Hab 1:2-2:20.” *SJOT* 17.2 (2003): p. 223.

52 Lim, *The Earliest Commentary*, p. 2.

53 Csaba Balogh, “Survival of the Fittest: Habakkuk and the Changing Trail of the Prophetic Tradition.” Page 28 in *Wichtige Wendepunkte. Verändernde und sich ändernde Traditionen in Zeiten des Umbruchs. Pivotal Turns. Transforming Traditions in Times of Transition. BÖR 98*. Eds. Elod Hodossy-Takács and Leo J. Koffeman. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2014.

form (God's promise is a trustworthy source of life) and became a mainstay of Jewish and Christian theology in its later Greek incarnation (the righteous will live by faith). What begins as a cry of despair to a god who "rescues not" ends with a cry of joy in the god who is his "rescue."

Habaquq's Incantation

Although the third chapter is not a *mashal* and does not open like an oracle of execration, it is the culmination of the five oracles that came before and follows naturally from the end of the previous chapter with its description of YHWH's manifestation and cosmic conquest. If the previous oracles conjured a mimicking retaliation against Babylon, the final one is an incantation. Woven throughout are magical turns of phrase; words that appear in one verse are reversed or reassembled so that the spoken utterance bounds and rebounds, swallowing up the target in a swirl of talismanic power. Biblical scholars argue about whether the incantation is a hymn of praise/victory or a lament/complaint. It is better labeled a prophetic battle hymn. As seen in Psalms 7 and 18 (2 Sam 22), the battle hymn usually includes a denunciation of one's enemies (found largely in the preceding chapters of Hab), a declaration of innocence (also found largely in preceding chapters), a petition for the deity to act, words that highlight the speaker's distress, a description of the deity's warrior-like status, and lyrics of praise at the end. Habaquq's incantation has an onion-like structure. The outer layer features a liturgical introduction and closure (vv. 1 and 19b) with liturgical queues inserted into other layers of the text. The first inner layer contains the prophet's petition and his joy at the deity's response (vv. 2 and 18-19a). The second inner layer is a description of an ancient theophany and how both nature and the hearer are in need of its realization (vv. 3-7 and 16-17). The core of the battle hymn envisions the deity as a warrior trampling down the forces of evil in victory (vv. 8-15). Although Ps 7 contains a prophetic utterance within it (v. 8), it is the use of the hymn in Hab that makes it prophetic: to summon past divine action into present or future reality. The hymn "not only reports an epiphany—the drawing near of God in power and glory—it itself heralds that drawing near."⁵⁴

Although most agree that all of Hab could have been composed by the same person, a few have insisted otherwise. Hiebert threw down the gauntlet: "A major difficulty faced by those who assert unified authorship for Habakkuk is the patently archaic quality of Chapter 3."⁵⁵ Hiebert's argument amounted mostly to theories about the

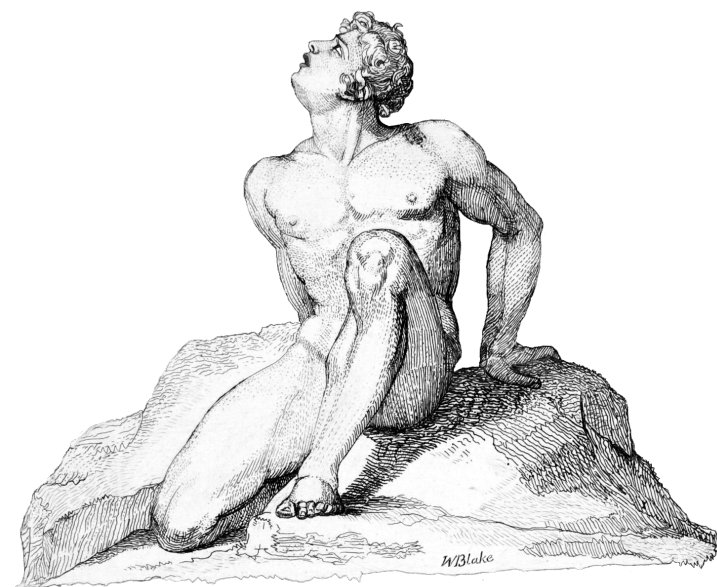
54 Leslie Demson, "‘In Time of Tumult You Remembered to Have Compassion’: Form-Critical Treatments of Habakkuk 3." Pages 197-217 in *The Identity of Israel's God in Christian Scripture*. Eds. Don Collett, Mark Elliott, Mark Gignilliat, and Ephraim Radner. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020.

55 Hiebert, *God of my Victory*, p. 82.

periods when certain imagery or ideologies would or would not be utilized—none of which can be established with certainty. A better argument is made by looking at actual archaic forms in the text, which are grounded in the historical development of the Hebrew language traced through time by epigraphic and linguistic evidence. When we do, we see that Hab 3 is not as archaic as many would like us to believe (for instance, it makes continuous use of medial and final *matres* and the archaic forms we do see are interspersed among predominantly classical forms). Fundamentally, there is a consistent use of archaic forms in all three chapters. The archaic third masculine singular suffix in 3:4 (עֹזָה) and 3:11 (זִבְלָה) was also used in 1:9 and 1:15 (כִּלָּה). The paragogic *nun* showed up in 3:7 (יִרְגִּזוּן) and 2:17 (יִחִיתֶן). Hab 3:17 utilized a Qal passive (גִּזַּר) just like 2:19 (תִּפּוֹשׁ). Hab 3:4 featured an archaic feminine dual imperfect verbal form (תִּהְיֶינָה), whereas 1:9 featured an archaic feminine singular nominal form (מִגְנֶמֶת). Hab 3:14 used an old form of prepositional *kaph* (כִּמּוֹ) and 2:7 used an old form of the 3MP suffix on prepositional *lamed* (לִּמּוֹ instead of לָהֶם). The archaic particle וַיִּ was used in 1:11, but not elsewhere. The archaic 3MS suffix for plural nouns was used in 3:10 (יִרְיֶהוּ), but not elsewhere. The use of *yiqtol*s as preterits is a feature not just of ch. 3, but 1-2 as well. Ultimately, the textual evidence compels us to answer Hiebert with a strong affirmation: *ch. 3 is no more archaic than the rest of Hab*. The fact that it was used (or intended for use) in the Jerusalem Temple is a reality with which we must reckon,⁵⁶ but not its inherent unity with chs. 1-2.

56 Why would someone try to incorporate Hab's battle hymn into religious service? Habaquq 3 was more dangerous than other prophetic texts because it not only offered a grand vision of the deity (an extremely problematic thing for some mindsets), but was meant to summon the Divine Warrior into actual historical circumstance. Dangerous poetry like that needed to be regulated. By adding liturgical elements to the text, it could become a prayer instead of an incantation; a song instead of an accusation; an eschatological vision instead of a visionary's execration.

Habaqquq



Chapter 1



¹ The [divine] clarification that the prophet Habaquq envisioned.

² Long enough, YHWH!

I shouted,
but you listened not—
cried to you “Violation!”,
but you rescued not.

³ Why have you looked [on]
[in] my harm and oppression
[or] watched
as ruin and violation [were] before me;
when strife appeared and conflict escalated

⁴ so that defeated was law—
yes, continually unissued, order;
while [the] wicked was obstructing the just
so that [any] order issued was distorted?

⁵ “Look, [all of you], on the nations and watch,
then be razzle-dazzled,

since a proceeding proceeds in your lifetime
you would not rely [on] were it recounted;

⁶ since I am now propping up the [tribes of] Kaldu,
that caste eager and beleaguered,
that marches toward earth’s extents
to make settlements not his his.”

⁷ Breathtaking and imperious [is] he.
From him will his divine order issue.

⁸ Swifter indeed than leopards [are] his horses
and more penetrating than wolves of evening
when *stampedes* his steeds.

When his steeds from afar arrive,
they will swoop vulture-like, swift to devour.

⁹ Each one for violation will arrive.
The assembly [at] their front advances,
collects captives like sand.

¹⁰ [It is] he, indeed, [who] belittles kings.
Monarchs even [are] a joke to him.
[It is] he [who], at every rampart, jokes,
ramps up dirt to capture it.

¹¹ Then courage vanishes, passes [away],
as he devastates—Such [is] his *sway*!—
for his deity.

¹² Undeniably ancient [are] you,
YHWH, my god, my holy [one].

We should not die!

YHWH, for the sake of order,
you established him.

Yes, Bedrock, for *swaying* [behavior],
you founded him.

¹³ Pure eyes [refrain] from looking [into] evil.
So to watch over oppression
should not be possible [for] you!

Why [then] do you watch betrayers,
are unresponsive while [the] wicked
swallows [up] from us [the] just?

¹⁴ You made humankind to be like fish of the sea,
like a critter none can control.

¹⁵ Each one with a *hook* he hauled up,
slashed it with his /sword/,
and collected it in his net.

For this reason, he shouts triumphantly.

¹⁶ For this reason, it is sacrificed on his /sword/
and immolated on his net.

Indeed, by means of them,
fat [is] his helping and his meal, ample!

¹⁷ [So] he has every reason
to unsheathe his sword
and continue slaying nations unrestrained!

Chapter 2



¹ At my lookout, I hereby will stand. In fact, I
hereby will position myself on a rocky [height] and
keep watch to see what he may communicate with
me and what I should send back from my *swayer*.

² When YHWH answered me, he said,

“Write and confirm [the] vision on your boards
since a herald will run with it.

³ [I swear] that a witness
[is] [the] vision of the appointed time,
[the] testimony of the resolution—
and it will not perjure!

If it dilly-dallies,

[may I be cursed]!

Stay *hooked* on it

because [what] occurs will occur—
will not deter!

- ⁴ See [how] rebellious is his desire?
It deviates from it!
Yet [the] just,
because of its reliability, will flourish.
- ⁵ How much more defiant then [the] betrayer,
[the] man haughty and malcontent,
who widens like [the] Grave his throat!"
He indeed [is] like Mot—that is, insatiable—
who collects to himself all the nations,
gathers to himself all populations.
- ⁶ It is certainly they—each of them—
who, toward him,
will conjure a mimicking [retaliation],
even accusatory runes about him!
So let [each] one say:
- "Oh [no]!
He increasingly makes not his his—
Long enough!—
and enforces toward him payments!
- ⁷ It will, no doubt, be sudden
[when] they arise who owe you—
yes, are roused who kowtow you.
Then you will become spoil for them.
- ⁸ Just as you yourself plundered
numerous nations,
they will plunder you,
all remaining populations,
because of the butchery of human beings
and the violation of land, city,
and all who dwell therein.
- ⁹ Oh [no]!
He enriches [with] injurious riches
his house
to set on the height his perch,
to escape from the grip of injury.
- ¹⁰ You conspired—Shame on your house!—
to finish off numerous populations,
but misplace your ambition.
- ¹¹ Surely [every] stone from [the] wall
will cry out
and [every] beam from [the] wood[work],
echo it!
- ¹² Oh [no]!
He builds a city through butchery—
yes, founds a village on victimization!

- ¹³ It is certainly he who roars
at YHWH, [God of] Legions!
So populations will labor
for conflagration—
yes, peoples, for desolation,
will languish
- ¹⁴ when that land is [as] overwhelmed
by the revelation of YHWH's honor
as the waters inundate [the] sea!
- ¹⁵ Oh [no]!
He makes his neighbor[s] swill
from the deluge of your wine-skin—
yes, brings to inebriation as well
in order to leer at their bare [places].
- ¹⁶ You were gluttoned [with] dishonor
[rather] than honor!
Drink up—You too!
Yes, you foreskinned [one],
let it turn against you,
the cup of YHWH's power,
till dishonor disgorges
[all] over your honor!
- ¹⁷ Just as Lebanon's violation covers you,
so [will] ruin!
Beasts will terrorize
because of the butchery of human beings
and the violation of land, city,
and all who dwell therein.
- ¹⁸ What benefit brings a statue
once one instatuates it?
Its form [is] a cast-metal [bod]
and instructor of fraud!
Yet he who forms its form trusts in it
[enough] to make idiotic idols!
- ¹⁹ Oh [no]!
He says to wood[work], 'Awake!',
[calls] 'Come alive!' to stone.
'Silence! It instructs!'
Look [at] it!
Stamped [on] is gold or silver,
but no spirit at all exists inside it.
- ²⁰ YHWH, however, [is] in his holy palace.
Hush at his manifestation, all you earth!"

Chapter 3 א

¹ An incantation by Habaququq, the prophet in charge of battle hymns.

² YHWH, I heard [what] [was] heard of you,
was awestruck, YHWH, [by] [what] proceeded [from] you.
In *battle*, a second [time], prosper him!
In *battle*, a second [time], bring revelation!
When *trembles* [the] *womb*, consider!

³ Eloah—from Teman, he came.
[The] Holy [One], indeed, from Mount Paran [went forth].
He covered heaven [with] his prestige.
With his illustriousness, the earth filled.

Exalt!

⁴ He blazed, in fact, like a luminary!
A pair of horns appeared by his might to [serve] him
and he secured a hideout [by] his strength.

⁵ At his front marched pestilence—
yes, plague advanced at his heels.

⁶ He stood [and] made earth stoop,
looked [out] [and] jolted nations.

They fractured, mountains of yore,
bowed, hills [and] highways of old, to him.

⁷ [In consequence] for harm, I did discover,
the camps of Kushan *trembled*,
[every] tent-cover [in] Midian's land [shook]!

⁸ Because of rivers it really did *fume*, YHWH!
Truly because of the rivers [did] the nose of you!
Truly because of the sea [did] the violence of you
when you rode with your horses—your chariots [to] victory!

⁹ Bare [and] brandished was your bow.
Seven-fold [was] [the] bending of [your] bough.

Exalt!

[The] rivers you sundered [in] [the] earth.

¹⁰ They saw you [and] convulsed—the mountains,
[as] [the] torrent of water passed [by],
[as] abyss gave [off] its bellow.

Majestic [in] its might was the towering of sun.

¹¹ Moon stood [in] its eminence.

Due to the luminance of your arrows, they dashed—
due to [the] blaze [and] *rattle* of your spear!

¹² With condemnation, you trod earth;
with confrontation, trampled nations.

¹³ You advanced for [the] victory of [those] you appointed,
for victory with your anointed.

You bashed [down] [the] head from the wicked homestead,
 baring [it], foundation to neck.

Exalt!

¹⁴ You impaled on his staff [that] head
 [and] they scattered who stormed [out] to disperse me,
 they [whose] delight [was] like /those who lie in wait/
 to devour [the] weak in ambush.

¹⁵ You stomped on the sea [with] your horses,
 [making] *spume* [the] wide waters.

¹⁶ My core *trembled* [when] I heard.
 Due to [the] sound, my speech slurred.
 Into my bones and my lower [limbs], *addle* entered.

I *trembled* where I laid
 due to [the] day of distress,
 due to [its] ascension,
 due to [the] people who banded [against] us;

¹⁷ while fig [tree] blossomed not
 and yield vanished on the vines;
 withered was the produce of the olive [tree]
 and fields produced not grain;
assembled not in pens was [the] flock
 and *cattle* vanished in the stalls.

¹⁸ Yet [it is] I, in YHWH, [who] will hereby exult,
 will hereby rejoice in the god who rescues me,

¹⁹ [in] YHWH, lord of my vitality,
 who secured my feet like does—
 yes, on summits, made me stride!

To bring glory with music.

The total number of
 verses [is]
 56.

NOTES



1:1 **The [divine] clarification** — The word מִשָּׁא has proved problematic. It comes from נָשָׂא meaning “to carry/lift up” and, in some contexts, refers to the “load,” “haul,” or “encumbrance” carried by people or pack animals (see, for example, Num 4:15; 11:11; 2 Kgs 5:17; 8:9; 2 Chr 17:11). But that nuance is not applicable in prophetic texts. As Floyd noted (“The מִשָּׁא (*maśśā*) as a Type of Prophetic Book”), “Scholars have attempted to extend the clearly defined part of the semantic field into the area that is less clearly defined. Some have thus proposed that the well-established sense of the word, referring to something that is literally or figuratively burdensome, be extended to refer to a prophecy that is also a ‘burden’ in the sense that its message is hard to bear.” From that extension came the rendering “burden,” which was used by early English translators, but has since been abandoned by modern ones due to its lack of clarity. Modern translators prefer a more etymological approach. Since the root means “to carry” or “lift,” they interpret מִשָּׁא as that which is carried or lifted by the voice. NET and AAT, for instance, rendered it “message.” Sweeney (“Structure, Genre, and Intent in the Book of Habakkuk”), NJPST, and Renz (NICOT) rendered it “pronouncement.” But Floyd was right that “This understanding . . . does not really help to clarify the particularly prophetic connotations of the word. It only tells us, rather colorlessly, that the prophecy in question was uttered. If the term מִשָּׁא does indeed refer to what results from ‘lifting [one’s] voice,’ then it should be applicable to utterances of many kinds.” As noted by Stonehouse (*The Book of Habakkuk*), “The meaning ‘utterance’ would not appear to suit all the passages in which the word occurs. Thus in the phrase מִשָּׁא דְּבַר יְהוָה (Zech 9:1, 12:1), דְּבַר would be somewhat otiose, if מִשָּׁא is used with this significance.” Andersen (AYB) noted, in fact, that “In prophetic writings *maśśā*’ becomes a technical expression for the message brought by a prophet.” Therefore, translators usually render it something like “oracle” (NIV), “prophecy” (Leeser), or “portent” (Alter). Yet there is still a lack of specificity; not all oracular utterances are introduced by מִשָּׁא. The term is often limited to prophetic announcements against foreign entities. Renderings that try to show that the מִשָּׁא reflects an utterance of judgment include “charge” (NJB) and “sentence” (Henderson, *The Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets*). Although some, like Haak (*Habakkuk*), thought that “The term *ms*’ is not helpful in determining either the general content or the form of the following prophecy,” several scholars have done tremendous work analyzing the term and its usage and their results are enlightening. Weis noted that “A *maśśā*’ is based on a particular revelation (given to the prophet) of the divine intention or of a forthcoming divine action. A speech or text belonging to this genre was composed by the prophet to expound the way in which the revealed divine action or intention would actually express itself in human affairs” (“Oracle,” AYBD). For that reason, he said that “a translation for *maśśā*’ such as ‘prophetic exposition of divine revelation’ would be preferable to ‘oracle.’” Floyd came to the same conclusion. He believed that מִשָּׁא “might be roughly translated as ‘prophetic reinterpretation of a previous revelation.’” The previous revelation in Hab would be the prophetic statement in 1:5-11 (YHWH is raising up the tribes of Kaidu to correct the deeds of “the wicked”). The problem is that the corrector is more wicked than those it was sent to correct! Habaquq brings that before the deity and the deity responds with a “clarification/explanation/elucidation”—i.e., a מִשָּׁא. Therefore, we render מִשָּׁא as “a [divine] clarification.” That meaning is evident in the longer expression מִשָּׁא דְּבַר־יְהוָה (Zech 9:1;

12:1; Mal 1:1): “a [divine] clarification of YHWH’s oracle” (Zech 9-11 clarifies or explains Zech 1-8, Zech 12-14 clarifies or explains Zech 1-11, and Malachi clarifies or explains parts of the divine revelation called “the law of Mosheh”). For more on מִשָּׁא and how the interpretation we provide fixes a host of interpretive issues throughout Hab, see Cleaver-Bartholomew’s “An Alternative Approach to Hab 1:2-2:20.”

- 1:2 **Long enough, YHWH!** — Translators usually do not render עַד־אֵנָּה יְהוָה as a standalone statement. Instead, they connect it to the following verb, resulting in renderings like “how long shall I cry?” (KJV) or “how long must I call for help?” (HCSB). In other words, the phrase is believed to refer to the length of time that the prophet has been crying out (and may continue to cry out) to God. Due to the conjunctive accents beneath אֵנָּה and יְהוָה, it is clear that the Masoretes believed that people should recite the text that way. Yet there are several problems with that reading. First, when עַד־אֵנָּה describes a verbal action, that verb almost always takes the form of an imperfect (Num 14:11; Yob 18:2, 19:2; Ps 13:2, 3, 64:4; Jer 47:6) or participle (Josh 18:3) to indicate present and/or ongoing action. Here, however, we find a perfect. It is no wonder that Stonehouse should remark, “The use of the perfect . . . seems to us inappropriate.” The only other place where a perfect follows עַד־אֵנָּה is Exod 16:28. In that verse, however, the verb is used as part of a rhetorical statement that describes a characteristic trait: עַד־אֵנָּה לִשְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתַי וְתוֹרֹתַי (“How often you [all] refuse to keep my commands and instructions!” or “Limitless is your refusal to keep my commands and instructions!”). Houtman (HCOT) said this about it: “Israel is pictured as a people which persistently disregards YHWH’s rules and does what displeases him.” Yet it cannot be said in Hab or elsewhere that it is characteristic of the Israelite deity neither to listen nor to rescue! Therefore, both the syntactic and semantic usage of עַד־אֵנָּה + perfect argues against the typical interpretation. Second, vv. 2-4 work together to introduce a larger structure in Hab (form-critically termed a “complaint”). Since the complaint begins the entire prophetic text and עַד־אֵנָּה appears at the start, it probably functions as a thematic heading for everything that follows. In other words, עַד־אֵנָּה doesn’t just tell the reader/hearer that God hasn’t listened when Hab cried out, but asks the bigger question: “‘how long?’ must Judah and her people be subjected to the cruel oppression of a foreign power” (Thompson, “Prayer, Oracle and Theophany: The Book of Habakkuk”). Third, עַד־אֵנָּה occurs twice in Hab. In the second instance (2:6), it clearly functions as a standalone statement. If 1:2 and 2:6 were composed by the same person, and if authors are prone to use the same language in the same way, then it is likely that the phrase here is a standalone statement. For all those reasons, we render עַד־אֵנָּה as a standalone statement. NAB and Andersen (AYB) did likewise. The next question is whether the phrase is an actual question or if it functions as a rhetorical exclamation. Andersen rightly pointed out that “In Hebrew, there is considerable semantic overlap among interrogatives, negatives, and exclamations. A common example is the use of a rhetorical question to make a positive assertion.” The same thing happens in English. When a speaker declares “Are you kidding me?”, they are not asking a question; they are emphatically stating that there must be a mistake. The speaker of עַד־אֵנָּה expects the recipient to act or respond to the circumstances that drove

the speaker to make the exclamation. In other words, Hab is *giving* YHWH an end date, not *asking* for one. Using a rhetorical question as an emphatic statement grabs the audience's attention in a way that an ordinary statement of inquiry would not. Therefore, it seems certain that עַד־אָנָה + perfect has the same rhetorical function in Hab 1:2 as it did in Exod 16:28.

To reflect that function, we render the phrase as an emphatic exclamation.

I shouted . . . cried — Although שׁוֹעֵתִי and אֶזְעַק are parallel, their forms are different (perfect and imperfect, respectively). Walker and Lund (“The Literary Structure of the Book of Habakkuk”) showed the differences: “I cried” (past tense) versus “I call” (present tense). So did Goldingay: “I called” and “I cry.” But why are the forms different? How should that effect translation? Both the shift in form and the questions that arise from it go unnoticed by most commentators. “We have yet to come across a commentary that even notices this problem, let alone discusses it in order to justify the choice of English tenses to translate these Hebrew verbs” (Andersen). Henderson argued that “The influence of עַד־אָנָה, *how long*, upon the Preterite and Future tenses in this verse, so modifies them as to give them the force of a present time.” Few translators, however, have ever rendered שׁוֹעֵתִי in the present tense (“I am calling” or “I call”). Almost unanimously, translators treat it as a future imperfect (I will/shall/must). But why is there a shift in verbal form at all? The answer is that ancient Semitic poetry typically features patterns of grammatical alternation (where the gender, number, person, and/or aspect shifts within words between parallel lines or cola). Although one might be tempted to render the verbs differently, the purpose of grammatical alternation is not to introduce semantic difference, but to produce dramatic effect. The question, therefore, is not whether the sense changes between שׁוֹעֵתִי and אֶזְעַק, but what sense those synonymous verbs share. Virtually all translators think that the perfect takes on the sense of the imperfect. That interpretation is supported by 6, which renders both as future indicatives. However, it is astonishing that the one verb that is clearly a preterit should be treated as something else entirely. Considering that the *yiqtol* was originally used as a preterit and such archaic usage tends to appear in Hebrew poetry, it is far more likely that the imperfects in Hab 1:2-4 are *yiqtol* preterits. Andersen agreed: “The occurrence of an opening *qāṭal* form (*šīwwā’û*) and a later *wayyiqṭōl* (*wayêhî*) anchors the discourse in past-time reference and coerces the *yiqṭōl* forms into the same tense.” He rendered שׁוֹעֵתִי and אֶזְעַק as “I have called” and “I protested.” Möller (*The Vision in Habakkuk*) did similarly. For more on grammatical alternation, see Watson’s *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*.

1:3 have you looked [on] [in] my harm and oppression [or] watched — תִּבְיַט and תִּרְאֵנִי are synonymous in form and meaning. Both are second-person masculine singular (you) referring to YHWH. Even though virtually all English translators render these verbs in the present or future tense, both are *yiqtol* preterits indicating past tense due to the influence of the opening perfect (שׁוֹעֵתִי) and the *wayyiqṭol* (וַיִּהְיֶה), which is used for past tense purposes (see note above). The Masoretes vocalized תִּרְאֵנִי as a Hiphil (תִּרְאֵנִי), meaning “you made/caused me to see” or “you showed me.” Virtually all English translations render it that way. The same word, however, can be read as a Qal (תִּרְאֵנִי), meaning “you looked at me” or “you saw me.” As Andersen (AYB) noted, “The two verbs are conventional parallels. In nearly half its OT occurrences, *hibbîṭ* is parallel to *rā’â*. . . . In every instance *rā’â* is *Qal*, except in Hab 1:3.

This is enough to throw doubt on the *Hip'il*. . . . Furthermore the *Hip'il tar'enî* of the MT deviates from Habakkuk's own use of *Qal* in vv. 5 and 13." In other words, it is likely that the *Qal* of תראני was altered to conform with the Hiphil of תביט. Many English translations reflect that harmonization. Note, for example, KJV (shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold) or NRSV (make me see . . . and look at). As for תביט, Henderson noted that "הביט, though the Hiphil conjugation, is never used in a causative sense." Apart from one occurrence in the Piel (Isa 5:30), נבט only occurs in the Hiphil stem and always means "to look/gaze/see." Despite the fact that virtually every English translation renders one or both verbs as causative, such treatment deviates radically from their attested usage either individually or as word-pairs. Therefore, we render both verbs in a non-causative sense. As for the pronominal suffix, Andersen pointed to an example of the same verb with a suffixed pronoun and a very similar syntactic usage (Exod 2:6): "*wattir'ehû 'et hayyeled*, 'and she saw him (namely) the boy.' By analogy, Hab 1:3 means 'You watch me, misery,' that is, 'You watch me (in my) misery' or 'You watch my misery.'" In other words, תראני אין ועמל means "you saw me [in] harm and oppression" or, more simply, "you saw my harm and oppression." By rendering the verbs with a causative sense, English translators miss the point; this is not about what Hab is made to see, but what YHWH is willing to witness before acting. As Haak said, "The theme is that of Yahweh, not the author, 'looking at' or 'shewing regard to' . . . various evils." S. R. Driver (*The Minor Prophets*) agreed: "God the Holy One seems to look on quietly, and permit injustice and wrong to pass unpunished." In the words of Henderson, "The prophet introduces Jehovah . . . as an inactive spectator of the evil." To capture that sense here, we rendered ראה as "to look on" (i.e., "to witness/spectate"). ESV (to idly look) captured the sense well. So did Walker and Lund (o'erlookest). HCSB (to tolerate) and NET (put up with) abandoned the use of verbs linked to sight, thereby destroying the parallelism between the verbs and severing the links between this verse and others where the same verbs occur (1:5, 13, and 3:6). We render ראה as "to look" and נבט as "to gaze" so that the connections within and between verses are not obscured (for the exception, see **I did discover . . . [every] tent-cover** in 3:7).

as . . . when — Attached to שר is a conjunction as witnessed by מ^L, מ^A, מ^P, and ו (neither MurXII nor 1QpHab provide data at this point). Virtually all English translators ignore the conjunction (perhaps they are influenced by ו). But the job of the translator is to figure out why the text says what it says, not to ignore the text if it interferes with their interpretation. The few that try to account for the *waw* usually translate it as causal (see KJV) or an asseverative (see NASB). JPS (and why) treated it as a coordinative conjunction that continued the sense of למנה. Clearly, the translators of JPS were trying to understand how the *waw* functioned not just in the clause it introduced, but in the larger textual structure. Like them, we believe that the function and semantic nuance of the conjunction can be identified by looking at the poetic structure. It is the nature of BH poetry to make parallel statements. BH poetry often sets up its parallel statements with similar words or ideas. We see several examples of that in this textual unit: "I shouted, but you listened not—cried to you 'Violation!,' but you rescued not" (v. 2), "so that defeated was law and continually unissued, order" (v. 4). Sometimes repetition of the same word or phrase is used as a structuring device. We see that in v. 4, where על-כן (therefore/so that) is repeated to produce two clauses of

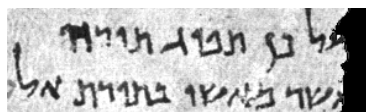
consequence or effect. When we look at those clauses, we see that similar ideas are presented: “defeated was law and continually unissued, order” and “[any] order issued was distorted.” In other words, the composer of vv. 2-4 is structuring it so that different parts of the unit correspond to each other. The clauses that come before **על-כן** would state the conditions or events leading to those consequences or effects. Given the structuring already present, the question is whether the clauses that provide conditions or events are in any sense related. It seems evident that they are. Both “[the] wicked was obstructing the just” and “strife appeared and conflict escalated” describe events or experiences that gave rise to Hab’s question at the start of v. 3. The same can be said of “ruin and violation [were] before me.” Therefore, the following three phrases are all parallel clauses, subordinate to Hab’s question, and the words that open them can be expected to give those clauses a similar meaning:

- (1) **ושד וחמס לנגדי**
- (2) **ויהי ריב ומדון ישא**
- (3) **כי רשע מכתיר את-הצדיק**

In the case of (1), the opening *waw* would be understood in a circumstantial sense (as/while). According to Merwe (BHRG §40.8.2ii) this kind of *waw* “joins clauses in which the content of the clause with **ו** refers to *circumstances* that prevailed at the same time” (italics original). SET (with) is one English translation that rendered the *waw* that way. The second subordinate clause begins with **ויהי**, which often introduces circumstantial clauses and may, therefore, be translated “when” or “while” (see IBHS §33.2.4b). Orelli (*The Twelve Minor Prophets*) and Leiser rendered **ויהי** with a circumstantial meaning: “while there is.” The third subordinate clause begins with **כי**, which can have a temporal (when) or concessive (while) sense (for examples, see Muilenburg’s “The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages of the Particle **כי** in the Old Testament”). Translators typically render the **כי** as causal (because/for), which means that it opens up a clause explaining the reason for something in a different clause. Yet the clauses that come both before and after it begin with **על-כן**, which means that, if either of them are related to the **כי** clause, they must explain the consequences or effects of the **כי** clause, not the reasons for the **כי** clause. Translators that realize that end up ignoring the **כי** just like those who ignored the *waw* before **ושד**. AAT rendered the **כי** as adversative (but). Andersen (AYB) rendered the **כי** as asseverative (in fact). Virtually no commentator discusses or defends the meaning they give to **כי**. Given the structure we’ve outlined above, it seems evident that **ויהי**, **ו**, and **כי** are all functionally related and should be represented by translators with similar renderings (we use “as,” “when,” and “while,” respectively).

- 1:4 **defeated** — As noted by Johnson (“The Paralysis of Torah in Habakkuk 1:4”), “The verb *pûg* is rare in the OT and its meaning remains obscure.” To make sense of the verb, some translators look at the meaning of cognates in other Semitic languages. In Syriac, for instance, **פוג** means “to be cold,” “cool down,” or “refresh” (CAL). In Arabic (according to Stonehouse), the verb would also mean “to be cold,” but “in reference to the weather.” Therefore, many translators assume that the meaning in Hebrew is “to be cold” and, by extension, “to be numb.” Johnson concluded, for example, that “the general meaning . . . seems to be that of being frozen or

numbed.” Smith (WBC) and S. R. Driver gave it the primary meaning “numb.” Rotherham, Moffatt, and others preferred “benumbed.” Some draw from the sense that the verb has in MH: “to evaporate/escape/lose” or “to weaken/slacken/become faint” (Jastrow). Geneva (dissolved) followed the first set of nuances. Most follow the second. Examples include “slacked” (KJV), “weak” (Haak), “fails” (NJPST), and “faint” (Walker and Lund). Others try to discern the verb’s meaning by looking at the context of Hab 1:4. Since **לֹא-יֵצֵא מִשְׁפָּט** and **תִּפְּנוּ תוֹרָה** (order did not go forth) are parallel, **תִּפְּנוּ תוֹרָה** could mean something similar. Perhaps **תוֹרָה** is “ignored” (NASB), “ineffective” (HCSB), “cannot be enforced” (CEV), or “made void” (Cheyne, “An Appeal for a More Complete Criticism of the Book of Habakkuk”). Some such meaning would be supported by **פ**’s **δυσχεδάζω**, meaning “to prevent,” “thwart,” or “jeopardize” (GLS). The Habaquq *peshar* scroll appears to explain **פִּנּוּ** as equivalent to **מָאָס**, meaning “to reject/deny” (note that the scribe spelled **מָאָס** as **מָאָשׁ**):



(photo from Trevor’s *Scrolls from Qumrân Cave 1*)

על כן **תִּפְּנוּ תוֹרָה**
אשר **מָאָשׁ** בתורת אל

“Therefore, law is ...”

[Its interpretation is?] that they rejected divine law.

Due to the troublesome nature of the verb, some have proposed emending it. Cheyne championed an emendation at first mentioned by Nowack: that we read **תִּפְּר**, a Hophal of **פָּרַר** (to break/frustrate/invalidate), instead of **תִּפְּנוּ**. The result would be quite sensible (law is broken/invalidated) and similar to what is stated elsewhere (Ps 119:126 says **הִפְּרוּ תוֹרָתִי**, “they broke/invalidated my law”). In our work, however, we proceed according to the following principle: if possible, it is better to make sense of the text we have than depend upon a form of text with no attestation in Hebrew MSS (i.e., conjectural emendation). Since the Masoretic text is supported by 1QpHab, we stick with the text as we have it. The best way to make sense of a word is to see how it is used elsewhere. In what follows, we group together the major semantic nuances that have been proposed for words from **פִּנּוּ** and then analyze every verbal or nominal instance to see what renderings do or do not make sense of their contexts. Finally, we summarize the results and suggest the best possible nuance(s) of the verb in Hab.

Suggested interpretations of **פִּנּוּ** (randomly listed)

- A = to be weak/slack/faint
- B = to be cold/frigid/numb/benumbed
- C = to be debilitated/crippled/paralyzed
- D = to despair/be dejected/defeated
- E = to be stunned/astonished/amazed
- F = to stop/cease/halt/interrupt
- G = to lack power/be powerless/impotent
- H = to rest/relax/be refreshed

- [1] In Gen 45:26, Yoseph’s brothers travel back to Canaan to tell their father that Yoseph is governing the whole land of Egypt. But Jacob did not believe them. In fact, his mind/body/being (**לֵב**) is described with **פִּנּוּ**. When Jacob saw the donkeys laden with

Egypt's finest goods, v. 27 says that his spirit/life/energy (רוח) was revived. If Jacob did not believe them, he would have no reason "to be weak/slack/faint" (**A**) at the news that his son was alive. Neither does it make sense to say that he didn't believe them because his mind/body/being was "frigid" or "numb" with cold (**B**). If having one's spirit/life/energy revived is a reversal of פוג, it would make sense to interpret פוג as the "debilitating," "crippling," or "paralyzing" (**C**) of Jacob's לב. It would also make sense to say that Jacob was "dejected/depressed/defeated" (**D**) with sorrow. Most modern translations render the verb in Genesis as "to stun," which is based on ὁ ἐξίστημι, meaning, among other things, "to be astonished/amazed/stunned" (**E**). In his commentary on Genesis, Alter said, "The Hebrew verb plainly means to stop, or more precisely, to intermit. . . . The tremendous shock of this news about Joseph, . . . induces a physical syncope." We agree that "to stop/cease/halt/interrupt" (**F**) would work. A nuance that would not work is "to lack power/be powerless/impotent" (**G**). Finally, there are some instances where "to rest/relax/be refreshed" (**H**) is an obvious meaning. The verb in Genesis, however, is not one of them.

- [2] In Ps 38:9, the psalmist roars because of the agony of his condition (called a "plague" or "affliction" in v. 12). That affliction is described by pairing פוג with a verb meaning "to be crushed" (דכה). Many translations render פוג in Ps 38 as **A**, which does fit the context, but not very well. **G** would fit the context better. **C** or **D** would make the most sense paired with דכה. **B**, **E**, and **F** make no sense of that pairing. As in Genesis, **H** would not fit the context. ὁ used a passive form of κακῶ, meaning "to be harmed/harshly treated" (GLS), which better represents the Hebrew verb ענה (to afflict/harm), but supports both **C** and **D**.
- [3] Psalm 77:3 features the expression ידי לילה נגרה ולא תפוג, "my strength/vigor/[over]night was drained, but would not פוג" (the noun "hand" functions as a metonym for the power or energy of the body). In other words, during the time when the speaker should expect to find rest or relief, such things were denied him. To say that the speaker's energy would not **A** would be a blatant contradiction with the immediately preceding phrase (my strength/vigor [over]night was drained). Neither would it make sense to say the speaker's energy would not **B**. As in Ps 38 and Gen 45, **C** and **D** fit the context perfectly. A nuance like **E** or **G** would not work. Although **F** could work (my strength/vigor [over]night was drained, but would not *cease*), **H** makes far better sense (was drained and would not *rest*).
- [4] In Hab 1:4, the verb פוג is preceded by על-כן, which turns the whole clause into one of consequence or effect. As we saw in the previous translation note, the clause that comes before על-כן states the conditions or events leading to the consequences that begin v. 14. Therefore, whatever meaning we give to פוג must make sense as a consequence of ויהי ריב ומדון ישא. It does not make sense to say that, as a consequence of strife and conflict, law is **B**, **E**, or **H**. However, it is possible to say that law is **A**, **C**, **D**, **F**, or **G**.
- [5] There are two nouns from פוג to consider. In Lam 2:18, the speaker says to Jerusalem, "Do not make/let/permit yourself פוגה." That phrase is expanded with "Let not the

pupil of your eye be calm.” A similar thing is communicated in Lam 3:49-50: “My eye gushes and will not quiet—lacking/without **הפנות** until YHWH looks down [and] notices from heaven.” Due to the parallelism between **פונה/הפנות** and verbs meaning “to be calm/still/quiet” (**דמם/דמה**), English translators favor one of two interpretations for **פונה** and **הפנות**: “rest,” “relief,” “respite” (**H**) or “stopping,” “intermission,” “interruption,” and the like (**F**). Of course, it makes no sense to render the nouns as “weakness/feebleness” (**A**), “coldness/numbness” (**B**), “astonishment/amazement” (**E**), or “powerlessness/impotency” (**G**) and it is quite difficult to make sense of these texts with **C** (“do not permit yourself paralysis”?). Yet **D** would work in Lam 2:18 (do not permit yourself despair/defeat) and possibly 3:49 (without despairing).

Unfortunately, a quick tally of interpretations that make sense in the most cases cannot, alone, determine a root’s semantic nuance for the simple reason that words are not always used the same way and often have different meanings. It is quite possible, for example, that the nominal forms have a different nuance than their verbal counterparts. Yet there is a lot that we can learn from the analysis above. If one were to say that the verb in Hab 1:4 means “to be cold/frigid,” then such a meaning should be evident elsewhere in the HB. It is not. Therefore, we find Haak’s statement (“in no case is any connotation of ‘coldness’ involved”) to be true and must reject translations derived from that interpretation (“numb” and “benumbed”). A similar situation occurs in Gen 45:26: although many English translators render **פוג** as “to be stunned/astonished/amazed,” since that nuance does not work in any other context, it must be rejected. Another thing that stands out is how badly some interpretations fit their contexts. Most translators favor **A**, yet such a meaning doesn’t make sense in Gen 45:26 and the words in Ps 77:3 directly refute it. When there are cases where a nuance is directly opposed, it becomes difficult to accept that a verb with such a nuance would be used in that place, even if the verb has multiple nuances. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that **פוג** means “to be weak/slack/faint.” A related interpretation, “to lack power/be powerless/impotent,” suffers from the same issues in the same verses and, therefore, is also unlikely—even though such a rendering would make sense in Hab 1:4. Since **פונה** and **הפנות** probably mean “rest/respite” or “stopping/intermission/interruption,” it is possible that the verb means “to cease” and/or “to rest.” However, **H** does not make sense in Hab 1:4. In our verse, therefore, we are left with only three possibilities: **C**, **D**, and **F**. The question is which rendering fits better in the immediate and larger contexts. In the immediate context, what happens to “law” is parallel to what happens to “order.” The word used to describe “order” is **מעקל**, a Piel participle from **עקל** (to twist/bend). The nuance closest to that would be “crippled” (**C**). As noted, however, by Haak (“‘Poetry’ in Habakkuk 1:1-2:4?”), the verb used with “order” was chosen to create a semantic contrast with it: “The use of the contrasting terms ‘Wicked’ / ‘Righteous’ and ‘order’ / ‘crooked’ . . . tend to draw the line together.” If **עקל** was picked specifically for the way it played off of “order,” then there may be little or no similarity between **פוג** and **עקל**. In the larger context, we see that “order” and “to issue” appear again in v. 7. As discussed in our very first translation note, Hab 1:5-11 provides a previous revelation to which the rest of the chapter responds. In v. 7, the deity says that the tribes of Kaldû will be the instrument of his divine order (we view **משפטו ושאתו**, “his law and his majesty,” as a statement of hendiadys).

