

INTRODUCTION TO HABAKKUK

This book is called, in the Vulgate Latin and Syriac versions, “the Prophecy of Habakkuk”. Of this prophet, Aben Ezra and Kimchi say, we know neither his age nor his family; which shows they paid no regard to a tradition of their nation, mentioned by some of their ancient writers^{f1}, that he was the son of the Shunammite, whom Elisha raised from the dead; and find the etymology of his name in the words of the prophet to her, “about this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son”, (^{<3146>}2 Kings 4:16) where the root of his name is used; and they account for the doubling of the last radical in his name, because of the two embraces of him, one by his mother, and the other by the prophet. His name indeed signifies “an embrace”^{f2}; or, as some, “an embracer”^{f3}; and the last letter being doubled, it is with others interpreted “the best embracer”^{f4}; to which name his character and conduct agree; who, in the most tender manner, embraced the people of God, as parents their children, and comforted them with the assurance of their preservation, notwithstanding their captivity, and with the promise of the Messiah’s coming; suggesting to them they should live by faith, to which he led them the way by his own example, (^{<3112>}Habakkuk 1:12) (^{<3113>}Habakkuk 2:3,4 ^{<3117>}Habakkuk 3:17-19) but as this is placing him too early, to put him in the times of Elisha; so it is fixing him too late, to make him to be in the times of Daniel, and to feed him in the den of the lions, as Joseph ben Gorion^{f5}, and the author of the apocryphal book of Bel and the Dragon, say he did, which was after the Babylonish captivity was ended; whereas it is certain this prophet prophesied of it, and must have lived some time before it; for he speaks of the Chaldeans by name coming against the Jews, and carrying them captive, (^{<3106>}Habakkuk 1:6,9). The learned Huetius^{f6}, and others, think there were two prophets of this name; one of the tribe of Simeon, who lived before the captivity; and another of the tribe of Levi, who lived after it. The Jewish chronologers^{f7} generally place this our prophet in the times of Manasseh; with which well enough agrees the description of the times the prophet lived in, given in (^{<3102>}Habakkuk 1:2-4) though some think he lived in the latter times of Josiah^{f8}, or the beginning of Jehoiakim^{f9}; and it is probable he was a contemporary of the Prophet Jeremiah, with whom he agrees in many things, and prophesied of the same. However, there is no room to doubt of the authority of this book, being always received by the

Jewish church, and agreeing with other parts of Scripture, and especially with the prophecies of Jeremiah; and may be further confirmed and established by the quotations out of it in the New Testament, as (~~<3005>~~ Habakkuk 1:5) in (~~<4434>~~ Acts 13:41) and (~~<3004>~~ Habakkuk 2:4) in (~~<5017>~~ Romans 1:17 ~~<8081>~~ Galatians 3:11 ~~<3008>~~ Hebrews 10:38). The general design of the prophecy is to comfort the people of God under the afflictions that were coming upon them, and to encourage them to the exercise of faith and patience, in the hope and view of the coming of the Messiah. Pseudo Epiphanius^{f10} says that Habakkuk died two years before the people of the Jews returned from Babylon, and was honourably buried in his own native place, which he says was Bethsocher, in the tribe of Simeon. With whom Isidore^{f11} agrees, as to the time of his death; but the place of his birth, he says, was Bethacat; and of his death, Sabarta. Sozomen^{f12} reports, that, in the days of Theodosius, the grave of Habakkuk was found in Cele, formerly the city Ceila. So Eusebius says it was shown at Kela, eight miles from Eleutheropolis; though, in another place, he says it was to be seen at Gabbatha, twelve miles from the same place; which may be reconciled, by observing that it might be between them both, and be seen from each, since they were places near to each other^{f13}. But the Cippi Hebraici^{f14} say it was at a place called Jakuk in Galilee, not far from Sephetta, where was an academy of the Jews; and this seems to agree with what Sanderson, a countryman of ours, as quoted by Van Till^{f15}, observes; that in his journey from Damascus to Jerusalem, between Sephet and Chapherchittin, he found a village, in which, the Jews report, Habakkuk the prophet dwelt and died, the name of which is Jeakoke. But these things are not to be depended on.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO HABAKKUK 1

