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Hartog, P.B.

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Author(s): Pieter B. Hartog

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# RE-READING HABAKKUK 2:4B: LEMMA AND INTERPRETATION IN 1QP Hab VII 17–VIII 3

## The Traditional View

**E**VEN though the lemma has not been preserved, it stands beyond doubt that 1QpHab VIII 1–3 contains an interpretation — introduced by the characteristic formula על פשרו in line 1 — of Hab 2:4b. (1) 1QpHab VI 17–VIII 3 read as follows:

[וצדיק באמונתו יחיה] פשרו על כל עושי התורה בבית יהודה אשר יצילם אל  
מבית המשפט בעבור עמלם ואמנתם במורה הצדק

[“And the righteous one shall live through his faith” (2) (Hab 2:4b).] Its interpretation concerns all the doers of the Law in the House of Jacob,

(1) The preceding (Hab 2:4a) and following (Hab 2:5) lemmata have been (partially) preserved, leading all editors of 1QpHab to reconstruct Hab 2:4b in 1QpHab VII 17. See Maurya P. Horgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretations of Biblical Books* (CBQMS 8; Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1979), 17; Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1997–1998), 1:16; Maurya P. Horgan, “Habakkuk Peshar,” in *Pesharim, Other Commentaries, and Related Documents* (ed. James H. Charlesworth, Henry W. Rietz, Casey D. Elledge, and Lidija Novakovic; PTSDSSP 6B: Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 157–85 (172).

(2) For now, I follow the most common translation of the verse. Below, I shall argue that Hab 2:4b was probably not — or not exclusively — read in this way by the Qumran commentator.

Note that the noun אַמּוּנָה usually means ‘faithfulness’ rather than ‘faith.’ Yet, in these lines, the term does seem to connote ‘faith’; see William H. Brownlee, *The Midrash Peshar of Habakkuk* (SBLMS 24; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979), 128–29. I therefore translate accordingly. The argument developed below does, however, not depend on this understanding of אַמּוּנָה, and translating it with ‘faithfulness’ or ‘loyalty’ (so García Martínez and Tigchelaar, *DSSSE*, 1:17) may work equally well.

whom God shall save from the House of Judgment on account of their toil and their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness. (3)

The connection between the lemma and its interpretation seems straightforward: אֱמוּנָתוֹ from Hab 2:4b is mirrored by אֱמוּנָתָם in the interpretation, (4) and the idea of ‘living,’ expressed by the verb חִיָּה in the lemma, is understood as ‘being saved by God from the house of judgment’ (יִצִּילֵם אֶל מִבֵּית הַמִּשְׁפֵּט) in the interpretation. Most scholars would furthermore hold that ‘the righteous one’ (צַדִּיק) from Hab 2:4b is identified with ‘all the doers of the law in the house of Judah’ (כֹּל עוֹשֵׂי הַתּוֹרָה בְּבֵית יְהוּדָה) in the interpretation. This view is expressed for instance by William Brownlee, who suggests that the singular צַדִּיק in the lemma should be read as a collective, just as some of the singulars in Hab 1:

The Biblical text of the first chapter is full of singulars which are collectives for the Chaldeans, which are naturally rendered as plurals in English. The present singulars (“The righteous [one] through his faith will live”) are generic and are correctly interpreted by plurals in the commentary. (5)

This ‘interpretation by plurals in the commentary’ to which Brownlee refers entails the equation of ‘the righteous one’ with ‘the doers of the Torah’: “All the doers of the Law in the house of Judah” identifies the “righteous” of Hab 2:4.’ (6)

Brownlee’s study provides the most thorough discussion of what has become the traditional understanding of the relationship between lemma and interpretation in 1QpHab VI 17–VIII 3. Many subsequent studies on 1QpHab take up Brownlee’s view. Bilhah Nitzan, for instance, states with regard to 1QpHab VIII 1: ‘the “righteous” mentioned in Hab 2:4b (“and the righteous one shall live through his faith”) is interpreted with regard to the sectarians upholding its regulations [...]’ (7) Likewise, in his study on the reception of Hab 2:4 in Early Judaism and Christianity, Stephen Hultgren asserts that

(3) References to the Qumran material are according to García Martínez and Tigchelaar, *DSSSE*. Translations are my own.

