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COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY ON
HABAKKUK

by Adam Clarke.

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World

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A COMMENTARY AND CRITICAL NOTES

ON THE

HOLY BIBLE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

DESIGNED AS A HELP TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING
OF THE SACRED WRITINGS

BY ADAM CLARKE, LL.D., F.S.A., &c.

A NEW EDITION, WITH THE
AUTHOR'S FINAL CORRECTIONS

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.—Rom. 15:4.

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THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET HABAKKUK

Chronological Notes relative to this Book, upon the supposition that it was written a little before the destruction of Jerusalem, about six hundred years before the commencement of the Christian era.

- Year from the Creation, according to Archbishop Usher, 3404.
- Year of the Julian Period, 4114.
- Year since the Flood, 1748.
- Year since the vocation of Abram, 1321.
- Year from the foundation of Solomon's temple, 412.
- Year since the division of Solomon's monarchy into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, 376.
- First year of the *forty-fifth* Olympiad.
- Year since the destruction of the kingdom of Israel by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, 121.
- Year before the birth of Jesus Christ, 596.
- Year before the vulgar era of Christ's nativity, 600.
- Cycle of the Sun, 26.
- Cycle of the Moon, 10.
- Third year of Æropas, king of Macedon.
- Twentieth year of Alyattes II., king of Lydia.
- Twenty-sixth year of Cyaxares or Cyaraxes, king of Media.
- Sixth year of Agasicles, king of Lacedæmon, of the family of the Proclidæ.
- Eighth year of Leon, king of Lacedæmon, of the family of the Eurysthenidæ.
- Seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.
- Seventeenth year of Tarquinius Priscus, king of the Romans.
- Eleventh year of Jehoiakim, king of Judah.

CHAPTER 1

The prophet enters very abruptly on his subject, his spirit being greatly indignant at the rapid progress of vice and impiety, 1-4. Upon which God is

introduced threatening very awful and sudden judgments to be indicted by the ministry of the Chaldeans, 5-10. The Babylonians attribute their wonderful successes to their idols, 11. The prophet then, making a sudden transition, expostulates with God (probably personating the Jews) for permitting a nation much more wicked than themselves, as they supposed, to oppress and devour them, as fishers and fowlers do their prey, 12-17.

We know little of this prophet; for what we find in the *ancients* concerning him is evidently fabulous, as well as that which appears in the *Apocrypha*. He was probably of the tribe of *Simeon*, and a native of *Beth-zacar*. It is very likely that he lived after the destruction of Nineveh, as he speaks of the *Chaldeans*, but makes no mention of the *Assyrians*. And he appears also to have prophesied *before* the Jewish captivity, see ^{<35016>}**Habakkuk 1:5; 2:1; 3:2, 16-19**; and therefore Abp. *Newcome* thinks he may be placed in the reign of Jehoiakim, between the years 606 B.C. and 598 B.C.

As a *poet*, Habakkuk holds a high rank among the Hebrew prophets. The beautiful connection between the parts of his prophecy, its diction, imagery, spirit, and sublimity, cannot be too much admired; and his hymn, ^{<35016>}**Habakkuk 3:1-19**, is allowed by the best judges to be a masterpiece of its kind. See *Lowth's* Prælect. xxi., xxviii.

NOTES ON CHAP. 1

Verse 1. The burden] **acmh** *hammassa* signifies not only the *burdensome* prophecy, but the prophecy or *revelation* itself which God presented to the *mind* of Habakkuk, and which he *saw*-clearly perceived, in the light of prophecy, and then faithfully declared, as this book shows. The word signifies an *oracle* or *revelation* in general; but chiefly, one relative to *future calamities*.

Verse 2. O Lord, how long shall I cry] The prophet feels himself strongly excited against the vices which he beheld; and which, it appears from this verse, he had often declaimed against, but in vain; the people continued in their vices, and God in his longsuffering.

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

*Semper ego auditor tantum?
Nunquamne reponam?
Vexatus toties rauci Theseide Codri?
Sat. i. l.*

*“Shall I always be a hearer only?
Shall I never reply?
So often vexed?”*

Of **violence**] The most unlawful and outrageous acts.

Verse 3. And cause me to behold grievance] **l m** [*amal*, labour, toil, distress, misery, &c., the common fruits of sin.