In this chapter, after the inscription, in which are the title of the book, the name and character of the writer, (^{<3000>}Habakkuk 1:1), there is a complaint made by the prophet of his cry not being heard, and of salvation being deferred, which was long expected, (^{<3000>}Habakkuk 1:2) and of the wickedness of the times he lived in; of iniquity and trouble, rapine and oppression, in general; and particularly of corruption in courts of judicature, in which there were nothing but strife and contention, a dilatoriness in proceedings at law, and justice was stopped and suppressed, (^{<3003>}Habakkuk 1:3,4) then follows an answer to this, showing that some sore judgment, amazing and incredible, would soon be executed for such sins, (^{<3005>}Habakkuk 1:5) that the Chaldeans would be raised up and sent against the Jews, and spoil them, and carry them captive; who are described by the cruelty of their temper and disposition; by the swiftness and fierceness of their cavalry; and by their derision of kings, princes, and strong holds; and by their victories and success, which they should impute to their idols, (^{<3006>}Habakkuk 1:6-11) and then the prophet, in the name of the church, expresses his faith that the people of God, and his interest, would be preserved, and not perish in this calamity; which is urged from the eternity, holiness, faithfulness, and power of God, and from his design in this affliction, which was correction, and not destruction, (^{<3012>}Habakkuk 1:12) and the chapter is closed with an expostulation of the prophet with God, in consideration of his purity and holiness; how he could bear with such a wicked nation as the Chaldeans, and suffer them to devour men as fishes, in an arbitrary way, that have no ruler; catch them in their net, and insult them, and ascribe all to their own power and prudence, and think to go on continually in this way, (^{<3013>}Habakkuk 1:13-17).

Ver. 1. *The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.*] This prophecy is called a “burden”, or something took up and carried, being what the prophet received from the Lord, and went with to the people of the Jews, and was a heavy burdensome prophecy to them; declaring the calamities that should come upon them by the Chaldeans, who would invade their

land, and carry them captive; and Habakkuk, that brought this account, is called a “prophet”, to give the greater sanction to it; and it was what he had in vision from the Lord represented unto him, and therefore should be credited. Abarbinel inquires why Habakkuk should be called a prophet, when none of the lesser prophets are, excepting Haggai and Zechariah; and thinks the reason of it is, to give weight to his prophecy, since it might be suspected by some whether he was one; there being none of those phrases to be met with in this prophecy as in others, as “the word of the Lord came”, etc. or “thus saith the Lord”.

Ver. 2. *O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear!* etc.] The prophet having long observed the sins and iniquities of the people among whom he lived, and being greatly distressed in his mind on account of them, had frequently and importunately cried unto the Lord to put a stop to the abounding of them, that the people might be brought to a sense of their sins, and reform from them; but nothing of this kind appearing, he concludes his prayers were not heard, and therefore expostulates with the Lord upon this head:

[even] cry unto thee [of] violence, and thou wilt not save! either of violence done to himself in the discharge of his office, or of one man to another, of the rich to the poor; and yet, though he cried again and again to the Lord, to check this growing evil, and deliver the oppressed out of the hands of their oppressors, it was not done; which was matter of grief and trouble to him.

Ver. 3. *Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause [me] to behold grievance?* etc.] That is, wicked men, and such as give a great deal of trouble vexation, and grief to others, by their rapine and oppression; suggesting that he could not turn his eyes any where, but such persons presented themselves to his view; and that their wicked actions were performed by them openly and publicly, in the sight of all, without any shame or fear. So the Targum,

“why do I see oppressors, and behold those that do the labour of falsehood?”

For spoiling and violence [are] before me; in my sight and presence, though a prophet, and notwithstanding all my remonstrances, exhortations, and reproofs; such were the hardness, obstinacy, and impudence of this

people; to such a height and pitch of iniquity were they arrived, as to regard not the prophets of the Lord. The Targum is,

“spoilers and robbers are before me:”

or, “against me”^{f16}, as in the text; these sins were committed against him, he was injuriously used himself; or they were done to others, contrary to his advice and persuasion:

and there are [that] raise up strife and contention; in the kingdom, in cities, in families; in one man, brother, friend, and neighbour, against another; which occasion lawsuits, and in them justice is not done, as follows. It may be rendered, and “there shall be [and] is [a man] of strife”; so Japhet: “and he shall raise up contention”; one man given to strife will and does use great contention in communities, civil and religious.

