THE PSALM OF HABAKKUK

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*Thematically, textually, and literarily, the psalm of Habakkuk
(3:3 -15) differs markedly from the material in the rest of the book.
Translation and subsequent analysis of the psalm reveal that it is a
remnant of epic literature, and as such it focuses on the theme of the
heroic. Throughout the passage, God is the hero whose actions divide
the psalm into two parts. The first poem (vv 3-7) relates the account
of an epic journey as God guides his people toward the land of
promise. In the second poem (vv 8-15), God's miraculous acts in the
conquest period are rehearsed. The singing of these two epic songs
was designed to evoke in the listeners a response of submission to
Israel's Redeemer. Habakkuk's own response (in vv 16-19) illustrates
the proper movement toward Israel's grand and heroic Savior.*

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INTRODUCTION

AN enigmatic psalm of praise occupies the greater portion of the
third chapter of Habakkuk's prophecy[1] and exhibits striking
differences from the preceding two chapters. Thematically, the first
two chapters are largely narrative, recording Habakkuk's great per-
plexities (1:2-4, 12-17) and God's detailed responses (1:5-11; 2:1-20);
whereas, with the third chapter, a positive tone emerges in the

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[1] W. F. Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy
Dedicated to T: H. Robinson*, ed. H. H. Rowley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950) 1,
notes, "The Psalm of Habakkuk, with its magnificent but often obscure imagery has
attracted many generations of scholars to its study." Despite scholarly scrutinizing,
Habakkuk 3 has defied a final solution. B. Margulis, "The Psalm of Habakkuk: A
Reconstruction and Interpretation," *ZAW* 82 (1970) 411, well remarks, "The numerous
treatments of the problems involved, in whole or in part, attest scholarly interest while
the serious divergences of opinion and conclusion indicate the need and desirability of
a new approach." (Note that Margulis includes an excellent bibliography of studies on
Habakkuk 3, pp. 440-41.) Although the observations that follow make no claim to be
a final solution of all the problems in the tantalizingly difficult poetic material in Hab
3:3-15, it is hoped that they will demarcate some elements that will point toward their
final solution.

prophet's great prayer of praise of God. The first two chapters are written in the usual classical Hebrew that was prevalent in the seventh century B.C., whereas the psalm of chap. 3 utilizes older literary material that had been passed down since Moses' day. Furthermore these two sections are written in distinctively different literary vehicles. The first two chapters were composed largely in literary forms that are typical of prophecy such as oracles, laments, and woes. However, the psalm of Hab 3:3-15 is written in an older poetic format that contains some very difficult Hebrew grammatical constructions and very rare words.

These factors, plus the inclusion of several musical notations (3: 1, 3, 9, 13, 19) and the exclusion of the third chapter from the Pesher Habakkuk of the Qumranic corpus, convinced many liberal scholars that Habakkuk 3 is not an authentic work of the prophet but is made up of several independent units that had been united with the prophet's own writings.[2] However, although it may deny the unity of Habakkuk, current critical scholarship tends to consider the resultant canonical book of Habakkuk to be the work of the prophet. Thus, Eissfeldt remarks,

> We must therefore regard the book of Habakkuk as a loose collection of a group of songs of lamentation and oracles (i, 2-ii, 4), a series of six cries of woe (ii, 5-20), and the prayer of iii, which all stem from the same prophet Habakkuk, probably a cult-prophet, and originated in approximately the same period.[3]

Leaving aside matters of authorship, date, and composition, this article will address specifically Habakkuk's psalm in 3:3-15. Having looked at the text and noted some of its distinctive difficulties, an analysis of its grammatical, literary, historical, and theological features will be undertaken. A discussion of the identity of the literary

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[2] See J. A. Bewer, *The Literature of the Old Testament* (3rd ed.; New York: Columbia University, 1962) 151. Actually more than just Hab 3:3-15 has been denied, at times, as being genuine, some going as far as Marti who felt that only seven verses in the entire book were genuinely the work of the prophet (cf. H. D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1979] 344). See further, R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 932-37.

30. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 420. This writer believes that a good case can be made for Habakkuk's authorship of the entire three chapters thematically, historically, and contextually. See the remarks in the Introduction to the "Commentary on Habakkuk" in the forthcoming *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. W. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker). In the translation and discussion below, recourse will be made at times to the principle of the phonetic consonantism of the MT. For details as to phonetic consonantism, see F. J. Cross, Jr., *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1950) 59-61.

genre of Habakkuk's psalm will follow, together with an examination
of its literary dependence on other poetic works of the same genre
in the literature of the ancient Near East. The closing summation
and conclusions will consider the significance of the psalm for the
prophet.

TRANSLATION AND NOTES

Translation

3. Eloah came from Teman,
    The Holy One from Mount Paran.
    His glory covered the heavens
    And his praise filled the earth.

4. His brightness was like the light;
    Rays (flashed) from his very own hand
    That were from the inner recesses of his strength.

5. Plague went before him
    And pestilence went out from his feet.

6. He stood and shook the earth;
    He looked and made the nations to tremble.
    The everlasting hills were shattered;
    The eternal hills were made low
    --His eternal courses.

7. I looked on Tahath-Aven
    The tents of Cushan were trembling,
    The tent curtains of the land of Midian.

8. Oh, Lord, were you angry with the rivers,
    Or was your wrath against the streams,
    Or your fury against the sea
    When you were mounted upon your horses,
    Your chariots of salvation?

9. You laid bare your bow;
    You were satisfied with the club which you commanded.

10. The earth was split with rivers;
    The mountains saw you, they trembled.
    Torrents of water swept by;
    The deep gave its voice;
    It lifted its hands on high.

11. Sun and moon stood still in their lofty height;
    They proceeded by the light of your arrows,
    By the flash of the lightning, your spear.

12. In indignation you tread upon the earth;
    In anger you trampled the nations.

13. You went out to save your people,

> To deliver your anointed.
> You smashed the head of the house of evil;
> You stripped him from head to foot;
> 14. You split his head with his own club.
> His leaders stormed out;
> To scatter the humble was their boast,
> Like devouring the poor in secret.
> 15. You tread upon the sea with your horses,
> Heaping up the many waters.

Notes

Verse Three

The interchangeability of the three OT words for God אֵל, אֱלֹהִים, and אֱלֹוהַ makes any precise distinction to be difficult at best. The use of the last word was predominant in the earlier periods, particularly in connection with Edomite Ternan as shown by the frequency of its employment in the dialogue between Job and Eliphaz. Accordingly, Hummel may be correct in suggesting an association of this name for God particularly with that region.[4] It occurs in other early literature in Deut 32:15, 17 and Ps 18:32 (Heb.; cf. Ps 114:7).

One might also construe the second line of v 3 as reading "and the holy ones from Mount Paran," taking the מ of Mount Paran with קדש, thus reading קדשׁים, and utilizing the preposition of line one for line two, as well.[5] "Holy One" is a common epithet for Yahweh (cf. Job 6:10 with Lev 11:44). It was often used by Isaiah (e.g., 6:3) and has already been employed by Habakkuk (1:12). Teman names the southernmost of Edom's two chief cities. Edom itself is also called Teman (Obad 9), the name stemming from a grandson of Esau (Gen 36:11, 15, 42; Jer 49:7,20) whose descendants inhabited the area. (For the relationship Esau = Edom, see Gen 25:25, 3.0.) Edom was formerly called Mount Seir (Gen 36:8-9; Deut 2:12). Paran designates not only a mountain range west and south of Edom and northeast of Mount Sinai, but a broad desert area in the Sinai Peninsula. (For the juxtaposition of Seir and Paran, see Gen 14:6.) All three terms appear to be used as parallel names for the southern area that stretched as far as the Sinai Peninsula. Thus Deut 33:1-2a reads: "Yahweh came from Sinai; he beamed forth from Seir;

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[4] Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 461. See further, H. D. Preuss, *TDOT* 1.272; J. Scott, *TWOT* 1.43.
    [5] For the presence of God's angels/holy ones in the movement from the south, see Deut 33:2b-3; for the use of double duty prepositions, see M. Dahood, *Psalms* (AB; Garden City; Doubleday, 1970) 3.435-37.

he shone from Mount Paran." The movement from the southeast is
also mentioned in Judg 5:4-5,

> "O Lord, when you went out from Seir,
> When you marched from the land of Edom,
> The earth shook, the heavens poured,
> The clouds poured down water.
> The mountains quaked before the LORD, the One of Sinai,
> Before the LORD, the God of Israel."

and Ps 68:7-8 (Heb. 8-9),

> "When you went out before your people, O God,
> When you marched through the wasteland,
> The earth shook,
> The heavens poured down rain."

The motif seems to be a key one in Israel's early epic tradition. Thus,
Cross points out,

> The relation of this motif, the march of Conquest, to the early Israelite
> cultus has been insufficiently studied. The last-mentioned hymn, Exodus
> 15, is rooted in the liturgy of the spring festival ("Passover" or Massot),
> and it may be argued that it stems originally from the Gilgal cultus as
> early as the twelfth century B.C. It rehearses the story of the Exodus in
> the primitive form, the march of Conquest (13-18), and after the
> "crossing over," the arrival at the sanctuary (verses 13, 17).[6]

תְּהִלָּתוֹ is sometimes translated "splendor" rather than "praise"
(see BDB, 240).

