ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN LITERATURE AND THE PSALM OF HABAKKUK 3

by

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A RESEARCH PAPER

Submitted to Richard E. Averbeck, PhD
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
OT 7680 — Literature of the Ancient Near Reast
at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Deerfield, IL
April 2015

Introduction

The final chapter of Habakkuk has proven to be on of the most puzzling for biblical interpreters. Following two chapters of dialogue between the prophet and Yahweh, the book closes with a psalm. Within this psalm we find one of the most vivid and detailed descriptions of an appearance of Yahweh in the Old Testament, unlike anything in its canonical vicinity. It is not entirely clear how one should interpret the imagery describing Yahweh. Thus, this paper will investigate the genre of Habakkuk 3, explore possible parallels in ancient Near Eastern literature, and offer some suggestions for how the interpreter should engage the text. Our hope is that, by examining the core of the Habakkuk 3 psalm (vv. 3-15) in light of relevant ancient Near Eastern literature, we might make more clear the function of the text in its literary, cultural, and theological context.

Habakkuk in Literary Context

The book of Habakkuk speaks with a unique voice within the Minor Prophets, providing a transparent window into Habakkuk's personal "struggle of faith." The prophet engages in a dialogical complaint with Yahweh, calling on him to act in a world that does not reflect the reality of his rule.[1] As the dialogue moves forward, God brings Habakkuk "out of older theological constructs into new understandings of God's way in the world (Hab. 1:5, 12-13; 2:2-6; 3:16-19; cf. Job 42:1-9)."[2] The woe oracles of 2:6-20 act as an assurance of the final fate that awaits the invading Chaldeans; the prophet's challenge is to trust that the righteous will ultimately triumph (2:4b). Despite the threat of the Chaldeans, a day is coming when "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (2:14). Habakkuk must reorient himself to radically trust God for the future, even though he might have every reason to despair in the present.

William Dumbrell states that the psalm of chapter 3 appears to be "the key to understanding the book," in that Habakkuk begins to see the events of his own day through the perspective of salvation history.[3] Habakkuk pleads with Yahweh to revive and make known his great "deed" (פעלך) of old (3:2b).[4] In his appeal Habakkuk reaches back to Israel's foundational narratives (especially the Exodus), expressing trust in God's proven character and work on behalf

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[1] Similarly in the complaint psalms, "the psalmists appeal to God as He has revealed Himself against the hidden and angry God whom they experience" (I. Fløysvik, "When God Behaves Strangely: A Study in the Complaint Psalms," *Concordia Journal* 21:3 [1995], 304).

[2] James K. Bruckner, "Habakkuk, Book of," in *Dictionary of Old Testament Prophets* (eds. M. J. Boda and J. G. McConville; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 295. See also Job 38.

[3] William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 217. For the relationship between Hab. 1-2 and Hab. 3, see Marvin A. Sweeney, "Structure, Genre, and Intent in the Book of Habakkuk," *VT* 41:1 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 80. Sweeney concludes that "it is clear that Hab. iii functions as a corroborating conclusion that responds to the issues raised in Hab. i-ii" (ibid.).

[4] The word פאל "regularly describes God's works/deeds in history and in nature" (E. Carpenter, "פאל [p'l]" *NIDOTTE* 3:648). While Habakkuk seems to be alluding primarily to Yahweh's great deeds in the Exodus and Conquest, the reader is also hearkened back to Yahweh's challenge to Habakkuk in 1:5: "Look among the nations and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work [פֹּעַל פֹּעֵל] in your days that you would not believe if told."

of his people. Indeed, even if all indicators of God's covenantal blessing are absent, Habakkuk vows to "rejoice in the Yahweh," and to "take joy in the God of [his] salvation" (3:18).

The Prayer of Habakkuk

The final chapter of Habakkuk is considered a special field within Habakkuk studies, as it presents its own unique challenges in its interpretation. In the theophany of chapter 3, Yahweh is one character among many in a drama of cosmic proportions. First, the prayer describes the Divine Warrior coming from the south lands (Teman and Paran) as the Lord of creation, armed with supernatural weapons (vv. 3-4), and accompanied to battle by the attendants דבר and רשׁף (Plague and Pestilence; v. 5). Creation itself convulses at Yahweh's approach (vv. 6-7). Israel's threat is personified as the rivers and sea (v. 8), against which Yahweh battles with a bow and arrows (v. 9). The sun and moon stand still at the sight of the warfare of God (v. 11). Yahweh is revealed to be victor over the leader of the wicked, defeating the threat to save his people (v. 13). Habakkuk's prayer portrays the Divine Warrior crushing the head of his enemy, piercing him with arrows, and trampling him with war-horses (vv. 13-15). The language of this psalm is saturated with such "mythological" concepts and imagery common to the ancient Near East.

While good work has been done on the text of Habakkuk 3,[5] this psalm remains one of the most problematic (and critically rewritten) chapters in the Old Testament.[6] Despite these difficulties, one can be confident that that the Masoretic Text is reliable.[7] Proposals for drastic textual emendation have reduced considerably in recent publications, allowing more confident work to be done with the text as it stands.

Before moving forward with comparative work, special consideration must first be made concerning the genre of Habakkuk 3.[8] Although J. J. M. Roberts has argued extensively that the

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[5] The most noteworthy include the work of Julius Wellhausen (*Die kleinen Propheten übersetzt und erklärt, mit Noten* [2nd ed.; Berlin: Reimer, 1893]), William. F. Albright ("The Psalm of Habakkuk" in *Studies in the Old Testament Prophecy: Presented to Prof. Theodore H. Robinson,* [ed. H. H. Rowley; Edingburgh: Clark, 1950], 1-18), Simon Mowinckel ("Zum Psalm des Habakuk," *ThZ* 9 [1953], 1-23), Michael Eaton ("The Origin and Meaning of Habakkuk 3," *ZAW* 76 [1964], 144-71), Wilhelm Rudolph (*Micha—Nahum—Habakuk—Zephanja* [KAT 13:3; Guttersloh: Mohn, 1975]), Theodore Hiebert (*God of My Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3* [HSM 38; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986]), J. J. M. Roberts (*Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.* [OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991]), R. D. Haak (*Habakkuk* [VTSup 44; Leiden: Brill, 1992]), Yitzhak Avishur (*Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994]); more recently Francis I. Andersen (*Habakkuk: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* [AB 25; New York: Doubleday, 2001]), and Richard D. Patterson (*Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: An Exegetical Commentary* [Dallas, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2003]). For an excellent survey of Habakkuk research, especially that of the 90's, see Oskar Dangl, "Habakkuk in Recent Research," *CR:BS* 9 (2001), 131-168.

[6] E.g., T. Hiebert, *God of My Victory,* has ninety textual notes, and J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.* has ninety-eight.

[7] See Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 264-268, who gives a full treatment of reliability of the text of Habakkuk 3. Earlier studies deferred to the MT out of piety, but the discovery of the Minor Prophets Scroll in Wadi Murabba'at in 1955 (MurXII) has now validated the MT as a faithful preservation of the ancient text. While this does not ease the problems inherent to the MT, it is helpful in employing certain restraints on handling these textual difficulties.

