

Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania

Review: The Book of Habakkuk

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THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK*

THE Book of Habakkuk continues to tax the ingenuity of commentators. The emphasis in Paul Humbert's study (but recently received in this country) is on vocabulary and idiom. The author analyzes almost every word and expression used by the prophet, carefully listing its occurrences in other parts of the Old Testament. By this stylistic criterion he reaches the conclusion that the book is a unity and that it was composed about 602 B. C. E. The wicked tyrant who is said to be oppressing the righteous is King Jehoiakim of Judah, and the doom which Yahweh is said to be preparing for him is the imminent campaign of the Babylonians, Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites against his state and capital. The old hypotheses that the prophecy is directed against Assyrian or Babylonian invaders or even (save the mark!) against Alexander are each discarded after careful examination. Humbert agrees with Mowinckel that the book was designed for liturgical use on a day of public prayer.

In matters of textual criticism, this work is a curious blend of the conservative and the radical. In general, it may be said that the author's defense of traditional readings (e. g. *מְכַתִּיר* in 1.4 or *קִנְיָמָה* in 1.8) is far more sensitive and convincing than are his innovations. In the latter, he seems strangely to abandon that feeling for the niceties of Hebrew idiom which elsewhere characterizes his treatment, and many of the restorations proposed bear unfortunate traces of "concordance jargon." Few scholars will be convinced, for example, that the admittedly difficult words *לֵאלֹהֵי זֶה כָּחוֹ לְאֱלֹהֵי זֶה וְאֲשֶׁם זֶה כָּחוֹ לְאֱלֹהֵי זֶה* in 1.11 should be emended to *וְאֲשֶׁם זֶה כָּחוֹ לְאֱלֹהֵי זֶה תּוֹכַחְתִּי לְאֱלֹהֵי זֶה*, if only because Hebrew does not use the verb *שִׁים* with *תּוֹכַחָה*. Similarly, the emendation of *הוּי הַמְרַבָּה לְאֵלוֹ עַד־מְתִי* in 2.6 to *הוּי הַמְרַבָּה לְאֵלֶיךָ מְדוּחַת*, "Woe unto him who imposes many tributes upon the hard-pressed," overlooks the fact that *אֵלֶיךָ* denotes the exercise of compulsion not the reduction of a man's material circumstances. Again, the adoption of the conjecture *וְיִפְרַח לְקֶץ* (supposedly indicated by LXX's *ἀνατελεῖ*) in 2.3 *כִּי עוֹד חֲזוֹן לְמוֹעֵד וְיִפְתַּח לְקֶץ וְלֹא יִפְתַּח* in 2.3 *כִּי עוֹד חֲזוֹן לְמוֹעֵד וְיִפְתַּח לְקֶץ וְלֹא יִפְתַּח* clearly stands in some sort of relation to the expression *יִפְתַּח קְנֻבִים* in Prov. 6.19; 14.5, 25; 19.5, 9, and that the verb may be explained, with Barth (*Etymologische Studien*, 25), from Arabic *بَحَّ* "impart, communicate, disclose." (Moreover, in view of the phrase *יִפְתַּח קְנֻבִים עַד שְׁקֵר* in Prov. 6.19 and

**Problèmes du livre d'Habacuc*. Memoires de l'Université de Neuchâtel, XVIII. By Paul Humbert. Neuchâtel, 1944. 303 pp.

14.5, might we not read here *לְקַח וְלֹא יִכְנָב* (?) Scarcely more plausible is Humbert's change of *עָרוֹת יְסוֹד עַד־צִנּוֹאר* in 3.13 to *עָרוֹת יְסוֹד אֶסְרָם אֶסְרָם עַד־צִנּוֹאר* which is rendered "Tu les serres de liens jusqu'à la nuque." In the first place, *צָרַר* means "to tie in a bundle," not simply "to bind with cords or fetters." In the second place, there would be no point in so binding men whose skulls had already been crushed (*מִחֲצֵתָ רֹאשׁ*). In the third place, we should require at least *אֶסְרִים* or perhaps even *אֶסְרָר*. Lastly, it seems somewhat gratuitous thus to eliminate the metaphorical expression *עָרוֹת יְסוֹד עַד־צִנּוֹאר* which may well have been a colloquial idiom derived from the razing of buildings (cf. Ps. 137.7) and which suggests comparison with the common Accadian phrase *iš-tu uš-se-šu a-di tab-lu-pi-šu*. (How the sentiment which Humbert reconstructs would have been expressed in Hebrew may be seen from Lam. 1.14). In 1.17 *הָעֵל כֵּן יִרִיק חֲרָמוֹ* *הָעֵל כֵּן יִרִיק חֲרָמוֹ*, the emendation *הָעֵל כֵּן יִרִיק חֲרָמוֹ* can but evoke a smile; no one "slays" fishes, and there is no reason why, in its final clause, an otherwise metaphorical sentence may not be resolved, for the sake of clarity, into direct statement.¹

On the other hand, certain emendations which one might have liked to see adopted do not figure in this work. Thus, comparison with Job 9.26 suggests that in 1.8 *בְּנֶשֶׁר קֵשׁ לְאֹכֹל* should be emended to *בְּנֶשֶׁר קֵשׁ לְאֹכֹל*. Similarly, I cannot resist the suspicion that in 3.7 we should read *רָחֲמוּ אֶהְלִי כֹשֶׁן יְרֻזוּן יְרִיעוֹת מְרִינָן* for M's *רָחֲמוּ אֶהְלִי כֹשֶׁן יְרֻזוּן יְרִיעוֹת מְרִינָן* the preceding *תַּחַת אֲנִי לֹא* being read, with Albright, as the archaic *תַּחַת אֲנִי לֹא* and joined to v. 6. In 3.14, is it possible that a word has dropped out after *בְּמֹו* and that we should read *עָנִי לְאֹכֵל עָנִי* (or *אֲרִי*) *עָנִי לְאֹכֵל עָנִי*; cf. Lam. 3.10?

In the discussion of the Psalm of Habbakuk, Humbert strangely overlooks recent studies by Stephens, Cassuto, Irwin and the present reviewer bearing on its connections with Mesopotamian and Ugaritic mythology.

Summing up, therefore, it may be said that while this study is strong in meticulous linguistic analysis and in judicious assessment of previous work, and while it thus constitutes a welcome and valuable addition to the literature on Habakkuk, the author's own attempts at textual emendation tend to mar an otherwise excellent performance.

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¹ Perhaps we should read *הָעֵלָה* for M's *הָעֵל*.