Chaos, Kingship, Councils, and Couriers:

A Reading of Habakkuk 2:1-4 in its Biblical and Near Eastern Context

Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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Graduate Program in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

The Ohio State University

2013

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Abstract

Habakkuk 2:4b is a prominent proof-text in several early Judaic writings. This thesis analyzes Hab 2:4 along with the preceding three verses and the rest of the book of Habakkuk. This analysis is conducted in light of the kingship and council of Yahweh, closely related institutions which frame the issues raised by the book of Habakkuk and lay the foundation for an analysis of 2:1-4. The kingship of Yahweh demonstrates the link between Yahweh’s battle with the sea in Habakkuk 3 and the problem of injustice raised in in Habakkuk 1, while the council of Yahweh provides an important backdrop to Habakkuk’s intercession in ch. 1 and to the messenger-witness of Hab 2:1-4. This thesis concludes that Hab 2:1-4 describes the speedy delivery of legally confirmed tablets by a messenger whose faithful testimony will result in the survival of the righteous.
To my parents
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the following persons:

My colleagues in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, who have been a joy to work alongside and have stimulated by thinking in countless new directions.

Naoki Fuse of Ohio State’s Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, who expertly translated David Tsumura’s “An Exegetical Note on Hab 2:3a” into English from Japanese. Quotations from the article in this thesis represent Fuse’s translation. Thanks are also due to Professor Tsumura for graciously emailing me a copy of the article, which I was unable to obtain through Ohio State’s interlibrary services, and to my friend Brent Potter, who located professor Tsumura’s contact information.

Dr. Daniel Frank, who has offered thoughtful advice throughout my time at Ohio State and been a model of friendliness and warmth.

My advisor, Dr. Samuel Meier, who has taught me over the last three years what it means to be a rigorous scholar and teacher, a clear thinker, and an honest seeker of truth. He has been a gracious, patient, and generous source of help and guidance.

My wife Theresa and our daughter Adelaide, who have cheerfully come along for the ride as I have worked on this thesis. I could not have asked for better companions. Theresa
regularly offered her own time and energy to accommodate my work, and for this I am greatly in her debt.

Finally, my parents, who sparked my love of learning and my love of the Bible. I dedicate this thesis to them with deep gratitude for the countless ways they have provided support and encouragement at every step of my education.
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Major field: Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

vi
Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................................ ii

Dedication ......................................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................ iv

Vita .................................................................................................................................................... vi

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................. vii

Abbreviations ................................................................................................................................... ix

Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2: Chaos and Kingship ......................................................................................................... 5

  2.1 Justice and kings in the ancient Near East and the Bible ......................................................... 5

  2.2 The battle with the sea and justice in Habakkuk ......................................................................... 12

  2.3 Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 15

Chapter 3: Kings and Councils ........................................................................................................ 17

  3.1 Aspects of the divine council in the Bible and the ancient Near East ..................................... 17

  3.2 Prophetic intercession at the divine council in Habakkuk 1 ...................................................... 25

  3.3 Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 39

Chapter 4: Councils and Couriers ................................................................................................. 41

  4.1 Legal terminology in Habakkuk 2:1-4 ....................................................................................... 43
4.1.1 The meaning of b'r in Habakkuk 2:2 ................................................................. 44
4.1.2 The legal function of tablets in Habakkuk 2:2.................................................. 46
4.1.3 The meanings of yāpēaḥ and ‘wd in Habakkuk 2:3 ........................................ 47
4.1.4 Yahweh's answer in Habakkuk 2:2 as a legal response .................................. 51
4.1.5 Criteria for reliable witnesses in Habakkuk 2:3-4 ............................................. 51
4.1.6 The šaddîq in Habakkuk 2:4b ........................................................................ 53
4.1.7 The righteous shall live .................................................................................... 56
4.1.8 Summary ........................................................................................................ 59

4.2 Messenger language in Habakkuk 2:1-4............................................................... 59
  4.2.1 Messengers in the Bible and in the ancient Near East .................................. 60
  4.2.2 The qôrē' as herald in Habakkuk 2:2 ............................................................ 63
  4.2.3 "So that he may run" in Habakkuk 2:2b ........................................................ 65
  4.2.4 Messengers and speed ................................................................................... 68
  4.2.5 Messengers and their tablets ....................................................................... 70
  4.2.6 Habakkuk as a watchman ............................................................................ 72
  4.2.7 Excursus: A messenger in Habakkuk 2:4a? ............................................... 75
  4.2.8 Summary ...................................................................................................... 77

4.3 Habakkuk's messenger as a divine witness ......................................................... 77

4.4 Directions for further research ....................................................................... 80

4.5 Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 81

Chapter 5: Conclusion .......................................................................................... 83

Bibliography .......................................................................................................... 85
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Anchor Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>1QpHab</td>
<td>The <em>pesher</em> on Habakkuk from Qumran, cave 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>8ḤevXIIgr</td>
<td>The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Naḥal Hever, cave 8</td>
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<td><em>b. Mak.</em></td>
<td>Tractate Makkot of the Babylonian Talmud</td>
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<td>BDB</td>
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<td>CBQ</td>
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<td>JBL</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Habakkuk 2:4b is justly famous. Commonly translated “the righteous shall live by his faith,” it is interpreted in the Habakkuk Pesher from Qumran (1QpHab 8.1-3), plays a significant role in the arguments of three New Testament books (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38), appears in a very early Midrash (Mek. R. Ishmael, Beshallah 7), and serves in the Talmud as a condensation of the six hundred thirteen commandments of the Torah (b. Mak. 24a). Not surprisingly, this verse has generated a large number of studies, many focusing on its use in the New Testament.¹ Other studies focus on the textual variation of Hab 2:4b in its early Greek translations.² This thesis aims to contribute to the continued study of Hab 2:4b, focusing on its context in the Hebrew Bible. Specifically, Hab 2:4b will be considered in the context of the three verses which precede it, in turn keeping in mind the kingship and the council of Yahweh as the implicit conceptual backdrop of these verses and of the book of Habakkuk as a whole.


The kingship of Yahweh in the context of the divine council has been foundational for study of the Hebrew Bible since the idea first received scholarly attention in the middle of the twentieth century.\(^3\) Despite important studies which have continued to treat these topics,\(^4\) and despite Habakkuk often being understood as a cult prophet\(^5\) (which may have connected him with visions of the divine council),\(^6\) no study of the divine council or of the book of Habakkuk of which this author is aware considers the council as a possible context for the book overall or for 2:1-4.\(^7\) Nonetheless, keeping the divine council in mind while

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\(^6\) Kingsbury notes a possible connection between the feast day of Yahweh, celebrated at the new year, and scenes or visions of the council of Yahweh described in the Hebrew Bible (cf. “The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh”).

reading Habakkuk not only lends coherence to the book as a whole, but also provides a helpful context for making sense of 2:1-4. Further, thinking in terms of the divine council opens new possibilities for making sense of aspects of 2:1-4 which have resisted explanation.

This thesis argues that there are two main layers of the conceptual backdrop of the book of Habakkuk. The first layer is the kingship of Yahweh. When the responsibility of kings for maintaining justice—as well as the method through which the divine king accomplished this task—is brought to bear upon the book of Habakkuk, the conceptual link between Habakkuk chs. 1 and 3 comes into focus. This part is dealt with in chapter 2, “Chaos and Kingship.” The second layer of the conceptual backdrop of Habakkuk is the idea of the divine council. Although kings were an important part of the political systems of the ancient Near East, they often operated in the context of assemblies (or “councils”) of various sorts which limited their power. This was especially true of the divine realm. Two additional parts of Habakkuk come into greater focus when one recognizes the relationship between Yahweh and his council: Habakkuk’s intercession in ch. 1 and Yahweh’s response in 2:1-4. Habakkuk’s intercession and its relation to the divine council will be discussed in chapter 3, “Kings and Councils.” Yahweh’s response will be discussed in chapter 4, “Councils and Couriers.” Chapters 1 and 2 set the stage for chapter three by establishing that the problem of injustice drives the action of the book of Habakkuk, and by establishing

that not only the divine king but the divine council as well are involved in the resolution of this problem. This resolution is described in Hab 2:1-4, the report of Yahweh’s response to Habakkuk.

The analysis of Yahweh’s response in ch. 3 of this thesis will require more detailed attention to a number of philological advances in the last generation of biblical scholarship, as well as an attempt to develop a creative hypothesis to make sense of this evidence. This hypothesis is that Hab 2:1-4 describe the operation of a messenger who will provide testimony concerning a vision written on a legally confirmed document, an activity which makes the most sense when viewed in relation to the divine council. Despite the advantages of reading Hab 2:1-4 in this way, however, there are still significant unanswered questions under this hypothesis. Is this messenger summoning a defendant to court in order to testify before the heavenly assembly? Or is this messenger functioning as a herald who publicly proclaims a divine decree? Neither hypothesis seems to explain fully the evidence and, lacking a more plausible specific scenario, what remains is a vague sketch rather than a detailed description of the process described in these verses. Still, recognizing that the most likely context for the legal procedure underway in Hab 2:1-4 is an appeal for justice to the divine king in his council is a step forward in what many have recognized as one of the most difficult passages of one of the more obscure books of the Hebrew Bible.⁸

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Chapter 2: Chaos and Kingship

This chapter deals with the responsibility for justice of kingship in the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible, specifically as these ideas connect ch. 3 of Habakkuk to ch. 1. The following chapter will deal with the “assembly,” an institution related to kingship and more relevant to Habakkuk chs. 1-2. Yahweh's battle in Habakkuk 3 is an example of a typical solution to a specific problem found throughout ancient near eastern literature. This solution is a cosmic battle for kingship which makes possible the ordering of the cosmos, a prerequisite for justice (ṣdq). The cosmic battle responds to the threat of disorder or injustice, the same threat at work in the book of Habakkuk.

2.1 Justice and kings in the ancient Near East and the Bible

In ancient near eastern literature, the responsibility for any failure to administer justice was to be traced to the king over the realm in question. The single role of the king combined the responsibilities of both judges and warriors for preserving justice and order. ⁹ This is indicated in part by the use in Hebrew of the same group of words—all related to the root ṣdq, meaning “justice” or “righteousness”—to describe the activities of all three roles.

Place judges [šōpē] and officers for yourselves in all your gates...so that they may judge [šp] the people a judgment [mišpāt] of justice [sedeq]...Justice [sedeq], justice alone [sedeq], you shall pursue... (Deut 16:18, 20).

May Yahweh your god be blessed, who delights in you and placed you on the throne of Israel! Because Yahweh loves Israel forever, he made you king, in order to do judgment [mišpāt] and justice [šadāqāh]! (1 Kgs 10:9; cf. Isa 32:1; Ps 9:1, 4).

Yahweh, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the field of Edom, the earth trembled, indeed the sky dripped, indeed the clouds dripped water! The mountains flowed before Yahweh! Even Sinai! before Yahweh, the god of Israel... ...they recount the just deeds [šadāqāh] of Yahweh, the just deeds [šadāqāh] of the peasants of Israel... (Judg 5:4-5, 11)

The king’s actions as both judge and warrior are described as “justice” (ṣdq). This common terminology suggests that the roles of kings, judges, and warriors overlapped in a substantial way. The common appearance of “judges” in military roles reinforces this overlap. In the book of Judges, only Deborah actually “sits” for “judgment” (4:4-5). The rest of the judges are military leaders, and the angel’s statement to Samson’s parents appears to capture the general expectation for these judges: “he will begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines” (13:5; cf. 1 Sam 9:16; 2 Sam 3:18). On the other hand, the role of military savior (cf. 1 Sam 18:7; 25:28; 2 Sam 3:18; 5:1-10) sometimes shifted to that of judicial savior (cf. 2 Sam 15:2-6; cf. 2 Sam 8:15; 1 Kgs 3:9), again suggesting that the roles of king, warrior, and judge were fluid.

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10 Translations from the Hebrew Bible are the author’s unless otherwise noted. English versification has been used throughout.

11 For a discussion of kings’ role as judges, see Keith W. Whitelam, The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel, JSOTSup 12 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979).
As in the Bible, kings throughout the ancient Near East were expected to administer justice, especially for the "widow, orphan, and the poor." An Ugaritic address of Yaṣṣib, son of Kirta, reflects this priority:

You do not judge the case of the widow,
Nor do you judge the case of the wretched.
You do not drive out the oppressor of the poor!
You do not feed the orphan before you,
Nor the widow behind you!...

Descend from the kingship that I might reign,
From your dominion that I might sit enthroned over it!

Ultimately, kings who do not rule justly for all their subjects are deposed by a higher authority or overthrown by their subjects (cf. 1 Kgs 12:16). Further, when one was concerned that justice had not been properly administered, there could be no better place to turn than to a just king (cf. 2 Sam 23:3-4; Ps 82:1-3; 96:7-13; 98:7-9; 99:4).

Ancient near eastern literature speaks of the divine king in terms similar to human kings. One of the most prominent biblical passages regarding the necessity of just rulership in the divine realm is Psalm 82. While this Psalm is one of the more controversial texts of


13 Mullen, The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature, 235.

14 Cf. Raymond Westbrook, who writes, "continued legitimacy depended on the king fulfilling the mandate that the gods assigned to him, the most important element of which from the legal perspective was the duty to do justice" (A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law, Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section One: The Near and Middle East 72 [Leiden: Brill, 2003], vol 1, 26).
the psalter, many have understood it as follows: Yahweh stands in the "council of El" (i.e., the assembly of divine beings) to bring an accusation against the elohim ("deities"). What is his charge?

82:2 How long will you judge with injustice, and show partiality to the wicked [rāšā']?
3 Give judgment for the weak and fatherless, the afflicted and the poor!
4 Rescue the weak, and deliver the needy from the hand of the wicked [rāšā']!

This passage illustrates that ruling with justice was essential for the divine king no less than for his human counterpart and that this important feature characterized Yahweh’s rule as well. Yahweh's unique responsibility for Israel may be represented in the textual variants of Deut 32:8 found in the LXX and DSS, which perhaps describe the allotment of the nations to various divine beings. Yahweh’s just protection of his allotted people is depicted in


passages like Isa 26:9, "when your judgments [mišpāt] are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn justice [ṣedeq]" and Isa 33:5, "Yahweh is exalted; indeed, he dwells on high. He fills Zion with judgment [mišpāt] and justice [ṣadāqāh]."

The divine "king of kings," 17 however, was responsible for administering justice not only in a particular realm, but in the cosmos as a whole. In the polytheistic world of the ancient Near East, this king achieved cosmic order, justice, and stability through a cosmic battle in which he defeats the forces of destruction and death as manifested in the Sea, the single most powerful manifestation of evil, death, and disorder. 18 Defeating this enemy is the method by which other deities like Marduk and Baal achieved their prominence and their status as "kings." 19 Both myths participate in a common mythic narrative, adapted in various contexts, in which Sea is defeated before creation can commence and order be

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17 Cf. Handy, Among the Hosts of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy, 112.


established. Yahweh is included among those deities who conquer Sea. The defeat of the Sea by Yahweh is depicted in passages like the following from Isaiah:

51:9 Arise! Arise! Put on strength, arm of Yahweh!
    Arise as in the days of antiquity,
    as in the generations of ancient times!
    Was it not you who hewed Rahab,
    who pierced Dragon?
10 Was it not you who dried up Sea,
    the waters of Great Deep?
    Who made a road in the depths of Sea,
    so the redeemed ones could pass over? (cf. also Isa 27:1)

For the divine king to establish order in the cosmos defeating this opponent was the key to success. The following Psalms also depict this battle:

77:16 The waters saw you, Elohim,
    the waters saw you and writhed!
    Indeed, the deeps trembled!
17 The clouds poured forth water,
    the skies gave thunder.
    Indeed, you arrows shot back and forth!
74:12 Elohim is my king from antiquity,
    who performs deeds of salvation in the earth.
13 You divided Sea in your strength,
    you broke the heads of the dragons upon the waters.
14 You crushed the heads of Leviathan,
    you gave him as food to the desert creatures...
16 Yours is the day, and so is the night;

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you established a luminary, that is, the sun.

