Almost every modern treatment of the וַאֲשֶׁר in Hab 3:16 opts to emend the text to a form of וַאֲשֶׁר ‘step’, citing the text of the Septuagint as support. The few exegetes that choose to maintain the Masoretic Text interpret the וַאֲשֶׁר 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 וַאֲשֶׁר clause in Hab 3:16 is an “extraposed relative clause” that modifies the substantive יָדָו.

1. INTRODUCTION

Most recent translations of Habakkuk 3:16 avoid translating the relative word וַאֲשֶׁר that begins the second half of the verse both because they do not consider the presence of the וַאֲשֶׁר grammatically appropriate and because they argue that ancient translations understood the sequence of letters וַאֲשֶׁר 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 וַאֲשֶׁר of Hab 3:16 in the Masoretic Text, given in (1), choose the path of textual analysis and emend the וַאֲשֶׁר (stich β2).

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The perceived awkwardness of the 穰 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 穰, 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 Yet 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 穰 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 RV AKIN 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 RV AK. The most common proposal is to revocalize or emend RV AK to some form of the word RV AK ‘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 ἐταράχη ἢ ἐξίς μου “and beneath me my state/condition/habit was troubled.”

(5) α1 ἐφυλαξάμην καὶ ἐπτοήθη ἦ κοιλία μου
α2 ἀπὸ φωνῆς προσευχῆς χειλέων μου
α3 καὶ εἰσῆλθεν τρόμος εἰς τά ὀστά μου
β1 καὶ ὑποκάτωθέν μου ἐταράχη ἢ ἐξίς μου
β2 ἀναπύσσομαι ἐν ἡμέρᾳ θλίψεως
β3 τοὺς ἀναβήναι εἰς λαὸν παροικίας μου (Göttingen Septuagint)

In particular, the phrase ἢ ἐξίς μου ‘my state/condition/habit’ is supposed to support a Hebrew Vorlage containing some form of RV AK (although this correspondence is dubitable).²

The simple change from RV AK to the noun RV AK, though, does not by itself produce a sensible text; the new text RV AK ἦν ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ μου ‘beneath me I tremble (my) step(s)’ is clearly ungrammatical. The verb RV AK must also be emended. In the Masoretic Text the prophet is the subject of the 1cs verb RV AK ‘I quake’; with the emendation of RV AK to some form of RV AK, the verb must be emended to agree with the new subject, the feminine 3rd person ‘(my) step(s)’⁴. 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

²Neither 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 ἐξίς ever corresponds to Hebrew RV AK. Thus, using the Greek ἐξίς as support for emending the Masoretic Text to RV AK is highly suspect. (Note that Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate reflect the relative word RV AK of the Masoretic Text.)
⁴Haak reads the θ of RV AK with the preceding word and thus revocalizes and analyzes the word as a masculine noun RV AK “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 לארשי “my (two) steps,” while Haak emends to לארשי, 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) \(\alpha_1\) I heard, and my stomach churned.
\(\alpha_2\) At the account, my lips quivered.
\(\alpha_3\) Rottenness entered my bones,
\(\beta_1\) Beneath me my steps trembled.
\(\beta_2\) I groaned in the day of distress,
\(\beta_3\) When the militia which attacked went up. (T. Hiebert, God of My Victory, p. 8)

(7) \(\alpha_1\) I heard, and my bowels churned,
\(\alpha_2\) At the sound my lips quivered,
\(\alpha_3\) Rottenness entered into my bones,
\(\beta_1\) And beneath me my steps wavered.
\(\beta_2\) I will wait quietly for the day of affliction
\(\beta_3\) To come upon the people who attack us. (J. J. M. Roberts, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, p. 129)

(8) \(\alpha_1\) I have heard and my belly quakes,
\(\alpha_2\) my lips quiver at the sound,
\(\alpha_3\) rottenness comes into my bones,
\(\beta_1\) my steps tremble under me.
\(\beta_2\) I will wait calmly for the day of distress
\(\beta_3\) to come upon the people attacking us. (R. L. Smith, Micah-Malachi, pp. 113-14)

(9) \(\alpha_1\) I hear and my belly shakes.
\(\alpha_2\) At (the) sound my lips quiver.
\(\alpha_3\) Rottenness enters into my bones


\(^5\) 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.
\( \beta_1 \) and my steps are shattered by shaking.
\( \beta_2 \) I moan on account of the day of distress,
\( \beta_3 \) on account of the going up of a people who attack us. (R. d. Haak, *Habakkuk*, p. 102)

