

## A Strategy for Overcoming Divine Silence in Psalm 77 and Habakkuk<sup>1</sup>

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Human consternation in the face of divine silence, or apparent divine indifference to formal procedures of supplication, appears somewhat often in the Hebrew Bible. Biblical texts, especially in the Psalms and the Prophets, confront head on the difficult situations where someone makes a formal inquiry or petition to God but does not apparently receive an immediate answer from God. Ritual experts, prophets, scribes and others sought remedies for this type of divine silence, and over time hard won strategies began to take shape to ameliorate the problem.<sup>2</sup> The solutions sought for the problem of divine silence in Psalm 77 and the book of Habakkuk share a structurally similar logic, which explains their appeal to similar traditions and their similarities in diction.

In ancient Israel, thinkers shared an almost universal assumption about the character of Yhwh, the God of Israel: they assumed—just as worshippers of oth-

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  - 2 See here the wide-ranging and influential treatment of the problem in the work of Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

er deities in the Near East also did—that Yhwh would respond to the legitimate requests and acts of supplication directed to him by his human followers. Such requests could be posed on behalf of the community as a whole, or by individuals, for example, the Psalmist, but also by others: prophets, expectant mothers, kings, officiants in the cult, etc. The legitimate cries of Yhwh’s people, it was expected, would have an almost automatic effect on him: he would respond actively. Exodus 2:23–24 represents something of an archetypal instance:

23 ויהי בימים הרבים ההם וימת מלך מצרים ויאנחו בני־ישראל מן־העבדה ויזעקו ותעל שועתם אל־האלהים מן־העבדה: 24 וישמע אלהים את־נאקתם ויזכר אלהים את־בריתו את־אברהם את־יצחק ואת־יעקב:

“After a long while, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned because of the slavery and they cried out; their plea went up to God because of the slavery. God heard their plaint, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

On the other hand, specific bad actions of the people could affect God’s responsiveness. Yet especially when this is the case, the exception proves the rule, since texts must go to considerable lengths to explain why God might *not* respond to a human cry. A poignant example is Samuel’s speech about the people requesting a king: וזעקתם ביום ההוא מלפני מלככם אשר בחרתם לכם ולא־יענה יהוה אתכם: “You will cry out on that day on account of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but Yhwh will not answer you on that day” (1 Sam 8:18). Lamentations 3:57 similarly wrestles with how the principle of God’s responsiveness can be reclaimed in the wake of disaster. With Jerusalem in rubble after the assault of the Babylonians, the poet affirms the principle of divine response to human supplication: “You draw near on the day when I call you; you say, ‘do not fear.’” And yet, destruction came to Judah and Jerusalem. The explanation, Lamentations insists, may be expressed by the type

of countervailing idea articulated also in the Samuel passage: נחננו פשענו ומרינו אהת: לא סלחת: “We transgressed and rebelled; you have not forgiven” (3:42).

Yet there is another type of specific example in which God’s apparent failure to respond to a legitimate cry of supplication or act of cultic inquiry deserves further consideration. In this type of example, legitimate acts of supplication before the deity in the context of the cult apparently go unanswered and this produces a profound anxiety. The two examples I want to consider in more detail by way of illustration are taken from prophecy—the book of Habakkuk—and from Psalms—number 77.

Scholars have long recognized that the book of Habakkuk actually shares a number of features in common with the Psalms. The opening of the first chapter of Habakkuk, 1:2–4, reads like an excerpt from a typical individual lament or complaint psalm, as P. Humbert demonstrated.<sup>3</sup> F. I. Andersen, building on the work of Humbert and P. D. Miller, argues convincingly in favor of taking these verses as a complaint.<sup>4</sup> M. Floyd has suggested that 1:2–4 may more technically be a “prophetic complaint about the fulfillment of an oracle.”<sup>5</sup> The particular problem in this psalm-like complaint has to do with calling out and not receiving a response from God; the absence of a divine response is thus signaled as the central problem of the prophetic book.<sup>6</sup>

Even more than the complaint of 1:2–4, the third chapter of Habakkuk, for-

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3 P. Humbert, *Problèmes du Livre d’Habacuc*, Neuchâtel: University of Neuchâtel Press, 1944, pp. 9–11.

4 F. I. Andersen, *Habakkuk*, Anchor Bible, New York: Doubleday, 2001, p. 21; P. D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994, pp. 68–73.

5 M. H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, FOTL 22, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000, p. 99.