Verse Four

קַרְנַיִם/ 'rays' comes from a root meaning "to shine." The noun is
used primarily for the horns of various animals and hence becomes
employed figuratively as a symbol for strength or power. The juxta-
position of radiance and power can be seen in the incident of the
outshining of God's power through Moses' face (Exod 34:29). Both
radiance and power seem to be clearly intended here. The dual form
also controls the verb הָיָה which takes the t-form common to older
poetry.

[6] F. M. Cross, Jr., "The Divine Warrior in Israel's Early Cult," in *Biblical Motifs*,
ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1966) 25. Cross links this
motif with the idea of kingship and suggests that both were utilized in the royal cultus
(pp. 27-33). See further, R. Patterson, "The Song of Deborah," in *Tradition and
Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, eds. John S. Feinberg and Paul
D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody, 1981) 130-31.

חֶבְיוֹן is hapax legomenon from the root חָבָה / 'to hide'. The whole line is extremely difficult and has occasioned many suggestions and emendations. Some meaning, such as "secret place," "inner recesses," or "source," has usually been put forward here. Likewise, the preceding word שם can be variously pointed as שָׁם / 'there', שֵׁם / 'name', or שִׂים / 'set'. Thus, the line could be translated variously: (1) "There was the hiding place of his might," (2) "(Its) name was 'The Source/Secret Place of his strength,'" or (3) "Set (there) from [utilizing the preposition from the preceding line] the inner recesses of his strength." The suggestion that would point the word as "name" would be in keeping with the ancient Near Eastern practice of naming weapons and essential features.[7] The word may also be divided by adding the מ to the following word, yielding a still different result (see below).

It may be added that חֶבְיוֹן has often been related to the root. חָפַף / חָפָה / 'cover' and accordingly is translated "covering."[8] Thus, the line would be translated, "And there is the covering of his power," or "The name of the covering is His Strength." If this latter suggestion is followed, the covering could be understood as an entourage. Thus, a smooth transition with v 5 could be gained by translating the troublesome line, "And his mighty ones were there as a covering" (i.e., encircling the divine king). So constructed, the thought parallels that of Deut 33:2, "He came with myriads of holy ones" (cf. Ps 68:18 [Heb.]). It is of interest to note that Cross employs the term חָבָב in this passage as a parallel to קדשׁים / 'his holy ones.' If this meaning is allowed, then perhaps חֶבְיוֹן could be normalized חַבּוֹן with a meaning something like "splendor" (cf. Akkadian *ebebu* / 'be pure, clean', *ebbu* / 'polished, pure, shining, lustrous'). Hence, the line could be read in parallel with the preceding two, "There is the splendor of his might." However, since the Deuteronomy passage is beset with great difficulty and Cross's own handling of the text is colored by numerous conjectural emendations, this last translation must remain a pure conjecture. Hab 3:4b stands as a crux interpretum. Ultimately, one must determine (1) whether the line is best understood as a strict parallel to the previous two lines or as transitional between them and the two lines that follow, and (2) whether the contextual emphasis centers on the frequently stressed idea of the veiled presence of God[9],

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[7] See further, R. Patterson, "A Multiplex Approach to Psalm 45," *GTJ* 6 (1985) 29-48.

[8] See R. L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco: Word, 1984) 112; cf. M. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 1980) 234.

[9] See S. L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) 69; .cf. C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 2.99-100.

or is a literary borrowing of the familiar theme of the divine warrior moving amidst his heavenly armies that is adapted for Israelite cultic purposes,[10] or is simply an expression of God's power as manifested in the natural world.

The translation followed here takes this line as parallel to the preceding two and views it as primarily a poetic expression of God's power in the natural world. The rendering given above is gained by separating the מ from the word and viewing the remaining שׁ as a relative particle preceded by a pleonastic *waw*. The resultant tense stresses that the brilliant theophany originated in the inner recesses of the strength of him who is light (cf. 1 John .1:5).

Verse Five

The parallel lines here have often been taken as evidence for viewing Debir as an epithet or alternate name of Reshef, the well-known Canaanite god of pestilence and sterility.[11] Dahood calls attention to the set pairs קֶרֶן / פָּנִים in vv 4-5.12 O'Connor translates לְפָנָיו "at his face."[13]

Verse Six

וַיְמֹדֶד has customarily been translated either "he measured" (RSV, KJV, NKJV; cf. NASB, "surveyed") or "shook" (NIV; cf. LXX ἐσαλεύθη). The inappropriateness of the former meaning has led most critical expositors to favor the latter meaning here. Scholars haye suggested various byforms and alloforms to account for this understanding of מדד: (1) מוד = מוט / 'crumble', 'set in reeling motion' (Keil), (2) מוד = נָדַד / נוד / 'move', (cf. מוט / מָטַט / 'crumble,' נוט / נָטַט) / 'shake' [Margulis]), and (3) Arabic ** (*mada*) / 'was convulsed' (Driver).

Likewise, וַיַּתֵּר has occasioned several translations: διέτακη / 'melt' (LXX), "drove asunder" (KJV), "startled" (NASB, NKJV), "shook" (RSV), and "made to tremble" (NIV). If the previous line is to be rendered "shook," the NIV translation is certainly most appropriate. If the traditional understanding of מָדַד / 'measure' is retained, perhaps a root fur / 'spy out, survey' might be suggested for the form

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[10] See F. M. Cross, Jr., *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973) 100-105.

[11] See W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969) 186. For the proposed Eblaite evidence, see the comments of Dahood in G. Pettinato, *The Archives of Elba* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981) 296.

[12] M. Dahood, "Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Paris," in *Ras Shamra Parallels*, ed. Loren R. Fisher and Stan Rummel (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1972) 1.331.

[13] O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 235.

here. The force of the following couplet and the dire effects of the preceding two probably best favor a translation similar to that of the NIV for these two lines.

חֲלִיכוֹת עוֹלָם לוֹ. The line is difficult. It has usually been translated by the English versions "His ways are everlasting/eternal." Albright suggested that the ל of the last word be combined with the first two words of v 7 to read לתחתאן, thus reading an energic feminine plural of חָתָא with emphatic ל.[14] So constructed, the newly constituted line would be translated "Eternal orbits were shattered." While this suggestion is attractive and involves no consonantal revision, it would leave a metrical imbalance in vv 6b and 7, which appear to be formed as a 3/3/3 pattern. Further, MT does yield a reasonable sense as "his eternal courses." The meaning would be that the ancient hills and mountains, now convulsing before the approaching theophany, had formed the time-honored paths of God (cf. Amos 4: 13). Surely such a poetic figure is most apropos for him who is called "The Rider on the Clouds" (Ps 68:5 [Heb.]; cf. Isa 19:1) or "He who rides the Heavens" (Deut 33:26; cr. Ps 68:34 [Heb.]). The syntax of the line is reminiscent of Num 23:22b: כְּתוֹעֲפֹת רְאֵם לוֹ (cf. Ps 18:8 [Heb.]: כֹּה־חָרָה לוֹ וַיִּתְגָּעֲשׁוּ).

Verse Seven

        The first line of v 7 is another extremely difficult sentence to interpret. The line has frequently been taken with the first two words of the second line, leaving the last word of line two to be constructed with line three. While this makes for a smooth translation, "I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: / And the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble (NIV)," it leaves an unusually long pair of lines: 5 / 4. Despite the difficulty of MT, it seems best to retain the more customary reading with its 3/3/3 meter. The troublesome תַּחַת אָוֶן can be translated by the usual "in distress/ affliction," but may perhaps be better taken as a geographical name paralleling Cushan and Midian in lines two and three. Perhaps it may have been a name employed by the Hebrew poet to describe the general area where the enigmatic Cushan (= Egyptian Kushu?) and Midian were located, that is, tbe southern part of the broad area that stretched from the Sinai Peninsula northward into Transjordania. If so, the whole verse forms a geographic inclusio with v 3.[15]

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        [14] Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," 15.
        [15] Note that תחת appears as a geographical name in Num 33:26, 27. אָוֶן-type forms occur as personal names and geographical names in the OT (e.g" Num 16:1; Ezra 2:33; Neh 6:2; 7:37; 11:35; Amos 1:5; cf. Gen 36:23; 38:4, 8, 9, etc.). If תחתאון is to be taken as a geographical name, אָ-ון may be associated with a noun meaning "vigor" or "wealth" coming from a second homophonous root to that of the usual noun translated "trouble" or "wickedness" or "distress." The easy confusion between the two words

The presence of רָאִיתִי here, a source of concern to many commentators, may be explained by recalling the similar employment of this verb in the Balaam oracles (Num 23:9; 24:17). Indeed, the poet may have intended a deliberate pun or literary allusion to Num 23:21, "He has not seen distress/wickedness in Jacob; / Nor has he looked upon trouble in Israel."

Verse Eight

Many have pointed out the familiar Ugaritic parallelism here of יָם / נָהָר.[16] The reason for their employment here is an interpretive problem that will be discussed below.[17] Dahood also calls attention to the use of סוּס / מַרְכְּבוֹת here.[18] The final noun has been taken as standing at the end of a broken construct chain by Freedman.[19]

Verse Nine

The question of whether תֵּעוֹר should be viewed as second masculine singular or third feminine singular is conditioned by the understanding of the parallel line. Albright decides for the former and translates "Bare dost Thou strip Thy bow";[20] Keil follows the latter course: "Thy bow lays itself bare."[21] The second line is particularly troublesome. Indeed, Margulis laments, "The second hemistich is patently impossible."[22] A perusal of the various ancient and modern versions, as well as the commentators, shows the difficulties under which the translators labored. No consensus as to the translation has been reached. Laetsch points out that by his day Delitzsch had counted more than one hundred different interpretations of this difficult line.[23]

That the divine warrior's weapons are taken in hand is clear from the parallel pair קֶשֶׁת / מַטֶּה.[24] The use of such special weapons are

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may possibly have been viewed as a literary pun: תחתאון / 'wealthy place' is seen as 'in distress.'

