

Habakkuk

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

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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 himself, as representing the faithful among the Jews, brought into deep exercises, 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 exulting hope into which he was led by the communications of the Spirit of God. We shall see too that the hope proves its divine quality; for there is all that which is calculated to sustain in patient waiting, though there be nothing shown outwardly, save indeed the extreme of earthly trial. Still the prophet rejoices in Jehovah, and counts on as undisturbed possession of all that is promised above every foe, as gazelles enjoy on the heights where no other foot can tread in safety.

"The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. O Jehovah, how long shall I cry, and thou dost not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou dost not save! Why dost thou show me iniquity, and beholdest grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth; for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth." Hence there is a goodly measure of spiritual resemblance between the short prophecy of Habakkuk and the longer one of Jeremiah. At the same time Habakkuk is no mere imitator. He alludes to the previous prophets as he does to facts in the early history of Israel: so all the prophets did. There was no avoidance sometimes of direct quotation; nay, we have seen that the Spirit led them to adopt and reiterate that which other prophets had said before them. If the consciousness of originality and affluence of thought sometimes enable men to rise superior to the charge of borrowing from a compeer, much more did divine guidance make prophets less careful and sensitive on this head. Vain souls who yearn after and affect original power are too feeble to act candidly and with freedom, and are apt to show extreme jealousy lest they might be thought to make use of another; if they do not, it is to their own loss and that of their readers; for "non omnia possumus omnes."

Hence in scripture we see the contrary of this weak narrowness. Daniel for instance, who is stamped with a characteristic style of his own from beginning to end, was a diligent student of Jeremiah, and, certainly from no lack of power to express himself, prefers to take up the language of Moses where it suited the Spirit's purpose. So we saw Micah and Isaiah furnishing important portions not only in thought analogous, but in many respects identical in expression, yet each having its own proper object. Consequently the use which they serve remains characteristic for each, so that the very points of resemblance only strengthen the real difference in the object before the Spirit of God. In fact this is so true of scripture, that whether it be the same writer or a different one (most probably the same), we find in the book of Psalms that two of these compositions are almost word for word alike; and yet I am persuaded that neither could be spared without positive loss, and that the few words which differ between Psalms 14 and 53 are of the greatest moment to take into consideration if we would rightly divide the word of truth and understand their scope. Consequently while there is instruction in the sameness, there is also the most important key to interpretation by the difference. But almost all this is and must be lost save to those who look carefully into their words separately and as compared with each other, but every word is full of instruction when once clearly seen.

In this way then, although there is a certain spirit of complaint observable at first in Habakkuk as well as in Jeremiah, a burdened sorrowful-stricken spirit, nevertheless we may say of him, as Paul said of himself, "Cast down, but not destroyed." He shows us not sin indeed but infirmity, the infirmity of the earthen vessel; but there is a brilliant testimony in both to the treasure that divine grace put in it.

Here then the prophet groans, but he does what the Jews did not in Hosea — he groans to God. "O Jehovah, how long shall I cry, and thou hearest not? even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou savest not?" Jehovah had other purposes; and if He appears not to hear, and if He does not put forth His arm to save — for salvation, we must remember, here means by external power, or deliverances shown on the earth, — if such be not exerted it is always for the accomplishment of ' better things. We may always count on the perfect goodness of God and the resources of His grace wherever there is faith; for all good for failing man is of faith that it might be by grace; and Habakkuk particularly is the prophet who is charged with the mission of giving its due place to faith. But invariably, wherever there is real faith, it must be tried. We find accordingly the trial even before the faith is distinctly in evidence; yet had there not been real faith underneath, we may be perfectly assured there would have been no such putting to the proof.

Hence the very severity of a trial ought to comfort the believer; for the Lord never puts a heavier burden than He gives grace to bear; and therefore it is always an honour to have a trial as far as it goes. It is no honour to slip aside from what God has given us to do or bear. To be unfaithful as a steward is a disgrace in the eyes both of God and man. :But Habakkuk's distress was that there should be such a state of things in the people of God, that He should delay His answer, and that He should not be able morally to put forth salvation in the way of external deliverance I have just now described. "Why dost thou show me iniquity," if it is so exceedingly distressing? — iniquity even in the very place where righteousness might have been looked for. It was among the people of God. This the more harassed him. That the Gentiles should be iniquitous was no wonder; that the Jews should be so was a deep trouble to his soul.

"For spoiling and violence are before me," he says further; "and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked." He is speaking of those who had the law and were formally under it. "And judgment doth never go forth." There was no proper answer to it. "For the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth."

But if man and His people fail, Jehovah answers; He at least heard. Therefore so far there is an immediate appearance of the Lord, though not in the way in which the prophet had looked and yearned for it; but Jehovah must always be above the thoughts of the heart. The foolishness of God, as it is said, is wiser than man, let him put forth his best wisdom.