17 You established all the boundaries of the earth; summer and winter, you fashioned them.

18 Remember this, Yahweh, an enemy reproaches, and a foolish people despises your name!

19 Do not give the life of your dove to beasts! Do not forget the life of your poor forever!\(^1\)

Ps 74 depicts Yahweh's primordial defeat of Sea (vv. 13-17) which identifies him as king (v. 12) and qualifies him to offer protection to those in need (v. 19; also cf. Ps 89). For those seeking justice from the divine king Yahweh's defeat of Sea was an important statement of this king's power to execute the justice they desired.

It is important to note why the responsibility for the administration of justice ($dq$) delegated to kings—divine and human—is connected to the defeat of Sea. The full meaning of this complex of words comes to light in part by comparison with the Egyptian word Maat. In Egypt, Maat was the ordering principle of the cosmos, sustained by the human king who was closely connected to the divine king.\(^2\) $dq$ functions in a similar way in the Hebrew Bible. An act of $dq$ by the divine king is an act with cosmic consequences that dispels disorder and on some level repeats what happened at creation.\(^3\) This conception of $dq$

\(^{1}\) Cf. Ex 15; Ps 29; 93; 114; Job 38:4-11 for other depictions of this battle.


\(^{3}\) For various perspectives on the relationship in the Hebrew Bible between creation and the battle with the Sea, cf. Loren R. Fisher, “Creation at Ugarit and in the Old Testament,” VT 15
makes sense of the use of this word to describe the actions of judges, kings, and warriors, all of which oriented towards protecting the order of the community and the cosmos.

Yahweh's righteous acts include not only his legal judgments, but his defeat of the enemies of his covenant people, for these enemies threaten the existence of šdq in the community. Yahweh's defeat of Sea, which represents a cosmic threat to the order and flourishing of creation, is also an act of righteousness, ensuring and restoring order (šdq) in the cosmos.

2.2 The battle with the sea and justice in Habakkuk

Habakkuk 3 has often been understood as an appendix of some sort to the first two chapters of the book. While it is true that Habakkuk 3 is a different literary genre than chs. 1-2, this third chapter nonetheless provides a fitting resolution to the problems raised in ch. 1. Several aspects of Habakkuk 3 indicate that this chapter includes the theme of the defeat of chaos and that this is in fact an entirely appropriate response to the problems Habakkuk raises in ch. 1.

The first indication that a cosmic battle is underway in Hab 3 is Yahweh’s march from the east. At the beginning of the chapter, Yahweh comes from Teman and Mount Paran (v. 3). "Teman" is commonly associated with the land of Edom, southeast of the Dead Sea, where Esau’s descendants settled (cf. Gen 36:10-11; Jer 49:7-8; Ezek 29:13-14; Obad 9).


Mount Paran is associated with Seir, another name for the country of Edom (Gen 36:8-9; Num 24:18; Deut 33:2). Both terms are ways of indicating the land east of Canaan associated with the descendants of Esau.

These associations indicate that in Hab 3:3, Yahweh comes from the southeast. Most likely, Yahweh’s dwelling was understood to be located on Sinai in Seir/Edom, from where Yahweh sometimes emerged to wage war against his cosmic enemies and to establish himself as the cosmic king, providing protection for his people. Yahweh comes from the this location in Deuteronomy (33:2-3, 26-29) and Judges (5:4-5, 19-23, 31) with the purpose of waging war for his people, and since he appears here in military fashion (3:3-7), one would expect a similar purpose in Habakkuk 3.

In addition to his march from Sinai, vv. 8-15 of Habakkuk 3 depict Yahweh’s battle with the sea. The translation difficulties of this section are abundant. For this reason, Anderson’s 2001 translation serves here as a guide:

3:8 Was thine anger against the rivers, Yahweh? Was thy rage against the rivers? Was thy fury against the sea? When thou didst mount thy horses, thy chariots of deliverance?
9 Thou didst strip the cover from thy bow, Seven clubs thou didst bring to view.
10 The mountains saw thee and writhed; the cyclone passed over; the abyss gave forth its voice.

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The exalted sun raised his hands,  
the princely moon stood still;  
thine arrows went streaming to the light,  
thy flashing javelin to the bright one.  

In thine anger thou didst trample the Earth;  
in thy rage thou didst thresh the nations.  

Thou didst march out to deliver thy people,  
to deliver thy messiah thou didst come.  
Thou didst mash the head of the wicked,  
Thou didst slash them from backside to neck.  

Thou didst smash their heads with thy two maces.  
Their hair thou didst scatter to the wind.  
Thou didst gloat over them...  
like the oppressed feasting in the secret place.  

Thou didst trample the sea with thy horses,  
Thou didst churn up the many waters.  

It is difficult to miss the thematic connections of this passage with the mythic narratives concerning the defeat of the sea. Following a common interpretation, however, Anderson argues that despite the abundant terminological overlap between Hab 3:8-15 and "the revolt of the sea against Yahweh," this revolt is not in fact to be found in Hab 3. Although he provides compelling evidence for his position, Anderson does not interact with the arguments of Hiebert to the contrary. Whether Anderson's metaphorical interpretation or Hiebert's literal interpretation is correct, however, both support the idea that Yahweh's defeat of the Sea is used in Habakkuk 3 as a response to the injustice described in ch. 1.

Many have observed that Habakkuk is concerned with the problem of injustice. Indeed, this concern is hard to miss:

28 Ibid., 341.  
1:2  How long, Yahweh, will I cry out, and you do not hear?
   I call out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save.
3  Why do you show me injustice, and look upon trouble?
   Oppression and violence are before me!
   There is strife! Contention arises!
4  Therefore instruction [tôrâh] grows slack,
   and judgment [mišpâṭ] does not go forth successfully.
   Indeed, a wicked person [râšâ'] encompasses the righteous person
   [haṣṣaddîq],
   therefore judgment [mišpâṭ] is confused.

The fundamental problem of Habakkuk 1 is that justice (ṣdq) has not been properly
administered. Complaints concerning this issue are not directed to an “unmoved mover” or
to empty space. They are directed to the king. In Habakkuk's case, this king is Yahweh. It is
clear from that it is appropriate to understand Habakkuk's complaint as one which can only
be solved by the divine king. This is true whether the evildoers of these verses are Judeans
or foreigners. In light of the evidence in this chapter, it is also clear that Habakkuk 3 is an
entirely appropriate response to the problems raised by Habakkuk. The institution of order
(ṣdq) by the divine king through victory over Sea is the ultimate solution to the problem
described in these opening verses.30

2.3 Conclusion

   The purpose of this chapter has been to delineate the conception of kingship at work
in the Bible and in Habakkuk. This notion of kingship is implicit in Habakkuk 3, which
narrates the mythic defeat of the sea by the divine king, whose subsequent enthronement

30 It is interesting that the disorder in ch. 1 is in fact described in terms of the “fish of the
sea...who have no ruler” (v. 14). It seems fitting that order is instituted in Habakkuk by the
defeat of the sea and the enthronement of the divine ruler of all of creation.
makes possible the enactment of justice (ṣdq). This starting point establishes the
conceptual framework and thematic unity of the book of Habakkuk. This analysis is
foundational for the role of the divine assembly in Habakkuk, which is the theme of the
following two chapters.
Chapter 3: Kings and Councils

The previous chapter focused on the responsibility of kings for administering justice. Kings, however, did not operate in a vacuum; rather, they often functioned in relation to assemblies. The following two chapters will discuss how the divine assembly makes sense of the intercession of Habakkuk 1 and Yahweh’s answer to Habakkuk in 2:1-4. Not only the divine king, but also his council, is an essential aspect of the conceptual background of the book of Habakkuk.

3.1 Aspects of the divine council in the Bible and the ancient Near East

It is perhaps easy to imagine all kings possessing absolute authority of the sort which the decrees of the Persian monarchs, for instance, seem to possess in the book of Esther (e.g., 5:3; 7:9-14). It appears that from early on, however, the power of kings was often limited in some way by the authority of popular assemblies of various sorts. In some situations, the authority of these assemblies seems even to have surpassed that of kings. Thorkild Jacobsen’s classic analysis, for instance, suggested that ancient Mesopotamian assemblies belonged to a political system which he termed “primitive democracy.” With the exception of texts from the Old Assyrian city council of Assur, however, such primitive democracy is preserved only in the Mesopotamian myths and is strikingly absent from the

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31 Even here, however, we find that, “Collegiality pervaded all levels of the Persian bureaucracy” (Westbrook, A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law, vol 2, 865).

32 Ibid., vol 1, 27.
historical documents we possess. While the assembly of the gods in these myths possesses ultimate sovereignty, it would sometimes elect a provisional leader (i.e., a “king”) for emergency situations. This provisional leader served as a military hero and eventually instituted himself as a permanent political fixture. Gradually, it seems, there was a shift from the assembly to the king as the center of power, a shift which had stabilized by the times of the great empires which stretched across Mesopotamia over the course of its long history.

Building upon and refining the work of Jacobsen, Daniel Fleming has found resources for fresh analysis of the relationship between kings and councils in the work of Mesoamerican archaeologist Richard Blanton. “Ultimately, it is impossible to examine the collective or group-oriented element of ancient political life except as part of a dynamic system that involves both individual ’exclusionary’ and collective aspects, each with its own ideologies and spheres of activity.” In such systems, the corporate and the exclusionary

33 Jacobsen, "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia."


35 Ibid., 137–140. Cf. Moshe Weinfeld, “Congregation (Assembly),” in Encyclopaedia Judaica, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, vol. 5, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2007), 160, “The parallel democratic institutions in ancient Mesopotamia (puḫrum), the old Hittite Kingdom (pankuš) and ancient Greece (βονλη) were convened for similar reasons, and like the ’edith in Israel, the democratic institutions there decreased in importance as the kingdom became more stable.”


remain in permanent tension. The same sorts of processes, developments, and complex
dynamics may also be found at work in the Hebrew literature of ancient Israel.

There are several Hebrew words which may designate a council or assembly. Sôd, which may sometimes refer to “confidential discussion” or a “secret” (Ps 64:2; 83:3; Prov 15:22), also regularly designates a “circle of confidants” in both the human and divine realms:

Thus says Yahweh of armies, “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They delude you with visions of their own minds. They do not speak from the mouth of Yahweh...For who stands in the assembly [sôd] of Yahweh? Who sees and hears his words?... If they had stood in my assembly [sôd] and listened, they could have spoken to my people... (Jer 23:16, 18, 22; cf. Ezek 13:9; Ps 111:1)

Môêd is another word which designates an assembly, for example, “princes of the congregation [‘êdâh], famous in the assembly [môêd]” (Num 16:2). Isa 14:13 tells of the har môêd “mount of assembly (of the gods)” (cf. perhaps Lam 2:6). The meaning of môêd is evident in cognate languages as well. A more obscure Hebrew word used to designate an assembly is dôr. In addition to sôd, môêd, and dôr, two common words which designate

38 Ibid., 222–223.
42 This word was not recognized until comparative research brought it to light in the problematic Amos 8:14, where derek “road” was revocalized by F. J. Neuberg to read dôrakâ,
assemblies are qāhāl and ‘ēdāh. According to Moshe Weinfeld, the “assembly” of the people is a specific group which acts in behalf of the nation as a whole.\textsuperscript{43} Indeed, prior to the monarchy, this assembly was the basic governing institution of the people of Israel (Num 31:13-14; Judg 20:1-2; 21:25; 1 Sam 8:4-5), capable at times of challenging even the leadership of Moses (Num 16:2-3).

It was conceivable to the authors of the Hebrew Bible that divine as well as human beings could assemble in these sorts of governing bodies.\textsuperscript{44} We read of the ”assembly [qāhāl] of the holy ones” praising Yahweh (Ps 89:5). “Holy ones” here most likely refers to Yahweh’s heavenly armies, as in the early Greek texts of Deut 33:2, “Yahweh came from Sinai...with ten thousand holy ones,”\textsuperscript{45} or Zech 14:5, “then Yahweh my god will come, and all his holy ones with him” (cf. Ex 15:11; Job 15:15; Dan 8:13).\textsuperscript{46} These heavenly armies were most likely part of Yahweh’s council. We also read, “Yahweh\textsuperscript{47} stands in the council [‘ēdāh]

\textsuperscript{43} Weinfeld, “Congregation (Assembly),” 158.

\textsuperscript{44} In addition to the passages already considered, several further passages in which the divine assembly—specifically, the heavenly throne-room—is referenced or described are 1 Kgs 22:19-22; Isa 6:1-8; Zech 3:1-7; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Ps 29:1-2, 9-10; 58:1; 89:6-8; 103:20-22; 148:2; Dan 7:9-28. Also cf. Min Suc Kee, ”The Heavenly Council and Its Type Scene,” \textit{JSOT} 31 (2007): 259–273.


\textsuperscript{46} Cf. Mullen, \textit{The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature}, 190–192.

\textsuperscript{47} Although the MT reads elohim here, at the beginning of this verse and in v. 8 of the same chapter, elohim probably stands for an original ”Yahweh;” cf. Zakovitch, ”Psalm 82 and Biblical Exegesis,” 216.
of El, he judges in the midst of the deities [elohim]” (Ps 82:1). As noted above, the elohim ("deities") of this verse are on trial for failure to administer justice in their respective realms. Here the ‘ēdāh serves a judicial function, similar to that in Num 35:12, where the ‘ēdāh brings judgment (mišpāṭ):

And the cities [of refuge] shall be for you a refuge from the redeemer [of blood] so that the murderer does not die until he stands ['md] before the assembly ['ēdāh] for judgment [mišpāṭ]. (cf. Josh 20:6)

As Yahweh stands in Psalm 82 to bring judgment against the corrupt elohim, so the guilty murderer must stand before a judge to receive his sentence. It appears, then, that both divine and human assemblies could serve in a judicial capacity.\(^48\) In addition to Psalm 82, the prologue to the book of Job (chs. 1-2; cf. 10:17; 16:8, 19; 19:25; 33:23) as well as Zechariah’s vision of the trial of the high priest Joshua (3:1-10) also demonstrate this function. In line with this judicial aspect of the council, an important function of the divine council in the Bible was to act as the ordering force of the cosmos.\(^49\) Like kings, councils provided leadership through judgment.\(^50\)

In addition to its "judicial" role, the divine council also served in an "executive" capacity. As in the Ugaritic myths, in Israel the decree of Yahweh was proclaimed at the


\(^{49}\text{Miller, “Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament: The Divine Council as Cosmic-Political Symbol,” 56.}\)

council and carried out by its members. Frank Cross analyzed this phenomenon in several passages in Deutero-Isaiah. The plural imperative verbs found in these passages are the characteristic feature which identifies proclamations to the council: “strengthen” (35:3), “comfort” (40:1), “prepare” (40:3), “declare” (48:20), “build up” (57:14), “sing for joy” (52:9), “pass through” (62:10). There is no explicit addressee in the text for these plural directives, a fact which historically perplexed commentators. But Cross argued that ancient readers would have understood the addressees without explicit explanation; these addressees are the members of Yahweh’s council. This is perhaps especially evident in Isaiah 40, where the imperative verbs (“comfort,” “prepare,” “make straight,”) are addressed to a plural audience, not to an individual.

