



God's righteousness in the Book of Habakkuk: An exegetical study with a contemporary application

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Dissertation accepted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Theology with Old Testament* at the North-West University

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DECLARATION

I, Werner Louw Greeff, hereby declare that this thesis titled “God’s righteousness in the book of Habakkuk: an exegetical study with a contemporary application” and the work presented within it is my own, except as acknowledged in the text, and has not been submitted for a degree or diploma at any other institution. This thesis is presented for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of *Magister Theologiae* in Old Testament at the North-West University.

I affirm that all sources used have been properly cited, and I have complied with the university's guidelines for academic integrity and research ethics.

Werner Louw Greeff

DEDICATION

To You, O Lord, the source of all wisdom and insight,
The Creator and sustainer of life,
Through Your Grace you've helped me stand,
I submit this work humbly into Your hands.

PREFACE

When I decided to pursue a master's degree in theology, my initial thought was to focus on something practical and pastoral, perhaps addressing a social issue such as fatherlessness. I spoke to Rev. Jacob Pretorius, who was my mentor at the time, and his perspective transformed my approach and redirected the course of my studies. He told me that theology is like a house: biblical, and language studies form the foundation, systematics and church history create the walls, and practical theology is the roof of the building. This analogy, though simplified, became the foundation for my decision to conduct my master's research in Old Testament theology.

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I have become profoundly grateful for the exegetical skills that I developed. These skills laid a solid foundation for whatever lies ahead in my theological journey. I have learned not to take shortcuts but rather to prayerfully and, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, seek answers within the text itself. This journey has taught me to persevere, even when every part of me feels ready to give up. It has also deepened my understanding that theological inquiry often requires nuanced thinking, as issues are rarely straightforward or clear-cut.

I chose to study Old Testament theology because many Christians overlook the profound depth and theological richness it offers, reducing it to a series of moralistic stories suitable for children's lessons. The book of Habakkuk captured my attention because it is, in my view, an undervalued text within the Christian community, where it is mostly known for the prophet's declaration of trust in Habakkuk 3:17-19. My decision to focus on the topic of God's righteousness stems from a desire to explore the divine justice and mercy evident throughout the Old Testament, particularly as people, both Christians and non-Christians, often struggle to reconcile God's mercy with His justice. These themes not only enrich our understanding of God's character but also foreshadow the redemptive work of Christ on the cross.

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I am also thankful for my mother and my mother- and father-in-law, whose constant prayers, encouragement, and support have been a source of strength and comfort. Their faith and words of reassurance helped sustain me through this journey.

My deepest thanks also go to my supervisor, Dr Chris van der Walt, for his wisdom, encouragement, and guidance, without which I might have lost sight of this goal long ago. Special thanks to Elma van Wyk for her invaluable assistance in editing and refining the language of my thesis, ensuring clarity and cohesion. I also wish to acknowledge Rev Jacob Pretorius, who first encouraged me to pursue biblical studies, setting me on this rewarding path.

To all who contributed to the realisation of this thesis, I am sincerely grateful.

ABSTRACT

The concept of God's righteousness is a prevailing theme in the book of Habakkuk. It is portrayed through the notions of justice and mercy. A careful exegetical study of the terms "violence" (*ḥāmās*) (1:2, 3, 9; 2:8, 17), "save" (*yāšā*) (1:2), "justice"/"judgement" (*mišpāṭ*) (1:4, 7, 12), "wicked" (*rāšā*) (1:4, 13; 3:13), righteous (*šāddîq*) (1:4, 13; 2:4), "mercy" (*ḥāmāl*) (1:17), "wrath"/"tremble(d)" (*rōḡēz/rāḡāz*) (3:2, 7, 16), and mercy (*rāḥām*) (3:2), as they appear in Habakkuk, may lead to a greater comprehension of the concept of righteousness. Righteousness is often antithetically understood as either justice or mercy. In Habakkuk, however, it becomes clear that both justice and mercy are valid and inseparable expressions of righteousness. God's righteousness as an Old Testament concept must be first understood in its original context apart from Christology before it is assimilated into the faith community. It can then influence the way it is contemporarily perceived.

Key terms

Habakkuk; Justice, Mercy, Righteousness of God

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

PART 1: THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 Title and keywords

1.1.1 Title

God's righteousness in the book of Habakkuk: an exegetical study with a contemporary application.

1.1.2 Keywords

Habakkuk; Justice, Mercy, Righteousness of God

1.1.3 Abstract

The concept of God's righteousness is a prevailing theme in the book of Habakkuk. It is portrayed through the notions of justice and mercy. A careful exegetical study of the terms "violence" (*ḥāmās*) (1:2, 3, 9; 2:8, 17), "save" (*yāšā*) (1:2), "justice"/"judgement" (*mišpāṭ*) (1:4, 7, 12), "wicked" (*rāšā*) (1:4, 13; 3:13), righteous (*šaddîq*) (1:4, 13; 2:4), "mercy" (*ḥāmāl*) (1:17), "wrath"/"tremble(d)" (*rōḡēz/rāḡāz*) (3:2, 7, 16), and mercy (*rāḥām*) (3:2), as they appear in Habakkuk, may lead to a greater comprehension of the concept of righteousness. Righteousness is often antithetically understood as either justice or mercy. In Habakkuk, however, it becomes clear that both justice and mercy are valid and inseparable expressions of righteousness. God's righteousness as an Old Testament concept must be first understood in its original context apart from Christology before it is assimilated into the faith community. It can then influence the way it is contemporarily perceived.

1.2 Background and statement of the problem

1.2.1 Background

The initial conception of this study comes from two contemporary issues that grew into what is now a study of God's righteousness as expressed through His justice and mercy in the book of Habakkuk. The first issue is an "antipathy" towards the Old Testament and a preference for the New Testament within the faith community (Kaiser, 2015:9; Waltke & Yu, 2007:15; Walton, 2017:2). This notion was first introduced by Marcion, who deemed the canon of Scripture only to include a variation of Luke's gospel and some of Paul's letters (Raquel, 2016). He "considered

the Hebrew God [as revealed in the Old Testament] barbaric". When the Old Testament is read, it is interpreted through Christology, and the original intended message is lost (Walton, 2017:5-6). Such a reading or understanding of the text is concerning, as the Old Testament is foundational to both the New Testament and the Christian faith and has intrinsic value apart from Christology.

The Second issue is a misunderstanding of God's righteousness, particularly His justice and mercy (Sproul, 2017:44-45). A false dichotomy is created between these two fundamental aspects of God's righteousness, where either one is favoured above the other. This study, therefore, aims to point out the importance and coherence of justice and mercy as manifestations of God's righteousness within the context of the book of Habakkuk.

1.2.2 Literary study

A professional literary search into the themes of righteousness, justice, and mercy in the book of Habakkuk, conducted by NWU Librarian Ms Hester Lombaard, revealed that recent adequate studies on the topic had not yet been done. Most studies relating to the book of Habakkuk are mainly concerned with the problem of theodicy (cf. Avery, 2015; Cathcart, 2010; Heard, 1997; Nysse, 2017; Scott, 1985). The focus of this study is, however, not on issues relating to theodicy, although it may arise throughout the study, but rather on God's righteousness and how it is portrayed in the book of Habakkuk, specifically through justice and mercy.

1.2.2.1 'Law is Paralysed' (Habakkuk 1:4): Habakkuk's dialogue with God and the language of legal disputation

Cathcart (2010:339-340) asserts that one of the themes, if not the central theme of Habakkuk, is a problem of theodicy. Hyatt (1962:637) states, "Habakkuk is the sceptic among the prophets. He raises the question of theodicy: How can a just God allow the wicked to oppress the righteous"? Although Cathcart (2010:340) does not fully agree that Habakkuk was a sceptic, he proposes that Habakkuk "had more than one theodicy problem" (cf. Scott, 1985:339). Habakkuk appropriately utilises "forensic language" in his dialogue with God, which is reminiscent of a judicial process, to depict his theodicy problem. God is approached as a "magistrate" to grant justice (Cathcart, 2010:342-343). Cathcart (2010:350) suggests that the legal theme employed in the form of lament by Habakkuk is similar to that of Job and Jeremiah. Reading Habakkuk in the light of its use of legal language, aids in the understanding of the book.

1.2.2.1.1 Review

Although theodicy is an important theme in the book of Habakkuk, it should not be considered the only or most important theme. The problem with theodicy is that justice becomes anthropocentric

rather than theocentric. If it is assumed that “God’s character is the ultimate foundation and model of righteousness”, He cannot be judged according to human judgements (Sproul, 2009:13; cf. Ps 97:2; 119:137; Deut 32:4; Isa 45:21; Jer 12:1). The use of legal language in this sense is quite apt, where God is the judge rather than Habakkuk. The question then is not “why the righteous have to suffer”, as an accusation against God, but rather, “how does the suffering of the righteous fit into God’s sovereign will?” (Snyman, 2021:123; cf. Ps 115:3; Isa 55:8-9; Sproul, 2009:47-49).

1.2.2.2 A new approach to Habakkuk ii 4-5a

Scott (1985:339-340) calls to attention Habakkuk’s three questions of theodicy: (1) How can a good God permit unbridled evil to be prevalent in Judah (1:2-4)? When he was made aware of the coming judgement on Judah, the prophet asks, (2) How can a good God abandon His covenant people (1:12)? Finally, he asks (3) how a good God can use the Chaldeans, who are more wicked than Judah (1:13), as His instrument of judgment. He proposes that God does indeed answer all three of the prophet’s theodicy questions. The prophet’s first complaint is a call for justice, which God answers by revealing His intention to punish Judah through the Chaldeans whom He is raising (1:6). Regarding the covenant, it is Judah, not God who breaks it, according to the prophet’s own testimony (1:3-4). God’s judgement is therefore just. Using a *qal wahomer*¹ argument, Scott (1985:340) notes that “if the Judeans are liable to punishment, then the Chaldeans, because of their greater wickedness, are even more liable”. God is just in His judgement, whether against His chosen people or against foreign nations.

1.2.2.2.1 Review

The Old Testament concept of righteousness is often understood in “a comparative moral sense”, meaning that the righteousness of one group (Judah) is measured in comparison to that of their counterparts (the Chaldeans) (Mooney, 2003:1399; cf. 1:13). This perception, however, is misleading. God’s character is the standard by which all righteousness (or unrighteousness) is measured (Mooney, 2003:1400; Whitt, 2011:74; cf. Deut 8:5-6; 11). In this sense, there are no degrees of righteousness, only righteous or unrighteous based solely on conformity to the standard of God’s character. God’s covenant people had become unrighteous and were subject to God’s just punishment (1:3-4, 6). Although the Chaldeans are used as instruments of judgment against God’s covenant people, they are themselves subject to God’s just punishment according to the same standard of His character (Jer. 50:9-11).

¹ “A rule of rabbinic interpretation stating that what is true in a less-important case is even truer in a more-important case” (Patzia & Petrotta, 2002:97)

1.2.2.3 Between text and sermon: Habakkuk 1:2-4, 12 -17, and 2:1-4

Avery (2015:341) contends that there is a paradoxical truth at the heart of the question of theodicy; God's intention is "to act decisively to reverse injustice" and, "God's people will find themselves at the center [sic] of God's action". Through the Chaldeans, Judah "saw their [own] oppressive actions reflected and magnified" (Avery, 2015:343). Judah's need for reconciliation is made evident, even as they called for judgment to fall on the Chaldeans. She maintains that the question is not "why God doesn't do something about evil?", but rather "what does it mean to live faithfully in light of God's expectation that we do something about the evil we help perpetuate" (ibid.).

1.2.2.3.1 Review

God has always expected his covenant people to be righteous and just, but instead, they have become corrupted by injustice (Hab 1:2-4; cf. Deut 6:3-9; Mic 6:8). Avery (2015:342-343) looks at Habakkuk in the perspective of social justice asking what it means "to live faithfully in light of God's expectation that we do something about the evil we help perpetuate"². Although social justice is not the topic of this study, her question does bear practical significance for the contemporary faith community. As image-bearers of God, His covenant people should reflect His righteousness through justice and mercy, but sadly they are overcome by sin and fail to be a good representation of His character among the nations of the earth (cf. Gen 1:27; Deut 14:1-2; 26:16-19).

1.2.2.4 Hearing the children's cries: commentary, deconstruction, ethics, and the book of Habakkuk

Through deconstruction, Heard (1997:79) attempts to "open [the] intended meaning" of Habakkuk, in which the text is brought "into contradiction with itself". He notes that God's response to Habakkuk's first complaint does not offer a resolution, but rather perpetuates the violence that he complains about in the first place (cf. 1:6-11) (Heard, 1997:80). To Habakkuk, God's solution is not one of justice but one of injustice. Through an ethical reading of the book, Heard (1997:86) regards the children as affected by this violence. He sees Habakkuk as a "sad monument" of the Judahite and Chaldean children affected by the international working of justice (Heard, 1997:87).

² Emphasis added by original author.

1.2.2.4.1 Review

Where the hermeneutical position of this study is canonical, Heard (1997) deconstructs the text, reading an ethical message into the text that seems foreign to its original intent and disregards its authority (cf. Childs, 1979:71-83). The text is stripped of its context through deconstruction, and the study becomes eisegesis rather than exegesis. This study will, therefore disregard the research done by Heard (1997).

1.2.2.5 In wrath, remember mercy: A reading of Habakkuk

In Habakkuk's opening statement, "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save?", God is charged with two failures, "a failure to listen and a failure to save" (cf. 1:2) (Nysse, 2017:156). Nysse (2017:157) suggests that Habakkuk's lament is "an act of faith, not of depression, despair, or doubt", and is firmly rooted in a covenantal understanding of God's character (cf. Exod 2:23-25). He points out that the initial lament is not as expected from an oracle, in which "superficial petitions and acts of worship" are exposed (cf. Hos 6:1-4). The injustice described by Habakkuk does not result in a proclamation of judgment. Rather, it reflects petitions challenging God's apparent indifference. Habakkuk seeks intervention from God more than he does "human reform" (Nysse, 2017:158). Habakkuk's indictment against God is that He does not listen and respond (1:2-4). In God's response, Habakkuk is redirected to "see" and "look" (1:5) at what God is doing, indicating that He is not inactive. God reveals His plan to use the Chaldeans as His instrument of judgment, leading to Habakkuk's second complaint, that God "endorse[s] imperial tyranny and exploitation as a remedy for injustice" (Nysse, 2017:159). If the Chaldeans are God's response to Judah's injustice, it is un-godly. Habakkuk, however, is assured that God will also deal with the Chaldeans according to their injustice (cf. 2:2-19). In Habakkuk 3, the prophet reflects on the past, present and future (Nysse, 2017:161). He prays that God will "remember mercy" in his wrath (3:2 cf. Exod 2:23-25). He pleads with God to revive His works of deliverance in His own time. He also awaits future deliverance through the coming judgment upon the Chaldeans.

1.2.2.5.1 Review

Nysse (2017) sees the problem of theodicy in the book of Habakkuk through a covenantal perspective. According to His covenant character, the prophet queries God's (in)activity. Nysse (2017:162) points out that there is a time of judgment and a time of deliverance, and it is impossible to bear the wrath of God without His mercy (3:2). This study overlaps with the current theme in that it considers both God's justice and mercy as expressions of His righteousness.

1.2.2.6 Summary

As discussed above, most of the research done on the book of Habakkuk is centred around the theme of theodicy. Although it is an important theme—one indeed predominant in the book of Habakkuk—adequate studies on the subject have, in fact, already been done. There, however, seems to be very little if any, research done on the theme of God’s righteousness apart from theodicy.

1.2.3 Statement of the problem

This study is concerned with a twofold problem. Firstly, the Old Testament concept of righteousness is traditionally understood to encompass either justice or mercy, not both (Ringgren & Johnson, 2003:243-246). The question is how these two seemingly antithetical ideas can be consolidated to form a unified understanding of righteousness. The book of Habakkuk seems to amalgamate the ideas of justice and mercy, but it is generally overshadowed by the problem of theodicy (Brueggemann, 2019:90; Haak, 1992:148; Redditt, 2008:301). This study seeks to answer a second question of how righteousness as an Old Testament concept can be understood within its original context, apart from Christology, before it is assimilated into the contemporary faith community (Ringgren & Johnson, 2003:244; Walton, 2017:3; 4-6).

1.2.3.1 Key Questions

The following research key questions need to be dealt with:

- How is God’s justice and mercy portrayed in Habakkuk?
- How is Babylon an instrument of God’s righteousness?
- How does Habakkuk perceive God’s righteousness?
- What contemporary applications can be drawn from God’s righteousness through His justice and mercy in the book of Habakkuk?

1.2.3.2 Aim

This research aims to investigate God’s righteousness in the book of Habakkuk through an exegetical study. In a preliminary study of the book, the themes of justice and mercy seem to have a definite bearing on the concept.

1.2.3.3 Objectives

This study will seek to achieve the following objectives:

- Examine how God's justice and mercy are portrayed in Habakkuk.
- Determine how Babylon is an instrument of God's righteousness.
- Determine how Habakkuk perceives God's Righteousness.
- Determine contemporary applications that can be drawn from God's righteousness through His justice and mercy in the book of Habakkuk.

1.2.4 Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that justice and mercy are both integral to God's righteousness and should not be separated from one another. The book of Habakkuk clarifies how God's justice and mercy coexist in the Old Testament.

1.3 Elucidation the problem

1.3.1 Delimitations of the study

The following delimitations will be imposed on this study:

- This study's focus is not on the question of theodicy, although it might arise throughout the study (Achtemeier, 1986:31-32; Haak, 1992:148).
- This study is mainly concerned with חָמָס (*ḥāmās*) (1:2, 3, 9; 2:8, 17), יָשָׁר (*yāšār*) (1:2), מִשְׁפָּט (*mišpāṭ*) (1:4, 7, 12), רָשָׁע (*rāšāʿ*) (1:4, 13; 3:13), צַדִּיק (*šāddīq*) (1:4, 13; 2:4), חָמֶל (*ḥāmāl*) (1:17), רֹגֵז/רֹגֶז (*rōḡēz/rāḡāz*) (3:2, 7, 16), and רָחֵם (*rāḥām*) (3:2) as they relate to God's righteousness in the book of Habakkuk. These terms are used in the text to transmit the ideas of justice and mercy and are, therefore, significant to this study.
- This study will avoid superimposing "a Christological interpretation on the Old Testament" (Brueggemann, 2003:4-5; Childs, 1992:77-78; Goldingay, 2015:13; Walton, 2017:5-6).

1.3.2 Key terms to be investigated

An extensive discussion of the following terms will be done in this study:

- **חָמָס (*hāmās*)** – 1:2, 3, 9; 2:8, 17: The noun חָמָס could be translated as “violence”. According to Swanson (1997:2805), it refers to “the ruining of a thing, or land, or people, with a focus on the violence that accompanies these acts”. There are two levels on which חָמָס occurs (Swart & Van Dam, 1997:177-178). First, within the community, חָמָס refers to social injustice perpetrated by one group against another. The second level of חָמָס refers to international oppression, where a more powerful nation causes a weaker nation to be afflicted.
- **יָשַׁע (*yāšāʿ*)** – 1:2: According to Foerster (1964-:973-974), the hifʿil verb יָשַׁע which could be translated as “save” means “‘to make spacious’ for one who is constricted”. It pertains to the deliverance of the “weak or oppressed,” who would otherwise be completely abandoned (Sawyer & Fabry, 1990:455-456). In the Old Testament, יָשַׁע is predominantly used to denote God's act of rescuing His people from distress (Hubbard, 1997:556).
- **מִשְׁפָּט (*mišpāṭ*)** – 1:4, 7, 12: The noun מִשְׁפָּט can be translated as “justice” or “judgement”, and bears strong “judicial connotations” (Enns, 1996:1142; Johnson, 1998:87; Swanson, 1997:5477). It is often understood as the process in which a dispute is settled, either “between human parties or between God and the Israelites” (Enns, 1996:1142). Culver (1980:949) renders it “rightness rooted in God's character”.
- **רָשָׁע (*rāšāʿ*)** – 1:4, 13; 3:13: The adjective רָשָׁע, which could be translated as “wicked”, “unrighteous”, “evildoer” or “godless person”, describes someone who is “legally not innocent” and who is guilty of “violating a standard” (Ringgren, 2004a:3; Swanson, 1997:8401). Such a person (or nation) is a “transgressor” and in direct opposition to one who is righteous (van Leeuwen, 1997:1261).
- **צַדִּיק (*šāddīq*)** – 1:4, 13; 2:4: The adjective צַדִּיק could be translated as “just, righteous, correct, lawful”, “upright”, “innocent [or] guiltless”, and possibly be understood in two ways (Reimer, 1997:744; Ringgren & Johnson, 2003:243). The first is to conform to a “standard or norm” set by God, who also rewards and punishes under this set standard (Koch, 1997:1051; Stigers,

1980:1046; Swanson, 1997:7407). The second understanding bears a strong soteriological connotation.

- *חָמַל* (*hāmāl*) – 1:17: Possible translations for the Qal verb *חָמַל* include “spare, have compassion”, “be sorry for” “show mercy on” or “take pity on” (Swanson, 1997:2798; Tsevat, 1980:471). It carries a sense of restraint (Butterworth, 1997b:174).
- *רָגַז/רָגַז* (*rōḡēz/rāḡāz*) – 3:2, 7, 16: The noun *רָגַז*, which could be translated as “anger” or “wrath” denotes a sense of “intense displeasure” towards an object (in this case Judah) (Swanson, 1997:8075). The qal verb *רָגַז* could be translated as “tremble(d)” and always implies being “powerfully moved, outwardly or inwardly” (Vanoni, 2004:308). It conveys the notion of “shaking”, due to God’s wrath (Van Pelt & Kaiser, 1997:1045).
- *רָחַם* (*rāḥām*) – 3:2: The Pi’el verb *רָחַם* could be translated as “have compassion on, show mercy, take pity on [or], show love” (Swanson, 1997:8163). It denotes “deep love” and conveys “kindness and concern”, irrespective of the guilt caused by the offence (Coppes, 1980:814).

1.3.3 Paradigmatic approach

- This is an exegetical study with biblical-theological implications: “Biblical theology is integral to the whole process of discerning the meaning of the biblical text...” (Rosner, 2000:3). It is through theological criticism - not disregarding but in conjunction with other forms of criticism - that God becomes primal to an exegetical study (Vanhoozer, 2005:22). “... any sort of responsible biblical theology apart from careful, responsible exegesis” is impossible (Carson, 2000:91). Vanhoozer (2005:19-20), however, asserts that where historical, literary, and socio-political criticism is crucial to an exegetical study of the text, these methods fall short in terms of theological interpretation by ignoring any kind of “divine action”. This study, therefore, acknowledges God’s involvement in the text, within the original contexts that it was given (Abernethy, 2018b:17-18).
- This study is contextual-linguistic: Aubrey (2016:191) contends that exegesis is essentially “an intersection of history, theology, and language”. Linguistics, therefore, plays a vital role in the exegetical task. Although meaning is predominantly transmitted through words, Gorman (2009:106-107) attests that it is only in context that words truly have meaning.

- Even though this study seeks to understand the text in its original context through exegesis, it must have theological and practical value for the faith community (Chou, 2019; Conradie, 2008:3; Klink & Lockett, 2012:20; Waltke & Yu, 2007:17-19).
- This study is done from a canonical hermeneutical approach (Carr, 2010:3; Childs, 1979:72-74; Goldingay, 2015:13; Pereira, 2015).
- This study assumes that the Bible is God's theocentric revelation as contained in the Old and New Testaments (Brueggemann, 2015:8; Walton, 2017:3).

1.4 Value of the study

1.4.1 Theological value

Through exegetical analysis, this study aims to investigate God's righteousness as revealed through His justice and mercy in the book of Habakkuk. The primary objective is not to introduce a new or "unique" perspective, but rather through careful exegesis to explore and expound what the Bible has consistently conveyed on this topic (Fee & Stuart, 2014:22; Gorman, 2009:10-12). Finding the theological value of the text "requires interpretation – a detailed and nuanced assessment of the exegetical possibilities" (Vanhoozer, 1997:7).

1.4.2 Practical value

Stuart (2009:1) proposes that exegesis should always have "genuine practical value...", lest it becomes a mere vain academic pursuit (cf. Waltke & Yu, 2007:19). The intent of this study is therefore, to bear contemporary practical significance whilst remaining faithful to the original context of the text. The "God of the Old Testament", as Dawkins (2006:31) puts it, is often misrepresented by substandard reading and interpretation of the Old Testament (cf. Kaiser, 2015:15-16). Such readings create a false dualism between God's justice and mercy, preferring his love and kindness whilst rejecting his justice altogether. This study seeks to show that such dualism between God's justice and mercy is false and that both these elements are intrinsic expressions of God's righteousness, and must co-exist (Kaiser, 2015:19-21).

PART 2: RESEARCH PLAN

1.5 Research design

The research design for this study is adapted from Stuart's (2009) well-established exegetical method, consisting of the following facets:

1.5.1 Historical Context

1.5.1.1 Authorship

Rooker (2011a:466) attests that there is no compelling evidence that the authorship of Habakkuk should not be ascribed to the prophet whose name the book carries (cf. Childs, 1979:451-452; 455; Heflin, 1985:74-75; Lindblom, 1962:254) Habakkuk is identified as the prophet who saw the vision (1:1) as well as the author of the concluding Psalm (3:1). Apart from these two references, very little is known of the prophet himself (Dillard & Longman, 1994:463; Hays, 2010:322).

1.5.1.2 Dating

Pivotal in dating the book is understanding what is meant by “the Chaldeans” (כַּשְׁדִּים) (1:5-11; 2:5, 8-10) and the historical situation described in the opening verses of the oracle (Rooker, 2011a:465). It is also crucial to determine who is referred to as “the wicked” (רָשָׁע/rā·šā') (1:4); whether Judah or Assyria (Childs, 1979:448-450). Maintaining that the wicked refers to Assyria may be a logical inference, but a shaky one. There is no further mention of Assyria, and the message of God’s judgment is entirely lost upon His covenant people. Additionally, it is unlikely that the phrase “the law becomes slack” (1:4) pertains to the Assyrians, as this idiom is more appropriately suited to describe the “internal corruption within Judah”. (Dillard & Longman, 1994:466). Although there is some debate regarding the date of Habakkuk, (Achtemeier, 1986), Baker (1988:42-43), Shenton (2007:8), Barker and Bailey (1999:259-260), Rooker (2011a:465-466), Bruckner (2012:295-296), and Matthews (2012:134), among others, date it to the time of the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598 BC). Such dating would make him a contemporary of Nahum, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah. The internal evidence of the text (and lack of positive evidence for other propositions) best suits such a dating (Harrison, 1969:932-937; Robertson, 1990:34-38).

Habakkuk was a prophet in the southern kingdom of Judah during the time in which the Neo-Babylonian empire was growing as a political power under the leadership of Nabopolassar around 625 BC (Baker, 1988:42-43). The fall of Nineveh, Assyria’s capital, in 612 BC and Nebuchadnezzar’s victory over Egypt and Assyria in alliance with the Medes at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC added to its political dominance (cf. Jer 46:2). From chapter 2 it can be discerned that the prophet was familiar with the presence of the Chaldeans in Judah after 605, probably up to 598 (Matthews, 2012:134-135).

1.5.2 Literary Context

According to its distinctive literary aspects, House (1990:233-234) proposes that Habakkuk may very well be categorised in its own “special category”, adopting “a unique narrative system”.

Despite its uniqueness, Thomas (2018:19) points out that it is framed within the greater canonical structure of the Minor Prophets. Significant scholarly work has been done to attest that the twelve prophets have been “arranged as a composite book” (Dietrich, 2012; House, 1990:97; Nogalski, 1993:217; Redditt & Scharf, 2003:325). House (1990:72) suggests that the Twelve be divided into three groups; sin (Hosea – Micah), punishment (Nahum – Zephaniah), and restoration (Haggai – Malachi). Habakkuk is central to the punishment section, emphasising God’s judgement both upon foreign nations as well as upon His covenant people (House, 1990:91). Granted that there are traces of redaction throughout the Minor Prophets, Thomas (2018:22-23) notes that the message of Habakkuk must not be understood only as a segment of the larger meta-narrative, but first be understood distinctively before it is assimilated into the larger corpus.

1.5.3 Form

Habakkuk is a prophetic book; delineating the “oracle” or “prophetic announcement” (אָפּטַק /*maśśā*(')) which the prophet (נָבִיא/*nābī*(')) Habakkuk saw (חָזַק/*hāzā*(*h*)) (Swanson, 1997:5363). Müller (1998:23) attests that אָפּטַק in this sense refers to a proclamation of calamity “directed against foreign nations [and] Judah...”. In struggling with the notion that God is raising the Neo-Babylonian empire, the prophet gains a new perspective of God’s righteousness (Bruckner, 2020:671).

The content of the oracle is presented in the form of a dialogue between the prophet and God (1:2-2:20) and concluded with a prayer (תְּפִלָּה/*tēpīllā*(*h*)) (3:1-19). Its structure is in the form of a dialogue (1:2-2:5), making it unique among the prophets; “Instead of speaking to the people for God, Habakkuk spoke to God for the people” (Barker & Bailey, 1999:245). The prayer is a psalm of “lament or petition” (Baker, 1988:67; Thomas, 2018:143; cf. Ps 17:1; 86:1; 90:1; 102:1; 142:1). Roberts (1991:130) notes that “shigionoth” (שִׁיגִיּוֹת/*shīgīō’nōth*) (3:1) is the plural form of “shiggaion” (שִׁיגְגָיוֹן/*šiggāywōn*) in Psalm 7:1, which ostensibly refers to lament or prayer in sung form (cf. Matthews, 2012:136). This also agrees with the subscript in which it is directed to “the director of music” (מְנַצֵּחַ/*mēnāṣṣēh*) with stringed instruments (Swanson, 1997:4983). Bruckner (2012:298) suggests that the psalm in Habakkuk 3 is a response to the dialogue of the preceding chapters. Rooker (2011a:466) claims that there is a strong literary basis for the unity of Habakkuk 3 and Habakkuk 1-2. He notes the consistency in the use of language and “lexical links” between the sections. 3:2 and 3:16 which refer to the vision of 2:1-4. In the Psalm, God’s wrath, depicted in 1:12-17 is satisfied. Both sections also portray a soteriological expectation (2:1-5; 3:2,16).

1.5.4 Structure

The structure of the book begins with a dialogue between the prophet Habakkuk and God (1:2-2:5), leading into a set of five “woes” – laments (2:6-20), and finally a psalm (3:1-19). Scholars generally agree on the book’s structure (Childs, 1979:448). This study will adopt an adapted version of the structure proposed by Snyman (2020:53-54) which suits its specific purpose: a discussion of God’s righteousness through justice and mercy:

- (i) The Title (1:1)
- (ii) Dialogue between the prophet and God (1:2-2:20)
 - i. Habakkuk’s first complaint: God is indifferent (1:2-4)
 - ii. God’s first response: God is actively involved (1:5-11)
 - iii. Habakkuk’s second complaint: God’s justice is unlike human justice (1:12-17; 2:1)
 - (a) God is eternal (1:12)
 - (b) Why is God silent? (1:13)
 - (c) The wicked destroy nations without mercy (1:14-17)
 - iv. God’s second response: God reveals what He is about to do (2:2-20)
 - (a) God gives a vision (2:2)
 - (b) God’s appointed time (2:3)
 - (c) The righteous are marked by faith, the proud are marked by death (2:4-5)
 - (d) Woe(s) to the wicked! (2:6-20)
- (iii) Habakkuk’s prayer of praise (3:1-19)
 - (e) Prayer title (3:1)
 - (f) Habakkuk’s plea for mercy (3:2)
 - (g) Theophany (3:3-15)
 - (h) Habakkuk’s response (3:16-19a)
 - (i) Subscript (3:19b)

1.6 Research methodology

1.6.1 Data

This study is primarily textual and therefore does not hold any ethical risk because no people are involved in the conducting of the the research.

1.6.2 Tools

The tools used for this study will include (but are not limited to) the following literature:

- The Hebrew Bible: The Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) will be utilised as the source text.

- Bible Backgrounds: Bible backgrounds will be used to study the historical and social context and background of the text.
- Lexicons: The use of lexicons will provide insight into translation options for specific Hebrew words.
- Theological Dictionaries: Theological dictionaries will be used to provide theological meaning for words and concepts within their context.
- Commentaries: Because this is not the first study to be done on the book of Habakkuk (or the Bible in general), the input of other scholars through commentaries will be used for additional insight.

1.6.3 Facets

The following 6 facets adapted from Stuart (2009) will guide the exegetical process of this study:

- Overview: This study is concerned with the book of Habakkuk as a whole, with a particular interest in the sections that address God's righteousness (1:2-4, 7, 9, 12, 13, 17; 2:4, 8; 3:2, 7, 13, 16). The theological motif of this study is God's righteousness – His justice and mercy – which serves as the primary focus and guiding framework of this research work.
- Context: This study is conducted within the historical and literary contexts of the book of Habakkuk, both of which are crucial for shaping the interpretation of the text as a whole (Smith, 2016:133). While the general background – including issues of authorship, date, and audience – is of lesser significance to this research, it will be briefly addressed for context.
- Structure: The exegetical process will follow the natural flow of the book, allowing it to "speak for itself" (Stuart, 2009:15). The book will be interpreted as a whole to discover its full meaning.
- Language: Throughout this study, key semantic issues in the text will be addressed as they arise. Widder (2016b:135-137) identifies three primary challenges in studying the Old Testament text. The first challenge is that the Hebrew language of the Old Testament was "compiled over a thousand-year period," a span of time during which significant linguistic changes likely occurred. A second issue is that the text contains very few descriptive details concerning the "everyday life" of the Israelites. A third challenge is that the language of the Old Testament is no longer spoken as a native tongue, presenting additional difficulties for

interpretation. This study will utilise linguistic and semantic analysis to explore God's righteousness through his justice and mercy in the book of Habakkuk.

- Revelation: This study recognises that God (His speech and His acts) is revealed through the text (Goldingay, 2003:333). Schultz (2018:57) asserts that the "goal of all biblical study should be to hear the voice of God in the written text of Scripture".
- Integration: As truths are discovered, they must be assimilated into the larger corpus of biblical and theological (dogmatic) truth (Stuart, 2009:22).
- Summary and conclusion: Once all the other facets have been exhausted, a final summary and conclusion of the truths discovered in the study, will be presented.

1.7 Chapter division

The chapter divisions in this study correspond to the previously outlined facets, providing a structured framework for examining the key questions and objectives. Chapters 2 and 3 constitute the core of the research, forming the foundation upon which the first three key questions and objectives are addressed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 addresses the fourth key question of the study, exploring the contemporary application of the findings. Chapter 6 presents the conclusion of the study.

This study will be divided into the following chapters:

1.7.1 Chapter 1: Introduction (28 November 2022)

1.7.2 Chapter 2: Overview and Context of Habakkuk (31 July 2023)

1.7.3 Chapter 3: Structure and Language (30 September 2024)

1.7.4 Chapter 4: Revelation and Integration (14 October 2024)

1.7.5 Chapter 5: Synthesis (21 October 2024)

1.7.6 Chapter 6: Conclusion (1 November 2024)

CHAPTER 2 OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT OF HABAKKUK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the book of Habakkuk, discussing its historical and literary contexts. The historical context will examine the identity of the prophet Habakkuk, the identity of the wicked, the identity of the Chaldeans, and the dating of the book. The literary context will explore Habakkuk's placement within the Minor Prophets, and the genre of the book. Understanding these contexts offer greater insights into the message of God's righteousness in the book.

2.2 Overview

The book of Habakkuk depicts the prophet's struggle to comprehend God's righteousness. It is distinct from other prophetic books in that it presents "the prophet's challenge to God rather than God's challenge to his people" (Clark & Hatton, 1989:x). Through dialogue (1:1-4, 5-11, 12-17; 2:1-5), the prophet brings the injustice around him before God and questions His apparent inactivity towards the situation. However, the prophet is shocked when he learns that God is not indifferent but is, in fact, raising up the Chaldeans (Babylonians) as instruments of His divine justice. This reference to the Chaldeans (1:6) is one of the few indications of the book's historical context, foreshadowing the Babylonian invasion of Judah and the eventual destruction of Jerusalem (Hubbard & Dearman, 2018:363).

The book can be divided into three sections: (1) a dialogue between the prophet and God, which sets the tone of the book (1:2-2:5); (2) a set of five woe oracles (2:6-20); and (3) a psalm of praise (3:1-19). At the heart of the book is the prophet's profound challenge to understand He wrestles with the question of how a righteous God can "use the worst people to punish those who, by comparison, are not so bad"(Fee & Hubbard, 2011:473). This theme of God's righteousness permeates the book (1:2-4, 7, 9, 12, 13, 17; 2:4, 8; 3:2, 7, 13, 16).

2.3 Historical Context

Determining the historical background of Habakkuk is a complex task. The prophet's complaint clearly indicates a state of desperation (1:2-4) and could plausibly align with various historical contexts (Renz, 2021:207). Establishing the precise historical context of the book or the life of the prophet may therefore prove to be a precarious task, whether relying on internal evidence or external sources. Unlike other prophetic books (Isa, Jer, Ezek, Hos, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Mic, Zeph, Hag, Zech), Habakkuk lacks a historical superscription that connects it to a specific king or historical setting (Hays, 2010:322; Snyman, 2020:45). Furthermore, there is no mention of the

prophet's father's name, his place of origin, or his life circumstances, complicating efforts to situate the book within a defined historical context. Consequently, significant scholarly debate has emerged regarding the exact historical setting of Habakkuk (Thomas, 2018:24-29). However, there is a vital historical reference to the Chaldeans (כַּשְׁדִּים/*kāšdīm*) (1:6), which pertains to the Neo-Babylonian empire and places it within a specific (though not necessarily exact) timeframe (Snyman, 2020:46-47).

2.3.1 The Prophet

The subscript of the book (1:1) attributes its content to the prophet (נָבִיא/*nābī*) Habakkuk, and the psalm in 3:1 is also ascribed to him. However, it is peculiar that he is called a prophet, considering that the book does not adhere the conventional prophetic formula. Instead of presenting “the word of the Lord” to the people as is customary to other prophets (cf. Isa 1:1-2; Jer 1:1-4; Ezek 2:1-4; Hos 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Mic 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1; Mal 1:1), the book opens with a complaint directed toward God. This prompts the question of why Habakkuk is called a prophet, considering that God has historically spoke through his prophets (2 Kgs 21:10; Ezek 38:17; Zech 7:7; Hos 6:5; Heb 1:1; Luke 1:70). Peckham (2011:209) posits that “the biblical concept of a true prophet refers to one divinely authorized [sic] to speak for God” (Jer 15:19).

Hebrew prophets urged God's people to live according to His precepts, and reminded them of their covenant³ with Him (Matthews, 2012:19). They also predicted the disciplinary consequences of violating the stipulations of that covenant. Judgement oracles typically include “cataclysmic, cosmic, and universal dimensions” (VanGemeren, 2011:378). In this sense, Habakkuk fulfils the role of a classic Hebrew prophet (1:12; 2:14, 16, 17, 20; 3:2, 3-16). Habakkuk explicitly expresses his frustration with the situation, stating: “Destruction and violence are before me”, “strife and contention arise”, “the law becomes slack”, and “justice never prevails” (1:3-4). The moral climate depicted in Habakkuk aligns with the historical context described in Jeremiah. Jeremiah 7:1-31 provides a detailed description of the wickedness and injustice that the prophet complains about in 1:2-4. As a result, God raises the Chaldeans as his divine instrument of judgement against the injustice of his people (5-11; cf. Jer 25:8-11; 2 Kgs 24:1-7; 13-17). In turn, Jeremiah 50-51 offers a detailed depiction of God's judgement against the Chaldeans, as proclaimed in Habakkuk 2.

³ Through the covenant, Yahweh establishes the framework that enables a relationship with Him (cf. Gen 17:7; Exod 6:7; Jer 7:23; 30:22; 31:33). As Berry (1915:728) puts it: “the covenant of God with men is a Divine ordinance, with signs and pledges on God's part, and with promises for human obedience and penalties for disobedience”. The stipulations of the covenant, as outlined in the law, govern Yahweh's relationship with His people (cf. Gen 15:1-21; Exod 19:5; Deut 4:13).

2.3.1.1 The Name Habakkuk

The name Habakkuk, derived from the root הִבַּק (*hābaq*), means to “embrace” (Patterson, 2003:111). This interpretation has led some scholars to associate Habakkuk with the Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4:16, to whom Elisha prophesied, “At this season, in due time, you shall embrace a son” (Patterson, 2003:111; Rooker, 2011a:465). While this connection is supported by Jewish tradition, it relies on scant evidence and does not align with the book’s historical context. Reiser (1904:5ff) posits that the prophet received an education in Nineveh, suggesting a connection between his name and the Assyrian term “*hambaququ*”, which refers to a garden plant. However, this association is highly speculative due to insufficient internal evidence (Harrison, 1969:931).

It is not surprising that the prophet has an Akkadian name, since it was the language spoken in Mesopotamia since 3000 BCE (Tuell, 2016:54). Unlike other prophets such as Elijah, Samuel, and Isaiah, Habakkuk’s name does not contribute meaningfully to the interpretation of the book or provide further insight into his life or ministry (Thomas, 2018:12). Some scholars suggest that Habakkuk may be the “watchman” referred to in Isaiah 21:6, as indicated in 2:1, where he states he “will stand at [his] watchpost” (Snyman, 2020:46).

Habakkuk is mentioned by name in Bel and the Dragon vv. 33-39 and is also identified as a Levite son of a man named Jesus (Goldingay, 2009:48). This identification has been interpreted by some as a rationale for his use of musical terms and notation in the text (Rooker, 2011a:465; 3:3, 9, 13, 19). However, the historical value of these deuterocanonical traditions is highly questionable, likely stemming from late Midrashic speculation (Roberts, 1991:86). In the pseudepigraphic work *Lives of the Prophets*, Habakkuk is identified as a descendant of the tribe of Simeon (Smith, 1984:93), but this detail lacks significance in establishing the prophet’s identity as it does not conform to the broader narrative of the Old Testament (Thomas, 2018:12).

Based on the style and vocabulary employed in the book, Habakkuk may have been an official “musician-prophet” in the temple (Snyman, 2020:45-46; cf. 1 Chr 25:1-8). The use of (בְּנִינֹתַי/n^eḡîṇā(h)) “with my stringed instruments” implies Levitical involvement and participation in temple worship. However, due to the lack of further contextual information within the text, we cannot draw definitive conclusions (Robertson, 1990:135). It is reasonable to conclude, though, that the prophet possessed an understanding of Israel’s liturgical forms and that some aspect of his prophetic ministry likely occurred within the temple setting (Roberts, 1991:87).

2.3.2 The Wicked

The identity of the wicked (רָשָׁע/*rāšā'*)⁴ (1:4, 13; 3:13) is crucial for understanding the historical context of the book (Thomas, 2018:26). Scholars have proposed two primary interpretations regarding the identity of the wicked (Bullock, 2007:212). The first view, which Tuell (2016:57) argues is most natural, sees “the wicked” in 1:4 as unjust members within Judah itself. Their conduct, characterised by destruction (שָׁדָד/*šōḏḏ*) and violence (חָמָאס/*hāmās*)⁵ (1:3), contributes to “social disorder within Judah” (Bullock, 2007:212-213). The use of “destruction” (שָׁדָד), “violence” (חָמָאס), “strife” (מַדּוֹן/*māḏōn*), and “contention” (רִיב/*rīb*) suggests a general moral degeneration within the Judahite society (Patterson, 2003:132-133; cf. Jer 6:7; 20:8; Ezek 45:9; Zeph 3:4; Ps 55:9). This situation is particularly troubling given God's call for His covenant people to be distinct from other nations and to embody holiness (Lev 19). Instead, they have abandoned His rule and become morally corrupt, mirroring the nations around them (Jer 7:9). In response to this injustice, God raises up the Chaldeans to chastise his people (1:5-11).

Baker (1988:44-45) contends that the identity of “the wicked” in 1:4 cannot be equated with that in 1:13. If the wicked in 1:4 were a foreign oppressor, such as Assyria or Egypt, then the righteous (צַדִּיק/*šāddīq*) in both 1:4 and 1:13 would logically refer to the whole of Judah. While it makes sense for the prophet to implore God to punish a foreign oppressor (1:2-4), his moral objection to their punishment in 1:13 is less coherent since they belong to a pagan nation. A more fitting interpretation is that the wicked in 1:4 refers to individuals within Judah, while the wicked in 1:13 refers specifically to the Chaldeans sent by God as an instrument of punishment. This scenario is best situated against the backdrop of Jehoiakim's reign (Thomas, 2018:25; 2 Kgs 23:36-24:6; 2 Chr 36:5-8). Although this view offers a coherent reading of the text, it is not without any difficulties. In 1:5-6, the Chaldean invasion is predicted as a future event, while in 1:7-11, it is described as an immediate reality (Childs, 1979:449). This creates a temporal gap between these verses, wherein the Chaldean oppression is initially presented as unexperienced and later described as fully known. If 1:5 is a prophetic foretelling, it could not have been after 605 BC when Babylon defeated Egypt at Carchemish and became “the dominant world power” (Barker & Bailey, 1999:250; Matthews, 2012:134-135). Childs (1979:449) notes that “it is difficult to maintain this

⁴ See 3.4.3.4

⁵ See 3.4.3.1

same pre-exilic dating for the rest of the book”, in which Judah’s injustice is not mentioned and the focus is entirely “on the destruction of the nations”.