Jehovah then is here represented as calling on His people to see what He was going to do. Great changes were in progress; greater still in store. The fall of the Assyrian kingdom was a grave and alarming event: so should Egypt and all others who proudly resisted Jehovah's will and word — the more strikingly shown when His own people were going to be put down among the rest. So much the worse for the Jew if he believed not what God made known to him beyond all the world. "Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you." We see that every chapter throughout the prophecy has for its kernel the folly of unbelief and value of faith. This was quoted by the apostle Paul, and that too among the Jews, when they were in danger of letting slip the blessing because of its very magnitude: so perfectly does the Spirit of God always apply the word even in circumstances which might seem to be unlike.

In Acts 13: 38, 39, the apostle applies the passage to the assembled Jews: "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things." This was the great emphatic point; first the Man that has brought in by His work that blessing, the forgiveness of sins, the boon of divine mercy to the needy sinner when awakened. "By him all that believe are justified from all things," — a precise and full expression though in the simplest elements of the gospel. It is not only the forgiveness of sins, but "justified," which, of course, includes it? but goes farther. "By him *all* that believe." Therefore there is the grace that imparts this rich blessing to the feeblest faith, for it is not a question of depth or power but of reality. God is real, and by His grace He gives unlimited blessing to those that are simple and true. This is proved by faith, which honours Him in spite of appearances. It is for "all that believe," says Paul, though all the virtue be "by *him*." The whole value of redemption stands in Christ, and turns on His work — "By *him* all that believe." Yet it is inseparable from the believer. Although faith may have in itself no such quality as could be a meritorious ground for the blessing, nevertheless "without faith it is impossible to please God." Grace and righteousness are not at issue but in harmony through the cross of Christ. How else could man righteously be blessed, being a sinner before God? Faith takes him out of himself, and brings in all the blessing that comes through another, even through Christ our Lord. "By him all that believe are justified from all things." Everything here is, as it should be, in fulness — "justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

The state of Israel was clearly one of unrighteousness; law could only condemn. Grace could save through the faith of the Messiah, and save in a deeper way than Habakkuk was permitted to see; for the prophet undoubtedly, as is usual in the Old Testament looked on salvation largely, though certainly not exclusively, as a deliverance from outward misery and danger by the gracious intervention of God, and not so much to that still more wondrous deliverance which has come in already to faith in a dead and risen Christ. All things around us remain unchanged; the power of evil still goes on. Fraud and oppression are not judged and gone from the world; but there is One who has broken right through the power of evil, and made a way into heaven itself for those who believe on Him. This is Christianity, and of this the apostle is full, though he does not scruple, as we shall see, to apply the prophecy to it on the principle of faith, and according to the divine depth of the written word. "Beware, therefore," says he, turning to those who refuse the testimony, "lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in nowise believe, though a man declare it unto you." Now it is very evident that this has a reference to Habakkuk, though I should think not to Habakkuk only. We can easily see the exactness of it. "That which is spoken of in the prophets." It would seem that Isaiah is referred to as well as Habakkuk, though one need not dwell upon the reasons for the thought just now.

But there is also wisdom in omission; for the prophecy says, "Behold ye among the heathen." This might have appeared ambiguous, and capable of being turned aside by the Jew, who would say, "This is exactly our conviction: we all know the heathen to be in a dangerous state; but why overlook the favour of the people of God?" Therefore in the application the direct reference to the heathen is dropped, and all is made pointed and personal to the people themselves; for undoubtedly if God resent despite to His truth and righteousness among the heathen, much more will He judge it among His own people. No prescriptive place given to the Jew can justly be pleaded to preserve them from the consequences of slighting and blaspheming God and His grace. On the contrary, nowhere is judgment so insupportably severe as among those who take the place of the people of God and yet set Jesus at nought. If bad in Israel, it is incomparably worse in Christendom: what is it in this land of Bibles and free preaching?

I do not, it will be seen, contend that the death and resurrection of Christ is explicitly named in our prophet; but that a principle is laid down which covers the work of the Saviour. The particular application is left entirely open. We know what the work is which alone could meet the need of guilty man before God. On the surface it is rather the work of judgment which Jehovah had then in hand in raising up the Chaldeans to supreme power, and thereby both destroying Assyria and chastising the Jew sorely. That testimony put the Jew to the test then. Now what is such an object of witness as redemption? Despising it, our Lord teaches (Matt. 22: 7), would bring a worse judgment from the Romans. But I am inclined to think that the apostle applies the principle to what God was doing then in grace, in view of a judgment which the Lord will execute at His coming. For no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation. We must not limit it to the past. All is part of an organic whole with Christ and His kingdom for its centre. If this be so, it was God who had wrought in Christ, and by the Spirit was still carrying on and out His work, grounded, as we know, on the mighty work of redemption.