[16] For example, Cross, *Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*, 140 and Dahood, "Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs," 1.203.

[17] See below. See further, A. Cooper, "Divine Names and Epithets in the Ugaritic. Texts," in *Ras Shamra Parallels*, 3.375.

[18] Dahood, "Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs," 1.284; for רכב, see Patterson, "Psalm 45," 37 n. 35.

[19] D. N. Freedman, "The Broken Construct Chain," *Biblica* 53 (1972) 535.

[20] Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," 12.

[21] Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2.103.

[22] Margulis, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," 420.

[23] T. Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: The Minor Prophets* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956) 347.

[24] See Dahood, "Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs," 1.258. The final ת in מטֹת is the common Canaanite feminine singular.

familiar from the literature of the ancient Near East. Thus Ward
remarks, "Syrian and Hittite art frequently represents *Adad- Ramman*,
god of storm, as armed with the same weapons, while the Babylonian
art gave this western god the forked thunderbolt."[25] Good sense can
be gained by following Albright's lead in repointing MT שְׁבֻעוֹת as a
second masculine singular perfect from שָׁבַע (although Albright .need-
lessly takes the following *mattot* from ESA *mtw* / 'fight,'[26]), yielding a
rendering that is reminiscent of Anat's fighting as recorded in the Baal
cycle, "Anat fought hard and gazed (on her work), she battled. . .
until she was sated, fighting in the palace. . . . "[27] As for the final אֹמֶר,
one may take the word possibly as the name of God's war club, the
noun coming from a verbal root מָרַר 'drive out,'[28] If so, it could be
a veiled reflection or scribal pun on Baal's war weapon Aymur
("Expeller").[29] Perhaps the simplest solution is achieved, however, by
viewing the final t of *mattot* as a double duty consonant and translat-
ing the line "You were satisfied with the club which you com-
manded."[30] Thus, there is probably a reminiscence of God's promise
to defend his people as given in Deut 32:40-42.

Verses Nine-c through Eleven
        The first line (v 9c) has been translated by taking "earth" as
either the subject or the object of the sentence: Because the second
masculine singular verbal suffix is read in the following line, it seems
best to retain the traditional understanding of תְּבַקַּע as a second
masculine singular verb and view "earth" as its object, Earth and
mountains are found in parallel in several texts commemorating this
event (e.g., Judg 5:5; Ps 18:8 [Heb.]),[31] The scene depicted here is

[25] W. H. Ward, *Habakkuk* (lCC; New York: Scribner's, 1911) 23. See also
Patterson, "Psalm 45," 38-39.

[26] Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," 15.

[27] See G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark;
1956) 84-85.

[28] See C. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontificium lnstitutum Biblicum,
1965) 3.356.

[29] Ibid., 2.180.

[30] For the use of double duty consonants, see I. O. Lehman, "A Forgotten Principle
of Biblical Textual Tradition Rediscovered,'" *JNES* 26 (1967) 93; cf. Dahood, *Psalms*,
2.81,3.371. For asyndetic subordination, see R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax* (Toronto:
Toronto University, 1976) 90; Dahood, *Psalms*, 3.426-27; and A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew
Syntax* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark. 1958) 191-92. For the corresponding Akkadian
construction, see W. von Soden, *Grundriss des akkadischen Grammatik* (Rome:
Pontificium lnstitutum Biblicum, 1952) 219.

[31] Several other parallel terms common to Ugaritic and Hebrew have been sug-
gested as present here by Dahood, "Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs," 1.177-78, 218,
372-73: הע/ יד, נתן/ נשׂא, תהום/ קול (although LXX may be right in finding the parallel
of תהום as רום).

recounted in detail also in Pss 18:8-16 (Heb.); 77:17-19 (Heb.); and 144:5-6 (cf. Judg 5:4-5).

The lack of metrical balance at the end of v 10 and the beginning of v 11 has occasioned several suggestions as to the division of the lines. Dahood takes רוֹם, with the first line of v 10b and reads "The abyss gave forth its haughty voice."[32] Albright takes the שֶׁמֶשׁ of v 11 with v 10 and translates "The Exalted One, Sun, raised its arms."[33] The translation adopted here takes שֶׁמֶשׁ־יָרֵחַ as one composite name, formed perhaps as a result of a deletion transformation so as to achieve the desired three poetic lines. The juxtaposition of sun and moon participating in earthly events is noted elsewhere (e.g., Josh 10:12-13; Isa 13:10; Joel 2:10; 3:4, etc.). The words are, of course, familiar set terms.[34]

Smith calls attention to the fact that זְבֻל used here for the dwelling place for the sun and moon; is usually reserved for the "exalted dwelling place of God."[35] Since sun and moon are reported as being among the heavenly retinue, they may also be viewed as being where God dwells.[36]

Verse Twelve

The parallel pair אַף / זַעַם appears elsewhere of God's indignation against his enemies (e.g., Isa 30:27). Especially instructive is Isa 10:5 where not only is this pair found, but מַטֶּה (Hab 3:9) also appears: "Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath." For יָצָא employed for God's going out to fight on behalf of his people, see Judg 5:4 and Isa 42:13.

Verse Thirteen

אֶת־ may be another example of an intrusive element within a construct chain.[37] Pusey, however, translates it as the preposition

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[32] M. Dahood, "The Phoenician Contribution to Biblical Wisdom Literature," in *The Role of the Phoenicians in the Interaction of Mediterranean Civilizations*, ed. William A. Ward (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1968) 140.

[33] Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," 12.

[34] For the use of fixed pairs of set terms, see S. Gervirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1963) 2-4, 10-14; and Y. Avishur, "Word Pairs Common to Phoenician and Biblical Hebrew," *UF* 7 (1975) 13-47, esp. p. 19. Note, however, the caution of P. C. Craigie, "Parallel Words in the Song of Deborah," *JETS* 20 (1977) 15-22. For the participation of other celestial phenomena in earthly events, see Judg 5:20; Isa 60:19-20 and the remarks of P. C. Craigie, "Three Ugaritic Notes on the Song of Deborah," *JSOT* 2 (1977) 33-49.

[35] Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 114.

[36] See the discussion of J. Gamberoni, *TDOT* 4.29-31; see also H. Wolf, *TWOT* 1.235.

[37] Freedman, "The Broken Construct Chain," 535; remarks, "The meaning must be: 'for the salvation of your people/for the salvation of your anointed.' Apparently the

"with," while Dahood suggests that לְיֵשַׁע / 'for the salvation of' be repointed to read לְיֵשַׁע / 'to save' (= a yiphil infinitive construct), a suggestion apparently followed by NIV. The following –אֶת would thus become an expanded accusative particle after a causative verbal form.[38]

The term מְשִׁיחֶךָ/ 'your anointed,' has been taken as referring either to the nation Israel (Ewald, Hitzig), Israel's Davidic king (R. Smith; cf. 2 Sam 23: 1), or to the Messiah (Hailey, Keil, Laetsch, Von Orelli). The problem is largely an interpretive one. If the reference is primarily historical and has in view the era of the exodus and wilderness wanderings, the term must refer to Moses. Although "your anointed" seemingly forms a parallel to "your people," Israel is not elsewhere called by this term. Rather, "the anointed" is customarily reserved for individuals such as the high priest or the king (note also Cyrus, Isa 45: 1). If Moses is intended, Pusey may be right in suggesting that the אֶת is to be taken as the preposition "with" (cf. Lat. Vg. *in salutem cum Christo tuo*), for God promised Moses that he would be with him (Josh 1:5; note, however, that the preposition there is עִם).[39]

Verses Thirteen-b through Fourteen-a

The three lines here have occasioned several difficulties, chief of which is the figure involved. Does God's smiting refer to the wicked enemy (Margulis), a mythological figure (Albright, Smith), or the enemy nation or armies viewed here under the figure of a house (Keil)? Since, as Cassuto points out, the verb מָחַץ is commonly used in both Ugaritic and the OT to signify a blow that the divine warrior gives to his enemies, it seems best to translate the three lines as rendered in my translation given above (cf. NIV).[40] Such an understanding does away with the need for finding yet another broken construct chain in the first line as suggested by Freedman.[41]

second phrase is a construct chain, like the first, except that the intrusive 't has been inserted between the construct and the absolute. Exactly what the 't is it may be difficult to say: it may be the emphasizing particle, normally used to identify the definite direct object of a verb (here of the action), or it may be the pronoun written defectively, used here to call attention to the pronominal suffix attached to the following noun." For added discussion as to the broken construct chain, see A. C. M. Blommerde, "The Broken Construct Chain, Further Examples," *Biblica*, 55 (1974) 549-52. For a negative appraisal of the whole concept, see J. D. Price, "Rosh: An Ancient Land Known to Ezekiel," *GTJ6* (1985) 79-88.

[38] For details, see E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953) 2.217; and M. Dahood, "Two Yiphil Causatives in Habakkuk 3, 13a," *OR* 48 (1979) 258-59.

[39] For the interchange of אֶת and עִם, see H. D. Preuss, *TDOT*, 1.449-58.

[40] See U. Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973) 1.268.

[41] Freedman, "The Broken Construct Chain," 535.