Ver. 4. *Therefore the law is slacked*, etc.] Is not put into execution against offenders: the civil magistrates, whose office it is to do justice according to law, are dilatory, and do not proceed with vigour and spirit against the transgressors of it, and in favour of honest and good men oppressed: or “it intermits”^{f17}, or is “intermitted”; it is like a man whose pulse beats low, and is scarce perceived, which is a sign that he is not in good health as the body politic is not, when the law, which is the soul of it, is not suffered to take place, and do its office. So the Targum,

“the law languishes;”

loses its force and vigour, and is ready to expire; which is a sad symptom of the bad estate of a commonwealth.

And judgment doth never go forth; at least not right, to the justifying of the righteous, acquitting the innocent, and giving the cause on the right side; condemning the wicked, and punishing offenders as their crime deserves: it never appears as it should do; it is either not done at all, or done badly and perversely:

for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; to hurt him or ensnare him, and by frauds and wicked artifices, and false witnesses, to carry a cause against him:

therefore wrong judgment proceedeth; the cause is given on the wrong side, against a good man, and for a wicked man; all these things the

prophet saw with grief, and complained of to the Lord, from whom he has an answer in the following words:

Ver. 5. *Behold ye among the heathen, and regard,* etc.] This is the Lord's answer to the prophet's complaint, or what he directs him to say to the Jews, guilty of the crimes complained of, which should not go long unpunished; and who are called upon to look around them, and see what was doing among the nations; how the king of Babylon had overturned the Assyrian empire, and was going from place to place, subduing one nation after another, and their turn would be quickly: for these words are not addressed to the heathen, to stir them up to observe what was doing, or about to be done, to the Jews; but to the Jews themselves, to consider and regard the operations of the Lord, and the works of his providence among the nations of the earth. These words are differently rendered in the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, and which better agree with the quotation of them by the apostle, (see Gill on "~~4134~~ Acts 13:41"):

and wonder marvellously; or "wonder, wonder"^{f18}; the word is repeated, to express the great admiration there would be found just reason for, on consideration of what was now doing in the world, and would be done, especially in Judea:

for [I] will work a work in your days, [which] ye will not believe, though it be told [you]; which was the destruction of the Jewish nation, city, and temple, by the Chaldeans, as is evident from the following words; and, though they were the instruments of it, it was the work of divine Providence; it was done according to the will of God, and by his direction, he giving success; and, being thus declared, was a certain thing, and might be depended on, nothing should hinder it; and it should be done speedily, in that generation, some then living should see it; though the thing was so amazing and incredible, that they would not believe it ever would be; partly because the Chaldeans were their good friends and allies, as they thought, as appears by Josiah's going out against the king of Egypt, when he was marching his army against the king of Babylon; and partly because they were the covenant people of God, and would never be abandoned and given up by him into the hands of another people; and therefore, when they were told of it by the prophets of the Lord, especially by Jeremiah, time after time; who expressly said the king of Babylon would come against them, and they would be delivered into the hands of the Chaldeans; yet they would give no credit to it, till their ruin came upon them, as may be

observed in various parts of his prophecy. The apostle quotes this passage in the place above mentioned, and applies it to the destruction of the Jews by the Romans, for their contemptuous rejection of the Messiah and his Gospel; which yet they would not believe to the last, though it was foretold by Christ and his apostles.

Ver. 6. *For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans*, etc.] A people still of late mean and low, famous only for their soothsaying, divination, and judicial astrology; but now become a powerful and warlike people, rising up under the permission of Providence to universal monarchy, and who would quickly add Judea to the rest of their dominions:

[that] bitter and hasty nation; a cruel and merciless people in their temper and disposition: “bitter” against the people of God and true religion, and causing bitterness, calamities, and distress, wherever they came: “hasty” and precipitate in their determinations; swift and nimble in their motions; active and vigorous in the prosecution of their designs:

which shall march through the breadth of the land; or “breadths of the land”^{f19}; through the whole world, as they were attempting to do, having subdued Syria, all Asia, and great part of Africa, through which they boldly marched, bearing down all opposition that was in their way; or through the breadth of the land of Judea, taking all the fenced cities as they went along, and Jerusalem the metropolis of it; see (^{2381B} Isaiah 8:7,8):

to possess the dwellingplaces [that are] not theirs; the cities of Judea, and houses in them, as well as the palaces and dwellingplaces in Jerusalem, which they had no right unto, but what they got by the sword; what were the legal possessions and inheritances of others from father to son for ages past, these the Chaldeans would dispossess them of; and not only take them, and the spoil and plunder of them, for the present, but retain them in their possession, as an inheritance to be transmitted to their posterity. This may have some respect to the length of the captivity of the Jews, and their land being in the hands of their enemies for the space of seventy years.

