CONCORDIA
COMMENTARY

A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture

OBADIAH AND HABAKKUK

Obadiah
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Habakkuk
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Obadiah 21b

Conclusion: The Kingship Will Belong to YHWH

Translation

[21b]And the kingship will belong to YHWH.

Textual Notes

21b וְהָיְתָה לַיהוָה הַמְּלוּכָה׃—In this context, the verb הָיָה with the preposition לְ is best rendered as "will belong." לְ indicates possession, "(belonging) to" (BDB, 5 a; *DCH*, לְ I, 1). The initial verb is a perfect *waw* consecutive, the ninth and final perfect *waw* consecutive in Obad 17–21; see the second textual note on Obad 17. The verb is feminine to match its subject, the feminine noun מְלוּכָה with the article. (For its form, see Joüon, § 97D a.) מְלוּכָה means "kingship," "kingdom," or "royalty" (*DCH*; cf. BDB). It is the sole word in Obadiah derived from the root מלך. Obadiah avoids מלך even in Obad 21a and uses the terminology of "saviors" and "to judge" instead of "king" and "reign." He prefers to speak of YHWH's kingdom in terms of "Mount Zion" (Obad 17, 21a; see the commentary on those verses).

The conjunction וְ, "and," is easily overlooked, but nevertheless, it is significant to the argument. Unlike Obad 15, Obadiah does not use כִּי or any other subordinate clause marker. Instead, he uses the common Hebrew technique of parataxis. For the purpose of the genre of a commentary, we have devoted this separate commentary section to Obad 21b to describe its relationship to the rest of the book. The risk in treating Obad 21b by itself is that this takes away from the power of Obadiah's use of parataxis. By using a simple *waw* and without any further elaboration of the exact relationship between Obad 21b and the preceding material, the prophet forces the audience to deeply contemplate the relationship. Obadiah's message in the first twenty verses is increasingly transformed by each half of the final verse, Obad 21a and then Obad 21b. The moment we try to narrow down or limit the relationship of Obad 21b to the rest of the prophecy, we circumvent the prophetic process and lessen its impact.

Commentary

The final three Hebrew words of Obadiah, "and the kingship will belong to YHWH," are jarring and unexpected after the prior references to Judah's suffering (e.g., drinking the cup of YHWH's wrath in Obad 16) and exile (Obad 20). Much of this book has been devoted to images of destruction supporting its vehement attacks on Edom in conjunction with all the nations, before its vivid declaration of a restored Mount Zion (Obad 17–21a). Now Obadiah brings the book to a conclusion in a way that has nothing obviously to do with Edom or even with the Judahites themselves. But it has everything to do with the premise of YHWH's "revelatory word" through Obadiah (Obad 1a). Up to this point,

Obadiah has taken the audience[1] on a journey from Edom's prideful attitudes and its betrayal of its brother (Jacob, the Judahites) to a restored land of promise beyond anything Israel had ever known. In the end, Obadiah's message is part of a larger proclamation of God's Law and Gospel within the Bible.

Jesus Christ, quoted by the NT evangelists, will say it somewhat differently with the statement "the kingdom of heaven/God has drawn near."[2] We look at this in greater detail in our discussion of the theology of the book.[3] Nevertheless, this is Obadiah's message as well. In spite of all appearances, YHWH still reigns over the fallen creation. The day is coming when his reign shall be restored fully.[4] Since kingship belongs to him, he will not let evil go unpunished, whether it's Edom's evil or the evil of the nations. He remains faithful to his promises to Zion, even as earthly Zion/Jerusalem was destroyed.

It is through destruction that God brings forth new and everlasting life. The personification of this is in the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Christ, who brought the kingdom and who will return in glory to establish it forever.[5] The closest parallel to Obad 21b is "for the kingship belongs to YHWH (כִּי לַיהוָה הַמְּלוּכָה), who reigns over the nations" (Ps 22:29 [ET 22:28]), which comes near the conclusion of a psalm that, in vivid detail, portrays the dereliction, suffering, crucifixion, death, and glorious resurrection of the Davidic Messiah.[6] "Kingdom" language permeates the Passion Narratives in the Gospels. The trial, mocking, and titulus of Jesus focused on his office as "the King of the Jews" and over what kind of "kingdom" he reigned.[7] We, baptized into his death and resurrection, daily die to sin and live by his power, confident that he shall raise us from the dead on the Last Day (Rom 6:1–13; Col 2:11–13). This hope is our Mount Zion (Heb 12:22; Rev 14:1).

These final three Hebrew words encapsulate the entire message of Obadiah. The book began with the hearing of a report that the nations were gathering against Edom (Obad 1b). The final words remind us that Edom's complicity in the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC was all part of God's reign and plan—not only to punish his apostate people but also to abolish their enemies, regather

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1 See "Audience" in "Obadiah: The Man and His Times" in the introduction.

2 Mt 4:17; Mk 1:14–15; also John the Baptizer in Mt 3:1–2. Jesus entrusted this message to his apostles to preach (Mt 10:7; Lk 10:9, 11).

3 See "Summary Introduction to the Entire Commentary" in the introduction. See also the excursus "Obadiah as a Preacher of the Coming Kingdom of God" following this pericope.

4 To name just a few verses for this prophetic message see, e.g., Is 2:1–5; 4:2–6; 11:1–16; 65:17–25.

5 See, e.g., "The Function Obadiah 15–21a" at the conclusion of the commentary on Obad 15–21a.

6 Raabe, *Obadiah*, 271, highlights the parallel and suggests that Obad 21b is liturgical language. While the nominal sentence in Ps 22:29 (ET 22:28) is commonly rendered in the present tense, the future-looking "will belong" in Obad 21b is fitting for a historical context when YHWH's kingdom appeared to have been destroyed recently by the Babylonians in 587 BC.

7 Mt 27:11, 29, 37, 42; Mk 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32; Lk 23:2–3, 37–38; Jn 18:33–39; 19:3, 14–22; cf. Mt 2:2; 26:29; Lk 22:16, 18, 29–30, 42; Jn 1:49; 12:13–15.

his exiles, and reestablish them on an ever-secure Zion. Obadiah moved from Obad 1 to describe the sinful pride and false confidence of Edom in Obad 2–9. Edom's problem was not political naivety or even its political hubris. Its problem was that it sinned against YHWH, the only King, the only one worthy of trust. Obad 10–14 attacked Edom for its brotherly betrayal.

Obadiah's concluding three words remind the audience that this quintessential foe had attacked YHWH's people whom he promised ultimately to restore, even if that restoration included temporary punishment. Indeed, "the kingship will belong to YHWH" (Obad 21b) undergirded Obadiah's argument in Obad 15–16. Obad 15a, in particular, put Edom's demise in this broader eschatological context, presenting Edom's judgment as part of a larger divine program with the nations. The enemies of YHWH and his people, as Obadiah lucidly described in Obad 16, will drink the cup of divine wrath and be no more. Furthermore, Obadiah's vivid depiction of salvation and restoration in Obad 17–21a is likewise a direct consequence of YHWH's reign as King on Mount Zion. As Monarch over the cosmos, YHWH keeps his promises to his people. He restores them to their land in a way that far surpasses their previous experiences. He transforms his dispossessed people into dispossessors and heirs.[8] Obadiah truly takes his audience on a journey from historic judgment for the recent betrayal and sin against YHWH to a statement of ultimate hope. Kingship does and evermore will belong to YHWH. YHWH judges, but YHWH also restores.[9]

[8] See the third textual note and the commentary on Obad 17.

[9] Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6; Is 26:19; Dan 12:2–3; Jn 11:25–26, 43–44.

Excursus

Obadiah as a Preacher of the Coming Kingdom of God

Much of this commentary has looked at the impact of the book of Obadiah on its original Judahite audience.[1] In this respect, Obadiah is a message of hope to the persecuted, scattered, and marginalized survivors of Jerusalem's destruction in 587 BC that ultimately YHWH would vindicate them by annihilating Edom and regather them on a renewed Mount Zion. However, Obadiah's message is no antiquated relic relevant only to a distant past. Obadiah speaks to the faithful remnant of every age. To appreciate how is challenging because Obadiah has had minimal direct impact on the theology and the liturgy of the church. The issue of Edomite incursions into Judah, the restoration of Mount Zion, and the repossession of the land—if taken only in a literal and historically past sense—are not directly relevant to the Christian church now that Obadiah's prophetic mission has been accomplished and Edom has long been destroyed, never to rise again. The NT writers, for the most part, do not draw on this book explicitly. Beale and Carson note only nine allusions to it in the entire NT,[2] which is considerably more than the one allusion noted in NA[28].[3] The current LCMS lectionaries do not include any readings from Obadiah.[4]

Not surprisingly, the NT is not particularly interested in the ancient kingdom of Edom, which ceased to exist about 400 BC, long before the first advent of Jesus Christ.[5] The nearest potential Edomite in the NT would be Herod the Great, but even that connection must be qualified because Edom was then occupied by a different people group that gave rise to the Idumeans.[6] While the NT shows no explicit interest in Edom, the proclamation that the kingdom of God is at hand drives the NT, as seen in the preaching of John the Baptizer (Mt 3:1–2) and Jesus (Mt 4:17; Mk 1:15). In the Lord's inaugural sermon in Lk 4:16–30, he anticipates the widespread rejection of himself by his Jewish contemporaries and also the extension of his ministry to the Gentiles, as signified by Zarephath (Lk 4:26), which is named elsewhere in the Scriptures only

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1 See "Audience" in "Obadiah: The Man and His Times" in the introduction.

2 Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1195.

3 NA[28] notes that Rev 11:15 alludes to Obad 21.

4 See *LSB*, pp. xiv–xxiii.

5 See "Setting and Date" in "Obadiah: The Man and His Times" in the introduction.

6 See "Esau as a Character in the New Testament" in the following excursus "Edom as a Character in the Scriptures."

as the location of Elijah's ministry in 1 Ki 17:9–10 and as a place to be inherited by reconstituted Israel in Obad 20.[7]

To fully grasp the implications of the NT, one must realize that the writers broadly speak in OT idiom. Brent Strawn provides a helpful assessment of the OT functioning as a "language" in that it describes reality a certain way and provides a particular theological worldview.[8] "The kingdom of God" might have different connotations to people today, but when the NT proclaims that the kingdom of God is at hand, it uses the language of "kingdom" that the OT has already established. Further, the NT writers, who were steeped in the language and idioms of the OT, assume their audiences are familiar (perhaps to varying extents) with the same background.

Obadiah ends with the climactic statement "and the kingship will belong to YHWH" (וְהָיְתָה לַיהוָה הַמְּלוּכָה, Obad 21). The kingdom of God functions as the broad motif for Obadiah's theology that looks to a hope well beyond the return from the Babylonian exile and the elimination of the historical enemy Edom. The commentary sections on Obad 15–21a and Obad 21b have sought to show the dynamic, future-looking nature of the culminating verses of this book. Obadiah describes the kingdom of God in terms of new life on the eschatological Mount Zion (Obad 17), the possession of a greater land of promise (Obad 18–20), the ascent of saviors to judge (Obad 21a)—typifying the Savior who will justify—and the advent of YHWH's kingdom. The imminent coming of the kingdom involves the bringing down of the proud, the permanent defeat of evil, and the global scope of salvation, which will impact all the nations. This is congruent with Jesus' proclamation that the kingdom of God is at hand, for when the NT proclaims the kingdom, it presupposes these entailments that Obadiah describes. The kingdom of God vanquishes all opposition, including even Satan and his demonic powers, who attempted to thwart Jesus' execution of God's plan of universal judgment and salvation. The kingdom of God undermines any sense of self-sufficiency, as seen in Jesus' attacks on the religious leaders of his day. Further, starting from the cross and Jerusalem, the kingdom of God will encompass the whole world, including the Gentiles, far beyond the borders of Israel/Judah, to the very ends of the earth (Lk 24:46–47; Acts 1:8). We will look more closely at the theology of Obadiah in terms of the coming kingdom of God.



The Kingdom of God as a Restored Zion

Obad 17 looks to the restoration of Mount Zion as the location of eternal salvation ("survival," "holy," "will possess"). To further grasp the theological import of Zion, it is important to draw from other prophetic writings such as Isaiah. Is 2:2–5 describes Zion as the place from which God reigns and to which

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[7] For the Christian church, composed of all Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ, as the reconstituted Israel of God, see, e.g., Romans 9–11; Gal 6:14–16, passages worth reciting below.

[8] Strawn, *The Old Testament Is Dying: A Diagnosis and Recommended Treatment*, 8–13.

he draws the nations to be catechized. The result is the inbreaking of radical peace that passes understanding. Luther rightly observes that "Mount Zion" in Obad 17, 21 looks to the establishment of the kingdom of Christ, so that Zion is the church, the place for all nations to hear and believe the Gospel.[9] This fulfillment in Christ and his church is the case not only with Obadiah and Is 2:2–5, but also throughout Isaiah in texts like Is 4:2–6; 12:1–6; 25:6–11; 40:9; 62:1–12.[10] This identification of Zion with the church, where the Word of God is proclaimed and the Sacraments of Christ are administered, enables us to see how Obadiah proclaims our own everlasting restoration.

The Kingdom of God as a Restored Land of Promise

Obadiah closely connects the kingdom of YHWH to a radically rejuvenated Israel. We already noted the significance of the boundaries in Obad 18–20 that extend beyond the land that YHWH had enabled his people, redeemed from Egypt, to conquer in the OT period (Joshua–Kings). This renovated land has important implications for the church as the new Israel (Romans 9–11; Gal 6:14–16). Israel is no longer determined by ethnicity or land but is a diaspora united by faith in Christ (James 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1).

