HABAKKUK 3:16 – WHERE DID THE אֲשֶׁר GO?

Robert D. Holmstedt

University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

Almost every modern treatment of the אֲשֶׁר in Hab 3:16 opts to emend the text to a form of אָשֻׁר 'step', citing the text of the Septuaging as support. The few exegetes that choose to maintain the Masoretic Text interpret the אֲשֶׁר as either a causal or concessive particle. In this article, I will argue that neither option is viable—the first does not have convincing textual support; the second reflects an inaccurate understanding of Biblical Hebrew grammar. Rather, I will propose that the אֲשֶׁר clause in Hab 3:16 is an "extraposed relative clause" that modifies the substantive תַּחְתַּי.

1. INTRODUCTION

Most recent translations of Habakkuk 3:16 avoid translating the relative word אֲשֶׁר that begins the second half of the verse both because they do not consider the presence of the אֲשֶׁר grammatically appropriate and because they argue that ancient translations understood the sequence of letters אשר as an unrelated noun. These approaches illustrate well James Barr's description of textual (in contrast to philological) analysis of linguistic difficulties in the Bible:

> *[A] textual discussion* usually begins from a different starting-point, which we can name only vaguely as a 'difficulty'. The reader finds 'a difficulty' in the text which he is reading. He feels that it 'does not make sense'. The grammar is 'wrong', i.e., does not fit with usual patterns of usage. . . . he may begin to suspect an error in the text. If there is no manuscript reading to support his conclusions, what he produces will be a conjectural emendation, which he will support by arguing that it makes better sense. . . .
>   A *philological treatment* does not suggest a differing original text, corrupted by graphic error; rather, it elucidates the meaning of the existing text through the application of linguistic evidence hitherto ignored. It thus justifies the existence of the rare or anomalous words which had constituted the original difficulty, and by removing the difficulty it undercuts the foundations of the textual treatment.[1]

The overwhelming majority of modern treatments of the אֲשֶׁר of Hab 3:16 in the Masoretic Text, given in (1), choose the path of textual analysis and emend the אֲשֶׁר (stich β2).

---

[1]J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1968; reprint with additions and corrections, Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1987), pp. 3, 6 (emphases added).

(1) α1   שָׁמַעְתִּי ׀ וַתִּרְגַּז בִּטְנִי
    α2   לְקוֹל# צָלֲלוּ שְׂפָתַי
    α3   יָבוֹא רָקָב בַּעֲצָמַי
    β1   וְתַחְתַּי אֶרְגָּז
    β2   אֲשֶׁר אָנוּחַ לְיוֹם צָרָה
    β3   לַעֲלוֹת לְעַם יְגוּדֶנּוּ׃

The perceived awkwardness of the אֲשֶׁר is illustrated well by the KJV translation in (2), while the choice to emend is illustrated by the NRSV translation in (3).

(2) α1 When I heard, my belly trembled;
    α2 my lips quivered at the voice:
    α3 rottenness entered into my bones,
    β1 and I trembled in myself,
    β2 **that** I might rest in the day of trouble:
    β3 when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops. (KJV)

(3) α1 I hear, and I tremble within;
    α2 my lips quiver at the sound.
    α3 Rottenness enters into my bones,
    β1 **and my steps** tremble beneath me.
    β2 I wait quietly for the day of calamity
    β3 to come upon the people who attack us. (NRSV; similarly *La Bible de Jérusalem* [1973], *Die Elberfelder Bibel* [1985])

The careful exegete must ask if an emendation like that illustrated by the NRSV translation is necessary; is there not a grammatical solution that explains the text as it stands in the Masoretic Text? Unfortunately, those few who choose the path of philological analysis and maintain the Masoretic Text in Hab 3:16 assign what I will argue are illegitimate functions to the אֲשֶׁר, such as a concessive function, which is illustrated by the NIV translation in (4).

(4) α1 I heard and my heart pounded,
    α2 my lips quivered at the sound;
    α3 decay crept into my bones,
    β1 and my legs trembled.
    β2 **<u>Yet</u>** I will wait patiently for the day of calamity
    β3 to come on the nation invading us. (NIV; see also NJPS)

In this essay, I will propose that the simplest solution—the relative clause interpretation, for the אֲשֶׁר in Hab 3:16 of the Masoretic Text is correct. The relative analysis accords with known grammatical principles in Biblical Hebrew, fits the literary context, and avoids unnecessary emendation or revocalization of the Masoretic Text.

