

8. The Prayer of Habakkuk in Habakkuk 3— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

- Please read the [General Introduction](#) and the Introduction to the [Embedded Poetry](#).
- For common features found in the numerical analysis charts, see the "[Key to the charts](#)".

Habakkuk 3 in its Literary Context

- The little Book of Habakkuk as a whole is a textbook example of a numerical composition. The divine name numbers **17** and **26** are not only woven into the text to signify God's presence in the prophecy, but also to give structure to it. Moreover, the numerical features strongly suggest that the book is a coherent literary unit and that the prayer in Chapter 3 is integral to the prophecy, like the prayers in 1:2-4 and 1:12-17. What makes the concluding prayer in Chapter 3 stand out is that it has been given the appearance of a psalm by being supplied with a psalm-like heading, three *selahs*, and a subscription. That it should be regarded as an inset psalm is therefore totally out of the question, but this holds true for all the embedded poems we have studied so far.
- Here is an overview of the numerical features of the book as a whole:

1:1	Heading of Chapters 1-2, and of the book as a whole	5
1:2-4	First prayer, his complaint: Yahweh, there is no justice!	41
1:5-6	Divine speech: Yahweh will raise up the Chaldeans	28
1:7-11	Habakkuk's comment: Description of the terrifying army	52 (2 x 26)
1:12-14	Second prayer, part 1: Yahweh, why do you keep silent?	39 (26 + 13)
1:15-17	Second prayer, part 2: Will the wicked slaughter the nations?	32
2:1-2a	Habakkuk keeps a look-out, awaiting Yahweh's response	18
2:2b-d	Divine speech, part 1: Write down the vision on tablets!	9 +
2:3	Divine speech, part 2: Yahweh vouches for its truth	17 = 26
2:4	Habakkuk says: The oppressor will die, the righteous will live	9
2:5-6	Habakkuk's comment: The fate of the oppressor: Woe!	43 (17a+26b)
2:4-6	Habakkuk's comments before he addresses the oppressor	52 (2 x 26)
2:7-8	He warns the plunderer that he himself will be plundered	26 (15a+11b)
2:9-11	He admonishes the plunderer: Woe betide his house!	26
2:12-14	He reprimands the oppressor: Woe betide his city!	31
2:15-17	He warns the man of violence: Woe betide his companions!	41
2:18-19	Woe to those who make idols and trust in them	35
2:20	Yahweh is in his temple! Be silent in his presence!	7
3:1-19	The third prayer (to be analysed in detail below)	212
Chapter 1	First part of the Prophetic Oracle	197 = 106a + 91b
Chapter 2	Second part of the Prophetic Oracle	262 = 128a + 134b
Chapters 1-2	Habakkuk's Prophetic Oracle	459 = 234a + 225b
Chapter 3	Habakkuk's Prophetic Prayer	212 = 130a + 82b
Chapters 1-3	The Book of Habakkuk as a whole	671 = 364a + 307b.

The concluding statement (2:20; cf. 3:19) may be regarded as a coda. It stands apart from the woe oracles, for the prophet's words in 2:4-19 are clearly demarcated by two corresponding statements in 4a ('no life in him') and 19e ('no breath in it').

I consider it very likely that the number **32**, occurring in the **64** (2×32) cola of the third prayer in 3:2-19c, and in the **32** words spoken by the prophet in 1:15-17, was determined by the numerical value of Habakkuk's title **הַנְּבִיאַ**, 'the prophet' ($5+14+2+10+1 = 32$), which we find in both headings (1:1 and 3:1).

The **459** words in Habakkuk's Prophetic Oracle (Chapters 1-2) are a multiple of **17** ($459 = 27 \times 17$), while the words before *atnach* are a multiple of **26** ($234 = 9 \times 26$). What is particularly significant, and obviously not by chance, is that the words before *atnach* in two totals are multiples of **26** ($130a = 5 \times 26$, and $364a = 14 \times 26$).

