Psalmody in Prophecy: Habakkuk 3 in Context

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Since what remains is the text, scholars will determine how to speak of textual phenomena. Thus, even if one cannot confirm dramatic productions in Israel, one must still speak understandably about the text. So terms like 'dramatic prophecy'[22] and 'dramatic coherence' in prophecy may simply be used to describe how one sort of prophecy presents its message. It is legitimate to ask for clarification and refinement of such literary concepts applied to scripture. What is odd is to eliminate using terminology like 'drama' or 'dramatic' when biblical critics freely speak of 'editors', 'redactors', 'narrative fiction', 'legends', 'myths', 'poetry', and a host of other terms they deem necessary. In this same vein, one can appropriately speak of dramatic coherence in Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. What remains is the text, and dramatic coherence is one way, though not the only way, that the text of the Twelve unites its diverse parts.

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22. This term is preferable to prophetic drama because prophecy is its own biblical genre. Dramatic principles help create prophecy in some prophetic books.

PSALMODY IN PROPHECY: HABAKKUK 3 IN CONTEXT

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The psalm in Habakkuk 3 resembles songs in Exodus 15, Deuteronomy 32 and 33, Judges 5 and 2 Samuel 22 in its archaic linguistic formations and vocabulary stock, victory hymn form, and appearance outside of the Psalter.[1] Unlike these hymns set within prose narratives, however, Habakkuk 3 appears within a book of prophetic poetry structured in a liturgical and dramatic fashion. Habakkuk, therefore, offers an ideal case for the comparative study of prophetic and narrative composition through the use of the same literary device. The results of such a comparison reveal a sophisticated text which mixes inherited generic conventions to create novel effects. I am delighted to dedicate this essay to my father, John D.W. Watts, whose early work included the form-critical description of inset hymnody in Amos.[2]

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1. As has frequently been noted, for example, by G.H.A. von Ewald, *Commentary on the Prophets of the Old Testament* (trans. J.F. Smith; vol. 3; London: Williams and Norgate, 1878), p. 43; B. Duhm, *Das Buch Habakuk: Text, Übersetzung und Erklärung* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1906), p. 7; J.M.P. Smith, W.H. Ward, and J.A. Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel* (ICC; New York: Scribner's, 1911), p. 6; W.F. Albright, 'The Psalm of Habakkuk', in H.H. Rowley (ed.), *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950), pp. 8-10; T. Hiebert, *God of My Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3* (HSM, 38; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), pp. 119-21; J.J.M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), p. 149. For histories of the book's interpretation, see P. Jöcken, *Das Buch Habakuk: Darstellung der Geschichte seiner kritischen Erforschung mit einer eigenen Beurteilung* (Köln-Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1977), and E. Otto, 'Die Theologie des buches Habakuk', *VT* 35 (1985), pp. 274-95.

2. *Vision and Prophecy in Amos* (Leiden: Brill, 1958), pp. 51-67; reprinted in idem, *Vision and Prophecy: Expanded Anniversary Edition* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996).

The appearance of psalms within non-hymnic contexts always raises issues both of literary role and of compositional history. The following study assumes the validity of both synchronic and diachronic methods of analysis and their mutual importance for the understanding of ancient literature. Only through detailed interpretation of the text as it stands can the conventions and innovations of the work be described. Only through careful description of a text's development can the place of those conventions and innovations in the history of literature be ascertained. I will, therefore, give attention to both approaches in turn.

Literary Role

Commentators have long noted the liturgical or dramatic form of the book of Habakkuk.[3] In the first two chapters, poetic genres of various kinds alternate in a question-response format. The relationship of Habakkuk's psalm to what precedes it remains, however, a matter of debate.

The language of psalmody is not restricted to the final hymn. Two laments in ch. 1 (vv. 2-4, 12-17) present the book's theme: Yahweh's inexplicable passivity in the face of Chaldean depravations. Yet, unlike these earlier hymnic passages in Habakkuk, ch. 3 explicitly marks itself as a hymn in several ways. First, an invocation of God's presence in the Temple and a call to worship establish the liturgical context (2.20).[4] Second, a superscription (3.1), identical in form to those of the Psalter, labels what follows as a תפלה 'prayer' (cf. Pss. 17.1; 86.1; 90.1; 142.1) of Habakkuk the prophet and, together with a colophon (3.19), describes the composition in the technical jargon of hymnody.[5] Third, liturgical

