

**THE SILENCE OF GOD:
AN EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF HABAKKUK**

1:1—2:20

BY

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DECLARATION

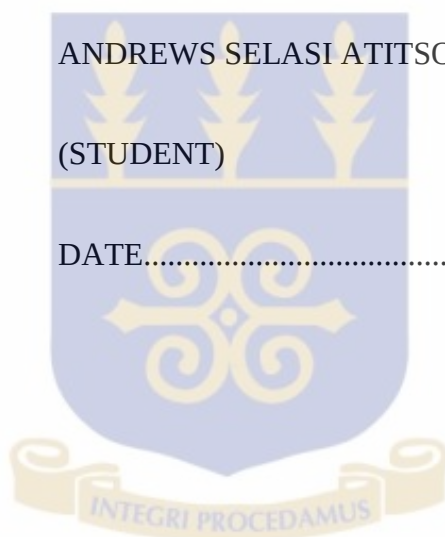
This is to certify that this thesis is the result of research undertaken by Andrews Selasi Atitsogbi (10441996) under the supervision of Dr. Nicoletta Gatti and Rev. Dr. George Ossom-Batsa towards the award of M.Phil, at the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana, Legon.

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ABSTRACT

The silence of God and the problem of evil are mysterious issues and a major concern for human history which many have tried to unravel. However, some contemporary Charismatic Churches try to use motivational or prosperity gospel to resolve the problem of evil. Some of their leaders preach that Christians must not lack anything. If that is so, how do we explain the circumstances of poverty, sufferings, natural and man-made disasters that claim so many lives? Is it because those who suffer such calamities are not ‘good’ Christians? The above questions are not new, the prophet Habakkuk in a different situation shares in the same agony. In his book, he discusses the confusing and often controversial issue of evil in his society.

Against this background, the research analyses Hab 1:1—2:20, a literary unit composed like a dialogue between the prophet and God dealing with a single question: “Why say nothing while the wicked swallows someone more upright than himself?” (1:3). The investigation employs a synchronic approach to the exegesis of the text. Among the main approaches available, the research follows a text centred approach called New Rhetorical Criticism. The method is suitable to the study of the text because prophetic literature is a ‘purposive literature’. The study analysed how the biblical author used rhetorical features (structures; metaphors; repetitions; parallelisms, etc.) to impact his readers and to confirm their faith in time of crisis. In the awareness that the hermeneutical cycle is not complete until the text becomes relevant in the life of the reader, in our case the Ghanaian reader, the communicative/dialogic approach proposed by Ossom-Batsa was employed.

In answering the major research question — i.e. how does Hab 1:1—2:20, articulate the problem of the ‘silence of God’? — The exegetical analysis indicates the concept of אֱמֻנָה, (faithfulness/steadfastness) as the rhetorical climax of the text. Therefore, the researcher concludes that God was not ‘silent’, as the prophet thought. The Almighty God has a plan for those who remain faithful to Him and in their steadfastness do not answer to violence with violence. At the appropriate time, the Almighty God will respond to His creatures.

The text challenges Charismatic Churches in Ghana to reconsider their preaching of ‘faith’ as ‘positive confession’, ‘investment’ and ‘prosperity right’. The engagement with the text invites Charismatic readers to embark on a journey from ‘positive confession’ to ‘dialogue with God’ even in the suffering; from ‘investment’ to trust and from ‘prosperity right’ to relationship, in order to cleave totally to God and to collaborate with him in transforming the world. Therefore, they are called to care and identify with the sufferings of the members of their various congregations and be actively involved in promoting social justice.

Finally, the researcher recommends a further academic study on the concept of the silence of God in Charismatic theology and prophetism, with respect to social action and social justice.

DEDICATION

First and foremost, I dedicate this work to the Almighty God, who cared and equipped me to bring this work to completion. Secondly, to my dear ones Mrs. Juliana Atitsogbi (wife), Mr. Seth Andrew Atitsogbi (father), Madam Philomina Dzogbo (mother), Prince, Kingsley and Perpetual (Children), I will forever remember you for your care, concern, love, and support towards my education.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	I
ABSTRACT	II
DEDICATION.....	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	9
1.3 Aims and Objectives.....	9
1.4 Research Questions.....	10
1.5 Literature Review	10
1.5.1 General Hermeneutics	10
1.5.2 African Hermeneutics.....	11
1.5.3 Rhetorical Analysis.....	17
1.5.4 Scholarly Debate on the Book of Habakkuk	22
1.5.5 Conclusion	27
1.6 Methodology.....	28
1.7 Organization of the Work	30
CHAPTER TWO.....	32
UNITY AND STRUCTURE OF HABAKKUK.....	32
2.1 Introduction.....	32
2.2 Literary Unit.....	33

2.3 Outline of the Book	38
2.4 Rhetorical Organization.....	42
2.5 Conclusion.....	47
CHAPTER THREE	48
EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF HABAKKUK 1:1—2:20	48
3.1 Introduction.....	48
3.2 A Dialogue with God: Habakkuk Previewed God’s Discipline of Judah (1:1-17)	48
3.2.1. Habakkuk’s Complaint (1:1-4).....	50
3.2.2 God’s Disclosure (1:5-11)	57
3.2.3 Habakkuk’s dilemma (1:12-17).....	63
3.3 A Dirge from God (2:1-20).....	67
3.3.1 Habakkuk’s Anticipation: Watch (2:1).....	68
3.3.2 God’s Admonition: ‘Write’ (2:2-5)	70
3.4 The five woes oracle (2:5-20).....	73
3.4.1 Woe for Intimidation (2:6-8)	75
3.4.2 Woe for Intemperance (2:9-11)	76
3.4.3 Woe for Iniquity (2:12-14)	77
3.4.4 Woe for Indignity (2:15-17)	79
3.4.5 Woe for Idolatry (2:18-20)	82
3.5 Conclusion.....	84
CHAPTER FOUR	89
FAITH IN THE CHARISMATIC CONTEXT	89
4.1 Introduction.....	89
4.2 Habakkuk’s Concept of Faith	90
4.3 Faith according to Charismatic Preaching.....	92

4.3.1 Faith as ‘Positive confession’	96
4.3.2 Faith as ‘Investment’	99
4.3.3 Faith as ‘Prosperity Right’	102
4.3.4 Conclusion	107
4.4 Challenges of Habakkuk to Charismatics Preaching.....	108
4.4.1 From ‘Positive Confession’ to Dialogue	109
4.4.2 From ‘Investment’ to ‘Trust’	111
4.4.3 From ‘Prosperity Right’ to Relationship	112
4.6 Conclusion.....	115
CHAPTER FIVE	116
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	116
5.1 Introduction.....	116
5.2 Summary.....	116
5.3 Conclusion.....	118
5.4. Recommendations.....	118
BIBLIOGRAPHY	121

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

So many people experience excruciating pains, tragedies, calamities and sufferings in life as a result of natural disasters and human violence. People from all races, tribes, languages and religions suffer from different kinds of diseases and disasters. Raging floods, massive storms and catastrophic earthquakes occur, and every year about 340 million people are affected by these and other disasters, which cause loss of lives and damage to personal property, agriculture and infrastructure.¹ These dreadful conditions of life and evil have been with man both in the ancient past and in our modern era, why?

For those who believe in the existence of a personal God, different questions arise: Why does God, in most agonising circumstances of life, seem to be silent? Is God not powerful enough to save? Is He unconcerned about His creation or is He a wicked Deity? If humans originate from a good and powerful Deity and He is our source, sustenance and livelihood, why then should humans experience so much pain, suffering, tragedy and calamity? Humanity expects the Supreme Being to arbitrate in moments of anguish but most of the times that does not happen. Why is this so? It is in regard of this that Blanchard wrote an article on “Where is God when things go wrong?”²

On 11th March, 2011, at 2:46 pm, a massive 9.0-magnitude earthquake occurred near the north-eastern coast of Japan, creating extremely destructive tsunami waves which hit the coast just minutes after the earthquake. The earthquake and the tsunami caused

¹ G. Bankoff, “In the Eye of the Storm: The Social Construction of the Forces of Nature and the Climatic and Seismic Construction of God in the Philippines” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35 no.1 (2011): 91–111.

² J. Blanchard, *Where is God When Things Go Wrong* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2005). www.johnblanchard.org.books.htm.

severe and extensive damage to the north-eastern part of Japan, leaving thousands of people dead, injured or missing, and millions more without electricity, water and transportation. On 10th February, 2014, a Japanese National Police Agency report confirmed 15,889 deaths, 6,152 injured, and 2,601 people missing across twenty regions, as well as 127,290 buildings totally collapsed, with a further 272,788 buildings ‘half collapsed’, and another 747,989 buildings partially damaged. Furthermore, the earthquake and the tsunami also caused extensive and severe structural damage in north-eastern Japan, including heavy damage to roads and railways as well as fires in many areas and a collapsed dam. According to the Japanese Prime Minister, Naoto Kan, this is the toughest and the most difficult crisis for Japan after 65 years of the end of the Second World War. About 4.4 million households were left without electricity and 1.5 million without water.³ The above report gives us a picture of the horror and the misery mankind is suffering. Why then is God silent?

Likewise, on the 22nd February, 2011, another server earthquake of 6.3 magnitude occurred in Christchurch, New Zealand. The New Zealand Prime Minister, John Key, confirmed that about 65 people died after the earthquake devastated Christchurch on what he described as the country’s “darkest day.”⁴ With regards to suffering in the world Arthur Schopenhauer ponders; “Human life must be some form of mistake.”⁵ The question is, why all these disasters in the life of human beings? Is there a God? Why is He silent?

³ Rasoul Sorkhabi, “Japan earthquake and tsunami of 2011,” *Time*, March 11, 2011 (accessed October 16th, 2014), <http://www.earthmagazine.org/article/japans-megaquake-and-killer-tsunami-how-did-happen>.

⁴ “New Zealand Earthquake Report,” *Time*, February 22, 2011 (accessed May 28th, 2014), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Christchurch_earthquake.

⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, “Aphorismes et Phrases en Anglais” (accessed April 14th, 2014), <http://www.phrases-anglais.net/aphorismes/arthur-schopenhauer/page/6/>.

However, inasmuch as natural disasters cause us great pain and loss of human life, on the other side of the spectrum, there is so much injustice and discomfort the human race brings upon their fellow humans. For instance, on the 7th of November, 2012, Ghana suffered a major accident when the five-story building which housed the Melcom Shopping Mall at Achimota collapsed and trapped about 82 people, out of which 14 died.⁶ Although the accident may be due to negligence on the part of the contractor, greed, lack of adherence to building codes and the use of inferior building materials, the question is: couldn't God have intervened and prevented the people from those tragic deaths?

Correspondingly, Government officials whom the citizens of their country voted into power for the welfare of both the rich and the poor are perverting justice by taking bribe and spending so much money such that the tax payer is suffering whereas ministers of state are enjoying and living in luxury. The poor are marginalized and abused; women are raped and taken undue advantage of and children are brutalized. For example, recently in Ghana, it was alleged that a renowned television and radio host, Mr. Kwasi Kyei Darkwa, popularly known as KKD was arrested by the Airport Police at African Regency Hotel in Accra, Ghana, for sexual assault.⁷

In like manner, graduates looking for jobs in some government institutions such as the security services are asked by some top government officials to pay as much as five thousand Ghana Cedis (GH¢ 5,000.00) or even more to be enlisted in these services through protocol. Some of the female graduates have to even warm the beds of the top government officials before getting jobs. These demands cause pains, sufferings and

⁶ "Melcom Disaster" *Times*, November 7, 2012 (accessed June 9th, 2014), www.myjoyonline.com.

⁷ Dominic Moses Awiah, "No show at KKD's trial," *Daily Graphic*, no 19652, p. 19. Tuesday, Dec.30, 2014. www.Graphic.com.gh.

frustration to our young graduates. For instance, in one of the Ghanaian newspapers, The Daily Graphic, recently reported on the Ghana Police recruitment scam which happened from the 2nd to 20th of March, 2015, resulting in hundreds of young men and women turning up at the five police training depots in the country for training. According to the newspaper report, most of the victims were university graduates. The Daily Graphic also gathered from the Police sources that some of the victims paid between GHC 2,000 to 3,500 just to join the service.⁸

Looking at all these injustices in life and the agonies of humankind, Gutierrez asks the following questions:

- 1) How can we proclaim the God of love to men and women who die prematurely and unjustly?
- 2) How are we to acknowledge that God makes us a free gift of love and justice when we have before us the suffering of the innocent?
- 3) What words are we to use in telling those who are not even regarded as persons that they are the daughters and sons of God?⁹

Gesché also points out that: “The suffering of the innocent and the questions it leads them to ask are indeed key problems for theology. The theology of liberation tries to meet this challenge”.¹⁰ The problem was already felt by those who empathised with the sufferings of the Amerindians of Peru toward the end of the sixteenth century. Poma tells us how he was moved by the plight of the people and set out to scour the ancient

⁸ Mary Mensah, “Police Recruitment scam” *Daily Graphic*, no 19705, p. 3. Monday, March 2, 2015, www.graphic.com.gh.

⁹ G. Gutiérrez, *On Job: God Talk and the suffering of the innocent* (New York: Maryknoll, 2003), xvi.

¹⁰ N. Gesché, “Le Problème du Mal, Problème de Société,” *In Théologie de la Libération* (Louvain-La-Neuve: Annales Cardijn, 1985), 33.

Incan empire in search of the poor people of Jesus Christ. According to Poma, his mission led him to settle among them for thirty years. He narrates how he went everywhere to see and promote justice and help for the poor. He saw and heard how these people faced injustice and destitution, how they were flogged and exploited.¹¹ The sufferings of the people made Poma exclaimed: “My God, where are you? Will you not hear me and help your poor, because I myself am helpless?” This exclamation shows that the silence is hardest to bear for those who believe that the God of our faith is a living God and not like the ‘gods’ of whom the psalmist says: “They have mouths, but do not speak” (Ps. 115:5).

Many are still persecuted for their faith and it appears that God is unconcerned. The New Testament establishes the fact that even Jesus Christ experienced the silence of God, during his crucifixion. He cried out with a loud voice saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? (Matt 27:46).

These questions are not new: many Old Testament texts testify the struggle human beings go through to understand the silence of God when faced with ‘innocent sufferings.’ A notable example is the story of Job and the cry of Habakkuk in the Old Testament. The Prophet called out to God in times of distress by crying out: “How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save?” (1:2). The prophet expects God to do something to bring him out of his sufferings but God seems far away and deaf to his supplication.

In the case of Job, he is recognized as a blameless and an upright man among his generation (1:1). According to the retributive theology, no evil should befall him. But what

¹¹ F.G.A. Poma, *El primer Nueva Coronica y Buen Gobierno* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1985), xxi.

do we see? Job is afflicted by several degrees of pains and agonies at a point in his life. He becomes exasperated with life and questions even his birth:

Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb?... who long for death, but it does not come, and search for it more than hidden treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad when they can find the grave? Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in? (3:11, 21-23).

Job's suffering causes him to see the universe as chaotic and lacking the presence of God; a place where God, as the One who creates and shapes the cosmos is absent. Certainly, when people suffer terrible hunger, horrible diseases and pain they wish they were dead.¹²

When Jeremiah was sent by God to speak forth His word, he expected that as soon as he delivers the message, God's judgement would come upon the people. However, God remained silent which invariably made the people mock at the prophet. Due to this, he suffered in the hands of those he prophesied to and as a result became disappointed in God. He lamented:

"O LORD, You induced me, and I was persuaded; you are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I am in derision daily; everyone mocks me. For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, 'Violence and plunder!' Because the word of the Lord was made to me a reproach and derision daily..." (Jer. 20:7).

Just like Job, he cursed the day he was born:

Cursed be the day in which I was born! Let the day not be blessed in which my mother bore me! Let the man be cursed who brought news to my father, saying, "A male child has been born to you!" making him very glad. And let that man be like the cities which the LORD overthrew, and did not relent; Let him hear

¹² G. Gutiérrez, *On Job*, xvii.

the cry in the morning and the shouting at noon, because he did not kill me from the womb, that my mother might have been my grave and her womb always enlarged with me. Why did I come forth from the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame (Jer. 20:14-18).

In the New Testament, we read that Paul suffered so much for the sake of God's mission. Even though he accomplished great things for the Lord, he faced many challenges and it was as if God had not called or sent him for a specific purpose. In his afflictions, he cries:

Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything (2 Cor. 6:4-10).

The examples above suggest that suffering was, is and probably will be a recurring event in human endeavour, thus raising doubts about the presence and the power of God. In contemporary Ghanaian Christianity, some Charismatic leaders try to unravel the mystery of suffering with the doctrine of 'prosperity Gospel'.¹³ They preach that

¹³ The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement in Ghana, according to C. N. Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism: A study of the development of Charismatic renewal in the mainline Churches in Ghana*. (Zoetermeer: Boekcentrum Publishing House, 2002), could be categorised as follows: (i) the independent churches originating in Ghana or from other African countries, otherwise called the African Initiated Churches (AICs). (ii) The Classical Pentecostal Movement, which began in North America at the beginning of the 20th century and appeared on the Ghanaian religious scene in the 1920s e.g. the Assemblies of God, The Church of Pentecost, Christ Apostolic Church etc. (iii) Neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic non-denominational fellowship for example the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship and Women Aglow, (iv) Charismatic renewal groups in the mainline Churches and (v) the independent Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches/Ministries including Christian Action Faith Ministries International, International Central Gospel Church, Fountain Gate Chapel etc. (vi). For the purposes of this study, Charismatic churches

Christians must not lack anything.¹⁴ According to them, if you are ‘born again,’ you are born to ‘take over territories and you are a champion’.¹⁵ Their sermons show that nothing can defeat the individual; but in case the individual is defeated, then probably he/she has sinned against God. These leaders hold the view that we can change our circumstances by positive confessions and speaking the word of faith. The researcher estimates this to be a profound statement, and acknowledges that these teachings in particular have helped numerous people out of their predicaments. However, many believers are still in their cruel and devastating situations.

How do we account for or explain the circumstances of poverty, sufferings, natural and man-made disasters that claim so many lives? Is it because those who suffer such calamities do not speak words of faith or confess positively? What could be wrong? Is positive confession not enough? These questions provoke the researcher’s curiosity to investigate the meaning of the ‘silence of God’ in human life.

The prophet Habakkuk, in a different situation, shares in the same agony. His prophecy discusses the confusing and often controversial issue of evil in the society. It answers such questions as: ‘Why does wickedness remain unpunished for so long?’ and ‘How can a holy God use wicked instruments to fulfil his purposes?’ The book addresses the seeming inequality of the proceedings of God in the government of the world, in which the good suffer evil, the evil enjoy prosperity and the worst domineer over the best.¹⁶

will be used in reference to (v) as shown above - Churches that emerged as a result of the Charismatic renewal in the 1960s and 1970s in Ghana.

¹⁴ C.N. Omenyo, and Atiemo, “Claiming Religious Space: The Case of Neo-Prophetism in Ghana”, *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 1, no. 1 (2006): 55-68.

¹⁵ E. Anaba, *The Workerbility of Faith* (Bolgatanga: Desert Leaf Publication, 2004), 38.

¹⁶ T. Shenton, *Habakkuk: An Expository Commentary: Exploring the Bible* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2007), 2, CD Version.

The heart of Habakkuk ached about the injustices, destruction and violence in his era and he lamented:

Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore, the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted (1:3-4).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It is against this background that the researcher attempts to make an enquiry into the book of the prophet Habakkuk in an attempt to resolve the pertinent issues regarding the silence of God. The first aim is to find how the prophet helped his contemporary audience to answer the question: why God created a beautiful world, yet He is often perceived 'silent' on all the injustices and sufferings in the world. Secondly, the study intends to explore the relevance of the text to contemporary Charismatic readers. The investigation is conducted through an exegetical and theological analysis of Hab 1:1—2:20, in order to find out if the Charismatic answer to the presence of evil (lack of faith) and the use of 'material prosperity' as an indicator of faith are compatible with the prophetic message of the Old Testament.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

- 1) To measure persuasive religious discourse and its impact in social contexts.
- 2) To explore the answer Habakkuk gave to the problem of evil.
- 3) To compare the solution of Habakkuk to that of the contemporary Charismatic Churches.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to achieve the aims and objectives of the study, the following questions are addressed:

- a) How does Hab 1:1—2:20 articulate the problem of the silence of God?
- b) Which kind of answer or solution does the text offer?
- c) Which call of action is proposed to the reader?
- d) What is the relevance of the text to the contemporary Ghanaian Christian?

1.5 Literature Review

This section examines the scholarly debates on three areas: General Hermeneutics, Rhetorical Criticism and scholars' views on the book of Habakkuk.

1.5.1 General Hermeneutics

Some scholars have given concise definitions to the term hermeneutics. For instance, Brown defines hermeneutics as “The analysis of what we do when we seek to understand the Bible, including its appropriation to the contemporary world.”¹⁷ Ntamburi states that hermeneutics may be generally defined as the principles, rules, and methods of the interpretation of literary texts.¹⁸ Fee and Stuart avow that generally, people refer to hermeneutics either to speak about the act of bringing the meaning of the text to bear in one's present context, or the study of the whole movement involved in interpreting a text's meaning and applying it today,¹⁹ while Tate affirms that hermeneutics is “the study of the locus of meaning and the principles of interpretation”.²⁰ Osborne maintains

¹⁷ J. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 24.

¹⁸ Z. Ntamburi, “Biblical Hermeneutics in the African Instituted Churches,” *AICMAR Bulletin* 1 (2002): 15.

¹⁹ G. D. Fee & D. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 7.

²⁰ W. Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 1.

that “Hermeneutics is an overall term of exegesis”.²¹ Concerning interpretation, the scholars claims it is the task of explaining or drawing out implications of understanding for contemporary readers and hearers.

The terms hermeneutics and interpretation are often used interchangeably to refer to the process of determining the meaning and significance of a text. The word hermeneutics is derived from a Greek term which means ‘interpretation’, ‘translation’, or ‘explanation.’ Interpretation as used in this context, begins with a methodological search for the meaning of a text (exegesis) and ends with “determination of the meaning of this same text for the modern reader” (hermeneutics).²² When applied to the Bible, and as used in this study, hermeneutics means the art or technique of analysing a biblical text in order to understand its original context and find its meaning for the contemporary audience. In this sense, it is the art of interpreting the Bible for ongoing believing communities so that they will be able to have an informed understanding of the text in its context of utterance and then delineate its significance to the contemporary community.

1.5.2 African Hermeneutics

With respect to Hermeneutics or Biblical interpretation in Africa, Ossom-Batsa, a Ghanaian scholar, sustains that on our continent, Biblical interpretation was done principally from the Western point of view and the results were passively learnt in Seminaries and Theological faculties of local universities until the 1960’s.²³ According to him, a shift occurred when many African interpreters, namely J. S. Mbiti, K. A. Dickson, J. S. Ukpogon, J. S. Pobee, and K. Bediako began developing models of interpretation, with

²¹ R. Osborne Grant, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 2006), 5.

²² F. L. Arrington, “Historical Perspective,” 377.

²³ G. Ossom-Batsa, “Africa Interpretation of the Bible in Communicative Perspective,” *Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, 2 (2007): 91-104.

the aim of acculturating the Bible in a dialogue with the African situation, which includes the multiplicity of culture, religious pluralism, political and socio-economic challenges.²⁴

Du Toit raised certain legitimate questions, such as “what is African hermeneutics?” “What is Africa?” and “If hermeneutics is the science of interpretation and understanding, can there be different justifiable ways of practicing it?” He affirms that our understanding of hermeneutics must be enlarged to include a holistic look at religion, religious understanding and communication.²⁵

Mugambi on the other hand argues that the terms ‘Africa’ and ‘African’ should be interpreted ideologically rather than racially.²⁶ The motive behind Mugambi's definition is to provide a frame that encompasses Pan Africanists outside the continent of Africa and human races other than black on the continent. On this ground Du Toit suggests that the theologies of Afro-Americans and Liberation theologies of the third world should be considered since their hermeneutics have exerted much influence on African hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, Cornel du Toit contends is not a western or scholarly prerogative that all people practice hermeneutics since they communicate every day and are challenged to understand accurately, to relate to conflicting ideas and to voice their ideas when they are misinterpreted.²⁷

²⁴ Ossom-Batsa, “Africa Interpretation of the Bible,” 91-104.

²⁵ C. du Toit, *African Hermeneutics*, in Mainmela and S Konig, ed. *A Perspective on African Theology* (Pretoria: JL van Shaik, 1998), 377- 398.

²⁶ J. N. Mugambi, “Foundation for an African Approach to Biblical Hermeneutics,” in M. Getui, T. Maluleke, & J. Ukpong ed. *Interpretating the New Testament in Africa*. (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2002), 9-29.

