

The Structure and Structural Relationships of the Book of Habakkuk

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Abstract:

Despite the fact that some scholars consider God's proclamation in 2:4 as the climactic statement of the book of Habakkuk based on their diachronic study, synchronic study of the structure and structural relationships of the book as a whole reveals that the apogee of Habakkuk's confession of faith is actually found in 3:16–19. Nevertheless, synchronic study is never meant to replace diachronic study. Therefore, this article first investigates how the findings of a historical-critical research of the book can be incorporated into a synchronic study, and then analyzes the structure and major structural relationships of the book

Keywords: diachronic study, synchronic study, structure, Inductive Bible Study, Habakkuk

Introduction

Many readers are tempted to think that “וְצַדִּיק בְּאֱמוּנָתוֹ יֵחִיָּה” (The righteous will live by his faith)” in Hab 2:4 is the climactic statement of the book rather than Habakkuk’s confession in faith in 3:16–19. Partially, it is due to the impact of Paul’s quotation in Rom 1:17, but the main reason is that a historical-critical study of the book often does not maintain the idea of the coherent literary unity of the book, rendering it impossible to study the book as a whole. The implication is that many scholars have conducted historical-critical studies on the book of Habakkuk to discover what lies behind the text, but they do not always find adequate answers to the theological message of the book as a whole. Some historical-critical studies such as redaction criticism suggest that the oldest pericope contains the central message of the book. However, a synchronic study of the book seems to be more appropriate and adequate to study the theological message of the book. Therefore, in this article I will conduct a synchronic study of the book by utilizing the Masoretic Text (MT) as the final form of the text and discuss how the analysis of the structure and structural relationships of the book as a whole reveal that the climax of the book is actually found in Habakkuk’s confession of faith in 3:16–19 instead of God’s proclamation in 2:4. Thus, this study generates insights to the theological message of the book as a whole.

Nevertheless, a synchronic study of the book is not meant to replace the diachronic study of the book. Brevard S. Childs, who is known as the advocator of the canonical approach to biblical study insists that “it is a basic misunderstanding of the canonical approach to describe it as non-historical reading of the Bible.”¹ If one wants to be true to his vision, a canonical approach to the Bible must include the historical-critical study of the Bible. Therefore, I will first discuss how the findings of a historical-critical research of the book can be incorporated into a synchronic study by reviewing major scholarly

1. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 71.

debates of the book, and then point out the inadequacies of specific historical-critical approaches for studying the theological message.

Reviews of Historical-Critical Research

Having stated my intention of the study, I will now review major historical-critical research on the book of Habakkuk, particularly textual criticism, literary unity, redaction criticism, and historical setting.

Textual Criticism

Textual criticism in the book of Habakkuk is quite complex and difficult. Scholars have debated over textual problems, but a unified consensus has not come about. Moreover, a reconstruction of the original reading itself does not seem to be helpful in understanding the dynamics of the theological message of the book as a whole. However, a text-critical approach can be incorporated into a synchronic study of the book; textual scholarship shows not only that many scholars generally agree with the validity of the MT but also that the MT provides a basis for a synchronic study of the book, although the possibilities to correct and alter the text of the MT should remain.

Previously, many scholars considered the MT of Habakkuk to be corrupt due to the fact that there are significant variations between the MT and ancient manuscripts such as the Habakkuk Peshet from Qumran (1QpHab) and the LXX.² However, this view has been questioned in recent scholarship. For instance, William H. Brownlee did an extensive study on 1QpHab and compared it with the MT. While there are significant variations observed between them, Brownlee concludes; “On the whole the orthography of the MT is more classical; and, though its readings are not always correct, it does not contain so many bad ones as DSH. Therefore, in all cases of doubt, the safe

2. Marvin A. Sweeney, “Habakkuk, Book of,” *ABD* 3: 2.

criterion would be to follow MT.”³ O. Palmer Robertson and Richard D. Patterson agree with Brownlee and support that the text is well preserved in the MT in general.⁴ Moreover, Yitshak Avishur suggests that it is possible to confirm the originality and plausibility of the MT in the third chapter, which many scholars regard as the most difficult and corrupted text because of the number of textual issues.⁵

Other scholars acknowledge that the Hebrew text of the book of Habakkuk imposes difficult textual problems; yet they still agree that the consonantal tradition of the MT is reliable. F. F. Bruce argues that scholars attempted to solve the textual problems, but they too often lack evidence. Thus, “The Masoretic Text, especially its consonantal framework should not be abandoned without good reason.”⁶ Robert D. Haak insists that the reading of the MT is generally equal or even superior to the other ancient manuscripts, and the consonantal text of the MT must be the initial point for discussion.⁷

Thus, scholars agree that the MT provides a basis for the study of the book of Habakkuk, and a synchronic study of the book can reasonably exploit the MT as the base text for its investigation of the theological message of the book. Francis Anderson summarizes and concludes in regard to the textual issues and scholarly discussions of

3. William Hugh Brownlee, *The Text of Habakkuk in the Ancient Commentary from Qumran*, JBLMS 11 (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, 1959), 113.

4. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 40–2; Richard Duane Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 132–3.

5. Yitshak Avishur, *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms*, Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), 111–2.

6. F. F. Bruce, “Habakkuk,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 831–96.

7. Robert D. Haak, *Habakkuk*, VTSup 44 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 1–11.

the book that since scholarship in textual criticism has not come to defensible decisions, it is reasonable to “fall back on the MT” with openness to correction when necessary.⁸ Therefore, while text-critical options themselves do not explicitly uncover the theological message of the book as a whole, they provide a basis for synchronic study of the book based on the MT.

Literary Unity

Having looked at the textual issues and the validity of the MT as the basis for a synchronic study of the book of Habakkuk, one also needs to consider the literary unity of the book. While scholars have argued over the literary unity of the book and its historical composition, the synchronic study of the book of Habakkuk essentially focuses on the final form of the text and treats the book as one literary unit in order to study the theological message of the book. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the literary critical study of the book cannot be incorporated into the synchronic study. Indeed, many scholars at least agree on the coherent unity of the book from diachronic points of view although they are open to minor redactions and editions.

Sweeney points out that many scholars argue for three major literary units of the book of Habakkuk (1:1–2:4/5, 2:5/6–20, and ch. 3). Some maintain that there are two major units in the book of Habakkuk (chs. 1–2 and ch. 3), but many do not maintain the idea that there is a literary unity in these sections. Yet Sweeney concludes that the book presents coherent literary unity although a single author did not write the entire book.⁹

One of the major arguments against the original unity of the book arises from the discovery of the commentary of Habakkuk found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. It invoked a question of whether ch. 3 was a later addition to chs. 1 and 2 because the Peshier Habakkuk (1QpHab) does not contain commentaries on ch. 3. However, many scholars still

8. Francis I. Andersen, *Habakkuk*, AB 25 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 22.

9. Sweeney, “Habakkuk,” 2.

maintain the coherence of the literary units. Robertson, for instance, argues that the testimony from 1QpHab does not adequately explain the issue of literary unity. He appeals to the fact that the LXX includes the third chapter, and the absence of the chapter may indicate that the commentary was unfinished or was due to a process of selectivity. Thus he concludes that the book of Habakkuk itself presents authentic words of the prophet.¹⁰ Patterson also insists that the failure of ch. 3 to be included in 1QpHab does not pertain to matters of unity or composition. Furthermore, several internal data support the unity between chs. 1–2 and ch. 3, though they do not guarantee the original compositional unity of the whole book.¹¹

Rex Mason nicely summarizes scholarly discussions on the unity of the book by categorizing three groups: arguments for a unity of sense in the book as it stands; arguments for unity based on cultic function; and arguments for unity based on form-critical grounds. While many scholars agree with the unity of the book, some argue against the unity of the book from redactional points of view.¹² Therefore, I now turn to redactional options.

Redaction Criticism

Scholars who emphasize redactional processes of the book often assume that a literary unity was not originally created but rather that later redactors imposed unity on it. However, many still maintain the general unity of the book. For instance, J. J. M. Roberts accepts that the book of Habakkuk is a unified composition by the prophet or a very good editor.¹³ Ralph L. Smith explicates that there is some editing

10. Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 38–40.

11. Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 127–9.

12. Rex Mason, *Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Joel*, OTG (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 66–79.

13. J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 84.

done later, but he still agrees for the unity of the book in general.¹⁴ Interestingly, in spite of the acceptance of the redactions, the conclusion of these scholars does not differ much from those who support the unity of the book.¹⁵

Yet, some redaction critics explore the complex process of redaction, which implicitly leads one to think of the theological message of the book. James Nogalski explains that the book of Habakkuk was considerably expanded by a later redactor in order to be integrated into the corpus of the Twelve Prophets. What he calls “Babylonian commentary (1:5–11, 12, 15–17; 2:5b, 6a, 8, 10b, 13–14, 16b–17, 18–19)” was expanded, and ch. 3 was affixed to the existing corpus.¹⁶ According to his theory, only 1:1–4, 13–14; 2:1–4, 6b, 7, 9, 11–12, 15–16a, and 20 existed as original. Theodor Lescow further argues that Hab 2:1–4 is not only the original part of the book but also the central message in the history of redactional process. He explains that three parts existed in the pre-exilic period: lamentation (A: 1:2–4, 13), an oracle (B: 2:1–4), and five woes (C: 2:6b, 9, 12, 15, 19a). In late exilic times, God’s response (1:5–11) and the second lamentation (1:12–17) were added to section A, and section C was also expanded into a funeral dirge while section B remain unaltered. Then in post-exilic times, 1:15–16 was inserted, and the post-Persian author added ch. 3. Thus, section B actually existed as a core of the composition and these three sections are to be read concentrically ($A > B < C$).¹⁷ This suggests that the discussion of the redactional process actually explains what the central theological message of the book of Habakkuk is. In other words, if Hab 2:1–4 is the oldest and original section that forms

14. Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, WBC 32 (Dallas: Word, 1998), 94.

15. Mason, *Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Joel*, 75–79.

16. James Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*, BZAW 218 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), 129–81; 274–80.

17. Theodor Lescow, “Die Komposition Der Bücher Nahum Und Habakuk,” *BN 77* (1995): 59–85.

the composition of the book as Nagaloski and Lescow argue, one should regard Hab 2:1–4 as containing the central message of the book.

Klaus Seybold, not surprisingly, disagrees with Nagaloski and Lescow and argues that Hab 2:1–4 was not the oldest, but was added in the post-exilic era. According to his theory, the oldest parts are 1:1, 5–11, 14–17; 2:1–3, 5–19 from around 650 BCE, and Hab 3:1, 3–7, 15, 8–13a were added in the pre-exilic era around 550 BCE, and finally the rest of the portions were included in the post-exilic time.¹⁸

Although redaction-critical approaches may suggest the theological message of the book by identifying the kernel message at the earliest stage of the text, redactional critics often disagree with one another over the identification of the earliest text. Then, the question is which voice one should depend on to determine the theological message of the book. These contradictory conclusions from redactional critics illustrate the insufficiency of solely depending on a diachronic approach to examine the theological message of the book. In other words, the redactional study of the book indicates the need for a more appropriate approach to delineate the message of the book. Mason rightly points out; “we may find after redaction-critical analysis that it is difficult to interpret the text at all, if it appears as the result of such a complex process that no consistent voice can be discerned. We should examine other avenues of analysis before accepting such a negative conclusion.”¹⁹ Moreover, as I have stated above, many scholars are still generally in agreement with the coherent unity of the book; and it is reasonable to exploit their general consensus as a basis for the synchronic study of the book.

Historical Setting

Related to the literary unity of the book is the scholarship that explores the date and historical setting of the book. While there is no

18. Klaus Seybold, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephaniah*, ZBK (Zurich: TVZ, 1991), 44–45.

19. Mason, *Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Joel*, 79.

specific date mentioned in the book, the key to the historical setting seems to hinge on the identification of “the wicked” in Hab 1:4 and 1:13 and “the righteousness” in 2:4. However, no consensus has been reached yet regarding both the date and identification of those people. This suggests both the methodological problem in the historical-critical study and the need for a canonical study of the book of Habakkuk.

While the majority of scholars prefers to date the prophecy to the time of Jehoiakim, some maintain the view that it was in the time of Manasseh or Josiah. Patterson argues that scriptural evidence supports the wickedness during the time of Manasseh, so the date for the book should be assigned to a time during the reign of Manasseh (687–642 BCE) extending possibly into the early years of Josiah’s reign. Moreover, Patterson appeals to the Jewish tradition that associated Habakkuk with Manasseh; yet he acknowledges that the date is elusive.²⁰

Many scholars, however, date the prophecy to the time of Jehoiakim while the precise positions differ among these scholars. John Kessler explains that the first chapter describes Jerusalem before Babylon’s defeat of Egypt at Carchemish (605 BCE), and the wicked in the first complaint refers to Jehoiakim and the wicked in the second complaint refers to Babylon. The five woes in the second chapter imply Babylon’s future defeat of Jerusalem, and the third chapter also reflects the circumstance of the exile.²¹ Many scholars arrive at a similar conclusion. Roberts and Robertson generally agree that the date is the time of Jehoiakim’s reign (the end of the seventh century BCE) because the wicked in 1:4 appear in connection with affairs within Judah, and the wicked in 1:11–17 refers to the Babylonian oppressor in the time after Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem in 597 BCE.²²

20. Richard D. Patterson, “Habakkuk,” in *Minor Prophets: Hosea-Malachi* (Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 10; Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2008), 397–9.

21. John Kessler, “Habakkuk,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 295–6.

22. Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 34–38; Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 82–4.