Ver. 7. *They [are] terrible and dreadful*, etc.] For the fierceness of their countenances; the number and valour of their troops; the splendor of their armour; the victories they had obtained, and the cruelty they had exercised; the fame of all which spread terror wherever they came:

their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves; they will not be directed and governed by any laws of God and man, but by their own;

they will do according to their will and pleasure, and none will be able to gainsay and resist them; they will hear no reason or argument; their decrees and determinations they make of themselves shall be put into execution, and there will be no opposing their tyrannical measures; they will usurp a power, and take upon them an authority over others of themselves, which all must submit unto; no mercy and pity: no goodness and humanity, are to be expected from such lawless and imperious enemies.

Ver. 8. *Their horses also are swifter than the leopards,* etc.] Creatures remarkable for their swiftness: these are creatures born of the mating of a he panther and a lioness, and not of a lion and a she panther, as some have affirmed; and which adultery is highly resented by the lion; nor will he suffer it to go unrevenged, as Pliny^{f20} and Philostratus^{f21} observe: those thus begotten differ from common lions in this, that they have no manes: the panthers are the creatures here meant, which are very swift, as Bochart^{f22} from various authors has observed. Lucan^{f23} calls this creature “celerem pardum”, “the swift panther”; and Jerom says^{f24} nothing is swifter than the panther; and Aelianus^{f25} observes that the panther, by the swiftness of its running, will overtake most creatures, and particularly apes; and Eustathius^{f26} confirms the same, saying that it exceeds other creatures in swiftness, and as it were flies before the eyes of hunters; and Osorius^{f27} relates, that the king of Portugal once sent to the pope of Rome a panther tamed, which being had into the woods a hunting by a Persian hunter, with wonderful swiftness leaped upon the boars and deer, and killed them at once; and the Septuagint version here is, “their horses will leap above the panthers”: or exceed them in leaping, for which these panthers are very famous too: an Arabic writer^{f28}, whom Bochart mentions, says it will leap above forty cubits at a leap. Pliny^{f29} reports, that the panthers in Africa will get up into thick trees, and hide themselves in the branches, and leap from thence on those that pass by; and because of the swiftness of this creature, with other qualities of it, the third beast or Grecian monarchy, especially in its first head Alexander the great, is represented by it, (²⁰⁰⁶ Daniel 7:6) he making such a swift and rapid progress in his conquests; and yet the Chaldean horses would exceed them in swiftness, and be very speedy in their march into the land of Judea; and therefore it was in vain for the Jews to please themselves with the thoughts that these people were a great way off, and so they secure from them, when they could and would be upon them presently, ere they were aware:

and are more fierce than ravening wolves; which creatures are naturally fierce, and especially when they are hungry, and particularly at evening; when, having had no food all the day, their appetites are very keen, and they go in quest of their prey; and, when they meet with it, fall upon it with greater eagerness and fierceness. The Septuagint and Arabic versions render it, than the wolves of Arabia; that there are wolves very frequent in Arabia, is observed by Diodorus Siculus^{f30}, and Strabo^{f31}; but that these are remarkable for their fierceness does not appear; rather those in colder climates are more fierce; so Pliny^{f32} says, they are little and sluggish in Africa and Egypt, but rough and fierce in cold climates. It is, in the original text, “more sharp”^{f33}; which some interpret of the sharpness of their sight. Aelianus says^{f34}, it is a most quick and sharp sighted creature; and can see in the night season, even though the moon shines not: the reason of which Pliny^{f35} gives is, because the eyes of wolves are shining, and dart light; hence Aelianus^{f36} observes, that that time of the night in which the wolf only by nature enjoys the light is called wolf light; and that Homer^{f37} calls a night which has some glimmering of light, or a sort of twilight, such as the wolves can see themselves walk by, *αμφιλυχη νυξ*, which is that light that precedes the rising sun; and he also observes that the wolf is sacred to the sun, and to Apollo, which are the same; and there was an image of one at Delphos; and so Macrobius^{f38} says, that the inhabitants of Lycopolis, a city of Thebais in Egypt, alike worship Apollo and a wolf, and in both the sun, because this animal takes and consumes all things like the sun; and, because perceiving much by the quick sight of its eyes, overcomes the darkness of the night; and observes, that some think they have their name from light, though they would have it be from the morning light; because those creatures especially observe that time for seizing on cattle, after a nights hunger, when before day light they are turned out of the stables into pasture; but it is for the most part at evening, and in the night, that wolves prowl about for their prey^{f39}; and from whence they have the name of evening wolves, to which the Chaldean horses are here compared: and yet there seems to be an antipathy between these, if what some naturalists^{f40} say is true; as that if a horse by chance treads in the footsteps of a wolf, a numbness will immediately seize it, yea, even its belly will burst; and that, if the hip bone of a wolf is thrown under horses drawing a chariot full speed, and they tread upon it, they will stop and stand stone still, immovable: whether respect is here had to the quick sight or sharp hunger of these creatures is not easy to say; though rather, since the comparison of them is with horses, it seems to respect the fierceness of them, for which the war