Verse 4. The law is slacked] They pay no attention to it; it has lost all its vigour, its restraining and correcting power, it is not executed; right *judgment* is never *pronounced*; and the *poor righteous man* complains in vain that he is grievously oppressed by the *wicked*, and by those in power and authority. That the utmost depravity prevailed in the land of Judah is evident from these verses; and can we wonder, then, that God poured out such signal judgments upon them? When *judgment doth not proceed* from the seat of judgment upon earth, it will infallibly *go forth* from the throne of judgment in heaven.

Verse 5. Behold ye among the heathen] Instead of **μywg**b**** *baggoyim*, among the *nations* or *heathen*, some critics think we should read **μydg**b**** *bogedim*, *transgressors*; and to the same purpose the *Septuagint*, *Syriac*, and *Arabic* have read; and thus it is quoted by St. Paul, ^{<4134>}**Acts 13:41**. But neither this, nor any tantamount reading, is found in any of the MSS. yet collated. *Newcome* translates, “See, ye transgressors, and behold a wonder, and perish.”

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

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

It is evident that St. Paul, in the above place, *accommodates* this prediction to his own purpose. And possibly this sense might have been the intention of the Divine Spirit when he first spoke the words to the prophet; for, as God *works* in reference to *eternity*, so he *speaks* in reference to the same; and therefore there is an infinity of meaning in his WORD. These appear to

be the words of God in answer to the prophet, in which he declares he will entirely ruin this wicked people by means of the Chaldeans.

Verse 6. That bitter and hasty nation] Cruel and oppressive in their disposition; and prompt and speedy in their assaults and conquests.

Verse 7. Their judgment—shall proceed of themselves.] By revolting from the Assyrians, they have become a great nation. Thus, their judgment and excellence were the result of their own valour. Other meanings are given to this passage.

Verse 8. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards] The Chaldean cavalry are proverbial for swiftness, courage, &c. In Jeremiah, ^{<2043>}**Jeremiah 4:13**, it is said, speaking of Nebuchadnezzar, “His chariots are as a whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles.”

Oppian, speaking of the horses bred about the Euphrates, says, “They are by nature warhorses, and so intrepid that neither the sight nor the roaring of the lion appals them; and, besides, they are astonishingly fleet.”

The *leopard*, of all quadrupeds, is allowed to be the *swiftest*.

The evening wolves] The wolf is remarkable for his quick sight. *Ælian* says, Οξυωτεστατον εστι ζων, και μεντοι, και νυκτος και σεληνης ουκ ουσης οδε ορα; “The wolf is a very fleet animal; and, besides, it can see by night, even when there is no moonlight.” Some think the *hyæna* is meant: it is a swift, cruel, and untameable animal. The other prophets speak of the Chaldeans in the same way. See ^{<15284>}**Deuteronomy 28:49**; ^{<2480>}**Jeremiah 48:40; 49:22**; ^{<3175>}**Ezekiel 17:5**; ^{<2949>}**Lamentations 4:19**.

Verse 9. Their faces shall sup up as the east wind] This may be an allusion to those *electrical winds* which prevail in that country. Mr. *Jackson*, in his overland journey from India, mentions his having bathed in the *Tigris*. On his coming out of the river one of those winds passed over him, and, in a moment, carried off every particle of *water* that was on his body and in his bathing dress. So, the Chaldeans shall leave no substance behind them; their *faces*, their bare *appearance*, is the proof that nothing good shall be left.

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

Verse 10. They shall scoff at the kings] No power shall be able to stand before them. It will be only as *pastime* to them to take the strongest places. They will have no need to build formidable ramparts: by sweeping the *dust* together they shall make mounts sufficient to pass over the walls and take the city.

Verse 11. Then shall his mind change] This is thought to relate to the change which took place in Nebuchadnezzar, when “a beast’s heart was given to him,” and he was “driven from the dwellings of men.” And this was because of his *offending*-his pride and arrogance; and his attributing all his success, &c., to his *idols*.

Verse 12. Art thou not frown everlasting] The idols change, and their worshippers change and fail: but thou, Jehovah, art *eternal*; thou canst not change, and they who trust in thee are safe. Thou art infinite in thy mercy; therefore, “we shall not die,” shall not be totally exterminated.

