
HABAKKUK 1: 1 The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.

The prophet enters very abruptly on his subject, his spirit being greatly indignant at the rapid progress of vice and impiety, Hab 1:1-4. Upon which God is introduced threatening very awful and sudden judgments to be indicted by the ministry of the Chaldeans, Hab 1:5-10. The Babylonians attribute their wonderful successes to their idols, Hab 1:11. The prophet then, making a sudden transition, expostulates with God (probably personating the Jews) for permitting a nation much more wicked than themselves, as they supposed, to oppress and devour them, as fishers and foulers do their prey, Hab 1:12-17.

We know little of this prophet; for what we find in the ancients concerning him is evidently fabulous, as well as that which appears in the Apocrypha. He was probably of the tribe of Simeon, and a native of Beth-zacar. It is very likely that he lived after the destruction of Nineveh, as he speaks of the Chaldeans, but makes no mention of the Assyrians. And he appears also to have prophesied before the Jewish captivity, see Hab 1:5; Hab 2:1; Hab 3:2, Hab 3:16-19; and therefore Abp. Newcome thinks he may be placed in the reign of Jehoiakim, between the years 606 b.c. and 598 b.c.

As a poet, Habakkuk holds a high rank among the Hebrew prophets. The beautiful connection between the parts of his prophecy, its diction, imagery, spirit, and sublimity, cannot be too much admired; and his hymn, chap. 3, is allowed by the best judges to be a masterpiece of its kind. See Lowth's Praelect. xxi., xxviii.

Verse 1

The burden - **הַמַּשָּׂא** *hammassa* signifies not only the burdensome prophecy, but the prophecy or revelation itself which God presented to the mind of Habakkuk, and which he saw-clearly perceived, in the light of prophecy and then faithfully declared, as this book shows. The word signifies an oracle or revelation in general; but chiefly, one relative to future calamities.

HABAKKUK 1: 2 LORD, how long will I cry, and you will not hear? I cry out to you "Violence!" and will you not save?

Verse 2

O Lord, how long shall I cry - The prophet feels himself strongly excited against the vices which he beheld; and which, it appears from this verse, he had often declaimed against, but in vain; the people continued in their vices, and God in his longsuffering.

Habakkuk begins his prophecy under a similar feeling, and nearly in similar words, as Juvenal did his Satires: -

Semper ego auditor tantum?

Nunquamne reponam?

Vexatus toties rauci Theseide Codri?

Sat. 1:1. "Shall I always be a hearer only?

Shall I never reply?

So often vexed?"

Of violence - The most unlawful and outrageous acts.

HABAKKUK 1: 3 Why do you show me iniquity, and look at perversity? For destruction and violence are before me. There is strife, and contention rises up.

Verse 3

And cause me to behold grievance - עמל *amal*, labor, toil, distress, misery, etc., the common fruits of sin.

HABAKKUK 1: 4 Therefore the law is paralysed, and justice never prevails; for the wicked surround the righteous; therefore justice comes out perverted.

Verse 4

The law is slacked - They pay no attention to it; it has lost all its vigor, its restraining and correcting power, it is not executed; right judgment is never pronounced; and the poor righteous man complains in vain that he is grievously oppressed by the wicked, and by those in power and authority. That the utmost depravity prevailed in the land of Judah is evident from these verses; and can we wonder, then, that God poured out such signal judgments upon them? When judgment doth not proceed from the seat of judgment upon earth, it will infallibly go forth from the throne of judgment in heaven.

HABAKKUK 1: 5 "Look among the nations, watch, and wonder marvellously; for I am working a work in your days, which you will not believe though it is told you.

Verse 5

Behold ye among the heathen - Instead of בגיִים *bagoyim*, among the nations or heathen, some critics think we should read בגדיִם *bogedim*, transgressors; and to the same purpose the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic have read; and thus it is quoted by St. Paul Act 13:41. But neither this, nor any tantamount reading, is found in any of the MSS. yet collated. Newcome translates, "See, ye transgressors, and behold a wonder, and perish."