As to the latter clause of verse 41, it refers to the opposition of their will. "A work which ye shall in nowise believe." It is no question of a decree on God's part, but of the people's will against Him, of which He gives them ample notice. I should doubt its being the judicial sentence, but a prophecy used for a solemn warning of what unbelief would render imperative. The judicial aspect in the book of Acts is reserved till Acts 28. There and then it is pronounced. That is, we have the full testimony going out persistently and most patiently; and the more patient God may be with His testimony, the more unsparing the judgment when it comes. But He is slow to anger, as we know, and a strange work to Him is judgment; yet, when it comes, it must surely take its course according to His holy nature and majesty. But it seems to me only pronounced judicially in the last chapter of the Acts. Here it was in progress, as the Jews were being put to the final proof. There was a highly significant act done, and recorded there at the end of this very chapter — the shaking off the dust from the disciples' feet; which shows that, although sentence might not formally be pronounced, there was nevertheless a loud testimony to it, and an intimation that they had better beware, for their danger was as extreme as their unbelief.

However, the prophet hears from Jehovah that He was going to raise up the Chaldeans; and this all know was the proximate judgment then impending, though far from being all that awaits the Jew in this way. "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." They were spoilers whom God employed in His providence for the purpose of breaking down the apostacy of Judah, and also for chastising the pride of other nations. "They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; and they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it. Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god." Thus there would be a permitted prevalence of the Chaldean scourge for a certain time; but when they forgot that God was employing them for the purpose of dealing with those who had offended His name and glory, directly they imputed their power not to the sovereign will of God but to the positive influence and agency of their own god, then the true God would take them in hand. Their self-proceeding energy would come to nought just as much as the haughtiness of other nations. This action of the Chaldeans is to be assigned to the moment of their coming up under Nebuchadnezzar down to the overthrow of the Babylonish monarchy. It was then that all should be changed. The

culminating point of this outrageous iniquity was the insult that was done to Jehovah by Belshazzar, when they praised their gods in presence of the dishonoured vessels of the temple at Jerusalem, as if Jehovah could not preserve His own people before the superior power of their idols, or of Chaldean hands.

Then comes the answer of the prophet to Jehovah's word. "Art thou not from everlasting, O Jehovah, my God?" This brings out now a measure of rest to the spirit of the prophet. Now, instead of yielding to the plaintive tone in which he began, he is emboldened to speak plainly of the Chaldeans. He bows in a measure to the wisdom and righteousness of the discipline; and if not complete as yet, we shall find it has its perfect work before he closes. It is of deep interest to mark such progress in the soul, and it is always thus where there is reality. Nothing more painful than when believers settle down in a barely dogmatic statement of truth, or in a monotonous experience from day to day, without gathering fresh strength from the Lord, instead of seeking to turn everything, whether of sorrow or of joy, into a means of a better knowledge of Himself. This is all-important. It is one of the grand differences between law and grace. According to law you have demands and directions all definitely out, and it is not in the nature of law to produce increase in acquaintance with the divine mind; whereas as surely as grace takes its way, souls "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," — "increasing," as it is said, "by the knowledge of God."

Just so is it with the prophet here. "Art thou not from everlasting, O Jehovah my God; mine Holy One? we shall not die. O Jehovah, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them far correction," the Chaldeans. There is but little said about their history. They were brought out fully as a scourge, and this is clearly set forth, but it cannot be without God's taking them in hand in the end. All was measured. His mercy always measured the trial where His people must needs come under a chastening. How blessed that even those self-assertive Chaldeans with an unexampled energy of man should nevertheless be but employed of God for the correction of His own grievously failing people! This is what comforted the prophet at length as he weighs it all. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." He evidently refers to language used elsewhere, as early as Job, but still with an entirely new application. "Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?"

For after all this is what drew out the prophet's heart — that the people of God, let their faults be what they might, contained whatever was righteous at that time on the earth, and that these Chaldeans, raised up to humble the Jews, were as merciless in their dealings with them as they were forgetful and contemptuous toward God Himself. "And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag; therefore they rejoice and are glad." But as Jehovah told the prophet that they should offend, imputing this very power to their god, so the prophet tells Jehovah, "Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous." We see how skilfully he turns the little word that Jehovah had given him as a groundwork now to plead reasons why He should not spare these ruthless enemies of Himself and His people. Nothing can be more beautiful than the way in which a single eye — an eye that knows the love God has to His own people and above all to Christ Himself — lays hold of the suitable truth and employs it in the interests of the needy who cleave to His name. "Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations." Will Jehovah allow them then to go on in this unsparing way? It cannot be. But the issue must be waited for.

"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say

unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved" This closes the matter. I do not know why this verse should be dislocated from Habakkuk 1, which it naturally closes. It is the conclusion of the question which had so sorely tried his spirit at first; not so much looking to events in providence but to see what Jehovah will say. There does not seem the least real ground for the hypothesis of a late writer who will have it that the prophet wrote Habakkuk 1 under Jehoiakim, Habakkuk 2 under Jehoiachin, and Habakkuk 3 under Zedekiah. Such a scheme breaks up an admirably connected whole.