- The numerical evidence supports the view that the book comprises two major sections:
 - Chapters 1-2 Habakkuk's Prophetic Oracle** (with a distinct heading)
 - Chapter 3 Habakkuk's Prophetic Prayer** (with a distinct heading).

The Prophetic Oracle in Chapters 1-2 divides into two distinct parts (corresponding to the chapter division) which constitute an unmistakable coherent literary unit. They are clearly differentiated by the prophet's statement (2:1) in which he declares his intention to stand at his post, keeping a look-out and awaiting Yahweh's response to his complaint.

- The numerical features also persuaded me to regard the famous statement in 2:4 as part of the prophet's comment and not as part of Yahweh's speech:

תִּנְהַ עֶפְלָ הַלֹּא־יִשְׁרָה נַפְשׁוֹ בְּוֹ וְצַדִּיק בְּאַמּוֹנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה,
 Behold the impudent, surely, the life in him will be removed,
 While the righteous will live by being faithful.¹

The demarcation of the prophet's comment, 2:4-6, is based on the fact that the author differentiates between the woe statement put on the lips of those who hurl taunts at the oppressor (2:6), and the woe's Habakkuk himself directs at him (2:7-17).

- A closer examination of the two divine speeches reveals that they form a chiasmic pattern, showing that they are logotechnically closely connected (for the numerical chiasmus, see the [General Introduction](#), p. 12):

First speech (1:5-6)	28 = 13a + 15b
Second speech (2:2-3)	26 = 13a + 13b
Yahweh's speeches	54 = 26a + 28b

This is additionally demonstrated by the fact that they are composed of altogether **54** words, which is the numerical value of **Habakkuk** ($8+2+19+6+19 = 54$). See the chart, and for the use of the numerical value of a key-word or key-name as a structuring device, see the [General Introduction](#), p. 13.

- It is worth noting that the **26** words in 2:7-8 are divided by *atnach* into **15a** (YH) and **11b** (WH), and that the first woe saying (2:9-11) is made up of **26** words. Note also that the **43** words in 2:5-6 are neatly divided into **17** words before, and **26** after *atnach*, and that the prophet's comments in 2:4-6 are composed of **52** ($2 \times 26 = 9 + 43$) words.
- Note also the use of **39** words in the first part of Habakkuk's second prayer (1:12-14), which represents the YHWH-'*echad* formula ($39 = 26 + 13$) signifying Yahweh's *uniqueness*. The subtle reference to Yahweh's 'One-ness' is most appropriate, for the prophet explicitly appeals to his incomparable characteristics (everlasting, holy, immortal) to urge him not to keep silent but to act for the sake of justice. For the **39** words in 3:4-7, see Observation 2.
- For a detailed survey of the research into the compositional problems and literary issues of the Book of Habakkuk, see the article by Marvin A. Sweeney, "Habakkuk, Book of", in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 3 (1992).

¹ Preserving, but rearranging the consonantal text of MT, with A.S. van der Woude, *Habakuk Zefanja* (De Prediking van het Oude Testament, 1978). The impudent oppressor is Chaldea, the righteous victim is Judah.

Special Features of the Prayer

- The prayer in Habakkuk 3 is the high point of the book, being the third - and by far the longest - prayer after the prayers in 1:2-4 and 1:12-17. The remarkable way in which it is demarcated by the psalm-like addition, **עַל שְׁנוֹנוֹת**, to the heading in 3:1 and the typical technical terms, **לְמִנְצַח בְּנִינוֹתַי**, at the end (3:19d), highlights it as a momentous component of the book. At the same time, the psalm-like brackets function as explicit markers of its hymnic status, which characterizes it as a hymnic Prayer. Its positioning by means of the well-known 'split-and-embed' technique gives it the appearance of an embedded poem.²
- To accentuate its psalm-like character in still another way, the author (or a later priestly editor?) supplied it with three *selahs* (in vs. 3b, 9b, and 13d), a technical term occurring only in the Book of Psalms. Their precise role is unclear, for they do not seem to have a highlighting or demarcating function as in many psalms, except for the *selah* in v. 13 which may have been intended to mark the end of a strophe. Since they do not form part of the poetical body of the prayer, which also holds true for the superscription and subscription, I shall leave them out of consideration in my logotechnical analysis.³
- In terms of content, the prayer was composed as the third and final prayer in the book, as indicated by the heading. It functions in the book as a petition addressed to Yahweh to manifest his divine power to deliver the land from invading forces, expressing confidence that the vision of the prophet in 1:1-4 will be fulfilled and that God's righteousness will be vindicated with the deliverance of his people.⁴