עָרוֹת is doubtless to be construed as an infinitive absolute detailing the extended activity of the main verb.[42]

Verse Fourteen

The last three lines of v 14 are exceedingly obscure. The position taken here suggests that there are three lines of text in a 2/3/3 pattern rather than the two lines of 3/4 as traditionally rendered. Key to the understanding is the dividing of לַחְפִיצֵנִי into two words: פוּץ / 'scatter' and צָנִיעַ / 'humble' by viewing the צ as another example of a double duty consonant. The resultant translation yields not only better sense, but delivers a nice parallel between צָנִיעַ / 'humble' and עָנִי / 'poor.' So construed, צָנִיעַ would take its place alongside such words as אֶבְיוֹן in contexts with עָנִי.[43]

Verse Fifteen

For the figure of God treading upon the sea, see Ps 77:20 (Heb.). סוּסֶיךָ is an adverbial accusative absolute which, in compressed language, complements the action of the main verb and governs the sense of the following line. The preposition of line one is also to be understood in the second line.[44]

ANALYSIS

Grammatical Features

The basic literary dichotomy between chaps. 1 and 2 and 3:3-15 has already been noted (see above). The data that support the archaic nature of 3:3-15 are presented here. First, it may be noted that there are numerous cases of defective spelling in the interior of words, as pointed out by Albright.[45] Next may be gathered the various archaic grammatical elements and poetic devices that occur: (1) the lack of the definite article throughout these verses, (2) the t-form imperfect used with duals or collectives (v 4), (3) the use of the old pronominal

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[42] See further, Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 38-39; and M. Hammershaimb, "On the So-called Infinitivus Absolutus in Hebrew," in *Hebrew and Semitic Studies Presented to Godfrey Rolles Driver*, ed. D. Winton Thomas and W. D. McHardy (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) 85-93.

[43] Suitable parallels can be found in Pss 10:2, 8-10; 35:10; Prov 30:14, etc.

[44] For details, see Dahood, *Psalms*, 3.436.

[45] Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," 10. Albright also suggests the presence of an old energic form with emphatic ל in vv 6-7: לתחתא ו/'(eternal orbits) were shattered.' It should also be noted that E. Wurthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament* (4th ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 114-15, follows the lead of K. Ellinger in translating the troublesome crux as the Ugaritic word for destruction preceded by the preposition ל. However, see the discussion above in n. 15.

suffix in ה (vv 4, 11), (4) the employment of enclitic *-m* (v 8),[46] (5) the
frequent appearance of the old preterite prefix conjugation verb (vv
3-5, 7-12, 14) in variation with the suffix conjugation, (6) the use of
the ל of possession in inverted predicate position in a non-verbal
sentence (v 6), and (7) the use of structured tri-cola employing climac-
tic parallelism (vv 4, 6b, 7, 8a, 10, 11, 13b) to mark major divisions
(6b- 7, 8) or subdivisions (vv 4, 10a, 11, 13b-14) within the poem.
As well, one may notice the use of parallel expressions and set
terms held in common in Ugaritic and the corpus of old Hebrew
poetry: הַרְרֵי־עַד /גִּבְעוֹת עוֹלָם (v 6), קֶרֶן /פָּנִים ;(vv 4-5), שָׁמַיִם /אֶרֶץ (v 3),
נָתַן /נָשָׂא (v 8), and סוּס /מַרְכָּבָה ,נָהָר /יָם (v 8), תְּהוֹם /קוֹל (v 9), קֶשֶׁת /מַטֶּה
חֵץ / בָּרָק ,שֶׁמֶשׁ / יָרֵחַ (v 11). Also to be noted is the utilization of a
vocabulary commonly found in older poetic material in the OT: אֱלוֹהַ,
מַיִם (v 8), רָכַב ,אַף (v 7), רָגַז ,אָוֶן (v 6), חָוַה (v 3), שָׁמַיִם ,הַר־פָּארָן ,קָדוֹשׁ
מַיִם רַבִּים, פָּרַז ,רֹאשׁ ,מַטֶּה (v 14), and קוֹל ,תְּהוֹם (v 10), אַף (v 12), (זֶרֶם),
יָם (v 15).[47]

Literary Features

No less significant is the presence of several themes common to
the body of Ugaritic and early OT poetic literature: (1) the Lord's
movement from the southland (v 3); cf. Deut 33:1-2; Judg 5:4; Ps
68:8 [Heb.]), (2) the presence of the heavenly assemblage (v 5; cf.
Deut 33:2-3), (3) the shaking of the terrestrial and celestial worlds at
God's presence (vv 6, 10-11; cf. Judg 5:4-5; Pss 18:8-9, 13-15 [Heb.];
68:34 [Heb]; 77:17-19 [Heb.]; 144:5-6), (4) the Lord's anger against.
sea and river (v 8; cf. Exod 15:8; Ps 18:8, 16 [Heb.]), (5) the Lord's
presence riding the clouds (v 8; cf. Exod 15:4; Pss 18:11-12 [Heb.];
68:5, 34 [Heb.]), (6) the fear of the enemy at the Lord's advance (vv 7,
10?; cr. Exod 15:14-16; Pss 18:8 [Heb.]; 77:17-19 [Heb.]), and (7)
the Lord's fighting against the boastful (v 14; cf. Exod 15:9) enemy
(vv 9, 11, 13-14; cf. Exod 15:3, 6; Ps 77:18 [Heb.]) so as to deliver his
people (vv 13-15; cf. Pss 18:38-39, 41 [Heb.]; 68:8 [Heb.] with Exod
15:10, 12-13).[48]

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[46] For enclitic -m, see M. Pope, "Ugaritic Enclitic -m," *JCS* 5 (1951) 123-28; H. D.
Hummel, "Enclitic MEM in Early Northwest Semitic, Especially Hebrew," *JBL* 76
(1957) 85-106; and Dahood, Psalms, 3.408-9.

[47] For the bearing of Ugaritic research upon biblical studies see P. C. Craigie,
Ugarit and the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 67-90, and his exten-
sive bibliography, pp. 107-9. For the corpus of ancient OT poetry, see below.

[48] See further Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," 8-9; *idem, Yahweh and the
Gods of Canaan,* 1-52, 183-93; Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, 2.3-15, 16-59,
69-109; S. Rummel, "Narrative Structures in the Ugaritic Texts," in *Ras Shamra
Parallels*, 3.233-84; and Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 91-194.

Historical/ Theological Features

Having noted the archaic nature of the linguistic evidence concerning Hab 3:3-15, it is necessary to inquire further concerning historical and theological data that can be analyzed to help in ascertaining the setting of Habakkuk's psalmic material. The historical information is minimal, consisting of the notice of God's leading Israel (v 3) in her movement from the Transjordanian south-an advance that brought consternation to that entire area (v 7). The era involved in these verses, then, is obviously that of the period surrounding the exodus and Mount Sinai revelation and the movement to the Jordan River. This is further confirmed by the notice of the victory at the Red Sea (vv 14-15). Other possible historical reminiscences have been suggested for some of the intervening verses, such as the crossing of the Jordan or the Battle of Ta'anach (commemorated in Deborah's Song in Judges 5), but certainty is lacking in either of these proposals. It must be pointed out, however, that even though the time frame envisioned in these verses is that of the exodus and Israel's early movement toward the Land of Promise, the highly figurative nature of the poetry does not allow a precise identification as to the time of its original composition.

Much can be said with regard to theological data. Certainly the omnipotence and self-revelation of the invisible God of the universe are taught here. As well, his sovereign control of the physical world and his direct intervention into the historical affairs of mankind are in evidence. Moreover, his redemption of and continuing care for his people are distinctly underscored. However, because such theological information is found in many places in the OT, these data are not decisive in determining the date of the original composition of these verses. Nevertheless, the fact that the historical reflections and theological viewpoint are consistent with and, indeed, are dominant in the other early literature that forms parallels with these verses, and the fact that the grammatical and literary data are like those that are found in the early poetry of Israel argue for the presumption that these verses belong to that same literary cycle and commemorate the same occasion. If not written in the same era as the other poetic material and handed down to the prophet's day, the poetry found in Habakkuk's prophecy here is at least written in a consciously archaistic manner. The utilization of earlier traditional material is championed by Cassuto;[49] an archaistic style is favored by Albright.[50] I am convinced that Cassuto's position is essentially correct and that the substance of Habakkuk's poetry, though doubtless reworked

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[49] Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, 2.73.
[50] Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," 9.

by the prophet in accordance with the musical standards demanded
for its employment in the cultus, was directly part of a living epic
material handed down since the days of the exodus and its related
events and, under divine inspiration, was incorporated by Habakkuk
into his prophecy.

DISCUSSION

The Question of Literary Genre

It has been assumed to this point that the material in Hab 3:3-15
is epic in nature. The justification for this classification must now be
considered. An epic is a long narrative poem that recounts heroic
actions, usually connected with a nation's or people's golden age. As
such, epic forms a distinct substratum within the class of heroic
narrative.[51] Epic literature usually finds its unifying factor in a central
hero whose courageous, wise, altruistic, and virtuous actions are
intended to be exemplary to subsequent generations. Thus, Ing
remarks,

> Its heroic nature is its prime essential and there is one meaning of
> "heroic" which remains constant throughout all local and temporal
> variations: the heroic standard of conduct means that a man cares for
> something beyond his own material welfare and is prepared to sacrifice
> for it comfort, safety and life itself; and his care for this "something" is
> active.[52]

It is, therefore, highly didactic in purpose.