In light of these challenges, some scholars have proposed that “the wicked” in 1:4 refers to an external foreign nation rather than those within Judah (Bullock, 2007:213). While some have suggested the Chaldeans to be the wicked, this interpretation is logically inconsistent with the rest of the book, as they are depicted as the agents of punishment (1:6) against the wicked of 1:4 (cf. Lindblom, 1962:254). Budde (1983:386-393) highlighted this inconsistency, proposing that the wicked in both 1:2-4 and 1:12-2:4 should be identified as Assyria (cf. Isa 10:5). This interpretation requires altering the historical sequence of the book by repositioning 1:5-11 after 2:4 to fit his argument. However, this approach is problematic, as rearranging the order of the texts undermines the integrity of its final canonical form (Haydon & Schreiner, 2016:41; Merrill, 2011:145). Arbitrarily changing the canonical structure of the text to support a particular argument usurps the text of its intrinsic objectivity and authority (Peckham, 2011:211).

Another option is that the wicked in 1:12-17 refers to Egypt between 608-605 BC. However, identifying the wicked in 1:4 as either Assyria or Egypt is problematic, as neither is explicitly mentioned in the text of Habakkuk (Anderson, 2001:24; Childs, 1979:449). Moreover, If the wicked in 1:4 is an external reference, the implications are historical and theological, as the message would then shift from being a critique of God’s covenant people to a message aimed solely at foreign nations. Yet, the book addresses both God’s people and foreign nations (Bruckner, 2012:294; 2:20; cf. Exod 9:16; Num 14:21; Isa 11:9). God detests wickedness, regardless of whether it is found among His own people or foreign nations (cf. Ps 5:4-5; 11:5; Zech 8:17; Isa 5:20; Prov 15:9). Thus, ethnicity⁶ cannot serve as the basis for determining who is deemed “righteous” (1:4).

To gain a deeper understanding of the identity of the wicked, it is essential to examine the contrast between the prophet’s perception and God’s perception. Key to understanding this distinction is the difference between “nations” (גוֹי/gôy) (1:5, 6, 17; 2:5, 8; 3:6, 12) and “people” (עַם/’ām) (2:5, 8, 10, 13; 3:13, 16). Cody (1964:1-5) asserts that עַם broadly refers to God’s “Chosen People” (covenant people) and that the quasi-synonym גוֹי typically refers to “heathen nations”. However, he stresses the need for a more nuanced approach in interpreting עַם and גוֹי (cf. Hulst, 1997:915-

⁶ Ethnicity, especially relating to the covenant, is an important aspect to consider although it is not within the scope of this study to discuss it fully. See discussion below.

919). Throughout the text, there is a development in the use of גוֹי. The prophet is urged to “look at the nations” (1:5), in other words, to look not only at God’s chosen covenant people, but to see that God is actively engaged in a broader, more significant work throughout the world among all the nations. In 1:6 גוֹי refers to the Chaldeans whom God uses as His sovereign means of punishment against the wicked Judeans (cf. 1:2-4). As the text progresses, גוֹי (1:17; 2:5, 8) is used to refer to nations that are oppressed by the wicked (Chaldeans), and finally in the context of God’s wrath/anger (רֹגֶז/rōḡēz)⁷ against the nations (3:6, 12; cf. 3:2-15). In response to Habakkuk’s complaint that the wicked oppress nations (1:17) without mercy (חַמָּל/hāmāl)⁸, God acknowledges that He sees the injustice inflicted by the wicked upon the nations and will administer punishment accordingly (cf. 2:4-19). In Chapter 3, the nations “tremble” (3:6) and are “trampled” (3:12) as a response to God’s anger/wrath. Consequently, God’s righteousness is not limited to His covenant people (עַם) or even to the Chaldeans; rather, it extends to all the nations of the earth.

Similarly, there is also a progression in the use of עַם in the text. עַם is used interchangeably with רֹגֶז in 2:5 and 2:8; in 2:5 it refers to the people who are oppressed by the wicked, while in 2:8, 2:8, it denotes the survivors of those “plundered” by the wicked, who will repay them for the “violence” and “bloodshed” they have inflicted. In 2:10 and 2:13, עַם again refers to those afflicted by the wicked, and in 3:13, it is used in a covenantal sense, depicting God’s act of saving (יַעֲשֶׂה/yēšā)⁹ His people. In 3:16, עַם refers to the wicked (Chaldeans), upon whom the prophet awaits the execution of God’s judgment.

Renz (2021:25-26) maintains that the text remains ambiguous regarding whether “the wicked” refers to a local or foreign oppressor, rendering any conclusions as speculative. Injustice emerges as a universal theme that progresses from a “local” context (1:2-4) to an “international” context (1:5-11) and ultimately to a “cosmic level” (1:12-17) (Dangl, 2001:135). Although Habakkuk is a historical book, in the sense that it did actually take place at a certain point in history, it is not historical in the sense of reporting exact facts and dates. Instead, the historical narrative serves

⁷ See 3.4.3.7

⁸ See 3.4.3.6

⁹ See 3.4.3.2

a secondary role to the overarching theological message regarding God's righteousness. In addressing this issue, it is imperative to consider the genre of the text. Abernethy (2018a:44) asserts that the various genres of the Old Testament offer distinct interpretive "windows... into various dimensions of reality". As a prophetic book, it must be interpreted accordingly, emphasising its value as prophetic literature rather than imposing a strictly historical reading of the text.

2.3.3 The Chaldeans

In the book of Habakkuk, the term "the Chaldeans" (כַּשְׁדִּים/*kāšdīm*) (1:6) appears only once. This reference is critical for understanding the historical context of the text, as the majority of biblical references to the Chaldeans relate to their role in the destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile of the Jewish people (Crouser, 2016; Thomas, 2018:24; cf. 2 Kgs 24:2; 25:4, 5, 10, 13; Jer 21:4, 9; 22:25; 32:4-5, 24-25, 28-29, 43; 37:9; 38:18; 39:8; 38:23). *Kāšdīm* occurs 70 times throughout the scriptures, always referring to the Chaldeans or Babylonians (Robertson, 1990:34). However, various alternate interpretations have emerged regarding its meaning in Habakkuk, including "the Persians, the Greeks, the Selucids [sic], a mythological demonic power, and an unidentified conquering nation" (Fohrer, 1968:454-455; Robertson, 1990:34). Notably, Duhm (1906) proposed an emendation of the text from *Kasdim* to "*Kittim*", referring to the Greeks under Alexander the Great (Fohrer, 1968:455). This reading is based on a commentary produced by the Qumran community "in which they interpreted it as relating to events of their own day", equating "the Babylonians" with the Romans who were the main political power of their time (Goldingay, 2009:50).

In 1:6, God reveals that he is "raising up" (קוּם/*qûm*) the Babylonians, suggesting that they have not yet reached the pinnacle of their power (Robertson, 1990:34). This places it before the seventh century (609-598 BC), during Jehoiakim's reign, making the prophet a contemporary of Jeremiah (Achtemeier, 1986:32; Harrison, 1969:932-937; Robertson, 1990:34-38). Renz (2021:207-208), allows this date, but only for 1:5-11, which he believes "is likely a later, polemic rewriting of an earlier prophecy such as Jeremiah 5:15-17". He sees chapters one and two as "a prophecy that responds to the effects of the fulfilment [sic] of an earlier oracle", suggesting that the Babylonians "are a direct as well as an indirect cause of the violation of the Torah within Judah", thus placing the book in a time when Babylonian oppression was already exercised over Judah. Furthermore, he states that the text mentions a protagonist, indicating a broader concern with the principle of injustice rather than simply focusing on unjust people (Renz, 2021:209).

While Renz (2021:ibid.) makes a compelling argument for the book's emphasis on injustice as a general principle, he underestimates the significance of the text for Judahite society. His

methodology may also be perceived as overreaching, as there is no explicit textual evidence to support the notion that 1:5-11 is a previous prophecy. As Carson (1996:132) puts it, "... a little speculative reconstruction of the flow of history is surely allowable if we are attempting to fill in some of the lacunae left by insufficient evidence", "but", he adds, "it is methodologically indefensible to use those speculations to undermine large parts of the only evidence we have". "... it is a fallacy to think that speculative reconstructions have any force in overturning the evidence".

2.3.4 Dating

After evaluating the various scholarly perspectives, it is essential to avoid unsubstantiated speculation and to remain anchored in the text itself. What we can affirm from the text is that the book is a prophecy received by the prophet Habakkuk (1:1; 3:1), that he is faced with a crisis (1:2-4), and that God is raising up the Babylonians (1:6). This places the book somewhere between 609-598 BC, during the reign of Jehoiakim, and makes Habakkuk a contemporary of Jeremiah.

While determining the historical setting as a key aspect of exegesis, it should not be the main focus. Instead, it should serve as an aid to the theological interpretation of the book. Childs (1979:454-455) argues that the theological message of the book is not correctly understood by "...establish[ing] a time-frame", but rather by understanding it within the broader biblical canon. Habakkuk's message should thus not be confined to a single historical context, as it is a "universal and timeless... witness to every age" (Achtemeier, 1986:23; cf. VanGemeren, 2011:378).

Thus, this study approaches the historical context of the book as a framework that supports the interpretation of the book's theological message and helps prevent misinterpretation (Stuart, 2009:52-53). This study is, first and foremost, theological rather than purely historical (Waltke & Yu, 2007:40).

2.4 Literary Context

Habakkuk is situated chronologically between Nahum and Zephaniah, in a period following the Assyrian captivity, with a strong emphasis on the emerging Chaldean empire (Redditt, 2012:596-597). The first two chapters are introduced as an "oracle" (נִצְוָה/*māššā*) that the prophet "saw" (חָזַק/*hāzā(h)*) (1:1), structured as a dialogue between Habakkuk and God. The flow of the text alternates between the prophet's questions and God's responses, reflecting a tension between the prophet's perception of God's apparent inactivity (1:1-4, 12-17) and God's revealed actions (1:5-11; 2:1-5). Initially, the prophet's concerns are internal, focusing on local injustice (1:2-4), but the revelation that God is "raising up" the Chaldeans as His instrument of judgment (1:6) expands

the scope to a broader, international scale (1:5-11). In 2:20, the concern of the book shifts beyond the Chaldeans to a cosmic scale, encompassing “all the earth”. As the scope grows wider throughout the book, the prophet grows in perspective and gains greater insight into God’s righteousness.

Chapter 3 marks a stylistic shift from dialogue to prayer (תפלה/*t^epillā(h)*), written in the form of a psalm and attributed to the prophet (3:1) (Patterson, 2003:205). This shift in style highlights the prophet’s transition from a posture of inquisition to one of praise focusing entirely on God and His sovereign activity. The book’s central message, concerned with God’s righteousness and its implications for the world, also forms part of the broader metanarrative of the “Book of the Twelve” (Minor Prophets), as recognised in Jewish tradition (Firth & Melton, 2022:3; Rooker, 2011a:469-470). To fully appreciate the literary context of Habakkuk, it is essential to explore its genres and its function within the collection of the Minor Prophets.

2.4.1 Habakkuk within the Minor Prophets

Habakkuk occupies a crucial position within the canonical structure of the Minor Prophets, narrating God’s judgment both on foreign nations and upon His own people (House, 1990:72, 91). This is purposely (divinely) arranged as part of a broader metanarrative that progresses through sin (Hosea–Micah), punishment (Nahum–Zephaniah), and restoration (Haggai–Malachi) (Dietrich, 2012; Nogalski, 1993:218; Redditt & Scharf, 2003:325). Its theological focus on God’s righteousness is integral to the larger canonical framework. Tuell (2016:6-7) argues that Nahum and Habakkuk were probably edited together to form a unified microstructure. Where Nahum begins with a psalm in which God is portrayed as a warrior (Nah 1:2-11), Habakkuk concludes with a similar psalm (3:1-19), which ends with a psalm reinforcing this warrior image (Redditt, 2008:198-199). Both books also address the theme of the “end” (Nah 1:8-9; Hab 2:3; cf. Zeph 1:18; Amos 8:2) which serves as a unifying motif.

Additionally, both Nahum and Habakkuk are introduced with oracles (נִצְּנָה/*māššā’*) that the prophets received (Tuell, 2016:62; Nah 1:1; Hab 1:1). While Nahum refers to the “vision” (חִזְיוֹן/*hāzôn*) he received, Habakkuk describes the oracle which he saw (חִזְיוֹן/*hāzā(h)*), and both books contain judgments against foreign nations. However, Thomas (2018:21) cautions that overstating the coherence of the Minor Prophets as a unified book, and reading them solely as part of the “Book of the Twelve”, risks obscuring the unique theological message of each individual text (cf. Firth & Melton, 2022:5). This study, therefore, approaches Habakkuk as a distinct book, preserving its particular message while acknowledging the thematic connections that run through the broader corpus of the Minor Prophets.

2.4.2 Genre

According to Abernethy (2018a:43-45), the term "genre" is often misconstrued as a mere "category" or classification. However, when examining the biblical text, such a simplistic interpretation of genre proves insufficient for the process of exegesis. In written communication, genre plays a crucial role in the interaction between "author, text, and reader". Recognising the distinct functions of specific genres within the communication process is essential, especially in biblical texts where the reader no longer has direct access to the author. Consequently, the author carefully selects the form of communication that will effectively convey the desired message or content (Ricoeur, 1976:25-34). These communicative forms constitute the genre of a text. Although genres provide a "prototypical form" for communication, every author skilfully adapts a genre to effectively express his desired message or content (Wright, 2010:260-285). Genre also plays a significant role in shaping the structure of the text.

To fully appreciate the religious and social context in which ancient Israel, and specifically Habakkuk, operated, one must carefully consider the genre or genres employed (Barton, 1992:839). It is common for Old Testament books or sections to encompass multiple genres and subgenres (Gerstenberger, 2003:72). This is also true for Habakkuk, where various genres are combined to form the distinct rhetoric of the book (Bruckner, 2012:295). While Habakkuk is generally classified as a prophetic book based on its superscription in 1:1 and 3:1, and its message relating to righteousness (1:1-4, 7, 12, 13, 17; 2:4; 3:2; 3:3-16), it also incorporates elements of poetry and wisdom literature.

Wilson (1997:1281) asserts that a key aspect of wisdom literature is its exploration of whether human beings can truly "discover the orderly purpose of God in the universe". The entire book of Habakkuk is a quest to answer this question. Rooker (2011b:498) adds that biblical wisdom literature "focus[es] on the established moral and social code of conduct as well as the perennial struggle with the question of good versus evil in the world". Throughout the book the prophet wrestles with the notions of good and evil, which are depicted through the contrasting ideas of "justice" and "judgment" (מִשְׁפָּט) (1:4, 7, 12), "wrath" (רָגַז) (3:2) and "mercy" (רַחֵם/רַחֲמֵי) (1:17; 3:2), and "the wicked" (רָשָׁע) versus "the righteous" (צַדִּיק) (1:4, 13; 2:4; 3:13)¹⁰. These thematic contrasts are vital for understanding the book's portrayal of God's righteousness.

¹⁰ The translation of the Hebrew terms is based on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

The various genres employed in Habakkuk underscore the prophet's theological journey from complaint to praise. Among these different genres are laments in the form of "dialogical complaint" (1:1-4, 12-17), an oracle of judgment (1:5-11), an oracle of response (2:2-4), woe oracles (2:6-20), and a psalm, which consists of a theophany (3:1-16) followed by a "psalm of trust" (3:17-19) (Bruckner, 2012:295). Snyman (2020:53-54) provides a useful structure for tracing these themes as they relate to the exploration of God's righteousness in Habakkuk:

The Title (1:1)

Dialogue between the prophet and God (1:2-2:20)

- v. Habakkuk's first complaint: God is indifferent (1:2-4)
- vi. God's first response: God is actively involved (1:5-11)
- vii. Habakkuk's second complaint: God's justice is unlike human justice (1:12-17; 2:1)
 - (j) God is eternal (1:12)
 - (k) Why is God silent? (1:13)
 - (l) The wicked destroy nations without mercy (1:14-17)
- viii. God's second response: God reveals what He is about to do (2:2-20)
 - (m) God gives a vision (2:2)
 - (n) God's appointed time (2:3)
 - (o) The righteous are marked by faith, the proud are marked by death (2:4-5)
 - (p) Woes to the wicked (2:6-20)

Habakkuk's prayer of praise (3:1-19)

- (q) Prayer title (3:1)
- (r) Habakkuk's plea for mercy (3:2)
- (s) Theophany (3:3-15)
- (t) Habakkuk's response (3:16-19a)
- (u) Subscript (3:19b)¹¹

2.4.2.1 Prophecy

The superscription in Habakkuk 1:1, while offering no explicit details about the book's historical context, clearly identifies its content as an "oracle" (נִבְיָה/*māššā'*). This signifies that the prophet has received a divine message which he is commissioned to proclaim (Swanson, 1997:5566). This designation serves as the foundation of the book's message, and on this basis, it is situated within the canonical collection of the Minor Prophets.

¹¹ The structure of the book will be further discussed in chapter three.

2.4.2.1.1 Lament (1:2-4, 12-17)

Habakkuk's complaint, beginning with the phrase "How long...?" is similar to many complaints found in the Psalms, such as "How long?" (Ps 6:3; 13:1-2; 79:5; 89:46); "Why do you...?" (Ps 10:1; 44:23-24; 74:11) (Bruckner, 2012:295). The prophet questions God through lament because of the dire circumstances surrounding him (Moberly, 1997:876). While the first two chapters convey a gloomy tone, chapter three shifts towards hope and comfort. Boda (2012a:476), acknowledges that lament is a prevalent theme throughout the prophets but emphasises that "comfort and joy remain their ultimate hope". Smith (2017:108) also argues for "the relationship between lament and praise", which is often perceived as antithetical. He contends that lament frequently transitions into praise (3:17-19; cf. Ps 30), making it the vehicle through which the prophet moves from anguish to a posture of worship. He shifts towards a greater understanding of God's righteousness, seeing and acknowledging His justice, while looking forward to His mercy (3:2). Dobbs-Allsopp (2000:785) maintains that individual laments typically contain components such as an "...address to Yahweh, complaint describing the situation..., request for help, affirmation of confidence, assertion of innocence or confession of sin, and hymnic elements".

2.4.2.1.2 Woe Oracles (2:6-20)

Zobel (1978:363) notes that prophetic woe oracles generally tend to occur in series, five in the case of Habakkuk (2:6-8, 9-11, 12-14, 15-17, 18-19). The term "woe" (הוֹי/hôy) is an interjective expression of "pain, discomfort, and unhappiness", found in prophetic woe oracles (Clements & Collins, 1992:955-956). In these woe oracles, the prophet describes the source of his distress. Jenni (1997:358) suggests that prophetic woe oracles are probably rooted in funeral laments, linking them to mourning for the dead (cf. Wanke, 1966). This connection highlights the pervasive corruption of death already present in human behaviour (cf. Gen 3; 6:5; Jer 17:9). While woe oracles in the Old Testament often target the people of God, Habakkuk extends this pronouncement to all peoples and nations (Bruckner, 2012:295; 2:5-6; cf. Isa 5:8-23). These woe oracles announce the imminent destruction against all people not living according to God's standards (Archer, 2000:1385). Yet, there is also an implicit salvific dimension in these oracles (Zobel, 1978:363). They serve as a "prophetic weapon of hope", offering captives a means to taunt their oppressors (Bruckner, 2012:295). Additionally, the "character-consequence nexus" found in Old Testament wisdom literature is also evident in these woe oracles (Thomas, 2018:124). The foolish and wicked will be overcome by disaster, while those who seek wisdom and righteousness are blessed by God (cf. Prov 3:35; 14; 28:26).

2.4.2.1.3 The Psalm (Ch. 3)

The Psalm represents a significant literary and theological shift in the prophet's perspective. This transition, however, is foreshadowed by the laments in 1:2-4 and 12-17. Jones (2007:48) asserts that the progression from "plea to praise" is a fundamental characteristic of lament, and Habakkuk's psalm exemplifies the prophet's "movement toward God" (Smith, 2017:109; Westermann, 1981:273). This shift is a natural outcome of the prophet's ongoing struggle with the concept of God's righteousness throughout the book.

The terms "*Shigionoth*" (שִׁיגְיוֹנוֹת/*šiggāywōn*) and "*Selah*" (סֶלָה/*sēlā(h)*), which appear in this chapter (3:1, 3, 9, 13), relate the psalm closely to the literary form of the Psalms (Matthews, 2012:136-137). These terms suggest that the psalm may have been performed as part of a liturgical service, possibly by a choir or in a dramatic ritual (Snyman, 2020:91). The use of "*Selah*" outside the Psalms is unique to Habakkuk, further linking this section to the Psalmic tradition (Matthews, 2012:136). Additionally, the use of "*Shigionoth*" supports the classification of the psalm as a lament, thereby creating thematic continuity between this chapter and the rest of the book. (Swanson, 1997:8710).

At first glance, the psalm in chapter three may seem somewhat out of place and disjointed from the preceding chapters. However, it is classified as a prayer in the superscription, a rare occurrence within the prophetic writings (Gerstenberger & Fabry, 2001:572). The term "prayer" (תְּפִלָּה/*tēfīlā*) appears in five Psalmic superscriptions (Ps 17; 86; 90; 102; 142), and is consistently associated with ritual prayer, often including elements of penance (Gerstenberger, 2003:76). In this context, prayer reflects the petitioner's faith, grounded in the belief that God will respond (Verhoef, 1997:1060; cf. Ps 102:17). Aune (1991:84) suggests that the pre-exilic prophets were likely connected to the Jerusalem Temple cult, as evidenced by their use of liturgical forms, such as prayer, strengthening the argument that Habakkuk may have served as a temple prophet.

Habakkuk's psalm begins with a theophany, where God is depicted as being manifested through natural phenomena (Niehaus, 1997:1247). This extends the theme of divine judgment, which has been prominent throughout the book, though here it is intertwined with Salvation (3:13-16) (Robertson, 1990:219). The prophet reflects on God's covenantal history with Israel and Judah, pleading for God to "revive" His mighty acts of judgment and salvation (Chisholm, 2000:817-818; 3:2; cf. Exod 9:23-25; 13:21-22). The references to "Teman" and "Mount Paran" evoke memories of Sinai, where God established His covenant with Israel (Snyman, 2020:83; cf. Exod 19; 24). It is upon this covenant relationship that the prophet places his hope and trust (3:17-19), pleading with God to "remember mercy" amid His wrath (3:2). The anticipated deliverance is not immediate but points to an eschatological fulfilment (Brueggemann, 2003:241, 242).

2.5 Conclusion

In the book of Habakkuk, the prophet wrestles with God's righteousness, dividing the text into three sections: (1) a dialogue between the prophet and God (1:2–2:5), (2) five woe oracles (2:6–20), and (3) a psalm of praise. This chapter explores several key points related to the historical context of the book, including the prophet's identity (*nāḥū*), his name (*ḥābaq*), the wicked (*rāšā*), the Chaldeans (*kāšdīm*), and the dating of the book. Determining Habakkuk's precise historical setting is complex, as the book lacks a superscription tying it to a specific king or historical event. The mention of the Chaldeans (1:6) places the narrative within the broader context of the Neo-Babylonian empire, though not in an exact timeframe. While Habakkuk may not be a conventional prophet, he plays a traditional prophetic role, predicting the consequences for God's covenant people as a result of their violating their covenantal obligations. Although there is no definitive evidence to classify him as a temple prophet, he appears to have understood Israel's liturgical forms, suggesting that some of his prophetic ministry may have occurred within the temple.

In identifying the historical context of the book, the question of who the "wicked" refers to (1:4, 13; 3:13) is crucial. Scholars have proposed two main interpretations: the wicked are either unjust members of Judah or a foreign nation (such as Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon). The book, however, addresses both the sins of God's people and those of foreign nations (cf. Exod 9:16; Num 14:21; Isa 11:9). God's abhorrence of wickedness is universal, extending to both His people and to foreign nations (cf. Ps 5:4–5; 11:5; Zech 8:17; Isa 5:20; Prov 15:9), making ethnicity irrelevant as a basis for righteousness (1:4). Although Habakkuk is historical in the sense that it addresses real events, it does not focus on historical accuracy in terms of dates or factual reporting. Instead, the book prioritises its theological message of God's righteousness. Therefore, interpreting the book requires a prophetic lens rather than a purely historical one. The historical context serves as a framework to better understand the theological message and prevent misinterpretation.

Several points related to Habakkuk's literary context were also discussed, including its place within the Minor Prophets and its genre. The prophet challenges God's perceived inactivity in addressing injustice (1:1–4, 12–17). Initially, his focus is on the immediate circumstances (1:1–4), but as the book progresses, the scope of his concerns broadens, allowing him to gain a deeper understanding of God's righteousness. In chapter 3, the tone of the book shifts from dialogue to prayer, with the prayer taking the form of a psalm. This stylistic shift is accompanied by a change in the prophet's posture, from inquiry to praise. While Habakkuk's message fits within the broader metanarrative of the Minor Prophets, it must also be understood on its own to appreciate its unique theological nuances. Although Habakkuk is primarily a prophetic book (1:1; 3:1), it incorporates elements of poetry and wisdom literature. Throughout the book, the prophet wrestles with the themes of good and evil, often expressed through contrasts such as "justice" and

"judgment" (12, 7, 1:4) (מִשְׁפָּט), "wrath" (3:2) (רָגַז), "mercy" (3:2 ; 1:17) (חַמֵּל/רַחֵם), and the tension between the "wicked" (רָשָׁע) and the "righteous" (3:13 ; 2:4 ; 13, 1:4) (צַדִּיק). These various genres and rhetorical elements emphasise the prophet's theological journey from complaint to praise as he struggles with God's righteousness. These insights serve as a basis for the next chapter, which will discuss the structure and language of the text, further deepening our understanding of God's righteousness in the book Habakkuk.

CHAPTER 3 STRUCTURE AND LANGUAGE

3.1 Structure

3.1.1 Introduction

The structure of the text provides a basic framework for interpretation based on its form and outline. This section will offer an analysis of the composition of the text, considering its form and its outline.

3.1.2 Form: Structure and patterns

In the process of exegesis, it is essential to ascertain the textual form, which refers to the appearance and structure of the text. Text forms generally fall into two categories: prose and poetry. Habakkuk is written in poetry form and should be approached and interpreted accordingly (Meier, 2009:78-93; Thomas, 2018:35). Poetry can be distinguished from prose in its minimal use of prose particles¹² as well as its use of (1) parallelism and (2) imagery (Longman, 1988:93-94).

(1) Parallelism:

The relationship or alignment between phrases of a poetic line is signified by parallelism (Longman, 1988:95). Hebrew poetry thus diverges from English poetry in that it employs thought couplets instead of depending on meter, rhythm, line length, and rhyme schemes to convey meaning (Ryken, 2015:69).

Various forms of parallelism are relevant to this study (Davies, 1915:2411-2412):

- (a) Synonymous parallelism: where an idea or concept is repeated using different words (1:3, 6, 17; 2:12; cf. Ps 15:1, 24:1-3, 25:5, 36:5).
- (b) Antithetic parallelism: where the second part of a line or verse presents the inverse of an idea in the first part (2:3, 2:4; cf. Prov 10; 11:3; Ps 20:8; 37:9 Isa 54:7 ff).
- (c) Synthetic parallelism: which is also known as constructive or epithetic parallelism, where the second part of a line or verse expands or expounds the concepts of the first (1:6-11; cf. Ps 1:3; 15:4 19:7-10; Prov 1:7; 3:5,7).

¹² Prose Particles include “the definite article, the relative clause marker, the definite object marker” (Van der Merwe *et al.*, 2017:65)

- (d) Introverted Parallelism: which involves the chiasmic arrangement of *hemistichs* in parallel members, following the pattern *ab ba* (1:4; Prov 10:4, 12; 13:24; 21:17).
- (e) Palillogical parallelism: where one or more words from the first part are echoed in the second part (1:2-4, 12; Nah 1:2; Ps 72:2; Isa 2:7; Hos 6:4).

(2) Imagery

Imagery and word pictures convey abstract concepts that should not be taken literally but rather be interpreted figuratively. Various imagery techniques include similes, metaphors, personification, and anthropomorphism. These are employed to compare two matters that share similarities in certain aspects but differ in others (1:8-11, 12, 14-17; 3:4, 6, 8-15) (Longman, 1988:113-116). Images evoke emotions, captivate our attention, and ignite our imagination. They also aid in uncovering fresh insights about the objects being compared. It is vital to take note of and identify different elements of Hebrew poetry to understand the book of Habakkuk, mainly as to how different thoughts are related.

Even though Habakkuk is presented in poetry form, it is a prophetic book (1:1; 3:1), containing elements of lament (1:1-4; 12-17) and woe oracles (2:6-20) presented as a dialogue between Habakkuk and God (chapters 1-2). The book also includes a psalm of praise (chapter 3) consisting of a theophany (3:1-16) and a declaration of trust (3:17-19). Each of these components serves a distinct purpose, offering valuable insights into the author's intentions. Through identification of the structure and the components thereof, we gain a clearer understanding of God's righteousness throughout the book.

In summary, text forms relate to the text's structure and appearance, falling into two overarching categories: poetry and prose. Habakkuk can be classified as poetry, based on its limited use of prose particles and use of parallelism (synonymous, antithetic, synthetic, introverted, and palillogical) and imagery. Whilst the book is written as poetry, it is prophetic poetry with various elements (lament, woe oracles, a theophany, and a declaration of trust) that informs us how it must be interpreted to illuminate God's righteousness throughout the book.

3.1.3 Structure analysis

Scholars have proposed a diverse array of structural analyses concerning the book of Habakkuk. Some contemporary contributions include the following:

Anderson (2001) provides an exceptionally comprehensive exploration of the Masoretic text. His highly-detailed analysis offers deep insight into the use of language and poetry in the book which is valuable for this study. He delves into the use of words and their significance to the text. In his

outline, he divides the book into two parts: (1) a dialogue between Habakkuk and God (chapters 1-2), and (2) a “prayer-hymn” (chapter 3) (2001:14-15). He contends that the woe oracles form an integral part of the dialogue and sees the dialogue as the vehicle of this message of woe. Other scholars, for example, Childs (1979:448), Sweeney (1992:3), and Floyd (2000:81-86) argue for a three-part division; (1) a dialogue between the prophet and God (1:1-2:5), (2) woe oracles (2:6-20), and (3) a psalm (3:1-19).

Anderson (2001:15) proposes the following outline:

- I. Title (1:1)
- II. Habakkuk’s first prayer (1:2–4)
- III. Yahweh’s first response (1:5–11)
- IV. Habakkuk’s second prayer (1:12–17)
- V. A soliloquy (2:1)
Narrative (2:2aA)
- VI. Yahweh’s second response (2:2aB–20), including
- VII.1 Exhortation (2:6a), and
- VII.2–7. The “woe oracles” (2:6b–20)
- VIII. The Prayer of Habakkuk (Habakkuk 3)
- VIII.1 Title (3:1a)
Rubric (3:1b)
- VIII.2.i–iii. The vision of Habakkuk (3:2–15)
- VIII.2.iv Narrative (3:16)
Soliloquy (3:17–19b)
- VIII.3. Rubric (3:19c)

This study will incorporate and adapt aspects of Anderson’s (2001) work, particularly as it relates to God’s righteousness.

Renz (2021:199, 207-208, 235-236) offers one of the most recent exegetical works on the book of Habakkuk, making it valuable for this study. He suggests that 1:5-11 is a rewriting of a prior oracle (cf. Jer 5:15-17) and thus not an original prophecy, which affects not only the historical context of the book but also its structure and canonicity. He considers chapters one and two as a prophetic response to the implications arising from the realisation of a prior prophecy (1:5–11). He objects to the traditional reading of the book holding that 1:5-11 is God’s response to the prophet’s complaint (1:2-4), observing that 1:2-4 is singular, relating to the prophet personally whereas 1:5-11 is plural, addressed to an audience wider than the prophet himself. Furthermore,

he notes that 1:5-11 does not offer any “comfort or assurance or deliverance”. He argues that “the Babylonians are never portrayed in the book as the divine answer to Judean wickedness”. The problem with this position, however, is that the text clearly states that God is “rousing” (מְקִיף/hif’îl participle/*qûm*) the Chaldeans (1:6). He suggests the following outline:

- A. The Pronouncement (1:1–2:20)
 - 1. The superscription (1:1)
 - 2. Habakkuk’s complaint (1:2–17)
 - (a) The first part of Habakkuk’s complaint (1:2–4)
 - (b) The citation of an earlier oracle (1:5–11)
 - (c) The final part of the complaint (1:12–17)
 - 2. The prophet’s resolve to get an answer (2:1)
 - 3. YHWH’s reply (2:2–20)
 - (a) The instruction to the prophet (2:2–3)
 - (b) The revelation (2:4–5)
 - (c) The agreement of the oppressed nations (2:6–20)
 - (i) introduction (2:6a)
 - (ii) The first saying (2:6b–8)
 - (iii) The second saying (2:9–11)
 - (iv) The third saying (2:12–14)
 - (v) The fourth saying (2:15–17)
 - (vi) The fifth saying (2:18–20)
- B. The prayer (3:1–19)
 - 1. The heading (3:1)
 - 2. The prayer (3:2–19a)
 - (a) The opening part of the prayer (3:2)
 - (b) A reflection on YHWH’s appearance (3:3–7)
 - (c) Expression of marvel at YHWH’s attack on his enemies (3:8–15)
 - (d) Expression of confidence in the midst of distress (3:16–19a)
 - 3. The Postscript (3:19b)

Renz (2021:199) identifies 1:2-17 as a unified whole, outlining the prophet’s complaint, including 1:5-11, which he sees as a citation of a previous oracle. Moreover, it is only in chapter two that God responds to the prophet’s complaints. This is in contrast to Anderson’s (2001:14-15) view, who considers chapter one as a dialogue between the prophet and God, initiated by the prophet’s first complaint (1:2-4), followed by God’s response (1:5-11), to which the prophet again raises a further complaint (1:12-17). This dialogue structure is maintained throughout the first two chapters of the book. The main thrust of Renz’s (2021:300-303) argument lies with the injustice of the

Chaldeans; he holds that the primary concern of the book is “the breakdown of a Torah-faithful society as a consequence of Babylonian domination”. Judean injustice is thus only a mere byproduct of Chaldean affliction. On the contrary, this study diverges from his position on this point, considering God’s righteousness as it relates to Judeans, Chaldeans, as well as other nations (cf. 1:5; 2:20; Eccl 3:16-17; Mic 6:8; Jer 22:3; Amos 5).

Thomas (2018:17-18, 35-37) also offers a notable contribution, although his structure is more condensed. He maintains that the entire book of Habakkuk is written as poetry and he therefore accentuates the poetic elements within the book, advocating for its importance in interpretation. As such, his nuanced angle holds value for this study. He highlights the complaint/response structure of the first two chapters, pointing out that “there is clear interaction at the level of theme, subject matter, and repetition of language”, even though God does not necessarily answer each of the prophet’s questions in the manner that one would expect. He agrees with Anderson (2001:15) that the woes (2:6-20) are integral to the oracle as a whole and should not be separated from God’s second response. In Thomas’ (2018:17-18) view, 2:1 should be considered as a part of Habakkuk’s second complaint (2:2-20), acting as a conclusion to the previous section and a bridge into God’s second response. His proposed structure is presented as follows:

- Oracle (Hab 1:1)

- First complaint (Hab 1:2–4)

- First divine response (Hab 1:5–11)

- Second complaint (Hab 1:12–17; 2:1)

- Second divine response (Hab 2:2–20)

- Prayer (Hab 3:1)

- Programmatic introduction (Hab 3:2)

- The divine march to Egypt (Hab 3:3–15)

- The prophet’s response (Hab 3:16–19)

Snyman (2020:45-54) also offers a recent study on the book of Habakkuk that provides some useful insights for this study. He argues that the book’s style and use of vocabulary suggest a liturgical structure associated with temple cult prophecy (cf. 3:19; 1 Chr 25:1). He highlights God’s sovereignty, as well as His righteousness and justice, not only within the boundaries of his own people but also among foreign nations (the Chaldeans). Furthermore, he points out God’s mercy in considering the prophet’s complaints. He agrees with Anderson (2001:15) and Thomas (2018:17-18) that the book follows a two-part division consisting of (1) a dialogue and (2) a psalm. This study will therefore adopt and adapt elements of Snyman’s (2020:53-54) proposed outline as it relates to God’s righteousness. He offers the following structural outline:

- A. The superscription to the book (1:1)
- B. Two complaints by the prophet Habakkuk and two responses from YHWH (1:2–2:20)
 - i. The first complaint of Habakkuk (1:2–4)
 - ii. YHWH's response (1:5–11)
 - iii. The second complaint of Habakkuk (1:12–2:1)
 - iv. YHWH's second response (2:2–20)
 - a. To live by faith even in times of adversity (2:2–5)
 - b. The woe oracles (2:6–20)
- C. The prayer-cum-psalm of the prophet Habakkuk (3:1–19)
 - i. Superscription (3:1)
 - ii. The prophet calls upon YHWH (3:2)
 - iii. The coming of YHWH (3:3–7)
 - iv. God is a warrior (3:8–15)
 - v. The prophet reacts (3:16)
 - vi. The prophet's confession of faith (3:17–19a)
 - vii. A musical direction (3:19b)

In short, the contemporary works of Anderson (2001), Renz (2021), Thomas (2018), and Snyman (2020), are valuable to this study based on their recent and exegetical insights. Although there are various points of agreement as well as points of divergence, these works offer a solid foundation upon which the structural outline of this study can be built.

3.1.3.1 Outline

Based on the discussion above the following working outline will serve as a structural guideline in order to facilitate the objectives of this study:

- (i) The Title (1:1)
- (ii) Dialogue between the prophet and God (1:2-2:20)
 - i. Habakkuk's first complaint: God is indifferent (1:2-4)
 - ii. God's first response: God is actively involved (1:5-11)
 - iii. Habakkuk's second complaint: God's justice is unlike human justice (1:12-17; 2:1)
 - (a) God is eternal (1:12)
 - (b) Why is God silent? (1:13)
 - (c) The wicked destroy nations without mercy (1:14-17)
 - (d) Habakkuk awaits God's response (2:1)

- iv. God's second response: God reveals what He is about to do (2:2-20)
 - (a) God gives a vision (2:2)
 - (b) God's appointed time (2:3)
 - (c) The righteous are marked by faith, the proud are marked by death (2:4-5)
 - (d) Woes to the wicked (2:6-20)
- (iii) Habakkuk's prayer of praise (3:1-19)
 - i. Prayer title (3:1)
 - (a) Habakkuk's plea for mercy (3:2)
 - ii. Theophany (3:3-15)
 - (a) God reveals Himself (3:3-7)
 - (b) God's wrath displayed (3:8-15)
 - iii. Habakkuk's response (3:16)
 - iv. Habakkuk's declaration of trust (3:17-19a)
 - v. Subscript (3:19b)

3.1.4 Conclusion

Within the facet of structure, the form of the text has been analysed, as it significantly influences interpretation and provides insights into its thematic and theological development. Habakkuk is composed in the form of poetry, a crucial factor that should guide how it is approached and interpreted. The poetic nature of the text is evident through various literary devices, including synonymous parallelism (1:3, 6, 17; 2:12), antithetic parallelism (2:3, 2:4), synthetic parallelism (1:6–11), introverted parallelism (1:4), and palillogical parallelism (1:2–4, 12). Additionally, the text employs imagery, such as similes, metaphors, personification, and anthropomorphism (1:8–11, 12, 14–17; 3:4, 6, 8–15), further enriching its meaning.

Despite its poetic composition, Habakkuk is fundamentally a prophetic book (1:1; 3:1), incorporating elements of lament (1:1–4, 12–17) and woe oracles (2:6–20). Structurally, it unfolds as a dialogue between Habakkuk and God (chapters 1–2) and culminates in a psalm of praise (chapter 3). These structural elements collectively offer deeper insight into the author's intentions and contribute to a clearer understanding of God's righteousness as it is conveyed throughout the book.

A structural analysis was conducted, comparing the outlines proposed by Anderson (2001), Renz (2021), Thomas (2018), and Snyman (2020). While these scholars present varying perspectives, their analyses reveal both points of convergence and divergence, collectively providing a strong foundation for the proposed structural outline in this study. Based on the structure of the text, various patterns become apparent which are examined under the facet of patterns

3.2 Patterns

3.2.1 Introduction

Having presented the working structural outline for this study, we will now discuss the subsequent facet of patterns. Where the greater structure gives a broad outline of the text, patterns emerge from that outline to form links within the text (Stuart, 2009:71). These patterns include but are not limited to repetition of words or concepts, elaboration of ideas, and emphasis of key concepts. Patterns arise through the natural flow of the text, indicated through repetition or progression.

Based on the form of the text, the following patterns emerge, exposing key concepts and ideas that bear significance to this study. As these patterns unfold, and core concepts are identified, they will be noted and discussed under the facet of language where their intricacies and nuances will be comprehensively expounded.

3.2.2 Title (1:1)

1:1 The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw¹³.

The title of the book is vital in placing the book in a contextual framework. By identifying the book as an “oracle” (אִשְׁמָרָה/*māššā’*) given to the “prophet” (נָבִיא/*nābī’*) Habakkuk, a contextual lens is offered through which it must be interpreted. Through this interpretive lens we gain a deeper insight into the structure and language of the book¹⁴.

¹³ All scripture references are taken from the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) translation, unless indicated otherwise.

¹⁴ See discussion under 2.2

3.2.3 Dialogue between the prophet and God (1:2-2:20)

3.2.3.1 Introduction (1:2-2:20)

The first two chapters of Habakkuk present a dialogue between the prophet and God. It is unusual that the prophet initiates the dialogue. He raises inquiries about his circumstances (1:2-4) and questions God's righteousness. God interacts with Habakkuk in a fascinating exchange, although His answer does not align with the prophet's expectations (1:6). Based on God's first response to his lament (1:5-11), Habakkuk launches a second complaint (1:12-17), questioning how God, whose nature is so pure that He cannot even bear to look upon evil (1:13), could utilise the Chaldeans as a tool for divine judgment¹⁵. God again answers Habakkuk (2:2-20), by making a distinction between the "righteous" (צַדִּיק/šāddîq) (2:4), who "live by their faith" (אֱמֻנָה/ʿmûnā(h)), and the "arrogant" (יָהִיר/yāhîr) (2:5) who "open their throats wide as Sheol". Chapter 2:6-19 contains five woe oracles which serve the purpose of taunting and mocking the wicked (2:6). At the end of the entire dialogue, the prophet concludes that "the LORD is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him!" (2:20).

The dialogue between Habakkuk and God will be discussed in detail below.

3.2.3.1.1 Habakkuk's first complaint: God is indifferent (1:2-4)

1:2 O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,

and you will not listen?

Or cry to you "Violence!"

and you will not save?

3 Why do you make me see wrongdoing
and look at trouble?

Destruction and violence are before me;
strife and contention arise.

4 So the law becomes slack
and justice never prevails.

The wicked surround the righteous—
therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

¹⁵ The irony in this situation is truly remarkable. The prophet reiterates his distinction between the "wicked" and the "righteous" (1:4), now ascribing a higher level of righteousness to the very people he had initially complained about, in comparison to the Chaldeans (1:13). This idea will be further discussed in-depth under the facet of language.

Anderson (2001:98) points out that the language in Habakkuk 1:2-4 is distinctly poetic, evident through the definitive lack of “prose particles”. Typically, such particles are required in prose syntax, but in poetic prophecy, it is important to seek out contextual “implicit signals” to indicate the specific reference of a formally indefinite noun. Furthermore, he observes that the absence of prose particles does not imply the indefiniteness of the nouns. On the contrary, the prophet's complaint pertains to a specific situation which requires a specific response from God. The prophet uses the following word-pairs to describe his situation (Snyman, 2020:56). Arrows are used to visually display whether the word-pairs are analogous or antithetical:

“wrongdoing” (אָוֶן/*āwēn*) ↔ “trouble” (עָמָל/*āmāl*) (1:3)

The use of אָוֶן together with עָמָל highlights the prophet's overwhelming sense of trouble or misery caused by an “abuse of power that brings harm and destruction” (Carpenter & Grisanti, 1997b:310; Swanson, 1997:6662). The use of אָוֶן in this sense refers to an act perpetrated with the intent to harm others (Bernhardt, 1977:142).