2. PREVIOUS TREATMENTS OF THE אֲשֶׁר IN HABAKKUK 3:16

It is clear that modern commentators prefer textual revocalization (and sometimes emendation) as the solution for the "obscure text" of Hab 3:16 β1–β2 in the Masoretic Text, particularly the "unusual" use of the אֲשֶׁר. The most common proposal is to revocalize or emend אֲשֶׁר to some form of the word אֲשֻׁר 'step' (see Job 31:7; Ps 17:11), often with an absent (but understood) 1cs possessive suffix, e.g., "(my) step," "(my) steps (dual)," "(my) steps (pl)." The support cited for this proposal is the text of the Septuagint, provided in (5), which renders stich β1 with καὶ ὑποκάτωθέν μου ἐταράχθη ἡ ἕξις μου "and beneath me my state/condition/habit was troubled."

(5) α1 ἐφυλαξάμην καὶ ἐπτοήθη ἡ κοιλία μου
    α2 ἀπὸ φωνῆς προσευχῆς χειλέων μου
    α3 καὶ εἰσῆλθεν τρόμος εἰς τὰ ὀστᾶ μου
    β1 **καὶ ὑποκάτωθέν μου ἐταράχθη ἡ ἕξις μου**
    β2 **ἀναπαύσομαι ἐν** ἡμέρᾳ θλίψεως
    β3 τοῦ ἀναβῆναι εἰς λαὸν παροικίας μου (Göttingen Septuagint)

In particular, the phrase ἡ ἕξις μου 'my state/condition/habit' is supposed to support a Hebrew *Vorlage* containing some form of אֲשֻׁר (although this correspondence is dubitable).[2]

The simple change from אֲשֶׁר to the noun אֲשֻׁר, though, does not by itself produce a sensible text; the new text תַּחְתַּי אֶרְגָּז אֲשֻׁר 'beneath me I tremble (my) step(s)' is clearly ungrammatical. The verb אֶרְגָּז must also be emended. In the Masoretic Text the prophet is the subject of the 1cs verb אֶרְגָּז 'I quake'; with the emendation of אֲשֶׁר to some form of אֲשֻׁר, the verb must be emended to agree with the new subject, the feminine 3rd person '(my) step(s)'. For example, Roberts suggests emending to "*tirgoz*, 3 f.s. form of the verb, in order to agree with the dual subject"; in support of his decision, he states that "LXX, V, and S all have third-person forms over against the MT's first person".[3]

---

[2] Neither E. Hatch and H. A. Redpath (*A Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1897-1906; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998]) nor T. Muraoka (*Hebrew/Aramaic Index to the Septuagint: Keyed to the Hatch-Redpath Concordance* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998]) indicate that the Greek ἕξις ever corresponds to Hebrew אֲשֻׁר. Thus, using the Greek ἕξις as support for emending the Masoretic Text to אֲשֻׁר is highly suspect. (Note that Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate reflect the relative word אֲשֶׁר of the Masoretic Text.)

[3] J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster, 1991), p. 146; see also T. Hiebert, *God of My Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3* (HSM 38; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1986), p. 50; cf. R. D. Haak, *Habakkuk* (VTSup 44; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), p. 103.

    Haak reads the א of אֶרְגָּז with the preceding word and thus revocalizes and analyzes the word as a masculine noun רֶגֶז "functioning as an accusative of means or cause" (R. D. Haak, *Habakkuk*, 1991:103).

Roberts, Smith, Hiebert, Haak, and Andersen are a few of the more recent commentators who have chosen to make the emendation of the Masoretic Text, many of them arguing that such a move is in accordance with the Septuagint.[4] Hiebert, Roberts, and apparently Smith, emend to the dual אֲשֻׁרַי "my (two) steps,"[5] while Haak emends to אֲשֻׁר, suggesting that the presence of the suffix is unnecessary since it can be understood from the context.[6] Their translations of Hab 3:16, given below in (6)-(10), illustrate their reconstructions of stichs β1–β2.