Compositional Structure

- The prayer as such, excluding the superscription, the three *selahs*, and the subscription, has 28 verselines, 64 cola and 202 words. Its compositional structure is disputed. At first sight, the macro structure appears to be fundamentally determined by the change in the direction of address: words explicitly **addressed to God** (vs. 2 and 8-15) alternating with words **spoken about him** (vs. 3-7 and 16-19):

v. 2	Invocation introducing the petition
vs. 3-7	The use of theophany images as motivation for petitioning Yahweh
vs. 8-15	The use of cosmic battle images to urge Yahweh to act
vs. 16-19	The prophet's personal response.

Consequently, in terms of content, the prayer can be subdivided into 9 strophes:

v. 2	Invocation introducing the petition: I am in awe of what you have done
vs. 3-5	Description of a theophany as the manifestation of Yahweh's power
vs. 6-7	Yahweh's acts during the theophany, and <u>what the prophet observes</u>
vs. 8-11	Yahweh, you prepare for battle on a cosmic level
vs. 12-13	Yahweh, you traverse the earth to crush evil powers and save your people
vs. 14-15	Yahweh, you fight those who try to devour the poor; you tread the sea
v. 16	<u>What the prophet observes</u> and experiences awaiting the day of disaster
vs. 17-18	Whatever befalls him, he will exult in Yahweh and rejoice in the saviour
v. 19	The prophet asseverates his trust in Yahweh who will elevate him.

This division corresponds to the macro structure proposed by R.L. Smith (Word Biblical Commentary, 1984): 2 Petition; 3-7 Theophany; 8-15 Battle; 16-19 Response of Faith.

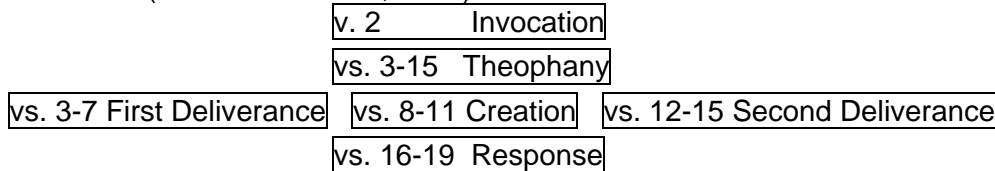
² For this compositional technique, which we encountered in all of the embedded poetry we have studied so far, see the paragraph "Embedding and Framing Techniques" in the Introduction to the [Embedded Poetry](#), pp. 6-7.

³ For some preliminary remarks on the disputed role of the psalm headings and other technical terms, such as the *selahs*, see my Analysis of [Psalm 3](#), Observations 1 and 4.

⁴ For an in-depth discussion of the prayer in its context, see the article by J.W. Watts cited in the Bibliography.

- In his logoprosodic analysis, Duane Christensen, who includes the superscription, the *selahs*, and the subscription in the word-count, finds 13 strophes:
vs. 1-2, 3, 4-5, 6, 7, 8, 9-11, 12-13b, 13cd, 14-15, 16, 17, 18-19.
For particulars, see: http://www.bibal.net/04/proso/psalms-ii/pdf/dlc_hk003-001-d.pdf.
Christensen reads an extra word in v. 13b and counts 213 words in the entire text.

- F.I. Andersen (The Anchor Bible, 2001) has a different view of the structure:



- On rhetorical grounds, Pieter van der Lugt has argued persuasively that the text exhibits great regularity in the division of its 28 verselines. He finds 5 cantos and 12 strophes:
vs. 2 || 3, 4-6b, 6c-7 || 8-9, 10, 11-12 || 13, 14-15, 16 || 17, 18-19.