“destruction” (שָׁד/*šōd*) ↔ “violence” (חָמָס/*hāmās*) (1:3)

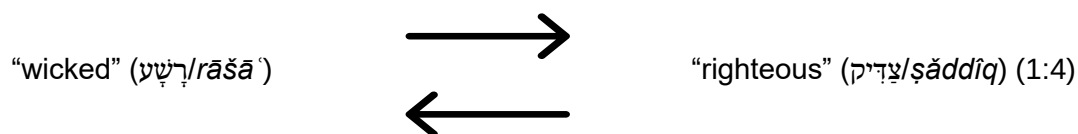
The prophet uses the complimentary word-pair שָׁד and חָמָס, to emphasise the “physical violence” and “unjust or harsh treatment” that surrounds him (Freedman & Welch, 2004:416-417). שָׁד accentuates the destructive impact of violence in the society.

“strife” (מָדוֹן/*māḏōn*) ↔ “contention” (רִיב/*rīb*) (1:3)

The word-pair מָדוֹן and רִיב, employed to describe “quarrel or conflict”, suggests a legal aspect within the text, where רִיב generally implies a formal dispute with legal implications (Cathcart, 2010:343; Ringgren, 2004b:475). The use of legal language facilitates the transition into verse 4 which addresses the law that has “become slack”.

“law” (תּוֹרָה/*tôrā(h)*) ↔ “justice” (מִשְׁפָּט/*mišpāt*) (1:4)

The words תורה and משפט are intricately connected, both relating to the law, although the use of משפט offers a more nuanced meaning. It involves a sense of justice (what is right), and judgment, with the תורה as the standard (Johnson, 1998:87).



The antithetic word-pair רָשָׁע and צַדִּיק is used to further emphasise the prophet's experience of turmoil within the society. He complains that justice is perverted because the righteous are surrounded by the wicked. "In contrast to צַדִּיק, רָשָׁע signifies negative behavior [sic] of evil thoughts, words, and deeds that are not only contrary to God's character, but are also hostile to the surrounding community" (Carpenter & Grisanti, 1997a:1201).

The dialogue begins with a lament that mirrors the sentiments found in the language of Psalm 13 (Jacobson & Jacobson, 2013:42-43). The prophet's cry, "O LORD, how long..." (עַד־אֵנָּה יְהוָה) (1:2), echoes the psalmist's plea, "How long, O LORD?" (עַד־אֵנָּה יְהוָה) (Ps 13:1). The prophet's complaints are expressed in three distinct forms: firstly, directed towards God (1:2): while the psalmist asks, "...will you forget me forever?" (Ps 13:1), the prophet asks "...how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen" (1:2). Secondly, the prophet complains about his own affliction, asking, "Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble" (1:4), resounding the psalmist's outcry: "How long must I bear pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long?" (Ps 13:2). Finally, the prophet complains about those who inflict suffering upon him: "The wicked surround the righteous" (1:4), which resonates with the words of the psalmist: "my enemy will say, 'I have prevailed'; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken" (Ps 13:4).

With a heavy heart, the prophet articulates his distress, expressing profound sorrow and lamentation over what seems to be God's enigmatic silence. He laments the prevailing disregard for justice and the rise of lawlessness in society. Additionally, he voices his grievances over the apparent triumph of the wicked over the righteous, expressing deep concern and frustration. Despite fervently crying out for help, he feels unheard and abandoned, left to bear the burden of injustice that pervades his surroundings.

3.2.3.1.1.1 Summary (1:2-4)

The language in Habakkuk 1:2-4 is notably poetic, marked by the absence of typical prose particles, which would normally provide syntactical clarity. In poetic prophecy, contextual clues

are instead relied upon to identify specific references for indefinite nouns. This does not, however, imply ambiguity in the prophet's complaints; rather, he addresses a particular situation that demands a direct response from God. The prophet employs several word-pairs to articulate his distress. The pair אָזַן and עֵמָל highlights his sense of overwhelming trouble and the abuse of power that brings harm and destruction. Similarly, the pairing of שָׁד and חֲמָס underscores the physical violence and injustice that plague his society.

Additionally, the terms מִדּוֹן and רִיב suggest a legal dimension to the conflict, with רִיב often implying a formal dispute. This legal language transitions into 1:4, where the prophet laments that the law has become ineffective. The words תּוֹרָה and מִשְׁפָּט further emphasise the breakdown of justice, with מִשְׁפָּט referring not only to judgment but to a deeper sense of what is right, with תּוֹרָה serving as the moral standard.

The antithetical word pair רָשָׁע and צַדִּיק amplifies the prophet's anguish, as he observes the perversion of justice, where the righteous are overwhelmed by the wicked. The prophet's lament mirrors the sentiments of Psalm 13, as both he and the psalmist cry out to God, questioning His apparent silence. The prophet's complaints are threefold: directed toward God, focused on his own suffering, and concerning the actions of the wicked. Despite his fervent pleas, the prophet feels abandoned, forced to witness the triumph of injustice and lawlessness, leaving him burdened by the inequities that surround him.

3.2.3.2 God's first response: God is actively involved (1:5-11)

1:5 Look at the nations, and see!

- Be astonished! Be astounded!
- For a work is being done in your days
- that you would not believe if you were told.
- 6 For I am rousing the Chaldeans,
- that fierce and impetuous nation,
- who march through the breadth of the earth
- to seize dwellings not their own.
- 7 Dread and fearsome are they;
- their justice and dignity proceed from themselves.
- 8 Their horses are swifter than leopards,
- more menacing than wolves at dusk;
- their horses charge.
- Their horsemen come from far away;
- they fly like an eagle swift to devour.
- 9 They all come for violence,
- with faces pressing forward;
- they gather captives like sand.

- 10 At kings they scoff,
 and of rulers they make sport.
 They laugh at every fortress,
 and heap up earth to take it.
 11 Then they sweep by like the wind;
 they transgress and become guilty;
 their own might is their god!

Initially, the book of Habakkuk begins with a complaint that God is indifferent towards the injustice that the prophet sees all around him (1:2-4) (Gunkel & Begrich, 1998:136). Whilst God does not provide a direct answer to the prophet's complaint, He actively engages with the prophet in a dialogue, expanding the locus of the prophet's complaint. In the initial stages, the prophet's complaint (1:2-4) is only concerned with his immediate environment. However, God prompts him to broaden his perspective, urging him to "Look at the nations" (1:5). By doing so, God begins to probe the prophet's comprehension of justice and righteousness. The prophet's theological perspective is thoroughly challenged as God unveils a greater realm of His justice and righteousness. In 1:6, God announces that He is "rousing the Chaldeans", showing that He is in fact actively involved in the prophet's situation.

God's response relates to the prophet's complaint (1:2-4) through poetic elements such as synonyms and parallels (Thomas, 2018:85-86). The concepts of observing (רָאָה/*rā'ā(h)*) (1:3; cf. 1:5), justice (מִשְׁפָּט/*mišpāṭ*) (1:4; cf. 1:7), and violence (חָמָס/*ḥāmās*) (1:2, 3; cf. 1:9) are repeated, reformed, and developed to form a thread to bind these two sections together. The prophet questions why God makes him "see" (רָאָה/*rā'ā(h)*) "wrongdoing and look" (נָבֵט/*nāḇāṭ*) "at trouble" (1:3). To this God replies: "Look to the nations and see" (נָבֵט) (1:5). Words that relate to observation are used to draw a parallel between the prophet's complaint and God's response. God opens the prophet's eyes to a greater cosmic reality that surpasses his personal circumstances¹⁶. God is not only actively involved in the prophet's situation but also in a larger metanarrative involving His covenant people, and even the nations beyond. The prophet continues his lament, stating that "justice" (מִשְׁפָּט/*mišpāṭ*) "never prevails" (1:4). Adhering to the prophet's complaint about a lack of justice, God responds, saying that the Chaldeans' "justice" (מִשְׁפָּט) "...proceed from themselves" (1:7). Although their notion of justice is, in fact, injustice, God uses them to bring about His supreme justice across all nations. Using the Chaldeans for His purpose is, therefore, a display of His sovereignty. Sproul (2012:50) notes "...that when God

¹⁶ The prophet receives profound insight into an unfolding cosmic narrative, transcending his personal concerns to reveal the grand tapestry of God's righteousness, woven together by his justice and mercy.

ordains anything, His purpose is altogether good". In His's sovereignty, God can use something that is evil to ultimately manifest His justice and righteousness. The prophet is left astounded: his preconception of God's justice and righteousness is deeply tested (cf. 1:13; Isa 55:8-9). In 1:2-3, the prophet bemoans the prevailing violence (חֲמָסָה/*hāmās*) that surrounds him. God's response is that the Chaldeans' "come for violence" (1:9). Where the prophet's complaint has a narrow focus only on the violence that he experiences within his immediate environment, God again draws his attention to the grand scheme of His righteousness. The prophet's perception of God's righteousness is further tested: How can God's answer to violence involve more violence?¹⁷ The prophet seems to have a certain resolution in mind to his complaint, based on his limited perspective of God's righteousness, such as often found in the Psalms (cf. Ps 23; 27:1-3; 32:7; 46:1; 91). However, God offers the prophet a new perspective of His righteousness comparable to that of Job (cf. Job 38-39; Ps 135:6-7).

The Chaldean violence is vividly described in 1:8-11, where metaphors and similes are used to emphasise their brutality and wickedness. Their horses are described as being "swifter than leopards" and fiercer than wolves; their "horsemen ... fly like an eagle swift to devour" (1:8); "they gather captives like sand" (1:9); they "scoff" at kings and "make sport" of rulers, they "laugh at every fortress and heap up earth to take it" (1:10); "they sweep by like the wind" and "their own might is their god" (1:11). They are proud (cf. 2:4-5), ruthless (cf. 1:15-17) and hedonistic (cf. 1:16). Although they idolise their own might, God still uses them for His purpose (cf. 1:6).

In summary, the book of Habakkuk opens with the prophet's complaint about God's perceived indifference to the rampant injustice surrounding him (1:2-4). While God does not directly answer his complaint, He engages in a dialogue, shifting the prophet's focus beyond his immediate concerns to a broader, cosmic perspective. Initially, the prophet's complaint is concerned with local injustice, but God expands this by urging him to "look at the nations" (1:5), challenging his understanding of divine justice and righteousness. God's revelation that He is "rousing the Chaldeans" (1:6) demonstrates His active involvement, not only in the prophet's situation but also in a larger metanarrative that involves all nations.

The connection between the prophet's complaint and God's response is highlighted through repeated themes of observation, justice, and violence. The prophet laments the injustice he is forced to witness (1:3), to which God responds, inviting him to look and see a broader reality (1:5). In contrast though, while the prophet protests that justice is absent (1:4), God reveals that the

¹⁷The concept of חֲמָסָה (violence) will be discussed in-depth under the facet of language to further draw out this point.

Chaldeans' version of justice is self-serving (1:7), and that He uses them to enact His supreme justice across nations. This illustrates God's sovereignty, where even the wicked are used to fulfil His greater purpose.

The prophet's understanding of God's justice is challenged, particularly as he struggles with how God's solution to violence involves more violence. His narrow expectation of divine righteousness, similar to the resolutions found in the Psalms, is confronted with a more complex perspective, comparable to the lessons learned by Job (cf. Job 38-39). The Chaldeans' brutal and arrogant nature is vividly described through metaphors and similes (1:8-11), yet despite their pride and wickedness, God uses them to fulfil His sovereign will. This revelation leaves the prophet's preconceived notions of justice deeply shaken, forcing him to reconsider the vastness of God's righteousness and the complexity of His action in the world.

3.2.3.3 Habakkuk's second complaint: God's justice is unlike human justice (1:12-17; 2:1)

3.2.3.3.1 Introduction (1:12-17; 2:1)

Habakkuk's second complaint resembles his initial complaint (1:2-4), although it is twice as long (Anderson, 2001:187). Similar elements between the prophet's first and second complaints include queries (1:13, 17; cf. 1:2, 3), factual statements (1:12, 13, 14, 15, 16; cf. 1:3, 4), and "logical inferences introduced by subordinating conjunctions": "so" and "therefore" (עַל־כֵּן / *al-kēn*) (כִּי / *kī*) (1:15, 16; cf. 1:4). These two complaints are also tied together by shared language: "...look at trouble" (נִבֵּט / *nbṭ*) (אִמָּל / *āmāl*) (1:13; cf. 1:3), "judgment" (מִשְׁפָּט / *mišpāṭ*) (1:12; cf. 1:4), and the "wicked" (רָשָׁע / *rāšā'*) and the "righteous" (צַדִּיק / *šāddīq*) (1:13; cf. 1:4). Rather than bringing the prophet to peace, God's response in 1:5-11 only leaves him with even more questions relating to His righteousness. The reality of the prophet's situation appears to contradict his theological framework; God's answer to his circumstance does not fit his understanding of God's righteousness. Habakkuk asks why God is silent "when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they" (1:13), indicating his lack of comprehension of the situation. In the prophet's perspective, the wickedness of God's covenant people is not as bad as the wickedness of the Chaldeans¹⁸. In 1:5-11 it seems as though God condones the Chaldeans' wickedness: however, as the dialogue progresses it becomes clear that God does not condone any wickedness, whether

¹⁸ This idea will be further discussed in-depth under 3.4.

committed by the Chaldeans or His covenant people¹⁹ (cf. 2:2-20). Using the imagery of fishing, the prophet highlights the wickedness of the Chaldeans (1:14-17). He compares the Chaldeans to fishermen who gather people like fish to be devoured. The outcome of this gathering results in destruction, prompting Habakkuk to question God about “rousing the Chaldeans” (1:6), who “destroy nations without mercy” (1:17). In 2:1, Habakkuk concludes his complaint, awaiting God’s response.

Habakkuk’s second complaint consists of four parts: (1) 1:12 – God is eternal; (2) 1:13 – Why is God silent? (3) 1:14-17 – The wicked destroy nations without mercy: and (4) 2:1 – Habakkuk awaits God’s response. The patterns within each of these sections will be discussed below.

¹⁹ This will be further discussed under 3.3.2.4.

3.2.3.3.2 God is eternal (1:12)

1:12 Are you not from of old,
O Lord my God, my Holy One?
You shall not die.
O Lord, you have marked them for judgment;
and you, O Rock, have established them for punishment.

The prophet's complaint begins with a rhetorical question: "Are you not from old, O LORD my God, my Holy One?" (הֲלֹא אַתָּה מִקִּדְם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי). The reference to God's eternity is reminiscent of Psalm 55:19: "God, who is enthroned from of old, who does not change..." (cf. Ps 90:23). It reflects his belief that God is sovereign and that His character does not change; God's eternity is directly tied to His unchanging nature (cf. Grudem, 2020:200). Although Habakkuk struggles with God's justice, he affirms God's sovereignty. He also personally appeals to God's holiness, indicated by his use of the first-person singular form. The mention of God's holiness brings to mind not only His greatness and transcendence but also as Sproul (2017:40) puts it, "...His purity, His absolute moral and ethical excellence". While the prophet acknowledges that God's moral standard is beyond our human reasoning (cf. 1:13; Isa 55:8; Ps 115:3), he finds it difficult to make peace with God's justice in this situation. The prophet, however, makes a distinction between his (my) God אֱלֹהֵי and their (the Chaldeans') god לֵאלֹהֵי (1:11), signifying that he trusts in God and His character even though he struggles to understand His actions (Thomas, 2018:91). The use of הֲ (hă-) and לֹא (lō') "are [you] not", which effectively negate each other, also denotes Habakkuk's perplexity (Anderson, 2001:175). The phrase לֹא נָמוּת (lō' nāmût) is translated in the NRSV as "You shall not die" and in the ESV as "We shall not die".²⁰ The former would further assert God's eternity whereas the latter would serve as comfort for God's covenant people that He will preserve them even in this time of turmoil (Snyman, 2020:63). Thomas (2018:91-92) translates the phrase as an interrogative: "Will we not die?", arguing that לֹא applies to both the first and second lines. This is a poetic reading that contrasts God's eternal nature with the transience of His people. Although Clark and Hatton (1989:82-83) affirm that it is very difficult to determine the original text and that both readings are contextually plausible, they advocate for accepting the

²⁰ Ginsburg (1966:358) argues that this is a case of *Tiqqune Sopherim* (an emendation of the original text) where *lō' tāmût* "You will not die" is replaced with *lō' nāmût* "We will not die" in the Masoretic Text. He prefers the second-person singular over the first-person plural. McCarthy (1981:105-111), on the other hand, favours the reading of the Masoretic Text "We will not die", arguing that there is not enough evidence to the contrary.

alternate reading “You will not die”. It offers a less abrupt and more seamless flow to the verse. It also balances the first part of the verse “Are you not from of old[?]”.

With the above being said, this study accepts the alternate reading, “You shall not die”, as it offers a smoother, more natural flow of thought to the text.

Between 1:7-12, there is a noticeable shift of focus regarding the concept of justice. In verse 1:7, the Chaldeans derive their sense of justice from themselves, while in 1:12, God assigns them for judgment. This shift in 1:12 portrays God as the ultimate and sovereign judge. God’s justice is further emphasised through the imagery of a “Rock” (צור/ṣûr), invoking the ideas of “stability” and holiness (set apart and wholly distinct from anything else in creation) (cf. Deut 32:4, 31, 37; Ps 18:2; 28:1; 42:9; 62:7; 78:35; 92:15; 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Sam 22:3, 32, 47; Isa 26:4; 44:8) (Snyman, 2020:63). God’s justice is steadfast, far beyond the Chaldeans’ feeble sense of justice (cf. 2:5, 8, 16, 17; 3:13).

In summary, the prophet’s complaint begins with a rhetorical question: “Are you not from old, O LORD my God, my Holy One?” (1:12), evoking God’s eternity and unchanging nature, similar to expressions in the Psalms (Ps 55:19; 90:2). This reflects the prophet’s belief in God’s sovereignty and moral perfection, even though he struggles with God’s justice in the current situation. The personal appeal to “my God” contrasts with the Chaldeans’ “god” (1:11), signifying the prophet’s trust in God’s character despite his confusion. The phrase “You shall not die” (1:12) further asserts God’s eternal nature and serves as a reassurance for God’s covenant people during this time of turmoil.

A shift occurs between 1:7 and 1:12 regarding the concept of justice: the Chaldeans derive justice from themselves (1:7), but God establishes Himself as the sovereign judge, assigning them for judgment (1:12). This portrayal of God as the “Rock” (1:12) invokes the imagery of stability and holiness, emphasising the steadfastness of His justice compared to the Chaldeans’ flawed version. God’s justice, rooted in His holiness, remains firm and transcendent, far surpassing human notions of righteousness and judgment (cf. Deut 32:4; Ps 18:2; 62:7).

3.2.3.3.3 Why is God silent? (1:13)

1:13 Your eyes are too pure to behold evil,
and you cannot look on wrongdoing;
why do you look on the treacherous,
and are silent when the wicked swallow
those more righteous than they?

In 1:13, the prophet maintains the poetic repetition of the themes from 1:3-4 (Thomas, 2018:92). He states that God’s “eyes are too pure” to “behold” (רָאָה/rā’ā(h)) evil and that He is unable to

“look” (נִבְּטָ/ *nābāṭ*) at “wrongdoing” (לִמְלָ/ *āmāl*) (cf. 1:3). He questions how God can “look” and be “silent” (cf. 1:3) while the “wicked” (רָשָׁע/ *rāšāʿ*) swallow those who are more “righteous” (צַדִּיק/ *šāddīq*) (cf. 1:4). By connecting these themes between 1:3-4 and 1:13, the prophet reveals his perception of “wrongdoing”, as well as how he perceives the “wicked” and the “righteous”. Although he accuses God of incongruence, he displays incongruence in his own judgments. Where he seeks justice against the “wicked [who] surround the righteous” in 1:2-4, he classifies “the wicked” of 1:4 as “... more righteous” in 1:13²¹. His frustration is highlighted through the parallelism in “...to behold evil” and “...look on wrongdoing” (Anderson, 2001:181, 103-104). Habakkuk is perplexed that God sees the evil around him and yet remains “silent”.

3.2.3.3.4 The wicked destroy nations without mercy (1:14-17)

1:14 You have made people like the fish of the sea,
like crawling things that have no ruler.

15 The enemy brings all of them up with a hook;
he drags them out with his net,
he gathers them in his seine;
so he rejoices and exults.

16 Therefore he sacrifices to his net
and makes offerings to his seine;
for by them his portion is lavish,
and his food is rich.

17 Is he then to keep on emptying his net,
and destroying nations without mercy?

In 1:14-17, the prophet employs an extensive metaphor to illustrate his discontent with the Lord’s perceived inactivity (Snyman, 2020:64). The use of creation language (1:14) (cf. Gen 1:26-28) firstly establishes the prophet’s conviction that God is the creator, and secondly, highlights the prophet’s overwhelming sense of turmoil and chaos that God’s rule seems to be overturned (Thomas, 2018:93). Where 1:8 utilises imagery of land animals and birds in the sky, 1:14-17 compares the Chaldeans to fishermen and their opponents to helpless fish. In 1:14, people are depicted as a group of fish devoid of any governing system, whereas 1:15 portrays a careful and deliberate approach to catching them (Renz, 2021:260). This imagery of fish caught in a net to demonstrate “sovereignty and control”, as well as “ultimate world dominion” is not uncommon in the Bible or ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt (cf. Amos 4:2; Jer 16:16; Ezek 12:13; Eccl 9:12) (Keel, 1997:89-93). It is worth noting that the metaphor of predators in 1:8-11 striking their prey

²¹ The concept צַדִּיק/ *šāddīq* (righteous) will be discussed in-depth under 3.4.3.5 to further draw out this point.

with remarkable swiftness is focused on the Babylonians (Snyman, 2020:65). In 1:14-17, however, the emphasis shifts to the hunted victims.

In 1:16, the prophet's complaint draws to a close. He brings the Chaldeans' idolatry to attention as they worship their own might and military prowess (cf. 1:11). The inference to Chaldean idolatry serves to further contrast them with the "Holy" God who is the "Rock" "from of old" from the previous section (cf. 1:12-13). Ending his second complaint, the prophet asks whether the Chaldeans will continue to ruthlessly pillage other nations (1:17). This reference to "nations" (גוֹי/gôy) in 1:17 ties Habakkuk's second complaint to God's first response where he commands the prophet to "Look at the nations" (cf. 1:5) (Anderson, 2001:187). The prophet's attention has now moved beyond the scope of his initial complaint (1:2-4) to the injustice of the Chaldeans against nations. The phrase "... destroying nations without mercy"²² (1:17) also serves as a fitting parallel to "...seize dwellings not their own" (cf. 1:6), highlighting the ruthlessness of the Chaldeans.

3.2.3.3.5 Habakkuk awaits God's response (2:1)

2:1 I will stand at my watchpost,
and station myself on the rampart;
I will keep watch to see what he will say to me,
and what he will answer concerning my complaint.

Habakkuk 2:1 places an emphasis on the prophet's expectation to receive an answer from the Lord; he anxiously awaits God's response, just like a sentinel keeping watch from a watchtower. While the precise interpretation, whether symbolic or literal, of "watchpost" (מִשְׁמֶרֶת/*mišmêrêṭ*) is not certain, the image of watching and waiting is familiar in the works of the prophets (cf. Isa 21:6-9; Ezek 3:17-21; 1 Sam 4:13). The prophet eagerly anticipates to "see" (רָאָה/*rā'ā(h)*) how God will respond to his complaints. The pinnacle of the book revolves around this moment of expectation, as the prophet awaits God to unveil the oracle that the prophet "saw" (חָזָה/*hāzā(h)*) as foretold in the title (1:1). Up to this juncture (1:2-17), the prophet has expressed confusion and indignation. Thomas (2018:101) points out the change of tone from interrogative (cf. 1:17) to indicative: the prophet is no longer questioning God or the actions of the Chaldeans, but simply states that he awaits God's answer. God is now also referred to in the third-person, indicating that the dialogue is taking another direction (Renz, 2021:266). This change in tone indicates a shift from confusion to acceptance. There appears to be a pivotal shift in the prophet's demeanour; although he awaits

²² The concept of חַמָּל/*hāmāl* (mercy) will be discussed under 3.4.3.6.

a response, this verse reflects a newfound sense of patience and expectance leading up to his sense of “equanimity” in 3:17-19 (Anderson, 2001:191).

3.2.3.4 God’s second response: God reveals what He is about to do (2:2-20)

3.2.3.4.1 Introduction (2:2-20)

In 2:2-20, the ongoing conversation between the prophet and God unfolds further with God's response to the prophet's second complaint and concludes with the delivery of five woe oracles against the wicked. The figure below illustrates how the poetic repetition of words serves to convey the development of ideas and thoughts (Thomas, 2018:99-100). A basic translation of these words is provided, based on their context. The development of broad themes can be traced through these words repeated throughout the dialogue. Among these recurring themes, צדק (righteous) is paramount to this study, with several other concepts also contributing to the foundational framework upon which it is constructed²³:

Table 1: Repetition of language in Habakkuk 2

Repeated term	Habakkuk Speaks	God Speaks	Basic Translation
ראה/r'h	2:1 (cf. 1:3,13)	(cf. 1:5)	“see, look, view” (Swanson, 1997:8011). “behold” (1:13) (NRSV).
יכח/ykh	2:1 (cf. 1:12)	-	“rebuke, discipline..., punish” (1:12) (Swanson, 1997:3519). Complaint or accusation (2:1)
יהוה/yhwh	2:2 (cf. 1:2, 12)	2:13, 14, 16, 20	“LORD”
נפש/npš	-	2:4, 5, 10	“spirit, soul, throat”
גוים/gôy/גוי'am	(cf. 1:5, 17)	2:5, 8, 10, 13	“nations’ or “people” (Swanson, 1997:6639)

²³ Possible further studies could be done to research the interrelationship between these themes and God’s righteousness, as the scope of this study does not allow a full comprehensive exploration of each of these themes.

מות/ <i>mwt</i>	(cf. 1:12)	2:5	“die” (1:12), “death” (2:5)
צדק/ <i>ṣdk</i>	(cf. 1:4, 13)	2:4	“righteous, upright, just” (Swanson, 1997:7404)
משל/ <i>mšl</i>	(cf. 1:14)	2:6	“rule, govern, control, be in charge” (1:14) (Swanson, 1997:5440). “quote a proverb or saying” (2:6) (Swanson, 1997:5439), “mocking riddles” (NRSV).
חמס/ <i>hms</i>	(cf. 1:2, 3)	2:8, 17 (cf. 1:9)	“violence”
רע/און/ <i>wn/rʿ</i>	(cf. 1:3, 13)	2:9	“evil, wickedness, iniquity” (1:3) (Swanson, 1997:224), “wrongdoing” (NRSV). “bad, evil, wicked, no good” (1:13; 2:9) (Swanson, 1997:8273), “harm” (2:9) (NRSV).
נבט/ <i>nbṭ</i>	(cf. 1:3, 13)	2:15	“look at, gaze at, consider” (Swanson, 1997:5564)
שד/ <i>šōd</i>	(cf. 1:3)	2:17	“destruction, ruin” (Swanson, 1997:8719)
אמן/ <i>mn</i>	-	2:4 (cf. 1:5)	“believe to be true, be confident of” (1:5) (Swanson, 1997:586) “faithfulness, reliability, trustworthiness” (2:4) (Swanson, 1997:574)

3.2.3.4.2 God gives a vision (2:2)

2:2 Then the Lord answered me and said:

Write the vision;
make it plain on tablets,
so that a runner may read it.

The prophet receives an answer from God and is commanded to write down what is revealed to him. Anderson (2001:202) notes that the use of the verb “answered” (עָנָה/ *ānā(h)*) indicates a positive response to someone in distress (cf. Jonah 2:3), suggesting that this is a salvation oracle. Thus, God is not inactive (cf. 1:2-4) as the prophet initially complains, but actively answers the

prophet through a vision (חֲזֹן/*hāzôn*). According to Sproul (2015:1600) the term “vision” represents a word from God, specifically a word of impending judgment nearing its fulfilment. Thomas (2018:104-105) points out the irony of God’s answer. The prophet cries out to God for help (1:2-4), and He does respond to the prophet’s outcry (1:5-11), yet His response is not at all what the prophet expected; the prophet cries out against the injustice around him, but God’s response seems to be more injustice at an even greater level. Shepherd (2018), however, notes that the vision is not given to rebuke the prophet, but on the contrary, “to bolster the faith of the true people of God”. God’s answer, although one of judgment, is offered as a consolation to the prophet and God’s people (cf. 2:4).

The prophet is commanded to write the vision down: to make it “plain on tablets”. These “tablets” (לוחות/*lûḥōt*) are reminiscent of the tablets on which the Law of the Covenant was written (cf. Exod 32:15-16; 34:1, 4, 28-29) (Snyman, 2020:67-68). Writing the vision down on tablets is also an answer to the prophet’s complaint that “the law becomes slack” (cf. 1:4). This command to write down the received vision is not exclusive to Habakkuk; other prophets were similarly instructed to write down the visions they had received (Isa 8:1-4; 30:8; Jer 36:2, 32).

The scope of the vision’s content remains ambiguous, with various proposals offered by scholars (Dietrich, 2016:126). Snyman (2020:68) agrees with Sweeney (1992:4), asserting that the essence of God’s response to the prophet is found in 2:4, where the wicked are contrasted to the righteous. Renz (2021:278) argues that the substance of the vision should be sought in chapter 2, since chapter 1 primarily consists of the prophet’s complaints, and chapter 3 marks a distinct section with its own introduction, indicated by a separate heading (cf. 3:1). Similarly, Thomas (2018:107) proposes that the content of the vision is 2:4-20 considering the relationship between “the oracle” (מִשְׁמָר/*maśśār*) (1:1) and “the vision” (חֲזֹן/*hāzôn*) (2:2), which indicates that what follows must be the content of the vision. He also observes that “tablets” (לוחות/*lûḥōt*) is plural, which suggests a substantial amount of content as opposed to only 2:4-5 which would fit on a single tablet. Armerding (2008:623) agrees, stating that “the present verse [2:2]... serves to announce the central content of what he ‘receives,’ or sees”. Both Bruce (1998:859) and Roberts (1991:116, 128) advocate that the content of the vision is eventually found in chapter 3, based on the theophany (cf. 3:3-15). Anderson (2001:202) emphasises that “the vision itself is not described” but suggests that the content of the vision might be captured in Habakkuk 3, although he leans more towards the vision referring to the woe oracles (2:6-20).

Considering the discussion above, this study holds that the vision (2:2-3) refers to the entire book of Habakkuk, based on the relationship between the terms “vision” (חֲזֹן/*hāzôn*) (2:2,3) and “saw”

(הָאֲזָאָה) (1:1) in the introduction of the book. The message of righteousness is only understood if it is seen within the context and progression of the entire text: (1) the prophet's complaints (1:2-4, 12-17; 2:1), (2) God's responses (1:5-11; 2:2-20), and (3) the Psalm of praise (3:1-19). This content would all fit on more than one tablet (cf. Thomas, 2018:107). As such, the book does not contain the oracle, but is the oracle.

The exact meaning of the phrase “so that a runner may read it” (לְמַעַן יִרְוֶץ קֹרֵא בּוֹ) is also difficult to determine. Haak (1992:56) understands it as “so that the one reading it will run” suggesting that the message is so unsettling that it will cause readers to flee in fear. Another possibility is to understand “a runner” (רֹוֹץ/rûṣ) metaphorically as referring to someone living their life or “fulfilling an assigned task” (Bratcher, 1984:120). Roberts (1991:109-110) proposes a twofold meaning to the phrase: one of the meanings is that the vision should be written “legibly on the tablets so that the one reading from it can read quickly”, the other meaning is that he should write it “on the tablets and make its import plain so that the one reading [it] can take refuge in it”. Roberts (1991:170) interprets it to mean that the prophet “must inscribe his vision plainly so that he who proclaims it may run”, implying that the message must be widely proclaimed and spread to be made known (cf. Dietrich, 2016:112-113; Floyd, 2000:473). Snyman (2020:68-69) adopts the view of Bruce (1998:859) and Tuell (2016:78) who both suggest that the expression pertains to readability with “the eye running over the letters”. This interpretation fits well with the first part of the verse, where the prophet is instructed to make the vision “plain” (בְּאֶר /bā'ār). Considering the poetic nature of the phrase, one or more interpretations may be valid. This study therefore agrees that it relates to readability, but also to the spread of the message by a “runner” so that it can be widely proclaimed.

In essence, God responds to the prophet in 2:2, giving him a “vision” (הָאֲזֹנָה/hāzōn) which he is instructed to inscribe clearly on tablets. This study contends that the entire book constitutes the content of the vision, progressively revealing the message of God's righteousness. This study also maintains that the phrase “so that a runner may read it” pertains to the readability and spreading of the message.

3.2.3.4.3 God's appointed time (2:3)

2:3 For there is still a vision for the appointed time;
it speaks of the end, and does not lie.
If it seems to tarry, wait for it;
it will surely come, it will not delay.

Anderson (2001:205) proposes that the subjects of the verbs should be God rather than the vision itself, which would align with the general tone of the entire book. The prophet is exhorted to “wait” (הָקָה/ḥāqā(h)) patiently for God to fulfil the vision in His time (Matthews, 2012:136). Although He may seem to “tarry” (מָחָה/mḥh), He is certain to come and bring the vision to fruition without “delay” (אָחַר/’āḥār). The trustworthiness of the vision is intricately linked to the trustworthiness of God Himself.

God’s sovereignty is highlighted, revealing the vision at His “appointed time” (cf. Isa 55:8-9) (Snyman, 2020:69). The prophet is assured that the vision “speaks of the end, and does not lie” and that “it will not delay”. The language used carries an eschatological resonance, possibly referring to the day of the Lord, which “offer[s] both warning and hope” and could be perceived as either positive or negative, based on God’s salvation and His judgment (Barker, 2012:132, 139).

3.2.3.4.4 The righteous are marked by faith, the proud are marked by death (2:4-5)

2:4 Look at the proud!

Their spirit is not right in them,
but the righteous live by their faith.
5 Moreover, wealth is treacherous;
the arrogant do not endure.
They open their throats wide as Sheol;
like Death they never have enough.
They gather all nations for themselves,
and collect all peoples as their own.

Although 2:4 marks a pivotal turning point in the book as it offers an answer to the prophet’s complaints (cf. 1:2-4, 12-2:1), there is also a continuity in the text (Snyman, 2020:69-70). The idea of perceiving (cf. 1:3; 1:5; 1:13; 2:1) is developed further and the prophet is urged to “look” (הִנֵּה/hinnē(h)) “at the proud!”. The “proud” (עָבָל/’pāl) stands in contrast with the “righteous” (צַדִּיק) to demonstrate what the righteous are not: they are arrogant and self-reliant, but the righteous live by faith in God (cf. 1:11, 15-17; cf. Ps 1; 5:4-12) (Achteemeier, 1986:45). The proud probably refers to the “the wicked”; not only the Chaldeans, but also those whom the prophet initially complains about among his own people (cf. 1:4) (Clark & Hatton, 1989:92). Thomas (2018:113) notes the difficulty of translating עָבָל/’uppēlā (עָבָל/’āpāl) the “proud” as the only other occurrence of this root is in Numbers 14:44 where its meaning is also contested. Roberts (1991:107,111-112) proposes that a solution to this problem is to divide עָבָל/’uppēlā into two to read לֹא יָפֵיץ/’āp lōh “to faint”, treating it as a ll-yod root. The line is then translated as: “Behold, the one who faints before it [(the vision)], his soul is not upright in him”. The subject of the pronoun would then be the vision

of 2:2-3 and not the wicked one's soul. Thus, 2:4 draws a clear distinction between the one who rejects the vision and "faints before it", and the "righteous" person who, in contrast, hears it and responds with faith. According to Thomas (2018:113), this is how it is translated and understood in the LXX. He concedes that the conventional interpretation, "Behold, his soul is puffed up" (ESV), is also reasonable, and both readings contrast two distinct groups of individuals. O'Brien (2004:51-52) doubts the traditional reading in which (אֱמוּנָה/ʿ^ē*mûnā(h)*) carries the idea of belief. Instead, she suggests that it relates to "God's consistency". She further notes that "the pronoun suffix of "faith" is masculine singular", proposing that the verse could either be translated as "the righteous one will live by his steadfastness", or as Roberts (1991:113) suggests, "the righteous one will live by its [(the vision's)] reliability". According to Shepherd (2018:327-328), "modern commentary tends to historicize [sic] the meaning of the text", understanding בְּאֱמוּנָתוֹ as "by his faithfulness" so that it relates to the verb "live" (חָיָה/*hāyā(h)*). Based on this interpretation, the text reads: "...the righteous will live by his faithfulness". This reading highlights the preservation of the righteous, even in a time of crisis such as outlined in the text. A different approach would be to understand the phrase בְּאֱמוּנָתוֹ as "by his faith", relating to the adjective (צַדִּיק/*ṣāddīq*). The text would then read: "...he who is righteous by his faith is the one who will live", meaning that the righteous one will live, and that their righteousness is attributed by faith (cf. Gen 15:6, Ps 106:31; Neh 9:8).

In light of the discussion above, this study agrees with Shepherd (2018:327-328) that בְּאֱמוּנָתוֹ should be translated as "by his faith" rather than "by his faithfulness" which is consistent with its interpretation in the New Testament²⁴. However, while אֱמוּנָה is generally associated with the notion of salvation, this study interprets it in relation to one's conducts in life²⁵

In 2:5, parataxis²⁶ is used to force readers to slow down and contemplate the intricacies embedded within the imagery and language of the text (Thomas, 2018:122). At first glance, 2:5 seems disconnected from 2:4, but it begins with "Moreover" (אֲדָמָר/*ʾāḏāmar*), suggesting that it expands on the previous verse (Anderson, 2001:216-217; Snyman, 2020:71). The focus shifts from the dichotomy between the "righteous" and the "proud" (cf. 2:4) to the seemingly unrelated ideas of wine

²⁴ Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38

²⁵ See discussion under 3.4.3.5.2.4

²⁶ The poetic art of juxtaposing seemingly unrelated words, imagery, clauses, or ideas side by side (Hauser, 1980).

(יַיִן/*yāyin*), death (מָוֶת/*māwēṭ*), and nations (גּוֹי/*gōy*) (Thomas, 2018:122-123). Where these concepts seem disjointed at first, the harmony between them becomes clear upon closer examination. In the Old Testament, wine is frequently portrayed as the conduit of divine judgment (cf. Ps 75:8 [BHS 75:9], 10 [BHS 11]; Jer 25:15; 51:7). "Sheol" (שְׁאוֹל/*še'ôl*) and "death" (מָוֶת/*māwēṭ*) dualistically symbolise the Chaldean devastation of nations (cf. 1:17), as well as their own eventual demise. Thus, 2:5 aptly serves as a bridge to the woe oracles (2:6-20).

To present the key points, 2:4 draws a contrast between the "proud" and the "righteous" to illustrate what constitutes unrighteousness. This study asserts that בְּאֵמוּנָתוֹ should be translated as "by his faith" rather than "by his faithfulness", reflecting its interpretation in the New Testament. However, within the scope of this study, the term is understood not in relation to salvation, but rather to one's conduct. The emphasis shifts in 2:5, where parataxis is employed to juxtapose the concepts of wine (יַיִן/*yāyin*), death (מָוֶת/*māwēṭ*), and nations (גּוֹי/*gōy*) to draw out its deeper meaning of divine judgment, Chaldean destruction, and their fall.

3.2.3.4.5 Woes to the wicked (2:6-20)

3.2.3.4.5.1 Introduction (2:6-20)

In 2:6-20 there are five woe oracles, signified by "alas!" (NRSV) or "woe!" (ESV) (הֵיָ/*hōy*). Woe oracles are not unique to Habakkuk and are also found in other prophetic books (cf. Isa 5:8-23; 10:1; 28:1; 29:15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1; Amos 5:18; 6:1, 4) (Snyman, 2020:73). According to Anderson (2001:225), they offer a fitting response to the prophet's prayers, even though each of the woes differs in its literary design. They unveil a shift in fortunes, adhering to the "character-consequence nexus" seen in wisdom literature in the Old Testament (Thomas, 2018:124). The nexus can be grasped as follows: when an individual or group exhibits a life marked by foolishness, they typically face calamity as their character becomes evident as both wicked and unwise. On the other hand, if an individual or a group dedicates their lives to steadfast devotion to God and their fellow human beings, they demonstrate wisdom and reverence for God. A life that is devoted to God receives His blessings. The folly of the wicked is evident through their pride, violence, wickedness, and idolatry, which marks their character. Written as wisdom sayings, or parables infused with satire and metaphorical language, these woes reveal and ridicule the character and actions of the wicked (2:6). Woes were commonly linked to funerals, and their usage in the text is effectively a death sentence against the wicked (Snyman, 2020:73). The woes are deliberately veiled to prevent complete comprehension, especially by the wicked.

The following section will examine the patterns within the woes (2:6-20) that relate to God's righteousness.

3.2.3.4.5.2 The first woe (2:6-8)

- 2:6 Shall not everyone taunt such people and, with mocking riddles, say about them,
“Alas for you who heap up what is not your own!”
How long will you load yourselves with goods taken in pledge?
- 7 Will not your own creditors suddenly rise,
and those who make you tremble wake up?
Then you will be booty for them.
- 8 Because you have plundered many nations,
all that survive of the peoples shall plunder you—
because of human bloodshed, and violence to the earth,
to cities and all who live in them.

The first half of verse 6 serves as a general introduction to all the woes (2:6-20) (Barker & Bailey, 1999:331). Although it is likely that the woes are directed at the Chaldeans, it has a general application against those who oppress others. The first woe (2:6-8) deals with extortion, with victims rising up against their oppressor (Bruckner, 2012:298). The prophet warns the wicked of impending judgment in the form of reversal of fortunes (2:7) (Matthews, 2012:136).

3.2.3.4.5.3 The second woe (2:9-11)

- 2:9 “Alas for you who get evil gain for your houses,
setting your nest on high
to be safe from the reach of harm!”
- 10 You have devised shame for your house
by cutting off many peoples;
you have forfeited your life.
- 11 The very stones will cry out from the wall,
and the plaster will respond from the woodwork.

In the second woe (2:9-11), the wicked are ridiculed for thinking that financial security will keep them “safe from the reach of harm” (2:9 cf. Num 24:21; Jer 49.16; Obad 4); particularly if gained through immoral and corrupt means in which others are exploited (2:10) (Shepherd, 2018:334). The same verb *בָּשָׁא* / *bāšā* ‘used in other Old Testament passages (cf. Ps 10; Prov 1:19; 15:27; Jer 6:13; 8:10; Ezek 22:12, 27) is also used here to describe evil gain. Ironically, in their pursuit of security, the wicked have instead “devised shame” upon their houses (2:9-10) (Snyman, 2020:74-75). The stones and plaster are personified, crying out against the evil of the wicked.

3.2.3.4.5.4 The third woe (2:12-14)

- 2:12 “Alas for you who build a town by bloodshed,
and found a city on iniquity!”
13 Is it not from the Lord of hosts
that peoples labor [sic] only to feed the flames,
and nations weary themselves for nothing?
14 But the earth will be filled
with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,
as the waters cover the sea.

Verse 12 commences with synonymous parallelism, following an ABC//ABC structure. The concepts of “build” (בָּנָה/*bānā(h)*) (A), “town” (עִיר/*’îr*) (B), and “bloodshed” (דָּם/*dām*) (C) are synonymously restated as “found” (בָּנוּ/*kûn*) (A¹), “city” (קִירָה/*qiryā(h)*) (B¹), and “iniquity” (עֲוֹלָה/*’āwlā(h)*) (C¹). This verse picks up on the theme of building from the second woe (2:9-11), paradoxically²⁷ highlighting the destruction which the wicked bring upon others and themselves (Jer 22:13; Mic 3:10; Nah 3:1; Dan 4:30) (Shepherd, 2018:335). Where the verbs “build” and “found” would generally refer to something positive, here it is used in the negative: the Chaldeans build their “town” or “city” on “bloodshed” and “iniquity” which eventually leads to their downfall (cf. Isa 13:19; 21:9; 47:1; 48:14; Jer 50; 51. The wicked house is founded upon “bloodshed” and “iniquity” as opposed to wisdom and understanding (cf. Prov 24:3;). Verse 13 also contains a synonymous parallelism, following an ABC//B¹C¹A¹ structure. Here the words “peoples” (עַם/*’ām*) (A), “labor” (עָבַד/*yāgāḏ*) (B), and “flames” (אֵשׁ/*’ēš*) (C) are restated as “weary” (יָגַע/*yā’ēp*) (B¹), “nothing” (רִיק/*rîq*) (C¹), and “nations” (עַמִּים/*’ōm*) (A¹) (Anderson, 2001:242). The futility of the work of the wicked is highlighted. Of all the content of the woe oracles, 2:14 stands as the least poetic based on its rhythm. Even so, it retains a unique air of grandeur. It closely resembles Isaiah 11:9, conveying the notion that just as the Assyrian empire met its demise (cf. 2 Kgs 19:34-36), the Chaldean empire would also face a similar fate (Snyman, 2020:76).