Stylistically, the exalted theme(s) and didactic material call forth
the highest efforts of the poet so that the language and expressions
become lofty in tone, or as Ryken puts it, "a consciously exalted
mode of expression that removes the language from the common-
place."[53] To accomplish this goal, the poet makes special use of static
epithets, standardized literary formulae, and a body of set terms that
are not just easily memorized but are particularly designed to achieve
a distinct effect commensurate with his purposes. Nilsson observes,

> In the epical language of all peoples occurs a store of stock
> expressions, constantly recurring phrases, half and whole verses and
> even verse complexes; and repetitions are characteristic of the epic
> style. . . . The singer has a large store of poetical parts ready, and his
> art consists in coordinating these parts according to the course of

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[51] See L. Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 81.

[52] C. M. lng, "Epic," in Cassell's *Encyclopaedia of Literature*, ed. S. H. Steinberg
(London: Cassell & Company, 1953) 1.195-200.

[53] Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible*, 81.

events and connecting them by the aid of new-made verses. A skilled poet is able to improvise a poem on every subject.[54]

Accordingly, the epic poet's vocabulary is carefully drawn to emphasize such qualities as: magnificence and grandeur, awe-inspiring might and greatness, munificence and generosity, virility and valor, piety and wisdom, and a strong sense of personal commitment even to the point of complete self-sacrifice. Commensurate with these idealized qualities, the epic plot is usually sublimated to the character of its hero. The action of the narrative, while filled with such things as exciting adventures, perilous wanderings, and colossal battles, is nonetheless usually merely an instrument of focusing on the hero himself whose laudatory conduct both emphasizes the significance of life's quest and provides for future generations a model for the challenges experienced by all men. Tillyard comments,

> The epic writer must express the feelings of a large group of people living in or near his own time. The notion that the epic is primarily patriotic is an unduly narrowed version of this require- ment. . . . The epic must communicate the feeling of what it was like to be alive at the time.[55]

The hero, then, is man written large.

> The structure of epic is often like a great arch through which on one side the past may be seen, on the other the future. . . . While epic raises its figures to astounding heroic stature, it never makes them strange by eccentricity. They may be giants but they retain the form and blood of the family of man.[56]

In turning to the epic literature of the classical world, certainly this feature is central in the Homeric epics. As Flaceliere points out,

> Homer bequeathed to future generations the ideal type of Greek man (if we accept subtlety and a tendency to deception as part of such a character); and perhaps the ideal type of all men (provided one regards as a virtue prudence, which, in cases of extremity, is not above lying).[57] To be sure, Homer's heroes play out their earthly roles in the face of a heavenly family of deities whose own selfishness often causes them

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[54] M. P. Nilsson, *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology* (New York: Norton, 1932) 19.

[55] E. M. W. Tillyard, *The English Epic and Its Background* (New York: Oxford University, 1966) 12.

[56] Ing, "Epic," 1.197.

[57] R. Flacelieie, *A Literary History of Greece*, trans. Douglas Garman (Chicago: Aldine, 1964) 38.

to intervene on the stage of man's affairs in a capricious and cruel manner.[58] Nevertheless, this time-honored struggle[59] was all to man's own betterment, for the harshness of life brought on by the heavenly fates provided man with a training ground for keeping in proper tension[60] the twin virtues of heroism and obedience on the one hand and an often violent virility blended at times with a touching tenderness on the other. The balanced man must learn to live the full life of human potential.

> In the midst of the catastrophes decreed by the gods, the best men are capable of great actions, though at the cost of infinite affliction. . . . Thus Homer sets before the Greeks the twofold ideal of the hero-sage. In his two poems he exalts the clear-sighted energy of men who, without illusions, struggle with their tragic destinies, with no real and constant help save what they find in themselves, in "the greatness of their hearts".[61]

Much of this was passed on to the classical Latin world where it was reshaped to fit the Roman mold. Hadas shows that Vergil "crowns his work and Latin literature with an epic which would be inconceivable without the models of Iliad and Odyssey."[62] It was the latter epic that had the place of prominence for the great Latin poet, for

> there were familiar elements sure to appeal to the Roman-the spectacle of endurance in the face of danger, the love of home, the fear of the gods, the sombre religious associations with the 1ower world. Odysseus was a hero more after the Roman heart than Achilles, and Virgil shows this in his modelling of Aeneas.[63]

[58] See Flaceliere's extended discussion, ibid., 46-50. See also, H. C. Baldry, *Ancient Greek Literature in Its Living Context* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968) 18-23.

[59] Nilsson, *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology*, 12-34, points out that Homer was an heir to a heroic tradition that stretched back to the Middle Helladic Age of Mycenae. D. Page, *History and the Homeric Iliad* (Berkeley: University of California, 1963) demonstrates that there is an essential core of historical trustworthiness as to the Mycenaean Age in the Homeric Iliad. Note, for example, his extended discussions on pp. 134-47 and pp. 218-96.

[60] W. C. Stephens, ed., *The Spirit of the Classical World* (New York: Capricorn, 1967), 14, remarks, "The gods were in charge of life--there was no doubt of that--and man could expect to suffer a good deal from them. But the Greeks combined this attitude with an intense joy in living, for they did not regard themselves as playthings of a despotic destiny. They were shapers of their own lives, within a framework set by the gods, and took a fierce pride in human accomplishments even while they recognized their vulnerability. It is this tension which makes Greek tragedy the profound and moving form of art it is."

[61] Placeliere, *A Literary History of Greece*, 59.

[62] M. Hadas, *A History of Latin Literature* (New York: Columbia University, 1952) II.

[63] J. W. Duff, *A Literary History of Rome*, ed. A. M. Duff (3rd ed.; London: Ernest Benn, 1953) 91.

However, Vergil's genius may be seen in his psychologically pene-
trating advance on the concept of heroism. Thus, Bowra rightly
points out,

> In the Aeneid Vergil presented a new ideal of heroism and showed
> in what fields it could be exercised. The essence of his conception is
> that a man's *virtus* is shown less in battle and physical danger than in
> the defeat of his own weaknesses.[64]

Still further, Vergil emphasized that man's *virtus* became perfected
not only through courage, cunning, and the conquest of self, but
through suffering:

> Vergil. . . has a profound sympathy for suffering and sorrow and
> a conviction that it is through suffering that man reaches the depths of
> religious experience. It is through sacrifice and suffering that ultimate
> triumph is to be achieved.[65]

With all this Vergil's writings begin to take on a spiritual quality that
at times approaches Christian perspective, especially as seen in his
famous *Fourth Eclogue*. Hadas observes,

> This poem has been more widely discussed than any piece of
> similar length in classical literature. In language reminiscent of Scrip-
> ture the poet prophesies the birth of a boy whose rule will usher in a
> golden age of peace. Since Constantine and Augustine, Christian writers
> have regarded the Eclogue as a prophecy of the Messiah. More prob-
> ably the reference is to the child expected by Octavian and Scribonia,
> who proved to be a girl, the infamous Julia, or possibly to a child of
> Antony and Octavia, or to Pollio's own son. But if the prophecy
> cannot refer to Jesus, the notion of an expected redeemer may quite
> likely derive from the hopeful speculations of the Jews on the subject.[66]

> When one turns to the ancient Near Eastern world, he also
> encounters epic material. Kramer counts no less than nine epics in
> ancient Sumer. However, as Kramer points out, distinct differences
> exist between the Sumerian epic and its classical counterparts.

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[64] C. M. Bowra, *From Vergil to Milton* (New York: St. Martin's, 1967) 84.

[65] M. Hadas, *A History of Latin Literature*, 154.

[66] Ibid., 144. Cyrus Gordon, "Vergil and the Near East," *Ugaritica* VI (Paris: Paul
Geuthner, 1969) 277, suggests that "by Vergil's time the Jews of Italy must have
cultivated messianism in the heart of the Roman Empire, where they influenced
Romans of Vergil's generation." There was also a growing sense of apocalyptic in
Vergil, a theme for which he was perhaps indebted to the widespread appearance of
apocalypses in the centuries surrounding the advent of the Christian era. Messianism
and apocalyptic were blended together by Vergil who had a great feeling for the destiny
of Rome in general and for the key role of Augustus in particular.

The Sumerian epic poems consist of individual disconnected tales of varying length, each of which is restricted to a single episode. There is no attempt to articulate and integrate these episodes into a larger unit. There is relatively little characterization and psychological penetration in the Sumerian material. The heroes tend to be broad types, more or less undifferentiated, rather than highly personalized individuals. Moreover, the incidents and plot motifs are related in a rather static and conventionalized style; there is little of that plastic, expressive movement that characterizes such poems as Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. Mortal women play hardly any role in Sumerian epic literature, whereas they have a very prominent part in. Indo-European epic literature. Finally, in the matter of technique, the Sumerian poet gets his rhythmic effects primarily from variations in the repetition patterns. He makes no use whatever of the meters or uniform line so characteristic of Indo-European epics.[67]

Kramer adds that the Sumerian narratives doubtless influenced the literatures of the peoples around them so that the Sumerian epic probably formed the precursor to the later classical and western epics.[68] Be that as it may, a direct transmission to the Semitic world can be shown, most notably in the case of the famous Gilgamesh Epic of ancient Babylon which was drawn largely from several earlier Sumerian stories. Important for the present discussion is the fact that the Gilgamesh Epic is replete with many themes and elements common, to epic literature in general. It focuses on a central hero whose deeds and fortunes are praised. It tells of his wisdom and strength, rehearsing his dangerous journeys during which his courageous strength in the face of great odds is demonstrated, often in the presence of hostile heavenly intervention. It, too, has a universalistic and timeless tone, for it grapples with the perennial problems of life itself: life's frailty, the relation of life to death and the afterlife, and how best to make the most of this life despite its sufferings. As Heidel writes, "Finally, the epic takes up the question as to what course a man should follow

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[67] S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago: Chicago University, 1963) 184-85.