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3.   So already Ewald: 'It is... a simple scenic and declamatory piece (a drama), divided into three parts' (*Commentary on the Prophets*, p. 31). Cf. E. Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch: Zweite Hälfte Nahum—Maleachi* (KAT, 12; Leipzig: Scholl, 2nd-3rd edn, 1930), pp. 381-82. P. Humbert argued that the book played a real liturgical role (*Problèmes du livre d'Habacuc* [Neuchatel: Secrétariat de l'université, 1944], pp. 290, 296; so also J.H. Eaton, 'The Origin and Meaning of Habakkuk 3', *ZAW* 76 [1964], pp. 160-63; J.D.W. Watts, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* [CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975], pp. 5-7, 144).

4.   Humbert argued that in three of its six occurances (here, Zeph. 1.7; Zech. 2.17), the formula הס מפני יהוה 'keep silence before Yahweh' appears immediately prior to a theophany (*Problèmes*, p. 28).

5.   שגינות (3.1), appearing elsewhere only in the singular in the superscription of

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markers (the little understood סלה *selah* in vv. 3, 9, and 13) interrupt the poem itself. Fourth, the archaic language and contents of the hymn identify it with a corpus of other ancient Israelite psalms, most of which appear outside the Psalter (for example, Judg. 5; Deut. 33; Exod. 15; cf. Ps. 77.16-20).

Taken together, these features of Habakkuk 3 distinguish the psalm from its literary context in a conspicuous manner.[6] They also invite comparison with similar phenomena in the narrative books of the Hebrew Bible. Narratively inset poems are often marked explicitly in both the poetry and the surrounding prose.[7] The markers alert readers to the shift in genre (from narrative to hymnody) and in mode (from prose to poetry). The narrative effects of such shifts include thematic emphasis through emotional commentary, liturgical and musical actualization of the story through audience involvement, and deepened characterizations of the singers or speakers of the poems.[8] Inset poetry expands the representational scope of prose narrative while preserving the distinctiveness of the poetic mode.

In many respects, Habakkuk 3 fits well within this corpus, but two features of the psalm distinguish it sharply from narratively inset poems. First, it contains a far greater number and variety of liturgical and musical markers, more like some hymns in the Psalter than any within

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Psalm 7, has been explained variously as 'stringed music' (so LXX; see Eaton, 'Origin and Meaning', p. 146), as a 'wandering' style or meter (so P.C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* [WBC, 19; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983], p. 97, on the basis of other ancient versions), or as 'psalm of lamentation' (so S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* [trans. D.R. Ap-Thomas; Oxford: Blackwell, 1962], II, p. 209, and Watts, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, p. 144). The colophon's (3.19) vocabulary, למנצח 'for the choir master' and בנגינותי 'with string music', is clearer and more standard, occurring in Psalter superscriptions fifty-five and six times respectively.

6.   As interpreters have noted: 'With respect to its musical notations Habakkuk 3 again appears more distinct from its canonical setting than a part of it' (Hiebert, *God of My Victory*, p. 134); 'The new title... suggests to us an emphasis upon the fact that a particular form is deliberately being employed at this stage in the work' (M.E.W. Thompson, 'Prayer, Oracle and Theophany: the Book of Habakkuk', *TynBul* 44 [1993], p. 51).

7.   See James W. Watts, '"This Song": Conspicuous Poetry in Hebrew Prose', in J.C. de Moor and W.G.E. Watson (eds.), *Verse in Ancient Near Eastern Prose* (AOAT, 42; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), pp. 345-48.

8.   James W. Watts, *Psalm and Story: Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative* (JSOTSup, 139; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992).

narrative.[9] In fact, Habakkuk's psalm even exceeds that standard by using a colophon, unparalleled in the Psalms, for the otherwise familiar ascription, 'for the choir master with stringed music' (3.19).[10] Second, Habakkuk's psalm appears not in narrative but in a poetic and prophetic context. These two factors make the chapter unique. Hymnic forms and language appear throughout prophetic poetry, but only here are they explicitly marked by genre labels and liturgical instructions. Explicitly marked hymns appear frequently in Hebrew narratives, but only here in a poetic context. Liturgical instructions and genre labels introduce many psalms, but only here are they used so extensively on a psalm integrated into a larger literary context. Habakkuk 3 thus employs conventions of literary prophecy, hymnic anthology, and narrative prose simultaneously.