[8] On the varying opinions and problems regarding the genre of Habakkuk 3, see Marvin Sweeney, "Habakkuk, Book of," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary,* 6 vols. (ed. David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:4-5. Following his survey he concludes that in its present form the composition "is a *petition* addressed by the psalmist to God to manifest divine power in the world in order to deliver the land from invaders" (ibid., 4; emphasis added).

psalm of chapter 3 is to be understood as the content of a theophanic *vision* (promised in 2:2-3),[9] several elements favor interpreting the chapter as a petition or prayer psalm.

First, one of the most striking features of the chapter is its framing with a title (v. 1) and colophon (v. 19b). Setting chapter 3 apart from the rest of the book, these literary labels, along with poetic marker סלה, confirm that we are dealing with psalmic material.[10]

Second, the opening statement, "a prayer of Habakkuk," links the unit to Psalms 17, 86, 90, 102, and 142, which all contain תפלה ("prayer") as part of a title.[11] In fact, two prayers frame the the report of God's action (vv. 3-15): a prayer of petition (v. 2), and a prayer of confidence (vv. 16-19a). Although the previous two chapters were characterized by complaint and lament features, D. A. Patterson has shown that the final chapter draws on the form of other *prayer psalms*. "Indeed, many of the features common to this type of poetry . . . are present: opening cry/statement of praise, attestation of reverence/trust (v. 2*a*), petition/problem (v. 2*b*), praise and exultation of God (vv. 3-15), statement of trust and confidence in God (vv. 16-18), and concluding note of praise (v. 19)"[12] Habakkuk's closing psalm also had an important corporate function. The closing musical colophon (v. 19b) makes it clear that this prayer was intended to be used in a cultic setting.[13]

Habakkuk 3 is thus best interpreted as a *petition* or *prayer* psalm. In this way the final chapter is distinguished from the first two chapters, although serving as the necessary conclusion to the earlier complaint. The psalm is also distinguished from an externally received message: it is neither vision nor oracle, as one might expect in a prophetic book. Rather, the chapter is a psalm addressed by Habakkuk as a petition to Yahweh toward action.

Despite defining chapter 3 as a prayer psalm, the core of the prayer eludes easy categorization. It is characterized by archaisms, difficult syntax, and expressive imagery in describing God. This literary climax of chapter 3, where Yahweh comes as Israel's Divine Warrior, should be divided into two parts. In the first section, the Divine Warrior marches from

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[9] Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah,* 149. He states that the present text "no longer celebrates Yahweh's march as a past event, but describes this event as it is happening, as a visionary experience. In short, Hab. 3:3-15 contains Yahweh's last response to Habakkuk, and that response is the vision promised in 2:2-3." F. F. Bruce ("Habakkuk" in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical & Expositional Commentary* [ed. T. E. McComiskey; 2 Vols.; Baker, 1992], 2:878) states that the title "prayer" (3:1) only strictly applies to v. 2, and continues his exposition presupposing that the chapter is Habakkuk's visionary experience (ibid., 882). John Goldingay ("Habakkuk," in *Minor Prophets II* [NIBCOT; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009], 81) similarly states, on the basis of the "I saw" of 3:7, that Habakkuk is speaking and reporting his vision.

[10] The (somewhat ambiguous) poetic marker סֶלָה occurs three times in the chapter.

[11] The other term in the title of ch. 3, שִׁגְיֹנוֹת, might also prove helpful in discerning the genre of the section. Based on the term's presence in Ps. 7:1, Simon Mowinckel ("Zum Psalm des Habakuk,") argued for identifying Hab. 3 as an individual's lament, but the alleged matches between the psalms are not firm (Hans Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary,* [trans. H. C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988], 168-69). Furthermore, the emotions expressed in Hab. 3:3 and 3:16 are not the sorrows of a grieving person, but the awe of one describing a theophany. The word comes from the root שׁגה, to "go astray, err, stagger," which may point to Habakkuk's need for guidance. However, due to the obscurity of the term, it may be best to take it as the musical tune or setting for singing (James Bruckner, *Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah,* [NIVAC; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004], 251).

[12] Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 117. The presence of a psalm within a prophetic book may seem out of place, but hymnic material has been incorporated into other prophecies (Amos 4:13; 5:8; 9:5-6) and narrative (Jonah 2), and is even used in sustained prophetic and liturgical discourse (Isa. 40-55) (Andersen, *Habakkuk,* 259).

[13] J. A. Smith, "Which Psalms Were Sung in the Temple?" *Music & Letters* 71 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 167-186.

the south (vv. 3-7), and in the second he defeats his enemies personified as waters (vv. 8-15). Such a twofold division is confirmed by the thematic and grammatical differences between the sections.[14] Though no consensus has been reached, it has been variously argued that the author is drawing together two distinct old Hebrew poems and repurposing them in a new context.[15] This structure can be illustrated in our outline of chapter 3, drawing in our observations made in regards to genre:

A Psalmic Title	v. 1
B Prayer of Petition	v. 2
***C* Yahweh's Theophanic March**	vv. 3-7
***C'* Yahweh's Victory over the Waters**	vv. 8-15
B' Prayer of Confidence	vv. 16-19a
A' Closing Musical Colophon	v. 19b

The chiastic structure of the outline shows that the report of God's militaristic action acts as the core of the prayer (vv. 3-15), bridging Habakkuk's petition (v. 2) and praise (vv. 16-19a). This rhetorical center of Habakkuk 3 is where our primary exegetical and comparative interest lies.

History of Research into ANE Parallels

The beginning of parallels between Habakkuk and its ANE context may be traced as far as Gunkel's *Schöpfung und Chaos.*[16] Although Gunkel dealt with Habakkuk only cursorily, his line of argument from the viewpoint of the Mesopotamian Marduk-Tiamat myth was developed early on by F. J. Stephens,[17] and later by W. A. Irwin.[18] Irwin claimed that the poem of Habakkuk

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[14] Section one describes Yahweh's approach (vv. 3-7; passive verbs—God does not act directly), while section two describes his actions against his enemies (vv. 8-15; active verbs—God engages in warfare). The *waw* conjunction is used to tie together thought associations in vv. 3-7, while *waw* is completely missing in vv. 8-15. How Habakkuk speaks of God's acts also changes—first in the third person (vv. 3-7; e.g., "God came from Teman"), and then in the second person (vv. 8-15; e.g., "Was your anger against the rivers, O Yahweh?").

[15] Theodore Hiebert ("Habakkuk," *NIB*, 7:563) argues that the poem's archaic features are indicative of separate authorship: "the archaic quality of the style and content … suggests this poem is a composition much older than the rest of the book of Habakkuk." Albright thinks that vv. 3-7 were "probably taken with little alteration from a very early Israelite poem on the theophany of Yahweh as exhibited in the south-east storm, the *zauba'ah* of the Arabs; the historico-geographical background reflects the period following the wilderness wanderings." Concerning vv. 8-15, Albright argues that the poem "appears in light of Ugaritic and other parallels as adapted from an early poem or poems of Canaanite origin, celebrating the triumph of Baal over … [the] primordial dragon of chaos" (Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," 8-9). Anderson proposes that the core theophany (vv. 3-15) is comprised of "two traditions—a theophany and a refashioning of a Canaanite epic with YHWH as divine warrior—which have been joined … together into a sensible, cohesive text" (Anderson, "Awaiting an Answered Prayer," 61).

[16] Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895).

[17] F. J. Stephens, "The Babylonian Dragon Myth Habakkuk 3," *JBL* 43 (1924), 290-293. "There is nothing that can be called direct quotation or literary dependence, but the background of the allusions [i.e., the Babylonian Creation Epic] is scarcely to be doubted" (290).

