Habakkuk 2:5a: Denouncing ‘wine’ or ‘wealth’? Contextual readings of the Masoretic text and 1QpHab

Habakkuk 2:5 is a problematic text. The ‘correctness’ of the Masoretic text’s passage ‘moreover, the wine is treacherous, an arrogant person – he will not come to rest’ has often been questioned. The discovery of the Pesher Habakkuk (1QpHab) in Cave 1 at Qumran gave impetus to this tendency. It contains a reading quite different from the Masoretic text. It reads ‘moreover, wealth deceives an arrogant man, and he will not come to rest’. Many modern commentaries and translations assume that 1QpHab contains the ‘correct’ reading. This study argues that this assumption is based upon questionable text critical practice and pleads for a contextual interpretation of variant readings before rash decisions about the status of the Masoretic text can be made.

Introduction

Several interpretational problems confront readers in Habakkuk 2:5.1 What is the function of the particles כִּֽיִּים and אַף in 2:5a? What kind of relationship is suggested with the preceding verse and with the following verses? What is the meaning of יִנְוֶה [the wine] in 2:5a and does the presence of the definite article have particular significance? What is the syntactic function of the participle בּוֹגֵ֔ד in 5a; the meaning of the rare form יִנְוֶה, and the hapax legomenon כָּל in 5b? What is the syntactic relationship between 5ab and 5cd? Especially under suspicion is the phrase כִּֽי יִנְוֶה אַף כִּֽי יִנְוֶה in the Masoretic text (MT) of 2:5a. A reference to wine is absent in some of the ancient versions (Septuagint; Peshitta). Lothar Perlitt bluntly states that a reference to wine gibt hier kein Sinn (Perlitt 2004:67).2 Ever since the discovery of the Pesher Habakkuk in Cave 1 at Qumran (1QpHab), the version of 2:5a in the Pesher’s quotation of 2:5–6 in 8.3–8 has been hailed as the perfect solution to the textual and interpretational difficulties posed by MT. Instead of MT’s יִנְוֶה [the wine], 1QpHab reads יִנְוֶה usually vocalised as יְנָו [wealth]. The syntactically awkward relationship between the participle בּוֹגֵ֔ד in 2:5a and the following יִנְוֶה in 5b in MT is simplified in 1QpHab where an imperfect יִנְוֶה occurs with יִנְוֶה בּוֹגֵ֔ד as its logical object. Perlitt (2004:67) regards this as an empfehlenswerte Alternative to MT.

A classic criterion in the evaluation of textual variants is that the lectio difficilior often represents the preferred reading (see Brotzman 1994:128; Deist 1978:244–245; Tov 1992:302–305).3 The consummate ease with which 1QpHab’s version of 2:5a is accepted is quite surprising.4 I question the assumption that 1QpHab contains the ‘better’ reading.5 My thesis is that a balanced evaluation of variant readings in different textual witnesses is only possible if the literary and social context of each textual witness is taken into consideration.6 Confronted by the different readings of 2:5a in MT and 1QpHab, our first order of business is to ask the following questions: (1) Does יִנְוֶה בּוֹגֵ֔ד make sense in the context of MT? (2) Does יִנְוֶה אַף כִּֽי יִנְוֶה make sense in the context of 1QpHab?

2.Roberts (1991:113) remarks, ‘[o]ne can do nothing with MT’s “wine is treacherous”’.  
3.It is no absolute principle (Brooke 2013:3–4; Brotzman 1994:128; McCarter 1986:13), but its ‘basic validity ... cannot be denied’ (Tov 1992:303).  
5.This study is not concerned with text-critical practice as such (see Brooke 2013:1–17). Sources for Hebrew Bible textual criticism attest to a variety of textual forms (Umm 2000:66). All variants cannot be ascribed to scribal errors (Barthelmy 2012:97–136). It ‘is simply no longer appropriate to embark on the quest for the original form of the text, and especially no longer fitting to consider the MT as representing some form of Ur-text’ (Brooke 2013:3–8). Textual diversity should not be ‘reduced to a chosen, preferred reading’ (Brooke 2013:17).  
6.A list of variant readings for specific words and phrases in MT in ‘critical’ editions of the Hebrew Bible indicates that, according to the editors of the critical edition, variant readings exist in other textual witnesses. Such lists by definition disregard the context of MT and the alternative textual tradition. Ideally interpreters should evaluate variant readings in the context of all the respective textual traditions before deciding to emend texts.
Failure to ask these fundamental questions leads to rash decisions about ‘better’ readings and disregards the possibility that different but equally valid versions of texts of Jewish origin might have existed at the dawn of the Common Era. This study is (1) a plea for contextual interpretations of two alternative textual traditions of Habakkuk 2:5a and (2) an argument for the retention of both readings in their respective contexts against the practice of using one to ‘correct’ the other.

**Habakkuk 2:5a: Ancient textual witnesses and modern studies – a review**

In this section two issues are investigated:

- The delimitation of units in Habakkuk 2:1–8 as expressed by ancient scribal delimitation markers in various manuscript traditions (see Oesch 1979; Tov 2000:312–350). The purpose is to indicate how 2:5a is perceived in ancient scribal traditions to fit into its immediate context, especially in relation to 2:4 and 2:6.
- The text of Habakkuk 2:5a in various ancient textual witnesses: The purpose is to indicate that three textual traditions regarding 2:5a exist in ancient textual witnesses.