[68] The vastness of Sumerian connections in the ancient world has been demonstrated repeatedly. See, for example, the discussion of H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon* (New York: Hawthorn, 1962) 271-92; and E. Yamauchi, *Greece and Babylon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967) 26-32. In another connection, H. W. F. Saggs, *The Encounter with the Divine in Mesopotamia and Israel* (London: Athlone, 1978) 6, remarks, "Historically, it is difficult to accept a total absence of continuum in conceptual links between ancient Mesopotamia and the present." The established fact of cultural interrelations between Sumer and the Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds predisposes at least a case for a literary interplay as well. A literary link between the classical and Near Eastern civilizations has been pled by C. H. Gordon, *Ugarit and Minoan Crete* (New York: Norton, 1966); idem, *Before the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); and idem, *The World of the Old Testament* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958), 101-12.

in view of these hard facts. The solution it offers is simple: 'Enjoy your life and make the best of it!'"[69]

The epic was also alive in ancient Syro-Palestine, as attested by the Ugaritic literature. Prominence of place must be given to the KRT Epic and the Epic of Aqhat. The former deals with heroism in the royal house and has a theme in some ways akin to the Helen of Troy motif of the Iliad. The latter tells of the fortunes of Aqhat and his son Danel at the hands of the goddess Anat. Although both epics lack the scope and psychological penetration of the classical epics and do not specifically formulate questions about the eternal issues of life, nonetheless they do wrestle with the problems of coping with the vicissitudes of this life, particularly in the face of the divine presence.[70] As well, they share motifs common both to the classical and Near Eastern literatures so that Gordon can say, "It should thus be apparent that Ugarit has the most intimate connections with the Old Testament in language and literature. At the same time, Ugarit has close Aegean connections."[71]

The point of all of this is not necessarily to demonstrate any distinct interaction of a particular epic between the Near East and the classical, western traditions, but simply to show that the epic was a widespread literary experience in the ancient world.[72] Accordingly, it would seem only natural that the Hebrews would be partakers of that genre. Biblical critics have suggested that such is certainly the case. Gordon finds much traditional epic material in the OT and is especially attracted to the concept of royal epic as it appears in the patriarchal narratives.[73] Ryken, however, classifies the patriarchal

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[69] A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (2nd ed.; Chicago: Chicago University, 1949) 12. The Gilgamesh Epic is also known from Hittite and Hurrian tablets.

[70] Most scholars suggest that the struggles of Baal against Yam and Mot also comprise an epic cycle. Particularly important parallels exist between Hab 3:3-15 and the Ugaritic material. See Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, 2.169-74, 178-80 (texts 51, 67, 68).

[71] Gordon, *Ugarit and Minoan Crete*, 28.

[72] Although consideration of the epic in ancient India is beyond the parameters of this paper, it should be noted that the epic made a significant contribution to the literary tradition of the classical period. Two primary epics, both of which experienced varying recensions and interpolations, are attested: the Mahabharata which traced the account of the bloody battle between the Kauravas and its bloody aftermath, including the adventures of the five sons of Pandu; and the Ramayana, which celebrated the heroic deeds and adventures of Rama, the virtuous prince of Ayodhya. For details, see Vincent Smith; *The Oxford History of India* (3rd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1958) 55-60; and A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India* (2nd ed.; New York: Hawthorn, 1963) 409-34,471-78.

73 See Gordon, *Before the Bible*, 285. Gordon earlier (pp. 101-12) suggests that Hebrew literature followed a pure format in its epic style due to its connection with Egypt. N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1968) 315-20, remarks that, in a sense, the whole Bible is epic, especially the Christian message.

accounts as belonging to the wider genre of heroic narrative, with which he also includes the stories of Daniel, Gideon, David, Ruth, and Esther. He restricts biblical epic to the exodus event.

> There is only one biblical story that is in the running for consideration as an epic. It is what I shall call the Epic of the Exodus, which occupies parts of the biblical books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The main narrative sections are as follows: Exodus 1-20, 32-34; Numbers 10-14, 16-17, 20-24; Deuteronomy 32-34.[74]

Cassuto likewise decides for the presence of epic tradition in the OT, relating it particularly to the older poetry.

> The Hebrew literature. . . continues the literary tradition that had already become crystallized among the Canaanite population before the people of Israel came into being, just as there survives in the Hebrew tongue, with certain dialectal variations, the most ancient Canaanite idiom.[75]

Cassuto is careful to point out, however, that a fully developed epic poem does not exist in the OT canon. What is found, rather, are poetic remnants of what must have been a once extensive epic literature:

> When we have regard to the fact that the relevant passages depict the events in poetic colours and expressions, and that in the main these phrases are stereotyped, recurring verbatim in quite a number of different verses, . . . it follows that these legends were not handed down orally in a simple prosaic speech, which was liable to variations, but assumed a fixed, traditional, poetic aspect. . . . This poetic form was specifically epic in character.[76]

On the whole, one must agree with Cassuto. For certainly the basic epic standard that such a work must be a long narrative poem is nowhere met in the OT. Nevertheless, the primary importance of the exodus itself and the prevalence of the exodus motif, as well as the poetic reproduction of that event in various places in the OT, make it highly likely that Israel, like its neighbors, sang the praises of a past great era in epic fashion.[77] The epic remnants scattered throughout

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[74] Ryken, *The Literature after Bible*, 81.

[75] Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, 2.70.

[76] Ibid., 73.

[77] Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 70, observes, "The exodus event is the heart of the Old Testament 'gospel,' and the word 'redeem' comes to be forever bound to it." To this may be added the remarks of O. T. Allis, *The Old Testament: Its Claims and Its Critics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972) 267, "The deliverance from Egyptian bondage is the most important, as it is the most spectacular redemptive event in the

the OT render it possible also that the details of the exodus once existed in full epic form. If that was not in classical format, it was, at least, in the traditional style of the familiar Near Eastern heroic cycle.

Literary Dependence

At this point two further problems surface. (1) If it can be shown that Habakkuk's material is of epic quality, belonging to a corpus of epic poetry, can the full range of that epic material be determined or the original poem itself be recovered? (2) If that poem can be recovered and if it may be safely assumed that Israel was a full participant in the ancient Near Eastern Mediterranean milieu, was its epic drawn from and/or dependent upon any Near Eastern precursors?

The question of the content of the proposed Hebrew epic rests on an examination of those poems that sing of the era and events of Israel's exodus from Egypt and contain the same grammatical and literary features. To Hab 3:3-15 may be added: Exod 15:1-18; Deut 33:1-3; Judg 5:4-5; Pss 18:8-16 (Heb.); 68:8-9 (Heb.); 77:17-20 (Heb.); and 144:5-6. Two of these passages, Hab 3:3-15 and Exod 15:1-18, contain extended portrayals of the exodus experience.

Like Habakkuk's psalm, Exod 15:1-18 gives a detailed discussion of the era of the exodus, first singing of the exodus itself and Yahweh's victory at the Red Sea (vv 1-10) and then praising the Lord for his divine leading, first to Mount Sinai (vv 11-13) and then proleptically from Sinai to the Promised Land (vv 14-18).

Habakkuk adds considerable information to this event. In these verses one can observe that there are actually two compositions, each of which makes its own contribution to the corpus of the exodus epic. That there are two poems here can be seen both from their differing themes and the syntax of the respective material. Hab 3:3-7 describes God's leading of his heavenly and earthly hosts from the south in an awe-inspiring mighty theophany. It is marked structurally by the repeated use of the coordinator waw to tie together its thought associations. Hab 3:8-15 comprises a victory song commemorating the conquest itself and points to the basis of that success in the exodus event, particularly in the victory at the Red Sea. Structurally, no waw coordinator is used, thought associations being accomplished via variations in sentence structure, including change of word order and the skillful employment of poetic tricola.

Both portions, however, tell of the same era and sing of the unfolding drama of the exodus event and in so doing employ epic

history of Israel. Together with the events leading up to it, it is described in detail in Exodus 3-15 and referred to a hundred or more times in the rest of the Old Testament."

themes and style. Thus, there is the central focus on a hero--God himself. Moreover, in the first poem (vv 3-7) the poet relates the account of an epic journey, here God's leading of his people from the southland toward Canaan, the land of promise. He calls particular attention to God's command of nature in awesome theophany (vv 3-4), his special companions (v 5), his earthshaking power (v 6), and the effect of all of this on the inhabitants of the land (v 7).

The second poem (vv 8-15) transcends the general bounds of the movement from Egypt to the Jordan (cf. Ps 114:3-5), the phraseology being best understood as including God's miraculous acts in the conquest period as well. God's victories at the end of the exodus account are rehearsed first (vv 8-11), possibly reflecting such deeds as the triumph at the Red Sea (Exodus 15) and at the Jordan (Joshua 3-4), as well as the victories at the Wadi Kishon (Judges 4-5) and Gibeon (Joshua 10). The poet then directs his hearers' attention to the basic victory that gave Israel its deliverance and eventual conquest of Canaan--the triumph in Israel's exodus from Egypt (vv 12-15). That the singing of these two epic songs was designed for the listeners' response in submission to Israel's Redeemer can be seen in Habakkuk's own reaction to them (vv 16-19).