Taken together, the opening and concluding cantos comprise 7 verselines, which means that the canto structure is determined by the number 7: a 2-line introduction, three 7-line cantos, and a 5-line concluding canto.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words addressed to God; **d**: words spoken about God.
- The verseline numbering is in the first column to the right of the Hebrew text.
- As it stands in the Masoretic text, I regard Habakkuk 3 as a text in its own right.

			Total		a		b		c		d
1 Heading :	עַל שְׁיִנוּחַ לַחֲבַקּוּק הַנְּבִיאִי		5		3		2				
2	יְהוָה שָׁמַעְתִּי שְׁמַעֲדָה 1		3		3				3		
	יִרְאֵתִי יְהוָה פָּעַלָּה 3		3		3				3		
	בְּקִרְבַּ שָׁנִים תִּלְיִהוּ 2		3		3				3		
	בְּקִרְבַּ שָׁנִים תוֹדִיעֵנִי 3		3		3				3		
	בְּרַגְזֵי רַחֵם תִּזְכּוֹר : 3		3				3		3		
	Canto I Strophe 1 Total, v. 2		15	= 12		+ 3	= 15		+ 0		
3	אֲלוֹתַי מִתִּימְנָן יָבוֹא 3		3		3						3
	וְקָדוֹשׁ מִהַר-פָּאֵרָן סִלְהֵנִי 3		3		3						3
	כִּסֵּה שָׁמַיִם הוֹדִוּ 4		3				3				3
	וַתְהַלְתֵּנוּ מִלְּאֵת הָאָרֶץ : 3		3				3				3
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 3		12	= 6		+ 6	= 0		+ 12		
4	וְנִגְהַר כְּאוֹר תְּהִלָּה 5		3		3						3
	קִרְנֵי מִיָּדוֹ לֹא 3		3		3						3
	וְשֵׁם חֲבִיּוֹן עֲזָה : 3		3				3				3
5	לְפָנָיו יִלְדֵי הַבְּרָא 6		3		3						3
	וַיִּצְא רֶשֶׁף לְרִגְלָיו : 3		3				3				3
6a	עָמְדוּ וַיִּמְדְּדוּ אֶרֶץ 7		3		3						3
6b	רָאָה וַיִּתֵּר גּוֹיִם 3		3		3						3
	Strophe 3 Total, v. 4-6b		21	= 15		+ 6	= 0		+ 21		