²⁷ Toit, *African Hermeneutic*, 378-398.

Phan remarks that the African approach to hermeneutics functions within the general framework of biblical hermeneutics.²⁸ Therefore, if the task of biblical hermeneutics is to apply the word of God to people today, “for African Christians this means an attempt to translate Biblical meaning into cultural mode of the African worldview”.²⁹ Hence interpretation is not complete until the text is contextualized, made alive and relevant in a specific socio-cultural context.³⁰

Ossom-Batsa reiterates that the art of interpreting a biblical text in order to understand its original meaning and then delineate its significance for the contemporary audience is the process of relating the gospel message to the people’s life situations. The experiences have been variously referred to as adaption, indigenization, incarnation, acculturation and recently contextualization.³¹

Ossom-Batsa suggests that the basic presumptions on which African interpretation is based could be summarised as:

- (a) The Bible is contextual – in the sense that God was involved in the daily life situations of His people in the Old Testament and Jesus also came into human history as God personified. In the light of this, Kalilombe writes that African biblical hermeneutics comes out of a careful social analysis. The social, economic, political, cultural and religious environments, the history of the people ... constitute the ‘Tent’ in which the World lives among us. Discernment in this regard helps to see the

²⁸ P. Phan, “Theologizing in the Context of Cultural and Religious Pluralism” *An Asian Experience TD*, 50, 152.

²⁹ Ntamburi, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 15.

³⁰ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 24.

³¹ B. Bevan, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992).

negative and enslaving elements and the positive prophetic aspects that inspire genuine spirituality.³² The journey of the interpretive process is therefore characterized as a dialogue between two cultural worlds; an exchange between the generative culture of the text and the receiving culture. In other words, the hermeneutic process is bi-polar, and remains incomplete until a determined text is ‘understood’ as reformulated and made relevant in the receiving culture. Therefore we say the hermeneutical cycle is not complete until the text become relevant in a context.³³

- (b) Biblical message requests to be contextualized — because biblical tradition reveals how God has made Himself known to the people of each generation.³⁴ Brown further indicates that we might think of contextualization as decontextualizing the message of Scripture into our setting, giving the messages of biblical authors were already contextualized for their audiences.³⁵

Ossom-Batsa indicates that generally speaking, there are four major approaches to contextual biblical interpretation in Africa.³⁶

These are outlined below:

- i. Interfaith or Comparative Approach: In this method of interpretation, Ossom-Batsa states that the Bible is not used as a standard to judge other religions but as a discourse in search for mutual enlightenment. He continues that such a

³² P. Kalilombe, “Spirituality in African perspective,” in R. Gibellini, ed. *Paths of African Theology* (Maryknol, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 115-135.

³³ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 24.

³⁴ Ossom-Batsa, “Africa Interpretation of the Bible,” 91-104.

³⁵ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 24.

³⁶ Ossom-Batsa, “Africa Interpretation of the Bible,” 91-104.

reading is auspicious and helpful in a religious pluralistic setting as it aids in inter-religious dialogue.³⁷

- ii. People Based and Community Approach. This approach is sometimes referred to as popular reading.³⁸ It is when ordinary believers meet in communities for worship and Bible study. The role of the community therefore is paramount: as they apply the Word into the daily living and their lives are transformed.³⁹
- iii. Cultural and Intercultural Approach.⁴⁰ Proponents of this type of hermeneutics are D.B. Stinton (Jesus of Africa), and K. Bediako (Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective). Ukpong highlights that this approach is based on cultural contexts, concepts present in the Bible and tradition are studied together.⁴¹
- iv. Post-Colonial Approach: this hermeneutic is motivated by the long history of western colonialism and imperialism.⁴² Ela states that an awareness of the restoration of the African dignity was being created among the people of Africa — thus freedom from oppression of all forms to a dignified living. The poor and less privileged in society receive a special attention in this method. The propensity has resulted in African Liberation theology.⁴³

³⁷ G. Ossom-Batsa, "Christological Issues Stumbling Block or Meeting Point for Muslim-Christian Dialogue?" *Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, 1 (2006): 95-101. Examples of comparative studies in African hermeneutics are Harry Sawyer's 'God: Creator or Ancestor,' Nyamiti's 'Christ as an Ancestor' where the Biblical roles of Christ are compared to the roles of ancestors in African tradition; and Abraham Akroong's 'Jesus with the face of the ancestor'.

³⁸ Nthaburi declares that most African initiated churches have their origins in this praxis. Nthaburi, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 18-19.

³⁹ Ossom-Batsa, "Africa Interpretation of the Bible," 91-104.

⁴⁰ Ossom-Batsa, "Africa Interpretation of the Bible," 91-104.

⁴¹ J. Ukpong, "Reading the Bible with African Eyes," *JTSA*, 91 (1995): 3-14.

⁴² Ossom-Batsa, "Africa Interpretation of the Bible," 91-104.

⁴³ J. Ela, "Christianity and Liberation in Africa", in R. Gibellini, *Paths of African Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 137-138.

There are obvious strengths and weakness as far as the methods employed in African Biblical hermeneutics are concerned. According to Ossom-Batsa, these approaches lead to the formation and spread of an authentic African Christianity, culture and faith are mutually enhanced and they generate diverse ways of being a Christian. The negative dimensions include the risk of making false Biblical theology and orientation towards syncretism.⁴⁴

There are clear challenges confronting biblical interpretation in Africa. Obeng identifies that biblical scholarship has not made an impact on the thinking of the people in Ghana for example. That biblical scholarship including interpretation was and has remained an academic exercise among few scholars findings are circulated among their kind; leaving majority of the population untouched by their interpretations.⁴⁵

Adrianjatovo also determines identity crisis as a concern in theological discussions in Africa. On this subject, he writes that colonization and unfair international trade (or economic supremacy of the west) affects the identity of the African. He contends that this is the case because: people cannot use their own language to translate their experience into meaningful discourses, because it is neither the language of administration nor that of science. As consequence of this failure of socialization, the individual is deprived of social ordering processes and thus deprived of meaning itself.⁴⁶

Ossom-Batsa recognizes that lack of funding contributes to the lack of excellent formation centres and adequate tools such as good libraries and internet facilities for doing theology. He also thinks globalization and the short teaching and research life of well-

⁴⁴ Ossom-Batsa, "Africa Interpretation of the Bible," 91-104.

⁴⁵ E. A. Obeng, "Emerging Concerns for Biblical Scholarship", in M. Getui, T. Malueke, & J. Ukpong *Interpreting the New Testament in African* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2001). 31-40.

⁴⁶ R. Adrianjatovo, "African Readings of the New Testament", in M. Getui, T. Malueke, & J. Ukpong ed. *Interpreting the New Testament in African* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2001), 177-182.

trained theologians is a contributing challenge facing biblical interpretation in Africa. Since the world is fast becoming a global village, cultures are meeting and changing rapidly, the definition of context in African hermeneutics needs to be critically examined.⁴⁷ Du Toit nevertheless projects that an exciting yet very challenging future awaits African hermeneutics. He foresees the themes of liberation to remain imperative, but a shift in its emphasis to economic upliftment and African politics would be crucial. The vibrancy of African hermeneutics, Cornel du Toit anticipates will be determined not by theologians, but by daily life experiences.⁴⁸

1.5.3 Rhetorical Analysis

Aristotle defines rhetoric as “an ability to see the available means of persuasion.” Rhetoric is the art of composing a discourse aimed at persuasion. Some biblical scholars devoted extensive attention to the presence of rhetorical features in Scripture. Three different approaches can be noted in their studies. The first approach is based upon classical Greco-Roman rhetoric; the second one devotes itself to Semitic procedures of composition; the third one takes its inspiration from more recent studies, which is called the ‘New Rhetoric’.

Haraguchi sees rhetoric as the art of persuasion employed in a public speech in the Greco-Roman world⁴⁹ whilst Aristotle conceives it as the art of evaluating the persuasive power of any opinion or belief drawn from common knowledge and shared beliefs. Larraín and Haye on the other hand, specify that rhetoric is not just a speech that is meant to persuade. Rather, it is the activity whereby one takes into account the participants of any piece of discourse, real or virtual, and their ideological backgrounds,

⁴⁷ Ossom-Batsa, “Africa Interpretation of the Bible,” 91-104.

⁴⁸ Toit, *African Hermeneutic*, 378-398.

⁴⁹ Haraguchi Takaaki, “A Call for Repentance to the Whole Israel-A Rhetorical Study of Acts 3:12-26”, *Asia Journal of Theology* (2004): 267-282.

namely, the opinions and counter opinions that they hold and reject, toward which they react or respond.⁵⁰ However, Benoit affirms that rhetoric is the faculty of observing the available means for persuasion in each concrete situation.⁵¹

Rhetoric is therefore, the faculty of speech that explicitly takes into account the characteristics of opinions that gives the concrete meaning of a passage to the audiences and speakers: it was conceived of as the faculty through which concrete social conditions determine human speech. Haraguchi explains that rhetoric is regarded as a sign of the civilized world free from tyranny, to form an ideal communal life which is strengthened by speeches appropriate for various social occasions. Fee argues to lesser or greater degrees that the writers of the NT Epistles used the rhetorical forms of Greco-Roman world.⁵²

Haraguchi again emphasizes that there are two different approaches to rhetorical analysis of ancient historiography. The first approach is macroscopic and the second one is microscopic. The microscopic approach picks up a particular part or passage of historiography and gives it a detailed analysis of its rhetorical structure and intended effects on the audience in the given narrated story. The macroscopic approach treats a certain historiographic work as a whole and analyses it in terms of rhetorical techniques and its intended effects on the audience or readers. The approach is based on the assumption that Greco-Roman historians were trained in rhetoric and used rhetorical techniques even when they narrated developments of events and their historical meanings in their

⁵⁰ Antonia Larraín and Andrés Haye, "The Role of Rhetoric in a Dialogical Approach to Thinking" *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 42 (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012): 220-237.b_487 20..23

⁵¹ W. Benoit, "Isocrates and Aristotle on Rhetoric" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 20 no. 3 (1990): 251-59.

⁵² D. Gordon Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: Handbook for Students and Pastors* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 42.

writings.⁵³ Haraguchi indicates that Kennedy's comprehensive work on rhetorical criticism has offered a theoretical model of rhetorical analysis and many rhetorical critics have accepted and used his model of rhetorical exegesis.⁵⁴

The second approach concentrates on the characteristics of the biblical literary tradition. Rooted in Semitic culture, this approach displays a distinct preference for symmetrical compositions, through which one can detect relationships between different elements in the text. The study of the multiple forms of parallelism and other procedures characteristic of the Semitic mode of composition allows for a better discernment of the literary structure of the texts, which can only lead to a more adequate understanding of their message.⁵⁵

The New Rhetoric approach, on the other hand, espouses a more general opinion in that it aims at something more than a simple catalogue of stylistic figures, oratorical devices and various kinds of discourse. It investigates what makes a particular use of language effective and successful in the communication of conviction. It is a method which is mainly pointed at persuading the audience. The method is not new: what is new about it is its use in a systematic way for the interpretation of the Bible.

New rhetoric approach seeks to be 'realistic' in the sense of not wanting to limit itself to an analysis that is purely formal. It takes due account of the actual situation of debate or discussion. It studies style and composition, as means of acting upon an audience. To this end, it benefits from contributions made in such other areas of knowledge as

⁵³ W. C. van Unnik, "Luke's Second Book and the Rules of Hellenistic Historiography," in *Les Actes des Apôtres* (ed. J. Kremer; Gembloux: Duclos; Leuven: University Press, 1970) 37-40; E. Plumacher, "Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte und Dyonys von Halikarnass," *NTS* 39 (1993) 161-177; Dion. Hal. *Pomp.* 3.2; *Ant. Rom.* 1.1.3; 1.2.1.

⁵⁴ Haraguchi, "A Call for Repentance," 267-282.

⁵⁵ S. J. Just Felix, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" *PBC* (Published in *Origins*, 1994), catholic-resource.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp0.htm.

linguistics, semiotics, anthropology and sociology. When applied to the Bible, the New Rhetoric approach aims to penetrate into the very core of the language of revelation, precisely as persuasive religious discourse and to measure the impact of such discourse in the social context.

Huiling Ding asserts that rhetorical analysis investigates holistically the way keywords operate in the text and shed additional light on the relationship among the keywords, persuasion, and rhetoric.⁵⁶ In his brief introduction to rhetorical criticism, Walton rightly stresses that the approach “provides an interpretative key to texts, but not the interpretative key”.⁵⁷ Similarly, Stone maintains that interpretations sometimes fail to convince not because they make use of a ‘bad’ method, and not because of their ‘bad’ use or an otherwise helpful method, but rather because their reliance upon a single method, to the exclusion of questions highlighted by other methods, results in a focus that is too narrow.⁵⁸

With regards to the language of a biblical context, K. Bühler maintains that, language is a tool that can accomplish three basic functions: presentation of the outside world, expression of the inside world and exhortation. However, Onoja averts that the complexities of language are normally brought to the forefront, if they are essentially and intentionally assessed or examined in relation to the society in which the language is used. He adds that language has the capacity to adapt to varied situations, context, place, time or use as determined by the user.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Huiling Ding, “Confucius’s Virtue-Centered Rhetoric: Case Study” *Rhetoric Review* 26, no. 2 (2007): 142–59.

⁵⁷ S. Walton, “Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction,” *Themelios* 21, no. 2 (1996):4-9.

⁵⁸ K. Stone, “Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject—Honor, Object— Shame?” *JSOT* 61 (1995): 87-107.

⁵⁹ A. Onoja, “The Language of Church Sermons”: A Stylistic Perspective, *Jos Journal of Humanity* (2010): 1-3.

Therefore, when rhetoric method is applied to the Bible, it makes the Biblical text not simply a statement of truth but a message that carries within itself a function of communication within a particular context, a message which carries with it a certain power of argument and a rhetorical strategy. Osborne opines that when diagramming the structured development of ideas in a paragraph, one often comes into contact with rhetorical techniques, that is, stylistic methods for getting across a message⁶⁰.

However not all scholars appreciate the use of Rhetorical Criticism as an exegetical tool.⁶¹ Wuellner even speaks of “the Babylonian captivity of rhetoric reduced to stylistics”⁶² and “the ghetto of an estheticizing preoccupation with biblical stylistics”.⁶³ Bitzer introduces the concept of ‘rhetorical situation’ as distinct from ‘persuasive situation’. According to him, a “persuasive situation exists whenever an audience can be changed in belief or action by means of speech”.⁶⁴ A ‘rhetorical situation’, on the other hand, is a specific situation that determines and controls the rhetorical utterance it occasions.⁶⁵ It is characterized, moreover, by an “exigency which amounts to an imperative stimulus”⁶⁶ and which the rhetorical discourse is designed to address with the aim of modifying it. Rhetoric, thus defined, “is a mode of altering reality by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action”.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Kessler Martin, “A Methodological Setting for Rhetorical Criticism: *In Art and Meaning Biblical Literature*. David J. A. Clines, David M. Gunn and Alan J. Hauser ed.” (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1982): 1-19.

⁶¹ Wuellner, “Rhetorical Criticism,” 453; the term is Genette’s; cf. G. Genette “Rhetoric Restrained,” in *idem, Figures of Literary Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982): 103-26.

⁶² Wuellner, “Rhetorical Criticism,” 457.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 462.

⁶⁴ L.F. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” in *Rhetoric: A Tradition in Transition. In Honor of Donald C. Bryant* W.R. Fisher, ed. (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1974): 247-60.

⁶⁵ Bitzer, “Rhetorical Situation,” 249.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 250.

Such an understanding of rhetoric fits the prophetic mode well. It is a commonplace that the prophets are public speakers who, as Brenner states, “Appealed to addressees in order to gain influence over them”.⁶⁸

The above interactions with scholars confirmed the choice to employ the New Rhetoric for the analysis, because Hab 1:1—2:20 as a prophetic text is a ‘purposive’ literature.

1.5.4 Scholarly Debate on the Book of Habakkuk

The book of Habakkuk was written during a critical period in Israel’s history. It was the year 612 B.C.E, when the sun of Assyria’s glory finally set; for after just a short time there began the Neo-Babylonian Empire’s successful but short-lived orbit, which greatly impacted the life and thought of Habakkuk’s contemporary. Scholars have difficulties to determine the identity of the prophet because, Habakkuk provides no information on his background. However, there are some scholarly debates on the authorship and the date of composition of the book of Habakkuk.

a) Authorship

The authorship of Habakkuk has been disputed since ancient times. The Septuagint version of Bel and the Dragon introduce the prophet as the son of Joshua from the tribe of Levi. However, neither the Theodotion nor the Vulgate includes these details. According to the “Lives of the Prophets”, Habakkuk comes from the tribe of Simeon and located his hometown in the countryside of Bethzouchar.⁶⁹ Wilson is of the view that Habakkuk is a cult prophet attached to the temple.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ A. Brenner, *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (FCB, 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 13-19.

⁶⁹ Shenton, *Habakkuk*, 3.

⁷⁰ Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 278.

Shenton specifies that the name Habakkuk occurs nowhere else in the Bible. It is probably derived from the verb חבק meaning ‘to enfold’ or ‘to embrace’ (some say ‘to wrestle’). He further indicates that the name describes Habakkuk, not as a man who fights with God, but as someone who embraces God and his Word, and then consoles the people of Israel with the assurance that mercy follows judgment. In other words, he takes the people in his arms, comforts and cheers them up, as one pats a poor, weeping child, calming and consoling it with good hope, that if God wills, it will grow better.⁷¹ Several commentators say that his name is not Hebrew but comes from an Akkadian word meaning ‘fragrant’, which refers to some garden plant or fruit tree or to a basil-like flower that flourished throughout Babylonia and that was used for healing wounds.⁷²

Nogalski assumes that the book of Habakkuk was significantly expanded in the course of its integration into the corpus of the Twelve Prophets. He regards it as an addition to the ‘Babylonian Commentary’ (1:5-11, part of v. 12 and 15-17), part of the woe oracles (2:5-20) and the entire ch.3, to which he believes minor additions were made.⁷³

Focusing on the message of the prophet, Bacon states that Habakkuk, like many of the other prophets before and after him, envisions a Day of Trouble where the Lord will judge the world. However, he differs from all the prophets by portraying this day in the framework of an attractive psalm. On the same line, Shenton states that Habakkuk’s prophecy is unique in that it is not a series of messages to the people of God but a

⁷¹ Shenton, *Habakkuk*, 3.

⁷² R. Haak, *Habakkuk Among the Prophets* (Ph.D. diss. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986).

⁷³ J. Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW Berlin: Wde Gruyter, 1993), 218.

dialogue between the prophet himself and the sovereign LORD. He declares that Habakkuk does not speak to Israel on behalf of God, but to God on behalf of Israel. He is at times, in his office, more like a priest than a prophet.⁷⁴

b) Date of Composition

Scholars hold divergent views on the time the book was written. For instance, Steiner opines that the Book of Habakkuk is not a familiar book, and asserts that it was written within a very short time span, which is between 605-597 B.C.E.⁷⁵ Roberts sustains that the book of Habakkuk represents the prophet's meditation on the problem of divine justice in light of Judah's subjugation to Babylonian imperial power in the late sixth and early seventh centuries.⁷⁶ Similarly, Mason argues that it would be wiser to be content with a relatively broad determination and consider the second half of the seventh century BCE as the period in which the prophet Habakkuk was active.⁷⁷

According to the Zohar (Introduction, 7b), Habakkuk is the son of a grand lady, the Shunnamite, who hosted the prophet Elisha. Elisha, as a sign of appreciation for her kindness, prophesied that "At this season next year you will be embracing a son" (2 Kings 4:16). However, Bacon argues against the Zohar that Elisha's ministry was in the 9th century BCE whereas Habakkuk lived in the late 7th century. Therefore, the assertion may not be true due to the fact that the prophet could not have lived two centuries. Bacon further insisted that it would be more logical to place Habakkuk around 600 BCE. He states that in 604, Nebuchadnezzar gained a decisive victory over Necho, King

⁷⁴ Shenton, *Habakkuk*, 4.

⁷⁵ Edward Steiner, "God's Way," 26.

⁷⁶ J.J.M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1991), 223.

⁷⁷ R. Mason, *Habakkuk* (OTG, 27; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994): 60-96.

of Egypt. The Chaldeans, therefore, became the dominant force in the Near East. Then in 601, they invaded Judah at a time when King Josiah's reformation was waning.⁷⁸

Haak maintains that Habakkuk predicts the dispossession of "the wicked one" by the Chaldeans in 1:6 and the return of "the righteous one" to power in 2:4. He further upholds that the internal evidence of the prophecy suggests Habakkuk was written after the deposition of Jehoahaz, probably during Jehoiakim's reign. Additionally, he indicates that because the prophet complained that the promised deliverance has been delayed (2:3), he considers it "appropriate to place the prophecy in a period in which the Babylonian advance into Judah would have been expected but did not actually occur," most likely between the battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE and Jehoiakim's capitulation to Babylon in 603 BCE.⁷⁹

The Hebrew chronicle *Seder Olam Rabbah* associates Habakkuk with the oppressive reign of Manasseh (687–642 BCE), the worst king in Judean history according to the historian of the book of Kings (2 Kings 21:2, 9, 11, 16; 23:26), implying that the prophetic book originated in a period when the people of God had to wrestle with troubled times.

In the early church, Theodore of Mopsuestia reads Habakkuk as censuring the powerful who oppressed the poor, and argues that the prophet was anticipating that God would bring the Babylonians in order to punish the wicked, and that the Babylonians themselves would also be punished for "gaining control of Jerusalem and exercising this control improperly".⁸⁰ Martin Luther regards Habakkuk as "a prophet who prophesied

⁷⁸ Bakon, "Habakkuk," 26-29.

⁷⁹ R. D. Haak, *Habakkuk* (VT Sup. 44; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992).

⁸⁰ D. W. Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTOC; repr.; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995).

before the Babylonian captivity”. John Calvin concurs with Luther on the sixth-century setting of the prophetic book, while holding that the exact date cannot be determined.⁸¹

In recent times, Patterson⁸², Sweeney⁸³ and Mason⁸⁴ expressed the view that in light of the huge difference in the historical dating of the book, with a maximum range of five hundred years, it would be misleading to seek a final certain of the dating of the book. Patterson argues in favour of an earlier date, suggesting a period around 652 BCE, in other words, during the reign of King Manasseh; Seybold dates Habakkuk’s original prophecy earlier, around 630 BCE. The mention of the Chaldeans in 1:6 plays a key role in the arguments in favour of this dating, since this passage is taken as a historical indicator by all exegetes.⁸⁵

Sweeney contemplates that the book of Habakkuk is intended to explain the rise of the Chaldeans in the battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE. Kessler, Baker, Bailey and Lescow affirm that it is sufficient to date Habakkuk without the era of Jehoiakim (609 BCE).⁸⁶ Since Lescow distinguishes among several text layers, the time period he cites refers only to the foundational level that he has identified.

Other scholars endeavour a more precise dating within the reign of Jehoiakim. For them, the battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE generally serves as a point of orientation. Robertson and Kaiser find the early years of Jehoiakim’s reign before 605 BCE a reasonable conjecture. According to Kyomaya, the most probable date for the book of

⁸¹ R.D. Patterson, *Habakkuk, Nahum, Zephaniah* (WEC; Chicago: Moody Press, 1991): 115-84.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 115-84.

⁸³ M. A. Sweeney, “Habakkuk Book of” in *ABD III*, D.N. Freedman ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992):1-2.

⁸⁴ R. Mason, *Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Joel* (OTG, 27; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994): 81-84.

⁸⁵ K. Seybold, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (ZBKAT, 24.2; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991): 43-83.

⁸⁶ W. Bailey “Habakkuk” in *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* K. L. Barker and W. Bailey, eds. (NAC, 20; Nashville, NT: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998): 245-378.

Habakkuk would be somewhere close to the battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE.⁸⁷ Deissler, however, prefers to date Hab 1:2-11 before 605 BCE, but attributes the rest of the book to the period of 605-598 BCE. Hiebert has a similar opinion about the period of the book of Habakkuk, with only a minor shift backward in time: he holds the view that 1:2-11 originated during the year 605-604 BCE, but the rest of chs. 1 and 2 were not created until between 597 BCE, and the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE in other words, during the reign of King Zedekiah.⁸⁸

Without a doubt, the most extensive historical investigation is the one undertaken by Haak, following elaborate historical explication, Haak assigned the period of Habakkuk's activity to 605-603 BCE. He holds that Habakkuk himself was a follower of Jehoahaz, and supported the pro-Babylonian oracle in Hab 1:5-6.

Habakkuk is, therefore, a book generated in the most dramatic moment of the life of Judah, in order to offer answer to the hermeneutical challenges created by the destruction of Jerusalem and the holy temple.