Similar statements to a group with no explicit identity are found in Gen 1:26, “Let us make humans in our image” (cf. Gen 3:22; 11:7). The idea that Yahweh here addresses his council was in fact recognized by Jewish interpreters as early as the fifth century C.E. in the midrash on Gen 1:26. It is clear that the Rabbis understood the Holy One to be taking counsel with the angels as he created humans. Genesis 1 and Isaiah 40, then, serve as examples of the proclamation of a decree to the council, which is responsible for implementing that decree.

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The executive function of the heavenly assembly is also evident in divine warfare.\textsuperscript{55} The “hosts of Yahweh” are the heavenly armies whose commander appears to Joshua (Josh 5:14-15), who stand around Yahweh in his throne room (1 Kgs 22:19), who carry out the will of Yahweh (Ps 103:21), and who praise him alongside the heavenly messengers (Ps 148:2). When Yahweh goes to battle, these armies go with him, as in Deut 33:2 and Zech 14:5. They are also seen at work at several points in the Deuteronomistic History (2 Sam 5:22-29; 2 Kgs 6:15-19; 7:6).\textsuperscript{56} In the Hebrew Bible, then, one cannot in fact completely separate the reign of the king from the operations of the council. The “notion of the divine council...underscores the fact that we do not have simplicity without complexity in the divine world and the governance of the cosmos.”\textsuperscript{57}

One of the most unique aspects of the depiction of the divine assembly in the Hebrew Bible is the role of dialogue in the decision-making process. While one could turn to Isaiah 6 or Job 1-2 for dialogue in the divine assembly, 1 Kgs 22:19-22 is sufficient to establish the point. Not trusting King Ahab’s “official” prophets who promise military victory, King Jehoshaphat asks if there are any other prophets of Yahweh. Ahab sends for Micaiah, who reports what he has seen concerning the fate of Ahab:

I saw Yahweh, sitting on his throne. All the army of heaven stood around him, on his right and his left. Yahweh said, “Who will entice Ahab, so that he goes up and falls at Ramoth Gilead?” One said this and another said that,

\textsuperscript{55} Cf. ibid, 184; Patrick D. Miller, “The Divine Council and the Prophetic Call to War,” Vetus Testamentum 18 (1968): 100–107.

\textsuperscript{56} Miller, “Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament: The Divine Council as Cosmic-Political Symbol,” 59.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 56.
until a spirit\textsuperscript{58} came forth, stood before Yahweh, and said, “I will entice him.” Yahweh responded, “How?” He said, “I will go and be a spirit of deception in the mouth of all his prophets.” He said, “You shall entice. Indeed, you shall prevail. Go and do so.” (1 Kgs 22:19-22)

Here Yahweh asks for advice and discusses a problem with his council until an acceptable solution is reached.

The idea that Yahweh takes counsel before making decisions is also apparent in Amos 3:7, “Adonai Yahweh does not act on a matter unless he reveals his counsel [sōd] to his servants the prophets.” Elsewhere, prophets like Abraham (Gen 18:22-33), Moses (Ex 32:7-14), and Amos (7:1-6) had the capacity to change Yahweh’s mind, doing so by pleading, discussing, and reasoning with him to reverse decisions he already seems to have made.\textsuperscript{59} Terence Fretheim spells out the theological implications of this reality:

While this passage [Amos 3:7] may sound as if God announces a series of faits accomplis to the prophets, the examples cited above [Gen 18:22-33; Ex 32:7-14; Amos 7:1-6] suggest another interpretation. Namely, God reveals his secret to the prophets precisely in order to draw them into the sphere of decision making with respect to the future of the people. God does nothing without consultation!...“the prophet becomes a sine qua non of divine action.” But even more, consultation with the prophet becomes a sine qua non.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{58} In addition to “spirit,” the Hebrew word ruāḥ means "breath" and "wind," metaphorically referring as well to a "messenger," a meaning it probably carries here. Ps 104:4, for instance, reads, “He makes his messengers winds [ruāḥ], his ministers a flaming fire” (cf. Ps 18:10; 148:8; Job 30:22).

\textsuperscript{59} On this topic, see the helpful discussion in Meier, Themes and Transformations in Old Testament Prophecy, 19–37.

In describing Yahweh, the divine king, refusing to act without the expert consultation of his prophets, the authors of the Hebrew Scriptures have followed depictions of Yahweh’s human counterparts. Indeed, the counsel of King David’s adviser Ahithophel was so highly regarded that it was compared to “the word of elohim” (2 Sam 16:23). Comments such as these suggest that, at least in some cases, kings took the words of advisers extremely seriously. In the case of Yahweh and his prophets, who were members in good standing of the divine assembly, the same reality is at work. In light of this evidence, R. Joshua b. Levi’s comments seem entirely appropriate: Yahweh “may be compared to the case of a king who had...advisers, and he would do nothing without their express approval.”

3.2 Prophetic intercession at the divine council in Habakkuk 1

The previous section discussed that the presence of dialogue, sometimes manifested through prophetic intercession, is a distinct feature of the divine assembly in the Hebrew Bible. The book of Habakkuk gives several indications that Habakkuk himself should be understood in a similar role. In particular, the plural imperatives of Hab 1:5 constitute a declaration by Yahweh to the divine assembly, a declaration whose justice Habakkuk explicitly questions. There is no likely human candidate for this declaration, which suggests that one should look for an alternative audience. Habakkuk frames this declaration to the divine council with his own statements regarding its injustice. Finally, Hab 1:12b may be read as a wish rather than a statement, constituting an explicit request by Habakkuk for

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Yahweh to judge the Chaldeans. If these arguments are sound, they lead to the conclusion that Habakkuk 1 does not in fact constitute a true “dialogue” between Habakkuk and Yahweh, as it has often been understood. Rather, it is Habakkuk's critique of Yahweh's declaration and his request for a further declaration which Habakkuk believes will bring about a more just situation. Yahweh’s actual response to Habakkuk occurs only in 2:2. This collective evidence points to the divine council as an important context for understanding the first chapter of Habakkuk.

Before discussing the intercession of Habakkuk 1, there are two aspects of the book (which were already noted in the discussion of the divine king) that presuppose the divine council. These suggest that one should not be surprised to find additional evidence of the divine council in Habakkuk. First, as is often the case, members of the divine council go to war with Yahweh in Habakkuk 3, which describes the victory of the divine king over the Sea. Here, Yahweh does not go to battle alone, but marches with his attendants, Deber (“Pestilence”) and Resheph (“Plague”) (Hab 3:5). Resheph, a well-known west Semitic deity, “could be invoked in the assembly when the concern was for progeny... [and] could also accompany the warrior-god in combat.” While less is known about Deber, it is possible that Deber was also part of the divine assembly, and hence part of the divine army as well (cf. 1 Chr 21:12, where one of David’s options for his punishment is “pestilence [deber] in the land, even an angel of Yahweh, a destroyer...”).

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63 The dialogue is commonly understood to consist of four parts: Habakkuk's complaint (vv. 2-4), Yahweh's response (vv. 5-11), Habakkuk's second complaint (vv. 12-17), which states Habakkuk's dissatisfaction and confusion at Yahweh’s response, and Yahweh’s second response (2:2ff), which explains that Habakkuk must wait patiently.

Second, in light of the responsibility of kings and councils for maintaining, Miller argues, that “at the key point where the issue of the justice of God and the problem of undeserved suffering comes to the fore, the divine council is the setting or the occasion for the raising of the issue.” Habakkuk’s complaint is precisely that of the “issue of the justice of God and the problem of undeserved suffering” (cf. Hab 1:4b, 6b, 13; 2:6b, 8-10, 12, 15, 17). If Miller is correct, then, Habakkuk’s complaint in 1:2-4, 12-17 falls under the jurisdiction not only of the divine king, but of his council as a whole.

In addition to these two aspects of the book of Habakkuk which belong in the broader context of the divine king and his council, Habakkuk 1 as a whole belongs naturally in this context as well. This is especially evident in the plural imperatives of v. 5, which are part of a shifting pattern from a single addressee (Habakkuk speaking to Yahweh; 1:1-4) to multiple addressees (Yahweh speaking to a group; 1:5-11) back to a single addressee (Habakkuk speaking to Yahweh; 1:12-17). These plural imperatives are easily understood as an address to the council of the sort detected by Cross in Deutero-Isaiah and by many others in Gen 1:26 (see 3.1). Hab 1:5 reads, “Look among the nations! Gaze and be horrified! Be astonished! For I am doing a deed in your days which you will not believe when it is told!” Whom do these plural imperatives address? Suggestions in the major commentaries have been “the prophet’s address to the people,” an oracle of salvation, “a

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65 Miller, “Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament: The Divine Council as Cosmic-Political Symbol,” 68, 70. Italics in original.


67 Haak, Habakkuk, 14.
Judean audience,"68 or "either Judah or some particular group within Judah."69 These suggestions are influenced by Humbert’s form-critical analysis of Habakkuk, in which the prophet functions as a liturgical intermediary between the people and Yahweh.70 This form-critical analysis demands that Hab 1:5 be addressed to the people.71 If Floyd is right, however, that “In the final analysis, the compositional form of this section of Habakkuk cannot be defined in terms of a dramatic exchange, liturgical or otherwise,"72 then there is no longer any need to assume, as most commentators have, that the addressee of the speech is Judah or some group within it.73 There are four additional reasons why it makes little sense to think of Yahweh addressing the people of Judah in this verse. These combined reasons leave the divine council as the most likely addressee in Hab 1:5.

(1) A common interpretation understands Hab 1:5-11 as a response from Yahweh regarding the complaint brought in behalf of the oppressed “righteous” of 1:4. The problem with this interpretation is that there is nothing in vv. 5-11 which would be relevant to an oppressed Judean audience. This response contains the announcement that Yahweh is


69 Floyd, Minor Prophets: Part 2, 106.


raising up the Chaldeans\textsuperscript{74} to invade and devastate the nations of the world, an announcement that would not be encouraging to a group of oppressed Judeans. Further, as Anderson notes, if vv. 5-11 were intended to be a rectification of the problem raised in vv. 2-4, one would expect some indication in the book of Habakkuk that justice had been brought about by the vicious (1:6-9) Chaldeans. But there is no hint of this. Rather, the Chaldeans have simply and unjustly taken that which is “not their own” (1:6; 2:6), oppressing multiple nations (1:5, 17; 2:5, 8).\textsuperscript{75}

(2) If not the righteous, does it make sense to think of the “wicked” as the addressees of vv. 5-11? There are both formal and contextual grounds to suggest that it does not. On formal grounds, if vv. 5-11 were addressed to the “wicked” of 1:4, they would be a prophetic statement of judgment, announcing imminent punishment by the Babylonians. But if this were the case, one would expect these verses to have something in common with other prophetic statements of judgment. Although Westermann’s influential argument that the “judgment-speech” is the “basic form of prophetic speech” may be an overstatement, his analysis of this form is nonetheless insightful.\textsuperscript{76} In the judgment-speech,

\textsuperscript{74} Although nineteenth and early twentieth century commentators suggested a wide range of dates, identifications, and textual emendations for Habakkuk’s “Chaldeans,” more recent scholarship has tended to accept the text as it stands and understood the Chaldeans as a reference to the Neo-Babylonian Empire (c. 626-539 B.C.E.). Cf. Haak, \textit{Habakkuk}, 108, 114; Sweeney, \textit{The Twelve Prophets}, 2:465; Floyd, \textit{Minor Prophets: Part 2}, 105; Anderson, \textit{Habakkuk: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary}, 24–27.


judgment is announced for wrongs committed. Admitting some variation, this form typically involves a reason for the announcement, as well as an explicit addressee.\textsuperscript{77} When directed against a nation, "it usually includes a large number of transgressions," because a large number is required in order for judgment to be brought upon an entire nation.\textsuperscript{78} None of these elements are present in Hab 1:5-11, so it appears unlikely that this section is addressed to an audience whose punishment will be carried out by the Babylonians. Contrast this situation with, for instance, that in the book of Isaiah, where the Assyrians have been summoned to punish the Judeans (10:5-11). Here it is explicit that the Assyrians are coming "against a godless nation" (10:6), and by this point in the book we have already been treated to multiple chapters detailing just how "godless" Judah has become.

(3) In addition to form-critical considerations, two aspects of the book of Habakkuk suggest that the "wicked" does not refer to a group of Judeans. If this evidence were compelling, it would make more sense to think of 1:5-11 as an intensification, continuation, or explanation of 1:2-4, rather than as a response in a dialogue.\textsuperscript{79} The first reason for the identification of "the wicked" with the Chaldeans is found at the end of ch. 3, where Habakkuk says, "I await the day of distress to overtake the nation that invades us" (v. 16). This nation appears to be identified with "the house of the wicked" (3:13) earlier in this

\textsuperscript{77} Westermann, \textit{Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech}, 97, 130–131.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 170.

chapter. If the invading nation and the house of the wicked are the same, it would suggest that the invading nation (1:6) and the wicked (1:4, 13) of ch. 1 are also the same.\textsuperscript{80}

The second reason for the identification of the wicked with the Chaldeans is the great continuity of vocabulary between chs. 1 and 2, suggesting that the evildoers in ch. 2 are also to be grouped with those of chs. 1 and 3. Below, this verbal continuity is demonstrated by noting key words which are repeated in chs. 1 and 2. The “crimes” are delineated in section (A), followed by the “punishments” in (B). These correspondences focus on the unjust oppression carried out by the Chaldeans and the way this same oppression will be brought upon the Chaldeans in the future:

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(A)] \textbf{1:2} How long ['ad-\textsuperscript{anāḥ}, Yahweh, will I cry out, and you do not hear]?...
\item 6 See, I am raising up the Chaldeans!—
a bitter and impetuous nation,\textsuperscript{81}
marching through the breadth of the earth
to dispossess abodes not his own [lō' lō].
\item 7 He is terrible and dreadful;
judgment and sovereignty proceed from him.
\item 9 All of him goes out to violence [ḥāmās],
the entirety of their faces are forward,
and he gathers captives like sand.
\item[(B)] \textbf{2:6b} Woe to the one who acquires what is not his own [lō' lō]—\textsuperscript{82}
for how long ['ad-mātay]?—
who multiplies debt.
\item 7 In an instant, won’t your creditors arise,
and your collectors awake?
You will be profit for them.
\end{enumerate}


\textsuperscript{81} The antecedent of the following masculine singular pronouns is the noun “nation” in this verse.

\textsuperscript{82} This phrase occurs in biblical Hebrew only here and in Hab 1:6.
Since you, you plundered [šl] many nations, all the remainder of the peoples will plunder [šl] you— from human blood and violence [ḥāmās] to land, to a city and all its inhabitants.

Surely the violence [ḥāmās] of Lebanon will overwhelm you, and the oppression of Behemoth will terrify— from human blood and violence [ḥāmās] to land, to a city and all its inhabitants.

The key words here have to do with the violent exploitation of other nations for personal gain and security. Because the Chaldeans violently took things belonging to others and profited from them, their debts will suddenly be called in (1:6; 2:6b; 2:7-8). The oppression carried out by the Chaldeans will come back upon them in the future.