God gave the original promised land to Israel as the place wherein he would dwell in his sanctuary to provide his grace and as a means of providing their daily bread. The land was a powerful reminder that provisions for all needs of body and soul come from God's gracious sustenance. Elmer Martens presents us with a helpful understanding of the true significance of the land: "God's gift to his people was the abundant life in the land. In turn, he called them to live according to a prescribed order."[11] Martens thus also connects land to an obedient response to God's provision of life in giving "daily bread" to his people. This important, core entailment of God's gift of land anticipates the acts of Jesus in the miraculous feedings of the five thousand and the four thousand, as well as the Lord's Prayer in Mt 6:9–13, where the petition "your kingdom come" leads to "give us this day our daily bread." As was the case in Solomon's prayer at the consecration of the Jerusalem temple as the center of the land (1 Kings 8), this prayer asks for God's provision concerning *all* daily needs, as Luther explains in the Small Catechism, where he supplies an expansive list of what this "daily bread" entails.[12]

The restored Zion and land in Obad 17–20 also signifies the coming of the new creation. As we observed in the commentary, the new boundaries in Obadiah result in a secured land of promise in which the traditional invasion routes have been eliminated. Thus, the people will be able to live in the eternal security YHWH lavishes on Zion. Radical peace with YHWH and with the

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[9] AE 18:200–201.

[10] For a helpful discussion of these texts, see Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*.

[11] Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology*, 352.

[12] SC III 14.

community characterizes Zion theology. Is 2:2–5 looks to a gathering of nations in which they will not learn war anymore. Is 65:13–25 moves seamlessly from land theology to the theology of the creation of the new heavens and the new earth; it portrays the benefits of living in the land in the new creation, which is utterly different from the present corrupted creation. Indeed, the profound difference between the old and the new offers a further parallel to Obadiah's description of the remnant living in the restored land. Rounding out the biblical picture, Rev 21:1–5 draws on the language of Isaiah to describe this new creation as "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1; cf. Is 65:17), free of all sin, suffering, and conflict, as indicated, e.g., by the statement "and the sea was no more" in Rev 21:1[13] and by God's wiping away all tears and ending death in Rev 21:4 (cf. Is 25:7–8).[14]

The Kingdom of God as the Coming of the Messiah Presented in Amos

For all of his imagery of a revived Zion and an unimaginably reinvigorated land of promise, Obadiah leaves us wondering, "How will this be?" He speaks of these as happening in connection with YHWH's "kingdom" but never explicitly talks about a coming "King" or "Messiah." (The closest he gets is the plural "saviors" in Obad 21.) Perhaps for Obadiah, the current state of the deposed earthly Davidic dynasty makes it difficult if not impossible to speak of a Davidic hope. At the time Obadiah prophesied, the last living Davidic kings of Judah, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, had been taken captive to Babylon (2 Ki 24:8–15; 25:1–7). Yet Obadiah still causes his audience to seek out the coming Agent who will bring about this salvation. A helpful possibility lies in reading Obadiah intertextually with the earlier prophecy of Amos 9:11–12.

Amos 9:11–15

The excursus "Edom as a Character in the Scriptures" (following this excursus) examines the portrayal of Edom in Amos 1:11–12 in more detail. Here we shall examine how Amos 9:11–15, which refers to "the remnant of Edom" (building on that earlier portrayal), is the eschatological climax of the book of Amos. These final verses combine rich language of Davidic and Mosaic promises at the final Day of YHWH (cf. Obad 8).

Amos 9:11 first begins with the eschatological language "in that day" (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא), which connects to "behold, days are coming" (הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים) in Amos 9:13. Lessing notes that these are "eschatological Gospel phrases that refer to the time after the judgment."[15] This provides a theological setting in

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[13] See Brighton, *Revelation,* 591–95.

[14] Cf. "the day of the Lord" and "day of God" that bring the new heavens and new earth in 2 Pet 3:1–13—phrases that relate to "the Day of YHWH" in Obad 15, which then sets the stage for Obad 17–21.

[15] Lessing, *Amos*, 586.

Amos that encapsulates both Christ's first and second comings. Amos applies this eschatological language, moreover, to the raising up of "the tabernacle of David" (Amos 9:11), that is, the resurrection of the Son of David, Jesus Christ, who "tabernacled" among us (Jn 1:14) and is the new temple, destroyed and then raised (Jn 2:18–22).[16] He has inaugurated the eschaton, which restores the kingdom of God (cf. Acts 1:6–8). For Amos' original audience, this is a powerful message of hope given that the Davidic monarchy had fallen apart theologically during Amos' time. The depiction of the resurrection of David's tabernacle is saturated with the language of God mending its breaches, raising up its ruins, and rebuilding it firm (Amos 9:11).

Amos 9:12 shifts focus to the result of the resurrection, the restored Israelites' possession of Edom. Lessing raises the question as to why Edom is singled out here, suggesting that Edom could either be a pun on humanity (*ʾedom* and *ʾadam*) or a symbol for all the nations of the world.[17] Both of these suggestions are commendable. By placing Edom in this context, Amos makes Edom's defeat an inherent part of the eschatological reign of the Davidic Messiah, anticipating the development of Edom that we have examined throughout this commentary on Obadiah.

The use of the plural verb "so that they will possess" (יִירְשׁוּ) in Amos 9:12 also ties Amos with Obadiah, who uses the same verb, "to possess, take possession of, inherit" (יָרַשׁ), four times (Obad 17, 19 [twice], 20). The subject of the verb in both books is the regathered people, who are the ones now taking possession of their enemies. In the commentary on Obad 17–20, we saw that this is a critical aspect of Obadiah's message of hope. Amos 9:12 shows that the people under the resurrected tabernacle of David are the ones taking possession of "Edom and all the nations," that is, all enemies of God and his people. By reading these texts together, Amos 9:11–12 shows us that it is under the risen David that the possession of the radically transformed land of promise will take place in Obad 19–20.

Obadiah, then, provides an extended commentary on Edom's defeat. Further, Obad 15–21 shares the same eschatological perspective as Amos 9:11–15. The verb "possess" (יָרַשׁ) provides a connection between Amos and its more extensive use in Obadiah. What is more, Obadiah, as we have seen, presents Edom first as the epitome of prideful opposition against YHWH, reminiscent of the tower of Babel (Obad 2–4). In doing so, Obadiah expands on the language of Amos to show that the Davidic Messiah will bring an end to all who think themselves independent of God, whether in terms of their own might, politics, or wisdom (Obad 7–8). Furthermore, Obadiah identifies Edom as a nation that had broken its obligations to its "brother" (Obad 10, 12), which is congruent with Amos 1:11–12. In view of these connections, Obadiah reinforces

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[16] See Lessing, *Amos*, 586–87, who also notes that Amos 9:11–12 is quoted in Acts 15:16–17 to support the inclusion of Gentiles in the Christian church.

[17] Lessing, *Amos*, 588.

the point already present in Amos: messianic hope includes the punishment of large-scale corporate evil.

As noted above, Lessing suggests that Edom functions symbolically for all the nations, as indicated explicitly by "Edom and all the nations" in Amos 9:12. Reading Obadiah after Amos supports this contention. We have already examined the move in Obad 15–16, where the punishment for what Edom did is also applied to "all the nations," which provides further reason to recognize Edom as a pattern for all the nations also in Amos 9.

To summarize, Obadiah provides a powerful message of hope resulting from the utter destruction of Edom. The challenge of Obadiah is that nowhere does the prophet explain, in overtly Christological terms, how this will be brought about (although vocables in Obad 17, 21, "Mount Zion," "saviors," "to judge," and "the kingship" certainly point the way). Nevertheless, Obadiah, when read as an extended commentary on Amos, proclaims the coming of Christ to deliver his scattered refugees and defeat all opposition. Both these books provide a similar attack on Edom (Esau's descendants) for its betrayal of its brother Jacob/Israel, from whose lineage the Christ will come. Most importantly, Amos 9:11–15 describes the revivified David as one who will sponsor the possession Edom. The reference to Edom in Amos 9:12 is unexpected in its context, raising perplexing questions about the implications of Edom's incorporation into the Davidic kingdom. Obadiah provides important commentary on this, however. If Amos tells us that it is the Davidic Messiah who will punish Edom (Amos 1:11–12; 9:11–12), then Obadiah shows how completely the Messiah will end Edom's evil hubris and brotherly betrayal; the coming of the Messiah means that all who fail to trust in YHWH and love their brother come under judgment. For the beleaguered survivors to whom Obadiah preaches as well as the church militant under oppression, this is the sweetest hope. By reading Obadiah in light of Amos, we see that Christ is the one who brings about restoration to life. This prophet focuses our eyes on Jesus, so that we trust in him. He is the one who suffered the punishment all humanity deserves for disobedience and who is coming again to end all evil and raise his faithful remnant to eternal joy in the new creation.

The Kingdom of God as the Defeat of the Proud

The advent of YHWH's kingdom results in the defeat of the proud. Hubris was the first major sin targeted in this book (Obad 2–4). Edom's problem was its self-confidence in its power, geography, and alliances.[18] The coming of YHWH's kingdom renders all human power utterly futile. It also brings about justice. While Obadiah describes "saviors" on Mount Zion as the ones who "judge" (Obad 21a), they do so because of their divinely given authority. They judge "Mount Esau," the antithesis of "Mount Zion," to punish all of Edom's sins (Obad 21a). Edom's second major sin was its failure to love its "brother"

[18] See "Edom's Geography" in "Obadiah: The Man and His Times" in the introduction.

(Obad 10, 12). Instead, it betrayed Jacob. Thus, when the kingdom of YHWH arrives, YHWH punishes all sin, including the failure to practice love and loyalty. In Obadiah, Edom is penalized, but Edom is not the only unbelieving nation. Indeed, the Day of YHWH will be "against all the nations" (Obad 15a; see "all the nations" also in Obad 16a). YHWH is and always has been the universal King of the cosmos, despite humanity's rebellion, and the arrival of his kingdom implements his tangible rule over all.

The humbling of the proud and the exaltation of the humble are important features of the kingdom of God coming near in Jesus. According to the Magnificat, God's advent in Christ puts an end to the proud. Mary sings in Lk 1:51: "He has scattered the proud in the thought of their hearts" (διεσκόρπισεν ὑπερηφάνους διανοίᾳ καρδίας αὐτῶν). This language is remarkably similar to but a reversal of the LXX translation of Obad 3, which states: "the pride of your heart has exalted you" (ὑπερηφανία τῆς καρδίας σου ἐπῆρέν σε). Mary reflects the same epic reversal as Obadiah. Concerning Lk 1:51–55, Green observes:

> This coupling of the proud, powerful, and rich anticipates a major theme of the Lukan narrative. The opponents of Jesus, and therefore of God's purpose, are portrayed as persons who grasp for social respect and positions of honor, who exclude the less fortunate and socially unacceptable from their circles of kinship, who enjoy the power that accompanies the privileged status.[19]

The pattern of bringing down the proud *and exalting the lowly* in Lk 1:51–55 therefore entails God's restoring his beleaguered, downtrodden people. Just as Obadiah couples YHWH's humbling the proud with his elevation of the exiles (on Mount Zion), so, too, Mary's hymn lauds God for raising up the lowly, filling the hungry, and helping his servant Israel, fulfilling his promises of mercy for Abraham and his offspring forever.

This pattern of reversal is found throughout Luke. The next significant example is at Jesus' birth in Lk 2:1–7, which shows the unexpected exaltation of the lowly while bringing down the proud. Caesar Augustus was the epitome of power. His might consisted of his empire and military. The Roman Empire was obviously far greater than the rather insignificant nation-state of Edom. Furthermore, Caesar Augustus proclaimed himself "the savior of the world."[20] The census was also an act of power over the lives of the Judeans, yet Caesar Augustus makes what amounts only to a brief cameo appearance in Luke's Gospel. The irony is that the man who called himself the savior of the world is absent when the true "Savior of the world" is born, yet lowly shepherds are present with the holy family (Lk 2:8–20). The lofty Caesar with all of his advantages is brought down because he does not ever know the true Savior. Just observes:

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[19] Green, *Luke*, 104–5.

[20] Koester provides a helpful survey of this title in regards to Caesar. He demonstrates that in the Roman world, the precise phrase "the savior of the world" was applied only to the emperor (" 'The Savior of the World' (John 4:42)," 666–67).

> Here the theme of the Magnificat takes concrete shape in that the Creator of the universe, Jesus, is born in Bethlehem in a manger during the census decreed by the emperor of the world, Caesar Augustus. Indeed, the mighty are being pulled down from their thrones and the humble exalted.[21]

This reversal in the nativity of our Lord, which includes an apparently insignificant Galilean couple and shepherds, realizes YHWH's warning to Edom that "I would bring you down" (Obad 4). In Luke, this forms part of God's ongoing plan of eschatological redemption for the salvation of the whole world. Simeon's prophecy in Lk 2:34 continues and then concludes this subversive *synkrisis* between Caesar Augustus and the rest of the people in the story.

