

THE PROPHET HABAKKUK

BY

Arno C. Gaebeleinn

1861-1942

(C) In the Public Domain

THE PROPHET HABAKKUK

Introduction

There is a very interesting diversity among these minor prophets. Hosea starts with the command of the Lord for a symbolical action to show Israel her spiritual whoredoms. Joel plunges in at once to describe the judgment of the land by the locusts and leads on to the day of the Lord. Amos begins with the announcement of the judgment of the surrounding nations, while Obadiah is chiefly concerned with the judgment of Edom. Jonah is different from all the rest in his miraculous experience, while Micah has a character of his own. Nahum, as we saw, has the one great message of the doom of Nineveh, and brings comfort to God's people. Habakkuk again is different from all the rest. In nature God displays as Creator a wonderful diversity, and so in His revelation His Spirit uses every instrument in His own way, as it pleases Him.

Of Habakkuk the same holds good as with most of the other minor prophets; we know nothing of the particulars of his life. It does not matter much. God knows these holy men, whom He called to make known His will and the future, and He has kept the record of their lives, as He keeps the record of all of our lives.

His name means "to embrace," but it has the double meaning "to embrace" and "being embraced." He embraced his own people and embraced God in prayer, then "being embraced"--God answered him. Dr. Martin Luther gave a very striking definition of his name, which cannot be improved upon. "Habakkuk signifies an embracer, or one who embraces another, takes him into his arms. He embraces his people, and takes them to his arms, i.e., he comforts them and holds them up, as one embraces a weeping child, to quiet it with the assurance that if God wills it shall soon be better."

It has been assumed that he probably sprang, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, from a priestly family, for at the end of the great ode, at the conclusion of the book, he states--"to the chief singer on my stringed instruments," from which we may gather that he was officially qualified to take part of the temple service. But Isaiah 38:20 seems to contradict this.

An apocryphal book, "Bel and the Dragon," states that Habakkuk was miraculously transported to Daniel, who had been cast a second time to the lions by Cyrus. This and other legends are without any foundation at all, and need not be examined, for they are worthless.

The Date of Habakkuk

As it is with Nahum, so it is with Habakkuk, the superscription does not fix a definite date, but the contents of the book do not leave us in doubt about the time when this man of God prophesied.

In the sixth verse of the opening chapter we read, "For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs." He therefore prophesied at the time when the Chaldeans, or as they are also called the Babylonians, were coming into power, and soon to be used against the house of Judah, as the Assyrian was used in judgment with the house of Israel. He prophesied during the reign of Josiah, that is at the very close of his reign, and a few years before Nineveh was destroyed, which elevated the Babylonians to the place of prominence. Some have put the date into the reign of Manasseh, the father of Josiah, but this is too early. Josiah died on the battlefield, and after his son Jehoahaz had reigned three months, Pharaoh-necho, who had slain Josiah, made Eliakim, the son of Josiah, king over Judah, and gave him the name of Jehoiakim. (See 2 Kings 23:28-37.)

The Message of Habakkuk

The language which Habakkuk used is extremely beautiful. Professor Delitzsch speaks of it as follows: "His language is classical throughout, full of rare and select turns and words, which are to some extent exclusively his own, whilst his view and mode of presentation bear the seal of independent force and finished beauty. Notwithstanding the violent rush and lofty soaring of the thoughts, his prophecy forms a finely organized and artistically rounded whole. Like Isaiah, he is, comparatively speaking, much more independent of his predecessors, both in contents and form, than any of the other prophets." "Everything reflects the time when prophecy was in its greatest glory, when the place of the sacred lyrics, in which the religious life had expressed itself, was occupied, through a still mightier inter-position on the part of God, by prophetic poetry with its trumpet voice." Much in his message is in the form of communion with the Lord. He begins with the familiar heart-cry, "O LORD, how long shall I cry?" He receives an answer, which announces the coming of the Chaldeans, to which again the prophet replies. Then he said, "I will stand upon my watch, and will set me upon the tower, and will watch and see what He will say unto me" (chapter 2). Then he receives another answer. The judgment of Judah by the Chaldeans as well as the overthrow of the Chaldeans, on account of the deification of their power, is the prophetic message with which he starts.

