David J. Fuller
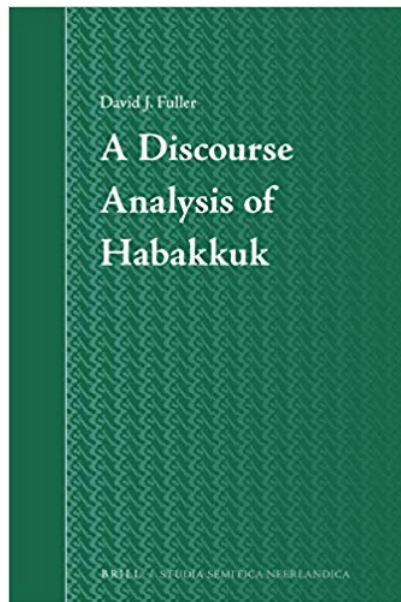
A Discourse Analysis of Habakkuk

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David J. Fuller's *A Discourse Analysis of Habakkuk* begins with an introductory chapter that sets forth features of Habakkuk that make it a good candidate for a new form of analysis utilizing linguistic theory. Key features include the interchange of speeches between prophet and deity and the varying levels of cohesion and disunity between the various literary forms (complaint, woe oracle, prayer, theophany) and the structural units they make up. A survey of previous approaches, including literary, form-critical, and redaction-critical, sets the stage for introducing systematic functional linguistics as a source of more objective, data-driven criteria for evaluating the interpretive questions about Habakkuk that have arisen using other methods.

Chapter 1 describes the theoretical foundations of systematic functional linguistics and the analytical tools that Fuller applies to the text of Habakkuk. The key concepts of Michael Halliday that inform Fuller's methodology are field, tenor, and mode. The discussion is technical and in places difficult for the nonspecialist in linguistics to follow, but a patient reading produces an understanding of *field* as the social interactions described between participants in a given text, *tenor* as an examination of the social roles and relationships of participants, and *mode* as the role of language in organizing and giving cohesion to a text. Field, tenor, and mode are often employed as tools for register analysis, a means of identifying the way in which language usage correlates to social situations and functions. Fuller's goal is more modest than providing a register analysis of Habakkuk. His aim is to use the tools of field, tenor, and mode to clarify the literary content of

each primary unit of Habakkuk and to describe the interrelationships between the respective units and the book as a whole. He adapts the tools of Hallidayian analysis to the linguistic features of Biblical Hebrew in various ways. The mode analysis focuses on linguistic chains that identify the most prominent actors in a text and the nature of their interactions. Field analysis describes the verbal processes that articulate interactions and relationships and the relationships between clauses in a text unit, whether on a similar level (parataxis) or a subordinate level (hypotaxis). Field analysis also includes the usage of the Hebrew verbal system. Tenor analysis looks at speech roles and the representation of subject-verb relationships.

Chapters 2–8 report the results of Fuller's discourse analysis of the major structural units of Habakkuk, which he identifies as 1:2–4; 1:5–11; 1:12–17; 2:1–2b; 2:2c–6b; 2:6c–20; and 3:1–19. He describes the major strength of discourse analysis as its ability "to succinctly describe the content of a portion of text" (42). Summarizing his results, therefore, would require the difficult feat of summarizing a summary. Alternatively, what follows are some general observations about the nature and results of Fuller's analysis. Each summary begins with the analysis of mode, which by its nature foregrounds and highlights the unifying and cohesive structures in the text. The discourse analysis proceeds at the global level of each unit rather than following the sequential order of the text. It looks at participants and referents as they appear across the span of textual units and between units in addition to how these appear in the sequence of the text. This global, multilevel approach is also biased toward textual coherence over against evidence of textual dissonance.

The analysis does indeed produce a succinct description of textual content that provides a level of clarity produced by a perspective that is different from rhetorical analysis or literary close readings. For example, four primary referents dominate the linguistic connections in Hab 1:2–4: the prophet, YHWH, evildoers, and flagging institutions. While these referents are also clearly identified in most literary analyses of Habakkuk, Fuller's discourse analysis provides a different way of quantifying and describing the language of the text.

Another clarifying result of Fuller's analysis is the view of the rhetorical movement within the text across the scope of the book. Habakkuk is structured by explicit or presumed speeches between the prophet and YHWH. The discourse analysis highlights the changing references of these speeches within the book. Habakkuk's reference to evildoers in 1:2–4 gives way to YHWH's description of the Chaldeans in 1:5–11. Habakkuk takes up and elaborates on the topic of the Chaldeans in 1:12–17. In 2:2–6, YHWH's promised vision takes prominence, and the Chaldean (identified with the "proud one" of 2:4) takes on a subordinate role in comparison to 1:5–17. In 2:6–20, an evildoer referenced in the five woe oracles (also identified with the Chaldean leader) is recipient of the actions of YHWH and other nations, actions that ultimately result in his destruction. In the prayer of 3:1–19, divine speech and action move again toward a wider arena of activity, from the arena of the nations described in the woe oracles to the arena of the natural world.

The result is an analytical, technical, quantitative description of Habakkuk's expanding vision of divine activity from Judah to the nations to the created order.

The new perspective on Habakkuk that Fuller's analysis provides is not that of new discoveries as much as of new descriptions of features that have previously been described using other methods. For example, Fuller provides analytical evidence of the identification of "the proud one" of Hab 2:4 with the Chaldeans of Hab 1:5–17 through a comparison of the "transitivity structure" of both passages. He notes, however, that J. J. M. Roberts made a similar analysis using different language (150 n. 24). Not all of Fuller's results repeat or reframe earlier studies, however. Mode analysis stresses the importance of structural features. This analysis reveals that Hab 2:4, for all its importance in the reception history of the book, is not part of the central grammatical structure of either the unit in which it occurs or the book as a whole (148). In this case, discourse analysis provides a method for evaluating the structural role of a text that is independent of the influence the text has had in subsequent history.

Fuller's use of a linguistic theory that views language as a broad, nearly limitless functional system of relationships understandably leads to an emphasis on the unifying structures and features of the text. The global nature of the analysis also elides discordant elements of Habakkuk's syntax, grammar, and literary forms. Redactional analyses of Habakkuk place greater weight on the disjunctive linguistic features of the text than Fuller's discourse analysis does. Evaluating the differences between redactional models and an inherently cohesive model like Fuller's will require an approach that is different from the one he employs.

There is a benefit to seeing even familiar interpretive results in a new format using a different kind of evidence. The cost of this benefit in this case is understanding the terminology and methodology of one theoretical framework taken from a distinct discipline with its own knowledge base and history of development. One can imagine ways in which the cost to the reader of understanding the theoretical framework Fuller uses could be decreased. The methodological chapter reads more like a biblical scholar's attempt to demonstrate his understanding of linguistics to linguists than an effort to explain linguistic theory to biblical scholars. Nevertheless, I think the benefit of the book is worth the elevated cost. The structure, content, and movement of the book of Habakkuk as a whole are made clear in new ways by this analysis. Scholars of biblical prophetic literature will benefit from its results.