These unique features have generated many theories about the chapter's composition (see below), but less often has their literary effect been evaluated. Clearly, the writer(s) seems intent on calling the liturgical nature of the poem to the reader's attention. The poetic context, with its mix of genres, makes it necessary to mark such distinctions clearly. Whereas psalms set within prose narrative stand out because of their poetic mode and require relatively few explicit markers of genre, hymns in poetic books merge easily with the context and require sophisticated analysis to be distinguished. If a writer wishes the hymnic genre to be clearly recognized, relatively greater effort is required to mark it than in prose. So the unique features of Habakkuk's psalm serve at the very least to mark explicitly an inset hymn within a poetic context.

Why was reader's recognition of the hymnic genre of Habakkuk 3 so important to its writer(s)? Answers to this question must be sought in the psalm's position within the structure of the book and in its impact on the characterization of 'Habakkuk the prophet'.

Conventions of Context

Comparisons of narratively inset hymns reveals two conventional patterns which may have informed the usage in Habakkuk 3. Victory hymns appear at the end of several stories (for example, Exod. 14–15;

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9. 'It is remarkable that in all of the Hebrew literature which has been preserved these notations never appear, except in this case, outside the Psalter' (Hiebert, *God of My Victory*, p. 134).

10. The Psalms invariably set such information in superscriptions. Colophons only mark divisions of the Psalter with blessings (41.14; 72.18-19; 89.53; 106.48) and (once) comments on the contents (72.20).

Judg. 4–5; Jdt. 16) but do not affect their plots. Instead, they enrich the accounts with added details, emotional reactions, and lively depictions of the divine warrior. Individual thanksgivings, on the other hand, often appear at points in stories where deliverance is promised but not yet realized (Isa. 38.9-20; Jon. 2; Dan. 2.20-23; LXX's additions to Dan. 3). By voicing thanksgivings at this point in the plot, the speakers show their trust in God.

The book of Habakkuk reveals familiarity with both narrative conventions, but it adapts them to a prophetic and poetic mode of writing. Like victory hymns in stories, Habakkuk's psalm, which incorporates a victory hymn in 3.3-15, appears at the end of the book. The psalm has little explicit effect on the argument of chs. 1–2, but it refocuses thematic attention on Yahweh as warrior and savior of Israel.[11] Whereas the earlier chapters are preoccupied with the destructive violence by and of the Chaldeans (1.5-11, 15-17; 2.5-17), the hymn celebrates the salvific violence of God in images which make the preceding descriptions pale by comparison. Thus the Habakkuk psalm, like its counterparts in narrative, uses the traditional language and form of victory hymns to establish a theocentric climax.

Like narratively inset thanksgivings, Habakkuk 3 expresses trust in a divine deliverance still to come. The hymn's theophany is a vision (2.2-3) not yet realized, as its conclusion makes clear (3.16-19). The effect is to characterize Habakkuk, the psalm's speaker (3.1), as a faithful and orthodox Yahwist, despite the complaints expressed earlier in the book (1.2-4, 12-17).

The book's use of inset hymnody, however, differs from the narrative conventions as well. Habakkuk 3 employs simultaneously both a climactic victory hymn and an expression of trust prior to deliverance, a combination never found in Hebrew narrative.[12] Neither does the book reflect the actual events of deliverance as stories surrounding psalms always do, either prior to victory hymns or after thanksgivings. Habakkuk replaces narrative closure with prophetic anticipation, with the result that the tension between oppressive reality (chs. 1–2) and

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11. As with narratively inset hymns, the lack of explicit connections between the Habakkuk psalm and the preceding chapters has generated considerable debate as to the psalm's originality in this setting. See *Compositional History* below.

12. The latter half of the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15.12-18) celebrates victories not yet achieved in the narrative, but the psalm's perspective remains after-the-fact, rather than anticipatory.

salvific hope (3.2-15) remains taut to the end (cf. 3.16-17 with 3.18-19).