**Habakkuk 2:5a: Unit delimitation in ancient textual witnesses**

In a study of ancient scribal unit delimiters in Habakkuk I remarked: 'It is quite surprising that the most basic of exegetical exercises, namely the demarcation of both larger and smaller units, has not been adequately addressed' (Prinsloo 2009:198). Apart from some general remarks on the delimitation of units in Habakkuk 2 (Prinsloo 2009:215–217), I have not undertaken a detailed study of the implications of unit delimitation for the interpretation of Habakkuk 2 yet. This section is a step in that direction with a very specific focus, namely the relationship between 2:4–5 and 2:5f. It is important for the interpretation of Habakkuk 2.

There has been considerable debate about the extent and content of the setumot that Habakkuk was instructed to write down (2:2b), a question directly related to the relationship between 2:4 and 5. Some regard 2:1–4 as a unit (Denden 1953:263; Elliger 1956:41; Nowack 1903:283; Van Katwijk 1912:51; Prinsloo 1999:524–525), others 2:1–5 (Deissler 1984:226; Rudolph 1975:216; Sellin 1930:399), still others 2:1–5b (Brownlee 1971:258–259; Prinsloo 1989:132), whereas some are of the opinion that 2:1–20 should be read as a single pericope (Van der Woude 1978:31).

A key issue in this discussion is the interpretation of כ יָד in 2:5. The function of the combination of three conjunctive and/or subordinate particles without any obvious referent is controversial. For those who propose a close relationship between 2:4 and 5, כ יָד [how much more and/or less …] introduces an argument a minori ad maius (Rudolph 1975:213; Van der Woude 1966:367–375, 1970:281–282). For others there is no logical a minori ad maius connection between 2:4 and 5 (Roberts 1991:116) and כ יָד functions as an ‘emphatic connective’ (Bratcher 1985:145) to be translated by something like ‘yes, indeed …’ (Deissler 1984:226; Van Katwijk 1912:108; Van der Woude 1978:39).

Principles of unit delimitation can assist modern interpreters in making exegetical decisions. Addendum 1 contains a brief discussion of textual witnesses used in this study and their bibliographical information. The consulted Hebrew textual witnesses unanimously suggest a section break between 1:17 and 2:1 and again between 2:8 and 9. Witnesses are divided about the delimitation of units in 2:1–8. Some regard it as a single paragraph, whereas others have a division between 2:4 and 5. QpHab supports this division. It quotes Habakkuk 2:4a in 7:14–15; 2:4b in 7:17; 2:5–6 in 8:3–8; 2:7–8a in 8:13–15; 2:8a again in 9:3–4 and 2:28b in 9:8. The combination of 2:5–6 in the quote in 8:3–8 suggests a close relationship between the introduction to the woe oracles (2:5–6d) and the first oracle itself (2:6e–8). Data from the Hebrew manuscripts is summarised in Table 1.

Greek textual witnesses by and large support the delimitation traditions in Masoretic manuscripts. Greek manuscripts

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**TABLE 1: Paragraph markers in Hebrew manuscripts.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before</th>
<th>M$^1$</th>
<th>M$^2$</th>
<th>M$^3$</th>
<th>M$^4$</th>
<th>M$^5$</th>
<th>M$^6$</th>
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<td>2:5</td>
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<td>2:9</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: See Addendum 1 for the full bibliographical particulars of the Hebrew manuscripts consulted

1. Habakkuk 2:4 contains the content of the תומא with 2:5–6c as introduction to the woe oracles.
2. Habakkuk 2:4–5 contains the content of the תומא with 2:6a–c as introduction to the woe oracles.
3. Habakkuk 2:4–5b contains the content of the תומא with 2:5c–6c as introduction to the woe oracles.
4. He regards 2:4 as the content of the תומא whereas 2:5–20 is a kind of ‘commentary’ by the prophet upon YHWH’s revelation in 2:4.
5. Between 1:17 and 2:1 MurXII has a פִּתְעָה, while M$^1$, M$^2$, M$^3$, M$^4$ and BibR have a סִּירָם. The consulted witnesses agree that a section break occurs between 2:8 and 9. A סִירָם is present in M$^1$, M$^2$ and BibR. A פִּתְעָה appears in M$^3$, M$^4$ and M$^5$. MurXII is too fragmentary to determine the presence or absence of a delimiter.
6. No division is apparent in M$^1$, M$^2$ and BibR. It is supported by the Peshitta and the Vulgate. A סִירָם appears between 2:4 and 5 in M$^1$, M$^2$ and M$^3$. MurXII is too fragmentary to determine the presence or absence of a delimiter.
indicate in various ways that a new section begins with
2:1.  Seputaquit manuscripts demarcate 2:1 as a sub-unit, an indication that it was regarded as an introduction to 2:2–20. There is no uniform treatment of 2:2–8 in Seputaquit manuscripts. Whereas 2:2–8 is subdivided into smaller units by some, there are no subdivisions in apparent others. All four consulted uncials demarcate καὶ ἐροῦσιν (2:6c) as a separate phrase. Thus, Greek manuscripts attest to the following: 2:1 is regarded as an introductory phrase in all manuscripts. As in some Hebrew manuscripts, Greek witnesses divide 2:2–6, regarding 2:2–4 as a unit and 2:5–6c as an introduction to the series of woe oracles commencing in 2:6c–20. Other Greek witnesses support the second Hebrew tradition without subdivision in 2:2–8. The two traditions in the consulted textual witnesses are summarised in Table 2.