6 “The prophet excoriates God’s inaction in response to ‘violence’ (1:2–3) and the dissolution of מִשְׁפָּט ‘justice’ (1:4). God’s inaction permits the perversion of Torah and the predations of the wicked against the righteous,” D. S. Vanderhooft, *Habakkuk*, in: M. D. Coogan (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible*, New York and

mally labeled the תפלה “prayer” of the prophet in its superscription (3:1), is a clear “psalm-like” composition. It is an archaic poetic text that celebrates the God of Israel as a Warrior, one who appears in a dramatic theophany to defeat the terrible forces of chaos.<sup>7</sup> These foes are personified, as they sometimes are elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, in the figures of “Sea” and “River.” In addition to the dominant poetic form of its lines in tricola, Habakkuk 3 also has other psalm-like features: like most Psalms, it contains a superscription, which reads “the *təpillāh* of Habakkuk, the prophet, according to *šigyōnôt*.” Psalm 7:1 is the only other text containing the obscure term *šiggāyôn*, which is probably related to the Akkadian term *šigû*, a type of lamentation.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Habakkuk 3 uses the term *selah* as a liturgical marker three times, the only poem outside the Psalms to use *selah*. Finally, Hab 3:19 concludes with a subscription or colophon that reads, לַמְנַצֵּחַ בְּנַגִּינוֹת “for the leader, with [my] stringed instruments.” This phrase occurs elsewhere in the superscriptions to seven psalms (4:1; 6:1; 54:1; 55:1; 61:1; 67:1; 76:1).<sup>9</sup> Habakkuk 3 therefore deploys many formal markers that link it explicitly to the Psalms as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

Yet there are more than simply formal markers signaling a connection to the

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Oxford: Oxford University, 2011, pp. 351–57.

- 7 For its archaic elements, see W. F. Albright, The Psalm of Habakkuk, in: H. H. Rowley (ed.), *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1950, pp. 1–18; B. Margulis, The Psalm of Habakkuk: A Reconstruction and Interpretation, *ZAW* 82, 1970, pp. 409–42; F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1973, pp. 70–71, 102–3, 140; and in greatest detail, T. Hiebert, *God of My Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 38, Decatur, Georgia: Scholars, 1986; Andersen, *Habakkuk*, pp. 284–89.
- 8 CAD Š2, s.v. *šigû*, pp. 413–14; see already S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004 [first edition Oxford: Blackwell, 1962], p. 2.209; also Andersen, *Habakkuk*, pp. 268–72 with some reservations.
- 9 Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, pp. 210–13.

Psalms. An impressive list of lexical connections links Habakkuk to a particular psalm, namely, Psalm 77. Scholars have long recognized the lexical overlap especially between the theophanic poem of Habakkuk 3 and Ps 77:17–20.<sup>11</sup> There are, however, broader connections between the book and Psalm 77. To understand the parallels in diction and logic, I begin with a translation of Psalm 77:

1. For the leader, pertaining to Yeduthun; of Asaph, a *mizmôr*.

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2. Aloud to God I cry aloud to God, that he might hear me.

3. On the day of my distress I inquire of my Lord; my hand is outstretched all night, it never falters<sup>12</sup>; my being refuses to be comforted.

4. I remember, O God, and I rail; I ponder and my spirit languishes. Selah.

5. You have gripped my very eyelids! I am so shaken I cannot speak.

6. I consider days of yore, bygone years.

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10 Cf. Margulis, *The Psalm of Habakkuk*, p. 437.

11 See already C. A. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, International Critical Commentary, 2 vols., New York: Scribner's, 1907, pp. 2.171–78: “[Psalm 77 is] based on Hab. 3”; Albright, *Psalm of Habakkuk*, p. 9, thinks Habakkuk is dependent on Ps 77; he is followed by M. Dahood, *Psalms*, Anchor Bible, Garden City, NJ, 1968; and Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, pp. 70–71. See also the studies of J. S. Kselman, *Psalm 77 and the Book of Exodus*, *JANES* 15, 1983, pp. 51–58; Hiebert, *God of My Victory*; W. van der Meer, *Psalm 77:17–19: Hymnisches Fragment oder Aktualisierung?* *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 70, 1994, pp. 105–11; and E. S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, *FOTL* 15, Grand Rapids, 2001, p. 89. F.-L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger suggest that “the author of the psalm has integrated independent hymnic fragments,” *Psalms 2*, Hermeneia, Philadelphia: Fortress, 2005, p. 276. For an exposition concentrating especially on aspects of Yhwh's presentation as a “weather god,” see R. Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott: Studien zur althebräischen Kultlyrik anhand ausgewählter Psalmen*, *BZAW* 387, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008, 43–63.