The suspense is sustained by one other change to the narrative conventions of inset psalmody: Habakkuk 3 uses the language and forms of laments to frame the victory hymn, rather than those of the thanksgivings found uniformly in narratives.[13] Most of the lament's traditional elements appear within a few verses (address and petition in v. 2, assurance, vow of praise, and expression of trust in vv. 16-19). The complaint itself is missing, probably because it is already voiced in 1.2-4, 12-17.[14] Laments express the anxiety of indeterminacy, rather than the closure exhibited by thanksgivings and narrative. Thus the use of lament elements, as well as the combination and modification of the structural settings of inset thanksgivings and victory hymns, adapts narrative conventions for the context of prophetic expectations in the book of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk's psalm may also function within the wider context of the Book of the Twelve in a manner analogous to some narratively inset hymns. The book of Nahum begins with a psalm, marked as such by its (partial) acrostic structure. Since Habakkuk follows Nahum in the canonical sequence of the Twelve, the psalms form a bracket around the two books. Both books use the variety of poetic genres characteristic of 'prophetic liturgies' and address the religious problems posed by invading foreign empires (Assyria in Nahum, Babylon in Habakkuk). In both books, the psalms serve to refocus attention on God.[15] In Samuel,

13. Unlike the large number of laments in the Psalter, none appear in narrative contexts of the Hebrew Bible, though secular dirges appear twice (2 Sam. 1.17-27; 3.33-34).

14. On the form-criticism of the psalm, see Humbert (*Problèmes*, pp. 24-26), K. Elliger (*Das Buch der zwölf kleinen Propheten. II. Die Propheten Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja, Haggai, Sacharja, Maleachi* [ATD, 25; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950], pp. 48, 51), B. Margulis ('The Psalm of Habakkuk: A Reconstruction and Interpretation', *ZAW* 82 [1970], p. 437), W.H. Bellinger, Jr (*Psalmody and Prophecy* [JSOTSup, 27; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984], pp. 84-85, who noted the adaptation of lament forms to prophetic patterns), Peckham ('Vision', p. 619), and M.A. Sweeney ('Structure, Genre, and Intent in the Book of Habakkuk', *VT* 41 [1991], pp. 78-79).

15. B. Childs commented that, in both Nahum and Habakkuk, 'older material was assigned a new role by a final redactional stamp which fashioned earlier parts into a literary unity. However, in Nahum the psalm introduced the book, in Habakkuk it concluded it... In Nahum the reader begins with the theocentric perspective of the hymn and secondarily derives the meaning of human events from the divine purpose. In Habakkuk the order is reversed. The reader begins with the

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psalms (1 Sam. 2.1-10; 2 Sam. 22) bracket the bulk of the stories and emphasize God's support for Israel and its king. Thus in prose and poetic contexts, hymnic brackets can establish similar themes.

The conclusion that Habakkuk 3 has used and modified narrative conventions of inset hymnody does not exclude the possible influence of other literary conventions as well. D.E. Gowan pointed out that arguments over theodicy conclude with theophanies in Job and some lament psalms, as well as Habakkuk.[16] Other interpreters have argued that the lament form shapes the structure of much or all of the book.[17] Nothing in the present analysis disputes the presence of these patterns in the book of Habakkuk. However, the book not only employs the forms of liturgical hymnody in its structure, it also uses the conventions of narratively inset hymnody and modifies them to suit its prophetic message. The heavy liturgical markers in ch. 3 ensure that it will be recognized as a psalm in distinction from its context and will evoke the expectations associated with inset psalms in stories. Thus the description of the psalm's role in the book of Habakkuk requires not just form-critical analysis of the book's structure but an awareness of the genre conventions governing Hebrew inset hymnody as well.

Characterization

The victory hymn (3.3-15) focuses on characterizing Yahweh as the divine warrior. In the context of Habakkuk, this fierce depiction parallels the description of the Chaldeans in ch. 1. The vocabulary of the two passages differs considerably, but the themes echo each other. Thus, whereas the Chaldeans march throughout the earth (1.6), heavens and earth all reflect Yahweh's glory (3.3); whereas the Babylonians destroy nations and fortresses using earthen ramps (1.10), Yahweh shakes the

problems of human history and only subsequently are they resolved in the light of a divine oracle' (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], p. 454); see also J. Nogalski (*Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* [BZAW, 218; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993], p. 181). On prophetic liturgies, see Sellin (*Das Zwölfprophetenbuch*, pp. 381-82) and John D.W. Watts (*Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, pp. 1-7).

