The enigmatic phrase שְׁבֻעוֹת מַטּוֹת אֹמֶר in verse 9 of the Psalm of Habakkuk (Hab 3:1–19) has taxed the ingenuity of generations of scholars. Over the years these words have been much emended and scores of suggestions have been made. Already in 1843, in his commentary on Habakkuk, Franz Delitzsch stated that he had found over one hundred possible interpretations for this phrase, and since Delitzsch’s time, even more suggestions have been made to elucidate these words. Because the preceding and following phrases, which describe the actions of the divine warrior can stand alone in reasonable poetic parallelism (see diagram below), it is not surprising that one of the suggestions made to elucidate these three words was that they might represent glosses incorporated inadvertently by a later scribe.

The first to mention this possibility was the prominent classical scholar Henry St. John Thackeray at the beginning of the 19th century. Thackeray noted that in some printed editions of the Hebrew Bible there

* This article is dedicated to Bezalel Porten, the acknowledged master of the Elephantine Papyri, with deep appreciation for all his scholarly endeavors.


2 Some of the new, and many of the old, emendations that have been proposed for these three words by various scholars are listed by Edwin M. Good in an Appendix to his 1958 PhD Dissertation (Edwin M. Good, “The Text and Versions of Habakkuk 3: A Study in Textual History” [PhD diss., Columbia University, 1958], 392–394). More recent proposals have been examined by Francis I. Andersen, *Habakkuk: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 25 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 320–325.
is a liturgical note in the margin at the beginning of chapter three of Habakkuk. The note states that this chapter is the one prescribed as the prophetic portion, the *haftarah*, to be read for the second day of *Shavuot* (好莱ח נניל יום ב' של שבועות). With this marginal note in mind, Thackeray wondered if the phrase שְׁבֻעוֹת מַטּוֹת אֹמֶר, occurring before the musical notation סֶלָה in verse 9, might not similarly be a collection of liturgical notes which were incorrectly incorporated from the margin into the text by a later scribe. These liturgical notes might have represented catchwords, or headings, for sections of the Torah which were read on *Shavuot* in the Palestinian triennial cycle of readings.

For his information on the Palestinian triennial cycle Thackeray relied on the work of Adolf Büchler who believed that the Palestinian triennial cycle was bound to a fixed calendar. According to Büchler, the Torah was read over a three year cycle, and each part of the cycle was identified with a specific date. The first cycle, naturally commencing with Genesis, started in the month of Nissan, and the reading for that year extended to the end of Exodus 11 which was reached at the month of Adar of the following year. Since Adar had its own special readings, the second year cycle recommenced on the next Nissan, this time starting with Exodus 12 extending to Num 6:21. The third year cycle began on the third Nissan at Numbers 6:22, and concluded with the end of Deuteronomy. There were two readings for the holiday.

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6 The four Adar readings are for the sabbaths of שֵׁלֵ֥לֶים (Exod 30:11–16), חָיָ֥ה (Deut 25:17–19), חָרְרוֹן (Num 19:1–22), and נוֹרָ֥ה (Exod 12:1–20).

7 Jacob Mann, who differed from Büchler believing as he did that the triennial cycle began in Tishrei not Nissan, wrote about Büchler that “he brilliantly became involved in an untenable theory” (Jacob Mann, *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue* [Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1940], 6). Ironically, the same verdict was later applied to Mann himself by Joseph Heinemann (Joseph Heinemann, “The Triennial Lectionary Cycle” *JJS* 19 [1968]: 48), and a similar judgment was made by Isaiah