

Habakkuk

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Section 8 of: **The Minor Prophets**

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We must begin with God, as sinners, on the principle of faith, and go on with Him to the end, as saints, on the same principle. "The just shall live by faith." (See Rom. 1: 17; Gal. 3: 11; Heb. 10: 38; taken from Hab. 2: 4.)

This prophecy of Habakkuk has great moral value for us. But besides this, it is seasonable now; for in this our day things are ripening to a crisis, as they were in the day of Habakkuk.

His was a day when the iniquities of the professing people of God were moving the holy anger and sorrow of this man of God. And yet, while his soul was thus vexed with their evil conversation, his heart would feel for their misery, and he would earnestly make their cause his own.

I would listen to him a little carefully for a few minutes, and observe upon his words as they show themselves to us in their natural parts and order.

Habakkuk 1: 1-4. In these opening verses, as I noticed already, the prophet's righteous soul is vexed with the evil conversation of his nation. He presents the sad, reprobate scene that was lying under his eye to the notice of the Lord. He cries out of violence, and grievance, and spoiling, and strife, and such like iniquity, found, as it was, in the very midst of God's people.

Habakkuk 1: 5-11. In His answer to this cry of His servant, the Lord seems, at the first, to vindicate and to join with it. He enters into the resentment of the moral state of Israel, which Habakkuk was so deeply feeling. He challenges His people as "heathen" — for such they would prove themselves to be, by not believing the work that He himself was purposing to work among them. He counts their circumcision as uncircumcision. The apostle, quoting this word from our prophet, calls them "despisers." (Acts 13: 41) The Lord, therefore, thus, at the first, follows the story of Israel's iniquities, which the prophet had been rehearsing; and anticipates their great crowning, closing iniquity — the rejection of His word and work through unbelief.

But having done this, He lets the prophet know, that this iniquity which had been vexing his soul, and against which he had been crying to Him, should not go unpunished, for that the Chaldean sword should soon enter the land to avenge the quarrel of His holiness.

Habakkuk 1: 12-17. Hearing this, Habakkuk is terribly alarmed. Like Moses, in such a case, he cannot be prepared for this; nor can his heart, that so cared for his people, welcome the Chaldean, however his soul may be angry with their evil ways.

In the deepest strain of fear and of feeling, and in the skilfulness of an advocate whose allections were making him eloquent, he pleads against the Chaldean, assured that the Lord would not give over His own people, however guilty they might be, to the reckless wrath of those who were still more wicked than themselves. Moreover, he seeks that this terrible scourge may in the Lord's grace, be only for *correction*, and not for *destruction*, to Israel.

All this is a sweet state of soul in our prophet. Habakkuk, perhaps, is more of a Jeremiah than any of the prophets. He lives more *personally* in the scenes he was describing than is common. He

feels everything — and so did Jeremiah. They *lived* the prophet, and not merely *spoke* as such.

Habakkuk 2: 1. And having thus unburthened his heart and pleaded with the Lord, he waits for the answer. His heart is with his people, and he must watch for the end of the Lord." He is no hireling; he cares for the flock, and cannot flee. His service for Israel had not been lightly taken up,, and it cannot therefore be quickly laid down. He must see the end of it; and for this, he sets himself upon the watch-tower.

Habakkuk 2: 2-20. Here we read the Lord's answer — and it is full of solemn, interesting meaning. Habakkuk shall not be disappointed; he shall not be on his tower for nothing, As Daniel's fasting for his twenty-one days, so Habakkuk's watching on the tower shall be rewarded.

The Lord, however, begins his answer by stating some strong, leading facts, or rather principles of truth.

1. That the vision or prophecy was to be clearly announced.
2. That all was to remain in vision, or unfulfilled, for a season.
3. That during that season the man of the world would ripen himself in pride for the judgment of God.
4. That during the same season the saint should live by faith.
5. That in due season, God's appointed time, the vision should speak, the prophecy be fulfilled, so that the end was surely worth waiting for.

Then, having laid down these facts or principles, the Lord goes on to announce, to the welcoming ear of the prophet, the awful judgments that were to overtake the Chaldean.

Habakkuk 3. Having listened to this from his watchtower, the prophet, as I may say, descends to speak with the Lord. Having been graciously visited and answered on the tower, he will now enter the sanctuary, as with the voice of prayer and praise, and in the power of that faith which had accepted the answer of God, rejoiced in it, and counted on still further blessing.

But these his closing words are very beautiful.