12 On the meaning of the verb, see below, n. 32.

7. I remember through the night my song, with my mind I ponder; my spirit broods.

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8. Will my Lord spurn forever, and never again show favor?

9. Has his *hesed* ceased in perpetuity; did he cut off [every] oracle for all generations?

10. Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he terminated his mercies through wrath? Selah.

11. I concluded, “This pains me: the right hand of Elyon changed.”<sup>13</sup>

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12. I remember the deeds of Yah; indeed I remember your wonders of yore.

13. I consider all your action; ponder your deeds.

14. O God, your way is in holiness! What god is as great as God?

15. You are the God who performs a wonder; you’ve made known among the peoples your might.

16. You rescued your people with an arm, the children of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.

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17. Waters saw you, God<sup>14</sup>; Waters saw you and churned; indeed Deepes writhed.

18. Clouds poured waters; heavens thundered; your arrows darted around.

19. The sound of your thunder was in the tempest; lightning bolts lit the world; the earth quaked and shook.

20. Your way was via the sea; your tracks over many waters; but your footprints were unknown.

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13 For this line, see especially Kselman, Psalm 77 and Exodus, p. 52 n. 7; similarly, Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, p. 274, n. e.

14 Originally perhaps “Yhwh,” thus altered here in the “Elohistic Psalter”; thus Briggs, *Book of Psalms*, vol. 2, p. 171; also Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, p. 136 n. 82. Yet Elohim here echoes the El/Elohim play in v. 14.

21. You led your people like the flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Psalm 77, in summary, is about crying out to God and bringing to his attention his deeds of old in the Psalmist's present dire circumstance. The psalm struggles with the problem of whether, in the midst of a human crisis, God might disregard his characteristic faithfulness, cancel his promises, "forget" his acts of *hesed*, cut off every oracle (*ʿōmer*), and eliminate his mercies in anger. In short, Psalm 77 treats the terrifying problem of whether, as v. 11 suggests, "the right hand of Elyon changes"—whether God remains silent in response to a formal human appeal for support. If he can disregard the formal cultic inquiry of a suffering person, then what is to become of the human community? A solution seems mandatory.

The psalm divides into several parts. After the superscription, which invokes the enigmatic ידותן (Qr; see also Ps 39:1; 62:1), it describes in vv. 2–7 a cultic act of divinatory inquiry by an individual. The Psalmist, in an unspecified moment of crisis, directs an inquiry to God to obtain an oracular assurance of remedy. Whether this is an individual making inquiry on his own behalf, or rather on behalf of the community, is not directly relevant to my argument. Verse 2 announces the general problem:

קולי אל־אלהים ואצעקה קולי אל־אלהים והאזין אלי:

The cry is, we should note, deliberately artful, not merely a *cri de coeur*, placing the cohortative verb at the end of v. 2a, Janus-like, between two identical phrases: קולי אל־אלהים. Verse 3 is then very important for the larger argument. The phrase, "On the day of my distress I inquire of my Lord," is a reference to making an oracular inquiry to God, perhaps at the temple, to solicit a divine oracle in response. The verb דרש "inquire" is certainly used in this way elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>15</sup> A good example that specifies the divine word in time of

war as the object of the verb occurs in 1 Kgs 22:5, the case of Micaiah ben Imlah, where Jehoshapat of Judah demands: דַּרְשׁוּנָא כִּיּוֹם אֶת־דַּבֵּר יְהוָה “inquire today for a word of Yhwh.” The verb is used in the same sense as our Psalm on several occasions in Jeremiah as well (Jer 21:2; 29:7; 38:4).<sup>16</sup> Another clue that this is the correct understanding of the Psalm’s reference to “making an inquiry of Yhwh,” is the reference to the speaker’s posture: he extends his hand all night and will not let it falter or drop, *tāpûg*. This posture, of extending the hands to God, routinely signals an act of ritual supplication. Examples of stretching out the hands when making a concrete plea include Ps 28:2, 63:5 and 143:6; meanwhile, Ps 44:21 protests that members of the Psalmist’s community have not stretched forth their hands to a strange god. At the same time, nocturnal supplications, possibly of a mantic nature, are common (e.g., Ps 88:10; 6:7). Christopher Frechette has studied this phenomenon of supplicatory posture in its wider Near Eastern and especially Mesopotamian contexts. The gesture pertains to obtaining a favorable audience with a superior in order to have a request heard and to generate a suitable response. A typical example, cited by Frechette, comes from the Assyrian king Esarhaddon in the seventh century, one of whose inscriptions reads: “I lifted my hand (*qātī aššīma*) to the gods Aššur, Sîn, Šamaš, Bēl, Nabû, and Nergal, Ištar of Nineveh, (and) Ištar of Arbela, and they received my word(s) favorably.”<sup>17</sup> The expectation is that the royal request and associated rituals will yield a divine response in the form of concrete aid.