Jehovah replies to the prophet in the second verse of Habakkuk 2 "And Jehovah answered and said, Write the vision and make it plain upon the tables, that he may run that readeth it." There is but one reason why it seems to me that it may be taken with the first verse; namely, that it is a plain allusion to what the prophet had just before uttered; but still we must always bear in mind that, except in the Psalms and in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the division of chapters is not divine, but merely according to the judgment of men. The Psalms are by inspired authority written separately one from another; and, again, they appear to be divinely grouped in the order in which we find them. Jeremiah in a somewhat similar way has a peculiar internal construction, which proves that God divided the Lamentations practically as we see in our common English version. But with all the rest of the Bible, Old and New Testament, spiritual judgment alone can discern where the divisions ought to be made; and the manner in which much of it was made might prepare us for not the happiest results. The distribution into verses is said to have been done during a journey on horseback by a printer, of learning, no doubt, but possessed of no such qualities of a higher order as one could consider requisite for anything like a satisfactory execution of so delicate a task. It certainly will not be pretended by competent judges that either the person or the manner was at all favourable to a judicious dealing with the word of God. I think it would have been better done on one's knees in the closet, than *inter equitandum* from Paris to Lyons.* However so it has too often fared with the word of God, though it claims and needs a holy and reverent attitude beyond all other books. Is it too much to say that no book in the world has met with such unworthy usage at the hands of man? On the other hand never has God shown Himself so truly and fully as in the way in which He gave it and watched over it, spite of faithless guardians to whose responsibility it was entrusted.

{*It is H Stephens, in the Preface to his New Testament of 1576, who tells us the story of this performance of his father R. Stephens at least as far as regards the New Testament, which first appeared in his fourth edition (1551), followed by Beza and since then by almost all."}

"Jehovah" then "answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." It is well known that the apostle Paul applies this to the very centre of the vision, and of all visions, to Jesus Christ the Lord coming back in glory. In Hebrews 10 we are told that He who shall come will come, and will not tarry. Such is the way in which the Spirit displays His admirable use of Old Testament scripture. Already had the Lord Jesus personally come the first time, and been rejected by the Jews to their own ruin. The apostle's use of it gives the words a much more personal force; yet, we can see, not departing from but only adding to the evident issue contemplated in Hebrews 2, 3, which can have no greater fulfilment short of that crowning event.

But then there is another remark to be made here. The prophet lets us know that the vision of God is written so that a man does not require I know not what accessories in order to understand it. It was to be made plain on tablets, distinctly set out in large impressive characters. But it is not said, as the common view assumes, that the runner may read, but rather that the reader may run, and thus, it would seem, spread the joyful intelligence one to another. It has been suggested that we should compare

Daniel 12: 4; but this, I think, carries out the idea of running to and fro, and increasing knowledge thus among such as have an ear to hear. The passage then holds out no premium to the careless reader, but shows how the reader of the vision will be stimulated thereby to earnest spread of the truth he receives.

It is granted, however, that scripture does meet and bless those who take but a scanty draught from the waters of life to which it points in Christ the Lord. At the same time they only enter into its depths who believe in its divine fulness, and have confidence that the Spirit, who made it the word of God in all the emphasis of that expression, delights to lead the believer into the understanding of all the truth.

Thus, while the power of the vision is shown in verse 2, the sureness of it in verse 3, whatever may be the delay meanwhile, from verse 4 we learn another thing, that is, the all-importance of faith to make it good for the soul before it comes. The result is not yet come; but this is no reason we should not gather the profit by that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, It cannot be denied that this is an immensely important principle; and more particularly in prophecy. The common notion is that prophecy never does people good unless it treat directly of the times and circumstances in which they themselves are found. There can be no greater fallacy. Abraham got more good from the prophecy about Sodom and Gomorrah than Lot did; yet it clearly was not because Abraham was there, for he was not in Sodom, while Lot was, who barely escaped and with little honour as we soon sorrowfully learn. But the Spirit teaches us by these two cases in the first book of the Bible His mind as to this question. I grant entirely that when the fulfilment of prophecy in all its details comes, there will be persons to glean the most express directions. But I am persuaded that the deepest value of prophecy is for those who are occupied with Christ, and who will be in heaven along with Christ, just as Abraham was with Jehovah, instead of being like Lot in the midst of the guilty Sodomites. If this be so, the book of Revelation ought to be of far richer blessing to us now who enjoy by grace heavenly associations with Christ, and are members of His body, though we shall be on high when the hour of temptation comes on those that dwell on the earth.

It is freely allowed that the Revelation will be an amazing comfort and help to the saints who may be there. But this is no reason why it should not be a still greater blessing now to those who will be caught up to Christ before that hour. The fact is, that both are true: only it is a higher and more intimate privilege to be with the Lord in the communion of His own love and mind before the things come to pass, though comfort will be given, when they come, to those that are immersed in them. Consequently we see in the Revelation (Rev. 4, 5, 6) already with the Lord the glorified saints of the Old and New Testament who were taken up to meet Him, including those to whom the prophecy was primarily given. Afterwards we see the judgments come in gradual succession; but when they take place, there are saints who evidently witness for God on earth, some suffering unto death, others preserved to be a blessed earthly people. To such undoubtedly the prophetic visions will be of value when the actual events arrive; but the most admirable value always is to faith before the events confirm the truth of the word. This is an invariable principle as to the prophetic word and indeed in divine truth generally.