Sublime is the great lyric ode contained in the third chapter, which begins with a prayer (chapter 3). It is one of the greatest descriptions of the theophany, the coming of the Lord, which the Spirit of God has given. He comes in glory and in wrath; the wicked are overthrown, His people are saved. It waits for its great fulfillment when our Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire

with His holy angels.

The Division of Habakkuk

The division is very simple. Chapter 1 forms the first part and gives the coming invasion of Judah by the Chaldeans. In chapter 2 the "woe" is pronounced upon the Chaldeans and their destruction is predicted. The third chapter contains the vision of the coming of the Lord, with which all the ungodly world powers terminate, and the dominion of the Gentiles ends.

Inasmuch as the Authorized Version contains numerous incorrect renderings, we give a complete text in a metric version.

THE PROPHET HABAKKUK

CHAPTER 1

1. The burden, which Habakkuk the prophet saw.
2. How long, O LORD, must I cry
And Thou hearest not?
I cry to Thee; Violence!
And Thou dost not help.
3. Why dost Thou show me iniquity,
And cause me to behold grievance?
Oppression and violence are before me;
There is strife, and contention ariseth.
4. Therefore the law is slacked;
And justice doth never go forth
For the wicked compass about the righteous;
Therefore justice goes forth perverted.
5. Behold ye among the nations and regard,
And wonder marvellously;
For I work a work in your days
Which ye will not believe, though it were told.
6. For behold! I raise up the Chaldeans,
That bitter and impetuous nation,
Which march through the breadth of the earth.
To possess dwelling-places that are not theirs.
7. They are terrible and dreadful,
Their judgment and dignity proceed from themselves.
8. Swifter than leopards are their horses,
And fiercer than the evening wolves.
Their horsemen shall spread themselves,
And their horsemen shall come from afar.
They fly like an eagle hastening to devour.
9. All of them come for violence;
The host of their faces is forward;
And they gather captives like the sand.
10. Yea, he scoffeth at kings,
And princes are a derision unto him.
He laughs at every stronghold
For he heapeth up earth and taketh it.
11. Then he sweepeth by as a tempest
And shall pass over and be guilty,
He whose might is his god.

12. Art Thou not from Everlasting,
Jehovah, my God, my Holy One?
We shall not die!
Jehovah! Thou has appointed them for judgment;
And Thou, O Rock! Thou has established him for chastisement.
13. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil;
Thou canst not look upon injustice.
Why lookest Thou upon the treacherous?
Why art Thou silent when the wicked destroys
The man that is more righteous than he?
14. And Thou makest men like fishes of the sea,
Like reptiles that have no ruler.
15. All of them he lifts up with the hook,
He catcheth them in His net
And gathers them in his drag;
Therefore he rejoices and is glad.
16. Therefore he sacrificeth to his net,
And burneth incense to his drag,
Because by them his portion is rich,
And his food plenteous.
17. Shall he, therefore, empty his net,
And spare not to slay the nations continually?

CHAPTER 2

1. I will stand upon my watch,
And set me upon the tower,
And I will wait to see what He will say to me,
And what I shall answer as to my complaint.
2. And Jehovah answered me and said:
Write the vision and make it plain on tablets,
That he may run that reads it.
3. For the vision is yet for the appointed time,
And it hastens to the end, and shall not lie;
Though it tarry, wait for it;
Because it will surely come, it will not tarry.
4. Behold the proud:
His soul is not right within him;
But the just shall live by faith.
5. And moreover, wine is treacherous;
A haughty man, that keepeth not at home:
Who enlargeth this desire as Sheol,
As death he is and cannot be satisfied,
And gathereth all nations to himself
And heapeth unto him all peoples.
6. Will not all these take up a song against him?
And a taunting proverb against him, and say:
Woe to him who increaseth what is not his own!
How long?
And that ladeth himself with pledges.
7. Will not thy biters rise up suddenly,
And those awake that shall shake thee violently?
And thou wilt become a prey to them.
8. Because thou hast plundered many nations,
All the remnant of the peoples shall plunder thee;
Because of men's blood, and for the violence done to the land,
To the city and all that dwell therein.