Reading v. 4 in light of v. 7 reveals an integral part of Hab's complaint: not only has the divine order not gone out as promised, but what has gone out is a distortion of divine order (the same complaint will occur in 1:12-17). In the larger context, therefore, it makes more sense to say that the intended law and order have been "interrupted/halted" (F) or "defeated" (D). Considering the widespread use of military imagery and terminology in Hab, we feel that "to be defeated" fits better into the style of the text. Therefore, we render תפוג as "it was defeated" (for our use of the *yiqtol* preterit, see **I shouted . . . cried** in 1:2). Ironically, REB (justice was defeated) came up with the same sense, but used it for the parallel verb instead.

yes — Virtually all English translators render this *waw* as "and" as though the text were trying to tell us about two different things: law was defeated "and" order did not go forth. Such a rendering displays a fundamental lack of understanding about the nature and function of ancient Hebrew poetry. It is the same misunderstanding that caused the author of the Gospel of Matthew to say that as Yeshua approached Jerusalem, he asked his disciples to find *two* donkeys, and then he rode *both of them* into the city. The author of Matthew had Yeshua find and use two donkeys because he interpreted a *waw* in Zech 9:9 as "and" instead of as an indicator of "seconding" (to use Kugel's term in *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*). In other words, the *waw* is often used in poetry to introduce a parallel poetic line that restates what was said in the previous line while adding more detail to the initial statement. So when Zech 9:9 says רכב על-חמור ועל-עיר, that means "riding on a male donkey—yes, on a young donkey" or "riding on a male donkey—that is, on a young donkey," not "riding on a male donkey and on a young donkey" (i.e., two donkeys). The same situation applies here in Hab; the *waw* that starts the parallel statement is describing another aspect of the same situation, not two different situations. That is also why we used the renderings "law" and "order" for תורה and משפט—because the two words are linked together in English to describe the same situation.

continually — לנצח (or simply נצח) occurs most often in Psalms. Outside of Psalms, it occurs occasionally in other poetic literature (like Yob and the prophets). In each case, it functions adjectivally or adverbially to give a sense of continuous or never-ending duration. Therefore, translators typically render it "everlasting," "eternal," or "forever." By appending לנצח to לא-יצא, a more emphatic statement is created—something like "it does not issue *ever/at all/continually*." For our use of the *yiqtol* preterit, see **I shouted . . . cried** in 1:2.

while — Virtually all translators treat this כִּי either as superfluous or as causal (for/because). When it comes to Hebrew poetry, however, much can be communicated by means of seemingly minor particles. We believe that this כִּי introduces the last of three circumstantial clauses in the first textual unit of Hab (1:2-4) and, therefore, treat it as concessive (while). For the reasons why, see **as . . . when** in 1:3.

1:5 **be dazzle-dazzled** — The first oracle in Hab opens with an incredible word-play! By repeating the verb תמה (to shock/amaze/astound) in two different stems (Hithpael and Qal) without a conjunction between them, the phrase הִתְמַהְמַהּ תִּמְהוּ (hittammehû temāhû) dances from the tongue of the speaker into the ears of the listener with rhythmic assonance and end-rhyme. The purpose of the artful utterance is rhetorical. By duplicating the same sounds, a more emphatic statement is created that captures the attention of the hearer, helps the hearer retain the message, and aids in the processes of recitation for the one who reads it. Robert Alter

dedicated a full chapter in *The Art of Bible Translation* to the importance of sound-play and word-play and their neglect by English translators. He noted how “Many of the biblical writers are virtuosos of word play, and this is especially striking in the Prophets.” Nevertheless, “Sound play and word play . . . are a feature of the Hebrew that has been almost entirely ignored in existing English versions.” Since form and content work together to give meaning, we agree with Alter: “A conscientious translator should strive to fashion as many English approximations as may be feasible of the purposeful artistry through sound of the Hebrew.” Almost two decades earlier, Paul Raabe (“Translating for Sound”) had come to the same conclusion: “In cases where the biblical writer played with sound in a particularly striking way, where the sound is of equal value and importance as the sense, translators should translate for sound. Where the biblical writer intentionally chose a word or phrase for its sound as much as for its sense, something of the sound play deserves to be communicated to the reader of the English translation.” To ignore those aspects of the text is not only to disrespect the composer, who considered them vital aspects of the message, but to distort the message itself! Even **Θ** recognized the importance of representing the repetitive nature of the text: θαυμάσατε θαύμασια (wonder at the wondrous!). To mimic the word-play, we render the phrase “be razzle-dazzled” (to “dazzle” means to amaze with a spectacular display, which is precisely what תמה involves, and “razzle” is a reduplication of the sounds in “dazzle” that adds rhetorical emphasis to the verb). Smith (*The Book of the Twelve Prophets*) tried to capture the sound-play as well: “shudder and be shocked.” So did Rotherham: “stand stock still—stare.” Others repeat the same verb or substitute a synonym.

a proceeding proceeds — Once again, a fantastic word-play is woven into the opening of the oracle—a noun and participle from the same root: פָּעַל פְּעֹל (pō‘al pō‘ēl). By stringing two virtually identical words together, a repetitive, undulating sound is created that invests the message with rhetorical power and mental permanence. Early English translators noticed the profound language and tried to replicate it. Note, for example, Geneva (I will work a work), JPS (a work shall be wrought), or YLT (a work He is working). It is curious that modern translators find it so difficult. To mimic that sound-play, we render the phrase “a proceeding proceeds” (see **be razzle-dazzled** for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB). Note that, unlike many translations, there is no first-person verb in the phrase (*I am doing*). Rather, the text (as pointed by the Masoretes) is a masculine singular participle (one could repoint it as a 3MS Qal). The subject (פָּעַל) has been fronted before the participle to indicate a shift from “you all” to “he/it.” JM §154c claimed that this was a rare case of the first-person subject pronoun אנכי being omitted from a participial clause. **Θ**’s use of εγω (I) could support that reading, but it is just as likely that **Θ** made an interpretive alteration. As noted by S. R. Driver, “In such cases a subject in the third person, not in the first, is usually understood.” Not only is there no other indication of the first-person in this verse, but the very next verse shows that if a subject pronoun is used with a participle, that subject appears before the participle (הנני מקים)—the very spot where פָּעַל occurs. Furthermore, Hab doesn’t cry out because YHWH raised up Babylon by means of the tribes of Kaidu, but because the Babylonians brought about wickedness and injustice instead of divine order. The action or event, therefore, is not an “I” thing (what YHWH is doing), but a “he/it” or “they” thing (what Babylon is doing). Möller said it well: “When the verse is rendered literally (that is, without the

added divine subject) the grammar holds together quite well” (no parenthetical added). Note also that, unlike many translations, the participle is active (is doing), not passive (is being done). One final thing to analyze is the particular verb and noun used in this oracle. **פָּעַל** and **פָּעַל** are synonyms of **עָשָׂה** (to do/act/work) and **מַעֲשֶׂה** (work/act/deed). Typically, the verb would mean “to do” or “act” and the noun “a deed” or “action.” The noun and verb in this case, however, refer to an event or situation that is initiated or carried out. Translators understand that intuitively, which is why they are slowly moving toward renderings that communicate an event or undertaking. Note, for example, HCSB (something is taking place), ISV (something is happening), and CEV (what’s happening). The reason that **פָּעַל** and **פָּעַל** occur instead of **עָשָׂה** and **מַעֲשֶׂה** is because **פָּעַל** and **פָּעַל** are archaic terms and poetry is prone to use archaic terms more than prose. The use of rarer Hebrew terms warrants rarer English renderings like our own (our rendering also conveys the notion of a legal action meant to correct injustice, which is precisely what the oracles of Hab are all about).

1:6 **I am now** — Typically, **הִנֵּה** functions as a presentative particle (“look!” or “here is!”). Most English translations render it that way here. There are, however, numerous other usages of **הִנֵּה**. When used with participles or finite verbs, it usually gives that verb or participle a sense of vivid immediacy (see IBHS §40.2.1b). When linked with **הִנֵּנִי**, **מִקִּים** probably means “I am now” or “I am about to.” Smith (*The Book of the Twelve Prophets*) and Alter gave it precisely that nuance. Unable to choose between nuances, NET offered two: “Look (presentative), I am about to (vivid immediacy).” Some translations seem to consider the particle’s highly evocative and rhetorical function superfluous and ignore it entirely.

caste — Everywhere else in Hab, **גִּי** refers to a “nation” or “nation-state.” In this place, however, the term is describing an unexpected situation. The rise of the nation of Babylon would not be regarded as a new or unexpected situation. Babylon had established itself as a world power in the days of Hammurabi (circa 1790 BC) and would rise and fall from power many times after that. What *was* new or unexpected was the periodic invasion and control of Babylon by outside tribes and people-groups. The last to do so (as far as the nation of Judah was concerned) were the tribes of Kaldu (see section A3). It would certainly be unexpected for such a small tribal group in the southern swamps of Babylon to rise to power over the native population and then lead them across the Levant to overthrow other world powers. Therefore, **גִּי** seems to be used in this place not to describe a political entity (as in v. 5), but the ethnic or social group that would rise to power over that political entity. English translations that try to reflect that historical reality typically use the word “race” or “people.” We prefer “caste,” since the ethnic group appears to have become the ruling class in Babylon. Some might argue that since **גִּי** was used at the very start of the oracle, its repetition in the next verse should convey the same sense. In this case, however, the oral composer or scribal artisan could have used a poetic device called “antanaclasis”—where the same word or root is reused to play with the semantic range of a word (so that it means one thing in the first instance, but something different in the next). Bullinger (*Figures of Speech used in the Bible*) called this “word-clashing.”

eager and beleaguered — Typically, **מָר** means “bitter” when referring to tastes (see Prov 2:7) or “sharp” when referring to sounds (see Zeph 1:14). When referring to one’s state of mind or disposition, the “bitterness” relates to a feeling of *being attacked or treated badly* (see Ruth

1:13, 20). Even though many translations render it in this text as something like “fierce” (NASB), “ruthless” (NIV), “ferocious” (Fenton), or “savage” (AAT), there is nothing about the term that indicates cruelty or savagery. Haak agreed: “Several scholars have proposed, largely on the basis of this passage, that \sqrt{mrr} in Hebrew has the meaning ‘strong, violent’ in addition to the meaning ‘bitter.’ In spite of the large number of commentators who have adopted this proposal, the most exhaustive study of this word has reached opposite conclusions.” In Judg 18:5, for example, the men described as מר are not more violent than others—they are simply willing to fight to protect what they think is rightfully theirs *when those things are threatened*. In 2 Sam 17:8, the warriors described as מר are equated with a bear that lost its cubs. In that circumstance, the bear-like warrior could certainly be violent or aggressive, but only as a consequence of being מר , which means that מר must refer to something else—probably the feeling of *being attacked* and/or *experiencing harm*. It is also possible that the term was chosen to reflect the people-group’s geographic locale (i.e., to act as a *pun*). The ancient name of the sea by which the tribes of Kaldu lived was called “the Bitter Sea.” On the walls of his palace in Khorsabad, Sargon II, King of Assyria, had this to say about his campaigns in Babylon: “Merodach-baladan, king of Chaldea, who dwelt on the shore of the Bitter Sea, . . . my mighty hand conquered” (translation of the display inscription taken from Luckenbill’s *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, Vol. 2). An inscription from Nimrud, which describes the exploits of Shalmaneser III, King of Assyria, had this to say: “To Babylon I marched. I offered sacrifices in Babylon, Borsippa and Kutha. I went down to Kaldu (Chaldea). Their cities I captured. To the sea which they call Marratu (Bitter Sea) I marched” (translation of the monumental bull inscription taken from Luckenbill’s *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, Vol. 1). As for נמהר , many translators render it in Hab as “impetuous.” In most contexts, however, the sense of the active stem (Piel) is “to hurry” and, in the passive stem (Niphal), “to be quick.” As Andersen (AYB) explained, “The *Niph'al nimhār* suggests energetic, impatient haste rather than impulsiveness.” Furthermore, note that the words in the phrase המר והנמהר (*hammar wehannimhār*) were clearly chosen because of their assonance (every consonant in the first word is duplicated in the second). If, therefore, it was the sound of the words that motivated their selection, the same principle should guide the choice of words in English. Ward (ICC) did exactly that: “violent and vehement.” So did Moffatt (fierce and fiery) and SAT (foul and foolhardy). Alter (harsh and headlong) and Ewald (the rough and the restless) went for alliteration instead. We prefer “beleaguered and eager,” which not only mimics the assonance, but closely captures the meaning of each term as well. We then reverse the word-order so that, like the Hebrew, the longer word follows the shorter one (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

not his his — This verse ends with a short, but powerful piece of rhythmic assonance: לא-לו (*lō'-lō*). Literally, it means “not belonging to him/it” or “not his/its own.” The same phrase is repeated in another oracle (see Hab 2:6). To capture the sound-play, we render לרשת (to seize/take/possess) as “to make his” and then shift the pronoun to the end to place phonetic emphasis on the final two words just like in the Hebrew: “to make settlements not his his.” The only other English translation we could find that tried to mimic the assonance of those final words was SAT: “to make dwellings there theirs” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB). Ward (ICC) preferred to weave alliteration throughout the line instead: “to hold the homes that are not his.”

- 1:7 There is almost universal agreement that Hab 1:5-11 forms a cohesive unit within Habaququq. What is not clear, however, is where the divine speech ends. Those few English translations that represent the divine speech with quotation marks tend to place them at the start of v. 5 and end of v. 11, thereby demarcating the whole unit as first-person divine speech. Haak, however, argued that the oracle itself was contained in vv. 5-6 and that vv. 7-11 was a “natural outgrowth of the preceding oracle of salvation” where “Habakkuk states his knowledge of the overwhelming power of the Chaldeans.” In other words, the words of God end in v. 6 and prophetic commentary begins in v. 7. We agree with Haak’s analysis. A couple things make that change in speech evident. First, one notes the strange use in v. 7 of third-person pronominal suffixes on **משפט** and **שאת**. Those suffixes would be pointless if the text were trying to tell us that such things were coming from the tribes of Kaldu instead of YHWH. But if they refer to YHWH, the text shifts from the voice of God to a voice speaking about God (see **his divine order** below). The speech with “God” as an object is then repeated at the end with **לאלהו** (his god). Second, not only does the content of the text change (from declaration in vv. 5-6 to description in vv. 7-11), but the language shifts. Repetition is used, for example, as a structuring device: “steeds” is repeated in v. 8, the verb “to come” is repeated in vv. 8-9, and “joke” is repeated in v. 10. Furthermore, a cluster of *wayyiqtol* verbs are isolated in the descriptive portion (**וַיֵּצֵבֶר** in v. 9, **וַיִּלְכְּדָהּ** and **וַיַּעֲבֹר** in v. 10, and **וַיַּעֲבֹר** in v. 11). By contrast, only two *wayyiqtol* verbs appear in the “complaints” that open and close the first chapter (**וַיִּהְיֶה** in v. 3 and **וַתַּעֲשֶׂה** in v. 14). Since prophetic commentary on divine oracles (often following the oracle and with no formal marker to indicate the shift in speaker) is a common characteristic of prophetic texts, it is likely that vv. 7-11 represent that same phenomenon. Despite the change in voice/speaker, we do not mean to say that someone other than the prophet who originally received and communicated the oracle was the one who commented upon it. Since words and phrases are strung together in vv. 7-11 with the same kind of assonance and alliteration crafted in vv. 5-6 (see notes below), it seems evident that the one who gave us the oracle is the same one who was commenting upon it.

Breathtaking and imperious — Since translators view **נורא** as indicative of terror, dread, or fear, they tend to interpret the adjective paired with it (**אִימָה**) in the same sense. The rendering of KJV is characteristic: “terrible and dreadful.” **𐤓**, **𐤔**, and **𐤕** actually support that reading. Two things, however, are overlooked by translators and commentators: the meaning of **אִימָה** as reflected by its feminine form (**אִימָהּ**) and the broader semantic nuance of **נורא**. Although the masculine form occurs only in Hab 1:7, the feminine form is used in Song 6:4 and 10 alongside “beautiful,” “lovely,” and “pure” to describe the attractive and compelling appearance of the female lover. In her commentary, J. Cheryl Exum (OTL) translated **אִימָהּ** as “awesome” and explained the term as related to an “awe-inspiring” sight that induces “veneration” or “wonder.” In neither case does **אִימָהּ** refer to terror, fear, or dread. Since **אִימָה** and **אִימָהּ** are the same word (differing only in grammatical gender), they probably have the same meaning. It is evident, therefore, that translators and commentators are importing into Hab the sense from a different word that does refer to fear or terror (**אִימָה**). Andersen’s discussion (AYB) is an example of that evasive tactic. After stating that “the adjective is used only here and in Song

6:4, 10,” he abandoned any examination of the adjective in those verses and went on to say, “The corresponding noun *’emâ* is used more often. It describes terror in the face of a strong and cruel enemy.” Second, it is clear from many contexts (Exod 15:11, Judg 13:6, Yob 37:22, etc.), that **נֹרָא** can convey a positive sense like reverence, magnificence, or sublimity—especially when it concerns a *theophany-like experience*. That is precisely what the prophet intended to communicate in this oracle; the rising of the tribes of Kaidu to overthrow the nations is described as though it were a manifestation of divine power (one reason why the psalm at the end of Hab fits so neatly into the prophetic text). In fact, a theophany-like experience is precisely what Exum believed to be behind the use of **אִמָּה** in Song 6:4 and 10: “That seeing the woman is something like a theophany is suggested in v. 10, when the phrase (awesome in splendor) is again applied to her” (parenthetical with Exum’s translation added). Therefore, it is more likely that **אִים** and **נֹרָא** indicate awe and grandeur than fear and terror.

his divine order — More literally, “his order and his majesty.” In this case, however, the use of the two nouns with a conjunction between probably functions as a statement of hendiadys (when two words are placed side-by-side, often with a conjunction between, to create a statement more emphatic together than the mere sum of its parts). A common English example would be “sick and tired.” Such a statement doesn’t mean that one is both sick and tired; it means that one is thoroughly sick (they have reached the utmost limit of what they are willing to endure). Therefore, we render the two words as “his divine order” (for an example of verbal hendiadys, see **יִשְׁמַח וַיִּגִּיל** in 1:15). If we are correct that vv. 2-4 are a response to the oracle and commentary in vv. 5-11 (see *The [divine] clarification* in 1:1), then **מִשְׁפַּט** must have the same sense in both places. As for **שְׁאֵת**, translations are all over the map. G. R. Driver (“Linguistic and Textual Problems: Minor Prophets. III”) argued that it referred to a “sentence” (i.e., a legal pronouncement against someone) on the basis of **צ**’s **גִּזְרֵתִיה** (his decree). As noted, however, by Henderson, “**שְׁאֵת** nowhere occurs in reference to a judicial decree.” Although Andersen rendered it as “status,” he gave up any hope of understanding the term outside its use to describe a swelling organ. Instead of taking the word from **נָשָׂא** (to lift), Haak believed that the term was related to an Akkadian adjective (*ašû, išû, eše’û*) meaning “tangled/confused/blurred” (CAD) and, therefore, rendered **שְׁאֵת** as “rage.” That interpretation, however, is fraught with problems. The alternate root proposed by Haak (**שְׁאֵה**) is difficult to substantiate in BH. Even if we assume that BH retained the term or borrowed it from Akkadian, Haak’s rendering is far removed from the Akkadian. Finally, it is methodologically unsound to appeal to a questionable root with uncertain meaning on the basis of a different language when there is an easily recognizable root in BH. **Θ** rendered the term as **λημμα**, which often represents **מִשָּׂא**. SET gave it the same meaning. Such renderings seem to presume a corruption of the text (from **מִשָּׂא** to **שְׁאֵת**?). Ward (ICC) dropped **שְׁאֵת** entirely. Since 1QpHab supports the consonantal text in the Masoretic tradition, **שְׁאֵת** should be retained. A few translations interpret **שְׁאֵת** as a gerund of the verb **נָשָׂא**. Note, for example, Rotherham (decision and *uprising*) or Walker and Lund (justice and *bearing*). AAT (judgment and *destruction*) took **שְׁאֵת** either as a corruption of **שָׂד**, which appeared in v. 3, or read **שְׁאֵת** as

שֵׁאת, a term in Lam 3:47 with uncertain meaning. Sweeney correctly noted that one nuance of שֵׁאת is “dominance” and that it “is frequently used to describe the pre-eminent or dominant position of the party under discussion, such as Cain in Gen 4:7, Reuben in Gen 49:3, or YHWH in Job 13:11.” The other nuance of the term is something like “majesty” or “splendor.” Note, for example, KJV (dignity), YLT (excellency), NAB (majesty), and HCSB (sovereignty). The most curious aspect of the verse is the use of third-person singular pronominal suffixes on מִשְׁפָּט and שֵׁאת. Virtually all English translators treat their referent as גִּי. In that case, the reason for using the pronouns would be to say that the order and majesty of Babylon issues מִמֶּנּוּ (from himself). However, if the composer wanted to say that the nation gives forth its own justice, the text could have been written this way: מִמֶּנּוּ מִשְׁפָּט וְשֵׁאת יֵצֵא, “from him will order and majesty issue.” Placing מִמֶּנּוּ at the start would focus the reader or hearer on the fact that what follows comes “from him/it”—that is, not from someone else (like YHWH). In his notes on the text, Orelli observed how scholars have long realized the antithetical function of מִמֶּנּוּ: “from himself . . . therefore not from God.” So the inclusion of pronominal suffixes on מִשְׁפָּט and שֵׁאת adds nothing to what מִמֶּנּוּ already communicates. Alternatively, the text could have been written מִשְׁפָּטוֹ וְשֵׁאתוֹ יֵצֵא, “his own order and his own majesty will issue.” By fronting the collective subjects before the verb, the pronominal suffixes would emphasize that it is *his* order and *his* majesty that issue—that is, not someone else’s. The problem with the traditional interpretation is that it makes either the pronominal suffixes or מִמֶּנּוּ pointless. By including the suffixes, however, majesty and order are attributed to a different “him” than is emphasized by מִמֶּנּוּ. In other words, YHWH’s divine order will issue from the nation. It is no wonder that HALOT should list “sovereignty” or “majesty” as one of שֵׁאת’s meanings and point to this verse as an example where the term is speaking “of God.” In fact, if one searches for the exact same term (שֵׁאתוֹ), one is led to Yob 13:11, where it describes the majesty of YHWH. Yob 31:23 also uses שֵׁאת with reference to YHWH’s majesty. Despite a long history of interpretation in which Babylon is identified as the referent of the two pronominal suffixes (and the many different renderings besides), the meaning of שֵׁאתוֹ is quite simple: “his (YHWH’s) majesty.” The shift from first-person divine speech to third-person speech about the divine indicates that the text has moved away from the original oracle and into prophetic commentary upon it.

- 1:8 In this and the next verse there are two cases of repetition that trouble scholars, commentators, and translators alike: פִּרְשִׁי וּפִרְשִׁי and יָבֹא in v. 8 followed by יָבֹא in v. 9. Those that believe the first case to involve accidental duplication (dittography) tend to translate only one instance of פִּרְשִׁי. See, for instance, Ward (ICC), O’Neal, and Smith (*The Book of the Twelve Prophets*). In 1QpHab’s וּפִרְשִׁי פִּרְשִׁי, each פִּרְשִׁי could be a defective form of the noun (and, therefore, identical to the word as vocalized by the Masoretes) or a masculine plural of the verb פִּרַּשׁ. Some translators, therefore, treat the two words as a noun and a verb (see, for instance, REB). Reading the second iteration as a verb is the textual choice advocated in Barthélemy.

Bosshard (“*Bemerkungen zum text von Habakuk 1:8*”) explained how a noun and a verb could have become two nouns: (1) the earliest form of the text had **פרשו** for both the noun and the verb, (2) the scribes followed their common spelling convention by inserting a *yod* (*mater lectionis*) into the noun, and (3) a *yod* was then inserted into the following verb through assimilation, changing it from a verb to a noun. The question is whether it is possible to find purpose and meaning in the repetition of **פרשו**. When we investigate the structure of the Masoretic text, it seems that v. 8 and the first colon of v. 9 consist of two tricola with the first **פרשו** ending the first tricolon and the second **פרשו** beginning the second tricolon. In other words, the repetition of **פרשו** provides a pivot around which the text can swing. Haak agreed: “This . . . allowed the author to begin a new unit, with a different focus, with the same word as that with which he had ended the previous unit.” By repeating the noun, it would also be possible for the composer or scribal artisan to use it in a slightly different sense. Tsumura (“Polysemy and Parallelism in Hab 1:8-9”) believed that “the term . . . is used polysemously, meaning both »his steeds« and »his horsemen«.” Numerous translators agree with him. Since purpose and design are perceptible both structurally and semantically (and both MurXII and 8HevXII gr feature a second noun instead of a verb), we stick with the Masoretic text. Similarly, many scholars and interpreters find the occurrence of **יבאו** problematic. **ס** doesn’t represent it and the verb is missing from the quotation in 1QpHab. Barthélemy advocated deleting **יבאו**. Those that do include Moffatt, REB, and NLT. Again, however, the question is whether it is possible to find purpose and meaning in the text as we have it. If we are correct about the textual structure above, the first instance of the verb (**יבאו**) and the second (**יבוא**) would be parallel: the first one begins the second tricolon and the second one ends the second tricolon. Together, they bring immanence to what is mostly description: this is *arriving*! Since artistic purpose and design are perceptible both structurally and semantically, we stick with the Masoretic text.

penetrating — In this verse, translators tend to represent **חדר** in three ways: as an indicator of speed, ferocity, or acuity. Examples of the first include Alter (quicker), Henderson (swifter), and NJPST (fleeter). Examples of the second include KJV (more fierce), NRSV (more menacing), and Andersen (more savage). Examples of the third include NASB (keener) and Haak (sharper). Some renderings seem to stand alone. Note, for example, NET (more alert) or Barthélemy (*ils ont plus de mordant*, i.e., “they have more bite”). As always, the best way to make sense of a word is to examine its usage. Ezekiel 21:14-16 uses the verb three times to describe a “sharpened” sword that “is sharpened” to slaughter [the] slaughter and “is sharpened” for the use of the killer. Prov 27:17 says “[As] iron *is sharpened* against iron, so a person *is sharpened* [by] his friend’s presence.” In no context does **חדר** refer to speed or ferocity; it always refers to a weapon that has been ground to a fine point so that it can cut through something. Proverbs then uses that sense to make a metaphoric statement. Since it is the ability to cut into or through something (its sharpness) that is the basic sense of **חדר**, we render the verb “to penetrate.”

when stampedes his steeds — Four things need to be analyzed in the phrase **ופשו פרשו**: the meaning of the verb, the meaning of the noun, the function of the *waw*, and the way they all work together to make a statement (their rhetoric). As pointed by the Masoretes, **פשו** is a

third-person plural perfect of the verb פָּוֵשׁ. Anyone who reads this verse in English translations will encounter what seems like a bewildering array of verbal renderings. Most, however, are based on one of three interpretations derived from three different biblical texts (since נִפְשָׁו in Nah 3:18 is likely a corruption of נִפְצָו, that text will not be considered here). Malachi 3:30 (4:2) says “then you will emerge and פָּוֵשׁ like a free-range heifer.” The context of that verse implies that the verb means something like “to prance” (NAB), “leap” (Rotherham), “bound” (Orelli), “cavort” (Walker and Lund), “spring” (Möller), “gambol,” or “frisk.” Nevertheless, “The expression ‘his horsemen leap about’ is peculiar” (Stonehouse). Jeremiah 50:11 says “you פָּוֵשׁ like a heifer that tramples.” Because דָּוֵשׁ (to trample) is used as a descriptor of פָּוֵשׁ, the Jeremiah passage suggests that the verb means “to stomp,” “tread,” or “beat [hoofs].” Renderings based on that verse include “to gallop” (NASB), “charge” (NRSV), “dash” (Andersen, AYB), and “paw the ground” (Smith, WBC). Some think that the verb was pointed wrong by the Masoretes; it should be פָּשָׁו, from פָּשָׁה (see Lev 13-14). If פָּשָׁו were פָּשָׁו, the verb would mean something like “to spread” (KJV), “be many” (Geneva), or “increase” (YLT). Since פָּשָׁה is a technical term used only by the Priestly writer to describe disease or infection, virtually all modern translators have decided against it. But how did ancient translators understand the verb? ὁ rendered it ἐξῆπτασσοντα, meaning “to ride on horseback” (GLS). For reasons that are discussed below, that rendering must be rejected. The commentary on v. 8 in 1QpHab (as reconstructed by Martínez and Tigchelaar in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*) is פִּשְׁרוֹן עַל הַכְּתִימִים אֲשֶׁר יִדְּשׁוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ בְּסוּסֵי יִהְיֶה (Its in[terpretation] concerns the Kittim who will trample the earth with [their] horse[s]). By using דָּוֵשׁ, the commentary shows that it agrees with the sense in Jer 50:11. It is likely, therefore, that פָּוֵשׁ referred to *stomping*, not leaping, frolicking, or bounding. That leaves no doubt about the meaning of the noun: “horses.” It also creates a wonderful parallel between the theophany-like experience here and the theophany in Hab 3, where YHWH stomps on the sea with his horses (v. 15). Other translations of פָּרָשׁ include “horsemen” (KJV), “steeds” (NJPST), “cavalry” (NIV), “chargers” (NKJV), and “war-horses” (Martínez and Tigchelaar). Mowinckel (“Drive and/or Ride in O.T.”) brought the results of ancient NE history and archaeology to bear on the question of equine usage in armed conflict. He noted that whenever a horse was mentioned in a military context in preexilic times, it referred to a chariot horse, not a horseback rider. Although the Israelites eventually adopted the horse and chariot in their military use, “The Israelites never seem to have adopted cavalry, warriors riding on horseback, as part of their military forces.” Mowinckel noted that this “earthly” reality was paralleled by representations of the “divine” reality: “It is characteristic that the gods of the Mesopotamians and Assyrians are never conceived or depicted as riding on horseback. . . . That Yahweh himself is also thought of as riding in a chariot is seen from Hab 3:8, 15.” Horseback riding was not unknown in the ancient NE, but “was only for the use of single persons, messengers or the like, not as a military weapon.” So פָּרָשׁ can refer to horses, chariot horses, or chariot drivers, but not to riders, horsemen, or cavalry. Therefore, even if we agree with Tsumura that פָּרָשׁ functions polysemously (see above), we must reject any rendering that makes one of the two nouns refer to *riders* instead of *drivers*. There is also a question about the purpose of the *waw* that begins

the phrase. Most English translators treat it as superfluous. Although it does not appear in the quotation from 1QpHab, **6** preserves it, which means that the *waw* must have a function in the textual tradition. Those few translators who represent it interpret it as coordinative (and). However, we believe that the *waw* is circumstantial; it indicates that the פוש of the horses relates specifically to *how they penetrate*. In other words, this *waw* functions precisely the same as the *waw* that began the phrase וּשְׁדָּ וְחַמֶּס לַנְּגָדִי in 1:3 and is another indicator that the speaker in vv. 7-11 is the same as in vv. 2-4 (the prophet). Finally, it is clear that פָּשׁוּ פָּרָשָׁיו was specifically crafted to ring with assonance. To mimic that sound-play, we render it “stampedes his steeds” (every consonant in “steeds” is duplicated in the word “stampedes” and both have the same sounds at the beginning and end). NKJV (their chargers charge ahead) used word repetition instead of assonance. SAT (their cavalry is capering) used alliteration instead of assonance. For a further word-play here in Hab, see *stamped [on]* in 2:19 (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB). For our use of italics, see section A3.

- 1:9 **The assembly** — מַגְמַת occurs only here in the HB. The word has puzzled translators to such an extent that some have given up their task entirely. Ward (ICC), for example, rendered the whole colon “[Untranslatable intrusion].” Andersen (AYB) simply transliterated the consonants: “*mgmt.*” To make sense of the text, some turn to conjectural emendation. The most common suggestion is that, due to an accidental *resh-mem* interchange, מַגְמַת (horror/terror) became מַגְמַת. Translations that try to “restore” that reading include RSV (*terror* of them) and AAT (*terror . . .* before him). Since 1QpHab replicates the word exactly (מַגְמַת), it seems wise to presume textual integrity. Ultimately, interpreters must follow whatever method seems best and it is difficult to judge the accuracy of their conclusions. Some prefer to follow one of the versions. For example, σ´ rendered the text η προσησπισ (the appearance/aspect). The same idea is found in **S** (sight/appearance/vision). Henderson adopted that reading (*the aspect* of their faces). **Ⲛ** rendered the text with מַקְבִּיל (as if the Hebrew were מַגְמַת or מַמּוּל, meaning “opposite/in front of”). Examples of that reading include Geneva (*before* their faces) and Leiser (*the front of* their faces). **6** rendered the word as a plural participle meaning “those who stand against/resist.” Renderings that appear to be influenced by **6** include “to press” (NRSV) and “thrust” (Goldingay). Another method is to make a contextual guess. Those who interpret קַדִּימָה as “east wind” (see note below) may view מַגְמַת as describing that wind. Note, for example, NJB (their faces *scorching*) or Martínez and Tigchelaar (*the breath of* their faces). Barthélemy advocated for a meaning like “aim” or “direction.” Rotherham (the intent of) and ASV (the set of) came to similar conclusions. The most common method translators take is to look for a possible root and see how that could make sense of the word. Some think that מַגְמַת comes from גַּמַּא, which occurs in the Piel stem and means “to drink/swallow.” Translations that reflect that interpretation include KJV (sup up) and YLT (swallowing up). Metaphorically, one might say that “swallowing up” relates to eagerness or desire. Therefore, several translations reflect that sense (see Moffatt, JPS, or Fenton). Translators usually trace מַגְמַת to גַּמַּם, which, in Arabic, means something like “to become much” (according to Haak) or “to congregate/heap up” (according to Henderson). Translators extrapolate from that to renderings like “horde” (as in NASB), “multitude” (Möller), “totality” (the choice of HALOT),

or “abundance” (Lim, *The Earliest Commentary on the Prophecy of Habakkuk*). We prefer to make sense of the text by looking at its parallelism. **מִנְמַת** is parallel to **וַיֵּאסֹף**, a *wayyiqtol* of **אָסַף** (to gather), which seems to function as a marker of the present instead of the past (see JM §118q). Sometimes words in parallel cola have similar meanings (in 1:4, for example, “law” and “order” are parallel). If that were the case here, **מִנְמַת** could refer to a kind of military troop or armed assembly (to parallel the gathering or assembling of captives). And if **גָּמַם** means “to congregate” in Arabic, then that could provide further justification for such a reading. From those tenuous suggestions, we render **מִנְמַת** as “assembly.” S. R. Driver thought similarly: “The most probable rendering would be . . . ‘the assembling.’” Virtually all scholars and translators interpret the *-at* ending as a construct form. Since, however, the meaning of the term seems to have been lost long ago, it is possible that the ending is actually a preservation of the archaic feminine singular (just like the archaic masculine singular suffix preserved at the start of the verse). In that case, **מִנְמַת** would simply be “the assembly” (not “the assembly of”) with **פְּנֵיהֶם** functioning as a dative (*at* their front).

advances — As with the previous term, translators struggle to make sense of the text before them. The Masoretic text says **קְדִימָה**, which means “east/eastward.” Its alternate form is **קְדִמָּה**. The only English translation we could find that accurately reflected the meaning of that term was Rotherham (the intent of their faces is *to the east*). Instead, translators resort to renderings like “forward” or “onward.” However, **קְדִימָה** nowhere means “forward” or “onward.” Wellhausen (*Die kleinen Propheten*) pointed that out over a century ago. S. R. Driver rightly called it a “very questionable alternative.” To arrive at that meaning, therefore, translators end up *altering the text*. Other translators render the word as “east wind” or “desert wind.” That interpretation is supported by **כְּרוּחַ קְדוּמָא** and **σ' (ἀνεμος καὺσσων)**. However, the word for “east wind” is always **קָדִים**. Henderson rightly noted the discrepancy: “The east wind is elsewhere uniformly expressed by **קָדִים**, without the **ה**.” To arrive at that meaning, therefore, translators end up *altering the text*. Curiously, the quoted portion of 1QpHab has **קְדִימָה**, not **קָדִים**. One is tempted to adopt the form in 1QpHab so that more sense may be made of the text. If one were to do so, however, it becomes difficult to explain how **קָדִים** would have become **קְדִימָה** (it is far more likely for a scribe to drop the *heh* to make the text less problematic than add it and make the text more problematic). We also have an ancient witness that agrees with the Masoretic text (what remains of the word in MurXII is the *heh*). Furthermore, it is difficult to ascertain the trustworthiness of the quoted portion of 1QpHab unless it agrees with what is preserved in the Masoretic text. Even though the quoted text tends to agree with the Masoretic text, it diverges at many points. In v. 8, for example, the quoted portion left out **יְבֹא** even though the commentary contained it. In v. 9, the archaic third-person masculine singular suffix in the Masoretic text (**כֹּלֶה**) was updated to its later form (**כֹּלֵל**). Then the scribe took what would normally be a single word (**פְּנִיָּהֶם**) and sliced it in half (**פְּנִי הֵם**)—perhaps to use the pronoun as a copula (is). It seems evident, therefore, that the text in 1QpHab reflects a manipulation involving omission (**יְבֹא**), disassociation (**פְּנִי הֵם**), and

modernization (כולל). It is not unreasonable to view קרים as *interpretive modification*. We propose, therefore, that the earliest form of the text was a feminine singular perfect in the Piel stem of the verb קרם, meaning “to oppose/stand against/move against/act contrary to.” The feminine singular verb would gender-match the ambiguous, but possibly feminine singular term מנמת (see note above). Suddenly the syntax makes sense: מנמת is the fronted subject of the verb “she/it moves against.” Those that appear to translate the word the same way include AAT (terror *marches* before him) and Walker and Lund (the set of their faces *is hostile*). 6 may have read the text similarly: ἐξ ἐναντίας (over against/opposite). We propose that, at some point, קרמה was misread as קרמה (east/eastward) and a *yod* inserted to create the longer version (קרמה). As a result, the feminine verb was forever lost. Some may argue that קרמה couldn’t go back to a feminine singular קרמה because the subject in the next colon is masculine. One common feature of ancient Semitic poetry, however, is the alternation of grammatical gender between cola. We see that, for example, in Hab 1:4, where the feminine noun “law” and the feminine verb “to despair/be dejected/defeated” are parallel to the masculine noun “order” and the masculine verb “to issue.”

- 1:10 **[It is] he** — At the beginning and middle of this verse, the oral composer or scribal artisan used the independent pronoun “he/it” to identify the subject. Since the verb contains its subject within it, such identification is unnecessary. One characteristic of ancient Hebrew poetry is terseness—the avoidance of extra words and particles. When, therefore, we find them so prominently, we know that they have an important rhetorical function. In this case, the point is to emphasize that it is the people or caste from Kaldu who so brazenly make sport of rulers and their defenses. We might say, “The very one!” We believe that a translation that seeks to treat its source with dignity and respect should try to replicate the language it uses. Ward (ICC) agreed: “The emphatic position of the pronoun in both couplets must be observed in translation.” An early advocate of Hab’s “vivid” and “picturesque” style rendered the text this way: “He! at Kings he scoffs . . . he! at every stronghold laughs” (Irving, “Habakkuk”). We mimic the rhetoric by beginning both halves of the verse with “[it is] he.”

rampart . . . ramps up — Note the assonance in מִבְצָר and יִצְבֵּר (repetition of *bet*, *tsade*, and *resh*). By crafting phonetic links between words, an association is created that binds them together even stronger than their context allows. In other words, sound works with semantics to create a vivid expression that impresses upon its hearers the vision that the prophet means his audience to experience. Prophecy is not just explanatory or descriptive—even if that is the way it is treated by virtually all English translators. Prophecy is emotive, subversive, dramatic, and provocative. To capture something of that power and rhetoric, we render the noun as “ramparts” and the verb as “to ramp up” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB). SAT used “fortress” and “fortify.”