(6)　α1 I heard, and my stomach churned.
　　　α2 At the account, my lips quivered.
　　　α3 Rottenness entered my bones,
　　　β1 **Beneath me my steps trembled.**
　　　β2 **I groaned in the day of distress,**
　　　β3 When the militia which attacked went up. (T. Hiebert, *God of My Victory*, p. 8)

(7)　α1 I heard, and my bowels churned,
　　　α2 At the sound my lips quivered,
　　　α3 Rottenness entered into my bones,
　　　β1 **And beneath me my steps wavered.**
　　　β2 **I will wait quietly for the day of affliction**
　　　β3 To come upon the people who attack us. (J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah,* p. 129)

(8)　α1 I have heard and my belly quakes,
　　　α2 my lips quiver at the sound,
　　　α3 rottenness comes into my bones,
　　　β1 **my steps tremble under me.**
　　　β2 **I will wait calmly for the day of distress**
　　　β3 to come upon the people attacking us. (R. L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, pp. 113-14)

(9)　α1 I hear and my belly shakes.
　　　α2 At (the) sound my lips quiver.
　　　α3 Rottenness enters into my bones

---

[4]J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary* ; R. L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC 32; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1984); T. Hiebert *God of My Victory*; R. D. Haak *Habakkuk*, and F. I. Andersen, *Habakkuk: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25; New York: Doubleday, 2001).

[5]T. Hiebert, *God of My Victory,* pp. 51-52; J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* , p. 146; and R. L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, pp. 113-14 (Smith does not discuss this textual issue, although his translation reflects emendation).

[6]R. D. Haak, *Habakkuk*, 103.

       β1 **and my steps are shattered by shaking.**
       β2 **I moan on account of the day of distress,**
       β3 on account of the going up of a people who attack us. (R. d. Haak, *Habakkuk*, p. 102)

  (10) α1 I heard, and my stomach churned,
       α2 at the sound my lips trembled;
       α3 Rottenness entered my bones
       β1 **and my feet shook beneath me.**
       β2 **I waited for the day of disaster**
       β3 to come up against the people who had invaded us. (F. I. Andersen, *Habakkuk*, p. 341)

Notice how the emendation in each translations changes the syntactic relationship of the two halves of verse 16. In the Masoretic Text, the אֲשֶׁר that initiates stich β2 suggests that β2–β3 modify β1 (see below for a discussion of the semantic nature of this modification). In contrast, once the relative word אֲשֶׁר is emended to the noun אַשֻׁר, there is no formal connection whatsoever between β1 and β2 (the punctuation used in the translations given in [6]-[10] illustrates the syntactic independence of the emended material).

In summary, many commentators emend the text of Hab 3:16 of the Masoretic Text due to the apparent difficulty of understanding the use of the אֲשֶׁר in β1 (e.g., if the אֲשֶׁר is a relative word, what is the antecedent?). Crucially, however, the proposals for emendation or revocalization *do not* have the unequivocal support of the Septuagint, since nowhere else do אֲשֶׁר and ἕξις correspond. Without the support of the Septuagint and in light of the fact that the remaining versional evidence (Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate) reflects the relative word אֲשֶׁר of the Masoretic Text, we must conclude that emending the אֲשֶׁר (and thus also the verb אָרְגַּז) in Hab 3:16 is not a sound text-critical decision, and that the philological path might be more fruitful. What, then, is the solution for the enigmatic grammar?

Keil presents two options for dealing with the difficulties of the אֲשֶׁר in Hab 3:16, neither of which involves a change in the Masoretic Text.[7] He first suggests that "אֲשֶׁר אָנוּחַ might mean, 'I who was to rest'," with the first person subject of the context as the antecedent of the relative אֲשֶׁר. However, in the end he deems it "more appropriate to take *'ăsher* as a relative conjunction, "that I," since the clause *explains* the great fear that had fallen upon him" (emphasis mine).[8] While Keil calls the אֲשֶׁר in Hab 3:16 a "relative conjunction", his explanation of the

---

[7]K. F. Keil, *Minor Prophets* (2 vols.; trans. J. Martin; 1877; repr., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986).

[8]K. F. Keil, *Minor Prophets*, vol. 2, p. 113.

passage as well as his translation, provided in (11), clearly indicate a causal interpretation of אֲשֶׁר.[9]

> (11) α1 I heard it, then my belly trembled,
> α2 at the sound my lips yelled;
> α3 rottenness forces itself into my bones,
> β1 and I tremble under myself,
> β2 **that**[10] I am to wait quietly for the day of tribulation,
> β3 when he that attacketh it approacheth the nation.