The, answer he had just received seems at once to put him in spirit, back to the earliest days of his nation, or the time of the salvation of God, when He was beginning to make Israel His people. The Chaldean reminded him of the Egyptian and of the Amorite. And he designs that the Lord would do for Israel now in the face of the Chaldean, what in those primitive days He had done for them in the face of the Egyptian and the Amorite. He seeks that there may be "a revival" — that now in the midst of the years God would do the works which so wondrously marked the *beginning* of the years. And with affecting beauty, and in the broken style of one who was following the currents of a heart alive to its subject, he rehearses, as in the divine presence, those early works of Jehovah in behalf of Israel, whether accomplished in Egypt, or in the wilderness, or in Canaan, that (if I may so speak), the Lord might look at those mighty doings of His, and do the like in these present Chaldean times. It is as if Habakkuk were lifting up the bow under the eye of God in the day of the cloud; so that, looking at it, He might remember His covenant, His grace, and His power for His saints, His promises and. His mercies, and save His people from this threatened overwhelming.

For as yet the Lord had only promised judgment on the Chaldean. (See Hab. 2) He had not spoken of the final restoration and glory of Israel; but Habakkuk must have this also promised and

secured; and therefore he prays for "a revival" of His work in behalf of Israel.

And then, at the very end, as the just man living by faith, whom the Lord's word had already told him of, (see Hab. 2) he utters his present full confidence in God. He tells, indeed, how the Lord's word about the coming of the Chaldean had frightened him, so that he was as one astonished, or as a dead man; but that now, as a man of faith, he knows that he has but to wait, through a season of discipline and patience, assured that all will end in the salvation of God. And in the joyous assurance of this, he sings to the chief singer on his stringed instrument; and as Jehoshaphat entered the battle with the song of victory on his lips, so Habakkuk now enters on the season of the vision, or of the exercise of faith and patience, in the joy of the Lord, and with a song prepared as for a day of glory.

Now, upon this, we may again say, the present day may put us much in company with Habakkuk. The man of God looks round, and sees everything in Christendom to provoke the resentment of holiness, or to vex the righteous soul. But while he resents the thing, he would fain plead for the people, like Habakkuk; and, like him again, turn to God, with his burthens and his expectations. But somewhat beyond our prophet, the believer now, from the fuller instructions of God, *knows* there will be "a revival," and does not merely pray for it. He knows that the judgments which are coming, more solemn than that by the hand of the Chaldean, will only clear the earth of all that offends, take out of it all that are corrupting it, and thus lead to its redemption, and not to its destruction. And he knows that a brighter, richer condition will mark its end, than that which did its beginning — for "the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into, the glorious liberty of the children of God." So that it will not be merely a revival of early days in the history of either Israel or the earth; but their latter end, like that of Job, will be more than their beginning.

And I would add a practical word upon the experience of Habakkuk, which is so blessed at the end. "I will rejoice in the Lord," he says, "although the fig-trees shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines."

To live happily in the love of God, through Jesus, is the glory He seeks at our hand — sinner, self-ruined, as we are. And to do this, like Habakkuk in spite of the contradiction of circumstances, makes this service and worship still more excellent — the fruit, as it surely is, of His grace and inworking power.

Man seeks to live *pleasurably*, but he has no care to live *happily*. He would live pleasurably, or in the sunshine of favouring, flattering circumstances; but to live happily, or in the favour of God, in the light of His countenance, the sense of His love, and the hope of His presence in glory, this is not what man cares about. And it is God's work in the heart and conscience, when man is bethinking himself, and seeking to cease from living pleasurably, that he may live happily — find his life only in the greatest of all circumstances, that is, in his relation to God, having discovered, through grace, that that relationship is settled for him for ever, in the precious reconciliation accomplished in the blood of Christ.

And let me still take on me to add another word on what the Lord says as to the Chaldean in Hab. 2: 14. "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

The pride of man, whether he be Chaldean or any other, that would affect universal empire, has ever been, and shall still be, judged and broken; and that dominion shall be reserved for Jesus "the Lord," and for Him only. He shall be made higher than the kings of the earth, and His kingdom

shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Neither the past or present unbelief of His own nation, Israel, nor the purposes and attempts of any of the Gentiles, shall hinder this. (See Num. 14: 21; Hab. 2: 14) For, in the coming peaceful days of the sceptre of the righteous One, this shall be accomplished. (See Isa. 11: 9).

The people shall labour after this, but they shall weary themselves for nothing, for "very vanity." (Hab. 2: 13). But Jesus shall have it. "Blessed be his glorious name for ever, and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. "Amen and amen." (Ps. 72).