- 1:11 **courage** — One of the first decisions translators make in this verse is how best to understand רוח. Typically, it refers to “breath,” “wind,” or “spirit.” The verb חלף, which can mean “to change,” “sweep past,” “vanish,” “pierce,” or “renew,” only makes the decision more difficult. Furthermore, how does רוח relate to חלף; is it the subject, accusative object, or something else? And why does רוח have no definite article? Is that a result of poetic elision? Just what is the final verse in the oracle trying to tell us? Roberts (OTL) was correct when he

said, “This verse is a very difficult crux, but the difficulty is largely exegetical rather than textual.” On the basis of everything that came before, we do not think that this verse involves a comparison with Babylon’s arbitrary changeableness/swiftness and wind (preferred by most translators), the passage of the Spirit that inspired the oracular vision (argued by Roberts), the reinforcement of Babylon’s conquering impulse (argued by Henderson), the passing over of a spirit of error that influences Babylon (indicated by SET), or the fleeting nature of Babylon’s own strength or dominance (argued by Betteridge in “The Interpretation of the Prophecy of Habakkuk”). Rather, this verse speaks about the loss of “spirit” or “courage” experienced by those who face an overwhelming military presence and the divine power it represents (see, for example, Isa 19:1-4 or Josh 2:11). Therefore, we render רוּחַ as “courage” and treat it as the masculine subject of הָלַךְ (as in Yob 4:15). Andersen (AYB) agreed that “The most natural reading of Hab 1:11 is that *rûah* is the subject of the preceding and following masculine verbs.” He also explained why we shouldn’t think that רוּחַ can only reflect a feminine gender: “Like all other features of natural languages, the allocation of the word stock to the grammatical categories of gender is purely arbitrary. Gender has no intrinsic or essential referential logic. It has no ontological meaning.” In other words, there is nothing about רוּחַ that necessitates a feminine gender; rather, it is the usage of a word syntactically that determines its gender (for multiple gender-bending examples of רוּחַ, see Andersen).

as he devastates — Another crux of this verse is וַאֲשֶׁם. Most view it as a third-person singular perfect of אָשַׁם (to be guilty). Note, for example, HCSB (they are guilty), NRSV (they become guilty), and NKJV (he commits offense). However, that interpretation leaves much to be desired. Ward (ICC) called it “weak and meaningless.” Troxel (*Prophetic Literature: From Oracles to Books*) pointed out that “Although ‘becoming guilty’ makes sense to modern readers, it is a perplexing use of the Hebrew verb, which designates cultic sins rather than ‘war crimes.’” Wellhausen wondered whether the text was supposed to be וַיֵּשֶׁם, from שָׂם (to set up/erect). Ward followed that suggestion (he setteth up). Astonishingly, the quotation in 1QpHab is וַיֵּשֶׁם! Martínez and Tigchelaar translated וַיֵּשֶׁם as “they placed.” Troxel suggested something similar in the Masoretic text: “this one devotes.” Considering, however, the modifications that occur throughout the quoted portions of 1QpHab (see **advances** in v. 9 for a short list of examples), it is difficult to ascertain their trustworthiness. It is better to assume that the text preserved by the Masoretes is (in most cases) more authentic. G. R. Driver argued that וַאֲשֶׁם could be a variant of שָׂם, meaning either “to be astonished,” as in Qoh 7:16 (“Linguistic and Textual Problems: Minor Prophets. III”) or “destroy/devastate/desolate” (“Confused Hebrew Roots”). In the latter case, he provided multiple examples where that sense fit the context very well, was paralleled by words meaning something extremely similar, and was supported by one or more ancient versions (see Isa 24:6; 59:10; Ezek 6:6; Hos 5:15, 10:2, 14:1; Joel 1:18; Ps 34:23). If the verb has that sense here, our text would mean “he devastates” and the initial conjunction could function circumstantially (for another instance of the circumstantial *waw*, see 1:3). If so, the oracle would end by assuring its audience that Babylon will not only shake and destroy their buildings, but their very hopes and dreams as well; a rhetorically powerful conclusion that leaves no doubt in the minds of its hearers about the outcome. That is a far more attractive interpretation than the one typically offered (if Babylon is going to pass swiftly

by like the wind, the audience would have little reason to worry about it doing any lasting harm!) and requires no textual emendation. We may test the validity of that interpretation by looking at how the verse was understood by the commentator in 1QpHab. Lim translated the commentary as follows: “[Its] interpretation [con]cerns the commanders of the Kittim who, in the council of the house of [their] guilt[t], each man will cross over from before his neighbour. [Their] commanders, [on]e after another, continue to come to devastate the la[nd].” Here we find a reference to the “guilt” of the subject as well as a description of the subject “devastating” the land. The latter term is an infinitive construct of שָׁחַת (to ruin/corrupt/destroy/devastate). It is curious that such a term would be used when there is nothing in v. 11 to indicate “destruction” unless אָשָׁם were being interpreted once as “to be guilty” and again as “to destroy/devastate.” Therefore, it is quite possible that G. R. Driver’s proposed nuance was understood and implemented in ancient times. To represent that nuance, we render the verb “to devastate.” Haak did likewise. Stonehouse preferred “lay waste.” But how do we explain the word in 1QpHab? Isbell (“Initial *alef-yod* Interchange and Selected Biblical Passages”) noted that there are many places where *aleph* stands in for *yod* due to a softening of the vocalized sound (or, conversely, *yod* stands in for *aleph* due to a hardening of the sound). One example is אָשׁ in 2 Sam 14:19, which must be a variant of יֵשׁ (there is). Isaiah 51:19 features a verb that seems to be first-person: אֶנְחֶמְךָ (I will comfort you). However, both the parallelism and the context make it clear that this is a third-person question: “who will comfort you?” (אֶנְחֶמְךָ represents יִנְחֶמְךָ). Isbell also noted several proper nouns that “harden” from initial-*aleph* to initial-*yod* and several roots that have closely related meanings and are graphically identical except for initial-*aleph* or initial-*yod*. In light of such evidence, it is possible that 1QpHab offers a verb that differs primarily in its *sound* (not *sense*) from what the Masoretes preserved.

for — Usually, the prefixed *lamed* in לְאֱלֹהֵי is understood as a *lamed* of being or becoming (sometimes called a *lamed* of result). GKC §119t said that this *lamed* occurs “after verbs of making, forming, changing, appointing *to* something, esteeming *as* something” (italics original). If that is the case, the message would be something like “they whose strength *is* their god” (NASB), “who *makes* his strength his god” (NAB), or “their strength *becomes* their god” (Stonehouse). In other words, Babylon is going to be judged by God because it deified its strength. However, that reading suffers from some major issues. First, there is no verb of making, forming, changing, appointing, or esteeming before the *lamed* unless one interprets אָשָׁם as יֵשָׁם (from the verb יָשָׁם). We do not believe that אָשָׁם conveys that sense (see above). Furthermore, when a *lamed* of becoming appears elsewhere in Hab, it occurs alongside the verb הָיָה (see 2:7), which is not present here. Second, the typical interpretation doesn’t make sense! “Condemnation of making strength ‘one’s god’ would have been unintelligible in the ancient Near East, where valor and success in battle evidenced the *support* of one’s deity” (Troxel, italics original). “The close connection between the military conquest of a ruler and the dominance of his patron deity is assumed in the ancient world” (Haak). In other words, if an ancient people-group did well in battle, they would not think that *their own might* won the day, but that *their particular god or gods* had given them victory. Matthews (*Habakkuk*) noted that “Babylonian inscriptions invariably give credit for military victories to the strength provided to kings by their gods.” He then noted one inscription where Nabopolassar, the founder of the ruling dynasty referred to in Hab, clearly praises his gods for giving him the strength to conquer

Assyria. There is no possible way to read such a thing as the glorification of his own might: “The Assyrian, who had ruled Akkad because of divine anger and had, with his heavy yoke, oppressed the inhabitants of the country, I, the weak one, the powerless one, who constantly seeks the lord of lords, with the mighty strength of Nabu and Marduk my lords I removed them from Akkad and caused (the Babylonians) to throw off their yoke” (COS 2:121). The only thing remotely similar to the statement “he makes his strength his god” is the act of self-deification. Naram-Sin, grandson of Sargon of Akkad, for instance, made himself a god—but only over the city of Akkad. Shulgi of Ur was another king who deified himself. We have no evidence that any Neo-Babylonian king deified himself. To get around the difficulty, some translations give the sense of “imputing” (KJV), “ascribing” (NJPST), or “attributing” (Alter) to the *lamed*. It is far simpler to interpret the *lamed* as one of advantage. That *lamed*, as noted in JM §133d, “expresses *for* whom, *to* whose advantage . . . something is done” (italics original). In other words, the acts of devastation wrought by Babylon are done not just by the power of, but “for” or “on behalf of” its patron deity (Marduk). That interpretation not only works perfectly in Hebrew, but makes sense of the ancient NE context.

his sway . . . his deity — Note the alliteration and end-rhyme in כָּחוֹ לְאֱלֹהֵי (kōhō lē’lōhō), which is difficult to capture in English. If “sway” is used in place of “might/strength/power” and “deity” is pronounced dee-ih-tay, then some of the sound-play is replicated. Note also that כֹּחַ not only rings with alliteration in this verse, but is part of a word-play with הוֹכִיחַ in 1:12 and תוֹכַחְתִּי in 2:1. Each term occurs at the opening or close of a textual unit and ties them together into a whole (see **for the sake of order . . . for swaying [behavior]** in 1:12 and **my swayer** in 2:1). To make that rhetorically powerful structure and design evident, we render each term similarly (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

1:12 **Undeniably ancient [are] you** — Most translators treat the interrogative *heh*, negative particle לוֹא, and קִרַּם as a genuine inquiry: “Are you not from ancient times?” It seems evident to us, however, that the statement is rhetorical; the speaker knows the answer and is framing the question in an emphatic way to elicit the desired response. In fact, הֲלוֹא is often used rhetorically to produce statements of affirmation (it is so) or assurance (surely/of truth/rightly). For multiple examples, see GKC §150e. In this case, we think that the point is to make an emphatic statement of affirmation (compare with **Long enough, YHWH!** in 1:2). Therefore, we render הֲלוֹא as “undeniably.” NJPST (you, O LORD, are) and NET (LORD, you have been) also rendered the statement as an affirmative. Haak (indeed) and NJB (surely) preferred a statement of assurance.

We should not die! — Under the assumption that לֹא נָמוּת makes little sense, many English translators point to this as an instance of the so-called “scribal emendations” (places where the ancient scribes, according to Jewish tradition, altered the text for theological reasons) and “correct” the text to its presumed original: לֹא תָמוּת. We do not perceive any incoherence. The verse began by mentioning how far *in the past* the deity had been at work. To have it then say that Israel’s future should not be ended suggests that God’s actions in history and the future of his people are interrelated. In other words, there is rhetorical power to the shift in person. That power is displayed by means of a personal statement (we are dying), not theological dogma (you can’t die). A. J. O. van der Wal (“Lô’ nāmūt in Habakkuk 1:12: A Suggestion”)

noted some important structural correspondences: “The fact that the verb *mūt* in Hab 1:12 has a human subject is also indicated by the verb *hārag* in Hab 1:17, with which the verb *mūt* in Hab 1:12 corresponds. Both the subject and the object of *hārag* in v. 17 consists of people. The verb *hārag* in v. 17 deals with the offenders, *mūt* in v. 12 with the victims.” Andersen (AYB) noted that when there is something offensive in the text, scribes usually “correct” it by inserting a euphemism, yet “‘We shall not die’ is hardly a euphemism for ‘you shall not die.’” Furthermore, even though the word is not extant in the quotation in 1QpHab, the editors of *BHQ* were right to say “its commentary ‘God is not to destroy his nation’ clearly presupposes מוֹת.” The next verse describes a situation in which the just are “swallowed up” or “gulped down” by the wicked, which coheres with the idea that Hab’s people are dying. As for the scribal emendations, “Probably most corrections were not carried out in reality” (Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*). Instead, they represent exegetical reactions to or reflections upon the text as we have it. We believe that Irving understood the sense rightly: “With so dire a foe menacing, that the prophet and his people should die seemed inevitable. But somehow, oh, somehow! the eternal God would work deliverance.” Ultimately, therefore, we adhere closely to the consonantal text as preserved by the Masoretes and render the imperfect in a modal sense (we should not die).

for the sake of order . . . for swaying [behavior] — These two phrases display a structural parallelism created by the repetition of prefixed *lamed*. In each case, however, there is poetic alternation (the *lamed* is first prefixed to a noun and then to an infinitive). Therefore, the phrases are composed similarly, but differ in sense. To mimic that structure, we render each *lamed* similarly (for), but use a noun in the first phrase (order) and a verb in the second (to sway [behavior]). Most English translations hide or ignore the alternation. Note also the fantastic sound-play woven between הוֹכִיחַ (*hōkîaḥ*) in this verse and כֹּחַ (*kôaḥ*) in the previous verse. Virtually all translators ignore the sound-play and, therefore, sever the connections between the end of the divine oracle and the resumption of the prophet’s complaint. To mimic the sound-play and make the textual connections evident, we render the noun as “sway” and the verb as “to sway [behavior]” (see also **my swayer** in 2:1). For the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB, see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5.

- 1:13 **Pure eyes** — The way that BH uses a word to modify “eyes” is to place that word before it. For example, יָפֵה עֵינַיִם (1 Sam 16:12) means “beautiful eyes,” גְּבוֹה־עֵינַיִם (Ps 101:5) means “haughty eyes,” מְאֹר־עֵינַיִם (Prov 15:30) means “shiny eyes,” and רוֹם־עֵינַיִם (Prov 21:4) means “lofty eyes.” Therefore, טָהוֹר עֵינַיִם makes sense as a simple adjectival statement (pure eyes). Most translators render “pure” as “too pure” and turn the expression into a theological expression about the nature or character of the deity (his eyes are “too pure” to look at what is evil). From a theological perspective, such an interpretation is highly questionable (surely the deity sees all things—both good and evil!). The interpretation is also questionable from a textual standpoint because it reads the prefixed *min* in מִרְאוֹת as comparative, which is unlikely (see below). Most translators also insert “your” into the text (*your* eyes are too pure) to harmonize this colon with the next, which uses a second-person statement to describe the deity. In fact, some believe that the verb at the end of the second colon causes the reader to retroactively go back and view the first colon with a second-person reference. While reading the text that way is certainly possible, it is unnecessary. It is far easier to read the first colon as a wisdom-like saying that has no one in particular as its referent. That saying then becomes a

point of departure for the prophet to make a claim about the deity. In other words, the prophet may be using an early version of the classic Rabbinic argument known as *qal wa-homer* (the argument from the lighter to the heavier). The basic argument runs like this: if one situation is true, then a far more significant situation must be true as well. So if it is true that pure eyes do not “look” into evil (that is, try to find out ways to do evil), then surely YHWH cannot “watch” over evil (that is, actively participate in it)! By speaking that way, the prophet is not pontificating about the deity; he is using the art of rhetoric to imply that YHWH is *guilty of negligence*. He then goes on to describe that negligence in detail in the rest of the complaint. Some translators view v. 13 as an extension of the previous vocatives. If true, the first half of the verse would mean “You who are pure-eyed, never looking into evil, and who, to watch over oppression, would not be able.” The problem, however, is that all the markers of the vocative in the previous verse are missing (no divine name, titles, or second-person independent pronoun). In fact, if **טהור עינים** were a vocative title, it would be the only place in the HB where **טהור** functions as a vocative, which makes that interpretation suspect.

[refrain] from — Virtually all translations treat the prefixed *min* in **מראות** as comparative (the eyes are “too pure to look” or “more pure than to look”). Such a reading, however, is highly questionable. **מראות** (or **מראת**, *defectiva*) occurs several times in the HB. In none of those places is the *min* comparative. Note, for example, the following:

Genesis 27:1: **ותכהין עיניו מראת** ([and] his eyes weakened from seeing)

Psalms 69:24: **תחשכנה עיניהם מראות** (let their eyes darken from seeing)

Psalms 119:37: **העבר עיני מראות שוא** (avert my eyes from seeing [what is] worthless)

Isaiah 33:15: **עצם עיניו מראות ברע** (who shuts his eyes from looking into evil)

The last example is particularly instructive since it features **רע + מראות** just like in Hab. Although there is no prepositional *bet* on **רע** in the text preserved by the Masoretes, one does appear in the quotation in 1QpHab: **רע**. The text in 1QpHab is probably filling in what was elided by the poetry in the Masoretic version. In all instances of **מראות**, the *min* refers to a lack, absence, cessation, or inability. Therefore, a similar sense must apply in Hab. An analysis of the poetic parallelism verifies that sense. **ראות** (to see) is parallel to **הביט** (to watch) and prepositional *min* modifies **ראות** just like **לא תוכל** modifies **הביט**. In other words, *min* occupies the same conceptual space as “cannot/unable.” Novick (“**עקב הלב מכל ואנש הוא**” (Jeremiah 17:9)”) analyzed numerous cases of the construction adjective + noun + infinitive with prefixed *min* and came to the following conclusion: “The construction conveys that the action represented by the infinitive construct cannot be performed.” He then pointed to this verse of Hab as an example as well as Gen 13:6 and 36:7, which feature the exact same statement except that **לא יכלו לשבת** (they were unable to dwell) is interchanged with **משבת** (*min* + “to dwell”)—more evidence that *min* functions in the same sense as “cannot/unable.” Stonehouse came to the same conclusion: “The **מן** may be construed . . . so that Thou art not able.” Ultimately, therefore, the evidence favors a rendering like “cease from,” “refrain from,” or “be unable to,” not “more than.”

from us — In **מִמֶּנּוּ**, how does the preposition function and to who(m) does the pronominal suffix refer? Virtually all translators view the *min* as comparative (more than). Such usage is well attested (see, for instance, Gen 26:16 or 38:26). The pronominal suffix functions either as a third-person masculine singular (him) or first-person plural (us). Virtually all translators view it as third-person singular. Therefore, **מִמֶּנּוּ** is typically interpreted as “more than he” (that is, “more just/righteous than he”). There are, however, several problems with those interpretations. First, **מִמֶּנּוּ** already appeared in Hab 1:7, where the preposition meant “from.” If authors are prone to use the same language the same way, then the preposition probably functions the same way in this verse. Second, the typical interpretation makes no sense because the term “wicked” implies that anyone swallowed by such a person is “more just/righteous” than him (i.e., if **מִמֶּנּוּ** means “more than him,” it adds nothing to the text). Andersen (AYB) put it this way: “‘The righteous’ (absolutely) is a stronger expression than ‘the one who is more righteous than he’ (relatively).” If **מִמֶּנּוּ** means “more than him,” it becomes hard to escape Cheyne’s bewilderment (“Why, pray, should a foolish scribe have inserted it?”). There is, however, a far less confounding interpretation. Marti (*Das Dodekapropheton*) interpreted **מִמֶּנּוּ** as *weg von ihm* (away from him) or *im Gegensatz zu ihm* (in opposition to him). That use of the preposition would agree with the vast majority of cases where it appears with a pronominal suffix and would agree with the sense of **מִמֶּנּוּ** in Hab 1:7. And if the *nu*-suffix is interpreted as a first-person plural, we suddenly have a statement about the same people-group, undergoing the same life-threatening conditions, as in v. 12 (we should not die!). Since that interpretation makes more sense of the text and its context and has stronger rhetorical power, we render **מִמֶּנּוּ** as “from us.”

- 1:14 **made to be . . . of the sea** — The first colon in this verse is structured so that the middle word (*’ādām*) and final word (*hayyām*) contain an end-rhyme. To mimic that sound-play, we shift the rhyming words from “humans” and “the sea” to “he made” and “the sea” and add “to be” (see **be dazzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).
- critter . . . can control** — What, precisely, is the **רֶמֶשׂ**? As noted by Whitekettle (“Like a Fish and Shrimp out of Water: Identifying the Dāg and Remeś Animals of Habakkuk 1:14”), the **רֶמֶשׂ** is usually defined by the geographic area where it is found (a **רֶמֶשׂ** “on the land” or “in the water”). Such information is missing in Hab. Therefore, it is hard to tell if it refers to “marine creatures” (HCSB) or “sea creatures” (NIV), “reptiles” (Henderson) or “worms” (Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*), or something more general. Considering the terse nature of ancient Hebrew poetry, we think that it is better to give it a general rendering. Note that the last phrase in this verse alliterates due to the repetition of three long-o sounds: *lō’-mōšēl bō*. To mimic that sound-play, we use three words that each start with the same consonant: “critter,” “can,” and “control” (see **be dazzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB). SAT preferred “creatures crawling.” Our rendering of the last phrase (none can control) follows the Masoretic text: **לֹא-מִשַּׁל בּוֹ** (no one rules over it). The quotation in 1QpHab is different: **לְמִשַּׁל בּוֹ** (in order to rule over it). Since the latter makes no sense of Hab, it probably reflects a departure from the original text due to the influence of Gen 1:26.

1:15 **slashed** — The four meanings typically given to גרר in Hab are “to pull,” “draw,” “drag,” and “sweep” (i.e., to forcibly move from one place to another). Virtually no discussion of the verb in this verse is ever provided in commentaries. The unanimous agreement about the verb’s meaning in Hab and utter silence about any interpretive issues creates the impression that the verb’s nuance in Hab is not only well-substantiated, but beyond question. The reality, however, is drastically different. When one opens a lexicon (like HALOT or BDB), the primary evidence for the meaning “to pull” or “drag” is *this verse in Hab*. Proverbs 21:7 may be mentioned secondarily, *but it is then translated differently*. Further support may be sought in a possible Arabic cognate or in 6, which uses the verb ελκω (meaning to “draw in” a breath or “to pull” a plow or yoke) for the verb here in Hab. What is most jarring, however, is the fact that גרר occurs in many other contexts, none of which have anything to do with pulling, drawing, dragging, or sweeping. Leviticus 11:7, for example, says גרה לא־יגר ([what is] chewed, it does not re-chew). The nominal form refers to food that is *scraped apart* by the teeth and the verb refers to the act of *scraping apart* food. 1 Kings 7:9 says מגררות במגרה, which refers to the *cutting* done by a *cutting tool* (sawing with saws). Clearly, גרר refers to slashing or gashing (particularly with sharp objects). In 1 Kgs 18:28, the prophets of Baal use swords or knives and spears or lances to do something so violent to themselves that blood pours out over them. They must be gashing, cutting, or slashing themselves. The verb used to describe that action is גרר, which has no known meaning. If we presume an accidental *resh-dalet* interchange, the original verb would be a Hithpoel of גרר, meaning “they slashed themselves.” In Yob 2:8, Yob takes a piece of pottery and uses it on his boils. The verb there is גרר, which has no known meaning. If we presume a *resh-dalet* interchange, Yob would be *scraping* himself (from גרר). In Prov 21:7, one finds the statement “the destruction of the wicked ygr them.” If the verb there is גרר, the evidence above makes the meaning evident: “the destruction wrought by the wicked *tears them apart*” (the very destruction perpetrated by wicked people will come back to get them—a meaning that makes perfect sense and is in full agreement with other sayings in Proverbs). Such a nuance corresponds with the two other verbs in the last verses of Hab: זבח (to sacrifice) and הרג (to kill/slay). A nuance like “to pull/draw/drag/sweep” does not correspond with those verbs and is further evidence that such a meaning is inappropriate. Note that we treat this and the rest of the imperfect verbs in ch. 1 as *yiqtol* preterits. That sense was triggered by the inverted imperfect in the previous verse (ותעשה) and corresponds with the use of *yiqtol* preterits elsewhere in the complaint (see **I shouted . . . cried** in 1:2).

/sword/ — The use of גרר (to cut/slash/gash) calls into question the noun “fishing net”—an object that is neither sharp nor used to cut things. Therefore, we propose that the text originally mentioned a “sword” (חרב), which was later altered to “fishing net” (חרם) through graphic confusion and/or to harmonize it with “net” (מכמרת) in the next colon. If there were no evidence of such an alteration elsewhere in the text, we would not propose it here. In v. 17, however, two ancient textual witnesses have “sword” in place of “fishing net” (see **unsheathe his sword** in v. 17). If an alteration is possible with the word there, it is certainly possible with that word here (for our use of forward slashes, see section C6).

1:16 **it is sacrificed** — Both **יָזַבַּח** and **קָטַר** were pointed by the Masoretes as verbs in the Piel stem, which provides the active meanings “he sacrificed” and “he burned/offered up,” respectively. Such forms indicate that “he” (Babylon) treats the metaphoric implements of his success (hooks and nets) as though they were gods by burning offerings to them. That interpretation is ancient. The commentary on this verse in 1QpHab, for instance, clearly interpreted the verse in that manner: “Its interpretation: they offer sacrifices to their standards and their weapons are the object of their worship” (Martínez and Tigchelaar). Such an interpretation, however, misses the point. The complaint in both this section (vv. 12-17) and the first (vv. 2-4) is that God is culpable for the wicked acts that are carried out by his appointed ones. It is irrelevant, therefore, if there is evidence that the Babylonians, Scythians, or anyone else treated their weapons as deities or offered sacrifices to them (as argued by some commentators). What we find in this complaint is the claim that YHWH left humankind leaderless and defenseless—like mere animals to be caught and consumed by the one who hunts them. It is as if YHWH prepared the people, *like a sacrifice*, to be slaughtered by Babylon. The context, therefore, requires that these verbs be read passively (Pual stem) with the masculine subject referring to humankind (**אָדָם**). Even though **יָזַבַּח** does not occur elsewhere in the Pual, any verb in the Piel could potentially be crafted in the Pual to give it a passive sense (for **קָטַר** in the Pual, see Song 3:6). For our use of the *yiqtol* preterit, see **slashed** in 1:15.

on his . . . on his — Typically, each prepositional *lamed* is interpreted as indicating the object “to” or “toward” which the sacrifice is made. In this case, however, since the verbs are interpreted in a passive sense (see above) each *lamed* indicates either the location of the passive action (on) or the agent of that action (with/by).

/sword/ — For our use of “sword” (**חֶרֶב**) instead of “fishing net” (**חָרֶם**), see the note in v. 15 and **unsheathe his sword** in v. 17. For our use of forward slashes, see section C6.

1:17 **every reason** — According to the Masoretic text, which is supported by 8HevXII gr and **כ**, the last verse in ch. 1 starts with an interrogative *heh*. The first verse in this section (1:12) also began with an interrogative *heh*. The use of the interrogative particle at both ends creates a framework within which the content of the complaint is expounded. In v. 12, the interrogative was used rhetorically to produce an emphatic statement of affirmation. Such language matched the use of an interrogative at the very beginning of Hab. In both instances, interrogative words or particles were used to declare an emphatic statement. Therefore, the interrogative at the end of the complaint probably functions the same way. Haak agreed: “The understanding of the phrase adopted here (therefore indeed) is based on the tendency of Habakkuk to use rhetorical questions as a method of stating the emphatic” (parenthetical with Haak’s translation added). To mimic that rhetoric, we turn “for that reason” into “he has *every* reason.”

unsheathe his sword — Because the noun **חָרֶם** (fishing net) occurs in the Masoretic text, most translations render **רִיק** as “to empty.” The question the prophet would be asking, therefore, is whether Babylon was going to “empty its net.” As noted, however, by Andersen (AYB), “There is no obvious logic in the question.” Why would Hab care whether Babylon emptied its net? Is a metaphorical net too small to hold its catch? If a metaphorical net can’t be big enough, why not use another one? Since the Masoretic text lists *two* nets, why not start filling the **מַכְמֶרֶת**? What possible metaphorical notion does “emptying the net” serve? Henderson thought it referred to “the depositing of the captives, etc., in Babylon.” While such an interpretation is

possible, there is nothing in the text to suggest the location where such “emptying” takes place. In fact, the idea of emptying the net in which the nations are caught would seem to imply something *positive*: being released from captivity. But that certainly can’t be implied by the metaphor here. If **יִרִיק חֶרְמוֹ** were dropped from the text, the prophetic complaint would end on a much stronger note: “[So] he has every reason to continue to slay nations unrestrained!” It is perplexing to find a text crafted with such powerful rhetoric ending with such an “empty” statement. But perhaps translators have misunderstood the verbal nuance. **יִרִיק** is often used to describe *the drawing of sharp weapons*. Therefore, previous to the discovery of the DSS, many scholars hypothesized that the implement in v. 17 was originally a “sword” (**חֶרֶב**), which was later altered to “fishing net” (**חֶרֶם**) through graphic confusion and/or to harmonize it with “net” (**מַכְמֶרֶת**). Barthélemy advocated for “sword” because there was no other place where **יִרִיק** described a **חֶרֶם** and the verb **הִרְג** more naturally applied to a sword. Cathcart (“A New Proposal for Hab 1:17”) proposed that the text originally referred to a “spear/lance” because the difference between “fishing net” (**חֶרֶם**) and “spear/lance” (**רֶמֶח**) was nothing more than the transposition of a consonant. Both suggestions provide a far more rhetorically powerful statement than one that describes the metaphoric emptying of a net. However, just because those readings work a lot better is no justification for altering the text. If only there was an ancient text that could validate the hypothesis! It turns out that there is. The quotation of this verse in 1QpHab reads “sword” instead of “fishing net”: **חֶרֶב**. As we have already seen, the quotation in 1QpHab deviates enough from the text preserved by the Masoretes that it is never possible to know if the text is being updated, altered, or reflects an actual variant. Therefore, what we really need is a text independent of the Qumran scrolls that can validate the reading in 1QpHab. 8HevXII gr is a Greek translation that reflects the same text as preserved by the Masoretes. In this verse, however, 8HevXII gr says “sword” (**μαχαίραν**) instead of “fishing net”: **ΑΛΛΑΧΑΙΡΑΝ**. Therefore, two independent compositions used by completely different people-groups in ancient times attest to the reading “sword” in Hab 1:17 (the Greek Minor Prophets scroll was found in a cave used by rebels during the Bar Kokhba revolt, whereas 1QpHab was produced by an insular sect called the “Community” that would have regarded the followers of Bar Kokhba as “children of darkness”). It is clear, therefore, that there were two different textual traditions existing at the same time in the ancient world—one that read “fishing net” and one that read “sword.” We believe not only that “sword” makes more sense in this verse, but in vv. 15-16 as well. We propose that, over time, those instances of **חֶרֶב** parallel to **מַכְמֶרֶת** were altered to **חֶרֶם** in conformity with it. It took longer, however, for **חֶרֶב** in v. 17 to be altered since there was nothing else in the context of the verse to suggest a “net.” Both 1QpHab and 8HevXII gr would be versions of the text that were still holding out against the total harmonization that had already taken place within the text preserved by the Masoretes and reflected in the Septuagint. Therefore, we render the phrase in this verse as “unsheathe his sword.” Alter, Moffatt, Stonehouse, and Smith (*The Book of the Twelve Prophets*) did likewise.

- 2:1 **At my post, I hereby will stand** — The first thing that stands out here is the inversion of typical word-order. BH is a V-S-O language. Moshavi (“The Discourse Functions of Object/Adverbial-Fronting in Biblical Hebrew”) described the syntactic situation this way: “There is widespread, though not universal, agreement that verb-first (VX) is the *basic*, or *unmarked* word order in the verbal clause, and verb-second (XV) the *marked* order. On the basis of this

view, the preverbal clausal element in an XV clause is said to be *fronted* from its normal position, or *preposed*. . . . The unmarked order is *pragmatically neutral*, having no particular discourse function, while the marked order is used to achieve a specific discourse function or functions” (italics original). In this case, “at my post” comes *before* the verb. Such syntactic inversion is done to bring dramatic emphasis to the fronted element. Robert Alter dedicated half a chapter in *The Art of Bible Translation* to the importance of syntactic inversion and its neglect by English translators. He said that in the prophetic texts, “There is a good deal of fronting . . . for the sake of emphasis. . . . The many English versions that regularize the word order lose this force of emphasis.” Therefore, we agree with Alter that when “the order of terms . . . has been carefully arranged by the writer, it behooves the translator to reproduce that order scrupulously.” To mimic the syntax, we render this “at my post, I hereby will stand,” not “I hereby will stand at my post.” The second thing that stands out here is the use of the cohortative verbal form. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know whether this should be a cohortative of request or intent because we have no idea who was the intended recipient of such words. If Hab was communicating with a king, the use of the cohortative could function as a request to seek an oracle: “let me stand.” SAT interpreted it that way. Absent any indication of an addressee, it seems more to be a declaration of intent within a short soliloquy. Henderson said that the cohortatives marked “the intensity of his (Hab’s) desire” (parenthetical added). Andersen (AYB) thought that they represented the “language of resolution.” O’Neal said that they reflected “intentionality and intensity.” Despite such statements, virtually all English translators treat the cohortatives as standard imperatives (I will). We mimic the emphatic nature of the verbal form by rendering it “I hereby will.”

rocky [height] — **מצור** typically refers to a siege mound set up by an attacker or a fortification from which those who are attacked may defend themselves. The first sense can’t apply in Hab. But what about the second? Is Hab actually standing on a “fortress” (Henderson), “tower” (KJV), “rampart” (NRSV), “turret” (Moffatt), or “city wall” (NET)? We think that is the wrong question. The prophet is not taking a defensive position even if he is standing on a defensive barrier; rather, he is placing himself at an elevated vantage-point where he can keep a sharp lookout and have the best possible view of the vision God sends him. Instead, the locale is probably called **מצור** to play off of Hab’s reference to the deity as **צור** in 1:12. In other words, Hab is declaring that, despite his complaint, he ultimately “stands” upon the solid foundation of his “rock,” YHWH. Therefore, we render **מצור** as “rocky [height]” to coincide with “rock” (or “bedrock” as we prefer it) in 1:12. The translators of **Θ** seem to have recognized the word-play as well, which is why they rendered the term **πετραν** (rock). See also **8HēvXII** gr. A similar word-play is created in Zech 9:3 by using **מצור** alongside the name of a city-state: **ותבן צר מצור** (Tsor built a tor).

my swayer — To make sense of **תוכחתי**, three things need to be interpreted: the meaning of **תוכחתי**, the function of the suffix, and the word’s poetic usage. A survey of English translations shows that **תוכחתי** is often understood in Hab with a meaning like “complaint” (HCSB), “argument” (NET), “plea” (Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*), or “protest” (Andersen). As pointed out by Floyd (*Minor Prophets: Part 2*), “This translation is problematic, however, for the word has this meaning nowhere else. . . . The word ordinarily means ‘reproof’ or ‘correction.’” Floyd’s argument is valid, which is why other translations prefer something like

“reproof” (KJV), “correction” (NKJV), “chiding” (Walker and Lund), or “rebuke” (Geneva). The second issue is stated well by Möller: “The translation of the term as ‘complaint’ or ‘reproof’ is dependent upon the understanding of the pronoun suffixed to it as a subjective or objective genitive, respectively. In other words, is **תוכחת** the complaint that Habakkuk speaks or the reproof that he receives?” Even if Hab is expecting to be corrected, the fundamental issue is YHWH’s response, not Hab’s. The whole point of this text is to seek clarification regarding a former divine oracle (see *The [divine] clarification* in 1:1). Ultimately, however, our rendering is constrained by how the term is used poetically. **תוכחת** is derived from the same root (and sounds very similar to) the infinitive **הוכיח** in 1:12, which in turn plays off of **כח** (his strength) in 1:11. In other words, **תוכחת** is part of a tripartite word-play. To mimic that word-play, we render **כוח** as “sway,” **הוכיח** as “to sway [behavior],” and **תוכחת** as “swayer” (see **be dazzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

2:2 **confirm** — Or “validate.” The verb **באר** occurs two other times in the HB (Deut 1:5 and 27:8).

The first says “Mosheh began to **באר** this teaching/instruction/law.” The second says “Write on the stones all the words of this teaching/instruction/law. **באר** [it] thoroughly.” Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell from these occurrences how **באר** functions. In all three cases, **ב** rendered the verb as either the adjective $\sigma\alpha\varphi\omega\varsigma$, meaning “clearly/without doubt,” or as the verb $\delta\iota\alpha\sigma\alpha\varphi\epsilon\omega$, meaning “to explain the meaning of/state plainly” (GLS). Translators typically interpret the verb according to **ב**. Note, for example, HCSB (clearly inscribe), KJV (make plain), and NET (record legibly). Those who support that interpretation defend it by saying that the writing “was to be brief and simple enough that one would not waste time in reading it” (O’Neal). If the “vision” that Hab was waiting for is nothing more than the content of 2:4, then that interpretation is possible. Such an interpretation can’t apply, however, to the passages in Deut. Furthermore, it is far more probable that the “vision” in Hab is a larger textual unit like the “woe” oracles (2:6b-19) and/or the concluding psalm (ch. 3). Ultimately, therefore, the verb seems to convey something more significant than writing neatly or simply. Some think that the verb relates to the size of the writing. In other words, the inscription must have been massive enough to be seen and read clearly by people in whatever public place it was installed. It is ludicrous, however, to imagine that a herald would pick up a massive stone inscription and *run* with it. Some have argued that the verb relates to “digging” or “boring” (and, therefore, “engraving”). In other words, the verb could share its root with the noun **באר**, which refers to a “pit,” “well,” or “alcove.” Ward (ICC) and Orelli, for example, rendered it “to engrave.” However, Deut 27:4 says that the stones on which the words should be written were covered with plaster. Words are *painted* on plaster, not engraved. Therefore, “to engrave” should be rejected. **ב** rendered **באר** as **פרש**, meaning “to separate,” “depart,” “specify,” or “explain” (CAL). Andersen (explain), Möller (expound), and others follow the Aramaic. One scholar discovered an intriguing cognate that not only makes good sense of the verb in the HB, but sheds further light on its usage. Tsumura (“Hab 2:2 in the Light of Akkadian Legal Practice”) showed that there is a parallel to the Piel of **באר** in Akkadian (see *burru*, D-stem of *bāru*, in CAD). That verb is used in legal contexts to indicate that a matter has been established or

confirmed by means of oaths and/or witnesses after a matter had been written down. “That confirmation by oath of witnesses was necessary before any legal procedure was concluded is widely known by ancient Near Eastern documents. . . . Hab 2:2 reflects two stages of a legal procedure, i.e., »writing down« a contract, testimony, etc. and »confirming« it by witnesses.” The very same situation can be seen in Isaiah 8:1-2, where Isaiah is told to write something down by the deity and witnesses then verify either what he writes or that it was he who wrote it. In Hab, the next verse describes the vision as a witness that does not lie under oath. In other words, the truth of the vision was being “legally established.” In “‘Law is Paralyzed’ (Habakkuk 1:4),” Cathcart noted how the specific verbs in this verse and at the start of the next are often used in legal or forensic settings—like Yob 13:17-22, where Yob is defending himself as though in a legal dispute. Considering these things, we have good reasons to interpret בֹּאֵר as “to (legally) confirm/establish/validate.”

your boards — הַלְּחָוֹת is almost universally rendered “tablets” (“tables” in older translations) in Hab (i.e., *stone* tablets). But how difficult it would be for someone to run carrying stone tablets! For that reason, Ward (ICC) said, “The tablets were like those of Babylonia, of clay.” Orelli agreed: “Clay tablets are the most probable.” But as Andersen (AYB) noted, “The very small number of inscribed clay tablets found in Palestine shows that this medium never came into general use.” Archaeological evidence shows that Israelite messengers usually carried letters or messages on pieces of pottery (because it was small, light, cheap, and portable). Since pottery was not used in this case, the term must refer to some other small, light, and portable medium. In fact, the same Hebrew term also applies to wooden boards, which is why Matthews said, “The Hebrew in this phrase suggests . . . stone or wood.” When God tells Mosheh how to build the wooden tabernacle altar, for example, he says גִּבּוֹב לַחֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ, “hollow of boards, you must build it” (Exod 27:8—see also 38:7). As another example, the female lover in Song 8:9 is said to be enclosed with לֹחַ אֲרִזָּה (cedar board). ש used πτυξίον here in Hab, which referred to *wooden boards* in classical Greek. All of that led Andersen to conclude, “The most eligible candidates are clay, stone, and wood, with probability increasing in that order.” In other words, wood boards (with a wax coating on which the words would be written) are the most likely candidate for הַלְּחָוֹת. The only other English translation we could find that rendered it “board(s)” was Fenton. Below is an example of what those boards might have looked like (photo of Neo-Assyrian writing boards from Nimrud taken at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2018). What is surprising in our text is the definite article. Sometimes the definite article



describes a category of thing and doesn't need to be represented in English translation. In this case, however, the text is poetry. Hebrew poetry often elides the definite article as seen, for example, in the words חֲזוֹן (vision) and קוֹרָא (herald) in this verse (note how the article on קוֹרָא was reinserted in the quotation in 1QpHab). Therefore, the presence of the definite article is striking and implies something more definite than usual. We interpret that definiteness as referring to the particular boards that Hab had with him: “*your boards*.”

2:3 [I swear] that — This כִּי is typically interpreted as causal (because/for). When combined with the usual interpretations of עוֹד חֲזוֹן לְמוֹעֵד and אֵשׁ־יִתְמַהֲמָה, the result is comical:

the heavenly fire

the prophet is told that a herald is going to “run” with his vision report *because* the vision is for some later time and it will tarry (or will it?). In either case, why the rush? Let the herald *walk* with it! At best, vv. 2-3 could be interpreted as saying that the prophet must write down the vision because it needs to be preserved until the appointed time. But that seems like a stretch. Unless **לחזות** refers to *stone* tablets (see above), there is nothing to indicate that preservation was the issue; rather, it was important that the vision was *written, legally verified, transmitted quickly, and reliable*. The first three are guaranteed by obedience to the commands in v. 2 and by the herald who runs with the report. But how can the deity affirm the vision’s *reliability*? He could declare that it will not communicate falsely (**לא יכזב**), but it would be more profound if the deity gave an oath statement guaranteeing the vision and holding himself accountable for its fulfillment. Considering the strong complaint and accusation leveled by the prophet against the deity, an equally strong rhetorical response is required; anything less would suggest either that the deity was indifferent or that his words were empty. **כי** also functions as a complementizer of the verb “to swear” (to swear *that*) as seen, for example, in Josh 2:12, 2 Sam 19:8, 1 Kgs 18:10, and Jer 22:5. What follows **כי** would be the content of the oath. As in many oath statements, however, the opening of the oath is elided because the fact of the swearing is carried forward by the **כי** itself. Note, for example, how the oath in Zeph 2:9 (clearly indicated with the formulaic expression “by the life of X”) uses **כי** as a standalone for the fuller expression: **חַי־אֲנִי נֶאֱמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־מוֹאב כְּסֹדֶם תְּהִיָּה** ([By] my life—prophecy of YHWH, [Lord] of Legions, God of Israel—[I swear] that Moab—the same as Sodom, will she be). For an overview of oath expressions and the use of **כי** within them, see Conklin’s *Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew*. See **If it dilly-dallies, [may I be cursed]!** for more on the oath in this verse.

a witness . . . a testimony — **עֹד** seems pretty straight-forward: “still/yet.” Some understand it to mean “there is *yet/still* a vision,” which would indicate that Hab and the people have to wait for it. However, the urgency expressed in the previous verse (a herald is going to “run” with the message) and the need for legal verification (it must be “confirmed” by witnesses) implies the opposite. Möller agreed: “The production of the vision in written form must have special and presumably immediate significance.” Another way to interpret it is that “the vision is *yet/still* for the appointed time,” which means “It still relates to the time appointed by God for its fulfillment” (S. R. Driver). But there is nothing to indicate that people were questioning whether God’s word would be fulfilled at its proper time. The problem was that the divine word didn’t seem to match the reality! To respond by saying “a vision will come later” or “all things will happen when they are supposed to” is to overlook the seriousness of the prophet’s intervention and make the deity seem unconcerned about his people’s suffering. Traditionally, **יִפַּח** is identified as a verb from **פָּוַח**, meaning “to exhale/blow.” YLT, for example, rendered **יִפַּח לִקְץ** as “it breatheth for the end.” Since that doesn’t make sense, the “breathing” is almost always reinterpreted as something else—like “speaking” (see KJV or JPS). In other places, however, the breathing/blowing relates to a pleasant breeze (Song 4:16) or fire-stoking (Ezek 21:36), not “breathing out words” (i.e., “speaking”). Some interpret the breathing as an act of physical exertion (see ESV, NAB, or Fenton). Andersen (AYB) was right to say, “The interpretation that here *yāpēah* means ‘pant’ because the vision is breathless with hurry . . . is

too fanciful to be taken seriously.” ש read יפה as יפרח, from פרח (to sprout/bud/bloom). Since, however, MurXII and 1QpHab represent יפה (or יפיה), we stick with the Masoretic Text. Pardee (“*Yph* ‘Witness’ in Hebrew and Ugaritic”) noted that “*Yph* was the regular Ugaritic word for ‘witness’ as a socio-economic entity.” Since *yph* is such an ancient word for “witness,” we might not expect to find it except in poetic texts or short, pithy statements that preserve words that might otherwise have fallen out of usage. That is precisely where יפה (or יפיה) occurs: numerous times throughout Proverbs (6:19; 12:17; 14:5, 25; 19:5, 9; 27:12) and twice in Psalms (12:6, 27:12). After analyzing the Proverbs passages, Janzen (“Habakkuk 2:2–4 in the Light of Recent Philological Advances”) remarked that they “reflect a common life-situation and, within that situation, the same primary concern, the concern for the credibility of witnesses.” Another thing to note is that יפה (or יפיה) almost always occurs as part of a word-pair with עד (witness). Pardee argued, therefore, that יפה functions as a substantive that is semantically and syntactically synonymous with עד. But if so, it is likely that עור in Hab is really עד (witness). עור can, in fact, be written as עד (see, for example, Gen 8:22, Jer 2:9, or Hos 12:1), in which case the current text could have said “a witness [is] [the] vision” with the predicate fronted for emphasis, but was misread and then vocalized as “yet/still a vision.” “There is really little room for doubt . . . that in Hab 2:3 we should read something like: ‘The vision is a witness to an appointed time, a testifier to the end’” (Janzen). In the face of Hab’s claim that the divine word seems to speak in error, YHWH swears an oath that it is a reliable witness and holds himself accountable for its quick resolution. The fact that a prophet should write something down as a “witness” is reflected elsewhere in the HB. Isaiah 30:8, for example, says, “Go write it on a tablet with them or mark it on a scroll so that it will serve at a later time as a witness—a witness perpetually.” But how do we explain the shift between יפה and יפיה? Pardee noted that “The North-West Semitic words for ‘witness’ are participles with unchangeably long vowels. . . . If Ugaritic adhered to this pattern, *yph*, . . . would have been vocalized *yāpihu*. . . . The hypothesis here advanced is that the word was borrowed into Hebrew as a learned word for ‘witness’ from a dialect in which the Canaanite vowel shift ($\bar{a} \rightarrow \bar{o}$) did not obtain and in which the /i/ did not (necessarily) shift to /ē/. . . . In Hab 2:3 the . . . /i/ has shifted to /ē/.” Ultimately, therefore, we render עור and יפה as “witness” and “testimony.” Haak, Ginsberg (*Studies in Daniel*), NET, and others did similarly.