Some scholars prefer to date the book at a broader period. Waylon Bailey agrees that “the wicked” in the first chapter refers to Judah itself and possibly Jehoiakim, but his view is not conclusive. He explicates that we must accept a broader time span: the time from the death of Ashurbanipal of Assyria (627 BCE) to the end of Jehoiakim’s reign (598 BCE).²³ Other scholars argue for different dates in the third chapter. William H. Ward generally agrees that 1:5-11 refers to the reign of Jehoiakim and the second complaint in 1:11–17 refers to a later period during the Captivity. However, he refers the date of the second and the third maledictions to the Maccabean period as well as the fourth and fifth one.²⁴ Andersen, on the other hand, argues that “most of the hymnic material in Hab 3:3–15 could be pre monarchical and that some of the Creation passages could go back to very remote Hebrew antiquity.”²⁵

Regarding the identification of “the righteous” in 2:4, Haak argues that it refers to Jehoahaz and “the wicked” is his opponent Jehoiakim and his party. So Habakkuk is a follower of Jehoahaz.²⁶ However, according to Andersen, “the righteous” refers to the prophet himself.²⁷ Thus, scholars have different opinions on this issue.

Having seen these various discussions, Childs rightly points out “The frequent assumption of the historical critical method that the correct interpretation of a biblical text depends upon the critic’s ability to establish a time-frame for its historical background breaks down in

23 . Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, NAC 20 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 257–60.

24. William H. Ward, “Introduction to Habakkuk,” in ICC 24 (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 3–4.

25. Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 24.

26. Haak, *Habakkuk*, 107–11.

27. Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 24.

the case of Habakkuk.”²⁸ Thus, these various conclusions of the date and historical settings indicate two facts. First, the different methodological suppositions affect one’s understanding of the date. Depending on whether one supports a redactional process or the original unity of the book, the conclusion regarding date varies. Second, it is too risky to take one inconclusive position as a basis for the interpretation of the book. Therefore, the synchronic study of the book has a place to contribute to the study of the book of Habakkuk. It provides a more reliable insight to the central theological message of the book in its final form in light of the fact that the historical-critical data alone fails to present conclusive results.

Summary

I have reviewed recent scholarships of the diachronic study of the book of Habakkuk, and indicated both how these historical critical options can be incorporated into the synchronic study and the inadequacy of some diachronic options for studying the theological message of the book. Scholars generally agree that the MT provides a basis of the study of the book of Habakkuk and that the literary unity of the book is maintained. These conclusions give enough foundation to conduct a synchronic study of the book. In addition, disagreements among scholars over the issue of the date and historical setting of the book indicate that historical-critical study does not always provide firm ground for the study of the book, and thus that the canonical study of the book has a place to contribute.

Oskar Dangl conducted an extensive study of Habakkuk in recent research and suggests the potential of the synchronic study of the book, stating; “The canonical approach has entered into the realm of the prophetic books alongside a classical, historically oriented exegesis of the prophets.”²⁹ Even historical critics see the potential of the canonical approach. Roberts explicates;

28. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 454.

29. Oskar Dangl, “Habakkuk in Recent Research,” *CurBS* 9 (2001): 162.

Habakkuk is not a typical prophetic book. Like other prophetic books, it consists of oracles that were given on different occasions during the ministry of the prophet, but unlike the typical prophetic book, these oracles have been arranged in the book of Habakkuk to develop a coherent, sequentially developed argument that extends through the whole book and to which each individual oracle contributes its part.³⁰

Thus, I will now move to the analysis of the structure and structural relationships that render the insights to the theological message of the book.

Structure of the Book of Habakkuk

According to Brevard S. Childs, the theological message of book is that Habakkuk learned the divine perspective on human history, and his testimony at the end of the third chapter testifies that he adopted this perspective.³¹ However, the difficulty is that Childs does not explain how he has come to this conclusion in his brief introduction of the book of Habakkuk in *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*.³²

In order to investigate Childs' conclusion, G. Michael O'Neal applies the canonical approach to the book of Habakkuk to determine if it is a satisfactory method of interpreting the book. While he supports Childs' conclusion, his study gives additional findings about the book such as lament structure, combination of lament, theophany, and the emphasis of the two superscriptions.³³ Dennis R. Bratcher takes a

30. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 81.

31. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 453–4.

32. *Ibid.*, 447–56.

33. G. Michael O'Neal, *Interpreting Habakkuk as Scripture: An Application of the Canonical Approach of Brevard S. Childs*, StBibLit 9 (New York: Lang, 2007).

literary-rhetorical approach to the book of Habakkuk based on Muilenburg, and concludes that 3:18–19 is the climax of the book.³⁴ Mark Allen Hahlen expands Bratcher's study and includes further discussions, including reader-response studies. He argues that literary design communicates a unified message of the book based on literary-rhetorical criticism. His study focuses on how the interplay of genre and the use of major motifs function to develop the linear movement of the text.³⁵

Interestingly enough, scholars in favor of the synchronic study of the book appear to support Childs' original conclusion of the message of the book. However, their approach involves the ways in which a rhetorical approach is essentially looking at how the author's message is conveyed to the recipient of the message by examining the linguistic patterns of a pericope.³⁶ Thus, it is essential for rhetorical criticism to identify who the author and audience are; however, scholars have not come to a consensus over the authorship and recipient of the book of Habakkuk, as I have already shown in a review of historical-critical study of the book.