In the evaluation of these witnesses, another classic principle in Hebrew textual criticism should be kept in mind, namely that textual evidence should be weighed and not counted
(see Deit 1978:243-244; Tov 1992:300-301). The division of 2:1-8 into two paragraphs is attested in the Peshrer Habakkuk and in three Masoretic codices dating from before 1000 CE. This tradition cannot simply be discounted.

The text of Habakkuk 2:5a In ancient textual witnesses

When the text of 2:5a is compared in six ancient textual witnesses (see Addendum 2), different textual traditions are apparent. The basic tenet in all witnesses is clear. All denounce an arrogant person whose insatiable appetite for violence is likened to Sheol [death] and finds expression in his obsession to gather to himself all the nations or peoples.

With regard to 2:5a, however, three textual traditions are apparent. The first refers to the treacherous nature of wine, which has exactly the effect described in the rest of the verse – those who become addicted to it always crave more. It is reflected in MT, the Targum and the Vulgate and is followed in many modern translations.

The second does not refer to wine, but contains a number of synonyms for arrogance. The Septuagint reads ὁ δὲ κατοιόμενος καὶ καταφρονητής, ἀνὴρ ἀλαζών [but the arrogant and the scorner, the boastful man] and the Peshitta [the arrogant and greedy man]. It is followed in a number of modern translations.

The third tradition is present only in 1QpHab, where MT’s ג י כ is replaced by the orthographically similar ג כ י, usually vocalised as ג כ י [wealth]. This reading is popular in so-called dynamic-equivalent translations.

Unit delimitation thus suggests that consideration should be given to the scribal tradition demarcating a section break between 2:4 and 2:5. It implies that 2:5 should be interpreted in light of the following verses, and 2:5–20 then in conjunction with 2:1-4. A comparative reading of various textual witnesses suggests the existence of three traditions regarding 2:5a. Is wine, arrogance or wealth denounced in 2:5a? In this study I will focus on two of the three textual traditions and ask whether ‘wine’ or ‘wealth’ is denounced in 2:5a.

Towards contextual readings of Habakkuk 2:5a in MT and 1QpHab

Table 3 contains the text of Habakkuk 2:5–6 in MT and its quotation and interpretation in 1QpHab 8.3–13. Words marked in grey indicate differences between MT and 1QpHab. Words encircled indicate links between the quotation of 2:5 in 1QpHab and its interpretation.

I return to my main thesis, namely that a meaningful and balanced evaluation of variant readings in different ancient textual witnesses is only possible if the variants are evaluated taking the literary and social context of each textual witness into consideration. Two questions should be asked: (1) Does ג י כ signify an arrogant person, whose insatiable appetite for violence is likened to Sheol [death] and finds expression in his obsession to gather to himself all the nations or peoples.

2. According to Brownlee (1979:132) the Septuagint and Peshitta are based upon a Hebrew original reading כ י כ [the arrogant] and it was followed by the Targum. The second does not refer to wine, but contains a number of synonyms for arrogance. The Septuagint reads ὁ δὲ κατοιόμενος καὶ καταφρονητής, ἀνὴρ ἀλαζών [but the arrogant and the scorner, the boastful man] and the Peshitta [the arrogant and greedy man]. It is followed in a number of modern translations.

24. See Luther Bibel (1545); King James Version (1611); Statenvertaling (1637); Revised Standard Version (1952); New International Version (1984).


26. According to Brownlee (1979:132) the Septuagint and Peshitta are based upon a Hebrew original reading כ י כ [the arrogant] and it was followed by the Targum. The second does not refer to wine, but contains a number of synonyms for arrogance. The Septuagint reads ὁ δὲ κατοιόμενος καὶ καταφρονητής, ἀνὴρ ἀλαζών [but the arrogant and the scorner, the boastful man] and the Peshitta [the arrogant and greedy man]. It is followed in a number of modern translations.

TABLE 3: Habakkuk 2:5–6 in MT and 1QpHab.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Habakkuk 2:5–6 in MT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5a</td>
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<td>b</td>
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<tr>
<td>5c</td>
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Reading מֵהִין [wealth] in the context of 1QpHab

Does מֵהִין [wealth] make sense in the context of 1QpHab?

Three issues should be kept in mind in a contextual interpretation of 1QpHab 8:3–13.