(4) There has been some discussion on how to vocalise אֱמוּנָתָם. See, e.g., Brownlee, *Midrash Pesher*, 128; Gary Rendsburg, “The Nature of Qumran Hebrew as Revealed through Pesher Habakkuk,” in *Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira* (ed. Pierre J.P. Van Hecke and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

(5) *Midrash Pesher*, 126.

(6) *Midrash Pesher*, 126.

(7) *The Pesher Habakkuk Scroll* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1986), 175 [Hebrew]. The English translation is mine.

‘1QpHab VIII,1 interprets the “righteous one” of Hab 2:4 with reference to “all observing the Law (כול עושי התורה) in the House of Judah” (cf. VII,11).’ (8) These two examples sufficiently illustrate the *communis opinio* that the correspondence between lemma and interpretation in 1QpHab VII 17–VIII 3 depends on the identification of ‘the righteous one’ in the lemma with ‘all the doers of the Torah’ in the interpretation.

### An Alternative

The scholarly consensus outlined in the preceding paragraph implies that the Peshar commentator understood Hab 2:4b in much the same way as the Masoretic Text of this verse is commonly understood. (9) The MT of this verse reads **וְצַדִּיק בְּאִמּוּנָתוֹ יֵחִיָּה**, which — as we have seen — is usually translated as: ‘and the righteous one shall live through his faith.’ (10) Most commentators understand ‘the righteous one’ to be the subject of an intransitive verb **יֵחִיָּה** ‘to live.’ The suffix in **בְּאִמּוּנָתוֹ** is taken as a possessive suffix referring back to **צַדִּיק**. (11) The object of the faith of the righteous one is not expressed. This understanding of the MT of Hab 2:4b informs the traditional understanding of its interpretation in 1QpHab VII 17–VIII 3: just as ‘the righteous one’ shall live through his faith, so ‘all the doers of the Torah’ shall live — that is, be saved from judgment — through theirs. (12) However, a notable difference between the lemma and its interpretation is the fact that the lemma — understood in the sense outlined above — does not indicate the object of the faith of the righteous one, whilst the interpretation does: the ‘doers of the Torah’ are explicitly stated to have faith in the Teacher of Righteousness (**בְּאִמּוּנָתָם בְּמִוֶּרֶת הַצַּדִּיק**).

(8) Stephen Hultgren, *Habakkuk 2:4 in Early Judaism, in Hebrews, and in Paul* (CahRB 77; Paris: Gabalda, 2011), 14.

(9) For this understanding of the Masoretic Text of Hab 2:4b, see, e.g., Adam S. Van der Woude, *Habakuk Zefanja* (POT; Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1978), 36–38; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Micah – Nahum – Habakuk – Zephanja* (KAT 13/3; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1975), 216; Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC 32; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1984), 107 (assuming that the **צַדִּיק** is the prophet Habakkuk himself); Tremper Longman III, “Habakkuk,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (ed. Thomas E. McComiskey; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1993), 831–96 (860–61).

(10) Cf. note 2 above.

(11) J.J.M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 111 has the suffix refer back to the vision in Hab 2:3.

(12) The idea that **צַדִּיק** should be taken as a collective in Hab 2:4b is also found with Van der Woude, *Habakuk*, 38.