Here we have faith and its ground thus stated: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith." I suppose the proud soul particularly refers to the Chaldean. He was absolutely blind; but the principle of it is just as true of the unrighteous Jew or of any man who hardens himself against the divine word. For certainly the wrath of God is against all ungodliness, and indeed, if there be any difference, against those most of all who hold the truth ever so fast in unrighteousness. It does not matter how orthodox

they may be; but if men cleave to the truth in unrighteousness, so much the worse the sin. The truth in this case only condemns the more peremptorily. They may tenaciously hold the truth; yet truth was never given to make righteousness a light matter, but urgently due to God in the relations that pertain to us. The object of all truth is to put us in communion with God and in obedience. But the man whose soul is lifted up is not upright, as is plain. The invariable way of God is this, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted;" and faith alone gives humiliation of self. It may be here observed that there are two forms of it: the happiest of all is to be humble; the next best thing is to be humbled. It is better to be humble than to be humbled, but there is no comparison between being humbled and being lifted up. Humility is the effect of grace; humiliation rather of God's righteous government where we are not humble. This is what He did with His saints of old and outwardly with His ancient people. It is what is too often needful for ourselves. The best place of all is to be so realizing what the grace and glory of the Lord are that we are nothing before Him. Humility is the effect not so much of a moral process with ourselves, but of occupation with Him. Humbling is the effect of the Lord dealing with our souls when He sees the need of breaking us down, it may be to use us, certainly for further blessing. We could not so deal with ourselves. Judgment must come instead of humbling, but in every case anything is better than to have our soul lifted up: where is the uprightness there?

"The just," it is said, "shall live by faith." This is used repeatedly in the New Testament. There are three well-known quotations in the Epistles, on which a few words may be desirable before we leave the subject. It is the apostle Paul who uses this text on all these several occasions. In writing to the Roman saints he tells them that in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." Such is the only way and direction of the blessing. The righteousness of God is necessarily outside the reach of any unless it be revealed; but being revealed it is revealed "out of faith," (ἐκ πίστεως,) and in no other way, and consequently "unto faith" wherever faith might be. It could not be in the way of law: not even the Jew could suppose this, for the law claims man's righteousness, and does not say a word about the righteousness of God. The fact is that the law simply convicts man of inability to produce the righteousness which it claims; for though it demand it in God's name, there is only the answer of unrighteousness. According to the law a man ought to be righteous; but he is not. This is what the law proves wherever a man fairly confronts it — that he is not righteous according to the divine requirement.

This state of ruin Christ has met by redemption; and consequently the gospel is entirely a question of God revealing His righteousness, though so many real Christians misunderstand it through their tradition. The meaning of the phrase is that God acts consistently with what is due to Christ, who has in redemption perfectly glorified God. He glorified Him as Father during His life; yet this could not have put away sin. But He glorified Him as God, when it was expressly a question of our sins, by His atoning death on the cross. Thenceforward God reveals His righteousness in view of that all-efficacious sacrifice; not only vindicating His forbearance in past times, but in the present time justifying the believer freely and fully in consequence of that mighty work. The first effect of God's righteousness, though not referred to in the Epistle to the Romans, is that God sets Christ at His own right hand on high. The next result (and this is the one spoken of there) is, that God justifies the believer accordingly. Romans 1 no doubt treats of His righteousness in the most abstract terms. The manner of it is not described till we come to Romans 3, 4, 5. But even in the first statement we have the broad principle that in the gospel there is the revelation of divine righteousness from faith (not from law), and consequently to faith wherever it be found. Such I believe to be the force of the proposition. Probably the chief difficulty to most minds is the expression "from faith." It means on that principle not in the way of obedience to law, which must be the rule of human righteousness. Habits of misinterpretation make the difficulty. [faith alone can be the principle if it be a revelation of divine righteousness; and

consequently it is "to faith," wherever faith may be.

It is purposely put in abstract style, because the Spirit has not yet begun to set out how it can be and is. It would be anticipating the doctrine that He was afterwards to expound. For manifestly the work of Christ has not yet been brought in; and hence the consequences could not be explained consistently with any true order. It is mere ignorance to assume that scripture is irregular; for in fact there is the deepest order in what man's haughty spirit presumes thus to censure. It is entirely due to the haste which leads men naturally to admire only the order of man. As to the difficulty of the expression "from faith to faith," it is quite admitted that the idea is put in a very pithy and compressed form; so that to men who are apt to be wordy in the usual style, of course such compactness does sound peculiar.