Likewise, epic elements can be seen in these two poems in the stylistic employment of literary features common to epic genre: the use of static epithets, set parallel terms, and the utilization of a vocabulary and themes common to the commemoration of the exodus event.[78] In both subject matter and literary style, Habakkuk's twofold psalm deserves to be recognized as epic remnant.

When one considers both of the major passages concerning the exodus (Exod 15:1-18; Hab 3:3-15) together with the reflections of that event in other fragmentary portions, it is clear that the primary emphasis of the epic cycle is on the deliverance out of Egypt and that all other happenings that follow, including the conquest, are intricately tied to it. Thus the whole movement from Egypt to Canaan forms one grand exodus event. Seen in this way it may be possible to sketch at least in shadowy form something of the substance of that once great epic concerning Israel's exodus out of Egypt and eventual entrance in triumph into Canaan through the might of its divine hero and victor, God himself.

The following outline of themes and their source passages may thus be tentatively proposed.

I. The Exodus Experience: The Redeemer's redemption of his people (Exod 15:1-10)

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[78] See further, Rummel, "Narrative Structures in the UgariticTexts," 3.236-38.

    A. Heading and Theme: A song of redemption for the Redeemer (Exod 15:1-2)

    B. God's Redemptive Work: Brings deliverance to his people from their oppressors (Exod 15:3-5)

    C. Israel's redemption: By the power of her omnipotent Redeemer (Exod 15:6-10; cf. Hab 3:l4b-15)

II. The Movement to Sinai: The Redeemer's self-revelation to his redeemed people (Exod 15:11-13)

III. The Movement from Sinai to the Jordan: The revelation of Israel's Redeemer to the nations (Hab 3:3-15)

    A. The Redeemer's corning from the south (Hab 3:3-15)

        1. His appearance (Hab 3:3-4; cf. Judg 5:4; Ps 68:8)

        2. His associates (Hab 3:5; cf. Deut 33:2-3)

        3. His actions (Hab 3:6-7)

    B. The Redeemer's conquest (Hab 3:8-15)

        1. His power: As seen at the Jordan (Hab 3:8-9)

        2. His power: As seen in the natural world (Hab 3:10-11; cf. Judg 5:4-5; Pss 18:8-16; 68:8-9; 77:17-20; 144:5-6)

        3. His power: As seen by the enemy (Hab 3:12-15; cf. Exod 15:14-18)

So viewed, the exodus epic once sang of God's mighty prowess in delivering his people from Egypt, traced God's guidance of them to Sinai and through the Transjordanian Wilderness, sang of the crossing of the Jordan River and recorded the triumphal entry into and the conquest of the land. The full epic, obviously, has not been inscripturated. Perhaps this is because, as Cassuto suggests, the language of the full blown ancient epic was so intertwined with its mythological predecessors,[79] or simply because God wanted the focus of Israel's attention to be on himself and the redemption that he alone could and did supply to his enslaved people rather than on an account that all too easily could become treated as merely legendary.

    The question of Israel's literary indebtedness to other literary traditions must now be considered. Certainly Israel's central location in the midst of a somewhat similar cultural milieu favors the possibility of a literary borrowing. Moreover,

        Literary works throughout the ancient world, especially in the ancient Near East, share motifs and forms. Proverbs, hymns, disputations, and prophecies appear in the literature of cultures influenced by the Hebrews.[80]

Indeed, the Hebrew poets' employment of literary themes and terminology found in the epics of the surrounding nations makes the

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[79] Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, 2.70-80, 102.

[80] V. L. Toilers and J. R. Maier, eds., *The Bible and Its Literary Milieu* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 11.

question of the relationship of the Hebrew epic to the epic literature
of the Ancient Near East a pertinent one. However, as Lambert
points out, with regard to the many parallels between the literature of
Mesopotamia and the Bible, one must be cautious in finding direct
links in such cases.[81]

Although some scholars suggest a relationship between the above
mentioned material with Mesopotamian sources (e.g., Kramer and
Smith), most underscore the frequent similarities between the OT and
the great Canaanite epics in vocabulary, poetic devices, and, espe-
cially, thematic motifs. As for the material considered here, Cassuto
finds Canaanite literary traditions echoed in nearly every verse of
Exod 15:1-18,[82] and also lists the several cases where Habakkuk has
reproduced epic elements in his two psalms: the noise of the waves of
the sea (Hab 3:10), the anger of the Lord against the enemy (Hab 3:8,
12; cf. Exod 15:7), the appearance of the Lord riding on his chariots,
the clouds of the sky (Hab 3:8; cf. Exod 15:2,4), the thunderous voice
of the Lord above the roar of the sea (Hab 3:10), the fear and flight of
the enemy at the presence of the Lord (Hab 3:10; cf. Exod 15:14), the
Lord's fighting against the rebels with his divine weapons (Hab 3:9,
11, 14), the Lord's compelling of the monsters to leap into the sea
(Hab 3:6; cf. Exod 15:3), the Lord's annihilation of Rahab and his
helpers (Hab 3:9, 13; cf. Exod 15:2), the Lord's treading upon the sea
(Hab 3:15), and his final reign (Exod 15:18).[83] Cassuto relates most of
these to the battles reported in the Ugaritic tales of the Baal and Anat
cycles wherein Baal compelled Prince Yam (sea) and Judge Nahar
(river) to recognize his kingship over them.[84] Thus, the Hebrew
poets used "the expression and motifs that. . . were a paramount
feature of the ancient epic."[85] He goes on to suggest that the early
Hebrew storytellers probably borrowed wholesale elements from these
Canaanite myths and may even have had native (non-biblical)
epic literature to draw upon, such as in the case of "The Revolt of
the Sea."

[81] W. G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," in
The Bible and Its Literary Milieu, 285-97.

[82] Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, 2.99-101.

[83] See the concise summary by Rummel, "Narrative Structures in the Ugaritic
Texts," 3.236-39.

[84] Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, 2.80-97. Cassuto relates the Lord's tread-
ing upon the sea to Marduk's defeat of Tiamat recounted in the Enuma Elish; see
ANET,67.

[85] Ibid., 99. For a discussion of common elements of the epic battle of the divine
hero against the sea., see E. L. Greenstein, "The Snaring of Sea in the Baal Epic,"
MAARAV 3 (1982) 195-216. Greenstein has an excellent bibliography of sources that
relate the epic material to the Bible.

Although the Israelites no longer recounted tales concerning two deities who waged war against each other, they did nevertheless preserve a story about one of the created beings--the great Sea--who rebelled against his Creator, or of some kind of evil angel, who attempted unsuccessfully to oppose the will of God of the universe.[86]

However, it seems that the case for the adoption of a complete secular story in full literary dependence upon Ugaritic source material has not been demonstrated. While many of the data cited above extensively reflect the phraseology and vocabulary of Canaanite literature, no full scale borrowing can be shown, even in Cassuto's "Song of the Sea."

Not only this, but the settings of these two sources are distinctly different. The relevant Near Eastern accounts deal with creation and the ordering of the heavens and earth.[87] The cycle of biblical narratives upon which Habakkuk evidently drew deals with the exodus, the basic expression of Israel's spiritual heritage. Although the two extended portions in the OT considered here, Exod 15:1-18; Hab 3:3-15, are indeed victory songs, the literary relationship between the scriptural accounts and the Near Eastern literature need be viewed as nothing more than that. All that can be safely said is that in the singing of God's redemption of Israel from Egypt, Israel's songwriters have used the format, vocabulary, and phraseology of victory genre and heroic epic narratives. Therefore, Cross is correct when he maintains,

Israel's religion in its beginning stood in a clear line of continuity with the mythopoeic patterns of West Semitic, especially Canaanite myth. Yet its religion did emerge from the old matrix and its institutions were transformed by the impact of formative historical events and their interpretation by elements of what we may call "Proto-Israel" which came together in the days of Moses and in the era of the Conquest.[88]

Accordingly, it is apparent that just as with the whole corpus, so the relevant verses of Habakkuk's prophecy partake of a cycle of traditional epic material which, though using the language and literary motifs of its neighbors (particularly of Canaan), spoke of life through a victor, God himself.

[86] Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, 2.81.
[87] A discussion and detailed critique of the growing literature concerning the Hebrews' supposed indebtedness to the literature of the ancient Near East in general and to Ugaritic, in particular, is given by Rummel, "Narrative Structures in the Ugaritic Texts," 3.233-332.
[88] Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 143-44. Cf. P. C. Craigie, "The Poetry of Ugarit and Israel," *TB* 22 (197.1) 25.

Herein lies the crucial point of the matter. Unlike the typical secular epic, the central figure of the scriptural epic is not man written large, but the one in whose image man is created--God himself. Despite the prowess and success of the hero of the standard non-biblical epic, a note of pathos and a lack of fulfillment conventionally attend his actions. Accompanying the highest attainments of heroic man, be it the valor and wisdom of Homer's heroes, the virtue of Vergil's Aeneas, or the strength and resourcefulness of Gilgamesh, there is always the sense of striving to "make do" in the face of life's stark realities and often cruel circumstances. Man, then, must become superman, or as Ing puts it, "the human figures themselves may at moments be raised to act on the superhuman plane."[89] However representative of the finest qualities of humanity the epic hero may be, a sense of the unattainable, of the failure to achieve immortality and full human potential can be felt. Perhaps no more telling words can be cited than those of Gilgamesh:

> [For] whom, Urshanabi, have my hands become weary?
> For whom is the blood of my heart being spent?
> For myself I have not obtained any boon.
> For the 'earth-lion' have I obtained the boon.[90]

In the corpus of biblical epic literature, however, Israel's attention is focused always upon the one who himself is the *summum bonum*, the source of man's redemption and the norm and standard for man's activities. In the deepest sense, man's fullest goals become fulfilled by being identified with and submitted to him who is ultimate reality. Israelite epic, then, unlike its secular counterparts, is realized epic,[91] for the one of whose presence the Israelite sings is at once man's highest goal.