These correspondences suggest that the unpunished guilt of the Chaldeans is in fact one of the primary themes of the book of Habakkuk. Because so much space is devoted to laying out their crimes and specifying the appropriate punishments, it is hardly likely that there is a second group of guilty persons involved in the book of Habakkuk. For this reason, it makes sense to view the announcement of the impending invasion of the Chaldeans of 1:5-11 as a continuation of the problem that Habakkuk raises in 1:2-4. The most likely audience for an announcement of this sort, which Habakkuk patently understands as unjust, is the divine council. Only if 1:5-11 entailed salvation or judgment for some group within the book would it make sense as an announcement to the people. But strong reasons for such an interpretation are lacking.

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83 Cf. Haak, Habakkuk, 70–76.

84 Similar correspondences may be noted in 1:10; 2:5b-6a—both of which contain various terminology for scoffing and mocking—and 1:11; 2:19-20—both of which are connected by the word rūaḥ "breath/wind" and the contrast between the Chaldean's might and Yahweh in his temple.
(4) In the end, the identity of the “oppressors” or “wicked” (rāšā’) of Hab 1:4 is not the only decisive factor in determining the addressees of Hab 1:5, for Yahweh conceals his plans as often as he reveals them. Habakkuk 1:5-11 is most likely not an announcement of judgment or salvation, but an announcement to the divine council of Yahweh’s plans regarding the Chaldeans. Similar secret plans may be found in 1 Kings 22 when the spirit volunteers in the council to entice Ahab. Similarly, in Job 1-2, the test of the righteous man Job is completely hidden from all but the council and its members. In Isaiah 6, the only human with access to the proceedings of the council is Isaiah himself, but instead of informing the people of these proceedings, Isaiah is commanded as follows:

6:7 Make fat the heart of this people!
Make their ears heavy!
Make their eyes blind!
So that they cannot see with their eyes,
or hear with their ears,
or understand with their heart.
Otherwise they might turn and be healed.

Far from informing the people of the coming devastation, Isaiah is instructed to fill a role similar to the spirit of 1 Kings 22—he is to prevent the people from being aware of their coming punishment. These passages suggest that we should have a category when reading Hebrew literature for Yahweh hiding his plans from his people, revealing them only to a select group. As Meier notes, the “divine council is the body to whom God characteristically reveals his plans, and it is probably presupposed here [in Hab 1:5] as well…” 85 Thus, in addition to the lack of any plausible human audience for the announcement of Hab 1:5, it

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would not be surprising to find Yahweh making decrees to which only the members of his council were privy. This is the most plausible scenario for the plural imperatives of Hab 1:5.

Although there are strong reasons to believe that Hab 1:5 makes little sense when understood as an address to a Judean audience, it is still unclear why 1:5-11 is placed where it is. If the “wicked” of 1:4 are the Chaldeans, why is the announcement of their arrival delayed until 1:5, after Habakkuk’s initial complaint? Building on the work of Richard Weis, Michael Floyd and David Cleaver-Bartholomew answer this question by arguing that the announcement of 1:5-11 is chronologically out of place. Rather than constituting a new piece of information or a response, they argue, it is an earlier oracle concerning which Habakkuk seeks new revelation in his complaint of ch. 1. Taking a similar line of interpretation, Anderson suspects that 1:5-11 may be an unmarked quotation by Habakkuk of an earlier decree of Yahweh, rather than a response by Yahweh to Habakkuk’s words in 1:2-4. Understanding Hab 1:5-11 as such a quotation would lend greater coherence to the passage as a whole. A supplementary insertion of the sort often provided in modern English


translations in cases of unmarked quotation (e.g., “you say” in Job 21:19 [NASB, ESV, NRSV, NJPS, NEB]) would suffice here to make the point:

1:5  You said, "Look among the nations!
Gaze and be horrified! Be astonished!
For I am doing a deed in your days
which you will not believe when it is told!..."

This small insertion does no violence to the meaning of the passage. In fact, it clarifies a chapter that has long seemed to lack a unifying principle. If 1:5-11 is a quotation, then Habakkuk 1 may be understood from start to finish as a complaint and an intercession regarding the decree of Yahweh in these verses.

Despite the attractive ability of Anderson’s suggestion that Hab 1:5-11 is a quotation to provide coherence to Hab 1, one need not insist on this interpretation to accept the point which Anderson, Weis, Cleaver-Bartholomew, and Floyd attempt to make in various ways. Each argues that Hab 1:5-11 represents an extension of the verses which precede it rather than a response to them. Whatever literary devices one identifies here, this approach is

89 Also see the translations below, which insert quotation marks or a phrase such as “he said” in the following passages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ps 109:6-19</th>
<th>Job 21:19</th>
<th>Job 42:3-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RSV</td>
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<td>NRSV</td>
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<td>ESV</td>
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<td>NAB</td>
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<td>NABRE</td>
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<td>NASB</td>
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<td>NIV</td>
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<td>HCSB</td>
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<tr>
<td>Message</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>NET</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJPS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEB</td>
<td>only v. 6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>emends 42:3 and removes 42:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJB</td>
<td>only v. 6-15</td>
<td></td>
<td>emends 42:3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
helpful, for as Anderson notes, one must otherwise read “a great deal between the lines, as commentators usually do.” Conversely, if one understands 1:5-11 as a quotation (Anderson), a flashback (Cleave-Bartholomew), or an element of a special prophetic genre (Weis), the intelligibility and coherence of the chapter is strengthened.

Similar unmarked direct speech in medias res may be noted in the famous opening of Deutero-Isaiah: “Comfort, comfort my people…” (Isa 40:1). While the scene here begins with Yahweh’s speech, the implicit setting at the divine council is the same as that in Habakkuk 1. Yahweh’s speech continues for two verses before giving way to that of the heavenly herald, who instructs further characters (most likely members of the divine council as well) to “prepare the way of Yahweh” (v. 3). Although Yahweh’s response in Habakkuk 1 has traditionally been understood to extend through vv. 5-11, one might also think of it concluding with v. 6. Under this interpretation, vv. 7-11 would be the beginning of Habakkuk’s response rather than the conclusion of Yahweh’s speech. One advantage of this reading is that the tone of vv. 7-11—which describes the violence and arrogance of the Chaldeans—in fact fits closely with that of vv. 2-4 and vv. 12-17, where Habakkuk protests the injustice of the Chaldeans. This possibility is also attractive because it substitutes a seven-verse unmarked quotation with a two-verse unmarked quotation. This length is more typical of the short unmarked statements at the heavenly council found elsewhere (e.g. Isa 35:3-4; 40:26; 57:14; 62:10-12).

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The implicit setting of this chapter at the divine council is also suggested by Habakkuk’s intercessory stance throughout the chapter. In particular, v. 12a—where Habakkuk’s calls Yahweh “from antiquity” and “my holy one”—highlights this stance. A “holy one” in some cases designates a member of the heavenly army (cf. 3.1), a meaning it appears to carry as well in Hab 3:3 (“Eloah came from Teman, a holy one from Mount Paran...”). Exodus 15 explains, “Yahweh is a man of war” (v. 3) and asks, “Who is like you among the gods, Yahweh? Who is like you, glorious among the holy ones?” (v. 11).93 Similarly, Yahweh’s being from qedem “antiquity” indicates his power and justice as king, as well as his deeds in behalf of his people “in the days of antiquity”:

Ps 74:12 Elohim is my king,  
working from antiquity [qedem]  
salvation in the midst of the land.94

Habakkuk mentions these two characteristics of Yahweh—his “antiquity” and his “holiness”—in order to appeal to Yahweh’s commitment to his people as their king. Yahweh is the eternal king of Israel, the holy one who fights in their behalf today just as he did in the days of old. How could he have brought this undeserved punishment upon Israel? Habakkuk’s reasoning here is classic prophetic intercession, for Habakkuk challenges Yahweh’s decisions by appealing to Yahweh’s character and his relationship with Israel (cf.

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94 Also cf. Deut 33:27; Isa 9:7; 45:21; 46:10; 51:9-10; Jer 10:10; Mic 5:2; 7:20; Ps 29:10-11; 44:1; 55:19; 68:33; 74:2; 77:5, 11; 143:5; Job 29:2; Lam 1:7; 2:17; 5:21.
Gen 18:25; Ex 32:13-14). One could even understand v. 12b as a wish rather than a statement:95

Yahweh, would that you would ordain them for judgment! 
Rock, would that you would establish them for reproof!

Read in this way, Habakkuk 1 is a coherent complaint and intercession regarding the injustice of Yahweh’s decree about the Chaldeans. Habakkuk quotes, protests against, and argues with Yahweh concerning this decree throughout the first chapter of the book that bears his name.

Understanding Habakkuk 1 as a confident intercession by Habakkuk, who stands in the council of Yahweh to challenge the decree of the divine king, paints a different picture of this prophet than the one sometimes presented. Habakkuk has been depicted by some as a sensitive individual experiencing something like a “dark night of the soul” through which he learned to see with the eyes of faith. After an agonizing period of waiting, this sensitive prophet finally received a vision in which he transcended his burning uncertainty and obtained a message that would provide hope to the masses.96 The problem with such interpretations is not only that they miss Habakkuk’s confident intercession in ch. 1, but that they read modern notions of the self into Israelite prophetic experience. Habakkuk may have experienced dread due to the overwhelming power of Yahweh (3:16), but there is


not strong evidence in the prophetic writings that prophets ever doubted the authenticity of their prophetic experience. This is a modern and anachronistic depiction of prophetic experience based on notions of the self such as “inwardness” with which Habakkuk did not operate. Heschel is more accurate than others when he writes, “The prophet does not volunteer for his mission; it is forced upon him. He is seduced, he is overwhelmed. There is no choice...Thus even beyond the moment of the encounter, the prophet remains subject to the compelling power of his experiences.” Habakkuk is no exception to this rule. However one solves the literary and grammatical problems of Habakkuk 1, it is clear that Habakkuk seeks in this chapter to challenge the divine king to administer the justice expected of him. This responsibility, however, was not limited to the divine king, but included his council, and there is strong evidence to suggest that the divine council is an implicit but important layer of the conceptual backdrop of Habakkuk 1.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter has built upon the discussion of kingship in chapter 1 by noting that the divine council was an essential aspect of the governance of the cosmos, operating in dynamic tension with the king. Unique among humans, prophets were members of the divine council, and hence were also permitted to participate in the rule of the divine king, influencing and even challenging his decisions. Habakkuk 1 may be read as an instance of such prophetic intercession, an interpretive key which allows one to find a cohesive thread

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through the entire chapter. With this background established, we may now move on to what is certainly the most influential and controversial part of the book. Here, too, the divine council provides an important backdrop which sheds new light on the persistently challenging Hab 2:1-4.
Chapter 4: Councils and Couriers

We have covered significant ground to reach Habakkuk 2:1-4. There are two main points this thesis has sought to establish so far. The first point was the responsibility of the institution of kingship for maintaining justice or order (ṣdq). The divine king in ancient near eastern literature and in the Bible accomplishes this task in part by defeating the sea, which embodies the forces of disorder, chaos, and injustice. Habakkuk 3 utilizes this mythic theme to resolve the problem of injustice raised in Habakkuk 1. The second point was that although divine kingship is an essential concept for understanding Habakkuk, the divine council is equally important. In the book of Habakkuk, the march of the divine warrior and Habakkuk's raising the question of justice point clearly to the essential role of the divine assembly in the conceptual backdrop of the book. Further, the role of dialogue in the divine assembly is manifest in Habakkuk's intercession of ch. 1.

These two points are essential background for the discussion of Hab 2:1-4 that follows, for they establish that the rectification of injustice by the divine king and his council through prophetic intercession is the basic idea of the book of Habakkuk. This being the case, one would expect Hab 2:1-4 to relate in some way to the broader movement of the book. This chapter argues that Yahweh's response in Hab 2:1-4 in fact describes legal proceedings which should also be understood against the backdrop of the divine king and council. Specifically, legal terminology and messenger activity in Hab 2:1-4 may be combined and applied to a single figure who participates in the legal proceedings initiated
by Habakkuk's intercession of ch. 1. The basic picture which emerges is that Hab 2:1-4 involves the speedy delivery of a vision written on tablets by this figure, who will testify concerning this vision "at the appointed time" (2:3). This agent is perhaps issuing a court summons to a defendant or publicly announcing a royal decree.

Below is our translation of Hab 2:1-4, which may serve as a point of reference for what follows. Any rationale for translation decisions not provided in the notes below will be offered in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

2:1 On my post I will stand,
that on my rampart I might station myself,
in order to keep watch
to see what he will say to me,
and what I will respond\(^9^9\) concerning my argument.

2:2 And Yahweh answered me and he said,
'Write and confirm a vision on the tablets,
so that the one who heralds them may run.

2:3 For he will testify to the vision at the appointed time,\(^1^0^0\)

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\(^9^9\) Here I follow the reading of the MT and LXX. While the reconstruction of this word in 1QpHab as yāšîb is preferred by some translations (e.g., NRSV, NAB[RE], NJB), it lacks strong textual support. James Charlesworth notes, in fact, that in 1QpHab "it would be possible to restore...'how I will answer his charge' " (The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations: Volume 6b: Pesharim and Related Documents [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1994], 170).

\(^1^0^0\) It is tempting to understand mō’ēd in Hab 2:3 as a reference to the divine assembly (as in Isa 14:13), especially because one could understand qēṣ as an obscure reference to the assembly from which Yahweh's armies proceed (cf. Isa 13:5; 14:13; Ps 48:2; 48:10). However, it would seem that in order to maintain this meaning, one would have to understand the preposition l prefixed to mō’ēd and qēṣ in a spatial sense: he testifies at the assembly and at the end. This use is relatively unattested, given the over twenty thousand occurrences of this preposition in biblical Hebrew (but cf. Gen 4:7; Ex 26:27; Ps 9:4; Prov 9:14; 2 Chr 3:13; also cf. Ernst Jenni, Die Hebräischen Präpositionen: Band 3: Die Präposition Lamed [Stuttgart: Verlag W.
he will witness at the end, and he will not lie.
He will certainly not hesitate, wait for him!
He will surely come, he will not delay.

2:4 Behold, his throat within him is swollen, it is not smooth.
But the righteous will live by his faithfulness.

4.1 Legal terminology in Habakkuk 2:1-4

Hab 2:1-4 contains a great deal of legal terminology which has only been recognized in the last generation of biblical scholarship. The meanings of the words b’r and yāpēāh in particular have been understood more clearly by recent comparison with wisdom literature and by comparative linguistics. This understanding has in turn shed light on the legal connotations of seven other important words in these verses: ‘nh “answer,” ‘ōd “still,” lūhōt “tablets,” kzb “to lie,” ūmūnāh “faithfulness,” ṣaddiq “innocent,” and ḫyḥ “to live.”

Kohlhammer, 2000], 260, rubrik 815, “Orientierung an Einrichtung”). This suggests that we should understand mō’ēd as a time rather than a place. This interpretation is supported by the combination of the preposition l and the noun mō’ēd, which almost always means “at an appointed time.” God tells Abraham, lammō’ēd “at a set time” he will return and Sarah will conceive (Gen 18:14); and just as God said, Sarah bore the son lammō’ēd “at the set time” (Gen 21:2; cf. Ex 23:15; 1 Sam 20:35). The most significant alternative meaning is “until the appointed time” (cf. 1 Sam 9:24; 13:8), but this idea is essentially the same: it refers to what will happen at the actual appointed moment. It does not refer to something moving towards this moment, as Hab 2:3 has so often been read. Many translations, for example, read “for” an appointed time in Hab 2:3 (NEB, KJV, NJPS, NRSV, NASB), which seems to indicate that the vision “awaits” (NIV, ESV) its time or that it still “has its time” (NAB). These misunderstandings have obscured that lammō’ēd should be understood as “at the appointed time.” This leads to the conclusion that ‘ōd hāzōn lammō’ēd in Hab 2:3 means, “he witnesses to a vision at the appointed time.” Jenni’s analysis confirms this interpretation, for his places lammō’ēd in Hab 2:3 in his eighth Haupteinteilung, “Lamed adverbiale,” in the eighth rubric, “Zeitbestimmung mit begrenztem Intervall” (“designation of a time within a limited interval”) (ibid., 272–273).