[18] W. A. Irwin, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," *JNES* 1 (1942), 10-40.

3 "follows the thought and movement of this episode in the Babylonian Epic right through practically from beginning to end," leading him to conclude that the composition "is an adaptation of *Enuma Elish* embellished slightly with Canaanite conceptions."[19] Irwin's work was vehemently argued against by W. F. Albright, who declared that his "drastic emendations and forced interpretations yield a text which does not conform to any known Hebrew dialect or literary form, and that his innovations can safely be dismissed,"[20] although Irwin came to a similar conclusion in regards to Albright's interpretation.[21]

The discovery of the city of Ugarit in 1928 brought to light the Baal myth, and soon scholars began preferring Ugaritic parallels over Babylonian ones. Albright follows U. Cassuto's early work, seeing in Habakkuk "reminisces of the myth of the conflict between Yahweh and the primordial dragon Sea or River."[22] He cites Ginsberg on the use of tricola in the Ugaritic epic style (especially "climactic parallelism") which is also common in the older poetry of the OT (i.e., the "triumphal songs" of Exod. 15; Judg. 5) and Habakkuk 3.[23] If Albright's emendations to the MT of Hab. 3:13 are accepted, the verse would be a direct reference to the Baal-Mot myth.

On the other hand, Cassuto suggested that Habakkuk contains echoes of the Baal-Yamm myth, and that "despite the successive changes of thought, the literary tradition is preserved in all its details."[24] Baal's club *aymr* (*CAT* 1.2 IV.19) was even "found" in the word *'ōmer* at the end of (the textually problematic) 3:9. In Habakkuk 3:13, Cassuto saw Yahweh's two blows to the evil one (to the head and the neck) to parallel Baal's defeat of Yamm (*CAT* 1.2 IV.25).

Likewise, Day also argued that the imagery of divine conflict is of Canaanite and not Babylonian origin.[25] He supported his view by the reference in v. 8 to the enemy as "sea" (*yām*) and "rivers" (*n^{e}hārîm*), which parallel Baal's opponent "Sea" (*ym*) and "Judge River" (*ṯpṭ nhr*), noted previously by Cassuto and Albright. He further suggests that Habakkuk 3:9 makes reference to Yahweh's "seven arrows," paralleling Baal's seven lightnings in a shorter mythic text (*CAT* 1.101 3b-4). Resheph's participation in the conflict (Hab. 3:5) is also understood to have its background in a ("largely fragmentary and obscure")[26] Ugaritic text (*CAT* 1.82.1-3).[27]

In his *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms,* Y. Avishur outlined the history of research into ANE parallels to Habakkuk 3, examined the biblical parallels, and offered his own conclusions. Noting that the affinities between Ugaritic myths and Habakkuk 3 are limited to a single text (*CAT* 1.2, Tablet IV), he took a more reserved position on the correlations between the

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[19] W. A. Irwin, "The Mythological Background of Habakkuk, Chapter 3," *JNES* 15 (1956), 49-50.

[20] W. F. Albright, "Review of Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament,*" *JBL* 61 (1942), 121. In his own article on the Habakkuk psalm he again states that "Irwin's efforts to revive the parallel, but much more remote, hypothesis of Babylonian origin is wholly unsuccessful" (W. F. Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," 3).

[21] See Irwin's response to the methodology of Cassuto and Albright in Irwin, "The Mythological Background of Habakkuk" in *JNES* 15, 47-50.

[22] Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," 2-3.

[23] Ibid., 4-5.

[24] U. Cassuto, "Chapter III of Habakkuk and the Ras Shamra Texts," *Biblical & Oriental Studies II: Bible and Ancient Oriental Texts* (Jerusalem, 1975), 13.

[25] J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge, 1985), 1.

[26] J. Day, "New Light on the Mythological Background of the Allusion to Resheph in Habakkuk III 5," *VT* 29 (1979), 354.

[27] J. Day, "New Light on the Mythological Background of the Allusion to Resheph" *VT* 29, 353-5.

two.[28] Avishur concluded that there is no strong connection between Israelite and Ugaritic-Canaanite traditions, but rather the similarities can be accounted for by common formal, thematic, linguistic, and stylistic elements. Though tablet IV of the Baal Cycle fits well with Hab. 3:9, Avishur argued that there are more extensive affinities with Babylonian literature, including but not limited to *Enuma Elish*.[29] Avishur proposed that a Babylonian hymn describing a war-god battling against his enemies served as a model for the psalmic composition of Hab. 3. The psalm seems to combine motifs of various origins (biblical and non-biblical) in describing Yahweh.[30]

The hypothesis of a possible Ugaritic background to Hab. 3:9 is more firmly rejected by D. T. Tsumura. Tsumura cautions the reader against quick comparison, citing late Ugaritologist P. C. Craigie: "…virtually all Hebrew-Ugaritic comparative studies involve the comparison of *different* literary forms."[31] Although it has become customary to hold that Habakkuk 3 was influenced by Ugaritic poetry, this assumption may be questioned on the basis of genre studies. Furthermore, if 3:8 is a direct transfer of the Baal-Yamm myth, one would expect the pair *yām // nāhār* rather than the unusual *n^{e}hārîm // yām* (which corresponds only to Ugaritic *ym // nhrm*, found in a non-conflict text). He argues that "sea" and "river" are simply a traditional pair in ancient Semitic languages, and do not automatically allude to the *Chaoskampf* motif.[32] Moreover, many of the assumptions made by Cassuto and Day were on the basis of textual emendations. He concludes that the metaphors used to describe God (riding "chariots," v. 8, using a "bow" and "mace," v. 9) reflect typical ANE battle imagery, and that "the often suggested connection between Habakkuk 3 and Ugaritic mythology does not seem to be well-founded."[33]

While restating the observations of Albright and Cassuto concerning possible connections to Ugarit, F. I. Andersen declares in his Anchor Bible commentary on Habakkuk that the original (mythological) referent of Habakkuk 3 is now lost. "Only an echo remains, and the story cannot be reconstituted from an echo."[34] The Israelite poem cannot be directly dependent on either the Ugaritic or Babylonian epics. This does not hold Andersen back from finding points of contact with other ancient literature. He has quite an extensive discussion on the significance of *deber* and *rešep* (3:5), suggesting that originally Yahweh's bodyguard consisted of four attendant "destroyers:" Sword (*ḥrb*), Famine (*r'b*), Pestilence (*dbr*), and Plague (*ršp*). He bases these conclusions on Deut. 33:2 and numerous examples of four attendants to the supreme deity (an unspecified Hittite Sam'al text; Enuma Elish IV.50-51; cf. Epic of Erra I.10-12; Atra-Ḫasīs,[35] p.

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[28] Avishur, *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms,* 125-29.

[29] Ibid., 129-33.

[30] Ibid., 124-25.

[31] P. C. Craigie, "Ugarit and the Bible: Progress and Regress in 50 Years of Literary Study," in G. D. Young (ed.), *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 107; cited in D. T. Tsumura, "Ugaritic Poetry and Habakkuk 3," *Tyndale Bulletin* 40:1 (1989), 25.