This it is that answers to the expression of the prophet, "The just shall live by his faith." Success had great weight with the Jewish mind. They wondered at the prosperous career of the Gentile. But the prophet is explaining the enigma as Isaiah had done before. He insists that the only righteous man is the believer. It is not the justified but "the just;" and this in order to keep up the link between doctrine and practice, as it seems to me. "The righteous shall live by his faith." It is the combination of the two points, that faith is inseparable from righteousness, and a righteous man from believing. The Chaldean saw not God, and had no thought of His purpose or His way. The Israelite would find his blessing in subjection to His word and confidence in Himself. "Behold the proud! his soul is not right within him; but the just shall live by his faith." The expression then does not say the justified, but it is implied; and there is no real righteousness in practice apart from it. What preachers ordinarily mean is in itself true. We are justified by faith; but we do not require to draw out more than is in the prophecy; nor is justification explicitly developed in Romans 1 but rather in Romans 3, 5. Let every scripture teach its own appropriate lesson.

Again, in Galatians 3 we have a slightly different use of the same scripture. "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God it is evident; for the just shall live by faith." Now here it is sufficiently plain that the apostle is excluding the thought of justification by law, and the way he disproves it is by the cited passage of Habakkuk. Hence the difference between Romans 1 and Galatians 3 is this, that in Romans we have the positive statement and in Galatians the negative. There he positively affirms that God's righteousness is revealed from faith to faith, supported by this text; whereas the point here is to exclude the law distinctly and peremptorily from playing any part in the justification of a soul. Justification is in no way by law; for "the just shall live by faith:" such is the point in Galatians. It is God's righteousness revealed by faith; for "the just shall live by faith:" such is the point in Romans. The difference therefore is plain.

In Hebrews the passage is used again in a way quite as different by the same apostle Paul. "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith." The emphasis here is not on "the just" which is strong in Romans, nor upon "faith" which is strong in Galatians, but on "live" which is as strong here. Thus every word seems to acquire the emphasis according to the object for which it is used in these three places. In the end of Heb. 10 the apostle is guarding the believer from discouragement and turning aside. He quotes once more "the just shall *live* by faith." Accordingly we are shown in Heb. 11 the elders or Old Testament saints who obtained testimony in the power of faith. So they all lived in faith, every one whom God counts His worthies. It might be shown by faith in sacrifice, or in a walk of communion with God, or in anticipating judgment coming on the world, and accepting the divine means of escape. It might be in wearing the pilgrim character; or in the exertion of such power as delivered from the foe. But whatever the form, there was living by faith in every case. Hence we have here the most remarkable chapter in the Bible for its comprehensive grasp of the men of old who lived by faith, from the first great witness of its power here

below to the blessed One who summed up every quality of faith, which others had manifested now and then: they separately and not without inconsistency, He perfectly and combined in His own person, and ways here below, indeed with much more that is deeper and peculiar to Himself alone.

Thus I do not think that it is necessary to vindicate the wisdom of God at greater length. The passage seems most instructive, if it were only to show the fallacy of supposing that each shred of scripture can only warrant a single just application.* Not so; though clothed in the language of men, scripture affords in this respect an answer to the infinite nature of God Himself, whose Spirit can unfold and apply it in distinct but compatible ways. Even among men there are not wanting wise words which bear more than one application, yet each true and just. If faith distinguished and secured the righteous in presence of the Chaldean invader, its value is even more pronounced now in the gospel, where it is a question of a soul before God, refusing false grounds of confidence, and walking unmoved in the path of trial among men.

{*"Interpret the Scripture like any other book.... First, it may be laid down, that Scripture has one meaning — the meaning which it had to the mind of the Prophet or Evangelist who first uttered or wrote it, to the hearers or readers who first received it." (*Essays and Reviews: On the Interpretation of Scripture*, 327.) Not the worst answer appears in the next two pages. "There are difficulties of another kind in many parts of Scripture, the depth and inwardness of which require a measure of the same qualities in the interpreter himself. There are lessons in the Prophets which, however simple, mankind have not yet learned even in theory . . . All that the Prophet meant may not have been consciously present to his mind; there were depths which to himself also were but half revealed." (328, 329) It is no wonder that, when men forget that they are speaking of the word of *God*, they speak foolishly of Scripture and contradict themselves.}

Certainly the word of God is here proved to be susceptible of different uses, weighty and conclusively authoritative. That it is applied by the same apostle Paul makes the case far more remarkable than if it had been differently employed by various writers. Had it been so, I have no doubt that the rationalists would have set each of the different writers against the truth. But they would do well to weigh the fact that it is the same inspired man* who applies to these different ends the same few words of our prophet. He was right. And yet it is very evident that in its own primary application, in its strict position in the prophecy, God is particularly providing for a state which lay before the Jews in that day; but then the same Spirit who wrote by Habakkuk applies it with divine precision in every one of the three instances in the New Testament. For what is common to all is that the word of God is to be believed, and that he who uses it holily, according to God by faith, lives by it, and is alone just and humble in it, as only this glorifies God withal. But what is true in the case of an Israelite so employing the prophetic word applies at least as fully to all the word of God used by faith, and more particularly to the gospel, because the latter is an incomparably deeper unfolding of God's mind than any word strictly prophetic. Prophecy shows us the character of God more especially in government; but the gospel is the display of God in grace, and this in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. Is it possible to go beyond or even to reach this in depth? A simple Christian may indeed be led far beyond that which is usually proclaimed by preachers; but it is impossible to exaggerate the infinite character of the gospel as God has revealed it. We also learn from the use in Hebrews, as well as the prophet's context, that the vision looks on to the future coming of the Lord for the deliverance of His people. This indeed belongs to the prophetic word generally, and is no way peculiar to this vision in particular. It is a striking passage — the vision, as setting forth under the Chaldean the downfall of the hostile Gentile, proud as he might be, though Israel might have to wait for the accomplishment. And that the full force is only to be when the Lord is actually come in person, and in relationship with His ancient

people renewed by grace, is the gist of the prophets in general.