I will work a work in your days - As he is speaking of the desolation that should be produced by the Chaldeans, it follows, as Bp. Newcome has justly observed, that the Chaldeans invaded Judah whilst those were living whom the prophet addressed.

Which ye will not believe - Nor did they, after all the declarations of various prophets. They still supposed that God would not give them up into the hands of their enemies, though they continued in their abominations!

It is evident that St. Paul, in the above place, accommodates this prediction to his own purpose. And possibly this sense might have been the intention of the Divine Spirit when he first spoke the words to the prophet; for, as God works in reference to eternity, so he speaks in reference to the same; and therefore there is an infinity of meaning in his Word. These appear to be the words of God in answer to the prophet, in which he declares he will entirely ruin this wicked people by means of the Chaldeans.

HABAKKUK 1: 6 For, behold, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, that march through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs.

Verse 6

That bitter and hasty nation - Cruel and oppressive in their disposition; and prompt and speedy in their assaults and conquests.

HABAKKUK 1: 7 They are feared and dreaded. Their judgement and their dignity proceed from themselves.

Verse 7

Their judgment - shall proceed of themselves - By revolting from the Assyrians, they have become a great nation. Thus, their judgment and excellence were the result of their own valor. Other meanings are given to this passage.

HABAKKUK 1: 8 Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves. Their horsemen press proudly on. Yes, their horsemen come from afar. They fly as an eagle that hurries to devour.

Verse 8

Their horses also are swifter than the leopards - The Chaldean cavalry are proverbial for swiftness, courage, etc. In Jeremiah, Jer 4:13, it is said, speaking of Nebuchadnezzar, "His chariots are as a whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles."

Oppian, speaking of the horses bred about the Euphrates, says, "They are by nature warhorses, and so intrepid that neither the sight nor the roaring of the lion appals them; and, besides, they are astonishingly fleet." The leopard, of all quadrupeds, is allowed to be the swiftest.

The evening wolves - The wolf is remarkable for his quick sight. Aelian says, Οξυωτεστατον εστι ζων, και μεντοι, και νυκτος και σεληνης ουκ ουσης οδε ορα; "The wolf is a very fleet animal; and,

besides, it can see by night, even when there is no moonlight." Some think the hyena is meant: it is a swift, cruel, and untameable animal. The other prophets speak of the Chaldeans in the same way. See Deu 28:49; Jer 48:40; Jer 49:22; Eze 17:5; Lam 4:19.

HABAKKUK 1: 9 All of them come for violence. Their hordes face the desert. He gathers prisoners like sand.

Verse 9

Their faces shall sup up as the east wind - This may be an allusion to those electrical winds which prevail in that country. Mr. Jackson, in his overland journey from India, mentions his having bathed in the Tigris. On his coming out of the river one of those winds passed over him, and, in a moment, carried off every particle of water that was on his body and in his bathing dress. So, the Chaldeans shall leave no substance behind them; their faces, their bare appearance, is the proof that nothing good shall be left.

Shall gather the captivity as the sand - They shall carry off innumerable captives.

HABAKKUK 1: 10 Yes, he scoffs at kings, and princes are a derision to him. He laughs at every stronghold, for he builds up an earthen ramp, and takes it.

Verse 10

They shall scoff at the kings - No power shall be able to stand before them. It will be only as pastime to them to take the strongest places. They will have no need to build formidable ramparts: by sweeping the dust together they shall make mounts sufficient to pass over the walls and take the city.

HABAKKUK 1: 11 Then he sweeps by like the wind, and goes on. He is indeed guilty, whose strength is his god."

Verse 11

Then shall his mind change - This is thought to relate to the change which took place in Nebuchadnezzar, when "a beast's heart was given to him," and he was "driven from the dwellings of men." And this was because of his offending - his pride and arrogance; and his attributing all his success, etc., to his idols.

HABAKKUK 1: 12 Aren't you from everlasting, LORD my God, my Holy One? We will not die. LORD, you have appointed him for judgement. You, Rock, have established him to punish.