Luke uses the Beatitudes in Lk 6:20–26 differently from Matthew by including woes. The genre of the woe is prominent within the prophets. The interjection "woe" (אוי or הוי)[22] recontextualizes a funeral lament and uses it to condemn people to death.[23] Readers might expect Luke to present Jesus congratulating qualities that society exalts, such as power and status,[24] but instead Luke does the exact opposite. Lk 6:20–26 looks to a greater eschatological fulfillment, which is congruent with the language that we have seen in Obadiah. Jesus by his woes condemns the proud who see no need for forgiveness by grace alone. On the other hand, those who despair of their own merit and depend solely upon Jesus are now lifted up in the coming kingdom. Green writes: "Unacceptable in the socially defined world in which they live, they are not only tolerated but embraced and restored in the new world Jesus proclaims and embodies."[25] The language throughout Lk 6:22–26 declares a state of affairs that effectively fulfills what Mary had spoken in the Magnificat.[26] Green helpfully observes: "Less obvious, but no less important, are the echoes of the reversal segment of Mary's Song ([Lk] 1:46–55) heard in this preamble: 'blessed' ([Lk] 1:45, 48; 6:20, 21a, 21b, 22); 'hungry' versus 'filled' ([Lk] 1:53; 6:21, 25); 'rich' ([Lk] 1:53; 6:24)."[27] Indeed, by combining both beatitude and woe in Lk 6:20–26, Jesus proclaims a radical reversal in the coming eschatological kingdom that is already present in his own person with his disciples.

The rich fool in Lk 12:16–21 also depicts pride in a way similar to Obadiah's presentation of Edom. Jesus punctuates the parable with the rich man's repeated use of the first person "I." The man is concerned only for himself and is also by himself and is not engaged with his brothers. He does not use his abundance for the benefit of the needy. We saw a similar phenomenon in Obad 3, where Obadiah quotes the Edomites as saying, "Who will bring me down?" But their

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21 Just, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 106.

22 See, e.g., Is 3:9, 11; 5:8, 11, 18, 20–22; 10:5; 31:1.

23 Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 543.

24 Marshall, *Luke*, 244.

25 Green, *Luke*, 266.

26 Green, *Luke*, 165.

27 Green, *Luke*, 265.

self-confidence leads to disaster. Professing to be wise, they become fools (Obad 7–8; cf. Rom 1:22). Similarly, the fool in Luke suddenly dies and loses everything in a way reminiscent of Edom's sudden destruction.

Luke contrasts this rich fool with the following teachings of Jesus about wealth, anxiety, and seeking the treasure that is the kingdom (Lk 12:22–34). Jesus, in these words of comfort, shows the disciples the importance of a faith dependent upon God. Unlike the rich fool, who takes all the credit for himself, the disciples become paradigms of trustful reliance on the God who cares for them and provides in his kingdom all they truly need.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Lk 16:19–31 further epitomizes this reducing of the proud and uplifting of the destitute in Obadiah. The rich man had all of the advantages akin to Edom, which enjoyed geopolitical advantages that Judah lacked. Jesus uses extravagant language to describe the rich man, including the most expensive tailoring and sumptuous banqueting. Just observes: "To feast every day is a hyperbolic illustration of the improper use of possessions. This rich man is out of control, and his use of his possessions stands in contrast even to that of the rich fool ([Lk] 12:16–21)."[28] The moment each character dies, we see the subversive *synkrisis* and action: Lazarus rests in the bosom of Abraham, while the rich man languishes in hell. The reversal of the wealthy echoes the woes in Lk 6:24–26. The message is clear: only those who depend upon God, like impoverished Lazarus and the despondent exiles in Obadiah, will be restored in the eschaton. On the other hand, pride in human might, just like Edom's arrogance, leads to disaster.

A final helpful example of this Lukan message concerning God's debasing of the proud impenitent and his justifying of the meek sinner is the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Lk 18:9–14. In keeping with the pattern observed in the other texts, Jesus describes the Pharisee in extravagant terms. Much like the rich fool and Edom in Obad 3, the Pharisee uses the first person pronoun "I" to his own damnation. Green notes that the problem with the Pharisee's prayer is that, while it looks like a thanksgiving, it fails to thank God for anything that God has done. Green states: "For God's acts, the Pharisee has substituted his own."[29] This contrasts dramatically with the tax collector, whose prayer Jesus describes as a confession of sin and a plea for mercy. The tax collector offers no pretenses or puts no trust in his own abilities. The reversal is clear: the unrepentant Pharisee receives nothing, while the tax collector goes home justified and receives everything.

Luke's use of this parable and its portrayal of the Pharisee is congruent with his normal depiction of those in power. Kingsbury observes:

> Luke declares with an eye to the Pharisees and the scribes (lawyers) that because they refused to submit to John's baptism [of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, Lk 3:3], they "rejected the purpose of God for themselves"

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[28] Just, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 633.

[29] Green, *Luke*, 648.

> [Lk 7:30]. By refusing John's baptism, the religious authorities affirmed in effect that they had no need of repentance and forgiveness ([Lk] 15:7). … Ironically, therefore, the authorities, although they believe that they stand in a right relationship with God, in reality stand in a wrong relationship with him.[30]

The religious leadership stands there as the proud who, like Edom, will be brought down.

Obad 2–9 presents an extended attack on Edom's pride. The pride of the Edomites results in a form of idolatry where they base their hope on their own might and this self-deification leads to their other sins condemned in the book. YHWH's statement to Edom, "I would bring you down" in Obad 4, and the ascent of his remnant on Mount Zion in Obad 17, 21 anticipate the larger reversal concerning the proud and humble in Luke's Gospel explored here and thus show how Obadiah anticipates the fulfillment of that reversal in the coming of the kingdom in Christ Jesus.

The Kingdom of God as the Defeat of Evil

Obadiah proclaims God's greater dealings with all the nations as seen, for example, in Obad 15: "the Day of YHWH is near against all the nations." Then follows retribution theology that continues into Obad 16. This looks to the final punishment of all evil at Christ's second advent.[31] Indeed, even the name Edom suggests such a broader eschatological horizon, since "Edom" (אֱדוֹם, *ʾedom*) could be a pun on all "mankind, humanity" (אָדָם, *ʾadam*). Joel also employs historical nations and events in a similar way as he, like Obadiah, prophetically proclaims the OT's broader eschatological vision. The punishments of the nations function primarily as types of God's execution of wrath against all who oppose him. Furthermore, we see this also in the Edom sequence in Isaiah 34 and Isaiah 63. Isaiah 34 places Edom in a broader cosmic eschatological context, providing the window for interpreting Obadiah in *its* broader eschatological context.[32] Obadiah's message also transcends the original historical events that occasioned it in the sixth century BC and looks ahead to the Last Day, the Day of YHWH against all nations. Edom is thus a type of the demonic and evil that Jesus vanquishes in the NT through his exorcisms, as well as of the *Chaoskampf* language in, e.g., Mt 24:35; 2 Pet 3:10–13; and Revelation.

Obadiah uses the language of "drinking" the cup of YHWH's wrath to describe his judgment against all evil (see further the commentary on Obad 16). First, the Judahites "drank" the cup on YHWH's holy mountain when they suffered the demolition of Jerusalem and the temple on Mount Zion by the

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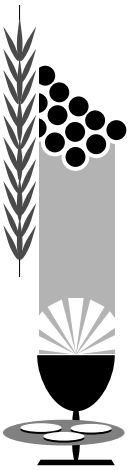
[30] Kingsbury, *Conflict in Luke*, 23.

[31] See, e.g., Matthew 24; 2 Thess 2:1–12; Revelation 19–20.

[32] An alternative way that some scholars understand the nations in these texts is as propaganda tools for Israel to boost their morale in the face of opposition. Such a view misses the theological significance of the nations, however, and reduces the Bible to a political text. For a provocative example of this approach, see Eidevall, *Prophecy and Propaganda: Images of Enemies in the Book of Isaiah*.



Babylonians in 587 BC and were subsequently exiled. But the tables will turn. The ones who "will drink continually" the cup of wrath are "all the nations" (כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם, Obad 16). The result is striking. The nations become as nothing. Paul Raabe has already thoroughly examined the cup of wrath metaphor, and it is not our intention to reduplicate his extensive work on this topic.[33] The NT reveals this motif's ultimate significance. Jesus is the one who drank the full measure of God's cup of wrath (Mt 26:39; Lk 22:42; Jn 18:11). He instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion, in which he gives his people the cup of blessing, the cup with the blood of the new testament—his own blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:27–29; Lk 22:17–20; 1 Cor 10:16, 21; 11:25–28). Jesus connected this cup to coming into the kingdom (Mt 26:29; Lk 22:18). By Jesus' consumption of the cup of divine wrath and his shedding of blood to fill the cup of forgiveness, God's people are not condemned but participate in his kingdom and proclaim his death until he returns (1 Cor 11:26).

Rev 14:9–11 pronounces a judgment on the ones following the beast, using language congruent with Obadiah's motif of drinking the cup of wrath. Obad 16 follows immediately after Obad 15b's explicit enunciation of the principle of retribution for divine judgment. This law of retribution is also the reason for the full drinking of the cup of wrath in Revelation. Rev 14:8 states that Babylon made of the nations drink "from the wine of the wrath of her sexual immorality" (ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς). Rev 14:9–10 moves on to describe a reversal of the drinking pattern. Rather than making others drink, the followers of the beast drink the entire wrath of God. In a way reminiscent of Obad 16, the cup of wrath is of devastatingly full strength. Rev 14:10 states that it is "the wine of the wrath of God which is poured unmixed in the cup of wrath" (τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ κεκερασμένου ἀκράτου ἐν τῷ ποτηρίῳ τῆς ὀργῆς). Here John, in a way reminiscent of Hebrew parallelism, uses multiple images to intensify the toxic effect of this cup. Brighton observes: "Eternal suffering is a result of God's anger, meted out as undiluted wine ([Rev] 14:10), that is, anger that is not tempered with any mercy."[34] Revelation almost seamlessly moves from the cup of wrath to the language of the eternal torment of hell. Rev 14:11 describes its perpetual nature by stating that the smoke of the torment of the worshipers of the beast "ascends forever and ever." While this is not a direct allusion to Obadiah, Osborne notes that it does allude to the oracle against Edom in Isaiah 34.[35] The effect of Revelation 14 is to proclaim the coming punishment of all who prostitute themselves in opposition to God, and it achieves this through the image of drinking the dreaded cup of wrath seen also in Obad 16.[36]

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[33] Raabe, *Obadiah*, 206–42.

[34] Brighton, *Revelation*, 383.

[35] Osborne, *Revelation*, 542.

[36] Beale provides another significant description of how Revelation 14 uses the language of the cup of wrath to describe God's devastating retribution (*Revelation*, 759).

Obadiah presents a compelling image of the divine punishment unleashed by the advent of YHWH's Day and kingdom: the drinking of wrath that poisons all who have opposed God. Our commentary on Obad 16 has already looked at the importance of this verse within the book of Obadiah, but as observed in the preceding discussion, the verse also has significant implications for the unfolding of God's redemptive purposes throughout the Scriptures. Jesus is the one in Revelation who pours out the cup of wrath that utterly annihilates the nations, resulting in their complete dissolution. This image is a significant part of the broader motif of God's punishment of all evil and his rescue of his faithful "on Mount Zion" (Obad 17, 21; Rev 14:1) for all eternity.

The other feature of God's punishment of evil with the arrival of his kingdom in Obad 17–21 is his use of agents to accomplish his divine purposes. We saw in Obad 21 that "saviors" on "Mount Zion" would judge "Mount Esau." In our analysis of this verse, we noted how Obadiah employs the language of the judges as "saviors" to describe God's use of local leaders to accomplish his purposes. In the NT, Jesus also speaks of those who follow him as God's agents. Their proclamation of the Gospel is a judgment against the unbelieving world and a justification of sinners for Christ's sake. Jesus entrusted the office of the keys to his apostles and his subsequent servants in the office of the holy ministry: "If you forgive the sins of any, they [the sins] are forgiven to them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:23; cf. Mt 16:19).

A related kingdom promise of Jesus applied to the apostolic office is the judging in Mt 19:28; Lk 22:28–30. To those who have remained with Jesus during his tribulations, he appoints a kingdom, just as his Father has appointed to him a kingdom (Lk 22:28–29). Moreover, he grants to citizens of that kingdom that "you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones, judging (κρίνοντες) the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk 22:30). The language of "judging" here is reminiscent of the role of the judges from Israel's past who "saved" the people from their enemies and administered on behalf of YHWH, and it is congruent with the role of the "saviors" in Obad 21.[37] In both cases, they function as the newly constituted leadership of God's people. Green observes regarding Lk 22:28–30: "Indeed, it is again here that we see the significance of Luke's identification of Jesus' followers at the table as 'apostles' [Lk 22:14], whose appointment is in anticipation of the restoration of Israel as God's people and who, therefore, are commissioned to govern the renewed people of God."[38] Just makes an even more explicit connection to the apostolic office and in turn the pastoral office: "They [the apostles] will be appointed as stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1; cf. Lk 8:10; Eph 3:9), and they

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[37] See the first textual note on Obad 21a. The "judges" (Judg 2:16–19; 4:4; 11:27) are "saviors" who "saved" Israel, or, more precisely, agents through whom YHWH "saved" Israel (Hiphil forms of יָשַׁע). See Judg 2:16, 18; 3:9, 15, 31; 6:14–15, 36–37; 7:2, 7; 8:22; 10:1, 12; 12:2; 13:5.

[38] Green, *Luke*, 770.

will serve to the church the eschatological Meal of the new era of salvation—the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7)."[39] Just further observes the function such judging has in the context of Luke: "Entrusted with the responsibility to apply Law and Gospel, to absolve or retain sins, and to preside at the Supper, the apostles—and those who serve as their successors in Jesus' ministry—will lead the new Israel to gather around the Table of the Lord in his kingdom."[40] By reading Luke with Obadiah, we see how Obadiah points to the rise of divinely delegated authorities to rule God's people and looks toward the apostolic office as well as the pastoral office.