horse is famous, (~~8324~~ Job 39:24) and may be better understood of the sharpness of the appetite of evening wolves, when hunger bitten:

and their horsemen shall spread themselves; or be multiplied, as the Targum; they shall be many, and spread themselves all over the country, so that there will be no escaping; all will fall into their hands:

and their horsemen shall come from far; as Chaldea was reckoned from Judea, and especially in comparison of neighbouring nations, who used to be troublesome, as Moab, Edom, etc. (see ~~2455~~ Jeremiah 5:15):

they shall flee as the eagle [that] hasteth to eat; those horsemen shall be so speedy in their march, that they shall seem rather to fly than ride, and even to fly as swift as the eagle, the swiftest of birds, and which itself flies swiftest when hungry, and in sight of its prey; and the rather this bird is mentioned, because used by many nations, as the Persians, and others, for a military sign^{f41}.

Ver. 9. *They shall come all for violence*, etc.] Or, “the whole of it”^{f42}; the whole army of the Chaldeans, everyone of them; this would be their sole view, not to do themselves justice, as might be pretended, or avenge any injuries or affronts done to them by the Jews; but purely for the sake of spoil and plunder:

their faces shall sup up [as] the east wind: their countenances will appear so stern and fierce, that their very looks will so frighten, as to cause men to sink and die through terror; just as herbs and plants shrivel up and wither away, when blasted by a nipping east wind. So the Targum,

“the reception or look of their faces is like to a vehement east wind.”

Some render it,

“the look or design of their faces is to the east”^{f43};

when the Chaldeans were on their march to Judea, their faces were to the west or south west; but then their desire and views were, that when they had got the spoil they came for, as in the preceding clause, to carry it to Babylon, which lay eastward or north east of Judea, and thither their faces looked:

and they shall gather the captivity as the sand; or gather up persons, both in Judea, and in other countries conquered by them, as innumerable as the sand of the sea, and carry them captive into their own land. Captivity is put for captives.

Ver. 10. *And they shall scoff at the kings*, etc.] Or, “he shall”^{f44}, Nebuchadnezzar king of the Chaldeans, and the army with him; who would make a jest of kings and their armies that should oppose them, as being not at all a match for them; as the kings of Judah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, they carried captive, and all others confederate with them, in whom they trusted, as the king of Egypt particularly; and which is observed to show the vanity of trusting in princes for safety; though it may also include all other kings the Chaldeans fought against, and the kingdoms they invaded and subdued:

and the princes shall be a scorn unto them; the nobles, counsellors, and ministers of state; or leaders and commanders of armies, and general officers, in whom great confidence is often put; but these the king of Babylon and his forces would mock and laugh at, as being nothing in their hands, and who would fall an easy prey to them:

they shall deride every strong hold; in Jerusalem, in the whole land of Judea, and in every other country they invade, or pass through, none being able to stand out against them:

for they shall heap dust, and take it; easily, as it were in sport, only by raising a dust heap, or a heap of dirt; by which is meant a mount raised up to give them a little rise, to throw in their darts or stones, or use their engines and battering rams to more advantage, and to scale the walls, and get possession. There are two other senses mentioned by Kimchi; as that they shall gather a great number of people as dust, and take it; or they shall gather dust to till up the trenches and ditches about the wall, that so they may come at it, and take it.