3.2.3.4.5.5 The fourth woe (2:15-17)

- 2:15 “Alas for you who make your neighbors drink,
pouring out your wrath until they are drunk,
in order to gaze on their nakedness!”
16 You will be sated with contempt instead of glory.

²⁷ A paradox involves two seemingly contradictory statements that, when examined more closely, reveal a deeper, coherent truth. (Ryken, 2015:55-57)

Drink, you yourself, and stagger!
 The cup in the Lord's right hand
 will come around to you,
 and shame will come upon your glory!
 17 For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you;
 the destruction of the animals will terrify you—
 because of human bloodshed and violence to the earth,
 to cities and all who live in them.

Habakkuk 2:15 uses the idea of drinking and “nakedness” metaphorically to convey various levels of meaning (Thomas, 2018:129). The first layer of meaning is an explicit reference to debauchery and drunkenness. Its deeper meaning is a depiction of immorality and exploitation (cf. Gen 9, 19:30-38; 2 Sam 11:13). Verse 16 depicts how the “glory” (כְּבוֹד/*kābôḏ*) of the wicked will turn to “shame” (קִיָּקָלֹן/*qīqālōn*) as a result of God’s judgment and draws a stark poetic contrast between the two concepts. The wicked will no longer force a cup of judgment onto other nations; instead, they will receive a cup of Judgment from “the LORD’s right hand” (cf. Exod 15:6; Isa 51:17; Jer 25:15-25; 49:12; Ezek 23:30-35; Lam 4:21) (Snyman, 2020:76). The second part of 2:17 is almost an exact repetition of 2:8, emphasising the “violence” and “bloodshed” inflicted by the wicked. There is a repetition of “violence” (cf. 1:2, 3; 1:9; 2:8) and “destruction” (cf. 1:3), but now not inflicted by the wicked, but instead inflicted to them as a result of the character-consequence nexus.

3.2.3.4.5.6 The fifth woe (2:18-19)

2:18 What use is an idol
 once its maker has shaped it—
 a cast image, a teacher of lies?
 For its maker trusts in what has been made,
 though the product is only an idol that cannot speak!
 19 Alas for you who say to the wood, “Wake up!”
 to silent stone, “Rouse yourself!”
 Can it teach?
 See, it is gold and silver plated,
 and there is no breath in it at all.

The final woe oracle (2:18-19) diverges from the preceding ones in structure, beginning with a question rather than the “woe” (Renz, 2021:326). Bruckner (2012:298) identifies seven aspects within the woe. He notes that (1) “An idol has no value because it is made by a human, (2) teaches lies, (3) cannot speak, (4) cannot come to life, (5) cannot wake up, (6) cannot give guidance and (7) has no breath”. The absence of life of idols is contrasted with “the LORD [who] is in his holy temple” (2:20). “He has created, teaches truth, is speaking, alive, awake, gives guidance, and is the one who gives the breath of life” (cf. Gen 1:1; Num 23:19; Ps 50:1; Ps 119:105; Gen 2:7). The change in structure from the previous woes signals that the woes are nearing their conclusion.

Verse 20, highlights God's sovereignty and transcendence. This verse serves as both the climax and the conclusion of the chapter. The coordinating conjunction *wāw* (וְיִהְיֶה) "But..." indicates that the verse offers an answer to all that precedes it. Although the prophet raises his complaints before the Lord (1:2-4; 12-17), the Lord remains transcendent and sovereign. While the Lord graciously engages with the prophet in dialogue, he ultimately has the final say. From this verse, the prophet moves into a prayer of praise (3:1-19) which indicates a complete shift in the prophet's perspective, much like that of Job (cf. Job 38-41; 42:1-6).

3.2.3.5 Summary (1:2-2:20)

The first section of the book of Habakkuk presents a dialogue between the prophet and God. It begins with a set of complaints, where he questions God's apparent inaction: "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?" (1:2). The prophet perceives God as being indifferent to his situation. However, God's response reveals that he is actively involved in the prophet's situation: "Look at the nations, and see! Be astonished! Be astounded! For a work is being done in your day that you would not believe if you were told" (1:5). Contrary to the prophet's expectations, God declares that he is raising up the Chaldeans as his instrument of divine justice (1:6). Though they are an ungodly nation, God uses them for his purpose (1:7-11).

The prophet protests against God's sovereignty, appealing to his everlasting nature (1:12). He reminds God that his "eyes are too pure to behold evil", and that he "cannot look on wrongdoing" (1:13). To the prophet, it seems as though God has abandoned his people with "no ruler", delivering them into the hands of their enemies (1:14-17). Habakkuk stations himself "on the rampart", awaiting God's answer to his complaint (2:1). God answers the prophet, revealing what he is about to do and commands that he write it down on tablets (2:2-3). God makes a distinction between the righteous who "live by their faith", and the wicked who are "treacherous" and "arrogant" (2:4-5). God then provides five woe oracles pertaining to the wicked, mocking them and pointing out their foolishness (2:6-20).

Throughout the dialogue, the prophet's perceived idea of God's righteousness is progressively challenged as God reveals His sovereignty.

3.2.4 Habakkuk's prayer of praise (3:1-19)

3.2.4.1 Introduction (3:1-19)

The final chapter of Habakkuk is written in the form of a Psalm that consists of two parts: a prayer Psalm (3:1-16), and a praise Psalm (3:17-19). The prayer Psalm includes the title of the Psalm (3:1), the prophet's plea for mercy (3:2), a theophany (3:3-15), and the prophet's response to the

theophany (3:16). The praise Psalm (3:17-19a) includes the prophet's declaration of trust and a subscript (3:19b).

The chapter is framed between two musical directions, “Shigionoth” (שִׁגְיוֹנוֹת)²⁸ (3:1) and “...with stringed instruments” (בְּנִינִיּוֹתַי) (3:19)²⁹, which renders it a specific unit within the book (Snyman, 2020:81-82). Together with שִׁגְיוֹנוֹת and בְּנִינִיּוֹתַי, the term “Selah” (סֶלָה/*sēlā(h)*), which only appears in 3:3, 3:9, and 3:13 outside of the Psalms (cf. Ps 3:8; 46:3; 50:6; 76:9), adds to the notion that chapter three is written with a musical intent (Clines, 1993-2011:159). Although chapter three deviates in form and style from the preceding two chapters, its repetition of language binds it to the rest of the book (Thomas, 2018:142). First, the verb רָאָה/*rā’ā(h)* (“see, look view” [qal]; “show, cause to see” [hif]) creates a thematic link (Swanson, 1997:8011). In 1:3, the prophet complains that God makes him “see [(רָאָה/*rā’ā(h)* (hif))] wrongdoing”, while in 1:5, God instructs him to “Look [(רָאָה/*rā’ā(h)* (qal))] at the nations” to witness the work that he is doing. Similarly, in 3:6-7, the prophet sees (רָאָה/*rā’ā(h)* [qal]) God’s mighty works. As the prophet looks where God directs him, he gains a new perspective.

Second, the noun פִּעֲלָה/*pō’āl* (work) appears in both 1:5 where God reveals his “work” (פִּעֲלָה/*pō’āl*) to the prophet, and in 3:2, where the prophet “...stand[s] in awe” of the Lord’s “work” (פִּעֲלָה/*pō’āl*), highlighting God’s sovereignty through his actions.

Finally, the verb יָשַׁע/*yāšā* (hif) (“save, rescue, deliver”) and the noun יְשׁוּעָה/*yēšū’ā(h)* (“salvation”, “victory”) tie the chapters together through the theme of divine deliverance (Swanson, 1997:3802, 3828). In 1:2, the prophet complains: “... how long shall I cry for help... and you will not save [(יָשַׁע/*yāšā*) (hif)]”, while in chapter three, God drives his “chariots to victory [יְשׁוּעָה/*yēšū’ā(h)* (noun)]” (3:8), and comes “to save [(יָשַׁע/*yāšā*) (noun)] [his] anointed” (3:13). The prophet proclaims that he will “exult in the God of [his] salvation [(יְשׁוּעָה/*yēšū’ā*) (noun)]” (3:18).

²⁸ The only other occurrence of שִׁגְיוֹנוֹת is in Psalm 7:1 (BHS) as שִׁגְיָנוֹת (*šiggāywn*).

²⁹ Other examples of בְּנִינִיּוֹתַי in the Psalms include Psalm 4:1 (BHS); 6:1 (BHS), 54:1 (BHS); 55:1 (BHS); 61:1 (BHS); 67:1 (BHS) and 76:1 (BHS).

These recurring concepts – רָאָה (seeing), פָּעַל (work), and יְשׁוּעָה/יִשְׁע (salvation) – serve as a thread that binds chapter three to the rest of the book through which the theme of God’s righteousness can be traced, delineated by the progression of the prophet’s perception from bewilderment—in the dialogue (chapters 1-2)—to praise in the Psalm (chapter 3).

The poem is a challenge to expound due to its “unique grammatical forms, archaic language, highly stylized [sic] poetry, succinctness, and cosmic symbolism that is, for many, shrouded in mystery” (Thomas, 2018:143-144). It does, however, offer much insight into God’s righteousness. The purpose of this study is not to exhaustively discuss the Psalm³⁰, but to discuss how it relates to God’s righteousness. It will, therefore, be treated accordingly.

The discussion below pertains to the patterns that emerge from the Psalm (3:1-19) that are relevant to God’s righteousness.

3:1 A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk according to Shigionoth.

Habakkuk’s prayer of praise begins with a title (3:1), indicating the start of an entirely new section in the book. In the title, the Psalm is classified as a “prayer”, similar to the titles commonly found in the Psalms (cf. Ps 17:1; 86:1; 90:1; 102:1; 142:1) (Snyman, 2020:82). This title highlights the distinctly poetic, if not liturgical nature of the text. The term “Shigionoth” (שִׁיגִיּוֹן/*šiggāywōn*) (cf. Ps 7:1 [BHS]) identifies the Psalm as a lament, although it contains elements of praise (cf. Ps 13). This development from lament to praise is not only valid in chapter three but can be seen throughout the book.

3.2.4.2 Prayer title (3:1)

3:1 A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk according to Shigionoth.

Habakkuk’s prayer of praise begins with a title (3:1), indicating the start of an entirely new section in the book. In the title, the Psalm is classified as a “prayer”, similar to the titles commonly found in the Psalms (cf. Ps 17:1; 86:1; 90:1; 102:1; 142:1) (Snyman, 2020:82). This title highlights the distinctly poetic, if not liturgical nature of the text. The term “Shigionoth” (שִׁיגִיּוֹן/*šiggāywōn*) (cf. Ps 7:1 [BHS]) identifies the Psalm as a lament, although it contains elements of praise (cf. Ps 13). As mentioned before, this development from lament to praise is not only true in chapter three but can be seen throughout the book.

³⁰ Both Hiebert (1986) and Anderson (2001:259-355) offer an outstanding in-depth analysis of the Psalm.

3.2.4.3 Habakkuk's plea for mercy (3:2)

3:2 O Lord, I have heard of your renown,
and I stand in awe, O Lord, of your work.
In our own time revive it;
in our own time make it known;
in wrath may you remember mercy.

In 3:2 there is a noticeable change of tone which stands in contrast to the accusing tone of the first two chapters (Snyman, 2020:82). The prophet has now assumed a posture of humility, standing "in awe" of God's work (cf. 2:20). He remembers God's works of judgment and deliverance throughout the history of His people (cf. Exod 7-11; Ps 105). He pleads that such acts be revived in his time. The prophet implores God to show "mercy" (רחם/*rḥm*) even in the midst of His "wrath" (אַף/*rōḡēz*)³¹, two concepts that appear to be in contrast. Thomas (2018:143-145) observes that 3:2 is structurally linked to 3:16, indicated by first-person speech which separates the prophet's response from the theophany (3:3-15) and forms a frame around it. In 3:2, the prophet anticipates the theophany and in verse 3:16 he responds to it.

3.2.4.4 Theophany (3:3-15)

Verses 3-15 forms a theophany which is divided into two parts, 3:3-7 where God reveals Himself, and 3:8-15 where God's wrath is displayed. Boyd (2022:570-571) observes strong thematic parallels between the theophany in Habakkuk 3:3-15 and Psalm 29. In both texts, God is depicted as a "warrior god". God is also described in both texts as a "storm god" in battle (3:8-15; cf. Ps 29:3-10). As a result of the theophany, each of these texts also ends with a doxology (3:17-19; Ps 29:11) (Boyd, 2022:575).

3.2.4.4.1 God reveals Himself (3:3-7)

3 God came from Teman,
the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah
His glory covered the heavens,
and the earth was full of his praise.
4 The brightness was like the sun;
rays came forth from his hand,
where his power lay hidden.
5 Before him went pestilence,
and plague followed close behind.
6 He stopped and shook the earth;
he looked and made the nations tremble.
The eternal mountains were shattered;

³¹ See 3.4.3.7 and 3.4.3.8

along his ancient pathways
the everlasting hills sank low.
7 I saw the tents of Cushan under affliction;
the tent-curtains of the land of Midian trembled.

In 3:3-7 the speech changes from second person to third person, forming a frame that establishes this section as a distinct unit within the theophany. (cf. 3:2, 3:8) (Thomas, 2018:145). Verse 3 begins with אֱלֹהִים/’ēlōh, “a seldom-used” term for God, where one would expect יהוה/YHWH which is often used in relation to the covenant (cf. Gen 12:1-3; 17:1; 26:24; 27:13) or אֱלֹהִים/’ēlōhîm (cf. Gen 1:1; Exod 3:4) (Snyman, 2020:82-83). אֱלֹהִים is also used in 1:11, referring to the god of the Chaldeans. They worship “their own might” as their god. The use of אֱלֹהִים in 3:3 creates a contrast between God who is “from of old”, the “Holy One” in “his holy temple” (cf. 1:12), and the god of the Chaldeans (cf. 2:18, 19, 20). The paradoxical use of אֱלֹהִים for God (the God of Habakkuk) and the god of the Chaldeans is noteworthy, highlighting a few crucial points:

- 1 God is both transcendent and immanent whilst the god of the Chaldeans is only immanent. God is not only the creator and sustainer of the universe (3:3-12; cf. Gen 1-2), but He is personally involved in the world, particularly in the lives of “[his] anointed” (3:13) (cf. Kreeft & Tacelli, 1994:93-94). Moreover, He even uses the Chaldeans and their god for his own purpose (1:6).
- 2 God has established a covenant relationship with His people (cf. Deut 7:9; Exod 19:5; 20:1-5) which is why the prophet cries out to Him for help in his situation (1:2). The Chaldeans and their god are one and the same entity, and as such have no interpersonal relationship.
- 3 God is eternal and “mark[s] them [(the Chaldeans)] for judgment” (1:12; cf. Isa 47; 48:14; Jer 51). Where the Chaldeans’ justice is only concerned with themselves (1:7), God’s overarching righteousness far exceeds the Chaldeans and the prophet’s initial perception.

In 3:3-7, God’s appearance is described with vivid imagery, symbolism, and other poetic literary devices, indicated below (Thomas, 2018:145):

Table 2: Imagery, symbolism, and other literary devices in 3:3-7

Imagery	“The brightness was like the sun; rays came forth from his hand” (3:4)
	“pestilence” and “plague” go before Him and after Him (3:5)

	He “shook the earth”, causing “eternal mountains” to shatter and “everlasting hills” to sink low (3:6)
Anthropomorphism	“rays came forth from his hand” (3:4)
	“he looked and made the nations tremble” (3:6)
Personification	“the tent-curtains of the land of Midian trembled” (3:7)

These poetic devices add to the grandeur and significance of the theophany. Thomas (2018:146) proposes the following chiastic structure for this section:

- (A) v. 3a: Place (Teman//Paran)
- (B) v. 3b: Celestial focus (sky) and terrestrial focus (earth)
- (C) v. 4: God compared to the sun
- (C1) v. 5: God’s retinue (plague and pestilence)
- (B1) v. 6: Terrestrial focus (earth, nations, mountains, hills) and celestial focus (ancient paths)
- (A1) v. 7: Place (Cushan//Midian)

This structure evokes both a sense of praise and of judgment. It begins with God’s movement, like the rising of the sun, from Teman (3:3-4) to Egypt (Cush and Midian) (3:7). This movement of God impels worship and praise from the earth and the sky (3:3b, 3:6) and the mention of “pestilence” (דִּבְרָ/ *děbēr*) and “plague” (רֶשַׁע/ *rěšēp*) recalls God’s judgment upon Egypt (3:5) (cf. Exod 9:3, 15). 3:4-5 forms the focal point of the chiasm, highlighting God’s holiness (3:4) and His judgment (3:5). The theme of judgment ties this section (3:3-7) to the woe oracles (2:6-20) and alludes to the Exodus narrative (Exod 6:1-9), speaking of God’s judgment against the wicked (cf. Deut 23:24; Ps 78:48), as well as his deliverance of the righteous (Ps 107:6).

3.2.4.4.2 God’s wrath displayed (3:8-15)

3:8 Was your wrath against the rivers, O Lord?
 Or your anger against the rivers,
 or your rage against the sea,
 when you drove your horses,
 your chariots to victory?

- 9 You brandished your naked bow,
sated were the arrows at your command. Selah
You split the earth with rivers.
- 10 The mountains saw you, and writhed;
a torrent of water swept by;
the deep gave forth its voice.
The sun raised high its hands;
- 11 the moon stood still in its exalted place,
at the light of your arrows speeding by,
at the gleam of your flashing spear.
- 12 In fury you trod the earth,
in anger you trampled nations.
- 13 You came forth to save your people,
to save your anointed.
You crushed the head of the wicked house,
laying it bare from foundation to roof. Selah
- 14 You pierced with their own arrows the head of his warriors,
who came like a whirlwind to scatter us,
gloating as if ready to devour the poor who were in hiding.
- 15 You trampled the sea with your horses,
churning the mighty waters.

The initial observation in this section is the shift from referring to God in the third person as אֱלֹהִים/’*ēlōah* (3:3) to addressing Him as יהוה/*YHWH* in the vocative (3:8), imparting a more personal tone (Barker & Bailey, 1999:365). This change in address marks the end of the previous section (3:3-7) and the start of a new section (Renz, 2021:376). A question connects this section with the one before it: “Was your wrath against the rivers, O Lord”. Avishur (1994:125-129) suggests that there is a correlation between this section and the Ba’lu myth (cf. Hallo, 2003:249). The words “rivers” (נְהָרִים/*nēhārīm*) and “sea” (יָם/*yām*) appear to align with the Ugaritic gods *Yammu* and *Naharu*. Thomas (2018:147), however, argues that the text “cannot be reduced to a mere recycling of Canaanite story”, but that the Lord is the one who delivers His people and the whole of creation responds. According to Grisanti (1997:465), turbulent “...sea depicts the restlessness of the wicked” (cf. Isa 57:20; Jer 49:23). In other places (cf. Ps 46:3; 89.9; Isa 17:12-13) there is reference to the “thunderous roar of the sea”, which in Isaiah 5:30 is “an image of [the] impending doom” of God’s people by “a nation far away” (Isa 5:26) (Ringgren, 1990:97). However, In Habakkuk 3:8, God is depicted as waging war against the sea and the rivers, bringing judgment against His enemies and deliverance for His people. The reference to God’s “wrath against the rivers” and “rage against the sea” could also be a reference to His acts of deliverance when He parted the Red Sea and the Jordan (cf. Exod 13:17-14:31; Josh 3:13-17, 4:21-24; Isa 10:26, 43:16, 50:2) (Baker, 1988:71).

Similar to 3:3-7, this section (3:8-15) continues to utilise poetic literary devices to describe the theophany:

Table 3: Imagery, symbolism, and other literary devices in 3:8-15

Synonymous Parallelism	“Was your wrath against the rivers, O Lord? Or your anger against the rivers, or your rage against the sea” (3:8)
	“at the light of your arrows speeding by, at the gleam of your flashing spear”. (3:11)
	“In fury you trod the earth, in anger you trampled nations”. (3:12)
	“You crushed the head of the wicked house, laying it bare from foundation to roof”. (3:13)
Anthropomorphism	“when you drove your horses, your chariots to victory”? (3:8)
	“You brandished your naked bow” (3:9)
	“You pierced with their own arrows the head of his warriors” (3:15)
	“You trampled the sea with your horses” (3:15)
Personification	“sated were the arrows at your command” (3:9)
	“The mountains saw you, and writhed” (3:10)
	“the deep gave forth its voice” (3:10)
	“The sun raised high its hands” (3:10)
	“the moon stood still in its exalted place, at the light of your arrows speeding by, at the gleam of your flashing spear”
	“you drove your horses, your chariots to victory”? (3:8)

Imagery	"You brandished your naked bow, sated were the arrows at your command" (3:9)
	"You split the earth with rivers" (3:9)
	"The mountains saw you, and writhed; a torrent of water swept by" (3:10)
	"the deep gave forth its voice. The sun raised high its hands" (3:10)
	"the moon stood still in its exalted place, at the light of your arrows speeding by, at the gleam of your flashing spear" (3:11)
	"In fury you trod the earth, in anger you trampled nations". (3:12)
	"You crushed the head of the wicked house, laying it bare from foundation to roof" (3:13)
	"You pierced with their own arrows the head of his warriors, who came like a whirlwind to scatter us, gloating as if ready to devour the poor who were in hiding" (3:14)
	"You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the mighty waters" (3:15)

Building upon 3:3-7, strong imagery and other poetic literary devices are used to communicate both God's wrath and his mercy. This second part of the theophany also follows a chiastic structure. Snyman (2020:84-85) offers the following outline for this section:

- A The sea and rivers as mighty powers (v. 8)
- B yhwh's weapons: bow and arrows and a spear (v. 9a)
- C The effect God's appearance has on nature (vv. 9b-11)
- D God's anger as viewed by the earth and the nations (v. 12)
- C' The effect of God's appearance both on His people and on the enemy (v. 13)
- B' yhwh's weapons: spears (v. 14)
- A' The sea and the deep waters in history (v. 15)

Where this outline is concise, Thomas' (2018:147) outline is more elaborate and better suited for the objectives of this study, pertaining to God's righteousness:

- (A) v. 8: Waters, sea, and horses
- (B) v. 8: Anger and rage; salvation
- (C) v. 9: Staff
- (D) v. 9: God makes the earth burst
- (E) v. 10: Terrestrial convulsion (mountains and deep)
- (E¹) v. 11: Celestial convulsion (sun and moon)
- (D¹) v. 12: God treads the earth
- (B¹) v. 12: Anger and fury; salvation (v. 13)
- (C¹) v. 14: Staff
- (A¹) v. 15: Sea, horses, great waters

Through this chiasmic structure, a thematic repetition can be observed (2018:147). A (3:8) corresponds with A¹ (3:15), B (3:8) corresponds with B¹ (3:12), C (3:9) corresponds with C¹ (3:14), D (3:9) corresponds with D¹ (3:12), and E (3:10) corresponds with E¹ (3:11). Notice, however, that there is a shift in the structure between B¹ and C¹. The focal point of this section is 3:10-11, highlighting both God's immanence and his transcendence. God is active in the world, but also at a cosmic level in the universe.

In 3:3-7, the theophany is presented as a historical account, while in 3:8-15, Habakkuk seeks to remind God of what He has done (Anderson, 2001:314). However, it is not the case that God needs to be reminded of His actions in the past, but rather that the prophet needs to remind himself of the things God has done (cf. Deut 4:32-40). By remembering, the prophet is not "simply recalling information from the past", but as he remembers, he acquires a new perspective (Jones, 2014). From his new perspective, he responds in awe and praise (cf. 3:16-19). God is actively engaged in the judgment of the wicked and deliverance of his people. "God's integrity guarantees [H]is punishment" (Waltke & Yu, 2007:830). In accordance with his righteousness, God executes his judgment upon the wicked, not only the wicked Chaldeans but also the wicked within the Judahite society. His judgment is expressed through "wrath" (חַרָּה/ḥārā(h)) (3:8), "anger" (אַף/ʾāp) (3:8, 12), "rage" (עֶבְרָה/ʿēbrā(h)) (3:8), and "fury" (זַעַם/zāʿām) (3:12). He delivers the righteous, by simultaneously expressing salvation language: "...you drove... your chariots to victory [(יָשַׁע/yaśāʿ) (h))]" (3:8), and "You came forth to save [(יָשַׁע/yaśāʿ)] your people]" (3:13). Both God's justice and His mercy are at work in the world.

3.2.4.5 Habakkuk's response (3:16)

3:16 I hear, and I tremble within;
my lips quiver at the sound.
Rottenness enters into my bones,
and my steps tremble beneath me.
I wait quietly for the day of calamity
to come upon the people who attack us.

Habakkuk 3:16 continues the prayer that is initiated in 3:2, indicated by the return to the first-person singular address (Snyman, 2020:87-88). The repetition of “hear” (שָׁמַע/šāmaʿ), and “tremble” (רָגַז/rāḡāz) further builds this connection between 3:2 and 3:16. This establishes a framework for the theophany (3:3-15). In 3:16, God is no longer the addressee but instead, there is a shift towards the prophet's reflection upon the theophany. The prophet's response can be divided into two distinct segments: initially, he is overwhelmed, and then he declares that he will “wait quietly for the day of calamity to come” (the “invasion of Judah and judgment on Babylon”) (Sprinkle, 2017:1434). Habakkuk's physical response – his “lips quiver at the sound”, “Rottenness” enters in his bones, and his “steps tremble” beneath him – to the theophany is not uncommon among the prophets (cf. Isa 21:3-4; Jer 4:19; Dan 7:8; 8:27; 10:9). Although the prophet responds in fear, he moves from a position of fear to a position of faith. Where he previously harboured apprehension towards God's *justice* (cf. 1:13), he has now gained a greater understanding of God's righteousness, patiently awaiting “the day of calamity to come upon the people who attack [them]”.

3.2.4.6 Habakkuk's declaration of trust (3:17-19a)

3:17 Though the fig tree does not blossom,
and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails
and the fields yield no food;
though the flock is cut off from the fold
and there is no herd in the stalls,
18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will exult in the God of my salvation.
19 God, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
and makes me tread upon the heights.

Habakkuk's declaration of trust marks the climax of the book. Habakkuk 3:17 is elegantly composed in flawless poetic symmetry (Snyman, 2020:88-89). The use of agricultural language ties it to creation references throughout the book (cf. 1:6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14; 2:8; 11, 14, 17, 20; 3:3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13; 15, 16). It again follows a chiastic structure (Robertson, 1990:244-245):

A the fig tree
B shall not blossom
B' and no fruit
A' on the vines

A shall fail
B the making of the olive
B' and the fields
A' shall not make food

A shall be cut off from the field
B the flock
B' and no cattle
A' in the stalls

Habakkuk 3:18 forms the focal point of the whole section, in which the prophet proclaims his trust in God. The language of 3:19 is similar to Psalm 18:33: "He made my feet like the feet of a deer, and set me secure on the heights", bringing praise to God (Thomas, 2018:152-153). In the context of Habakkuk, however, amidst great calamity, the prophet brings praise to God, with an expectance of deliverance. The entire message of Habakkuk, relating to God's righteousness is summed up in this section: although the prophet may not understand God's sovereign plan of judgment and deliverance, he trusts in, and submits to his plan and purpose, even in the midst of severe calamity.

3.2.4.7 Subscript (3:19b)

To the leader: with stringed instruments.

The psalm's subscript suggests that it was sung with musical accompaniment, whether within a formal worship environment or informally.

3.2.4.8 Summary (3:1-19)

The conclusion of the book of Habakkuk features a Psalm divided into two sections. The first is a Psalm of prayer (3:1-16), comprising a title (3:1), a plea for mercy (3:2), a theophany (3:3-15), and the prophet's response to the theophany. The second section is a Psalm of praise (3:17-19), containing the prophet's declaration of trust (3:17-19a) and a subscript (3:19b). The musical directions "Shigionoth" (שִׁגְיוֹנוֹת) (3:1), "...with stringed instruments" (בְּנִינִיּוֹת) (3:19), and the term "Selah" (סֶלָה/sēlā(h)) (3:3, 9, 13), suggest that the Psalm was written with a musical purpose in mind.

In 3:2, the prophet's tone changes from inquisition to awe as he pleads with God to have “mercy” (רַחֵם/*rāḥām*) in His “wrath” (רָגַז/*rōḡēz*), and that He would “revive” (חַיָּה/*ḥāyā(h)*) his works of judgment and deliverance (cf. Exod 7-11; Ps 105).

The concepts of רָאָה (“see, look view” [qal]; “show, cause to see” [hif]) (3:6-7 cf. 1:3, 5), פָּעַל (work) (3:2 cf. 1:5), and יִשְׁעֵי/יְשׁוּעָה (“save, rescue, deliver”/“salvation”, “victory”) (3:8, 13, 18 cf. 1:2) unify chapter three with the rest of the book (Swanson, 1997:3802, 3828, 8011). Through the progression of these concepts in the text, the prophet's disposition changes from one of being very disconcerted in the dialogue (chapters 1-2) to one of praise in the Psalm (chapter 3), as his perception of God's righteousness is expanded.

In the first part of the theophany (3:3-7), God is referred to as אֱלֹהִים/^ē*lōh* rather than יהוה/*YHWH* (cf. Gen 12:1-3; 17:1; 26:24; 27:13), or אֱלֹהִים/^ē*lōhîm* (cf. Gen 1:1; Exod 3:4), drawing a deliberate comparison between God (the God of Habakkuk) and the god of the Chaldeans (cf. 1:11). The use of אֱלֹהִים highlights God's superiority and sovereignty over the Chaldeans and their god as He is immanent and transcendent and establishes a covenant relationship with His people (cf. Deut 7:9; Exod 19:5; 20:1-5). Overall, this section (3:3-7) reinforces themes of God's holiness, judgment against the wicked, and deliverance of the righteous.

In the second part of the theophany (3:8-15), God wages war against the rivers and the sea, bringing to mind His acts of judgment and deliverance when He parted the Red Sea and the Jordan (cf. Exod 13:17-14:31; Josh 3:13-17, 4:21-24; Isa 10:26, 43:16, 50:2). As the prophet remembers God's actions from the past, he gains a new perspective of His righteousness. This new perspective leads to a doxology (3:16-19).

In 3:16, the prophet moves from an initial response of fear to one of faith. He declares his trust in God, even amidst great calamity (3:17-19).

3.2.5 Conclusion

Throughout the text, various patterns arise that reveal significant concepts related to God's righteousness. These patterns have been systematically examined according to the structural outline of the text as they unfold. In the dialogue (1:2–2:20), Habakkuk presents a complaint to God, questioning His apparent inaction (1:2–4). Initially, the prophet perceives God as indifferent to his circumstances. However, God's response reveals that He is not passive but actively engaged (1:5), albeit in a manner that Habakkuk does not anticipate. God declares that He is raising up the Chaldeans as instruments of divine justice (1:6). Although they are an ungodly

nation, He sovereignly employs them to fulfil His purpose (1:7–11). Struggling to reconcile this with his understanding of divine justice, Habakkuk raises a second complaint and awaits God’s response (1:12–2:1).

God answers by instructing Habakkuk to record the revelation (2:2–3). He distinguishes between the righteous, who “live by their faith” (2:4), and the proud, who are “treacherous” and “arrogant.” Through five woe oracles (2:6–20), God exposes the folly of the wicked. Throughout this dialogue, Habakkuk’s understanding of God’s righteousness is progressively challenged as God unveils His sovereignty.

The book concludes with a psalm (3:1–19), marking a significant shift in the prophet’s tone—from inquisition to reverence. Habakkuk pleads for God’s mercy amid His wrath and prays for the renewal of His works of judgement and deliverance (3:2). Whereas in chapters 1–2 the prophet is deeply disconcerted, in chapter 3 he responds with praise, as his understanding of God’s righteousness expands. Following the theophany (3:3–15), he initially expresses fear (3:16) but ultimately moves to a position of faith and trust, even in the face of impending calamity (3:17–19).

Building on the insights gained from these patterns, we now turn to the facet of language, where we will examine semantic issues and conduct in-depth word studies on key terms.

3.3 Language

3.3.1 Introduction

Aubrey (2016:191) notes that exegesis is essentially “an intersection of history, theology and language”. The study of language forms the most in-depth part of the exegetical process. Where other facets are concerned with the bigger picture, language exegesis is done at a micro level. This part of the study will now focus on the language aspect of exegesis. Waltke and O'Connor (1990:46) suggest that there are two basic categories into which language can be divided: “words (lexis) and their relations (grammar)”. There are various levels at which lexis and grammar can be studied.

- 1 Phonology: phonology is the study of sounds and their use in language (Widder, 2016a:11-12).

- 2 Morphology: morphology is the study of how words are formed through the organisation of sounds (Widder, 2016a:20-21)³². The most basic units of sounds are called “phonemes”, while the smallest units of grammatical form are called “morphemes”. The fundamental form of a word abstracted from its various inflections or variations, is called a “lexeme”³³ (Cotterell, 1997:134-135).
- 3 Semantics: through the study of semantics, we determine the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences (Widder, 2016a:28-37). The specific branch of semantics that explores the meaning of phrases and words is called lexical semantics. Lexical semantics is interested in “content words” (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs). Barr (1961:246) suggests that it is not merely the etymology of words that is important in determining meaning, but its immediate context. Kelsey (1975:27) adds that “a word does not have one structure of systematically interrelated senses that goes with the word in every context of use”. In other words, the meaning of a word is determined by its context. Carson (1996:64) furthermore asserts that “semantics... is more than the meaning of words. It involves phrases, sentences, discourse, genre, style”. That is to say, semantic studies cannot be done in a vacuum, but must consider the context in which they occur (grammatical, historical, and genre).
- 4 Syntax: Syntax is concerned with the arrangement of words into “phrases clauses and sentences” (Widder, 2016a:39). Osborne (2006:113) suggests that “syntax is structural at the core”. The study of syntax is undergirded by three fundamental aspects:
 - (1) Rhetorical patterns, which explore the interplay between sentence units.
 - (2) Grammar, which addresses the connections between individual terms and phrases.
 - (3) Semantics, which delves into the semitactical relationships among the meanings of terms within the broader surface structure.

Stuart (2016) makes a very important point: “Words and concepts are not the same thing, but words convey concepts in written materials”. Words (or terms) possess no intrinsic meaning; their meaning is only determined once the context is established (Cotterell, 1997:147). Words and

³² Phonology and morphology are not the main concern of this study unless it may bear a significance in the understanding of a concept relevant to the study.

³³ Lyons (1987:101) asserts that a lexeme constitutes both the “standard citation-form” and the “base-form” of a word. The citation-form is the form in which is used for the alphabetical dictionary listing of a lexeme. “The base-form is that form, if any, from which all the other forms of the lexeme can be derived by the morphological rules of the language.

phrases are only the means through which concepts are communicated. Terms are the labels by which concepts are categorised. Under these labels, concepts are conceptualised³⁴. By employing specific words and phrases, concepts are constructed in the reader's mind³⁵. Therefore, the study of words is concerned with the concept, or concepts, formed behind words, rather than the words themselves³⁶; hence, this study will examine language in Habakkuk in the sense that it relates to the concept of righteousness.

In this facet, the key terms—חָמָס/*hāmās* (1:2, 3, 9; 2:8, 17), יָשָׁא/*yāšāʿ* (1:2), מִשְׁפָּט/*mišpāt* (1:4, 7, 12), רָשָׁא/*rāšāʿ* (1:4, 13; 3:13), שֶׁדִּי/*šaddīq* (1:4, 13; 2:4), חָמָל/*hāmāl* (1:17), רֹגֵז/*rōḡēz*/רָגַז/*rāḡāz* (3:2, 7, 16), and רָחֵם/*rāḥām* (3:2)—will be examined while also addressing key semantic issues relating to God's righteousness.

3.3.2 Terms to be investigated

The following terms have been identified as semantically important because they contribute to understanding the concept of righteousness, which is the primary focus of this study. The identified terms will be briefly mentioned according to their translation in the NRSV, setting the scene for a contextual exposition of each term.

3.3.2.1 חָמָס/*hāmās* (1:2, 3, 9; 2:8, 17)

- The noun חָמָס appears in the following verses of Habakkuk: 1:2, 3, 9; 2:8; twice in 2:17. In all these instances חָמָס is translated as “violence” in the NRSV.

³⁴ “Conceptualization [sic] is the process of determining a set of cognitive features (including categorical) of a phenomenon of the real or imaginary world, allowing a person to have, remember and supplement with new information some emerging concept and idea about this phenomenon and distinguish it from other phenomena”.

³⁵ According to Туйтеева (2022:67), concepts “that arise in the minds of people are based not only on the meanings of words taken from dictionaries, but also on the basis of individual, national, cultural and historical experience, and the richer the experience, the wider the boundaries of the concept[s], the greater the possibility of an emotional aura of the word, which is reflected in all aspects of the concept[s]”.

³⁶ In some respects, linguistics is interested in words, in and of themselves, but that is not the concern of this study. This study is particularly focused on the concepts conveyed through the words.

3.3.2.2 יָשַׁע/*yāšāʿ* (1:2)

- The verb יָשַׁע appears in Habakkuk 1:2 in the hifʿil³⁷ form. It is translated as “save” in the NRSV.

3.3.2.3 מִשְׁפָּט/*mišpāṭ* (1:4, 7, 12)

The noun מִשְׁפָּט appears in the following verses of Habakkuk: twice in 1:4, and also in 7, 12. The NRSV translates it as follows:

- “justice” in 1:4
- “judgment” in 1:4
- “justice” in 1:7
- “judgment” in 1:12

3.3.2.4 רָשָׁע/*rāšāʿ* (1:4, 13; 3:13)

- The adjective רָשָׁע appears in the following verses of Habakkuk: 1:4, 13, 3:13. In all these instances רָשָׁע is translated as “wicked” in the NRSV.

3.3.2.5 צַדִּיק/*šaddīq* (1:4, 13; 2:4)

- The adjective צַדִּיק appears in the following verses of Habakkuk: 1:2, 13, 2:4. In all these instances צַדִּיק is translated as (the) “righteous” in the NRSV.

3.3.2.6 חַמָּל/*ḥāmāl* (1:17)

- The verb חַמָּל appears in the qal³⁸ form in Habakkuk 1:17. It is translated as “mercy” in the NRSV.

³⁷ The hifʿil form or “stem” of a verb is used to “indicat[e] the causative sense” (Heiser & Setterholm, 2013). This means that “the subject of the verb in the hifʿil stem causes the object of the verb to participate in the action of the verb as a sort of ‘undersubject’ or ‘secondary subject’”.

³⁸ “The qal is the unmarked stem; it has no nuanced meaning per se” (Heiser & Setterholm, 2013).

3.3.2.7 רָגַז/*rōgēz*/רָגַז/*rāgāz* (3:2, 7, 16)

The noun רָגַז appears once in Habakkuk 3:2. It is translated as “wrath” in the NRSV.

The verb רָגַז appears three times in the qal form in the text (3:7; twice in 3:16). The NRSV translates it as follows:

- “trembled” (3:7)
- Both occurrences in 3:16 are translated as “tremble”

3.3.2.8 רָחַם/*rāḥām* (3:2)

- The verb רָחַם appears in the pi‘‘ēl³⁹ form in Habakkuk 3:2. It is translated as “mercy” in the NRSV.

3.3.3 Exposition of key semantical terms

The terms mentioned above will be carefully expounded to gain a greater understanding of God’s righteousness in the book of Habakkuk. These terms will be examined with particular interest in the concepts behind them. The following outline will guide the study of these terms:

- (c) The context in which the term occurs
- (d) The contextual meaning of the term

First, the context in which the term occurs will be briefly discussed as a basis for its contextual meaning. The meaning of the term will then be discussed as it relates to its immediate context within Habakkuk. The study of these terms will only be done in so far as it relates to the concept of God’s righteousness, which is the primary concern of this research.

3.3.3.1 חָמָס/*noun/hāmās* (1:2, 3, 9; 2:8, 17)

The noun חָמָס (violence) appears six times in the book of Habakkuk (1:2, 3, 9; 2:8, and twice in 2:17).

³⁹ “The pi‘‘ēl stem expresses the bringing about of a state. The object of the pi‘‘ēl verb’s action “suffers the effect” of the action; i.e., it is put into a state by the action” (Heiser & Setterholm, 2013).

3.3.3.1.1 Context of **סָמָה**

3.3.3.1.1.1 **סָמָה (1:2-3)**

1:2 O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,
and you will not listen?
Or cry to you “Violence!”
and you will not save?
3 Why do you make me see wrongdoing
and look at trouble?
Destruction and violence are before me;
strife and contention arise.

In 1:2-3, **סָמָה** (and all its cognates⁴⁰) provides the context for the prophet’s complaints (1:2-4, 12-2:1), and sets the backdrop for the entire book. The prophet cries out to God because of the **סָמָה** within the society and pleads with God to save (**יָשָׁא**/*yāšā*)⁴¹ him from the injustice around him. As a result of the **סָמָה**, there is a total breakdown in the society; “the law⁴² becomes slack and justice never prevails” (1:4). **סָמָה** leads to a perverted sense of justice (**מִשְׁפָּת**/*mišpāt*)⁴³. In 1:2-3, **סָמָה** refers to the internal violence committed by Judahites in the community. The violence among Judahites triggers the first, internal, level of the prophet’s complaints (1:2-4).

3.3.3.1.1.2 **הָמָס (1:9)**

1:9 They all come for violence,
with faces pressing forward;
they gather captives like sand.

⁴⁰ **אָוֶן**/*āwēn* (“wrongdoing”) (1:3), **עָמָל**/*āmāl* (“trouble”) (1:3), **שֹׁד**/*šōd* (“destruction”) (1:3), **מָדוֹן**/*māḏōn* (“strife”) (1:3), and **רִיב**/*rīb* (“contention”) (1:3) are all terms with similar meanings to **סָמָה**. Possible further studies could be done to examine the nuanced relationship between **סָמָה** and each of these terms/concepts.

⁴¹ See 3.4.3.2

⁴² Halton (2012:499-500) notes that the biblical prophets did not consider the law to be “an abstract concept”, “but rather... the very character and nature of God that God embedded into the fabric of the universe”. He further states that “embracing divine law leads to peace and life, while rejection of it leads to destruction and violence”. “Divine law fosters human flourishing and a harmonious relationship with God”.

⁴³ See 3.4.3.3

The focus of *ḥm* (violence) in 1:9 shifts from the Judahites towards the Chaldeans, depicting their brutality. They “seize dwellings not their own” (1:6) and “their justice... proceed from themselves” (1:7). They “fly like an eagle swift to devour” (1:8) and “gather captives like sand” (1:9). They “scoff” at kings and “make sport” of rulers (1:10). They “transgress and become guilty” and “their own might is their god” (1:11). The entire existence of the Chaldeans seems to be permeated with *ḥm*. The prophet’s initial complaint (1:2-4) concerning the *ḥm* committed by Judahites seems to be drowned by the *ḥm* of the Chaldeans. From his perspective, *ḥm* committed by non-Judahites (the Chaldeans) is much worse than *ḥm* committed among God’s covenant⁴⁴ community (1:12-13) (Fee & Hubbard, 2011:473). The *ḥm* of the Chaldeans prompts the prophet’s second complaint (1:12-17). He is now even more distraught than before (1:12-13).

3.3.3.1.1.3 *ḥm* (2:8,17)

2:8 Because you have plundered many nations,
all that survive of the peoples shall plunder you—
because of human bloodshed, and violence to the earth,
to cities and all who live in them.

2:17 For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you;
the destruction of the animals will terrify you—
because of human bloodshed and violence to the earth,
to cities and all who live in them.

In 2:8 and 17, *ḥm* is no longer portrayed from the prophet’s perspective, but now depicted from God’s perspective. Where the prophet complains about the *ḥm* of the Judahites (1:2-3) and the Chaldeans (1:12-13 cf. 1:9), God’s perspective is revealed in the six woe oracles (2:6-19). Here, *ḥm* is used in the context of judgment against the Chaldeans. It becomes clear that God will punish the Chaldeans for the *ḥm* that they have committed against other nations, even though they are His chosen conduit to bring about his judgment against the Judahites (1:6). The *ḥm* that they have committed will now be committed against them (2:7-8)⁴⁵. After being confronted with

⁴⁴ See footnote 3 under 2.2.1

⁴⁵ See discussion on *lex talionis* under 3.4.3.5.2.3

God's perspective of **סָחַק**, the prophet recognises God's sovereignty even amid his questions (2:20).

3.3.3.1.2 סָחַק meaning within context

The concept of **סָחַק** is significant to this study as it directly relates to God's righteousness. The prophet brings God's righteousness into question in response to the **סָחַק** which he witnesses. Bearing in mind the various contexts of **סָחַק** discussed above, we must first establish a general understanding of what **סָחַק** means and then consider its meaning in each of its occurrences in Habakkuk (1:2, 3, 9; 2:8, 17) (cf. Stuart, 2009:114).