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

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

Verse 13. Thou art of purer eyes] Seeing thou art so pure, and canst not look on iniquity-it is so abominable—how canst thou bear with them who “deal treacherously, and hold thy tongue when the wicked devour the righteous?” All such questions are easily solved by a consideration of God’s ineffable mercy, which leads him to *suffer long* and be kind. He has no pleasure in the death of a sinner.

Verse 14. Makest men as the fishes of the sea] Easily are we taken and destroyed. We have no *leader* to guide us, and no *power* to defend ourselves. Nebuchadnezzar is here represented as a fisherman, who is constantly casting his nets into the sea, and enclosing multitudes of fishes;

and, being always successful, he sacrifices to his own net-attributes all his conquests to his own power and prudence; not considering that he is only like a *net* that after having been used for a while, shall at last be thrown by as useless, or burnt in the fire.

Verse 16. They sacrifice unto their net] He had no God; he cared for none; and worshipped only his *armour* and *himself*. King *Mezentius*, one of the worst characters in the *Æneid* of *Virgil*, is represented as invoking his own *right hand* and his *spear* in battle. *Æn.* x. 773.

*Dextra mihi Deus, et telum quod missile libro,
Nunc adsint.*

“*My strong right hand and sword, assert my stroke.
Those only gods Mezentius will invoke.*”

DRYDEN.

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

*Ades, O mihi dextera tantum
Tu præses belli, et inevitabile Numen,
Te voco, te solum Superum contemptor adoro.*

“Only thou, my right hand, be my aid; I contemn the gods, and adore thee as the chief in battle, and the irresistible deity.” The poet tells us that, for his impiety, Jupiter slew him with thunder.

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

Verse 17. And not spare continually to slay the nations?] They are running from conquest to conquest; burning, slaying, sacking, and slaughtering. Like the fishermen, who throw cast after cast while any fish are to be caught, so *Nebuchadnezzar* is destroying one nation after another. This last sentence explains the allegory of the *net*.

HABAKKUK

CHAPTER 2

*The prophet, waiting for a return to his expostulation, is answered by God that the time for the destruction of the Jewish polity by the Chaldeans is not only fixed in the Divine counsel, but is awfully near; and he is therefore commanded to write down the vision relative to this appalling subject in the most legible characters, and in the plainest language, that all who read it with attention (those just persons who exercise an unwavering faith in the declaration of God respecting the violent irruption of the merciless Babylonians) may flee from the impending vengeance, 1-4. The fall of the Chaldeans, and of their ambitious monarch is then predicted, 5-10; and, by a strong and bold personification, the very stone and wood of those magnificent buildings, which the Babylonish king had raised by oppression and bloodshed, pronounce his wo, and in responsive taunts upbraid him, 11, 12. The prophet then beautifully sets forth the absolute impotence of every effort, however well conducted, which is not in concert with the Divine counsel: for though the wicked rage, and threaten the utter extermination of the people of God; yet when the SET time to favour Zion is come, the destroyers of God's heritage shall themselves be destroyed, and "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea," 13, 14. See ^{A213} **Psalm 102:13-16.** For the cup of idolatry which Babylon has given to many nations, she will receive of the Lord's hand the cup of fury by the insurrection of mighty enemies (the Medes and Persians) rushing like wild beasts to destroy her, 15. In the midst of this distress the prophet very opportunely asks in what the Babylonians had profited by their idols, exposes the absurdity of trusting in them, and calls upon the whole world to stand in awe of the everlasting Jehovah, 16-19.*

NOTES ON CHAP. 2

Verse 1. I will stand upon my watch] The prophets are always represented as *watchmen*, watching constantly for the comfort, safety, and welfare of the people; and watching also to receive information from the Lord: for the prophetic influence was not *always* with them, but was granted only at particular times, according to the will of God. When, in doubtful cases, they wished to know what God was about to do with the country, they retired from society and gave themselves to meditation and prayer, waiting thus upon God *to hear what he would say IN them.*

What he will say unto me] *yb bi*, IN *me*-in my understanding and heart.

And what I shall answer when I am reproved.] What I shall say to God *in behalf* of the people; and what the Lord shall command me to say *to the people*. Some translate, “And what he will answer for my conviction.” Or, “what shall be answered to my pleading.”

Verse 2. Write the vision] Carefully take down all that I shall say.