In Psalm 77, the opening demand to be heard, the explicit reference to mak-

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15 See C. Westermann, *Die Begriffe für Fragen und Suchen im Alten Testament*, *Kerygma und Dogma* 6, 1960, pp. 2–30; also G. Gerleman, “*drš*,” *TLOT*, 346–51.

16 See the discussion in D. S. Vanderhooft, *Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, My Servant: Contrasting Prophetic Images of the Great King*, *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 7/1, 2018, pp. 103–5.

17 C. Frechette, *Mesopotamian Ritual-prayers of “Hand-lifting”* (Akkadian *Šuillas*), *AOAT* 379, Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2012, p. 237.

ing inquiry of Yhwh, the reference to extending the hand all night, a second reference to the night in v. 7, along with the vivid image of the eyelids forcibly held open by God himself (v. 5),<sup>18</sup> all indicate that the text is describing a nocturnal act of oracular inquiry. I am not persuaded, however, that Schmidt was correct to argue, already in 1928, that the text describes a juridical ordeal, in which an accused party endures a nocturnal trial by ordeal to ascertain, by morning's light, his guilt or innocence as before a court.<sup>19</sup> But I do think that this and other psalms make it clear that oracular inquiries, in general, could be made at night with the expectation that morning would bring a divine response to the petitioner. Whether we should follow Sigmund Mowinckel, and Begrich before him, in the suggestion that the response was often transmitted as a "priestly oracle of salvation" remains less convincing to me.<sup>20</sup> What Psalm 77 emphasizes, in any case, is the Psalmist's tortured nighttime experience. It pairs the sequence of verbs *zākar* (twice), *śiaḥ* (twice), and *ḥiṣṣab* with objects including God, days of yore, and שנות עולמים "years gone by." The acts of recollection are balanced with painful expressions of total psychic breakdown: "I am so shaken I cannot speak. I consider days of yore, bygone years. I remember through the night my song, with my mind I ponder; my spirit broods" (vv. 4–7). This leads in turn in vv. 8–10 to a series of rhetorical questions that illumine an even more significant

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18 LXX and Syr. read the verb as plural, while Symm. and Jerome read a singular. MT, as *lectio deficiolor*, is preferable (so also Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, p. 277). The idea that the Psalmist understands God to be responsible for "prying open the eyelids" is unique.

19 See H. Schmidt, *Das Gebet der Angeklagten im Alten Testament*, BZAW 49, Giessen: Töpelmann, 1928; and for an insightful critique, K. van der Toorn, *Ordeal Procedures in the Psalms and the Passover Meal*, VT 38, 1988, pp. 427–29.

20 J. Begrich, *Das Priesterliche Heilsorakel*, ZAW 52, 1934, pp. 81–92; Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, p. 2.60: "the temple prophet (priest) is supposed to be the intermediary and messenger; the deity is supposed to speak to the cultic official about the worshipper, and then the cultic official announces what the deity has said."

problem than the one that elicited the original divination inquiry: no answer is forthcoming from God in response to the inquiry. Note the incredulous question particularly in v. 9b: “(has) he cut off (every) oracle for all generations?” The noun *ʾōmer* here, I think, may reasonably be taken to be coextensive with the content of the expected divination “oracle,” as Dahood already argued when discussing the term in Ps 68:12: אֲדַנִּי יִתְרָאֵמֶר הַמְבַשְׂרוֹת צַבָּא רַבּ: “The Lord gave an oracle, the messengers [formed] a great brigade.”<sup>21</sup> At the end of the Psalmist’s questions, however, he reaches a terrifying conclusion, because God has not provided an oracle in response to his cry: “the right hand of Elyon changed.” The characteristic response of the deity to the petitioner in need—active response and deliverance—is in abeyance, or worse. The Psalmist is crushed.