9. Woe to him that procureth a wicked gain for his house,
To set his nest on high,
To secure himself from the hand of disaster.
10. Thou has devised shame for thy house,
By cutting off many peoples, and sinning against thyself.
11. For the stone crieth out from the wall,
And the beam out of the wood-work answers it.
12. Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood,
And founds a city by iniquity.
13. Behold is it not from Jehovah of hosts,
That the peoples labor for the fire,
And the nations weary themselves for vanity?
14. For the earth shall be filled
With the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah,
As the waters cover the sea.
15. Woe to him that giveth his neighbor to drink,
Pouring out thy fury, and also making drunk,
In order to look upon their nakedness.
16. Thou art filled with shame instead of glory,
Drink thou also, and be like the uncircumcised:
The cup of Jehovah's right hand shall be turned to thee,
And vile shame shall be upon thy glory.
17. For the violence done to Lebanon shall cover thee,
And the destruction of wild beasts which made them afraid,
Because of the blood of men, and the violence done to the land,
To the city and all that dwell therein.
18. What profiteth a graven image, that its maker has carved?
The molten image, and the teacher of lies,
That the maker of his image trusts therein, to make dumb idols?
19. Woe to him that saith to the wood, Awake;
To the dumb stone, Arise!
Shall it teach? Behold it is overlaid with gold and Silver;
And there is no breath in its inside.
20. But Jehovah is in His holy temple.
Let all the earth be silent before Him.

CHAPTER 3

1. A prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet, set to Shigionoth.
2. O Jehovah! I have heard the report of Thee. I am afraid!
O Jehovah! revise Thy work in the midst of the years;
In the midst of the years make it known;
In wrath remember mercy.
3. God cometh from Teman,
And the Holy One from Mount Paran.--Selah.
His glory covereth the heavens,
And the earth is full of His glory.
4. His brightness is like the sun;
Rays are streaming from His hand;
And there is the hiding of His power.
5. Before Him goeth the pestilence;
And fiery bolts follow His feet.
6. He standeth and measureth the earth;
He looketh and maketh nations tremble;
The everlasting mountains are broken to pieces;
The eternal hills sink down:
His goings are as of old.

7. I saw the tents of Cushan in trouble;
The tent-curtains of Midian are trembling.
8. Was it against the rivers Thou wert displeased, O Jehovah?
Was Thine anger against the rivers?
Was Thy fury against the sea?
That Thou didst ride upon Thy horses,
In Thy chariots of victory?
9. Thy bow is made completely bare;
Rods (of chastisement are sworn by Thy Word,
Thou cleavest the earth with rivers.
10. The mountains saw Thee, and trembled;
The flood of waters passeth over;
The deep uttereth its voice,
And lifteth up its hands on high.
11. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation;
At the light of Thine arrows, which flew,
At the slinging of Thy glittering spear.
12. In wrath Thou marchest through the earth;
In fury Thou treadest down the nations.
13. Thou goest forth for the salvation of Thy people,
For the salvation of Thine anointed;
Thou dashest in pieces the head out of the house of the wicked,
Laying bare the foundation even to the neck--Selah.
14. Thou piercest with his own staves the chief of his warriors.
That rush on like a whirlwind to scatter me;
Their rejoicing is to devour the poor secretly.
15. Thou treadest upon the sea with Thine horses,
The swelling of mighty waters.
16. I heard, and my bowels trembled;
My lips quivered at the sound;
Rottenness entered my bones;
And I trembled in my place,
That I might rest in the day of trouble
When he that approaches the nation presseth upon it.
17. For though the fig tree shall not blossom,
Neither shall fruit be in the vines;
The fruit of the olive tree fails
And the fields shall yield no food;
The flock shall be cut off from the fold,
And there shall be no cattle in the stalls.
18. Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
19. Jehovah, the Lord, is my strength,
And makes my feet like the hinds',
And will make me to walk upon mine high places.
(For the Chief Musician, on my stringed instruments.)