1.5.5 Conclusion

The book of Habakkuk offers very little or no information about the prophet except the mention of his name in the opening verse (1:1). From internal evidences, biblical scholars argue that it was composed in the last years of the Southern Kingdom, when the threatening presence of the Babylonian army was raising questions about the future of the holy city and the faithfulness of YHWH to his promises.

⁸⁷ M. A. S. Kyomya, *The Use of Habakkuk in Romans 1:17*, ThD Dissertation (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1994): 44-47.

⁸⁸ T. Hiebert, *The Book of Habakkuk: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections* (NIB.7; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996): 623-55.

The dramatic situation constitutes a hermeneutical challenge: the prophet could not comprehend why God was not actively involved in the liberation of His chosen Nation; why the wicked prospered and the righteous suffers.

On this background, he engaged YHWH with questions and complaints about why He was silent (1:13), about the meaning of evil and suffering. The purpose of the book was to help the people of Judah to read their situation ‘theologically’, to support the faith of his community in a moment of crisis.

The purposive nature of the book suggests the employment of the New Rhetorical Criticism in the exegetical analysis. When it is applied to the Bible, the method aims to penetrate to the very core of language of revelation, precisely as persuasive religious discourse, and to measure the impact of such discourse in social context.

The New Rhetorical criticism seeks to be ‘realistic’ in the sense of not waiting to limit itself to an analysis that is purely formal. It takes due accounts of the actual situation of debate or discussion. The method studies style and composition as means of acting upon an audience and devotes extensive attention to the presence of features such as structures; metaphors; repetitions; and parallelisms, in the text.

1.6 Methodology

To achieve the objective of the research, the investigation employs a synchronic approach to the exegesis of the text. Among the main approaches available, the research chose a text centred approach, namely New Rhetorical Criticism. The method is suitable because it aims at something more than a simple catalogue of stylistic figures, oratorical devices and various kinds of discourse. This method investigates what makes a particular use of language effective and successful in the communication of conviction. The approach is appropriate to the study of the text because prophetic literature is a

‘purposive literature’. The aim is to analyse how the biblical author used rhetorical features (structures; metaphors; repetitions; parallelisms, etc.) to impact his readers and to confirm their faith in time of crisis.

After analysing different structures, the one presented by J. Ronald Blue is adopted as a road-map for the analysis. Grammatical, syntactical and semantic features are studied with special emphasis on the rhetoric indicators (parallelism; metaphors; semantic fields). In the awareness that the hermeneutical cycle is not complete until the text become relevant in the life of the reader,⁸⁹ the research employs the communicative/ dialogic approach proposed by Ossom-Batsa⁹⁰ as his theoretical framework.

The Ghanaian scholar suggests a three-step approach to African Biblical interpretation, which intends to be respectful of the biblical text and the culture:

1. Adherence to the text: the approach restores the text to its primary position. The researcher pays attention to linguistic elements as signals offered by the author to guide the reader.
2. Call to action present in the text: attention is given to the literary world of the text in order to understand the journey offered to the reader. In this regard, the organisation of the text and the communicative force of the different elements help to highlight its functional organisation. The analysis brings on board a consequence for contextualisation of the text, in that the text is not made to say what the reader wants to hear. From the communicative standpoint, the readers

⁸⁹ H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward Stagbooks, 2004).

⁹⁰ George Ossom-Batsa, “African Interpretation of the Bible in Communicative Perspective,” *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2, (2006): 91-105.

are challenged to read their lives in the light of the text. The process eventually leads to a transformed life in order to transform the environment.

3. Contextualization: the focus is finally on the context of the reader, his worldview, fear, richness and challenges. It enables the researcher to determine the cultural pre-understanding and the challenge of the text to the context.⁹¹ At this point, the experience of the reader may lead them to see more clearly certain aspects of the text that may evade other readers because of different experiences.

After recognizing in 2:4 the climax of the text, and the call to action for the reader, the researcher engaged the concept of faith described in Hab. 1:1—2:20 with the preaching about faith in the Charismatic churches, in order to contextualize the text in our contemporary era. To collect Charismatic leaders' sermons about faith, personal participation and secondary sources were employed.

1.7 Organization of the Work

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter One deals with the general introduction to the study; comprised of background, statement of the problem; aims and objectives of the study; research questions; literature review and methodology. Chapter Two discusses the literary context and the rhetorical organization of the book of the prophet Habakkuk. Chapter Three constitutes the central chapter of the research, which delved extensively into the exegetical analysis of Hab. 1:1—2:20. Chapter Four explores faith in charismatic context, and analyses the challenges that the concept of faith outlined in the exegetical process offered to the Charismatic community. Chapter Five concludes

⁹¹ George Ossom-Batsa, "African Interpretation of the Bible," 91-105. Cfr. George Ossom-Batsa, "Biblical Exegesis in the African Context: A Communicative Approach," in *Unpacking the Sense of the Sacred. A Reader in the Study of Religions*, A.A. Atiemo, B-W. K. Golo and L. K. Boakye, eds. (Banburi, UK: Ayebia Clarke Publication, 2014), 116-134.

the study by providing a summary of the findings and a general conclusion. Furthermore, it also prompts new avenues for future studies.

CHAPTER TWO

UNITY AND STRUCTURE OF HABAKKUK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the problem of the literary unit of the text and the rhetorical structures proposed by scholars, in order to verify the delimitation of our study and determine a structure as the road-map for our exegetical analysis. The analysis is aimed at arriving at an informed understanding of the text and to explain the rhetorical devices used by the author to reach out his audience in moments of crisis and to support their faith in YHWH.

As emerged in the literature review, Habakkuk is a contemporary of Jeremiah, who lived the tragedy of the destruction of Jerusalem. On this background, the book focuses on the prophet's own struggle to understand God's justice in dealing with Judah, and the role played by Babylonians in God's plan.

In the opening sentence of the book, the word **נְבִיא** (v. 1) identifies Habakkuk as the Lord's spokesperson, called, trained, and commissioned to be Yahweh's messenger. Unfortunately, the superscription does not offer any biographic information about his life and mission. Based on internal evidences, Széles claims that Habakkuk was a 'cultic prophet' at the Jerusalem temple, a hypothesis accepted by most recent commentaries.⁹² According to these commentaries, it is indisputable that Habakkuk received his call in Jerusalem and that his whole period of service was connected with the temple (2:1–5).⁹³

⁹² M. Eszenyei Széles, *Wrath and Mercy: A Commentary on the Books of Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (ITC; Grand Rapids - Edinburgh: Eerdmans - Handsel Press, 1987), 4.

⁹³ Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, 4.

From this overview, it is clear that the ‘dilemma’ of the book of Habakkuk and the identity of the prophet is a major concern to scholarship and modern readership. We can add that in spite of its brevity, the literary unity of the book has been an object of contention: the authorship of the third chapter of the book is disputed and a number of verses in the first chapter are considered out of context. Many scholars suggest that they find a more suitable collocation in chapter 2.⁹⁴

2.2 Literary Unit

As stated in the previous paragraph, there is an animated scholarly debate on the unit of the book of Habakkuk. The main problem consists in the thematic and literary differences between chapters 1—2 and chapter 3. While the first two chapters are construed as a dialogue between the prophet and God, the third chapter is in a psalmic form.⁹⁵ Furthermore, some scholars, such as Dorsey, point out a second problem constituted by the collection of ‘woe-oracles’ in 2:9-18.⁹⁶

The proponents of the literary unit of the book of Habakkuk include Robertson who regards it fortunate that in chapter 3, “the pendulum seems to be swinging back”, to a position that enables attributing a message of hope to the pre-exilic prophets. According to him, the material composition of the book of Habakkuk presents itself, on the whole, as the authentic words of the prophet.⁹⁷ Deissler is basically convinced of the unity of the book: in his opinion when all data are compared, it appears evident that the text

⁹⁴ J. H. Eaton, “The Origin and Meaning of Habakkuk 3” ZAW 76 (1964):144-71.

⁹⁵ To overcome the difference in style, Széles states, that Habakkuk’s individuality as a prophet reveals two features, first he is a praying person and second is a seeing person. He establishes that Habakkuk’s prophecies are composed in the form of the prayers such as we see in the ‘psalms of complaint’ used in public worship. They are a theophany perceived in a vision and grasped audibly. Elements of Jeremiah’s ‘Confessions’ (Jer. 11:18ff. 12:1ff. 15:10ff. 17:12ff. 18:19ff. 20:7ff.) can be discerned in our prophet’s complaint as well as the argumentative sound of the psalms of complaint. (Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*).

⁹⁶ A. David Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Publishing Group, 2005), 306.

⁹⁷ O. P. Robertson, *The book of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

goes back to Habakkuk himself although there are a few redaction additions (2:18-20; 3: 1b, c; 3:9, 13; 3:17-19).

Patterson regards the argument in favour of unity as more persuasive, although he concedes that they cannot guarantee the original unity of the entire book. He mentions two problems in particular that could threaten the unity: the problem of the reference to the wicked man (1:2-4. 13-17)⁹⁸ and the question of whether chapter 3 was originally part of the book. The most plausible reconstruction of the genesis of the book of Habakkuk, the scholar argues, is based on the idea that it was composed by a single author, who included older material.⁹⁹ Watts proposed similar arguments: in his view, Hab 3 is neither a secondary addition to the two preceding chapters, nor a layer in itself.¹⁰⁰

In regard of the presence of different literary genres, Thompson posits that the book utilizes prayers, oracles and theophany, and incorporated elements of the traditions of Wisdom. However, the variety does not result in a redactional assembly of incoherent elements, rather indicates that it is a coherent work. In his view, the combination of such heterogeneous materials makes indeed the book a unique literary masterpiece.¹⁰¹

Finally, Fromm addresses the problem by proposing a classification of the literary forms into two main classes: the one-mood psalm and the dynamic psalm. Contrary to the one mood psalm (chapter 3); the dynamic psalms manifest the fact that a 'change of mood' is within the poet; a change that is reflected in the psalm. According to Fromm, the prophet's mood is lifted up by the Lord's assurance of the ultimate punish-

⁹⁸ Baker, *Nahum*, 44-45; Sweeney, "Structure, Genre," 63-83.

⁹⁹ J. W. Watts, *'Psalmody in Prophecy: Habakkuk 3 in context*, Watts and House, eds. (1996): 209-23.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 209-23.

¹⁰¹ M.E.W. Thompson, "Prayer, Oracle, and Theophany: The Book of Habakkuk" *TynBul* 44 (1993): 33-53.

ment of the wicked, then falls in despair because Israel would be affected by the disorder (chapters 1 and 2). In chapter 3, confidence and joy testify the turning point caused by his meeting with the Lord (2:4).¹⁰²

Scholars who do not accept the literary unit of the book underline the differences in theme and literary style between chapters 1—2 and chapter 3. The two parts evince distinct literary styles. The first two chapters are largely narrative, being written in a familiar prophetic style that makes use of oracles, lamentations, and woes written in the usual classical Hebrew that was prevalent in the Seventh century BCE; whereas the ‘epic materials’ in 3:3-15 utilize older literary material and present rare words and some very difficult grammatical constructions.¹⁰³

Thematically, the first two chapters record Habakkuk’s great perplexities (1:2-4, 12-17) and God’s detailed response (1:5-11; 2:1-20). With the third chapter, a more positive tone emerges in the prophet’s great prayer of praise to God.¹⁰⁴ In addition, unlike Habakkuk 1 and 2, the third chapter treats the subject of the oppression of the righteous from a different standpoint. Again, the third chapter is clearly delineated from the first two chapters by its title and its colophon, as well as by a passage duplicated in Psalm 77.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Erich Fromm, *You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition* (Greenwich CT: Fawcett Publishers. 1980), 163.

¹⁰³ Fred T. Kelly, “The Strophic Structure of Habakkuk” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 18, no. 2 (1902): 94-119; Kelly, “The Structure of Habakkuk,” (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Faculties of the Graduate Schools of Arts, Literature, and Science, Dept. Of Old Testament and Interpretation, Chicago).

¹⁰⁴ J. A. Bewer, *The Literature of the Old Testament 3rd ed.* (New York: Columbia University, 1962), 151; H. D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979), 344. See further, R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 932-37. However, Eissfeldt believes that a good case can be made for Habakkuk’s authorship of the entire three chapters thematically, historically, and contextually, Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 420.

¹⁰⁵ Kelly, “Structure of Habakkuk,” 94-119.

There is no doubt that thematically, textually, and literally, 3:3-15 differs remarkably from the rest of the book. Translation and subsequent analysis of the psalm suggest that it is a remnant of epic literature, and as such focuses on the theme of the heroic action of YHWH.¹⁰⁶ Throughout the passage, God is the hero whose actions divide the psalm into two parts. The first poem (vv. 3-7) relates the account of an epic journey as God guides his people toward the promise land. In the second poem (vv. 8-15), God's miraculous acts in the conquest period are rehearsed. The singing of these two epic songs was designed to evoke in the listeners a response of submission to Israel's redeemer. Habakkuk's own response (vv. 16-19) illustrates the proper movement towards Israel's grand and heroic Saviour.¹⁰⁷

Again, careful analysis of a number of ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, especially in the inter-testamental and early medieval tradition, reveals a different understanding of the structure of Hab 3, from chapters 1 and 2. Noteworthy is the fact that the units demarcated by the ancient scribes transcend the form's critical borders set by modern interpreters. They indicate that Hab 3 can be read as a single prayer coupled with a second theme, namely, the personal involvement of the poet in the events of his day, expressed by means of urgent prayer (3:2), careful observation (3:7), negative experience (3:14) and in the end, differential awe and joyful confidence in the presence of YHWH (3:16-19).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ B. Margulis, "The Psalm of Habakkuk: A Reconstruction and Interpretation," *ZAW* 82 (1970):440-41; W. F. Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*. Dedicated to T. H. Robinson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950), 1; Patterson, 'The Psalm of Habakkuk,' *Grace Theological Journal* 8, no. 2 (1987): 163-94.

¹⁰⁷ R. D. Patterson, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," *Grace Theological Journal* 8, no. 2 (1987): 163-94.

¹⁰⁸ Kelly, "Structure of Habakkuk," 94-119; Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 871-72.

The musical notations found in the chapter (3:1, 3, 9, 13, 19) point to its being for use in the temple worship. This led some scholars, who prefer to think that the temple worship attained comparative purity only in the period after the exile, to date the psalm in the post-Exilic period.¹⁰⁹ Further support to the argument seems to be found in the fact that the Pesher Habakkuk, found among the Qumran Scrolls, makes no reference to the third chapter of Habakkuk.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, reading Hab 3 as a single unit hints at the possibility that it can be interpreted as a later generation's appropriation of Hab 1 and 2 into their present circumstance. In view of this, Hab 1 and 2 clearly form one literary unit and justify our choice to delimit our work to 1:1—2:20.¹¹¹

Biblical scholars who support the unity and single authorship of Habakkuk claim that it can be demonstrated from at least three facts. First, a common theme runs throughout the prophecy, namely, that God is sovereignly in control of the affairs of history. Second, elements of internal dependence and relation exist between the various parts: Habakkuk's patient waiting on the Lord (2:1-3, 20; 3:2, 16-19), his consistent portrayal of the godless (1:4, 13; 3:13), his reception of the Lord's answer to his perplexities (1:5; 2:2; 3:2, 16), and his confidence that the Lord will not utterly destroy his people (1:12; 3:1-2, 16-19). Finally, only with the closing verses of the third chapter is there a satisfactory answer to all of the prophet's uncertainties.¹¹²

Scholars against this hypothesis emphasise the differences in themes and literary forms between chapters 1—2 and chapter 3. Sweeney summarizes the debate with the opinion that there is a consensus that the book may not have been written originally by one

¹⁰⁹ Bewer, *Old Testament*, 151.

¹¹⁰ Pfeiffer, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 871-72.

¹¹¹ Gert T. M. Prinsloo, "Reading Habakkuk 3 as a Single הַבְּרָכָה," *Open Journals*. www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/a.

¹¹² R. D. Patterson, "Habakkuk," in *Evangelical Commentary of the Bible*, Elwell Baker, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 667-68.

author, although it does represent a coherent literary unit in its present form.¹¹³ While it is not possible to resolve this issue definitively, the researcher thinks that even if the poem is either an early or a late composition, its themes and messages are quite compatible with Hab 1—2 and serve as a fitting conclusion to the book.¹¹⁴ In the next section, the reader would understand the rhetorical organization of the book drawing on the convictions shared by contemporary biblical scholars.

2.3 Outline of the Book

The organization and structure of the book of Habakkuk have attracted the attention of many scholars. Regarding the overall organization of the book, there is an on-going debate on the dialogic nature of chapters 1—2. Generally speaking, scholars who follow a diachronic approach do not consider chapters 1—2 a dialogue; those who embrace a more synchronic approach interpret the text as a dialogue between the prophet and YHWH.

For example, in the light of the book's heading (1:1) Sweeney regards chapters 1—2 as a specific type of prophetic discourse, attempting to explain how YHWH's intention is manifested in the world. Although he characterizes 1:5-11 as God's response to the prophet's preceding complaint in 1:2-4, he states that the textual unity should not be regarded as a dialogue. He further explains that 2:1-4 should not be understood as a divine response to the lament in 1:12-17, but rather as the prophet's account of God's

¹¹³ M. A. Sweeney, "Habakkuk, Book of" in *ABD III*, D. N. Freedman, ed. (New York: Doubleday):1-6.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Leclerc adds that there are three major opinions. First, that Habakkuk himself composed the psalm. Second, that it was composed and added to the book in the postexilic period. Third, that the psalm is in fact an ancient poem, which was added to the book in the postexilic period. L. T. Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets: Their Stories, Sayings and Scrolls* (Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 2007), 226-234.

response. Likewise, in 1:5-11, the Chaldeans are not the means of correction for the injustice lamented in 1:2-4, but rather their cause.¹¹⁵

Floyd refutes the traditional understanding of 1:5-11 as God's response to the preceding complaint because it is contradicted by numerous difficulties. Consequently, in his opinion, the rhetorical exchange cannot be adequately described as dialogue. He rather maintains that the two sections 1:2-4 and 1:5-11 should be regarded as 'two sides of the same coin'. The lamentation in 1:2-4 describes local effects in the prophet's homeland that have been triggered by the international development (1:5-11).¹¹⁶ The progress of the text in chapter 1 rises from the theme of justice at a local level (1:2-4) to justice at an international level (1:5-11) and finally to injustice at a cosmic level (1:12-17). God's response to the complaint of the prophet does not begin until in 2:1.

The juxtaposition implies, however, that the prophet's question is motivated by his desire to resolve the puzzle posed in the extensive lamentation of chapter 1. Bailey and Haak go a step further to propose that we should try not to limit our understanding of the text to the individual sections of the book but rather try to understand the entire book as a whole, as a lamentation. According to Haak, the woe oracles and the psalm in 2:6 are integral parts of the complaint.¹¹⁷

Contrary to Haak, Leigh proposes a rhetorical and structural analysis of the book of Habakkuk by employing a synchronic approach.¹¹⁸ It is interesting to note, that among

¹¹⁵ M. A. Sweeney, "Structure, Genre, and Intent in the book of Habakkuk," VT 41: (1991), 63-83. Mason argues alone the same line. He said injustice at home is not the only occasion and content of the prophet's complaint (1:2-4), but also injustice in the international world (1:5-11). R. Mason, 'Habakkuk', 60-96.

¹¹⁶ As difficult as it is to interpret the two units (1:2-4 and 1:5-11) as the first round of dialogue between the prophet and Yahweh, it is still more difficult to see the beginning of a second round of dialogue in 1:12-17. Indeed, the accusations in 1:2-4 are intensified here to the extreme.

¹¹⁷ R. D. Haak, *Habakkuk* (VT Sup. 44; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992).

¹¹⁸ B. Y. Leigh, *Rhetorical and Structural Study of the book of Habakkuk* (PhD Dissertation, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994). In Leigh's opinion, scholarly research has previously been determined by traditional historical criticism and form criticism. Yet, the book of Habakkuk contains so little

scholars who analyse the book of Habakkuk synchronically, there is a common agreement on the structure of the book.¹¹⁹ The first major unit is structured around a two-part dialogue between the prophet and God. In each part, the prophet raises a complaint to God and then God responds. The second answer of God is composed as a series of woe oracles against those who plunder; those who obtain gain through evil means; those who build towns by bloodshed; those who forcibly humiliate others; and those who trust in idols.¹²⁰

Some scholars observe that Habakkuk uses two primary sources of imagery to embody his vision. These are nature and warfare. In both spheres the predominated mood is one of terror; as foreign armies invade and conquer, as God makes people like fish of the sea (1:13-17), as God shakes the nations and scatters the mountains (3:6), as mountains writhe and waters rage (3:10). It is no wonder that the prophet's body trembles and quivers for the prophecy is largely one of judgement and woe (3:16).¹²¹

It seems important to add that Habakkuk's literary artistry is seen especially in his free use of simile and metaphor. He mirrored the Chaldean as a man who gives his neighbour a drink in a seeming hospitality. However, the apparently innocent cup contains a draught of wrath, for it is designed to get its partaker drunk. Drunkenness alone is not the motive of the untrustworthy friend. Having got his neighbour drunk he denudes him and mock at his nudity. The Chaldeans' cavalry is portrayed as advancing on horses swifter than leopards and fiercer than evening wolves. Like vultures bent for prey or as mighty dust cloud gathering sand, they come seeking spoil and taking vast numbers of prisoners (1:8-

concrete historical information that historical critical research can only arrive at unsatisfactory answer to its questions, and thus produces divergent opinions.

¹¹⁹ Shimon Bakon, "Habakkuk: From Perplexity to Faith" *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 39 (2011): 26-29.

¹²⁰ Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophet*, 226-234.

¹²¹ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit & Tremper Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 357.

9). Although the captive people are like fish caught in the net (1:14-15), their eventual vacation is represented as a case in which a creditor calls his debt (2:7-8).

In another simile, God's glory is compared to the rising sun, and his act of delivering his people in the exodus is described as a Divine Warrior subduing his foes. This latter literary device appears in the midst of a periscope (3:3-15) containing two ancient poems: a theophanic narrative (3:3-7) and victory psalms commemorating Israel's exodus and journey toward the Promised Land (3:8-15).¹²²

Clear opening formulae and stich words are evident, as well as the inclusion between (1:12—2:1), being bracketed with the idea of reproof, and (2:4-20), with enclosing statements that contrast the unrighteous Chaldean with the righteous who live by faith.¹²³

Finally, a further rhetorical element is emphasised by Bacon; the use of interrogative sentence. Habakkuk raises two or possibly three complaints, questioning other facets of God's moral rule: "how long O Lord shall I cry out and You will not listen? Shall I shout to You 'violence' and You will not save?" (1:1).

Based on these rhetorical elements, an outline of the book is proposed. The common outline of the book includes: Superscription (1:1), the prophet's first complains about the oppression of the righteous by the wicked (1:2-4). The prophet asks why YHWH allows sin to go unpunished. The next division (1:5-11) seems to be a direct answer from YHWH to the prophet's complaint in the form of an oracle (1:2-4). YHWH says that the wicked will be punished by a new nation on the rise. A major division comes

¹²² Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imager*, 357.

¹²³ Ibid., 357.

after (2:5: 2:6–20) contains a series of five woes addressed to the oppressor. Each woe indicates that the oppressor or the evil one is doomed.¹²⁴

Brevard Childs calls attention to the ‘autobiographical framework’ of the book.¹²⁵ According to him the superscription designates Habakkuk as the one who receives the vision. The complaint in 1:2–4 is the prophet’s complaint and the response in 1:5–11 is YHWH’s response to Habakkuk’s question and complaint. The same is true of Habakkuk’s second complaint in 1:12–17 and God’s response to it in 2:1–5.¹²⁶

2.4 Rhetorical Organization

If scholars agree on the outline of the book, they have different proposals on its internal organization. Hayes Ward opts for a descriptive structure, and organizes the chapters into twelve units:

1. The Complaint (1:2–4)
2. The Response (1:5–11)
3. Second Complaint (1:12–17)
4. The Watch for Yahweh’s Answer (2:1)
5. Yahweh’s Direction (2:2–3)
6. The Oracle (2:4–5)
7. The Maledictions (2:6–20)
 - a. First Malediction (2:6b–8)
 - b. Second Malediction (2:9–11)
 - c. Third Malediction (2:12–14)

¹²⁴ W. H. Brownlee, *The Text of Habakkuk in the Ancient Commentary from Qumran* (Philadelphia: JBL Monograph Series: Scholars Press, 1979).

¹²⁵ B. Child, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Scholar Press, 1979), 106. Many scholars see a cultic setting for the book of Habakkuk, but Childs suggests that this autobiographical framework does not lend itself to a cultic setting.