[32] Tsumura, "Ugaritic Poetry and Habakkuk 3," 30. He notes the Akkadian equivalent to this pair, *ti-a-am-ta* "sea" // *na-ra-am* "river" (*Atra-Hasis* III iv:5-6), as well as the Sumerian equivalents in the Sumerian-Eblaite bilingual texts from Ebla (MEE 4, 63-64:v.II:18-19; 79:r.III:8'-9').

[33] Ibid., 48. See also D. T. Tsumura, "The 'Word Pair' *qšt and *mṭ in Habakkuk 3:9 in the Light of Ugaritic and Akkadian," in *"Go to the Land I Will Show You," Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young*, eds. J. E. Coleson & V. H. Matthews (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 355-361.

[34] Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 317.

[35] W. G. Lambert & A. R. Millard, *Atra-Ḫasīs: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

108, line 28).[36] Such a configuration, he argues, is also common in "magic amulets intended to ward off evil of all kinds."[37] For vv. 8-16, he concludes that numerous incidents in Israel's past (Creation, Flood, Exodus, Conquest) supply memories that are echoed in the psalm, but the psalm's "main substance is a (creation?) myth, akin to the subjugation of the primal marine dragon, in which Yahweh—armed with bow, javelin, and mace—is featured as a chariot-riding warrior. The language matches this very archaic content."[38]

R. D. Patterson's recent commentary on Habakkuk makes some major leaps forward in terms of understanding the archaic features of the Psalm. He keys in on (1) various early grammatical elements and poetic devices, (2) parallel expressions held in common in Ugaritic and old Hebrew poetry, and (3) themes common to the body of Ugaritic and early OT poetry.[39] Despite the affinities with Ugaritic literature, Patterson argues that the psalm is distinctly old Israelite: "Habakkuk draws upon older poetic material that had formed part of a body of compositions commemorating God's deliverance of His people at the Exodus and the entrance into Canaan."[40] Patterson notes the texts of Quntillet 'Ajrud strengthening the association of Yahweh with the south (cf. 3:3) and seismic activity (cf. 3:7).[41] Alluding to the Baal epic (but denying literary dependence), Patterson argues that much of the language describing Yahweh as divine warrior is "drawn from the epic literature familiar to the people of the Levant," though in this case Yahweh is the unmatched champion.[42] He prefers to interpret the water imagery in light of the Exodus. Textual emendation (i.e., Cassuto) is unnecessary for understanding Yahweh's blows to the enemy in 3:13-14; rather, this action should be understood in light "of two-stage fighting attested in ancient literature," such as the battles of Marduk against Tiamat, Sinuhe against his Amorite foe, and Baal against Yamm (*ANET,* 67; 20; 131; cf. David and Goliath, 1 Sam. 17:51).[43]

While early research sough to prove a direct literary dependence of Habakkuk 3 on an ANE text (especially *Enuma Elish* or the Baal cycle), this hypothesis has failed to withstand the test of time. Robertson has noted that

> *So far as the mythological background of the poem is concerned, such allusions may be acknowledged as based on a possible but unestablished hypothesis. Nothing in the language of the chapter requires that a source be found outside the historical traditions of Israel, and it appears much more natural to identify the frame of reference in terms of the great saving acts of the Exodus…*[44]

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[36] Andersen, *Habakkuk,* 300-6.

[37] Ibid., 301. Here Andersen cites E. Reiner, "Plague Amulets and House Blessings," *JNES* 19 (1960), 148-55. He also notes a traditional Jewish prayer: "In the name of the Lord, the God of Israel: may Michael be at my right hand, Gabriel at my left hand, before me Uriel, behind me Raphael, and above me the divine presence of God."

[38] Ibid., 339.

[39] Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah,* 115.

[40] Ibid., 209. Patterson had argued previously that Habakkuk is drawing on an unscripturated early Hebrew epic (R. D. Patterson, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," *GTJ* 8 [1987], 178-92).

[41] Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah,* 210-11, 215.

[42] Ibid., 216.

[43] Ibid., 229.

[44] O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 232.

While it was once commonplace to emend the MT in order to align it more closely with its ANE parallels, this methodology has been proven questionable in light of the proven stability of the MT (see esp. MurXII). While an adherence to the MT does not alleviate interpretive difficulty, it does help by imposing certain restraints. Comparative work must be done with the text as it stands. The goal of comparative work must be to better understand the MT in light of its cultural, linguistic, and theological context.

Some of the difficulty in the text may be due to its origins in a much earlier age. J. Andersen has noted the parallels between this text pre-monarchic Hebrew poetry (e.g., Exod. 15; Deut. 33; Judg. 5), as well as 14th century Canaanite epic poems, making it "tantalizingly plausible" that this may be "one of the most ancient texts in the Hebrew Bible."[45] The content of the psalm, its grammar, and its archaic features all direct the reader toward the early stages of Israel's history, especially the Exodus. This broadens the scope for comparative work beyond the old debate of Babylonian vs. Ugaritic sources for the imagery in Habakkuk 3. Much more is happening in the text.

It seems apparent that in order for this comparative discussion to move forward, we must explore literature beyond just *Enuma Elish* and the Baal Myth, as important as they are for the topic. Our brief examination of the genre suggests that important parallels may be found in psalmic or hymnic literature as well as mythic texts.

Survey of Relevant ANE Literature

The following section intends to briefly survey the relevant ancient Near Eastern literature in Habakkuk 3 studies. Special attention will be given to genre, descriptions of divine warfare, and the extent of parallels to Habakkuk 3. Following this survey we will explore the psalm of Habakkuk 3 in light of the ANE material.

Enuma Elish

The Babylonian Creation myth, known by its first words *Enuma Elish* ("When on high…"), is a narrative poem of which about 1,071 lines are preserved. It is thought to originate as early as the Old Babylonian period, with the earliest extant copies of of the work dating to the 1st millennium BC.[46] It details the advancement of Babylonian god Marduk to the place of supremacy in the pantheon, and gives an explanation for his fifty epithets.[47]

While *Enuma Elish* is well known as a creation text describing Babylonian cosmology, the theme of theomachy plays a particularly important part in the narrative. The pillars of the universe emerge out of the primeval duality of the sea: Apsu (fresh water), and Tiamat (salt water). Anu, the sky god, begets Ea, god of wisdom and magic. When Apsu plans on destroying the younger generation of gods, Ea defeats him; but when the enraged Tiamat assembles an army

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[45] John E. Anderson, "Awaiting an Answered Prayer: The Development and Reinterpretation of Habakkuk 3 in its Context," *ZAW* 123 (2011), 62. Several Psalms also show affinities with these examples of Old Hebrew poetry (Pss. 18; 68; 77; and 144).

[46] Beate Pongratz-Leisten, "Enuma Elish" in *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 5 vols.* (ed. K. D. Sakenfeld; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2009), 2:267.

[47] Benjamin R. Foster, "Akkadian Literature," in *From an Antique Land: An Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, Carl S. Ehrlich, ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 168.

of monsters to attack the gods, no god is brave enough to fight her. Marduk volunteers, demanding that he be granted supremacy over the gods as his reward. When Marduk kills Tiamat with an arrow, he bashes her head with a mace, and proceeds to reorganize the universe using her remains as the base elements. His own temple in Babylon acts as the religious and politic center of the world. A great portion of the poem is finally given over to explaining the many names of Marduk.