If it dilly-dallies, [may I be cursed]! — When it comes to יתמהמה, the underlying verb always occurs in a form that duplicates the first and last consonants. JM §59c notes that in forms like these, the repetition of the consonants signifies the repetition of the action. Sometimes the sound of the verb also mimics the sound of the action (onomatopoeic). Therefore, even though a rendering like “to tarry/linger/delay” would make good sense of the verb, a rendering like “to dilly-dally” would represent both the sound-play and the action more effectively. Although numerous translations render the verb that way in other texts, the translation of Walker and Lund was the only one we could find with that rendering in Hab (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB). As for אם, it is almost universally interpreted as a conditional or hypothetical particle. In that case, the text would be saying something like “though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (KJV) or “though it delays, wait for it, since it will certainly come and not be late” (HCSB).

As recognized by many scholars, there is a serious consistency problem here. “How can ‘he/it not delay’ but still ‘tarry’?” (Haak). “Does it tarry or not?” (Möller). Translators try to get around the problem either by explaining it away—it only “seems” to be late, for instance, but will not *actually* be late (NRSV, ESV, etc.)—or by fudging one or both verbs. For example, NET rendered the passage “Even if the message is not fulfilled right away, wait patiently; . . . it will not arrive late.” Yet how many people wouldn’t immediately be confused and/or alarmed if their employer notified them that “due to staffing shortages, your paycheck will be delayed this month. But don’t worry, it will still come on time”? What if your *life* could depend on the coming of that check—how satisfied would *you* be with that answer? Despite both textual and exegetical maneuvers, fundamental problems persist. Haak thought that “The solution seems to lie in the recognition of a special use of *’m*.” By appealing to BDB, he called אֵם an “emphatic negative,” meaning that the vision would *not* tarry. Haak was on the right trail. Sometimes אֵם is part of a conditional self-imprecation with the negative content elided as seen, for example, in Ps 89:36: אַחַת נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי בִקְדָשִׁי אֵם-לְדוֹר אֶכֶזֶב. Virtually every English translation renders the אֵם as “not.” Note, for example, KJV: “Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will *not* lie to David.” But אֵם does not function as a negative particle; rather, it introduces a negative oath statement. In his study of oaths in the HB, Conklin noted that oaths appear most frequently in the form of a conditional sentence with elided negative apodosis. Although there are exceptions, the primary order is protasis to apodosis. The protasis of positive oaths begins with אֵם-לֹא (if not) and that of negative oaths begins with אֵם (if so). The full conditional content would, therefore, look something like “If X does not happen, may I be cursed” (a positive oath) or “If X happens, may I be cursed” (a negative oath). Psalm 89:36 is actually saying, “I swore once by my holiness: ‘If to David I should lie, [may I be cursed].’” Altering it to “I will not lie to David” loses both the oath and the rhetoric. Below are three more examples from Numbers:

Num 14:30 (Negative oath)	אֵם-אַתֶּם תָּבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת־יָדִי לִשְׁכֵן אִתְּכֶם בָּהּ כִּי אֵם-כָּלֵב בֶּן-יִפְנֶה וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן-נֹון	“If you come into the land that I lifted my hand to establish you therein (except Kaleb, son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, son of Nun), [may I be cursed].”
Num 14:35 (Positive oath)	אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי אֵם-לֹא זֹאת אֲעִשֶׂה לְכָל-הָעַדָּה הָרְעָה הַזֹּאת הַנוֹעֲדִים עָלַי בַּמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה יָתֻמוּ וּשְׁם יִמָּתוּ	I, YHWH, declared, “If I should <u>not</u> make it [happen] to all this evil throng that is united against me [that] in this desert they will die— die there indeed, [may I be cursed].”

Num 32:9b-10a (Negative oath)	וישבע לאמר אם-יראו האנשים העלים ממצרים מבן עשרים שנה ומעלה את האדמה אשר נשבעתי לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב	He swore [an oath], saying, “If they see [it]— the men who went up from Egypt, 20 years [old] or more— the land that I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, [may I be cursed].”
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When **אם** is interpreted as a negative oath, the whole statement makes sense: YHWH is not declaring that a delay will or might happen, *he is emphatically declaring that it won't*. First he does so with an oath statement, then he uses an alliterative end-rhyme to drive the point further home (see **occurs . . . occur . . . deter**). Haring (“He will certainly not hesitate, wait for him!”: Evidence for an Unrecognized Oath in Habakkuk 2:3b and its Implications for Interpreting Habakkuk 2:2-4”) made another observation: “A further reason to read Hab 2:3b as an oath is that **באר** in Hab 2:2 makes reference to swearing an oath, which means that the presence of an oath [in] Hab 2:3b would be continuous with the subject-matter of the previous verse” (see **confirm** in 2:2). Ultimately, therefore, “When 2:3b is read as an oath, it possesses greater clarity, stronger poetic parallelism, and increased thematic continuity with the surrounding verses.” See **[I swear] that** for more on the oath in this verse.

stay hooked — Note the fantastic word-play: the imperative **חכה** (wait!) is virtually identical with **חכה** (hook) in 1:15. The noun was used in Hab’s complaint to emphasize how the righteous were caught by the wicked. By using a term virtually identical to it, the deity not only responds to the complaint, but turns it around: the righteous should “stay hooked” on the vision because it foretells their release from the “hook” of the wicked. In other words, the resolution of the people’s suffering centers on the faithfulness of God and his promises. When translations render the imperative as “wait” without considering how it relates phonetically to “hook,” the artistically crafted connection between prophetic complaint and divine response is destroyed (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB). For our use of italics, see section A3.

occurs . . . occur . . . deter — If the author wanted to say nothing more than that “it will come,” there would be no need for the Infinitive Absolute. By including it, the statement is made more emphatic. By including the particle **לֹא**, a string of successive end-rhymes are crafted (*ḥakkēh-lô kî-ḥō’ yāḥō’ lō’*) that add rhetorical force to the statement and impel the reader/hearer to believe what Henderson calls “the certainty of the event.” These end-rhymes are only one element in a larger array of rhetorical devices that invest the message with power and meaning. We mimic much of that sound-play by using the words “occurs,” “occur,” and “deter” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

- 2:4 Many people view this as one of the most difficult verses to interpret in Hab. That difficulty arises not just because of the perplexing nature of **עפלה**, but because virtually every particle, word, and phrase has multiple semantic nuances and their relation to each other and to the larger context is ambiguous. Many English interpreters resort to emendations to make sense of the

verse—a practice reflected in many of the ancient versions as well (for a good survey of emendations, see Pinker’s “Habakkuk 2:4: An Ethical Paradigm or a Political Observation?”). There is no evidence, however, that the consonantal text in Hab 2:4 differed at any point from the one preserved by the Masoretes. Not only does the quotation in 1QpHab reflect the same consonantal text, but the adjustments made by the versions diverge so much from each other that it is obvious that what differed was not the text before them, but their attempt to make sense of it. Therefore, despite the myriad hypothetical reconstructions proposed by scholars for this verse, we feel compelled to work within the confines of the current consonantal text.

See [how] . . . ? — Or “Consider [how].” הִנֵּה usually functions as a presentative particle (“look!” or “here is!”). Virtually all English translators treat it that way. In this case, however, the deity is not presenting someone in a spatial or relational sense (“Look at X” as in 1:5); rather, הִנֵּה brings a specific reality into the mind of the listener/reader. To capture that cognitive sense, we use the rendering “see how X is Y?” Woude (“Habakkuk 2:4”) interpreted הִנֵּה as *wenn* (if). According to JM §1671, “הִנֵּה never appears to have the proper force of *if*,” but הֵן “is occasionally used with the value of *if*, as in Aramaic and no doubt under Aramaic influence.” Woude’s interpretation could work if הִנֵּה עָפְלָה was redivided as הֵן הַעֲפָלָה, but there is nothing in his article to indicate that textual reworking. He appears to be influenced by ὅ (εάν, “if/whenever”). Aquila (ὅ, “look/see”) brought the Greek in line with the Hebrew text in his day, which is exactly what we find in our text today and is supported by the quotation in 1QpHab centuries before him.

rebellious — Perhaps Zemek (“Interpretive Challenges Relating to Habakkuk 2:4b”) said it best: “עָפְלָה presents a seemingly impossible challenge of decipherment.” We have no desire to restate what multitudes have stated before us. Instead, we will focus on areas that (it seems to us) have not been properly followed and seem to lead in a reasonable direction. To start the investigation, many turn to ὅ. However, Andersen (AYB) correctly stated that “There does not seem to be any hope of recovering a viable alternative Hebrew text by back-translation.” 1QpHab offers a better chance. Not only does it quote the first half of v. 4, but it contains commentary upon it: פָּשְׁרוּ אֲשֶׁר יִכְפְּלוּ עֲלֵיהֶם (its interpretation [is] that they will double/be doubled upon them). What is “doubled” is not clear due to the presence of a lacuna. What interests us, however, is what the commentator’s choice of language infers about עָפְלָה. For centuries, scholars said that עָפְלָה came from the same root as “ophel” (high place) and “opalim” (traditionally regarded as “tumors,” but, as argued by Maeir in “A New Interpretation of the Term ‘opalim (עָפְלִים) in the Light of Recent Archaeological Finds from Philistia,” may actually refer to “phalli”). Therefore, they hypothesized that the verb עָפַל meant “to swell/puff up.” They then departed from that sense by presuming it to be a metaphor for pride or conceit. The result was a rendering that had no support from the ancient versions, had nothing in common with the textual evidence (more on that below), was utterly arbitrary (apparently “to swell/puff up” can’t refer to ambition, zeal, rage, virility, or anything else), and provided a response from the deity that, as Möller said, “does not address the specific queries that Habakkuk raises.” If, however, the commentator in 1QpHab chose כָּפַל because it reflected the Hebrew, then עָפַל must have been understood to mean something like “pile up/multiply/amass.” That sense is evident in Lim’s translation of 1QpHab: “it is heaped up; it is not made

level.” The feminine subject would be נפש. But what could it mean to say that one’s life/person/appetite/desire is heaped up, multiplied, or amassed? Are there any markers in the text that can clarify the meaning? Although scholars have long known that the verb עפל occurs in Num 14:44, most have been hesitant to look there for clues. Haak dismissed it, for example, because “its precise meaning is unclear there.” Others associate the verb in Num with a root beginning with *gayin* instead of *‘ayin* (based on the Arabic *gafala*, “to be heedless/careless/negligent”). What interpreters often fail to appreciate are intertextual connections not just between Hab 1-2 and the tale in Num 14 generally, but Hab 2:4-5 and Num 14:44/Deut 1:41 specifically. Note the following:

- Both feature ער-אנה (how long?) prominently (God uses it twice in Num 14:11 and Hab 1:2 uses it to introduce the whole text).
- Both have people crying out to God (Num 14:1 and Hab 1:2).
- Both feature complaints about dying (Num 14:2 and Hab 1:12 in the consonantal text).
- Both describe the Israelites as leaderless (Num 14:4 and Hab 1:14).
- Both use the verb אנן and indicate its neglect (Num 14:11 and Hab 1:5).
- Both mention the sword of an enemy nation (Num 14:3 and Hab 1:15-7 reconstructed).
- Both make use of the elided oath expressions “[to swear] that” and “if X happens, [may I be cursed]” for rhetorical effect (Num 14:22-23, 28-30, 35 and Hab 2:3).
- Both relate כוח directly to a deity (Num 14:13, 17 and Hab 1:11).
- Both speak of the earth being filled with YHWH’s glory (Num 14:21 and Hab 2:14).

The quantity of correspondences suggests that something about the story in Num 44, whether in oral or written form, lies behind Hab’s message. If so, Hab may be speaking from the perspective of “Israel suffering in the wilderness” while God is responding from the perspective of “the one whose word Israel rejects.” It turns out that there are specific markers in Hab 2 that validate those correspondences. After introductory particles, vv. 4 and 5 each start with words that are difficult to interpret: עפלה and היין. We mentioned עפלה above, but היין is equally troubling. First, there is no discernible connection between “the wine” and what came before. Some might say that is because a new section begins in 2:5. Prinsloo (“Habakkuk 2:5a: Denouncing ‘wine’ or ‘wealth’?”) noted, for example, how many Masoretic MSS begin a new “paragraph” at v. 5, which evinces a tradition of reading vv. 4 and 5 separate. Yet the phrase ואף כי naturally connects the verses together. “From a syntactical and rhetorical perspective, I consider ואף כי a strong syntactical argument against reading v. 5 independently from v. 4” (Balogh, “Tracing the Pre-Massoretic Text of the Book of Habakkuk”). Second, it is hard to know what the statement about wine is trying to communicate. Ward (ICC), for example, argued that “the wine” should be retained because v. 5 was about the oppressor boasting like one filled with wine. Yet among all the wicked acts about which Hab complained prior to this, and in the oracle that mentions drunkenness after it (2:15-17), one fails to find any mention of boasting. Interpreters typically turn to other texts in the HB where an alcoholic stupor is part of a metaphor for violence and/or judgment because all those texts make the metaphor clear (Hab 2:5 does not). Third, it is strange to find the definite article attached to “wine” since the poetic sections of Hab make such rare use of it. What would be the point of it here? Virtually all those who retain “wine” ignore its definite article. Contrary, therefore, to some interpreters, we agree with S. R. Driver that “‘wine’ is out of place here” and that “no intelligible sense” can

be made of the Masoretic text. In 1QpHab, we find **הוֹן** instead of **הִיִּין**. It is clear that the commentator interpreted it as “wealth.” Some translations prefer “wealth” instead of “the wine” (see, for example, NRSV, NJB, or NAB). Yet even if “wealth” makes more sense, it is hazardous to assume that 1QpHab is correct. Balogh (“Tracing the Pre-Massoretic Text”) was wisely cautious when he said, “We cannot ignore the serious possibility that interpretations surviving in ancient textual witnesses (be they translations or copies) do not lead us back to a more original, pre-Massoretic version of the prophecy but are mere relics of the perplexity of confused translators or scribes.” How then can we make sense of the words in vv. 4 and 5? We noted that a verb that is virtually identical to **עפלה** appears in Num 14. Verse 40 provides some context: “They got up early in the morning [and] went up to the tip of the hill [country] [after] saying, ‘[Since] we are here, let’s go up to the place of which YHWH spoke—despite our transgression.’” Verse 44 then says “They ??? (**ויעפלו**) to go up to the tip of the hill [country] even though neither YHWH’s covenant chest nor Mosheh had moved from the center of the encampment.” When read on its own, we have to agree with Haak that the text is not very helpful. The same story, however, is retold in Deut 1:41: “You answered [and] said to me, ‘[Although] we transgressed against YHWH, we [indeed] will go up [and] battle in conformity with everything that our god YHWH commanded us.’ [So] each [of you] buckled [on] his battle gear [and] ??? (**ותהינו**) to go up toward the hill [country].” Notice that **עפל** in Num 14:44 and **הוֹן** (in the Hiphil stem) in Deut 1:41 are synonymous; they inhabit the same place in virtually the same phrase to describe the same situation in two versions of the story:

ויעפלו לעלות אל־ראש ההר they ??? to go up to the tip of the hill [country]

ותהינו לעלת ההרה you ??? to go up toward the hill [country]

Notice also that the verb **הוֹן** in Deut 1:41 is the same as the term that appeared instead of **הִיִּין** in 1QpHab’s quotation of Hab 2:5. Such precise parallels in back-to-back verses with extraordinarily rare terms in two versions of the same tale cannot be coincidental. The variant in 1QpHab must be correct (despite how its commentators interpreted it) and **עפלה** and **הוֹן** must be markers in Hab that point its audience to the specific action described by the synonymous verbs in Num 14:44 and Deut 1:41. We are not the first to come to that conclusion. Half a century before the discovery of the DSS, Houtsma (“Habakuk 2, vs. 4 en 5 Verbeterd”) pointed to the same verses in Num and Deut as evidence that **הִיִּין** was a corrupted form of another word (**הוֹן** or **הִין**) that must be a synonym of **עפלה**. Brownlee (“The Placarded Revelation of Habakkuk”) agreed. Several things may be noted about **עפל** in Num 14:44 and **הוֹן** in Deut 1:41: the action took place prior to the people “going up,” it was done collectively, and it was part of the preparation for war. In other words, the terms could describe “mobilizing” or “mustering” for battle. **ס** clearly understood **הוֹן** in that sense; it used the verb **συναθροίζω** in Deut 1:41, which might generally mean “to gather/assemble,” but is more specifically used to describe troops gathering for battle (see 1 Kgs 20:1 and 1 Sam 4:1 in the Greek). In Num 14:44, **ס** used the verb **διαβάζομαι**, which means “to force through/penetrate” or “compel/urge.” That sense is captured well by Levine (*Numbers 1-20*), who said that the Hebrew “might be rendered, literally, ‘they surged up, stormed’” (a rendering that also

reflects the sense of “amassing/piling up” militarily). If διαβιαζομαι means “to force/urge contrary to,” then something like “to act rebellious/defiant/mutinous” could be intended. That is the meaning of διαβιαζομαι preferred by GLS (to act deliberately against). It is also supported by Deut 1:43, which comments upon the act in Deut 1:41 by saying “You opposed the mouth of YHWH [when] you acted defiantly (וַתִּזְדָּר) [and] went up toward the hill [country].” There are, therefore, a couple renderings that work well in the Hebrew, are consistent across texts, and are supported by one or more ancient versions:

Text	Option 1
Num 14:44	They mustered to go up to the tip of the hill [country].
Hab 2:4	See [how] mustered is his life/will/desire?
Deut 1:41	You mobilized to go up toward the hill [country].
Hab 2:5	How much more mobilized then [the] betrayer!

Text	Option 2
Num 14:44	They rebelled [by] going up to the tip of the hill [country].
Hab 2:4	See [how] rebellious is his life/will/desire?
Deut 1:41	You defiantly went up toward the hill [country].
Hab 2:5	How much more defiant then [the] betrayer!

The first option makes sense in Hab 2:4-5 because it participates in the use of combat language and imagery elsewhere in Hab. However, it is awkward to speak of one’s life, will, or desire “mustered” for battle. The second option makes sense in Hab 2:4-5 because it parallels the terms that occur after עָפַלָה and הִוֵּן (“rebellious” is similar to “deviating” and “defiant” is similar to “betraying”). It would also agree with the sense of the verb in Deut 1:43 (although the verb there may have been chosen because it was synonymous with מָרַר, not עָפַל and הִוֵּן). The people in Hab’s time would be “mustered” or “rebellious” because they mistrust and/or reject the original oracle, turning to some power (perhaps their own or that of Egypt) to save them from Babylon. In either case, God’s response directly addresses the prophet’s concerns: first by emphatically declaring that the divine word is trustworthy (v. 3), then by reassuring the prophet and the audience of his vision that those who fall under judgment deserve it whereas those who trust it will live/prosper/flourish (v. 4), and, finally, by describing the fate of the oppressor (v. 5 and following). Ultimately, the interpreter must decide which option is more likely. We chose the second. Our explanation falls under what Emerton (“The Textual and Linguistic Problems of Habakkuk 2:4-5”) called “theories that find in *uppēlāh* a word for a blameworthy person.” He rejected such theories because “We expect to find in the verse, not only a mention of the evildoer, but a statement that he will be overthrown.” We do not think that Emerton’s criticism is justified. Since the wicked *are already perishing* and the means by which the wicked would be dealt with was already addressed in the original oracle (1:5-11), there is simply no reason why it should need to be stated. What *does* need to be stated is that God is setting the wrongs right (the primary concern of Hab). If neither of the two options above are appealing, then Scott’s argument (“A New Approach to Habakkuk 2:4-5a”) is probably the best alternative (for this verse at least): “It is suggested that the Masoretic reading *uppēlā* is formed from the masculine noun *‘ōpel* with the termination *-ā* locale. . . .

Thus *uppêlâ* would be the toponym for that fortified acropolis in Jerusalem which in English transliteration is called ‘Ophel.’ . . . Having received this oracle of Judah’s peril, the prophet takes up his post as a watchman atop Jerusalem’s battlements (2:1). This mention of the city’s fortifications provides a smooth transition to a mention of Ophel.” Such a translation would look like this: “Look at [the] Ophel! Its life/will/desire deviates from it!” (for instances where “Ophel” describes Jerusalem or Zion, see Isa 32:14 and Mik 4:8).

It deviates from it! — That is, “It does not go straight in it.” Virtually all English translators craft their rendering of v. 4 on the premise that since the root of יָשַׁר is “to be upright” (that is, to be morally or ethically good), the verb must convey that sense as well. However, the meaning of a verb comes more from its usage than its root (see Barr’s *The Semantics of Biblical Language* for more on the “root fallacy”). Until Janzen’s article, virtually no one thought to question the conventional premise. Janzen pointed out that “The customary rendering ‘his soul is not upright in him’ is really quite unnatural in Hebrew; indeed, it is so unlikely as to be an impossible or at least an outlandish rendering.” That is because “There is no analogy for such a stative use of the verb *yšr* . . . in the Hebrew Bible.” Only the nominal and adjectival forms deal with “uprightness” or “straightforwardness” and those forms are never used with נָפֶשׁ. “If standard Hebrew usage is any guide, then, we must suppose that the writer, had he wished to say ‘his [seat of moral and religious character] is not upright in him,’ would have written a sentence containing the noun *lēb/lēbāb*, to produce something like *lō’ yāšār libbô bēqirbô*.” Janzen would go on to argue that the verb יָשַׁר deals with “locomotion along a path” or “making straight such a path.” Therefore, the verb must mean something like “to go straight” or “act in the right way,” not “to be upright.” Renz (“An Emendation of Hab 2:4a in the Light of Hab 1:5”) defended the traditional interpretation of יָשַׁר. Let’s examine its usage. The verb occurs in the Qal, the Piel or Pual, and the Hiphil stems, and uses *bet* as a helping particle. In the Qal stem, יָשַׁר occurs with or without the expression “the eyes of X.” When used with that expression, the verb indicates that someone views or estimates a person/thing to be pleasing/right (i.e., יָשַׁר + ב + “the eyes of X” means “X views favorably”). When used without that expression, the verb means that someone or something “moves straight” (1 Sam 6:12). In no case does the verb appear in the Qal stem in the HB with a stative sense (to be upright). In the Piel and Hiphil stems, יָשַׁר means “to direct,” “level/smooth out,” or “keep straight.” The Pual is used in one place to describe gold plates that “are smoothed” over carvings (1 Kgs 6:35). If one wanted to read Hab 2:4 as “to not be straight/right,” one would have to repoint the verb as an adjective. Yet the adjective is never negated by לֹא. Instead, לֹא negates a verb. In 2 Kings 16:2 and 2 Chr 28:1, for instance, the לֹא in לֹא-עָשָׂה הַיָּשָׁר (he did not do what is right) modifies the verb, not the adjective. Renz thought that the one instance of יָשַׁר in the Qal without “the eyes of X” was “hardly sufficient evidence to demand a distancing of the verb in the qal from the related nominal and adjectival forms.” However, apart from any positive evidence in the HB that the Qal verb functions like the nominal and adjectival forms, we have no reason to doubt that the sense in 1 Sam 6:12 shouldn’t apply to any other use of the same language. Renz based his counterargument on texts that originated centuries after those in the canonical corpus were finalized (Jubilees, Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, and the Hebrew version of Sirach) when the language had undergone significant and widespread changes. His objection, therefore, is anachronistic. The evidence in the HB forces one to concede Janzen’s claim: “to not be upright”

makes no sense of the Hebrew. If interpreted from the Qal stem, **ב** + **יֵשֶׁר** + **לֹא** must mean either “to not accept/be pleased with” (assuming elision of “the eyes”) or “to not go straight in/along” (i.e., “to deviate from”). If interpreted in the passive sense (Pual), it could mean “to not be directed by.” For good reason, therefore, **ש** represented **יֵשֶׁר** with εὐδοκᾶω, meaning “to be content with” or “find pleasure in” (LEH). Another issue that needs to be clarified is the referent of the masculine singular suffix on **בו** (and **בְּאִמּוֹנָתוֹ**). Again, Janzen provided a good summary: “The Book of Habakkuk is to be understood as centering in . . . the debate within the individual prophetic consciousness as to the authenticity of the prophetic experience and, more radically, as to the reliability of the God disclosed at the center of that experience.” In fact, Hab is introduced as a **מִשְׁאֵל**—a prophetic explanation of an earlier oracle in light of current circumstances (see *The [divine] clarification* in 1:1). More specifically, this new section of Hab began with “the vision” as its primary referent and the last masculine singular pronominal suffix on a preposition (**הַכֹּהֵן־לִי**) had “the vision” as its referent. Therefore, we have every reason to think that “the vision” will continue to be the referent of pronominal suffixes on prepositions in this verse. “The antecedent is understood as the vision, since it is the reliability of the vision which is in question” (Haak). **ט** altered the suffixes from singular to plural to make it clear that the suffixes refer to the words spoken by God to the prophet: “Behold, the wicked think that all *these things* are not so, but the righteous shall live by the truth of *them*” (Cathcart and Gordon, italics added). Hunn (“Habakkuk 2:4b in its Context: How Far Off Was Paul?”) argued against that interpretation for three primary reasons. First, she said that the verb **אֲמֵן** appeared in 1:5 because “The Lord tells Habakkuk that he will not believe what he (the Lord) is about to do.” That situation was then echoed by the use of **אֲמוֹנָה** in 2:4. But if the verb in 1:5 “speaks of Habakkuk’s belief in God’s word, not the dependability of that word,” then the noun in 2:4 must do so as well. However, Hunn overlooked the grammar. The referent of the original oracle is *plural*, not singular, which means that Hab was not being addressed personally (i.e., it had nothing to do with what Hab himself believed). Hunn also misconstrued the point. The statement in 1:5 that the people would not believe the oracle if they only heard it *is not Hab’s complaint*. Hab’s complaint is that the oracle he heard and the events that he sees do not align! Therefore, it is precisely “the dependability of that word” that is at issue. Second, Hunn argued that if the suffix on **בו** meant “in him” (that is, in “the wicked”), the suffix on **בְּאִמּוֹנָתוֹ** should, likewise, refer to “him” (that is, “the righteous”). If, however, **יֵשֶׁר** in the Qal plus *bet* means either “to view favorably” or “to move straight” (see above), then **בו** would not mean “in him” (likewise, **בְּאִמּוֹנָתוֹ** would not mean “in his faithfulness”). Finally, Hunn thought that the suffixes couldn’t refer to the vision because the vision was eschatological (i.e., it didn’t refer to events in Hab’s lifetime). Even though it was a very ancient practice to interpret Hab eschatologically, such a reading was not originally intended (see v. 3). Furthermore, even though the commentator of 1QpHab viewed the text eschatologically, s/he applied it to present-day circumstances (i.e., events happening in the commentator’s lifetime). Ultimately, therefore, Hunn’s objections are not compelling if one is interested in the sense of the text when it was first composed. To make it clear that the referent of both suffixes is “the vision,” we render each suffix as “it.”

2:5 As with the very first oracle (1:5-11), there is a question about where the divine voice ends and prophetic commentary begins. Again, that detail is rarely represented by English translators. Typically, they treat the entire textual unit as divine speech. Sweeney, however, noted that Hab 2:2-20 “comprises two basic parts: the report of YHWH’s response in vv. 2-4 and Habakkuk’s explication of that response in vv. 5-20.” It is obvious that the oracle shifts to the voice of the prophet since there are third-person references to YHWH at numerous points. But how did Sweeney locate that shift in v. 5? First, he noted that “It is the role of the prophet to explain the meaning of YHWH’s response.” Then he looked for a place where that could occur. Verse 5 simply works as an explication of the deity’s statement. Second, Sweeney noticed that v. 5 was intimately connected to vv. 6-20. Therefore, if any change in speaker were to occur, it would have to occur before v. 6. Sweeney’s analysis is a good start. By comparing the second oracle with the first, we should be able to identify more elements that reveal the prophet’s voice. In Hab 1:7, we noticed that the shift to the prophet’s voice involved several elements. One was the increased use of the *wayyiqtol* verbal form, which doesn’t appear frequently in poetry. The first occurrence of a *wayyiqtol* in Hab after the prose introduction is here in v. 5 (וַיֹּאסֶף). That word, in fact, is identical to one that alerted us to the prophet’s voice in 1:9. Inverted verbal forms then continue throughout 2:5-20 even though the text does not switch back to prose. Another thing to note is that the shift from divine to prophetic voice in 1:7 involved using an independent personal pronoun (הוּא) to take what had previously been said and expand on it. The same thing happens in 2:5. Therefore, we agree with Sweeney that the shift in voice occurs in this verse, but would suggest that the shift doesn’t happen until וְהוּא. We have a couple reasons for that suggestion. First, if one disregards the Masoretic accentuation, the content in Hab 2:5 can be neatly organized into two tricola. One would end with נַפְשִׁי and the other would begin with וְהוּא. According to Watson, “The tricolon does have the function of *demarcating stanzas* (or segments of poetry), coming either at the beginning or at the end, and sometimes in both places.” Therefore, the first tricolon could serve to end the divine speech while the second tricolon could begin the prophetic commentary. Second, while it is obvious that v. 5 speaks about the Babylonian oppressor, the one referred to as “rebellious” in v. 4 is not so easy to identify. The use of language drawn directly from one of the stories of Israel’s rebellion in the wilderness (Num 14 and Deut 1) makes it likely that the rebellious one is the nation of Judah and/or the wicked ones therein. If, therefore, the divine voice ceased at the end of v. 4, we would be left with a response from the deity that didn’t actually mention Babylon, whose wickedness sparked Hab’s complaint in the first place! While it is certainly possible that the prophet had to speak up about Babylon because YHWH didn’t, the deity’s emphatic response in previous verses makes that unlikely.

defiant — Perhaps Ward (ICC) said it best: “By common consent of critics the first couplet of this verse is corrupt.” According to the Masoretic text, which is supported by \mathfrak{T} and \mathfrak{B} , the word here is דִּיין (the wine). Since, however, that doesn’t make sense, numerous emendations have been proposed. Some, like Graham (“A Note on Habakkuk 2:4-5”) or Powis Smith (AAT) substituted יַחֲיֶה (he will live) for דִּיין. Wellhausen and *BHS* suggested הוּי (Oh [no]!). Haak read דִּיין as דִּיין (the mire/muck). \mathfrak{G} lacks any reference to alcohol (κατωινωμενος, which appears in many Greek editions, is a modern emendation that altered the Greek so that it

would conform better with the Masoretic version) and 1QpHab's quotation has הָוִין instead of הָיִין , which it interpreted as “wealth.” We believe that הָוִין is more authentic than הָיִין and that it means something like “to be defiant” or “mobilize” (see **rebellious** in 2:4). As mentioned by Houtsma, its form is probably a *qattāl* adjective (הָוִין) like קָנָא (zealous/jealous) or נָגַח (charging/goring). But if הָיִין is a corruption of הָוִין , how did it get that way? Since *yod* and *waw* are often indistinguishable in ancient texts (like 1QpHab!), it is quite possible that הָוִין was misread as הָיִין . “The later discovery of a shorter spelling for ‘wine’ in the Samaritan Ostraca, as simply *YN*, has shown how an original *HYN* could be misinterpreted as meaning ‘[the] wine.’ This misunderstanding would naturally lead to the adoption of the longer spelling *HYYN*. Similarly, an original *HWN* could be misinterpreted as meaning *hôn*, ‘wealth’” (Brownlee, “The Placarded Revelation”). What would it mean for Babylon to be “defiant”? Probably that it violates the purpose for which it was raised up (to establish divine order). Other translations that accept with our interpretation include NJPST and LEB.

malcontent — The verb נָוֶה is usually interpreted as a denominative of נֹוֶה (meadow/pasture/dwelling-place/abode), meaning “to dwell/abide” or “make a home.” That interpretation is reflected in the Talmud: “R. Mari said: One who is proud is not acceptable even to his own household, for it is said. *A haughty man abideth not*, this means. he abideth not in his own abode” (*b. Baba Bathra* 98a, Soncino, italics original). Such a reading is questionable, however, because the noun refers specifically to the dwelling-place of flocks and shepherds and is usually only applied to people when they are described metaphorically as those animals and caretakers, but there is nothing in this text to indicate that metaphor. Furthermore, none of the ancient versions understood the term that way. That interpretation also presumes that this verse should supply a judgment for the “haughty man” when there is nothing else in the verse to suggest it and the next verse introduces the first execration oracle, which provides an explicit judgment on Babylon for the issues raised here. Related to that interpretation is the idea that, since they have no home, the Babylonians would “never be at rest” (ESV), be “restless” (NET), or be “forever on the move” (NJB). That idea suffers from the same issues raised above, but has one more hitch: it presumes that נָוֶה is either a by-form of נֹוֶה (to settle down/rest) or a corruption of it. Another idea related to the denominative reading and suffering from the same problems is that the verb idiomatically describes the ruin of one’s house. Leiser, for example, translated it “whose house will not stand” and Scott related it to a Babylonian verb that means “to be abandoned/lie in ruins.” נָוֶה interpreted נָוֶה as περαίνω (to complete/finish/accomplish). Virtually no translator follows נָוֶה . Instead, they tend to draw from an Arabic root (*nwy*) meaning “to aim at/intend/carry out.” Examples include REB (still less will he *reach his goal*) and LEB (will not succeed). נָוֶה based its interpretation on נָאֵר (to be lovely/adorn). Southwell (“A Note on Habakkuk 2:4”) interpreted נָוֶה from an Arabic root (*nwh*) meaning “to be high.” If true, the verb could mean “to glorify/elevate/exalt.” Some people point to a term in Exod 15:2 (אֲנַחֵהוּ) as an example of the same verb and many of the same interpretations are applied to it. Most translators render the verb in Exod 15:2 as “to praise/glorify/exalt” and appeal to the Arabic *nwh*. Some early English translators rendered the verb in Exod 15:2 as “I will prepare him a habitation/tabernacle” (the denominative interpretation in the Hiphil stem). A few read it as נָאֵר (see Durham’s *Exodus*). It is far more likely, however, that the verb in Exod 15:2 is a

corruption of יָדָה (to praise/glorify) and should not be used as a basis for interpretation in Hab (note the similarity between אָנְדָהוּ and אָנְדָהוּ). Since few if any of the above interpretations work in Hab 2:5, some translators emend the text. Wellhausen suggested that the word was originally יָרַוָה, from the verb יָרַו, meaning “to quench/drench/fill (with liquid).” While that might make sense of the Masoretic text’s “wine,” it suffers from many of the same problems as interpretations that require no emendation. Considering that the quotation in 1QpHab agrees with the traditional Hebrew text, we agree with Emerton: “It is hazardous to emend the word simply because it is a *hapax legomenon*.” Instead, we prefer to interpret the verb according to its poetic sense—an admittedly subjective business, but one in which many interpreters engage. Some think that נִוָה should contrast with חִיָה in 2:4. Note, for example, Alter (prosper), NRSV (endure), and Smith, WBC (survive). צ’s use of קָיָם, which means “to last/endure/live/stay alive” in the Dt-stem (CAL), would seem to support that interpretation. However, we agree with Stonehouse: “What we want is really some verb corresponding in thought to וְלֹא יִשְׂבַע.” The translators of S agreed. They render it with a verb that means “to be sated/have enough/be satisfied” (CAL). Likewise, Ward (ICC) rendered it “to fill.” Our intuition runs along the same lines: just as Death is never sated/has enough, so Babylon is never satisfied/content with the lives, possessions, or lands it seizes—it keeps swallowing (1:13) and its sword continues to slay (1:17). Poetically, the phrase לֹא יִנְוָה (he is not content/satisfied) functions adjectivally (which is why it is joined with a conjunction to יִדְהִיר) to tell us something about the character of the “man.” In other words, נִוָה is a stative verb; it tells us what kind of person he *is*, not what he *does*. Let us presume for a moment that the verb in Exod 15:2 is נִוָה instead of יָדָה. Would our interpretation make sense there? One function of the Hiphil is to take a stative verb and make it declarative. Therefore, אָנְדָהוּ could be rendered “I will declare him satisfying” or, more simply, “I will approve/esteem/admire him.” Such a rendering would seem to be “satisfying” both in that text and here.

the nations . . . populations — Each word at the end of the final two cola are poetically structured to ring with a rhythmic end-rhyme: הַגִּיִּים (*haggôyîm*) and הָעַמִּים (*hā‘ammîm*). To mimic that sound-play (and keep the words a similar length), we render them as “the nations” and “populations” (see **be dazzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

2:6 **It is certainly** — The prophet has a penchant for using interrogatives rhetorically. As in the previous cases (1:2, 12, 17), this statement is an exclamation, not an inquiry. In our opinion, הֲלוֹא (is it not?) is used to produce a statement of assurance: “it is certainly!” For more evidence that the voice of the prophet is speaking, see our opening remarks on 2:5.

toward him . . . toward him — One structural feature of the verse is the prominent placement of עָלָיו both at the beginning and end. Although the עָל could be translated differently in each case (*against* him . . . *upon* him), we show the structure by using the same rendering.

conjure a mimicking [retaliation] — The fact that a *mashal* is not well understood can be seen by looking at how the term is translated in Hab. Three different renderings are typical: those that stress the poetic or lyrical quality of the expression (such as Henderson’s “ode,” Möller’s “poem,” or Martínez and Tigchelaar’s “verses”), those that treat the term as a specific sort of

wise saying (such as KJV's "parable," NKJV's "proverb," or Alter's "adage"), and those that believe that the term refers to an utterance of mockery (such as NRSV's "taunt," Walker and Lund's "by-word," or Fenton's "satires"). Occasionally, two of the three are combined (as in NASB's "taunt-song" or Lim's "taunting parable"). The three typical renderings are derived from the three contexts in which the *mashal* is found in the HB (Wisdom literature, prophetic literature, and poetic songs or discourses). All three are in some sense correct. It is true, for instance, that a *mashal* is composed in an elevated, poetic language, but not all texts with elevated, poetic language (like prophetic texts) are *mashals*. It is also true that a *mashal*, like a proverb, can teach people how to behave by revealing the consequences of inappropriate behavior, but not all *mashals* are meant to instruct or influence behavior. Finally, a *mashal* can contain a negative statement about a person or group, but there is nothing to suggest that its purpose was to make fun of someone. Ultimately, therefore, something more specific is required if translators are going to adequately capture the sense of the term in Hab. *Mashal* comes from מִשַּׁל, which means "to be/become like," "resemble," or "mimic." Undertaking a study of words based on the root is tricky because such words can look identical to those that are based on a different root meaning "to rule," "reign," "govern," or "have dominion." Nevertheless, there is enough evidence both in Hebrew and in other Semitic languages (like Arabic and Akkadian) to show that S. R. Driver was correct to say that *mashal* "means properly a *likeness* or *representation*" (italics original). It is for good reason, therefore, that YLT rendered it as "simile." But what does it mean to "lift up" a prophetic "likeness"? Although Allen Godbey ("The Hebrew *Mašal*") was overeager when he sought to explain virtually all symbolic acts performed by the prophets as a *mashal*, to presume some act of "war-medicine" behind almost every reference to a *mashal*, or to reinterpret almost every instance of the verb "to rule" (מִשַּׁל) as "to represent/become like," his understanding of African cultures and sociology led him to an important observation that has not been appreciated by most interpreters: a *mashal* is not just an utterance, but an act with transformative power. It is, in fact, a speech act. The point of the prophetic *mashal* is to call out wrongdoing and call forth its "likeness" in divine retribution. In other words, by speaking the prophetic *mashal*, one is actively engaging in its realization. What makes the *mashal* different from other prophetic utterances is how its judgment "mimics" the behavior that is condemned (the one who plunders will be plundered, the one who does injurious acts to secure their household will find that household turning against him, the one who uses violence to fortify his cities will have fire destroy his populaces, the one who strips lands of their cities and natural resources will find his cities falling to ruin and nature rising against him, and the one who depends upon a god that cannot speak will be hushed by the God of heaven and earth). Therefore, even if one is tempted to render *mashal* as "taunt" due to its parallel with מְלִיצָה (see below), to use that label for this kind of utterance is to severely distort what this utterance is *doing*. The verb נָשָׂא (to lift up) is used idiomatically alongside *mashal*. In Wisdom texts, the verb probably means "to recite." In poetic songs or discourses, it probably means "to chant." In prophetic texts, where the utterance creates a reciprocal likeness, the verb probably means "to enact." To capture the sense of the whole phrase, we render it "to conjure a mimicking [retaliation]." In some situations, a symbolic action is part of the *mashal* as seen in Ezek 24:3: מִשַּׁל אֶל-בֵּית-הָמָרִי מִשַּׁל, "mimic before the House of Obstinacy a mimicking [retaliation]." In that case, what the prophet does or what the prophet has the people do is then explained as a

“representation” of what will happen to them. Godbey was correct to say that “Such men as Ezekiel were powerful magicians, who were not simply warning of ruin but performing terrible incantations to bring it about.” It is no wonder that Brownlee (*The Midrash Pesher of Habakkuk: Text, Translation, Exposition with an Introduction*) should say, “If . . . one assigns the meaning of magical power to *māšāl*, he may wish to translate Hab 2:6a in the Bible as follows: Shall they not all intone *an incantation* against him?” (italics original).

accusatory — מליצה comes from לייץ, which is usually rendered “to scorn” or “mock.” מליצה would, therefore, refer to “scorn” or “mockery.” If true, this would be evidence that the parallel word משל has a similar meaning. Some translators, however, noticed that the masculine form in Gen 42:23 couldn’t have that meaning: “But they did not know that Yoseph was listening because the מליץ [was] between them.” Virtually all translators render that מליץ as “interpreter” (assuming that Yoseph’s brothers were speaking with someone in a different language) and explain the Hiphil form of לייץ as “to interpret/give meaning to.” Translators influenced by that reading may then import the idea into Hab as seen, for example, in the renderings of Martínez and Tigchelaar (*explaining* riddles) or Ward, ICC (its *meaning* a riddle). Several scholars, however, have pointed out the very tenuous, if not dubious, rationale behind those readings. Canney, for example, questioned whether “one and the same root (לייץ) should mean in the Qal ‘to scorn’ and in the Hiphil ‘to interpret’” (“The Hebrew מליץ”). He argued that “to scorn” was “a pure guess” and suggested that לייץ meant “to speak loosely” and לייץ referred to a “free-talker” or “babblers.” After examining other places where מליץ occurs, he concluded that “There is no reason to suppose that in biblical Hebrew מליץ ever means ‘interpreter’” and that it must refer to an “intermediary” or “ambassador” instead. Richardson (“Some Notes on לייץ and its Derivatives”) took Canney’s observations further. After a long survey of verses in the HB with the verb לייץ or its derivatives, he concluded that there was nothing to demand the meaning “scorn” and that something like “to talk freely/loosely” or “babble” would fit just as well or better in most contexts. When it came to מליצה, however, he proposed that it was derived from מליץ (to slide/slip): “We thus would understand *mēlîṣa* to be ‘an alluding saying, i.e., one that slips away’ or in a sense ‘a slippery saying.’” Our analysis of the textual evidence leads us to the conclusion that לייץ has a wide semantic range that includes the following nuances:

- “To speak authoritatively” either because someone is an official representative of another (i.e., a “spokesman”) or because their insight is so highly valued that it is passed down as a traditional form of learning. See, for example, Gen 42:23 and Isa 43:27.
- “To accuse” or “denounce” when used in legal contexts, whether literal or figurative, or those that call for some kind of retributive judgment. See, for example, Prov 3:34, 22:10, Yob 16:20, and Isa 29:20.
- “To complain” or “whine” when used in contexts that indicate foolishness or describe attributes detrimental to wisdom. See, for example, Prov 13:1, 14:6, 20:1, and 21:11.
- “To boast” or “bluster” when used in contexts that indicate pride or haughtiness. See, for example, Prov 21:24 and Isa 28:14.