Obadiah describes the global dominion of YHWH that results in the defeat of evil and the rescue of his persecuted believers. Up until this point, we have limited our discussion of evil to human agents and sin. However, Jesus' defeat of evil goes well beyond the human and includes Satan himself, as seen in such actions as Jesus' exorcisms. While Obadiah is concerned with the nations and with human evil, behind those evils is the greater evil, namely, the evil one. The OT closely aligns the nations with the gods they worshiped, and the veneration of idols is the worship of demons (1 Cor 10:20). Babylon's evil is as much a problem about Marduk, its chief deity, as about its politics. Ex 12:12 shows that the plagues against Egypt were also an attack on its gods. In this way, the nations stand for their gods and thus have demonic overtones. Further, in Lk 10:18, Jesus applies Isaiah's language against Babylon from Is 14:12 to Satan. These observations suggest that Obadiah has in view the defeat of all evil, even Satan, the one who deceives the nations (Rev 18:23; 20:2–10).

The Kingdom of God as a Global Dominion

Obad 15 states that the Day of YHWH is "against all the nations." As we have noted, this verse is the theological key to the entire book. Obadiah deliberately presents us a book that is not just about Edom nor, for that matter, just about Judah. Rather, this book is about all of God's dealings with the cosmos. This is of course further punctuated by the broad proclamation of the kingdom with judgment and salvation in Obad 21.

YHWH's universal dominion spans the Testaments from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible repeatedly describes YHWH as a God far more than a mere localized deity, such as Qos or Marduk. The kingdom of God coming in the NT is universal in its scope as seen, for example, in the pilgrimage of the Gentile Magi (Mt 2:1–16) and in the Great Commission to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:18–20).[41] Paul further notes in Gal 3:26–29 that all baptized believers in Christ are incorporated within the kingdom as the sons of

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[39] Just, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 848. For more about the Lord's Supper in connection with the cup, see the discussion above on drinking the cup of YHWH's wrath.

[40] Just, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 850.

[41] We should be cautious with the word "universal." The biblical understanding of "universal" still assumes an exclusive membership in the kingdom of God through faith.

God, Abraham's seed/offspring, and heirs of the promises. All this is through faith in the one Seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16–18). Here the NT presents us with a helpful counterbalance to Obadiah's message of judgment on the nations. Obadiah is primarily focused upon the evil of the nations being destroyed with the restoration of Mount Zion. Much of the rest of the biblical canon tempers this destruction with the invitation for all nations to be incorporated into God's kingdom through faith in the Savior.

Rev 11:15–19 describes the seventh trumpet, which transforms the kingdom of the world to become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ as he assumes his reign forever and ever. This kingdom is global in scope and triumphs over all evil. According the editors of NA[28], Rev 11:15 is the only direct allusion in the NT to Obadiah, specifically to Obad 21. As we have repeatedly observed, Obadiah looks beyond YHWH's dealings with Edom to his final dealings with "all the nations" (Obad 15–16). Obadiah is able to foresee this because YHWH's kingship extends over all the nations. Rev 11:15–19 presents us with, as Beale observes, "the consummation of history."[42] Like Obadiah, Rev 11:15–19 envisions the defeat of evil and the eschatological establishment of divine rule. As in Obadiah, divine wrath comes to the raging nations and destroys the destroyers of the earth (Rev 11:18).

How John describes the establishment of the Lord's kingdom in Rev 11:15 is also similar to Obad 21. The texts read as follows:

> Rev 11:15: The kingdom of the world has become [the kingdom] of our Lord and of his Christ.
>
> ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ κόσμου τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ.
>
> Obad 21: And the kingship will belong to YHWH.
>
> וְהָיְתָה לַיהוָה הַמְּלוּכָה

John uses the verb "has become" (ἐγένετο), which is equivalent to the Hebrew construction that can just as easily be rendered as "will become" ("the kingdom will become YHWH's") in Obad 21 (the verb הָיָה with the preposition לְ). In both cases, this terminology is used to denote ownership. Rev 11:15 looks to the final victory of Christ's kingdom over "the kingdom of the world," whose ruler is Satan (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Eph 2:2). The term "world" (κόσμος, *kosmos*) in Rev 11:15 further describes the universal, cosmic scope of the kingdom that now belongs solely to the Lord and his Christ.[43] Hence, Brighton concludes:

> At the End in the final display of the victory of Christ, God will openly claim all of his creation as his own, in particular that part of creation that was once under the prince of darkness. God will publicly display his reign over all his creation as he lays claim to that realm of his creation that has been restored through Christ's redemption.[44]

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[42] Beale, *Revelation*, 609.

[43] Brighton, *Revelation*, 309.

[44] Brighton, *Revelation*, 309.

The Greek aorist tense of the verb "has become" (ἐγένετο) in Rev 11:15 conveys the certainty of this reality.[45] It indicates the fulfillment of the prophetic prediction in Obad 21, expressed by "will belong/become" (וְהָיְתָה, a perfect *waw* consecutive).

Rev 11:16–18 states that the Lord's reign arrives at the expense of the nations who rage against God. Similarly, Obadiah had depicted Edom as the epitome of a prideful nation that rages against the true God. Furthermore, just as Obad 15b applies the law of retribution to Edom, so John uses similar retribution language in Rev 11:18. This is particularly seen in the repetition of "wrath" language in verbal and nominal forms in Rev 11:18, which states, literally, "and the nations *wrathed* (ὠργίσθησαν), and your *wrath* (ὀργή) came." Later John in Rev 11:18 uses a similar pattern through the repetition of the verb "destroy" (διαφθείρω) in the statement that the time has come "to *destroy* (διαφθεῖραι) the ones *destroying* (διαφθείροντας) the earth." The combined effect is to emphasize the appropriateness of the coming retribution against the nations.[46]

Obadiah anticipates the consummation of God's kingdom, seen clearly in the final clause of the book, as do NT authors who teach about the future manifestation of Christ's universal and eternal reign at his second coming. For John in the book of Revelation, the final consummation of the kingdom of God completely replaces the kingdom of Satan as God punishes the nations according to the principle of *lex talionis*. The consummation of the kingdom is also the time for God to deliver his faithful, "to give the reward to his servants, to the prophets and to the saints and to the ones who fear your name, the small and the great" (Rev 11:18).

The Kingdom of God as an Imminent Reality

God's kingdom is not distant in Obadiah. Rather, the King's day is "near" to all nations (Obad 15). This imminence of the kingdom of God is picked up significantly in the NT, in Jesus' preaching in the Gospels, in the apostles' epistles, and also in the conclusion to Revelation. Obadiah looks for the kingdom where and when people are restored and evil is defeated, and this is exactly what has arrived in Christ according to the NT proclamation.

Obadiah's audience was one grappling with the effects of divine absence.[47] They lost everything and were even betrayed by their brother, Edom. YHWH's house, the Jerusalem temple, had been destroyed in 587 BC, and now the leading Judahites were in exile. For them, God's reign must have seemed far removed. Visible evidence of the kingdom was gone. Obadiah reaches into that situation and proclaims that God's kingship and God's day are imminent, stating in Obad 15 that "the Day of YHWH is near against all the nations"

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[45] Osborne, *Revelation*, 440.

[46] Osborne, *Revelation*, 447; Beale, *Revelation*, 616.

[47] See "Audience" in "Obadiah: The Man and His Times" in the introduction.

(כִּי־קָרוֹב יוֹם־יְהוָה עַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם). This imminence of the divine kingdom is part of the overarching pattern in the Bible. In the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus comes on the scene to proclaim "the Gospel of God" (Mk 1:14), these are his very first words: "The time *has been fulfilled*, and the kingdom of God *has come near*" (πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, Mk 1:15). This use of two Greek perfect verbs expresses the imminent reality of this reign of God that has arrived in Jesus with continuing results.[48] Lane notes that this verse announces that God is come to invade history in order to bring about humanity's redemption.[49]

In the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptizer's sermon in Mt 3:2 has the same perfect verb for the kingdom, "*it has come near*" (ἤγγικεν), as does Jesus' preaching in Mt 4:17. Gibbs notes that this proclamation by John the Baptizer indicates the start of the eschaton that the OT prophets proclaimed,[50] and Obadiah's announcement of the imminent coming of YHWH's kingdom is a prime example.

Jesus' final words in the last chapter of the last biblical book, Revelation, likewise affirm the nearness of his coming and with it the full manifestation of his reign. His kingdom is now here but hidden in these last days inaugurated by his first advent. Jesus states in Rev 22:12, "Behold, I am coming quickly and my reward is with me to repay to each according to his work" (ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ, καὶ ὁ μισθός μου μετ᾽ ἐμοῦ ἀποδοῦναι ἑκάστῳ ὡς τὸ ἔργον ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ). Once again, we find the language of imminence tied to that of recompense with μισθός, denoting a "reward" or "payment due" (as in, e.g., Mt 5:12; 10:41–42; 20:8). This reflects the retribution theology in Obad 15,[51] notably, "your reward" (גְּמֻלְךָ).

The last words of Jesus in Scripture are quoted in Rev 22:20: "The one who testifies says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (λέγει ὁ μαρτυρῶν ταῦτα· ναί, ἔρχομαι ταχύ. ἀμήν, ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ). This verse, the last before the final benediction, forms a climax of the book and once again emphasizes the proximity of the coming of Christ as the one who sets all things in order, punishes evil, and awards his saints the reward he himself earned for them by his atonement on the cross. The liturgical refrain "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus," teaches that the proper response is to pray for his coming.[52] Since Christ's second advent is also tied to the final destruction of all our enemies (1 Cor 15:26), the concluding petition in Revelation may bother Christians attuned to Jesus' command to love our enemies (Lk 6:27, 35). Obadiah's message of hope for exiles also means destruction for their foes, and so it may

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[48] Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 573–74.

[49] Lane, *Mark*, 64.

[50] Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 159.

[51] Osborne, *Revelation*, 788.

[52] So, too, does the conclusion of another biblical book before its final benediction: the Aramaic "maranatha," "our Lord, come!" (μαράνα θά, 1 Cor 16:22).

likewise evoke such concerns. The imprecatory psalms are comparable in this respect and helpful because they give voice to the experience of suffering. For us, Psalm 137 is a particularly beneficial example because it emanates from an audience similar to Obadiah's: exiles in Babylon remembering Zion. Hence, Psalm 137 is perhaps the best known of this genre, and it even, just like Obadiah, condemns Edom's sins when Jerusalem was destroyed (Ps 137:7).

For us, this may be a challenging prayer. This language of violent destruction is disturbing and part of a larger interpretive question. Jione Havea proposes that "violence in holy scriptures contributes to the violence that takes place in contemporary societies. In other words, I want to believe that holy scriptures do influence the way people live, and the way things are."[53] As we look at this charge, we need to note first that Obadiah is a book about Edom and other nations that ravaged God's people receiving their just punishment. Thus, praying for the destruction of evil is not a prayer for unjustified violence. Edom and the nations get what they deserved based on Obad 15b. Further, we cannot use Scripture to warrant human violence against ethnic or political groups because the point of Obadiah is not that the Edomites are punished for being a foreign nation (Jacob was their "brother," Obad 10, 12) but for their wrongdoing against the city of God's habitation, Jerusalem. Obadiah does not call the sixth-century Judahites to pick up swords and avenge themselves. Rather, YHWH is the one who will bring about the great reversal in Obad 17–21, and his eschatological goal for Zion is peace (see the parallel passage Is 2:4). Obadiah's language of YHWH's retribution according to YHWH's eschatological timetable is vital for shaping our thinking on this topic. Seibert, an advocate of an approach that seeks to read Scripture in a way that does not condone contemporary violence, even classifies Obad 10 is an example of a condemnation of violence.[54]

The ardor for the near Day of YHWH to arrive, like the prayer for Christ to return quickly, is a cry of faith. Interpreters' attempts to extrapolate from Scripture's violent images to perpetrators who think they are right to carry out modern violent actions ignore the fact that the Bible does not call for people to take matters into their own hands and destroy evil persons. Romans 13 delegates this authority to the government, not to the church or individual Christians. There is no room in Scripture for vigilantism. The authors of the imprecatory psalms as well as Obadiah trust that God will be the one who brings about justice. St. Paul reminds us that our true struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers and principalities of darkness, and we put on the whole armor of God to be able to withstand the attacks of the devil (Eph 6:11–13).

Obadiah and the imprecatory psalms call evil evil. We see the pathos of Obadiah especially in the series of imperatives in Obad 12–14.[55] The prophet

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[53] Havea, "Pleasure and Grief, in Violence," 5.

[54] Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy*, 30.

[55] Havea helpfully observes the connection between grief and violence: "Regarding the suppression of grief, I consider the outbreaks of violence as the consequence of suppressed grief" ("Pleasure and Grief, in Violence," 12).

does not shy away from suffering or attempt to discount the problem. Instead, Obadiah and the imprecatory psalms give Christians permission to acknowledge the pain evil causes them. Commenting on the imprecatory psalms, C. S. Lewis observes: "It is monstrously simple-minded to read the cursings in the Psalms with no feeling except one of horror at the uncharity of the poets. … Their hatreds are the kind of thing that cruelty and injustice, by a sort of natural law, produce."[56] As we reflect on Obadiah, we see how the prophet repeatedly describes the pain caused by Edom's evil. Saleska also wrestles with the problem of the imprecatory psalms. He helpfully observes:

> The shocking and alienating voices in these psalms force upon me something that I do not think about nearly often enough nor even pay a lot of attention to: the visceral reality of violence and injustice that many humans suffer at the hands of others, and the heartbreaking anger and hatred that works in them as a result.[57]

Obadiah presents us with an example of longing for God to drastically punish even from the perspective of a traumatized Judahite audience that has lost everything.