Verse 12

Art thou not frown everlasting - The idols change, and their worshippers change and fail: but thou, Jehovah, art eternal; thou canst not change, and they who trust in thee are safe. Thou art infinite in thy mercy; therefore, "we shall not die," shall not be totally exterminated.

Thou hast ordained them for judgment - Thou hast raised up the Chaldeans to correct and punish us; but thou hast not given them a commission to destroy us totally.

Instead of **לֹא נָמוּת** lo namuth, "we shall not die," Houbigant and other critics, with a little transposition of letters, read **אֱלֹהֵי אֱמֶת** El emeth, "God of truth;" and then the verse will stand thus: "Art thou not from everlasting, O Jehovah, my God, my Holy One? O Jehovah, God of Truth, thou hast appointed them for judgment." But this emendation, however elegant, is not supported by any MS.; nor, indeed, by any of the ancient versions, though the Chaldee has something like it. The common reading makes a very good sense.

HABAKKUK 1: 13 You who have purer eyes than to see evil, and who cannot look on perversity, why do you tolerate those who deal treacherously, and keep silent when the wicked swallows up the man who is more righteous than he,

Verse 13

Thou art of purer eyes - Seeing thou art so pure, and canst not look on iniquity - it is so abominable - how canst thou bear with them who "deal treacherously, and hold thy tongue when the wicked devour the righteous?" All such questions are easily solved by a consideration of God's ineffable mercy, which leads him to suffer long and be kind. He has no pleasure in the death of a sinner.

HABAKKUK 1: 14 and make men like the fish of the sea, like the creeping things, that have no ruler over them?

Verse 14

Makest men as the fishes of the sea - Easily are we taken and destroyed. We have no leader to guide us, and no power to defend ourselves. Nebuchadnezzar is here represented as a fisherman, who is constantly casting his nets into the sea, and enclosing multitudes of fishes; and, being always successful, he sacrifices to his own net - attributes all his conquests to his own power and prudence; not considering that he is only like a net that after having been used for a while, shall at last be thrown by as useless, or burnt in the fire.

HABAKKUK 1: 15 He takes up all of them with the hook. He catches them in his net, and gathers them in his dragnet. Therefore he rejoices and is glad.

HABAKKUK 1: 16 Therefore he sacrifices to his net, and burns incense to his dragnet, because by them his life is luxurious, and his food is good.

 Verse 16

They sacrifice unto their net - He had no God; he cared for none; and worshipped only his armor and himself. King Mezentius, one of the worst characters in the Aeneid of Virgil, is represented as invoking his own right hand and his spear in battle. Aen. 10:773.

Dextra mihi Deus, et telum quod missile libro, Nunc adsint. "My strong right hand and sword, assert my stroke.

Those only gods Mezentius will invoke."

Dryden.

And Capaneus, in Statius, gives us a more decisive proof of this self-idolatry. Thebaid, lib. x.

Ades, O mihi dextera tantum

Tu praeses belli, et inevitabile Numen,

Te voco, te solum Superum contemptor adoro. "Only thou, my right hand, be my aid; I condemn the gods, and adore thee as the chief in battle, and the irresistible deity."

The poet tells us that, for his impiety, Jupiter slew him with thunder.

This was an ancient idolatry in this country, and has existed till within about a century. There are relics of it in different parts of Europe; for when military men bind themselves to accomplish any particular purpose, it is usual to lay their hand upon their sword: but formerly they kissed it, when swearing by it. With most heroes, the sword is both their Bible and their God. To the present day it is a custom among the Hindoos annually to worship the implements of their trades. See Ward.

 HABAKKUK 1: 17 Will he therefore continually empty his net, and kill the nations without mercy?

Verse 17

And not spare continually to slay the nation? - They are running from conquest to conquest; burning, slaying, sacking, and slaughtering. Like the fishermen, who throw cast after cast while any fish are to be caught, so Nebuchadnezzar is destroying one nation after another. This last sentence explains the allegory of the net.