Ver. 11. *Then shall [his] mind change*, etc.] The mind of the king of Babylon; not that, when he had taken Jerusalem, he altered his purpose, and laid aside his designs of attacking other nations, and returned to his own country; where he became guilty of gross idolatry, in setting up the golden image in the plain of Dura, which he required all his subjects to worship, and to which he ascribed all his victories; for, five years after this, Josephus^{f45} says, he led his army into Coelesyria, and conquered the

Moabites and Ammonites, and entered Egypt, and slew the reigning king of it: but rather the disposition of his mind changed for the worse upon his success in subduing kings and princes, and their kingdoms; for though his mind was never good, but always proud, haughty, and ambitious, insolent, cruel, and tyrannical; yet, being flushed with his conquests, he grew more and more so:

and he shall pass over^{f46}, or “transgress”, all bounds of modesty and sobriety, of humanity and goodness:

and offend, [imputing] this his power unto his god^{f47}; this particularly will be the sin he will be guilty of, he will ascribe all his achievements to his idol Bel; or rather to himself, to his own prowess and valour, his wisdom and skill in military affairs; for so it will bear to be rendered, making “this his own power to be his god”; and perhaps the golden image Nebuchadnezzar set up to be worshipped was for himself; (see ^{<2083>}Daniel 4:30). The Targum is,

“therefore, because of the lifting up of his spirit, his kingdom was removed from him; and he committed an offence, in that he multiplied glory to his idol;”

and some interpret the whole of this of the miserable condition Nebuchadnezzar was brought into, being a prophecy of it: “then shall his mind change”; his heart from man’s to a beast’s, (^{<2046>}Daniel 4:16): “and he shall pass over”; from all society and conversation with men, and have his dwelling with beasts, (^{<2061>}Daniel 4:31,32): “and offend”, or rather “be punished”, and become desolate and miserable, for his pride, and idolatry, and other sins: “this his power” is “his god”,^{f48}; spoken ironically; see what his power is now, being changed into a beast, which he reckoned his god, or gloried in as what he had from his god: but I rather think the whole is a continuation of his success, particularly in the land of Judea; and to be rendered, “then shall he pass through, as the wind, and shall pass over; and he shall bear the punishment of his sin, whose power is his god”; that is, the king of Babylon and his army, the Chaldeans, should pass through all nations and kingdoms that were between them and Judea, like a strong wind or whirlwind, to which they are compared, (^{<2043>}Jeremiah 4:13) and carry all before them, none being able to resist and oppose them; and should pass over rivers that lay in their way, and the boundaries of Judea, and spread themselves over the whole country; and then that country, and the inhabitants of it, should be punished for their sins, particularly for their

confidence in themselves; in their wealth and riches; in their fortresses and strong towers; in their own works of righteousness; all which they made idols of, and trusted not in their God, as they ought to have done.

Ver. 12. [*Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine holy One?* etc.] The prophet, foreseeing these calamities coming upon his nation and people, observes some things for their comfort in this verse; and expostulates with God in the following verses (³⁰¹³Habakkuk 1:13-17) about his providential dealings, in order to obtain an answer from him, which might remove the objections of his own mind, and those of other good men he personates, raised against them; being stumbled at this, that wicked men should be suffered to succeed and prosper, and the righteous should be afflicted and distressed by them: but for his own present consolation, and that of others, in a view of the worst that should befall them, he strongly asserts,

we shall not die; meaning not a corporeal death, for that all men die, good and bad; and this the Jews did die, and no doubt good men among them too, at the siege and taking of Jerusalem by the Chaldean army, either by famine, or pestilence, or sword: nor a death of affliction, which the people of God are subject to, as well as others; is often their case, and is for their good, and in love, and not wrath: but a spiritual death, which none that are quickened by the Spirit and grace of God ever die; though grace may be low, it is never lost; though saints may be in dead and lifeless frames, and need quickening afresh, yet they are not without the principle of spiritual life; grace in them is a well of living water, springing up to everlasting life; their spiritual life can never fail them, since it is secured in Christ: and much less shall they die the second, or an eternal death; they are ordained to eternal life; Christ is come, and given his flesh for it, that they might have it; it is in his hands for them; they are united to him, and have both the promise and pledge of it: and this may be argued, as by the prophet here, from the eternity of God, art “*thou not from everlasting?*” he is from everlasting to everlasting, the Ancient of days, that inhabits eternity, is, was, and is to come: therefore “*we shall not die*”; none of his people shall perish, because he loves them with an everlasting love; has made an everlasting choice of them; has set up Christ from everlasting as their surety and Saviour; entered into an everlasting covenant with them in Christ; is their everlasting Father, and will be their everlasting portion; is the unchangeable Jehovah, and therefore they shall not be consumed: this may be concluded from their covenant interest in God, “*O Lord my God*”;