Difficulties with the causal analysis may explain why many choose to emend or revocalize. The question is, Why would the prophet be agitated *because* he waits for the destruction of his enemy?[11] It is precisely this incongruity that has led to the NIV translation of the אֲשֶׁר, repeated in (12), as a concessive disjunctive, for example, English *yet, however*.

> (12) α1 I heard and my heart pounded,
> α2 my lips quivered at the sound;
> α3 decay crept into my bones,
> β1 and my legs trembled.
> β2 <u>Yet</u> I will wait patiently for the day of calamity
> β3 to come on the nation invading us. (NIV; see also NJPS)

In the concessive analysis, the statement in β2 is set in contrast to the events presented in α1-β1, i.e., *despite* experiencing great fear, the prophet will calmly wait for the outcome he is sure will occur. While the concessive analysis of the אֲשֶׁר clause in Hab 3:16 fits the larger text better, the challenge that faces both a concessive and a causal analysis is whether BH grammar even allows אֲשֶׁר to introduce concessive and causal clauses. I will return to this issue in the next section.

---

[9]K. F. Keil, *Minor Prophets*, vol. 2, p. 113; see also O. P. Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990); similarly the NAS(95) translation.

[10]Keil's translation of the אֲשֶׁר with English "that," given in (11), is somewhat misleading for Modern English readers. Modern clausal usage of "that" is typically restricted to verbal complement clauses (*I thought that . . .*) or nominal complement clauses (*the fact that . . .*) and as an alternative to *wh*-words for some relatives (*The dog that bit me*; cf., *The dog which bit me*). However, Keil's use of "that" reflects a function largely unused in current idiom—to indicate a reason or cause (K. F. Keil, *Minor Prophets*, vol. 2, p. 113).

[11]In order for a causal analysis of β2 to be logical, one is restricted to a specific interpretation of β2–β3 with regard to the recipients of the צָרָה יוֹם. Many, if not most, commentators (e.g., Smith *Micah-Malachi*, Haak, *Habakkuk*) and translations (e.g., NIV, JPS, NRSV) understand β2–β3 in reference to the distress that will come upon the invading people; however, Keil, *Minor Prophets*, Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, and others who take the אֲשֶׁר as causal must interpret β2–β3 in exactly the opposite way, as the destruction that the invading people brings upon Habakkuk's Judah.

In summary, there have been two approaches to the אֲשֶׁר in β2 for those who choose to retain the text of the Masoretic Text. One approach, illustrated by both Keil and Robertson,[12] is to analyze the אֲשֶׁר in Hab 3:16 as a subordinating causal word, e.g., *because*, and to take the stich β2 as a reason for the prophet's fearful reaction to the theophany in the preceding verses (vv. 3-15). The second approach, illustrated in the NIV translation, is to interpret the function word as a concessive disjunctive, like English *yet*, and take the stich in β2 as the faithful (or perhaps stubborn, naïve, etc.) response of the prophet to the theophany of vv. 3-15.

3. THE 'RELATIVE' STATUS OF THE אֲשֶׁר IN HABAKKUK 3:16

The first problem in dealing with the אֲשֶׁר in Hab 3:16 is the confusion regarding the grammatical function of אֲשֶׁר itself. By this I mean that Biblical Hebrew grammarians often assign a plethora of functions to this single function word.[13] Thus the majority opinion for the function word אֲשֶׁר is that it can introduce relative clauses, object clauses, causal clauses, purpose clauses, result clauses, and conditional clauses. However, I have argued elsewhere that we may reduce the functions assigned to אֲשֶׁר to two: it introduces only relative clauses and complement clauses.[14] A complement clause analysis for the אֲשֶׁר clause is out of the question, though: the intransitive אֶרְגָּז preceding the אֲשֶׁר in Hab 3:16 does not take complements. We are left, then, with one option: that the אֲשֶׁר in Hab 3:16 introduces a relative clause.