The primary points of comparison and contrast between this composition and Habakkuk 3 is in the characterization of Marduk as a divine warrior. Like Marduk, Yahweh engages in warfare against the waters (although in Habakkuk they are de-personalized and are passive recipients of Yahweh's wrath). Yahweh wears his glory like armor (cf. *Ee* IV, 57-58), gathers his weapons (cf. *Ee* IV 35-39), deploys attendants to serve his needs (cf. *Ee* IV 42-43), mounts his chariot (*Ee* IV, 50-51), and sets forth to do battle with his enemy. Yahweh splits his opponent (cf. *Ee* IV, 135-138) and drives his chariot over the carcass of Sea, trampling it with his chariot horses (cf. *Ee* IV, 103-104, 128-129).

The Baal Cycle

The longest of extant Ugaritic works, the Baal Cycle was preserved on six clay tablets that originally held about 2,000 lines. It is categorized as a narrative mythic poem. Although similar narrative poems have been found, *Kirta* and *Aqhat,* these have humans as their protagonists and should be categorized as epics. Thus, the Baal Cycle should be treated as a unique example of its genre in Ugarit.[48]

Though there is some scholarly disagreement as to the correct narrative arrangement of the six tablets,[49] the general flow of the story is discernible. The theme of the cycle is to describe "how Baal came to be the ruler of the divine council and thus the king of heaven and earth."[50] In tablets 1-2 (*CAT* 1.1-1.2), Baal enters into conflict with Yamm (the Sea), his primary rival for kingship. El decides to appoint a new ruler, and Yamm is chosen for the honor. Yamm allows the power to get to his head, demanding from the divine assembly that Baal be given to him as a slave. The assembly, and even El, are intimidated by Yamm, so they concede; but Baal refuses to submit. *Kothar-wa-Ḫasis*, the divine craftsman, fashions two great war clubs for Baal. With them Baal defeats Yamm, and is subsequently proclaimed king of the gods. The next set of tablets (*CAT* 1.3-1.4) defines Baal's position in the universe and his function as provider of rains and fertility. The final episode (*CAT* 1.4 VII-1.6) addresses the "fact that Baal does not dominate or eliminate death from the universe."[51] The primary tension lies between Baal, representing life, and Mot, representing death.

The preceding summary of the narrative of the Baal Cycle is helpful in highlighting many of the important differences between the texts. Yet while the comparisons between the Baal

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[48] Wayne T. Pitard, "Canaanite Literature," in *From an Antique Land*, 266.

[49] See Mark S. Smith, "The Baal Cycle," in *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, ed. Simon B. Parker (SBL Writings from the Ancient World 9; Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1997), 81-82.

[50] Ibid., 279.

[51] Ibid., 284.

Cycle and Habakkuk 3 are typically limited to a single section (*CAT* 1.2 IV),[52] and also deal with different genres,[53] there are nevertheless some important parallels between the texts.

The Baal Cycle is significant for the study of Habakkuk 3 for thematic and linguistic reasons. This mythic text demonstrates "the high degree of similarity between second millennium poetic conventions in the northern part of the Syro-Palestine area … and those of the Canaanite areas in the first millennium, visible in the poetic sections of the Hebrew Bible."[54] Habakkuk 3 exhibits poetic features that appear to be characteristic of poetry throughout the Northwest Levant: the structuring method of bicolas and tricolas, the terseness of parallel lines, and variation of prefix- and suffix-conjugation verbs in narrating past-tense action.

Like Baal, Yahweh wages war against the Sea/River, striking him with weapons (*CAT* 1.2 IV 15-26). River's defeat requires a two-strike punch (IV 16-17, 24-25), crushing his head (IV 24-25). The defeated enemy is subsequently trampled in victory (cf. IV 27).

Egyptian Hymnody

Of further interest to our study are Egyptian hymns and prayers that contain solar imagery. There was a long history of solar religion in ancient Egypt, a tradition which produced several hymns of praise to sun-gods. When Amenhotep IV (1372—1355 BC) rose to power, he initiated a complete overhaul of the religious system, demanding exclusive worship of Aten, the deified sun-disk. Aten replaced Amun-Re as high god, and the whole pantheon of Egyptian deities were to be abandoned. Amenhotep took a new name, Akhenaten ("Agreeable to Aten"), and founded a new capital city, Akhetaten ("Horizon of Aten;" modern El Amarna).[55] It is from this period that we have texts like the Great Hymn to the Aten (*COS* 1.28). This hymn praises Aten for creating the world and all it contains, for giving life to man and beast, and for watching over his creation. In this text, "The Aten rises and sets in lonely majesty in an open empty sky. Only the earth is peopled by his creatures, and only they adore his rising and setting."[56]

After Akhenaten's successors reverted the religious system back to what it was before, Amun-Rê was developed into the supreme god of the pantheon and of Egyptian civilization. Amun-Rê was the result of the fusing of two gods together: Amun was the hidden one, and Rê was the visible god in the sky. Thus Amun-Rê was not only the creator god, but also the god of peoples and cultures; not only supremely powerful, but also caring of creatures; not only distant but also near. Two hymns to Amun-Rê are worth exploring in relation to Habakkuk 3: "The Power of God,"[57] and "God as the Divine Warrior."[58]

The benefit of comparing Egyptian hymnody with Habakkuk is their closer correspondence in regards to genre. If Habakkuk 3, as we have argued, is a prayer psalm, then it seems prudent to compare it to other psalmic or hymnic literature. This does not seem to have

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[52] Avishur, *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms,* 125-29.

[53] D. T. Tsumura, "Ugaritic Poetry and Habakkuk 3," 25.

[54] Dennis Pardee, "the Ba'lu Myth (1.86)," in *Context of Scripture, 3 Vols.* (eds., William W. Hallo & K. Lawson Younger; Leiden: Brill Academic, 2003), 1:241.

[55] Christopher B. Hays, *Hidden Riches: A Sourcebook for Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 361.

[56] Miriam Lichtheim, "The Great Hymn to the Aten (1.28)" in *COS,* 1:45.

[57] John L. Foster, *Hymns, Prayers, and Songs: An Anthology of Ancient Egyptian Lyric Poetry*, ed. Susan Tower Hollis (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1996), 72-73.

[58] Ibid., 78.

been adequately explored in Habakkuk literature.[59] In Habakkuk we have clear solar imagery, although in the context of divine warfare. Yahweh is not the deified Sun, but does display solar qualities. Like Aten, Yahweh's splendor fills the sky, his brightness is like sunlight, and rays flash from his hand (*COS* 1.28). Like with Amun-Rê, the mountains and earth quake before the might of Yahweh,[60] Yahweh's enemies tremble before him, and he is portrayed as having horns.[61]

Kuntillet 'Ajrud

A number of short ancient Hebrew texts are particularly relevant to our study of Habakkuk 3. The *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* inscriptions, excavated in the eastern Sinai Peninsula in the 1970's, were found in the ruins of two buildings dated to the end of the ninth and the beginning of the eighth century BC. The first large pithos features drawings and a blessing by "Yahweh of Samaria and his asherah" (*COS* 2.47A). The second large pithos is decorated with drawings of a cow, an archer with bow drawn, and a group of five figures with outstretched arms (possibly in worship). Four inscriptions are found on this pithos and are of special mention. The first is a Hebrew abecedary, the second a list of names, the third a fragmentary blessing, and fourth another message of blessing. These final two texts both mention "Yahweh of (the) Teman" (*COS* 2.47B). Another fragmentary text also refers to "Yahweh of the Teman" (*COS* 2.47C). Finally, an inscription formerly at the entrance to the storage room in the main building preserves a much longer text, "which was poetic in character and similar in striking ways to certain theophanic passages found in archaic biblical poetry."[62] It is this text (*COS* 2.47D) that offers some of the most striking parallels to Habakkuk 3.