3.3.3.1.2.1 Possible meaning of the lexeme סָחַק

Swanson (1997:2805) states that **סָחַק** refers to "the ruining of a thing, or land, or people, with a focus on the violence that accompanies these acts". Haag (1980:480-481) notes that **סָחַק** is frequently used alongside **שָׁחַד**, which both refer to oppression. However, while **שָׁחַד** implies "violence against property and possession", **סָחַק** conveys "an attack on human life". According to Stoebe (1997b:437), the correlation between the two concepts is rooted in the premise that **שָׁחַד** highlights the "active doing" while **סָחַק** signifies "the nature or consequence of the deed". Thus, **סָחַק** expresses the aftermath of **שָׁחַד**, depicting its extended implications. Swart and Van Dam (1997:177-178) identify two levels on which **סָחַק** occurs. Firstly, within the community, **סָחַק** depicts social injustice inflicted by one group upon another (1:2-4). This relates to Judahites who inflict **סָחַק** upon others within the covenant community. This is the context of the prophet's first complaint. The second level of **סָחַק** involves international oppression, where "a weaker nation [is afflicted] by a powerful nation" (1:5-11). It is in this context that God uses **סָחַק** to discipline His covenant people for their unfaithfulness, directing them back to obedience. Both these levels of **סָחַק** are represented in the book of Habakkuk.

3.3.3.1.2.1.1 Meaning of סָחַק (1:2-3)

In Habakkuk's first complaint (1:2-4), he cries out to God against the violence (**סָחַק**) prevalent at a communal level. He pleads for God's justice (1:4) against the wicked (Judahites) who inflict

violence upon others in the community. The meaning of *חֲמָץ* in 1:2-3 is closely related to the terms, *אָוֶן* / *āwēn* (“wrongdoing”) (1:3), *אָמָל* / *āmāl* (“trouble”) (1:3), *שֹׁד* / *šōd* (“destruction”) (1:3), *מַדּוֹן* / *māḏōn* (“strife”) (1:3), and *רִיב* / *rīb* (“contention”) (1:3)⁴⁶. The use of *חֲמָץ* in 1:2 serves as an overarching concept for all these terms, each of which add a different nuance to the overall concept of *חֲמָץ* in this section. In 1:3, *חֲמָץ* is related to “the law [that] becomes slack” (1:4), indicating that the prevalence of violence in the community leads to the impairment of the Torah. Swanson (1997:2805) states that the concept of *חֲמָץ* includes acts of “violence” that imply “a lawlessness... and lack of moral restrain[t]”. This definition seems to fit the meaning of *חֲמָץ* in 1:2-3.

Although the prophet complains about the violence of the wicked (Judahites), he later compares this violence to the violence of the Chaldeans (1:12-13), stating that they (the Chaldeans) are much worse than the Judahites. However, his perception is misconceived as the violence of Judah is a direct consequence of “extreme wickedness” (Harris, 1980:297) (cf. Isa 1:1-25).

3.3.3.1.2.1.2 Meaning of *חֲמָץ* (1:9)

In God’s first response (1:5-11), He shifts the focus of *חֲמָץ* from a local to an international scale. Here, *חֲמָץ* is used in relation to how the Chaldeans conduct themselves. “They... come for violence” (1:9); they have an insatiable lust after violence. Their *חֲמָץ* involves oppression (1:6, 10) and self-elevation (1:7). However, God uses the violence of the Chaldeans as His sovereign instrument of judgment against his covenant people (Judah). Ironically, God’s response to the violence (of the Judahites), which the prophet complains about (1:2-4), seems to be even more violence (Thomas, 2018:85). The prophet subsequently complains against God’s divine justice (1:12-13), questioning how God can allow the wicked to “swallow those [who are] more righteous⁴⁷” through their violence. From Habakkuk’s perspective, God’s divine use of *חֲמָץ* seems to contradict His nature (1:13) (cf. Ps 11:5; Jer 22:3; Ezek 45:9; Mal 2:16) (van der Walt, 2024:87). He struggles to understand how God can employ violence for His greater purpose.

⁴⁶ See footnote 40 under 3.4.3.1.1.1

⁴⁷ See 3.4.3.5

3.3.3.1.2.1.3 Meaning of חֲמָץ (2:8,17)

Where חֲמָץ is associated with judgment against the Judahites in 1:9, it is used in 2:8 and 2:17 in the context of judgment against the Chaldeans for the violence which they have committed against other nations. While the prophet distinguishes between violence administered by “the wicked” (Chaldeans) and by “those more righteous than they” (Judahites) (1:13), God detests חֲמָץ regardless of whether it is among His own covenant people or the Chaldeans, even though He uses it for his greater purpose. This is evident when the חֲמָץ (2:8) inflicted by the Chaldeans is inflicted upon them (2:17; cf. 2:4, 5).

Human violence extends beyond harm inflicted upon others; it ultimately constitutes an offence against God Himself, violating His holiness and righteousness (Haag, 1980:485-486). God does not endorse violence in any form, and as a result, violence provokes God’s wrath against perpetrators. Nevertheless, God can utilise violence to fulfil His greater purposes. While the prophet’s perspective is constrained by his immediate circumstances, God’s perspective encompasses His broader, sovereign plan. God uses violence, although enacted through human agents (1:6), to fulfil His greater purpose. God broadens the prophet’s understanding, revealing His greater purpose behind the Chaldeans’ acts of violence and the divine judgment that will follow.

3.3.3.1.3 חֲמָץ Synthesis

In the book of Habakkuk, two distinct levels of violence are depicted: internal injustice within the community of Judah (1:2-4), and international oppression, where a dominant nation (the Chaldeans) oppress a weaker nation (Judah) (1:5-11) (Swart & Van Dam, 1997:177-178).

In 1:2-3, the prophet laments the prevalence of violence in the community and pleads for divine justice against the wicked Judahites. Here, חֲמָץ occurs among various related terms such as אָוֶן/’*āwēn* (“wrongdoing”), אָמָל/’*āmāl* (“trouble”), שֹׁד/’*šōd* (“destruction”), מַדּוֹן/’*māḏōn* (“strife”), and רִיב/’*rīb* (“contention”), to describe the prevalence of violence and its impact. This violence leads to the impairment of the law (1:4).

In response to the prophet’s complaint, God shifts the focus of חֲמָץ from local to international dimensions in 1:5-6, where He describes the violence of the Chaldeans. Despite the prophet’s view that the Chaldeans’ violence is more severe than that of the Judahites, God’s use of violence

as His means of divine judgment reveals his sovereign plan, even though it seems contradictory to His nature (cf. 1:13).

In 2:8 and 2:17, חֲמָס is associated with the judgment against the Chaldeans for their violence against other nations. Although God detests violence in all contexts, He employs it to achieve His greater purposes. This dual application underscores the idea that, while God does not condone violence, He can use it within His broader, sovereign plan to fulfil His divine objectives.

The preceding discussion on חֲמָס establishes a foundation for an in-depth exploration of מִשְׁפָּט and its significance within the book of Habakkuk.

3.3.3.2 יָשַׁע/hif'îl/yāšā' (1:2)

The verb יָשַׁע/yāšā' (save) (תִּשְׁיַע – hif'îl, imperfect, second person, masculine, singular) appears once in the book of Habakkuk (1:2)

3.3.3.2.1 Context of יָשַׁע

3.3.3.2.1.1 יָשַׁע (1:2)

1:2 O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,
and you will not listen?
Or cry to you “Violence!”
and you will not save?

In 1:2, the prophet uses the hif'îl verb יָשַׁע (תִּשְׁיַע) in the negative (לֹא), asking how long he will cry out to God against the violence (חֲמָס) around him before He יָשַׁע (save(s)/rescue(s)/deliver(s)) him (Swanson, 1997:3828). The prophet's complaint (1:2-4) stems from his frustration with his perceived situation. Although he acknowledges that God alone has the power to יָשַׁע him from his circumstances (cf. Ps 46:1; 62:1-2 68:10; 27:1), he feels disconcerted that God has not yet intervened and saved him (Sawyer & Fabry, 1990:455-456). According to the prophet, יָשַׁע/yāšā'

(salvation/deliverance)⁴⁸ is at the heart of God's character, and he pleads with God to *yšc* him from his current situation.

In 3:13 and 3:18, the noun *yšc* is used in the context of the theophany (3:3-15), where God saves "[His] anointed" whilst "crush[ing] the head of the wicked house".

3.3.3.2.2 *yšc* meaning within context

We will now discuss the meaning of *yšc*, considering its general meaning and then move to its meaning in the context discussed above (1:2).

3.3.3.2.2.1 Possible meaning of the lexeme *yšc*

According to Foerster (1964-:973-974), the *hif'il* *yšc* (תוֹשִׁיעַ) literally means "'to make spacious' for one who is constricted". It refers to the deliverance of the "weak or oppressed", who would otherwise be utterly forsaken. Sawyer and Fabry (1990:455-456) affirm that unequivocally, God is the only "proper subject" of *yšc* and *yšc*/yēšā' (salvation) (2:18-19; cf. Isa 43:11; 45:20, 21; 46:7; 47:13; Jer 2:27, 28; 14:9; 11:12). Hubbard (1997:556) agrees, asserting that *yšc* (save) is almost always used in the Old Testament in the sense of God rescuing His people from trouble. Furthermore, he notes that "Yahweh never lacks the power to save..., though [H]is [intentional] inaction may leave that impression" (1:2-3; cf. Isa 59:1; Jer 8:20; 14:9) (1997:558). O'Collins (1992:909-910) observes that God offers salvation to those who have faith and trust in Him (2:4; cf. Ps 33:18-19) and live by His תוֹרָה (law) and his מִשְׁפָּט (justice) (contra 1:4).

3.3.3.2.2.2 Meaning of *yšc* (1:2)

In Habakkuk 1:2, the prophet draws upon the rich history of God, delivering His covenant people during periods of distress (cf. Exod 3:7-9; Judg 2:16, 18; 1 Sam 10:18). However, at this stage of the dialogue (1:2-4), the prophet's understanding of *yšc* seems constrained by a limited comprehension of God's divine purpose. Despite God's supposed indifference towards the

⁴⁸ The noun *yšc* also appears in the text (twice in 3:13 translated as "save", and in 3:18 translated as "salvation"), and will be discussed together with *yšc*.

prophet's situation and presumed reluctance to deliver him, God will *יִשַׁע* the צַדִּיק (cf. 2:4) according to His sovereign will (cf. Jer 24).

The extent of *יִשַׁע* is twofold: firstly, it represents divine deliverance from enemies and injustice (cf. Exod 14) (Hubbard, 1997:556). Conversely, where *יִשַׁע* means deliverance for the righteous (צַדִּיק) (cf. 1:4, 13; 2:4), it also means the opposite for the wicked (רָשָׁע) (cf. 1:4, 13; 3:13), which includes notions such as “wrath” (חֶמָּה/*hēmā(h)*) (2:15), “contempt” (קִלּוֹן/*qālōn*) (2:16), “violence” (חֲמָס/*hāmās*) (2:17), and “destruction” (שֹׁד/*šōd*) (2:17) (Johnson, 1998:90-91). *יִשַׁע*, for the “righteous” (1:4, 13; 2:4), means that they will be delivered from the “wicked”. For the “wicked” (Judeans) (1:4), *יִשַׁע* means punishment administered by the Chaldeans (1:5-16). For the Chaldeans, *יִשַׁע* implies ruin and devastation (2:4-20; cf. Isa 47; Jer 50-51). God calls for His people to be holy (cf. Lev 19:2), yet they have turned away from Him and embraced injustice, warranting His just punishment (cf. Jer 25:1-11). The prophet seeks immediate *יִשַׁע* from the injustice around him, but God has a greater plan in mind. He will *יִשַׁע* (save) in a manner that seems unconventional to the prophet (1:13), using the wicked Chaldeans to chastise His covenant people for their injustice (1:5-6). Initially, the prophet envisions deliverance from the wicked (Judeans) (1:2-4), but as the dialogue progresses and he is made aware of what God's greater plan is, he seeks deliverance from the wicked (Chaldeans) (1:5-17).

To *יִשַׁע* (deliver) is intrinsic to God's character and aligns with His צַדִּיקָה (righteousness) (cf. Ps 71:2). Throughout the book, the prophet seems distressed and struggles with God's apparent indifference and unwillingness to *יִשַׁע* (deliver) him, but God guides him from a posture of inquisition to one of praise (3:17-19). In 3:13, God's *יִשַׁע* (deliverance) of His “anointed” (מָשִׁיחַ/*māšīḥ*) is made manifest, as a counterpoint to His “wrath” (חֶרָה/*hārā(h)*), “anger” (אַף/*ʾāp*), and “rage” (עֶבְרָה/*ʿēbrā(h)*) (3:8, 12) against the wicked (רָשָׁע). As the prophet gains deeper insight into God's צַדִּיקָה, His מִשְׁפָּט, and His *יִשַׁע*, Habakkuk ultimately, even amid great calamity, “exult[s]” (גִּיל/*gīl*) “in the God of [his] salvation [*יִשַׁע*]” (3:18).

3.3.3.2.3 יִשַׁע synthesis

God יִשַׁע (saves/rescues/delivers); it is His nature. However, the concept of יִשַׁע (salvation/deliverance) is a manifestation of His righteousness (צִדְקָה) (cf. Ps 71:2). The way in which He יִשַׁע (delivers) in this context is not necessarily as one (Habakkuk) might expect; it forms part of the broader metanarrative of His sovereign purpose to purify His covenant people, as well as His purpose for other nations (the Chaldeans). Where the prophet begins the dialogue with a cry to God to יִשַׁע (deliver) him (1:2-4), He leads him towards a position of praise (3:17-19) at the end of the book. Although his situation did not necessarily change, his perspective about God's righteousness (צִדְקָה), His justice (מִשְׁפָּט), and His salvation (יִשַׁע) changed. He praises the God of his salvation (3:18), even amid great calamity.

3.3.3.3 מִשְׁפָּט/noun/mišpāt (1:4, 7, 12)

The noun מִשְׁפָּט/mišpāt (justice/judgment) appears four times in the book of Habakkuk (twice in 1:4, 7, 12).

3.3.3.3.1 Context of מִשְׁפָּט

3.3.3.3.1.1 מִשְׁפָּט (1:4)

1:4 So the law becomes slack
and justice never prevails.
The wicked surround the righteous—
therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

מִשְׁפָּט is employed in 1:4 concerning the law, which has become “paralyzed [sic]” and, consequently, is rendered “incapable to function in its normal way” (Swanson, 1997:7028). The prophet complains that מִשְׁפָּט “never prevails” and “comes forth perverted”. This is because the righteous (צַדִּיק/šaddîq)⁴⁹ are surrounded by the wicked (רָשָׁע/rāšā')⁵⁰. מִשְׁפָּט represents God's requirements of His covenant people as outlined in His law (cf. Exod 21-23; Lev 5:10; 9:16; Deut

⁴⁹ See 3.4.3.5

⁵⁰ See 3.4.3.4

33:10, 21; Isa 42:4; 16 times in Ps 119) (Culver, 1980:949). However, Judah has departed from God's law, and consequently, they are no longer agents of God's *מִשְׁפָּט* in the world. The absence of *מִשְׁפָּט* among God's people – compounded by outright injustice – prompts the prophet's first complaint. *מִשְׁפָּט* as an outflow of God's law, directly opposes the conduct of the wicked (cf. Jer 2:8; 8:7-8; 11:1-17) (Garcia-López & Fabry, 2006:624-626).

3.3.3.3.1.2 *מִשְׁפָּט* (1:7)

1:7 Dread and fearsome are they;
their justice and dignity proceed from themselves.

In 1:7, *מִשְׁפָּט* relates to the Chaldeans; their *מִשְׁפָּט* “proceed” from within themselves. The Chaldeans' conduct (cf. 1:6-11) is governed by their own contorted sense of *מִשְׁפָּט*, which is based on their lust for violence (*חֲמָאָה*/*hāmās*)⁵¹ and power (Barker & Bailey, 1999:304). This stands in direct opposition to God's *מִשְׁפָּט* – the perfect standard of *מִשְׁפָּט* by which all humans should live (Johnson, 1998:92).

3.3.3.3.1.3 *מִשְׁפָּט* (1:12)

1:12 Are you not from of old,
O Lord my God, my Holy One?
You shall not die.
O Lord, you have marked them for judgment;
and you, O Rock, have established them for punishment.

In 1:12, *מִשְׁפָּט* is used in the sense of “judgment” against the evil conduct of the Chaldeans (Büchsel & Hertrich, 1964-:932). The prophet recognises God as the source of perfect *מִשְׁפָּט* (justice) and pleads with Him to execute His *מִשְׁפָּט* (judgment) against the Chaldeans.

⁵¹ See 3.4.3.1

3.3.3.3.2 מִשְׁפָּט meaning within context

Starting with a general understanding of what מִשְׁפָּט means, we will proceed to explore its meaning in the various contexts (1:4, 7, 12) discussed above.

3.3.3.3.2.1 Possible meaning of the lexeme שָׁפַט

According to Johnson (1998:87), the “basic meaning” of מִשְׁפָּט cannot exclude its verbal stem שָׁפַט/*šāpāṭ*. Liedke (1997:1394) suggests that שָׁפַט pertains to governing or ruling, particularly to restore community order, “not only as a one-time act but also as a continuous activity, as a constant preservation of *šālôm*”. Schultz (1997:214) agrees with Mafico (1992:1128), who asserts that מִשְׁפָּט “originally... referred to the restoration of a situation or environment which promoted equity and harmony (*šālôm*) in a community”. Büchsel and Hertrich (1964:923-924) also note that the שָׁפַט conveys two meanings: “a. ‘to rule’ and b. ‘[to] judge’”. They suggest that doing “justice is part of the royal office” and that “part of the ruler’s office [is] to establish justice”. Habakkuk’s use of מִשְׁפָּט (1:4) as a derivative of שָׁפַט certainly includes this idea of restoration and *šālôm* within the community. It also incorporates the ideas of ruling and judging. The prophet acknowledges God as the ultimate judge and ruler of the world (2:14, 20; 3:2, 3-15; cf. Isa 33:22; Ps 96:13; 1 Chr 29:11-12) and calls upon him to restore מִשְׁפָּט in the society (1:2-4). God’s standard of מִשְׁפָּט is determined by His righteousness (צִדְקָה/*ṣēdāqā(h)*), not by the “contemporary community” (Leeman & Naselli, 2020:15). It is not humans who determine what is right and what is just (cf. 1:7), but God, who does so according to His nature (2:20). True מִשְׁפָּט, manifested through hearing from God and honouring Him in practice “requires a perspective that places humans beneath the divine” (Bacote, 2005:415). Consequently, it is God’s character that is the origin of justice and righteousness. As such, the concept of מִשְׁפָּט is intricately linked to the concept of righteousness (Mafico, 1992:1128). According to Sproul (2017:43), God’s righteous character defines God’s justice. Put differently, God implements His justice through His righteousness. Thus, God’s Justice flows directly from His righteousness. To acquire a greater understanding of מִשְׁפָּט in Habakkuk, we must consider its context.

3.3.3.2.2 Meaning of מִשְׁפָּט (1:4)

When Habakkuk initiates the dialogue in 1:2-4, he uses מִשְׁפָּט in a forensic sense (Cathcart, 2010:341-342; Johnson, 1998:89-90). He calls upon God as a judge to make a judgment between the “wicked” and the “righteous” (1:2-4 cf. Ps 1:5). The prophet highlights the prevalence of “destruction” and “violence”, as well as “strife” and “contention” caused by the distortion of מִשְׁפָּט within the community (1:3). Further ramifications of the warped sense of מִשְׁפָּט among the Judahites include lawlessness, and the suppression of the righteous by the wicked (1:4). The use of מִשְׁפָּט in this sense (1:2-4) is based on the violation of Yahweh’s moral standard set in his Torah (cf. Deut 16:19). The Torah represents Yahweh’s “divine instruction” in which He discloses His מִשְׁפָּט to His people (Liedke & Petersen, 1997:1416). The Torah serves as the foundation upon which the community is meant to build their lives, allowing them to be instruments of Yahweh’s מִשְׁפָּט in the world. Yet, they have abandoned Yahweh and His Torah and have become like the other nations, perpetuating injustice instead. (Jer 2:7; 10:2) The prophet pleads with Yahweh “to act in support of His law” (Garcia-López & Fabry, 2006:625). The prophet therefore calls upon God to intervene with His higher sense of מִשְׁפָּט. Despite the prophet’s pursuit of peace and retribution against the injustice within the society; his complaint appears to be constrained by a narrow view of God’s מִשְׁפָּט. While he desired God’s intervention, he envisioned it through the lens of His own comprehension (cf. 1:12-13). Yet, God sees a much broader perspective and challenges the prophet towards a deeper understanding of His מִשְׁפָּט (cf. Deut 32:4) (cf. Richards, 1999:368-369).

3.3.3.2.3 Meaning of מִשְׁפָּט (1:7)

The Chaldeans’ מִשְׁפָּט in 1:7 conveys the notion of autonomy. They are “proud” (2:4) and decide for themselves what is מִשְׁפָּט. They have no concern for anyone or anything else but themselves (cf. 1:6-11). From their perspective, their might (1:11) gives them the power to execute מִשְׁפָּט (judgment/punishment) upon others (cf. Jer 39:5-8; 52:9-11; Ps 33:17) (cf. Johnson, 1998:90). As such, their מִשְׁפָּט is not based on God’s standard of מִשְׁפָּט, but arbitrarily based on what quenches their thirst for violence (חֲמָץ/ḥāmās) (1:9). מִשְׁפָּט as a Chaldean concept, and מִשְׁפָּט as God’s standard of justice are thus fundamentally incongruent. Ironically, however, God, in His sovereignty ultimately uses their perverted idea of מִשְׁפָּט to bring about His true מִשְׁפָּט (1:6). Even

though they operate under a false sense of autonomy, they are instrumental in God's sovereign plan to chastise His covenant people for their injustice (Jer 5:15-17). Additionally, God also brings the Chaldeans under His מִשְׁפָּט (1:12; Isa 47; Jer 50-51), showing that He is the only true Judge and Ruler of the earth (2:14, 20; cf. Ps 9:7-8; 75:7).

3.3.3.3.2.4 Meaning of מִשְׁפָּט (1:12)

In 1:12, the prophet appeals to God's divine attribute of מִשְׁפָּט, and pleads that He would punish the Chaldeans accordingly. He recognises God as the highest sense of authority, the only one who can bring judgment against the wicked (Culver, 1980:949). The prophet seeks God's מִשְׁפָּט against the Chaldeans, and in 1:13 complains that He is "silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they". It is striking that the prophet appears to be consumed by the injustice of the Chaldeans, seemingly forgetting his initial complaint (1:2-4) against the wicked within the Judahite society. His concern for the injustice in Judah seems to have diminished compared to the injustice of the Chaldeans. He seeks punishment against the Chaldeans but not against his own people (1:12-13). Both the prophet and the Chaldeans display an inconsistent sense of מִשְׁפָּט, influenced by external factors. In contrast, God's מִשְׁפָּט is consistent and steadfast, determined solely by His perfect character. He demands מִשְׁפָּט and צְדָקָה from all people, including His covenant people and the Chaldeans.

Both the prophet (1:2-4, 12-13) and the Chaldeans (1:7) have a limited understanding of מִשְׁפָּט, leading to a misinterpretation of God's righteousness. The prophet as well as the Chaldeans assume the role of judges (1:6-11, 12-13), seeking to manifest their own idea of מִשְׁפָּט. However, as God reveals His מִשְׁפָּט to the prophet, he gains greater insight into His righteousness. Where he began with a complaint (1:2-4), he ends with a declaration of "awe" (3:2) as he is faced with God's מִשְׁפָּט and צְדָקָה. He ends the book with a doxology (3:18-19), even in the face of great calamity.

As the concept of מִשְׁפָּט unfolds, the prophet comes to the understanding that God's מִשְׁפָּט includes both judgment for the wicked (for both Judahites and Chaldeans), and salvation for the righteous (1:5-6; 2:4, 5-20) (Büchsel & Hertrich, 1964-:931). In the end, God does hear the prophet's original cry to "save" (יִשְׁׁצֵר/yaššā) him (1:2), albeit much different than he first envisioned. It is in the face of God's מִשְׁפָּט that he experiences God's mercy and salvation (3:17-19).

3.3.3.3 מִשְׁפָּט Synthesis

The concept of מִשְׁפָּט (justice/judgment) is progressively developed throughout the text. Initially, Habakkuk seeks God's מִשְׁפָּט for the wicked (רָשָׁע/*rāšā'*) within the Judahite society (1:2-4). The prophet is soon confronted with God's sovereign plan to use the Chaldeans as His instrument to execute His מִשְׁפָּט upon His covenant people (1:5-6). Conflicted, the prophet asks why God is "...silent when the wicked [(the Chaldeans)] swallow those more righteous [(the wicked Judahites)] than they" (1:13); how can God use those who live by their own distorted sense of מִשְׁפָּט (1:7) to implement His מִשְׁפָּט against His covenant people. The prophet's understanding of מִשְׁפָּט proves to be capricious, as his initial concern for injustice in Judah seems to have waned compared to the injustice of the Chaldeans. Indeed, the Chaldeans are idolatrous (1:11) and their מִשְׁפָּט (1:7) is corrupted by violence (חָמָס/*hāmās*) (1:9), which consequently brings God's מִשְׁפָּט upon them (2:4-20). Hence, both Judah and the Chaldeans face God's divine מִשְׁפָּט. God's צְדָקָה (righteousness) is made manifest through His מִשְׁפָּט. Although God brings his covenant people under His מִשְׁפָּט, He also saves them (3:18; cf. Jer 30:3). As a result, the concept of מִשְׁפָּט encompasses both the notion of judgment against the wicked and of salvation of the righteous.

God wants all people to live according to His מִשְׁפָּט but instead, the wicked (both Judahites and Chaldeans) embrace injustice and reject His מִשְׁפָּט, which provokes His anger against them (Jer 22:3-10; Isa 1:17; Deut 27:19). The righteous are those who accept God's מִשְׁפָּט as the highest standard to live by and conduct their lives accordingly. God's מִשְׁפָּט leads to both punishment and deliverance, which is "positive for those who are just and innocent, but negative for the wicked and sinful" (Johnson, 1998:90). It is this tension between punishment and deliverance that the prophet grapples with, as he progressively gains a deeper insight of God's מִשְׁפָּט throughout the text (cf. 1:12-13, 17; 3:2, 16, 17-19).

3.3.3.4 רָשָׁע/adjective/*rāšā'* (1:4, 13; 3:13)

The adjective⁵² רָשָׁע/*rāšā'* appears three times in the book of Habakkuk (1:4, 13; 3:13).

3.3.3.4.1 Context of רָשָׁע

3.3.3.4.1.1 רָשָׁע (1:4)

1:4 So the law becomes slack
and justice never prevails.
The wicked surround the righteous—
therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

Habakkuk uses רָשָׁע (the wicked) in 1:4 as an antithesis to צַדִּיק/*ṣāddîq* (the righteous) to draw a strong contrast between these two types of people⁵³. He complains to God (1:2-4) and pleads that He would save him from the רָשָׁע. The רָשָׁע here refers to wicked Judeans who have departed from God's law (תּוֹרָה/*tôrā(h)*) and His justice (מִשְׁפָּט/*mišpāt*)⁵⁴.

3.3.3.4.1.2 רָשָׁע (1:13)

1:13 Your eyes are too pure to behold evil,

and you cannot look on wrongdoing;
why do you look on the treacherous,
and are silent when the wicked swallow
those more righteous than they?

After hearing God's answer (1:5-6) to his original complaint (1:2-4), the prophet adopts a new position. The רָשָׁע (wicked) in 1:13 no longer refers to the wicked Judeans (cf. 1:4) but now refers to the wicked Chaldeans. He compares the רָשָׁע Judeans to the רָשָׁע Chaldeans asking, how can God be “silent when the wicked [(רָשָׁע)] swallow those more righteous [(צַדִּיק)] than they”. Those

⁵² An adjective “modifies or describes a noun, noun substitute..., or another adjective” (Heiser & Setterholm, 2013).

⁵³ van der Walt (2024) offers some good insight into the distinction between the רָשָׁע and the צַדִּיק, although his focus is more on צַדִּיק than רָשָׁע.

⁵⁴ See 3.4.3.3

he originally called the רָשָׁע (wicked) (Judeans) are now called צַדִּיק (righteous), compared to the Chaldeans.

3.3.3.4.1.3 רָשָׁע (3:13)

3:13 You came forth to save your people,

to save your anointed.

You crushed the head of the wicked house,
laying it bare from foundation to roof. Selah

In 3:13, רָשָׁע is used in the context of God's wrath and vengeance against the "wicked [[רָשָׁע]] house". Where the prophet previously complains about God's reluctance to punish the wicked (1:2-4; 12-13), 3:3-15 describes God's action against the wicked.

3.3.3.4.2 רָשָׁע meaning within context

We will now discuss the possible meanings of רָשָׁע, first in a general sense, and then in the context of Habakkuk (1:4, 13; 3:13).

3.3.3.4.2.1 Possible meaning of the lexeme רָשָׁע

Translation possibilities for the lexeme רָשָׁע include "wicked" or "unrighteous", in other words, "being evil", particularly relating to "the guilt of violating a standard" (Swanson, 1997:8401). As will be demonstrated in the section addressing צַדִּיק/*ṣdq*⁵⁵, this standard is determined by Yahweh's righteousness (צַדִּיקָה/*ṣḏāqā(h)*) rather than by human measures. To some extent, we cannot understand רָשָׁע apart from צַדִּיק/*ṣḏdīq* (righteous), as these contrasting notions are intricately linked and vital to Hebrew thought (cf. Ps 1; 37:16; Prov 4:14-19; Mal 3:18) (Ringgren, 2004a:1). The רָשָׁע are deemed to be רָשָׁע due to their conduct, which is antithetical to the conduct of the צַדִּיק (van Leeuwen, 1997:1262-1263). Whereas the conduct of the צַדִּיק is deeply rooted in adherence to the law (cf. Ps 1:1-2; 119), which is a representation of Yahweh's righteousness and His covenant with His people, the רָשָׁע reject and violate the law (1:4) and the covenant. This leads to immorality and idolatry (cf. 1:11) (Carrigan, 2000:437). The צַדִּיק, in contrast to the רָשָׁע,

⁵⁵ See 3.4.3.5

are those whose hearts are turned towards Yahweh (cf. Deut 10:16; 30:6-10), and seek to be agents of Yahweh's מִשְׁפָּט in the world (Thomas, 2018:84). The actions of the רָשָׁע frustrate the efforts of the צַדִּיק, resulting in the distortion of Yahweh's מִשְׁפָּט within society (Achtemeier, 1986:35). The רָשָׁע are inclined towards "injustice against God or persons" (Carpenter & Grisanti, 1997a:1201). They are arrogant (עָבָל/ʿāpāl) (2:4), and reject and rebel against Yahweh's righteousness (Deut 25:2; Ezek 3:18; Prov 17:23) (Gleaves, 2014). They are predisposed to violence (1:9), guilty of bloodshed, and consequentially deserving of its penalty (2:8; cf. Num 35:31; 2 Sam 4:11) (van Leeuwen, 1997:1262). In contrast, the צַדִּיק are humble and live by "faith" (2:4) (Helberg, 1988:248). They look to God as the ultimate source of צִדְקָה rather than themselves. They are "blameless" and "upright" (Prov 11:5) (Livingston, 1980:864).

3.3.3.4.2.2 Meaning of רָשָׁע (1:4)

Habakkuk's use of רָשָׁע (the wicked) in 1:4 (cf. 1:2-4) implies that it supposedly only refers to those outliers within the Judahite community who do not conduct their lives according to God's צִדְקָה (righteousness). However, the problem is that Judah, the covenant people of God, have rebelled against Him and conducted their lives contrary to His צִדְקָה (cf. Deut 9:4-14; Jer 5; Ps 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccl 7:20). They have violated the תּוֹרָה (law) (cf. Deut 32; Jer 3:1-5) and embraced רָשָׁע/ʾrēšāʿ (wickedness).

Taking all of this into consideration, there is a divergence between what the prophet means with רָשָׁע (the wicked), and who God considers to be רָשָׁע. At first glance, it seems as if the prophet has a clear definition of who רָשָׁע (the wicked) (1:4) are. He describes them using terms such as חָמָס/hāmās (violence)⁵⁶ (1:2, 3), אָוֶן/ʾāwēn ("wrongdoing") (1:3), אָמָל/āmāl ("trouble") (1:3), שֹׁד/šōd ("destruction") (1:3), מַדּוֹן/māḏōn ("strife") (1:3), and רִיב/rīb ("contention") (1:3), contrasting them with the צַדִּיק (righteous) (1:4). Yet, as the dialogue progresses, the prophet's perception of who the רָשָׁע are seems to change (cf. 1:13). By contrast, God's definition of the רָשָׁע remains steadfast

⁵⁶ See 3.4.3.1

throughout the text. He does not see the distinction between the צדיק (the righteous) and the רשע (the wicked) as ethnic, but rather as a disposition of the heart (cf. 2:4).

3.3.3.4.2.3 Meaning of רשע (1:13)

Habakkuk raises a crucial question in 1:13 that sheds some light on the concept of the רשע and its relation to God's righteousness: how can God be "...silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?" (Achtemeier, 1986:40). This question is born from a preconceived idea of who the righteous (צדיק) are, and what righteousness (צדקה) entails. According to Krašovec (2022:1), "God's righteousness has different theological criteria than human righteousness". The prophet expects God to act according to his limited human understanding of righteousness (1:12-13) (van der Walt, 2024:88). His question assumes that God's covenant people are inherently more צדיק, based on ethnic identity.

The prophet essentially asks the same question in 1:13 regarding the צדיק (righteous) and the רשע (wicked) (cf. 1:4): why do the רשע (wicked) oppress ("surround"/"swallow") the צדיק (righteous)? Nevertheless, his question in 1:13 is nuanced quite differently. The רשע (1:13) now refers to the Chaldeans and those, whom the prophet considers to be "more" צדיק (righteous), are the ones he originally calls the רשע (1:4). As a result, the prophet's understanding of who the רשע (wicked) are, has changed between 1:4 and 1:13. His understanding is confined to an "either/or" paradigm, whereas God guides him towards a "both/and" understanding. In other words, God considers both the רשע (wicked Judeans) (1:4) and the רשע (wicked Chaldeans) (1:13) as רשע (wicked), compared to His צדיק (righteous) standard, and He will punish them accordingly (cf. 1:5-6; 2:5-19).

Consequently, the רשע refers to both wicked Chaldeans and wicked Judahites. Both groups fall short of God's perfect צדקה. This dichotomy between the רשע and the "more" צדיק is false, as it is based on a misplaced security in ethnic identity rather than faith in God (2:4). God calls all people to repentance (cf. Jonah 1:2; Jer 4:4), but only those who respond and put their trust in Him (2:4) are considered צדיק (Ezek 18:27).

3.3.3.4.2.4 Meaning of רָשָׁע (3:13)

Although רָשָׁע (the wicked) in 3:13 most obviously refers to the Chaldeans (cf. 1:13), based on the discussion above, there is a sublevel meaning that refers to the רָשָׁע (the wicked Judeans) (cf. 1:4). God will exact His judgment against the wicked Judahites through the Chaldeans (cf. 2 Kgs 25:1-2; 2 Chr 36:15-20; Jer 52:3-30), and against the Chaldeans through the Medes (cf. Jer 51:1-19; Isa 47). However, God “come[s] forth to save [רָשָׁע]⁵⁷ [His] people”; not based on ethnic identity but on their faith (אֱמוּנָה/ *mûnā(h)*) in Him. God not only punishes רָשָׁע (the wicked) but also delivers (יִשְׁע) the צַדִּיק (the righteous).

3.3.3.4.3 רָשָׁע synthesis

Habakkuk mentions two groups of people whom he calls רָשָׁע, the רָשָׁע (Judeans) (1:4), and the רָשָׁע (Chaldeans) (1:13). However, compared to the Chaldeans, he deems the wicked Judeans more “righteous” (צַדִּיק). He makes an ethnic distinction, considering Chaldean wickedness (רָשָׁע/ *riš’ā(h)*) to be worse than Judean wickedness. God, on the other hand, does not make this distinction. He requires all people to equally live by His perfect standard of צַדִּיקָה (righteousness). In God’s perspective, there are only the רָשָׁע and the צַדִּיק. The רָשָׁע seek violence (חָמָס) (1:2-3, 9), reject God’s law (תּוֹרָה/ *tōrā(h)*) (1:4), subvert justice (מִשְׁפָּט/ *mišpāṭ*) (1:4); are idolatrous (1:11), and arrogant (2:5); and they rebel against God. In contrast, the צַדִּיק live by their faith (אֱמוּנָה) (2:4). They trust in God and live according to His צַדִּיקָה. Eventually, both the Judean רָשָׁע and the Chaldean רָשָׁע face God’s judgment. The Judeans are punished by the Chaldeans (1:5-6), and the Chaldeans meet their own demise by the hands of the Medes (cf. Jer 50-51). The violence (חָמָס/ *hāmās*) they have committed against other nations will be repaid to them (2:6-17).

We will now focus our attention on the righteous (צַדִּיק), which will be discussed in depth due to its direct relevance to the central question of this research concerning God’s righteousness in the book of Habakkuk.

⁵⁷ See 3.4.3.2

3.3.3.5 צדיק/adjective/šāddīq (1:4, 13; 2:4)

First, we will discuss the context of צדק (*šdq*) in the book of Habakkuk, where it appears exclusively as an adjective⁵⁸ (צדיק/šāddīq with the article ה) (1:4, 13; 2:4). Following this, we will explore its potential meanings, beginning with the broad significance of the lexeme צדק (*šdq*) and then narrowing it down to its specific contextual meaning in the text.

3.3.3.5.1 Context of צדיק

3.3.3.5.1.1 צדיק (1:4)

1:4 So the law becomes slack
and justice never prevails.
The wicked surround the righteous—
therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

Habakkuk uses אֲתֵּי-הַצְדִּיק (the righteous) in 1:4 to refer to those who are oppressed by the wicked (רָשָׁע/*rāšāʿ*)⁵⁹. He laments the deteriorating condition of Judean society, brought about by the actions of the wicked, and appeals to God to “save” (יִשַׁע/*yāšāʿ*)⁶⁰ (cf. 1:2) the righteous from the wicked (Redmond *et al.*, 2016:187). Here, both the צדיק and the רָשָׁע refer to Judahites (Barker & Bailey, 1999:298).

3.3.3.5.1.2 צדיק (1:13)

1:13 Your eyes are too pure to behold evil,

and you cannot look on wrongdoing;
why do you look on the treacherous,
and are silent when the wicked swallow
those more righteous than they?

⁵⁸ In Habakkuk, only the adjectival form of צדק is used, a detail of theological significance for this study. This will be further explored in the discussion under 3.4.3.5.2.

⁵⁹ See 3.4.3.4

⁶⁰ See 3.4.3.2

In 1:13, צדיק (the righteous) is still used as an antithesis to רשע (the wicked). However, where the prophet referred to the righteous in contrast to the wicked Judeans, here he uses it in comparison to the wicked Chaldeans. He now describes the wicked (Judeans) (1:4) as being “more righteous” than the wicked (Chaldeans). צדיק is used in a comparative sense between the Judeans and the Chaldeans (van der Walt, 2024:73-74). The focus has now shifted from the Judeans to the Chaldeans. He uses צדיק (1:13) to refer to the רשע (1:4) whom he initially complains about (1:2-4) (Hubbard, 1960:348).

3.3.3.5.1.3 צדיק (2:4)

2:4 Look at the proud!
 Their spirit is not right in them,
 but the righteous live by their faith.

In 2:4, the צדיק (righteous) is no longer presented from the prophet’s perspective, but from God’s perspective. It is used in the context of God’s second answer (2:2-20) to the prophet’s complaints (1:2-4; 1:13-2:1). He says that “the righteous live by their faith”⁶¹, in comparison to the “proud”⁶², who’s “spirit is not right in them”. Again, צדיק is used as an antithesis to the wicked.

3.3.3.5.2 צדיק meaning within context

We will now discuss the meaning of צדק, beginning with a broad analysis to establish possible meaning, and then proceed to its specific meaning within the contexts discussed above (1:4, 13; 2:4).

3.3.3.5.2.1 Possible meaning of the lexeme צדק

The lexeme צדק/*sdq* forms the basis from which all its other forms are derived (צדק/*ṣādaq*, verb; צדק/*ṣedeq*, masculine noun; צדקה/*ṣēdāqâ*, feminine noun; צדיק/*ṣaddîq*, adjective).

⁶¹ This verse is famously quoted in the New Testament (Rom 1:17; Heb 10:38; Gal 3:11), showing dependency on God, and rather than on one’s own might (cf. 1:11; 2:5) (Renz, 2021:289)

⁶² The “proud” is still a reference to the wicked although the term רשע is not actually used (Barker & Bailey, 1999:324).

Curiously, צדק is only used as an adjective (צדיק) in Habakkuk (1:4, 1:13; 2:4). Even so, it remains a highly significant theme throughout the text. Given this observation, we must ask why it is used exclusively as an adjective (צדיק), and not as a verb (צדק) or a noun (צדקה/צדקה)⁶³ (cf. Walton, 1997:161-164). Reimer (1997:746) suggests that it is important to acknowledge the semantic distinctions between these different terms, despite significant overlap in meaning. He further states that, even though “some generalizations [sic] may be made about the individual terms, semantic nuance is better derived from context than morphology”. Krašovec (2022:1) asserts that the “question [of צדק] is about God’s essence, [H]is authority, and the scope of [H]is activities [as well as [H]is standard]. A mere dictionary approach would ideally lead to a virtual answer”. At best, a “mere dictionary approach” may provide superficial and broad insights, but it is through the context that deeper nuances of meaning emerge, allowing for a fuller understanding of the significance of the concept within the book of Habakkuk.

As a vital concept, not only in Habakkuk, but in biblical studies as a whole, צדק⁶⁴ has been the subject of extensive scholarly research. However, there is considerable scholarly debate concerning its exact meaning (Ringgren & Johnson, 2003:243).

The first view is that צדק is primarily understood within a legal framework, representing the standard by which humans should live. God “distributes reward and punishment” according to the standard of his צדק (cf. Quell, 1964-:177). Stigers (1980:752) agrees with this view, asserting that צדק “basically connotes conformity to an ethical or moral standard”. He further notes that צדק relates to the “ethical, forensic, and theocratic” aspects of personal relationships (1980:753). God’s righteousness is the ethical standard by which humans should conduct their lives. צדק in a forensic sense, is used to signify the “equality of all, rich and poor, before the law” (cf. Exod 23:7; Isa 5:23) (1980:ibid.). God’s righteousness is the basis on which the righteous are judged in

⁶³ This study accedes to Fahlgren’s (1932; cf. Koch, 1997:1046-1047) view, who suggests that צדק and צדקה are synonymous, although (Jepsen, 1965) argues that צדק “refers to proper order” whilst צדקה refers to “correct behaviour that aims at order”. Swanson (1997:7406; 7407) on the other hand suggests that צדק refers to “the **act** of doing what is required according to a standard”, while צדקה refers to “the **state** of doing what is required according to a standard”. The scope of this study does not allow for an exposition of the differences between צדק and צדקה.

⁶⁴ Although צדק is crucial to this study, it is not within the scope of this research to do an exhaustive survey on different scholarly perspectives of its basic meaning. See Scullion (1992) for various proposals.

contrast to the wicked (2:4; cf. Prov 12:7, 12, 28; 13:5, 6; 15:8, 9, 29). In a theocratic sense, צדק involves Yahweh's covenant⁶⁵ people. Yahweh's covenant people are (should be) marked by His righteousness, which sets them apart from other nations and makes them righteous (2:4; cf. Lev 19-20; Deut 6:25; Ps 1) (Snaith, 1946:63-64). Reimer (1997:748) proposes that צדק does not represent something that a person has done, but rather something that they are (cf. Gen 6:9). This righteousness, though manifested through humans, ultimately originates from God's righteousness, the ultimate source of all righteousness (cf. Deut 32:4; Ps 9:8; 97; 119:137, 142; 145:17; Isa 5:16; 45:21; Jer 12:1).

The second view is that of Köhler (1957:35), who suggests that righteousness "is not a juristic concept but one having reference to relationships". Achtemeier (1959:68-70) agrees with this view, placing a strong emphasis on the ethical aspect. She holds that צדק describes the relational well-being within a community. Goldingay (2006:120) furthermore adds that God is righteous, based on the way that He "rule[s] over people in the context of fellowship". God's perfect righteousness is thus expressed through fellowship, and the foundation of righteousness among people within the society. Humans are righteous based on God's righteousness and not their own. Von Rad (1965:129) notes that "it is faith which sets men on a right footing with God" (i.e. makes them righteous). It is only by faith that a person can be in "a right relationship" with God (2:4; cf. Gen 15:5). Being in a relationship with Yahweh represents the highest manifestation of His righteousness as revealed through humanity.