In order to correctly analyze some of the אֲשֶׁר relative clauses in the Hebrew Bible (and in particular the אֲשֶׁר relative clause in Hab 3:16), it is necessary to recognize the presence of the phenomenon called *extraposition* within Biblical Hebrew grammar. What is extraposition? It is the movement of a constituent towards the *end* of a clause.[15] Compare the normal English relative in (13) with

---

[12]K. F. Keil, *Minor Prophets*, and O. P. Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* .

[13]See, for example, E. Ben Yehuda, ed.,   *Milon ha-lashon ha-'Ivrit ha-yeshanah veha-hadashah*   (16 vols.; Berlin: Langenscheidt, 1908-1959); E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (trans. A. E. Cowley; 2d English ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910); S. E. Loewenstamm and J. Blau, eds., *Otsar leshon ha-Mikra: konkordantsyah shelemah u-milon `Ivri ve-Angli* (3 vols.; Jerusalem: Hotsa'at Konkordantsyah Tanakhit, 1957-1968); B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990); P. Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (trans. and rev. T. Muraoka; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993); J. C. L. Gibson, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar – Syntax* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994); C. H. J. van der Merwe, J. A. Naudé, and J. H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

[14]R. D. Holmstedt, "Headlessness and Extraposition: Another Look at the Syntax of   אשר," *JNSL* 27 (2001):1-16; R. D. Holmstedt, "The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew: A Linguistic Analysis" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Wisconsin at Madison, 2002), 290-305.

[15]The term 'extraposition' appears to have had a much broader reference in the early twentieth century. In his 1920s and 1930s works, Jespersen defines extraposition as the case in which "a word, or a group of word, is placed, as it were, outside of the sentence as if it had nothing to do there" (O. Jespersen, *Analytic Syntax* [ed. S. R. Levine; New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1969], p. 35; see also *A Modern English Grammar: On Historical Principles*. [7 vols; ed. N. Haislund; London: George Allen & Unwin,

the extraposed relative clause in (14).[16] Notice how in (14) the extraposed relative clause is placed at a distance from its head (traditionally called the 'antecedent').

(13) <u>A man who claims to be the culprit</u> has come forward .

(14) <u>A man</u> has come forward <u>who claims to be the culprit</u>.

Biblical Hebrew relative clauses exhibit extraposition as well,[17] illustrated by the examples in (15) and (16).[18]

(15) וּרְאוּ כִּי־רָעַתְכֶם רַבָּה אֲשֶׁר עֲשִׂיתֶם בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה
*and see that your evil (is) great **which you did** in the eyes of Yhwh* (1 Sam 12:17)

(16) וְהִנֵּה רִבְקָה יֹצֵאת אֲשֶׁר יֻלְּדָה לִבְתוּאֵל
*and behold, Rebekah was coming out **who was born to Bethuel** *(Gen 24:15)

Now that we have covered the basics of extraposition, we may continue with the analysis of Hab 3:16. I have built my argument upon the three following

---

Ltd., 1928-1949], vol. 3, p. 72, 357; vol. 7, p. 223; *Essentials of English Grammar*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1964], p. 95.

However, within the last twenty years linguists have been consistent in using extraposition to refer more narrowly to the movement of a constituent towards the *end of a clause* (see G. Mallinson, "Languages with and Without Extraposition, *Folia Linguistica* 20 (1986):147-68; L. Haegeman, *Introduction to Government & Binding Theory* [2d ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1994], pp. 60-3; D. Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1997], p. 146; J. Ouhalla, *Introducing Transformational Grammar: From Principles and Parameters to Minimalism* [2d ed. London: Arnold, 1999], p. 87). Unfortunately, Hebraists do not seem to have adjusted their use of the term in accordance with linguistic convention (see, for example, G. Khan, *Studies in Semitic Syntax* [London Oriental Series 38. London: Oxford University Press, 1988]); J. C. L. Gibson, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar – Syntax* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994]; T. Zewi, "Subordinate Nominal Sentences Involving Prolepsis in Biblical Hebrew," *JSS* 41 (1996):1-20; "The Definition of the Copula and the Role of 3rd Independent Personal Pronouns in Nominal Sentences of Semitic Languages," *Folia Linguistica Historica* 17, nos. 1-2 (1996): 41-55; K. Shimasaki, *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew: A Study of Word Order and Information Structure* [Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2002]. In this work, though, I will use extraposition as it is used within general linguistics.