The tone, however, then quickly changes in v. 12, which begins a new unit. The Psalmist reexerts his cognitive faculties. He activates his mind. In a staccato series of four verbs he “remembers” (twice), “considers,” and “ponders” God’s acts of old. Earlier in the Psalm, consideration of God and the days of old or bygone years in vv 3–7 were paired with statements of exasperation and distress. Now, in an ecstatic affirmation, he declares, “your way is in holiness!” and he asks, מִי־אֵל גָּדוֹל כְּאֱלֹהִים “what god is as great as God?” (v. 14; cf. Exod 15:11).<sup>22</sup> And what acts in particular does the Psalmist recall? He recalls in v. 16, גָּאֵלְתָּ, בְּזַרְעֵךָ עָמְךָ בְּנִי־יַעֲקֹב וַיּוֹסֶף “You rescued your people with an arm, the children of Jacob and Joseph.” Kselman argues that “by calling to mind the paradigmatic act of wonder and power from Israel’s past, Yahweh’s victory over Egypt and his mastery over the sea, the psalmist answers the questions of Psalm 77 by asserting that God’s mighty power to save is still active.”<sup>23</sup>

Kselman’s reading is fundamentally correct, but more can be said. How,

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21 Dahood, *Psalms*, p. 1.179.

22 The original was perhaps כִּידָהּ.

23 Kselman, Psalm 77 and Exodus, p. 53.

after all, does recollection of Yhwh's past achievements help the Psalmist overcome his present anguish? No indication is given that he had received a response to his opening oracular inquiry, any sort of "priestly oracle of salvation." Instead, the text links the change of demeanor specifically to the Psalmist's reassertion of cognitive energy, to the reactivation of memory. For the moment, the Psalmist appears to have overcome his predicament, his nighttime crisis, by remembering the distant past. Whatever disaster brought about the existential pain he described at the beginning, it was not his oracular inquiry to God in the context of a ritual that renewed his confidence, but rather his activation of memory about God's past actions.

But the Psalm, of course, is not at an end. An unprecedented four verses, all containing neatly balanced poetic tricola in climactic parallelism—marking their antiquity in Albright's opinion<sup>24</sup>—celebrate the original victory of God over the "Deeps" (תְּהוֹמוֹת, v. 17) and the Waters of chaos (מַיִם רַבִּים, v. 20). By setting God's victory over the waters between an allusion to his rescue of the children of Jacob and Joseph and the reference to the leadership of Moses and Aaron in v. 21, the Psalm invites the interpretation that these four verses celebrate God's victory in much the same way that Exodus 15 does. This prompted Frank Cross to note of Psalm 77: "the creation myth is fully combined with the Exodus-Conquest events."<sup>25</sup>

Yet some scholars have argued that the poetic lines about God's conquest of the Sea are secondary, added to an otherwise unrelated Psalm.<sup>26</sup> Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, in their *Hermeneia* commentary, favor seeing these verses as secondary, and emphasize what they see as the fundamental problem

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24 Albright, *The Psalm of Habakkuk*, pp. 3–4; Hiebert, *God of My Salvation*, pp. 62–63.

25 Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, p. 136; similarly Kselman, *Psalm 77 and Exodus*, pp. 51–58.

26 See already Briggs, *Book of Psalms*, p. 2.171: "To this Ps. was added at a later date a little poem of four trimeter tristichs, based on Hb. 3, and also citing (v. 19) from Ps. 97:4."

in the interpretation of Psalm 77: “The description of personal crisis and remembrance of salvation history stand unconnected . . . the remembrance is not applied to the present of the petitioner’s situation of need.”<sup>27</sup> However, analogies to the problem detected by Hossfeld and Zenger are near at hand. Psalm 74, a *maskil* of Asaph, contrasts the possession of oracular “signs” (אותות) by Israel’s foes (v. 4) with a corresponding lack among Israel’s people: אותותינו לא ראינו “we do not perceive our signs” (v. 9). In Psalm 74, reflection on the decimation of the Temple, combined with a lack of divinatory signs (words) from the deity (in response to oracular inquiries?), likewise prompt recollection of God’s ancient acts of conquest over the waters (vv. 13–15).<sup>28</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger seem to disregard this fact. Kselman makes a stronger case for understanding the references to the Divine Warrior in Ps 77:17–20 as integral—although formally distinctive—forming a coherent, unified argument. He argues that the hymnic material, with its explicit allusions to God’s defeat of the *mayim rabbim*, was used by the poet “to answer [the] series of questions” posed in vv. 8–10.<sup>29</sup> I think that Kselman is correct, but that we can go one step further. The archaic poetic materials of vv. 17–20, I contend, stand as a *substitute* for the oracular response that did not come in response to the Psalmist’s oracular inquiry. Through the exertion of cognitive effort, the reappropriation or *Aktualisierung* of ancient tropes pertaining to the Divine Warrior, the poet recovers, reworks, and presents archaic hymnic materials—in whatever form they may have been known—as the effective equivalent of a new oracular response of God. The solution to what might be seen as a failure in cultic terms, as a case of divine silence, is overcome through an effort that could be cautiously described as “proto-canonical.”