{*I do not stop here to state the overwhelming evidence that Paul and no other wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. The peculiarity of the style and method can be simply and satisfactorily accounted for by the consideration of his writing to believers of his own nation outside his Gentile apostleship. The doctrine is pre-eminently his own.}

But it is important of course to bear in mind that, save in special revelations of the Jewish prophets, the vision of coming deliverance vouchsafed did not discriminate the time between the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow. Perhaps we may safely say that none seems to have known beforehand that there would be a long interval between the two advents; yet when the interval came we can bring passages from the prophets to prove it. So perfectly did God write the word by them, and so far beyond the very men who were the inspired witnesses of it; for no prophet knew the full extent or depth of his own inspired communications. This was a far better proof that God wrote by them than if all had been known; because whatever might have been the ignorance of Jeremiah or Isaiah, of Daniel or of Habakkuk the Holy Ghost necessarily knew all from the beginning. Thus what they wrote, going far beyond their own intelligence, rendered His mind who employed them evident. Hence we read in 1 Peter; of "The Spirit of Christ which was in them;" and the same scripture which indicates the reality of the inspiring Spirit in the prophets just now quoted shows that they themselves did not enter into all they wrote. They were "searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow." Certainly they did not know, but like others had to learn; and when they searched into it, they were told it was not for themselves, but "unto us they did minister the things that are now reported unto us by them that have preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." It will be observed that the expression, "The Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," as we know Him now, is in full contrast with the prophetic Spirit who wrought in them and is called "the Spirit of Christ." The Lord Jesus was the great object of all the visions; and this it is important to note.

"Spirit of Christ," in Romans 8, I think, goes far beyond this. As employed by the apostle there, it means that the Holy Ghost characterizes the Christian with the full possession of his own proper portion as in Christ and Christ in him. The Holy Ghost is the seal of all, and dwells in the believer on this ground.

Then we find a remarkable series of what may be called strophes or stanzas, from verse 6 to the end of the chapter, — a number of woes in regular succession with a reason annexed to each case. Verse 5 seems to be a general introduction. "Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people." Here we find that what was pronounced on the Chaldean by the Lord, and what was laid hold of by the tried prophet, when pleading for the people in spite of their faults, is now formally brought out. The evil must be judged before the blessing can be introduced in power. Consequently the evil is now fully set out before us. The reason why the Chaldean must be taken in hand by God flows simply and necessarily from the moral nature of God — the impossibility that He should sustain one whom He had employed as His instrument when the instrument dared to exalt itself to the dishonour of God.

Here the derisive ode properly begins, or the first stanza. "Shall not all these (speaking of the nations that he was gathering unto him) take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with many pledges!* Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee,

and thou shalt be for booties unto them? Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and all that dwell therein." Such is the first woe here pronounced on the enemy for his cruel rapacity without.

{*So it would seem most naturally to mean. The reduplication of the word expresses increase either of degree or of number. So Drs. Lee and Henderson understand. The A.V., with Luther, etc., interprets like the Syriac and Vulgate. The Jewish commentators too are divided. It is hard to see any tolerable sense in the version as it stands.}

The second woe pursues the matter more within. "Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!" It may begin with mere self-aggrandisement or coveting another's; but the end of it is his own exaltation against all adversaries. He might not have so used his resources, but have simply lavished them away; but they are as selfishly employed as they were won — to "set his nest on high that he may be delivered from the power of evil." "Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul." Violence follows in the wake. Verse 11, as is easily seen, answers to verse 8. "For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it."

Then comes as the third woe (verse 12) another divine denunciation on more daring evil, not private only, but public and on a great scale. "Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity! Behold, is it not of the Jehovah of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea" (ver. 12-14) What a picture of the futile labours of the peoples, more particularly of the energetic Chaldean — first of the Gentiles to come into the place of supreme power and universal authority! Jehovah reserves it for Himself in the only true sense. The kingdom of Messiah introduced by solemn judgments shall see the peaceful sway of good inseparable from the manifestation of the divine glory. That, and not at all Christianity or the church, is what is referred to here. It is the millennial age which will be the true time for the public establishment of all authority to the glory of Jehovah. The destruction of the Babylonian empire is no doubt of special interest in the mind of God, because the fall of that first world-empire shadows the fall of the last, when the dispersed Jews shall be freed and return from a still longer captivity; and a greater than Cyrus shall rule the world. All will be unrest among the nations till then, however truly grace may give souls far and wide to know a portion in Christ above and apart from the world. But there is no hope for the earth to be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah's glory till that day: on the contrary the apostacy must come before it and be judged by the righteous power of the Lord. What is called "the gospel dispensation" has another object and character, is inconsistent with the special pre-eminence of Israel, and stands aloof from the execution of judgments on the Gentiles.