The most powerful example in the book of the painful result of evil is in that rather odd series of negative imperatives in Obad 12–14, which implore Edom not to do what it has already done. In the commentary on those verses, we wrestled with the uniqueness of negative commands regarding events in past history. God's commands in these emotional negative imperatives for instigators of violence to stop hurting his people portray the helplessness of his people in the face of evil. With "do not … ," God gives voice to his people's vulnerability by the futility of absurd demands for their attacker to stop. God's answer to their pain is to end it by destroying Edom and providing saviors and sanctuary for them on the transformed Temple Mount. This is a powerful message of hope in the midst of suffering. By acknowledging the reality of evil, this language points us to the Savior who triumphs over it all on Mount Calvary and whose Easter resurrection inspires our hope for our own on the Last Day.

The punishment of evil also functions as a warning to us. Amos 1–2 and Zeph 2:1–3:8 both use the strategy of oracles against foreign nations to set up even greater judgment against Israel for its apostasy. We look for the destruction of evil (cf. Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8), recognizing that we are saved from the coming judgment only through the work God has done for us in Christ. The Formula of Concord thus observes:

> Through the example of certain lands and persons, God shows his own people how serious he is regarding what we all would have indeed merited and deserved given our defiance of God's Word and how often we deeply grieve the Holy Spirit. God does this so that we live in the fear of God and recognize

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[56] Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 25.

[57] Saleska, *Psalms 1–50*, 40.

> and praise God's goodness, which is granted us apart from and in spite of what we deserve—to whom he gives his Word and whom he does not harden or reject.[58]

This points us to the reality of our sin and the magnanimous gift of salvation in Christ through faith created and sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit by means of the Word and Sacraments. The church with these means of grace is the "Mount Zion" (Obad 17, 21) on which we stand. We also rejoice humbly knowing that we, based on our own merits, are no better than Edom on Mount Esau (Obad 8–9, 19, 21). Paul, in Rom 9:13, places the dynamic of Esau and Jacob in the context of his teaching on election. The doctrine of election by grace alone is given to console us. The Formula of Concord states that this doctrine "gives us wonderful comfort in crosses and trials, that in his counsel before time began God determined and decreed that he would stand by us in every trouble, grant us patience, give us comfort, create hope, and provide a way out of all things so that we may be saved [cf. 1 Cor. 10:13]."[59] Obadiah's implied Judahite audience was a people who had lost everything. He comforts them with the promise that a renewed Zion remains for them. He also comforts them with the promise that all evil, whether that of Edom or of all the nations, will be destroyed in "the Day of Yahweh," which is "near" (Obad 15). As members of the Christian church, "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16), these promises now belong to us. We find solace that Zion, the church, will prevail over the attacks of hell itself (Mt 16:18) and endure to the end of the age (Mt 28:20).[60]



Obadiah offers a message of hope with the dramatic defeat of evil and the eternal salvation of YHWH's kingdom. Obadiah presents us with an understanding of evil that takes it and the outrage it causes seriously, allowing us also to give voice to evil in our day. Outrage is the response of a traumatized people, so God's coming to destroy evil is an awesome message of hope. We should temper our glee, however. We rejoice to the utmost in the fact that God poured out his wrath at mankind's sin upon his Son, who vicariously atoned for it that we may be accounted righteous.[61] It is only through faith in Christ that we are saved; Jesus "delivers us from the wrath that is coming" (1 Thess 1:10). We rejoice with Obadiah that the kingdom does and ever will belong to Yahweh and that no evil will ever overcome it.

The Kingdom of God in the Small Catechism

The Small Catechism emphasizes the importance of the kingdom of God in Luther's explanation of the meaning of the Lord's Prayer. In the Second Petition, Jesus commands us to pray for the coming of the kingdom of God: "Thy kingdom come" (Mt 6:10). Luther teaches us that the kingdom of God "comes when

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[58] FC SD XI 59.

[59] FC SD XI 48.

[60] FC SD XI 50.

[61] Jn 1:29; Rom 3:21–28; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24.

our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity."[62] The Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer further clarifies what it means for the kingdom of God to come. Luther explains: "God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die."[63] When we pray these petitions, we pray according to Obadiah's proclamation in Obad 21: "the kingdom will belong to YHWH."

Conclusion

"The reign of heaven/God has come near" is a refrain that reverberates throughout the Gospels,[64] and Obadiah had proclaimed this same message couched in OT idiom. The kingdom of YHWH he announces comprises a restored Mount Zion, where God's regathered people find "survival" in the sense of holiness, salvation, and eternal life (Obad 17, 21). There they dwell forever. Because Obadiah also portends the defeat of Edom and all hostile nations, the book of Obadiah is a commentary on the resurrection of the tabernacle of David in Amos 9:11–15, another OT depiction of Christ's advent. At the coming of Christ, God's kingdom is established forevermore. By the cross, Christ defeats all the powers of evil and creates a global dominion for his church. When we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done; … give us today our daily bread" (Mt 6:10–11), we are praying for the ultimate consummation and actualization of what Obadiah preached and what Jesus accomplished in his earthly ministry. We long for the permanent abolishment of wickedness and the establishment of the Mount Zion known to us by faith now (Heb 12:22; 1 Pet 2:6) and by sight in the hereafter (Rev 21:10). After hearing this good news of the impending unveiling of the kingdom and the permanent trouncing of every last foe, we can only pray, "Come, Lord Jesus" (1 Cor 16:22; Rev 22:20).

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62 SC III 8 (*LSB*, p. 324).

63 SC III 11 (*LSB*, p. 324).

64 These are the words of John the Baptizer in Mt 3:2 and of Christ himself in Mt 4:17; Mk 1:15. This was the message Jesus gave to his apostles to proclaim in their ministry in his stead (Mt 10:7; Lk 10:9, 11).

Introduction to Habakkuk

The Presumptuous Prophet

Habakkuk seems to speak in a manner unbecoming of a prophet of God. The blunt, aggressive, and even presumptuous way that he speaks to God runs counter to what one would expect from the prophetic tradition. Instead of calling out Israel for its sins, the prophet calls out God for his behavior. Habakkuk accuses God of indifference toward the plight of the righteous (1:3, 13), and he states that God's Torah has proven ineffective to remedy the situation (1:4). He even challenges God to a debate that the prophet somehow believes he will win (2:1). His speech lacks the pleasantries and politeness with which one should approach the Almighty. In his commentary on the book, St. Jerome comes within an inch of accusing the prophet of blasphemy:

> For no one has dared with so bold a voice to challenge God to a debate about justice and say to him: Why is such a great iniquity involved in the realities of human affairs and in the πολιτεία ["polity"] of the world? … Do you see that he has a rash voice and in a certain way it belongs to one who is blaspheming, in a way calling out his Creator unto judgment? The fragile vessel is disputing against the potter as to why this thing or that has been done.[1]

Reportedly, the philosopher Voltaire also found this prophet to be dangerous and unpredictable, retorting: "Sir, you do not know much about this Habakkuk. This rogue is capable of anything."[2] Both of these testimonials reveal just how far Habakkuk stands outside of the norm of the prophetic tradition.

For this reason, Habakkuk is a source of uneasiness and angst for many interpreters. The rabbis showed clear discomfort at what the prophet had to say.[3] Likewise, many modern Christian interpreters, particularly those of an Evangelical background, try to take the edge off of Habakkuk's prophecy by labeling him an "honest doubter" and one "who answers back in faith."[4] After all, how could a true prophet be so hostile toward God and so presumptuous? But any attempt to sand off Habakkuk's rough edges does disservice to this book, which intentionally portrays Habakkuk as an audacious and abrasive figure.

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1 Jerome, *The Twelve Prophets*, 1:185–86.

2 Translated by Thomas, *Habakkuk*, 3.

3 Pinker, "Was Habakkuk Presumptuous?"

4 For examples of this approach, see Barker and Bailey, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 277–78; Bruce, "Habakkuk," 844–45; Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 141; Bruckner, *Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 197; Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi*, 36; Westendorf, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 88.

The Problem According to Habakkuk

The reason that Habakkuk speaks with such fervor and audacity is that he does not understand why YHWH is behaving in the way that the prophet is observing. The problem that Habakkuk raises is the perennially challenging topic of theodicy. Why does God allow the righteous to suffer and the wicked to prosper? Habakkuk sees that the righteous in Judah are suffering oppression, first at the hands of an unrighteous Judahite government and then at the hands of the monstrous Chaldeans (1:6). Habakkuk expects God to intervene on behalf of the righteous, but God appears to be silent and inactive. Even worse, he seems to be exasperating an already bad situation by sending the Chaldeans. Will YHWH allow this injustice to continue indefinitely?

This is a most relevant question for anyone who lives in the time between the promise and the fulfillment. Just as YHWH promised good to his people Israel, so he has promised in the NT to work all things for the good of those love the Lord (Rom 8:28). So why do the prayers of God's people go unanswered? Why does he not intervene to save them immediately? Habakkuk does not even entertain the possibility that the Lord is unable to save; therefore, the Lord must have chosen not to save. But why? To borrow Abraham's question: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do justly?" (Gen 18:25).

The Humbling of Habakkuk

The prophet Habakkuk believes that he himself is a righteous sufferer (like Job), but he is not behaving like the righteous do. YHWH's response to Habakkuk's questions serves as a subtle rebuke of the prophet's attitude. "If he acts presumptuously, his life is not upright within him. But the righteous one lives by his faith" (Hab 2:4, quoted in Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38). Habakkuk's audacity in believing that he knows better than God is a dangerous mindset. He is behaving presumptuously, and such a person will not survive when the justice of God is done. God invites him to give up his preconceived notions of what God should do and to live by faith instead. This leads into the woe oracles (2:6–20), where God reveals the ignoble end of those who are arrogant and self-absorbed. Habakkuk seems to have accepted this divine rebuke with humility, as is revealed by his words in response to the woes: "YHWH is in his holy temple. Hush before him, all the earth!" (2:20). Then the narrative continues with a vision (3:3–15) that is so disturbing that it affects the prophet physically (3:16). Surprisingly, Habakkuk's reaction to the vision is to praise YHWH and to express absolute confidence in him (3:17–19).

The plotline of the book of Habakkuk is the story of the prophet's transformation. The final words in Habakkuk's oracles are those of deep faith and abject humility. When he declares that, even if there is no visible sign that he can observe of God keeping his promises, he will live as if the promises have already been fulfilled: "Yet I intend to exult in YHWH. I intend to rejoice in the God of my salvation" (3:18). God has changed the heart of his hard-hearted prophet so that he now lives by faith. Thus YHWH—the righteous one, who

makes many righteous (Is 53:11)—has made even Habakkuk into one of the righteous. The reader of this book is likewise called to follow the prophet's narrative arc. The reader first identifies with Habakkuk's complaint, revealing the arrogance and doubt that live in every human heart. Each of us thinks that we know better than God, and each of us questions the way in which God governs history. But over the course of the book, the living Word of God works on the heart of the reader. We are drawn to repent and to respond in humility and trust, and so we too are counted among those righteous ones who live by faith.

How to Respond to the Vision

In YHWH's second speech (2:2–5), he promises a vision (given in 3:3–15) that will speak to the problem of theodicy and answer all of Habakkuk's concerns. This is a vision that will come according to God's timing and at his initiative (2:2–3), and he lays out three distinct ways to respond to the vision. The presumptuous one questions God's actions and is impatient about the fulfillment of the promise, but such a person is not right before God (2:4a). The arrogant one is so self-absorbed that he ignores God's work entirely, seeking always his own version of justice and power, but this one will be destroyed by his own greed (2:5). In contrast to both, the righteous one is like Abraham, who "believed in YHWH, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6, quoted in Rom 4:3, 22; Gal 3:6; James 2:23). The righteous one takes YHWH at his word, and this trust is the basis of his life now and at the end. This is the key insight of the book of Habakkuk. It does not explain why God allows the righteous to suffer or why the fulfillment is so long in coming. Instead, it says that faith is the appropriate response to the promises of YHWH, and it is the only response that leads to life. It bypasses the questions of theodicy and offers peace that is founded in the character and track record of YHWH, the faithful God. When experience insists that God is not keeping his promises, the solution to the problem of why the righteous suffer is not to gain an understanding of why God acts the way that he does. The solution is to trust him, to believe that YHWH will act justly and mercifully, to live by faith and not by sight (2 Cor 5:7).

While in the short-term (the "now," the penultimate) great injustice may exist, the book reveals that in the end (the "not yet," the ultimate), YHWH will indeed do justly. At the last, he will be proven just by his deeds. He will also see to it that those he has made righteous shall live (Hab 2:4b). As Habakkuk's woe oracles (2:6–20) reveal, God will punish the rapacious and cruel—whether Judahites or Chaldeans or anyone. Their own evil will fall upon them, and afterward the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of YHWH (2:14). As the theophanic vision (3:3–15) reveals, YHWH will remember his people with great zeal, and he will crush the head of their foe and rescue them (3:13). The vivid message is that God has great compassion for his people and that he will enact a new and greater exodus event to set them free.