The first is the Pesher’s socio-historical context. The scroll dates from the latter half of the first century BCE, but was probably first written in the time of Alexander Jannaeus (103–176 BCE) (Fabry 2003:252). It should be read against the background of the conflicts between successive imperial powers of the time (the Persians, Greeks and Romans) and their influence upon the Jewish minority in and around Jerusalem. It should especially be read in the light of the second and first century BCE’s emerging and often conflicting Judaism(s). A core belief of Second Temple Judaism was to view the totality of the Jewish people as an organic whole, almost like a single body that was chosen by God. At the same time ‘individual religious communities ... proliferated during this period’, all adhering to ‘this overarching view of Israel’s sanctity’, but each group established its own ways to live a life of sanctity and saw itself as verus Israel’ (Flusser 2009:8). Some groups placed their hopes in the institutions and leaders of their day, whether the High Priests, the Ptolemies, or the Maccabees and had little interest in messianism, while [apocalyptic] groups developed the idea of a transcendent savior figure, either as an alternative or as a complement to earthly messianism. At Qumran we find a group with a strong and developed interest in messianism (Collins 1987:106).

The second is the nature of the Qumran community. Sometime before 150 BCE centuries of tension within the manly priestly groups in the Jerusalem Temple came to a climax and the Righteous Teacher led a group out of the Temple and Jerusalem and southeastward into the wilderness (Charlesworth 2002:37) and established the so-called Qumran community:

[The] Qumran phenomenon derives from larger and earlier sectarian apocalyptic movements. It is likely that the origins of the Qumran Community are to be found ‘within the Essene movement’ which antedates Qumran, but that the settlement at Qumran dates towards the latter half of the 2nd century BCE (2002:55–56).

Much has been written about the community’s mode(s) of self-identification and their sectarian identity (Berg 2011:333–349; Jokiranta 2013; Newsom 2004):

28. According to Morgan (2002:157) the script of both identifiable handwritings in the scroll (1:1–12:13; 12:13–13:34) is Herodian. The copying of the scroll ‘can probably be placed in the second half of the first century BCE.’


The Qumran community had much in common with other Jews of the same place and time. It was, however, a very radical group, and in numerous ways it was distinctive, so distinctive that it separated itself from other Palestinian Jews. (2000:32—42)

31. Cf. Garcia Martinez (2007:3–29, 31–52) for a discussion on the origins and nature of the Qumran community. I concur with the basic tenets of the Groningen Hypothesis which places ‘the origins of the Essene movement in the Palestinian apocalyptic tradition of the late 3rd and early 2nd c. BCE, helps us to understand how and why within this Essene movement the influence of the Teacher of Righteousness gave rise to a fringe group and makes it clear how after opposing the High Priests Jonathan and Simon, this group eventually broke with the original Essene Community and retired to the desert’ (Garcia Martinez 2007:29).

The Qumran community:

... can best be described as a group of Jews possessed by an ardent messianic vision ... By extrapolating biblical texts, they had worked out the exact date of the onset of the ideal 'Age to Come', and held themselves in readiness to welcome its harbingers, the 'Anointed', who would usher it in. (Talmon 1987:115)

The third is the nature of the posher genre. Posher [הון] 'is a term ... largely distinctive of the Qumran sectarian literature' (Brooke 2013:101). It introduces 'a revealed interpretation ... of an earlier revelation' (Silberman 1961:326), indicates 'the meaning of a biblical word, phrase or verse' (Lim 2000:59) and 'introduces the specific point of reference from which the entire verse is to be understood' (Silberman 1961:328). The pesharim 'are hermeneutically focused. They are biblical commentaries in the sense of fulfilment hermeneutics' (Charlesworth 2002:5–6). Posher interpretation 'is pneumatic, eschatological, and "fulfilment interpretation"; it is also self-serving and idiosyncratic' (2002:68). The posherist read the biblical text in the light of his community's interests and circumstances, as if 'the ancient men of wisdom, especially the prophets, focused their thoughts on the latter days and as if the Qumranites ... were living in the latter days of time and history' (Charlesworth 2002:70). The 'Habakkuk Posher and, indeed, all Posher material are related on one side to Daniel and on the other to a body of midrashim whose structure is parallel to and perhaps derived from the form found in Daniel and developed in the Qumran pesharim' (see Instone Brewer 1992:187–198; Silberman 1961:326). In 1QpHab 8:3–13 both the biblical lemma (8:3–8) and its interpretation and application (8:8–13) should be read against this background. The interpretation 'is not merely juxtaposed to the lemma with but superficial relation to it. Rather does it grow out of the lemma, using literary devices to establish the connection' (Silberman 1961:334). The term הון [wealth] is key in 8:3–13. It occurs four times, once in the lemma (8:3) and three times in the application (8:11–12). The term הון occurs another five times in 1QpHab (1:8; 6:1; 9:5, 6; 12:10). The Posher 'mentions wealth more extensively than any of the other exegetical works' (Murray 2002:235) and always uses the term in the sense of illegitimately taking the possessions of others. The Qumran community 'displayed a distinct antipathy towards wealth and they regarded it as the result of violence, pillage and oppression' (Potgieter-Annandale 1999:81). In 1:8 and 6:1 the Romans are accused of seizing the wealth of others in order to increase their own wealth. Especially the so-called Wicked Priest is accused of committing this atrocity. In 8:3 Habakkuk 2:5 is quoted as 'wealth betrays a haughty man ...' It is applied to the Wicked Priest, who is accused of betraying God's statutes for the sake of wealth (8:11) and of amassing the wealth of men (8:11) and taking the wealth of peoples (8:12). In 12:10 he is accused of stealing the wealth of the poor ones. The last priests of Jerusalem are also accused of amassing wealth and profit (9:5) and warn that it will be given into the hands of the army of the Kittim (9:6).