Analysis and Annotations

CHAPTER 1

The Judgment of Judah Through the Chaldeans Announced

1. The prophet's cry to Jehovah (1:1-4)
2. The answer (1:5-11)
3. The prophet's plea (1:12-17)

Verses 1-4. The prophet begins his message with a prayer-cry to Jehovah. He whose name is "the embracer" embraces the Lord and cries to Him on account of the conditions prevailing in Judah. The Spirit of God stirred up the heart of Habakkuk on account of the moral conditions in Judah. He is jealous for Jehovah's glory, which manifested itself in hating the evil. "There is no prophetic delivery among the twelve lesser books more peculiar and characteristic than that of Habakkuk. It has no longer the occupation with the enemy as its main feature, although the enemy is referred to; but for its prominent topic we find the soul of the prophet, as representing the faithful among Judah, brought into deep exercise, and indeed a kind of colloquy between God Himself and the prophet, so as to set out not only that which gave him trouble of heart, but also divine comfort, as well as into exulting hope into which he was led by the communications of the Spirit of God."

Like Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, Habakkuk is deeply stirred on account of the declension among the people of God, and that led him to cry to Jehovah, to tell Him all about it. He begins with "How long, O LORD." It is the cry of the saints of God in all generations. We, too, in the midst of the increasing apostasy, the perilous times, cry to Him, "How long, O Lord." He had cried and there seemed to be no answer. Heaven was silent. And with him the righteous among the Jews had cried for help and for a change of conditions, under which they were suffering affliction. Wickedness and violence were evident on all sides. Strife and contention were the continued order of things. They injured each other wherever they could. The law of God was completely flouted; there was no more justice, and the wicked compassed about the righteous.

Verses 5-11. Jehovah speaks and answers the complaint of His servant. He is going to raise up the Chaldeans to chastise His wayward people. The Lord is calling on His people, that they should see now what He was going to do. "Behold ye among the nations, and regard, and wonder marvellously; for I work a work in your days, which ye will not believe though it were told you." The meaning is that they should look around among the nations, the faithless ones among the Jews, and see how the storm would gather and ultimately break over the head of the house of Judah. He would work a judgment work, which they would not believe, it would be an unparalleled occurrence, amazing and terrible. This passage is quoted by the Apostle Paul in Acts 13:41 and applied to the unbelievers and despisers of the gospel. In the quotation the Spirit of God led the Apostle to omit the address to the nations, and substituted for it "Ye despisers." While in Habakkuk's day God was about to work a work of judgment, which the unbelievers would not believe when they heard of it, we note that Paul preached the gospel; he has reference to speaking to the Jews in the synagogue; preached the gospel unto them, and they did not believe. Then He worked a work which they would not believe, in sending that gospel far hence to the Gentiles (Acts 28) while the unbelieving Jews would be dispersed among the nations.

In verse 6 the instrument of chastisement is announced, and afterward described. A new power would arise, the Chaldeans. They would make an invasion, and possess dwelling places which were not theirs, that is, they would set out for a widespread conquest and take away the dwelling place of Judah. They were to be the instrument in the hand of God to mete out judgment to the Jews and humble them, as well as other nations. The Chaldeans, called in Hebrew Hakhadsim were of Semitic

origin, springing from Kesed, the son of Nahor, and brother of Abraham (Gen. 22:22). Jeremiah, who also announced the Chaldean invasion, speaks of them in the following manner: "Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from afar, O house of Israel, saith the LORD, it is a mighty nation, an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. Their quiver is an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat, they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds, they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees; they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustest, with the sword. Nevertheless, in those days, saith the LORD, I will not make an end of you" (Jer. 5:15-18). Their terrible onslaught is here compared to the swiftness of the leopards, their fierceness with the prowling evening wolves, and their horsemen in their dash with the eagle's flight. They come for violence and know no defeat, for their faces are always forward. They make prisoners like the sand, and mock all attempts to check their advance; kings and princes are ridiculed and all strongholds are quickly reduced.