6c	וַיִּתְפַּצְצוּ הַרְרֵי-עַד	8	3	3	3
	שָׁחוּ גִבְעוֹת עוֹלָם		3	3	3
	הַלִּיכוֹת עוֹלָם לֹו:		3	3	3
7	תַּחַת אֲנִי רְאִיתִי אֶהְלִי כּוֹשֵׁן	9	5	5	5
	יִרְגְּזוּן יִרְעוֹת אֶרֶץ מִדְּבָר: ס		4	4	4
	Strophe 4 Total, v. 6c-7		18	= 11 + 7 = 0 + 18	
	Total, v. 4-7		39	= 26 + 13 = 0 + 39	
	Canto II Total, v. 3-7		51	= 32 + 19 = 0 + 51	
	לְחִבְקוֹק = 66 (12+8+2+19+6+19) Total, v. 2-7		66	= 44 + 22 = 15 + 51	
8	הַבְּנֵה־רִים תִּרְהַ יְהוָה	10	3	3	3
	אִם בְּנֵה־רִים אֶפְדֶּה		3	3	3
	אִם-בָּיִם עִבְרַתְּהָ		3	3	3
	כִּי תִרְכַּב עַל-סוּסֶיךָ	11	4	4	4
	מִרְכַּבְתֶּיךָ יִשׁוּעָה:		2	2	2
9	עֲרִיגָה תַעֲזוֹר קִשְׁתְּךָ	12	3	3	3
	שִׁבְעוֹת מִטּוֹת אָמַר סִלְהָ		3	3	3
	נְהַרּוֹת תִּבְקַע-אֶרֶץ:		3	3	3
	Strophe 5 Total, v. 8-9		24	= 15 + 9 = 24 + 0	
10	Middle verselines: רְאוּךָ יַחֲלוּ הַרִים	13	3	3	3
	28 = 13 + 2 + 13 זָרַם מַיִם עֲבָרָ		3	3	3
	Middle cola: 64 = 31 + 2 + 31 נָתַן תְּהוֹם קוֹלוֹ	14	3	3	3
	Middle words: 202=100+2+100: רוֹם נִדְּהוּ נִשְׂא:		3	3	3
	Strophe 6 Total, v. 10		12	= 6 + 6 = 12 + 0	
11	שָׁמַשׁ יִרְחַ עֵמֶד זִבְלָהָ	15	4	4	4
	לְאוֹר חֲצִיךָ יִתְלַכּוּ		3	3	3
	לְגִנָּה בְּרַק חֲנִיתְךָ:		3	3	3
12	בְּזַעַם תִּצְעַד-אֶרֶץ	16	3	3	3
	בְּאֵף תִּדְּוֹשׁ גּוֹיִם:		3	3	3
	Strophe 7 Total, v. 11-12		16	= 7 + 9 = 16 + 0	
	Canto III Total, v. 8-12		52	= 28 + 24 = 52 + 0	
13	יִצְאֵת לְיִשְׁעַ עֲמֹךָ	17	3	3	3
	לְיִשְׁעַ אֶת-מְשִׁיחְךָ		3	3	3
	מְחַצֵּת רֹאשׁ מִבַּיִת רִשְׁעַ	18	4	4	4
	עֲרוֹת יִסוֹד עַד-צִנּוֹר סִלְחָ: פ		4	4	4
	Strophe 8 Total, v. 13		14	= 6 + 8 = 14 + 0	
14	* נִקְבַּת בְּמַטְיֹו רֹאשׁ בְּרִזּוֹ	19	4	4	4
	יִסְעֲרוּ לְתַפְיִצְנִי		2	2	2
	עַל־צִתְּם כְּמוֹ-לְאֹכֵל עֲנִי בַמִּסְתָּר:		5	5	5
15	דְּרַכְתָּ בָיִם סוּסֶיךָ	20	3	3	3
	חָמַר מַיִם רַבִּים:		3	3	3
	Strophe 9 Total, v. 14-15		17	= 9 + 8 = 17 + 0	

16	שָׁמַעְתִּי וַתִּרְגַּז בְּטִנִּי	21	3	3	3
	לְקוֹל צִלְלוֹ שִׁפְתֵי		3	3	3
	יָבֹא רִקְבִי בְּעֲצָמֵי	22	3	3	3
*	וַתַּחֲתִי אֲרִגֵּז אֲשֶׁר־י		3	3	3
	אֲנוּחַ לְיוֹם צָרָה	23	3	3	3
	לְעֹלוֹת לְעַם יְגוֹדְנִי:		3	3	3
	Strophe 10 Total, v. 16		18	= 12 + 6 = 0 + 18	
	Canto IV Total, v. 13-16		49	= 27 + 22 = 31 + 18	
17	כִּי־תֵאָנֵחַ לְאַתְפָּרֵחַ	24	4	4	4
	וְאֵין יָבוּל בְּגִפְנִים		3	3	3
	כַּחַשׁ מַעֲשֵׂה־זֹת	25	3	3	3
	וּשְׂדֵמוֹת לֹא־עָשָׂה אֲכָל־		4	4	4
	גֹּזֵר מִמִּכְלֵה צֹאן	26	3	3	3
	וְאֵין בָּקָר בְּרִפְתִּים:		3	3	3
	Strophe 11 Total, v. 17		20	= 14 + 6 = 0 + 20	
18	וְאֵנִי בֵיתֵיךָ אֶעֱלֹזָה	27	3	3	3
	אֲגִילָה בְּאַלְהֵי יִשְׁעֵי:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 17-18		26	= 17 + 9 = 0 + 26	
19	יְהוָה אֱדַנִּי חֵילִי	28	3	3	3
	וַיִּשֶׂם רַגְלִי כְּאַיִלוֹת		3	3	3
	וְעַל בְּמוֹתַי יִדְרֹכֵנִי		3	3	3
	Strophe 12 Total, v. 18-19c		15	= 12 + 3 = 0 + 15	
	Canto V Total, v. 17-19c		35	= 26 + 9 = 0 + 20	
	Total, v. 3-19c		187	= 113 + 74 = 83 + 104	
	Prayer, Total, v. 2-19c		202	= 125 + 77 = 98 + 104	
19d	Subscription לְמִנְצַח בְּנִינֹתַי		2	2	
	With Superscription and Subscription, v. 1-19d		209	= 128 + 81	
	Including the 3 Selahs as well, v. 1-19d		212	= 130 + 82	