Psalm 77 emerges from the realm of the Israelite cult; it is defined by the

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27 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, p. 276.

28 Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, p. 1.84–85.

29 Kselman, Psalm 77 and Exodus, p. 53.

ritual framework of the Psalmist's nighttime oracular inquiry. It has as its background a ritual process: the accepted idea that the crisis of a petitioner can be alleviated when the petitioner makes a cultic inquiry and awaits and receives a word in response. But in Psalm 77, no indication is offered that God heard or responded to the inquiry, which causes distress. When the divination inquiry yields no response, the petitioner encounters silence. The petitioner then explicitly reappropriates elements of the ancient tradition. If vv. 17–20 rely upon traditions similar to those found elsewhere in such texts as Exodus 15, Psalm 18, and Habakkuk 3, then it would appear that the answer that the Psalmist is finally able to offer in the wake of his failed inquiry does not come from a new oracular word from God. The Psalmist recycles ancient hymnic materials to fit the purpose.

How does the approach to Ps 77:17–20 above pertain to understanding the book of Habakkuk, then? As noted, scholars have long recognized that the hymn in Ps 77:17–20 has close parallels in the language of the hymn of Habakkuk 3. Of the 34 words in Ps 77:17–20, 24 of them appear in Habakkuk 3. Several of the lines bear obvious connections, especially vv. 10, 11, and 15.<sup>30</sup>

But let me set the question of parallels between these texts against the general framework of how the third chapter fits within the book of Habakkuk, which, I think, shares a structural logic similar to that of Psalm 77. Habakkuk treats the causes and consequences of Chaldean military dominance not just over Judah, but over the earth.<sup>31</sup> After the superscription, the prophet's complaint begins with a question about how long God will tolerate violence and evil. The prophet

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30 For lexical similarities, see Humbert, *Problèmes du Livre d'Habacuc*, pp. 58–72, 204–45; for clausal parallels, Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*, pp. 53–54.

31 On the designation “Chaldeans” in 1:5, and more generally in HB, see D. S. Vanderhooft, “Depictions of כשדים “Chaldeans” in Judean Prophecy and Historiography,” in: S. Ahituv, A. Baruchi-Unna, I. Eph'al, T. Forti, and J. H. Tigay (eds.) *Now It Happened in Those Days”: Studies in Biblical, Assyrian and Other Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Mordechai Cogan on His 75th Birthday*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017, pp. 171–82.

angrily questions God's inaction in response to "violence" (1:2, 3) and the dissolution of "justice", משפט (1:4). God's inaction, the prophet asserts, permits the displacement or removal of Torah (תפיג תורה)—the same verb is predicated of the Psalmist's "hand" in Ps 77:3.<sup>32</sup> In general, according to this complaint, God's failure to respond to the prophet's cry about violence allows the wicked to prevail over the righteous (1:4).

After the prophet's complaint comes God's astonishing announcement in 1:5–11: for unstated reasons, God announces that he is now raising up the fearsome Chaldeans, who terrorize populations, take captives, and depose kings and rulers. As Abraham Heschel wrote of God's announcement: "The Voice does not explain why God should rouse the terrible Chaldeans to march through the breadth of the earth. On the contrary, the message represents another assault upon Habakkuk's understanding, adding mystery to amazement."<sup>33</sup>

In 1:12–17, Habakkuk therefore addresses God again, in the style of Moses, now leveling a harsh accusation against him.<sup>34</sup> After describing God's characteristics—he is מקדום, "primordial" (the phrase occurs also in Ps 77:12); "too pure of eyes to look upon evil," and "incapable of looking upon wrong" (1:12–13)—the

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32 The rarity of this word and its appearance in Ps 77:3 is noteworthy. In Habakkuk, LXX translates διασκέδασται, "(Torah) is dispersed," indicating physical removal. In post-biblical Hebrew, *pwg* does mean "to disappear" or "to lose (something)," and the Greek translators apparently reflect this semantic sense. The meaning "to disappear," moreover, has ancient roots. The Akkadian verb *puāgu* is cognate with Hebrew *pwg*, and von Soden provides the definition "gewaltsam wegnehmen (jmd.m)," (*AHw* 874b, s.v.). The semantic range of the term in Akk., in biblical Hebrew, and in post-biblical Hebrew (reflected also by LXX) includes "to displace, remove, or lose." In Ps 77:3, it means "falter," or "drop."