One needs therefore to consider alternative ways to explicate the theological message of the book. As the earlier quotation from Robertson indicated, if the author of the book intended to develop a coherent message by arranging elements of the book in a particular

34 . Dennis Ray Bratcher, "The Theological Message of Habakkuk: A Literary-Rhetorical Analysis" (PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1984), <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.asburyseminary.edu/docview/303371981/fulltextPDF/F8092628422246F0PQ/1?accountid=8380>.

35. Mark Allen Hahlen, "The Literary Design of Habakkuk" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1992), <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.asburyseminary.edu/docview/304020142/fulltextPDF/5384577568D44234PQ/1?accountid=8380>.

36 . D. F. Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism," *DJG* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 698–701.

order, it is necessary to observe how each unit illumines the others in order to study the theological message of the book as a whole. Thus, I will analyze the major structural relationships of the book based on the study of David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina because no other work so thoroughly discusses how literary structure informs theological meaning of a biblical text. In their book *Inductive Bible Study*, they explain:

Main units and subunits have to do with linear arrangement of material, the movement of the book according to major shifts of material emphasis. These structural relationships are *organizational systems* that pertain to the dynamic arrangement of various thoughts and themes throughout the book ... the relationships ... are found in all cultures, all genres, all time periods, and all forms of art, not simply in literature. They are pervasive and foundational for communication.³⁷

Thus, I see the analysis of structural relationships as a valid and appropriate way to study the book particularly when a historical reconstruction of the book is difficult to be achieved like the book of Habakkuk.

Regarding the structure of the book of Habakkuk, Childs argues that there is a consensus reached. I summarized his argument as following:³⁸

37 . David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 94.

38. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 448.

Figure 1: Childs’ Structure

1:1-2:4(5) Complaints and The Divine Response				2:6-20 A Series of Woe Oracles	3:1-19 Concluding Psalm
1:2-4 First Complaint	1:5-11 Divine Response	1:12-17 Second Complaint	2:1-4 Divine Answer		

However, Sweeney disagrees with Childs’ structure and argues that the main unit of the book is not a three-part structure but a two-part structure as following:³⁹

39. Marvin A. Sweeney, “Structure, Genre and Intent in the Book of Habakkuk,” in *Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible: Selected Studies from Vetus Testamentum*, ed. David E. Orton, Brill’s Readers in Biblical Studies 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 224–44.

Figure 2: Sweeney’s Structure

1:1-2:20 Pronouncement of Habakkuk					3:1-19 Prayer/Petition by Habakkuk to YHWH				
1:1 Superscription	1:2-2:20 Pronouncement Proper				3:1 Superscription	3:2-19a Prayer/Petition Proper			3:19b Instruction to the Choirmaster
	1:2-4 Habakkuk's Complaint to YHWH	1:5-11 YHWH's Response to Habakkuk	1:12-17 Habakkuk's Second Complaint to YHWH	2:1-20 Habakkuk's Report of YHWH's Second Response		3:2 Introduction	3:3-15 Theophany Report	3:6-19a Conclusion	

The major difference between Childs and Sweeney is their recognition of the major units as a three-part or a two-part structure. My presentation will follow Sweeney’s two-part structural understanding of the book.

Structural Relationships of the Book of Habakkuk

There are two major relationships that control the book of Habakkuk as a whole: Climax with Causation and Contrastive Inclusio. These structures are concerned with the movements between main units (1:1–2:20 and 3:1–19) and how each unit illumines another within the book.

Climax with Causation

I observe a movement called Climax with Causation from the first major unit (1:1–2:20) to the second major unit (3:1–19). David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina define it this way; “Climax is the movement from the lesser to the greater, toward a high point of culmination.”⁴⁰ The book of Habakkuk is concerned with the movement of Habakkuk’s understanding of who God is from 1:1–2:20 to 3:1–19. Specifically, the key verses of this movement are God’s answer in 2:4 and Habakkuk’s confession of faith in 3:16–19. These verses also suggest that there is Causation involved with this Climactic movement. According to Bauer and Traina, the basic definition of Causation is the movement from cause to effect; and the movement observed in 2:4 and 3:16–19 is what they call “Historical causation” that can be paraphrased as “Because A happened, therefore B happened.”⁴¹ To put it another way, God’s answer in 2:4 caused the prophet to respond in his confession in faith in 3:16–19, which is the climax of the book as a whole. The rest of the book is designed to build toward this high point of culmination.