Since much of the term's meaning is derived from its usage, it is unhelpful to reduce all those senses to one that doesn't adequately capture any of them (to scorn). By looking at the contexts in which we find מליצה, we are now able to identify its nuances. In Prov 1:6, which is part of the introduction to a large body of wisdom sayings, we find מליצה paired with משל, which must refer to a "proverb," and חידת, which must refer to "arcane lore" (see below). Therefore, מליצה should have the sense of an "authoritative saying" (i.e., a "citation" or "adage"). Here in Hab, מליצה is parallel with משל, which is an utterance that gives form to divine judgment. Therefore, מליצה must refer to a formal "denouncement" or "accusation." The question is how the term functions in the phrase מליצה חידות. Either the two nouns exist in apposition (our preference) or the two nouns form a statement of hendiadys (preferred by Watson). In either case, the expression is best represented by rendering one of the two nouns adjectivally.

runes — Or "ciphers" (i.e., mysterious poetic words). חידות (or חידת *defectiva*) is usually rendered "riddles" because virtually half of its occurrences in the HB are in Judges 14, where Samson asks the people to figure out the meaning of his coded statement. Although "riddles" makes perfect sense of that context, the choice of "riddle" elsewhere is both clumsy and questionable. Generally speaking, חידת refers to a message that is mysterious or coded, but the type of coding or what makes it mysterious is often determined by context. For example, 1 Kgs 10 states that when the Queen of Sheba heard about King Solomon's wisdom, she came to test him "in/with חידות." Virtually no English translator renders the term there as "riddles"; rather, they tend to render it as "difficult/hard questions." The questions are difficult or hard (i.e., mysterious) because they require a great deal of learning to answer. In other words, the Queen of Sheba is testing Solomon's knowledge of "arcane lore." The ability to peer into the mysteries of the world and understand them through advanced learning and obscure arts was a skill sought after by many kings in the ancient NE. Proverbs 25:2, for example, says "The prestige of Elohim [comes from] hiding a thing, but the prestige of kings [comes from] its fathoming." It is not surprising, therefore, to find kings boasting about their ability to understand obscure things. Assurbanipal, King of Assyria, had this to say:

"Marduk, master of the gods, granted me as a gift a receptive mind and ample (power of) thought. Nabû, the universal scribe, made me a present of his wisdom. . . . The art of the Master Adapa I learned—the hidden treasure of all scribal knowledge, the signs of heaven and earth. . . . I have studied the heavens with the learned masters of oil divination, I have solved the laborious (problems of) division and multiplication, which were not clear, I have read the artistic script of Sumer (and) the dark Akkadian, which is hard to master, taking pleasure in the reading of the stones from before the flood."

—Dedicatory inscription of Assurbanipal from tablet fragments K3050 and K2694, translated by Luckenbill in *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, Vol. 2

Considering the inherent wisdom context in Proverbs, it is highly likely that the same meaning applies in Prov 1:6 as it did in 1 Kings 10: דברי חכמים וחידתם (the sayings of sages and their arcane lore). A different sense can be seen in Num 12:8, where God says that he speaks to Moses literally and openly (that is, "mouth to mouth" and "[by] sight") as opposed to "in/with חידת." Most translators render the term there as "riddles," which doesn't make sense (the deity isn't in the habit of speaking in riddles to anyone). Instead, the term probably refers to

figurative or metaphoric statements. Since such statements are *ubiquitous* in divine oracles, it should not be surprising to find a technical term that captures that sense when it relates to divine communications. When a חִידָה turns into a lengthy story, it becomes a “mystery story” or “parable.” In Ezek 17:2, for example, the deity tells the prophet to “parabolize a parable” (חִזֵּק חִידָה). Here in Hab, there is no lengthy story, but there are places where Babylon is formally denounced using cryptic words (“runes” or “ciphers”) that require decoding.

not his his — This is a repetition of an alliterative phrase in 1:6. The alliteration is mimicked here as it was there. Ewald comes close to our rendering with “what is not his.”

long enough! — For “long enough!” instead of “how long?”, see **Long enough, YHWH!** in 1:2.

payments — At first glance, there seems to be a disconnect in the first execration oracle. One part describes plunder and spoil and the other describes pledges/collateral and creditors/borrowers. How are they related? Some believe that the oracle is responding to unjust financial practices. If so, then the references to “plunder” and “spoil” are figurative and the point of the oracle is to correct Babylon’s financial dealings by using hyperbolic rhetoric to label those dealings as violent and corrupt. Möller seemed to accept that interpretation: “The one committing financial misdeeds will be punished by his own victims.” If that were the case, then a translator is obligated to represent as accurate as possible the financial activity indicated by עֲבֵטִי and נֶשֶׁךְ. That isn’t hard to do. נֶשֶׁךְ is a participle of the verb נָשַׁךְ, which means “to give or charge interest.” Therefore, one could render it as “creditor” or “debtor” (see the next verse for more). עֲבֵטִי must be derived from עֲבַט, which, in Deut 24:10-13, describes something that is promised as “security/pledge/collateral” against a loan or debt. The text says that the עֲבַט should not be held by the creditor overnight (it should remain in the possession of the borrower and only be seized if or when the borrower defaulted). The kind of security that was possessed by the creditor and then returned when the loan or debt was paid off was called חֶבֶל (see Deut 24:6 or Ezek 18:7, 12, 16). Since the עֲבַט is described in Deut 24 as a שְׁלֵמָה (cloak/robe/mantle), it is clear that the debt was small. As a reduplicated form of עֲבַט, however, עֲבֵטִי probably represents a far more substantial pledge. Since the עֲבַט was not supposed to be held by the creditor, the oracle could be denouncing the forceful and systemic possession of nonpossessory collateral. Others believe that the oracle has nothing to do with taking out loans, going in debt, or giving or taking pledges, but is responding to actual plundering and despoiling, in which case “pledges/security” and “creditors/borrowers” are *figurative*. “The reference to getting rich on pledges . . . is a figure for plunder by conquest” (Andersen, AYB). In that case, the composer would be using cryptic language that denounces Babylon for robbing the nations. The sort of robbery involved—either the reception of tribute from nations that surrender or the forceful acquisition of property and possessions from those that don’t—would be figuratively referred to as “pledges” and those from whom it was taken would be figuratively referred to as “debtors.” If we presume that the execration oracles were composed for their placement in Hab as opposed to having some sort of preexistence, then the second interpretation makes far more sense—not only because the nations weren’t offering pledges to Babylon (or vice versa), but because these oracles are described as חִידוֹת (mysterious poetic words). Andersen agreed: “The looting of the nations (v. 8a) is a theme closer to the prayers in Habakkuk 1 than getting rich on pledges. The punishment also fits the former and not the

later.” If the text is translated too literally, the reader will think that this is really about pledges; if translated too loosely, the reader will miss the fact that the text is speaking figuratively. To convey the mysterious nature of the terms, we opt for renderings that are ambiguous enough to be interpreted in several ways: “payments” for עבטיט and “those who owe you” for נשך. Some of the versions rendered עבטיט as a compound of עב (cloud) and טיט (clay), meaning something like “thick clay” (8HevXII gr, S, and T). Many early English translations did likewise. However, עבטיט was not meant to be bifurcated any more than צלמות (blackness/darkness/gloom) was meant to be split into “the shadow of” (צל) “death” (מות).

2:7 **It will, no doubt,** — The prophet has a penchant for using interrogatives rhetorically. As in the previous cases (1:2, 12, 17; 2:6), this statement is an exclamation, not an inquiry. In our opinion, הלא (is it not?) is used to produce a statement of affirmation: “without doubt!”

who owe you . . . who kowtow you — Or “your owers . . . your kowtowers.” Notice how the oral composer or scribal artisan used the same pronominal suffix to create an end-rhyme for each colon (-êkā, -êkā). Many commentators make a big deal about נשך having a double meaning: “to bite” and “to charge or pay interest.” Just because the verb means “to bite” in one context (when speaking of snakes) and “to charge or pay interest” in others (when speaking of financial transactions) does not, however, mean that the verb conveys both at the same time (imagine a snake bite as an interest charge!). A double meaning arises from the way that the term is used in this particular context. In this context, the participle נשך is a cryptic or coded word that speaks figuratively of those who have been plundered/despoiled by Babylon (see **runes** and **payments** in v. 6). They are likened to people who have borrowed from or owe money to Babylon (i.e., “debtors”). The oracle makes it clear that the punishment will mimic the crime: the plunderer will be plundered. The double meaning, therefore, arises from the notion that those who must “pay back” their debt to Babylon will get “payback” for their treatment. To represent that word-play, we render נשך as “those who owe you” (they owe Babylon retribution as much as they might owe it tribute!). מזעזע comes from the verb זוע. Virtually all translators believe that the verb means “to shake,” “tremble,” or “quake,” and, by extension, “to stir” (as in Geneva), “vex” (as in KJV), “disturb” (as in HCSB), “shiver” (as in NJB), “terrify” (as in NET), “torment” (as in Orelli), or “oppress” (as in Ward, ICC). Notice that the form of the word is reduplicated, which gives it more intensity (see **If it dilly-dallies, [may I be cursed]!** in 2:3). S. R. Driver, therefore, explained the meaning as “to toss to and fro.” Möller thought it meant “to shake violently.” Almost all such renderings, however, are based on Arabic or Aramaic cognates. The versions had a difficult time with the term as well. V rendered it *lacerantes*, meaning “harassers,” “destroyers,” “slanderers,” or “manglers” (DRC translated it “that shall tear thee”). G rendered it επιβουλοι, meaning “schemers/plotters” or “betrayers” (NETS translated it “those who plot against you”). As always, the best way to interpret a word is to look at its usage. Qohelet 12:1-7 features a metaphorical story about a person growing old. The reader/listener is told to cherish his youth before his body deteriorates. Verse 3 describes it as a day in which “the ‘house protectors’ (arms) יזעו, and the ‘strong members’ (legs) are bent/crooked, and the ‘grinders’ (teeth) are useless/ineffective because they are few, and the ‘windowpanes’ (eyes) are dark.” In that verse, “house protectors” is parallel to “strong members” and the verb זוע is parallel with ערה (to be bent/crooked). The parallelism

indicates that **זוע** refers to a “folding” or “collapsing” of the arms (so that they can no longer protect the body) just as the legs become “bent/crooked” (so that they can no longer support the body). In Est 5:9, Haman is infuriated when Mordakai, who was in the King’s Gate, did not “get up/rise” or **זע** because of him. Haman then went home, sent for his friends, and boasted about his greatness. Obviously, Haman felt that he had not been respected by Mordakai—that, in fact, he had been dishonored! Virtually all translations render that **זוע** as “to tremble,” “stir,” or “show fear.” If we use the sense of **זוע** in Qoh 12:3, then the text would mean that Mordakai did not “bend,” “bow down,” or “genuflect” in Haman’s presence. When used alongside “to get up/rise,” the two terms would function as a merism indicating that Mordakai did *nothing at all* to show honor and deference. But why would that be problematic? And how do we know that **זוע** doesn’t have some other sense in Esther? Because Est 3:2 tells us that the specific thing the king did to honor Haman was command everyone “in the King’s Gate” to “bend the knee” (**כרע**) or “bow down” (**חווה**) to him, but Mordakai would not! It was precisely Mordakai’s refusal to **כרע** or **חווה** that sent Haman into a seething rage the first time. It is no surprise, therefore, to see him distressed when Mordakai would not do so again. Esther 3:2 confirms what the other contexts already suggested: **זוע** means “to bow/bend down/genuflect.” Here in Hab, however, we find a reduplicated version. To mimic that word-play, we render the verb “to kowtow,” which means to kneel or bow down in deference (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

2:8 **Just as** — Like the other execration oracles (except the last), this opens its final statement with **כי**. The **כי** functions differently in each case. In this case, virtually all English translators treat it as causal (since/because/for). It is clear from the context, however (both here and in v. 17), that the **כי** introduces the “comparison” or “similitude” that lies at the heart of each *mashal*. In other words, the **כי** introduces the “as this is/was” portion of an “as this is/was, so will that be” statement. In fact, the commentator in 1QpHab used **כאשר** (as/just as) to explain the parallel statement in v. 17: **יִשׁוּפְטֵנוּ אֵל לְכֻלָּהּ כְּאִשֶּׁר זָמַם לְכָלִּיתָ**, “El will sentence him to destruction just as he intended to destroy.” Although **ס** interpreted the word in a causal sense (**διότι**), 8HevXII gr used **οτι**, which usually means “that,” “with regard to the fact that” or “considering that”—a sense much closer to what we propose. Note also that the “cause” of the judgment is clearly indicated by the *min* that begins the final refrain: **מִדְּמֵי אָדָם** (because of the butchery of human beings). No wonder so many commentators have considered the refrain superfluous; if the cause was already given at the start of the verse, there is no reason to give it again at the end! The misinterpretation occurs because of a failure to appreciate the nature of a prophetic *mashal*. Instead of viewing the language as helping to create a retributive reality (see **conjure a mimicking [retaliation]** in 2:6), translators view the language as purely descriptive. Therefore, the **כי** is presumed to provide nothing more than the rationale for divine judgment.

nations . . . populations — This verse features the same rhyme that appeared in 2:5 except that an adverb was added to lengthen its rhythmic effect: **גוֹיִם רַבִּים** (*gôyîm rabbîm*) and **עַמִּים** (*‘ammîm*). Since we were unable to extend that sound-play similarly in English, we repeat the rhyme we used in 2:5 (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

because of the butchery of human beings — More literally, “because of the bloods of humankind.” The plural form of “blood” functions as a metonym for bloodshed or slaughter. **מַדְמֵי אֲדָם** contains a wonderful, rhythmic alliteration in its thrice-fold repetition of *mem* and twice-fold repetition of *dalet*. As noted by Robertson (NICOT), “The similarity of sound enhances the memorableness of the phrase.” We mimic that alliteration with “because,” “butchery,” and “beings.” Ewald preferred “murder of men” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

- 2:9 When Nebuchadnezzar II finished constructing his palace in Babylon, he had his scribes create a commemorative inscription that asked his chief god Marduk to bless his house: “At your command, O merciful Marduk, may the house I built long endure and may I enjoy its delights in full measure. . . . May I receive therein the massive tribute of the kings of the four world regions and of all humankind. From horizon to zenith, wherever the sun comes forth, may I have no opponents nor encounter those who affright me. Within it may my descendants hold dominion . . . forever” (portion of a prayer to Marduk from Foster’s *Before the Muses*, Vol 2). Nebuchadnezzar asked that riches would fill his house, that it would be a safe haven from his enemies, and for that house to provide long-term support both for himself and his progeny. The oracle here in Hab provides a splendid counter-prayer to Nebuchadnezzar’s. It calls down a divine curse upon his house for taking in riches by means of harm or injury, notes that the house was built to shelter him from those who might harm or injure him, and then calls on the house itself to turn against him.

enriches . . . riches — The verb **בָּצַע** has a wide semantic range. It sometimes means to “finish” or “complete” a task (see, for example, Zech 4:9). In a related sense, **בָּצַע** sometimes means “to put to an end” as in “destroy” or “terminate” (see, for example, Yob 6:9). There are even instances where it appears to mean something like “smash” or “break” (see Amos 9:1). In most cases, however, it refers to the acquisition of material wealth and perhaps even the lust for it: “to seek riches/wealth/profit.” The acquisition often involves looting, pilfering, or bribery. That sense is unlikely in this oracle, however, since spoil and plundering were already the topic of the previous one. As in the very first oracle (see 1:5), this one begins with a wonderfully alliterative root-play: **בָּצַע בָּצַע** (*bōṣēa’ beṣa’*). To mimic that word-play, we render the verb “to enrich” and the noun “riches” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB). Some translators do likewise. Note, for example, KJV (coveteth / covetousness), Stonehouse (gains / gain), Rotherham (extorteth / extortion), and Renz, NICOT (takes / takings).

injurious . . . injury — Or “calamitous . . . calamity.” This verse features a repetition of **רָע** at the beginning and end, which not only creates a structural framework for the first problematic statement in the oracle, but provides rationale for the condemnation that follows: Babylon inflicts upon others (**רָע**) what it does not want inflicted upon itself (**רָע**). The implication is that Babylon will end up reaping what it has sown (**רָע**). The associations and its implication are either lost or muffled if translations use completely different words in each instance.

- 2:10 —**Shame on your house!**— Some interpreters view the first colon in this verse as describing “the result of a course of action [that] is described ironically as its purpose” (S. R. Driver). In other words, the text means to say “Your schemes will bring shame to your house” (NET). That interpretation reflects the notion that “Instead of imperishable fame, the latter has procured shame to himself” (Orelli). The problem, however, is that there is nothing in the verse

to indicate that “fame” or “honor” (the opposite of “shame”) was Babylon’s goal in doing any of the actions described in this oracle. Therefore, to say that Babylon planned (ironically) for its own dishonor when it meant to do the opposite is to read much into this text. The translators of NASB thought that the use of “shame” was indicative of the speaker’s own judgment or perspective (a far simpler and easier interpretation): “You have devised a shameful thing.” Ultimately, however, we agree with Andersen (AYB) that **בַּשֵּׁת לְבֵיתָךְ** does not seem to have any connection to the rest of the verse and that it makes more sense to say “you conspired to finish off numerous populations” than “you conspired shame for your house.” Therefore, as with **עַד־מָתִי** in v. 6, we view the phrase as a standalone interjection that is calling down shame on the “house” for reasons that already have and will continue to be specified.

misplace your ambition — **חֹטֵא נַפְשְׁךָ** may be one of the most perplexing phrases in this oracle. Older translations viewed **חֹטֵא** as “to sin [against],” **נַפֶּשׁ** as the Greco-Roman notion of one’s eternal essence, and then interpreted the whole as a theological statement about Babylon’s moral corruption: “hast sinned against thy soul” (KJV). Typically, however, **חֹטֵא** only has the sense of “sinning” when it is used in reference to the Israelite deity. When used in reference to people, the sense is more like “wronging” or “offending.” Furthermore, if humans are perceived to have both a perishable material being (body) and an imperishable immaterial being (soul), it is the former to which **נַפֶּשׁ** applies in ancient Hebrew conception, not the latter. Finally, even though the notion of “sinning against one’s soul” might make sense to a modern-day church member, it is highly unlikely that an ancient Hebrew would have thought in such terms. Ward (ICC), therefore, preferred something more judicial: “brought guilt on thy own self.” Stonehouse, however, was right to point out that “there would not appear to be any clear parallel in Hebrew for this use of **חֹטֵא** in the *Qal*; moreover, we should expect, in such a case, the *Hif’il*.” Stonehouse suggested that the phrase meant “to forfeit one’s life” and pointed to Prov 20:2 as an example: “The lion-like roar [and] terror of a king [share this]: whoever incites it *forfeits his life* (**חֹטֵא נַפְשׁוֹ**).” Some English translations prefer that sense in Hab (NRSV, NAB, NIV, etc.). However, Haak correctly noted that “The Proverbs passage appears to be no less difficult than the present text” and that **חֹטֵא** does not mean “forfeit” elsewhere. Furthermore, any declaration of retribution in this verse would weaken (if not displace) the declaration that follows (the statement of retribution is usually introduced by **כִּי** and occurs at the end of the oracle). Therefore, that rendering is equally questionable. Since the basic sense of **חֹטֵא** is “to fall short of,” “err,” or “be amiss/out of place” (see, for example, Isa 65:20 and Yob 5:24), we propose that it continues that sense here and is applied to the “ambition” or “desire” (a sense usually indicated by **נַפֶּשׁ**) by which Babylon carries out its schemes. Although some scholars think that **חֹטֵא** should be changed from a masculine-singular participle to 2MS perfect (**חֹטֵאת**, “you misplaced”), such emendation is unnecessary. One characteristic of ancient Semitic poetry is grammatical alternation. In verbs, for example, the gender, number, or person may shift between different parts of the poem. It is also common to see different verbal forms utilized. Such shifts often have no semantic significance; their purpose is to produce dramatic effect. Therefore, the participle at the end of the verse poetically carries forward the second-person subject made explicit at the start of the verse.

2:11 **beam** — **כפיס** occurs only here in the HB. Because the phrases **אבן מקיר** and **כפיס מעץ** are parallel, it is reasonable to conclude that **כפיס** is a kind of building material (like **אבן**, “stone”) and that **עץ** (wood) refers to the structure from which it was composed (like **קיר**, “wall”). In the construction of buildings, wood was often used to create floors above the ground level and ceilings over everything. Both required beams or rafters to hold them in place. Therefore, we hypothesize that **כפיס** was either a wooden beam/rafter above or the wooden nails/pegs used to hold the woodwork together. Many ancient and modern translations come to the same conclusion (for a summary of the ancient versions, see Stonehouse). The underlying idea is that these upper structures “echo” the cry that emanates from the walls, thereby filling the whole house with the call for Babylon’s condemnation. “The rafter is not responding to the stone; it is joining in, making an antiphon. The wood and stone bear united witness against the tyrant” (Andersen, AYB).

2:12 Every verse in this oracle shares a significant amount of content with other verses in the HB, which has led many to believe that Hab is drawing from those texts. That is certainly possible. It is also possible that, in some cases, the authors of Hab and of the other biblical texts are drawing from a well of traditional poetic sayings and theological statements, which results in very close, but entirely coincidental correspondences. In this verse, for example, we find an oracle introduced with **הוי** followed by the participial form of **בנה**: “Oh [no]! He builds!” The same phrase begins an oracle in Jeremiah (22:13). More correspondences occur between this verse and Mikah 3:10:

Mik 3:10 **בנה ציון בדמים וירושלם בעולה**

Hab 2:12 **הוי בנה עיר בדמים וכוונן קריה בעולה**

Both have **דמים** and **עולה** in parallel (a pairing that does not occur elsewhere), both begin the content of the statement with **בנה**, both feature cities as parallel objects, both use *bet* to indicate the means “by/through” which the actions are accomplished, and both use a conjunction to introduce a synonymous parallelism. There are, however, many differences. The statement in Mikah is not part of an oracle introduced by **הוי**; the cities are specific localities in Mikah (referring to Judah), but general localities in Hab (referring to Babylon); the verb parallel to **בנה** is present in Hab, but elided in Mikah; the singular participle fits well in Hab, which is speaking about a “he” and uses singular participles in the surrounding oracles, whereas Mikah diverges from its regular use of plural forms both before and after; although both feature alliteration between **בנה** and **בדמים**, Hab’s use of **קריה** and **עולה** furthers the alliteration already present. Did Hab borrow from Mikah or Mikah from Hab? The statements are short enough that they could both reflect a common or well-known turn of phrase (to build X by means of Y).

yes — Virtually all English translators render this *waw* as “and” (as if the wicked one were doing two different things). Instead, the *waw* introduces a parallel statement that describes another aspect of the same situation (see 1:4). Mikah 3:10 is no different: “He builds Zion through butchery—yes, Jerusalem through victimization,” not “he builds Zion through butchery and Jerusalem through victimization” (Zion and Jerusalem are the same!). In contradistinction, the *waw* in v. 11 indicates that two separate things are happening: “[every] stone . . . will cry out *and* [every] beam . . . will echo it.”

village . . . victimization — קרייה and עולה were chosen to create an alliterative end-rhyme (note also the alliteration in בנה and ברמים). To mimic that alliteration (and since we were unable to recreate the end-rhyme), we use two words that each begin with the same sounds (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB). As noted by Stonehouse, this oracle is concerned with Babylon's "unscrupulousness in establishing a kingdom through the oppression of other peoples." Our use of "victimization" reflects the kind of wrong-doing or injustice indicated by עולה.

2:13 **he who roars at** — How does one make sense of הנה מאת? The first word is vocalized by the Masoretes as *hinnēh*, which is usually a presentative particle ("look!" or "here is!"). The second word expresses cause or origin ("because of" or "originating from"). Together, the verse would begin "It is certainly—Behold!—from YHWH" (for "it is certainly" instead of "is it not?", see 2:6). In other words, YHWH would be the primary subject in vv. 13-14 and the point would be that the disasters befalling the nations are brought about by YHWH. There are, however, significant problems with that interpretation. The first has to do with הנה. Since nothing new or unexpected is being presented (whether physically, temporally, or cognitively), the presentative sense doesn't work. For that reason, many think הנה should be pointed as *hēnnāh* (they) and read as a demonstrative (these/those). Some ancient versions (𐤁, 𐤅, and 𐤍) support that reading. In that case, הנה הלא would function as a rhetorical affirmation to a quote or saying: "*These are certainly* from YHWH!" The word "these" would refer to the sayings that come after, which many believe are quotations from other biblical texts. That interpretation is based on the use of הלא + הם, המה, or הנם + כתובים (meaning "They are certainly written") in Kings and Chronicles. However, none of the statements in Kings or Chronicles use הנה, the words or reports to which the pronouns refer are mentioned before the statement, not after it, and it is questionable whether all the content that follows in Hab is quoted from other biblical texts. Furthermore, if the text is understood in any of the ways mentioned above, there would be no logical connection between v. 12 and vv. 13-14 (not only would the subject shift entirely from Babylon in v. 12 to YHWH in vv. 13-14, but it would be v. 14, not v. 12, that provides the reason for the statement in v. 13). There would also be no logical connection with the larger context. Hab's complaint (ch. 1:2-4, 12-17) features many instances of denunciation and despair over the evils that befall the nations. For this oracle to then state that all such evils come from YHWH is not only to admit divine complicity, but to negate all that surrounds it! As Andersen (AYB) said, "This cannot be their just punishment. The sympathies of Habakkuk are entirely with these victims." It would make far more sense to say "*It is not in fact* from YHWH" that the עמים suffer such catastrophes. One could presume that the interrogative *heh* resulted from an accidental duplication of the previous consonant (הלא became הלאה). However, since Hab often uses הלא for rhetorical emphasis, its appearance is unsurprising and the *heh* should be retained. Like the oracles around it, this one laments Babylon's wicked behavior. If we presume due to its literary context that the oracle is a *mashal*, then its purpose must be to call down a divine judgment that is a similitude of the condemned behavior (see **conjure a mimicking [retaliation]** in 2:6). In that

case, this verse must speak about *Babylon's* judgment: since his cities were constructed through the destruction and maltreatment of other peoples, his people will find that all their efforts have led to the destruction and abandonment of their cities. The fact that this is speaking about the peoples of Babylon instead of the surrounding nations can be verified by turning to Jer 51:58, where the same text is repeated in an oracle against Babylon with the peoples of Babylon as its referent. The present text can only be interpreted that way, however, if Babylon continues to be the subject. If we redivide the text, **הִנֵּה מֵאֵת** (certainly originating from) becomes **הִנֵּה אֵת** (the one who roars at)—a masculine singular participle with prefixed definite article of the verb **נָהַם**, meaning “to roar,” and a definite direct object marker with YHWH as the affected receiver of the verbal action. Verbal and nominal forms of **נָהַם** typically describe the roar of a lion and are applied metaphorically to kings (see **misplace your ambition** in 2:10 for one example). Since the previous oracle ended with a reference to a vocal cry, it would make sense to place an oracle that begins with a vocal cry right after it. In this case, the king of Babylon would be likened to a lion—that is, a predator that seeks to attack and slay the nations. Jeremiah 4:7 similarly describes the coming of Babylon as a lion that rises from the thicket to bring the land to ruin. Nebuchadnezzar’s throne room in Babylon was decorated with glazed brick panels that depicted roaring lions. Anyone who entered would know that they were in the den of a great predator. Nebuchadnezzar II’s namesake was poetically described as a roaring lion in later times: “When Nebuchadnezzar [the king] dwelt in Babylon, he would roar like a lion, would rum[ble] like thunder” (translation of “Nebuchadnezzar and Marduk” from Foster’s *Before the Muses*). It was not uncommon for nations or nation-states to be described as a lion. Judah is poetically described as one (Gen 49:9). Egypt likens itself to one (Ezek 32:2). If Babylon is a roaring lion, unjustly tearing apart the nations, it behooves YHWH as the true King of Justice to slay the defiant lion. Therefore, v. 14 is not about eschatology; it is—like the rest of Hab—about theodicy. Interpreting the text that way resolves numerous interpretive difficulties: it enables an oracle that began with Babylon as its primary subject to continue speaking primarily about Babylon, it provides a retributive consequence for Babylon’s behavior, it explains the presence of v. 14 in terms that are well-suited to the ancient context (any good king would go out to slay a lion that was terrorizing its people), it enables this oracle to flow logically from the previous one by the use of a shared concept (a vocal cry), and it eliminates the need to make sense of the problematic use of **הִנֵּה**. Some might fault our interpretation on the grounds that definite direct object markers are almost never used in poetry. Since, however, an object marker occurs in the very next verse, no other execration oracle in Hab has one, and the object marker deals with the same referent, we have every reason to think that if there were another object marker, it would be here.

[God of] Legions — The full title is elided, which we reinsert (see 2 Sam 5:10; 1 Kgs 19:10, 14; Ps 89:9; Jer 5:14).

So — Or “Consequently.” **וַיִּנָּעַר** is a *w-yiqtol* (a conjunction prefixed to an imperfect). In this case, the conjunction is important because it introduces the retributive punishment for the oracle. Most translations treat it as explicative (that).

conflagration . . . desolation — **אֵשׁ** and **רֵיקָן** typically mean “fire” and “emptiness.” In this case, however, they are coded references to the destruction and abandonment of Babylon’s cities as a retributive punishment (see **conjure a mimicking [retaliation]** in 2:6). Therefore, we render them “conflagration” and “desolation.” To render them “for nothing” misses the point entirely.

2:14 **when** — Most translators render this כִּי as causal (because/for) like in Num 14:21 (*since* the honor of YHWH must fill the earth). In this case, however, the preposition is probably temporal like in Isa 11:9 (*when* the land is full of respect for YHWH)—it assigns the aforementioned situations to a future time “when” X happens.

that land — Virtually all English translators interpret this verse eschatologically. Therefore, they render הָאָרֶץ as “the earth.” But if v. 13 actually involves theodicy (Babylon must be dealt with if YHWH is going to maintain his honor), then הָאָרֶץ must refer to “the land” of Babylon. The definite article identifies this as “the” land built on atrocities (i.e., “that” land just described). By using the definite article, the poet helps identify the “peoples” and “populaces” as those who are a part of Babylon, not those of the nations generally. Here, as in Isa 11:9, הָאָרֶץ is the subject of the verb.

is overwhelmed — תִּמָּלֵא is an imperfect. The verb מָלֵא typically means “to fill” or “be full.” Sometimes, however, it has more specialized senses. It can mean “to sate/satisfy” (as in Yob 38:39 or Qoh 1:8), “accomplish/fulfill” (as in Exod 7:25, Yob 15:32, or Isa 40:2), “make up one’s mind” (as in Qoh 8:11 or Est 7:5), or “fill one’s hand,” which is an idiom for “empowering/authorizing/commissioning” (as in Exod 28:41 or 29:35). Sometimes it pertains to sound. In 1 Kgs 1:14, for example, it means “to confirm” what has been said. In Jer 4:5, it means to proclaim “out loud” (with full voice). It also has the sense of “filling up too much.” In Josh 3:15, for instance, the water of the Jordan is said to “overflow” its banks. Here in Hab, מָלֵא is parallel to the verb and preposition combo כָּסָה עַל (to cover over), which must have a sense similar to the one in Josh 3:15. Since this oracle proclaims a negative outcome for Babylon using highly rhetorical language, the verb מָלֵא must have a similarly emphatic sense. Something like “to overwhelm/engulf” would capture the sense well. As a Niphal, however, the verb functions passively. For the typical sense of the verb, see Hab 3:3.

by the revelation — Most translators render the word here the same way they do in Isa 11:9. Although both texts make use of the same root, the forms are dissimilar. Isaiah 11:9 uses the noun רֵעָה, whereas Hab uses an infinitive with prefixed prepositional *lamed*: לִרְעֹת. In other contexts, the infinitive might indicate purpose (in order to know). In Hab, however, it functions as a gerund and the *lamed* indicates agency: “by knowing” (or, more simply, “by the knowledge of”). For more examples of *lamed* + infinitive, see IBHS §36.2.3e. As in Isa 11:9, however, this has nothing to do with mental acknowledgment; this is about the dramatic realization (due to starkly negative consequences) that the deity requires different behavior. Therefore, we render it “revelation.” NET preferred “recognition.”

honor — Virtually all English translators render this כְּבוֹד as “glory.” We understand “glory” to be a physical and/or visual display of a person or thing’s greatness. Since it is textually questionable and theologically problematic to say that YHWH is going to display his greatness by destroying people, such a rendering seems misleading. Wendland noted the inconsistency: “It is somewhat ironic . . . that in contrast to the strongly worded threats that are predicted for ‘Babylon’ . . . in the five ‘woe’ oracles of chapter two, the Lord of vengeance (2:16-17) is described in rather passive proclamations of trust that extol his ‘glory.’” To get a better sense of what’s going on here, let’s look back at Num 14. In that chapter, the issue for Mosheh was that

YHWH would be viewed by the nations as a god who does not keep his word (i.e., dishonorable) if he destroyed his people in the wilderness when he had promised to bring them into Canaan. The reply, therefore (14:21), insisted that the opposite will be the case: YHWH's "honor" (כבוד) must fill the earth. In Hab, the first oracle stated that YHWH was raising up Babylon (1:5-6) to bring about his divine order (1:7). Since, however, the reality was quite different, Hab cried out to God for an answer (1:13). If God failed to punish and/or remove "[the] betrayer" (2:5), then his name would be disgraced! To restore his honor, YHWH must move against "that land." Therefore, כבוד must again refer to God's "honor." The next oracle uses כבוד in a sense opposite to קלון (disgrace). The opposite of "disgrace" is "honor." Therefore, the sense of כבוד in this oracle matches the sense of כבוד in the next one. In fact, כבוד is a *Leitwort* (linking word) that binds the third and fourth execration oracles together. Therefore, it should be translated the same way in both oracles (see v. 16 for more).

2:15 **swill . . . as well** — Note the assonance crafted by the oral composer or scribal artisan between parallel cola in משקה רעהו (he makes drink his neighbor[s]) and שכר (making intoxicated) through repeated use of *shin*, *resh*, and the virtually identical sounds of *qoph* and *kaph*. To mimic that sound-play, we use "to swill" for שכר and then render אף as "as well" (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

deluge — Or "torrent/outpour." מספח can be interpreted in three ways: (1) as a Piel participle from ספח, (2) as the noun סף (bowl) with prefixed *min* and accidental duplication of the פ that begins the next word, or (3) as a nominal form of ספח featuring either preformative *mem* or prefixed *min*. The Masoretes preferred the first option. As noted by Stonehouse, "ספח is used of a person attaching himself to some particular office (cf. 1 S. 21:36); or joining a community of persons (cf. 1 S. 26:19; Isa 14:1); or of persons joining or banding themselves into a party (cf. Jb. 30:7)." Translations that favor that nuance include Geneva (joinest), ASV (addest), and Alter (adding). Those loosely based on it include KJV (that putteth to), NKJV (pressing), and NASB (mix in). Since, however, none of the situations described by Stonehouse apply to Hab, such renderings are highly questionable. The fact that none of the versions understood the term that way makes that interpretation even more doubtful. Therefore, interpreters have been compelled to look elsewhere for meaning. Because ט represents the word with זלף, meaning "to sprinkle" (CAL), and there appears to be an Arabic cognate (*safaha*), meaning "to pour," others have proposed that ספח means "to pour." The participle would mean something like "pouring" (as in NIV) or "spilling" (as in Martínez and Tigchelaar). Such a reading may underlie the translation choices in ש (to send/throw/let out/release) and σ' (to send away/send forth/emit). There are, however, several problems with that reading. As noted by Andersen (AYB), if "to pour" is a valid meaning of the verb ספח, then it is valid only in this verse (one would expect to find that nuance elsewhere). Even more problematic, however, is the fact that if מספח is a participle then there is no object for משקה. If we look at how שקה or its participial form is used elsewhere in the Hiphil stem, we find that an object usually follows. In Psalm 104:13, for example, משקה occurs with the object "mountains" (he

waters [the] mountains from his palace). Genesis 2:6 uses the verb with the object “the whole surface of the ground.” In other words, the text as interpreted by the Masoretes seems incomplete: “What is required is a word or combination of words to complete the sense of מִשְׁקָה” (Stonehouse). As noted by C. F. Whitley (“A Note on Habakkuk 2:15”), “It has been usual to emend מִסְפַּח חֲמַתּוֹ to מִסְפַּח חֲמַתּוֹ (‘from the cup of his wrath’)” since the time of Wellhausen (option 2). Not only does that emendation provide an object for מִשְׁקָה, but the presumed error would be easy to make. RSV, NET, AAT, and many others read the text as מִסְפַּח. Again, however, there are several problems: there is no textual evidence for that alteration (1QpHab supports the traditional consonantal text), no ancient version understood the text that way, and the very next verse mentions the “cup” in God’s hand (using a completely different word). Most of the translators that follow option 2 believe that the next word (חֲמַתּוֹ) involves “wrath” or “anger.” Whitley has rightly pointed out the serious flaws that arise from such an interpretation: “It is true that in a few passages in the Old Testament we find references to the ‘cup’ as a measure of Yahweh’s ‘wrath’ (e.g., Isa 51:17, 22; Ps 75:9; Cf. Isa 63:6; Job 21:20); but it is questionable if the notion of an evil man making another person ‘drink from the cup of his wrath’ has any significant meaning.” In fact, “a man could hardly become drunk from another’s ‘wrath’” anyway. The path of least resistance is option 3. There are nouns from √ספח that appear to refer to an “overflow” or “flood” of some kind. “The meaning of this root seems to be related to ‘overflowing.’ Cf. *spyh*, the overflow of a channel that erodes the earth (Job 14:19); the grain that overflows onto the ground to sprout the next year (2 Kgs 19:29 = Isa 37:30; Lev 25:5, 11); and *msphh* an article of clothing flowing down from the head to the lower part of the body (Ezek 13:18, 21; cf. English ‘flowing veil’). Finally, the word here may be an orthographic variant for the *msph* of Isa 5:7, which is related to the flowing of blood” (Haak). There is also plenty of support for this option from the versions: “Pursuing the clue offered by the Septuagintal ἀνατροπή, and indeed Aquila’s ἐπιρρίψεως (‘throwing, casting’) and Theodotion’s χύσεως (‘effusion’), it is preferable to take מִסְפַּח as a noun” (Whitley). Whitley translated מִסְפַּח as “draught” (“draft” in US English). Since we interpret the next word as “wine-skin” (see below), it makes sense to read the *mem* as a prefixed *min* (from). We then translate ספח as “deluge” (the rhetoric implies a forceful *guzzling* or being made to drink to *excess*, not simply being forced to take a drink). Our rendering is supported by χυσις in θ’, which can refer to a “flood” or “stream” (LS).

wine-skin — Most interpreters think that the noun in חֲמַתּוֹ is חֶמֶה, referring to “heat” (as in Geneva), “venom/poison” (as in NASB), or “anger/wrath” (the favored choice). Interpreting the term as חֶמֶה goes back to ancient times (see the commentary in 1QpHab). If חֲמַתּוֹ does refer to “heat/wrath,” then the following אַף must refer to “anger” since both are a well-established word-pair. Möller, for instance, rendered them “your rage and anger.” Goldingay preferred “your wrath and your . . . anger,” duplicating the pronominal suffix. His alteration pinpoints one of the problems with that interpretation. If אַף were a noun, “a suffix is required with the second as with the first noun” (G. R. Driver, “Hebrew Notes”). That is because “when several substantives are coordinated, the pronominal suffix must be attached to each singly” (GKC §135m). Therefore, אַף is probably not a noun. But if אַף does not mean “anger,” then חֲמַתּוֹ

probably does not refer to “wrath.” There are more problems with that interpretation. The first has to do with the poetic structure. As Andersen put it, “‘pouring out wrath’ is not such a good parallel to ‘make his neighbor drink.’” In fact, the parallelism between the phrase **משקה רעהו** and **מספח חמתך** “suggests that *hēmâ* is some kind of liquor.” The second problem has to do with the content. Again, Andersen put it well: “The pouring out of wrath is more typically an act of God than of a human being.” Whether one accepts the second-person pronominal suffix in the Masoretic Text or emends it to the third-person suffix in other sources doesn’t escape the difficulty; the referent must be Babylon. “The simplest explanation is that the term is related to Hebrew *hmt*, which is usually defined as ‘waterskin’” (Haak), but could also refer to a “wine-skin” or “goat-skin.” The same term appears in several ancient Semitic languages. Ugaritic, for example, has *hmt* for “wine-skin,” Arabic has *hamīt*, and Akkadian has *himtu* (DUL). For other examples of **חמת** as “wine-skin” or “water-skin” in the HB, see Gen 21:14, 19 and Hos 7:5.

bare [places] — Most English translators render **מעורים** as something like “naked bodies” (as in NIV), “genitals” (as in NET), or “nakedness” (the favored choice). However, this oracle (like the past three) is a **חידה**, a mysteriously coded statement (see **runes** in 2:6). “The language is not to be taken literally.” Rather, it describes “the state of stupefaction, prostration, and exposure, to which the conquered nations were reduced” (Henderson). Roberts (OTL) agreed: “The prophet is not concerned here with the evils of alcohol abuse . . . His metaphor exposes the disgusting brutality of imperialistic conquest.” Roberts noted that “synonyms from related roots are often used metaphorically elsewhere either to describe the weak points in a country’s defenses (Gen 49:9, 12) or to describe the shameful treatment of conquered lands or cities (Isa. 47:1-3; Nahum 3:5).” The latter is probably intended here. Therefore, we suggest that the term describes the “denuding” of territory—of its people, its animals, and/or its resources. Such a reading is supported by v. 17, which mentions (as a specific example) the “violation” done to Lebanon so that Babylon might “cover” itself (with Lebanon’s cedar). If **מעורים** is translated too literally, then a reader will think that the text is actually talking about nudity. If the word is translated too loosely, then the coded nature of the language will be lost. By using “bare [places]” instead of “nakedness,” we take the word out of the individual or personal realm and allow it to have connotations that are more global or geographic. The translators of **6** did something similar with **σπηλαια**, which literally means “caves,” but probably refers to places in the earth that are usually “covered/hidden.”