The community disdains 'the arrogance and viciousness associated with wealth ... and give economic witness to the eschatological justice for which they hope' (Murray 2002:102). The Rule of the Community (23x) shares with the Damascus Document 'an intense interest in wealth'. Whereas the Damascus Document focuses upon 'socio-economic critique', in the Rule:

... priority is given to the alternative ideal community ... organised around a renewed covenant. This new covenant, in turn, reorients the agricultural-sacrificial enterprise away from the urban sanctuary and towards the wilderness congregation committed more radically than others to the statutes of Deuteronomy. (Murray 2002:162)

4QInstruction and other wisdom texts (26x) presume 'an audience that regularly finds itself in difficult economic circumstances to which the pooling of resources, charity and in the last resort loans appear to be the only avenues of recourse' (Murray 2002:209). In the Pesharim (10x) there is 'the association of arrogance and wickedness with wealth, the self-identification of the community as the poor and the meek' and 'the assertion that God will bless these poor ones by feeding them' (Murray 2002:235).

34. An exact count depends upon textual reconstructions. I did not take parallel texts (e.g. 1QS V.1–4 // 4Q258 I.2–3) into consideration but did a simple count of all occurrences of הון. The statistics simply illustrate that it is a keyword in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

35. See Brownlee (1979:131–144) for a detailed exegesis of the passage. 1QpHab 8:3–11 is the first paragraph in an extended passage (8:3–12:10) where Habakkuk 2:5–17 is applied to the Wicked Priest and his disciples (Potgieter-Annandale 1999:77).

[They] called themselves 'the Poor Ones', 'the Good Ones', 'the Sons of Aaron', 'the Sons of Light', 'the Sons of Truth', 'the Sons of Dawn', 'the Sons of Zadok', 'the Sons of Righteousness', 'the Righteous Ones', 'the Perfect Ones', 'the Perfect in the Way', 'the Holy Ones', and 'the Most Holy Ones'. (Charlesworth 2002:73)
Slomovic (1969–71:15) argues that in 8:3–13 ‘the general idea of the pesher is apparent. The Wicked Priest, after a period of enjoying a reputation for truth, grew arrogant and betrayed God and his precepts for the sake of wealth. Wealth was the underlying cause for his betrayal’ (my emphasis).42 Departing from the reading יהי היין homah (8:3) the pesherist applied the biblical phrase to יהי היין שכר in 8:8.43 For Brownlee (1951:67) the ‘explication of the passage grows out of its distinctive readings.’ He identifies three distinctive readings of the biblical text in the pesher: Firstly, יהי [wealth] is read instead of MT’s יין [the wine], allowing the pesherist to make deceptive wealth the key term that ‘drives several sentences in the interpretation’ (VanderKam 2011:356). Secondly, for the pesherist MT’s במילים [proverb] (2:6; see 1QpHab 8:6) implies something cryptic (Brownlee 1951:67), hence it is read in the application as יהי [to rule] in the phrase ‘but when he ruled in Israel his heart became haughty’ (8:9–10).44 Thirdly, the final word in MT 2:6, יהי [pledge], is written defectively in 1QpHab 8:8, thus יהי, allowing the pesherist to read it as two words, יהי שכר [thickness of mud] and apply it as במילא תרד [unclean impurity] (see Brownlee 1951:67, 1979:142).45 Hence the Wicked Priest, who once ‘was called by the name of truth’ (8:9) became laden with every kind of unclean impurity’ (VanderKam 2011:358).

The accumulated evidence indicate that pesherists reading in 1QpHab 8:3 is an acceptable and explainable reading in the context of the Qumran community and its literature.

Reading יין [the wine] in the context of MT


The first is the text’s socio-historical context. At least for Habakkuk 1–2, readers have to transpose themselves about 400 years earlier than the events suggested in the Pesher Habakkuk. The text can be read against the background of the Babylonian exile (Prinsloo 2013a:132–154). Habakkuk displays a ‘curious reluctance to identify the wicked’, yet ‘there are hints that the Babylonians are the object of the scorn, the nation on whom imminent doom is pronounced’ (Prinsloo 2013a:152). I inferred this from the ‘many parallels between Habakuk 2 and oracles of doom in Isaiah directed against the Babylonians (cf. Isa 13–14; 21:1–10)’ (Prinsloo 2013a:152). With reference to Habakkuk 3 I postulated that the:

\[\ldots\] reference to יין ‘the poor’ (3:14) \ldots points to the poet of Habakkuk 3 being a member of a specific social group in the late Persian and/or early Hellenistic period who regarded themselves as the true Israel and as the actual recipients of YHWH’s salvific intervention in and promises to his people. The poet appropriates YHWH’s promise to the prophet Habakkuk at the time of the Chaldean onslaught on and devastation of Jerusalem to his own predicament as a marginalised ‘poor’ in a wicked and hostile environment.