¹²⁶ O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 416–422. Many scholars see a cultic setting for the book of Habakkuk, but Childs suggests that this autobiographical framework does not lend itself to a cultic setting.

d. Fourth Malediction (2:15–17)

e. Fifth Malediction (2:18–20)¹²⁷

Armerding¹²⁸, Adeyemo¹²⁹ and Leclerc emphasise the dialogical nature of chapters 1—2. They divide the section into two ‘arguments’ where the prophet’s complaint is followed by YHWH’s answer. A series of five ‘Woes’ (2:6-20) constitutes a sort of bridge between the two sections dividing the book into two parts, introduced by a superscription (1:1; 3:1). An example is presented below:

Superscription (1:1)	Superscription (3:1)
First Argument (1:2-11)	The Psalm of Habakkuk (3:2-19) ¹³⁰
a) Prophet’s complaint (1:2-1)	
b) Yahweh’s response (1:5-11)	
Second Argument (1:12—2:5)	
a) Prophet’s complaint (1:12—2:1)	
b) Yahweh’s response (2:2-5)	
Five Woes (2:6-20)	

Shelton’s structure embraces the same criterion but it is more elaborated: he divides the chapters into five major sections, which he further fragments into several smaller units:

I. The title: The oracle and the prophet (1:1).

II. Habakkuk’s first complaint (1:2–4):

- a. How long? (1:2)
- b. Why? (1:3)
- c. Lawlessness (1:4).

¹²⁷ William Hayes Ward, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Habakkuk* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2006).

¹²⁸ Carl E. Armerding, “Habakkuk” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Daniel and the Minor Prophets* Vol. 7, Frank E. Gæbelein, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 499.

¹²⁹ Youssouf Dembele, “Habakkuk” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, Tokuunboh Adeyemo, ed. (Nairobi: Worldalive, 2006), 1063.

¹³⁰ Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 226-234.

III. The Lord's answer (1:5–11):

- a. Watch and be amazed (1:5)
- b. The Babylonians (1:6–11)
- c. Their nature (1:6)
- d. Their law (1:7)
- e. Their army (1:8–9)
- f. Their attitude (1:10)
- g. Their god (1:11).

IV. Habakkuk's second complaint (1:12–2:1); the character of God (1:12–13a):

- a. Why? (1:13b)
- b. The helplessness of the nations (1:14)
- c. The Babylonians (1:15–16)
- d. Their conquests and joy (1:15)
- e. Their idolatry and prosperity (1:16)
- f. How long? (1:17)
- g. The watchfulness of the prophet (2:1).

V. The Lord's answer (2:2–20):

- a. Introduction (2:2–3)
- b. The Babylonians (2:4–5)
- c. Their arrogance (2:4–5a)
- d. Their greed (2:5b)
- e. The first woe against the Babylonians (2:6–8)
 - Their extortion (2:6)
 - Their overthrow (2:7–8)
- f. The second woe against the Babylonians (2:9–11)
 - Their injustice and cruelty (2:9)
 - Their shame and ruin (2:10–11)
- g. The third woe against the Babylonians (2:12–14)
 - Their violence (2:12)
 - Their destruction (2:13)
 - The glory of the LORD (2:14)
- h. The fourth woe against the Babylonians (2:15–17)
 - Their oppression (2:15)
 - Their disgrace (2:16)
 - Their violence and terror (2:17)
- i. The fifth woe against the Babylonians (2:18–20)
 - Their idolatry (2:18–19)
 - The living and holy God (2:20)

VI. Habakkuk's Prayer (3:1–19)

- a. Title and introduction (3:1)
- b. Habakkuk's awe and plea (3:2)
- c. The theophany (3:3–15)
- d. His glory and splendour (3:3–4)
- e. His judgment and power (3:5–7)

- f. His wrath and power (3:8–10)
- g. His splendour and wrath (3:11–12)
- h. His salvation and judgment (3:13–14)
- i. His power (3:15);
- j. Habakkuk's faith (3:16–19b)
- k. His fear and patience (3:16)
- l. His affliction and joy (3:17–18)
- m. His confidence and victory (3:19a–b)
- n. The subscription (3:19c)¹³¹

Shenton's outline renders a vivid description of Habakkuk's intent and concern about the righteous Judah who are to undergo the punishment of God due to their unfaithfulness to their Maker.

Samuel J. Schultz focuses on the 'questions' present in the text and employs them as a rhetorical signal to design a structure organized around three parallel blocks, where unrighteousness and righteousness are contrasted. The structure is as follows:

1) Why does God allow violence? (1:1 – 4)

God arouses the Chaldeans to punish Judah (1: 5 – 11)

2) Why should the wicked punish the upright? (1:12 – 2: 1)

The righteous live by faith and hope (2: 2 – 4)

3) Denunciation of the unrighteous (2: 5 – 20)

A psalm of praise (3:19)¹³²

J. Ronald Blue presents a structure able to emphasise the dialogical nature of chapters 1—2 and the different rhetorical features present in the texts, such as questions and repetitions. The structure is exemplified below:

I. A Dialogue with God: Habakkuk Previewed God's Discipline of Judah

A. Habakkuk's distress (1:1-4)

1. Why is God indifferent to supplication? (1:1-2)

¹³¹ Shenton, *Habakkuk*, 7-8.

¹³² Samuel J. Schultz, *The Old Testament Speaks* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1960), 407. David Dorsey also suggests a six fold organization which comprises of: Habakkuk's first complaint about Yahweh's justice (1:2–4); Yahweh's response to Habakkuk's first complaint (1:5–11); Habakkuk's second complaint about Yahweh's (1:12–17); Yahweh's response to Habakkuk's second complaint (2:1–5); Five woes (2:6–20); Habakkuk's psalm (3:1–19); Cfr. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure*, 306.

2. Why is God insensitive to sin and suffering? (1:3-4)

B. God's disclosure (1:5-11)

1. God's intention of discipline (1:5)
2. God's instrument of discipline (1:6-11)

C. Habakkuk's dilemma (1:12-17)

1. Why would God employ a people of iniquity? (1:12-17)
2. Why would God endorse a people of injustice? (1:14-15)
3. Why would God excuse a people of idolatry? (1:16-17)

II. Dirge from God: Habakkuk Pronounced God's Destruction of Babylon (2:1-20)

A. Habakkuk's anticipation: "Watch" (2:1)

B. God's admonition: "Write" (2:2-5)

1. God's clear revelation (2:2)
2. God's certain revelation (2:3)
3. God's condemnatory revelation (2:4-5)

C. Habakkuk's annotation: "Woe" (2:6-20), (1) Woe for intimidation (2:6-8), (2) Woe for intemperance (2:9-11), (3) Woe for iniquity (2:12-14), (4) Woe for indignity (2:15-17), and (5) Woe for idolatry (2:18-20)

iii) A Doxology to God: Habakkuk praised God's Design of Creation (3:1-19)

A. Habakkuk's prayer for mercy (3:1-2)

B. God's presence of majesty (3:3-15)

1. God's arrival (3:3a)
2. God's appearance (3:3b-7)
3. God's actions (3:8-15)

C. Habakkuk's peace in ministry (3:16-19)¹³³

The structure of Ronald Blue is adopted for the research because it enlightens the narrative structure of the text and aids the reader to appreciate the development of Habakkuk's rhetorical aim.

¹³³ J. Ronald Blue, "Habakkuk" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty, Old Testament Based on the New International Version*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, ed. (Princeton: Scripture Press Publications INC., 1995), 1507.

2.5 Conclusion

The book of Habakkuk challenges readers with problems about its literary unit and rhetorical structure. Clearly, we cannot speak of the literary unity of the three chapters, nor can we regard them as mere collections of prophetic speeches.

The analysis reveals the presence of a narrative unity not based on its form but of its contents: YHWH is the Lord of history who in a sovereign manner directs the fate of his people and brings to their conclusion his inscrutable plans. These in man's eyes remain a mystery and can be understood only in terms of faith.¹³⁴

The dialogical organization of the text invites the reader to interrogate its mystery, to reflect on the problem of violence and evil that characterized human history. Together, Habakkuk guides the reader to read the reality 'theologically', to perceive the presence of YHWH, to listen to His voice even when the situation seems to deny his presence and echo his silence. The next chapter enhances Habakkuk's challenge offering an exegetical reading of the text.

¹³⁴ Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, 9.

CHAPTER THREE

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF HABAKKUK 1:1—2:20

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to exegete Hab 1:1—2:20 a remarkable dialogue between the prophet and God. The book of Habakkuk commences by proclaiming a revelation given to Habakkuk ‘the prophet’ (1:1).

For the purpose of this work, J. Ronald Blue’s structure constitutes the road map of our exegetical analysis. This structure enlightens the narrative structure and aids the reader to appreciate and understand the development of Habakkuk’s rhetorical quest.

The book of Habakkuk raises philosophical questions of an apparent discrepancy between the facts of history and the divine revelation. In the end, the prophet resolves his difficulties by expressing his faith in God.¹³⁵ The prophet is disturbed by the evils of his era: injustice, lawlessness, immorality, violence, idolatry through which the Torah is ignored. He impatiently appeals to God, because he feels that there is no remedy to the situation.

3.2 A Dialogue with God: Habakkuk Previewed God’s Discipline of Judah (1:1-17)

Habakkuk’s opening complaint in 1:2-4 is resonated in several ways by his personal resolution of faith at the conclusion of the book. Both units (and otherwise only the central unit) feature lengthy first-person discourses (“I ... I ... me” etc.) so that Habakkuk’s more personal expressions are featured at the book’s beginning (1:2-3), middle (2:1), and end (3:18-19). The final unit represents the resolution of the opening one. In

¹³⁵ Schultz, *The Old Testament Speaks*, 407.

Habakkuk's opening complain, he asks God: "How long ... shall I cry out to you, but you do not save? The closing unit provides Habakkuk's resolution to this question: "I will wait patiently, though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vines, yet I will rejoice in God my Saviour". Furthermore, the root יָשַׁע (to save) links these two units, and invites the reader to understand the main topic of the text.

The two phrasal verbs with which Habakkuk expresses his distress to God in his opening complaint in 1:2, "I *call out* for help" and "I *cry out* to you," are balanced in the closing unit by two opposite verbs expressing his joy toward God: "I will be joyful in YHWH, I will rejoice in God my saviour" (3:18). The verb 'to hear' appears in the introductory line of both units, playing significantly different roles. In the opening unit Habakkuk complains that YHWH does not hear his cries for help (1:2) and Habakkuk is very disturbed by this. In the closing unit we see the other side of the spectrum: the Prophet hears the thunderous, mighty sound of YHWH arriving to save his people, and as a result his inner struggle may have been resolved.¹³⁶

A critical consideration of chapter one specifies the perplexity of the Prophet. The prophet speaks to God in 1:1-4 and God replies in 1:5-11. Then the prophet speaks again in vv. 12-17, while the discourse closes in 2:15. He is deeply concerned about the moral state of God's people; in view of wickedness and violence, he presents a complaint to God. He grumbles about the rampant injustice in the Judea society in his time.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Dorsey, *The Literary Structure*, 306.

¹³⁷ Gelston indicates that the form of the complaint is that of the "individual lament," familiar with the psalms and further affirms that the prophet may well be speaking to an individual in an intercessory role than on behalf of the society to which he belongs.

3.2.1. Habakkuk's Complaint (1:1-4)

(a) *Superscription: the 'burden' of Habakkuk' (1:1)*

הַמִּשָּׁא אֲשֶׁר חָזָה חִבְקוּק הַנְּבִיא:

The revelation of Habakkuk is described by the Hebrew term מִשָּׁא which literally means a 'burden' or 'load' (Exod. 23:5). The word is often used in the oracle of judgment. It was used as a title for the rather non-threatening sayings recorded in Prov. 30:1 and 31:1; (cfr. Isa. 13:1; 15:1 Nah. 1:1).

The word חָזָה, often translated as received, literally means 'to see' (cf. Isa. 1:13). The word is used in prophetic literature as a technical term indicating 'to see in a vision' (cf. Isa. 1:1; 2:1; Ezek. 12:27; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1). Receiving glimpses from God into the future rendered the prophets, God's seers (חֹזֵה). This means that the combination of 'burden' and 'saw' suggests that there is a visual dimension to God's communication with the prophet.¹³⁸ The same Hebrew syntagm is used in Isa 13:1.

The close link between the prophetic vision and the spoken message is expressed in the phrase "the oracle (burden) which Habakkuk saw" (v. 1); meaning that the prophet utters what God shows him. The term oracle may be defined as a pronouncement that attempts to explain the manner in which God's intention is manifested in human affairs.¹³⁹ The reference to the prophecy as a burden or an oracle points out to the audience

¹³⁸ Dembele, "Habakkuk," 1063.

¹³⁹ William Sanford LaSor† et. al., eds. *Survey of the Old Testament: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI-Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1996), 323; Blue, "Habakkuk," 1508.

that the message received from the Lord is a ‘heavy’ message.¹⁴⁰ Most interpreters of this text refer **הַכַּשְׂדִּים** to the Chaldeans and the monarchy of Babylon.

Contexture reason compels the researcher to dissent from this opinion: for as the Prophet addresses the Jews, and without any addition calls his prophecy a burden, there is no doubt that he refers to the revelation with his own prophetic ministry toward the end. The Prophet dreads the future devastation of the land, and complains to God for allowing His chosen and elect people to be so cruelly treated.¹⁴¹

Habakkuk then reproves his own nation, and shows that they had in vain disdainfully resisted all God’s prophets, for they would at length find that their threatening would be accomplished. The burden, then, which the Prophet Habakkuk saw, was this—that God, after having exercised long forbearance towards the Jews, would at length be the punisher of their many sins (vv. 2-3).¹⁴²

(b) Why is God Indifferent to Supplication? (v. 2)

עַד-אַנָּה יְהוָה שׁוֹעֲתִי וְלֹא תִשְׁמַע אֲזַעֲק אֱלֹהִים חֲמָס וְלֹא תוֹשִׁיעַ:

Habakkuk felt that God was unresponsive to his petition, hence demanded of God why He was silent to his plight and why God seemed to be insensitive or unconcerned about the moral disorder of his day. The expression **עַד-אַנָּה** describes the distress of the prophet. God’s response to dealing with sin and violence seems to delay. Habakkuk

¹⁴⁰ John Calvin, ‘Commentaries on The Prophet Habakkuk: lecture One Hundred and Sixth.’ In John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets: Habakkuk, Zephania, Haggai*, trans. John Owen (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1848), 15-18.

¹⁴¹ Calvin, *Commentaries on Habakkuk*, 15.

¹⁴² Ibid., 15-16. For detail discussions of the ‘oracle’ of Habakkuk, read the works of P. C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets* vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); H. A. Hailey, *Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972); C. F. Keil, *The Minor Prophets: Old Testament Commentaries* vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949); T. Laetsch, *The Minor prophets* (St Louis: Concordia, 1956); E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets* vol. 2 (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1986).

complains about his troubles but God is silent. The prophet is perturbed about malicious viciousness, utter wickedness, and perversity. These negative expressions depict a general condition of oppression, strife, and contention in his day (vv. 2-3).¹⁴³

Armerding stresses that twice Habakkuk emphasizes the opposing principles of evil and justice thereby revealing his dominant concern. One major concern of the prophet is that God has not judged the wickedness of Judah vv. 2-4. God, not the people, is the first object of Habakkuk's censure. Judah's sin has become so disgraceful and monstrous that God's reputation is jeopardized by his reluctance to judge. The judgement for which he pleads is in twofold: vengeance on the wicked and vindication of the righteous.¹⁴⁴ He further adds that it is evident that not only is lawlessness of "violence" rampant, but it has mastered the very mechanisms of law by which it should be curbed. He states that in such circumstances it is clear that only divine intervention can correct the imbalance (cf. "save" v. 2). When this intervention is not forthcoming, then faith is stretched beyond its limits.¹⁴⁵

The sight of corruption and the persistent violence deepen the concern of the prophet; he cried out to God but it seems the Almighty did nothing. Patterson argues that because the call or answer motif is used often in the Old Testament to express intimacy of communion between God and the believer, God's failure to answer the prophet's call may indicate Habakkuk's fear that perhaps he is out of fellowship with God.¹⁴⁶ Gelston af-

¹⁴³ Elwell, *Baker Commentary on the Bible*, 668.

¹⁴⁴ William Sanford LaSor† et. al., eds. *Survey of the Old Testament*, 321.

¹⁴⁵ Armerding, "Habakkuk," 499.

¹⁴⁶ R. D. Patterson, "Habakkuk," in *Baker Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2005), 666-673.

firms that the prophet's question 'How long'? (v. 2) and 'why'? (v. 3) express the anguish of those whose prayers appear to have remained long unanswered, while violence and wrong appear to go scot-free.¹⁴⁷

The question 'how long' is a typical introduction to a Jewish lament (Psa 6:3; 13:1-2; 80:4; Jer. 12:4 and Zech. 1:12). Shenton concurs with Armerding that Habakkuk uses a typical lament to express his perplexity. The lament is not directed against the Babylonians for the following reasons. First, the expressions used by the prophet clearly point to the evils prevalent in Jerusalem at that time. Second, the whole description is remarkably similar to Jeremiah's account of the state of Jerusalem under Jehoiakim (22:13-17). Third, the four words used by Habakkuk also occur in Psa 55:9-10, where they refer to internal and domestic wickedness. Finally, the Babylonians are not the subjects but the instruments of judgment (cf. 1:6-11); and where 'violence' and 'justice' are contrasted, the wicked are usually the people of Israel, unless another group is clearly designated.¹⁴⁸

The word **חַמַּס** (violence) denotes flagrant violation of moral law by which man injures primarily his fellowman (Gen 6:11). Its underlying meaning is one of ethical wrong, by which physical brutality is only one possible expression (Jdg 9:24).¹⁴⁹ The prophet complains that the wicked are imposing injustice and suffering in his country, while God remains silent and inactive and opines that the question 'how long?' indicates this has been going on for a long time and still continuing (1:2a; cfr. Psa 6:3; 13:1-2). Dembele states in v. 2b that the prophet's cry of violence describes the social, political, and religious situation in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE and intimates that it was an

¹⁴⁷ Gelston, "Habakkuk," 710.

¹⁴⁸ Shenton, *Habakkuk*, 12.

¹⁴⁹ Armerding, "Habakkuk," 499; R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, eds. *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, Illinois, 1980), CD Version.

era of great instability (cfr. 2 Kings 23:31-25:7). The prophet Jeremiah and Ezekiel also warned their contemporaries that divine judgment was coming because of the violence and wickedness prevailing in Judah (cf. Jer 6:6-7; Eze 7:23).¹⁵⁰

c) *Why is God insensitive to sin and suffering?* (vv. 3-4)

לָמָּה תִּרְאֵנִי אֶל וְעָמַל תִּבְּיִט וְשָׂד וְחָמָס לִנְגִּדִי וַיְהִי רִיב וּמִדּוֹן יִשָּׂא:³
 עַל־כֵּן תִּפּוֹג תּוֹרָה וְלֹא־יֵצֵא לְנֶצַח מִשְׁפָּט בִּי רָשָׁע מִכְתִּיר אֶת־הַצְּדִיק עַל־כֵּן יֵצֵא
 מִשְׁפָּט מִעֵקֶל:⁴

In v. 3, the prophet asks God: “why do you make me see wrong and look upon trouble?” Blue renders this verse as: “why do you look on trouble?” as though the prophet indignantly bore the connivance of God. According to Blue, the next question seems to be: “why do you show me iniquity?” Here, the prophet is exposed to evil and wicked people, who are troublesome to the good and innocent, as it is usually the case when freedom of sinning prevails.¹⁵¹

The term ‘oppression’ means outrage, wrongly, forcibly done, violent injustice. The Hebrew term, in the first line of the third verse, in its primary sense, is defined as labour, toil; it produces toil, mischief and wickedness. The term ‘wickedness,’ is a word adopted by Newcome; רִיב which he refers to as strife, it is a verbal contention; and מִדּוֹן is a judicial contest, or a trial by law.¹⁵² In the prophet’s opinion, violence and corruption is the order of the day. Yet God is unconcerned and indifferent. Habakkuk blames God with piercing interrogations (why do you make me look at injustice?) He was so courageous to put forth even a far greater question to God: why do you tolerate wrong? The presence of evil and the existence of a righteous God are too hard for Habakkuk to reconcile. Although a weak sinner should behold wickedness, however, for a

¹⁵⁰ Dembele, “Habakkuk,” 1063.

¹⁵¹ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Habakkuk*, 18-19

¹⁵² Ibid., 19-20; Patterson, ‘Habakkuk,’ 668.

righteous God to see evil and do nothing about it seemed unacceptable. With the uncertainty of the prevailing issues at that time, Habakkuk states, “the Law is paralyzed” (1:4).

Blue avers that the divine Law appeared to have suffered a ‘knockout’.¹⁵³ In my understanding, the law has become feeble and non-effective. Habakkuk alleges, the law never comes forth to fight injustice and it appears wickedness is winning (v.3). The wicked takes undue advantage of the righteous, therefore justice is *נִעַל קָל* (Crooked, bent, twisted or out of shape). With wicked men in authority, justice was twisted to become injustice.

Baker opines that the dialogue comprises two queries by Habakkuk to God; each with his response, however, the main concerns is God’s slowness in punishing the wicked among his chosen people.¹⁵⁴ Dembele maintains that Habakkuk is on the same wavelength as the prophet Jeremiah. He suffers for justice because his views go against those of the society he lives in, but he is not prepared to renounce his faith in God and his belief that God will intervene (cf. Jer 20:7-10).¹⁵⁵

תּוֹרָה (v.4) may refer to any form of authoritative ‘teaching’ (e.g. Prov 3:1; 4:2). When used in the singular form without clear definition, it signifies God’s covenant code established with Israel, given through Moses and set forth particularly in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 1:5; 4:8; 17:18-19; Josh 8:31-32). The law was mediated primarily through the Levitical priesthood (Lev 10:11; Deut 33:10), in close conjunction with the king or other governing authorities (Deut 17:8-11). The effectiveness of the law was,

¹⁵³ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1509.

¹⁵⁴ W. Dave Baker, “Habakkuk” in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer & G. J. Wenham (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 841.

¹⁵⁵ Dembele, “Habakkuk,” 1063.

therefore, ‘paralysed’ most extensively by the corruption of the religious and civil leadership of the nation.¹⁵⁶ מִשְׁפָּט has broad and varied connotations in the Old Testament, it appears three times in 1:4; 13 and 2:4. It suggests that the exercise of justice is not merely of legal processes but of all the functions of government; it is through ‘justice’ and the act of ‘judging’ that the law and order are represented, legislated, interpreted, and enforced. In Israel this order is based on the Torah of which ‘justice’ is the application (e.g., Exod 18:16, Num 15:16; Deut 17:11).¹⁵⁷ When a people or a group becomes lawless, justice is usually perverted. The people have no respect for their fellows, therefore treat them harshly, take bribe and indulge in immorality.¹⁵⁸

It should not be assumed that the prophet doubted that the Lord had heard his cry (in the sense that the Lord was aware). The prophet’s words; ‘how long’, again shows his agony over ‘God’s seeming delay’ in responding to his concerns. However, the prophet thought that God’s hearing would involve God’s responding. As yet his prayer had been unavailing. The reference to ‘violence’ was not only that his cries went unheard, but that God seemed to do nothing.

The stark word violence sums up all the chaos Habakkuk witnesses around him. Now the question is who is responsible for it? Scholars presumed that it is the Judeans. However, there are those who also believe that because the same word is used in 2:8 and 2:17 to describe the Chaldeans, the violence of which the prophet complains was that of the Chaldeans, since they are to be the means of punishment and are about to be raised up, they cannot be thought of as perpetrators. In my opinion, both the Chaldeans

¹⁵⁶ Armerding, “Habakkuk,” 499.

¹⁵⁷ Ibidem, 499.

¹⁵⁸ Pfeiffer, *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 871; Baker, ‘Habakkuk,’ 840-847; cf. TWOT, 2:947-49.

and Judeans are responsible because Judeans were the cause or the initiators of the violence and the Chaldeans were God's rod of punishment.

3.2.2 God's Disclosure (1:5-11)

After the prophet engaged God, God answered his complaint showing that He was neither indifferent nor insensitive.¹⁵⁹ Habakkuk did not have to wait long for God's response. The use of the plural form indicates that God's words are directed to a larger audience than just the prophet. The divine response comes with a surprise to the prophet. His complaint is not answered by a promise of deliverance, a salvation speech, but with a judgement in the form of the Babylonian army.¹⁶⁰

a) God's intention of discipline (1:5)

רָאוּ בְּגוֹיִם וְהִבִּיטוּ וְהִתְמַהוּ תִּמְהוּ כִּי־פָעַל פָּעַל בְּיַמֵּיכֶם לֹא תִאֲמִינוּ כִּי יִסְפָּר:

In v. 5, the prophet turns his discourse to the Jews, after having related the private dialogue with God in which he accuses God for having so patiently bore with the obstinate wickedness of the nation. With God's command, he performs the duty of a herald, and proclaims an approaching destruction. He indeed adopts a preface, which ought to have awakened the drowsy and careless minds of the people. He says: 'look,' 'see,' 'be astonished.' These repetitions do not just increase the alarming rate of the impending danger; he twice bids them to see, and twice exhorts them to be astonished, or to wonder.¹⁶¹

The verse is addressed to a plural audience. The hearers, by implication Judeans, are treated as distinct from other 'nations' to whom they are to 'look'. To be 'amazed' is man's response to an event that utterly confounds all previous expectation (Gen 43:33;

¹⁵⁹ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1509.