* In v. 14b, I follow the Qere reading פָּרְזִי, 'his warriors'. * In v. 16, I have moved the enigmatic אשר from 16e (after *atnach*) to 16d (before *atnach*) reading אֲשֶׁר־י, 'my tracks': "I tottered on my tracks".

Observations

- The arithmetic centre on all levels (of words, verselines, and cola) is to be found in v. 10, but it does not constitute a persuasive consciously designed meaningful centre. Pieter van der Lugt finds the quintessential thought of the poem in v. 19a: Yahweh my Lord is my strength, but it is rather the gist of the prophet's attestation of faith (18-19) than the gist of the poem as a whole.
- The divine name numbers feature in the following select instances:
 - vs. 4-7 **39** words (**26a** + **13b**), the YHWH 'echad formula; compare the **39** words of 1:12-14 and see my remark at the bottom of page 2 above.
 - vs. 3-7 **51** (3 x **17**) words in total spoken about God: Canto II
 - vs. 8-12 **52** (2 x **26**) words in total addressed to God: Canto III
 - vs. 14-15 **17** words in total: Strophe 9
 - vs. 17-18 **26** words in total, with **17** before the *atnach*

vs. 18-19d **17** words in total
 vs. 17-19c **26** words before the *atnach*
 vs. 3-19c **187** (11 x **17**) words in total
 vs. 2-19c **104** (4 x **26**) words in total spoken about God (Column d)
 vs. 1-19d **130** (5 x **26**) words before *atnach* in the entire text.

3. In line with the use of the numerical value of the word **הַנְּבִיא**, 'the prophet' (**32**), and the name **Habakkuk** (**54**) as a structuring device (which occur in 1:1 and 3:1; see p. 2 above), it is very likely that the **66** words of 3:2-7 have been determined by the numerical value of **לְחַבְקִיּוֹק**, 'belonging to Habakkuk' (3:1).
4. In the Prophetic Prayer (Chapter 3), the name **יהוה** occurs 5x (2a, 2b, 8a, 18a, 19a), **אֱלֹהִים**, 'God', 1x (3a), Elohim 1x (18b), and Adonay 1x (19a).

In the preceding Prophetic Oracle (Chapters 1-2), the divine name appears **7** times in a menorah pattern (1:2a and 12a, 2:2a, **13a**, 14b, 16c, and 20a). Note that in the middle instance (2:13) the divine name is combined with *Sebaoth*, which is most appropriate in a battle context.

Bibliography

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J.W. Watts' article, "Psalmody in Prophecy: Habakkuk 3 in Context", in: J.W. Watts and P.R. House (eds.), *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays in Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. Watts* (JSOTSuppl 235), Sheffield, 1996, pp. 209-223, is also available at his site: <http://web.syr.edu/~jwwatts/Hab3.htm>.

The most recent study: Dominik Markl, "Hab 3 in intertextueller und kontextueller Sicht", *Biblica* 85 (2004), pp. 99-108.

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