Now let us turn to observe closely how the other materials illumine the movement of Climax with Causation that culminates in 3:16–19. First, materials of the first main unit (1:1–2:20) are arranged to reach its climax in God’s answer to Habakkuk in 2:4 which causes the prophet to respond in his prayer in the second main unit in 3:1–19. After the superscription (1:1) the book begins with Habakkuk’s first complaint or lamentation in 1:2–4. Habakkuk expects God to intervene into the injustice he and his community are facing by appealing to the fact that God’s nonintervention (1:2–3) causes ignorance of the law and injustice (1:4). This complaint causes God’s first response in 1:5–11.⁴² The structural relationship between 1:2–4 and 1:5–11 is called

40. Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 99.

41. *Ibid.*, 105–6.

42. Some argue that it is not God’s direct answer but the report of God’s answer by the prophet. For instance, Smith argues that here God speaks through the prophet (*Micah–Malachi*, 101); however, Andersen insists that the content

“Interrogation” defined as “the employment of a question or a problem followed by its answer or solution.”⁴³ Habakkuk casts a question about God’s non-intervention in the form of a complaint, and God answers it. This movement involves Causation and Contrast from 1:2–4 to 1:5–11. According to Bauer and Traina, “Contrast is the association of opposites or of things whose differences the writer wishes to stress.”⁴⁴ The prophet’s complaint causes God to respond (Causation), and His response is different from what the prophet expected (Contrast); contrary to the prophet’s expectation, God’s response is to raise up the Chaldeans (1:6). Furthermore, 1:5 functions as Preparation/Realization for 1:6–11, which is described as follows: “Preparation pertains to the background or introductory material itself, while realization is that for which the preparation is made.”⁴⁵ In other words, 1:5 functions as a transition from 1:2–4 by preparing readers for what they are going to hear in 1:6–11. The author/editor employs four imperative verbs in 1:5: “רֵא (look),” “הִבִּיטוּ (see),” “הִתְמַהוּ (be horrified),” and “תִּמְהוּ (be astonished)” to make readers aware and prepared for what is going to be proclaimed. Thus, one can observe the author/editor of the book intentionally makes a coherent relationship between 1:2–4 and 1:5–11 by placing 1:5 as the preparatory verse for God’s response in the following verses. Thus, Habakkuk’s complaint in 1:2–4 causes God’s response in 1:5–11 with a transitional and preparatory verse of 1:5.

Now, 1:5–11 and 1:12–2:1 is structured as Causation: Habakkuk is unsatisfied with God’s response (1:5–11) to Habakkuk’s complaint and

indicates that this is a divine proclamation (*Habakkuk*, 139) and Bailey states, “Normally a priest or cult prophet would deliver such an oracle to the one offering the lament, but Habakkuk’s response came directly from God” (*Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 300). Whether it is God’s direct response or not, my analysis of structural relationships with regard to the linear movement of the content still stands.

43. Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 113.

44. *Ibid.*, 97.

45. *Ibid.*, 114.

appeal for God's intervention into the injustice (1:2–4). Thus the prophet attempts to make God act according to his understanding of who God is by appealing to God once again, which leads to Habakkuk's second complaint in 1:12–2:1. Instead of accepting God's message in 1:5–11, Habakkuk makes another complaint against God by appealing to God's very nature and His titles: “קָדֶם (Everlasting),” “קָדוֹשׁ (Holy One),” and “צוּר (Rock)” in 1:12.⁴⁶ The prophet again attempts to invoke the fact, as he did in his first complaint in 1:2–4, that God's nonintervention (1:13–15) results in the abusive and disgraceful acts of the Chaldeans (1:16–17). This triggers God's second response in 2:2–4 in the structure of Interrogation with Causation. Particularly, 2:1 shows that the prophet expects God to respond to his appeal, and indeed God does. In addition, 2:2 again functions, like 1:5, as the transitional verse in Preparation/Realization structure. In 2:1 the author once again prepares readers by using two imperatives “כָּתוּב (record)” and “בָּאֵר (inscribe)” for what they are going to hear in the following verses through the prophet's report.