In a third view, צדק has also been described as about salvation and deliverance based on a relationship with Yahweh rather than His objective moral standard (Ringgren & Johnson, 2003:243-244). In this sense, Yahweh's righteousness is expressed through His saving intervention rather than punishment of the wicked. "The notion of chastising divine righteousness is viewed at most as a secondary effect directed against those who would obstruct such divine intervention" (2003:ibid.). In this view, "divine intervention" is primarily understood in terms of deliverance, with punishment being only a peripheral effect. While Krašovec (2022:1-2) agrees that the basic meaning of righteousness includes the concepts of salvation and grace, he contends that it is more intricately connected to retribution and punishment which "keep open the possibilities for God's mercy and forgiveness".

⁶⁵ See discussion under 2.2.2. Further studies could be done on the concept of צִדְקָה within a covenantal framework. However, it is not within the scope of this study to discuss the covenant at length.

3.3.3.5.2.1.1 Summary

Scholars have conceptualised צדק through three primary lenses: (1) within a legal framework, as an objective standard which guides human behaviour; (2) within a relational framework, focusing on the ethical welfare of the community; and (3) within a salvific framework, as expressed through Yahweh's saving intervention. This study posits that צדק cannot be exclusively confined to any single interpretation; rather, each perspective illuminates a distinct facet of צדק, emphasised according to the specific context in which it is examined.

Establishing a definitive meaning of the lexeme צדק is not feasible; instead, one can derive inferences from its semantic range that may influence its interpretation across various contexts. As such, צדק should be considered as it appears in the text. We must therefore examine the occurrences of צדיק in the text (1:4, 13; 2:4) to understand the prophet's perspective. However, what is particularly significant is not only the presence of the term צדיק (adjective), but the absence of the terms צדקה (noun) and צדק (verb). This invites deeper exploration of the choice of words, as well as the implicit significance of the overarching theme of God's righteousness in the text. Although the term צדקה (righteousness) is not explicitly mentioned in the text, the concept of righteousness remains a significant theme throughout and necessitates careful exposition. The concept of righteousness will therefore be kept in mind throughout the exposition.

For Habakkuk, צדק is about right and wrong, while Yahweh teaches him throughout the text that צדק is not merely about right and wrong, but about a standard that must be upheld – a standard defined by His character rather than by human perception. Where the prophet reflects a primarily soteriological perspective of righteousness (1:2, 4, 13, 17; 3:2), this study holds that the interplay between the ideas of salvation, grace, and mercy, on the one hand, and retribution and punishment on the other, is more closely intertwined within the concept than one might initially think. The apparent paradox of grace, mercy, and salvation on the one hand, and punishment and retribution on the other hand, must coexist within the concept of righteousness for it to be true righteousness.

Given the considerations mentioned above, it is essential to move from a broad understanding of possible meanings associated with the lexeme צדק to a more nuanced, context-specific understanding of צדיק in Habakkuk (1:4, 13; 2:4). Context plays a crucial role in clarifying meaning, emphasising the importance of contextual analysis to refine meaning.

3.3.3.5.2.2 Meaning of צָדִיק (1:4)

In his first complaint (1:2-4), Habakkuk laments the moral and social decay which he observes in the community (cf. Jer 5:1-5). He implores Yahweh to “save” him (1:2) and questions why He causes him to “see wrongdoing and look at trouble” (1:3). These complaints, which carry an accusatory tone, offer deeper insight into the prophet’s perception of Yahweh’s righteousness. His complaint fundamentally pertains to his perceived disparity between Yahweh’s righteousness and the prophet’s experienced reality. He questions why he is surrounded by wickedness if Yahweh is understood to be sovereign, omniscient, and benevolent (cf. Gen 18:25) (Carson, 2006:178). The prophet’s perspective of Yahweh’s righteousness is gradually shaped and refined as Yahweh progressively reveals His divine perspective to him.

Firstly, the prophet understands Yahweh’s righteousness mainly in terms of salvation, a theme that recurs throughout Israel’s history (cf. Exod 6:6; 14:13-28; Deut 33:29; Ps 34:6). Yet, despite the prophet’s anticipation for Yahweh to save him from his dire circumstances, Yahweh seems unresponsive to the prophet’s plea to act in accordance with his understanding of Yahweh’s righteousness (Snyman, 2020:57). The prophet initially seeks deliverance from the wicked, specifically referring to the wicked Judeans at this stage of the dialogue. However, as the dialogue develops, his understanding of who constitutes the wicked also broadens and becomes more nuanced. Yahweh intentionally refrains from delivering him, as his primary concern lies in the formation of the prophet’s perspective. The prophet’s circumstances serve as a means by which he is confronted with his understanding of Yahweh’s righteousness and challenged with its true nature. The prophet has yet to comprehend that salvation constitutes merely one aspect of the multifaceted nature of God’s righteousness (cf. Krašovec, 2022:1-2).

Secondly, the prophet implicitly attributes the moral corruption of the society to God, as if He had withdrawn His righteousness from his people (Hubbard, 1960:346). The prophet is unable to comprehend how God can permit the prevailing injustice occurring among His people, resulting in “violence” (חָמָאס/ḥāmās)⁶⁶ (1:2, 3). Habakkuk seems to diminish human responsibility, as he does not perceive being righteous as entailing an obligation to act in accordance with God’s righteousness. Instead, he shifts the blame onto God for the situation, effectively absolving those who are directly responsible for the injustice.

⁶⁶ See 3.4.3.1

In 1:4, he observes that “the law becomes slack and justice never prevails”. The prophet associates the paralysis of the law with the apparent retraction of Yahweh’s righteousness from His people (Renz, 2021:227-228). However, the law was given by Yahweh to facilitate the relationship between Him and His people and to implement His justice (מִשְׁפָּט/*mišpāt*)⁶⁷ in the world. Its paralysis is not a result of Yahweh’s alleged indifference, but rather of Judah’s own sinfulness and rebellion against Yahweh and His law (cf. Jer 5:1-5). Thomas (2018:77), furthermore states that the impairment of the law is not “an internal defect of the law”, but rather the inability of Yahweh’s people to uphold its commandments. Yahweh remains faithful to the covenant with His people as an expression of His righteousness, though the prophet, at this stage in the dialogue, has yet to fully grasp this broader concept. (cf. Waltke & Yu, 2007:357-358).

The prophet points out that the “wicked surround the righteous” (1:4), emphasising the prevailing injustice and the oppression of the righteous. This not only promotes injustice, but also thwarts righteousness from being implemented (Baker, 1988:50). The construction אֶת־הַצְדִּיק (אֶת־ with the particle אֶת and the definite article הַ) appears exclusively in 1:4 to refer specifically to righteous Judahites where in 1:13 and 2:4 it occurs as צַדִּיק (1:13) and וְצַדִּיק (2:4). This distinction is not only linguistically significant but also bears theological implications (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:161-162, 177-179). Here, the prophet emphatically uses the particle אֶת־ as a direct object marker⁶⁸ to indicate the accusative⁶⁹, highlighting that it is *the righteous (ones)* who are being surrounded by the wicked. He deliberately directs attention to the righteous, positioning them as the central focus of his complaint. His concern is not primarily with the injustice perpetrated by the wicked, but rather with the oppression suffered by the wicked. It is also interesting that he uses אֶת־הַצְדִּיק (adjective) to refer to the righteous Judahites rather than צַדִּיקָה (noun) in reference to God’s righteousness. This distinction suggests a deliberate emphasis on human righteousness within the context of the community, as opposed to God’s righteousness as the objective standard (cf.

⁶⁷ See 3.4.3.3

⁶⁸ “The particle (sometimes classified as a preposition) that indicates the following nominal is the definite direct object of the clause. The most common example in Hebrew is the particle אֶת” (Heiser & Setterholm, 2013)

⁶⁹ “...the accusative is a function of modification or dependency: nouns used with other nouns or with prepositions are in the genitive, while nouns modifying verbs are in the accusative. This ad-verbial function can involve recipients or objects of verbal action, sometimes where definite marked with the particle אֶת” (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:161).

Ringgren & Johnson, 2003:243). The absence of the verb צַדֵּק in the text also underscores that "the righteous" are not depicted as actively performing righteousness but are merely described as such. The prophet appears not yet to grasp that "the righteous" (צַדִּיק) are not inherently righteous by their own merit or their ethnical background, but rather are those who embody and manifest God's righteousness (צִדְקָה) in the world. The prophet's inquiry may be considered misplaced; rather than questioning why "the wicked surround the righteous," a more profound question might be to explore the underlying factors that define the wicked as "wicked" and the righteous as "righteous". In 1:4, the prophet draws a clear distinction between the righteous and the wicked, identifying the wicked Judeans as רָשָׁע. However, in 1:13, he implies that they (the wicked of 1:4) possess an inherent sense of righteousness, derived from their covenantal status as members of Judah. He identifies the wicked as such, based on their behaviour. However, it is not merely one's actions that defines one as righteous or wicked; rather, it is the disposition of the heart which ultimately shapes one's behaviour (cf. Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:25). Judging the state of the nation based on behaviour is merely a symptomatic diagnosis, whilst the underlying root cause of the problem remains unidentified and unresolved. Being part of the covenant does not make one righteous; rather, it is living in alignment with God's righteous standards that leads to righteousness (2:4; Exod 20:1-17; Ps 15; 24:3-6; Job 31; Ezek 18:5-30 cf. Rom 9:30-31). (Ringgren & Johnson, 2003:258-259). The prophet's conception of righteousness as a privilege granted through being part of the covenant is fundamentally challenged. Indeed, Judah is God's covenant people, but they have chosen to abandon the covenant and live wicked lives instead (cf. Jer 11:1-17). Yahweh requires of His covenant people to "walk before [Him], and be blameless" (Gen 17:1 cf. 17:9; Exod 19:5). Yahweh reveals to the prophet that His righteousness operates within a legal framework, which is expressed and fulfilled through a relational context. As Yahweh's people actively seek a relationship with Him, He imparts His righteousness through them. However, Judah desires only the benefits of the relationship without the commitment to live according to its principles. The foundation of their righteousness should be grounded in the degree to which they pursue God's standard of righteousness and align their lives with His Torah, which serves as a guide for living in covenant with Him. In Yahweh's eyes, Judah's physical circumcision offers no superiority over foreign nations if they have not undergone a transformation of heart and attitude. (cf. Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:25) (Barry *et al.*, 2016). Yahweh intends to bring about reform⁷⁰ among His people; however, as the dialogue progresses, it becomes evident

⁷⁰ The scope of this study does not allow a detailed discussion on reformation, although it is acknowledged that God's punishment will ultimately result in reformation (cf. Jer 29:10-14). The text of Habakkuk does not include a call to repentance, and reformation occurs only later, during the period of exile.

that the prophet neither fully understands nor agrees with the method by which Yahweh seeks to accomplish this. In 1:5, Yahweh reveals His plan to chastise His people by employing the Chaldeans as his instrument of divine punishment, a revelation that prompts even more questions from the prophet.

3.3.3.5.2.2.1 Summary

In 1:2-4, the prophet expresses deep concern over the moral and social decay within the community, questioning Yahweh's justice and righteousness. His lament reflects a struggle with the apparent discrepancy between Yahweh's sovereignty, omniscience, and benevolence, and the wickedness that surrounds him (1:3). Habakkuk's view of righteousness is initially framed by his own perspective, focusing on salvation as a key aspect of Yahweh's righteousness (1:2). However, Yahweh's delayed response challenges this view, compelling the prophet to confront his understanding of righteousness.

Habakkuk observes that the law is paralysed, and justice is perverted (1:4), attributing this to a perceived withdrawal of Yahweh's righteousness from the community. He mistakenly attributes the impairment of the law to Yahweh's indifference, overlooking the role of Judah's own sinfulness. The prophet's focus on human righteousness, as evidenced by his use of the term "the righteous" (אֲתֵּי-הַצְדִּיק) in contrast to God's righteousness (צְדִקָּה), highlights his initial misunderstanding. Yahweh's righteousness, however, is not solely linked to covenantal status but to adherence to His Torah.

In 1:5, the prophet's view of righteousness is challenged even more as Yahweh reveals a plan which involves the Chaldeans as his instruments of divine punishment. This revelation deepens Habakkuk's questions, prompting him to reconsider the true nature of God's righteousness and its implications for His people.

3.3.3.5.2.3 Meaning of צְדִיק (1:13)

In Habakkuk 1:12-13, the prophet's perspective on righteousness becomes more obscure as he navigates the tension between his expectation of God's righteousness and God's actual righteousness, as it is manifested throughout the dialogue. Initially, Habakkuk's complaint is directed toward the violence and injustice of the wicked Judeans (1:2-4), where he condemns the wickedness of his own people. However, as he struggles with God's response (1:5-11)—that He will use the Chaldeans as His instrument of divine judgment (1:6)—his perception of righteousness takes on a new form. In 1:13, his initial clear distinction between the righteous and the wicked Judeans becomes ambiguous. Habakkuk seems to group all the Judeans, even the

"wicked" ones whom he initially condemned, under the category of being "more righteous" than the Chaldeans.

Thomas (2018:92-94) contends that the prophet implores God to "...act on behalf of some of the righteous among [H]is wicked people" (cf. Gen 18:23-32). However, this plea necessitates that God overlook the wickedness of His people on behalf of "some" who are considered to be righteous among them. This position undermines the central argument the prophet is attempting to convey as he states: "you cannot look on wrongdoing; why do you look on the treacherous" (1:13).

Habakkuk's comparison between the "wicked" Chaldeans and the "more righteous" Judeans is not based on an actual moral or ethical evaluation of the Judeans' behaviour but rather on their ethnic and covenantal status as Yahweh's chosen people. The prophet contrasts the Judeans with the Chaldeans, whose violence and disregard for Yahweh's law place them in an apparent category of greater wickedness. Here, the prophet redefines righteousness, not in terms of individual or communal behaviour, but in light of the larger covenant relationship between Yahweh and His people. As a result, the prophet seems to minimise the sins of the Judeans, emphasising that their wickedness is less severe compared to the idolatrous and brutal Chaldeans⁷¹. This interpretation suggests that Habakkuk is appealing to God's covenant with Judah, in which the people, despite their failures, remain "more righteous" than a foreign nation that does not acknowledge Yahweh.

The equivocation here reflects a tension in the prophet's worldview: on the one hand, God's covenant people are expected to uphold His standards of justice (מִשְׁפָּט) and righteousness (צִדְקָה); on the other hand, they retain a privileged position by virtue of their covenant with Yahweh, even when they fall short of His standards. This leads Habakkuk to the troubling question posed in 1:13: How can a righteous God allow a nation even more wicked than Judah to execute judgment upon them? The prophet struggles with the notion of divine justice, particularly when the instruments of judgment appear to be less righteous than those being judged.

Habakkuk's shifting perspective reveals the prophet's internal conflict. He diminishes the wickedness of the Judeans, not excusing their conduct but highlighting the overwhelming injustice of the Chaldeans; his main concern is no longer the distinction between the "wicked" and righteous "Judeans", but now takes on a new form to distinguish between the wicked Chaldeans

⁷¹Van der Walt (2024) offers valuable insight into the idea of varying degrees of righteousness.

and the Judeans as a whole. This judgment is based on ethnic and covenantal status rather than actual righteousness.

While the prophet accuses God of being inconsistent with His righteous character (cf. 1:12-13), it is, in fact, the prophet who demonstrates inconsistency. At the outset of the dialogue, the prophet is unaware of his own inconsistency; however, as the dialogue unfolds, God gradually reveals this inconsistency to him. The prophet's inconsistent understanding of who the righteous are highlights his astonishment when he learns that God is raising the Chaldeans to punish Judah for their injustice (1:5-11) (Mangum, 2020). God's sovereign plan to chastise His people by means of the wicked Chaldeans does not seem to fit in the prophet's theological framework of God's righteousness (Redmond *et al.*, 2016:192). The prophet asserts that God's "eyes are too pure to behold evil", and that He "cannot look on wrongdoing". From the prophet's perspective, God's righteousness implies that He would intervene and compel the Chaldeans to show mercy (חַמָּל/*hāmal*)⁷² towards the Judeans (cf. 1:17). He has an expectation that Yahweh will save (יִשְׁעֵם/*yāšā*)⁷³ them from the imminent threat of the Chaldeans.

The prophet cannot comprehend how God can condone the wickedness of the Chaldeans (Redmond *et al.*, 2016:193). He demonstrates an overly narrow understanding of God's righteousness, seeking justice (מִשְׁפָּט/*mišpāt*)⁷⁴ against the Chaldeans (cf. 1:12) while expecting mercy for the Judeans. This oversimplified view overlooks the broader nature of God's righteousness, which encompasses not only His "moral character and covenantal love and faithfulness", but also the "legislative, judicial, and administrative aspects of [H]is actions in the world" (Bacote, 2005:415)⁷⁵. Through their covenant relationship with Yahweh, the Judeans should be motivated to "walk in the right way, in a straight and right path" (cf. Ps 6:16; Prov 4:11) (Da Silva, 2019:36). However, they have strayed from the path of God's righteousness (cf. Jer 16:11). The prophet fails to recognise that the same objective standard of God's righteousness which he applies to the Chaldeans also applies to the Judeans – arguably even more so, as they are Yahweh's covenant people and have been entrusted with the Torah as their guide for living. Nevertheless, the prophet is not entirely incorrect in his understanding of God's position toward the wicked; God indeed abhors wickedness (1:4, 13; cf. Prov 6:16-19; Ps 145:20; 97:10; 45:7;

⁷² See 3.4.3.6

⁷³ See 3.4.3.2

⁷⁴ See 3.4.3.3

⁷⁵ Da Silva (2019:35) erroneously cites Alan Groves instead of Vincent E. Bacote

5:4-5). While God does not approve of the actions of the wicked, He uses their actions to fulfil His greater purpose. Rather, He employs the wicked as instruments of punishment, ultimately aimed at correction (Achtemeier, 1986:40). Although God desires all people to repent and live righteously, this is not the central emphasis of His righteousness in Habakkuk. In this context, God's righteousness is demonstrated through His response to the violation of His righteous standard.

Smith (1984:103) proposes that Habakkuk “believes that what was happening in his world was the work of God. God had appointed and ordained the Babylonians to reprove and bring judgment on [H]is people”. However, the prophet does not seem to fully grasp God’s righteousness until later in the dialogue. At this point, he appears perplexed and uncertain about how God’s righteousness is being manifested in the world. If the Chaldeans are also wicked according to God’s standard (1:6-11), why would He choose them as instruments to reprove His covenant people? Armerding (2008:618-619) posits that the punishment of the wicked (1:4) by the wicked (1:13) constitutes a form of *lex talionis*⁷⁶. At this point in the dialogue, God has revealed only His intention to use the wicked Chaldeans to chastise Judah. What has not yet been disclosed to the prophet, but will be revealed as the dialogue unfolds, is that the Chaldeans themselves will eventually face judgment by the hands of the Medes for their wickedness (cf. 2:2-20; Jer 51:1-19; Isa 47). Habakkuk’s perspective of God’s righteousness stems from his understanding of the covenant. He considers the Judeans to be righteous even though they are, in fact, unrighteous, just like the Chaldeans. However, God’s perspective on righteousness is far more expansive, extending beyond the ethical and geographical boundaries of His covenant people. His righteousness encompasses not only His chosen people, but also the entire world (cf. 2:14, 20). This broader view reflects a righteousness that is both inclusive and universal in scope. The prophet struggles to comprehend how wickedness could be employed in God’s ultimate design, yet God reveals that He is orchestrating a grander, sovereign plan. As the prophet waits for God’s response to his complaint, God discloses His intended actions (2:2-3).

3.3.3.5.2.3.1 Summary

Habakkuk 1:12-13 reveals the prophet’s struggle with the apparent tension between his understanding of God’s righteousness and the way God’s righteousness unfolds in the world. Initially, Habakkuk condemns the wickedness of his fellow Judeans (1:2-4), but his view shifts when God reveals that He will use the Chaldeans as His instrument of divine judgment (1:5-11).

⁷⁶ Lex talionis refers to a “law of retaliation by which the guilty party suffers the same harm as that experienced by the injured party” (Huffman, 1992:321)

This revelation challenges the prophet's understanding, leading him to question how a righteous God could use a nation even more wicked than Judah to bring judgment on them (1:13).

Habakkuk pleads with God to intervene on behalf of the righteous among His wicked people, but this request appears to contradict the prophet's assertion that God cannot tolerate wrongdoing. In comparing the Judeans to the Chaldeans and labelling them as "more righteous", his distinction is rooted not in moral superiority but in their covenant relationship with Yahweh.

The prophet's shifting perspective reflects an internal conflict. Initially, he distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked within Judah, but later he focuses on the distinction between the wicked Chaldeans and the Judeans as a whole. This shift in judgment highlights the prophet's reliance on ethnic and covenantal status rather than true righteousness.

As the dialogue progresses, it becomes clear that Habakkuk's limited view of righteousness is challenged. While the prophet accuses God of inconsistency, it is Habakkuk who demonstrates an inconsistent understanding of God's righteousness. He fails to recognise that God's righteousness extends beyond the covenant to include a global and universal perspective. Though God's plan may appear unjust to the prophet, it reveals a broader purpose in which both the Chaldeans and the Judeans are subject to His divine judgment. Ultimately, God's righteousness is manifested not only in His covenant with Judah but in His sovereign rule over all nations (cf. 2:14, 20).

3.3.3.5.2.4 Meaning of צַדִּיק (2:4)

Thomas (2018:103-104, 107) argues that Habakkuk 2:2-5 serves as the central passage for interpreting the entire book of Habakkuk, with 2:4 being pivotal in revealing its core message concerning God's righteousness. Throughout the text, God consistently challenges Habakkuk's understanding of righteousness, gradually shaping the prophet's perspective (Wendland, 1999:592). In 1:4, Habakkuk obviously differentiates between the righteous and the wicked among the Judeans. However, in 1:13, his understanding becomes more ambiguous, as he categorises both groups collectively as "more righteous" compared to the wicked Chaldeans. In 2:4, God finally reveals His perspective. He declares that it is not according to ethnic or covenantal status that one is identified as righteous, but rather, according to their "faith". Put differently, the righteous are those who live by their "faithfulness" to God and His righteousness (Swanson, 1997:575). Understanding the meaning of צַדִּיק in this passage depends heavily on understanding אֱמוּנָה/*mûnā(h)* (faith). Jepsen (1977:318-319) asserts that אֱמוּנָה here means much more than merely faithfulness; it refers to "conduct which... includes sincerity, faithfulness, reliability and

stability". As such, אֱמוּנָה "is not so much an abstract quality,... but a way of acting which grows out of inner stability" (1977:317). אֱמוּנָה relates to "one's inner attitude and the conduct it produces". The righteous are thus those who conduct their life faithfully to God and His commands, whether Judean or Chaldean.

Unexpectedly, God does not follow the prophet's distinction between the righteous and the wicked (רָשָׁע). Instead, He differentiates between the righteous and the "proud" (עָפָל/ʿāpāl), thereby redefining the prophet's categories. While the term "proud" clearly refers to the Chaldeans (cf. 1:7, 11), who are depicted as self-worshippers, it also, rather surprisingly, applies to the Judeans (Snyman, 2020:70). Although the Judeans perceive themselves as righteous due to their covenant relationship with Yahweh, they are, in fact, far from embodying true righteousness (1:2-4; cf. Jer 13:9-10). Both the Judeans and the Chaldeans display a false sense of pride, though it is more explicitly apparent with the Chaldeans (Swanson, 1997:6752).

Renz (2021:286) describes the proud as ones who have an unquenchable appetite for violence and power – an appetite that is "...without constraint, a desire that does *not* know the limits set by *judicious* moderation"⁷⁷. The Chaldeans display an explicit and insatiable lust for power and violence (1:7, 9, 10, 11; 16, 17), driven by an unrestrained sense of pride (cf. 1:17). They seem completely indifferent to the consequences of their pursuit of power, with no regard whatsoever for God's righteousness. In contrast, the pride of the Judeans is more subtle and less overt, perhaps because it is minimised by the prophet in 1:13. The Chaldeans' pride revolves around their pursuit of world domination, while the Judeans' pride is based on their spiritual status, convinced that their own wickedness is less severe than that of the Chaldeans. Nevertheless, both the Judeans and Chaldeans fall short of Yahweh's righteous standard and are in rebellion against God. Regardless of their ethnicity – whether Judean or Chaldean – those who rebel against God will ultimately face death (Barker & Bailey, 1999:325).

However, the latter part of verse 2:4 asserts that "the righteous live by their faith"⁷⁸, a phrase that significantly influences how righteousness is understood in Habakkuk. If the emphasis is placed on the verb "live" (חָיָה/hāyā(h)), at least two interpretative possibilities arise. The first interpretation suggests that the righteous conduct their lives in accordance with their faith; in other words, they are identified as righteous because their behaviour reflects their faith. The second interpretation

⁷⁷ Emphasis by original author

⁷⁸ See 3.3.2.4.4

associates “live” with the notion of salvation, indicating that the righteous will attain life and escape death through their faith⁷⁹.

While this study acknowledges the validity of the latter interpretation, it contends that the former interpretation is more illuminating for the purpose of understanding God's righteousness within the context of this study. Once we comprehend the first interpretation, the second interpretation follows naturally, providing a clearer understanding of who the righteous are from Yahweh's perspective. A nuanced understanding is crucial when exploring the relationship between the righteous and their behaviour. It is often misconstrued that a person is deemed righteous due to his righteous actions. However, righteousness is not determined by behaviour; instead, it is a person's righteous identity that gives rise to righteous conduct. Faith in Yahweh is what defines an individual as righteous, and this faith subsequently influences his actions. Consequently, a righteous person lives in accordance with a sense of righteousness that emerges from his relationship with Yahweh, grounded in faith in Him.

3.3.3.5.2.4.1 Summary

Habakkuk 2:2-5 serves as the key passage for interpreting the book of Habakkuk, with 2:4 being central to its message about God's righteousness. Throughout the dialogue, Habakkuk's understanding of righteousness is challenged, moving the prophet away from a simplistic view that distinguishes the righteous from the wicked based on ethnic or covenantal status. Instead, God reveals that righteousness is defined by faithfulness to Him. The concept of faith (אֱמוּנָה/ *’ēmûnāh*) in this passage goes beyond mere belief, reflecting a deep-rooted stability and conduct aligned with truth and sincerity. Both the Judeans and Chaldeans are portrayed as falling short of God's righteous standard due to their pride – albeit in different ways. The Chaldeans exhibit an overt and unrestrained desire for power and violence, while the Judeans' pride is more subtle, rooted in their perceived covenantal privilege. Nevertheless, both are in rebellion against Yahweh. The latter part of Habakkuk 2:4 asserts that the righteous will live by their faith, suggesting two interpretive possibilities: (1) that the righteous demonstrate their faith through their conduct or, (2) that they will be saved through their faith. While the second interpretation relating to salvation is valid, the focus here is on how a person's faith in Yahweh makes him righteous, with righteous behaviour being a natural outcome of this faith. This distinction highlights that

⁷⁹ This interpretation is consistent with the usage of the term by New Testament writers (cf. Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38).

righteousness stems from one's identity in relation to God, not from his actions. Faith in Yahweh leads to righteous conduct, which is the true hallmark of a righteous person.

3.3.3.5.3 צִדִּיק Synthesis

Scholars have interpreted צִדִּיק/*ṣdḏq* through three key lenses: (1) a legal framework, viewing it as an objective standard guiding behaviour; (2) a relational framework, emphasising ethical welfare within a community; and (3) a salvific framework, focusing on Yahweh's saving intervention. Rather than adhering exclusively to one perspective, this study asserts that each interpretation highlights different facets of צִדִּיק depending on the context. The term's semantic range invites a nuanced exploration, particularly of the adjective צִדִּיק/*ṣaddīq* in Habakkuk. The absence of צִדִּיק/*ṣēdāqâ* (noun) and צִדִּיק/*ṣādaq* (verb) in the text invites a closer analysis of how God's righteousness is expressed, despite these terms not being explicitly used in the text.

For Habakkuk, צִדִּיק initially revolves around the distinction between right and wrong, but Yahweh demonstrates that His righteousness is the divine standard defined by His character, not human perception. Habakkuk's understanding is shaped by a soteriological focus, as he perceives God's righteousness in terms of salvation (cf. 1:2). However, the unfolding dialogue between the prophet and Yahweh reveals that His righteousness encompasses both mercy and retribution, highlighting the apparent paradox of justice and mercy coexisting within God's righteousness.

Habakkuk 1:2-4 reflects the prophet's lament over the moral and social decay of his community, where he questions Yahweh's righteousness. His initial view of righteousness, focused on salvation, is challenged as he is confronted with the complexities of God's righteousness. Habakkuk attributes the paralysis of the law and the perversion of justice (1:4) to Yahweh's apparent indifference, though this overlooks the role of Judah's wickedness. Yahweh's righteousness is eventually revealed to transcend ethnic and covenantal boundaries, reflecting a broader, more universal application of righteousness.

The use of the Chaldeans as instruments of judgment (1:6) further deepens Habakkuk's struggle to reconcile his understanding of righteousness with God's actions. In comparing the Judeans to the Chaldeans, Habakkuk misplaces his focus on ethnic identity and covenantal status rather than on true righteousness. Habakkuk's shifting perspective reflects his internal conflict, as Yahweh's righteousness is reshaped to transcend the prophet's initial, limited view. This culminates in 2:2-5, where Yahweh teaches the prophet that the righteous are those who live by their faith in him, regardless of their ethnic background.

Ultimately, Yahweh's righteousness is not only seen in His dealings with Judah, but in His universal sovereignty over all nations. Both the Judeans and Chaldeans are subject to God's righteous judgment, as both groups exhibit pride and rebellion against Him. Where the prophet contrasts the righteous with the wicked, Yahweh contrasts the righteous with the proud, redefining the prophet's categories and demonstrating that righteousness stems from faith in Yahweh and not from ethnic identity or covenantal privilege. Faith leads to righteous conduct, establishing one's identity as truly righteous before God.

We now turn our attention to the concept of mercy (חַמֵּל) (1:17), which, despite appearing only once in the text, plays a crucial role in understanding God's righteousness and forms a key aspect of this study.

3.3.3.6 חַמֵּל/qal/hāmāl (1:17)

The verb חַמֵּל/hāmāl (mercy) (יִחַמֵּל – qal, imperfect, third person, masculine, singular) is used once in the book of Habakkuk (1:17)

3.3.3.6.1 Context of חַמֵּל

3.3.3.6.1.1 חַמֵּל (1:17)

1:17 Is he then to keep on emptying his net,
and destroying nations without mercy?

חַמֵּל appears in the context of Habakkuk's second complaint (1:12-17). The prophet is perplexed that God would use the wicked (רָשָׁע/rāšā')⁸⁰ Chaldeans (cf. 1:5-6) as His instrument to chastise the wicked Judahites (cf. 1:4). He asks whether they (the Chaldeans) will continue "destroying nations without mercy [(חַמֵּל)]" (1:17).

3.3.3.6.2 חַמֵּל meaning within context

The meaning of חַמֵּל will first be discussed in a general sense, and then based on the specific context of 1:17.

⁸⁰ See 3.4.3.4

3.3.3.6.2.1 Possible meaning of the lexeme מַלְחָה

Swanson (1997:2798) asserts that מַלְחָה (qal) means to “show mercy on, spare, take pity on, i.e. show kindness to one in an unfavorable [sic], difficult, or dangerous situation, and so help deliver in some manner, implying in some cases that the distress may deserve the condition”. Butterworth (1997a:174) also proposes that the basic meaning of מַלְחָה connotes the ideas of sparing or refraining from; specifically, “holding back from an action that, for one reason or another, might be expected”, or to have “pity” or “compassion”. Coppes (1980:296) agrees that “sparing” is a good translation of מַלְחָה as a concept that is predominantly used in a negative sense. This is certainly the case in Habakkuk as Tsevat (1980:471) notes that it is used with the negation אֵל in 1:17, relating it to the Chaldeans who are “pitiless or even merciless” in the prophet’s perspective.

3.3.3.6.2.2 מַלְחָה meaning (1:17)

מַלְחָה (mercy) occurs in the context of Habakkuk’s second complaint (1:12-17), in which he asks how God can allow the Chaldeans to carry on “destroying nations without mercy”. From the prophet’s perspective, מַלְחָה implies immediate deliverance (יִשְׁעַ/yešāʿ)⁸¹ (cf. 1:2, 3:13, 18) from the oppression of the wicked (רָשָׁע/rašāʿ). He wants the wicked Chaldeans to “have pity” (מַלְחָה/hāmāl) on the Judeans, whom he presumes to be more righteous (צַדִּיק/šaddîq)⁸² (Swanson, 1997:2798). Habakkuk not only points out the Chaldeans’ lack of mercy, but indirectly accuses God of also not having mercy. This apparent lack of mercy forms the foundation of the prophet’s second complaint.

Based on Habakkuk’s first complaint (1:2-4), he knows that the Judahites are wicked and deserve punishment. However, his issue lies with the fact that the Chaldeans’ wickedness seems to be “unchecked” (Renz, 2021:263). They continue to “destroy nations” without “holding back” (מַלְחָה) (Butterworth, 1997a:174). Therefore, the prophet’s plea is for God to intervene and restrain them (cf. 1:12). The Judahites will face “a terrible and inescapable destiny” if Yahweh does not “help or deliver” them (Swanson, 1997:2798; Tsevat, 1980:471).

⁸¹ See 3.4.3.2

⁸² See 3.4.3.5

According to Walker (1915:2036), God's mercy transcends the mere forgiveness of those who violate His law; it reflects His character and His compassion towards humanity. God's forgiveness, therefore, emanates from His intrinsic nature of compassion. Habakkuk, aware of God's compassionate and forgiving nature, appeals to this aspect of His character (cf. Exod 34:6-7; Ps 86:5; Ps 103:8-12). However, he constrains God's character to align his own expectations of divine mercy, overstating his mercy and understating his justice—specifically in relation to the Judahites. In contrast, he desires a harsher expression of divine justice for the Chaldeans. Habakkuk expects God to refrain from punishing the Judeans through the wicked Chaldeans as He had foretold He would (cf. 1:5-11), further illustrating his limited understanding of the balance between divine mercy and justice. Richards (1999:439), makes an important observation, stating that “no one has a right to mercy”, with Parker (2003:1106) echoing this sentiment, emphasising that mercy is a gift of God, not a privilege granted to God's people based on their merit. In contrast, Habakkuk assumes Judah is entitled to be spared from destruction based on their ethnic identity and covenantal status, reflecting a fundamental misconception of both mercy and the covenant.

The prophet uses mercy in a negative sense indicated by the negation לֹא , illustrating his perception that both the Chaldeans and God seem to be “pitiless” or “merciless” (Tsevat, 1980:471). They do not show mercy, which would entail withholding the punishment that Judah justly deserves (cf. Jer 21:1-10). Habakkuk fails to recognise that God's righteousness is not only revealed through His mercy but also through His justice, both of which are essential aspects of His divine nature. God's righteous character necessitates that He administer his justice by punishing the wickedness of the Judeans. While the prophet readily condemns the wickedness of the Chaldeans (1:12-13), he expects God to “show kindness” towards the sins of his own people and “take pity on” them (Swanson, 1997:2798). From the prophet's perspective, the Chaldeans deserves punishment to ensure the prosperity of the Judahites (Barker & Bailey, 1999:318). He is “... a victim of that self-deception which blunts a man's sense of the reality and the gravity of his own sin” (Tasker, 2001:11-12).

To better understand this dynamic, a differentiation between חַמֶּלֶךְ (1:17) and חַמֶּלֶךְ ⁸³ (3:2) is required, both translated as “mercy” in the NRSV. Firstly, חַמֶּלֶךְ is used directly in reference to the Chaldeans' lack of mercy, while also connoting a secondary implication concerning God's mercy. His complaint is motivated by fear of being subjected to the Chaldeans' brutality. Habakkuk petitions God to compel the Chaldeans to refrain from destroying the Judahites. He understands

⁸³ See 3.4.3.8

חַמֵּל as the withholding or suspension of punishment, failing to see God's greater sovereign plan to use the Chaldeans (cf. 1:5-6) as His instruments of judgment against Judah for their wickedness (cf. 1:2-4). If חַמֵּל is understood to mean "spare" or "refrain from" an expected action (Butterworth, 1997a:174), the question arises: why does God withhold חַמֵּל? A deeper exploration of the prophet's perception will yield insights that address this question.

Habakkuk perceives God's righteousness as "covenant faithfulness", though Niehaus (2017:18-19) proposes a broader definition. While covenant faithfulness is an aspect of God's righteousness, it ultimately refers to "conformity to a standard". From the prophet's perspective, covenant faithfulness relates to salvation (cf. 1:2; Ps 3), and he expects Yahweh to remain faithful to His people, even when they are unfaithful to him. However, God expands Habakkuk's understanding, in two significant ways.

Firstly, God shows him that His faithfulness extends not only to His covenant but also to His own righteous character, which demands both justice and mercy. His justice requires punishing those who fail to conform to His standard, while His mercy impels Him to preserve those who are righteous according to their faith in Him. Secondly, he clarifies what it truly means to be righteous (2:4), showing that those who live in alignment with His righteous standard are truly righteous, whereas the "proud" fall under His judgment (cf. 2:5-20). By executing his judgment against Judah, God upholds the justice inherent in His righteousness.

Contrary to the prophet's understanding, the purpose of God's punishment is not only punitive but also restorative. God's decision not to compel the Chaldeans to show mercy is not an absence of mercy (חַמֵּל) on Yahweh's part. Instead, it is a deeper expression of His mercy (רַחֵם), as He remains faithful to His righteous character. Through judgment, Yahweh refines His people into a people with whom He can continue to have a covenant relationship. His desire is for His righteousness to be reflected by those who have faith (אֱמוּנָה)⁸⁴ in Him (cf. 2:4).

Habakkuk's use of חַמֵּל reflects his limited understanding of God's righteousness at this stage of the dialogue. As the dialogue progresses, however, God reveals that His concern extends beyond חַמֵּל, which the prophet associates with immediate relief for the Judeans. Instead, God emphasises רַחֵם (3:2)—a deeper expression of compassion that persists even in the face of the

⁸⁴ See discussion under 3.4.3.5.2.4

people's "state of guilt for an offense" (Swanson, 1997:8163). Yahweh has compassion on His people regardless of their wickedness, based on His relationship with them. This progression highlights God's broader purpose, which includes both justice and mercy in the refinement of His people.

An additional question emerges: how does God's justice and mercy apply concerning the Chaldeans? If Judah, as God's covenant people, is subject to His wrath for their wickedness, it stands to reason that the Chaldeans, who are equally guilty, would also face the same divine judgment (cf. 1:12-13). In 2:2-20, God responds to Habakkuk's complaint with five woe oracles directed against the "proud", which includes the wicked Judahites and the Chaldeans. For Judah, judgment is executed through the Chaldeans, while for the Chaldeans, judgment will be delivered through the Medes (cf. Jer 51:1-19; Isa 47). But how does God extend mercy towards the Chaldeans? God's ultimate purpose is not only that His covenant people would live according to His righteous standard; His plan is for the entire world to align with His intended design (cf. Gen 12:3). Ultimately, God's punishment serves a restorative purpose, and it is through this restoration that He displays His mercy⁸⁵.

3.3.3.6.3 מֶלֶךְ Synthesis

In Habakkuk's second complaint (1:12-17), the prophet questions how God can allow the Chaldeans to continue "destroying nations without mercy." From Habakkuk's perspective, מֶלֶךְ (mercy) implies immediate deliverance from oppression (cf. 1:2, 3:13, 18), with the expectation that the wicked Chaldeans would spare the Judeans, whom he considers more righteous. This expectation reveals the prophet's limited understanding of God's mercy, as he not only criticises the Chaldeans for their lack of mercy but also implicitly accuses God of withholding it.

While the prophet assumes that Judah is entitled to mercy based on their covenantal status, he fails to recognise that it is not their right to be spared but mercy is a gift from God. His narrow view reduces God's mercy to a form of favouritism, expecting God to hold back the punishment that Judah deserves and to deliver them from a terrible and inescapable destiny, while

⁸⁵ This idea is exemplified in the life of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel. After exalting himself and defying God (Dan 3:1-16), Nebuchadnezzar faces divine judgment (Dan 4:28-32). However, following this period of judgment, he ultimately acknowledges and praises God (Dan 4:34-36), illustrating the restorative nature of God's justice. Another example of God's mercy toward non-Judahites is found in the book of Jonah. God sends the prophet to "cry out" against the wickedness of Nineveh (Jonah 1:2). While Jonah desires God to execute judgment upon the Ninevites, God's pronouncement of judgment ultimately leads to their repentance (Jonah 3). These narratives highlight God's willingness to extend mercy, even to those outside His covenant people, when they turn from their wickedness.

condemning the Chaldeans. This misunderstanding is further emphasised by the negative use of *חַמֵּל*, where the absence of mercy is perceived as an unjust punishment for Judah, although they are deserving of it.

The distinction between *חַמֵּל* (1:17) and *רַחֵם* (3:2) provides clarity in understanding God's mercy. Habakkuk uses *חַמֵּל* in reference to the Chaldeans' lack of mercy, while also applying it to God's perceived inaction. He sees *חַמֵּל* as the withholding of punishment, yet he fails to understand God's sovereign plan to use the Chaldeans as instruments of His righteous judgment (cf. 1:5-6). God's decision to withhold *חַמֵּל* from Judah is not a sign of mercilessness but rather an expression of divine justice. Through this judgment, Yahweh refines His people, transforming them into the people with whom He can maintain a continued covenant relationship, in which his compassion (*רַחֵם*) is fully expressed.

As the dialogue progresses, God reveals that His concern extends beyond the immediate relief that Habakkuk seeks. God's mercy, communicated through *רַחֵם*, involves a deeper compassion that remains even in the face of Judah's guilt. This progression of understanding highlights the transformative nature of God's mercy, which works alongside His justice to restore His people.

A further question arises regarding how God's justice and mercy apply to the Chaldeans. If Judah, as God's covenant people, is subject to divine wrath, it follows that the Chaldeans, who are equally guilty, would also face divine judgment (cf. 1:12-13). God responds with five woe oracles (2:2-20), addressing the pride and wickedness of both the Judahites and the Chaldeans. While Judah's judgment comes through the Chaldeans, the Chaldeans' punishment will be enacted through the Medes. God's ultimate plan is for both Judah and all the other nations to conform to His righteous standard. His punishment, though severe, serves a restorative purpose, demonstrating that His mercy is not limited to Judah but extends to all who turn from their wickedness and align themselves with His divine will.

The concepts of "wrath" (*רָגַז*) (3:2) and "tremble(d)" (*רָגַז*) (3:7, 16) will now be discussed, as they relate to the expression of God's righteousness and the prophet's response to it.

3.3.3.7 *רָגַז/noun/rōḡēz/רָגַז/verb/rāḡāz* (3:2, 7, 16)

The following table shows the occurrences and translation of the noun *רָגַז/rōḡēz* and the verb *רָגַז/rāḡāz* in Habakkuk.

Table 4: Occurrences of רָגַז / רָגַזְתָּ

Term	Lexical category	Translation	Occurance
רָגַז/ <i>rōḡēz</i>	Noun	“wrath”	(3:2)
רָגַז/ <i>rāḡāz</i>	Verb: יִרְגֹּז – qal, imperfect, third person, masculine, plural	“trembled”	(3:7)
רָגַז/ <i>rāḡāz</i>	Verb: וַתִּרְגֹּז – qal, third person, feminine, singular plus ו consecutive	“tremble”	(3:16)
רָגַז/ <i>rāḡāz</i>	Verb: אֶרְגֹּז – qal, imperfect, first person, singular	“tremble”	(3:16)

3.3.3.7.1 Context of רָגַז/רָגַזְתָּ

3.3.3.7.1.1 רָגַז (3:2)

3:2 O Lord, I have heard of your renown,
and I stand in awe, O Lord, of your work.
In our own time revive it;
in our own time make it known;
in wrath may you remember mercy.

The term רָגַז ⁸⁶ (wrath) appears within Habakkuk's plea for mercy (רַחֵם/rāḥām) ⁸⁷ (3:2), situated in the initial section of his prayer of praise (3:1-19). His appeal for God to demonstrate compassion amidst His wrath arises from his state of “awe” (יָרֵא/yārē‘) ⁸⁸ after being confronted with Yahweh and His righteousness (2:14, 20; cf. 2:3-20). The dialogue (1:2-2:20) preceding this section ends with five woe oracles in which Yahweh reveals His attitude against the wicked (רָשָׁע/rāšā‘) ⁸⁹ (2:6-20). The prophet is confronted with God's רָגַז and implores Him to “revive” His work of deliverance (יְשִׁעַ/yēšā‘) ⁹⁰ (cf. Exod 14).

3.3.3.7.1.2 רָגַז (3:7)

3:7 I saw the tents of Cushan under affliction;
the tent-curtains of the land of Midian trembled.