2:16 **honor** — Virtually all translators render this **כבוד** as “glory.” As in v. 14, however, the term has more to do with honor than a physical and/or visual display of a person or thing’s greatness. We know that because **כבוד** is used in a sense opposite to **קלון** (dishonor): “The noun *qālôn* is a general term for ignominy in contrast to ‘honor’” (Andersen, AYB). **כבוד** represented **כבוד** with **יקר**, which means “honor” (CAL). For another use of **כבוד** as “honor” in opposition to **קלון** (dishonor), see Hos 4:7.

you foreskinned [one] — As pointed by the Masoretes, **הַעֲרֵל** would be a MS Niphal imperative from the verb **ערל**. In ancient Israelite custom, **ערל** describes the presence of specific body tissue (the foreskin). Therefore, the Qal stem would indicate a particular state: “to have a foreskin.” The Niphal has four primary senses: reflexive (get yourself a foreskin!), reciprocal (get foreskins for each other!), passive (be issued a foreskin!), and resultative (be able to get a

foreskin!). YLT preferred the passive sense: “be uncircumcised!” Of course, none of those options make sense; if one’s foreskin is removed, there is no going back! One would have to approach the Niphal completely differently to bring sense to the statement. Jenni (“*Zur Funktion der reflexiv-passiven Stammformen im Biblisch-Hebräischen*”) argued that instead of perceiving the Niphal as passive or reflexive, the fundamental meaning was *sich als etwas erweisen* or “to show oneself as X.” Therefore, the Niphal of עָרַל would mean “to show oneself as foreskinned.” Jenni’s definition is by no means accepted by most scholars. If we accept it, the command would presumably mean “reveal your foreskin” (i.e., “let out your gentile penis”). Translations that render it that way include ESV (show your uncircumcision), HCSB (expose your uncircumcision), NJB (show your foreskin), KJV (let thy foreskin be uncovered), and NET (expose your uncircumcised foreskin). Remember, however, that this is figurative language (there is no penis or foreskin!). So what does the verb actually mean? Some think that the term simply tells us that one’s nakedness is being exposed. Note, for example, NIV (be exposed), Geneva (be made naked), or NASB (expose your own nakedness). The idea would be that Babylon will be made bare just as it stripped its neighbors bare. Stonehouse thought that עָרַל was used to associate Babylon with “an object of reproach and mockery.” On the surface, that interpretation makes sense. There are, however, several problems. If the sense is “to expose oneself,” why not use the Niphal of גָּלָה (to show/expose oneself) as in 2 Sam 6:20 or Exod 20:26? If the author wanted to use a term that meant “to strip naked” as well as “be demolished,” עָרַר would do very well (see Isa 23:13 and 32:11). With such ready-made options available, it is perplexing why עָרַל would be chosen. Most importantly, however, the peculiar language has still not been adequately explained. To better understand the term, one must examine its usage. In Lev 19:23, the people are told to regard the skin on fruit that is less than three years old as though it were a foreskin. It makes no sense, however, for people to regard the skin of *fruit* as an object of mockery and reproach—particularly the fruit of the Promised Land! Rather, the (priestly?) idea must be that the fruit, until it has grown for three years, has a *profane status*. Murphy (ICC) understood עָרַל in Lev the same way: “regard it as profane and unfit for use.” If עָרַל has the same nuance in Hab, then this verse would have nothing to do with “nakedness” or “mockery”; the point would be to command Babylon to “show itself as profane.” But if all of Babylon’s actions described by the prophet were not enough to display its profane state, then what more could Babylon do? It is clear that the typical interpretation has not been thought through. Rashi looked at instances in the HB where עָרַל described an object like one’s ear or mind being “closed” or “occluded” and then compared the form of הָעֵרַל with a word that occurs elsewhere (הָאֵסֶף). He came to this conclusion: ה"א משמשת בתיבה זו בלשון התפעל כמו האסף אל עמך אף כאן הערל האטם בשממון ובתמהון לב (The *heh* serves in this word as an expression of reflexivity as [in] “join up with your people” (Deut 32:50). Here too, הָעֵרַל [is] “close up with confusion and with astonishment of mind.”). Rashi’s interpretation is easy to relate to the verb in Lev 19 (a premature fruit could certainly be described as “closed up” in its “peel”). It is difficult, however, to relate that sense to Hab. What does “closing up” (being dumbstruck?) have to do with forcing others to drink until inebriated and then leering at their nakedness? Rashi’s interpretation turns out to be just as opaque as the traditional one. Before the discovery of the

DSS, Wellhausen proposed that the text initially read **הָרַעַל**, but was changed to **הָעַרַל** through accidental metathesis. Surprisingly, **הָרַעַל** shows up in 1QpHab's quote of this verse! Those that prefer that reading (NRSV, NAB, NJPST, etc.) say that the verb refers to "reeling" or "staggering" from drunkenness. Such a meaning, however, is far from certain. The verb appears elsewhere only in Nah 2:4 (Eng 2:3), where it refers to the "rattling" of spears (no drunkenness indicated). **רָעַע** represents the term here in Hab 2:16 with the phrase "quake and shake!," which could represent **הָרַעַל** and provide further support for the nuance in Nahum. Nominal forms of **רָעַל** occur in several places with reference to YHWH's "cup" (Isa 51:17, 22; Zech 12:2), though whether they refer to the reeling or staggering effects of intoxication is hard to know. In Isa 51, the term seems to be related to torpor or lifelessness. In Zech 12, the context seems to involve trepidation and/or powerlessness. Even if we were certain that **רָעַל** refers to "reeling" or "staggering," the question remains whether we can trust the quotation in 1QpHab. We already saw that its quotations deviate enough from the text preserved by the Masoretes that it is hard to know if the text is being updated, altered, or reflects an actual variant. It is clear from the commentary in 1QpHab that the word that occurs in the traditional Hebrew text was known to them: "Its interpretation concerns the priest whose shame exceeds his glory, for he did not circumcise the foreskin of his heart" (Lim). Furthermore, the double rendering in **רָעַע** shows that its translators were not trying to follow the text very closely. Ultimately, therefore, we have to ask if there is any way to make sense of the traditional Hebrew text before accepting alternatives that may be even more questionable. What the Masoretes read as an imperative (**הָעַרְלֵךְ**) could also be read as an adjective with prefixed definite article (**הַרְעָלִי**) referring to someone who is "foreskinned" (as in 1 Sam 17:26 or Lev 26:41). The definite article could then be interpreted as a vocative marker (see IBHS §13.5.2c) as in the following examples:

- 1 Sam 17:58 **בֶּן־מִי אַתָּה הַנָּעַר** Whose son [are] you, young man?
 2 Sam 14:4 **הוֹשַׁעַה הַמֶּלֶךְ** Save [me], King!
 Isa 42:18 **הַחֲרָשִׁים שִׁמְעוּ** You deaf [ones], listen!
 וְהַעֲוִרִים הַבִּיטוּ Yes, you blind [ones], look!

By calling Babylon "foreskinned," the oral composer or scribal artisan would not be telling Babylon to do something to reveal its profane or abhorrent status; such language would be emphatically affirming that status! Since the Babylonians did not practice circumcision, the term would be a fitting derogatory reference. Although most translators prefer "uncircumcised," we use "foreskinned" for the following reasons: "uncircumcised" is a double negative (if "to be circumcised" means "to not have a foreskin," "to be uncircumcised" would mean "to not not have a foreskin"), such a term is opposite the sense of the Hebrew, which highlights something that is present, not something that is absent, and "uncircumcised" seems a rather bizarre way to speak (like saying "unempty" instead of "full" or "unabsent" instead of "present"). See the first note in v. 18 for more.

power — Literally, "right hand." Of course, YHWH doesn't have a "right hand." **יְמִין** is a body-part metonym that refers to "power" or "might." See **by his might** in 3:4. See also 3:10.

dishonor disgorges — קִיקְלוֹן has been understood in two ways: (1) a compound word featuring קִיא (it vomited) and קִלּוֹן (dishonor) or (2) a reduplicative form of קִלּוֹן “employed for the sake of intensity” (Henderson). 𐤒 must have understood קִיקְלוֹן the first way. It represents קִיקְלוֹן with both a verb and a noun: συνηχθη ατιμια. The verb συναγω is sometimes used as a substitute for expressions that indicate an expulsion from the body. In Ps 16:4, for example, the Greek phrase “By no means will I gather their gatherings of bloodshed” substitutes for the Hebrew phrase “Never will I spill their spillings of blood.” In other words, συναγω (to gather) substituted for the “spilling” of blood. It makes sense, therefore, that συναγω would be used in this verse for the “spilling” of the stomach (vomiting). 𐤒 understood the Hebrew that way: *vomitius ignominiae*. Wycliffe² rendered the Latin “casting up of ill fame.” DRC preferred “shameful vomiting.” 𐤒 is more subdued, but still places a verb alongside קִלּוֹן. English translations that follow the first option include KJV (shameful spewing), Rotherham (ignominious filth), ASV (foul shame), Leeser (filthy spittle), Alter (noxious shame), and Andersen (shameful vomit). Others prefer the second option. Stonehouse, for example, explained קִיקְלוֹן as “an intensive formation (Pilpel) for קִלְקִלוֹן.” Interpreters may also point to עֲבִטִית in 2:6 as an example of intensive duplication. Typical English renderings of the second option are “utter disgrace” (as in HCSB) and “utter shame” (as in NKJV). Barthélemy suggested that the term was purposely used to convey a double meaning: an emphatic notion (*le pire des deshonneurs*) and reference to vomit (*un vomissement degoutant*). Andersen argued against the intensive explanation: “In Semitic, it is the later, not the initial, radicals that are so repeated.” In עֲבִטִית, for example, the final radical is duplicated, not the first one. There is also a repetition of ideas if the first option is followed: expelling through the mouth (vomiting) would contrast nicely with taking in through the mouth (drinking). Furthermore, “vomiting/disgorging/expelling” is similar to our proposed meaning of סִפַּח in v. 15 (outpour). The fact that קִיא has *yod* as a medial consonant and ends with a guttural, which is easily elided both in speech and in writing, enables the verb to tack other words onto it and explains why it would be easier to combine this particular verb with another word (see קִיקִיִּין in Yonah 4:6). Note also that there is a repetition of sound in קִיקְלוֹן. We mimic that sound-play with our rendering “dishonor disgorges.” Walker and Lund preferred “pooh pooh” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

2:17 **Just as** — For the comparative instead of causal rendering of כִּי, see 2:8.

so [will] ruin! — Like 2:8, the first half of this verse contains (A) a description of the wicked acts by which Babylon will be judged and (B) a pronouncement of retribution. The wicked acts are “the violation of Lebanon.” If “Lebanon” is an objective genitive (the violation *done to* Lebanon), that violation is probably the stripping of Lebanon’s trees to use as building material. In Isaiah 14:8, for instance, the trees of Lebanon rejoice over Babylon’s ruin by saying, “Ever since you laid down, the feller has not come up against us!” Nebuchadnezzar II boasted of the way he cut down Lebanon’s cedars (see, for instance, his Wadi Brisa inscriptions). In other words, Babylon specifically went to Lebanon to chop down its legendary trees. The question is how the retribution works. It should mimic (A) in some sense. Part (B) begins with a conjunction, which introduces the consequence or result of the wicked acts (so/thus). Then we

see **שָׂר בַּהֲמוֹת**. Interpreters have a difficult time with the phrase because **בַּהֲמוֹת**, vocalized as “beasts,” seems to be in construct with **שָׂר**. If “beasts” is an objective genitive, then the phrase refers to “the ruin *done to* beasts.” That rendering is preferred by NJB (your destruction of animals), NET (the way you destroyed the wild animals), and NASB (the devastation of its beasts). The problem is that interpretation doesn’t fit; Babylon’s destruction of beasts is in no sense a retribution against Babylon. One is forced, therefore, to view “beasts” as a subjective genitive: “the ruin *done by* beasts.” The problem is that the following verb (**יַחֲתִין**) seems to be intransitive. It is possible, however, that the suffix was poetically elided so that the suffix on the previous verb (**יִכְסֹךְ**) would apply to both. If so, the text would mean “so will ruin [by] beasts terrorize [you].” That interpretation would restore to (B) its function as a pronouncement of mimicking retribution (beasts will rise up against Babylon in retaliation for Babylon’s violation of their habitat). While such a reading is suitable, it is far from satisfying. After all, how much ruin could beasts do to Babylon? Despite the Masoretic accentuation, there is nothing requiring us to read **שָׂר בַּהֲמוֹת** together. If read separately, “ruin” would stand alone (and **יַחֲתִין** would have **בַּהֲמוֹת** as its subject). In that case, the text would be saying “Just as the violation of Lebanon covered you, so will ruin!” In other words, the retribution would involve the verb “to cover.” Henderson agreed: “*to cover*, is used emphatically to express the completeness of the destruction which should overtake the Chaldeans. Similar violence to that which they had exercised should be brought upon themselves.” By chopping down Lebanon’s trees, Babylon stripped Lebanon. By using that wood in its construction projects, it “clothed” itself. To then be “covered by ruin” is not only a just consequence, but a similitude of its denuding of Lebanon.

beasts will terrorize — **יַחֲתִין** is probably an imperfect Hiphil of **חָתַת** (to shatter/terrify). While some commentators explain the terminal *nun* as a feminine plural suffix, it is probably a paragogic *nun*—a form that still perplexes scholars. Garr (“The Paragogic *nun* in Rhetorical Perspective”) dispelled common misconceptions and provided one of the best analyses to date. He showed that the *nun* is a remnant of the ancient Semitic *yaqtulu* form—the original indicative as opposed to the jussive-preterit *yaqtul* or volitive *yaqtula* (as seen in Ugaritic and Amarnah Canaanite). It now exists as a marked expression of the non-jussive, non-volitive imperfect (see JM §44e-f). Therefore, just like Phoenician, the indicative is distinguished from the jussive by final *nun*. That means that the verb would be a masculine plural (**יַחֲתִינוּ** or **יַחֲתִינוּ**) with *yod* inserted by a scribe to make sure it was read as a Hiphil. The problem is that the masculine plural verb would seem to conflict with the feminine plural “beasts.” Cheyne thought that **בַּהֲמוֹת** should reflect a place-name parallel to “Lebanon.” By dropping the *waw* (**בַּהֲמַת**), he suggested “in/on Hamath.” Powis Smith (“Some Textual Suggestions”) preferred that emendation and made it part of AAT (the destruction wrought *upon Hamath*). Since Hamath is in Syria, that interpretation would fail to work as a retribution against Babylon. The quotation in 1QpHab ends with *heh* instead of *nun*. However, it is difficult to know if we can trust a quotation in 1QpHab if it deviates from the text preserved by the Masoretes. Perhaps the composer perceived of **בַּהֲמוֹת** as a masculine plural. In 1:11, the composer took a term that is typically matched with grammatically feminine verbs (**רָוַח**) and matched it with a masculine one instead. A similar thing may be happening here.

because of the butchery of human beings — See the discussion in 2:8.

2:18 **statue . . . instatuates** — פֶּסֶל is typically rendered in this verse is “idol”—a derogatory reference to an image of a deity (borrowed from the Latin term *īdōlum*, which came from the Greek *eidōlon*, meaning “image”). The verb פָּסַל also occurs in this verse and refers to the activity involved in making the image: a wooden one would be “carved,” a metal one “molded,” and a stone one “sculpted” or “engraved.” Since “idol” is a better rendering for אֱלִילִים (see below), some translations try to capture the sense of the verb in their rendering of the noun. Note, for example, NAB (carved image), NJB (sculpted image), and KJV (graven image). The problem is that such renderings tie the object too closely to a specific material (we have no idea what material was intended). Since “figure,” “figurine,” or “statue” could apply to something made out of wood, stone, or metal, such renderings are preferable. To mimic the root-play between noun and verb, we use “statue” for פֶּסֶל and a neologism for the verb: “instatuate” (to make into a statue). For the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB, see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5.

cast-metal [bod] . . . fraud — Note the alliteration between מַסְכָּה and שָׁקֵר: the use of two sibilants (*samek* and *shin*) and two consonants that sound almost identical (*qoph* is the emphatic version of *kaph*). To mimic that sound-play, we use the words “bod” (short for “body”) and “fraud,” both of which contain the virtually identical sound “aud” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB). Contrary to many translations, שָׁקֵר should not be rendered as “lies,” “lying,” or the like. The point is not that the idol tells lies, but that the idol is incapable of saying anything; therefore, the notion that it should speak at all is a pious “deception” or “fraud.” As noted by Legaspi (“Opposition to Idolatry in the Book of Habakkuk”), “Oracles gleaned from wood and stone objects . . . mask Babylonian self-interest.” Andersen agreed: “The term *šeqer* refers characteristically to false prophecy, fraudulently concocted.” Moffatt (false guide), Alter (that gives false oracles), and Martínez and Tigchelaar (sham oracle) capture the sense well.

[enough] to make — A survey of translations shows that interpreters don’t know what to do with לַעֲשׂוֹת. Some render the *lamed* as “while” or “when.” That sense, however, is characteristically communicated by *bet* or *kaph*. Others ignore the *lamed* or alter it to *waw* and treat the infinitive as a finite verb. NRSV (though the product is) and LEB (though making) treat the *lamed* as concessive and the infinitive as a noun or gerund. NJB (that he should make) treats the *lamed* as resultative. Some render the *lamed* as a verbal complement: “he trusts in it *to make*.” But what does that mean? Ultimately, none of the renderings above provide a satisfactory explanation for the use of *lamed* + infinitive in the final clause. We propose that the *lamed* + infinitive indicates the degree of the aforementioned verb: he trusts in the form he forms *enough to make* such silly things. The same sense can be seen in Deut 9:20 (וּבְאַהֲרֹן הִתְאַנֵּף יְהוָה מְאֹד לְהַשְׁמִידוֹ) “Even with Aharon, YHWH was so very angry—enough to annihilate him!”) and 2 Kgs 20:1 (וְהִלָּחַזְקוּהוּ לְמוֹת) “Hezekiah was sick enough to die”).

idiotic idols — Many commentators explain אֱלִילִים as a plural of אֱלִיל, which refers to a “worthless” thing or “non-entity” (see, for instance, Yob 13:4 or Zech 11:17). S. R. Driver, therefore, said, “The word . . . suggests the idea of what is unsubstantial and worthless.” Andersen (AYB) agreed: “These gods are ‘not-things’—that is, things of negation (non-existence), not just things of nought (no value).” Translations that reflect those senses include

NET (worthless things), Goldingay (nonentities), and Alter (ungods). Even though **אלילים** looks like a plural of **אליל**, the two are probably unrelated. In **᠖**, for example, we find **ειδωλα** (images), **δαίμονια** (pagan gods, supernatural entities, or demons), and **τα χειροποίητα** (handmade things) for **אלילים**—never “worthless/bad things.” Likewise, **ט** never refers to **אלילים** as “worthless things.” As noted by Hamilton (“What are *’Elilim?*”), “A possibility that has received only passing consideration but deserves reexamination is that *’ēlîlîm* is a loan-word from the Akkadian term *illilu* (“deity”), itself a Sumerian loanword EN.LÍL.LÁ.” By looking at **אלילים** in the HB, Hamilton identified four things about its usage: (1) it never refers to **YHWH**, (2) it never refers to a group of beings associated with the Israelite deity (like the **אלהים** or “divine council”), (3) it can refer to metal objects and statues, and (4) it designates things and/or beings that are in some sense foreign. He concluded that “Strong circumstantial evidence exists for understanding the plural form to be a loanword . . . and therefore its suitability for naming beings not suitable for Israelite worship.” The renderings “idol” and “foreign deity” represent those nuances well (for the argument that **אליל** is also derived from Enlil/Illil and came to represent the notion of “worthlessness” only in later biblical texts, see Hays’ “Enlil, Isaiah, and the Origins of the *’ēlîlîm*: A Reassessment”). **אלמים** refers to an inability to speak and, therefore, serves as a derogatory reference to the impotence of the **אלילים**. It is certain that **אלמים** was chosen as much for the way that it alliterates with **אלילים** (*’ēlîlîm illemîm*) as for its semantic sense. To mimic that sound-play, we render the phrase “idiotic idols.” Other possibilities include “ineffectual effigies,” “impotent potentates,” “silly simulacra” (SAT), and “dumb dummies” (Brownlee in *The Midrash Peshar*). For the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB, see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5.

- 2:19 **“Come alive!”** — **עורי** is typically rendered “Arise!” or “Awake!” However, the term does not necessarily imply that someone/something is sleeping or lying down; rather, it has to do with being energized, animated, or set in motion. In this case, the verse presupposes the Mesopotamian rituals that were performed so that one or more deities would manifest in or through a cult statue (and thereby give instruction). Therefore, we render the imperative “Come alive!” HCSB did the same. Ward (ICC) paired the two imperatives: “Awake, arouse thyself!” Haak did the same. The problem with that combination, however, is that it treats the masculine imperative (**הקיצה**) and feminine imperative (**עורי**) as though they had the same referent. The gender shift results from two different referents: the masculine gendered “wood” and feminine gendered “stone.” Gender alternation in parallel clauses is a characteristic feature of ancient Semitic poetry. Watson put it this way: “Quite frequently gender parallelism is operative, a masculine noun in the first colon being balanced by a feminine counterpart in the second.” Watson noted that “wood” and “stone” were gender paralleled quite frequently in the HB (and in the very same order!) and pointed to this verse as an example.

Silence! — Most English translators render **דומם** as an adjective that modifies the noun **אבן**. In Isaiah 47:5, for instance, the final *mem* in **דומם** is clearly an adverbial ending (like **יומם**, “daily”). The Masoretes even read **אבן דומם** together. Since **אבן** is grammatically feminine, a modifying adjective should be feminine (like **גדלה** instead of **גדול** in Gen 29:2).

Since the previous verse ended by calling the idol אֱלִמִּים (mute/silent/speechless), there is little reason to repeat the same idea here. Furthermore, there is no adjective modifying “wood” in the previous clause that could parallel the notion of a “silent stone” in this clause. There is good reason, therefore, to abandon the adjectival reading in Hab. Andersen (AYB) thought that “*dûmām* is more likely to be a noun—‘silence.’” Möller (stone of silence) followed his suggestion. That reading seems equally unlikely. Perhaps the context of the oracle can help. The next verse tells all the earth to be silent using the exclamation הִס (hush!) because the god of Israel is present/manifest in his holy palace/temple. That situation can be contrasted with the one in this verse, where “no spirit/breath at all exists” in the idol. Since this oracle is part of a series of oracles that call out a retributive consequence that is a similitude of the referent’s behavior (see **conjure a mimicking [retaliation]** in 2:6), it seems likely that there should be another exclamation in this verse that contrasts with the Israelite prophet’s call to silence in the next one. Therefore, we propose moving the *athnach* from יִרְדָּה to דְּוֹמָם and reading דְּוֹמָם as part of a statement placed by the Israelite prophet in the mouth of the Babylonian priest about his idol. We then repoint דְּוֹמָם as a Polel imperative of the verb דָּוַם: “Silence!” Legaspi came to the same conclusion: “In Hab 2:19 woe is pronounced on the one who addresses the *pesel* or *massēkâ* in order to receive an oracle. It quotes the oracle-giver as he initiates the process, first by calling the idols to action . . . and then by addressing his oracle-seeking audience (‘Be silent! It gives an oracle!’).” In this way, the devotee of a foreign god will be made silent (impotent) by the god of Israel just as he turned for instruction to a speechless (impotent) god (i.e., the judgment fits the crime).

stamped [on] — The verb תָּפַשׁ (to take/seize/capture), vocalized as the passive participle תְּפוּשׁ (being taken/seized/captured), seems oddly out-of-place. Stonehouse explained it as a figurative expression meaning “encased” or “enclosed in.” Andersen referred to it in one place as “overlaid,” in another place as “adorned,” and in yet another as “encased.” Smith (*The Book of the Twelve Prophets*) was so bewildered that he just left it out of his translation. Considering the ancient context, the general sense is easy enough to figure out: it deals with the gold or silver that was fixed to Mesopotamian statues or figurines. Therefore, the numerous renderings given by translators must be close to the mark: “plated” (HCSB), “overlaid” (NKJV), “inlaid” (Alter), “cased” (Moffatt), “sheathed” (Möller), “coated” (SET), “covered” (NIV), et cetera. But if the oral composer or scribal artisan wanted to say “it is overlaid/plated” with gold or silver, s/he could have used the verb צָפַה, which is often used to describe those metals. Furthermore, אָחַז is often used to describe things that are “attached,” “fastened,” or “joined” to other things—particularly those in a sacred, royal, or celestial precinct (see 1 Kgs 6:10, 2 Chr 9:18, or Yob 26:9). The question is *why this particular word should be used here*. We propose that the participle תְּפוּשׁ (*tāpûš*) was chosen to create a clever sound-play with וּפְשִׁי (*ûpāšû*) in 1:8. Both use a voiceless labiodental fricative version of *peh*, a long a-sound, a sibilant (*shin* or *sin*), and a long u-sound with *waw*. The result is a text with a peculiar sounding word near the beginning and another that sounds peculiarly like it near the end. If we are correct, then the use of the particular verb in this verse is explained as part of the sophisticated artistry of the whole. Therefore, we render תָּפַשׁ as “to stamp [on],” which communicates the same sense we proposed above, sounds similar to our rendering of פֹּשׁ in

1:8 (to stampede), and agrees with ⚡'s use of ελασμα, which comes from ελαυνω, meaning “to beat out” (GLS). For the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB, see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5. For our use of italics, see section A3.

2:20 **Hush at his manifestation** — Typically, שֶׁח is rendered “let it keep silence” or “let it be silent” (as though it were a verb). However, the term is an exclamation or interjection that functions like a command. The English word “hush” actually mimics the sound of the Hebrew (*has*). Therefore, we use it here. Those that do likewise include Rotherham, Ward (ICC), and Moffatt. Those that prefer “silence!” or “be silent!” include NAB, NJPST, and O’Neal. The phrase מִפְּנֵי literally means “at/before his face.” The word “face” functions as a metonymy for the deity’s “presence” or “manifest being.” In other words, this verse is telling us that, in contrast with an idol, “Yahweh . . . doesn’t need a statue as a receptacle for his manifest presence” (Andersen, AYB). However, there seems to be more to it than that. By placing this phrase at the end of the series of execration oracles, which describe great catastrophe coming to Babylon, and before the psalm in the next chapter, which describes YHWH coming to destroy his foes, the phrase seems to refer more specifically to a theophany of judgment. Orelli agreed: “*Be still before Him!* announces His coming.”

you — This definite article was certainly intended to be a vocative. Nevertheless, the only other English translation we could find that interpreted it that way is SAT. For a discussion of the definite article as a vocative marker, see **you foreskinned [one]** in 2:16.

3:1-19 As noted by Andersen (AYB), “Habakkuk 3 must surely be the most rewritten chapter in the Hebrew Bible. Almost every word has been found unacceptable, touched up, replaced, or given a more appropriate meaning.” This is despite the fact that MurXII is virtually identical to the consonantal text in the Masoretic tradition, which lead Andersen to conclude that the traditional text “is a faithful preservation of an ancient text, at least as old as the turn of the eras.” Barré (“Newly Discovered Literary Devices in the Prayer of Habakkuk”) noted that there are anagrams, a geographical name structure, and other literary and/or scribal devices that unite the poem. To emend or eliminate such elements would make the text less sound. While the many possible readings provided by the Greek versions stimulate our thought about the purpose and meaning of the text, it is certain that their authors were struggling to make sense of the text and/or to make it more accessible to their audience(s). Therefore, even if a reading in one of the Greek versions is more compelling, that is no basis on which to alter the Hebrew. Eaton (“The Origin and Meaning of Habakkuk 3”) said it well: “We are hardly in a position to improve on ⚡’s consonantal tradition.” It is that same tradition—faithfully preserved since at least the first century—toward which we seek translational fidelity. Note also that scholars tend to mine Ugaritic, Babylonian, and/or other ancient NE texts for similarities or associations with Hab 3 and then presume that the associations they found are evidence that Hab 3 is either based on those texts or trying to say the same thing. One problem inherent in that enterprise, as Tsumura noted (“Ugaritic Poetry and Habakkuk 3”), is that the texts being compared to Hab 3 are often from completely different literary genres. In Ugaritic, for example, there are no prophetic texts or psalms. If the texts that scholars use as interpretive guides have different forms and functions, they should probably be read *differently* than Hab 3. Another problem is that scholars often draw piecemeal from multiple myths to explain separate verses and/or sections in Hab 3, but there is no control for what piece of myth is relevant in what part of Hab 3 (one might call it “proof-texting” with myths). Yet another problem is that different myths may provide equally compelling imagery and/or background for the biblical

text being analyzed (see, for example, 3:4). To favor one myth over another risks a completely arbitrary methodology. That is not to say that ancient NE myths, which form part of the cultural backdrop within which Hab 3 was created, can't help us understand the chapter better. The issue is that interpreters often depend on outside sources to provide the rationale for reading or interpreting Hab 3 *more than* trying to see how Hab 3 makes sense on its own terms. The third chapter of Hab was written in ancient Hebrew poetry. By analyzing that poetry, one should be able to arrive at satisfactory conclusions that are secondarily supported not just by other poetic texts in the HB, but by the wider ancient NE context. In the words of Irwin ("The Psalm of Habakkuk"), "As often happens when we quit tampering with the text and undertake to understand it—we are surprised how appropriate it is."

- 3:1 **incantation** — Or "invocation." Traditionally rendered "prayer." As noted, however, by Sinker (*The Psalm of Habakkuk*), "The Prayer is more than the earnest struggling of a soul after the Divine Light, it is definitely the prayer as shaped for him by the guidance of the Holy Spirit." In other words, the prayer serves a *prophetic function*; it actualizes past divine reality in present or future circumstances through magical turns of phrase and by summoning the Divine Warrior against current or future enemies. Therefore, we prefer a rendering that emphasizes this as an utterance/text with transformative power. Eaton ("The Origin and Meaning of Habakkuk 3") preferred "intercession," which indicates that the speaker is bringing himself before the deity to intervene on Israel's behalf, but lacks any notion that the hymn is also a prophetic declaration.
- in charge of battle hymns** — Or "over battle hymns." When translating **על שנינות**, one could presume that the phrase should be read independently like numerous other phrases beginning with **על** in the superscriptions of the Hebrew psalms. In that case, the preposition would mean "according to/regarding/in the manner of." One could then suppose **שנינות** to be an instrument (like **השמינית**, "the eight-string [lyre]" in Ps 6), a familiar tune (like **אילת השחר**, "The Dawn's Doe" in Ps 22), or even a style of music (many suggest music that is erratic in emotion and/or measure). Others try to locate a meaning for **שנינות** by looking at its root: **שנע** or **שנה** (to err/wander/go astray/sin inadvertently). Note, for example, **ט** (**שלוחא**), **ט** (*ignorantibus*), Geneva (ignorances), YLT (erring ones), SET (erroneous utterances), and others. Sinker rightly objected to those interpretations: "Such a view seems untenable when it is considered that the Psalm contains no reference to sins of ignorance." Commentators sometimes argue that **שנינות** is related to the Akkadian word for a prayer of lamentation (*šegû* or *šigû*). Translations that reflect that sense include Goldingay (laments), NJB (dirges), NAB (plaintive tune), and Fenton (sorrows). As stated, however, by Andersen (AYB), "The content of an Akkadian *šigû* does not match either of the suspected Hebrew counterparts (Psalm 7, Habakkuk 3)." Cheyne ("Shiggaion") suggested that the root was equivalent to **שנע** and that the term meant "a prophetic rhythm." Andersen also noted that "The root *šg* is best known for the use of the *Pu'al* participle to refer to the ravings of a prophet." If **שנינות** is the plural of **שניין**, it could be related to the Akkadian verb *šegû*, which means "to rage at" or "become enraged in battle" (CAD). The Hebrew noun would then be a technical term for a psalm composed in the "excitement" or "frenzy" of the prophetic Spirit to summon the Divine Warrior into battle. Both Ps 7 and Hab 3 contain elements that favor that interpretation (vv. 13-14 of Ps 7 speak of the Divine Warrior preparing for battle and v. 8 looks like a prophetic message). Following the Masoretic accentuation, translators read **לחבקוק הנביא** together and **על שנינות** together.

However, when **על** follows the title of a person elsewhere in the HB, it characteristically expands on the role played by that person. For example, when Ruth 2:5 introduces **הנצב** (the official/steward/supervisor), **על** follows in order to specify the people over which the official had charge: **על-הקוצרים** (over the harvesters). Numbers 7:2 mentions **העמדים** (the stationed/appointed ones) who were **על-הפקדים** (over the deployed ones). Exod 14:7 mentions **שלשם** (third-rank men?) who were **על-כלו** (“over all of it”—that is, in charge of all the chariots). Numbers 10:14-27 provides a list of people who were “over/in charge of” tribal armies. 2 Kings 10:22 mentions a person who was “over/in charge of” priestly vestments. Examples are almost endless. Since **על** follows a title in Hab 3:1, it is natural to conclude that it expands upon that title in the same way: the prophet “over/in charge of.” In psalmic superscriptions, one finds that wherever a name occurs with a prefixed *lamed* indicating ownership or attribution (as in **לאסף**, **לבני-קרח**, or **לדוד**), that name typically stands alone. Therefore, if we base our reading of Hab 3:1 on psalmic superscriptions, we expect **לחבבוק** to be a standalone statement. Finally, if we presume that **לחבבוק** and **הנביא** were meant to be read together, **הנביא** would add nothing to the text; Habakkuk was already identified as a prophet in 1:1 and it is absurd to think that an audience would have forgotten that detail by the time the third chapter was recited. If we are correct that **שניין** indicates a prophetically inspired battle hymn, then to call the composer “the prophet” would be doubly pointless.

3:2 **I heard [what] [was] heard of you** — Typically translated, “I heard of your fame/renown.” The oral composer or scribal artisan combined a verb (**שמעתי**) and noun (**שמעך**) from the same root to create a fantastic word-play that rings with alliteration. To mimic that sound-play, we render the phrase “I heard [what] [was] heard of you” (or “I took account of the account of you”). For the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB, see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5. Note that the suffix is an objective genitive (the report of/about you) not a subjective one (your report, i.e., the report that you gave). Contrary, therefore, to translations like Geneva (I have heard thy voice) or KJV (I have heard thy speech), this has nothing to do with Hab hearing an oracle or acknowledging the deity’s response to his complaint; this concerns deeds wrought by YHWH in times past (indicated by the unambiguous poetic parallelism between **שמעך** and **פעלך**) that have been transmitted by oral or written tradition.

[what] proceeded — The word-play **פעל פעל** in the very first oracle (1:5) is matched by the use of **פעל** at the start of the final oracle here in Hab. The use of the same term in two different oracles might be nothing more than coincidence, but to have a word that participates in a very specific word-play show up in the same place in an oracle that is structurally parallel is evidence of holistic design (i.e., shared authorship). To capture that root-play, we render each term similarly: “a proceeding,” “to proceed,” and “what proceeds” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

in battle, a second [time], — The difficulties, arguments, and interpretive history surrounding the phrase **בקרוב שנים** are well-documented. We have no desire to rehash them here (see Pinker’s “Captors’ for ‘Years’ in Habakkuk 3:2” for a good summary). The Masoretes vocalized **בקרוב**

as **בְּקֶרֶב**, which is a spatial term meaning “in the midst of” or “among.” Hiebert (*God of my Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3*) correctly noted that there are times where “*bēqereb* is most easily understood as a ballast variant of *bē*, the preposition which introduces the final line of this tricolon” (see Isa 6:12-13, Mik 5:7, or Ps 82:1). In such cases, the sense of both *bet* and **בְּקֶרֶב** is spatial and the switch between them in parallel phrases or cola is best explained as a type of lexical alternation typical of ancient Hebrew poetry. In this case, however, to interpret **בְּקֶרֶב** as part of a temporal expression linked to **שָׁנִים** (understood as “years”) violates the usage of **בְּקֶרֶב** in those poetic parallels and everywhere else. Therefore, while we appreciate translations that give the phrase an immediate relevancy (such as NET’s “in our time” or Alter’s “in these very years”), we must reject renderings that give a temporal meaning to a non-temporal expression. Revocalizing the consonants as an infinitive is another option. As noted by Haak, “Other occurrences of the infinitive of *qrb* with *bet* are rendered temporally” (see, for instance, 2 Sam 15:5 or Lev 16:1). That interpretation is evident in many strands of tradition (see, for instance, *b. Sotah* 49a). Yet translations like those of Roberts (when the years draw near) or Moffatt (as the years are passing/go by) suffer from numerous problems as well. First, there is a lack of specificity about what “years” refers to (how are these “years” different from other “years”?). Second, if this is about some unspecified stream of time, then the immediacy and urgency inherent in what came before and what comes after is lost. Most importantly, if the sense of **שָׁנִים** is “years,” then the form is wrong: “The word ‘year’ has two plural forms in Hebrew. The masculine form, as used here, is nearly always used with numerals. The more abstract idea of a stretch of time is expressed by the *feminine* plural” (Andersen, AYB, italics original). For that reason, Andersen argued that **שָׁנִים** must mean “once again” or “a second time” (reading **שְׁנַיִם**, “two” or “second,” instead of **שָׁנִים**, “years”). Pinker (“Captors’ for ‘Years’”) objected to that reading because that sense was “found only for the feminine **שְׁנַיִם**.” Nevertheless, there are places where **שָׁנִים** describes a “second” instance of something (in Gen 6:16, for example, Noah’s ark is said to contain a **שָׁנִים**, or “second [level]”). Therefore, we agree with Tuell (“The Psalm in Habakkuk 3”): “The prophet longs for YHWH to manifest YHWH’s power clearly and unmistakably against oppression in his own day, as in times past”—that is, to do so a “second” time. If we are correct, it makes sense for **קֶרֶב** to indicate a *thing or event* that will happen again. In the previous verse, we argued that **שְׁנִינוֹת** referred to divinely inspired battle hymns. Virtually everything that preceded this chapter revolved around the images, notions, and language of war. At the center of this chapter is a description of the Divine Warrior. Therefore, one would expect to find a mention of war in an introductory verse like this one. According to HALOT, **קֶרֶב** sometimes represents an Aramaic loanword (*qerāb*) describing a “hostile approach”—i.e., “war,” “battle,” or “conflict.” Some instances of the noun are post-exilic (see Qoh 9:18 and Zech 14:3), but others occur in preexilic (Ps 55:22) and archaic (Ps 68:31) texts. There is also a cognate in Akkadian (see *qarābu* in CAD). It makes sense, therefore, to read **בְּקֶרֶב** in Hab as “in war/battle”—perhaps even as an abbreviated version of the expression “on the day of battle” (**בְּיַמֵּי קֶרֶב**). Barré (“Habakkuk 3:2: Translation in Context”) and Irwin came to similar conclusions. The idea that the deity might manifest like the sun in time of war can be seen in the Kuntillet

‘Ajrud inscription 4.2 (9th century BC) published in *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (Ḥorvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border*. For our use of italics, see **Anagrams** in section A3.