they are his peculiar people, given to Christ to be preserved by him, and covenant interest always continues; he that is their God is their God and guide unto death: and also from the holiness of God, “mine holy One”; who has sworn by his holiness to them, and is faithful to his covenant and promise; and is the sanctifier of them, that has sanctified or set them apart for himself; made Christ sanctification to them, and makes them holy by his Spirit and grace, and enables them to persevere in grace and holiness: moreover, this may be understood of the people of the Jews, as a church and nation; who, though they would be carried captive into Babylon, yet would still continue as such, and be returned again as such, and not die, sink, and perish; since the Messiah was to spring from them; and they might be assured of their preservation for that purpose, from the perfections of God, his covenant with them, and their relation to him: nor shall the church of Christ in any age die and perish, though in ever so low a state; a particular church may, but the interest and church of Christ in general, or his spiritual seed, never shall. This is one of the eighteen passages, as Jarchi, Kimchi, and Ben Melech observe, called “Tikkun-Sopherim”, the correction of the scribes, of Ezra, and his company; it having been written, in some copies, “thou shall not die”^{f49}; asserting the immortality of God, or his eternity to come; and that, as he was from everlasting, so he should continue to everlasting; and to this sense the Targum paraphrases the words,

“thy Word remaineth for ever;”

and so the Syriac version follows the same reading:

O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment: that is, the Chaldeans; either to be judged and punished themselves for their sins, as all wicked Christless sinners are, even righteously foreordained to condemnation for their sins; or rather to be the instruments of punishing the wicked among the Jews; for this purpose were these people ordained in the counsels of God, and raised up in his providence, and constituted a kingdom, and made a powerful nation:

O mighty God; or “rock”^{f50}; the rock and refuge of his people:

thou hast established them for correction; or “founded”^{f51} them, and settled them as a monarchy, strong and mighty for this end, that they might be a rod in the hand of the Lord, not for destruction, but for correction and

chastisement; and from hence it might be also comfortably concluded that they should not die and utterly perish.

Ver. 13. [*Thou art*] of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity, etc.] The Lord with his eyes of omniscience beholds all things good and evil, and all men good and bad, with all their actions; but then he does not look upon the sins of men with pleasure and approbation; since they are contrary to his nature, repugnant to his will, and breaches of his righteous law: and though sin in general may be included here, yet there seems to be a particular respect had to the “evil” or injury done by the Chaldeans to the Jews, in invading their land, spoiling their substance, and slaying their persons; and to the “iniquity”, labour, or grievance, by which may be meant the oppression and violence the same people exercised upon the inhabitants of Judea; which, though permitted by the Lord, could not be well pleasing in his sight. The Targum interprets it of persons, workers of evil, and workers of the labour of falsehood; (see ^{<4174>}Psalm 5:4,5):

wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously; the Chaldeans, who dealt treacherously with God, by worshipping idols; and with the Jews, pretending to be their good friends and allies, when they meditated their ruin and destruction; and yet the Lord in his providence seemed to look favourably on these perfidious persons, since they succeeded in all their enterprises: this was stumbling to the prophet, and all good men; and they knew not how, or at least found great difficulty, to reconcile this to the purity and holiness of God, and to his justice and faithfulness; (see ^{<4175>}Jeremiah 12:1,2):

and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth [the man that is] more righteous than he? the comparison does not lie so much personally between Nebuchadnezzar and Zedekiah the last king of the Jews, whose eyes the king of Babylon put out, and whom he used in a cruel manner; who was, no doubt, comparatively speaking, a more righteous person than the Chaldean monarch was; being not the worst of the kings of Judea, and whose name has the signification of righteousness in it: but rather between the Chaldeans and the Jews; who, though there were many wicked persons among them, yet there were some truly righteous, who fell in the common calamity; and, as to the bulk of them, were a more righteous people, at the worst, than their enemies were, who devoured them, destroyed many with the sword, plundered them of their substance, and carried them captive; and the Lord was silent all this while, said nothing in his providence against

them, put no stop to their proceedings; and by his silence seemed to approve of, at least to connive at, what they did; and this the prophet in the name of good men reasons with the Lord about.