The next is, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness! Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the Lord's right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory. For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts, which made them afraid, because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein" (verses 15-17). Here we see the most grievous corruption added to violence. No doubt there was shameless dissolution of manners spread by the Chaldeans; but I agree with those who give the words a larger and deeper bearing than such personal excesses, followed by ignominious exposure when judgment shall come on the nations.

But it is observable that there is a slight divergence from the order in what follows, possibly

because it is the last woe here pronounced upon the foe. Consequently there is a purposed difference, and the sin here is brought in before the woe — it was so flagrant. In other cases the woe was pronounced, and then the ground of it was explained. In this case, as being idolatry it was not merely a sin against men; neither covetousness nor violence nor corruption of others for selfish purposes; but the making and worship of graven images, an insult to God Himself who handed over power to the Chaldean. Such a return he must be made to feel. There is no room for other woes after this. "Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it." God might be patient; but to set up a golden image for instance in the plain of Dura, after the God of heaven had formally given him his world-empire, was no small offence in the Chaldean. As usual, the first thorough departure from God is fatal. God may linger ever so many years after before the blow fell on the Chaldean; but when God does judge, this sin comes up before Him. The profane and corrupt Belshazzar was the immediate occasion; but the cause lay deeper — the first open insult to God after power was given of God. The last verse of the woe shows how after this the scene changes. "Jehovah is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

Habakkuk, however, breaks forth in prayer. It is now a question of the righteous, and not of the judgment of the Chaldean. The last chapter accordingly is a most beautiful and sublime outpouring of the prophet. "A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet on Shigionoth.* O Jehovah, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid. O Jehovah, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy." And so He does. "God came from Teman and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise." Although it be a prayer, it assumes the form of a psalm. "And his brightness was as the sunlight; he had rays streaming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and made the earth tremble: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting" (Habakkuk 3: 1-6).

{*It seems plain that the Hebrew refers here as in the Psalms to music, instruments accompanying the song suitably. In this case it was no doubt of a wild enthusiastic measure, expressive of joy and triumph.}

Nevertheless God occupies Himself with that which men may despise. He takes notice of the little; and this just because He is infinitely great. Those who merely aspire after a greatness which they do not possess are afraid of demeaning themselves by noticing that which is small. Not so where there is real greatness. Israel were His object, not the rivers or the sea. He sought and would save His people. "I saw the tents of Chushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Was Jehovah displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thy horses and thy chariots of salvation? Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the nations in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people." There we see what was near the prophet's heart: was it not also near Jehovah's heart? "Even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah" (verses 7-13).

To a Jew's mind, and very properly, the salvation of Israel is as a rule bound up with the

judgment of the Gentiles when the chosen people shall rise to their allotted and good eminence, at length fitted for it after humiliation, and the Gentiles willingly subject (though there may be, especially and growingly at the end but feigned obedience) spite of their long-continued resistance in pride. With the Christian salvation has another sense, and implies our calling out of the world to heaven. The world is left undisturbed: the individual soul is called by faith out of it to the Lord, and so it will be up to His coming for us and our change into conformity with His glory. But when salvation comes to the Jews it will be by the putting down of the enemies that strive round about and against them. That is, it is power that comes down to earth, and deals with the world, leaving the Jews for blessing, by the destruction of their enemies under the hand of God. We, on the contrary, are entitled to enjoy the salvation of God in Christ by His cross whilst the evil of mankind remains unjudged; and we, being thus delivered and knowing it in the power of the Spirit, are therefore called out to be separate to the Lord in grace, yet with full sense of personal victory through His death and resurrection.

The account of the judgment proceeds: "Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters."

The prophet then expresses even his awe at such a solemn interference for Israel: what should those feel who must be objects of divine vengeance? "When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops."

Although however there is such a magnificent description of the sure judgment of the enemy in all its extent (not merely the Chaldeans now, but all their enemies), and although there is the assured salvation of the people of God, even the Jews, the prophet meantime answers to the faith of which he had himself been the preacher by one of the finest expressions of that faith which the Old Testament contains. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:" none able to show them any good. "Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Jehovah the Lord is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my* stringed instruments."

{*That there is any ground to infer from the "my" that the prophet was a Levitical chorister is refuted by Isaiah 38: 20, as another has remarked. Certainly Hezekiah was no Levite, as he should be if that reason were valid. I am aware that so runs the tradition, as we learn from the Chisian MS. of the Inscription to Bel and the Dragon in the LXX.; but this is all very precarious. }

Thus, with this song which (in strains equally suited and magnificent as a whole) brings out the triumph of glory at the end, and meanwhile the path which faith pursues in the confidence of divine grace spite of all adverse appearances, the prophet closes his remarkable message.