4.1.1 The meaning of $b'r$ in Habakkuk 2:2

The word $b'r$ has been translated in a variety of ways. Some examples are “to make plain” (V, KJV, RSV, NRSV, NIV, ESV, NABRE; cf. T102), “to inscribe” (NEB, NASB, NJB), “to inscribe clearly” (NJPS), and “to display/exhibit” (8ḤevXIIgr [ekphainai]). More recent research has sharpened our understanding of the meaning of $b'r$. David Tsumura suggests that $b'r$ should be understood in light of its Akkadian cognates burru and bâru, which mean, “to establish the true legal situation (ownership, liability, etc.) by a legal procedure involving ordeal, oath, or testimony.”103 Tsumura cites a Babylonian text which reads, “When the written testimony was made out, it was written without witnesses having confirmed [u-bi-ir-ru] it by oath, now let witnesses under oath (also) confirm [li-bi-ir-ru-šu] it.”104 In light of this evidence, argues Tsumura, one should recognize a two-fold legal implementation of a document in the command of Hab 2:2 (“write a vision and $b'r$ it on tablets”). This legal implementation would have included a written text as well as confirmation of that text by witnesses. Detecting an AXB syntactic pattern, where the phrase “write and confirm” (A and B) is interrupted by “vision” (X), the direct object of both words, Tsumura translates the first line of Yahweh’s response in Hab 2:2, “Write and confirm the vision on tablets!”105

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105 Tsumura, “Hab 2 2 in the Light of Akkadian Legal Practice,” 295.
Joachim Schaper concurs with Tsumura’s analysis, supplementing it with a study by Georg Braulik and Norbert Lohfink which analyzes the other two biblical uses of the word בָּר (Deut 1:5; 27:8). Schaper argues that in Deuteronomy, בָּר does not refer back to an earlier law which Moses expounds throughout the rest of the book. Rather, בָּר looks forward to texts contained in Deuteronomy itself. For Schaper, “this Torah” in Deut 1:5 “is best understood as cataphorically referring to the Torah of Deuteronomy 5-28...and thus [בָּר] cannot mean ‘to interpret’ or ‘to expound’.” Rather, it must mean, “to confirm.”

Schaper argues that because each of the three uses of the verb בָּר in biblical Hebrew make the most sense when understood with the meaning “to confirm,” the relationship between בָּר and the Akkadian words burru and bâru suggested by Tsumura is the best explanation of the evidence. According to Schaper, one should in fact understand בָּר as an Akkadian loan word used by the final editors of Deuteronomy for whom the word had become commonplace during the exile. Schaper writes, “there is really not even a conceptual shift from the meaning of the Akkadian term to the meaning of the Hebrew: both signify confirmation—confirmation that puts the document in question in force.” Based on these arguments, it is best follow Schaper and Tsumura’s understanding of בָּר as signifying...

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108 Ibid., 230.
legal confirmation of what is written on the tablets in Hab 2:2. The legal understanding of \( b'r \) suggested by these studies strongly suggests a legal interpretation of Hab 2:1-4.

4.1.2 The legal function of tablets in Habakkuk 2:2

Closely related to the legal significance of \( b'r \) is the common legal function of tablets. Elsewhere in biblical Hebrew, tablets are qualified by \( ha'ēdāh \) “assembly” (Ex 31:18; 32:15; 34:29), perhaps indicating a legal function (cf. Ps 82:1). On tablets are written the words of an agreement (\( bǝrît \)), presumably to serve as a witness (Ex 34:28; cf. Deut 4:13; 5:22). In Isaiah, tablets are explicitly designated as a witness for a future time ( Isa 30:8, in most of the versions and two Hebrew mss, but not the MT). Elsewhere in Isaiah, an inscription on a cylinder-seal (NAB) (\( gillāyôn \)) seems to require witnesses for confirmation of some sort ( Isa 8:1-2). The very common legal use of tablets is evident elsewhere in the ancient Near East. In light of this evidence, it is not surprising to find tablets in Hab 2:2 as fulfilling a legal function as well, a major clue that a legal procedure is underway.

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109 Curiously, although it is included in Anderson’s bibliography, the work of Tsumura is not even mentioned by Smith (Micah-Malachi), Roberts ( Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary ), Haak ( Habakkuk ), Floyd ( Minor Prophets: Part 2 ), Sweeney ( The Twelve Prophets ), Anderson ( Habakkuk: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary ), or O’Neal ( Interpreting Habakkuk as Scripture: An Application of the Canonical Approach of Brevard S. Childs ). Seybold, however, takes note of Tsumura’s work and translates \( b'r \) as “beurkunden” “to certify” ( Nahum Habakkuk Zephanja ).

110 Cf. the NRSV, “Take a large tablet and write on it…and have it attested for me by reliable witnesses…” ( Isa 8:1-2 ).

4.1.3 The meanings of yāpēaḥ and ‘wd in Habakkuk 2:3

As with b’r, the precise meaning of yāpēaḥ in Hab 2:3 has long been elusive. Nonetheless, more recent research has shed new light on this word too, indicating that it belongs in a legal context as well. Yāpēaḥ has variously been translated “to speak” (KJV, NRSV, NIV), “to hasten” (RSV, NASB, NJB, ESV), “to arise” (LXX [anatellō]), “to appear” (V, 8HēvXIIgr [enphainō]), “to press on” (NAB), “breathless haste” (NEB), “is fixed” (T), “a witness” (NJPS, NABRE), and “witnesses.” The last two translations, “a witness/to witness,” reflect the most recent research by scholars like Dennis Pardee.

After reviewing the Ugaritic evidence, Pardee concludes that yph was the “regular Ugaritic word for ‘witness’ as a socio-economic entity.” He then notes that while most Hebrew dictionaries acknowledge a verbal adjective yāpīaḥ “witness” in Ps 27:12, interpreters have usually understood yāpīaḥ in Proverbs (6:19; 12:17; 14:5, 25; 19:5, 9) as a finite verb, traditionally understood to mean “breath out.” Because yāpīaḥ occurs in poetic parallelism with ‘ēd “witness” in each of these verses, however, Pardee argues that it is more natural to understand yāpīaḥ in these six occurrences in Proverbs as a nominal cognate of the Ugaritic yph “witness.” Pardee notes that one could also emend ‘ōd “still” to ‘ēd “witness” in Hab 2:3, yielding the same poetic parallelism. Janzen makes a similar argument regarding the meaning of yāpēaḥ in Hab 2:3, stating that in light of the poetic

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112 Cathcart and Gordon, *The Targum of the Minor Prophets*, 150.


parallelism $yāpīaḥ / 'ēd found in Proverbs, there is little choice but to emend the text of Hab 2:3a to read 'ēd “witness” rather than 'ōd “still”\textsuperscript{116}.

Although the parallel $yāpīaḥ / 'ēd is a strong one, and despite the acceptance by many commentators of the emendation of 'ōd to 'ēd in Hab 2:3a, there are two reasons to question this emendation. The first is lack of textual support. The DSS read ‘wd “still,” LXX/8HVIIgr read eti “still/yet,” V reads adhuc “still,” T reads “ready.”\textsuperscript{117} Further, the book of Daniel seems to have the phrase $kī 'ōd from Hab 2:3a specifically in mind in 10:14; 11:27, 35.\textsuperscript{118} The very earliest witnesses are unanimous, then, in reading Hab 2:3 as the Masoretes read it.\textsuperscript{119}

The second reason that one should hesitate before emending 'ōd to 'ēd is that 'ōd need not be emended in order to make it fit with the legal context of the verse. Tsumura argues that 'ōd should be understood as a Qal infinitive absolute from ‘wd “to witness.”\textsuperscript{120} Likewise (contra Pardee and Janzen), he argues that $yāpēaḥ is a verbal form in poetic parallelism with $lo'yəkazzēb “he will not lie.” Based on this grammatical and poetic analysis, Tsumura translates Hab 2:3a, “For the vision witnesses to the appointed time; it testifies to the end and does not lie.”\textsuperscript{121} Tsumura analyzes the poetic structure of the rest of verse as follows, describing the combination of “testifies” and “will not lie” ($b_1 + b_2$) as “balast

\begin{footnotes}
\item[116] Janzen, “Habakkuk 2:2-4 in Light of Recent Philological Advances,” 57.
\item[117] Cathcart and Gordon, \textit{The Targum of the Minor Prophets}, 150.
\item[121] Tsumura, “An Exegetical Note on Hab 2:3a,” 69.
\end{footnotes}
variants” of “witnesses” (b) in order to compensate for the ellipsis of “a” and “c” in the second line:

\[
\begin{array}{c|c}
\text{a} & \text{For} \\
\hline
\text{a} & \text{For} \\
\text{b} & \text{‘ôd} \\
\text{b} & \text{‘ôd} \\
\text{b} & \text{For} \\
\text{b} & \text{wāyāpēṭ} \\
\text{b} & \text{wāyāpēṭ} \\
\text{b} & \text{laqqēṣ} \\
\text{b} & \text{laqqēṣ} \\
\text{b} & \text{lo’yōkazzēb} \\
\text{b} & \text{lo’yōkazzēb} \\
\end{array}
\]

If ‘ôd should not be emended to ‘ēd, then Tsumura’s interpretation of ‘ôd as a verbal form meaning “to witness” (rather than Anderson’s “still”) allows one to maintain the unambiguous legal context of Hab 2:3a. Because of the textual evidence against emendation, because Tsumura’s interpretation of ‘ôd maintains the parallel with yāpēṭ, and because Tsumura’s poetic analysis explains all the elements of the line convincingly, this approach will be adopted here. Nonetheless, the legal function of the line is clearly established whether or not one emends the text.

Although Tsumura does not discuss the semantics of the verb ‘wād “to witness,” it is slightly problematic in this context. Normally, this verb occurs in the Hiphil stem (e.g., Deut 4:26, “I call heaven and earth to witness [ha’îdōṭî] against you today…”), while here it is in the Qal stem, a form unattested elsewhere in biblical Hebrew. One might propose a textual solution to this problem by suggesting that the first two words of Hab 2:3 lost a letter through haplography and that yod was mistaken for waw (an easy error, especially in early Hebrew scripts). Under this solution, an original ky y’yōd “for he will testify” became ky ’yd.

\[\text{Ibid., 71–72.}\]
and then *ky 'wd*, resulting in the consonants preserved in the extant texts. This solution, however, still lacks textual support.

An alternative may be suggested by noting that in the forty occurrences in biblical Hebrew of the verb *'wd* “to testify,” there are few occasions where it does not mean, “call as witness”/“cause to witness” (e.g., Deut 4:26; 31:28) or “warn” (e.g., Gen 43:3; Ex 19:21). In fact, aside from a few cases whose meaning is not entirely clear (Job 29:11; Lam 2:13), the only case where *'wd* clearly indicates a person actually testifying in court, and could not conceivably refer to the act of calling forth witnesses to testify in one’s behalf, is the story of Ahab’s seizure of Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kgs 21:10, 13). Elsewhere, while one could read, “testify concerning” or “testify against,” the meaning “call witnesses against” is also possible (e.g., Ps 50:7). Further, this meaning is probably to be preferred in these cases, for it fits more closely with the normal causative meaning of the Hiphil stem. In 1 Kings 21, however, “testify concerning/against” is the only possible interpretation. The implications of this observation may be that *'wd* in 1 Kings 21:10, 13 originally belonged to the Qal stem but was pointed by the Masoretes as a Hiphil because there were no other clear instances of the Qal form of the verb *'wd*. The lack of *matres lectionis* in the verb *'wd* in these verses—whose presence could have disambiguated the Qal from the Hiphil—makes it necessary to leave open this possibility. While the medieval Masoretes clearly understood these verbs to belong to the Hiphil stem, earlier scribes left them ambiguous. If in fact *'wd* in 1 Kings 21 is better understood as belonging to the Qal stem, then there is a precedent for *'ôd* “to testify concerning” in Hab 2:3a. Whether a textual or semantic explanation is the best option for this verse, the meaning is clear from the context. *'ôd* in Hab 2:3a relates in some way to the action of witnessing.
4.1.4 Yahweh’s answer in Habakkuk 2:2 as a legal response

Given the conjunction in Hab 2:1-4 of several words which clearly belong in a legal context (b’r; “tablets,” and yāpēḥ), other words in this passage which may be found in a larger range of contexts are likely to possess more specific nuances. The more common words which acquire a more specialized meaning in Hab 2:1-4 are ‘nh “to answer” or “to speak,”123 šûb “to respond,” and tōkāḥat “a complaint/argument.” Citing several examples in Job, Cathcart explains that along with ‘nh “answer” in Hab 2:2, the use of the words šûb “respond” and tōkāḥat “complaint/argument” in Hab 2:1 in fact suggest the presence of legal activity in Hab 2:1-4. Cathcart observes that in Job, for instance, šûb sometimes indicates a legal response (13:22; 31:14; 33:5), that tōkāḥat has a similar function (13:6; 23:4), and that ‘nh is used in the sense of “answering in law or making a response as one accused” (9:14-15, 32-33; 13:22).124 Similarly, the presence of these terms in Habakkuk most likely points to a legal context as well, especially given the disputational setting of ch. 1 and the legal terms in 2:1-4 already discussed. Habakkuk has lodged a complaint (tōkāḥat) against Yahweh, and he is now waiting for the response (‘nh) of the defense.

4.1.5 Criteria for reliable witnesses in Habakkuk 2:3-4

Beyond indications that Habakkuk is waiting for a response from Yahweh, ʾēmūnāh “faith/faithfulness” and kzb “to lie” in Hab 2:1-4 relate to the witness already discussed (4.1.3). The six Proverbs used to help establish the meaning of yāpēḥ in Hab 2:3 deal with


the general topic of reliable and unreliable witnesses, a topic which proves to be relevant in Hab 2:3b-4 as well. These Proverbs not only contain yāpîah, but also ‘êd “witness” (6:19; 12:17; 14:5, 25; 19:5, 9), cognates of kzb “lie” (6:19; 12:17; 14:25; 19:5, 9), and cognates of ‘mn “faithful, truthful, reliable” (12:17; 14:5, 25), each of which also occur in Hab 2:3-4. This similarity suggests that in Habakkuk, as in the proverbs, one should understand these words functioning together as an affirmation of the reliability of a witness who “will not lie” (kzb) and who is truthful (‘ēmûnâh).

This argument, however, challenges the common interpretation of ‘ēmûnâh in Hab 2:4b as “faith” in the sense of “belief” or “trust” in something or someone. Instead, it would be better to understand ‘ēmûnâh as a reference to the “trustworthiness” or “reliability” of a witness. Without undergoing a detailed linguistic analysis of the term, one may note that ‘ēmûnâh is used regularly in other passages to indicate a reliable witness or truthful judgment (Isa 59:4; Ps 96:13; Prov 12:17; 14:5). This meaning fits most closely with the legal context of Hab 2:1-4. This legal context is not mentioned in most recent discussions of ‘ēmûnâh in Hab 2:4b which take the position that it refers to “faith.” Such oversight tends to undermine the credibility of these arguments.