16. *The Triumph of Faith in Habakkuk* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1976), p. 70; 'God's Answer to Job: How is it an Answer?' *HBT* 8.2 (1986), p. 94.

17. G. Fohrer, 'Das "Gebet des Propheten Habakkuk" (Hab 3,1-16)', in A. Caquot, S. Légasse, M. Tardieu (eds.), *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Mathias Delcor* (Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985), pp. 160-61; Peckham, 'Vision', pp. 617-36.

earth and mountains on which the nations live (3.6, 9); whereas the Chaldeans' horses compare favorably to predators of land and air (1.8), Yahweh's horses also trample the sea (3.8, 15); mythologically, whereas the Babylonians compare with Death in their voraciousness (2.5), the psalm claims that Yahweh defeats Sea (3.8) which is associated in myth with Death in failed opposition to King of the gods.[18] Thus the effect of paralleling the descriptions of chs. 1–2 with that of the psalm is to undermine the enemy's ferocious reputation by comparison with Yahweh's greater war-making powers.

Speeches indirectly characterize their speakers.[19] In Habakkuk 3, the explicit attribution of the psalm to 'Habakkuk the prophet' (v. 1) links the chapter to the preceding oracles introduced by a similar superscription (1.1), and the first person statements of 3.2 and 16 place it within the autobiographical framework established by the laments of ch. 1 and especially the vision report in 2.1-3.[20] The psalm provides a completely orthodox and traditional response to the painful questions raised in earlier chapters, and thus it casts Habakkuk as a faithful Yahwist, despite his doubts. But, as with Hannah (1 Sam. 2.1-10), David (2 Sam. 22), Hezekiah (Isa. 38.9-20), and Jonah (Jon. 2), Habakkuk's voicing of a psalm does not paint a unique portrait of the prophet. Instead, it makes his experience paradigmatic for all the faithful who wait for Yahweh's deliverance. Psalmody depicts internal mental processes to a greater degree than any other genre of Hebrew literature, with the goal of expressing universal religious experiences in the context of worship. When literary contexts and/or superscriptions credit psalms to individuals, the resulting characterization describes not a unique individual but rather a universal experience which is available to all.[21]

Habakkuk's psalm deviates from the pattern of narratively inset hymns, however, by setting a victory hymn within the framework of a lament, rather than using the conventional individual thanksgiving. Both formal components of Habakkuk 3 emphasize the prophetic nature of

Habakkuk's experience: the lament form continues the prophet's initial complaint and the theophanic contents of the victory hymn portray the prophet's visionary experience. Using the introspective perspective of psalmody, the hymn comes as close as any Hebrew text to portraying the interior experience of prophetic vision. Yet because of that same hymnic perspective, the prophetic experience is equated with the experience of communal worship in the Temple. The psalm identifies liturgical worship and prophetic vision as one and the same thing.[22] Thus the result of the psalm's characterization of Habakkuk is not to set apart the prophet's vision from ordinary experience but rather to make it available to all who participate in the Temple liturgy.

Compositional History

The originality of Habakkuk's psalm in its literary context has been challenged by many interpreters—another distinction which it shares with inset hymns in narratives. In addition to arguments based on the themes and structures of the book as a whole, several specific features of Habakkuk 3 have stimulated questions regarding its compositional history.

Most commentators have assumed that the superscription, colophon, and other liturgical markings derive from the psalm's use in worship. Because the superscription refers to Habakkuk, these markers have usually been regarded as secondarily added to the psalm when it was adapted from the book of Habakkuk for liturgical use,[23] though other interpreters took them as evidence of the psalm's presence in a liturgical collection prior to its incorporation into Habakkuk.[24] These

18. So the Ugaritic Baal cycle. See Albright, 'The Psalm of Habakkuk', pp. 8-9; Margulis, 'The Psalm of Habakkuk', p. 437.

19. See the comments on prophetic characterization by E. ben Zvi, 'Twelve Prophetic Books or "The Twelve"', and by P.R. House, 'Dramatic Coherence', in this volume.

20. W. Rudolph, *Micha-Nahum-Habakuk-Zephanja* (KAT, 13.3; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1975), p. 240; Fohrer, 'Das "Gebet"', pp. 162-63.