רָגַז (trembled) appears in 3:7 in the context of the theophany (3:3-15). It is used in relation to Cushan and Midian, who are depicted as being “under affliction”. These nations, not mentioned anywhere else in the text, symbolise the response of other nations to the theophany, apart from Judah and the Chaldeans, based on their geographical location (cf. 2:20) (Barker & Bailey, 1999:364; Roberts, 1991:155). They רָגַז (trembled) as a reaction to God's רָגַז (wrath/anger) (3:2) (Snyman, 2020:83-84).

3.3.3.7.1.3 רָגַז (3:16)

3:16 I hear, and I tremble within;
my lips quiver at the sound.
Rottenness enters into my bones,

⁸⁶ The terms חָרָה/hārā(h) (wrath), אַף/āp (anger), and עֵבֶר/ēbrā(h) (rage) (3:8) also relate to the concept of anger/wrath/rage. Possible further studies could be done to examine the specific nuances of these terms in this context. However, it is not within the scope of this study to discuss these terms in-depth.

⁸⁷ See 3.4.3.8

⁸⁸ Fuhs (1990:296) proposes that 80 percent of the occurrences of אֵיִן refers to the “fear of God”. In 3:2 it seems to also be the case. He further notes that “fear (of death) is... the natural human reaction when someone experiences divine revelation in a theophany, dream, or vision” (1990:301).

⁸⁹ See 3.4.3.4

⁹⁰ See 3.4.3.2

and my steps tremble beneath me.
I wait quietly for the day of calamity
to come upon the people who attack us.

In 3:16, the prophet רָגַז (“tremble[s]”)⁹¹ in response to the theophany (3:3-15) and in reaction to encountering God’s רָגַז (wrath/anger) (3:2); his “lips quiver at the sound”, “rotteness enters into [his] bones”, and his “steps tremble [(רָגַז)] beneath [him]”. The רָגַז (trembl[ing]) appears to be a manifestation of the prophet’s sense of “awe”/fear of God (יִרְאָה) (3:2).

3.3.3.7.2 רָגַז/רָגַז meaning within context

The meaning of רָגַז/רָגַז will be discussed, first in a general sense and then in its context in Habakkuk (3:2, 7, 16).

3.3.3.7.2.1 Possible meaning of the lexeme רָגַז

According to Vanoni (2004:306-307) רָגַז “convey[s] the sense that the subject is powerfully moved, outwardly or inwardly”. He further notes that the verb רָגַז from which רָגַז is derived could either mean “tremble” as in a “somatic phenomenon” (3:7; cf. Ezek 12:18), or “disturbance” as a “psychic emotion”; or “anger”, depending on its context. According to van Pelt and Kaiser (1997:1045-1046) רָגַז refers to “agitation, excitement, turmoil”. It expresses a “type of fierce anger that is often accompanied by shaking. Swanson (1997:8075) expands on this, suggesting that רָגַז refers to 1. “turmoil, tumult, ... a state of trouble and hardship” (cf. Job 3:17, 26; 14:1; Isa 14:3), 2. “excitement,... a state which has and expends great, sudden energy” (cf. Job 39:24), 3. “roar of thunder, ... a very loud sound in weather that has lightning” (cf. Job 37:2), 4. “anger, wrath... a state or condition of intense displeasure with an object, implying [that] an action of anger will accompany” (3:2).

⁹¹ וְתִרְגַּז בִּטְנִי can literally be translated as “my stomach churns” (Anderson, 2001:341; Clark & Hatton, 1989:133; Renz, 2021:398)

3.3.3.7.2.2 Meaning of רָגַז (3:2)

In light of the discussion above, the meaning of רָגַז in Habakkuk (3:2; cf. 3:7) conveys a sense of wrath or anger. It is evident that God disapproves of the conduct of the wicked⁹² (cf. 1:4, 13; 2:4-20; Ps 92:7) and is not indifferent towards the wicked, contrary to the prophet's initial implication (cf. 1:2-4). Throughout the dialogue (1:2-2:20) the prophet struggles with God's righteousness, which he perceives to mean deliverance (cf. 1:2; 3:13, 18) for the righteous⁹³ (2:4; cf. Ps 34:17 Jer 15:19-21), and wrath against the wicked. However, in 3:2, he comes to a profound understanding of God's wrath directed towards the wicked (both Judeans and Chaldeans) (1:6-11; 2:5-20; cf. Ps 7:11; Prov 11:21). The prophet realises that those who are "proud"⁹⁴ (2:4) rely on a false sense of self-righteousness, positioning themselves in opposition to Yahweh. This incites Yahweh's just wrath, leading the prophet to a state of awe. In response, he pleads with Yahweh to "remember mercy" even in the midst of His righteous anger (3:2).

3.3.3.7.2.3 Meaning of רָגַז (3:7)

The meaning of רָגַז (*rāḡāz*) in 3:7 correlates with Swanson's (1997:8074) definition which conveys the idea of "shaking, quaking or trembling", which "in some contexts this may refer to fear and anxiety". In this context (3:3-15), רָגַז represents a psychological response (although it may also have a physical manifestation) to the theophany. van Pelt and Kaiser (1997:1045-1046) assert that רָגַז "fundamentally... expresses the idea of physical shaking", although it could also "...express the ideas of rebellion, fear, trouble, rage, and excitement". In this context, רָגַז conveys the notion of "fear", which aligns well with the "affliction" (אַוּ/ *āwēn*) experienced by "the tents of Cushan". This response of רָגַז (fear) is also congruent with the prophet's response of awe/fear to God's wrath (3:2). In the same way that Judah and the Chaldeans are judged by the God's righteous standard, so too are the nations and Habakkuk held accountable to this same measure. Ultimately, all the earth must keep silent in reverence before Yahweh (2:20).

⁹² Although God does not approve of the conduct of the wicked, He still uses it for His greater purpose.

⁹³ See 3.4.3.5

⁹⁴ See discussion under 3.4.3.5.2.4

3.3.3.7.2.4 Meaning of רָגַז (3:16)

Where רָגַז (*rāḡāz*) refers to the turmoil experienced by the nations of Cushan and Midian in 3:7, it pertains to the prophet himself in 3:16. The first use of רָגַז in 3:16 refers to “anguish, ... an emotional distress or turbulence, as a figurative extension of shaking an object” (Swanson, 1997:8074). The prophet trembles (in a figurative sense) as he experiences the theophany (3:3-15). The second occurrence of רָגַז in 3:16 refers to quaking, shaking, and trembling. Here the prophet loses his sure footing, (also in a figurative sense, although it may include a physical manifestation).

3.3.3.7.3 רָגַז/רָגַז synthesis

The term רָגַז in Habakkuk 3:2 conveys a sense of wrath or anger which aligns with the broader context of the book where God’s disapproval of the conduct of the wicked is evident. Initially, the prophet implies that God is indifferent to the wicked (1:2-4), yet, as the dialogue unfolds throughout the book (1:2-2:20), the prophet gains a deeper understanding of God’s righteousness. At first, he views God’s righteousness as merely deliverance for the righteous and punishment for the wicked. However, in 3:2, the prophet attains a more nuanced understanding, gaining deeper insight into God’s wrath, which is not only directed at the Chaldeans but also includes the Judeans. The prophet comes to a realisation that the “proud” (2:4) rely on a false sense of self-righteousness, placing them in opposition to Yahweh. This incites God’s justified wrath, inducing the prophet to a state of awe, where he pleads for God to “remember mercy” because of His relationship with His people, even amidst His righteous anger.

The use of רָגַז in 3:7 reflects a sense of shaking, quaking, or trembling, often associated with fear or anxiety. In the context of Habakkuk 3:3-15, this trembling is psychological, though it may also have physical manifestations. While רָגַז fundamentally conveys the idea of physical shaking, it can also encompass emotions such as rebellion, fear, trouble, rage, or excitement. In this passage, it expresses the notion of fear, which corresponds with the affliction experienced by the tents of Cushan. This fear is also congruent with the prophet’s own reaction of awe and fear in response to God’s wrath.

The use of רָגַז shifts from referring to the turmoil experienced by the nations of Cushan and Midian in 3:7, to referring to the prophet himself in 3:16. The first occurrence of רָגַז in 3:16 relates to anguish or emotional distress, representing a figurative expression of physical trembling. The

prophet figuratively trembles as he witnesses the theophany. The second occurrence of רָגַז in 3:16 describes quaking and trembling, reflecting the prophet's sense of instability, both figuratively and physically. Habakkuk and the nations are accountable to the same righteous standard by which Judah and the Chaldeans are judged—all must keep silent before Yahweh (2:20).

3.3.3.8 רָחַם/רָחֵם *ṣāḥām* (3:2)

The verb רָחַם/*rāḥām* (mercy) (רָחַם – pi‘‘ēl, infinitive, absolute⁹⁵) appears once in the book of Habakkuk (3:2).

3.3.3.8.1 Context of רָחַם

3.3.3.8.1.1 רָחַם (3:2)

3:2 O Lord, I have heard of your renown,
and I stand in awe, O Lord, of your work.
In our own time revive it;
in our own time make it known;
in wrath may you remember mercy.

רָחַם/*rāḥām* (mercy) is used in the context of Habakkuk's plea for mercy after he is exposed to God's wrath (רָגַז/*rōḡēz*)⁹⁶ (cf. 2:5-20). He is filled with awe as God's righteousness⁹⁷ is further revealed to him (cf. Fuhs, 1990:296). As a result, he beseeches God to "remember mercy".

3.3.3.8.2 רָחַם meaning within context

The meaning of רָחַם/*rāḥām* will be examined first in a general sense, followed by an exposition of its usage in Habakkuk (3:2).

⁹⁵ "An infinitive is a verbal noun" shares characteristics of a noun, verb, or adverb (Heiser & Setterholm, 2013). It "can function as a noun..., as a verb itself, or intensify the action of another verb". "The absolute form is the normal form of the infinitive when not in a bound construct relationship".

⁹⁶ See 3.4.3.7

⁹⁷ See 3.4.3.5

3.3.3.8.2.1 Possible meaning of the lexeme רַחֵם

According to Butterworth (1997a:1093), “רחם and its derivatives belong to the realm of grace and hope, expressing someone’s willingness to show favor [sic]”. Richards (1999:439) agrees with Stoebe (1997a:1225-1226), observing that “[רחם] and its cognates express the love of a superior for an inferior. This love is seen in the deep feelings that move the superior to help”. Simian-Yofre and Dahmen (2004:440) assert that in the majority of instances, God is the subject of the pi‘‘ēl form of רַחֵם, with Israel and Juda typically being the recipients (cf. Isa 14:1; Jer 31:20; Hos 1:6, 7; Ezek 39:25; Zech 1:12; 10:6; Jer 30:18). Although Stark (2014) agrees that רַחֵם refers to “have mercy, show compassion”, he notes that it has an intricate connection to forgiveness (cf. 1 Kgs 8:50). He asserts that “compassionate acts seem often to imply prior forgiveness, or compassion may be a motivator toward forgiveness” (cf. Deut 13:18; 30:1-3; Jer 12:15; Mic 7:19; Prov 28:13). Furthermore, “where forgiveness is withheld, compassion likewise is not extended” (cf. Isa 9:16).

3.3.3.8.2.2 Meaning of רַחֵם (3:2)

Swanson’s (1997:8163) assertion that the pi‘‘ēl form of רַחֵם connotes to “have compassion on, show mercy, take pity on, show love... have feelings and actions of kindness and concern for one in difficulty, regardless of one’s state of guilt for an offence” aligns with the context of Habakkuk 3:2. Confronted with God’s righteousness, the prophet becomes acutely aware of Yahweh’s wrath, and Judah’s wickedness, prompting him to plead with God for mercy. He appeals to God’s inherent compassion, even amidst His wrath (cf. Ps 103:13) (Simian-Yofre & Dahmen, 2004:441). Initially, Habakkuk complains in 1:17 that both God and the Chaldeans don’t have mercy (חַמֵּל)⁹⁸ for the Judeans, but His complaint shifts to a plea for mercy (רַחֵם) in the face of God’s “wrath”, knowing and accepting that His wrath is just. Habakkuk’s complaint that God was withholding mercy (חַמֵּל) has turned into a plea for mercy amidst God’s justice.

Throughout his dialogue with God (1:2-2:20), Habakkuk struggles to reconcile God’s mercy with His justice as expressions of His righteousness. However, he eventually reaches a point where the tension between these seemingly antithetical ideas have been resolved. What he once perceived as mutually exclusive – justice and mercy – have now become complementary and harmonious. Habakkuk acknowledges that God, being inherently righteous, must act in

⁹⁸ See 3.4.3.6

accordance with His righteous character, which necessitates punishment for the wicked. Yet, he pleads with God to temper this punishment with compassion, asking that the people not be completely destroyed, despite their deserving such an outcome.

The prophet picks up on a theme that permeates the Old Testament and the entire Bible as a whole: he recognises that God's grand sovereign plan involves a remnant⁹⁹ of people who are faithful to Him (cf. 2:4) (Nierengarten, 2016). Yahweh's mercy (רַחֵם) ensures that, even in His wrath, a remnant will survive and ultimately be restored into His people. This group of people represents in practice what the larger covenant community represents in theory, to be a representation of God's righteousness (צְדָקָה) and justice (מִשְׁפָּט)¹⁰⁰ in the world (cf. Ps 50) (Bruce, 2017:57). After Yahweh's covenant people receive their punishment, God would forgive them completely for their wickedness (cf. Jer 50:20) (Stark, 2014). This remnant will not survive based on merit, but because of God's compassion (רַחֵם) towards them (Martens, 1996). This revelation leaves the prophet with a sense of "awe" as he realises the depth of his (as well as Judah's) sin and the great extent of God's compassion towards them.

Habakkuk's plea for mercy is followed by the theophany (3:3-15), which evokes an even deeper response of trembling (3:16). It is only after the theophany that he makes his declaration of trust in God (3:17-19). He has a profound realisation of God's mercy and justice amid great calamity. He states that he will "rejoice in the Lord" and "exult in the God of [his] salvation" (3:18) who "makes [his] feet like the feet of a deer, and makes [him] tread upon the highs" (3:19), even if "the fig tree does not blossom..." (3:17).

3.3.3.8.3 רַחֵם synthesis

The pi'el form of רַחֵם denotes showing compassion, mercy, and kindness, regardless of guilt, in Habakkuk 3:2. Confronted by God's righteousness, the prophet becomes deeply aware of Yahweh's wrath and Judah's wickedness, prompting him to plead for mercy. Initially, Habakkuk complains in 1:17 that both God and the Chaldeans lack mercy (רַחֵם) towards the Judeans. However, this complaint transitions into a plea for mercy (רַחֵם) in response to God's wrath, which

⁹⁹ Further studies can be done on the relationship between God's righteousness and the remnant, but the scope this study does not allow for an in-depth discussion on this theme.

¹⁰⁰ See 3.4.3.3

the prophet recognises as just. What initially began as a complaint about the withholding of mercy develops into a request for mercy amidst God's justice."

Throughout his dialogue with God (1:2-2:20), Habakkuk wrestles with the tension between God's justice and mercy as expressions of His righteousness. Eventually, this tension is resolved, as he comes to see that justice and mercy are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary. He accepts that God's righteous character demands punishment for the wicked, yet he petitions for this punishment to be tempered with compassion, asking that the people not be utterly destroyed despite their deserving such an outcome.

Habakkuk identifies a theme that runs throughout the Old Testament and the entire Bible: God's sovereign plan which includes preserving a remnant of faithful people (cf. 2:4). Yahweh's mercy (רחם) ensures that, even in wrath, a remnant will survive and be restored as His people. This remnant represents in practice what the larger covenant community symbolises in theory: a demonstration of God's righteousness (צדקה) and justice (משפט) in the world (cf. Ps 50). After divine punishment, God promises to completely forgive His covenant people (cf. Jer 50:20), not because of their merit, but because of His compassion towards them. This revelation fills Habakkuk with awe as he realises the depth of Judah's sin and the vastness of God's mercy.

Habakkuk's plea for mercy is followed by a theophany (3:3-15), which evokes trembling (3:16). It is only after the theophany that he declares his trust in God (3:17-19). He gains a profound realisation of God's mercy and justice amidst great calamity.

3.3.4 Conclusion

Under the facet of language, we have done an exposition on key terms that relate to God's righteousness in the context that they occur in the text, including: חָמָס/*hāmās* (1:2, 3, 9; 2:8, 17), יָשָׁע/*yāšā* (1:2), מִשְׁפָּט/*mišpāt* (1:4, 7, 12), רָשָׁע/*rāšā* (1:4, 13; 3:13), הַצְדִּיק/*šāddīq* (1:4, 13; 2:4), חָמָל/*hāmāl* (1:17), רֹגֵז/*rōḡēz*/רָגַז/*rāḡāz* (3:2, 7, 16), רָחַם/*rāḥām* (3:2).

חָמָס represents two distinct levels of violence: internal injustice within the Judahite community (1:2-4), and international oppression of the Chaldeans over the Judeans (1:5-11). The prophet laments the prevalence of violence in the community which leads to the impairment of the law and pleads for God's justice against the wicked Judahites. However, God shifts the focus of חָמָס from a local to an international dimension in 1:5-6, revealing that the Chaldeans' violence serves as His sovereign means of divine judgement, even though it seems contradictory to His nature. Although God detests violence in all contexts, He employs it to achieve His sovereign purposes.

The prophet cries out for God to יִשַׁע (save/rescue/deliver) him from his situation (1:2), but fails to see how His יִשׁוּעַ (salvation/deliverance) forms part of the broader metanarrative of His sovereign purpose to purify His covenant people. Where the prophet begins the dialogue with a cry to God to deliver him (1:2-4), He leads him towards a position of praise (3:17-19) at the end of the book. Although his situation did not necessarily change, his perspective about God's righteousness (צְדִיקָה), His justice (מִשְׁפָּט), and His salvation (יִשׁוּעַ) changed. He praises the God of his salvation (3:18), even amid great calamity.

Throughout the text, the concept of מִשְׁפָּט is progressively developed; the prophet initially seeks God's justice within the Judahite community (1:2-4) but is soon confronted with God's sovereign plan to use the Chaldeans as His instrument to execute His judgement upon His covenant people (1:5-6). The prophet's understanding of מִשְׁפָּט proves to be capricious, as his initial concern for injustice in Judah seems to have waned compared to the injustice of the Chaldeans. Indeed, the Chaldeans are idolatrous (1:11) and their מִשְׁפָּט (1:7) is corrupted by violence (חֲמָסָה/hāmās) (1:9), which consequently brings God's מִשְׁפָּט upon them (2:4-20). Hence, both Judah and the Chaldeans face God's divine מִשְׁפָּט. God's צְדִיקָה (righteousness) is made manifest through His מִשְׁפָּט. Although God brings his covenant people under His מִשְׁפָּט, He also saves them (3:18). As a result, the concept of מִשְׁפָּט encompasses both the notion of judgment against the wicked and of salvation of the righteous.

God wants all people to live according to His מִשְׁפָּט but instead, the wicked (both Judahites and Chaldeans) embrace injustice and reject His מִשְׁפָּט, which provokes His anger against them. The righteous are those who accept God's מִשְׁפָּט as the highest standard to live by and conduct their lives accordingly. God's מִשְׁפָּט leads to both punishment and deliverance. It is this tension between punishment and deliverance that the prophet grapples with, as he progressively gains a deeper insight of God's מִשְׁפָּט throughout the text (cf. 1:12-13, 17; 3:2, 16, 17-19).

The prophet mentions two groups of people whom he calls רְשָׁעִים, the רְשָׁעִים (Judeans) (1:4), and the רְשָׁעִים (Chaldeans) (1:13). However, compared to the Chaldeans, he deems the wicked Judeans more "righteous" (צְדִיקִים). He makes an ethnic distinction, considering Chaldean wickedness (רְשָׁעִים/riš'ā(h)) to be worse than Judean wickedness. God, on the other hand, does not make this

distinction. He requires all people to equally live by His perfect standard of צְדָקָה (righteousness). In God's perspective, there are only the רָשָׁע and the צַדִּיק. The רָשָׁע seek violence (חֶמֶס) (1:2-3, 9), reject God's law (תּוֹרָה/*tôrā(h)*) (1:4), subvert justice (מִשְׁפָּט/*mišpāṭ*) (1:4); are idolatrous (1:11), and arrogant (2:5); and they rebel against God. In contrast, the צַדִּיק live by their faith (אֱמוּנָה) (2:4). They trust in God and live according to His צְדָקָה. Eventually, both the Judean רָשָׁע and the Chaldean רָשָׁע face God's judgment.

For Habakkuk, צדק initially revolves around the distinction between right and wrong, but Yahweh demonstrates that His righteousness is the divine standard defined by His character, not human perception. Habakkuk's understanding is shaped by a soteriological focus, as he perceives God's righteousness in terms of salvation (cf. 1:2). However, the unfolding dialogue between the prophet and Yahweh reveals that His righteousness encompasses both mercy and retribution, highlighting the apparent paradox of justice and mercy coexisting within God's righteousness. Habakkuk 1:2-4 reflects the prophet's lament over the moral and social decay of his community, where he questions Yahweh's righteousness. His initial view of righteousness, focused on salvation, is challenged as he is confronted with the complexities of God's righteousness. Throughout the progression of the text, Yahweh's righteousness is eventually revealed to transcend ethnic and covenantal boundaries, reflecting a broader, more universal application of righteousness. In comparing the Judeans to the Chaldeans, Habakkuk misplaces his focus on ethnic identity and covenantal status rather than on true righteousness. Habakkuk's shifting perspective reflects his internal conflict, as Yahweh's righteousness is reshaped to transcend the prophet's initial, limited view. This culminates in 2:2-5, where Yahweh teaches the prophet that the righteous are those who live by their faith in him, regardless of their ethnic background.

Ultimately, Yahweh's righteousness is not only seen in His dealings with Judah, but in His universal sovereignty over all nations. Both the Judeans and Chaldeans are subject to God's righteous judgment, as both groups exhibit pride and rebellion against Him. Where the prophet contrasts the righteous with the wicked, Yahweh contrasts the righteous with the proud, redefining the prophet's categories and demonstrating that righteousness stems from faith in Yahweh and not from ethnic identity or covenantal privilege. Faith leads to righteous conduct, establishing one's identity as truly righteous before God.

In Habakkuk's second complaint (1:12-17), the prophet questions how God can allow the Chaldeans to continue "destroying nations without mercy." From Habakkuk's perspective, חֶמֶל (mercy) implies immediate deliverance from oppression (cf. 1:2, 3:13, 18), with the expectation

that the wicked Chaldeans would spare the Judeans, whom he considers more righteous. This expectation reveals the prophet's limited understanding of God's mercy, as he not only criticises the Chaldeans for their lack of mercy but also implicitly accuses God of withholding it.

While the prophet assumes that Judah is entitled to mercy based on their covenantal status, he fails to recognise that it is not their right to be spared but mercy is a gift from God. His narrow view reduces God's mercy to a form of favouritism, expecting God to hold back the punishment that Judah deserves and to deliver them from a terrible and inescapable destiny, while condemning the Chaldeans. This misunderstanding is further emphasised by the negative use of *חַמֵּל*, where the absence of mercy is perceived as an unjust punishment for Judah, although they are deserving of it.

The distinction between *חַמֵּל* (1:17) and *רַחֵם* (3:2) provides clarity in understanding God's mercy. Habakkuk uses *חַמֵּל* in reference to the Chaldeans' lack of mercy, while also applying it to God's perceived inaction. He sees *חַמֵּל* as the withholding of punishment, yet he fails to understand God's sovereign plan to use the Chaldeans as instruments of His righteous judgment (cf. 1:5-6). God's decision to withhold *חַמֵּל* from Judah is not a sign of mercilessness but rather an expression of divine justice. Through this judgment, Yahweh refines His people, transforming them into the people with whom He can maintain a continued covenant relationship, in which his compassion (*רַחֵם*) is fully expressed.

As the dialogue progresses, God reveals that His concern extends beyond the immediate relief that Habakkuk seeks. God's mercy, communicated through *רַחֵם*, involves a deeper compassion that remains even in the face of Judah's guilt. This progression of understanding highlights the transformative nature of God's mercy, which works alongside His justice to restore His people.

A further question arises regarding how God's justice and mercy apply to the Chaldeans. If Judah, as God's covenant people, is subject to divine wrath, it follows that the Chaldeans, who are equally guilty, would also face divine judgment (cf. 1:12-13). God responds with five woe oracles (2:2-20), addressing the pride and wickedness of both the Judahites and the Chaldeans.

God's ultimate plan is for both Judah and all the other nations to conform to His righteous standard. His punishment, though severe, serves a restorative purpose, demonstrating that His mercy is not limited to Judah but extends to all who turn from their wickedness and align themselves with His divine will.

The term רָגַז in Habakkuk 3:2 conveys divine wrath, aligning with the book's broader theme of God's judgment against both the Chaldeans and the Judeans. Initially, the prophet perceives God as indifferent to the wicked (1:2-4), but through dialogue (1:2-2:20), he gains a deeper understanding of God's righteousness. He realises that God's wrath is not solely directed at the Chaldeans but also extends to the self-righteous Judeans (2:4). This recognition leads him to awe and a plea for mercy in 3:2, acknowledging God's justice within His covenant relationship.

In 3:7, רָגַז denotes shaking or trembling, primarily expressing fear or anxiety. The affliction of Cushan's tents reflects the terror induced by God's theophany (3:3-15). The term's meaning shifts in 3:16, first signifying emotional distress as the prophet trembles at God's revelation, then describing his physical instability in response to God's judgment. Ultimately, Habakkuk and the nations are held to the same righteous standard, standing in silence before Yahweh (2:20).

In Habakkuk 3:2, the pi'el form of רָחַם signifies showing compassion, mercy, and kindness, irrespective of guilt. Confronted with God's righteousness, the prophet becomes acutely aware of Yahweh's wrath and Judah's sinfulness, leading him to plead for mercy. Initially, he complains in 1:17 that neither God nor the Chaldeans show mercy (רָחַם) towards Judah.

However, this shifts into a plea for רָחַם, as he comes to recognise God's justified wrath. What begins as a complaint about God's withheld mercy transforms into a request for mercy in the midst of His justice.

Throughout his dialogue with God (1:2-2:20), Habakkuk wrestles with the tension between justice and mercy, ultimately realising they are complementary aspects of God's righteousness. He acknowledges that divine justice demands punishment but pleads for it to be tempered with compassion, ensuring Judah's survival despite their guilt.

This reflects a broader biblical theme: God's sovereign plan to preserve a faithful remnant (cf. 2:4). Yahweh's mercy ensures that, even in judgment, a remnant will survive and be restored as His people. This remnant embodies what the larger covenant community represents in principle—a demonstration of God's righteousness (צִדְקָה) and justice (מִשְׁפָּט) in the world (cf. Ps 50). After judgment, God promises full forgiveness (cf. Jer 50:20), not due to human merit but because of His compassion. This revelation fills Habakkuk with awe as he grasps both Judah's sinfulness and the vastness of God's mercy.

CHAPTER 4 REVELATION

4.1 Introduction

We will now explore how the insights gained from this research contribute to addressing the following key questions that form the objectives of this study. Although there is some overlap among these questions, each offers a nuanced perspective that deepens our understanding of God's righteousness in the book of Habakkuk. While there may appear to be some repetition, each question introduces a distinct perspective for examining the text concerning God's righteousness. The questions are answered systematically, beginning with the prophet's initial complaint (1:2–4) and culminating in his psalm of praise (3:1–19), highlighting different aspects through the flow of the text. The following questions can now be answered:

- (e) How does Habakkuk perceive God's righteousness?
- (f) How is Babylon an instrument of God's righteousness?
- (g) How is God's justice and mercy portrayed in Habakkuk?

4.2 Overview

The book of Habakkuk depicts the prophet's journey in understanding God's righteousness, demonstrating how Yahweh gradually provides him with a renewed perspective. It opens uniquely with the prophet's lament directed towards God, expressing his concern over the pervasive violence (חַמָּס/*hāmās*) and wrongdoing within the community, causing justice (מִשְׁפָּט/*mišpāt*) to be thwarted. In his lament, Habakkuk petitions for divine justice to be administered against the unrighteousness of the Judahites (1:2-4). He complains about God's apparent indifference towards the situation, raising questions about His righteousness. However, God engages with Habakkuk in a dialogue, revealing that He is not indifferent towards Judah's injustice, but, in fact, fully aware of it and actively working to bring His judgment upon them. He discloses to the prophet His sovereign plan to use the wicked Chaldeans as instruments of divine judgment against Judah (1:5-11). Astounded by God's response to his complaint, which appears to involve even more violence, the prophet raises a second complaint (1:12-17): how can God employ a nation characterised by its own distorted sense of justice (1:7) to execute His judgment upon Judah, who by comparison seems to be more righteous (1:13)? This paradox between the prophet's expectation of divine judgment and God's actual administration of justice reveals a deeper dimension of His sovereign plan, one that initially appears contradictory to His nature (cf. 1:12). In response to the prophet's complaint, Yahweh redefines Habakkuk's perspective of the

righteous (צַדִּיק/*šāddīq*) and the wicked (רָשָׁע/*rāšā'*), distinguishing between those who are truly righteous and those marked by pride (2:2-20). He shows that both Judah and the Chaldeans have violated His righteous standard and, consequently, deserve His just punishment. In response to the revelation of God's righteousness, the prophet exhibits a fundamental shift in his perspective. He presents a Psalm of praise as a result of his new perspective (3:1-19). He no longer complains about God's administration of justice, but now pleads with God to have mercy (רַחֵם/*rāḥām*) amidst His wrath (רָגַז/*rōḡēz*) (3:2). In 3:3-15, God manifests as a warrior, displaying His wrath in a theophany. Habakkuk trembles (רָגַז/*rāḡāz*) deeply within himself in reaction to the theophany (3:16), which leads into the final section of the book—a declaration of trust (3:17-19), where the prophet professes his trust in Yahweh, even in the face of severe calamity.

4.3 How does Habakkuk perceive God's righteousness?

In the book of Habakkuk, the prophet's perspective of God's righteousness undergoes significant reformation through his dialogue with God. He begins with a complaint that bears an accusatory tone towards God, in which he questions His righteousness. He struggles with reconciling his lived experience of rampant injustice within the Judahite community with his perception of God's righteousness. He complains that God causes him to witness wrongdoing and trouble, that he is faced with destruction and violence, that the law has become paralysed, and that justice never prevails. All of this is the result of the wicked who surround the righteous. He pleads with Yahweh to intervene and deliver him from this dreadful situation. The prophet attributes the paralysis of the law and the pervasion of justice to Yahweh's apparent indifference, though this overlooks the role of Judah's wickedness.

The prophet has an expectation of salvation as he understands God's righteousness primarily in terms of salvation. However, Yahweh seems unsympathetic and does not offer him the deliverance he seeks. Instead, Yahweh guides the prophet towards a greater understanding of His righteousness as expressed through His justice and mercy. By engaging with Habakkuk in a dialogue, Yahweh shows the prophet that He has a greater sovereign plan in which His righteousness will be fully displayed. In response to Habakkuk's complaint, God shows him that He is not indifferent but, in fact, actively involved in the situation, albeit in a different manner from what the prophet expects.

God's response to Habakkuk's complaint surprises him and He significantly challenges his initial perception. He reveals that He is raising the Chaldeans as His instruments of sovereign judgment against the wicked Judeans. God shifts the prophet's concern from local injustice to an international scale, thereby revealing His greater sovereign plan to the prophet. Instead of

alleviating the prophet's concerns, this revelation leaves him feeling even more disconcerted by God's actions: How can God's righteousness encompass answering the violence and destruction of His people with even more violence and destruction at an even greater scale? The Chaldeans are exceedingly arrogant, violent and bloodthirsty warmongers who live according to their own distorted sense of justice and have no regard for God's righteousness. They even worship their own military power as their god.

God's response to Habakkuk's complaint prompts a second complaint. Initially, Habakkuk protested God's apparent inaction; now, he expresses dismay that God is, in fact, intervening—yet not in the way that he anticipated. Habakkuk questions how God could condone the actions of the wicked Chaldeans. He seems to allow the wicked to swallow those who are more righteous in comparison. In fact, however, God will also punish them for their wickedness.

The prophet erroneously contrasts the wickedness of the Judeans with that of the Chaldeans, concluding that the Chaldeans' wickedness is far greater. His initial concern for injustice in Judah seems to have waned, compared to the injustice of the Chaldeans. The prophet's shifting perspective reflects his internal conflict, as Yahweh's righteousness is reframed to transcend his initial, limited view. This comparison reveals that the prophet's distinction is not founded upon actual righteousness but rather in a fundamentally-flawed perception of righteousness shaped by a comparison between the ethnic identities of Judah and the Chaldeans. However, God's righteousness has different theological criteria than human righteousness. Habakkuk's understanding of righteousness revolves around the distinction between what he perceives to be right and wrong. However, Yahweh gradually provides him with a new perspective that righteousness is not based on right and wrong, but on His standard of righteousness that must be upheld. Yahweh's standard of righteousness is not maintained by mere covenantal status but by hearts and attitudes that are turned towards Him. The Judahites have rejected Yahweh's righteous standard and must, consequentially, face His justice, which He will administer through the wicked Chaldeans. Upon this revelation, Habakkuk pleads with God to spare the Judahites and deliver them from oppression. He assumes that Judah is entitled to mercy based on their covenantal status, failing to recognise that it is not their right to be spared but that mercy is a gift from God. In his initial response, Habakkuk reduces God's mercy to a form of favouritism, expecting Him to hold back the punishment that Judah deserves, and to deliver them from a terrible and inescapable destiny. He perceives the absence of mercy as an unjust punishment for Judah, although, in reality, they ultimately deserve His judgment. Habakkuk appeals to Yahweh's compassionate nature and pleads with Him to pity Judah and withhold the punishment they justly deserve. Habakkuk's understanding of God's righteousness is constrained by a limited comprehension of God's divine purpose. The prophet perceives Yahweh's righteousness as mercy for the Judahites and justice towards the Chaldeans. However, as the dialogue unfolds,

Yahweh progressively reveals His purpose: to demonstrate His righteousness by refining His people through His justice and mercy. In doing so, He renews the prophet's perception of divine righteousness.

In response to Habakkuk's second complaint, Yahweh continues to transform his perspective. He shows that His righteousness transcends the prophet's mere distinction between right and wrong; instead, it is embodied by His righteous standard, which is expressed through His justice and mercy. While Habakkuk initially perceives righteousness as a covenantal byproduct afforded to Judah, Yahweh illustrates that true righteousness is the mark of one who lives according to one's faith in Him and His righteousness. In Habakkuk's understanding, righteousness is a result of righteous behaviour. Instead, Yahweh provides him with a new understanding: righteous behaviour stems from a righteous identity, which is grounded in faith in Him. Thus, Yahweh is revealed as the ultimate source of righteousness, with a righteous identity attainable through faith in Him. Yahweh differentiates between those who are truly righteous and the proud—those who oppose His righteousness and live by their own perception of righteousness. Both the Judahites and Chaldeans fall within this classification, although the prophet attempts to downplay the wickedness of the Judahites in contrast to that of the Chaldeans. Though the Chaldeans' pride is expressed through their unrestrained lust for violence and power, the Judeans possess a more subtle—yet equally deceptive—form of spiritual pride. Yahweh demonstrates that both the wicked Judeans and wicked Chaldeans justly deserve His wrath and are subject to His divine justice. This revelation of God's universal justice transfers the prophet's attitude from accusation to praise and reverential awe.

His reverential awe is expressed in a psalm of praise, in which his new perspective becomes evident. Throughout the dialogue, Habakkuk struggles with the tension between God's justice and mercy as expressions of His righteousness. Eventually, this tension is resolved, as he comes to realise that justice and mercy are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary. Yahweh gives him a new perspective of His righteousness—where justice and mercy not only co-exists but are intricately interdependent and inseparable. God's righteous character necessitates that the wicked be punished as an expression of His justice, yet it similarly compels Him to demonstrate compassion through His mercy, ensuring that they are not completely annihilated. The prophet attains a more nuanced understanding, gaining deeper insight into God's wrath, which is not only directed at the Chaldeans but also includes the Judeans. He becomes deeply aware of Judah's wickedness, prompting him to plead for mercy. Initially, Habakkuk had an expectation of salvation which did not include contemplation of God's justice. However, having gained a deeper understanding of the nature of God's righteousness, he now pleads for mercy even amidst Yahweh's justice. What initially began as a complaint about the withholding of mercy develops into a plea for this punishment to be tempered with compassion. He accepts that God's righteous

character demands punishment for the wicked, yet he petitions that the people not be utterly destroyed despite their deserving such an outcome. Yahweh shows the prophet that a remnant will be preserved to represent His righteousness on earth, even though they will inevitably fail to uphold His righteous standard. This remnant is not righteous by any means of their own, except through faith in Yahweh who makes them righteous.

The book of Habakkuk ends with a declaration of trust where Habakkuk declares his unwavering trust in God despite facing severe calamity. His perception of Yahweh's righteousness is no longer tied to his circumstances but to God's perfect character.

4.4 How is Babylon an instrument of God's righteousness?

Habakkuk raises a complaint before God about the injustice within his community. He laments that God allows the wicked to surround the righteous, thereby perverting justice and perpetuating injustice. His initial perspective is limited to his experience of local violence and oppression among the Judahites. He pleads with God to save him from his desperate situation. Much to the prophet's surprise, however, Yahweh's response does not meet his expectation of salvation, leaving him even more perplexed. Yahweh directs the prophet's attention to the Chaldeans whom he raises to fulfil His sovereign purpose. Yahweh initiates a transformation in the prophet's understanding, revealing that His righteousness extends far beyond what the prophet could conceive.

Though driven by self-serving motives, the Chaldeans are essential to God's sovereign plan. Using them, even without their awareness, Yahweh demonstrates that His sovereign authority and concern extends beyond His covenant people to all nations and all peoples—even including those who are exceedingly wicked. The Chaldeans are a presumptuous and bloodthirsty nation with an unquenchable drive for violence and destruction. They have a false sense of autonomy, living according to their own corrupted sense of justice and worshipping their own might as their god. Nevertheless, Yahweh elects to employ them for His purposes, specifically to chastise the nation of Judah with whom He maintains a covenant relationship. Although God abhors all forms of violence, He permits and employs the violence of the Chaldeans as a means to fulfil His overarching sovereign plan, which arises from His righteous wrath.

God's response to Habakkuk's complaint prompts the prophet to raise a second complaint: how can God condone the actions of the Chaldeans and remain silent when the wicked swallow those who are more righteous? How can He permit them to punish the Judahites, who are more righteous in comparison, and do so without restraint? The prophet still expects salvation; however, his hope is now directed not towards the wicked Judeans, but rather towards deliverance from the perceived even more wicked Chaldeans. He questions Yahweh's justice and mercy, for using the Chaldeans to fulfil His greater purpose, seems unconscionable. Habakkuk critiques the

Chaldeans for their merciless actions and implicitly questions God's apparent restraint in intervening. Yet, the Chaldeans' lack of mercy—despite not being of their own design—serves within the framework of God's overarching sovereign plan.

Again, God responds to the prophet's complaint, leading him towards a new perspective, enabling him to understand His righteousness beyond the categories of his ethnic identity. Yahweh shows the prophet what it means to be truly righteous. While Habakkuk perceives the Judahites to be righteous based on their covenant with Yahweh—despite their actions suggesting otherwise—God uses the Chaldeans to demonstrate that it is not Judah's identity as His covenant people that confers righteousness, but rather the disposition of their hearts. Yahweh reveals to the prophet that those who are genuinely righteous are those who have faith in Him and live by that faith. Living by faith in Yahweh entails humbly submitting to His righteous standard and aligning one's life with it. In contrast, the proud arrogantly view themselves as the source of their own righteousness. Both the Judeans and the Chaldeans fall in this category, though their expression of pride differs. The Chaldeans are utterly indifferent to the consequences of their unrestrained pursuit of power and violence, with no regard whatsoever for God's righteousness while the Judeans' pride is more inconspicuous, masked by false humility. They have a form of spiritual pride, convinced that their own wickedness and wrongdoing are less severe than that of the Chaldeans. Nevertheless, both the Judeans and Chaldeans fall short of Yahweh's righteous standard and are in rebellion against Him. If Judah, as God's covenant people, is subject to divine wrath, it follows that the equally guilty Chaldeans would also face divine judgment. While Judah's judgment will be executed through the Chaldeans, the Chaldeans' judgment will be delivered through the hands of the Medes. Regardless of their ethnic identity—whether Judean or Chaldean—those who rebel against God will ultimately face judgment and death. However, God's ultimate plan is for both Judah and all the other nations to conform to His righteous standard. His punishment, though severe, serves a restorative purpose, demonstrating that His mercy is not limited to Judah but extends to all who turn from their wickedness and align themselves faithfully with His divine will.

The explanation above further elucidates Habakkuk's response to the revelation of God's righteousness with a Psalm of praise. He stands in reverent awe and trembling before Yahweh, having come to a deep realisation of God's justified wrath against the wicked—a judgment against both the wicked Judahites and the Chaldeans. In this way, God administers His justice in alignment with His righteous character. However, God's righteousness is not only displayed through His justice, but also through His mercy. He employs the Chaldeans as instruments to fulfil His justice and mercy. His justice is manifested through the punishment of the wicked, by the righteous standard of His character. At the same time, His mercy is demonstrated by not destroying His people but preserving a group that is refined and purged by His justice. Throughout

the book of Habakkuk, Yahweh not only uses the Chaldeans to refine His people, but also to reform the prophet's understanding of His righteousness, guiding him on a journey from complaint to praise.

4.5 How is God's justice and mercy portrayed in Habakkuk?

The book of Habakkuk portrays God's righteousness as revealed through His justice and mercy, guiding the prophet through a transformative journey from complaint to praise. As previously stated, it begins with the prophet's lament against God, who appears indifferent towards His people's violence and injustice. The prophet cries out to God to save him from his dire situation, yet, He does not seem to listen. However, Yahweh progressively unveils His righteousness to the prophet, providing him with a renewed perspective through a dialogue in which Yahweh Himself establishes both the direction and tone. In Habakkuk's initial perspective, righteousness is primarily understood within a salvific framework; he pleads with Yahweh to deliver the righteous and punish the wicked according to His nature. However, the way in which His righteousness is manifested in this context is not as Habakkuk expects. Yahweh reveals that His righteousness transcends the prophet's limited understanding—not determined by human perception, but by a standard that must be upheld, based on His perfect character. Yahweh's righteousness is the foundational basis for ethical welfare within the community. However, the Judahite society rejected His objective standard as the guiding principle for moral behaviour, resulting in a descent into injustice.

Contrary to Habakkuk's perception, God holds His people accountable to His perfect standard of righteousness. He is busy with a grander plan which the prophet cannot yet see or understand. While Yahweh seems unresponsive to the prophet's situation, His apparent silence sets the tone for the rest of the dialogue in which He reforms the prophet's perspective of His righteousness. Yahweh demonstrates that He is actively involved in the situation, orchestrating a greater plan far beyond the prophet's immediate concerns.

In His response to Habakkuk's complaint, God directs the prophet's attention away from his local situation towards the greater context of the nations. God discloses that He is at work in ways that Habakkuk would not believe even if he were told. He reveals that He is raising the Chaldeans as His divine instrument to chastise the Judeans. As previously mentioned, His answer does not meet Habakkuk's expectation of deliverance but prompts even deeper theological questions. Questions like "How can God use the wicked Chaldeans—a people who live according to their own contorted sense of justice (1:7), have an insatiable appetite for violence (1:9), and worship their own might as their god (1:11)—to fulfil His greater purpose? How can God's answer to the violence of the Judeans be even more violence?" God's answer does not fit within the prophet's

existing theological framework or understanding of His righteousness. Still, Yahweh challenges the prophet's perception of righteousness, reframing his categories of right and wrong and guiding the prophet towards a deeper understanding of His justice and mercy. He begins to show the prophet that even violence can be used to fulfil His sovereign purpose, although He detests all forms of violence. God's use of violence forms part of the broader meta-narrative of His sovereign purpose to purify His covenant people and eventually punish all who do not live by faith.

Rather than bringing Habakkuk solace, God's response to his complaint raises even more questions. He reveals that His concern extends beyond the immediate relief that Habakkuk seeks. The prophet accuses God of inconsistency, questioning how He could allow the wicked to swallow those who are more righteous in comparison. However, it is not Yahweh who is inconsistent but rather the prophet himself, whose understanding of righteousness appears inconsistent. Initially, Habakkuk condemned the wickedness of the people of Judah, but now his focus has shifted, perceiving the Judeans as more righteous than the even greater wickedness of the Chaldeans. Habakkuk demonstrates a capricious understanding of justice, significantly influenced by his circumstances.