We may, thus, wonder whence the Teacher of Righteousness appears in the interpretation of Hab 2:4b. Is he just an addition included by the Peshet commentator so as to express his concerns with the community of which he was part? (13) Or can the mention of the Teacher in 1QpHab VIII 3 somehow be related to the way in which Hab 2:4b was read by the commentator? In other words: does the reference to the Teacher in this line have a basis in Scripture or not? At this point, it is worthwhile to refer to the *Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, where Hab 2:4b is translated as: ‘but the righteous man will live because of their loyalty to him.’ (14) In this translation, the צדיק is still considered to be the subject of the verb ‘to live’ and treated as a collective. (15) At the same time, García Martínez and Tigchelaar do not take the suffix in באמונתו as a possessive, but as an object suffix. (16) If we assume that the Qumran commentator read Hab 2:4b as suggested by the editors of the *Study Edition*, the reference to the Teacher in the interpretation of this verse indeed has a scriptural basis in the object suffix attached to באמונתו. (17)

It is possible, however, to go one step further. After all, all explanations of Hab 2:4b and its interpretation in 1QpHab VIII 1–3 offered so far fail to take into account one particular feature of 1QpHab, namely, its systematic identification of ‘righteous men’ (צדיק) in scriptural lemmata with the Teacher of Righteousness. This exegetical tendency can be illustrated by referring to the interpretation of the two other verses in the book of Habakkuk where the term צדיק occurs: Hab 1:4 and 1:13. To start with the second one: in the interpretation of Hab 1:13 in 1QpHab V 8–12, ‘the wicked one’ (רשע) in the scriptural base text is equated with ‘the Man of the Lie’ (איש הכוזב) in the interpretation, whilst ‘the righteous one’ in the lemma is identified with the Teacher of Righteousness. (18) This identification in turn illuminates the way in which Hab 1:4 is interpreted in 1QpHab I 12–14. Despite

(13) Even if this is the case, the Teacher may have some kind of scriptural basis when it is assumed that the act of ‘believing’ or ‘having faith’ always implies two parties, i.e., one party that has faith in the other one. In that sense, the reference to the Teacher may be understood as an explication of the idea, implicit in the lemma, of a party that is believed in.

(14) *DSSSE*, 1:17.

(15) As can be gathered from the plural possessive pronoun in ‘their loyalty.’

(16) On the ambiguity of suffixes with participles, infinitives, and verbal nouns, see *JM* §§ 65–66.

(17) It has been suggested that the reading of LXX also reflects an understanding of the suffix as an object suffix: ἐκ πιστεῶς μου can be translated either as “durch den Glauben an mich” or “durch meine Treue.” See Rudolph, *Micha – Nahum – Habakuk – Zephanja*, 213, but cf. Longman, “Habakkuk,” 860–61.

(18) Cf. Brownlee, *Midrash Peshet*, 91–95.

the fragmentary preservation of these lines, it is clear from the use of the pronoun **הוא** that **מורה הצדק** is here identified with an element from the base text. On the basis of the interpretation of Hab 1:13 in 1QpHab V 8–12, it can safely be assumed that in 1QpHab I 12–14, too, it is ‘the righteous one’ in the lemma which was equated with the Teacher. (19) These examples go to show that there is a strong connection between the term **צדיק** in the book of Habakkuk and references to the Teacher of Righteousness in 1QpHab. (20) As both terms feature in 1QpHab VI 17–VIII 3, one may wonder if, here too, they can be understood as being equated.

To my mind, this is indeed possible if, apart from understanding **בְּאֵמֹנָתוֹ** as exhibiting an object rather than a possessive suffix, we take into account one other feature of the Hebrew language. This concerns the verbal form **יחיה**, which — in its unvocalised form — does not necessarily point to a Qal, but can also reflect a Piel or a Hiphil of the root **חיה**. Both *binyanim* are attested in Biblical Hebrew: the Hiphil occurs 23 times, the Piel is found 57 times, of which once in the book of Habakkuk (3:2). Both *binyanim* mean ‘to preserve alive’ or ‘to give life.’ (21) If we take together these two suggestions — that **יחיה** was read a Piel or Hiphil and **בְּאֵמֹנָתוֹ** as exhibiting an object suffix — it can reasonably be suggested that the Qumran commentator understood Hab 2:4b to mean: ‘and the righteous shall give life through faith in him.’ In the interpretation, the verse is consequently read as referring to the Teacher of Righteousness — equated with ‘the righteous one’ from the lemma — giving life to ‘all the doers of the Torah in the House of Judah’ through the faith they have in him. Hence, the reference to the Teacher in 1QpHab VIII 1–3 has its scriptural basis in ‘the righteous one’ in Hab 2:4b. The ‘doers of the Torah,’ which in the traditional view are taken as the counterpart of ‘the righteous one’ from the lemma, should be considered an explication of the idea, implicit in the base text, of a group of believers having faith in ‘the righteous one.’ (22) Alternatively, it can be surmised that the interpretation of Hab 2:4b in 1QpHab VIII 1–3 is based on a double reading of this