¹⁶⁰ LaSort et. al., *Survey of the Old Testament*, 321.

¹⁶¹ Calvin, *Commentaries on Habakkuk*, 24.

Psa 48:5; Isa 13:8 and Jer 4:9); it counters what the listeners believe. Dembele observes that the Lord's reply comes in series of imperative verbs: רָאָה (look) and נִבֵּט (watch) and 'be utterly amazed' (1:5a). These imperatives imply that God is already doing something. God is doing a work in Habakkuk's days that the prophet and his people would not believe if told (v. 5b).¹⁶² God's response to Habakkuk's complaint shows that God has in mind disciplinary measures to carry out on Judah.

One issue the prophet does not recognise, and to which God draws his attention, is the fact that he is looking at the immediate havoc. God instructed him to look at the international horizons because he needs to develop a worldview that includes 'the nations'. Habakkuk and his people narrow their vision to the circumference of their region but the Lord is the God of the whole world. As the prophet does so, he becomes utterly amazed. The political development situates the prophet in another 'burden'.¹⁶³

The Lord loves Judah and for that matter chooses Israel as His cherished, peculiar treasure, kingdom of priests, and his holy nation through whom He seeks to bring salvation to the whole world (Exod 19:5-6). However, He is both the God of particularism and universalism, in that though He chooses Israel for His intended purpose yet He loves the people of other cultures because He made them all.

Therefore, even though all nations are accountable to God because He is their Creator, Israel is to have a unique relationship with God because He is her Redeemer. Israel's continuous elevation as the people of God is conditioned by her obeying Him as her Lord; by contrast, anytime Israel disobeys or rebels against the Lord they face the wrath and the punishment of God (cf. Amos 3:2).

¹⁶² Dembele, "Habakkuk," 1063.

¹⁶³ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1509.

The Lord usually uses heathen nations to punish the Israelites and when they repent, He uses the same instrument to restore them to their possession. For instance, the Lord uses the Chaldeans as a means of punishment and correction (1:5-7) and in like manner uses king Cyrus to restore them after they had repented (cf. Isa 45:1). Although Cyrus is not a worshiper of God (45:4-5), he is called “the anointed one,” (the Messiah, or Christ). Cyrus was anointed in the sense that he was used by YHWH to perform the important task of setting Israel free from bondage, so that God could complete His plans to use Israel to bring about the salvation of the human race (Ezra 1: 1-8; Isa 45:1 and Amos 3:2.).

b) God’s instrument of discipline (1:6-11)

Habakkuk prophesies to the people of Judah about social injustice around the seventh century BCE. However, there are similarities in his statements with regards to those made by Amos to the northern kingdom of Israel in the eighth century BCE. Both prophets condemn the self-indulgent and corrupt leaders of their time (cf. Amos 2:6-8; 5:12) with the sole aim of dealing with economic and social conditions in their era.¹⁶⁴

In v. 6 the word **כָּזָב** refers to bitter, poisonous, savage, merciless. The verb **מָהֵר** means hasty, rushing and tempestuous. Because of its speed, staggering occurs. As part of this conception we see the advance of a mob, staggering because of their speed. These are all external signs rousing terror in people. The Lord said in v. 6: I am raising up the Chaldeans to destroy Judah for their sin.

Babylon is a nation known for its violent impulses; they committed many atrocities without remorse. Historical records present the Babylonians as aggressive and pitiless

¹⁶⁴ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 791-792.

cruel people. The Chaldean are first mentioned in the Mesopotamian sources in the ninth century BCE although related ethnically to the other Aramean tribes of southern Babylonian, they had a distinct tribal structure. As the Assyrian Empire began to weaken, the Chaldean leaders, including Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar, eventually gained their independent dynasty after 625 BCE.

Nebuchadnezzar inherited this powerful state in 605 BCE, becoming its most famous king. He literally rebuilt the city of Babylon, solidified Babylonian control throughout the Near East.¹⁶⁵ They conquered many nations including Egypt, Edom, Assyria and Judah. The Lord refers to them as ruthless and impetuous or swift people.¹⁶⁶ The prophet wonders why God would use such a nation as an instrument to punish his own people. He gets to know that the thoughts of “God are not ours neither His ways our ways” (Isa 55:8).

Habakkuk uses metaphor to describe the Babylonians; the language shows the position of the Chaldeans as the dominate world power, the ferocity of their military movements and their unrestrained cruelty was unconceivable. They are a “law to themselves” and promote their own honour in (1:7). This indicates that they are proud and do not submit to any law nor regard any authority but themselves.¹⁶⁷

The Lord’s description of the Chaldeans in 1:8 mirrors them as “horsemen swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk”. Given the description of swiftly moving cavalry, it seems most likely that these people are spear-carrying horsemen rather than mounted

¹⁶⁵ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 791-792.

¹⁶⁶ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1509.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 1510.

archers. Assyrian reliefs from the palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh show how effectively these mounted soldiers could traverse hills and woodlands.¹⁶⁸ Their sudden appearance would have terrified local villagers. In open country the chariot corps functions as mounted infantry and archery platforms, serving as a frontal assault force, with the infantry following them.¹⁶⁹

Both leopards and wolves are fiercer, fast and excellent hunters. At dusk, wolves are hungry and are ready to pounce on their prey. The Babylonians' voracious speed to devour their prey is pictured as a vulture swooping to devour. The Hebrew word כְּנִשֵּׁר meaning 'vulture' or an 'eagle' may have been the great griffon vulture, a majestic bird often seen in Palestine circling higher and higher and then rapidly swooping on its prey.¹⁷⁰

God's response to Habakkuk, and to those who share his grief and anger, is that he is preparing an unprecedented judgment (1:9). Dembele, commenting on the text, states that violence may reign supreme, but it will be punished with even greater violence (v. 9).¹⁷¹ It seems nothing could stop the Babylonians; they come with collective effort bent on violence.

The phrase "desert wind" did not occur nowhere else and is variously rendered 'resisting', 'striving', 'eagerness', 'assembling', and a 'gathering host', 'troops', or 'horde'. The term קְדִיִּים "desert wind" refers to wind that comes from the East. Such fierce

¹⁶⁸ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1510.

¹⁶⁹ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 791-792.

¹⁷⁰ Blue, 'Habakkuk,' 1510.

¹⁷¹ Dembele, 'Habakkuk,' 1063.

scorching winds moving across the desert from the East that often devastates vegetation (Ezek 17:10).¹⁷²

The Babylonians have confidence in their strength for which reason they scoff kings and ridiculed rulers (v. 10). It is their custom to exhibit captive rulers as public spectacles. For instance, their brutality is seen in the way they treated Zedekiah after the fall of Jerusalem, they killed his sons before his eyes then put out his eyes, bound him in shackles, and took him prisoner to Babylon (2 Kings 25:7). Not only do the Babylonians ridicule their foes; they also laugh at all fortified cities. They make mockery on the strongholds, which their victims consider impregnable. They build earthen ramps (“heaped up earth”) against the walls of the cities built on mounds, and race up those ramps, attack the cities, and seize the fortified strongholds. This practice is fairly common in ancient warfare (2 Kings 19:32; cf. Ezek 4:2).

There is an ambivalence in the first part of v.11, which makes it quite difficult to translate:

אֲזַי חֲלֵף רוּחַ וַיַּעֲבֹר וְאִשָּׁם זֶה כְּחוּ לְאֱלֹהֵי:

The KJV has it: “then shall his mind (רוּחַ, ‘spirit’ or ‘wind’) change, and he shall pass over.” That is, the Babylonians changed their minds and went beyond all restraint to their own destruction. However, it is unlikely that רוּחַ is the subject; the verb ‘change’ can better be translated in its normal sense ‘to pass through’.¹⁷³ The NIV has a more likely interpretation; “they sweep past like the wind (desert wind)”. Their major offense is clearly recorded.

¹⁷² Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1510.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 1511.

The Babylonians are described as feared and dreaded, a people who are agile, swift, arrogant and as greedy as vultures and are compared to the top predators in the animal world. They arrogantly refuse to recognize any laws other than those that they make based on their own desires.¹⁷⁴ They consider their own strength as their god and treat their might as their master. For them, ‘might is right’, to become ‘mighty divine’. It is blasphemous for one to consider his or her might to be his/her god. It is no little wonder that God declares them guilty for such sacrilege.¹⁷⁵

3.2.3 Habakkuk’s dilemma (1:12-17)

The prophet spoke asking God if he really intends to use as instrument of judgment the Babylonians, who are even more violent than those they are appointed to punish! The dilemma is whether the cure will not be worse than the illness itself. God’s amazing disclosure left the prophet even more perplexed and bewildered. Habakkuk’s complaint about the sin and lawlessness in Judah (vv. 2-4) is met by God’s response that He is not ignorant of his people’s conduct. Judgment is on its way; the Babylonians will soon take the erring people captive. The prophet is astonished, just as God said he would be (v. 5). He is appalled that YHWH would employ so much evil as an instrument to punish his own people. Habakkuk expresses his deep concern: he questions God’s plan.¹⁷⁶

a) Why would God Employ a People of Iniquity? (1:12-13)

The question, “O Lord, are you not from everlasting?” requires an affirmative reply. It is as much a statement as an interrogation. The prophet has confidence in the eternal living God.¹⁷⁷ Dembele retains that God endorses Habakkuk’s positive words in v. 12, but it also indicates who exactly the ‘we’ in v. 12 are. They are those who will not die.

¹⁷⁴ Dembele, “Habakkuk,” 1063.

¹⁷⁵ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1511.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 1511.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

‘We’ does not indicate all the prophet’s people, but rather those who are righteous. God confirms that he will not make the righteous die with the wicked (Gen 18:20:23).¹⁷⁸

The metaphor of comparing deity to a rock (צור)¹⁷⁹ focuses primarily on the issues of protection and shelter. A large rock could provide shade, and caves are sometimes found in rocky areas. It is possible that the term is more than a metaphor because it appears in personal names in the same place as a divine name would normally appear.¹⁸⁰ The term was first applied to YHWH in Deut 32:4 to indicate the Almighty’s stability and security (cf. 32:15, 18, 18, 30-31).

The prophet supports the moral integrity of God and asks how God can overlook the crimes of the executioners, which are even more serious than those they are appointed to punish. Those described as “more righteous than they” in v.13 are probably the wicked in Judah mentioned in v. 4, who are otherwise less guilty than the Babylonians. The ‘silence’ of God (v. 13), in the face of such a triumph of injustice, is an even severe problem now than it was in v. 2. However, devastating the divine judgment may sound, the prophet draws consolation and hope from God’s holiness and faithfulness.¹⁸¹

In human terms, the Babylonians could very easily destroy Judah. Nevertheless, the prophet finds utterly unthinkable the elimination of God’s people and thereby the destruction of their covenant with YHWH. Habakkuk based his conclusion on his experience of the immutable and everlasting Lord (3:6) who will not allow sin to go unpunished in Israel or in her foes. He concludes: “my God, we will not die”. The prophet

¹⁷⁸ Dembele, “Habakkuk,” 1063.

¹⁷⁹ J. Joseph Owens, *Analytical Key to the Old Testament: Isaiah–Malachi*, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books Company, 2000).

¹⁸⁰ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 791-792; (for example, Elijah means “Yahweh is my God,” so by comparison Elizur [Num. 1:5] would mean “Zur [Rock] is my God”).

¹⁸¹ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1511.

reminds himself that the Lord has appointed the Babylonians to execute judgment but not the total destruction on Judah. The enemy is God's apparatus to punish, not to demolish.¹⁸²

The Prophet considers YHWH as a Holy God. Therefore, it is quite unthinkable of Him to use a wicked nation to administer discipline on Judah. Habakkuk has a burning question in his heart, he asked why he is forced to look on injustice and why God seemed to be less concerned and more comprehensive than he thought, hence he states: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil" (v.13). His focus seems to be shifting from the sin problems to the sovereign person in control.¹⁸³ In light of YHWH's character, it seemed fair to Habakkuk to ask God why He tolerates the treacherous. Why would He allow such a wicked nation to devour those who were more righteous? That seems a perversion of justice. Sinful though Judah is her wickedness is dwarfed by the atrocities committed by the Babylonians.

b) Why would God Endorse a People of Injustice? (1:14-15)

The prophet said God made men like fish in the sea, like sea creature that have no ruler. Helpless as fish, Judah's people are easy prey for powerful invaders. So helpless are they that they lack the ability to organize themselves for self-protection. They are like sea creatures that are on their own, with no leader to guide them. The effects of their sinful nature made them to be compared to fish caught in a net with no opportunity to escape.¹⁸⁴

The v. 15 pictures the 'wicked' in his cruelty attaining his ends with sadistic delight; the prophet uses the imagery of a fisherman חֶזֶק, "hook," "harpoon"; סֶנֶם, "fish-net";

¹⁸² Blue, "Habakkuk," 1511.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 1511.

¹⁸⁴ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1511.

מִכְמֹרֶת “drag-net,” “trawl” to describe the situation in which the Israelites find themselves. In royal inscription and art, fishing is done with woven baskets rather than individual hooks (Ezek 12:13; Amos 4:2). Naturally, in these instances the point is political, depicting the strength of a ruler who can trap his enemies like fish or birds (cf. Hos 5:1) in a net.¹⁸⁵ Habakkuk visualizes what helplessness and defencelessness means; the fish captured in the fisherman’s net, wriggles and writhes helplessly, threatened with certain destruction; this is what helpless humanity is like, unable to save himself.¹⁸⁶

The wicked Babylonians are visualized as catching unsuspecting men, like fish, with hooks, sweeping them into a net, and gathering them in a large mesh (v. 16). The imagery is vivid. Jeremiah uses the same analogy of fishermen, connecting it with that of hunters (Jer. 16:16). The evil Babylonians has little regard for the welfare of humanity as fishermen have for vulnerable fish. The victorious Babylon foe rejoices and is glad. For Habakkuk it is hard to understand why God would authorize such blatant injustice.¹⁸⁷

c) Why would God Excuse a People of Idolatry? (1:16-17)

The hooks and nets bring food and plenty to the Babylonian. The conquests provided not only a livelihood but also luxury (v. 16). They rendered worship and sacrifice to the apparatuses that contributed to their prosperity; their military power brought monetary profit. The enemy sacrificed to their nets and burned incense to their dragnets. The Babylonians worshiped the means that brought them military success. זָרַר occurs in the OT only here and in v. 15.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 791-792.

¹⁸⁶ Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, 17.

¹⁸⁷ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1511.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 1512.

The researcher adds that idolatry is not restricted to those who sacrifices or burn incense to lifeless objects, but also to people of influence or high position, power or prosperity who often pay respect or give worship to their business or the agencies that provide them with their coveted status. Their business becomes their constant preoccupation as far as becoming even their ‘god’.

The verb רִיק translated as ‘emptying’ is regularly used instead of ‘unsheathing’ a sword, and it is quite likely that this is the original reading. He said according to this difference, v. 17 reads as: “Is he then to keep on unsheathing his sword and destroying nations without mercy”.¹⁸⁹

Rhetorically the prophet asked the fat fisherman, Babylon, if he is to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy. The action signifies superficially a perpetual operation. They empty their nets so they could fill it again and again. Habakkuk’s concern is when will God put a stop to the Babylonians’ greed and wickedness? How could He let a people continue in power when they so openly worshiped that very power as their god?¹⁹⁰

3.3 A Dirge from God (2:1-20)

The prophet’s plight is addressed by God in regards to his question concerning the dominance of evil in the world and the possible extinction of the righteous. YHWH in response states that a time is coming when all the wicked deeds of humankind would be destroyed. However, the prophet’s predicament is deepened. He keeps wondering why God should use an ungodly nation, Babylon, as the instrument to punish His own people. Habakkuk confidently lodges his disputations and now he waits for God’s reply.

¹⁸⁹ Gelston, “Habakkuk,” 710.

¹⁹⁰ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1512.

God's new response to Habakkuk begins with a command: כָּתֹב write ... and בְּאֵר make it plain (2:2). The second half of this verse is difficult to translate. The NIV translates it as "so that a herald may run with it," the NKJV translates it as "that he may run who reads it". The original Hebrew uses two verbs: קָרָא read and רוץ run. The NKJV translation is close to that of the Hebrews.

The vision must be written down so clearly on clay or wooden tablets so that those who read it will recognize that they need to run for their lives. The idea of running with a message suggests its urgency and importance. What is unclear is whether the 'one who reads the message' is the herald (NIV), whose task it is to run from location to location reading aloud his proclamation, or whether it refers to anyone who reads the message.¹⁹¹

3.3.1 Habakkuk's Anticipation: Watch (2:1)

God answers the prophet's questions regarding the dominance of evil in the world and the possible extinction of the righteous. The Lord states that a time is coming when all the wicked would be destroyed and the only people who will not be shaken would be the righteous; those who are related to God by their faith.

Habakkuk expresses his experience in 2:1. He is a watchman standing on a watchtower to identify the first sign of an approaching enemy. He stations himself on the ramparts to see what God would say to him. He feels that he has established a case before God, and thus wants to see how God would reply. The expression "when I am corrected" or "when I am rebuked" (v.1) specifies that he knows he is making a complaint on behalf of the faithful few. He thus concludes that because God is working in a way that allows His people to suffer, there is something he does not understand. As a man, Habakkuk

¹⁹¹ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 791-792.

feels there is some justification to his complaint concerning the sufferings of the righteous at the hand of the unrighteous, who seem to prosper in all they do.

After making his grievance known, he resolves to position himself so he might obtain direct information and then, like a watchman, inform his waiting brethren. Blue indicates that it is likely that the watch, *עַל-מִשְׁמֶרֶתִּי* ('observation or station') and the ramparts refer to the prophet's attitude of expectation, rather than his physical location. He identifies that this vivid imagery is common in Habakkuk's society (2 Sam 18:24 Isa 21:6).¹⁹²

Shenton professes that Habakkuk uses figurative expressions and not literal language as in "I will 'stand' like a servant on duty and 'watch'" (cf. Isa 21:6, 8; Ezek 3:17; 33:7). Some commentaries include both ideas. Habakkuk retires to a private tower where he waits patiently and expectantly for God's response. He goes where he will not be disturbed and meditates on the Law and testimonies of the Lord.¹⁹³ Probably Habakkuk is referring to his own complaint lodged in his dialogue with God (Hab. 1:2-4, 12-7). Some translators, however, say that the complaint (*תוֹכַחַת*, 'correction, rebuke, or argument') is against the prophet rather than by the prophet. Thus they render the statement "what to answer when I am rebuked" (NIV marg.). Whether or not Habakkuk predicts reproof in God's response is not clear, but one thing is certain: the prophet anxiously anticipates God's answer.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Blue, "Habakkuk," 1512.

¹⁹³ Shenton, *Habakkuk*, 18.

¹⁹⁴ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1512.

3.3.2 God's Admonition: 'Write' (2:2-5)

True to his profession, Habakkuk is a spokesman for God's revelation. He waits for God's message, not simply for his own satisfaction but for his people as well. Because he is ready to carry God's message to his people, he waits for God to speak.¹⁹⁵

a) God's Clear Revelation (2:2)

Széles stresses that the certainty of the fulfilment of the vision is described from various angles and is set before us clearly as in: "It hastens to the end." רַיִץ is "panting," "kindling," "gasping for breath," and so it means "indefatigably labouring toward its goal." The word expresses the idea that it will in all certainty reach its destination, moving toward the decreed goal, that is, to fulfilment. The appointed time, the fixed moment for the substantiation of the 'vision', is decreed; it is not in man's power but depends on the favour of the sovereign God. When he deems it fit, then he would fulfil his plan.¹⁹⁶ Blue sustains that the Lord does not mumble: He speaks with precision and frankness. For this reason, he says to Habakkuk: "write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets".

The revelation is to be recorded on tablets of baked clay so that God's Word would be preserved and even more importantly, be publicized in order that a messenger could run with it. This phrase is interpreted by some scholars, to imply that the messenger should be able to read the tablet on the run. However, the researcher agrees with the most common interpretation: the messenger would read it and then run to broadcast the news to others.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1510.

¹⁹⁶ Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, 17.

¹⁹⁷ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1512.

b) God's Certain Revelation (2:4-3)

Each prophetic revelation demands a certain degree of patience. One must wait for its fulfilment. God's words to Habakkuk are reassuring; the revelation is for an appointed time. The prophecy points to a future goal as in the phrase 'it pants toward the end', 'like a runner toward the finish line'.¹⁹⁸ God's prophetic message will not prove false. Even though its fulfilment seems delayed, it will come to pass in accordance with His perfect plan. The people of Judah are about to experience the overwhelming Babylonian invasion and captivity. However, their captors would themselves in God's due time suffer divine judgment!¹⁹⁹

Széles emphatically states that the meaning of v.4 is problematic, and text-critical questions arise. He proclaims that there are two elements in the text to be brought to the notice of the cultic community, one of which is the ethical appraisal of two opposite poles: עָפַל "inflated/puffed up/swell," and צַדִּיק, the "righteous."²⁰⁰ Armerding comments that the verb פָּוַח 'puffed up' carries the basic meaning of 'swelling' and the same form recurs in Num 14:44, where the idea of arrogance and presumption is again evident.²⁰¹

The Lord who is "of purer eyes" (1:13) and who is 'holy' (1:12) knows that his instrument is destined to be punished. When God thus decides, he makes a distinction and a call to account. He directs his answer to the complaints that have been uttered (1:2-4, 12-17). The other element is the announcement of judgment that is described as a fate

¹⁹⁸ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1512.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*. Széles debates that the v. 4 is the centerpiece, the heart, of the whole prophecy and indicated that the NT quotes it several times, however, I may contend that the NT refers to the text only three times (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:37).

²⁰¹ Armerding, "Habakkuk," 512. נֶפֶשׁ is translated as 'soul'(KJV) or 'life'(RSV), this includes the idea of desire or appetite (cfr. Gen 23:8).

to be fulfilled in the future. Due consideration is to be taken of the process of events, of how life produces its fruits. The ‘punisher’ certainly completes his service, but because of that he makes himself responsible and is bound to be called to account, while the steadfastness of the ‘righteous’ also has its result.²⁰² The Lord’s reply to the prophet’s two questions: why the just shares in the punishment, and why an ungodly nation will carry out the punishment. In the text there is a contrast between the wicked; whose soul is swollen with pride, with someone who is righteous. Judgment is inescapable for the former but the righteous live by his faith (v. 4a).²⁰³ God gives His instantaneous disapproval of the conceited character of the Babylonians: they are swallowed with evil passions.²⁰⁴ Their desires are not upright.

YHWH then declares that a righteous person, by stark contrast, will live by his faith (אֱמוּנָה). The Hebrew אֱמוּנָה can be translated as ‘faithfulness’ or ‘steadfastness’²⁰⁵. This translation is based upon a verbal root which means to ‘be firm’, ‘be permanent’, or ‘be secure’, therefore ‘be faithful’. To the Hebrew mind no dichotomy exists between faith and faithfulness.

A righteous Israelite who remains loyal to God’s moral precepts and is humble before the Lord enjoys God’s abundant life. To ‘live’ means to experience God’s blessing by enjoying a life of security, protection, and fullness. Conversely, an apparently victorious but proud and perverse Babylonian would die.²⁰⁶

²⁰² Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, 18.

²⁰³ Dembele, “Habakkuk,” 1063. For further discussion see Aron Pinker, “Habakkuk 2.4: An Ethical Paradigm or a Political Observation?”, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 32, no. 1 (2007):91-112.

²⁰⁴ The verb עָלַל is used only here in the OT.

²⁰⁵ The concept is further elaborated in ch. 4 of the work.

²⁰⁶ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1513.