33 A. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 2 vols., New York: Harper and Row, 1962, vol. 1, p. 141.

34 On the Mosaic aspect of the prophetic role here, see Y. Muffs, *Who Will Stand in the Breach?: A Study of Prophetic Intercession*, in: *Love and Joy. Law, Language and Religion in Ancient Israel*, New York: JTS, 1992, pp. 9–48.

prophet then asks why God is silent when “the wicked swallows one more righteous than he” (1:13). Verse 14 levels another serious accusation against God, that he has turned humans into fish. The central element in this accusation of malfeasance is God’s demotion of humans from their rightful place in the cosmos. The accusation stems from the prophet’s perception of Chaldean crimes. By denuding the nations, the Chaldean conqueror, God’s agent, becomes a kind of imperial fisherman, a Sea Monster, or, as chapter 2 says, like Mawet (“Death,” 2:5). Chapter 1 ends with the prophet describing the Chaldean conqueror as a remorseless fisherman and his victims as the catch.

Chapter 2 opens with the prophet ascending a lookout’s post to await a divine response to his תוכחה, what I define as an accusation of divine wrongdoing (“legally actionable accusation of malfeasance”). God must finally respond to the prophet’s legal accusation, and He does break the silence that has plagued the prophet. The response consists of God’s instruction to transcribe a vision, which 2:3b says will come even if it is delayed. The warning here that the vision might well be delayed—even though the warning occurs in the account of God actually answering the prophet’s charges—is most vexing. Just as the text hints, then, the content of the vision promised by God does not materialize. God instead asserts the following about the vision: וצדיק באמונתו יחיה “the righteous one will live by its reliability” (2:4). J. G. Janzen carefully demonstrated in connection with this famous verse that the 3ms pronoun refers to the vision’s reliability, not to the righteous one’s faithfulness.<sup>35</sup> It appears that the vision itself must wait. A description of the oppressor is followed by four *hōy* or “woe” oracles to be uttered by the nations warning the oppressor of his inevitable fall.

It is the *tēpillāh* of chapter 3, instead, that proleptically articulates Habakkuk’s vision of Yhwh’s restoration of the cosmos. Habakkuk incorporates ele-

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35 J. G. Janzen, *Habakkuk 2:2–4 in the Light of Recent Philological Advances*, *HTR* 73, 1980, pp. 53–78; also Andersen, *Habakkuk*, p. 214.

ments of one or more archaic hymns in chap. 3, with patent echoes of traditions reflected already in the Ugaritic tales of conflict between Baal and his cosmic foes: Mot and Nahar/Yamm. In the version in Habakkuk, Yhwh, the Divine Warrior, marches out in an awesome theophany from Teman and Paran, both in the Southeast (3:3). *Deber*, “Plague,” and *Rešep*, “Pestilence”—cosmic forces of death identified in the archaic lore with divinities—march in God’s retinue: Deber in the van, Rešep in the rearguard. These olden gods have become part of Yhwh’s field force (3:5).<sup>36</sup> The earth quakes and the mountains tremble in the great theophany of God. The hymn celebrates, in other words, God’s primordial defeat of the agents of chaos. He raged against his foes: Nāhār and Yām, “River” and “Sea” (3:8). The echoes of Canaanite mythology are plain. There, Baal defeats Judge River (*tpt nhrm*) and Prince Yamm (*ym*). These are precisely the entities (minus their epithets) defeated by Yhwh in Habakkuk’s hymn after Yhwh mounts his horse-drawn chariot and readies his bow. The connections to the old mythology were recognized already by Cassuto in 1938, not long after the Ugaritic tablets were discovered and deciphered.<sup>37</sup> But this is finally not only a cosmic conflagration, for Yhwh not only defeated these hoary foes; he also “trode the earth in fury, and threshed nations in wrath” (3:12). Why? “To save your people, to save your anointed one” (3:13). The poet, it would seem, moves easily between the cosmic and historical planes, as Cross famously put it.

The author of Habakkuk 3, as Albright argued, “possessed a considerable amount of literary appreciation and ... lived in a strongly archaizing period.”<sup>38</sup> More recently, M. Barré has made a case for viewing the entirety of the poetic materials of Habakkuk 3 as a self-conscious scribal arrangement from its incep-

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36 So also Hiebert, *God of My Salvation*, pp. 92–94; Andersen, *Habakkuk*, pp. 306–7.

37 U. Cassuto, Chapter III of Habakkuk and the Ras Shamra Texts, *Biblical and Oriental Studies* 2, 1975, p. 11 (originally published in *Annuario di Studi Ebraici*, 1935–37 [1938], pp. 7–22).