Finally, the first main unit reaches its climax in 2:2–4, particularly in God's proclamation of “וְצַדִּיק בְּאַמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה (The righteous will live by his faith)” in 2:4. Habakkuk's complaints in 1:2–4 and 1:12–2:1 are based on his understanding of who God is and expectation of what God should do. Thus, he insists that God's nonintervention (1:2–3, 13–15) leads to certain consequences (1:4, 16–17), which should not have happened, according to his own understanding and expectation. However, God keeps responding to the prophet in contrast to the prophet's understanding and expectation. Preparing readers through imperatives (1:5; 2:2), God attempts to draw the attention of the prophet so that he will listen to what God says to him and understand the divine truth. God's proclamation in 2:4 is the summation of His responses to the prophet. In addition, the series of woe oracles in 2:5–20 function as Substantiation to support God's proclamation of “וְצַדִּיק בְּאַמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה (The righteous will live by his faith)” in 2:4. Bauer and Traina note that “Substantiation involves the same two components as

46. This implicitly involves a Contrast structure. Habakkuk responds against God's proclamation in 1:5–11.

causation, but used in reverse sequence; substitution is the movement from effect to cause.”⁴⁷ In other words, 2:5–20 function as a ground of God’s message to the prophet in 2:4. Ralph L. Smith rightly points out that “This series of woes is designed to show that ultimately sin, evil, crime, greed, oppression, debauchery, and idolatry are doomed to destruction.”⁴⁸ All kinds of evil and sin may take place, and even seem to prosper in the eyes of the prophet, but God will eventually judge them. God’s judgment and His sovereignty are introduced in the series of woe oracles in 2:5–20.⁴⁹ Thus the series of woe oracles in 2:5–20 is actually a part of God’s answer in 2:2–4. It serves to establish God’s judgment and sovereignty as a basis for His proclamation that “**וְצַדִּיק בְּאַמוּנָתוֹ יֵחִיָּה**” (The righteous will live by his faith)” in 2:4.

To sum up: the first main unit culminates in God’s proclamation to Habakkuk in 2:4, which means that the earlier materials are arranged to build up its climax in 2:4. Habakkuk’s complaint in 1:2–4 causes God to respond in 1:5–11 in interrogative form. Then God’s response in 1:5–11 triggers the prophet’s second complaint in 1:12–2:1. This complaint prompts God once again to respond to the prophet in 2:2–4. Further, God substantiates His message in 2:4 by introducing His judgment and sovereignty over the Chaldeans in a series of woe oracles in 2:5–20. This very message of God causes the prophet to respond in 3:1–19, which culminates in 3:16–19.

In addition, materials of the second unit (3:1–19) are also arranged to reach a climax in Habakkuk’s confession in faith in 3:16–19, which is a direct response to God’s proclamation in 2:4. After the superscription (3:1), Habakkuk begins to express who God is in his prayer in 3:2–15. Before the actual description of God in 3:3, the author

47. Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 107.

48. Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 111.

49. Moreover, structurally speaking, 2:5–6a functions as Preparation for 2:6b–20. Habakkuk 2:5 describes the evil deeds supposedly of the Chaldeans, and 2:6 casts a question regarding the consequence of these deeds. Readers are prepared to ponder this question; and the answer is given in the following verses: It is God’s judgment and destruction.

inserts an introductory verse (3:2). It is structured as Preparation/Realization: 3:2 prepares readers for what will be heard about God in 3:3–15. The author of the book also employs an imperative “חַיֵּהוּ (revive)” and an irreal imperfect “תֹּדִיעַ (make known)” and “תִּזְכֹּר (remember)” in 3:2⁵⁰ to prepare readers for the description of God in the following verse. A similar verb usage has been observed in 1:5 and 2:2.

After the introductory verse in 3:2 (Preparation) Habakkuk begins to describe who God is in 3:3–15 (Realization).⁵¹ The theophany of God in these verses seems to be the foundation of Habakkuk’s response of faith in 3:16–19. In other words, Habakkuk is able to learn the divine truth from God’s message in 2:4 and responds to it by faith in 3:16–19 because of the manifestation of God in 3:3–15. The structural relationship between 3:3–15 and 3:16–19 is Substantiation. Habakkuk is not exactly given the answer in the way he expects. He struggles with theodicy in the first main unit, but he is able to respond by faith in 3:16–19 because he now comes to the right understanding of who God is through the series of woe oracles in 2:5–20 and the manifestation of God in 3:3–15. Robertson rightly summarizes 3:3–15; “Having offered his petition, the prophet now turns his eyes toward the past and future, where he sees the Lord coming in all his glory.”⁵² The confession of the prophet in faith in 3:16–19 is grounded in the manifestation of God in 3:3–15; his confidence comes from the right understanding of who God is. Thus, 3:2 prepares readers for the following verse in 3:3–15 (Preparation/Realization) and 3:3–15 renders

50. Irreal mood can be regarded as real (indicative) or irreal (subjunctive and optative). In 3:2, Waltke and O’Connor calls the use of these two verbs “the non-perfective of obligation,” which “refers to either what the speaker considers to be the subject’s obligatory or necessary conduct or what the subject considers to be an obligation.” See, Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 508.