Ver. 14. *And makest men as the fishes of the sea*, etc.] That is, sufferest them to be used as the fishes of the sea, which are easily taken in the net, and are common to everyone; whosoever will may take them up, and kill them, and use them for their food; and which also among themselves are often hardly used, the lesser being devoured by the greater; and in like manner the prophet suggests, that the people of the Jews, who were men made after the image of God, and made for society and usefulness, and moreover were God's covenant people; and it might have been expected, that a more special providence would have attended them, more than other men, and especially than what attended the fishes of the sea; yet it looked as if there were no more care taken of them than of these:

as the creeping things [that have] no ruler over them; not the creeping things of the earth, but of the water, the lesser sort of fishes that move in the water; or those that more properly creep, as crabs, prawns, and shrimps; (see ¹⁹⁴²⁵Psalm 104:25) who have none to protect and defend them, and restrain others from taking and hurting them: this may seem contrary to what Aristotle^{f52} and Pliny^{f53} say of some fishes, that they go in company, and have a leader or governor; but, as Bochart^{f54} observes, it is one thing to be a leader of the way, a guide and director, which way to steer their course in swimming; and another thing to be as the general of an army, to protect and defend, or under whose directions they might defend themselves; such an one the prophet denies they had: and so, the prophet complains, this was the case of the Jews; they were exposed to the cruelty of their enemies, as if there was no God that governed in the world, and no providence to direct and order things for the preservation of men, and to keep good men from being hurt by evil men; or those that were weak and feeble from being oppressed by the powerful and mighty; this he reasons with the Lord about, and was desirous of an answer to it.

Ver. 15. *They take up all of them with the angle*, etc.] The prophet continues the metaphor of fishing, and observes the different ways of taking fish; which is to be applied to the case he is speaking of: as fishermen take all they can with their angles, so "they" or "he", for it is in the singular number, Nebuchadnezzar and his army, take up all out of the sea of the world; are ambitious of getting all kingdoms and nations of the

world under their power and dominion; particularly all Judea, and all the inhabitants of it, good and bad, without any distinction; for all were fish which came to their net: this may design the artful and alluring methods they first made use of to get the people into their hands, by making covenants with them, and drawing them into making of presents, and paying of tribute:

they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag; with the angle the fisherman catches fish one by one, but with the net great numbers; and what he misses by throwing the net, he gets by using the drag; all which may be expressive of the ways and methods used by the king of Babylon and his army, both in the times of Jeconiah, and of Zedekiah; under the former he used the net, and carried off large numbers, and with them the royal family and great substance, but left many behind; under the latter he came and swept away all, drained the land of its riches and its inhabitants:

therefore they rejoice and are glad; as fishermen do when they have good sport; so these people rejoiced in their own success, and in the calamities of their neighbours.

Ver. 16. *Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag*, etc.] Either to their idols, to fortune and the stars, as Aben Ezra; imagining they gave them success, and prospered them in the arts and methods they used: or to their arms, as the Targum; nor was it unusual with the Heathens to worship their spears, sacrifice to them, and swear by them^{f55}. So Justin says^{f56}, originally the ancients worshipped spears for gods, in memory of whose religion spears are still added to the images of the gods. Lucian^{f57} asserts that the Scythians sacrificed to a scimitar; and Arnobius^{f58} says the same; and Ammianus Marcellinus^{f59} reports, that the Quadi worship their swords or daggers instead of gods; and that it was usual to swear by the spear is evident from others^{f60}. Or else the sense is, they sacrificed to their own valour and courage, skill and conduct.

Because by them their portion [is] fat, and their meat plenteous: that is, by their angle, net, and drag; or by those things signified by them, the arts and methods they used to subdue nations, conquer kingdoms, and bring them into subjection to them; they enlarged their dominions, increased their riches and revenues, and had plenty of everything that was desirable for food and raiment, for pleasure and profit; or to gratify the most unbounded ambition, having everything that heart could wish for and desire: the

allusion is to making sumptuous feasts, and rich banquets, on occasion of victories obtained.

Ver. 17. *Shall they therefore empty their net*, etc.] Or “thus”, after this manner, so Noldius; as fishermen do, when they have had a good cast, and a large draught, spread the net, and take out the fishes, in order to throw it again, and catch more; and so it is asked, should these Chaldeans, when they have conquered one nation, and so filled their net or themselves with the spoil, carry it to Babylon, and there lay it up, and then proceed to fight against another kingdom and nation, and plunder it in like manner?

and not spare continually to slay the nations? the inhabitants of them one after another, and subdue them under them, and make themselves master of all their treasure, until they are arrived to universal monarchy by such cruel and unmerciful methods. The Targum is,

“shall he send his armies continually to consume nations, and that without mercy?”

This the prophet proposes in the name of the whole body of the Lord’s people, and leaves it with him to have an answer to it, which is given in the following chapter (^{<3111>}Habakkuk 2:1-20).