But as he is victorious the Chaldean becomes proud and forgets that he was but used as an instrument in the hand of God to deal with those who had done evil. As a result, they imputed their power to their own god, and do not give God the honor and the glory. His own might is his god. Then comes the day when the Lord takes the Chaldean in hand for judgment and deals with him, as He dealt with other nations. Nebuchadnezzar, the first great king of Babylon, after his humiliating experience, acknowledged the God of heaven, but his grandson Belshazzar praised the Babylonian idol-gods, at his licentious feast, dishonoring the temple vessels. Then followed the judgment of the Chaldeans in the overthrow of Babylon.

Verses 12-17. The prophet had listened to the terrible announcement from the lips of Jehovah, what was to befall his nation. How it must have shocked the man of God! But he knows the comfort and expresses it in faith at once. "Art Thou not from everlasting, O Jehovah, my God, my Holy One? we shall not die!" He knows Jehovah as the faithful God, the covenant-keeping God. Such a God will surely not permit the nation, to whom He has pledged His Word, to be wiped out. His faith lays hold on that and he realizes that the Lord is using this enemy for correction, to chastise His people. And furthermore in his plea he says, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, Thou canst not look upon injustice." Would He, the righteous God, look on unconcerned at the wicked deeds of the Chaldeans? Can He remain silent to all their deeds of violence? If such is the case, the prophet asks next, "Why lookest Thou upon the treacherous; why art Thou silent when the wicked destroys?" It is the voice of the godly remnant here, seen suffering with the nation. It brings before us the same question concerning the suffering of the righteous.

The Chaldean took men as if they were fishes, as a fisherman puts out the net and the drag, so they catch men by the net and the drag. Gathering in the people with their wealth, he rejoices and is glad. Then the prophet takes up the statement given by the Lord that the Chaldean would offend, and fall by his pride, and the worship of his false gods, he sacrifices to his net; he burns incense; he makes the thing which prospers him his idol, his god. Is this then to go on continually? Shall he who empties his net, and throws it out to catch more, to do this

again with the nations forever?

Such was the plea of Habakkuk, after the announcement of the coming chastisement of the Jews by the Chaldeans. He knows that the affliction could not continue forever, for God is a covenant-keeping God, and of purer eyes than to behold evil, a holy and a righteous God.

CHAPTER 2

The Ungodliness of the Chaldeans and Their Destruction

1. The waiting prophet and the message he received (2:1-4)
2. The five-fold woe upon the Chaldeans (2:5-20)

Verses 1-4. It seems there was no immediate answer to the plea of the prophet. He then speaks to himself and expresses his attitude. "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and I will wait to see what He will say to me, and what I shall answer as to my complaint." He watches like a sentinel upon a watchtower for the answer the Lord will give him. It does not mean that the prophet actually ascended a tower, but he expresses his innermost attitude by the symbol of the watchman. He remained silent and eagerly looked for the reply.

How long he waited is not stated. But the answer came, for the Lord never disappoints His inquiring and waiting servants. He is told to write the vision and make it plain upon the tablets, that he may run that readeth it. Thus the Lord spoke to him and gave him the vision, which he was to write in plain characters upon tablets. The effect should be not that he that runneth may read (as it is sometimes misquoted) but that he that readeth may run. The prophetic Word is always plain. It is far from being the deep and complicated portion of God's truth that some make it, but it needs an ear opened by the Spirit of God. Prophecy believed is a great stimulating agent to Christian service, even as it is stated here, that the reader of the vision runs to spread the message.

In the next place we hear of the certainty of the vision. It is for the appointed time. It hastes toward the end, and shall not lie. The prophet is commanded to wait for it, though it tarry, and then receives the assurance that it will surely come and not tarry. These are important instructions by which many a believer might profit. God has an appointed time for all His purposes and their fulfillment. He cannot be hastened, for His schedule was made before the foundation of the world. When the appointed time comes all visions will be accomplished. It hastens toward the end. That end is the end of the times of the Gentiles, which began with the rising of the Babylonians, and the first great king, Nebuchadnezzar, the golden head in the prophetic image of Daniel 2. When the end of the times of the Gentiles comes, the world-power then, final Babylon as revealed in the last book of the Bible, will be judged and the Lord will be manifested in all His glory. The prophet's business is, as well as that of every believer, to wait for it and not be disturbed if there is delay, for the assurance is given that it will surely come and not tarry. And here faith can rest.