The three shorter inscriptions of *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* help strengthen the connection between Yahweh and the Southland (Teman; cf. Hab. 3:3). The final inscription contains striking theophanic imagery that finds multiple points of connection with Habakkuk. God exhibits solar qualities, is on his way to battle, and is causing massive geological upheaval. All these points have parallels with our Habakkuk text.

Other Relevant Texts

Although our primary texts have been identified, a number of other texts offer some parallels to Habakkuk 3. Because these parallels are usually usually limited to a small portion of text, sometimes only a line or two, they will be discussed more briefly.

The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script contains a prayer to Ashim-Bethel, encouraging the deity to prepare his weapons for battle: "Your bow of heaven, draw it … may your hammer be good" (*COS* 1.99 XV.13-17).

The reference to Yahweh riding his horse-drawn chariots is similar to twentieth-century BC Ur III hymns, which describe the storm gods Ninurta, Enlil, and Adad thundering through the

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[59] The exception is Nili Shupak, "The God from Teman and the Egyptian Sun God: A Reconsideration of Habakkuk 3:3-7," *JANES* 28 (2001): 97–116.

[60] Ibid., 72, 78.

[61] Ibid., 78.

[62] P. Kyle McCarter, "Kuntillet 'Ajrud: Plaster Wall Inscription (2.47D)" in *COS* 2.173.

sky in their chariots.[63] A Sumerian lamentation titled "He Is a Storm, At the Howling" contains some interesting descriptions geological upheaval brought on by an approaching deity: "The heavens continually rumbled; The earth continually shook; The sun lay at the horizon; The moon stopped still in the midst of the sky."[64]

Yahweh is not the only one who marches to battle with attendants. In the Poem of Erra and Ishum, Erra, god of war and plague, has seven deities as his companions. Each control a power of nature, and march at his side to wreak havoc as Erra overthrows countries and destroys peoples (*COS* 1:113: I.1-110). Adad's appearance as a storm god in the Epic of Gilgamesh similarly features the accompaniment of two heralds, Shullat and Hanish (*Gilgamesh* 11:96-100).

The presence of Resheph (and Deber) in the Habakkuk prayer is a particular curiosity. Resheph seems to be one of the most popular West-Semitic gods, venerated in Syria (*ra-sa-ap* in Akkadian at Ebla), Palestine (*ršp* in Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Aramaic; *rešep* in Hebrew), and Egypt (*r-š-p[-w]*). Resheph (*Rašap*) is described as a god of plague and destruction in the Ugaritic *Kirta* epic, specifically as the gatekeeper of the Netherworld.[65] He is frequently mentioned in other Ugaritic ritual texts (see *COS* 1.90, 92, 94). His name is also attested in the Amarna letters, which describe him as the lord of battle and diseases, armed with a bow and arrows (*EA* 35). In Egypt, the cult of Resheph gained prominence under Amenhotep II (18th dynasty), who regarded him as protector during military enterprises.[66] In an inscription on a large statue of the god Hadad dating from the mid-eighth century BC, Panamuwa I, king of Y'dy (Sam'al), lists Rašap as one of the gods that supported him in his royal endeavors (*COS* 2.36). Azitawada mentions Baal and Resheph-*sprm* as dynastic deities in the Karatepe portal inscription (*KAI* 26). Since *Deber* is parallel to *Resheph* in Habakkuk 3, one might expect that this too is an attested deity. It has been argued by Pettinato and Dahood that *Deber* (written *dabir*) is attested in the archives from Tell Mardukh as the patron god of Ebla: "*da-bi-ir* dinger-*eb-la,*"[67] but the matter is not conclusive.

An Examination of Habakkuk 3 in Light of Parallels

Now that we have a good understanding of the parallel literature available, it is worth showing how this material illuminates or helps clarify the core of the Habakkuk 3 prayer. We will first present the portion of text under discussion (in Hebrew and English), and then explore the passage in light of our comparative work.[68]

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[63] Moshe Weinfeld, "Divine Intervention in War in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East," in *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures*, ed. M. Weinfeld and H. Tadmor (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 142-47.

[64] Mark E. Cohen, *The Canonical Lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Potomac, MD: Capital Decisions, 1988), 2:429-35.

[65] *KTU* 1.14 I 18-19; 1:82:3. See J. C. de Moor & K. Spronk, "More on Demons in Ugarit," *UF* 16 (1984), 237-240.

[66] P. Xella, "Resheph" in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (*K. van der Toorn, B. Becking and P. van der Horst, eds.; 2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 700.

[67] Hiebert, *God of My Victory,* 93.

[68] The following translation is the author's.

Habakkuk 3:3-4

v. 3	אֱלוֹהַ מִתֵּימָן יָבֹוא	*'Eloah* came from Teman
	וְקָדוֹשׁ מֵהַר־ פָּארָן סֶלָה	(even) the holy one from mount Paran. (Selah)
	כִּסָּה שָׁמַיִם הודֹו	His glory covered the heavens,
	וּתְהִלָּתוֹ מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ:	And his praises filled the earth.
v. 4	וְנֹגַהּ כָּאוֹר תִּהְיֶה	(And) his brightness was like the [sun]light,
	קַרְנַיִם מִיָּדוֹ לוֹ	he had rays [/horns] [coming out] from his hand,
	וְשָׁם חֶבְיוֹן עֻזּוֹ:	and there he veiled his power.

The prayer begins with Habakkuk describing the approach of God from the south. As we have seen in the *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* inscriptions, Yahweh was known to be associated with the south (*tmn*/*htmn*; *COS* 2.47B,C). Teman and Paran (v. 3) lie in the south, near Sinai, where Israel found refuge after deliverance from the Egyptian army at sea, and where God's formation of Israel began. Mount Paran may be an alternative name for Sinai (cf. Deut. 33:2).

Yahweh's glory covers the heavens, his praises fill the earth. He is present in all of creation—from the height of the heavens to the depth of the earth. This is not unlike the description of Aten:

When you have dawned in eastern lightland,
You fill every land with your beauty.
You are beauteous, great, radiant,
high over every land; ...
Though you are far, your rays are on earth.[69]

Indeed, God's brightness was comparable to light itself (perhaps of the sun?). The קרנים coming from God's hand has been a subject of debate, with some taking these as literal horns, other metaphorical horns (a metaphor for power), and others as describing rays of light. The context of solar imagery tips the scales toward the third option, although it is a rare usage. Thus rays of light emanate from the divine hands, as Yahweh begins to unveil his power.

Habakkuk 3:5

v. 5	לְפָנָיו יֵלֶךְ דָּבֶר	Before him marched Deber [plague],
	וְיֵצֵא רֶשֶׁף לְרַגְלָיו:	and Resheph [pestilence] came out at his footsteps.