38 Albright, *The Psalm of Habakkuk*, p. 9.

tion.<sup>39</sup> It exploits particular organizing principles including the use of anagrams of key roots, especially *q-r-b* and *b-r-q*, and *r-g-z* and *g-z-r*. Together with other indications of scribal conceits, Barré favors interpreting the prayer as a scribal composition rather than the incorporation of an older poem(s). Yet, the two views need not be contradictory, and the evidence of Psalm 77 here may be helpful. In both of these works, the authors advert to more ancient poetic materials and rework them into the macro-structures of their wider compositions. We may characterize this work as “scribal” even while we acknowledge the raw materials, however precisely they were obtained, were archaic.

As a whole, the book of Habakkuk treats a fundamental problem, one familiar from other Judean prophetic writings: the causes and consequences of foreign invasion. The book’s argument in response to this problem, however, is somewhat anomalous in the Judean prophetic tradition. It argues that God is complicit in the impending invasion by an implacable foe, and that his decision to raise up the feared Chaldeans is unacceptable. The prophet lays before God several challenging accusations. Habakkuk does not address God’s people, does not contain a prophetic messenger formula (e.g., “Thus says the Lord”), and does not warn the people of the error of their ways. Instead, the pattern of argument developed in Habakkuk represents an application of the same logical formulation as is found in Psalm 77. In Habakkuk 2, we recall, the prophet tried to get a response from God about the Chaldean oppressor through a formal procedure of legal disputation. He went up on his watchtower and awaited a response to his תוֹכַחַת. God responds with the promise of a *ḥazôn*, “vision.” This affords a parallel to the basic function of the oracular inquiry in Psalm 77, which was designed to elicit a favorable divine response. We saw, in Psalm 77, that no answer was forthcoming, and this precipitated a new crisis. Similarly, Habakkuk receives word that a

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39 M. Barré, *Newly Discovered Literary Devices in the Prayer of Habakkuk*, *CBQ* 75, 2013, pp. 446–62.

*ḥazôn* will arrive, but the text concedes that the vision might well be delayed. In fact, it is not clear whether the vision to be transcribed upon tablets ever *does* actually arrive. This led Albright, and, after him, Hiebert, to conclude that the poem of chapter 3, a recycled ancient hymn, actually serves as the effective equivalent of the promised *ḥazôn*. I think this is the most satisfactory hypothesis to account for the relationship between chapters 1–2 and chapter 3 of Habakkuk.

Thus, in Habakkuk, the logic of the argument and the concluding recitation of God's great achievements in defeating the agents of chaos, adumbrate the possibility of renewed cosmic order. The answer to the prophet's legal claim against the deity forces the prophet back to archaic traditions, as in Psalm 77. Yet Habakkuk differs, too. What Psalm 77 presents as a cultic procedure and possibly even private ritual, Habakkuk brings explicitly into the arena of political discourse and demands God's response. The procedures of oracular inquiry depicted in Psalm 77 give way in Habakkuk to language of the courtroom and are brought into the sphere of prophetic contest with God. But in both texts, the appeal to recognizably archaic hymnic materials functions as the effective equivalent of a *new* divine response. In Habakkuk, the hymn forms the content of the delayed vision, while in Psalm 77, the hymnic material becomes the effective content of a new oracle after a failed cultic inquiry.<sup>40</sup>

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40 The present paper is based on a talk delivered at Rikkyo University in Tokyo on April 1, 2019. As Prof. Shuichi Hasegawa reminded me before delivering the lecture, the classic Japanese novel, *Silence*, by Shusaku Endo, has as its main subject one variation of the problem considered in this paper: divine Silence in the face of suffering. Endo's historical novel deals with the perils of the 17th century Jesuit missionary work in Japan and the persecution of Japanese Christians during that period. Notwithstanding Endo's focus on the explicit perception of divine Silence by his protagonist, the Jesuit Rodrigues, Endo strategically breaks the Silence that Rodrigues experienced in several ways. First, through a kind of appeal to Natural Theology, Endo has Rodrigues consistently describe the sounds—human and natural—that washed over him even

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when he was terrified by Silence. In addition, Endo insists throughout the novel that Rodrigues's own memories could break the Silence: the priest regularly describes images of the Risen Jesus in art that affected him; but, most importantly for my subject, Rodrigues repeatedly quotes Scripture to himself and others, with the sound of those words echoing in the Silence. And in this latter sense, Endo was adopting and adapting a post-canonical approach analogous to that of the texts discussed in this paper.