21. Watts, *Psalm and Story*, pp. 130-31, 191-92.

22. Other prophetic texts reflect the same equation between the experiences of worship and prophecy. Temple worship shapes the images of prophetic visions in Isaiah 6, Ezek. 1.8-10, and the most personal and introspective passages in Jeremiah are cast in the language and form of laments (Jer. 11.18–12.6; 15.10-21; 17.14-18; 18.18-23; 20.7-18). Thus Hebrew prophetic literature, like narrative, often turns to psalmody to express interior experience.

23. E.g. Duhm, *Das Buch Habakuk*, p. 70; Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch*, p. 406; Elliger, *Zwölf kleinen Propheten*, pp. 48, 51; Eaton, 'Origin and Meaning', p. 167; Otto, 'Theologie', pp. 283, 295; Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, p. 148.

24. B.S. Childs, 'Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis', *JSS* 16 (1971), pp. 141-42; Hiebert, *God of My Victory*, pp. 141; Nogalski, *Redactional*

common-sense suggestions receive, however, only limited support from psalms whose presence in liturgical collections, as well as in non-hymnic contexts, is attested in the Hebrew Bible. David's Thanksgiving was excerpted from 2 Samuel 22 to become Psalm 18 with only the addition of למנצח לעבד יהוה 'to the choir master, of the servant of Yahweh' to the beginning of its superscription. Portions of Psalms 96, 105, and 106 were taken from the Psalter to create the Levitical medley in 1 Chron. 16.8-36, but whereas in the Psalter these texts are entirely devoid of liturgical or musical notations, the context in Chronicles makes explicit its performance by singers (15.16, 19, 27), specifically the Asaphites (16.5, 7), and the congregation's liturgical response (16.36b). Furthermore, like other inset hymns, Habakkuk's psalm itself appears apart from its context in the LXX's 'Odes' appended to the Psalter for liturgical use, but without the liturgical markers of its superscription and colophon in Habbakkuk 3.[25]

The comparative evidence for Habakkuk 3's liturgical markers originating from its use in worship is, therefore, mixed. Later liturgical use of David's Thanksgiving is reflected in its Psalter superscription but not in 2 Samuel 22, while later narrative use in 1 Chronicles 16 of several psalms actually emphasizes the liturgical context to a greater degree than does the Psalter. Habakkuk's psalm remains unique among inset hymns (and, in the case of the colophon, among the Psalms) for the technical nature of its markers, but this is much less true of the version excerpted for the LXX 'Odes'. Some arguments have been advanced for the liturgical markers as original to at least one stage in the composition of the book of Habakkuk itself.[26] The above observations on the effect of explicitly marking Habbakkuk 3 as a hymn support such claims, though for different reasons. The heavy and exceptional use of technical terms in and around the psalm reflects a self-conscious evocation of liturgical worship for literary effect within the book of Habakkuk.

The psalm's absence from the commentary on Habakkuk (1QpHab) found among the Dead Sea Scrolls has also been taken as evidence for

its secondary character.[27] Other manuscripts of nearly the same age (Mur 88; 8HevXIIgr) contain the psalm, however, so its absence from the commentary does not provide decisive evidence regarding the book's history of composition.[28]

Other arguments against the originality of the psalm within Habakkuk arise from redaction criticism of the book as a whole. In such reconstructions, the various parts of the psalm are often assigned to different redactional layers along with other parts of the book. Recent proposals include Otto's five-stage development in which a pre-existing psalm (3.3-15) was adapted by the post-exilic addition of vv. 2 and 16 to fit into the book, and the liturgical markers were added even later.[29] Hiebert suggested that Habakkuk 3 was an archaic hymn which was inserted as part of an apocalyptic reinterpretation of the book.[30] On the other hand, Peckham argued that portions of the chapter (vv. 2-12, 15-19a) were part of an original lament which was subsequently expanded by commentary on the topic of theodicy.[31]

Part of the rationale for finding redactional development in Habakkuk 3 derives from the hymn's unusual form. Form-critical analysis usually produces a (victory) hymn set within a lament—an odd combination which interpreters struggle to explain.[32] The above literary analysis has argued that the mixed form of this hymn is a creative adaptation for a prophetic context of the conventions governing narratively inset victory hymns and thanksgivings. Like psalms in stories, Habakkuk's psalm provides an emotional climax, refocuses attention on God, and characterizes its speaker as faithful, while, unlike them, it preserves the tension between harsh experience and prophetic expectations to the end. The book, thereby, builds on the expectations aroused by recognition of

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Processes, pp. 159, 180. For earlier interpreters holding this position, see Hiebert's summary, *God of My Victory*, pp. 134, 180 n. 16.