The Exodus-Shaped Salvation

The salvation of God's people is displayed in Habakkuk through a theophanic vision contained within a psalmic composition (3:3–15). This song uses the archaic language of premonarchic Israelite poetry (e.g., Exodus 15; Deuteronomy 32–33; Judges 5; Psalm 68) to evoke the ancient deeds of YHWH. This poem also makes use of Israel's theophany tradition, which is rooted in the events of the ten plagues against Egypt (Exodus 7–12), the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14–15), and the lightning and fire of Mount Sinai (Exodus 19). When YHWH comes in his holiness and glory, nature convulses and is undone at his very presence (cf. Isaiah 30; Micah 1; Psalms 18; 29; 68). This text has been analyzed in light of the mythological imagery and royal iconography of the ancient Near East, and it does include motifs associated with kings and storm deities from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Levant. Indeed, Habakkuk does present the Lord as the conqueror of the chaotic forces of nature, a theme that is found in both ancient Near Eastern creation accounts and in biblical passages that extol YHWH as Creator (cf. Isaiah 27; 51; Psalms 74; 89; Job 26). However, Habakkuk goes beyond a mere recounting of how YHWH defeated the chaotic waters (Hab 3:8) to show YHWH's victory within history for the salvation of his people (3:13).

The salvation in Habakkuk is decidedly exodus-shaped. Habakkuk describes how YHWH responds to the outcry of Israel (Ex 14:10, 15; Hab 1:2), defends them by his Messenger in the pillar of cloud and fire (Ex 14:19–20; Hab 3:3–4), destroys his enemies by means of a staff (Ex 14:16; Hab 3:9, 14), splits the waters (Ex 14:16, 20; Hab 3:9), and goads the enemies into certain defeat (Ex 14:17; Hab 3:14). This is all told in language that is reminiscent of the Song of the Sea (Ex 15:1–18).

The purpose of evoking the exodus is to give context to Israel's hope in YHWH. The book began with Habakkuk criticizing God for his inaction. The book ends with a dramatic presentation of YHWH the Warrior in full action. The great paradigmatic OT example of God's action in history is the exodus. In rescuing his people from Egypt, YHWH is revealed as the God who hears the outcry of his people and remembers his covenant (Ex 2:24), the Warrior God who triumphs over the foe (Ex 15:3–12), "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in loyalty and faithfulness" (Ex 34:6). Habakkuk's hope rests securely upon the God who has a proven track record of faithfulness and justice and grace in his actions within human history. The ancient salvation that was accomplished for Israel in Egypt becomes the prototype for every saving act of God. The return from the Babylonian captivity is exodus-shaped, and both of these OT events point forward to an even greater salvation.

The exodus is the type *par excellence* of the saving work of Christ by the cross and the empty tomb (Jesus' *exodos* [ἔξοδος], Lk 9:31). The NT, much like Habakkuk, draws upon the narrative of YHWH rescuing his people from slavery in Egypt to express how Christ's work has rescued his people from slavery to sin and death (e.g., Jn 6:22–69; 1 Cor 5:7; 10:1–13). Even more, the

exodus is held up as the paradigm for the final vindication on the Last Day. For the Christian, a firm faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus provides hope even now for those who suffer through unanswered prayers. Just as Habakkuk looked to God's past acts to find hope for the future, Christians look to the crucifixion and resurrection (along with their many OT types) to find hope that God loves them and will act for their ultimate benefit.

Habakkuk's Place in the Old Testament Canon

In many ways, the OT book that is most thematically similar to Habakkuk is Job. Perhaps a good summary of Habakkuk is "Job in a hurry" because Habakkuk covers much of the same ground as Job but in a fraction of the time (a slim three chapters as opposed to a hefty forty-two). Both Job and Habakkuk enter into their time of spiritual trials and questioning because of a tragedy that they are experiencing—a personal catastrophe in the case of Job and a national one in Habakkuk's case. Both employ various indirect means to imply an accusation against God without explicitly characterizing God as evil. Finally, both encounter God in direct conversation and are driven to stunned silence and profound trust by that encounter (Hab 2:20; 3:16–19; Job 40:3–5; 42:1–6).

However, there is one strong difference between Job and Habakkuk. For Job, the great act of God to which his thoughts are (re-)directed is the creation, as God questions him about the features of the natural world (Job 38–41). In curiosity toward and appreciation of the good world that God has created, Job is drawn away from his quest for answers and driven back into the arms of his loving God.[5] For Habakkuk, it is instead the exodus that becomes the foundation for his new way of thinking (Habakkuk 3). The book of Job shows no knowledge of the exodus, which is to be expected, since the narrative seems to be set earlier, during the patriarchal period. Habakkuk, however, portrays the salvation to come in the language and imagery of the past exodus event as the paradigmatic OT example of how and why God operates within history. Thus a more accurate assessment is that Habakkuk would be "Job with knowledge of the exodus." Habakkuk's knowledge of YHWH's greatest action in the OT means that the book of Habakkuk comes to a more satisfying conclusion than Job can provide.

Another book of the OT that bears some resemblance to Habakkuk is Jonah. Both of these prophets take an aggressive and adversarial stance toward YHWH. In particular, the charges levied by both Jonah and Habakkuk are one and the same:

> Jonah 4:2: "YHWH, isn't this what I said while I was still in my land? That is why I previously fled to Tarshish, namely, that I knew that you are a gracious

[5] Job does include a redemption motif (e.g., the "mediator/redeemer" passages, Yahweh's win over Satan's wager, Yahweh's overpowering of Leviathan, and Yahweh's final restoration of Job), but the motif is not exodus-shaped.

> and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding with loyalty, and one who reverses verdicts of disaster."
>
> Hab 1:13c–d: "Why would you stare idly at treacherous ones? Why would you keep silent when a wicked one swallows up one who is more righteous than he?"

The prophets are accusing God of being too lenient and too merciful toward the oppressors. In their opinion, God's slowness to anger has just become slowness. In response to the presumptuousness of both Jonah and Habakkuk, the Lord acts in a fatherly manner to bring his wayward prophets to repentance and faith. While Jonah's ultimate disposition toward God and his justice is left uncertain with a cliff-hanger ending (Jonah 4:11), there is no doubt that Habakkuk changed his attitude, learning humility and living by faith, as is demonstrated in the concluding verses (Hab 3:16–19). Perhaps another good description for the book of Habakkuk is "Jonah with a genuine change of heart."

Despite Habakkuk's unorthodox means, he comes to distinctly orthodox conclusions. Ultimately, the book does uphold divine justice, and it advocates for humility before God, even though it does not begin that way. In the end, Habakkuk upholds the faith of Abraham by calling Israel to trust YHWH and live according to the faith that makes one righteous. Habakkuk is not an iconoclast. If anything, he shows great fidelity to the prophetic tradition, which is evident in the way in which he borrows heavily from his forebears. In fact, at times Habakkuk assumes that his audience has a similarly deep knowledge of the prophets. For example, the quotations of Micah 3:10; Jer 51:58; and Is 11:9 in Habakkuk's third woe oracle (Hab 2:12–14) are nearly incomprehensible without knowledge of the wider context of those works. Habakkuk also uses traditional prophetic forms, such as *hôy* ("woe") sayings, vision reports, and taunt songs, even though he tends to mutilate these forms for his own purposes. Habakkuk also makes heavy use of the poetic traditions of ancient Israel. In particular, the two complaints of Habakkuk (1:2–4; 1:12–2:1) bear strong similarity to the complaint and lament songs of the book of Psalms. Even more so, the psalm of Habakkuk (Habakkuk 3) uses as a model the archaic poetry of premonarchic Israel, such as Exodus 15; Deuteronomy 32–33; Judges 5; and Psalm 68. Overall, it is clear that Habakkuk does not stand outside of the religious traditions of ancient Israel but firmly within them.

Habakkuk's relationship to the prophetic tradition can also be viewed through its placement within the Book of the Twelve. While Habakkuk is distinct from the other prophets (except for maybe Jonah) in his aggressive attitude toward God and in the doubts he raises, he develops many of the major themes of the Book of the Twelve. These include God's faithfulness to his covenant, his power over the nations and all of history, divine judgment against the sins of the nations, and eschatological hope in the defeat of evil and the deliverance of God's people. Situated between Nahum and Zephaniah, Habakkuk also connects directly into the message of these two contemporaries of his. Habakkuk tempers Nahum's excitement about the fall of Assyria by drawing attention to

the looming dread of Babylon's ascent to power.[6] Then Habakkuk provides the theological preparation for Zephaniah with his focus on the cosmic judgment of the nations and the ultimate vindication of the righteous.[7] In the plotline of the Book of the Twelve, the first six prophets in the collection (Hosea through Micah) expose the sins of Israel and Judah, and the next three prophets (Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah) reveal the results of those sins. This paves the way for the redemption that is shown in the final three prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). In this way, the complaints of Habakkuk represent the nadir of God's people, as they face the crisis of exile.[8] It is the hinge on which the Book of the Twelve turns. From this canonical perspective, Habakkuk's harsh rhetoric can be viewed as the desperation of Israel's darkest hour.

Habakkuk and the New Testament

Theological interest in the book of Habakkuk for the last two millennia has largely revolved around a single half verse: "but the righteous one lives by his faith" (Hab 2:4b). In Rom 1:17, Paul uses this brief text to support his thesis statement for the epistle—that the righteousness of God comes by faith in Christ. He also uses it in a similar manner in Gal 3:11, in support of his assertion that one is not justified by the Law but by faith in Christ. The epistle to the Hebrews (Heb 10:37–38) also cites Hab 2:3–4 in order to encourage Christians to endure hardship by trusting in the promises of God. (For these three NT passages, see further the excursus "A Select History of the Use and Interpretation of Habakkuk 2:4b" following the commentary on 2:2–5.) Jewish interpretation too has been fascinated by the verse. For example, in the Talmud, Rabbi Simelai (third to fourth century AD) claimed that Habakkuk summarized the entire Mosaic revelation in the statement "the righteous will live by faith."[9]

The accusation has been raised that Paul took this passage from Habakkuk out of context. The original context was addressing how God's people endure unanswered prayer, a dilemma also addressed by the quotation in Hebrews. Paul, however, has expanded upon the meaning of the original text. He has taken a specific case—faith in the Lord's promises will sustain the righteous through the exile—and applied it as a universal principle—faith in the Lord's promises will sustain through all things, even the final judgment. As Middendorf observes:

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[6] Nahum and Habakkuk also work well as a diptych, with the psalmic material at the opening of Nahum (Nah 1:2–8) and the close of Habakkuk (chapter 3) forming an inclusio . Moreover, both books are labeled as a "prophetic speech," *maśśāʾ*. (See the excursus "The Definition of מַשָּׂא (*maśśāʾ*), 'Prophetic Speech' " following the commentary on 1:1.) Both describe their prophet's experience as a "vision" (חָזוֹן, Nah 1:1; Hab 2:2–3). Both are concerned about God's justice vis-à-vis foreign oppressors. Both also grapple with the perception of slowness with regard to divine justice (see Nah 1:3). Also, a number of catchwords bind these works together. For more information, see Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*, 147.

[7] Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve*, 652.

[8] House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, 111–62.

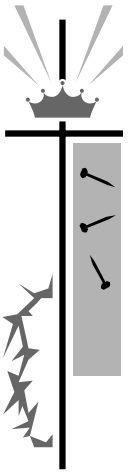
[9] Talmud, *Makkot*, 24a.

"The fact that Paul broadens the passage beyond Habakkuk's original intent allows him to stress different, yet equally valid, facets of 'the righteous person will live from faith'… throughout the letter."[10]

Nonetheless, the Pauline message—the truth that justification comes by faith in the Lord—is not absent from the book of Habakkuk. First of all, the eschatological dimension is already present in Habakkuk, whose vision is explicitly "for the end" (2:3). Moreover, one only needs to look to the life of the prophet himself, as YHWH works faith in him over the course of the book. At the beginning, Habakkuk demands that God justify his own actions. However, the Lord applies the Law and the Gospel to Habakkuk in the ensuing dialogue, and this divine work produces faith in the heart of the prophet, which is expressed at the end of the book in a declaration of absolute trust. Thus one observes that Habakkuk has become righteous by the Lord's doing. He now lives by faith.

The Theology of the Cross

The Lutheran distinction between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross provides valuable perspective on the book of Habakkuk. The prophet Habakkuk at the beginning of the book is a theologian of glory. He believes that he and the other "good" Judahites should receive the peace, health, and prosperity described at times in the Mosaic covenant. He also assumes that God's work in history should be completely apparent to human reason. When experience contradicts these assumptions, Habakkuk lashes out in frustration. In the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, Martin Luther wrote about such people: "That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened."[11]



The theologian of the cross, however, looks at the situation differently. Luther's next thesis is this: "He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross."[12] The theologian of the cross looks at Christ crucified and sees God's glory cloaked in shame, God's power cloaked in weakness, God's life cloaked in death. Habakkuk, at the end of his book, has been shaped into a theologian of the cross. The prophet has stopped trying to pierce the veil of God's hidden will, and instead he looks at what God has revealed, particularly in his ancient works of creation and exodus. There he sees a righteous God. Accordingly, Habakkuk clings to the vision and promise of God rather than trusting his own experience. Thus, even in the midst of oppression and devastation, when there remains no empirical reason to believe, Habakkuk trusts in the promises of his righteous God. He finds joy and strength in YHWH his Lord.

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[10] Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 106.

[11] AE 31:52 (Thesis 19).

[12] AE 31:52 (Thesis 20).