Part of this is quoted in the Epistle to the Hebrews. "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Heb. 10:37). From this quotation we learn that the vision which will surely come is a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the center of every vision and without Him there is no vision. The Septuagint translation is the same: "If He tarry wait for Him, for coming He will come and not delay."

In the fourth verse, which may properly be taken to be the opening statement for the vision which follows, the all importance of faith in the vision is made known. The proud one who is mentioned must primarily be applied to the haughty Chaldean, but it is equally true of the unbelieving, proud Jew, and of the nominal Christian. The proud, the puffed up one, his soul is not right within him, and God resisteth the proud, while he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

"But the just shall live by faith." Criticism has not left this matchless sentence untouched. The higher critic Davidson labors to show that the Hebrew word for faith (Emunoh) means faithfulness, dealing in faithfulness in money matters, that is, one who deals honestly. According to his statement the verse means if an Israelite, or anybody else, does right he will live. But in Genesis we read, "Abraham believed the LORD and He counted it to him for righteousness." As every intelligent Christian knows, there was no law then, and the New Testament in the testimony of the Holy Spirit makes it plain that this is the gospel of grace in which the ungodly are justified; justified by faith. Interesting is the quotation of the sentence "the just shall live by faith" in the three passages of the New Testament Epistles.

Romans 1:17 quotes this sentence. In this passage the emphasis is upon the word "just." The theme of Romans is the righteousness of God, at least in the opening chapters. It shows how a person, a lost and guilty sinner, becomes righteous, and as such is saved. "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

In Galatians 3:11 the emphasis is upon the word "faith." "But no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, as it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith."

In Hebrews 10:38 the emphasis is upon "live." "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith, but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him."

Verses 5-20. The Lord uncovers the wicked conditions prevailing among the Chaldeans. God had allowed the people whom He loved to be chastised by an evil instrument; they were to be crushed by injustice and by the actions of the cruel invader. But the character and conduct of the oppressor, the Chaldeans, was not unknown to Him, as the prophet expressed it, "Who is of purer eyes than to behold evil." And now the righteous Lord announces the five-fold woe upon the wicked world-power. While all this applies primarily to the Chaldean, it is likewise a prophecy concerning the future. The world powers remain the same to the end of the times of the Gentiles. It was true then, as it is true now, and will be true in the future throughout this present age, "The world lieth in the Wicked One." There is no improvement to be looked for among

the world powers, and as we have seen so frequently in the study of the prophets, the end of the age brings still greater opposition and defiance of God, with a corresponding moral decline. We see therefore in these verses a description of the world conditions down to its very end. The word

"wine" does not need to be interpreted in a literal way, though drunkenness was one of the sins of the Babylonians. They were inflamed with an ambition for conquest, as a drunken man is inflamed with wine. This intoxication made them treacherous, haughty, restless: like death, which is never satisfied, so they are never satisfied; constantly pressing on they spoil the nations, gather prisoners, and act in violence. How can God permit this to go unjudged?

Then follows a taunting song in verses 6-7. Divine retribution is coming for them. The spoiler is going to be spoiled. It is the retribution which may be read in all history, which still continues, for of nations it is true as of individuals, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."

The second woe is on account of their covetousness and their self aggrandizement. Like Edom, they were possessed by an abominable pride to make their nest high, they imagine self-security, thinking they can avert "the power of evil." But their proud plans were to result in shame; their security would end in collapse and confusion. It is well known how Nebuchadnezzar manifested this spirit. One day this proud monarch walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. "The king spake and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty?" The humiliation which came upon the king is prophetic. Thus the Lord will humble the proud world-power into the dust (Dan. 4).

Then comes a third woe. Verses 12-14 are of special interest, for they give us a picture of a godless civilization and its appointed end. Their cruel oppression, their ungodly gains, had built up a magnificent city. Excavations have shown what a marvelous civilization was in force when Babylon was mistress of the world. But the foundations of it all were iniquity and the blood of victims. Is it any better today? We have seen the top-notch of a boasted civilization, steeped in iniquity and defiance of God, suddenly collapsing and producing a war of horrors and cruelty which makes the conquests and atrocities of the Chaldeans pale into insignificance.