25. All that remains of them are the first two words of the superscription, 'a prayer of Habakkuk', and the three occurrences of סלה *selah*, translated as usual in the LXX by διάφαλμα.

26. So Peckham, 'Vision', p. 621; Sweeney, 'Structure', p. 65.

27. A. Dupont-Sommer, *Observations zur le commentaire d'Habacuc découvert près de la mer morte* (Dépôt: Librairie Adrien-maisonneuve, 1950), p. 4; W.H. Brownlee, *The Text of Habakkuk in the Ancient Commentary from Qumran* (SBLMS, 11; Philadelphia: SBL, 1959), pp. 93-95.

28. Rudolph, *Micha-Nahum-Habakuk-Zephanja*, p. 240 n. 2; Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, p. 148. On the manuscript evidence, see R. Fuller, 'The Form and Formation of the Book of the Twelve', in this volume.

29. Otto, 'Theologie', p. 282.

30. Hiebert, *God of My Victory*, pp. 136-49.

31. Peckham, 'Vision', pp. 619-21.

32. Humbert, *Problèmes*, pp. 24-26; Elliger, *Zwölf kleinen Propheten*, pp. 48-51; Margulis, 'The Psalm of Habakkuk', p. 411; Bellinger, *Psalmody and Prophecy*, pp. 84-85.

narrative conventions while remaining true to its prophetic message. The psalm's mixed form, therefore, does not, by itself, point to the book's compositional history but rather illustrates the writer's creative adaptation of Hebrew literary conventions.[33]

Archaic features of the hymn's vocabulary, poetic style, and themes provide another reason for positing the hymn's original independence from its context. Albright considered the hymn a composite of pieces ranging from Israel's earliest history to the sixth century BCE and brought together in an archaizing fashion.[34] Hiebert viewed the chapter as a whole as an archaic hymn, subsequently modified to fit into the book.[35] Most other interpreters noted that, in the present form of the psalm, the archaic features seem to be limited to 3.3-15 and, therefore, suggested that an old victory hymn has been surrounded by lament forms (vv. 2, 16-19) and incorporated into the book.[36] The latter opinion accords with the above observations on the literary effect of combining lament and victory song conventions. It also emphasizes Habakkuk 3's similarity to some other inset poems which are archaic victory hymns subsequently incorporated into a wider context (Exod. 15; Judg. 5; 1 Sam. 2).

The thematic unity of Habakkuk (with the exception of ch. 3's liturgical markers) has been defended by many commentators, though most think that the author incorporated older materials.[37] The issue of divine justice provides thematic unity, and a question-answer format makes

33. The mix of various genres and forms throughout the book led Thompson to observe that the author 'had something of a *penchant* for eclecticism' ('Prayer, Oracle and Theophany', p. 47).

34. Albright, 'The Psalm of Habakkuk', pp. 8-10.

35. Hiebert, *God of My Victory*, pp. 136-49; so also Nogalski, *Redactional Processes*, p. 180, except that he regards vv. 16b-17 as a redactional link to the earlier chapters.

36. Margulis, 'The Psalm of Habakkuk', p. 438; Childs, *Introduction*, p. 451; Otto, 'Theologie', p. 282; Fohrer, 'Das "Gebet"', p. 162; Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, pp. 84, 148.

37. Duhm, *Das Buch Habakuk*, pp. 1-2, 70; Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch*, pp. 381, 405; H.H. Walker and N.W. Lund, 'The Literary Structure of the Book of Habakkuk', *JBL* 53 (1934), pp. 355-70; Humbert, *Problèmes*, pp. 28-29, 290, 296; Elliger, *Zwölf kleinen Propheten*, p. 23; Eaton, 'Origin and Meaning', p. 167; Rudolph, *Micha-Nahum-Habakuk-Zephanja*, p. 240; Childs, *Introduction*, p. 451; Fohrer, 'Das "Gebet"', pp. 162-63; Sweeney, 'Structure', pp. 80-81; Thompson, 'Prayer, Oracle and Theophany', p. 44; Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, p. 81.

sense of the diverse genres set side-by-side. Despite its hymnic form, the last chapter picks up (in 3.2, 16) the autobiographical references from 1.2 and 2.1, thereby preserving the prophetic perspective of the book to the end. To such structural and thematic observations can be added the book's adaptation of the conventions governing inset hymnody as a further argument for the book's unity. Therefore, the most plausible reconstruction of the book's history suggests that a single writer composed the work by incorporating older materials (most notably 3.3-15) into an exploration of Yahweh's power in the face of military disaster.