Dembele recognizes v.4b as the key verse in the book of Habakkuk is “the righteous will live by his faith” (i.e. v. 4b) and therefore affirms the need to examine each of the main words in their context. According him the term **הַצַּדִּיק** “the righteous” in the OT, is used as a synonym for ‘innocent’ and ‘right’ and as the opposite of ‘wicked’ (cf. Gen 18: 23, Psa 37:21). He indicates that someone who is wicked is associated with violence, injustices, wrong, strife and conflict, paralysis and prevention of the law, oppression, destruction, pride and idolatry (1:1-4, 13-17; 2:4a, 5, 6-18). He further explains, that the contrast between the righteous and the wicked permits us to conclude that the ‘righteous’ person referred to in the text is anyone who lives in conformity with the will of God, expressed in the Mosaic law. He adds that in the book of Habakkuk, the term ‘righteous’ is used once to refer to the people of Judah in contrast to the Chaldeans whom God will use as executors of his judgment in 1:13. However, in 1:4 and 2:4b, the term is restricted only to those who lived in **אֲמוּנָה** the faithful, loyal remnant among Judah who still obeyed God’s law.²⁰⁷

The final solution to Habakkuk’s problem would come only in the future, at God’s appointed time. There would be an end to wickedness in the world. The faithful people of God have to ‘wait for it’, even though it seems to take a long time. Like Habakkuk, we must wait for the Lord’s righteous intervention at the end of this age.

3.4 The five woes oracle (2:5-20)

In this section, the researcher analyses the Lord’s replies to the prophet’s second question why God uses a wicked people as his agents? The answer takes the form of five woes that makes it clear that the Babylonians will also be punished. Blue orates that the passage provides a good image of the principles of double intent and he states that the

²⁰⁷ Dembele, “Habakkuk,” 1063.

same event may achieve two separate purposes: the purpose of God and the quite different purpose of his agent. God is using the Babylonians as a judgment on the wickedness of his people, but the Babylonians are pursuing their own ends. The motives with which the Babylonians are acting would be the ones for which God would call them to account.²⁰⁸

The general description of the Babylonians' wickedness is made more specific. They are betrayed by wine. They also used wine to betray others (2:15). The Babylonians are said to be very addicted to wine. For example, Babylon is conquered while Belshazzar and his leaders are feasting at a riotous banquet (cf. Dan 5). The treachery of wine is described in Prov 23:31-32. It looks so inviting in the glass but "in the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper". As God continues His condemnation, He says the typical Babylonian is arrogant (גָּדִיִּיר, 'haughty', occurs only here and in Prov 21:24, and never at rest, are these proud, restless people are as greedy as the grave. The metaphor greedy as the grave implies they are never content, just as death and the grave are not satisfied till all come into their grasp, so the Babylonians sought to take captive all the peoples (cf. 1:17). Like some hideous monster, the grave devours the nations. Likewise, Babylon opened wide her insatiable jaws to devour all peoples.²⁰⁹

This section consists of five woes signifying that the Babylonians are the object of the judgment sayings in 2:6-20. It is not quite clear who is envisioned as pronouncing the woes, but perhaps the most natural interpretation in the context is to regard the speakers as the 'nations' and 'peoples' of (v.5). The destruction of Babylon intimated in God's comments to Habakkuk was announced in fuller detail in a song of woe in five stanzas of three verses each ('woe' occurs in vv. 6, 9, 12, 15, 19). The NIV's interpretation,

²⁰⁸ Dembele, "Habakkuk," 1063.

²⁰⁹ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1513; Cfr., Armerding, "Habakkuk," 513.

“Will not all of them taunt him?” (v.6a) is literally, “Will not all of them take up against him a taunt-song?” The song מִשְׁל is any form of poetical composition in which parallelism is the principle of construction. It may denote a parable, proverb, ode, or a dirge such as the doleful lamentation recorded in the text.²¹⁰

3.4.1 Woe for Intimidation (2:6-8)

The word woe means an unfortunate happening; a serious affliction or misfortune. The Prophets use הֵיָ frequently; it is used 22 times in Isaiah; 10 times in Jeremiah and Lamentations, 7 times in Ezekiel 14 times by the Minor Prophets. Woe is an interjection of distress pronounced in the face of disaster or in view of coming judgment (e.g., Isa 3:11; 5:11; 10:5) because of certain sins (Isa 5:8,11; Jer 22:13; Amos 5:18).²¹¹ The language of these woes owes much to other Old Testament texts.²¹² As spoiled for their own gain they are merciless in hiping up the wealth of the nations. How long must this go on? How long would these evil aggressors be permitted to retain their ill-gained plunder?²¹³

“Will not your debtors suddenly arise?” The question in v. 6 is answered by two other questions. The ill-treated nations would suddenly arise in revolt. The debtors would suddenly strike back. They would not only get their bite of the stolen goods but also give their attackers a good shakedown. Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Those victimized would fight back their enemies to defend themselves. Babylon would

²¹⁰ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1514.

²¹¹ Armerding, “Habakkuk,” 516.

²¹² Cfr. Woe 3: Isa. 11:9; Jer. 51:58; Mic. 8:10; and Woe 4: Hab. 2:15-17; cf. Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17, 22-23; Jer. 25:15-29; Ezek. 23:32-34).

²¹³ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1514.

become their victim, the victim of the very nations she attacked (cf. 1:6, 8-10) and extracted so much from (1:6, 16).²¹⁴

The noun מַרְבָּה (extortion) denotes the accumulation of pledges taken as security by a creditor (Deut 24:10-13); such a procedure often accompanied the exploitation and even enslavement of the poor (cf. 2 Kings 4:1-7; Neh 5:1-13).²¹⁵ The destroyer would be destroyed, for the plundered would suddenly rise to plunder. The nations are subdued by Babylon but not destroyed; the people, who are left, would turn back. Babylon's terrorization and inhumanity would recoil on their own heads. Now Babylon would suffer the penalty for her crimes (cf. 1:12),²¹⁶ their blood would also be sheared.

3.4.2 Woe for Intemperance (2:9-11)

From the low-lying valley of their homeland, these conquerors use their illegal gain to build a towering world empire.²¹⁷ "Realm" refers to the Babylonian dynasty, although it could apply to the commoner's family line. "Unjust gain" depicts the sinful covetousness, rapacity and plundering of the Babylonians, who build their kingdom with the spoils of conquered nations. It highlights their love of illegal gain and greedy profiteering.

"To set his nest on high" (Num 24:21; Jer 49:16; Oba 4) is an allusion to the eagle that builds its nest in inaccessible places among the rocks (cf. Job 39:27). From there it watches and swoops down on its prey (cf. 1:8). Like the eagle, the Babylonians, although occupying low-lying country, make their "nest on high"; that is, from the wealth of others they construct huge fortifications that provide invulnerable security.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1514.

²¹⁵ Armerding, "Habakkuk," 516-17.

²¹⁶ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1514.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 1514.

²¹⁸ Shenton, *Habakkuk*, 24.

The Babylonians elevate themselves and trampled on others (v. 10). Their building plans include the ruining other people's lives and cutting off many people (cf. "nations" in 1:17; "nations" in v. 8). But their plan to destroy others in order to make themselves secure failed. Certainly, a house built of tortured bodies and stark skeletons is not too habitable. In their fray to erect a monument, they constructed their own shameful tomb (v. 16). Death became their due. Exciting witnesses in the trial that would yield the eventual death sentence are the stones of the wall and the beams of the woodwork. Even If every single enemy is exterminated, the very stones and lumber would testify against the rapacious and cruel hands of the Babylonians fashioned these building materials to show off their empire's strength and glory (v.11). The stones and timber with which the houses and palaces are built and has been obtained through plunder and injustice.²¹⁹

3.4.3 Woe for Iniquity (2:12-14)

This type of woe is derived from the statement "woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime" (v.12)! It is as though the materials of Babylon's vast building projects make up the song here. The cities of the Babylonian empire are built by the blood and the sweat of enslaved people. Murder, bloodshed, oppression, and domination are the tools employed in this building project.²²⁰ Shenton supports the argument that the Babylonians are charged with ruthless self-aggrandizement and signposts that the huge fortifications²²¹ and magnificent buildings of Babylonia and its capital are cemented together with the blood of innocent victims (cf. Mic 3:10). Shenton further establishes that murder, cruelty, oppression, tyranny of every kind are the foundation stones on which Babylon's empire and society are built; but

²¹⁹ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1514.

²²⁰ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1515.

²²¹ The walls surrounding Babylon measured between seventeen and twenty-two metres in width, the normal thickness of a city wall was three to seven metres.

“woe to him” who destroys other cities and civilizations in order to construct his own metropolis.²²²

In v.13, attention is shifted to the Lord Almighty. The Sovereign of the universe declares that their ambitious work is done in vain; the people’s labour is only the fuel for the fire about to consume the Babylonians (cf. Jer 51:58). Their carefully hewn stones would serve as the altar and their ornately carved wood as kindling for the giant sacrificial fire that would leave Babylon in ashes. Habakkuk adds that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing. If all the labour of Babylon or any other nation is fashioned or built on bloodshed and corruption, it will become waste.²²³

When the Babylonians are crushed, all the inhabitants of the earth will acknowledge God’s power and the awesomeness of his presence; through the termination of evildoers they will obtain ‘knowledge’ (v.14) of his righteousness and declare that the world is governed solely by the hand of the Almighty. Blue interprets the term “glory of the Lord” as the sovereign majesty, the absolute dominion and the matchless power of God which manifested in the judgments of ungodly powers. Shenton explains the terms “As the waters cover the bottom of the sea” to denote an overflowing abundance. This means that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will spread throughout the earth, saturating every land as the waters cover the sea.²²⁴

The wearisome toil of the whole generation of the boasting Babylonians provides a little fire that ends up as a heap of ashes in one corner of the earth. Nevertheless, God’s everlasting glory will fill the entire earth. Habakkuk claims that the earth would be filled with the knowledge of His glory. Comparing the prophet Habakkuk to the prophet

²²² Shenton, *Habakkuk*, 25.

²²³ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1515.

²²⁴ Shenton, *Habakkuk*, 25.

Isaiah, we can say that Isaiah deals with the essence of the kingdom of God whilst Habakkuk deals with the establishment of the kingdom. In other words, Isaiah presents the fact about the kingdom and Habakkuk presents the act of God.²²⁵

3.4.4 Woe for Indignity (2:15-17)

The fourth woe turns back to the despicable scene of the Babylonians' ferocious actions (2:15). The focus here is on the inhumanity and the indignity of the conqueror towards his subjects. He is pictured as a drunkard giving his neighbours wine to intoxicate them so that he may indulge in evil, immorality and expose his victims to shame (v.15). The Babylonians are lustful, violent and drunkards. Such action is severely condemned by God (Gen 9:21-25). The phrase 'pouring it from the wineskin' is "joining (to it) your wrath". Rendered in another manner the Babylonians poured out more than wine. With the wine they mixed 'wrath', a word related to 'heat', signifying any fierce passion. It is undeniably a 'mixed drink'; hatred and passion are poured out together. The nations that are enticed or more often forced to partake of the Babylonians' poisonous mix fell like drunkards and lay prostrate in disgrace and subjugation.²²⁶

Gelston declares that the fourth woe is at first sight a condemnation of alcohol abuse and reminiscent of the incident in Gen 9:20-25. The language, however, is metaphorical. He states that the intoxicating drink is the wrath of the oppressor, and the nakedness is the stripping away of the defences of the victims, the despoliation of their land, and the shameful treatment of the conquered population. In v.16, there is a clear allusion to

²²⁵ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1515.

²²⁶ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1515. Some commentators, following Isa 11:9, interpret v. 14 either messianically or eschatologically. They apply it either to the first advent of Christ, or to the consummation of all things, when the Messiah will return in triumph and glory to judge both the living and the dead, and to establish his universal and eternal kingdom.

the theme of God's cup of judgment, which guilty nations must drink (the classic instance of this in Jer 25:15-29). There is an interesting variant in 2:16, where some witnesses read a word meaning, "be uncircumcised" (here in effect "show your uncircumcised organ") in place of "stagger", where the difference in the two Hebrew words is merely that of the order of two of the consonants. Both readings make sense in this context (cf. Lam 4:21). The Chaldeans' nakedness would be an appropriate penalty for gloating on that of their victims, while staggering would indicate the effect of drinking the cup of divine judgment.²²⁷

The language of the verse, however, is more figurative than literal. The figure of speech, suggested by the habits of the Babylonians (2:5), is taken from ordinary life, where one man gives another a drink so as to intoxicate him, for the purpose of indulging his own wantonness at his neighbour's expense or of taking delight in his neighbour's shame. The Babylonians made other nations 'drunk' so that they can subdue and oppress them. Just as a drunkard is senseless and incapacitated, so the figure of speech here denotes the frustration and helplessness of a conquered people, powerless under the stupefying and paralyzing effects of a great catastrophe (cf. Nah 3:11).

"Pouring it from the wineskin" may be understood as mixing or adding wrath to the wine poured out, or as pouring out the wine from skins of wrath. Rather than denoting the open violence of the Babylonians, it depicts the cunning with which they deceive and overpower their enemies. To "gaze on their naked bodies" is the reason behind these artifices. An ancient form of punishment is to exhibit a prisoner or criminal naked. Such an act is public and malicious humiliation (cf. Gen 9:21-25; Nah 3:5; Isa 47:3). In this context, it symbolizes the shame and vulnerability of a defeated and demoralized

²²⁷ Gelston, "Habakkuk," 710.

nation. If the whole verse is interpreted literally, it possibly refers to a homosexual act.²²⁸

In v.17, Lebanon, a nation north of Israel, known for its abundance of cedar trees and wild animals, suffered the ruthless removal of timber for Babylonian's buildings and the destructive slaughter of beasts that live in their forests. The worst charge, however, is that of human bloodshed, already levelled against the Babylonians twice (2:8, 12). They have not only wrecked the forests and ravaged the hillsides, but have also ruined lands and cities (cf. v. 8) and everyone in them.²²⁹

Furthermore, "Lebanon" is a beautiful and fruitful mountain range in Syria, well known for its lush vegetation and mighty cedars (cf. Psa 72:16; Hos 14:5–7). Some interpret it figuratively and say it represents the inhabitants, the beauty and glory of the Holy Land (cf. Deut 3:25; Jer 22:6, 23), or the temple in Jerusalem, which is built from the cedars of Lebanon. The phrase "and your destruction of animals" probably denotes the Babylonians' slaughter of the animals that once inhabited the forest of Lebanon; the inhabitants of Israel or Lebanon, who have been destroyed in an animal-like fashion by the Babylonians; the devouring them as wild animals devour their prey; or simply that the Babylonians are beasts without a future. The first interpretation is the most suitable. The Babylonians have dealt savagely with all parts of creation, animate and inanimate, devastating both plant and animal life.²³⁰

Those who gloated over the shame of their drunken victims would someday be filled with shame. Their glory would become their shame. This depraved 'glory' of the Babylonians juxtaposes sharply with God's preeminent glory (v. 14). Far from glory, the

²²⁸ Shenton, *Habakkuk*, 25.

²²⁹ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1516.

²³⁰ Shenton, *Habakkuk*, 25.

Babylonians revel in shame and soon they would drink, fall down intoxicated, and be exposed as one who is ‘uncircumcised’. To be uncircumcised to the Jews is to be scorned. The Babylonians causes others to drink and be shamefully exposed (v. 15); later the tables will turn (cf. v. 7) and they would be drunk and naked. On drinking God’s judgment, Babylon would be covered with disgrace. “Shame” in the first line of (2:16) and disgrace in its last line translates in similar Hebrew words, but the second of these is in an emphatic form in Hebrew (used only here in the OT); it signifies extreme contempt. The once glorious Babylon is imagined as a disgraceful, contemptible drunk.²³¹

3.4.5 Woe for Idolatry (2:18-20)

Gelston acknowledges that in the vv. 18-20 of Chapter 2, it is possible that in the background is the fear that the rapid growth of the Babylonians Empire reflects the superior power of their gods. To this, the prophet replies by drawing attention to the fact that idol images are mere human artefacts. He adds that the reference to teaching are perhaps more probable allusions to oracular direction; these non-deities can give no useful direction at least any direction they give will be false.²³²

Blue avers that the final “Woe” begins with the probing question: “of what value is an idol?” As a graven image, an idol is an object worshipped as a god carved out of wood or hewn from stone. As a molten image, an idol is made by melting metal and casting it into a shape of false god. These are only blocks of wood or masses of metal, although they may be beautiful yet they have no significance since they are images functioned

²³¹ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1515.

²³² Gelston, “Habakkuk,” 713.

by human hands. To trust in such an idol is to trust in an object that teaches lies, for people are deceived and misled by it, thinking it could help them.²³³

Dembele comments on the final woe that the Babylonians are guilty of wilful self-delusion when it comes to their gods, trusting them even though they know that these images are lifeless stones and are incapable of giving them any guidance (cf. Psa 115:4-8; 135:15-18).²³⁴ However, idols cannot aid them (cf. v. 19). Carved or cast, they are dumb objects. The oracles attributed to them are obvious lies, for idols cannot speak.²³⁵ Isaiah applies the phrase used here to a false prophet (Isa 9:15), but Habakkuk is referring to the priests who manipulate people by “making the idols speak” or pronounce an oracle.²³⁶

In v.19, God articulates His condemnation of the insidious sin of idolatry. He warns: “woe to him who says to wood, come to life or to lifeless stone, wake up!” It is an absurdity to stand before a piece of wood or some cold stone and cry out, “Arise! Awake!” the act is like that of the prophets of Baal when they are teased by Elijah (1 Kings 18:26-29). No help or guidance comes from lifeless object even if it is coated in gold and silver (cf. Isa 40:19). It has no breath or spirit and therefore no life (cf. Gen 2:7). Deutero-Isaiah always mocks the Babylonians for their trust in numerous false gods, which are nothing but man-made idols (cf. Isa 41:7; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20; 46:1-2, 6-7; cf. Jer 10:8-16). Idols are valueless for they cannot talk, come alive or guide anyone.²³⁷

²³³ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1516.

²³⁴ Dembele, “Habakkuk,” 1063.

²³⁵ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1516.

²³⁶ The Babylonian’s priests functioned as diviners, interpreting omens, signs and performing rituals that are designed to solicit an answer from gods. Walton and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 791-792.

²³⁷ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1516.

The ritual of ‘opening the mouth’ is employed in Babylon to transform a wooden image, decorated with gold and precious jewels, into the physical embodiment of the god. The incantations of the priest is proclaimed to the god, ‘from this time forth you shall go before your father Ea.’ Ceremonial processions then take place, the mouth of the image is washed repeatedly (fourteen times in all), and food and drink are presented. After an evening sacrifice the priest opens the eyes of the image with a wand of tamarisk, and then the ‘god’ is enthroned within the temple and dressed with the insignia of office.²³⁸

2:20, the last verse of this section is distinctive. In the other four ‘woe’ stanzas, each concluding verse starts in the Hebrew with ‘for’ (כִּי, vv. 8, 11, 14, 17). The contrast is marked and the climax is marvellous: ‘the Lord is in His holy temple’. From dumb, man-carved idols, attention shifts to the Sovereign Lord, the self-existent, holy (cf. 1:12; 3:3) eternal (cf. 1:12; 3:6) who rules the universe from His holy temple. Instead of shouting: “Arise! Awake”, the whole earth must stand in silent awe and worship before Him. The Hebrew word הִסֵּה, rendered as “be silent” also means ‘hush’ (cf. Zeph. 1:7) and ‘be still’ (cf. Zech. 2:13).²³⁹

3.5 Conclusion

The outline of Hab 1:1—2:20 commences on a negative note and closes on a positive one. This suggests that the purpose of the book is to take the audience from a state of confusion and despair to a state of clarification and hope. The composition of the unit poses serious questions about divine justice in the opening verses and answers those questions in three closing sections. This organization leaves the audience on a note of

²³⁸ Walton and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 791-792.

²³⁹ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1516.

hope. It indicates that the author designs the text to clarify and encourage rather than to dishearten.

The theme of waiting is highlighted by its occurrence at the beginning, middle, and the end of the book. These structurally prominent units declare that God will ultimately right all wrongs, but his people must wait in patience for this to happen.

The series of woe-oracles in 2:6-20 is YHWH's answer to Habakkuk's second complaint. His answer is this: for the moment, it may seem unjust that the Babylonians go on destroying and plundering many nations, but in the end they themselves will be punished for all the wrongs they have done. The atrocities they have committed against other nations will be done to them. They have made other nations drink of the 'cup' of disgrace; but in the end YHWH will punish them, making them drink from the same cup. This is a classical retribution theology that Habakkuk attempts to teach his audience. It is a belief system holding the view that God punishes people for their wrong action and reward people for their righteousness.

The book of Deuteronomy describes the time-sensitive covenant of works between God and the Israelite nation regarding the Promise Land, this more naturally fits with the retribution theology taught in Proverbs (Deut 4:25-31). To a greater extent the book of Habakkuk teaches the same principles.

The structures focus on the wickedness of the Babylonians in their cruelty and maltreatment of conquered nations and peoples. Habakkuk's complaint raises the issue, and YHWH's response addresses it.²⁴⁰ The message is clear to Habakkuk: stop complaining! Stop doubting! God is not indifferent to sin. He is not insensitive to suffering. The

²⁴⁰ Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 306.

Lord is neither inactive nor impervious. He is in control in His divine purpose. Habakkuk is to stand in humble silence, a hushed expectancy of God's intervention (2:20).²⁴¹

Like Isaiah, Habakkuk becomes sure that God is at work on stage of international history, even in events that are not self-evidently desirable. Habakkuk also learns to turn doubt and grief into prayer, maybe in the temple. Worship leads him towards joyful faith in God's power and goodness. In Habakkuk God condemns evil; He condemns drunkenness, greed, theft, violence, debauchery, abuse of nature and idolatry. However, suffering is a mystery and Habakkuk finds out he has no answer, therefore it will be hard to conclude that those who suffer have committed a sin against the Lord.²⁴²

In answering the major research question, i.e. how does Hab 1:1—2:20 articulate the problem of the 'silence of God', after critically analysing the text, the researcher comes to a conclusion that God is not actually silent as the prophet thought. God has a plan for those who have 'faith' in Him and that at the appropriate time He will respond to their cry. On this background, the more appropriate translation of the term אֱמוּנָה (2:4) is perhaps not 'faith' but 'faithfulness'.

Although the times are violent and evil men seem to triumph, the righteous needs to 'stand firm' in his/her trust and do not enter in the cycle of violence and oppression, which characterised those who do not belong to the Lord. The wicked will fail but the

²⁴¹ Blue, "Habakkuk," 1516.

²⁴² A good example is the book of Job. The driving tension in the book of Job focuses on the apparent absence of righteous retribution. According to God, Job is "a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil," (Job 1:8) yet he, his possessions, family, and health are literally thumped at the seemingly merciless hand of God. Adding a degree of time does not solve the problem for Job, even though he is restored and vindicated at the end of the test (Job 42:7-16), for the theology of retribution requires that Job not suffer at all because he did nothing to deserve such anguish. It is the retribution theology of Job's three friends and Elihu ("Job suffers because he has sinned") that invites the final rebuke from God. "As a result, Job became an intercessor for his friends, who had advocated a false wisdom of mechanical retribution." Brian Sandifer, "How Does the Teaching of Job Fit With the Teaching of Proverbs?" *Reformed Theological Seminary* (2004): 1.

righteous, because of their faithfulness to God, will endure the catastrophic events of their day. God's judgment is, therefore, not indiscriminating; rather, he gives salvation to those whose loyalty to Him does not waiver. This insight is Habakkuk's most enduring legacy to theology.²⁴³

The interpretation of Hab 1:1—2:20 taught us that those who really serve and love God ought to burn with holy indignation whenever they see wickedness reigning without restraint in the society, and especially among Christians. Nothing ought to cause us more grief than to see people raging with profane contempt for God, and have no regard for his law and for the divine truth. When, therefore, such confusion appears before us, we must feel roused if we have in us any spark of religion.

Habakkuk undertakes the defence of justice; for he could not endure the law of God to be made a sport, allowing everyone the liberty to sin. Drawing on this, we can say that, the prophet is justly excused though he expostulates with God, for God does not condemn this freedom in our prayers; but the goal of praying is that every one of us pours forth his heart before God. It is therefore, no wonder that the Prophet, according to the manner of all humankind, says, "Why do You show me iniquity, and make me to see trouble?" (1:3).

If it be objected, that the Prophet exceeded moderation, the obvious answer is this: though, he freely pours forth his feelings, there is nothing wrong with this before God. At least no wrong was imputed to him. Each of us may unburden his cares, his grieves, and anxieties, by pouring them into the bosom of God. Since then, God allows us to deal so familiarly with him, therefore no wrong ought to be ascribed to our prayers

²⁴³ It is this idea that Paul uses to illustrate his doctrine of justification by faith, for it tells of the salvation of those who hope against hope despite their misfortune (cf. Rom. 4:18).

when we freely put forth our feelings, provided the bridle of obedience keeps us always within due limits, as is the case of the Prophet; for it is certain that he is retained under the influence of real kindness.

CHAPTER FOUR

FAITH IN THE CHARISMATIC CONTEXT

4.1 Introduction

The exegetical analysis in chapter three indicated that the concept of ‘faith’ is the rhetorical climax of the text. Faced with the violence present in human history and the perceived ‘silence’ of God, the prophet is called to persevere in faith and to act with ‘firmness, steadfastness, fidelity’ (אַמוּנָה).