And how true it is today, "The peoples labor for the fire, the nations weary themselves for vanity." The day is approaching when this civilization will be swept away, and before the better things come, the kingdom is established and He reigns whose right it is, there will be the fires of judgment. And after that it will be true, as it cannot be true before, "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

The fourth woe shows the corruption which held sway in the Babylonian empire. Drunkenness here is a figure of the utter prostration of the nations which the Chaldeans had conquered; they stripped them in their wicked endeavors of all they possessed. They spread a shameless dissolution in every direction. For this they will have to drink the cup of fury from the hand of the Lord, and shall be covered with vile shame, so that their glory will be blotted out.

The fifth woe is on account of their idolatry. They worshipped wood and stone. Nebuchadnezzar set up his golden image in the plain of Dura and demanded worship for it. The spiritual Babylon, Rome, is a well-organized system of idolatry which goes on undiminished. Finally the age ends in idolatry, for the image of the beast of Revelation 13 is still future.

"But the LORD is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him." First, by way of contrast, their idols are dumb; Jehovah, the God of Israel, is the living God. He is in His holy temple; from there He takes notice of the doings of men. He is the Sovereign, the only Potentate; the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance (Isa. 40:15). "It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in" (Isa. 40:22).

But this closing verse of the chapter of woe has a prophetic meaning. When at last the world-power is dethroned, when the Lord returns, He will take His place as King of Kings. He will be in His holy temple, and then all the earth will keep silence before Him.

CHAPTER 3

The Vision of the Coming of the Lord

1. The prophet's prayer (3:1-2)
2. The coming of the Lord for judgment and redemption (3:3-15)
3. The effect upon the prophet (3:16-19)

Verses 1-2. Once more we hear the voice of the man of God in prayer. Shigionoth is the plural of Shiggaion, and is found in the superscription of Psalm 7. Its meaning is "loud crying." The connection with the seventh Psalm is interesting. In that Psalm God appeared to David as the God of judgment, the righteous God who must save His righteous people and condemn the wicked. (See Annotations on Psalm 7.) The prophet had listened to the message and penned it as we have it in the preceding chapter. It struck terror to his heart and he trembled. Therefore he pleads for a revival of the Lord's work in the midst of the years. He must have taken a hasty glance over the past history of his people, how God had worked in their behalf in Egypt, redeemed them, led them forth, and the many evidences of the display of His power in behalf of the elect nation. And now, in the midst of years, he asks a revival of this work, the interposition of Jehovah, that He may be known in His power. The text is often quoted in pleading a revival among the dead conditions of Christendom. But it is a revival of the work of the Lord in a very different sense of the word, as we have indicated.

He knows that wrath is on the way. Not only wrath for the Chaldeans, but for his people, that the unbelieving, the apostates, would also have to face the judgment. Therefore he pleads, "In wrath remember mercy." Such is the way of God always. Judgment is His strange work, and mercy is mingled with His judgments. It will be so in connection with the winding up of this present age, when judgment wrath sweeps over the

earth, and especially Israel's land; He then will have mercy upon His people. The time of wrath will be His time of mercy, the covenant mercies promised to Israel. "Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion, for the time to favor her, yea, the set time, is come." And when will that be? When the Lord shall build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory (Psa, 102:13-16).

The great inspired ode which follows is one of the greatest sections of prophecy. It is a wonderful theophany the Spirit of God describes. Wrath and mercy are manifested, so that it is an answer to the prophet's plea. "In wrath remember mercy."

It has been said, "The poet describes a great storm, advancing from the south, the region of Paran and Sinai. In the dark storm clouds he conceives Jehovah to be concealed; the lightning flashes which illumine heaven and earth disclose glimpses of the dazzling brightness immediately about him; the earth quakes, the hills sink, and the neighboring desert tribes look on in dismay" (Canon Driver). Thus higher criticism, reduces one of the sublimest inspired prophecies, concerning the future appearing of the Lord, to the level of poetry.