Challenges of Interpreting Habakkuk

Habakkuk is a difficult book to grapple with. The book raises difficult questions and real doubts, and it deals with them honestly. There are no pat answers to Habakkuk's dilemma. However, it is not just the ideas of the book that are trying; the linguistic and poetic dimensions of the Hebrew text also provide major challenges for the interpreter. The poetry of Habakkuk is terse and laconic, and the linguistic register can be raw and colloquial. The vocabulary can also be fairly obscure, and this, combined with the minimal syntax, can leave the reader perplexed at times. The usage of verbal forms in Hebrew poetry is already problematic, but this problem seems to be magnified in this short book. The book of Habakkuk also defies modern attempts to fit it within genres or forms. In fact, it seems to be a major feature of the book that it will begin a traditional form but then abandon it partway through. In addition, the prophet seems to be employing archaicizing language and shifts into dialectical forms (code-shifting), especially in the closing psalm (Habakkuk 3). Altogether, the prophet Habakkuk has written a text that demands a careful and sensitive reading with every exegetical tool deployed in order to understand his message. It is a book that rewards careful rereading with a willingness to revise hypotheses. In writing this commentary, some degree of humility became necessary when struggling with the more difficult passages. Just as Habakkuk learned humility at the feet of YHWH, so writing this commentary has been a humbling experience. I will assert what I understand well with confidence, but I will also acknowledge when I am stumbling around at the edge of understanding.

Excursus

A Select History of the Use and Interpretation of Habakkuk 2:4b

It would be impossible to overstate the importance to the Jewish and Christian faiths of this tiny clause (only three Hebrew words) rendered as "but the righteous one lives by his faith" (וְצַדִּיק בֶּאֱמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה). Hab 2:4b has been used as a foundation of doctrine and a guide for life. While it is not reasonable in these pages to do a complete history of interpretation, a select group of significant Jewish and Christian uses of this text will be explored. This excursus will first investigate the interpretation of Hab 2:4b in the Jewish tradition, focusing on the Dead Sea Scrolls and the corpus of rabbinic literature. Then we will turn to the NT, examining the three times that this passage is quoted there (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:37–38). Finally, the importance of Hab 2:4b to the Lutheran Confessions will receive some attention.

In the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Qumran community's *pesher* (commentary) on Habakkuk, dated to the second half of the first century BC, has the following interpretation of Hab 2:4b: "They interpret it as all those who do the Torah in the house of Judah, whom God will deliver from the house of judgment because of their toil and because of their faith in the teacher of righteousness" (1QpHab 8.1–3). Naturally, the Qumran community cannot resist connecting any reference to righteousness to their beloved founder, "the teacher of righteousness" (מורה הצדק). As one would expect from their sectarian exegesis, the "arrogant man" (2:5b) who stands in contrast with "the righteous one" (2:4b) is none other than "the wicked priest" (הכהן הרשע), a figure who can be identified with the Sadducean high priest, the inveterate enemy of the Qumran community. Here the righteous are those who are faithful to the teacher of righteousness and to his particular interpretation of the Torah. Notice the distinctly different approach between the Qumran interpretation of Habakkuk and Paul's interpretation in Rom 1:17 and Gal 3:11 (see below). Where Paul sees Hab 2:4b as an expression of the Gospel, the *pesher* views it as a matter of the proper understanding of the Law.[1]

In Rabbinic Literature

Hab 2:4b was influential also in rabbinic Judaism. The *Mekilta of Rabbi Ishmael*, a halakhic midrash from perhaps the third century AD, quotes it as a

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[1] For further discussion, see Sanders, "Habakkuk in Qumran, Paul, and the Old Testament."

proof text that God is faithful to those who have faith in him.[2] This is a fairly straightforward usage of Hab 2:4b, and it generally stands in the spirit of its original context within Habakkuk. Rabbi Ishmael seems to be aware of multiple meanings of "by his faith" (בֶּאֱמוּנָתוֹ), referring to both "our faith" and "God's faithfulness."

More significantly, Hab 2:4b receives the prime place in an extended discussion from the Babylonian Talmud.[3] Rabbi Simelai (third or fourth century AD) gives the number of commandments of the Torah as 613, and he explains where this number comes from. He then walks through a series of Bible passages that he understands to be summaries of the whole Torah. He claims that David summarized the Torah down to eleven commandments in Psalm 15. Isaiah then reduced this to six (Is 33:15–16), Micah to three (Micah 6:8), and Isaiah again to two (Is 56:1). Finally, Amos reduced the Torah to a single command: "seek me and live" (Amos 5:4), and likewise Habakkuk reduced the entire requirements of the Torah to a single principle: "the righteous will live by faithfulness" (Hab 2:4b). Here the Talmud clearly envisions "will live" to mean "will behave" and "by faith(fulness)" to refer to a manner of life that is consistent with the covenantal requirements of the Torah. In other words, the rabbinic tradition, unlike the Christian one, sees this verse as speaking primarily about sanctification (living a righteous life) and not about justification (receiving God's righteousness). To this, Horace Hummel comments:

> How little can be absolutely "proved" on a purely philological basis, however, is evidenced by the fact that in Judaism too [Hab 2:4b] is a favorite text—but in the sense of *meritorious* faithfulness to the commandments. And, as usual, if Scripture were not its own interpreter, there would be no definitive way to respond.[4]

In the New Testament

Hebrews 10:37–38

The tenth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews contains a severe warning about abandoning the true faith (Heb 10:26–31) and an appeal to endure in faith (Heb 10:32–39). It is in this latter part that the author of Hebrews draws upon a loose quotation of Hab 2:3d–4 in support of his charge to persevere. This quotation is easier to understand when its Greek is compared to the MT and the LXX:

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[2] *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, 25.1.29, quoted in Neusner, *Habakkuk, Jonah, Nahum and Obadiah in Talmud and Midrash*, 7.

[3] Babylonian Talmud, *Makkot*, 23b–24a, quoted in Neusner, *Habakkuk, Jonah, Nahum and Obadiah in Talmud and Midrash*, 49–52.

[4] Hummel, "Justification in the Old Testament," 15.

Comparison of Hebrews 10:37–38 and Habakkuk 2:3d–4				
Heb	Hebrews	Hab	LXX Habakkuk	MT Habakkuk
10:37a	For, yet a little while ἔτι γὰρ μικρὸν ὅσον ὅσον			
10:37b	**the Coming One** will come and will not delay. ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἥξει καὶ οὐ χρονίσει.	2:3d	For coming, he will come, and will not delay. ὅτι ἐρχόμενος ἥξει καὶ οὐ μὴ χρονίσῃ.	Indeed, he/it will actually come. He/it will not delay. כִּי־בֹא יָבֹא לֹא יְאַחֵר
	[Displaced to Heb 10:38b after Heb 10:38a/Hab 2:4b.]	2:4a	If he should draw back, my soul has no pleasure in him. ἐὰν ὑποστείληται, οὐκ εὐδοκεῖ ἡ ψυχή μου ἐν αὐτῷ.	Behold, his life is swollen/ presumptuous, not upright in him. הִנֵּה עֻפְּלָה לֹא־יָשְׁרָה נַפְשׁוֹ בּוֹ
10:38a	But **my** righteous one from faith will live. ὁ δὲ δίκαιός μου ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.	2:4b	But the righteous will live from my faithfulness. ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεώς μου ζήσεται.	But the righteous one will live by his faith(fulness). וְצַדִּיק בֶּאֱמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה
10:38b	But if he should shrink back, my soul has no pleasure in him. καὶ ἐὰν ὑποστείληται, οὐκ εὐδοκεῖ ἡ ψυχή μου ἐν αὐτῷ.			

The starting point for the Hebrews text is something close to the LXX with its variations from the MT (see the textual notes on 2:2–5). In particular, Heb 10:38a uses the first person possessive pronoun "my" in its quote of Hab 2:4b, as in the LXX, rather than the third person possessive pronoun "his" of MT Hab 2:4b. However, the author of Hebrews does not use the LXX text precisely. These are the main differences:

- The first line (Heb 10:37a) draws upon a phrase from the LXX version of Is 26:20 ("a little while," μικρὸν ὅσον ὅσον). This text seems to have been on the mind of the author of Hebrews since some of the verbiage from several verses earlier in Heb 10:27 ("zealous fire," πυρὸς ζῆλος) seems to allude to the same chapter of Isaiah

(Is 26:11).[5] Even though the exact wording of Heb 10:37a is not found in Habakkuk, the idea of waiting for an imminent fulfillment of God's Word overlaps the thoughts expressed in Hab 2:3a–c.

- From where the author of Hebrews has chosen to begin this quotation, all of the references to the "vision" have been left out. A reasonable interpretation of the MT is that the "vision" is the subject of the verbs "tarries" in Hab 2:3c and "will come about" and "will not delay" in Hab 2:3d and the referent of the pronoun "it" in "by faith in it" in Hab 2:4b (see the textual notes on 2:3–4). However, Heb 10:37–38 takes the subject of the verbs to be "the Coming One" and the referent of the pronoun "my" to be God, presumably.
- In Hab 2:3d, the LXX had translated the first verb (the infinite absolute בֹּא) of the two Hebrew verbs rendered as "will actually come about" as a participle, "coming" (ἐρχόμενος). The quotation in Heb 10:37b adds the definite article to the participle, which changes it into a substantive, "the Coming One" (ὁ ἐρχόμενος). This enhances the messianic dimension of the text, which will be significant to the point that the author of Hebrews is making. It also highlights the eschatological dimension that was already present in Habakkuk.
- The personal pronoun "my" (μου) from the LXX version of Hab 2:4b has been displaced. Instead of modifying "faithfulness," "my faithfulness" (πίστεως μου, LXX Hab 2:4b), it modifies "righteous one," "my righteous one" (ὁ … δίκαιός μου, Heb 10:38a). This matches the variant reading that is found in two LXX manuscripts (Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus) of Hab 2:4b.
- After Heb 10:38a, Hebrews inserts a contrastive "but" (καί) at the start of Heb 10:38b. This heightens the contrast between "my righteous one" (Heb 10:38a) and the one who would "shrink back" (Heb 10:38b).
- Most significantly, one entire line is displaced. Heb 10:38a quotes Hab 2:4b and then Heb 10:38b quotes Hab 2:4a. The author thus moves Hab 2:4a to be after Hab 2:4b. This has two effects. First, it brings "my righteous one" closer to "the Coming One," which highlights that "my righteous one" is awaiting "the Coming One." Second, it moves the warning not to "shrink back" to the end, thus emphasizing it.

As one can see, Heb 10:37–38 is not a straight quotation but rather a "paraphrased pastiche," as Kleinig terms it.[6] In other words, the author of Hebrews is not so much using Hab 2:3–4 as a proof text; rather, he is applying the language and theology of Habakkuk to the present situation in the life of the church.

Turner points out that, even though the phraseology in Heb 10:37–38 is different from the original text of Hab 2:3–4, there is a great deal of consistency of thought in the big picture between Habakkuk and Hebrews.[7] In both texts, God has promised to save his people—with the fullness of that salvation coming eschatologically—and the right way to respond to that promise is in faith. Both texts encourage the audience to trust in the reliability of God and his revelation, even in the face of hardship and oppression. Since Heb 10:37–38 does not quote Hab 2:3–4 as a proof text but rather makes an application of that text,

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[5] Kleinig, *Hebrews*, 533.

[6] Kleinig, *Hebrews*, 533.

[7] Turner, *Habakkuk*, 130–31.

a more helpful approach would be to focus on which strands of Habakkuk are being emphasized and how the author of Hebrews is expanding upon Habakkuk. Hebrews places a strong focus on the Christological dimension of Habakkuk, while also bringing the Eschatological strand to the forefront. It also emphasizes the Historical sense of living in fidelity to God, and it makes the warning aspect of the text more severe. All of these strands are present in Habakkuk, even though the Christological horizon is more muted there than it is in Hebrews.[8]

Romans 1:17

In the first chapter of Romans, Paul begins a discussion of the relationship between righteousness and faith with this assertion: "for in it [the Gospel], the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith" (δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν). Immediately, he supports this assertion with the citation of Hab 2:4b: "just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith' " (καθὼς γέγραπται· ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται). Paul has been accused of ignoring the context of Habakkuk. Many modern interpreters read Habakkuk as primarily concerned with the righteous Israelites who should remain faithful to God (as opposed to those who are "presumptuous" [2:4a] and "arrogant" [2:5b]) in the midst of a historical crisis (Babylon's conquest of Jerusalem; see the commentary on 2:2–5). Such interpreters claim that Paul, in contrast, is primarily concerned with saving faith (as the opposite of works), which makes one righteous before God and gives eternal life. First of all, that opinion is based upon a reading of Habakkuk that is too narrow and that is limited to its immediate historical context. The perspective of Habakkuk is simultaneously eschatological,[9] which invites further NT revelation to expand and clarify it.[10] Second, a closer reading of Romans shows that Paul is not proof texting but rather that the spirit of Habakkuk enlivens the thought of the whole epistle.

In order to understand how Paul understands "faith(fulness)" from Hab 2:4b (LXX: πίστις) in Rom 1:17b, it is useful first to turn one's attention to how Paul uses this word twice in the previous half of the verse: "from faith to faith" (ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν). The NIV takes this as a sort of quasi-superlative: "by faith from first to last." However, Middendorf probably has the right sense of it when he interprets the first "faith" as referring to God's faithfulness and the second as referring to our "faith."[11] This could be expanded as "from (God's) faithfulness (as the source/origin of righteousness) to (our) faith (which receives his righteousness)." First, this interpretation highlights the faithfulness of God, who is

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[8] For the Historic, Eschatological, Salvific, and Christological interpretations of 2:4b, see the commentary on it in the preceding pericope.

[9] Again, see the commentary on 2:4b.

[10] Turner, *Habakkuk*, 131.

[11] Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 96–97.

described as faithful more frequently than other figure in the OT.[12] Second, this interpretation explains the connection between righteousness and faith that Paul is drawing out here: "for in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed" (Rom 1:17a). If Paul is trying to establish that God's faithfulness is the only basis of our faith, then Hab 2:4b is the most relevant text to cite.