When trembles [the] womb, consider! — Typically translated “in wrath remember mercy” (KJV). In other words, “When you, God, are peeved, remember your famed compassion.” There are, however, serious problems with that interpretation. First, the meaning “anger” or “wrath” makes no sense of רָגַז (see section B4). Second, “Mercy” hardly fits with the events described in the body or even the conclusion” (Barré, “Habakkuk 3:2: Translation in Context”). Furthermore, the term for “compassion/mercy” is רַחֲמִים, not רַחֵם. As vocalized by the Masoretes, רַחֵם would be a Piel Infinitive Absolute, but the only other place where that occurs is Jer 31:20 and the point of using it there is to create a word-play with a finite verb from the same root. Everywhere else in the HB, רַחֵם is either a finite verb or the noun “womb.” As noted by Roberts (OTL), “The versions all translate *rḥm* as a nominal form.” To work around these problems, Andersen repointed רַחֵם as רַחֲוִים, but that is unlikely because רַחֲוִים is part of a fixed expression involving חֲנוּן (in the rare instances where רַחֲוִים appears alone, it is likely that חֲנוּן was unstated because its sense was presumed). How then do we make sense of רַחֵם? When we look at רָגַז in v. 16, we see that it is associated with two parts of the speaker’s body: his בֶּטֶן (belly/gut) and תַּחַת (lower [limbs]/underside/nethers). Many scholars believe that vv. 2 and 16 are parallel and function as an *inclusio*. Whether true or not, it is certain that the two verses use the same terms because they reflect the same ideas. In ancient Hebrew poetry, בֶּטֶן and רַחֵם (womb) function as a parallel word-pair indicating the same area of the body. Therefore, it is certain that the “tremble” (רָגַז) of one’s “belly” (בֶּטֶן) in v. 16 conveys the same idea as the “tremble” (רָגַז) of one’s “womb” (רַחֵם) in v. 2 (i.e., someone is so scared that their gut quivers). Margulis (“The Psalm of Habakkuk: A Reconstruction and Interpretation”) and Haak rendered it similarly. Aḥituv (“The Sinai Theophany in the Psalm of Habakkuk”) seems to have interpreted “womb” as a metaphor: “when the earth shakes.” For our use of italics, see **Anagrams** in section A3.

3:3 **Exalt!** — See section A3.


He covered heaven [with] his prestige. — How does one interpret הוֹדוּ שָׁמַיִם הוֹדוּ? Both הוֹדוּ and שָׁמַיִם are masculine and שָׁמַיִם could be a collective singular, which means either could be the subject of the verb. If interpreted as normative Hebrew syntax (V-S-O), the phrase would read “heaven covered his prestige,” which doesn’t make sense. Therefore, most translators interpret the syntax as V-O-S: “his prestige covered heaven.” There are, however, several problems with that reading. First, V-O-S syntax is atypical for Hab. Second, if there were a change in subject from “Eloah, [the] Holy [One]” to “his prestige,” the new subject would normally be fronted before the verb. In Ps 148:13, for example, the shift in subject from “YHWH” to הוֹדוּ causes הוֹדוּ to be fronted in the verbless clause: הוֹדוּ עַל-אֶרֶץ וּשְׁמַיִם (his prestige [is] over earth and sky). Below are a few examples from Hab.

— In 2:17, the shift in subject from “Lebanon’s violation” to בְּהִמּוֹת causes בְּהִמּוֹת to be fronted before the verb: בְּהִמּוֹת יַחֲרִיץ (Beasts will terrorize).

- In 2:18, the shift in subject from “statue” to **צִרְוֹ** causes **צִרְוֹ** to be fronted in the verbless clause: **יִצְרֹוּ מַסְכָּה וּמִזְרָה שֶׁקֶר** (Its form [is] a cast-metal [bod] and instructor of fraud!).
- In 2:20, the shift in subject from the wood or stone idol to **יְהוָה** causes **יְהוָה** to be fronted in the verbless clause: **יְהוָה בְּהִיכָל קֹדֶשׁוֹ** (YHWH [is] in his holy palace.).

If the noun that follows the verb is unlikely to be the subject, the most likely subject is the one at the start of the previous two cola. That leaves **שָׁמַיִם** as the direct object and **הִוָּרֹו** as the characteristic of the deity that is displayed through such action. Smith (*The Book of the Twelve Prophets*) understood the text similarly: “He covers the heavens with His glory.” The only other way to make **שָׁמַיִם** the subject would be to repoint the Piel as a Pual: “heaven was covered [with] his prestige.” Note that Smith rendered **כָּסָה** in the present tense. Most translators do likewise (to show that the imperfect **יָבֹוא** and perfect **כָּסָה** share the same tense). NASB, for example, rendered the verse “God comes from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His splendor covers the heavens, And the earth is full of His praise.” However, by rendering both verbs in the present, the whole text is obfuscated. Is the deity *always* situated in Teman? Does God *typically* come from Mount Paran? It is clear that Hab is drawing on ancient traditions that speak about a great moment in the past (see Deut 33:2 and Ps 68:8-9 [Judg 5:4-5]). Therefore, it is more likely that the *yiqtol* functions as a preterit to match the past tense of the perfect—a situation that occurs elsewhere in Hab (see **I shouted . . . cried** in 1:2). Andersen agreed: “With the exception of the personal framework, which is obviously contemporary, we can now be confident that all of the core of the poem (vv 3-15) is intended to be past tense.” This verse, therefore, continues to reflect on the deity’s “deed” about which Hab “heard” and which he hoped God would do a “second” time. “The prophet does not refer to the glory of God which naturally is reflected in the creation,” which is what the present tense translation would indicate. Rather, “he speaks of the particular glory radiating from the theophany of God” (Robertson, NICOT). Note also that we rendered **כָּסָה** differently here than in Hab 2:14 because the verbs have a different sense in each place.

- 3:4 **He blazed, in fact, like a luminary!** — Or “[His] blaze, in fact, [was] like a luminary!” Scholars argue about whether **נָגַהּ** should be interpreted as a noun or a verb. Hiebert, for instance, noted that “God’s shining advance is expressed in other theophanic contexts by synonyms of *nāgah*” (i.e., with verbs). However, Roberts (OTL) was right when he said, “None of the ancient translations give any support to attempts to emend the noun into a verb form.” Whatever the case, the text clearly envisions God as a solar deity. The bigger question is how these words relate to the surrounding context. The answer often depends on how one makes sense of the feminine singular **תְּהִיָּה**. Although some argue that “**נָגַהּ** is elsewhere masc. and not fem” (Stonehouse), most would agree that since there is no place where the gender of **נָגַהּ** is firmly established (and gender is primarily a function of syntax, not substance), there is no reason why **נָגַהּ** couldn’t function as the feminine subject of **תְּהִיָּה** (particularly since **נָגַהּ** is the only “singular” contender). By placing a *munach* below **כְּאוֹר** and *zaqeph qaton* above **תְּהִיָּה**, it is clear that the Masoretes read the text that way. The problem with that interpretation is that it isolates **קִרְנֵיָם** from any other verb, which must then be reinserted behind prepositional *min* to

cover the omission. Note, for example, NASB (rays flashing from), NAB (rays shine forth from), and KJV (horns coming out of). It would also be unusual to shove the verb to the end of the phrase (S-O-V). The fact that virtually no English translation represents that syntax, despite how well it works in English (a blaze like a luminary *appeared*), is a further sign of the awkwardness translators feel about their own interpretation. If נגה is not the subject of תהיה, then קרניים must be. In that case, the syntax would be far more natural (V-S-O), קרניים would not need a verb to be resupplied, and the notion of YHWH's brilliance would be linked more with what came before than what comes after. Note, however, that such a reading appears to conflict with how the phrase was understood in MurXII (the space between תהיה and קרניים would seem to indicate that the two were not read together at that time): . It should also be mentioned that נגה and אור are repeated in v. 11. The repetition creates correspondences and contrasts between different parts of the psalm, which is evidence of an intentional and artful composition that deserves to be represented by translators. Therefore, we render אור as “luminary” (v. 4) and “luminance” (v. 11) and נגה as “he blazed” (v. 4) and “[the] blaze” (v. 11).

A pair of horns appeared — קרניים is a well-known crux. It has been interpreted as animal-like “horns,” “rays” of light, “lightning” bolts, and “braids” (for the last, see Arnold’s “The Interpretation of קרניים מידו לו, Hab 3:4” and *KTU* 1.10.ii:21-23, which, much like the story of Samson, probably speaks about the “braids/locks” of Anat’s strength). As mentioned by Wearne, it could also represent the two points of the crescent moon (“קרניים מידו לו” and קרניים מידו לו: Reading Habakkuk 3:4 and Deuteronomy 33:2 in Light of One Another”). The decision to choose one rendering over another is often based on whether the interpreter views the text as describing a solar deity, a storm god, a divine bull, or something else, and evidence marshaled from ancient Egyptian, Canaanite, Babylonian, or Mesopotamian iconography to support that interpretation. It must be admitted, however, that Hab’s psalm contains elements common to all those mythic representations. Furthermore, scholars have pointed out that the term could reflect more than one nuance at the same time. Tsumura (“Janus Parallelism in Hab 3:4”), for example, noted that “the horns of the crown of Enlil, who is like a wild ox, are said to ‘shine like the brilliance of the sun.’” Each rendering also has its problems. The reference to “horns” seems out-of-place among terms that refer specifically to light. It would also make little sense to speak of animal horns in one’s “hand.” One problem with “rays” is that it is based not on the noun קרן, but on a verbal form of the root in Exod 34 that, despite a long and well-established history of Jewish interpretation, is actually quite obscure. Haak was correct to say that “it can provide no sure guidance for the disputed Habakkuk passage.” Like “rays,” קרן doesn’t refer to lightning elsewhere. Furthermore, “the reader is left to wonder in what sense the deity’s power could be ‘hidden’ if it is contained within the shaft of lightning in his hand” (Wearne). At the end of the day, translators must choose between imperfect options. We think that “horns”—the typical semantic nuance—is the more probable meaning. Since the plural of קרן is קרנות (see, for instance, Lev 4:7, Ps 75:11, or Ezek 27:15), קרניים is probably a dual. The dual is typically utilized when referring to body parts that occur naturally in pairs. Therefore, קרניים would refer to a pair of horns. The term

could be used literally or it could function as a metaphor for power/might. It might even serve as a metaphor for a strong one/warrior or kingdom/power like in the visions of Daniel 8. Shupak (“The God from Teman and the Egyptian Sun God: A Reconsideration of Habakkuk 3:3-7”) noted that “Horn is used in reference to God’s strength in other places in the Bible” like 2 Sam 22:3 and Ps 18:3—a doublet that could also be a שְׁנִיִּין. Since Hab 3 shares some of its specialized imagery with Deut 33 and קַרְנִים occurs rarely in the HB, it would be fortuitous if קַרְנִים occurred there as well. When we look at Deut 33:17, we see קַרְנֵי רֶאֱם (the two horns of a wild ox). It is likely, therefore, that קַרְנִים has the same meaning here, which would bring it into close semantic alignment with other terms in the verse like עֹז. Haak, for example, said, “The conjunction of the term with ‘zh in the next line would seem to indicate that the nuance of ‘strength/power’ is also intended for qrn in this case.” Hiebert agreed: “The key to a solution, it seems to me, must be in the use of qrnym at the beginning of this line in parallelism with ‘zh at the conclusion of the following line. These terms appear elsewhere as a parallel pair in Hebrew poetry.” Hiebert thought that such horns “must be those of God himself.” However, Irwin rightly noticed that “The ‘horns’ from Yahweh’s hand parallel very well the ‘plague’ and ‘pestilence’ with which he is accompanied, or equipped, in verse 5.” Typically, feminine dual nouns are represented by what look like masculine plural verbs. In some cases, however—particularly when dealing with parts of the body that naturally occur in pairs—those nouns are linked with feminine singular verb forms. For example, 1 Sam 4:15 and Mik 4:11 both feature the feminine dual subject “eyes” paired with a feminine singular verb (the perfect קָמָה and imperfect תִּחַזֵּי, respectively). In Ps 68:14, we see a feminine singular perfect for the feminine dual “wings.” In Ugaritic, the third feminine dual in the imperfect started with preformative T. Some scholars have also noted what appears to be a dual preformative T in some of the Amarnah letters. Considering the archaic use of the 3MS pronominal suffix on עֹז, it is not unreasonable to view תִּחַזֵּי as an archaic use of the feminine dual imperfect. Therefore, Patterson (“The Psalm of Habakkuk”) is probably correct: “The dual form . . . controls the verb תִּחַזֵּי which takes the *t*-form common to older poetry.” Although we tend to approach arguments by Gary Rendsburg and Mitchell Dahood with a great deal of caution and/or suspicion, we believe that there is value in some of their efforts. Rendsburg’s “Dual Personal Pronouns and Dual Verbs in Hebrew” provides a welcome challenge to the common perception that ancient Hebrew had no “productive” use of the dual. For the caveat that we are reading this verb against the syntactic arrangement reflected in MurXII, see the note above. As mentioned by Briggs (*Messianic Prophecy*), “תִּחַזֵּי has here the meaning, become, *appear*.”

by his might — Part of the difficulty with מִיָּדוֹ is eliminated when one realizes that יָד (literally “hand”) functions as a metonym for power, control, dominion, or fortitude. For the same type of metonym elsewhere in Hab, see “power” (literally “right hand”) in 2:16 and “might” (literally “hands”) in 3:10. For other body-part metonyms, see “butchery” (literally “bloods”) in 2:8 and “manifestation” (literally “face”) in 2:20. Most interpreters think that the preposition *min* indicates location/source (from/out of) or is ablative (indicating motion “away from”). A few believe that it indicates position (at/on). Since we do not isolate תִּחַזֵּי from the current colon (see above), we can interpret *min* as the means or agency of the verbal action (IBHS

§11.2.11d) as seen, for example, in Gen 9:11: **לֹא־יִכְרַת כָּל־בָּשָׂר עוֹד מִמֵּי הַמַּבּוּל** (All flesh will never be rent again by the waters of such cataclysm!). Note that **מִיֶּדְדוֹ** is parallel to **עֵזָה**. The shift in the form of the pronominal suffix (from the usual *waw* to archaic *heh*) in parallel phrases is one example of the grammatical alternation common in ancient Hebrew poetry. Likewise, ancient Hebrew poetry often elides articles, prepositions, and particles that already appeared in a previous, parallel colon. It is no surprise, therefore, to find **עֵזָה** instead of **מֵעֵזָה**. Nevertheless, the sense of means or agency is still present.


to [serve] him — This *lamed* with pronominal suffix is usually treated as reflexive: “his own.” We believe, however, that it is a *lamed* of interest or advantage. Literally, therefore, one might render the text “for his benefit.” Möller interpreted it similarly: “for him.”

hideout — **חִבְיוֹן** is another well-known crux. **§** related it to the participle **חִבֵּב** in Deut 33:22. Since, however, the meaning of that participle is just as obscure as the noun in Hab, **§**'s rendering offers no help. Barb rendered it “glory,” which is also no help. Some look for possible cognates. In Akkadian, one finds *hābu* or *hubbu*, which means “to consecrate” or “purify” (CAD). Popular emendations include changing the *bet* to *peh*, resulting in renderings like “covering” or “veil” (from **חִפְּהוּ**), or altering **חִבְיוֹן** to **שִׂמְחָה בְּיוֹם**, “rejoicing in the day of” (see Albright, “The Psalm of Habakkuk”). As noted, however, by Wearne, “The most common solution is to identify . . . **חִבְיוֹן** . . . with the Heb root **חִבֵּא**, ‘to withdraw, hide,’ which occasionally appears in the form of a **חִבֵּא** verb **חִבֵּא לְהַ**.” From that interpretation comes renderings like “the hiding of his power” (KJV), which is then shifted into a verb as in NRSV (his power lay hidden), NAB (his power is concealed), or NJPST (His glory is enveloped). “Ultimately, one must determine . . . whether the contextual emphasis centers on the frequently stressed idea of the veiled presence of God, or is a literary borrowing of the familiar theme of the divine warrior moving amidst his heavenly armies . . . , or is simply an expression of God’s power as manifested in the natural world” (Patterson). We reject the third option and believe that Stonehouse provided the definitive reply to the first: “It is not easy to think of the bright splendour . . . as forming the hiding-place of the Divine Power; it would be rather regarded as the manifestation of the latter; and it is, moreover, darkness which forms elsewhere the covering of God’s glory and power.” It is no wonder that Andersen (he (un-)veiled his power), SET (His hidden strength [was revealed]), and others would start with the first option and then insert words that directly contradict it. The second option (a literary borrowing of the theme of the Divine Warrior) is clearly preferable. But if we take **חִבְיוֹן** from **חִבֵּא** or **חִבֵּא**, we are still left to wonder in what sense “a hiding place” works with the motif of the Divine Warrior. Smith (*The Book of the Twelve Prophets*) proposed that the sense was “ambush” (i.e., a hiding-place that enables someone to attack their opponents more successfully). We propose the opposite: “hideout” (i.e., a hiding-place that enables people who are being attacked to find safety). In other words, the Divine Warrior comes forth not just to fight off Israel’s opponents, but to provide them with shelter/asylum.

3:5 **yes** — Virtually all English translators render this *waw* as “and” as if **רָשָׁף** and **דָּבָר** were two different forces/entities doing separate things. Instead, the *waw* introduces a parallel statement that describes another aspect of the same situation. As noted by Avishur, “The two cola are completely parallel.” **לִפְנֵי** and **לְרִגְלָיו** are parallel, **יֵלֶךְ** and **יֵצֵא** are parallel, and **דָּבָר** and

רשף are parallel. The verbs ילך and יצא are synonymous (they describe the same action) and appear as word-pairs in both poetry and prose (see, for example, Isa 52:12 and Deut 8:14-15, respectively). Considering the larger context, they must pertain to a military-like advance (certainly not the jejune and vacuous renderings usually given them by translators of this verse). לרגליו and לפניו use a spacial or locational *lamed* (at/in [a place]) attached to two body-parts at polar ends of the body (face and feet) and at polar ends of the verse to create a merism that indicates totality—i.e., this is not happening at two different locations or in two different spaces, but “from head to toe” (metonyms indicating the area “all around” the deity). We have every reason, therefore, to view רשף and דבר are synonyms as well. In fact, “The interchanges between *rešep* / *qeteb* (Deut. 32:24) and *deber* / *qeteb* (Ps. 91:6, and apparently also Hos. 13:14) . . . imply that *deber* / *rešep* is a synonymous word pair” (Avishur). In fact, they are probably the “pair of horns” mentioned in the previous verse! As such, they probably function collectively, not separately. Tsumura (“Ugaritic Poetry and Habakkuk 3”) correctly noted that “In Habakkuk 3 *rešep* as well as *deber* are the symbols of Yahweh’s destructive power” (i.e., two symbols of a single thing). Despite an impressive number of scholars who view Resheph as something like “a demon of plague who travels in Yahweh’s royal entourage” (Roberts, OTL), the word רשף is simply another way to say דבר in poetic parallelism (which is why so many scholars are keen to alter the text in Ps 78:48 from ברד and רשפים, “hail” and “plague,” to דבר and רשפים, “pestilence” and “plague”). That is not to say that רשף can’t thicken the description; only that it is not a secondary thing to דבר. Therefore, we avoid rendering the *waw* as “and” (see 1:4 and 2:12). For the use of רשף in the HB, see Day (*Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*). For an excellent discussion of the ancient NE deity, see Fulco (*The Canaanite God Rešep*).

- 3:6 **stood . . . stoop** — The inverted imperfect וימדד consists either of the verb מדר (as a Poel) or מוד (as a Pilel). If the former, then the meaning is “to measure.” If the latter, then the verb is a *hapax legomenon*. Early English translators favored the first interpretation and some modern translators still prefer that sense. Grace Ko (*Theodicy in Habakkuk*) explained it this way: “God is portrayed as an architect who stood and measured the earth, but the purpose of measuring is for destruction rather than construction.” In other words, “measuring” has to do with divine judgment. There are, however, significant problems with that interpretation. As noted by Andersen (AYB), “Measuring the earth does not fit into the narrative of the theophany that develops in vv. 3-7.” The deity is portrayed everywhere else as a warrior, not an architect! To get around the inappropriateness of such a rendering, advocates sometimes say that it refers to the measurement done by one’s eyes. As noted, however, by Stonehouse, “מדד is nowhere else found in the sense of measuring with the eye.” Most importantly, however, “The parallel clause would lead us to expect not some further description of what He did, but a statement respecting the *effect* of His standing” (*italics and capitalization original*). Therefore, “to measure” should be rejected. ט and ט rendered the verb as “to shake.” Since, however, “There is no word מוד or מדר meaning ‘to shake’” (S. R. Driver), the translators of the versions were probably just as perplexed as we are! They could have read מוט (to topple/shake/move), מער (wobble/shake), or נוד (sway/swing) in place of מוד (like many modern

commentators). Ward (ICC) and Stonehouse thought that מִדֶּד was a corruption of מִגֵּג, a Pile of מִגֵּג, meaning “to melt.” But if one is willing to emend the text to make sense of it, how does one decide between “melt” and “shake”? Both are equally appropriate metaphoric reactions by the natural world to the presence of the deity. Since MurXII attests to the antiquity of the Masoretes’ consonantal text (), it is the inclination to disregard that text that should be emended. G. R. Driver suggested that מִדֶּד carried the sense of an Arabic cognate meaning “to convulse” (“Difficult Words in the Hebrew Prophets”). Such a reading seems plausible, but how can we validate it? Without some kind of control, one’s rendering ultimately depends on a subjective interpretation of the poetry and its context. We agree with Stonehouse that מִדֶּד must reflect the response of the earth to YHWH’s action. The reciprocal response to “standing” is “lowering” or “bending down.” That is reflected precisely in the final colon of the verse with שָׁחָה (to stoop/crouch). We think, therefore, that the first and last cola are parallel: just as earth is *made low* when YHWH stands, so the hills and highways *bow down*. Note also the assonance in the phrase עָמַד וַיִּמָּדֶד. To mimic that sound-play, we render the verbs as “stood” and “stoop” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

bowed, hills [and] highways of old, to him — The latter parts of this verse are typically translated “the perpetual hills did bow” followed by “his ways are everlasting.” But to move from the first idea to the second is a *non sequitur*. No wonder so many scholars have tried to excise or emend it! Albright, for instance, argued that הַלִּיכּוֹת עוֹלָם referred to the orbits of the stars. By reading תַּחַת אֵוֶן in the next verse as a form of the verb “to crush/grind up/annihilate” (see below), he was able to read the final colon as “eternal orbits were shattered.” Hiebert thought that “The disruption of the fixed movements of the heavenly bodies fits in well with the cosmic turmoil pictured in the preceding lines.” However, “‘Orbits’ are not quite at home in the context” (Eaton, “The Origin and Meaning of Habakkuk 3”). Instead, Hab 3 deals with “God’s mighty deeds as He goes out to battle His enemies and conquers them” (Avishur). Such enemies are situated in “earth,” “mountains,” and “hills.” Clearly, הַלִּיכּוֹת means the mountain ranges” (Ward) or roadways thereabout. Eaton was correct: “אֵוֶן is strongly supported by the VSS and is in itself satisfactory. There does not seem to be any scope for an emendation which does not bring its own greater difficulties.” To understand the final colon of this verse, three things need to be explained: (1) how שָׁחָה fits into the context, (2) why there is a repetition of עוֹלָם in the final colon, and (3) how the prepositional *lamed* (with pronominal suffix) fits into the picture. In the following verse, scholars routinely point out the discrepancy between the masculine יִרְגִּזוּן and feminine יִרְיַעוֹת. Such incongruity does more than draw comment; it influences translation. When it comes to this verse, however, גִּבְעוֹת is routinely treated as the subject of שָׁחָה with neither mention nor care that שָׁחָה is masculine and גִּבְעוֹת is feminine. If we presume that the text is intentional, then the gender of the terms provides valuable information. If one feminine-gendered noun was the subject of a verb, we would expect a feminine verb, but if two or more feminine-gendered nouns were the subject, we would expect a *masculine* verb. We have good reason, therefore, to think that גִּבְעוֹת is not

the sole subject of the verb. Ward thought that “the second appearance of עולם is suspicious.” It is clear that the first is parallel with ער. Why then the duplication? The way the duplication is treated by most translators, one would think that it was a different term. But if we presume that the text is intentional, the fact that גבעות עולם and הליכות עולם exist in extreme proximity to each other, both consist of feminine plural geographic terms, and both are followed by the same modifier, indicates that they function as a unit. We are left with three possible uses of the prepositional *lamed* (with pronominal suffix): (1) it indicates something more about the highways (they “are his”), (2) it functions as a helping particle for the verb (indicating motion or direction of action towards an object), or (3) it is an asseverative לו that was misunderstood and pointed wrongly by the Masoretes. If we follow (1), the result is “[the] hills of old bowed [down]—his own highways of old.” If we follow (2), the result is “[the] hills of old [and] highways of old bowed to him.” If we follow (3), we are forced to redivide the text so that לו begins the next verse. The result is “[In consequence] for harm, I surely did discover, the camps of Kushan trembled.” Of the three, (1) is the weakest. We prefer (2). Sinker objected to (2) on the grounds that שחח in Kal never occurs in the Bible with ל following.” Yet it is clear that שחח can utilize many different prepositions and particles to convey its sense. In Yob 38:40, שחח uses כ to situate the action in a particular place. In Ps 107:39, שחח uses מן to indicate the cause or means of the verbal action. Most importantly, שחח uses אל (to/toward) in Prov 2:18 to indicate the motion or direction of the verbal action. Likewise, שחח uses לפני (to the front/face of) in Prov 14:19 to indicate the motion or direction of the verbal action. If the *lamed* in לו can convey the same sense as אל or the *lamed* in לפני, then the idea that שחח can be used with ל to mean “to bow to X” is unassailable. For a good defense of (3), see Sivan and Schniedewind’s “Letting Your ‘Yes’ Be ‘No’ in Ancient Israel: A Study of the Asseverative לא and הלא.”

- 3:7 [In consequence] for harm — Or “[in exchange] for harm,” “because of harm.” The phrase תחת און is difficult for interpreters. Most render it “in affliction.” However, תחת means “under,” not “in.” Henderson thought that “‘under affliction’ . . . suggests the idea of a heavy load by which those spoken of were oppressed.” Sinker understood it that way: “bowed down under calamity.” But to say that Kushan and Midian are weighed down under iniquity seems out-of-place. Altering “harm/iniquity” (און) to the Egyptian city “On” (און)—i.e., Heliopolis—is a text-critical suggestion that stretches back to Perles’ *Analekten zur Textkritik des Alten Testaments* in 1895 (*Statt תחת און lese ich תחת און*) and Duhm’s *Das Buch Habakuk* in 1906 (*תחת און: unter (den Mauern von) Heliopolis*). In this case, however, it is better to follow the Masoretic vocalization. Not only would it be strange to have a city in Lower Egypt paralleling Kushan and Midian, it would destroy the parallelism between this verse at the end of the section and the verse at the start of the section (v. 3), each of which features two place-names in parallel cola (see Barré’s “Newly Discovered Literary Devices”). A similar problem is inherent in readings that take the whole phrase as a place-name (as in Patterson’s “I looked on Tahath-Aven”). Albright suggested that תחת און be read as תחתאון from חתא (to grind up/crush/annihilate), which appears in Ugaritic (see DUL) and has cognates in other ancient

Semitic languages. The result would be “they were crushed” (referring to the highways in v. 6). His suggestion has been followed by other scholars and translators. While such a rendering works well and is supported in ancient Semitic, it is also a completely unnecessary alteration. We shifted **הנה מאת** in Hab 2:13 to **את הנהם** because the text made no sense. The same cannot be said of **תחת און**. Furthermore, the alteration to **תחתאון** is usually driven by the need to tack a verb onto the end of the previous verse. There is no need here. When **תחת** does not mean “under/beneath,” it has two other nuances: “because of” or “instead of/in place of/in exchange for” (see, for instance, Zeph 2:10). Based on **𐤔**’s rendering, Cathcart and Gordon surmised that the translators of **𐤔** understood the Hebrew to mean “in return for.” **𐤔**’s use of *pro* (on behalf of/according to/instead of/for) also supports that interpretation. Therefore, Cheyne was right to say, “**תחת** retains its proper meaning, ‘instead of.’” Renz (NICOT) preferred “in place of.” What then is meant by the phrase? Roberts (OTL) explained it this way: “The line refers back to Habakkuk’s complaint in 1:3, and it serves as the protasis to the following two lines.” In other words, by reusing the verb **ראה** and noun **און** from 1:3, this verse addresses and reverses the situation that began Hab’s complaint—yet another proof that ch. 3 was composed specifically for its location at the end of Hab’s prophetic text (see below).

I did discover . . . [every] tent-cover — More literally, “I saw . . . tent-covers.” Scholars often view **ראיתי** as an anomaly. It is sometimes ignored; other times emended. Most translators, however, represent it. So they should! **ראיתי** (*rāʾîti*) and **יריעות** (*yeriʾôt*) form a clever sound-play (repetition of *resh*, *tav*, *yod*, and a guttural). To mimic that sound-play, we render the verb as “to discover” and the noun as “tent-cover” (see **be dazzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB). Note that by pairing this particular verb with **און**, a link is created between this verse (**און ראיתי**) and Hab 1:3, which featured the same verb and noun (**תראני און**). The word-order, however, is reversed, which reflects a reversal of the situation that first gave rise to Hab’s complaint.

the camps of Kushan trembled — More literally, “*the tents* of Kushan trembled” (“tents” is a metonym for the people living inside). Many translations treat **יריעות** (tent-covers) as the subject of **ירננון** (a *yiqtol* preterit with paragogic *nun*). However, scholars routinely point out the inconsistency between a masculine plural verb and a feminine plural subject. As noted by Hiebert, “This difficulty is resolved if the subject of *yrgzwn* is identified as the masculine term *hl* which precedes it.” Where then is the feminine verb in the final colon? It has been poetically elided—a common feature of ancient Semitic poetry! Therefore, **ירננון** is made to stand in for the missing verb (what scholars sometimes call “doing double duty”). In that way, the poetry at the end of the section matches the poetry at the start: “Eloah—from Teman, he came. [The] Holy [One], indeed, from Mount Paran [went forth].” For our use of italics, see **Anagrams** in section A3. For more on the paragogic *nun*, see **Beasts will terrorize** in 2:17.

3:8 Two things need to be understood about this verse before its parts can be appreciated: how to understand the relationship between the verb in the first colon and the rest of the verse and how to understand the interrogative particles. There are four ways to make sense of **חרה** in its larger context. The first is to make **YHWH** the subject. The problem, however, is that **YHWH** is nowhere else the subject of **חרה** (except in hypothetical situations). In fact, “an individual is

never the subject of this verb except in the reflexive conjugations” (Hiebert). Second, one could alter the verb from third to second-person. 𐤒 and Barb reflect that reading, but it is difficult to know whether the Greek texts represent an actual variant. Third, one could read “nose” in the following colon as the subject: “The subject of the verb 𐤒𐤒 is 𐤒𐤒” (Henderson). Although many scholars interpret the text that way, few translations reflect it. Perhaps translators are hesitant to embrace a more unusual syntactic relationship. Loewenstamm (“The Expanded Colon in Ugaritic and Biblical Verse”) noted that a more normal construction would look like this: “Against rivers did it *fume*, YHWH? Against the rivers did your nose *fume*?” Sinker objected to “having two consecutive clauses, of which the first contains the verb and the second its nominative” unless “some exact parallel instances were brought forward” to validate the structure. Studies of ancient Semitic poetry have now revealed that this verse aligns with a device sometimes called “delayed identification.” “Delayed identification . . . is simply leaving the name of a subject to some time after his or her actions are described. In other words, . . . the verb (or verbs) is (are) set out first, no definite identity being provided till the second or even third line of verse” (Watson). Watson provided several examples of that device in Ugaritic poetry, analyzed one from the HB (Ps 34:18-19) and then pointed to other examples for further study (see Isa 13:5, 23:11; Mik 6:5). Watson concluded by saying, “It is also interesting that when the subject is eventually named, identity is often made doubly clear by a parallel couplet,” which is precisely what we find in Hab 3:8. There is, therefore, no reasonable objection to the third option. There are also three ways to read the interrogative particles. Virtually all English translations represent them as genuine questions. Since Hab uses interrogatives rhetorically everywhere else (beginning with the very first statement), that reading seems improbable. Instead, the interrogatives must mark the phrases as rhetorical statements that anticipate either an emphatically negative answer (*no way* did it fume) or an emphatically positive one (it *really* did fume). Henderson was an early advocate of the former: “The implied answer is, No.” O’Neal defended that view by noting that when 𐤒 is used interrogatively, it “usually expresses a kind of rhetorical alternative which expects a negative answer.” He referenced Gen 37:8 as an example, where the statements “Will you rule [as] ruler over us?” (interrogative *heh*) and “Will you govern [as] governor of us?” (interrogative 𐤒) are rhetorical statements that anticipate a negative response. If one views the reference to “rivers” and “sea” literally, then it makes sense to interpret the statements as emphatically negative (why would YHWH’s nose fume over water?). Such a reading, however, is too simplistic. Most scholars agree that there is a mythological element in the imagery, in which case it would make more sense to interpret the statements as emphatically positive. Hiebert noted that “Throughout the poem, the poet has used the literary device of inclusion to indicate stanzaic structure. . . . V(erse) 8 opens the second section of God’s theophany by juxtaposing the cosmic waters . . . with the storm god mounted on his horse-drawn chariot. V(erse) 15 concludes this section by again juxtaposing these same characters. Only here God’s horses trample Sea, the cosmic waters. . . . The climax described in v. 15 necessitates an affirmative answer to the rhetorical question in v. 8.” It is more appropriate, therefore, to interpret the interrogative particles as emphatically positive: he *really* did! The goal of the statement wasn’t just to recount some historic event, but to create a new reality. Through his connection to the deity and his ability to speak words of power, Hab intended to usher the Divine Warrior into conflict with the current waters of chaos (Babylon). The use of rhetorically emphatic interrogatives was part of that process.

because of — In most cases, prepositional *bet* is locative—it indicates the place/space “in,” “at,” “among,” “on,” or “through” which something transpires. Since the “rivers” and “sea” are probably not literal references, the preposition probably doesn’t function that way here. Instead, interpreters tend to render the three instances of the preposition as a verbal complementizer that indicates adversative action: “to fume/burn *against*.” For the reasons why we do not follow that interpretation, see the discussion in section B4.

the nose of you . . . the violence of you — To mimic the end-rhyme between the second and third cola (*-ekā, -ekā*), we shift “your nose” and “your violence” to “the nose of you” and “the violence of you” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB). For our rendering of עברה, see the last part of section B4.

fume — For a discussion of this verb and how it has been distorted by translators, see section B (particularly Excursus 1 in section B3 and the analysis in section B4). To show that this verb is participating in a clever word-play, we render it “to fume” (see **Anagrams** in section A3). For a defense of the “broken anagram” in הבנהרים חרה, see Barré (“Newly Discovered Literary Devices”).

with — How should we understand על? It is clearly a helping particle for the verb רכב. Some translations, therefore, say that YHWH was riding “on” or “upon” his horses. As noted, however, in 1:8, ancient NE warriors did not ride on horses; they rode chariots pulled by them. Some translations say that YHWH “drove” his horses, which reflects the context better, but treats the preposition as superfluous. It makes better sense to read על as a preposition of accompaniment (alongside/with), which also explains the use of plural nouns (“chariots” and “horses”) instead of singular nouns.

- 3:9 The second colon of Hab 3:9 has continually mystified interpreters and defied explanation. Irving put it this way, “A clause of the ninth verse of the third chapter is said to have been translated in a hundred different ways; which means, of course, that it cannot be translated at all.” Perhaps Andersen (AYB) said it best: “The frustrating thing is that each of the three words . . . is separately recognizable. But the meaning of each is indeterminate, and the syntax is completely baffling.” It is no wonder that someone should come along and try to give meaning to each word independently. Henry St. John Thackeray (“Primitive Lectionary Notes in the Psalm of Habakkuk”) (in)famously argued that שבעות מטות אמר consisted of three different liturgical notes that originated in the margin, but were then incorporated into the text by a scribe. He believed that each note was a catchword for a portion of Torah to read during the triennial reading cycle on Pentecost. The fact that another liturgical note occurs at the same point in the verse (סלה) and that there was a tradition of reading the third chapter of Hab during the Festival of Weeks (*b. Meg.* 31A) made his interpretation attractive. For many reasons, however, it must be rejected (see Marcus’ “Does the Enigmatic Phrase שבעות מטות אמר (Hab 3:9) Represent Liturgical Glosses?”). In the notes below, we present our own interpretation. We do not pretend to solve all the problems. Nevertheless, we think we have found a way to understand the phrase that makes sense contextually, depends on a meaning for each word that is clearly attested, participates in ideas that can be found not just in ancient Israel, but throughout the ancient NE, and requires little or no emendation.

Bare [and] brandished was your bow. — עריה תעור is composed of the feminine singular noun עריה followed by a *yiqtol* preterit. The noun is easy to identify; it comes from ערה√ and refers to a state of bareness or nakedness. It is featured several times in Ezek (16:7, 22, 39; 23:29) as part of the phrase ערם ועריה (literally, “naked and bare,” but better interpreted as a statement of hendiadys: “stark naked”). The question is how it functions in relation to the verb in Hab. One normally finds an infinitive absolute used with a finite verb of the same root to create an emphatic statement. That is how ש interpreted the phrase: εντείνων εντενεις (bending, you bent). So did ו: *suscitans suscitabis* (stirring up, you stirred up). As mentioned, however, in GKC §113w, “The infinitive absolute may equally well be represented by a *substantive* of kindred stem” (*italics original*), which probably explains the situation here. The next issue is the root of תעור. If it comes from עור√, the verb would mean “to stir up/excite/prepare/brandish.” That meaning is represented by ש, ו, 8HevXII gr, Barb, and ש (“to bend” would be an interpretive explanation). If it comes from ערה√ or ערר√, the verb would mean something like “to be bare/naked” (some argue that the verb עור could also mean “to be bare/naked” even though it does not have that sense elsewhere). Since the noun seems to take the place of an infinitive absolute, many think that the verb should be taken from the same root (or from a root with the same meaning). But what does it mean to say that a weapon is “exposed in nakedness”? Proponents of that interpretation usually say that it refers to a weapon being taken out of its protective covering. Perhaps so. It seems strange, however, to use such an emphatic construction for such a normal procedure (unsheathing). Furthermore, the use of עריה would communicate the same sense anyway (a bare weapon is not in its covering). Avishur thought that “to bare one’s bow” meant to empty it of all its arrows, which would make more sense (if correct). Note that עריה תעור alliterates through repetition of the consonants *‘ayin* and *resh*. Henderson believed that such paronomasia “determines the signification of עור, as here employed, to be that of being *bare* or *naked*, and not that of *rousing* or *exciting*” (*italics original*). The sound-play would still exist, however, if the verb meant “to stir up/excite/prepare/brandish” instead—a sense that is applied elsewhere both to weapons (see 2 Sam 23:18) and warriors (like YHWH) and is supported by the versions. If it wasn’t enough to have to choose between roots, the *yiqtol* preterit could be interpreted either as a 2MS Piel or Hiphil with YHWH as the subject (you did/made) or a 3FS Niphal with “your bow” as the subject (it was). ש and ו prefer the former; Barb prefers the latter. Below is a chart that shows the translation options. In each case, we provide renderings that mimic the sound-play, which, unlike the various translation choices, is neither ambiguous nor doubtful and should, therefore, be represented by English translators (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

	YHWH as subject (active)	Bow as subject (passive)
to be bare/naked	Nude you shewed your bow.	Exposed [and] disclosed was your bow.
to excite/brandish	Bare [was] the bow you brandished.	Bare [and] brandished was your bow.

Seven-fold [was] [the] bending of [your] bough. — That is, the bough or shaft of the bow was bent seven times (to fire arrows). As mentioned by Cassuto (“Chapter 3 of Habakkuk and the Ras Shamra Texts”), “In view of the parallelism with 9a, in which the bow (קשתך) is mentioned, we expect here, too, mention of a weapon.” Most interpreters look to מטות for that weapon. As noted, however, by Andersen (AYB), “There is no story in Hebrew in which a *matteh* is used as a weapon.” To link מטות to קשת, many translations render מטות as “arrows.” מטה can mean many things (staff, scepter, branch, crossbar, tribe, etc.), but it never refers to an arrow. Furthermore, “In Habakkuk 3:11 the words for ‘arrow’ and ‘spear’ appear as חציך ‘your arrows’ and חניתך ‘your spear’” (Tsumura, “Ugaritic Poetry and Habakkuk 3”). Since the text uses different terms in this verse, it is even more unlikely that מטות would have that nuance. To salvage the idea that מטות is a weapon, interpreters turn to Akkadian texts where gods or kings are described as wielding a mace/club (*mittu*) or Ugaritic texts where it is believed that the cognate term *mt* (“rod/staff/riding crop,” DUL) is parallel to *qšt* (bow). In other words, scholars and interpreters are able to bring a sense to the Hebrew that it wouldn’t otherwise convey by appealing to outside sources. If one were looking for something to parallel קשת, the most obvious choice is אמר, which exists in the exact same position at the end of the colon. Interpreters automatically exclude that term because they believe that it comes from the same root as the verb אמר (to say/speak)—an identification that is itself baffling. In Isa 17:6, however, one finds the singular term אָמִיר (or אָמִר *defectiva*), which is parallel to the plural phrase “its fruitful limbs” (סעפיה פריה) and clearly refers to a “bough” or “branch” (perhaps even a collection of them). The same word probably occurs in Gen 49:21 referring to the branches/boughs/limbs of a tree (although that identification is disputed). In other words, we have at least one sure instance of a term that matches what we find in Hab 3 and has the same meaning that people find in מטות. Just as a bough/branch/limb could be used for a staff, scepter, or the crossbar of a yoke, so it could be used for the shaft of a bow. But if אמר is the term that parallels קשת, what do we make of מטות? In Isa 8:8, we find מטות, a feminine plural noun from נטה/ (to bend/stretch/extend/turn aside) that functions as a gerund: “bending/stretching.” Williamson (ICC) rendered the text there as “the *outspreading* of his wings.” Roberts (Hermeneia) preferred “the *spreading* of his wings.” Another term from the root occurs in Ezek 9:9: מטה (“corruption/perversion,” i.e., what is “bent/turned aside/warped”). If we read מטות in Hab 3:9 like Isa 8:8, we would have “[the] bending/stretching of [the] bough” (when the wooden shaft was stretched back at its two ends by the bowstring). And if אמר is part and parcel of קשת, the suffix on קשת could carry over easily (*your* shaft/bough/stave). Some may fault our interpretation on the grounds that מטוי in v. 14 can’t possibly mean “spreading/extending/bending.” In that verse, however, it is perfectly acceptable to say that the deity cracks open the head of the enemy with his own מטה (rod/scepter) because vv. 13-14 deal with the rescue of one ruling authority (the “anointed”) and the overthrow of another. There is no sense in this verse that a ruling authority (symbolized by his staff/scepter) is being overthrown. Therefore, we should not expect the same meaning.