Implications

Comparative analysis of Habakkuk with stories incorporating psalms has shown that the book employs and modifies narrative conventions of inset hymnody. To be effective, genre conventions must be recognized, so Habakkuk 3 provides an extraordinary number of liturgical markings. The result is that the book identifies Habakkuk's vision with the experience of Temple worship and points to this traditional hymnody as holding the answer to the political crisis facing Yahweh's people. Unlike inset hymns which maximize narrative closure, however, Habakkuk's psalm projects only a potential resolution. The use of lament forms which anticipate a future deliverance preserves the book's prophetic tension between human reality and divine possibility.

This conclusion has implications for the debate over Habakkuk's relationship to Temple worship. The use of hymnic forms and a question-answer structure led many interpreters to suggest that the book was a script for liturgical worship, and that Habakkuk was, therefore, a cult prophet.[38] Others have argued that the prophetic shaping of liturgical material removed the book and its author from the sphere of public worship.[39] The latter position receives support from the observation that Habakkuk 3 uses lament forms to create a unique adaptation of a victory hymn for prophetic purposes. However, the recognition of Habakkuk's use and modification of narrative conventions of inset

38. Humbert, *Problèmes*, pp. 28-29; Eaton, 'Origin and Meaning', pp. 166-67; John Watts, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, p. 144; Fohrer, 'Das "Gebet"', pp. 160-61.

39. Childs, *Introduction*, p. 452; Rudolph, *Micha-Nahum-Habaku-Zephanja*, p. 241; Bellinger, *Psalmody and Prophecy*, pp. 86, 92; Hiebert, *God of My Victory*, pp. 132-44.

hymnody casts the whole debate in a different light. The book now appears as a sophisticated montage of not only liturgical forms but also literary conventions, one which depends on their recognition by hearers and readers for its effect. And that effect identifies prophetic vision with the experience of communal worship. It may also, through its use of traditional hymnody, provide the opportunity to actualize that experience.

In other words, I am arguing that Habakkuk's use of hymnic and liturgical elements does not arise from a life setting in worship, as if the book was a transcript of an oral worship service. It derives rather from a literary setting in which the conventions governing inset hymnody were recognized by readers and writers alike. By employing the convention of narratively inset victory hymns, Habakkuk 3 also raises the possibility of the reader(s) singing the song. Since ancient readers customarily read aloud, usually to an audience, the inclusion of an old and clearly marked hymn in a text might evoke audience participation. So Habakkuk 3's literary effect might well move towards liturgical actualization, not just suggesting the identification of prophetic vision with corporate worship, but realizing it through the experience of reading the book publicly.[40]

Chapter 3 modifies the convention of inset thanksgivings by using lament forms to frame the victory hymn, thus maintaining the perspective of prophetic expectation throughout the book. Habakkuk does not just announce that prophecy and worship convey the same experience; public readings of the book actualize that experience for hearers and readers who join in the final hymn. The prophet's experience of Yahweh's power (3.2-15) and of waiting in the midst of crisis for that power to be unleashed (3.16-19) can become the people's own through public readings and responses cued by the liturgical markers around the hymn.

Comparison of Habakkuk's psalm with other inset hymns reveals a writer and intended readers familiar with the literary conventions of Hebrew narrative, hymnody, and prophecy, and capable of appreciating the effects of their mixture in novel ways. Hebrew authors appropriated the words of prophecy, liturgy, story, and song to create richly evocative compositions. Mingling different genres did not blur their distinctiveness but rather played on reader recognition of both the

40. On literary actualization by hymns in Hebrew and other ancient narrative traditions, see Watts, *Psalm and Story*, pp. 60-61, 176, 187-89, 192, 212; *idem*, 'Song and the Ancient Reader', *PRS* 22 (1995), pp. 139-40.

conventional forms and their new application. Arguments over such an author's prophetic or cultic identity underestimate the sophistication and integration of Israel's literary culture.