(10) \( \alpha_1 \) I heard, and my stomach churned,
\( \alpha_2 \) at the sound my lips trembled;
\( \alpha_3 \) Rottenness entered my bones
\( \beta_1 \) and my feet shook beneath me.
\( \beta_2 \) I waited for the day of disaster
\( \beta_3 \) 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 ות לו that initiates stich \( \beta_2 \) suggests that \( \beta_2-\beta_3 \) modify \( \beta_1 \) (see below for a discussion of the semantic nature of this modification). In contrast, once the relative word ות לו is emended to the noun ות לו, there is no formal connection whatsoever between \( \beta_1 \) and \( \beta_2 \) (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 ות לו in \( \beta_1 \) (e.g., if the ות לו 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 ות לו and ETYPE 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 ות לו of the Masoretic Text, we must conclude that emending the ות לו (and thus also the verb otate) 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 ות לו in Hab 3:16, neither of which involves a change in the Masoretic Text.\(^7\) He first suggests that "ות לו ות לו might mean, 'I who was to rest'," with the first person subject of the context as the antecedent of the relative ות לו. However, in the end he deems it "more appropriate to take 'asher 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 ות לו in Hab 3:16 a "relative conjunction", his explanation of the

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passage as well as his translation, provided in (11), clearly indicate a causal interpretation of קָֽרָץ.  

(11) a1 I heard it, then my belly trembled,  
    a2 at the sound my lips yelled;  
    a3 rottenness forces itself into my bones,  
    β1 and I tremble under myself,  
    β2 that 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? It is precisely this incongruity that has led to the NIV translation of the קָֽרָץ, repeated in (12), as a concessive disjunctive, for example, English yet, however.

(12) a1 I heard and my heart pounded,  
    a2 my lips quivered at the sound;  
    a3 decay crept into my bones,  
    β1 and my legs trembled.  
    β2 Yet 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 קָֽרָץ 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 קָֽרָץ to introduce concessive and causal clauses. I will return to this issue in the next section.

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9K. 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.

10Keil’s translation of the קָֽרָץ 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. 112).

11In 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 קָֽרָץ. 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 קָֽרָץ 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 כֹּל in בֵּי for those who choose to retain the text of the Masoretic Text. One approach, illustrated by both Keil and Robertson, is to analyze the כֹּל in Hab 3:16 as a subordinating causal word, e.g., because, and to take the stich בֵּי 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 בֵּי 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 כֹּל IN HABAKKUK 3:16

The first problem in dealing with the כֹּל in Hab 3:16 is the confusion regarding the grammatical function of כֹּל itself. By this I mean that Biblical Hebrew grammarians often assign a plethora of functions to this single function word. Thus the majority opinion for the function word כֹּל 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 כֹּל to two: it introduces only relative clauses and complement clauses. A complement clause analysis for the כֹּל clause is out of the question, though: the intransitive כֹּל preceding the כֹּל in Hab 3:16 does not take complements. We are left, then, with one option: that the כֹּל in Hab 3:16 introduces a relative clause.

In order to correctly analyze some of the כֹּל relative clauses in the Hebrew Bible (and in particular the כֹּל 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. Compare the normal English relative in (13) with

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15The 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). Notice how in (14) the extraposed relative clause is placed at a distance from its head (traditionally called the ‘antecedent’).

(13) A man who claims to be the culprit has come forward.

(14) A man has come forward who claims to be the culprit.

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

(15) וְהָעָרַג הָעָרַג אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הַיָּתִר הַרְעָהָה וּרְאֶה and see that your evil (is) great which you did in the eyes of Yhwh (1 Sam 12:17)

(16) וְהָעָרַג הָעָרַג אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הַיָּתִר הַרְעָהָה 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

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


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 רַעָּמָה in 3:16, we must find the solution within Biblical Hebrew grammar; 2) if רַעָּמָה introduces only relative or complement clauses in Biblical Hebrew, then the causal (e.g., Keil) and concessive (e.g., NIV, NJPS) analyses of the רַעָּמָה 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 רַעָּמָה in the Masoretic Text in Hab 3:16. However, if the רַעָּמָה 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 נאֹמַר נָאָר מַעְרֵךְ נָאָר
α2 נָאָר בִּשְׁפֵלָה נָאָר
α3 נָאָר לָגַדְתָּלָה נָאָר
β1 יָדֹתָ לָהָר נָאָר
β2 יָדֹתָ לָהָר נָאָר
β3 יָדֹתָ לָהָר נָאָר

We do not have to look far. The closest and likeliest head for the relative is the phrase רַעָּמָה, 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). 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

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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 relative clause creates interesting stichometry that parallels Hab 3:16.20

What sense does an extraposed analysis of the 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 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 in Hab 3:16 is most certainly not “out of the question”21—indeed, there is no grammatical reason whatsoever to emend the to some form of . Similarly, there is no reason to interpret the 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 as a relative word in 3:16 is the correct one, a solution that perhaps is reflected in Ibn Ezra’s comments:


21F. I. Andersen, Habakkuk, p. 344.

22And beneath me I trembled: in my place I trembled to find rest when the result (or: sustenance) comes, if distress comes.

Rashi: (and beneath me I trembled) in my place I trembled; where I wait for the day of distress: where my rest is ready for the day of distress.

Radaq: (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.