Although it is possible that the text alludes in some way to the plagues of the Exodus, it seems more likely in light of the ANE background that verse 5 gives a description of God's semi-divine military attendants. Perhaps these are members of the heavenly council, or perhaps this is a polemic against well-known deities. It is clear that Resheph was a very prominent god in the

[69] *COS* 1.28.

ancient Near East, and it is possible that Deber should also be considered an ANE deity. At any rate, in this text these attendants are in complete submission to the Divine Warrior, ready to do the commander's bidding. Deber acts as the forerunner of the march and Resheph brings up the rear.

Similarly, Marduk also deploys attendants to prepare the way for battle (*Ee* IV 42-43). Erra has seven deities march at his side (*COS* 1:113: I.1-110), and the storm god Adad is accompanied by his two heralds, Shullat and Hanish (Gilgamesh 11:96-100). Even Baal does not fight alone—he has *Kothar-wa-Ḫasis* prepare two weapons for him, both of whose names describe their function (*ygršˇ,* "Driver," and *'ymr,* "Expeller").

Habakkuk 3:6-7

v. 6	עָמַד ו וַיְמַדֵּד אֶֽרֶץ	He stood and measured the earth;
	רָאָה֙ וַיַּתֵּר גּוֹיִ֔ם	he looked and shook the nations;
	וַיִּתְפֹּצְצוּ֙ הָרֵרֵי־ עַ֔ד	then the ancient mountains were scattered;
	שַׁחֲוּ גִּבְעוֹת֙ עוֹלָ֔ם	the everlasting hills sank low.
	הֲלִיכוֹת֥ עוֹלָ֖ם לֽוֹ׃	The everlasting ways were his.
v. 7	תַּחַת֙ אָ֣וֶן רָאִ֔יתִי אָהֳלֵ֖י כוּשָׁ֑ן	Under affliction I saw the tents of Cushan
	יִרְגְּז֖וּן יְרִיעֹ֥ות אֶֽרֶץ מִדְיָֽן׃	the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

Before Yahweh engages in his battle, he stops to survey the earth. At his mere sight the mountains are shattered—even the "ancient" and "everlasting" ones, the ones that were thought to be immovable. On the contrary, these firm hills sink low. The seismic devastation at Yahweh's theophanic approach is astounding.

An Egyptian hymn to Amun-Rê describes a similar picture of immovable mountains crumbling at the might of the deity:

Your Name is potent, your power preeminent;
even the mountains of iron cannot withstand your might! …
Earth shakes when he puts forth his cry;
all that exists is in fear of his majesty.[70]

The longer inscription of *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* parallels the first half of the Habakkuk poem in a rather exciting way. First we have a description of God's brightness (cf. 3:3-4), then the subsequent geological upheaval (cf. 3:6-7), and finally God engages in battle (cf. 3:8-9). It would appear that both these texts are drawing on a common pattern for describing a Yahwistic theophany. The inscription is as follows:

[…] When 'El *shone forth in […]*
And mountains melted, and peaks grew weak […]
Ba'l *on the day of battle […] on the day of batt[le …].*[71]

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[70] John L. Foster, *Hymns, Prayers, and Songs*, 72.
[71] *COS* 2.47D.

Cushan and Midian are likely meant to be associated with Israel's wilderness wanderings after the Exodus (Num. 31:7), and are in anguish because of Yahweh's presence with Israel (cf. Exod. 15:14-16).

Habakkuk 3:8-10

v. 8	הֲבִנְהָרִים֙ חָרָ֣ה יְהוָ֔ה	Was [your] wrath against the rivers, O YHWH?
	אִ֥ם בַּנְּהָרִ֖ים אַפֶּ֑ךָ	Was your anger against the rivers,
	אִם־ בַּ֣יָּ֔ם עֶבְרָתֶ֔ךָ	Was your fury against the sea,
	כִּ֥י תִרְכַּ֖ב עַל־ סוּסֶ֑יךָ	When you rode upon your horses,
	מַרְכְּבֹתֶ֖יךָ יְשׁוּעָֽה	your chariot of salvation?
v. 9	עֶרְיָ֤ה תֵעוֹר֙ קַשְׁתֶּ֔ךָ	You stripped the sheath from your bow
	שִׁבְעֹ֥ות מַטֹּ֖ות אֲמֶ֣ר סֶ֑לָה	calling for many arrows [?]. (Selah)
	נְהָרֹ֥ות תְּבַקַּ֖ע־ אָֽרֶץ׃	With rivers you split the earth.
v. 10	רָא֣וּךָ יָחִ֔ילוּ הָרִ֖ים	The mountains saw you and writhed;
	זֶ֣רֶם מַ֔יִם עָבָ֑ר	the raging waters swept over;
	נָתַ֤ן תְּהוֹם֙ קוֹלֹ֔ו	the deep gave [forth] its voice;
	רוֹם֙ יָדָ֣יהוּ נָשָׂ֔א׃	it lifted its hand on high.

While Yahweh is likely enemies with the sea/rivers, the rhetorical questions in v. 8 suggest that his anger is directed elsewhere. The implied answer is, "No, not this time." Though there is an old ANE tradition of the storm god engaging in warfare against the deified Sea (Marduk vs. Tiamat; Baal vs. Yamm; Yahweh vs. Rahab [Ps. 80:10]), here the implied enemy appears to be the Chaldeans of Habakkuk 1-2. In fact, the river is even an instrument in God's hands to split the earth (v. 9). Like Marduk, Yahweh mounts a chariot carried by a team of horses (*Ee* IV 50-51). God takes the bow out of its chariot-sheath, and slings his arrows. The excerpt from the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script comes to mind: "Your bow of heaven, draw it … may your hammer be good" (*COS* 1.99 XV.13-17). God, however, has no club, but only a bow (and perhaps a spear, v. 11). Marduk has both weapons (including a quiver); he

fashioned a bow and made it his weapon,
he set an arrow in place, put the bow strong on.
He took up his club and held it in his right hand,
His bow and his quiver he hung at his side. (*Ee* IV 35-38)

Habakkuk 3:11-12

v. 11	שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ יָרֵ֤חַ עָמַד֙ זְבֻלָ֔ה	The sun [and] moon stood still in their place
	לְאֹ֥ור חִצֶּ֖יךָ יְהַלֵּכוּ	at the light of your arrows [as] they sped

	לְנֹגַהּ בָּרָק חֲנִיתֶךָ׃	at the flash of your glittering spear.
v. 12	בְּזַעַם תִּצְעַד־ אָרֶץ	In fury you marched [across] the earth,
	בְּאַף תָּדוּשׁ גּוֹיִם׃	in anger you threshed the nations.

The sun and moon are not deified here, but are passive observers to the warfare. As Yahweh's arrows and spears flash through the sky, the sun and moon are stunned speechless. A Sumerian *balag* lamentation also describes the sun and moon stopping in the heavenly courses at the sight of the approaching deity: "The heavens continually rumbled; The earth continually shook; The sun lay at the horizon; The moon stopped still in the midst of the sky."[72]

Another hymn to Amun-Rê depicts the Divine Warrior and the response of the enemies and nature. Again, we see seismic activity accompanying divine rage, causing the god's enemies to surrender:

The rebels against him are down on their faces,
there are none who attack him; …
Who takes to battle trusting his strength—
mountains tremble beneath him when he rages;
Earth quakes when he utters the war-cry,
all creation is in fear and terror of him.[73]

In both these texts, God is the unrivaled champion, marching across the earth unhindered, inspiring awe and fear in all who look upon him.