וְצִדִּיק בְּאַמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה:

It is important to note that the concept of faith is paramount to both Jews and Christian communities and constitutes one of the major teachings of the Tanak and the New Testament. For example, the importance of faith is greatly emphasized in most of the teachings of Jesus and Paul as enshrined in the gospels (cf. Mark 4:40) and the epistles (cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11). In view of this, the prophet Habakkuk highlights this concept in a way that inspires the idea of faith in his readers.

As Paul (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11) and the anonymous writer of the letter to the Hebrews (10:38), contextualize the words of Habakkuk in a new social context of faith, so contemporary Christian communities are called to incarnate the word of God in a society that is changing.

However, many people are wondering if the issue of faith is still central to contemporary African Christianity due to the interpretation given to faith in the Charismatic circles.²⁴⁴ To answer this question, there is the need ‘to exegete’ the idea of faith as presented in charismatic preaching and allow the text to engage this specific reality in a dialogue.

After summarizing the idea of ‘faith’ as presented by Hab 2:4, the chapter explores the concept of faith projected by contemporary Charismatic leaders.

4.2 Habakkuk’s Concept of Faith

In the midst of God’s unrelenting condemnation of the Chaldeans stands a bright revelation of God’s favour that is quoted three times in the New Testament (cf. Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38). Although we live in an evil age (Gal 1:4); “the just will live by his faith” (3:11) Faith is “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb 11:1). The ancient people are commended for their belief in God when all the circumstances conspire to say that such faith would not be rewarded (Heb 11:2-40).²⁴⁵

According to the Talmud (*Mak.* 24a), Habakkuk’s dictum that “the righteous shall live by his faith” (v. 4) summarizes the whole teaching of the Bible. Furthermore, the Talmud explains that the 613 precepts which God once delivered from Sinai are collated into this one sentence “The just shall live by faith.”²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ The misconception about faith, may be due to inadequate understanding of faith, much focus on prosperity messages and little knowledge of hermeneutics or improper hermeneutics (the preacher’s inability to scientifically analyse the biblical text to make meaningful inferences from the passage being read).

²⁴⁵ B. Raymond Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 411-412.

²⁴⁶ R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 285.

Living by faith is, therefore, to have an attitude of unshakeable trust in the Lord. Within the Tanak context, the word ‘live’ conveys a hope of salvation for the righteous in the reality of threatened destruction. It suggests deliverance from the Chaldean invasion and from evils to come, as well as enjoyment of blessings of the promise land.²⁴⁷ However, in the New Testament contextualization, the statement has a broader meaning than in the ancient prophecy. It means to enjoy salvation and eternal life.

In the book of Habakkuk, the ‘righteous’ is the innocent, the one who keeps the Torah and becomes the victim of those who ‘deformed’ justice. Justice is perverted through bribery and other immoral activities. The unrighteous people twist justice for their own benefit (1:4). The ‘righteous’ man is then the true, sincere man whose words and works is in full harmony with the laws of God and so “Shall live by his faithfulness”.

The Hebrew term אֱמוּנָה has a more extensive meaning of the English rendition of ‘faith’. In fact, it comes from the root אָמַן meaning firmness; solidity; stability and it carries the idea of ‘faithfulness, steadfastness, and constancy.’ In other biblical context, it is used to denote “fidelity, equity, truth, and sincerity” (cf. Hos 2:20; Prov 14:5; 12:17, 22). It is applied to the trustworthiness of God: “A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he” (cf. Deut 32: 4).²⁴⁸

Habakkuk’s concept of faith is considered as trust in the promise of God even if everything shows that God is unable to keep His promise. As in moment of great distress Job had faith because he knows the Almighty God will definitely come to his aid someday; he cries “though He slays me yet I will hope in Him” (Job 13:15).

²⁴⁷ Blue, “Habakkuk,” 1513.

²⁴⁸ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Illinois: Moody Press of Chicago, 1980), CD version.

The faithfulness preached by Habakkuk, is the ‘humility’ of those who, after appealing to God and even ‘fighting’ with Him are able to wait and allow God to be God. Furthermore, Habakkuk’s conception of faith as steadfastness is to make a decision not to adopt the logic and lifestyle of the ‘violent’, and not to answer violence with violence (Isa 53:7). Righteousness requires what Luke calls a ‘patient perseverance’ (cf. Luke 21:19; Matt 10:22) even facing martyrdom (Matt 10:22).²⁴⁹

When contrasted with the wicked, ‘the just’ although may be faced with violence will definitely survive because of his steadfastness in the Lord. The ‘just’ may have to endure great sufferings, but have to be brave and steadfast in their trials. The prophet exhorts the ‘just’ to have courage and confidence, indicating that soon the coming Messiah will appear, and he who is constant shall be saved on account of his fidelity, whereas the weak and vacillating shall be rejected in the messianic judgment.²⁵⁰

4.3 Faith according to Charismatic Preaching

Even though mainline churches are still predominant and of great relevance, Christianity over the years has experienced a paradigm shift with the widespread emergence of Neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic churches. According to Asamoah-Gyadu, the exact statistics are difficult to come by, but the sheer numbers of Pentecostal churches encountered in Africa’s sprawling towns and cities, and the increasing numbers of publications dedicated to the study of African Pentecostalism, attest to the growing significance of Pentecostalism on the continent.²⁵¹ Cephas N. Omenyo and Abamfo O. Atiemo identify

²⁴⁹ As can be seen in Jesus’ life and ministry that, He was harshly treated and humiliated for our sack, yet He humbled Himself to be maltreated by those whom He had created and did not answer violently (cf. Phil 2:5-8).

²⁵⁰ Stevens indicates that “shall live” means “shall escape destruction by the enemy,” “shall be preserved alive.” G.B. Stevens, “The Shall Live by Faith” *JSTOR, The Biblical World* 23, no. 4 (University of Chicago), www.jstor.org/stable/3140747.

²⁵¹ J. Asamoah-Gyadu, “I Will Put My Breath in You, and You Will Come to Life: Charismatic Renewal in Ghanaian Mainline Churches and its Implications for African Diasporan Christianity,” In *Christianity*

a number of Pentecostal groups represented in Ghana.²⁵² Omenyo asserts that the Pentecostal movement in Ghana could be categorized as follows:

- 1) The independent churches originating in Ghana or other African countries, otherwise called the African Initiated Churches (AICs).
- 2) The Classical Pentecostal Movement, which began in North America at the beginning of the 20th century and appeared on the Ghanaian religious scene in the 1920s e.g. the Assemblies of God, The Church of Pentecost, Christ Apostolic Church, etc. They teach a post-conversion experience of baptism with the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking with tongues.
- 3) Neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic non-denominational fellowship, for example, the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship and Women Aglow.
- 4) Charismatic renewal groups in the mainline Churches e.g. Catholic Charismatic Renewal.
- 5) The independent Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches/Ministries including Christian Action Faith Ministries International, International Central Gospel Church, Fountain Gate Chapel, etc.²⁵³

Another group identified by Omenyo and Atiemo is the neo-prophetic group. This last group highlights strongly the role of the prophet-leader, charismata and an elevated regard for the African perception of life.²⁵⁴ For the purposes of this study, Charismatic

in Africa and the African Diaspora, Afe Adogame, Roswith Gerloff & Klaus Hock, eds. (London: Continuum International, 2008), 193.

²⁵² Cephas N. Omenyo & Abamfo O. Atiemo, "Claiming religious space: the case of Neo-Prophetic churches in Ghana," *The Ghana Bulletin of Theology, New Series* 1, no.1 (2006): 55-68.

²⁵³ Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic renewal in the mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Boekcentrum Publishing House, 2002), 5-6.

²⁵⁴ Omenyo and Atiemo, "Claiming religious space," 59.

churches will be used in reference to (v) as indicated above; Churches that emerged as a result of the Charismatic renewal in the 1960s and 1970s in Ghana.

Omenyo intimates that these Charismatic churches are differentiated from the classical Pentecostal churches by their predominant use of the English language; embracing of American Pentecostal style of worship in terms of music and preaching. They are mainly a composition of youth in the membership.²⁵⁵

Asamoah-Gyadu espouses the African Pentecostalism as a pneumatic religious body from a global movement with many local varieties. Different researches portray it as the fastest growing stream of Christianity in the world today. He considers the rise of this new form of Pentecostalism, usually associated with youthful exuberance, charismatic dynamism, supernatural power, possibilities and prosperity, as the most significant development to occur within Christianity in Africa in the last three decades.²⁵⁶

The Ghanaian scholar observes that the Charismatic churches are usually and mainly located within the urban centers in the country. Their congregations are huge with the state of the art equipment, seen as discernible symbol of success.²⁵⁷ An example is 14,000 capacity auditorium of the Perez chapel International (PCI), the 'Quodesh' of the Light House Chapel International (LHCI), the prayer Cathedral of the Christian Action Faith Ministries (CAFM) and the Christ Temple of the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), among many others.

²⁵⁵ Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*, 6.

²⁵⁶ J. Asamoah-Gyadu, "*Taking Territories & Raising Champions' Contemporary Pentecostalism and the Changing Face of Christianity in Africa*" (Legon, Accra. Ghana Trinity Theological Seminary, 2010), 1.

²⁵⁷ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Faith and Visual Alertness: The Message of 'Mediatized' Religion in an African Pentecostal context," *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 1, no. 3 (2005): 338.

Their leaders preach motivational messages with the aim of alleviating poverty, in order to foster good living and prosperity to their followers. Consequently, they propose themselves as an answer to the religious/cultural needs of the contemporary Ghanaian Christians. However, faith as espoused by Habakkuk seems to vary from some Charismatic preaching, which mostly is geared toward materialism.

For instance, Otabi Fiifi defines faith as “the vehicle for accessing the Blessings of the covenant.” He adds that the blessings of the covenant are spiritually positioned so, you need the ingredient of faith to access it. Fiifi is of the view that faith is the way of life in the realms of the new creation reality; and opines that without faith you will get lost and suffer all kinds of frustrations. He posits that others suffer shipwreck in their Christian voyage as a result of their lack of faith.²⁵⁸

Scholars trace the root of the Charismatic teachings of ‘faith movement’ to McConnell, who names Kenneth Hagin as the spiritual mentor of many leading prosperity theologians, including Kenneth Copeland. Other preachers of prosperity gospel include Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Lester Sumrall, Charles Capps, Oral Roberts and Benny Hinn. According to McConnell, “Hagin claims to be the man who first received the ‘revelation’ on which the faith movement is based”.²⁵⁹ McConnell dismisses claims made by Hagin that the prosperity ideas he espouses are revealed to him by God, and traces the origins of prosperity theology to the ‘cultic teachings’ of E.W. Kenyon, and ‘the metaphysical cults’ that abounded in the turn of the twentieth century. In his largely polemical study, McConnell concludes, that since Hagin ‘plagiarised Kenyon’, the

²⁵⁸ Nii Otabi Fiifi Wilson, *Truths of the New Reality* (Accra, Ghana: Genius Publishers, 2005), 20.

²⁵⁹ D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, updated edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 4.

‘faith movement’ preaches a different gospel, which he considers to be “cultic and heretical”.²⁶⁰ For the purposes of this study, McConnell’s conclusions are useful. They establish that biblical evidence does not entirely support the health and wealth gospel whose ardent exponents include A.A. Allen and T.L. Osborn.²⁶¹

The role of the media in disseminating their message in Ghana is pivotal. The ministries of Roberts, Osborns and other televangelists are available to Ghanaians through personal visits, publications and the media. On Ghana television and on other terrains, Roberts preaches that ‘God is good’ and that he wills his children to prosper.

Some of these motivational preachers align themselves as very powerful and they believe that if someone is righteous, he/she cannot experience the silence of God, i.e. suffering, sorrow and calamities. On the contrary, if someone has a problem it is considered a sign that he/she have sinned against God. Can this conviction be reconciled with Habakkuk concept of ‘faith’? If the answer is on the negative, how can the meeting with Habakkuk challenge this idea? To answer this question, the following paragraphs explore the Charismatic pre-understanding of faith.

4.3.1 Faith as ‘Positive confession’

The Charismatic Churches instil in their followers that “what one confesses he possesses”. Therefore, what is thought of or uttered determines what people receive. Charismatic Christians are taught to be specific in prayer through the power of the spoken word in order to achieve whatever they desire; including miracles and financial prosperity.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., ix, xx.

²⁶¹ In the early 1960s, Allen claimed the power to lay hands on people who contributed to his ministry and to bestow on them the ‘power to get wealth’. Osborn is acknowledged as one of the first Pentecostal preachers to openly cite his lavish lifestyle as proof of God’s blessing. Brouwer, et al., *Exporting the American Gospel*, 24.

Positive confession doctrines among charismatic Christians have attracted various definitions such as ‘name-it-and claim- it’, ‘faith gospel’, ‘gospel of health and wealth’, ‘faith-formula theology’ and ‘faith-equals-fortune message’. These designations are mostly aimed at questioning the theological validity of prosperity teachings. However, in Ghana the doctrine is popularly referred to as the ‘gospel of prosperity’ or ‘prosperity gospel’.

According to Asamoah-Gyadu, one of the texts frequently used in the prosperity gospel preaching is Rom 10:9-10: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Asamoah-Gyadu avows that the text is given practical application during offering time. Worshipers are often requested to hold their offerings high and, with eyes closed, pray over the money, claiming what they require from God and trusting that, as they place the money in the collection bowls, the things ‘confessed’ will come to pass.²⁶²

Gloria Copeland advocates the above theology when she writes that Christians are entitled to ‘take authority’ over poverty in the same way they would over sickness.²⁶³ In view of this, for the Charismatic Christian, the moment a ‘symptom of lack’²⁶⁴ shows up in their lives they must command it to flee because Jesus has redeemed them from ‘the curses of poverty and lack’.²⁶⁵

The principle of ‘positive confession’ and ‘refusal or resistance’ to poverty is especially noticeable in Ghanaian Charismatic ministries during public prayer. Asamoah-Gyadu

²⁶² J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, “African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27 (Leiden: Boston, 2005): 214.

²⁶² Copeland, Gloria. *God’s Will is Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1994), 37.

²⁶³ Ibid. 35.

²⁶⁴ For instance, if a believer has no money, no food, can’t buy drugs, can’t finance their education and so on, these are considered symptom of lack or poverty.

²⁶⁵ Copeland, *God’s Will*, 35.

makes reference to Pastor Otabil's series on biblical prosperity, and intimates that in Otabil's radio ministry, not only does he reiterate the need to refuse the curse of poverty that is supposed to be hanging over the African continent, but he also encourages his willing listeners to touch the radio as he prays this prayer: "Lord, cause your favour to overwhelm your people; cause them to be the head and not the tail."²⁶⁶

With regards to the confession of sins, some charismatic Christians believed that once a person is born again his sins are perpetually forgiven. Asamoah-Gyadu elaborates that the 'confession of sin', although recommended by Jesus in his model prayer for the disciples, is considered unbiblical by some prosperity preachers that once believers are forgiven of their sins, they have no need to confess them regularly.²⁶⁷ Therefore, the 'born again Christians' pray usually using expressions like 'we take authority' or 'dominion' over a specific named item or even over the effect of the devil on a particular situation or condition. For them, 'negative confessions'²⁶⁸ must be withdrawn during prayer as they could serve as conduits for failure and various maladies in life.

To bring into effect such 'prosperity related' scriptural texts, the Charismatic Churches regularly disperse their congregation by repeating the closing words of Psalm 23: "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life". The emphasis is on the 'goodness and mercy', for it is believed that there are countless benefits in serving God faithfully and the believer must 'confess' them in order to 'activate' their effects.²⁶⁹ For instance, one of the prominent charismatic leaders in Ghana, Eastwood Anaba re-affirms the concept as follows: "Impossibility should be ruled out of your

²⁶⁶ Asamoah-Gyadu, "African Charismatics," 214.

²⁶⁷ Asamoah-Gyadu, "African Charismatics," 214.

²⁶⁸ Negative confessions refer to the person who confess: I do not have money, I am sick, I am poor, I am weak among others.

²⁶⁹ J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, "African Charismatics," 215.

vocabulary. ... We have the mandate to change our environment by speaking the word of faith. ... We have the mandate to set the oppressed free and our boldness in the exercise of our authority is crucial to the blessing of humanity.”²⁷⁰

The researcher estimates the above statement to be profound in a sense that we can change our circumstances by positive confession and the word of faith. Although this particular teaching may have helped some people out of their predicaments, many people are still in their cruel and debilitating situations. The question then arises: how do we account for or explain the circumstances of poverty, sufferings, natural and man-made disasters that claim so many lives? Is it because those who suffer such calamities do not speak words of faith or confess positively? What could be wrong? Is positive confession not enough?

4.3.2 Faith as ‘Investment’

As humans go through the hardship of life they resort to avenues such as prayer camps, spiritual churches and prophets which they believe could solve their problems. In this vein, they are taught to sow a ‘seed’ as investment into God’s Kingdom for a quick returns. Asamoah-Gyadu specifies that people attend Jericho Hour to seek God’s power available through the name of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit for health, employment, acquisition of visas for travelling abroad, business contacts, promotion at workplaces, success in examination, marriage, and others.²⁷¹ He remarks that speaking in tongues is a source of empowerment for Spirit-filled believers and is used in Charismatic Churches in at least three main ways: for private prayer, for prophecy, and for exorcising evil spirits.²⁷²

²⁷⁰ E. Anaba, “*The Workerability of Faith*” (Bolgatanga: Desert Leaf Publication, 2004), 38.

²⁷¹ J. Asamoah-Gyadu, *Taking Territories & Raising Champions’ Contemporary Pentecostalism and the Changing Face of Christianity in Africa* (Legon, Accra. Ghana Trinity Theological Seminary, 2010), 54.

²⁷² Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, 50.

One of the principal lines of thought in the booklet *Three Things to Do with the Word to Prosper* by Pastor Michael Essel of Grace Outreach Church, says: “as a believer, you can talk yourself into prosperity.” Asamoah-Gyadu explains that it appears from Essel’s argument that ‘positive confession’ is related to the principle of ‘sowing and reaping’ as what one speaks amounts to sowing a seed that will yield what has fallen from the lips.²⁷³ Bishop Duncan-Williams puts this principle even more succinctly when he advises believers to nurture their dreams into effect by constantly ‘confessing them’ because through such daily confessions their dreams ‘will come to pass’,²⁷⁴ adding that even in impoverished conditions ‘God needs something from you in order to bless you’.²⁷⁵

On this background, Charismatic leaders teach that the payment of tithes is the single most imperative means to ‘open doors’ for people to succeed or prosper in life. To them, lack of faithfulness in paying tithes and offerings accounts for the failures and curses in the endeavours of people in the world.

Their pastoral praxis seems to confirm Heward-Mills’ hypotheses that:

Prosperity in its most basic form consists of someone sowing a seed (money) and later harvesting the returns...not paying your tithes separates you from the most basic principle of sowing and reaping. When you do not pay your tithes, you harm your finances because you take away the foundation of prosperity.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Essel Michael, *Three Things to Do with the Word to Prosper* (Accra: Grace Outreach Church, 1993), chap. 2.

²⁷⁴ N. Duncan-Williams, *You are Destined to Succeed* (Accra: Action Faith Publications, 1990), 41.

²⁷⁵ Duncan-Williams, *Destined to Succeed*, 52.

²⁷⁶ D. Herward-Mills, “*Why non-tithing Christians become Poor and how Tithing Christians become Rich* (Wellington, South Africa: Lux Verbi, 2009), 1.

Roberts backs the notion of ‘seed faith’ with what he calls ‘planting a seed’, in other words, making financial contributions to the evangelist’s ministry, yields financial blessing for donors.

According to Pastor Otabil, one of the key principles of prosperity is the need to engage in ‘work that honours God’. However, work alone does not yield prosperity. Just as Jacob did during his stay at Bethel, Christians need to come into covenant with God through the payment of tithes and offerings (Gen 28:20–22). Prosperity, as Otabil notes, depends as much on hard and honest work as it does on being faithful in one’s covenant with God, ‘who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant’ (Deut. 8:17–18).

According to Asamoah-Gyadu, Otabil’s affirms that hard work alone may not yield the necessary returns unless God be in it and God can bless the work of the believers’ hands if they are faithful in their financial obligations to him. In Otabil’s view, when a Christian is seeking employment, paper qualification and experience by themselves may not be sufficient for securing the job. “God’s favour must accompany you to the interview.” God must be trusted to deliver the job. He emphasises that when things are tough, that is when the Christian must give. Thus, preaching from Gal 6:8–9 on a separate occasion, Otabil told his hearers that they are receivers of what they sow and prosperity was theirs if they sow rightly.²⁷⁷

In line with this thinking, one of the front banners at the Christian Action Faith Ministries read “Financial Breakthroughs are released through the Application of the Keys of Giving”. According to Anaba, “the principle of giving and receiving applies to all men and is valid under all circumstances. Whether you are poor or rich, if you practise it,

²⁷⁷ Asamoah-Gyadu, “African Charismatics,” 207.

you will be blessed, but if you don't, you are not blessed.”²⁷⁸ In effect, people are thought to be poor because they do not give money to God.

We admit the Bible indicates that we should pay our tithes, but is tithing the surest way to prosperity? Many Charismatic churches teach that those who faithfully pay their tithes will not experience any evil in their lives. Nonetheless, there are those who pay their tithes faithfully and yet experience disaster. We believe that tithing is our religious requirement or obligation, but should we hold that if we do not reap any benefits from that performance then God is unjust? Do the tithes not make these preachers enrich themselves and make the poor poorer?

4.3.3 Faith as ‘Prosperity Right’

The doctrine of prosperity has become so prevalent that contemporary churches assume that to believe is to acquire the ‘right’ to prosper. On the provenance of prosperity teachings in African Charismatic movements, Gifford’s view is that the theology is incomprehensible apart from its American origins.²⁷⁹ C. K. Ekeke underscores that US ‘baby boomers’ and the new “millennials” are flooding to churches and synagogues because of widespread hunger for meaning and many bring aversion to such traditional teachings such as sin, evil, forgiveness, commitment, even truth itself. He intimates that as a result, many large churches offer a ‘designer gospel message’ a sort of ‘religious syncretism’ where the gospel is re-packaged to suit those who want a faith to satisfy their ‘felt need.’ On this background, we understand ‘the gospel message’ that “God wants you to be rich in different ways: “send money as a step of faith and God will bless you message”, “give a \$1,000 pledge and God will bless you”, “name it claims

²⁷⁸ E. Anaba, *Breaking Illegal Possession: Dislodge the Enemy and Possess the Land* (Accra: Design Solutions, 1996), 29.

²⁷⁹ Paul Gifford, “Prosperity: A New and Foreign Element in African Christianity,” *Religion* 20 (1990), 373–388.

it”, “give to get rich message” and “100 fold return-blessing and even 1000 times return.”²⁸⁰

Ojo expresses an alternative view, insisting that the prosperity message is original to Africa’s Charismatic movements.²⁸¹ The view pursued here is that the primary motivation of the Ghanaian proponents of prosperity theology is to seek for themselves and their followers what they understand to be benefits willed to the believer by God. So the primary intent is to pursue ‘a right’ that they understand to be biblical, but to which, in their thinking, traditional churches remain oblivious. Nevertheless, as with their other beliefs and practices, the indigenous culture within which the message is preached has influences on the nature of prosperity teachings in the Ghanaian context.

In the Ghanaian Contemporary Churches when a believer’s life is devoid of sin and demonic presence, he is seen to be fruitful and prosperous. Consequently this is a constitutive element of the empowerment that the Charismatic ministries believe the Spirit grants to believers, which Mensa Otabil defines as ‘biblical prosperity’. Pastor Otabil outlines his thoughts on ‘biblical prosperity’ in his weekly Sunday morning programme, ‘Believer’s Voice of Hope’, now ‘Living Word’ on a radio station, JOY FM, in Ghana. According to this teaching, ‘biblical prosperity’ brings to the believer good health which is meant success but especially embodying material sufficiency if not excess and it is meant by God to follow the believer throughout his life.

Pastor Otabil starts the programmes with reference to the opening verses of Psalm 103. In reference to the traditional mission churches, he told his listeners: “We have been

²⁸⁰ C. K. Ekeke, “Prosperity Gospel, and 419 in the Church – Part 1” *Time*, October 23, 2012 (accessed May 2nd, 2015), <http://saharareporters.com>.