Paul's quotation exactly matches LXX Hab 2:4b with one glaring exception: he omits the possessive pronoun "my" (μου) in "my faith(fulness)." All of the manuscripts of Romans agree on this issue with only a single exception.[13] This seems to be a deliberate omission by Paul. This omission may display text-critical ambivalence, assuming that Paul was aware of the three different textual traditions: (1) the Masoretic, "his faith(fulness)"; (2) the majority reading of the LXX, "my faith(fulness)"; and (3) a minority reading of the LXX (as also in Hebrews): "my righteous one." After all, each of these three readings is theologically correct. We are saved by faith, *and* we are saved by God's faithfulness, *and* we are righteous because of the faithfulness of Christ, who is the Righteous One. Paul will affirm all of these things over the course of his epistle to the Romans. For him to commit to a single reading would narrow the interpretation too much, whereas Paul intends to be expansive.

Both Paul in Rom 1:17b and the LXX in Hab 2:4b use the Greek preposition ἐκ, "from, by," in the phrase ἐκ πίστεως, "from/by faith," to translate the Hebrew preposition בְּ, "by, in." The most natural sense of the Greek preposition is for source or origin (see the third option in the list in the commentary on 2:4b). Looking at Paul's word choice of the same preposition and noun, ἐκ πίστεως, in the previous half verse, "*from faith* to faith" (Rom 1:17a), it is possible that Paul is using the LXX translation to highlight the theocentric side of Hab 2:4b: "the righteous will live by (God's) faithfulness," i.e., the life of God's justified people flows out of his faithfulness to them.

So what is the best way to characterize Paul's use of Hab 2:4b?[14] First, some assert that Paul is making the exact same point as the prophet. Habakkuk is writing about living out one's faith in the midst of crisis, and Paul is encouraging the same thing.[15] While this is a theme in the epistle to the Romans (especially in chapters 12–15), it is hardly a predominant theme. Also, if Paul wanted to highlight only this interpretation, it is hard to understand why he would have omitted the possessive pronoun "his" from "his faith(fulness)" in the Masoretic tradition. Second, others believe that Paul is primarily concerned with how one becomes righteous before God. Thus he is interpreting Hab 2:4b to mean that the one who is righteous on the basis of faith (having "from faith" modify "the righteous

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[12] Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 96–97, asserts that this interpretation is "rooted in the theocentric sense of the Hebrew nouns for 'faithfulness' (אֱמוּנָה and אֱמֶת)."

[13] Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C) adds "my" (μου) in a different position, modifying "the righteous" (ὁ δίκαιος), in order to harmonize it with the reading from Heb 10:37–38.

[14] The brief survey that follows is indebted to Middendorf, *Romans 1–8,* 101–3.

[15] Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Romans,* 55–56.

one" instead of "will live") will have eternal life.[16] Certainly, Paul does teach that in Romans, and he supports this belief from Habakkuk. However, it would be too narrow to focus on this one fact to the exclusion all of strands of thought about righteousness, faith, and life—in Romans and in Habakkuk. Also, once again, there would have been no reason for Paul to delete the MT's possessive pronoun "his" if this was the entirety of Habakkuk's usefulness to the apostle. Third, still other scholars emphasize that both Romans and Habakkuk are books about God. Habakkuk is a book of theodicy, and Romans likewise is asserting that God is righteous and faithful. Again, there is truth in this interpretation, but it is incomplete. Moreover, it does not explain the immediate context in which Paul's quotation appears. Fourth and finally, some interpreters assert that Paul is using the messianic reading of Hab 2:4b. That is to say, the "Righteous One" is to be read as a messianic title, and Paul understands the import of the verse to be "Christ is faithful." Again, that is an entirely true statement, but it is not sufficient to understand what Paul is doing in Romans. In particular, there is no evidence that Romans uses "Righteous One" as a messianic title. Of the above explanations, the second one comes closest to explaining Paul's usage of Habakkuk. However, a stronger interpretation would be that Paul does not limit himself to a single sense of righteousness, faith(fulness), and life but that he is exploring these terms in all of their fullness.

Paul's quotation of Habakkuk in the first chapter of Romans is much more than just a proof text. It shapes Paul's thought for the entire book. In Romans, Paul is concerned with the nexus of righteousness, faith, and life—in all the senses of these words that are relevant to Christ and his people—and he quotes Hab 2:4b because it brings all three of these ideas together in a single clause: "the righteous will live by faith." Moody argues that Hab 2:4b is the structural key to the entire book.[17] Romans 1–4 explores the righteousness of God in relation to faith. Romans 5–8 considers righteousness in relation to life. Romans 9–11 is an excursus about the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in light of what has already been discussed. Finally, Romans 12–16 explores the relationship between faith and faithfulness as two sides of the same coin.

Therefore, when Paul reads the word "righteous" in Hab 2:4b, he has in mind both the righteousness of God and our righteousness, whose source is the righteousness of Christ. When he reads "from faith," he is thinking of God's faithfulness, the reliability of God's Word, and our faith, whose object is God's faithfulness as revealed in his reliable Word. And when he reads "will live," he is considering both the full and never-ending life whose source is Christ, as well as the Christian life that is lived in response to all that Christ has done. Each of these ideas is evident in the epistle to the Romans, and Paul allows all of these meanings to exist side by side. Moreover, there is a deep interrelatedness

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[16] AE 25:136–37; Nygren, *Romans*, 12–16, 86; Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*, 165–67.

[17] Moody, "The Habakkuk Quotation in Romans 1:17."

between these ideas. Our righteousness before God *is* God's righteous that he gifts us. Our faith is grounded in God's faithfulness, and our faithfulness flows from this faith. Our life of faithfulness now is only possible because of the eschatological life that is already ours now. To draw hard distinctions between these things goes against the message of Paul.

Finally, most of these ideas are present already in the book of Habakkuk, albeit some in inchoate form. As argued in the commentary on Hab 2:2–5, Habakkuk is calling upon his audience to trust that God's vision will provide an answer to a historical crisis, but this portends a much greater fulfillment. Ultimately, the vision points to an eschatological fulfillment in which the faithful God will give life to those who trust in him and his revelation. This interconnected Historical-Eschatological interpretation also leaves room for further revelation to unveil how God's faithfulness will be accomplished, which contains the seeds of a Christological and Salvific understanding.[18] Thus Paul is a faithful interpreter of the prophet. He does not merely repeat Habakkuk, but he also elucidates and expands upon the prophet's message under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 3:11

In the third chapter of Galatians, Paul is drawing a contrast between two OT texts that speak about "living." In Gal 3:12, he quotes part of Lev 18:5, which reads: "you shall keep my statutes and ordinances, which, if a person does them, he will live by them." But he also quotes from Hab 2:4b, which says that "the righteous will live from faith" (Gal 3:11). In other words, the question is not "how will one live?" but "who will live?"[19] Will the commandment-keepers live, as Leviticus says, or will the believers live, as Habakkuk says? While the commandment-keepers would theoretically live, Paul asserts in Gal 3:11a that, in practical terms, it is impossible because no fallen human beings keep the commandments sufficiently (that is, perfectly). Therefore, the only actual source of life is faith.

Here Paul is focusing primarily upon the Salvific reading of Hab 2:4b. The expression "from faith" in Gal 3:11b stands in contrast with "in the Law" in Gal 3:11a, which shows that Paul intends "faith" (πίστις) to mean saving faith in the faithful God, which is the opposite of works-righteousness. By putting "will live" (ζήσεται, Gal 3:11b) in parallel with "is justified" (δικαιοῦται, Gal 3:11a), Paul is asserting that "life" in this passage refers to the full eschatological life that never ends. Therefore, Paul is making the argument that "faith" here cannot mean "human faithfulness," if "will live" here means "will live eternally." In other words, Paul's quotation moves against the interpretation "the righteous shall live because of his [the person's own] faithfulness." By

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[18] Again, for the Historic, Eschatological, Salvific, and Christological interpretations of Hab 2:4b, see the commentary on it in the preceding pericope.

[19] Das, *Galatians*, 318–19.

emphasizing the Salvific aspect of Hab 2:4b so strongly, Paul is not necessarily rejecting the Historical, Eschatological, or Christological dimensions. After all, each of these themes is present in Paul's writings. However, these other layers of meaning are not immediately applicable to the particular argument that Paul is making here.[20]

Paul's quotation of Hab 2:4b in Gal 3:11 is identical to the one in Rom 1:17 except for the inconsequential omission of δέ.[21] That identicalness means that Paul has chosen to omit the possessive pronoun "his" or "my" with "by faith" (ἐκ πίστεως) also here, as in Rom 1:17. It is possible that the omission of the pronoun here is in response to how the text was used by his rivals—a usage which may have borne similarity to how Hab 2:4b is quoted in rabbinic literature.[22] Paul is rejecting an interpretation that would allow for human faithfulness to be a source of eternal life.

In the Lutheran Confessions

The verse "the righteous shall live by (his) faith" is quoted four times in the Book of Concord: thrice in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession and once in the Formula of Concord. In these texts, the Reformers are examining the relationship between faith and life or between righteousness and life, and Habakkuk is marshalled in support of their arguments.[23] Following here are descriptions of the contexts of those quotes.

Apology IV, "Justification," 100

Here Melanchthon is making the point that righteousness comes by faith alone, and he defines that faith as that "by which they believe that God is propitious"[24] (*qua credunt Deum propitium esse*).[25] The Latin word *propitius*, "favorable, well-disposed, gracious, kind, propitious," is a cultic term related to sacrifice.[26] In other words, saving faith is here defined as faith that God is favorably disposed toward humanity because of Christ's sacrifice. This is expressed paraphrastically in the German translation of Ap IV 100: "that God

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[20] Again, for the Historic, Eschatological, Salvific, and Christological interpretations of Hab 2:4b, see the commentary on it in the preceding pericope.

[21] The particle δέ is in LXX Hab 2:4b; Rom 1:17; Heb 10:38. This connective sometimes has a slight disjunctive force ("but"), although it often need not be translated.

[22] Das, *Galatians*, 318–19.

[23] The various editions of the Latin and German texts of the Lutheran Confessions can vary in details such as whether or not the quoted verse is from Hab 2:4 or from Rom 1:17 or from both. Quotations that include the pronoun "his" ("will live by his faith") are more congruent with MT Hab 2:4 (which includes a pronoun) than with Rom 1:17 (whose Greek text lacks a pronoun). Compare *Concordia Triglotta*, the 1930 edition of *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (BSLK), and the 2014 edition of *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (BSELK).

[24] *Triglotta*, 151.

[25] *Triglotta*, 150.

[26] Lewis and Short, *propitius*, I.

is gracious through Christ"[27] (*daß Gott durch Christum gnädig sei*).[28] Moreover, Melanchthon here understands the "life" that comes by faith to mean a life that "brings forth peace, joy, and eternal life in the heart" (Ap IV 100, Latin)[29]—in other words, the full range of what life can entail in Scripture. In this text, Melanchthon expertly weaves together several of the major theological emphases that come from the interpretation of Habakkuk.

Apology IV, "Justification," 179

Later in the same article, "Justification," the octavo Latin edition quotes the verse.[30] Melanchthon then explains that faith is not "a worthwhile work in and of itself" but rather that faith "receives the promise that is offered." That leads to this conclusion: "Therefore faith alone justifies, and good works please God on account of faith."

Apology XII, "Repentance," 47

Here Melanchthon is making the point that both contrition and faith are necessary parts of repentance. He demonstrates the relationship between faith and life: "Because there is no peace for the conscience except by faith, therefore faith alone quickens, according to the word (Hab. 2:4), 'The righteous shall live by faith.' "[31]

Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, III, "The Righteousness of Faith Before God," 57

The argument here concerns Christology, specifically how Christ's righteousness avails before God. The Formula affirms that, in the incarnation, the divine and human natures were united in the one person of Christ and that the union of the two natures was necessary for Christ to accomplish our salvation (FC SD III 56). Then it asserts that the obedience of the whole person of Jesus Christ satisfies God's righteousness and that therefore our righteousness comes from Christ and is revealed in the Gospel. To support this assertion, the confessors cite Rom 5:19; 1 Jn 1:7; Rom 1:17; Hab 2:4. Here the Formula follows the Christological/messianic reading of Hab 2:4b, where "the Righteous One" is understood to be Jesus Christ, and his "living by faithfulness" is his perfect obedience to the Father.

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[27] Author's translation.

[28] *Triglotta*, 150.

[29] Tappert, 121.

[30] The relevant paragraph with the quote is one of several paragraphs that are in the octavo Latin of Ap IV 179 (these paragraphs are given in italic in Kolb-Wengert) but are absent from the quarto Latin of Ap IV 179 (and so they do not appear in *Concordia Triglotta*, the translation of Tappert, or *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* [bookofconcord.cph.org]).

[31] Tappert, 188.

Summary

The Lutheran Confessions make a few distinctive exegetical moves in their handling of Hab 2:4b. First, they treat this text in a distinctively Pauline way, understanding Habakkuk to speak of the relationship between the righteousness given by Christ, the faith that trusts in Christ's work, and the life that results from it. Second, the Lutheran Confessions understand "life" to be more than just persevering through crisis and also more than just eternal life in heaven. "Life" is the fullness of what believers receive in Christ: "peace, joy, and eternal life in the heart" (Ap IV 100, Latin). Finally, the Lutheran Confessions allow for a Christological reading of the text (i.e., Christ is the "Righteous One") to coexist with a reading that deals with the justification of humans through faith in Christ.