Habakkuk 3:13-15

v. 13	יָצָאתָ לְיֵשַׁע עַמֶּךָ	You went out for the salvation of your people,
	לְיֵשַׁע אֶת־ מְשִׁיחֶךָ	for the salvation of your anointed.
	מָחַצְתָּ רֹאשׁ מִבֵּית רָשָׁע	You crushed the head of the house of the wicked,
	עָרוֹת יְסוֹד עַד־ צַוָּאר סֶלָה׃	uncovering [slashing?] him from thigh to neck [?]. (Selah)
v. 14	נָקַבְתָּ בְמַטָּיו רֹאשׁ פְּרָזֹו	You pierced the heads of his warriors with his own arrows
	יִסְעֲרוּ לַהֲפִיצֵנִי עֲלִיצָתָם	who came to scatter me like a whirlwind,
	כְּמוֹ־ לֶאֱכֹל עָנִי בַּמִּסְתָּר׃	rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret.
v. 15	דָּרַכְתָּ בַיָּם סוּסֶיךָ	You trampled the sea with your horses,
	חֹמֶר מַיִם רַבִּים׃	the surging of mighty waters.

In verse 13 we are given the reason for God's fierce warfare: it was for the deliverance of his people and their well-being. In order to provide security for Israel, God crushes the leader's

[72] Mark E. Cohen, *The Canonical Lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 2:429-35.
[73] John L. Foster, *Hymns, Prayers, and Songs,* 78.

head, slashing (lit. uncovering) him from bottom to top. Then he takes care of the remaining warriors, piercing them with the very arrows of their leader. The enemy had come to scatter and "devour" God's people, but they are destroyed instead. In verse 15 Yahweh's enemies are again personified as the sea, which God tramples with his chariot team. Not even the mighty surging waters outside the sphere of the Divine Warrior's dominion (cf. Exod. 15:8).

In the conflict in *Enuma Elish*, Marduk first pierces Tiamat's belly, then throws down her corpse and stands on it in victory. Then Marduk disposes of Tiamat's aides, who had begun to scatter. Finally, Marduk smashes Tiamat's skull with his club, and splits her body in two (*Ee* IV 101-110, 130-139). This parallels Yahweh's activity of attacking the enemy with arrows, smashing his head, and disposing of his warriors, and trampling the enemy corpse. In the Ugaritic myth Baal also crushes the head of his enemy Yamm (*CAT* 1.2 IV 24-25), and proceeds to dismember his enemy (IV 27). In both these mythological texts, however, the reason for this battle is the (self-focused) promotion of the warrior; in Habakkuk it is solely for the (selfless) protection of Yahweh's people.

Conclusion and Implications

Our study has proven fruitful in unpacking the imagery of Habakkuk 3 in light of its ANE parallels. Paying close attention to the genre of the Habakkuk composition directed us toward hymnic compositions (i.e., the Great Hymn to Aten) and mythic literature (i.e., *Enuma Elish,* the Baal Cycle). It is clear that the text has the strongest connections to this Babylonian, Egyptian, and Ugaritic literature, confirming our original classification of the chapter as a prayer psalm containing mythic imagery. The inscriptions of *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* have provided a unique help in understanding the text, suggesting that both authors are drawing on an established Hebrew theophanic pattern. And finally, other excerpts from texts have filled in gaps in understanding the seismic activity, the characters of Deber and Resheph, and Yahweh's battle gear.

Contrary to Tsumura, it seems that there is more to the text than only imagery depicting a human king going to war.[74] Though our text does not seem to be directly dependent on Babylonian or Ugaritic mythic material, the parallels are too striking to ignore. The author appears to be using common linguistic, thematic, and stylistic elements to depict Yahweh as the Divine Warrior in a way that is reminiscent of Marduk or Baal. While Yahweh attacks his enemies in similar fashion to these gods, important contrasts must be highlighted as well. Yahweh is not in any way defending nor acquiring his kingship, but is exercising his dominion for the deliverance of his people (cf. Exod. 15:2). There is no tension in the text as to who will win. In fact, God does not suffer any attack; the most the enemy does is cry out and raise his fist in defiance (3:10).

We can say the same of the Egyptian hymnic material. Texts like the Aten hymn help us key in on the solar imagery used to describe Yahweh. God's brightness fills the earth and inspires praise. Seismic activity even accompanies the approach of Amun-Rê, inspiring terror in his enemies. But despite exhibiting solar qualities, Yahweh is not a sun-god. God displays greater personality, emotion, battle skill, and purpose in his warfare than do the Egyptian gods.

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[74] D. T. Tsumura, "The 'Word Pair' *qšt and *mṭ," 361.

Although it has not been within the scope of this paper, we will close by drawing attention to the wealth of Exodus imagery in the Habakkuk psalm. The mention of Teman and Paran (Deut. 33:2), Cushan and Midian (Num. 31:7; cf. Exod. 15:14-16), God's control of the waters (Exod. 15:8-10), and his defeat of enemies for the salvation of his people (Exod. 15:1-2) all direct the reader back to the Exodus. Andersen has noted that despite the complexity surrounding the mythological imagery and historical statements, the composition's "historical memories are closer to the Exodus than to any other known event. … The March of Yahweh is, accordingly, a march from the desert into Egypt via Sinai to rescue his people (v 13)."[75] As the Chaldeans threaten to invade, Habakkuk reaches back to this foundational Hebrew story, appealing to the theological memory of Yahweh's mighty acts of old. Indeed, in the face of the Babylonian exile, "Israel's hope for the future was the expectation of a new Exodus."[76] The prophet's plea for the present crisis is that Yahweh's ancient feat of deliverance be repeated.

God's mighty acts in the beginning, from dividing the waters at creation, to redeeming his people in the Exodus through the Reed Sea, exist as prototypes for later revelations of God's power. This is the very "deed" that Habakkuk asks Yahweh to revive in 3:2. Yahweh's great acts of deliverance have been described in "mythic terms" before (i.e., Exod. 15, Deut. 33., Judg. 5, etc). Reading texts like Habakkuk 3 in light of ancient Near Eastern myths and hymns sensitizes us to the mythological language of foundational narratives, wherein the supreme deity establishes his kingship and sets the world in order. These cosmic prototypes from the past give context and meaning to present realities.

Israel's foundational narrative was the Exodus, and it is this very language that is reused again in Habakkuk's new context. As he subdued the waters, so will he subdue the Chaldeans; as he defeated the pharaoh of Egypt, so will he defeat the leader of "the house of the wicked" (v. 13). This echo of the Exodus "does no more than simply insist that Yahweh is consistent; as he dealt with one threat in one crucial era of history, so he will meet another in this present era."[77] For Habakkuk, the future never "breaks free" of the past, but is defined by it. The past is what gives vital perspective to life in the present.[78]

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[75] Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 292. See also M. E. W. Thompson, "Prayer, Oracle and Theophany: The Book of Habakkuk," *TynBul* 44:1 (1993), 34-53.

[76] Ibid., 340.

[77] Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel,* 220. Cf. Robertson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah,* 241: "God's great deliverance at the Red Sea clearly provides one of those points of solidarity to which the tried faith of God's people may return over and over."

[78] "…the requested or promised redemption is grounded in its unity and continuity in the past. The mythic prototype thus provides a dual service: it enables the historical imagination to assess the significance of certain past or present events; and correlatively, it projects a configuration upon future events by which they are anticipated and identified" (Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 356).

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