What sense can then be made of שבעות? Scholars agree that ש's use of επι τα (against the) is a corruption of επτα (seven). Some translators prefer that reading. Note, for example, Alter (seven rods), Avishur (seven staffs), or SAT (seven clubs). Such readings, however, presume an emendation to something like שבע or שבעת. The question is whether we can preserve the text and make sense of it as well. שבעות is a masculine plural noun that indicates a series of seven (a heptad). Elsewhere in the HB, it refers to days or years—i.e., it notes a progression through time. “It therefore entirely begs the question to assume that it may be used here for bundles” of weapons (Sinker). Instead, we suggest that it refers to a progression through time of battle acts and translate the whole phrase as “seven-fold [was] [the] bending of [your] bough” (more idiomatically, “seven times was your bow shaft bent”). Ewald interpreted שבעות the same way: “seven-fold spear-charges.” Pinker (“The Lord’s Bow in Habakkuk 3:9a”) objected to that reading because there is no evidence that seven volleys or seven attacks was a practice in ancient NE warfare. The term, however, is symbolic, not factual. In Joshua 6, Israel’s battle against Jericho is described this way: seven priests blow seven horns as they march around the city for six days. On the seventh day, seven priests blow their seven horns for a seventh time and then shout. Whether the battle actually took place that way misses the point; a series of seven is used to tell us that something was done completely or perfectly (therefore, the age-old walls of Jericho fell). In the War Scroll from Qumran, we see an imaginary battle play out (according to divine plan) in which seven lines of warriors hurl their instruments of war seven times against the enemy. Since seven was a highly symbolic number in the ancient NE, it is unsurprising to find it used in discussions of warfare. We suggest that Hab was drawing from the same well of symbolic imagery that was utilized by the composers of Joshua and the War Scroll. Symbolic words also have *power*, which further explains why “seven-fold” would be employed here.

Exalt! — See section A3.

3:10 [as] [the] torrent of water passed [by] — The final colon of the previous verse mentioned both earth and water: “[The] rivers you sundered [in] [the] earth.” We believe that this verse expands on that statement by referring again to both elements/regions, but in reverse order, thereby providing a chiasmus of imagery:

A. נהרות (rivers)

B. ארץ (earth)

B1. הרים (the mountains)

A1. זרם מים (torrent of water)

A2. תהום (abyss)

The description of YHWH’s assault on the watery forces began with the notion that they were split. A pair of parallel clauses then focus again on what happened to them. Since the earth/mountains are sandwiched between, they can’t help but be moved by those surrounding circumstances. In v. 10, however, the parallel cola function as circumstantial clauses, providing further context for the reaction of the earth/mountains. Therefore, we begin each cola with “as.” Instead of זרם מים עבר, MurXII has זרמו מים עבות (they poured—the waters of the clouds). The same phrase occurs in Ps 77:18. Some scholars prefer that reading. If we are correct about the chiasmus, the watery forces in the parallel cola should correspond with the

“rivers” at the start. Since the נהרות in v. 9 are described in terms of the earth, not the sky, the imagery in Ps 77 is unlikely. The text in MurXII is best explained as a case of harmonization with Ps 77:18.

Majestic [in] its might [was] the towering of sun. — The final colon (רום ידיהו נשא) is often understood with Tehom/abyss as the subject and ידיהו as a gesture involving one’s hands: “it lifted its hands on high.” But what does that mean? Supporters of that reading usually say that it refers to the rising of Tehom’s “waves.” However, when we find a text that says a body of water is “raising” its “waves,” גלים is used, not “hand(s)” (see, for example, Ps 107:25 and Ezek 26:3). Furthermore, “The other clauses . . . lead us to expect not the same subject . . . , but some other subject” (Stonehouse). Most interpreters find that subject in רום at the start of the colon or שמש at the start of the next verse (a few suggest YHWH). The first interpretation is based on the idea that רום is a secondary form of מרום, which is used in several places to indicate “sky/heaven” (see Isa 24:21, 33:5, or 38:14). Ewald (the height lifted up its hands) and Alter (the sky swears solemnly) read it that way. However, Sinker pointed out that “The noun רום . . . is ordinarily taken as standing for an adverb.” In fact, רום is synonymous with זבל, which leads one to suspect that the final colon of this verse is parallel with the first colon of the next one: שמש ירח עמד זבלה (Sun moon—it stood [in] its eminence). The strange thing about that colon is that “sun” and “moon” are a unified entity. Most translations obscure the issue by inserting a conjunction between the nouns, treating the verb as a plural, and altering זבלה to זבלם. Note, for example, KJV (The sun and moon stood in their habitation). Such a reading is not improbable, but neither is it compelling. If the verse is redivided so that שמש ends the previous verse and operates as the subject of נשא, then we have two cola where each subject, verb, and adverbial accusative are not only similar (“sun” and “moon” are both celestial luminaries, “to raise” and “to stand” both indicate upward motion, and “majestic/elevated” and “eminent/princely” both convey exalted status), but structurally parallel. Redividing the verses allows us to explain the final *heh* on זבלה as an archaic 3MS suffix parallel to the archaic 3MS suffix on ידיהו with the shift in form arising due to the grammatical alternation typical in ancient Hebrew poetry. 𐤅 and 𐤆 also interpreted the *heh* as a 3MS suffix (not a directional *heh* as presumed by early English translators). Translations that treat “sun” as the subject of נשא include NRSV, NAB, and AAT. Many scholars note the similarity between Hab 3:10-11 and Josh 10:13 (וידם השמש וירח עמד, “still was the sun and the moon transfixed”): both speak of sun and moon in the context of divine battle and both use the verb עמד. In fact, רום is eerily similar to רום in Josh 10:13. Due to those similarities, scholars sometimes let Josh 10:13 direct their reading of Hab 3:10-11. Given the lack of other correspondences between Hab 3 and Josh 10, we are hesitant to draw piecemeal from that text to explain this one. But what would it mean for the sun to “raise its hands”? A survey of texts that use נשא with “hand(s)” or “palm(s)” shows that the phrase sometimes describes prayer or supplication (as in Ps 28:2), praise or worship (as in Ps 63:2), the swearing of an oath (as in Ps 106:26), reliance or obedience (as in Ps 119:48), and even the raising of a sign/signal (as in Isa 49:22). Yet none of

those options work well in Hab. Andersen concluded, “Just what sun expresses in the gesture of raising his hands is not evident.” Roberts (OTL) admitted, “Even if the image of the sun with outstretched hands is common in Near Eastern iconography . . . , it makes little sense in this context.” The difficulty disappears if **יְיָ** is a metonym for “power” or “might.” We already saw instances where “hand” was used that way (2:16 and 3:4). In fact, body-part metonyms are an important component of Hab’s poetic style (see “face” and “feet” in 3:5 or the “nose” that “fumes” in 3:8). The point then is not that sun and moon were frozen in place, but that when **YHWH** charged into battle, not only were the age-old mountains moved, but the celestial spheres, which stood at their majestic heights (indicating their full power and influence), fled from him. In other words, the greatest and strongest things both above and below were shaken at the sight of his assault. Note that even though we rendered **נִשָּׂא** like a participle, we only did so to mimic the structure that we perceive in the text, in which “sun” ends the first colon and its parallel (moon) begins the second—an arrangement quite common in ancient Hebrew poetry (in 3:3, for example, “[with] his prestige” ended one colon and its parallel, “with his illustriousness,” began the next). The fact that our reading explains so much, fits well into previous and expected poetic structures, coheres with Hab’s poetic style, and has support among the versions is a strong argument for its acceptance.

- 3:11 **luminance . . . [the] blaze** — **אֹר** and **נָגַהּ** previously appeared in v. 4. Although the words function differently in each verse, the repetition creates correspondences between parts of the poem. To reflect those correspondences, we render **אֹר** as “luminary” (v. 4) and “luminance” (v. 11) and **נָגַהּ** as “he blazed” (v. 4) and “[the] blaze” (v. 11).

they dashed — **יְהַלְכוּ** is often rendered “flying” as if the plural subject were **YHWH**’s “arrows.” That reading is based on Ps 77:18 (**אֶף־הַצִּיץ יִתְהַלֵּכוּ**, “your arrows, in fact, shot out”), which is routinely viewed as the source from which the text in Hab was drawn and, therefore, usually informs how the text in Hab is interpreted. Despite shared vocabulary and the fact that Hab 3 also functioned as a psalm, the two texts diverge from each other at every point and each text makes sense on its own. Therefore, we have little reason to believe one text originated from the other. The correspondences between them are best understood as examples of scribal literati drawing from a common well of religious thoughts and expressions. To read “arrows” as the subject of **יְהַלְכוּ**, one must alter the text—either by adding **אֲשֶׁר** (preferred by Stonehouse), changing the verb from an intensive Piel to a reflexive Hithpael (as in Ps 77), or changing the *yiqtol* preterit to a participle (flying) or infinitive construct with prefixed *kaph* (as they flew). It is far more natural to read the sun and moon as the subject. Briggs (*Messianic Prophecy*) agreed: “It is better to think of the movement of the sun and moon in the light of the arrows of the lightnings.” In other words, **יְהַלְכוּ** “should be understood . . . as the principal verb recounting the flight of the enemies” (Irwin). Perhaps Marti said it best: “*vor Gottes Licht und Glanz verschwinden Sonne und Mond*” (before God’s light and splendor, the sun and moon disappear). That reading is supported by Barb, **Ⲫ**, and **Ⲕ**. Note, however, that the notion of “fleeing” or “dashing” comes from more intensive Piel form as represented in the Masoretic vocalization. Some translations treat the verb as a Qal (they went), which dulls the rhetorical force of the statement.

rattle — Literally, “lightning” or “thunderbolt.” However, ברק was specifically chosen by the oral composer or scribal artisan as a sophisticated word-play with קרב in v. 2, רקב in v. 16, and בקר in v. 17. To replicate something of that word-play, we render all four terms similarly and place them in italics to make their associations more evident (see **Anagrams** in section A3). The use of “rattle” focuses on the “thunder” aspect of YHWH’s bolts, which follows naturally from the notion of sound in the previous verse (its voice/bellow). For the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB, see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5.

3:12 **with** — One of the rarer uses of prepositional *bet* is to indicate the manner in which something transpires (BHRG §38.6.3v). That seems to be the sense in each case here.

condemnation . . . confrontation — Virtually all English translators render זעם and אף as indicators of divine anger. For a close look at זעם, see Excursus 2 in section B3. For a close look at אף, see Example 5 in section B3. For the use of both in this verse, see the last part of section B4.

3:13 **[those] you appointed . . . your anointed** — The first half of the verse features two cola, each ending with the same pronominal suffix (-*ekā*, -*ekā*) and producing, therefore, a simple end-rhyme (see **the nose of you . . . the violence of you** in 3:8). In the words that come before those suffixes, one also finds a repetition of the consonants *mem*, *shin*, and *lamed*, and the use of several gutturals. Together, those repetitions create a fantastic sound-play. To reflect the alliteration, we render עמך and משיחך as “[those] you appointed” and “your anointed” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB). Since the HB speaks of God’s people as “chosen” or “selected” (see, for example, Deut 7:6 and 14:2), calling them “appointed” feeds into the larger sense of the term.

with — ליִשַׁע אֵת is perplexing because אֵת looks like an object marker, which would require a verb or infinitive, and יִשַׁע is a noun, which does not use an object marker. Several grammars explain יִשַׁע as an example of a verbal noun that functions like an infinitive. Note JM §49ca: “BH possesses a series of verbal nouns of various patterns which can also function as infinitives. These may be then [sic] called pseudo-infinitives. . . . An interesting passage is Hb 3:13 . . . where יִשַׁע functions both times in the manner of the inf. cst., though in its first occurrence it is more like a verbal noun because of the absence of אֵת” (see also GKC §115d). The proper construction can be seen in Hab 2:14 (לִדְעַת אֶת־כְּבוֹד יְהוָה), where אֵת follows the infinitive דְּעַת. The phrase means “by knowing the honor of YHWH,” which we simplify to “by the revelation of YHWH’s honor.” In the similar expression דַּעַת אֶת־יְהוָה (respect for YHWH) in Isa 11:9, we see an example of a verbal noun that functions like an infinitive. The problem with identifying יִשַׁע as one of those pseudo-infinitives is that it does not derive from the correct stem (Hiphil). The other problem is אֵת, which seems out-of-place in this text. Andersen (AYB) read it as a Hiphil form of the verb *’atah* (he came). In defense of that reading, he said, “The acceptability of archaic *’ātūtā*, in parallel with *yāšā’tā*, is established by its use in Deut 33:2, a passage whose affinities with Habakkuk 3 need no further argumentation.” G. R. Driver came to the same conclusion on the basis of Arabic (“Linguistic

and Textual Problems: Minor Prophets. III”). We agree with Eaton, however, when he called the alteration of אֶת to אֶתִּית “unnecessarily drastic.” Like so many other texts in Hab 3, the list of proposed emendations for לִישַׁע אֶת is voluminous. The question is whether there is a way to make sense of the text as it stands. אֶת could also represent the preposition “with.” One could, therefore, read לִישַׁע אֶת־מְשִׁיחַךְ as “for victory with your anointed.” Haak, Barton (“The Prayer of Habakkuk”), Fenton, and others preferred that reading. What clinches that interpretation is the fact that יֵצֵא + אֶת (to go out with) is a construction that occurs elsewhere (see, for example, Gen 8:17-18 or 11:31). In 2 Sam 21:17, in fact, it describes a *battle march*, which is precisely the context here: לֹא־תֵצֵא עִיר אֲתָנוּ לַמִּלְחָמָה (You must never again advance with us into battle). What we find in Hab 3:13, therefore, is elision of the verb in the second colon. To show that the initial verb does “double duty” for both cola, a helping particle was used that could be tied back to that verb. The fuller statement would look like this: “You advanced for [the] victory of [those] you appointed, [advanced] for victory with your anointed.” Considering the ubiquitous use of verb gapping in ancient Hebrew poetry, it is astonishing that no one else (so far as we could find) has suggested that here.

head . . . homestead — Assonance was crafted in the second half of the verse by pairing ראש (rōš) with רשע (rāšā). To mimic that sound-play, we render ראש and מבית רשע as “head” and “wicked homestead” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

[down] from — Or “off of.” Preposition *min* indicates either the location/derivation of the “head” (the place where the head originated) or is ablative (signifying movement away or separation from). If the former, the preposition would likely disappear from translation: “the head of.” Virtually all English translators prefer that interpretation. Since, however, the same sense would be communicated with a simple genitival construction (ראש בית) and ancient Hebrew poetry elides unnecessary particles and prepositions, the latter interpretation is more likely (the head is *decapitated*). Eaton agreed: “מִן . . . would include the sense ‘from’—the head struck from the body.” Note also Stonehouse: “Thou didst smite the head from off the house of the wicked.”

foundation — יסוד is an architectural term. When paired, however, with “neck” (which occurs in MurXII and is represented by virtually all the ancient versions), and coming after a term that is a body-part metonym (head), it becomes evident that the composer or scribal artisan is blending the notions of a building with the notions of a body. For other places that use the term for the same conceptual blend, see Prov 10:25 and Ps 137:7 (for more on conceptual blending, see Fauconnier and Turner’s *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities*). But why not use an actual body-part term like “foot” (NIV) or “thigh” (NASB)? Why use יסוד? The prophet stated in 1:12 that YHWH “founded” the tribes of Kaldu (יִסְדָּתוּ), “you founded him/it”) for “correcting” or “swaying [behavior].” The prophet cried out to God, however, because they acted worse than those they were ordained to “correct.” If God did not reverse his “founding” of those people, he would be complicit in their crimes. By using a nominal form of the same root, this oracle addresses the specific situation that gave rise to the prophet’s cry in the first chapter: God is stripping away the *foundation* that he had previously *founded* (along with whatever was built on it). The victory of the Divine Warrior, therefore, is defined by a historical reversion that restores YHWH’s honor. All of that is communicated by

means of the seemingly out-of-place noun יסוד. Such a specific link between the first and third chapters is evidence of holistic design (i.e., shared authorship). To make that design evident, we use the same kind of rendering in both places (“to found” for the verb and “foundation” for the noun). THF is one of the only English translations that reflects that important textual link.

Exalt! — See section A3.

- 3:14 **you impaled on his staff** — Most readers think that נקבת במטיו ראש describes the opponents being pierced by their own weapons. As we saw in 2:9, however, “There is no story in Hebrew in which a *matteh* is used as a weapon” (Andersen, AYB). When one investigates all the places in the HB where an attack or assault is inflicted on someone’s “head,” it becomes clear that נקב is never utilized. How is the verb utilized? נקב occurs in 2 Kgs 12:10 to talk about “boring” a hole in the lid of a chest. While the tool must have been sharp, there is no reason to think it was a weapon. In 2 Kgs 18:21, a broken or splintered walking staff is said to “pierce” the hand of the one who leans on it (see also Isa 36:6). Again, no weapon is indicated. The verses that are most relevant to the discussion here are Yob 40:24 and 26. In 40:24, נקב describes the “piercing” of Behemoth’s nose. In 40:26, it describes the “piercing” of Leviathan’s jaw. In neither context is a weapon indicated; rather, the piercing is a sign that the opponent has been subdued or conquered. If we bring that idea into Hab, the sense would be that after smashing down the “head” of the wicked house, God thrust the leader’s staff up into his decapitated head to display it to enemy troops. In other words, the leader’s head was “impaled on his staff.” The result is immediate: his troops scatter. The typical interpretation of this phrase is based on a highly questionable sense of *matteh*, does not agree with the typical sense and usage of נקב, and makes little sense in context (why tell us the head was “pierced” right after telling us it was “bashed off”?). The reading we propose allows for the typical sense of *matteh*, agrees with the typical sense and usage of נקב, and doesn’t involve a needless repetition of content. The only drawback to our interpretation is the plural form of *matteh*. We propose that the *yod* (a *mater lectionis*) was added to a text that originally read מטו, causing a singular to become plural. Note that some English translations alter the suffix from third-person to second-person or even third-person plural. Such alterations are far more problematic than what we propose.

they scattered — פרוץ appears to be a *hapax legomenon*. According to the *Qere*, the text was traditionally read as a plural noun with masculine singular suffix (פְּרוֹצִי). Nominal forms of the root appear as “villager” or “countryside/villages” (see, for instance, Deut 3:5, Ezek 38:11, and Est 9:19). The meaning of פְּרוֹצִי in Judg 5:7 and 11 is unclear. Some propose “rule/dominion,” others “warriors,” still others “peasantry” or “village life.” When it comes to פְּרוֹצִי, the same readings show up in the versions. ⚙ preferred “princes.” ⚡ chose “warriors.” ⚡ went with “mighty men.” Although early English translators preferred the sense of “village,” most modern translators favor a sense like “leader/ruler/prince” or “warrior/troop/throng.” Andersen (AYB) thought the term could apply both to village people and warriors. Pinker stumbled upon something rather curious: “All the roots obtained from the bi-radical פֶּר by addition of another letter contain the sense of ‘spreading’” (“On the Meaning of מטיו in Habakkuk 3:14a”). Note, for example, פָּרַד (to separate/divide/branch off), פָּרַה (“to be fruitful,” i.e., “spread seed

out”), פרח (“to sprout/bud/bloom,” i.e., “spread out leaves”), פרם (to separate/tear), פרס (to break apart/divide), פרע (to untie/loosen/let spread out), פרץ (to breach/break through/spread into), פרק (to pull off/tear away/split off), פּרַר (to break out/burst forth), and פרש (to spread/stretch). It is no “stretch” of the imagination, therefore, to think that פּרַז has a similar meaning (to scatter/disperse/spread out), which would make it synonymous with פּוֹר. If so, פּרַז would be a masculine plural perfect meaning “they spread out/scattered” with the subject referring back to the “nations” in v. 12 and forward to the “wide waters” in v. 15. Such a reading results in a fabulous case of poetic justice, which is consistent with Hab’s use of *mashals* (mimicking [retaliations]) in ch. 2: those who meant to “scatter” Hab’s people (he speaks on their behalf) are themselves “scattered.” Our interpretation has the advantage not only of conforming precisely to the consonantal text, but explaining other forms of the root in the HB. If פּרַז means “to scatter/spread out,” then פּרַזי and פּרַזות could refer to “scattered/spread out places” (rural communities instead of population centers) and, by metonymy, the people therein. Likewise, פּרַזון could communicate the abstract idea of being able to “spread out” instead of being “contained/restrained” (i.e., “independence/freedom/autonomy” instead of “bondage/subservience/subjection”).

/those who lie in wait/ — Andersen said, “This verse is largely unintelligible, and the second part is best left untranslated.” The phrase עליצתם כמו־לאכל (their delight [was] like for eating) “seems to defy comprehension” (Margulis). Many have tried to emend the text, but their emendations usually result in far more problematic texts. In fact, “The correctness of the Hebrew text is shown by the Greek versions, or, rather, their evidence points to a text evidently the same as the MT” (Andersen). We propose, therefore, that the text we have is authentic insofar as it represents what was originally part of the verse, but inauthentic insofar as it lacks something that *used to be* part of the verse. In other words, the text we have is incomplete. Without further evidence, it is impossible to know what the missing piece of the puzzle looked like, but we can make an educated guess. במסתר sometimes has the sense of a covert place in which enemies (likened to predatory animals) lie in wait. Psalm 17:12, for example, says “His type [is] like a lion (כאריה) eager to tear [apart] (לטרוף); yes, a lion cub crouching in ambush (במסתרים).” Like Hab, that verse features במסתר, prepositional *kaph* to create a simile (like), and prepositional *lamed* prefixed to an infinitive construct (in order to do X). Psalm 10:9 says “He lurks (ארב) in hiding (במסתר) like a lion (כאריה); in a thicket, lies in wait to seize (לחטוף) the weak (עני).” That verse also has במסתר, prepositional *kaph* to create a simile, and prepositional *lamed* prefixed to an infinitive construct, but features עני as well. It is possible that the same sense was intended in Hab 3:14. Some scholars read it that way. Note Orelli’s description of the text (They proudly exult as if about *to devour the defenceless* [sic] in the ravenous beast’s *lair*) or the renderings of Ewald (in ambush to devour the helpless) and NJB (to devour some poor wretch in their lair). Like Ps 17 and 10, it seems like a verb or participle would fit well before the infinitive construct. Either ארבים or יארבו would make a lot of sense. Therefore, we leave the Hebrew text intact, but add something for which there is no manuscript evidence (see section C6). Unlike virtually all English translators, this is the only place in ch. 3 where we add something that isn’t already there.

3:15 **[making] spume** — Many translators understand חמר as a noun in parallel with ים. It is typically rendered something like “the turmoil” (AAT), “the boiling up” (Henderson), “the surge” (NASB), “the heap” (KJV), or “the roar” (Ewald). Since, however, “the image here is that of the victorious warrior trampling on his conquered foe” (Hiebert), the text is probably drawing on ancient NE mythological imagery. In a broken inscription from Ugarit (*KTU* 1.83), for example, we find a statement involving the god of the sea, the scattering or defeat of armies, and a verbal form of חמר: *pl tbt̄n yymm hmlt ht ynhr lph mk thmr* . . . (Then, indeed, will they be scattered, O Yamm, the multitude of Hatti(?), O River, at the appearance(?). Then will they churn . . .). Therefore, we agree with Eaton: “The customary understanding of מַיִם as the noun ‘seething mass’ in apposition to בַּיִם is feasible. But 6 Barb may rightly discern a verb here and the possibility of a transitive חָמַר or חָמַרְתָּ deserves attention, since this would suit the context (climax of divine triumph) a little better.” For our use of italics and our rendering “to spume,” see **Anagrams** in section A3.

wide waters — Our rendering mimics the alliterative nature of מַיִם רַבִּים (*mayim rabbîm*). The only other English translation we could find that tried something similar was that of Fenton (watery waves). For the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB, see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5.

3:16 **heard . . . slurred . . . entered** — The first three clauses feature multiple words with the same ending in rapid succession: שָׁמַעְתִּי, בָּטַנִּי, שָׁפַתִּי, בַּעֲצָמִי, and וַתַּחֲתִי. Not only does the first clause begin with one, but all three clauses end with one (the third ends with two). All of that is evidence of purposeful structuring. While it is certainly possible to represent the repetition in English through the use of “my,” “me,” or “mine,” the intentional structure and/or presence of end-rhyme would still be lost. To represent something of that structure and end-rhyme, we have translated and rearranged the first three clauses so that they all end with words that contain the same sounds: “heard,” “slurred,” and “entered” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

Due to . . . due to . . . due to . . . due to — This verse features the poetic device “anaphora” (the repetition of a word or element at the start of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences to build intensity). The next verse features a variation of that device in which the first instance of the word or element that might otherwise be repeated is elided, yet that word or element is expected to continue in each successive phrase. Many English translations make the anaphora clearer by reinserting the elided word or element. Note, for example, NASB: Though the fig tree should not blossom . . . , Though the yield of the olive should fail . . . , Though the flock should be cut off from the fold . . .” (the second and third iterations are not present in the text). Through the use of anaphora and other poetic devices like cataloging (building a list of body-parts in v. 16 and a list of agricultural terms in v. 17), we see that vv. 16-17 belong together. When v. 17 is severed from v. 16 and tied to v. 18, that causes the anaphora that is shared between verses to become less clear. Suddenly we are left with numerous phrases and clauses that begin with a preposition that can be rendered differently in each case. Interpreters also lose sight of the anaphora due to a confusion about “the day of distress.” If it refers to the distress of the oppressors, then the *lamed* probably signifies the time “on,” “during,” or “when” it would happen. The problem is that the *lamed* that came before (לְקוֹל) and those that come after (לְעוֹלָה and לְעַם) don’t all make sense temporally, which forces an interpreter to find different

nuances each time, thereby destroying the repetition of sound and sense. Andersen helped clear the air: “The phrase ‘day of distress’ . . . never describes the trouble experienced by the wicked when justice is done to them in retribution. It always describes the distress of the LORD’s people, caused by an oppressor, a distress from which he should deliver them.” As noted by Demson, trembling is often done in response to God’s judgment (or impending judgment), and Hab trembles as Israel’s representative. Therefore, this verse shares with v. 17 the notion of God’s judgment against Israel: “The image of agricultural devastation . . . functions in the Twelve as an index of God’s judgment upon sinning Israel.” But interpreting the *lamed* as indicating a future time of distress for Judah makes no sense. “The invasion is described . . . in ch. 1 as already taking place. It seems unlikely that Habakkuk is waiting for the Chaldeans to invade” (Möller). There is good reason, therefore, to interpret the *lamed* on לִיּוֹם in a way that works in all its other occurrences in v. 16 (“on account of,” “because of,” or “due to”). For the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB, see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5.

trembled — For our use of italics, see **Anagrams** in section A3.

addle — Literally, “rot/decay,” but rendered “addle” (from Old English *adel*, meaning “disease/sickness/putrefaction”) to mimic the fantastic word-play woven between this term and others throughout Hab (see **Anagrams** in section A3).

where I laid — Or, perhaps, “where I was stationed.” Many translators find אֲשֶׁר problematic.

They point to Θ’s η ἐξίς μου (my state/condition) as evidence that the Hebrew was understood by early readers as אֲשֶׁרִי (my step) or אֲשֶׁרִי (my steps). However, ἐξίς is never used that way. Some have tried other ways to reinterpret the word. Albright, for example, turned to Ugaritic and argued that אֲשֶׁר represented *’atr* (due to a merging in Hebrew of the Northwest Semitic sounds /th/ and /sh/), meaning “step” or “march.” According to DUL, however, *’atr* comes from a root meaning “to go/follow” and can take the form of a noun (the following), a preposition (afterwards/behind), an adverb (afterwards/then), or a noun (what remains/is left). The nuance “step” is labeled questionable. Despite a long history of disregard, there is nothing strange about the appearance of a relative particle in Hab 3:16. Many reject it because it is rarely used in poetry. But the fact that it occurs nowhere else in the third chapter doesn’t make it suspicious in v. 16; rather, it authenticates its rarity of usage. Note also the use of אֲשֶׁר once in chapter 2 (v. 5), which, so far as we can see, has never been questioned. Holmstedt (“Habakkuk 3:16—Where did the אֲשֶׁר Go?”) put it best: “Without the support of the Septuagint and in light of the fact that the remaining versional evidence (Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate) reflects the relative word אֲשֶׁר of the Masoretic Text, we must conclude that emending the אֲשֶׁר . . . is not a sound text critical decision.” The issue, in other words, is not with the *presence* of the relative particle, but with its *interpretation*. Interpreters have viewed it as concessive (yet), temporal (when), or causal (because). Earlier generations sometimes rendered it “that” in what seems to be a causal sense. Sinker thought that אֲשֶׁר functioned as an emphatic relative pronoun: “I, who.” Barthélemy concluded the same: *moi qui*. Considering Hab’s use of emphatic pronouns elsewhere, that suggestion has merit. However, we think it refers to the place “where” the action of אָנֹחַ occurs. The question is how to understand אָנֹחַ. Duhm, Eaton, Hiebert, and others took it from אָנַח (to sigh/groan). Wellhausen suggested altering אָנֹחַ to אָנַחַם (from נָחַם). BHS proposed altering the verb to חָכַח (to wait). There is

no reason to doubt, however, that the verb is a first-person imperfect of נָוַח (even 5 supports that reading). The problem is that the typical nuance of נָוַח (to settle/rest/relax/quiet down) does not fit the context. To get around the difficulty, translators often tack on nuances from other verbs (like חָכָה), resulting in renderings like “to wait quietly.” But “נָוַח” nowhere else means ‘wait calmly for’ (Stonehouse). The way the sense of the verb is overloaded to the point of nonsense can be seen in Sinkers’ explanation: “It is not the trembling waiting for an irrevocable doom, but the calm, patient acceptance of that doom, the courage which accepts the inevitable, but regards it with peaceful unruffled composure.” Instead of stuffing the verb with extraneous nuances, we should look at the way it is actually used. Möller noted that the Qal form of the verb sometimes means “to settle the land (e.g. Isa 7:19), to cease from labor (e.g. Deut 5:14), literally to set something down (e.g. Gen 8:4), and to be at peace from the invasion of enemies (e.g. Est 9:16; Neh 9:28; Isa 14:7).” Most interpreters default to the last sense. We propose that the sense in Gen 8:4 is more fitting. That sense can be seen in other stems as well. The Hiphil in Gen 2:15 describes how God “placed/appointed/stationed” the first human in Eden’s garden. At points in Ezekiel, God is said to “set/place/station” the prophet in specific locales (37:1; 40:2). The Hophal in Zech 5:11 means “to be set/placed/stationed.” We propose that the Qal in Hab 3:16 conveys a stative sense (to lay or be stationed) and refers not to being in a state of peace or calm, but of laying down *as if to die or be buried*. The phrase וַצִּדְקָה לָאָרֶץ הַנִּיחָהּ in Amos 5:7, for example, says “and justice, they put to rest in the earth” (i.e., *buried* it). Roberts (OTL) noted that “In Daniel the usage appears to imply resting in death” (12:13). That interpretation would explain the use of רָקַב—rot/decay occurs naturally in a dying body. In Prov 14:30, “decay of bones” (a phrase almost identical to the one in Hab) is contrasted with life in one’s flesh. Clearly, רָקַב symbolizes a movement from life to death; it has nothing to do with “unsteady steps.” Therefore, we render אֲשֶׁר אָנוּחַ as “where I laid” (to die). If נָוַח conveys the sense we propose, then Hab’s experience in v. 16 (as Israel’s representative) would parallel the wasting away/dying of the plant and animal worlds in v. 17.

banded [against] — Either יָגֹדֵנוּ comes from √גֹּדַר, meaning “to form a band/band up against,” (an original יָגַד could have become יָגֹדַר) or √גָּדַר, meaning “to cut/slash/gash” (an original יָגַד could have become יָגֹדַר). Nominal forms of the two roots refer to a “band/brigade/troop” or “trench/incision,” respectively. If taken from גֹּדַר, the verb in Hab would mean “they banded [against] us” (the verb גֹּדַר is used in only one other place (Gen 49:19), where it creates a fabulous word-play with the name of Gad: “[As for] Gad, brigades will brigade [against] him, but he will brigade [at their] heel”). If taken from גָּדַר, the verb would mean “they slashed us” or, perhaps, “cut us [down].” The ancient versions prefer גֹּדַר. English translators render the text so loosely that it could apply to either root (“attack,” “assault,” “assail,” and “afflict”—the most common renderings—could describe those who “slash/gash/cut [down]” others or those who “band up against” them). If גֹּדַר is preferred, few translations show its sense. S. R. Driver and Stonehouse left no doubt: “to troop upon.” Neither do we: “to band against.”

3:17 **while** — There is some variability in the way translators render the opening preposition. Some prefer a causal sense (because/for). Others believe it introduces the protasis for v. 18 and render it “though/although.” We think that it is circumstantial—it describes how the natural

world is dying “while” Hab’s body draws close to the grave. In other words, we link this verse with the previous one and view vv. 18-19a as a summary remark on vv. 16-17 (see **Due to . . . due to . . . due to** in v. 16 for more on the connections between vv. 16 and 17). NET rendered כִּי the same way. For another instance of circumstantial כִּי in Hab, see 1:4.

produce . . . produced — This verse features a word-play involving two words from the same root: the noun מַעֲשֶׂה and the verb עָשָׂה. To mimic that word-play, we render them as “produce” and “to produce” (see **be razzle-dazzled** in 1:5 for the importance of mimicking word-play or sound-play in the HB).

assembled not — We agree with those who think this verb should be read as a Qal passive perfect (נָזַר) or Qal passive participle (נֹזֵר). Its sense is not “cut up,” but “cut off” as in “separate” or “divide” (from which comes the notion of being cut off from life in Isa 53:8). To mimic the fantastic word-play woven between this and other verses in Hab, we take the sense of “separate,” which is the opposite of “being together,” and render the verb with ablative *min* as “to not assemble” (i.e., to not be together) and place it in italics (see **Anagrams** in section A3).

cattle — For our use of italics, see **Anagrams** in section A3.

- 3:18 There are syntactic and semantic affinities between this verse and the first half of Mik 7:7. As in the case of Hab and Ps 77 (see **they dashed** in 3:11), such affinities are probably evidence of scribal literati drawing from a common well of religious thoughts and expressions.

Hab 3:18	Mik 7:7
וְאֲנִי בִיהוָה אֶעֱלוֹזָה	וְאֲנִי בִיהוָה אֶצְפָּה
Yet [it is] I, in YHWH, [who] will hereby exult,	Yet [it is] I, in YHWH, [who] will hereby be expectant,
אֲנִילָה בֵּאלֹהֵי יִשְׁעִי	אֲחִילָה לֵּאלֹהֵי יִשְׁעִי
will hereby rejoice in the god who rescues me!	will hereby wait for the god who rescues me!

will hereby . . . will hereby — Our renderings of אֶעֱלוֹזָה and אֲנִילָה seek to reflect the emphatic nature of the cohortatives, which are neither necessary nor important, but part of the rhetorical nature of Hab’s statement (THF is one of the only English translations to do so). Note that the two verbs are vocal cries (to exult and to rejoice) just like the two verbs that began Hab (to shout and to cry). The use of such terms at the beginning and end shows a progression from despair to joy and is evidence of holistic design.

who rescues me — Literally, “my rescue.” To mimic the end-rhyme crafted at the end of the final colon of this verse (יִשְׁעִי) and at the end of the first colon of the next verse (חִילִי), we render them “who rescues me” and “my vitality.” Although יִשְׁעִי was used twice before to indicate “victory” in battle (v. 13), the sense here involves rescue or deliverance from harm and violation. In other words, the term is used at the very end of Hab to indicate a reversal of the situation that caused Hab’s complaint at the very start (1:2). Therefore, we use the same basic rendering in both places (rescue).

- 3:19 **lord of** — Most translators link this word with the divine name, resulting in יְהוָה אֲדֹנִי. However, אֲדֹנִי יְהוָה is extremely rare in the HB. What we expect is the ubiquitous יְהוָה אֲדֹנִי. When

we add to that the fact that **אֲדָנִי חִילִי** looks like it parallels **יֵשַׁעִי אֱלֹהֵי** at the end of the previous verse and both cola conclude with an end-rhyme, there is reason to suspect that **אֲדָנִי** is the plural of majesty in construct with the following noun. Andersen (AYB) agreed: “The phrase ‘the Lord of my strength’ is indicated by the parallelism with v. 18b.”

summits — The final *yod* in **בְּמוֹתֵי** has continually perplexed translators. Some treat it as a first-person singular pronominal suffix (my). Others view it as an error or anomaly. Since the same form occurs in parallel passages (2 Sam 22:34 and Ps 18:34), we can be confident that the text is accurate. But how do we make sense of it? Svi Rin (“.. as an absolute Plural Ending”) noted that “The conventional plural endings **וֹת** and **ִים** were by no means the only ways of expressing the idea of plurality. In ancient times other means were used for that purpose as, for example, the *collective nouns*; the *broken plural*; the **ִי** - ending for masculine in the nominative case; the **ִי** - ending for the oblique cases etc. And it seems that side by side with these forms, or as a derivation of some of them, there was also in existence an **ִי** or **ִי** ending to denote plurality.” Rin provided numerous examples like **בְּנֵי** (children) in Gen 50:23, **יָמֵי** (days) in Lev 13:46, **מַלְאָכֵי** (messengers) in Ps 78:49, and even **אֲדָנִי**, which, as a plural of grandeur, became used exclusively for the deity. We think that makes a lot of sense—not just in this instance, but when it comes to **גְּבִינּוֹתֵי**. Therefore, we render it “summits.” See *music* below.

To bring glory — Typically rendered “for the conductor/chief musician.” That rendering is based on a conjecture about the meaning of **מִנְצָחִים** in 2 Chr 34:13. Since the Chronicler uses **מִנְצָחִים** to refer to Levites who were “supervising/directing,” it is presumed that **מִנְצָח** in psalmic superscriptions must refer to the “supervisor” or “director” of worship songs. Yet there is no indication in 2 Chr 34 that the **מִנְצָחִים** directed Temple worship. In fact, the psalms in **6**, which were translated at least a century before the Jerusalem Temple fell to Rome (see Schaper’s “The Septuagint Psalter” in *The Oxford Handbook of The Psalms* for an overview of the probable date and location of the Psalter’s translation into Greek), give no indication that the term was linked to musical direction (**לְמִנְצָח** is rendered “for/to the end” in the Greek Psalter and “to conquer/prevail/be victorious” in Hab), which makes the traditional interpretation highly unlikely. Mowinckel (*The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*) noted that “The usual translation . . . is not known to any of the early translations, most of which look upon the term as a verbal noun, indicating an act and not used about the acting person.” **לְמִנְצָח** comes from **נִצַּח**, which probably means “to shine/be glorious.” In 1 Sam 15:29, for example, **YHWH** is called “glorious/illustrious” (**נִצַּח**). It says in 1 Chr 29:11 that “radiance/glory/illustriousness” (**הַנִּצָּח**) is **YHWH**’s. In 1 Chr 15:21, the Levites are said to play harps and lyres “for illumination/glory” (**לְנִצָּח**). Therefore, we interpret **לְמִנְצָח** as a Piel participle with prefixed *lamed* meaning “for giving/pronouncing glory.” Mowinckel came to a similar conclusion: “The sense of the term would then be: . . . to make Yahweh’s face shine with grace and goodness, i.e. to dispose Yahweh to mercy. Accordingly it would be most natural to interpret the psalm heading as . . . ‘for homage (of Yahweh).’” It is no wonder that **6** should render the term throughout the Psalter using a word from the verb **שָׁבַח** (to praise).

music — ננינות comes from the same root as the verb ננן. The verb is paired in several places with the lyre (כנור), which is why ננינות and ננינה are often thought to represent a category of instrumentation and/or music (“stringed” instruments and/or music as opposed to “wind” or “percussion” instruments and/or music). The use of one’s “hand” is often mentioned in combination with the verb (1 Sam 16:16, 23; 18:10; 19:9). In one place, YHWH’s hand comes on the prophet Elisha’ when someone performs the action of the verb (2 Kgs 3:15), which probably represents a play on the sense of it. There are many cases where ננינות refers to music or songs in general and “stringed instrument” or “stringed music” doesn’t make sense (see, for example, Yob 30:9, Lam 5:14, or Ps 69:13). It is far more likely, therefore, that the verb means nothing more than “to play music” or “make songs,” which explains the use of the root to describe musicians of various sorts (see נננים in Ps 68:26 or מננן in 2 Kgs 3:15). For those reasons, we render ננינות as “music.” Some translations interpret the terminal *yod* as a first-person pronominal suffix (my). Such an interpretation, however, conflicts with the characteristic use of third-person forms in superscriptions and/or subscriptions throughout the HB. How then do we explain the final *yod*? Some have proposed that ch. 3 was originally part of a collection of liturgical songs and that when it was taken out of that collection and appended to Hab, part of the superscription for the following song was left at the end (the *yod* could be all that remains of a word that followed ננינות). However, to propose a prehistory for the whole chapter on the basis of a *yod* is far-fetched. Others ignore the *yod* and treat the word as it appears elsewhere in the Psalms. It is important to note, however, that the same form occurs in Isa 38:20. The *yod* is also present in MurXII. 6 represents a final *waw* (his/its), which indirectly supports the Hebrew. It is clear, therefore, that the *yod* should be retained. Our conclusion here is the same as it was with במותי (summits): the *yod* probably represents a dialectical formation of an absolute plural. It might also be a contracted form of the ancient case-ending (-*tayyi* would have become -*tay* when the oblique short-i was dropped). Amos 6:6 is a probable example of a final *yod* operating as a plural marker on a word with a dative usage: השתים במזרק יין (they drink *in bowls* wine).

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