On the contrary, however, God's justice is consistent and steadfast, determined solely by His righteous character. He requires all people to live equally by His perfect standard of righteousness. Furthermore, the prophet not only questions God's justice, but also questions His mercy (חַמָּדָה/*hāmāḏā*), as he questions whether He would allow the Chaldeans to continue destroying nations without holding back. However, God's decision to withhold mercy from Judah is not a sign of mercilessness but rather an expression of divine justice. Yahweh's justice is demonstrated through the impending punishment of the Judahites, while His mercy unfolds progressively throughout the book. Rather than providing the immediate deliverance anticipated by the prophet, Yahweh's mercy takes the form of a refining process to form them into those with whom He can expect to have a continued covenant relationship. Yahweh's righteousness is thus revealed in both His justice and His mercy. Due to His righteous character, Yahweh must administer justice by punishing the wickedness of the Judeans. However, even in executing justice, He reveals His mercy by using this justice as a means to purify His people.

Yahweh's justice, though, is not limited to the Judeans alone. While Habakkuk associates righteousness with his perception of ethnic identity, Yahweh shows that the distinction between the righteous and the wicked is not rooted in ethnic identity but rather in the disposition of one's heart. He responds to Habakkuk's second complaint by further reshaping his perspective. Instead of distinguishing between the righteous and the wicked, Yahweh contrasts the proud with the righteous, revealing to Habakkuk the essence of true righteousness: living a life grounded in faith

(מִן־מִנְיָהּ ^ע*mû·nā(h)*) in Him. Such a life of faith in God is characterised by sincerity, faithfulness, reliability, and stability. Righteousness stems from faith in Yahweh and not from ethnic identity or covenantal privilege. Those who are truly righteous are humble and look to God as the ultimate source of righteousness rather than to themselves.

In contrast, the “proud” (2:4) rely on a false sense of self-righteousness, placing them in opposition to Yahweh. This incites God’s justified wrath. A false sense of pride marks both the Judeans and the Chaldeans: the Chaldeans are overt self-worshippers, while the Judeans exhibit spiritual pride rooted in their misguided sense of righteousness—this derived from their covenant with Yahweh. Yahweh reveals to the prophet that it is not righteous actions that produce righteousness, but inversely, a person’s righteous identity that gives rise to righteous conduct. Faith in Yahweh defines one as righteous and subsequently influences one’s actions. Consequently, a righteous person lives according to his sense of righteousness that emerges from his relationship with Yahweh, grounded in faith in Him. Thus, both Judah and the Chaldeans are subject to divine judgment based on their rebellion against God and His righteous standard. God desires that all people live in accordance with His righteousness, yet the proud—both Judahites and the Chaldeans—persist in embracing injustice and rejecting His divine standard of righteousness. This moral failure provokes God’s wrath against them. Yahweh reveals to the prophet that the wicked will be held accountable, facing the very judgment they have inflicted upon others. The knowledge of the glory of the Lord will fill the earth, and all the earth will remain silent before Him. Upon this revelation of God’s righteousness, the prophet’s disposition changes from accusation to praise. The dialogue, which is arranged around his complaints like a frame, then transitions into a Psalm of praise.

In his Psalm of praise, the prophet stands in awe of Yahweh’s wrath and pleads with Him to have mercy (רַחֵם *rāḥām*). Yahweh displays His wrath in a theophany, to which the prophet responds with a deep a sense of trembling. He acknowledges that God, being inherently righteous, must act in accordance with His righteous character, which necessitates punishment for the wicked. Throughout the dialogue, Habakkuk struggles to reconcile God’s justice and mercy—both expressions of His righteousness. Yahweh now leads him towards resolving this tension, gradually reshaping his perspective to reveal how divine justice and mercy align with His sovereign purpose. Initially, Habakkuk struggled to accept Yahweh’s justice, pleading for mercy, which he understood as deliverance from his situation. Now, however, he sees how God’s mercy—communicated through רַחֵם—involves a deeper compassion that remains even in the face of Judah’s guilt. The prophet embraces Yahweh’s justice and seeks mercy—not by removing the situation but by sustaining him through it. Yahweh reveals to the prophet a theme that permeates the Old Testament and, indeed, the entire Bible: through God’s grand sovereign plan,

a remnant of people who are faithful to Him are preserved, even in His wrath. This remnant will not survive based on their own merit but because of God's compassion towards them. They truly represent God's righteousness in the world, embodying both His justice and mercy.

Initially, Habakkuk pleaded with God for deliverance from his circumstances; now, however, he has come to accept God's sovereign purpose to chastise His people for their injustices. Thus, he no longer complains about his situation; instead, he praises God even amidst great calamity. Yahweh has profoundly transformed his perspective, enabling him to understand His justice and mercy as integral expressions of His righteousness.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have systematically discussed the key questions that form the objectives of this study based on the outline of the text. We have discussed how Habakkuk perceives God's righteousness, how Babylon is an instrument of God's righteousness, and how God's justice and mercy is portrayed in Habakkuk.

In the book of Habakkuk, the prophet undergoes a profound transformation in his understanding of God's righteousness. Initially, he questions God's justice, lamenting the pervasive injustice in Judah and perceiving divine indifference. Expecting salvation, he is instead confronted with the unsettling revelation that God will use the wicked Chaldeans to judge Judah. This revelation challenges Habakkuk's assumptions, as he struggles to reconcile God's justice with His mercy.

Through dialogue, God reveals that righteousness is not determined by national identity or moral comparison but by faith in Him (2:4). Both Judah and the Chaldeans stand guilty before God, and divine justice demands punishment. However, God's mercy ensures that a remnant will be preserved—not by their own merit but through faith.

Habakkuk's tone progresses from accusation to awe, as he realises that justice and mercy are inseparable. He pleads for compassion even in judgment and, ultimately, declares unwavering trust in God. His faith is no longer rooted in circumstances but in God's perfect character, demonstrating a transformed understanding of divine righteousness.

Initially, Habakkuk complained to God about the injustice in Judah, expecting divine intervention. However, Yahweh's response challenges his expectations, revealing that He will use the wicked Chaldeans as instruments of judgment. This deepens the prophet's perplexity as he struggles to reconcile God's justice with His mercy.

As the text progresses, Yahweh reshapes Habakkuk's understanding of righteousness. The prophet learns that righteousness is not defined by ethnic identity or covenant status but by faith in God (2:4). Both Judah and the Chaldeans stand guilty before Him—while Judah's judgment comes through the Chaldeans, the Chaldeans themselves will also face divine wrath. Yet, God's justice serves a restorative purpose, extending mercy to all who turn to Him.

Confronted with God's righteous standard, he ultimately responds with a psalm of praise, recognising that justice and mercy are inseparable. His transformed understanding leads him to trust in God's sovereign plan, even amidst judgment.

God's righteousness is revealed through His justice and mercy, guiding the prophet from complaint to praise. Where Habakkuk laments God's apparent indifference to Judah's violence and injustice, Yahweh's response challenges his expectations, revealing a broader divine plan beyond the prophet's immediate concerns.

God directs Habakkuk's attention to the Chaldeans, whom He raises as instruments of judgment against Judah. This deepens the prophet's confusion as he struggles to reconcile God's justice with the use of a more wicked nation. Yahweh reveals to the prophet that true righteousness is defined by trust in God, while pride—whether in the Chaldeans' arrogance or Judah's spiritual complacency—provokes divine wrath.

The book culminates in a psalm of praise, as Habakkuk acknowledges that God's justice and mercy are inseparable aspects of His righteousness. The prophet no longer complains about his situation but praises God amidst his circumstances, recognising that God's sovereign plan ultimately preserves a faithful remnant.

These insights form a strong foundation for the next chapter, in which the contemporary application of God's righteousness in Habakkuk will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5 APPLICATION

5.1 Introduction

Having thoroughly examined the text of Habakkuk, with particular focus on God's righteousness as it is expressed through His justice and mercy within its historical contexts, and addressing key semantic issues, we now turn to its contemporary application. This will be done with careful consideration of the research already conducted.

Klink and Lockett (2012:13) pose a critical question regarding biblical studies: "Is the Bible for the church or the academy, for people of faith or scholars of ancient history?" The response to this question significantly influences the relevance and direction of the research. Biblical studies frequently remain confined within academic circles, limiting its broader impact on church and society as a whole (cf. Waltke & Yu, 2007:19). It is thus the responsibility of academics not only to study the Scriptures but also to assist the church in interpreting and applying it to the contemporary faith community¹⁰¹ (Bartholomew & Beldman, 2012:xv). Biblical theology should flow from the academics to pastors and teachers, extending beyond these leaders to permeate the lives of all God's people (Goldsworthy, 2006).

Heiser (2015:14) describes the Bible as a mosaic comprising various parts collectively forming a unified whole. To understand its full meaning, each part must be interpreted within its specific context as well as within the broader context of the entire biblical narrative. To understand the text in its original context, we must bridge the gap of time, culture, geography, and language to uncover its intended meaning for its original audience (Osborne, 2006:24-25). It is essential to understand that we have a different worldview than that of the biblical writers (Richards & O'Brien, 2012:12-15). We should therefore avoid imposing our worldview onto the biblical text, for as doing so can obscure its authentic message. The process of exegesis helps us to cross the hermeneutical bridge. However, Childs (1992:8-9) asserts that the task of exegesis is not "confined simply to a historical description of the original author's intention", though understanding this aspect remains important. Through exegesis, "theological treasures" can be unearthed for the contemporary church (Boda, 2012b:122). Stuart (2009:25-26) argues that the purpose of exegesis is not merely to explore and discover what the text "*meant*" in its original historical

¹⁰¹ While it is not feasible to address the global faith community as a unified whole—given the diverse expressions of faith worldwide—we can examine specific observations within particular contemporary contexts. The phrase "contemporary faith community" is therefore not used to refer to the contemporary church as a whole, but rather to particular expressions of faith within specific communities.

context but rather to uncover its enduring significance and what it “*means*” in its present application. If exegesis is separated from application, it risks devolving into mere intellectual abstraction devoid of any meaningful impact. Schultz (2018:57) reinforces this perspective, asserting that “The goal of all biblical study should be to hear the voice of God in the written text of Scripture”. It is, therefore, the duty and privilege of each generation to “interact with the Bible” (Vanhoozer, 1997:7). With this purpose in mind, we explore the significance of the biblical text—specifically, God’s righteousness expressed through justice and mercy in the book of Habakkuk—for both the academics and the church, highlighting its enduring relevance across these contexts.

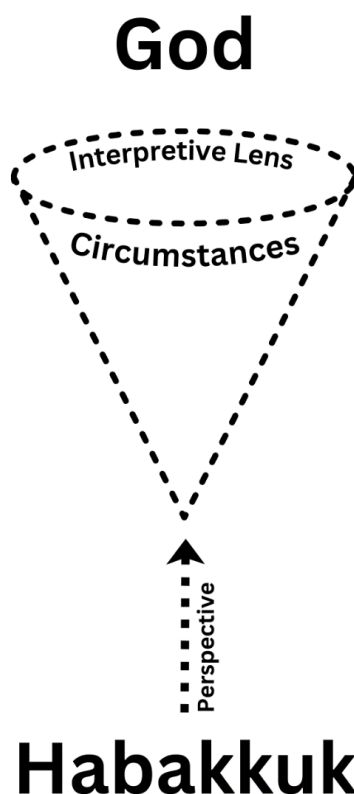
Zuck (1991:10) emphasises that understanding the “meaning” of a text is essential before we can understand its “message”. The bulk of this research is dedicated to understanding the meaning of the text, particularly in its historical and literary contexts, with special attention paid to key semantic issues. Having established this foundation, we now turn to discussing the text’s message and its relevance to the contemporary faith community.

The contemporary application of this research is based on observations within the faith community that the author has been exposed to in this study. The first observation addresses a prevalent disconnection from the Old Testament, because of a strong preference for the New Testament (Kaiser, 2015:9; Stanley, 2018). The Old Testament is often viewed as less relevant for teaching important theological concepts and is instead reduced to a collection of narratives perceived as having limited contemporary significance. This study, however, asserts that the Old Testament holds substantial importance and applicability for the contemporary church. The second observation highlights a common misunderstanding of God’s righteousness as solely a source of blessing for believers, often supported by selective scripture interpretations. Frequently referenced verses, among others, include Psalm 1, Jeremiah 29:11, Psalm 20:4, Philippians 4:19, and Romans 8:28 (Copeland, 2017; Hinn, 2024; TBN, 2021). The theme of God’s righteousness as it is presented in Habakkuk, addresses both of these issues.

5.2 The message of righteousness in Habakkuk

Understanding the message of righteousness in Habakkuk requires understanding the prophet’s perspective of God’s righteousness, along with related theological concepts. While Habakkuk discerned certain truths about God and His righteousness accurately, his interpretations led him to draw ultimately flawed conclusions (Dever, 2006:838). Throughout the book, God offers the prophet a new perspective, progressively revealing the true nature of His righteousness. Recognising the prophet’s initial perspective and its transformation throughout the book allows us to discern key insights and to consider its application to the contemporary faith community. The following figure represents Habakkuk’s initial perception:

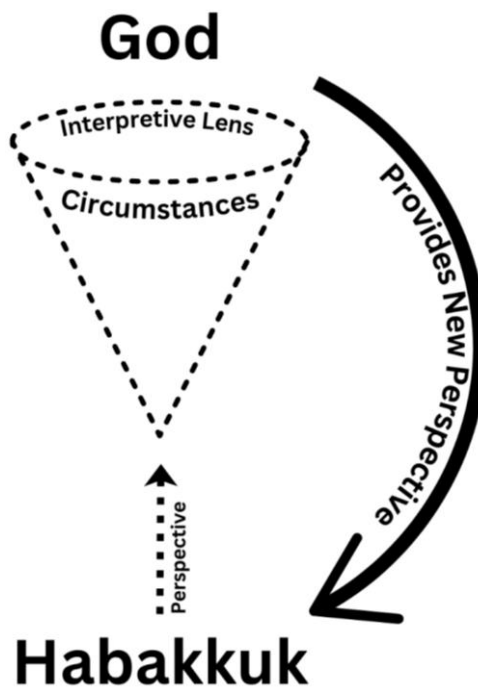
Figure 1: Habakkuk's initial perspective of God's righteousness



The book of Habakkuk begins where the prophet approaches God with a complaint regarding his circumstances (1:2-4). Distressed by the pervasive injustice within the community, he fervently appeals to God for intervention and deliverance. Overwhelmed by his circumstances, he begins to question God's righteousness. Yet, God appears silent, even seemingly indifferent to his pleas. The figure above illustrates how the prophet pleads with God, but God does not seem to listen. His circumstances act as the interpretive lens through which he views God and His righteousness. The prophet holds an expectation of salvation, anticipating that God will either remove or resolve the situation and deliver him (1:2).

However, God does not remain silent; He actively engages with the prophet, gradually renewing his perspective. The figure below illustrates how God interacts with Habakkuk to deepen his understanding of divine righteousness:

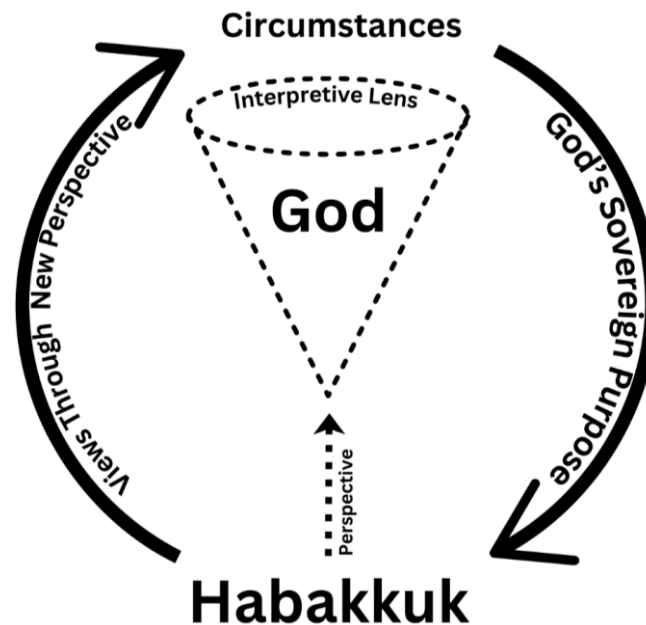
Figure 2: God's interaction with Habakkuk



Although not in the way that Habakkuk expects, Yahweh engages with him in a dialogue, demonstrating that He is not indifferent but, in fact, actively involved in the prophet's situation. Instead of removing or resolving the reason for the prophet's complaint, Yahweh begins to transform his perspective on it. Through this interaction, Yahweh unveils His sovereign plan to use the Chaldeans to chastise His people for their injustice. The figure above depicts how Yahweh engages with the prophet, offering him a renewed perspective. Despite this, the prophet continues to interpret God's righteousness through the lens of his circumstances, now with even greater distress. He cannot understand how Yahweh can use the wicked Chaldeans to fulfil His greater purpose. Habakkuk's focus on his circumstances obscures his perception of God and His righteousness. He implores God to withhold the punishment they rightfully deserve.

However, Yahweh continues to renew Habakkuk's perspective without answering him in the way that he expects. He reveals to the prophet that his notions of right and wrong are not rooted in His righteousness but are influenced by a misplaced sense of covenantal security. He shows the prophet that true righteousness comes from faith in Him, not from righteous behaviour. Yahweh reveals to the prophet that His righteous character requires punishment for the wicked. It is in response to this revelation that the prophet's attitude begins to change from accusation to praise.

Figure 3: Habakkuk's new perspective



Habakkuk no longer requests that Yahweh remove or resolve his situation; instead, he asks for compassion amidst His wrath. In reverential awe, he proclaims that he will trust in God even in the face of severe calamity. The figure above illustrates how Habakkuk's perspective shifts from viewing God through the lens of his circumstances to seeing his situation through the interpretive lens of God and His righteousness. His perspective is no longer grounded in his understanding of his circumstances but anchored in Yahweh and His sovereign purpose.

5.3 Application for the contemporary faith community

There is much that the contemporary church can learn from Habakkuk, particularly relating to God's righteousness. God took Habakkuk on a journey in which He progressively renewed the prophet's perspective on divine righteousness and his circumstances.

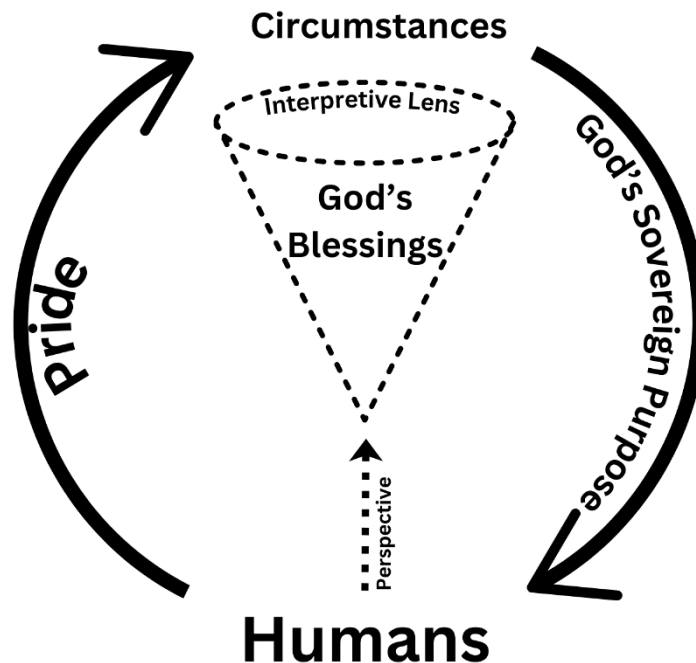
5.3.1 Prosperity theology

Many contemporary Christians fall into the trap of the prosperity theology: a belief system that promotes the idea that God desires everyone to be healthy and wealthy¹⁰² (Sexton, 2016:710). While there is some truth within this belief system, Habakkuk teaches us that it must be understood with fine nuance. God indeed desires what is best for His people (Num 6:24-26; Jer

¹⁰² Although a full thesis could be devoted to exploring the concept of prosperity theology, it will only be addressed briefly due to the limited scope of this study.

29:11; Ps 1; 2:8 Ps 84:11; 86:5 Rom 8:28; Ps 23; Matt 7:11; Jas 1:17; Nah 1:7; Matt 21:21-22)¹⁰³; however, He is ultimately more concerned with the development of our character than with our material prosperity or physical well-being (Jas 1:2-4). Our circumstances must be understood within the context of His perfect sovereign purpose.

Figure 4: Prosperity Theology



As humans, we tend to allow our circumstances—whether good or bad—to shape our emotions and influence how we perceive God and His righteousness. Like Habakkuk, we sometimes accuse God of failing to align circumstances with our desires. Often, as illustrated in the case of Habakkuk, God uses difficult circumstances to renew our perspective of Him and His righteousness. The figure above depicts how adherents of the prosperity theology interpret their circumstances through the lens of God's blessings. At its core, however, this theological framework is driven by pride—a self-centred perspective that shapes their understanding of God, His justice, mercy, and the world. Within this view, everything revolves around the individual's perception of happiness. Modern society is preoccupied with the fleeting notion of happiness, typically associated with material possessions and physical well-being. In contrast, God offers us a deeper, more enduring gift—joy—which remains steadfast regardless of our circumstances (Hab 3:17-19; Ps 30:5; Ps 34:19; John 15:11; Rom 15:13; Phil 4:4 1 Pet 1:6-7; 4:12-13; 2 Cor

¹⁰³ The scope of this study does not allow a comprehensive exposition of each of these scriptures. However, future studies could examine these passages in greater detail, specifically in relation to God's righteousness.

4:8-10; 2 Tim 3:12; Matt 5:10-12). He continually offers us a renewed perspective, revealing that our circumstances ultimately align with His sovereign purposes. It is important to understand that perilous circumstances are unavoidable and serve as a refining process for our faith, fostering a deeper dependency on God. Like Habakkuk, many of us view our circumstances with frustration or even offence; however, God reshapes our perspective, revealing how He uses these situations to demonstrate what is truly good according to His righteousness rather than our shifting human standards. Ultimately, God desires what is truly best for us (Rom 8:28), even when His plans diverge from our own expectations.

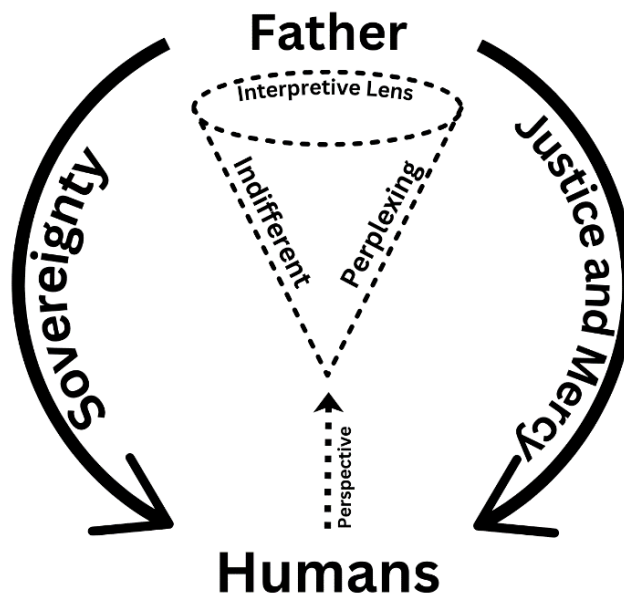
5.3.2 God's administration of His righteousness.

Examining how God reveals His righteousness in the book of Habakkuk provides deeper insight into how He continues to manifest His justice and mercy today. Reflecting on the roles of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in expressing His righteousness offers us a renewed perspective, similar to the one received by the prophet.

5.3.2.1 The work of the Father

Habakkuk initially complains that God appears indifferent to the injustice around him (1:2-4). However, when God unveils His sovereign plan, the prophet is left perplexed (1:12-17).

Figure 5: The Father administers justice and mercy



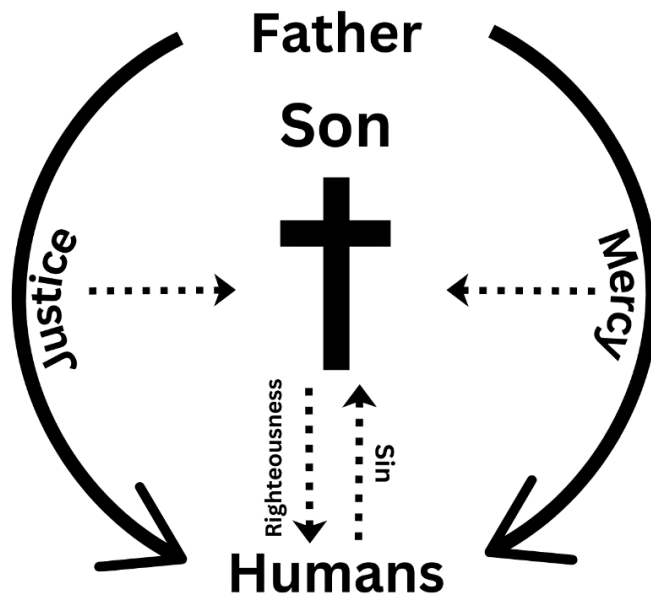
It is not uncommon to experience feelings similar to those of Habakkuk—where God seems to withhold intervention in our circumstances—and when He does act, His response is often far different from what we expect. This forms the basis of our perception of His righteousness.

However, the work of the Father is far more expansive and comprehensive than we may initially perceive. The figure above illustrates how the Father administers His justice and mercy. His righteous character demands that He act righteously—in both justice and mercy—according to His sovereignty. He is the righteous Judge who requires all people to live according to His righteous standard (cf. Ps 9:7-8; 50:6; Isa 33:22; Rom 2:5-6; Rev 20:12). However, there are none—apart from God Himself—who can uphold His righteous standard (cf. Ps 14:2-3; Eccl 7:20; Isa 64:6; Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8). Yet God reveals His mercy by preserving a righteous remnant, even though it fails to remain faithful to Him. God’s judgment upon the people of Judah serves as a fore-shadowing of His judgment upon humanity. Likewise, His mercy in preserving a righteous remnant among the Judahites prefigures the mercy He extends toward us. Through the work of the Son, the Father’s administration of justice and mercy becomes clearer and more understandable.

5.3.2.2 The work of the Son

God’s administration of His righteousness in Habakkuk presents a partial picture: His righteous wrath is not fully satisfied, as He refrains from completely destroying the people of Judah. Likewise, His mercy is also progressively revealed because only a remnant remains in the process of chastisement. This incomplete revelation of both wrath and mercy creates an expectation of future fulfilment in Jesus Christ (Timmer, 2018). Thus, God’s righteousness in Habakkuk is situated within the broader timeline of His progressive revelation, serving as a foreshadowing of the ultimate fulfilment of His righteousness.

Figure 6: The Son’s perfect display of God’s righteousness



God's righteousness in Habakkuk ultimately culminates in the cross of Christ¹⁰⁴, the perfect display of God's righteousness, where both His justice and mercy are fully consummated. The figure above illustrates how the Father's righteous wrath is satisfied fully through Jesus' payment for sin, while His mercy is fulfilled in the forgiveness of sin (cf. Rom 3:23-26). This payment is made possible because Christ lived a perfect sinless life (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5; John 8:46; Luke 23:41). Through the perfect atoning sacrifice for our sins, He fulfilled what Judah could never achieve—God's righteousness. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus on the cross, God imputes His righteousness to us. Just as God's judgment upon the people of Judah served to refine them and preserve a righteous remnant—even though they did not remain faithful (Neh. 13:15-18; 13:23-27; Mal. 1:6-8; 2:11; 3:7)—the judgment expressed through the cross, provides a fuller revelation of His righteousness. Through Christ's sacrifice, God established a way for His remnant to attain true righteousness and to continue in that righteousness.

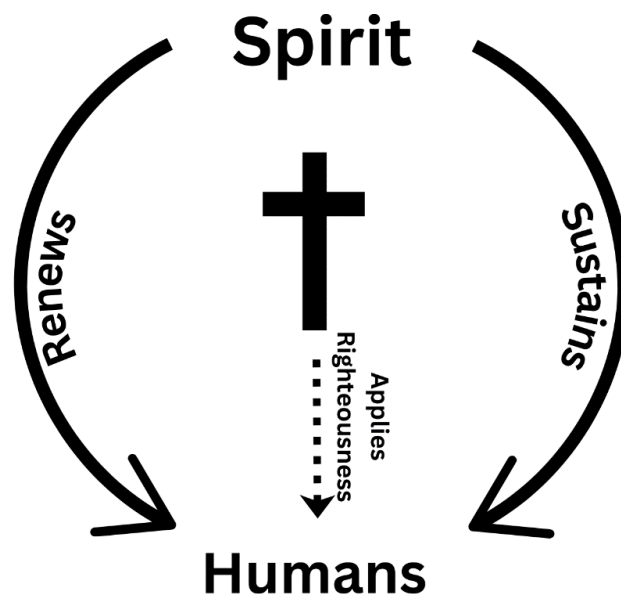
5.3.2.3 The work of the Spirit

Where God the Father is the righteous Judge, and the Son is the perfect atoning sacrifice, the Holy Spirit applies the works of the Father and the Son (Titus 3:5). He is the "agent of transformation" (McGrath, 2015:16). Through the work of the Holy Spirit, Habakkuk's perspective

¹⁰⁴ The term "cross of Christ" is used here to encompass not only Jesus' death on the cross but also His resurrection, signifying the entirety of this pivotal event.

shifts from one of accusation (1:2-2:1) to one of praise (3:1-19). Throughout the text, the Spirit continually renews the prophet's perception, enabling this transformation.

Figure 7: The Spirit's work of applying, renewing and sustaining



Similar to Habakkuk, God renews our understanding of His righteousness through the work of the Holy Spirit. Without a transformation in our perception, the work of the Father and the Son would have no effect on us. We must have a renewed perspective of God's righteousness before it can take effect in our lives. As the Spirit renews our minds, we are transformed from a state of pride to one of humility and submission to God and His righteousness (cf. Rom 8:5-8; 12:2). The figure above shows how the Holy Spirit not only renews us, but also sustains us, and applies the work of the Father and the Son to us (John 14:26; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 3:16-17). Through the Holy Spirit, we can continue in the righteousness of Christ.

Thus, the righteousness of God in the book of Habakkuk—and still continuing today—is accomplished through the collaborative work of the Trinity: the Father exercises righteous judgment, the Son mediates mercy, and the Holy Spirit applies this mercy to those who place their faith in God.

5.3.3 The Righteous live by faith

In the book of Habakkuk, God reveals to the prophet what it means to be truly righteous. The righteous are characterised by living in faith dependent on Him, in contrast to a life marked by pride (2:4). While the proud seek to achieve righteousness through their own efforts, the truly righteous obtain it through faith in God, demonstrating humility and submission to His righteous standard. Thus, righteousness becomes not merely a status that can be earned, but an identity

granted and received through faith. Similarly too, this might have been how Judah presumed righteousness based on their covenant relationship with Yahweh, despite lacking it in reality; and even individuals today might assume righteousness through adherence to religious practices—such as baptism, communion, or regular church attendance—or through outward displays of moral behaviour. The message of Habakkuk, however, reveals that a righteous identity is not derived from some righteous actions. Instead, a genuine righteous identity, rooted in faith, serves as the foundation from which righteous behaviour emerges (cf. Eph 2:8-10).

Habakkuk 2:4 is also echoed in the New Testament (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38), attesting to its significance and relevance. In Romans 1:17, Paul connects the concept of righteousness to salvation, asserting that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God, which is attainable through faith. Through this faith, believers receive God's righteousness and, consequently, the gift of eternal life. In Galatians 3:11, this verse is used in relation to the law. Here Paul contrasts a false sense of righteousness attained through adherence to the law and true righteousness which is attained through faith. God's righteousness cannot be attained by our own means but must be found through faith in God. In Hebrews 10:38, the author applies this verse to the context of perseverance amid hardship and persecution. The author uses this verse to encourage believers to endure in the face of suffering, emphasising the eternal hope of salvation. He asserts that God's righteous ones will endure through faith in Him. Just as God provided Habakkuk with a renewed perspective on his difficult circumstances, He similarly offers believers a new perspective on persevering through hardship.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the contemporary application of God's righteousness as presented in the book of Habakkuk.

There is much that the contemporary faith community can learn from the message of Habakkuk, particularly relating to God's righteousness. Many contemporary Christians fall prey to prosperity theology, which suggests that God desires everyone to be healthy and wealthy. While there is some truth in this, Habakkuk teaches that it must be understood with nuance. God indeed wants the best for His people, but His primary concern is the development of our character rather than material prosperity or physical well-being. Our circumstances should be viewed within the context of God's sovereign purpose.

As humans, we often allow circumstances to shape our emotions and influence our perception of God and His righteousness. Like Habakkuk, we may accuse God when our circumstances do not align with our desires. However, God often uses difficult circumstances to renew our

understanding of Him. Prosperity theology, at its core, reflects a self-centred perspective focused on material happiness, whereas God offers us lasting joy, regardless of circumstances.

Our circumstances, whether challenging or favourable, are part of God's refining process, drawing us into deeper dependency on Him. While we may initially feel frustration or offence, God reshapes our perspective, demonstrating how our situations align with His righteous purposes. Ultimately, God's plans, though different from our expectations, are always for our true good.

In examining how God reveals His righteousness in the book of Habakkuk, we gain insight into how He continues to manifest His justice and mercy today. Habakkuk's initial complaint about God's apparent indifference to injustice (1:2-4) is met with a sovereign plan that leaves him perplexed (1:12-17). Similar to the prophet, we may feel that God withholds intervention, and His responses often differ from our expectations, shaping our perception of His righteousness.

God's justice is expansive and rooted in His righteous character, which demands that all people adhere to His standard. However, no one—except God—can uphold this standard. Yet, God shows mercy by preserving a righteous remnant, even in the face of failure. The judgment upon Judah foreshadows God's judgment on humanity, while His mercy points to His ultimate mercy through Christ. The Father's administration of justice and mercy becomes clearer through the Son, where both justice and mercy are fully realised at the cross. Christ's perfect atoning sacrifice satisfies God's wrath and extends forgiveness, fulfilling what Judah could not.

The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in applying the works of the Father and Son. Through the Spirit, Habakkuk's perspective shifts from accusation to praise, and similarly, the Spirit transforms our perception of God's righteousness, moving us from pride to humility. The Spirit renews and sustains us, enabling us to live in Christ's righteousness.

Thus, God's righteousness in Habakkuk and today is achieved through the collaborative work of the Trinity: the Father exercises righteous judgment, the Son mediates mercy, and the Holy Spirit applies it to those who have faith in God. Habakkuk reveals that true righteousness is attained through faith in God, not through self-effort. The righteous are characterised by faith and humility, contrasting the proud who seek righteousness through their own actions. This message is also echoed in the New Testament, where the righteousness of God is shown to be accessible through faith, not by adherence to the law, and believers are encouraged to endure hardship with the hope of salvation.

The insights gained from this discussion provide a comprehensive understanding of God's righteousness and its application in both ancient and modern contexts. We now turn to the final chapter of this study. This concluding chapter will synthesise the key insights gained throughout

the research, offering a comprehensive summary of the findings, and reflecting on the broader implications of God's righteousness as revealed in Habakkuk. This final section will provide a holistic view of the study and its contributions to understanding God's righteousness.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to conduct an exegetical study of the concept of God's righteousness as presented in the book of Habakkuk, with particular attention to its expression through His justice and mercy, as well as its contemporary application. This study explored the text within its historical and literary contexts while also addressing significant semantic issues. The primary objectives were threefold: to examine Habakkuk's understanding of God's justice and mercy, to explore the role of Babylon (the Chaldeans) as an instrument of God's righteousness, and to examine how God's justice and mercy are depicted throughout the text, as well as explore how the book's message of God's righteousness can be applied to the contemporary faith community.

In the book of Habakkuk, the prophet wrestles with the concept of God's righteousness, which is explored across three main sections: (1) a dialogue between the prophet and God (1:2–2:5), (2) five woe oracles (2:6–20), and (3) a psalm of praise. The historical context is complex, as no specific king or event is mentioned; however, the reference to the Chaldeans (1:6) places the narrative within the broader framework of the Neo-Babylonian empire. While Habakkuk may not conform to the traditional role of a prophet, he nevertheless predicts the consequences for God's people due to their covenant violations. It is unclear whether he was a temple prophet, though he appears to have been familiar with Israel's liturgical practices.

The identification of the "wicked" (1:4, 13; 3:13) is central to the book, with scholars proposing that it refers either to the unjust people of Judah or foreign nations such as Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon. However, the book addresses the sins of both God's people and foreign nations, emphasising God's universal abhorrence of wickedness which extends to both His people and foreign nations, making ethnicity irrelevant as a basis for righteousness (1:4). While Habakkuk engages with historical events, the book's primary focus is theological, with a central message concerning God's righteousness. Interpreting the text requires a prophetic lens, in which the historical context informs a deeper understanding of its theological themes.

The literary context of Habakkuk is framed by its position among the Minor Prophets and its blending of prophecy, poetry, and wisdom literature. Initially focused on immediate concerns, Habakkuk's perspective broadens, leading to a deeper understanding of God's righteousness. Chapter 3 represents a shift from dialogue to prayer, presented as a psalm, with the prophet moving from inquiry to praise. The text explores key theological themes such as "justice" and "judgment," "wrath" and "mercy," and the tension between the "wicked" and the "righteous." These elements underscore the prophet's theological journey from complaint to praise in grappling with God's righteousness.

The structure of Habakkuk plays a significant role in shaping its interpretation, offering valuable insights into its thematic and theological development. The book is composed in poetic form, influencing its interpretation. The poetic nature is evident through the use of literary devices such as synonymous, antithetic, synthetic, introverted, and palillogical parallelism. Imagery, including similes, metaphors, personification, and anthropomorphism, further enriches the text's meaning.

Despite its poetic form, Habakkuk remains a prophetic work, incorporating elements of lament and woe oracles. Structurally, it is organised as a dialogue between Habakkuk and God (chapters 1–2), culminating in a psalm of praise (chapter 3). These structural components offer insight into the author's intentions and enhance our understanding of God's righteousness.

A comparison of structural analyses by scholars Anderson (2001), Renz (2021), Thomas (2018), and Snyman (2020) form the foundation for the proposed structural outline in this study.

Throughout Habakkuk, various recurring patterns highlight key concepts related to God's righteousness. In the dialogue (1:2–2:20), Habakkuk expresses a complaint, questioning God's apparent inaction. Initially, the prophet perceives God as indifferent, but God's response reveals His active involvement, using the Chaldeans as instruments of justice (1:5–11). Though the Chaldeans are ungodly, God sovereignly employs them to fulfil His purpose. Habakkuk struggles to reconcile this with his understanding of divine justice and raises a second complaint (1:12–2:1).

God answers by instructing Habakkuk to record the revelation (2:2–3), distinguishing between the righteous, who "live by their faith" (2:4), and the proud, who are "treacherous" and "arrogant." Through five woe oracles (2:6–20), God exposes the folly of the wicked. Throughout this dialogue, Habakkuk's understanding of God's righteousness is progressively challenged as God reveals His sovereignty.

The book concludes with a psalm (3:1–19), marking a shift in the prophet's tone from inquisition to reverence. Habakkuk pleads for God's mercy and prays for the renewal of His works of judgment and deliverance (3:2). In chapter 3, Habakkuk responds with praise as his understanding of God's righteousness expands. Despite initial fear following the theophany (3:3–15), he ultimately moves to a position of faith and trust, even in the face of impending calamity (3:17–19).

The Hebrew term *חַמָּס*/*ḥāmās* represents two forms of violence: internal injustice within Judah and the oppression of Judah by the Chaldeans. While God detests violence, He uses the Chaldeans as instruments of divine judgment. *יִשְׁעִי*/*yāšāʿ* reflects the prophet's plea for deliverance. The prophet struggles to reconcile God's means of deliverance with his expectation of salvation, and

how it fits into God's broader plan for salvation and purification. The concept of *מִשְׁפָּט*/*mišpāṭ* is progressively developed throughout the text, as the prophet initially seeks justice within the Judahite community but is later confronted with God's sovereign plan encompassing both judgment and salvation, applied to both Judah and the Chaldeans.

The distinction between *רָשָׁע*/*rāšāʿ* (the wicked) and *צַדִּיק*/*ṣāddīq* (the righteous) is crucial. Habakkuk initially views the Judeans as more righteous than the Chaldeans, but God reveals that righteousness is determined by faith in Him, not by ethnic identity or covenantal status. The prophet's understanding shifts as he struggles with the tension between God's justice and mercy.

Habakkuk's perception of *חַמּוּל*/*ḥāmāl* (mercy) evolves as he initially criticises both the Chaldeans and God for withholding mercy, only to realise that mercy is not a right but a divine gift. His plea for *רַחֲמִים*/*rāḥām* (compassion) in 3:2 marks a shift towards understanding that God's justice and mercy work together in His righteous plan.

The prophet comes to recognise that both justice and mercy are essential components of God's righteousness, with God's wrath and mercy being complementary. This realisation leads to a deeper appreciation of God's sovereignty and the preservation of a faithful remnant, embodying His righteousness and justice, even in judgment.

Initially, Habakkuk questions God's justice, lamenting the injustice in Judah and expecting divine intervention. However, he is confronted with the revelation that God will use the wicked Chaldeans as instruments of judgment, which challenges his assumptions and deepens his confusion.

Through dialogue, God teaches Habakkuk that righteousness is not defined by national identity or moral comparison, but by faith in God (2:4). Both Judah and the Chaldeans are guilty before God, and while divine justice demands punishment, mercy ensures the preservation of a faithful remnant, not based on merit but through faith.

Habakkuk's tone shifts from accusation to awe as he realises that justice and mercy are inseparable. He learns to trust in God's sovereign plan, no longer relying on his circumstances but on God's perfect character. The book culminates in a psalm of praise, as Habakkuk recognises that God's justice and mercy work together, guiding him from complaint to trust in God's overarching plan.

The message of God's righteousness in the book of Habakkuk offers valuable insights for the contemporary faith community, particularly in relation to prosperity theology, which suggests that God desires everyone to be healthy and wealthy. While there is some truth in this, Habakkuk

teaches that God's primary concern is the development of character rather than material prosperity or physical well-being. Our circumstances should be understood within the broader context of God's sovereign plan.

Our emotions and perceptions of God are often shaped by our circumstances, as demonstrated in Habakkuk's complaints. While prosperity theology focuses on self-centred material happiness, God offers lasting joy, regardless of external conditions. Both positive and negative circumstances are part of God's refining process, leading us to a deeper dependence on Him. While initial reactions may be frustration or offence, God uses these moments to realign our perspective, showing that His plans, though different from our expectations, are ultimately for our good.

Habakkuk's initial complaint about God's apparent indifference to injustice (1:2-4) is met with a perplexing response, similar to our own experiences when God's actions differ from our expectations. God's justice, rooted in His righteous character, demands adherence to His standard, which no one can fully uphold. However, God's mercy preserves a righteous remnant, pointing to His ultimate mercy through Christ. At the cross, both justice and mercy are fully realised, with Christ's sacrifice satisfying God's wrath and offering forgiveness.

The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in applying this righteousness, transforming our perception from pride to humility and enabling us to live in Christ's righteousness. The work of the Trinity is essential in achieving God's righteousness: the Father enacts judgment, the Son mediates mercy, and the Spirit applies it to those who have faith. True righteousness is attained through faith in God, not by self-effort, a message echoed in the New Testament, where righteousness is accessible through faith rather than adherence to the law.

Just as God's righteousness is revealed in the book of Habakkuk, it continues to manifest today. Habakkuk's initial complaint about God's apparent indifference to injustice (1:2-4) is met with a perplexing response, similar to our own experiences when God's actions differ from our expectations. God's justice, rooted in His righteous character, demands adherence to His standard, which no one can fully uphold. However, God's mercy preserves a righteous remnant, pointing to His ultimate mercy through Christ. At the cross, both justice and mercy are fully realised, with Christ's sacrifice satisfying God's wrath and offering forgiveness.

The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in applying this righteousness, transforming our perception from pride to humility and enabling us to live in Christ's righteousness. The work of the Trinity is essential in achieving God's righteousness: the Father enacts judgment, the Son mediates mercy, and the Spirit applies it to those who have faith. True righteousness is attained through faith in God, not by self-effort. The righteous are characterised by faith and humility, contrasting the proud

who seek righteousness through their own actions. This message is also echoed in the New Testament, where the righteousness of God is shown to be accessible through faith, not by adherence to the law, and believers are encouraged to endure hardship with the hope of salvation.

This study, which focused exclusively on an exegetical analysis of the book of Habakkuk without an empirical component, suggests the potential for future research to investigate how God's righteousness is perceived in contemporary contexts and how Habakkuk may play a pivotal role in shaping this perception. Additionally, while this research is primarily concerned with the book of Habakkuk, further comparative studies could explore how God's righteousness in Habakkuk relates to its depiction in other biblical texts, such as the Minor Prophets, other Old Testament books, and the New Testament.

In conclusion, by highlighting the dynamic interplay between God's justice and mercy as presented in the book of Habakkuk, this study demonstrated that both justice and mercy are inseparably integral facets of God's righteousness. God's mercy is manifested through His justice, while His justice is revealed through His mercy, reflecting the profound unity of these divine attributes.

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