[16]The examples in (13) and (14) are modified from J. Ouhalla,   *Introducing Transformational Grammar* , p. 87.

[17]See R. D. Holmstedt, "Headlessness and Extraposition," and R. D. Holmstedt, "The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew" for further discussion.

[18]See also Gen 1:11; 22:14; 30:2; 33:18; 34:13; 35:14; 41:50; 48:9, 22; Exod 1:8; 4:17; 5:21; 13:5; 20:2; 29:42; 32:4; Lev 1:5; Deut 4:19; 8:16; 11:10 (twice); 19.9; 23:16.

points: 1) since there is no text critical support for emending the אֲשֶׁר in 3:16, we must find the solution within Biblical Hebrew grammar; 2) if אֲשֶׁר introduces only relative or complement clauses in Biblical Hebrew, then the causal (e.g., Keil) and concessive (e.g., NIV, NJPS) analyses of the אֲשֶׁר in Hab 3:16 violate the rules of Biblical Hebrew grammar; and 3) only the phenomenon of extraposition offers an explanation for the placement and function of the אֲשֶׁר in the Masoretic Text in Hab 3:16. However, if the אֲשֶׁר relative clause in Hab 3:16, given again in (17), is extraposed, we still face the task of identifying the antecedent from the preceding context.

(17)　α1　שָׁמַ֤עְתִּי ׀ וַתִּרְגַּ֬ז בִּטְנִ֗י
　　　α2　לְקוֹל֙ צָלֲל֣וּ שְׂפָתַ֔י
　　　α3　יָב֥וֹא רָקָ֛ב בַּעֲצָמַ֖י
　　　β1　וְתַחְתַּ֣י אֶרְגָּ֑ז
　　　β2　אֲשֶׁ֤ר אָנ֙וּחַ֙ לְי֣וֹם צָרָ֔ה
　　　β3　לַעֲל֖וֹת לְעַ֥ם יְגוּדֶֽנּוּ׃

We do not have to look far. The closest and likeliest head for the relative is the phrase תַּחְתַּי, which can be a noun phrase "the place beneath me" (e.g., Exod 16:29; Lev 13:23; Deut 4:11; 2 Sam 2:23; Isa 25:10) or a prepositional phrase "beneath me" (e.g., Gen 16:9; 18:4; 21:15; 1 Kgs 5:5; 19:4; Ruth 2:12; Qoh 10:5).[19] If we identify this constituent as the head of the extraposed relative clause, it provides a place for the prophet to "rest/wait for the day of distress," as well as an allusion back to Hab 2:1, where the prophet announces his intention to stand and wait upon his "watch," upon "the siege works," for God to speak with him. The material between 2:1 and 3:16 constitutes the message of the received vision (2:2-20) as well as the poetic description of the vision (3:3-15). Thus, a likely translation (reflecting an extraposition analysis) for this verse is provided in (18).

(18)　α1　I heard and my belly shook,
　　　α2　at the sound my lips quivered;
　　　α3　decay entered into my bones,
　　　β1　and **beneath me** (or: **in my place**) I trembled,
　　　β2　**where** I wait for the day of distress
　　　β3　to come on the people (who) invade us.

　　Admittedly, the extraposed relative clause in this verse produces a somewhat awkward poetic shape: β1 contains a prepositional phrase followed by the verb

---

[19]It is also possible to identify　the 1CS suffix 'me' as the head of the extraposed relative clause (other examples of suffixes pronouns serving as the heads of relatives are provided in R. D. Holmstedt, "The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew," p. 67).

which governs it, and β2 begins with a relative clause that modifies the prepositional phrase of β1. However, Isa 29:22; 31:4; 54:9; 56:5 are just a few poetic passages in which an extraposed אֲשֶׁר clause creates interesting stichometry that parallels Hab 3:16.[20]

What sense does an extraposed analysis of the אֲשֶׁר relative clause in Hab 3:16 produce? The verse presents the prophet describing his reaction to the vision he received, the vision he asked for in 2:1. Clearly, the force of what he saw or heard affected him physically: his belly shook, his lips quivered, his bones became weak. The relative clause in 3:16 β2–β3 serves to describe the place where the prophet waited for and received the vision of Yhwh's theophany. He took his stand to wait for the answer to his complaint (2:1); the power of the answer made him both shake in his place (v. 16) and rejoice (vv. 17-19).