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If the interpretation here is correct, the pronoun "his" in Hab 2:4b most likely refers to the witness of Hab 2:3a, not to the righteous person of Hab 2:4b. This would lead one to connect 2:3a and 2:4b: “for he will testify to the vision at the appointed time...and the righteous will live by his faithfulness.” Although it is conceivable that the righteous person's faithfulness is in view here, this possibility is unlikely, for a righteous person by definition already is faithful (Ezek 18:9). The very problem raised by Habakkuk is that the faithfulness of the righteous has not availed. In spite of their faithfulness, the righteous are being killed by the wicked (1:4, 13, 17). The righteous need deliverance, not greater faithfulness to the law, much less “faith” as understood by Christian theology. The normal methods for the survival of the righteous have broken down and divine intervention is required. The implication of this argument is that Hab 2:4b is an assertion regarding the restoration of the proper reward (ḥyḥ) to the righteous (ṣaddīq) by an agent who is not identical with the righteous.

4.1.6 The ṣaddīq in Habakkuk 2:4b

Like 'nh "to answer" and 'ēmūnāh "faithfulness," the word ṣaddīq—commonly translated “righteous” or “a righteous person”—has a broad meaning that nonetheless acquires specific connotations in legal contexts. In Habakkuk, a ṣaddīq is a person who is “righteous,” “innocent,” or “deserving.” Since the word ṣaddīq begins a theologically loaded line, many have sought to understand which theological system Hab 2:4b supports. The
approach here seeks instead to take note of the concrete situation that has generated a word like ṣaddiq.\textsuperscript{129}

Ziesler argues that one important situation in which the root ṣdq and its cognates belong is that of covenant,\textsuperscript{130} while Cross has argued in turn that the (equally difficult) word “covenant” belongs in the context of kinship relationships.\textsuperscript{131} Kin had the obligation to “redeem” one another (cf. Lev 25:25; Num 35:12), a responsibility that could be extended to non-kin through covenants.\textsuperscript{132} A “righteous person” in this framework is one who is faithful to his or her kinship group (cf. Gen 38:26; Neh 9:8). Consonant with this kinship and covenantal concrete situation, Klaus Koch defines the verb ṣdq as “to be communally faithful, beneficial.”\textsuperscript{133}

A further aspect of this concrete situation is that for a ṣaddiq there exists “a sphere that enshrouds the actor so that one must assume a concept of ’actions with built-in consequences.’”\textsuperscript{134} In wisdom literature, this idea is especially clear (cf. Prov 10:30; 13:33). In addition to its meaning in the context of kinship and covenant, the root ṣdq possesses a


\textsuperscript{130} J. A. Ziesler, \textit{The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Inquiry} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 38–43.


\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 7, 8.

\textsuperscript{133} Koch, “ṣdq to be communally faithful, beneficial.”

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 1053.
legal function which builds on the notion of “built-in consequences.”

135 Passages like Ex 23:6-8 illustrate this legal meaning of šaddiq:

Do not turn away the judgment [mišpāṭ] of your poor in his allegation [rīb]. Stay away from a false [šequer] case [dābār], and do not execute a guiltless [nāqî] or innocent person [šaddîq], for I will not acquit [ṣdq] a guilty person [rāšā']. You shall not take a bribe, for the bribe blinds those who see clearly and misrepresents the cases [dābār] of innocent [šaddîq] persons.

The story of Abraham’s intercession in behalf of Sodom in Genesis 18 also illustrates the legal function of the adjective šaddiq. For Abraham, treating the guilty and innocent alike would have compromised the most basic aspect of Yahweh’s role as the divine judge and king (cf. Gen 18:23, 25).

In Habakkuk 1:4, 13, the prophet complains that the sort of just administration which these verses prescribe for the Israelites and which Abraham expected from Yahweh has not been executed on a cosmic level. This is indicated by the use of similar terminology like mišpāṭ (1:4, 12), rīb (1:3), šaddiq (1:4, 13), and rāšā’ (1:4, 13), as well as by verses like 1:13, where Habakkuk asks how Yahweh can “be silent when a guilty person [rāšā’] swallows a person more righteous [šaddiq] than himself” (cf. 1:4). The expected consequences of righteous behavior have not prevailed in Habakkuk’s situation. Appeals for justice (ṣdq) are to be brought to the king whose administration these appeals concern. Since Habakkuk is concerned with cosmic justice, he appeals to the divine king. It is best to understand the role of the šaddiq of Hab 2:4b in this broader context.

4.1.7 The righteous shall live

Like ‘nh and ᵃᵈᵈ, ḥyh “to live” occurs in a variety of contexts, but nonetheless is not unexpected in legal settings. Specifically, ḥyh in a legal context is the appropriate and expected reward for the ᵃᵈᵈ. Ḥyh in the Hebrew Bible generally refers to the preservation or living out of one’s life on earth (e.g., Gen 20:7; 42:2; Lev 25:35-36; 2 Kgs 4:7). It describes those in a state contrary to physical death (e.g., 1 Sam 2:6; Isa 26:14, 19; 38:16; Esth 4:11). When negated, ḥyh refers to the cessation of the life of a person who is to be executed for a serious crime (e.g., Ex 22:18) or who comes into improper contact with holiness (e.g., Num 4:19). It is applied with the same meaning to those who survive by seeking the favor and protection of Yahweh (Amos 5:4, 14; Ps 138:7).

Although it is tempting to read “shall live” in Hab 2:4b as referring to a “way of life,” this meaning is not attested elsewhere in biblical Hebrew, which makes it unlikely here. Instead, one’s “way of life” is commonly designated in Hebrew by the word hlk “to walk.” The idea of “walking” as a “way of life” (hlk) which results in “survival” (ḥyh) may be found throughout the Hebrew Bible.

You shall walk in all of the way which Yahweh your god commanded you, that you might live... (Deut 5:33; cf. 1 Kgs 8:25 // 2 Chr 6:16; Zech 3:7; Ps 1:1, 3)

136 Cf. the unlikely interpretations of Smith (Micah-Malachi, 107), Roberts (Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary, 112), and Dean (“The Use of Habakkuk 2:4 in the New Testament (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38),” 71–76), who in fact understand ḥyh in Habakkuk 2:4b to refer to the “way of life” of the righteous.
If Habakkuk had wanted to communicate the idea of “living by faith,” a much more natural idiom would have used the verb *ḥlk* “to walk.” This common idiom militates against the “lifestyle” interpretation of *ḥyh*.

It would also be inappropriate to find connotations of “eternal life” in Hab 2:4b. “Life” in the Hebrew Bible usually refers to life in the land Yahweh has given the Israelites. As the promise attached to the commandment suggests, an Israelite would have obeyed the law with the expectation that his “days might grow long in the land Yahweh your god is giving you” (Ex 20:12; cf. Deut 4:1, 40; 28:8). This is the expectation held out for the righteous who obey the Torah; eternal life after death is mentioned only obliquely, if at all.137 The ultimate reward for keeping the commandments is a long life in the land (cf. Ezek 3:21; 18:9).138 Likewise, disobedience is punished not by eternal damnation, but by exile and physical death (cf. Ezek 3:18; 33:8-9).

Deuteronomy provides one of the fullest biblical statements on the relationship between faithful obedience and life on the one hand and disobedience and death on the other:

> See I place before you life and prosperity, death and disaster...to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his judgments—so that you may live and multiply, and Yahweh your god may bless you in the land...If you turn away and do not listen...you will certainly perish...I am placing life and death

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138 Gerleman, “חָי הָיָה ḥyh to live,” 414.
before you, blessing and curse. Choose life...that you might love Yahweh your god...For he is your life and the length of your days... (Deut 30:15-20)

Elsewhere, Yahweh promises the survival of those who obey his law (cf. Lev 18:5; Deut 4:1; 5:33; 6:24; 8:1, 3; 16:20; 30:16, 19; Ezek 18; 20:11; Neh 9:29). In light of this theological perspective, “survive” or “live in the land” is the most likely meaning of ḫyḥ in Hab 2:4b.139 This may refer either to the survival of righteous individuals, or to the survival or the nation as a whole.140

In the context of Habakkuk, then, it is not surprising to find a promise of life for the righteous person. This promise, indeed, is a step towards the rectification of the problem that Habakkuk raised in ch. 1—where the righteous are literally being killed by the wicked (1:4, 13, 17)—a problem whose final solution is described in ch. 3. When Habakkuk writes, “the righteous shall live,” he is merely stating the appropriate, expected, and typical reward for those persons who are innocent or righteous. Indeed, the idea is almost a tautology, given the intrinsic connection between behavior and consequences expected in the Hebrew Bible (cf. 4.1.7).141 There is no additional element such as “faith” which is required in order for the righteous to survive. If “faith” qualifies the righteous person in any way here, it would simply be a restatement of what is already implicit in the idea of the righteous person: faithfulness to the law. But ēmûnāh “faithfulness” probably refers in Hab 2:4b to


140 Cf. Ringgren, “יתם châyāh,” 337, ”The statement in Hab. 2:4...is much more vague...The enemy will perish, the righteous (Judah? Israel?) will live through his faithfulness. ‘Life,’ as Elliger says, is ‘political existence...in the saving presence of God.’"

the "faithful testimony" of an agent who is not identical with the ṣaddīq (cf. 4.1.6). While ḥyh is not exclusively a legal term, then, its presence in this legal context is entirely appropriate.

4.1.8 Summary

The arguments above regarding the meanings of b’r “provide legal confirmation” and yāpēah “a witness” provide the cornerstones of the present aspect of this study. They place Hab 2:1-4 squarely in a legal context, which is essential for understanding why the divine council is an important backdrop to this passage. Further, it is clear that however one understands the text of Hab 2:3a (ʿōd or ʿēd), it may also be read in a legal sense. Finally, the language used throughout Hab 2:3-4 commonly describes reliable witnesses, while the ṣaddīq of 2:4b fits snugly in this context as a righteous person who will live or survive (ḥyh) not “by (his own) faith” but by the “faithfulness” of a witness. Given that the concerns of Habakkuk are international and cosmic in scope, the proper place to appeal this state of affairs is the council of Yahweh.

4.2 Messenger language in Habakkuk 2:1-4

This section argues that the legal terminology of Hab 2:1-4 makes the most sense when understood in relation to a messenger. Messenger terminology in this passage suggests the likelihood of a messenger here. This messenger is the most likely agent who performs the legal activities discussed in the previous section (4.1), and the most likely context for such a messenger is the divine council.
4.2.1 Messengers in the Bible and in the ancient Near East

Messengers were an important aspect of communication in a large variety of contexts in ancient near eastern society.\textsuperscript{142} One important role of messengers was to deliver important political news, like the death of a king (2 Sam 4:10), the development of a coup (2 Sam 15:13), or the conclusion of a battle (1 Sam 4:17; 31:9; Jer 51:31). Messengers could also summon armies to battle (Judg 7:24; Obad 1), announce an enthronement (Isa 52:7), or communicate between monarchs (1 Kgs 20:2-4). They facilitated personal communication (Gen 32:3, 6; 1 Sam 16:19), served as spies (1 Sam 19:11), and acted as agents in behalf of other individuals (2 Sam 3:14; 24:16; Ps 91:11; 103:20). It appears that messengers typically ran to deliver their messages (1 Sam 4:12; 2 Sam 18:19, 21-24, 26; Zech 2:4; Ps 147:15). As is still the case with the English word “courier” (from Latin currere “to run”), messengers in the ancient world were sometimes called “runners” (Hebrew rāṣ [Jer 51:31; Esth 3:13, 15; 8:10, 14; 2 Chr 30:6, 10]). Given this designation, it is not surprising that speed was in fact one of the most desirable qualities of a messenger.\textsuperscript{143} Even the messengers of the gods were speedy.\textsuperscript{144} There are a number of indications that an additional role of messengers was to function as witnesses.\textsuperscript{145} This role included


\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 25, n. 38. Nonetheless, technological development could displace the running messenger: “The chariot was a preferred means of sending the messenger, since it maximized that most important of messenger qualities, speed” (ibid., 86).

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid; Smith, \textit{The Ugaritic Baal Cycle: Volume 1: Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1-1.2}, 284.

\textsuperscript{145} Meier, \textit{The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World}, 3–4.
functioning as the legal agent of an absent individual.\textsuperscript{146} Similarly, the Neo-Babylonian legal texts depict messengers both summoning a defendant to court and providing testimony in behalf of the accused in his or her absence.\textsuperscript{147}

Many activities which human messengers perform occur in the divine realm as well.\textsuperscript{148} Divine messengers facilitated communication between deities.\textsuperscript{149} When issues of cosmic or international administration were at stake, messengers were sometimes sent to appeal to 'Ēl at the council.\textsuperscript{150} In the Hebrew Bible, divine messengers are found in poetic parallelism with the armies of heaven (Ps 148:2), suggesting that the two groups may have been identical and that messengers were regular members of the heavenly assembly. As in Ugaritic literature, divine messengers in the Hebrew Bible were agents of the divine king (Mal 3:1). Divine messengers not only facilitated communication, but also participated in legal proceedings. Examples are Yamm's legation to the council of 'Ēl\textsuperscript{151} and the legal function of the \textit{malāk yhwh} "messenger of Yahweh" at the trial of the high priest Joshua

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 4, n. 13.
\textsuperscript{147} Holtz, \textit{Neo-Babylonian Court Procedure}, 278, 284.
There is also etymological support for the legal function of messengers.\textsuperscript{153} Cross’ translation “council envoy”\textsuperscript{154} and in Smith’s “legation,”\textsuperscript{155} for instance, reflect the legal connotations of the Ugaritic t’dt “messenger.” An interesting phenomenon in this regard in the Hebrew Bible is that humans sometimes obtained legal representation through divine messengers before the divine judge in the heavenly council (cf. Zech 3:1-10; Ps 89:37-38; Job 16:19-21; 19:25; 33:23-24).\textsuperscript{156} A final connection between messengers and witnesses is indicated by an important quality which good messengers and good witnesses shared: truthfulness (cf. Prov 13:17; 25:13; and section 4.1.6 above). In fact, Meier notes that for messengers in the ancient Semitic world, only speed is mentioned more often than truthfulness as a desirable trait.\textsuperscript{157}

This wide range of functions filled by human and divine messengers in the Bible provides and important context for Hab 2:1-4. Given the messenger and legal terminology in these verses, it is best to recognize here a messenger at work in some legal function.

While the mere presence of a messenger in Hab 2:1-4 does not necessitate the background


\textsuperscript{155} Smith, \textit{The Ugaritic Baal Cycle: Volume 1: Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1-1.2}, 282.


\textsuperscript{157} Meier, \textit{The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World}, 22–25.
of the divine council, the best explanation for the presence of a messenger in this passage is the divine council.

4.2.2 The qôrê’ as herald in Habakkuk 2:2

A clear starting point for noticing the presence of a messenger in Hab 2:1-4 is the participle qôrê’ in Hab 2:2. Several translations recognize the qôrê’ in Hab 2:2 as a herald (NIV, NRSV, NEB).¹⁵⁸ This idea is also supported by the definite article found on the participles in 1QpHab and the LXX.