(Prinsloo 2013b:7)

The reference to יין in 2:5 should be interpreted against the background of imperial powers’ domination of the people of Judah/Yehud during the Babylonian exile and Persian/early Hellenistic rule.

Secondly, readers sensitive to intertextual allusions in the Hebrew Bible will recognise a number of intertextual contexts illuminating the phrase יין in 2:5a. In wisdom literature the delusionary influence of יין [the wine] is a well-known motif (see Proverbs 23:29–35). Proverbs 20:1 is reminiscent of Habakkuk 2:5a’s יין:43

\[1a \text{ For such thus said YHWH the God of Israel to me:} \]
\[b \text{ Take this cup of fuming wine from my hand} \]
\[c \text{ and let all the nations drink it,} \]
\[d \text{ those to whom I am sending you.} \]

Wine is used as metaphor for YHWH’s wrath. In Psalm 75:9 ‘the wicked of the earth’ are condemned:

\[9a \text{ A mocker is the wine, a brawler is beer,} \]
\[b \text{ and everyone led astray by it, is not wise.} \]

\[9c \text{ Indeed, its dregs they will drain, they will drink,} \]
\[d \text{ all the wicked people of the earth.} \]

In prophetic literature YHWH’s wrath is directed at Israel’s enemies in general, and at one enemy in particular – the Babylonians. Jeremiah 25:15–38 is a pronouncement of universal judgement directed at ‘Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials’ (Jer 25:18) and all surrounding kingdoms (Jer 25:19–26). The prophet is instructed (Jer 25:15–16):

\[15a \text{ For thus said YHWH the God of Israel to me:} \]
\[b \text{ Take this cup of fuming wine from my hand} \]
\[c \text{ and let all the nations drink it,} \]
\[d \text{ those to whom I am sending you.} \]

The prophet obeys and hands the cup to all nations (Jer 25:17–26).
Jeremiah 51:1–58 is a pronouncement of Babylon’s complete destruction. ’Wine’ serves as metaphor for Babylon’s violence (51:7–8):

A similar picture emerges in Isaiah 51:17–23. The exiles are comforted (51:17):

A complete reversal of fortunes is about to occur (51:21–23a):

In Jeremiah 51:1–58 and Isaiah 51:17–23 ‘wine’ is a metaphor for the Babylonians’ violence against the people of Judah. The cup of wrath they handed to the Judeans will become the cup of wrath in the hand of YHWH and the Babylonians will now be forced to drink it. Daniel 5:1–31, a tale about the final destruction of the Babylonian Empire, repeatedly refers to ‘the wine’ drank at King Belshazzar’s banquet from ‘the gold goblets’ taken by Nebuchadnezzar from ‘the temple of God in Jerusalem’ (see 5:1–4, 23). This action is interpreted by Daniel as a sure sign of Babylonian hubris (5:18–24) and it is the direct cause of the great empire’s fall (Kaiser 1992:172).

The intertexts teach a general principle: יין [the wine] is deceptive or treacherous and not to be trusted (see יין in Prov 20:1).46 It is used metaphorically for YHWH’s wrath and/or a foreign power’s violence, a Motivikonstellation is created that might be called ‘drinking the cup of wrath from YHWH’s hand’.47 It conveys a simple principle. The violence committed against others by imperial powers (metaphorically described as a cup filled with fuming wine) will turn against them. YHWH will force these powers to drink the cup of wrath themselves. The constellation consists of six motifs: a drinking vessel – hand (of YHWH) – fermented beverage – recipient(s) of the beverage – consuming the beverage – effect.

Thirdly, principles of unit delimitation suggest that a section break between Habakkuk 2:4 and 5 should seriously be considered. If 2:5 is interpreted in the light of 2:5–20, intratextual links in the pericope indicate that the reference to יין in 2:5a is not ‘hardly acceptable’ (Van der Woude 1978:39) or ‘senseless’ (Perlitt 2004:67). On the contrary, the general intent of the text is clear:

Like delusory wine, the arrogant man will not reach his destination. These Chaldean kings will no longer continue with their pillage and their voracious gathering of nations into their realm … At a certain moment in time the nations they have plundered will get the opportunity to scoff at the Chaldeans. (Potgieter-Annandale 1999:79)

If 2:5 is read in this context, the presence of the Motivikonstellation referred to above becomes apparent (see 2:5, 15–16). Table 4 summarises its manifestation in different contexts.

Read in this light the presence of יין [the wine] in 2:5a becomes perfectly legible. It refers to the arrogance of the wicked Babylonians, prompting them to gather more (2:6–8), secure more (2:9–11), build more (2:12–14), lust more (2:15–17) and in the end commit the ultimate folly of relying solely upon himself (2:18–19) in the presence of YHWH, who is in his holy palace and before whom all the Earth should hush (2:20). Their lust for ‘wine’ borders on the absurd and has become an insatiable obsession (2:5). Ironically, by committing the atrocities described in the woes oracles, the perpetrator of violent acts satiated himself with shame (2:16) and his downfall is inevitable.