(19) This is also the opinion of Brownlee, *Midrash Peshet*, 45–50. Note that Hab 1:4 and Hab 1:13 both describe a clash between a wicked and a righteous individual.

(20) The same connection probably underlies the interpretation of Ps 37:25–26 in 4Q171 1–10 iii 17–20.

(21) Cf. the usual dictionaries.

(22) In other words, the phrase **כל עושי התורה בבית יהודה** has no direct, but perhaps an indirect scriptural basis. Cf. n. 13 above. Cf. also 1QpHab V 9–14, where ‘the doers of the Torah’ (**עושי התורה**) are not directly equated with an element from the lemma either, but may represent a group implied in the lemma, namely, the addressees of the imperative **חכה**.

verse, one reading reflecting its more traditional understanding (equating ‘the righteous one’ with ‘all the doers of the Torah’ and taking them as the subject of the intransitive verb ‘to live’) and one reading reflecting the understanding of the verse suggested above. (23)

## Conclusion

In this contribution, I have attempted to offer an alternative understanding of the way in which Hab 2:4b was read and interpreted in 1QpHab VII 17–VIII 3. To my mind, it can reasonably be assumed that the Peshet commentator understood Hab 2:4b to mean: ‘the righteous shall give life through faith in him.’ Consequently, he identified the ‘righteous’ (צַדִּיק) from the lemma with the Teacher of Righteousness (מורה הצדק), just as he does elsewhere in 1QpHab. There is no way of knowing whether this understanding of Hab 2:4b by the Peshet commentator was ‘exegetical’ in nature or not. That is to say, just as scholars have wondered whether textual variants in the Pesharim are genuine variants reflecting the plurality of text-forms in this early period of scriptural transmission or exegetical variants created by the Qumran commentator so as to have the text correspond with what he wished it to mean, so one could wonder whether the commentator’s understanding of Hab 2:4b as suggested in this contribution reflects the semantic plurality of Scripture or the exegetical interests of the commentator. (24) It seems best not to draw too sharp a line between these two possibilities; in any case, deciding on the issue is very hard. This notwithstanding, the reading of Hab 2:4b by the Peshet commentator suggested here can be seen as a corrective to earlier treatments of 1QpHab VII 17–VIII 3, which seem to have depended on the Masoretic understanding of Hab 2:4b to too large a degree.

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(23) Cf. 1QpHab IV 9, where no less than three different readings of the verb *ישם* (Hab 1:11) seem to be reflected in the interpretation of this verse. See Brownlee, *Peshet Habakkuk*, 81.

(24) Some discussion on the presence or absence of exegetical variants in the Qumran commentaries can be found in, e.g., George J. Brooke, “The Biblical Texts in the Qumran Commentaries: Scribal Errors or Exegetical Variants?” in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee* (ed. Craig A. Evans and William F. Stinespring; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1987), 85–100; Moshe J. Bernstein, “4Q252 i 2: *לא ידור רוחי באדם לעולם*: Biblical Text or Biblical Interpretation?” *RevQ* 16/3 (1994): 421–27; Timothy H. Lim, “Biblical Quotations in the Pesharim and the Text of the Bible: Methodological Considerations,” in *The Bible as Book: The Hebrew Bible and the Judaean Desert Discoveries* (ed. Edward D. Herbert and Emanuel Tov; London: British Library, 2002), 71–79.