Other instances where the verb qr’ “to call/read” is followed by the preposition b in a context where something is being read indicate that qôrê’ in Hab 2:2 designates public proclamation rather than private reading, suggesting that the qôrê’ here should indeed be understood as a herald. There are in fact only three occasions where qr’ b occurs in the context of reading: when Baruch reads Jeremiah’s scroll in the temple (Jer 36:6, 8, 10, 13, 14), during the celebration following Nehemiah’s completion of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 8:3, 8, 18; 9:3; 13:1), and when Shaphan reads the book of the law to Josiah (2 Chr 34:18). Each of these occurrences unambiguously refers to reading out loud. The phrase also occurs in Deuteronomy, where it is part of the instruction for the king to read the law all his

life (Deut 17:19). This instruction most likely assumes reading out loud as well (cf. 2 Kgs 23:2 // 2 Chr 34:30).\footnote{Cf. Wildberger, “The fact that קָרָה means not only ‘call’ but also ‘read’ is naturally based on the fact that people read out loud,” Isaiah 28-39: A Continental Commentary, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, Continental Commentary Series (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 84.}

Given the use of qr’b in these passages, the translation, “so that [he] may run with it [bō]” is unlikely.\footnote{Cf. Roberts, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary, 109; Schaper, “Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophecy and the Orality/Literacy Problem,” 333.} Roberts opts for this interpretation of bō based on his astute observation that the phrase qr’b always refers to the object from which one reads, rather than the content of the reading. In Hab 2:2b, he argues, the suffixed personal pronoun is singular “in/with it” (bō), and therefore cannot refer to the plural “tablets,” as one would expect if his first observation were correct. Roberts’ second point overlooks, however, that it is not grammatically problematic for a singular suffixed pronoun to have a plural antecedent (cf. 2 Kgs 3:3; Jer 36:23; Job 39:15).\footnote{Cf. IBHS, §16.4b; GKC §135p.} The plural pronoun (auta “them”) found in the LXX supports the notion that the plural tablets are the antecedent of this pronoun. Nonetheless, Roberts’ first point is valid, and could lead one to translate, “so that the one who proclaims them may run.” A further reason to reject Roberts’ translation is that the idiom for carrying a message while running is not rûṣ b “run with” but bayad hāråšîm “by the hand of runners” (Esth 3:13; 8:10) or hāråšîm b...miyad “runners with...from the hand of” (2 Chr 30:6). When reading is involved, then, all available evidence indicates that qr’b refers to reading out loud in the presence of others, and there is no likely alternative in Hab
2:2b. In order to indicate that qôrē’ may designate both an activity ("one who proclaims/reads") and a title ("herald"), we translate Hab 2:2b, "in order that the one who heralds them may run."

4.2.3 "So that he may run" in Habakkuk 2:2b

The presence of running in Hab 2:2 suggests that the qôrē’ of this verse not only publicly proclaims what is written and confirmed on the tablets but also delivers them to a particular destination. Since "running" is an appropriate activity for a qôrē’ (see above), it would make sense for the qôrē’ to run, proclaiming the contents of the tablets or delivering them to some unspecified location. "Running" in Hab 2:2b, however, has often been interpreted figuratively, e.g., "so that it can be read easily" (NJPS; cf. HCSB, NAB, NJB).

Offering another approach, Holt suggests, "so he who reads it may live obediently," while Brownlee offers "that one may read it at a glance" or "that one may read it on the run" and Rudolph translates “damit man es geläufig lesen kann!” ("so one may read it fluently!").

Others note, however, that running in biblical Hebrew often describes a running messenger (2 Sam 18:24-27) and that the participle “runner” is often used to designate a

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162 Cf. Jenni, who groups Hab 2:2 with the other instances of lesen in/aus Schriftstück mentioned above (Die Hebräischen Präpositionen: Band 1: Die Präposition Beth, §2649). Although Jenni does not specify this group as reading aloud, each instance of this group would be difficult to interpret any other way.


messenger (2 Kgs 5:21; Jer 5:31; Esth 3:13; 2 Chr 30:6) or the herald of a coming king (2
Sam 15:1; 1 Kgs 1:5). Some translations reflect this interpretation: “so that a runner may
read it” (NRSV), “so that a herald may run with it” (NIV), “ready for a herald to carry it with
speed” (NEB). Noting this connection, Brownlee revises his earlier position, writing, “one
must not lose sight of the imagery of the watchman, whose message would be carried by a
runner.”166 Similarly, Floyd suggests that the runner is “metaphorically the medium
through which Yahweh's works and words were announced.”167 Sweeney, however,
interprets more literally: “Apparently the phrase refers to the passing of the recorded
vision to a runner or a herald who will read or proclaim the message publicly...”168 This
approach is preferable because the metaphorical uses of running in the Hebrew Bible do not
fit the context of Hab 2:2, as will be demonstrated below.

There are four passages in which it seems that running may function
metaphorically: Ps 119:32; 147:15; Isa 59:7; Jer 23:21. In Ps 147:15 and Jer 23:21, however,
not metaphor but metonymy is at work. In the first, dābār “word” is a metonymy for
“messenger,” while in the second, “running” is a metonymy for the messenger enterprise as
a whole. Even if one understands Yahweh’s “running word” in Ps 147:15 metaphorically,
however, it would not apply to Hab 2:2 passage, for there is clearly an agent of some sort at
work in this verse. Running in Hab 2:2 describes the activity of the person reading or
proclaiming the text, not the metaphorical activity of Yahweh’s word, as it would in Psalm

166 William H. Brownlee, The Midrash Pesher of Habakkuk, Society of Biblical Literature

167 Floyd, Minor Prophets: Part 2, 124.

Introduction and Commentary, 204–205.
Likewise, while prophets are not universally depicted as messengers,\textsuperscript{169} Jer 23:21 clearly depicts them in this function (cf. 23:22). A similar metonymic use of running is indicated by the use of the participle “runner” as a synonym for “messenger” (cf. Jer 51:31).\textsuperscript{170} One may regard the prophetic messenger activity in Jer 23:21 as metaphorical only if the presence of these same prophets in the council of Yahweh (23:22) should also be regarded as a mere metaphor. Even if prophets did not literally run to deliver their messages, running in Jer 23:21 would still function as a metonymy, not a metaphor, for the messenger enterprise. A metaphorical interpretation of these two passages is either problematic or, at best, irrelevant to Hab 2:2.

There are, however, two actual metaphorical uses of the word “run.” Isa 59:7 mentions those whose “feet run to evil,” while in Ps 119:32 the psalmist will “run in the path” of Yahweh’s commands. In both cases running indicates alacritous or eager behavior. One might understand Hab 2:2 in this way: “so that the one who reads it may do so with alacrity [i.e., may run].” But now that \textit{b ́r} is understood to mean “legally confirm” rather than “make plain,” what was already a tenuous logical connection between 2:2a and 2:2b becomes entirely obscure. There is no reason in this context to imagine legal confirmation facilitating eager reading. On the other hand, it is easy to understand why legal confirmation would then allow the messenger to run his message to its recipients, for this would assure them that the message was reliable (see section 4.4.). Because there is no appropriate figurative use on hand for the word “run” and because there is an entirely appropriate and abundantly attested literal use, one should understand running in Hab 2:2

\textsuperscript{169} Meier, \textit{Speaking of Speaking: Marking Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Bible}, 284–288.

\textsuperscript{170} Cf. Meier, \textit{The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World}, 25.
literally. "Running" in Hab 2:2 makes the most sense when understood in reference to the literal activity of the herald discussed in section 4.1.

4.2.4 Messengers and speed

Given the common high premium placed on speedy messengers, it would not be surprising to find mention of speed in Hab 2:1-4. Speed, in fact, is the central concern of Hab 2:3b. The first word of this line (‘im) has traditionally been translated "if." The line affirms a more consistent message, however, if it is understood as an oath ("He will certainly not delay!") rather than a conditional statement ("If he delays...").171 This type of "shortened" oath statement is common in biblical Hebrew. The form works by stating the first half of an oath, leaving the second half for the reader to infer. The full form is found in passages like 1 Sam 3:17, "Thus may elohim do to you, and continue to do, if you hide from me a single word of anything he said to you" (cf. Num 14:8; 2 Sam 3:35). More commonly, however, the curse is left out of the oath, leaving only the “if” clause (GKC §149). Ps 89:36, for instance, is literally translated, "Once, I swore by my holy one, if I lie to David." Recognizing the oath formula here, English translations generally render something like, "I will not lie to David" (ESV). It is preferable to find this formula in Hab 2:3b as well, for it allows the poetic structure of the line to emerge more clearly:

a He will certainly not hesitate, b wait for him!
b’ He will surely come, a’ he will not delay.

On the other hand, the traditional rendering “if he hesitates” does not fit well with the rest of the line, which indicates in b’ and a’ that in fact this person or thing will not hesitate. The

171 On the use of ‘im in negative oaths, see IBHS, §40.2.2.b.
traditional rendering, then, results in a somewhat contradictory translation, affirming both the possibility of a delay (a “if he hesitates”) and denying it (a’ “he will not delay”). This makes the alternative presented here more likely.

One might object, however, that it is common to find conditional statements followed by imperatives, while the combination of an oath formula and an imperative is unusual. For instance, statements of the following type are quite frequent in biblical Hebrew: “Elohim came to Balaam in the night and said to him, ‘If the men come to call you, rise, go with them...” (Num 22:20; cf. Gen 20:7; Ex 33:13; Num 5:19; Josh 22:19; 2 Sam 17:6; Jer 40:4). However, one also finds the same combination of the word ‘im “if” and an imperative in Ezekiel, this time with the meaning suggested here for Hab 2:3b: “As I live, declares Adonai Yahweh, I do not delight [‘im ‘ehpōṣ] in the death of the wicked, but only when the wicked turns from his way so that he may live. Turn! turn from your evil ways!” (33:11; cf. 2 Kgs 9:26; Jer 14:7; Ps 139:19). Here, the consequence of the oath (“I do not delight”) is an imperative (“turn!”). Likewise, in Hab 2:3b, the consequence of the oath (“He will not hesitate”) is also an imperative (“wait for him!”). Thus, there is not only strong poetic reason for understanding the beginning of Hab 2:3b as an oath, but also solid precedent for such an oath followed by an imperative.

Beyond these two reasons, it seems that the interpretation of Hab 2:3b as a conditional statement is based on an interpretation of the book of Habakkuk as a whole which is unlikely. In the context of the book of Habakkuk, it is only necessary to understand Hab 2:3b as a conditional statement if one believes that the problem of this verse (and this book) is a delay of some sort. However, while one could argue that Habakkuk’s question “how long?” (1:2) is concerned with a delay, it seems more likely that the problem is simply
that of injustice. Habakkuk’s question to Yahweh was not, “How long do I need persevere during this trial of my faith?” but “How long will you continue to be unjust?” The phrase “how long?” is not used to suggest that Habakkuk would have accepted the injustice if only it had been shorter. “How long?” does not suggest that the real problem is the length of the situation; rather, “how long?” rhetorically emphasizes just how problematic the situation is. In addition, if one does not interpret Hab 2:4b as implying the need for patient faith on the part of the righteous—an unlikely meaning of this verse (cf. sections 4.1.6 to 4.1.8)—then the idea that Hab 2:3b speaks of a possible delay is not demanded as strongly by its context. Thus, it is preferable to understand Hab 2:3b as an assurance that a messenger will deliver his message with speed.

4.2.5 Messengers and their tablets

The following indications of messenger activity—the presence of tablets and Habakkuk’s role as a watchman—do not suggest as strongly as the evidence considered thus far that a messenger must be present in Habakkuk 2:1-4. Nonetheless, they fit naturally in this context, and these cumulative considerations provide further confirmation of the presence of a messenger which they would not provide if taken in isolation.

One may begin by noting the common concern that messengers accurately deliver their messages.\(^{172}\) Meier argues that the “most fool-proof system” for allaying this concern was clay tablets, citing a treaty between the Hittite king Muwatalli and a king of Kizzuwatna.\(^{173}\) The role of tablets in this example may also explain why the verb \(b’r\) is used


\(^{173}\) Ibid., 171.
in Hab 2:2, for one would expect the tablets of a messenger to be legally confirmed in order to assure their reliability. This activity also fits closely with the affirmation of the witness's truthfulness in 2:3a ("he will not lie") and the assurance of his reliability in 2:4b (cf. section 4.1.6).  

The relationship between tablets and messengers may also be indicated by what Smith describes as “a semantic development of ḫt from ‘tablet’ to ‘correspondence’” in the Ugaritic language. This semantic shift would indicate the close connection in Canaanite culture between the tablets on which a message was written and the actual message itself. In Hab 2:2, both the confirmation on tablets and the tablets themselves point to a messenger as the most likely explanation for their presence.

Finally, while messengers in the Bible are not elsewhere described carrying tablets, they are found carrying sapārîm “documents.” A particularly relevant example is found in the book of Esther, where messengers carry messages that have been ḫtm “sealed” (Esth 8:9-10, 13). Sealed tablets and papyri were commonly used for official communications throughout the ancient Near East. The “sealing” (ḥtm) of these official documents probably accomplished the legal confirmation referenced by the Hebrew and Akkadian words b’r and bâru. In other words, a tablet or papyrus could be “legally confirmed” by

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176 Although the Hebrew language was typically written in ink on papyrus—a practice associated with Egypt—Judah also used clay tablets in international correspondence with the cuneiform cultures of Mesopotamia. Both letters and tablets could be sealed, but different processes were involved.
“sealing” it. The close connection between b’r “to legally confirm” and htm “to seal” is suggested as well by the legal procedure which takes place when Jeremiah redeems his family’s land during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. The connection becomes especially clear when this example is compared with Hab 2:2-3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jer 32:10</th>
<th>Hab 2:2-3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wā’ektōb bassēper</td>
<td>kōtōb ḥāzôn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wā’eḥtōm</td>
<td>ābāʾēr ‘al-hallūḥôt…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wā’a’ēd ʾēdîm…</td>
<td>kî ’ōd ḥāzôn…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I wrote [ktb] on the document, and I sealed (it) [htm], and I called forth [’wd] witnesses…</td>
<td>Write [ktb] a vision, and confirm (it) [b’r] on tablets… for he will testify [’wd] to the vision…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The connection between Jeremiah sealing his document and Habakkuk legally confirming his tablets further confirms, in conjunction with the example from Esther 8, that the legal confirmation of the tablets in Hab 2:2 was a typical way to prepare a message to be delivered by a messenger.

4.2.6 Habakkuk as a watchman

In addition to the presence of tablets in Hab 2:2, Habakkuk’s role as a watchman in Hab 2:1—indicated by the terms mišmeret and sph—points again to messenger communication. While Habakkuk’s role as a watchman does not demand that one find a messenger in Hab 2:1-4, it fits closely with the idea of communication through a messenger. Watchmen (sōpeh or mašappēh) in the Hebrew Bible are responsible for standing on towers

178 Cf. the Akkadian words būrtu and kunukku in Gelb et al., The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, vol 2, 339; vol 8, 543, 544, 546, 547.
or walls and reporting what they see (1 Sam 14:16; 2 Sam 18:24-27), including the arrival of running messengers or heralds (2 Sam 18:24-27). Watchmen were also involved in the transfer of information (2 Kgs 9:17-20; Isa 21:9-12; 63:1-2), which included announcing the arrival of divine messengers as well as human messengers (Isa 52:7-8). Further, although the word šōmēr often refers to a “guard” over a mišmeret “post” at places like the temple (2 Kgs 12:9) or city gates (Neh 11:19), it may also refer to a “watchman” with a function similar to the šōpeh (Jer 51:12; Ps 127:1; 130:6; Song 3:3).179 Prophets are sometimes depicted as šōpîm “watchmen” (Hos 9:8; Isa 56:10; Jer 6:17; Ezek 3:17).