The accumulated evidence indicate that the reading יין in MT 2:5a is an acceptable and explainable reading in the context of MT.

Conclusion

In this study I expressed my surprise at the way Habakkuk 2:5 becomes perfectly legible. It refers to the arrogance of the wicked Babylonians, prompting them to gather more (2:6–8), secure more (2:9–11), build more (2:12–14), lust more (2:15–17) and in the end commit the ultimate folly of relying solely upon himself (2:18–19) in the presence of YHWH, who is in his holy palace and before whom all the Earth should hush (2:20). Their lust for ‘wine’ borders on the absurd and has become an insatiable obsession (2:5). Ironically, by committing the atrocities described in the woes oracles, the perpetrator of violent acts satiated himself with shame (2:16) and his downfall is inevitable.

The accumulated evidence indicate that the reading יין in MT 2:5a is an acceptable and explainable reading in the context of MT.

Conclusion

In this study I expressed my surprise at the way Habakkuk 2:5 is dealt with in many commentaries and modern translations. There is a marked difference between MT’s interpretation of Habakkuk 2:5 and 1QpHab’s.46 I argued that both readings should be evaluated in their respective contexts before rash decisions are made about the ‘preferred’ reading. I asked two basic questions: Does wealth make sense in the context of 1QpHab? My answer was in the affirmative, but it would be negative if the reading were transposed to the context of MT. Does wine make sense in the context of MT? Again my answer was in the affirmative, but it would be negative if the reading were transposed to the context of 1QpHab. In essence this study was a plea for contextual interpretations of two alternative textual traditions of Habakkuk 2:5a.

46 Floyd (2000:113) remarks: [a] taste for wine, when overindulged, can give a man such delusions of grandeur that he is bound to fall; and a taste for conquest, when overextended to cosmic proportions, can likewise predispose a conqueror to make fatal mistakes.

47 For the term, see Berges (2000:153).
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Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

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Addendum 1: Textual witnesses utilised in the study

Hebrew witnesses

Proto-Masoretic manuscripts:

1. Pesher Habakkuk (1QpHab): One of the first scrolls discovered in Cave 1 at Qumran (Würtwein 1973:36). I consulted the photographs and transcription of the scroll by Burrows et al. (1950) and Cross et al. (1970) and the critical edition by Horgan (2002).

2. Codex Leningrad (B): According to the colophon the manuscript was copied in 916 CE. It utilises Babylonian vowel signs, but in the consonantal text and punctuation it follows the Tiberian tradition (Würtwein 1973:40; Barthélemy 2012:238).

3. Codex Reuchlinianus (M): The manuscript contains the former and latter prophets and dates from circa 1105 CE. The vocalisation of the manuscript is proto-Tiberian and it contains both the Masoretic text and the Targum Jonathan to the Prophets.

4. Codex Petropolitanus (M): According to the colophon the manuscript was copied in 916 CE. It utilises Babylonian vowel signs, but in the consonantal text and punctuation it follows the Tiberian tradition (Würtwein 1973:40; Barthélemy 2012:238).

Printed editions of the Hebrew Bible:

8. Biblia Rabbinica (BibRab): The so-called Second Rabbinic Bible was prepared by Jakob ben Chayyim and printed by Daniel Bomberg in Venice in 1524–1525. The Hebrew text occurs together with the Aramaic translation and the Rabbinic commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Kimchi (Würtwein 1973:42; Deist 1978:84).

Printed editions of the Targum:


Aramaic witnesses

Manuscript with non-Tiberian vocalisation:


Printed editions of the Targum:


http://www.hts.org.za
Greek witnesses

Scroll from the Judean Desert:

1. **Greek Minor Prophets scroll from Nahal Hever (8ḤevXIIgr):** Dates from between 50 BCE and 50 CE and contains a Greek translation of the Twelve Minor Prophets. It shows similarities with Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion and represents a recension of the Septuagint containing a literal translation of an apparently pre-Masoretic Hebrew text (Würtwein 1973:178; Barthélemy 2012:434–444).


Uncia Septuagint manuscripts:

2. **Codex Sinaiticus (G):** Dates from the fourth century CE. Originally contained the entire Bible, but large parts of the Old Testament have been lost (Deist 1978:190).

   *Codex Sinaiticus Petropolitanus et Friderico-Augustanus Lipsiensis: The Old Testament preserved in the public library of Petrograd, in the library of the Society of Ancient Literature in Petrograd, and in the library of the University of Leipzig now produced in facsimile from photographs by Helen and Kirsopp Lake, 1922, Clarendon, Oxford.*

3. **Codex Vaticanus (G):** Dates from the fourth century CE and contains the entire Bible. It is regarded as the best complete Septuagint manuscript (Deist 1978:190).

   *Bibliorum Sacrorum Graecus Codex Vaticanus Tomus IV: Libros Esther, Iudith, Tobiae et Prophetarum, 1872, Congregatiois de Propaganda Fide, Roma.*

4. **Codex Alexandrinus (G):** Dates from the fifth century CE and contains the entire Bible (Deist 1978:191).


5. **Codex Marchalianus (G):** Dates from the sixth century CE and contains the prophetic books. It is of interest because hexaplaric notes occur in the margins (Deist 1978:191).