51. Superscriptions in 1:1 and 3:1 themselves indeed function as Preparation for each main unit.

52. Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 219.

the reason and basis for Habakkuk's confession in faith in 3:16–19, which is the climax of not only the second main unit (3:1–19) but also the book as a whole.

In sum, the first structural relationship that controls the book as a whole is Climax with Causation. God proclaims His message to Habakkuk in 2:4 and the prophet responds to the message by confessing his faith in 3:16–19. The rest of the material in both the first and second main units is arranged to build up its own climax in 2:4 and 3:16–19.

Contrastive Inclusio

The second major structural relationship is Contrastive Inclusio. Bauer and Traina define it thusly: "Inclusio is the repetition of words, or phrases at the beginning and end of a unit, thus creating a bracket effect. At the boundaries inclusio establishes the main thought of the book (or passage), pointing to the essential concern of the book (or passage)."⁵³ While the second main unit (3:1–19) is also structured as Inclusio between 3:2 and 3:16 by the verb "שמעתי" (I heard)," the first main unit and the second main unit is also structured as Inclusio (1:2 and 3:16) by the verb "שמע" (to hear)" in a contrastive way. After the subscription (1:1) the book of Habakkuk begins with "ולא תשמע" (you do not hear)" in 1:2 and ends with "שמעתי" (I heard)" in 3:16.

In the first main unit Habakkuk struggles with a discrepancy between his reality and his understanding of God. He has a certain expectation toward God based on his understanding of who God is; thus he complains that God does not listen to the cry for help (1:2). However, as God proclaims the divine truth in 2:4 and substantiates the claim in the following series of woe oracles in 2:5–20, the prophet learns who God is and what He does from the divine perspective rather than his own understanding and expectation. By utilizing the structure of Contrastive Inclusio, the book of Habakkuk establishes the main thought that Habakkuk comes to a right understanding of who God is.

53. Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 117.

At first Habakkuk complains to God by saying “you do not hear” (1:2). However, at the end he has learned to see reality on the basis of the right understanding of God saying “I heard” (3:16). In other words, at first God is depicted as if he needs to “hear” Habakkuk’s cry, but readers are informed that it is the prophet who needed to “hear” God, and finally Habakkuk confesses “I heard” in 3:16 (and 3:2). In this process of moving from the prophet’s disorientation to orientation in his understanding of God, God patiently listens to the prophet complaining not only once but twice, and graciously teaches him the divine reality over the human reality. Therefore, the book is structured as Contrastive Inclusio signifying the shift from the prophet’s egocentric or human-centered perspective to the divine perspective.

To sum up, I have discussed two major structural relationships that control the book of Habakkuk as a whole: Climax with Causation and Contrastive Inclusio. These structural relationships indicate that materials of the book of Habakkuk are not only arranged for the coherent literary unity but also to build up to its climax in Habakkuk’s confession in faith in 3:16–19.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the synchronic study of the book of Habakkuk, particularly the analysis of the structure and structural relationships, can contribute to and supplement what historical-critical study of the book lacks. I have briefly reviewed scholarly debates over the textual, literary, redactional, and historical issues on the book, and concluded that the validity of the MT as the base text for the synchronic study and the literary unity of the book are generally supported from historical-critical points of view. I also pointed out that disagreement among scholars over the historical setting shows the need for the canonical approach to study the theological message of the book. The structural relationship of Climax with Causation reveals that materials within the book are arranged so that the book reaches its climax in 3:16–19; and Contrastive Inclusio shows that the central message of the book is that God graciously teaches Habakkuk to learn who God is and understands his reality based on the divine perspective

instead of his human-centric perspective and expectation, and the prophet finally understands it and responds to God's message in faith.

Moreover, the analysis of the structural relationships not only renders insights into the theological message of the book but also suggests the coherent literary unity of the book and the character of the form of the book as a whole. Each section of material is intentionally arranged to enhance the theological message of the book by coherent structuring, and God's message along with Habakkuk's response can be regarded as a cultic genre: the divine message and human response.⁵⁴ Limitations in space and the focus of the article did not permit me to include a comprehensive form-critical analysis of every chapter, but one can refer to Michael H. Floyd's work for helpful insights into the Minor Prophets especially the book of Habakkuk.⁵⁵

54. John Kessler recognizes the form of the divine call and human response, and develops a biblical theology from it. For instance, he labels Habakkuk 3:16–19 as “Promise Theology.” See, John Kessler, *Old Testament Theology: Divine Call and Human Response* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 312–3.

55. Michael H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets: Part 2*, FOTL 22 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 79–162.