That the Hebrew epic is realized epic may be seen not only from the clear implications of the epic material itself (e.g., Exod 15:2, 17-18; Ps 77:21 [Heb.]), but from the reaction of Habakkuk at witnessing the mighty acts of God (Hab 3:16-19; cf. Job's similar response at seeing the all-sufficient greatness of God, Job 42:1-6). Moreover, it is clear that the exodus event becomes throughout the OT not only the basis of Israel's redemption but the entrance into a life lived in accordance with God's predetermination of what is best for man.[92]

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[89] Ing, "Epic," 1.197.

[90] The translation given here is taken from Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, 92.

[91] I owe the coining of this term to Michael Travers of the English Department at Liberty University.

[92] See the helpful discussion of G. Vox, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 124-29. See also E. Martens, *God's Design* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 81-91, 208.

This is apparent not only from the account of the exodus from Egypt, which itself forms the foundation for the formulaic presentation of the Ten Commandments (Exod 19:4-6; 20:2-17; Deut 5:6-21) and the specific requirements for a redeemed people (Deut 4:37-40; 5:27-29; 10: 12-21; 12:28; Jer 7:22-23, etc.), but from the details of the wilderness wanderings (Deut 8:1-6; 11:1- 7, etc.) and the culminating experience of being God's special people (Exod 19:5; Deut 7:6-11; 14:2; 26:16-19) fitted for living in the land of promise (Deut 6:1-25; 8:7-10; 11:8-21; Josh 23:3-6,15; Ps 105:43-45, etc.).[93]

From start to finish, then, the exodus formed one grand event through which a redeemed people was to realize life's full potential and finest blessings. Indeed, before that event had taken place or the epic songs had been sung, God had told Moses,

> "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.
>
> The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey."[94]

Through it all a redeemed people learned the divine prescription for living life on the highest plane. As Martens remarks,

> In summary, early Israel knew about God through his activity in nature and among nations. She experienced him more directly in his power and salvation at the exodus, and in an on-going fashion she was led into a life of intimacy with him in the religious practices which he enjoined for her .[95]

The basis of that on-going life lay in doing that which was perfect in God's sight (Deut 18:13; cf. Ps 101:6). The dynamic for carrying out that life rested in the appropriating of God's moral attributes as one's own, especially his holiness (Lev 11:44; 19:2). The standard for the believer's ethical conduct meant living life as God did, in truth and justice (Ps 85:1-14 [Heb.]), and the imperative for that ethic lay in a growing, all-consuming love for God that resulted in a consistent

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[93] K. A. Kitchen, "Exodus;" in *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 404, well remarks, "Repeatedly in later generations, the prophets in exhorting Israel to return to her God and the psalmists in their meditations hark back to this Exodus. . . . For them, the great redemption is ever to be remembered with gratitude and response in obedience."

[94] Exod 3:6-8, NIV.

[95] E. Martens, *God's Design*, 96. See also his earlier discussion on pp. 18-20.

faithfulness to God in every area of life.[96] Unlike the frustrated hero of the secular epic who ultimately remained unfulfilled, the OT believer found his epic hero in the One who offered life on the highest plane. That message of full salvation would continue to punctuate the pages of the old revelation until in the fulness of time would come the Great Redeemer who would proclaim "I am come that ye might have life and that more abundantly" (John 10:10).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A careful analysis of Habakkuk's twofold psalm reveals that it is to be viewed primarily as a victory song. Like other victory songs in the ancient Near East its leading themes and literary features place Habakkuk's psalm firmly within the corpus of Semitic epic literature. The common subject matter, phraseology, and structure it shares with several other early poetic compositions in the OT suggest the possibility of the existence of an ancient Hebrew epic cycle that commemorated God's heroic redemption of Israel in the movement from Egypt to Canaan. Moreover, it is not inconceivable that the meaning of that great exodus event, starting from the deliverance out of Egypt and stretching to the conquest, continued to be sung in non-canonical and canonical settings down through Israel's history, becoming particularly prominent at times of national distress, as in Habakkuk's day. As noted above, the language and literary themes of that great event were sung not only by Moses (Exod 15:1-18; cf. Num 23:22-24; 24:8-9; Deut 33:2-3), but on subsequent occasions at crucial times: by Deborah (Judg 5:4-5) and David (Pss 18:8-16 [Heb.]; 68:8-9 [Heb.]; 144:5-6), and in the poems of the temple liturgy (Pss 77:17-20 [Heb.]; 114:3-7). Thus, Cross affirms that

> The oldest poetry of Israel, our earliest Biblical sources which survive in unrevised form, is marked by a ubiquitous motif: the march of Yahweh from the southern mountains (or from Egypt) with his heavenly armies.[97]

Cross goes on to suggest that this became the dominant theme of the early Israelite cultus. Whether or not this latter idea can be affirmed, certainly the exodus event is repeatedly referred to, and themes from the epic cycle continue to appear in the canonical literature at crucial times in the first millennium B.C. One may consider, for example, Joel

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[96] The NT ethic, based on the new covenant where God's eternal principles are written in the believer's heart, prescribes the same great elements: perfection (Matt 5:48), holiness (l Pet 1:16), and truth and love (Eph 4:15-16).

[97] Cross, "The Divine Warrior in Israel's Early Cult," 25.

(3:15-16), Amos (1:2; 4:13b; 8:8;9:5-6), and Isaiah (e.g., 17:13; 44:27; 50:2; 51:10, 15; 64:1-4; 66:15) in the eighth century, and Nahum (1:2-4), as well as Habakkuk, in the seventh century.

Thus, there is every reason to believe that Habakkuk could have literary antecedents that were fully available to him for use in composing his double psalm. In this regard, Keil remarks:

> The description of this theophany rests throughout upon earlier lyrical descriptions of the revelations of God in the earlier times of Israel. Even the introduction (ver. 3) has its roots in the song of Moses in Deut. xxxiii.2; and in the further course of the ode we meet with various echoes of different psalms (compare ver. 6 with Ps. xviii.8; ver. 8 with Ps. xviii.10; ver. 19 with Ps. xviii.33, 34; also ver. 5 with Ps. lxviii.25; ver. 8 with Ps. lxviii.5, 34). The points of contact in vers. 10-15 with Ps. lxxvii.17-21, are still more marked, and are of such a kind that Habakkuk evidently had the psalm in his mind, and not the writer of the psalm the hymn of the prophet, and the prophet has reproduced in an original manner such features of the psalm as were adapted to his purpose.[98]

Of course, God could also have supernaturally revealed to Habakkuk these very events so that Habakkuk saw and heard what transpired in those days. If so, he could have easily used the very archaic phraseology of that earlier age.[99] Habakkuk's own reaction to the epic material may well point to such a visionary experience: "I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound" (Hab 3:16). Under either alternative the archaic nature of the poetry is readily explained.

In any case, it is evident that Habakkuk had been led by the Lord to consider the greatness and sufficiency of God. In so doing, his attention is called to Israel's central experience of deliverance, the exodus. Habakkuk apparently knew it well: "LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD" (Hab 3:2a). As suggested above, he may even have had a body of epic literary tradition available to him as he contemplated his perplexities and God's person.[100] The rehearsal of the double poem of the exodus event was sufficient for the prophet.

[98] Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2.96.
[99] So T. Laetsch, *Minor Prophets*, 345. So also, Smith, *Micah-Malachi* 116, who remarks, "3:3-15 is a vision of Habakkuk much like the vision God promised him in 2.3. Habakkuk may have had an ecstatic experience in which he 'saw' God coming to defeat his enemies."
[100] Note that Habakkuk's final affirmation of confidence in the Lord (v 19) is also drawn from the corpus of older literature (cf. Ps 18:33-34 [Heb.] with Job 9:8). For Heb. במות = bmt / 'back,' see Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, 3.373.

Habakkuk had asked that-beyond whatever judgment Israel must experience--God would again move on behalf of his people in a deliverance like unto that in the exodus (Hab 3:2). The reiteration of God's past intervention on behalf of his people, delivering them from bondage and guiding them into the land of promise, brought reassurance to him (Hab 3:16-19). God's word had brought new confidence to the prophet that both the present situation and final destination for the people of God would find their resolution in the redeeming God of the exodus event. As Feinberg points out,

> In a sublime manner the prophet now pictures a future redemption under figures taken from past events. The background here is the memory of the events of the Exodus and Sinai. Just as the Lord manifested Himself when He redeemed Israel from Egypt, He will appear again to deliver the godly among His people from their oppressors among the nations and will judge their foes as He did the land of Egypt.[101]

As the message of Habakkuk is heard again by the people of God, may that same God-inspired confidence and conviction grip them as the prophets of old,

> I will wait patiently for the day of calamity. . .
> yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
> I will be joyful in God my Savior.
> The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
> he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
> he enables me to go on the heights.[102]

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[101] C. L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1976) 216-17. See also, H. Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972) 290.
[102] Hab 3:16,18-19, NIV.