²⁸¹ M. A. Ojo, ‘Charismatic Movements in Africa’, in Christopher Fyfe and Andrew Walls (eds.), *Christianity in Africa in the 1990s* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Centre of African Studies, 1996), 106.

trained to believe that money is evil' and that 'poverty and piety are bedfellows.' The thought that the Traditional or the Mainlines Churches preach a partial gospel because they do not emphasize prosperity is one that is widely held among Ghanaian Charismatic preachers. Contrary to the orthodox teaching, Otabil iterates the Psalmist's claims on benefits granted by God. He states that benefits are the things which make our lives better', and such benefits, according to him are part of the heritage of the Christian. He outlines some of these benefits as forgiveness of sins, healing, redemption of our lives from destruction and crowning us with tender mercies.²⁸²

Asamoah-Gyadu indicates that one of the arch-texts of the prosperity gospel is 3 John 2, normally cited from the Authorised King James Version: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth." According to Pastor Otabil, this passage means for the believer, 'financial prosperity, material prosperity and spiritual prosperity'. In the series of messages referred to earlier, Otabil underscores this view, noting well that "the Lord does not withhold good things from the upright, he blesses them with positives."

The above message conforms to the general neo-Pentecostal belief that God wants his children to be happy, to eat the best food at the most expensive restaurants, to appear in the best clothes, often designer made, because, as Bishop Duncan-Williams once said during a primetime TV talk show in Accra, "Jesus wore designer clothing".²⁸³ The donkey on which Jesus rode to Jerusalem is even considered by some to have been the most expensive means of transport of his day and people gambled for his robe because it was

²⁸² The name of this programme has now been changed to 'Living Word', the same as that of Otabil's television broadcast on Sunday evenings. For a useful and informative study of Otabil's programmes, see Marleen De Witte, "Altar Media's *Living Word*: Televised Charismatic Christianity in Ghana," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 33.2 (2003): 172–202.

²⁸³ Asamoah-Gyadu, "African Charismatics," 205–6.

seamless and, therefore, designer made. In short, from the charismatic preacher's point of view, God wants his children to have the best of everything. Making extensive references to biblical passages including John 10:10 and Psa 35:27, Otabil notes that Jesus gives "abundant life" and "God delights in the well-being of his children", but it is the devil who brings affliction, for "the one who gives abundant life and well-being is not the same person who afflicts".

According to Otabil's views on biblical prosperity, God becomes sad when the wicked use money to do evil. God's will, he notes, is for the righteous to have money so they can use it for good purposes. Referring to another prosperity passage, Gal 3:7–9, Otabil interprets the 'blessings of Abraham' to mean the divine provision that God makes for his children in order that they may not lack anything in this life. Elsewhere Pastor Anaba advances similar thoughts, noting that believers "cannot be paupers in a world created by our heavenly Father". He writes, "We are the seed of Abraham", for, "when Abraham received the promise of possession from God we were in his loins".²⁸⁴ A number of Charismatic pastors are also known to be owners of very luxurious accommodation situated in expensive residential areas in Ghana.²⁸⁵

A critical consideration of the issues presented in the paragraphs above indicates that Charismatic Pentecostalism has contributed significantly to the growth of the church in Ghana, both in terms of infrastructure and human development. The bowel of contention however is that, the leaders of these churches acquire all this wealth yet the weak and the poor are not cared for because their attention is on how to build magnificent infrastructures, get properties and make name for themselves (Gen 11:4).

²⁸⁴ Anaba, *Breaking Illegal Possession*, 10.

²⁸⁵ *The Watchman*, January 25–February 7, 1998.

Bishop Agyin Asare quotes 1 Chr 4:10 and explains Jabez's request, 'enlarge my coast' (v. 10) to mean crying to God and saying to him:

the kind of breakthrough (territory) you have given me is now not enough. I need more. . . . he states: maybe you have one house, a car and are married so you feel contented and think moving forward is not necessary. No! No! No! You need more territories, more coasts and more breakthroughs.²⁸⁶

"Duncan-Williams thus define the mission of the Charismatic Ministry over and against other traditional denominations, noting that 'our church is into the full revelation of God's success plan'.²⁸⁷ By virtue of sharing in the blessings of Abraham, material acquisitions by the Christian, Anaba writes, are not to be seen as sinful. 'It is the will of God for us to prosper'. Making reference to Deut 8:18, Anaba notes that God also "gives us the power to get wealth". The believer should therefore "believe God for material possession".²⁸⁸

The school of thought that indicates that prosperity is considered contrary to God's purpose for unbelievers to be rich is also present in the works of Pastor Anaba. Unbelievers, according to Anaba, have "possessed the land illegally" but this illegality must be broken, hence the title of his book *Breaking Illegal Possession: Dislodge the Enemy and Possess the Land!* He teaches in that book in this era of the worldwide commitment of the church to evangelism, "the church must have the material possessions and wealth needed to propagate the Kingdom of God".²⁸⁹ The understanding is that wealth in the hands of unbelievers promotes Satan's agenda, but God is putting 'the land' back into

²⁸⁶ Asamoah-Gyadu, "African Charismatics," 210.

²⁸⁷ Duncan-Williams, *Destined to Succeed*, 62.

²⁸⁸ Anaba, *Breaking Illegal Possession*, 45.

²⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 46.

the hands of his chosen people: “Believers must move in quickly to take possession. God is rearranging things to favour his people.”²⁹⁰

It is emphatic that the wicked is prospering but they should not be envied because the ungodly person is destitute spiritually, and is the poorest in terms of eternal life. The righteous place of abode is the Kingdom of the eternal God, not the earth; therefore the righteous should not be greedy to take what belongs to the ungodly as a sign of God’s prosperity.

4.3.4 Conclusion

The researcher agrees with Asamoah-Gyadu when he remarks that based on the theories and teachings outlined above, there are three main theological emphases which may be gleaned from the ‘gospel of prosperity’ hermeneutic: first and foremost, the positive endorsement of material wealth and consumerism as a sign of God’s blessing; secondly, God’s blessing as based on the principles or laws of ‘sowing and reaping’, that is, blessing comes through giving; and thirdly, the belief that the ‘power of positive confession’ is important for the realisation of prosperity.²⁹¹

A careful analysis of the concept of faith in the Ghanaian Charismatic context differs from the thought line of the prophet Habakkuk. This contradicts the meaning of the text “the just shall live by faith”, as explained by the prophet. Probably Habakkuk would have opposed prosperity theology as heresy, supporting the position of many Mainline and Evangelic Scholars.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Anaba, *Breaking Illegal Possession*, 49.

²⁹¹ Asamoah-Gyadu, “African Charismatics,” 211.

²⁹² Rosin Hanna, “Did Christianity Cause the Crash?” *The Atlantic*, August 2, 2011 (accessed April 24th, 2015), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazin/archive/2009/12/did-christianity-cause-the-crash/307764>.

In fact, prosperity ministries have frequently come into conflict with other Christian groups.²⁹³ Critics, such as Evangelical pastor Michael Catt, have argued that prosperity theology has little in common with traditional Christian theology.²⁹⁴ Prominent evangelical leaders, such as Rick Warren, Ben Witherington III, and Jerry Falwell, have harshly criticized the movement. Warren proposes that prosperity theology promotes the idolatry of money, and others argue that Jesus's teachings indicate a disdain for material wealth.²⁹⁵

The researcher is of the view that, prosperity is a sort of a demi-god that many crave and worship. Indeed the wicked will kill to get rich and live in luxury when the just had to struggle to live by his faith. However, this life is not all.

4.4 Challenges of Habakkuk to Charismatics Preaching

The climax of Habakkuk's prophecy and preaching is in the relation between righteousness and 'faith'.²⁹⁶ However, both concepts, as portrayed by Habakkuk, seem to be in a sharp contrast with the preaching of many contemporary Charismatic leaders.

The 'righteous' portrayed by the prophet is one being 'firm and steadfast' in the face of hardship, able to endure suffering because of his/her trust in the Lord. Whether God answers his/her prayers or not, the righteous remains faithful without compromising

²⁹³ Coleman Simon, "The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity" (Cambridge University Press, 2007), <http://www.cambridge.org/us/academic/subjects/religion/church-history/globalization-charismatic-christianity>.

²⁹⁴ Michelle Vu, "Pastor: Prosperity Gospel Is Hindering Church Revival," *The Christian Post*, Time, March 20, 2010 (November 21st, 2011).

²⁹⁵ Chu Jeff and van Biema, "Does God Want You To Be Rich?" *Time*, December 4, 2011 (accessed September 10th, 2006), <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1533448,00.html>.

²⁹⁶ When put side by side the true faith of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, one will therefore say that truly the righteous person is the one whose faith is demonstrated in faithful deeds. Elwell sustains that Paul used the term in Gal 3:11 to demonstrate that salvation is not achieved by keeping the works of genuine faith. In Romans Paul highlights the fact that the believer's salvation, acquired by faith, must also be lived out totally in faith. The writer of Hebrews (10:35-38) points out that the sure coming of Christ for his faithful ones makes living by faith a categorical necessity. Elwell, *Baker Commentary on the Bible*, 669. For discussion see Debbie Hunn, "Habakkuk 2.4b in its Context: How Far off Was Paul?" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34, no. 2 (2009):219-239.

his/her faith in God. On the contrary, the portrait of the 'born again' made familiar in the preaching of many charismatic leaders is successful, prosperous, healthy. He/she is called to prove his/her faith 'testing God': if righteous, God must answer the prayers.

Is it possible to have a dialogue between the two opposite views? How can the message of Habakkuk stimulate the Charismatic Christians to enlarge the horizon of their spirituality?

In the opinion of the researcher, Habakkuk engages contemporaneous readers in a journey from positive confession to truth; from 'investment' to trust and from 'prosperity right' to relationship.

4.4.1 From 'Positive Confession' to Dialogue

According to Charismatic spirituality, faith is positive confession. For instance, it may be prohibited for the Charismatic to confess things such as sickness, poverty, defeat, pain, suffering and tragedy because all these forms of negative situations are not to occur in the believer's life.

However, Habakkuk challenges 'believers' to go to God as they are. Habakkuk is not afraid to present to God the reality as it is. He is not afraid to disclose that the society is 'in a mess,' that injustice is the norm and even the Law is distorted. Trusting his God, the prophet does not hesitate to present his questions, his inability to understand the plan of God, to penetrate his mystery. Habakkuk felt 'betrayed' by YHWH: however, he transformed his anger into a tool to meet God.

The Old Testament prophet challenges contemporary Christians to be true in front of God and realistic in their reading of reality. It is interesting to note that both the Old

and the New Testaments teach that faithfulness to God does not guarantee believers freedom from suffering, pain, trouble and all forms of disaster.

In fact, Jesus teaches that we are to expect tribulations in life (John 16:1-4; 33). The Bible provides various examples of godly people who experienced significant amounts of misfortunes such as Joseph (Gen 37:23-28), David (1 Sam 19:1), Job (1:14-21), Jeremiah (20:2), Jesus (Mark 15:16-20), Peter (Acts 4:3, 12:5) and Paul (Acts 16:22-23) among others.

Scriptures offer different explanations concerning the suffering of humanity: humans suffer as a result of their own actions and inactions. The principle that “whatsoever a man sows, that he shall also reap” (cf. Gal 6:7) applies in a general sense to everyone. Christians suffer in their inner self because they live in a sinful, corrupt world. All around us are the effects of sin; people experience distress and anguish as they see the power that evil holds over so many lives (Ezek 9:4).

However, God can and does use the suffering of the righteous to further the cause of His kingdom and His plans of redemption (Isa 53:4-12). So is God silent? No, as Habakkuk discovered, He is involved in all human endeavours.

Nevertheless, there are sufferings that cannot be explained or justified, like death. Even Jesus, the son of God, experienced pain and suffering in His incarnation process. Suffering is a mystery, which cannot be fully explained. Faced with this mystery, Habakkuk chose to ‘trust’ God.

4.4.2 From 'Investment' to 'Trust'

Another important element to the Charismatics spirituality is faith as 'investment.' According to charismatic preaching, one 'receives' as much as he offers. God has become a money doubler! Probably if Habakkuk could comments on this understanding of faith, he will replay that no mortal can bribe God.

Even if at the beginning of his dialogue with YHWH, he asks for 'action' and judgment, at the end of his journey, he realized that the true 'human' attitude is to trust God.²⁹⁷

Habakkuk suggested that 'vengeance' and 'reward' belong to God (Rom. 12:19): "For the vision is for its appointed time, it hastens towards its end and it will not lie; although it may take some time, wait for it, for it will certainly come before too long" (2:3). The appointed time, introduced the reflection about the eschatological time that through the Apocalyptic Literature reached the New Testament writers. For example, in the letter to Hebrews, "the just shall live by faith", it is appropriated to admonish readers that he who patiently endures the present hardships, holding fast his Christian confession, shall attain the blessedness of the Messiah's kingdom at his second advent (Heb 9:28). Paul also attests to this fact in a different way: he who renounces all claims and merits of his own and trusts in Christ alone shall find justification, acceptance, acquittal from sin and guilt before God (Gal 2:16).

Although God may seem to be silent, He is still involved in the suffering of His people (Isa 43:2). God promised in His word that He will not allow us to be tempted above what we can bear (1 Cor 10:13). Again, He promised to bring good out of all the suffering and the persecution of those who love Him and obey His commandments (Gen

²⁹⁷ The author of the book of Job will go a step further. The problem posed at the beginning is if human being can fear God for nothing, without expecting *anything* in return (Job 1:9).

50:20; Rom 8:28). The writer of Hebrews shows how God uses the painful parts of our lives for our growth and benefit (Heb 12:5). Moreover, the Lord through His word gives the assurance to stand by us in our moment of pain, and to walk with us “through the valley of the shadow of death” (Psa 23:4).

The journey from ‘investment’ to ‘trust’ is also a journey from ‘retribution’ to ‘gratuitousness’. Learning to trust God is to embark on a journey of trust and love towards our fellow humans. In fact, everyday news makes it evident that human beings are their own enemies because it is man who destroys his fellow man. The lack of righteousness, faith in God, love for both God and man is the cause of all the disasters in the world. Even the ecology crises, caused by the depletion of natural resources, is as a result of human activities (Gen 2:15).

The consequence is that if human being could love his fellow man and live by faith in God there will be less suffering in the world and the perception of the silence of God will be mitigated by the shared experience of his love.

4.4.3 From ‘Prosperity Right’ to Relationship

After confessing positively and ‘sowing a seed’ which is ‘faith investment’, ‘the believer’ is born to ‘take over territories,’ and be a champion’. The position summarized in the title ‘prosperity right’ is very similar to the retribution theology common in Habakkuk times. The initial plight of Habakkuk is found in this shared belief: he thinks that God is unfair by using the Chaldeans to punish a less sinful Judah (1:6).

By the conclusion of the prophet, pious living is not tantamount to prosperity. The ‘just’ may have to endure great sufferings, but have to be brave and steadfast in their trials. The prophet exhorts the ‘just’ to have courage and confidence, indicating that soon YHWH will act, and he who is constant shall be saved on account of his fidelity.

What then is the issue with this prosperity gospel? The researcher holds that it is a wrong interpretation of Christianity, often transforming God into a ‘magician’.

That notwithstanding, prosperity is not beyond anyone; there are godly and ungodly people who are very wealthy, but they did not get rich overnight. It is true one can achieve prosperity through human development such as education, hard work, applying effective business principles among others. Therefore in the light of Hab 1:1—2:20, to impact the Ghanaian culture, charismatic preachers should do proper interpretation and application of the Biblical text. Materialism should not be equated to true Christianity.

Nevertheless, after all has been said and done, the intellectual problem remains; if one goes by human experience and reason then God is alien and unjust, for who can find Him in an absurd world where the just still suffer and the wicked still prosper? The obvious fact is that life as experienced, too often seems mad and dislocated: the just suffer and the wicked prosper in the sight of the society.

This absurdity described in Hab 1:1—2:20 is made tolerable by communion with God. According to the prophet, it is within the society of the Lord that man finds his true fulfilment and goal for life; that is “the just shall live by faith” and this is true prosperity. At the end of this traumatic intellectual journey, the prophet perceives the absolute human value of being possessed by God and possessing Him.

The prophet closes with an intense declaration of faith re-discovered. Precisely because it is in the society of the Lord that man finds his true fulfilment, his only goal. The prophet determines to cleave totally to God in this life.

Contemporary Christians may have success in marriage, get good employment, buy cars, build good houses, attain doctorate degrees among other attractive things, and may

not actually have a good relationship with their Maker. Such Christians are not prosperous; they will have no share in the prosperity of God. In fact, in the sight of God, they have failed miserably. All the good preaching about prosperity and success without a rich life and right relationship with God is meaningless.

Finally, there is a consequence of prosperity preaching that is too often underestimated: the ‘judgment’ of the poor. If righteousness is tantamount to material gains — buildings, cars, food and cloths as indicators of a righteous life — poverty becomes ‘manifestation’ of sin.

Coincidentally, the biblical God identified Himself with the poor (e.g. Isa 1:1-8; Matt 25). According to the Bible, not ‘faith as prosperity right’ but solidarity is the key to an inclusive development. The suffering of humankind and the presence of the poor is a sign that our faith is still not ‘in action.’ The biblical faith is a faith that transforms society because it puts the brothers, as in the image and likeness of God, first before material possessions. The interpretative process is complete only when the word of God is incarnated in a specific cultural context, in our case the Ghanaian context.

Therefore, Charismatic Churches in Ghana are challenged by the prophet to reconsider their preaching in order to determine how to cleave totally to God. They are to love, care and identify with the sufferings of the members of their various congregations and find practical ways to help the needy ones. Charismatic leaders are to practically support some members of their congregation to start small-scale businesses as well as educate some by giving them scholarships. They should focus on serving the poor, the oppressed and love among the Charismatic believers. By doing these we shall transform all earthly concepts of prosperity and attain real prosperity and peace with God.

4.6 Conclusion

The interpretation of faith in the contemporary Charismatic preaching is of major concern to the researcher. The concept of faith should critically be examined and the notion of Habakkuk on the subject of faith should offer a guide for a journey of conversion.

Faith as portrayed by Habakkuk is in a sharp contrast with the prosperity preaching of contemporary Charismatic Churches. ‘Pleasure seeking’ and ‘how to get rich at all cost’ contrast with the prophet invitation to being steadfast in the face of hardship and to endure difficult moments. Habakkuk challenges Ghanaian Christianity in that there is too much desire for earthly and material things as can be seen in the Chaldeans piling up stolen goods thinking that there is security in them (Hab 2: 5, 10).²⁹⁸

In the nutshell, Habakkuk invites contemporary Christians to start a journey to experience the presence of the Lord, even in the evil and suffering that characterized our human life. It is a journey from positive confession to realism and dialogue with God; from a concept of faith as investment to the freedom of trusting the Lord even when everyday life is contrasting our expectation; a journey from ‘prosperity right’ to a deep relationship, able to see the Presence of God in every situation and able to transform the unconditional love we experience, in a gift of love and solidarity for the outcast of our society.

²⁹⁸ C.S. Rodd, “*The Epworth Preacher’s Commentary, Psalms 73 – 150*” (London: The Epworth press, 1964), 1-4.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The main objective of this study was to examine the meaning of ‘the silence of God’ in Hab 1:1—2:20, and its implication to readers, in order to contextualize the call to action of the text in our contemporary society; that is the Ghanaian Charismatic Churches. This chapter seeks to summarize what has been discovered during the course of this research, highlighting some of the major findings. It will also give a general conclusion to the study and some recommendations.

5.2 Summary

The aim of the study was to analyse how Habakkuk used rhetorical features (structures; metaphors; repetitions; parallelisms, etc.) to impact his readers and to confirm their faith in time of crisis.

Chapter one, discusses the background of the study, aims and objectives, research questions, literature review as well as the origination of the work and methodology which guided the researcher to arrive at the conclusion of the thesis. The research employed the rhetorical analysis as exegetical tool and communicative/dialogic approach in order to contextualize the texts in the Ghanaian Charismatic context.

Chapter Two explored the narrative structure of the text and tried to explicate Habakkuk’s rhetorical aim. The chapter comprised of three main sections in which we discussed the literary unity of the book of Habakkuk; its rhetorical organization and its outline. The first section sought to establish the thematic difference that exists between the first two chapters of Habakkuk (Habakkuk’s perplexities and God’s answers), and the third chapter in order to justify our delimitation of the text (Hab 1:1—2:20). The

second focused on Habakkuk's literary artistry manifested in his free use of simile and metaphor. Clear opening formulae and stich words are evident, as well as the inclusion between 1:12 and 2:1 being bracketed with the idea of reproof, and 2:4-20, with enclosing statements that contrast the unrighteous Chaldean with the righteous who live by faith.²⁹⁹ Finally, the use of interrogative sentence in his diatribe with God that characterized the text since its opening verse (1:1). On this background, Hab 1—2 was classified as a dialogue between the prophet and God, and the dialogic structure proposed by Roland Blue was chosen as road-map for our exegesis.

In Chapter Three, an exegetical analysis of the literary unit was conducted following the classical exegetical steps. The study identified **אַמִּנָּה** as the call of action of the text. Faced with the violence in the human history and also the 'silence' of God, what identify the righteous is steadfastness (2:4). In connection to 1:4, the 'righteous' can be define as the 'innocent' person, the one who keeps the Torah and becomes the 'victim' of those who 'deformed' justice.

In Chapter Four, the researcher examined the contemporary Charismatic Churches interpretation of faith. The chapter demonstrated how the contemporary Charismatic Churches relate 'faith' to the acquisition of wealth and materialism. According to their interpretation, real 'faith' is demonstrated through positive confessions such as 'name it and claim it'; 'investment'; and 'prosperity right' as well as 'taking authority' and dominion over everything one desires. It also assessed the main views on 'faith' and its application by the contemporary Charismatic believers in Ghana. The chapter concludes engaging Habakkuk's concept of faith with the Charismatic beliefs.

²⁹⁹ Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 357.

5.3 Conclusion

The engagement between the text and Charismatic preaching about faith manifested a discrepancy between the vision of faith as steadfastness and firmness testified by Habakkuk and the message preached by contemporary Churches.

It is interesting to note that both the Old and the New Testaments teach that faithfulness to God does not guarantee believers freedom from suffering, pain, trouble and all forms of disaster. Even Jesus, the son of God, accepts to meet evil and to suffer pain. He refutes the theory of retribution and accepts to unite himself with his brothers who suffer. He enters into dialogue with Publicans and Prostitutes; touches the sick and dead, and even takes the risk to become “impure” according to the law.

In the fullness of time, Jesus chooses to experience pain as the way for a total incarnation. He cries over the dead friend, experiences the abandonment from his disciple and from his Father, and dies a shameful death on the cross.

Therefore, suffering is a mystery which cannot be fully explained. As Habakkuk says “But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him” (Hab 2:20). However, we can trust that even in suffering and death God is not silent, but is journeying on our side.

5.4. Recommendations

On academic level, the researcher recommends to considering further academic study on the concept of the silence of God in Charismatic theology and prophetism with respect to social action and social justice.

On a pastoral level, the researcher is of the view that there is a general lack of biblical and hermeneutical formation on the part of some Charismatic church leaders. As consequence, their reading of the text is mostly 'literal' and does not take into consideration the many 'gaps' present in the world of the text and our contemporary situation. On that note, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. That Charismatic pastors should be impressed upon to acquire theological and ministerial training before putting their God given gifts and talents to use.

2. That Charismatic leaders already in ministry should also be encouraged to have ministerial training. Such initiatives like the distant/sandwich courses should form an integral part of the academic calendar of existing theological institution to make theological education accessible to those who claim 'busyness' as reason for not pursuing ministerial training.

3. That there should be collaborations between existing Bible colleges within the Pentecostal/Charismatic settings with the higher places of theological learning. This should be with the aim of mentoring these Bible schools in order to streamline curricula and also deal with career development related issues. The end result should be to encourage graduates from such Bible colleges to further their theological formation in the universities that are springing up under the auspices of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement.

4. That umbrella bodies such as the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council and the National Association of Charismatic Churches should make deliberate and conscious efforts to impress upon pastors and ministers of all their member churches on the need for and benefits of theological training.

5. That there should be an effort to bring together Pentecostal/Charismatic scholars to a dialoguing table on the developmental challenges of the Charismatic movement in general including those issues raised in this work.

6. The Charismatic societies in Ghana accept the challenge to reconsider their preaching of Christianity in order to determine how to cleave totally to God.

7. Finally, the study recommends that Charismatic believers in Ghana should not only be committed to the Lord, but also be responsible for one another in mutual service, love and unity. A strong social ethic flows from the font of African traditional understandings of no one should go hungry while others feast, because the African culture enshrines the values of family, community, and mutual aid.³⁰⁰

Therefore, the Charismatic churches should make an effort to deliver a wide range of social services where crumbling government institutions are incapable of addressing people's most basic needs. They should join their colleagues in the Mainline Churches to take seriously Jesus' command to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, take care of the sick, and visit the prisoner (Matt 25:31-46).

³⁰⁰ Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values, An introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996, reprinted 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003), 9. Quoted in Godfred Nsiah, 'An Exegetical and Theological Study of the Institution of the Lord's Supper: Luke 22:7-23' (MPhil Thesis, University of Ghana, 2013), 95.

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