Syriac witnesses

1. **Codex Ambrosianus (7a1):** Dates from the sixth to seventh century CE and contains the entire Old Testament written in elegant Estrangela script (Deist 1978:147–148).


2. **Peshitta:** Printed version of the Syriac Old Testament with the Codex Ambrosianus as base text, produced by the Peshitta Institute in Leiden.


Latin witness

1. **Vulgate:** I utilised the critical printed edition prepared by the Benedictine order published since 1926 in numerous volumes (Deist 1978:213).

### Addendum 2: The text of Habakkuk 2:5 in six ancient textual witnesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MT</th>
<th>1QpHab</th>
<th>Targum</th>
<th>Peshitta</th>
<th>Septuagint</th>
<th>Vulgate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>גֶּ֥בֶר יָהִ֖יר</td>
<td>הוֹיָ֑ה יַעֲקֹֽב</td>
<td>הָאֵ֜ין יִרְמָ֣יאִים</td>
<td>מִ֑צְרִי</td>
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<tr>
<td>וְלֹ֣א יִנְוֶ֑ה</td>
<td>לֹֽאִֽיָּהֶ֥ב</td>
<td>לָוֶֽה</td>
<td>לֹֽאִֽיָּהֶ֥ב</td>
<td>לָוֶֽה</td>
<td>לָוֶֽה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וַיֶּאֱסֹ֤ף אֵלָ֙יו֙ כָּל־הַגּוֹיִ֔ם</td>
<td>אֵלָֻ֔יוֹ כָּל־הָעַמִּ֖ים</td>
<td>אֵלָֻ֔יוֹ כָּל־הָעַמִּ֖ים</td>
<td>אֵלָֻ֔יוֹ כָּל־הָעַמִּ֖ים</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>וַיִּקְבֹּ֥ץ אֵלָ֖יו כָּל־הָעַמִּ֑ים</td>
<td>אֵלָּ֖יו כָּל־הָעַמִּ֑ים</td>
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<td>אֵלָּ֖יו כָּל־הָעַמִּ֑ים</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**And yes, indeed – this wine is treacherous:**

an arrogant man – yes, …

… he does not come to rest –

... (he) who opened like Sheol his throat,

and he is like death – yes, he is not satisfied;

so he gathered to him all the nations,

and he collected to him all the peoples.

Moreover, *like one led astray by wine* …

... (is) a proud man in wickedness, and he will not endure

who opened like Sheol his throat,

and he, like death, was not satisfied;

and he collected to himself all the peoples,

and brought to himself all the kingdoms.

The arrogant and greedy man

is never satisfied

because he has enlarged his appetite

like Sheol

and never was satisfied like death

but he gathered to him all the peoples,

and he drew near to him all the nations.

But the arrogant and the scornful, the boastful man,

will not finish anything

who has enlarged his desire as the grave.

And like death he is never satisfied,

and he will gather to himself all the nations,

and will receive to himself all the peoples.

Moreover, *like one led astray by wine* …

... (is) a proud man in wickedness,

and he will not endure

who opened like Sheol his throat,

and he, like death, was not satisfied;

and he collected to himself all the peoples,

and brought to himself all the kingdoms.

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but he gathered to him all the peoples,

and he drew near to him all the nations.

But the arrogant and the scornful, the boastful man,

will not finish anything

who has enlarged his desire as the grave.

And like death he is never satisfied,

and he will gather to himself all the nations,

and will receive to himself all the peoples.

And yes, indeed – *wealth betrays* …

... an arrogant man,

and he does not come to rest –

... (he) who opened like Sheol his throat,

and he is like death; he is not satisfied.

And all the nations are gathered about him,

and all the peoples are assembled to him.

Moreover, *like one led astray by wine* …

... (is) a proud man in wickedness,

and he will not endure

who opened like Sheol his throat,

and he, like death, was not satisfied;

and he collected to himself all the peoples,

and brought to himself all the kingdoms.

The arrogant and greedy man

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because he has enlarged his appetite

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But the arrogant and the scornful, the boastful man,

will not finish anything

who has enlarged his desire as the grave.

And like death he is never satisfied,

and he will gather to himself all the nations,

and will receive to himself all the peoples.

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49. The three masculine plural verbs in 1QpHab should presumably be vocalised as Nif'al (Gelston 2010: 119).

50. The Targum translates MT יְכִּֽי־הַיַּ֣יִן as two emphatic particles, that is, אַף כִּֽי־הַיַּ֣יִן (Gelston 2010: 119).

51. The Targum translates MT כֵּֽי־הַיַּ֣יִן as the preposition כְּ (Gelston 2010: 118).

52. The Peshitta omits MT בּוֹגֵֽד כִּֽי־הַיַּ֣יִן (Gelston 2010: 118).

53. The Septuagint weakens MT כֵּֽי־הַיַּ֣יִן to a mere ὅ (Gelston 2010: 118).

54. Ziegler’s (1952: 366–370) emendation of κατοιόμενος [the arrogant] to κατοινωμένος [the wine drinker] in agreement with MT is not supported by LXX uncial manuscripts and should be rejected (Gelston 2010: 118).