Watchmen not only announced the arrival of messengers but communicated information through messengers. This is evident from Isa 21:11, where “one calls” (qôrē’) from Seir to a watchman. In this passage, the watchman receives news (Isa 21:9) and gives news (Isa 21:11-12). Although a messenger is not mentioned explicitly here—unless one takes the participle qôrē’ as a reference to a herald—it is clear that the watchman functions as an intermediary in the communication process. Yahweh describes Ezekiel’s role as a watchman in mediative terms as well (Ezek 3:17-19). Ezekiel does not merely provide impersonal reports. He delivers messages to the people in behalf of Yahweh. Yahweh also posts watchmen over Jerusalem: “On your walls, Jerusalem, I appointed watchmen all day and all night continually. Those who remind Yahweh will not be silent; there is no rest for them.” (Isa 62:6-7). One could imagine these watchmen crying out to Yahweh directly. It is possible, however, that the idea of communication through messengers is implicit in this passage, for biblical narrative tends to condense instances of communication involving

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179 Also see nōṣēr (2 Kgs 17:9; 18:8; Isa 27:3; Jer 31:6; Job 27:18).
messengers, often leaving implicit the messengers’ presence in a given instance of communication (e.g., 1 Kgs 20:4, 11).\textsuperscript{180}

Habakkuk’s status as a watchman has often been interpreted figuratively.\textsuperscript{181} Others argue that Habakkuk actually “had a particular place where he went to await an oracular response from Yahweh, and that place could have been in the temple complex.”\textsuperscript{182} If so, this “suggests that Habakkuk serves in some cultic function as a prophet or oracle diviner based in the temple.”\textsuperscript{183} What is common to each of these interpretations is that they assume Habakkuk had a visionary or auditory revelation for which the idea of being a “watchman” served as a metaphor in one sense or another. However, one should not to forget the idea of the watchman in Habakkuk by replacing it with some other experience for which one thinks it must be a metaphor. For it is not always clear in what sense language involved in divine revelations in the Hebrew Bible is metaphorical. Rather than assuming that the language of the watchman in Habakkuk is metaphorical, it would be better to attend first to the literal meaning, leaving a possible metaphorical sense for a later stage of inquiry.\textsuperscript{184}

Habakkuk’s role as a watchman does not mandate the presence of a messenger; indeed, Ezekiel seems to communicate as a watchman directly with Yahweh. However, the communication systems in which watchmen participated often involved messengers or heralds (cf. Isa 21:11-12; 52:7-8). For this reason, Habakkuk’s role as a watchman is

\textsuperscript{180} Meier, \textit{Speaking of Speaking: Marking Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Bible}, 123–129.


\textsuperscript{184} Cf. the hermeneutical discussion in the introduction.
consistent with the possibility of messenger communication in Hab 2:1-4. Indeed, this would be the most natural way for a watchman to communicate.

4.2.7 Excursus: A messenger in Habakkuk 2:4a?

The least conclusive part of the argument here regarding the presence of a messenger in Hab 2:1-4 is v. 4a. In fact, this line is so uncertain that this discussion represents a digression from the main progression of the argument. Nonetheless, it is possible to understand this verse in terms of messenger activity as well.

Some translations of 'ūppalāh (the second word of Hab 2:4) are “is lifted up” (KJV), “is puffed up” (ASV, NIV, NJPS, ESV), “is inflated” (HCSB), “is drawn back” (LXX [huposteilēta]), “is unbelieving” (V, T), “the proud” (NRSV, NASB), “the rash” (NAB, NABRE), “the reckless” (NEB), and “a dark one” (8ḤevXIIgr [skotia]). Translations related to “pride” or “inflation” are derived from the suggestion that 'ūppalāh is from the same root as 'ōpel, which in its nominal forms means “mound” (2 Kings 5:24; Is 32:14) or “tumor” (Deut 28:27; 1 Sam 5:6). Here, the argument goes, the root takes on an ethical connotation, referring to the “swelling ego” (cf. HCSB). It has also been noted that a verbal form from the root ‘pl meaning to be “heedless, presumptive” (BDB) or “impudent, foolish” (HALOT) is found in Num 14:44. However, the meaning of ‘pl here is uncertain and cannot not be used with confidence to determine the meaning of ūppalāh.\(^{185}\)

A variety of alternative solutions to the word ‘ūppalāh have been suggested, generally based on Wellhausen’s criteria which maintain that whatever replaces ūppalāh

\(^{185}\) Cf. Haak, Habakkuk, 59.
must be nominal in form and antithetical to "the righteous" of 2:4b. Haak, on the other hand, cautiously maintains that an ethical connotation should not be attached to ṣḥōlāh without further comparative evidence, and very literally translates nepeš at the end of 2:4a as "gullet" rather than the traditional "soul" (KJV, ASV, RSV, NRSV ["spirit"], NASB, ESV). Further, Haak argues that the verb yṣr never occurs in conjunction with nepeš with ethical connotations, but should rather be understood to mean, "free of obstacles, straight." Finally Haak understands nepeš as the subject of both verbs of the line. The resulting translation is as follows: "Behold, swollen, not smooth, will be his gullet within him..."

Haak's non-ethical translation may in fact fit with the messenger context established above. Meier notes that some ancient Semitic texts described the journeys of their messengers with great relish. Specifically, he observes regarding the messenger in Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta that "the idealized messenger never rests," crossing entire mountain ranges to reach his goal. Meier also cites a detailed and enthusiastic description of a messenger in Enmerkar and Ensukheshdanna. In light of such descriptions, one might understand Hab 2:4a as a description of the messenger en route. The puffed up gullet would refer to the messenger literally being out of breath. While the LXX clearly understands Hab 2:4a in an ethical sense, the verb used to translate ṣḥōlāh, hupostēlētai, means to "draw back, contract" and so in some distant way seems to relate to the idea

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187 Haak, Habakkuk, 58.

188 Ibid., 55.

suggested here. If this meaning were accepted, it would allow the entire scope of Hab 2:1-4 to relate to the messenger-witness context. It would also make sense in its position immediately following Hab 2:3b, which describes the haste of the messenger. Despite the attractiveness of certain aspects of this hypothesis, however, it may ultimately be best to conclude with Anderson regarding āppalāh in Hab 2:4a that “all one can do is resign to the likelihood that the original text is irretrievably lost or else struggle to make the best of the MT as it is.”

4.2.8 Summary

This section began by noting that the participle qôrē’ functions in some contexts to indicate the activity of a herald or messenger and that the phrase qr’ b in Hab 2:2 is best understood as referring to a public proclamation. The mention of running and not delaying provides further indication that a messenger may be involved, while the fact that messengers sometimes carried tablets with them in order to confirm the reliability of their message also suggests the presence of a messenger. Habakkuk’s role as a watchman is consistent with this interpretation. Finally, Hab 2:4a may also be understood as a description of the travels of a messenger. This evidence strongly suggests that a messenger is at work throughout Hab 2:1-4.

4.3 Habakkuk’s messenger as a divine witness

In sections 4.1 and 4.2, the purpose was to establish that legal and messenger terminology are scattered throughout Hab 2:1-4. This being the case, the legal and

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messenger terminology in this passage are in fact mutually reinforcing. Neither establishes the presence of the other, but their presence here in close proximity and with regular overlap leads the possibility that the legal and messenger terminology of Hab 2:1-4 relate to each other in some way. We are dealing here not with airtight deductions but with a series of observations which create a cumulative case that is difficult to ignore. The way that messenger and legal terms overlap in Hab 2:1-4 (see the full translation at the beginning of this chapter) highlights this cumulative case. The possibility that the legal and messenger functions are filled by a single individual—the qôré’—easily works as well as any of the other possibilities that have been suggested for this passage.191 With the exception of 2:4a, every line and almost every word of Hab 2:1-4 fit easily in a legal context or a messenger context. Further, these terms are mixed throughout the passage: they do not occur in discrete sections. Finally, they may on occasion serve double duty: “tablets” provide legal confirmation in court as well as confirmation of a messenger’s words; the participle qôré’ indicates the public reading of a text and may involve proclamation of a decree in a legal setting; ’êmûnâh refers to the reliability of both a witness and a messenger.

The messenger is also the most likely candidate to fulfill the legal functions present in Hab 2:2b-4. The messenger carries and proclaims the tablets (2:2); the messenger will testify at the appointed time concerning the vision (2:3a) and will arrive speedily at his destination (2:3b); finally, the righteous will survive by the faithful activity of this messenger-witness (2:4b). Most of these observations regarding the presence of a messenger in Hab 2:1-4 are not independently conclusive. Nonetheless, the explanation

which makes the best sense of all of the individual elements discussed above is the one argued here: Hab 2:1-4 involves the speedy delivery of a vision written on tablets by the qôrê', who will testify concerning this vision “at the appointed time”/“at the end.”

Further, it is worth noting that court scribes commonly wrote messages on sealed/legally confirmed documents (tablets or papyri) which were to be sent out from a king and his assembly (cf. 4.2.5). An example of this is the decree sent by the Persian king in Esther 8. The command by Yahweh to “write and legally confirm a vision on tablets” most likely fits into a similar picture: this vision on sealed tablets is to be delivered by a runner to some unstated location. If one moves beyond the idea of a court scribe, however, the picture becomes less clear. Nonetheless, there are several additional observations worth making.

First, if Yahweh’s response in 2:2 entails acquiescence to Habakkuk's intercession in ch. 1, then it would make perfect sense for Yahweh to agree to bring the Chaldeans (or the responsible deity? cf. Psalm 82 and section 2.1) to trial. If this were the case, then one can envision that the runner was summoning the defendant to court, a common phenomenon in ancient near eastern legal proceedings.192 In such instances, defendants were often ordered to appear within a set time frame,193 which would fit with the assertion that “he will testify...at the appointed time...” in Hab 2:3a.

Another possibility is that Habakkuk’s tablets record not a summons to court, but a public proclamation regarding a decision that had already been made. As in Esther 8, such

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193 Holtz, Neo-Babylonian Court Procedure, 133.
proclamations were often recorded on sealed tablets.\textsuperscript{194} In the Old Assyrian texts, such legal decisions were sent out from a city assembly to its colonies.\textsuperscript{195} The public proclamation prescribed in this text could easily be recognized in the formula \textit{qr’b} found in Hab 2:2, which describes the activity of the person who runs to proclaim the tablets. The speedy delivery assured in Hab 2:3b might also fit with this scenario.

4.4 Directions for further research

Despite these interesting possibilities, several challenges emerge at this point. If the tablets contain a public proclamation, why is witnessing “at the appointed time” mentioned in v. 3a? Further, why would the “righteous live by his faithfulness”? How would a public proclamation solve the problem Habakkuk has raised, providing life for the righteous? These questions suggest that the “public proclamation” scenario does not completely explain the evidence. Despite these problems with the public proclamation scenario, the “court summons” scenario also has its problems. V. 3a seems to fit more closely with this scenario because it speaks of the actions of witnesses (“for he will testify to the vision at the appointed time, he will witness at the end, he will not lie”). Likewise, v. 4b (“the righteous shall live by his faithfulness”) also seems to belong in this context. Nonetheless, even in this scenario, which seems to explain vv. 3a and 4b, it is still unclear what role Habakkuk’s \textit{ḥāzôn} “vision” plays. What would it mean to “testify to a vision”? For that matter, what would it mean to “write a vision”? What is the content of this vision, and how would it be involved in the trial which seems to be underway in Hab 2:1-4?

\textsuperscript{194} Also cf. ibid., 304.

\textsuperscript{195} Westbrook, \textit{A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law}, vol 1, 432.
It is also unclear whether Habakkuk is located at the divine council when he receives the command to “write a vision” (or is this command directed to someone else?). Because Habakkuk seems to have stationed himself as a watchman, one would expect him to be awaiting news via a messenger from a distant location. But if he is at the divine council, operating perhaps as a “court scribe” who may be spoken to directly by Yahweh, why does he depict himself as a “watchman”? The pieces do not quite fit together, although one might note that written summonses to appear in a particular court were not always written at that court.196

These questions demand further investigation, and perhaps such investigation will challenge the interpretations put forth here. Nonetheless, in spite of its ultimate resistance to complete explanation, Hab 2:1-4 does indeed acquire a greater degree of clarity and focus when viewed in light of the divine king and the divine council. It may not be precisely clear what role the messenger-witness plays in the legal proceedings which Habakkuk initiated in ch. 1. Nonetheless, Hab 2:1-4 makes more sense when read in this context than in a different one, such as the political machinations of Judean politics or the delivery of an oracle to an oppressed population by a doubting prophet.

4.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to bring to a conclusion the investigation of the book of Habakkuk, and of Hab 2:1-4 specifically, in light of the ancient near eastern social institutions of kingship and assemblies. This chapter examined the presence of significant legal terminology and messenger terminology in Hab 2:1-4 and applied this terminology to

a single figure. As with other parts of the book of Habakkuk, this passage too makes the
most sense when read in light of the divine council, especially given the importance of this
context elsewhere in the book. Nonetheless, it is difficult to explain with any precision the
legal procedure underway in this passage. Still, the idea that a legal procedure involving the
divine council is indeed at work in Hab 2:1-4 is the hypothesis which makes the best sense
of the evidence, even if there are aspects of the passage which still remain unexplained.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis has argued that the book of Habakkuk comes into the clearest focus and demonstrates the greatest thematic unity when it is read in light of two ancient near eastern social institutions: kingship and assemblies. It began with the battle against the sea in ch. 3, arguing that it makes the most sense when understood as a response by the divine king to the problem of injustice raised by Habakkuk in ch. 1. Because the maintenance of justice was the special responsibility of the king, Habakkuk appealed to the divine king to rectify the injustice brought about by the Chaldeans. Further, the institution of assemblies, an institution closely related to kingship, fits closely with two aspects of ch. 3 which were discussed in light of kingship: Yahweh’s retinue and the responsibility for maintaining justice. Habakkuk’s intercession in ch. 1 also makes the most sense when understood as taking place at the divine council. This is especially the case if one thinks of vv. 5-11 as some sort of reference to an earlier decree which Habakkuk protests throughout the chapter and if one reads the suffix verbs of v. 12 as a request or wish rather than a statement. Finally, Hab 2:1-4 contains indications of legal proceedings involving a messenger in some way. Even though it is difficult to explain the nature of these proceedings with any precision, the divine council is still the most plausible context for this passage. We leave it to further study to refine our hypotheses or perhaps to develop new explanations which take account of the evidence in more comprehensive ways.
This leads to the topic which began this thesis: the most influential and commonly quoted verse from the book of Habakkuk. According to the argument presented here, Hab 2:4b describes the survival of the “righteous” by the faithful testimony of an agent not to be identified with the righteous. This agent is most likely identical with the messenger who “runs” in Hab 2:2. While this is not the place for a survey or analysis of the use of Hab 2:4b in other texts, it is clear that this interpretation does not fit closely with the idea that “the righteous shall live by his faith (in God)” or “the righteous shall live by his faithfulness (to the Torah).” Both of these interpretations understand Hab 2:4b almost as a proverb, describing either the means by which righteous persons may acquire life or simply the “way of life” of the righteous. The evidence presented here, however, suggests that Hab 2:4b is part of a larger train of thought which begins with the report of Yahweh’s response to Habakkuk in 2:2. This report involves a command to write and legally confirm a vision on tablets (2:2), an assurance that the one who runs will testify to the vision at the appointed time and will not delay (2:3), and a promise that through the faithful testimony of this herald, the righteous will in fact attain their expected reward, which is survival and flourishing in the land given them by Yahweh (2:4).
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