In summary, I have proposed that the presence of the relative word אֲשֶׁר in Hab 3:16 is most certainly *not* "out of the question"[21]—indeed, there is no grammatical reason whatsoever to emend the אֲשֶׁר in 𝔐 to some form of אֲשֶׁר. Similarly, there is no reason to interpret the אֲשֶׁר as a causal or concessive function word—in fact, such an analysis is contrary to the grammar of Biblical Hebrew. Rather, I have proposed that the analysis of the אֲשֶׁר as a relative word in 3:16 is the correct one, a solution that perhaps is reflected in Ibn Ezra's comments: וְתַחַת אֶרְגָּז: בִּמְקוֹמִי בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל. **אֲשֶׁר אָנוּחַ**. שֶׁחָשַׁבְתִּי שֶׁאֶמְצָא מְנוּחָה בְּבוֹא אִם יָבוֹא צַר[22].

---

[20]For other examples of extraposition (including numerous poetic examples that are similar to Hab 3:16), see Gen 1:11; 22:14; 30:2; 33:18; 34:13; 35:14; 48:9, 22; Exod 1:8; 4:17; 5:21; 13:5; 20:2; 29:42; 32:4; Lev 1:5; Deut 4:19, 28; 8:16; 11:10 (2x); 19:9; 23:16; Josh 1:15; 6:26; Judg 9:17; 10:4; 18:16; 21:19; 1 Sam 3:11; 10:16; 14:21, 45; 15:2; 24:20; 2 Sam 2:5, 6; 3:8; 7:12, 23; 1 Kgs 5:21; 6:12; 8:24, 33; 10:3, 9, 10; 12:31; 13:14; 15:13; 2 Kgs 9:36, 37; 10:10; 12:3; 17:4; 21:12; Isa 28:4; 30:24; 63:7; 65:7; Jer 5:22; 13:25; 19:3; 24:3; 29:19; 37:1; 42:14; 43:1; Ezek 5:16; 6:9; 11:12; 12:2; 14:5; 15:6; 16:17, 45; 17:16; 20:11, 13, 21, 32; 47:14, 22; Mal 3:19; Ps 1:3; 26:9-10; 55:20; 58:5-6; 71:19; 78:5; 84:4; 119:49, 158; 132:2; 139:20; 140:3, 5; Ruth 4:1; Job 6:4; 12:10; 22:15; 30:1; 34:19; 36:28; 38:23; 39:6; Ruth 4:15; Qoh 2:3; 4:9; 7:20, 22, 29; 8:13; 10:15; Lam 1:10; 4:20; Esth 1:19; 2:6; 4:5, 6; Dan 9:1, 8; Ezra 2:2; 9:11; Neh 2:8; 6:11; 9:26; 1 Chr 16:16; 21:17; 2 Chr 1:6; 9:2, 8; 15:16; 22:9; 36:13.

[21]F. I. Andersen, *Habakkuk*, p. 344.

[22]*And beneath me I trembled* : in my place in the land of Israel;   *where I wait*: where I thought that I would find rest when the result (or: sustenance) comes, if distress comes.

Rashi: וְתַחַת אֶרְגָּז. בִּמְקוֹמִי אֲנִי מִזְדַּעֲזֵעַ: אֲשֶׁר אָנוּחַ לְיוֹם צָרָה. אֲשֶׁר מְנוּחָתִי זֹאת מוּכֶנֶת לְיוֹם צָרָה. (*and beneath me I trembled*: in my place I shook; *where I wait for the day of distress*: where my rest is ready for the day of distress).

Radaq: וְתַחַת אֶרְגָּז. בִּמְקוֹמִי אֶרְגָּז: אֲשֶׁר אָנוּחַ לְיוֹם צָרָה. אֲשֶׁר הָיִיתִי חוֹשֵׁב שֶׁאָנוּחַ בְּאַרְצִי אַחַר שֶׁשַּׁבְתִּי מֵהַגָּלוּת לְאַרְצִי וְהִנֵּה נֶהְפְּכָה מְנוּחָתִי לְיוֹם צָרָה (*and beneath me I trembled*: in my place I trembled; *where I wait for the day of distress*: because I had thought that I would rest in my land after I returned from exile to my land, and behold my rest was turned into a day of distress).