The great description of His coming must be linked with similar prophecies (Deut. 33:2; Psa. 18:8-19, 33, 34; Psa. 68:8, 34; Psa. 77:17-20). The great ode, cast in the form of a Psalm, begins with the statement that God cometh from Teman and the Holy One from Mount Paran. Moses in his prophetic blessing also begins with a similar declaration. "The LORD came from Sinai, and rose from Seir unto them; He shined from Mount Paran, and He came with the thousands of His saints (angels); from His right hand went a fiery law for them." Just as He was manifested when He had redeemed them out of Egypt, and constituted them His Kingdom people at Sinai (Exodus 19), so will He appear again to deliver the remnant of His people from the dominion of the world-power, and judge them as He judged Egypt. He comes from the direction of Edom, for Teman is the southern district of Idumea, while Paran is more southward. Isaiah also beheld him advancing from the same direction. "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" (Isa. 63:1-6). It is unfortunate that the Authorized Version has "God came from Teman," when it is "God cometh," not a past but a future event. After this opening statement the first Selah is put. This means to pause and to lift up. We are to pause and meditate, and then to lift up our hearts and voices in praise and thanksgiving. It is found seventy-one times in the Psalms and three times in this chapter of Habakkuk.

His glory covers the heavens, while the earth is filled with His praise. Heaven and earth reflect the glory of the Coming One. How all this corresponds with the divine statements concerning His coming in the New Testament does not need to be pointed out. He comes in power and great glory, in the clouds of heaven, as Daniel beheld Him in the night vision, and as our Lord testified Himself. Brightness fills the sky as He appears in person, while out of His hand glory rays emanate, the hiding of His power. The picture is evidently taken from the rising sun, which shoots forth great rays, heralding its ascending. As Delitzsch remarks, "His hand" means in a general sense, as signifying the hand generally, and not a single hand only. May we not have here a hint of His hands pierced once, but now emanating glory? Before Him goes the

pestilence, indicating the trouble which precedes His coming, when the four apocalyptic riders bring war, famine, pestilence, and death in judgment for this earth.

With the sixth verse He draws nearer. Up to this point in the theophany He is described as coming forth, like the sun out of His chamber, heaven and earth reflecting His glory, but now He stands and measures the earth; He looks and the nations tremble, while all creation is affected, and earthquakes shake down the mountains.

Then the prophet sees the tents of Cushan in affliction and the curtains of Midian tremble. Cushan means the Ethiopians, and the Midianites inhabited the Arabian coast along the Red Sea. The past is seen as a prophecy of the future. As He once came at Sinai, when the mountains shook and the hills trembled, and as once the tidings of the Red Sea disaster inspired terror among the neighboring nations, so will it be, only on a larger scale, when He comes in great power and glory.

The verses which follow (verses 8-15) are in the form of an address to God. The rivers and the seas, and the mountains feel His wrath; they represent symbolically the nations and the world-powers. He is seen marching in anger through the earth and in His fury treading down the nations. It is a majestic picture the Spirit of God gives of that coming day of wrath and judgment.

But while He comes thus, executing wrath and judgment upon the ungodly, He comes in mercy. He goes forth for the salvation of His people, for the salvation of Thine anointed, that is, the elect nation and the God-fearing, waiting remnant of the last days (Psa. 105:15). And there will be on the earth in that day the head of the house of the wicked, the ungodly head, the man of sin, the heading up of all apostasy and opposition to God. His doom is predicted in verse 13, followed by another *Selah*, like verses 3 and 9.

Verses 16-19. The prophet now speaks of his own feeling, which reflects the feeling of the godly among the Jews when this great theophany becomes history. There is fear and trembling in view of the coming tribulation. When he heard it he trembled; he is completely prostrated. He desires rest in the day of trouble, the day when the final enemy of God's people marches through the land. Then faith is triumphant, and in one of the most magnificent outbursts the prophet declares his confidence in his God (verse 17). Such will be the faith of the godly who pass through the time of great trouble. Finally he rejoices in the God of his salvation and declares his hope that his feet will be like hinds' feet to escape to the high places. Even so the remnant of Israel will be delivered. We leave the application to the Church-saints with the reader.

[Return to Top](#)