Make it plain upon tables] Write it in a full plain, legible hand.

That he may run that readeth it.] That he who attentively peruses it may speed to save his life from the irruption of the Chaldeans, by which so many shall be cut off. The prophet does not mean that the words are to be made so plain, that a man *running by* may easily read them, and catch their meaning. This interpretation has been frequently given; and it has been incautiously applied to the whole of the Bible: “God’s book is so plain, that he that runs may read;” but it is very foolish: God never intends that his words shall be understood by the *careless*. He that *reads, studies, meditates,* and *prays,* shall understand every portion of this sacred book that relates immediately to his own salvation. But no *trifler* can understand it. If the contents of a *play-bill* were to be read as many read the *Bible*, they would know just as much of the *one* as they do of the *other*.

Verse 3. The vision is yet for an appointed time] The Chaldeans, who are to ruin Judea, shall *afterwards* be ruined themselves: but they must do this work *before* they receive their wages; therefore the vision is for an *appointed time*. *But at the end it shall speak*. When his work of devastation is done, his day of retribution shall take place.

Though it tarry] Though it appear to be long, do not be impatient; *it will surely come; it will not tarry* longer than the prescribed time, and this time is not far distant. Wait for it.

Verse 4. Behold, his soul which is lifted up] Hee that presumes on his safety without any special warrant from God, is a *proud man*; and whatever he may profess, or think of himself, his *mind is not upright in him*. But he that is *just by faith shall live*—he that *believes* what God hath said relative to the Chaldeans besieging Jerusalem, shall make his escape from the place, and consequently shall *save his life*. The words in the *New Testament* are accommodated to the *salvation* which *believers in Christ* shall possess. Indeed, the just—the true Christians, who believed in Jesus Christ’s words relative to the destruction of Jerusalem, when they found

the Romans coming against it, left the city, and escaped to *Pella* in *Cœlesyria*, and did *live*—their lives were saved: while the unbelieving Jews, to a man, either *perished* or were made *slaves*. One good sense is, He that believes the promises of God, and has found life through believing, shall live by his faith.

Verse 5. Because he transgresseth by wine] From the present translation, it is not easy to see either reason or meaning in the first clause of this verse. *Newcome* translates, “Moreover, as a mighty man transgresseth through wine, he is proud, and remaineth not at rest.” *Houbigant* thus: “For he, though he be a despiser, and powerful, and proud, yet shall he not have rest.”

Nebuchadnezzar is here represented in his usual character, *proud, haughty, and ambitious*; inebriated with his successes, and determined on more extensive conquests; and, like the *grave*, can never have enough: yet, after the subjugation of many peoples and nations, he shall be brought down, and become so despicable that he shall be a *proverb of reproach*, and be taunted and scorned by all those whom he had before enslaved.

And cannot be satisfied] When he has obtained all that is within his reach, he wishes for more; and becomes miserable, because any limits are opposed to his insatiable ambition. It is said of *Alexander*:—

*Unus Pellæo juveni non sufficit orbis;
Æstuat infelix angusto limite mundi.
Juv. Sat. x. 168.*

*One world sufficed not Alexander's mind;
Coop'd up, he seem'd on earth and seas confined.*

And the poet justly ridicules him, because at last the sarcophagus was found *too large* for his body!

Verse 6. Shall not all these take up a parable against him] His ambition, derangement, and the final destruction of his mighty empire by the Persians, shall form the foundation of many *sententious sayings* among the people. “He who towered so high, behold how *low* he is fallen!” “He made himself a god; behold, he herds with the *beasts* of the field!” “The disturber of the peace of the world is now a *handful of dust!*”

Verse 7. Shall they not rise up suddenly] Does not this refer to the *sudden and unexpected taking of Babylon by Cyrus*, whose troops entered

into the city through the bed of the Euphrates, whose waters they had diverted by another channel; so that the Babylonians *knew nothing of the matter* till they *saw* the Persian soldiers *rise up as in a moment*, in the very heart of their city?

Verse 8. For **the violence of the land**] Or, *for the violence done to the land of Judea, and to the city of Jerusalem.*

Verse 9. **An evil covetousness to his house**] Nebuchadnezzar wished to aggrandize his *family*, and make his *empire* permanent: but both *family* and *empire* were soon cut off by the death of his son Belshazzar, and the consequent destruction of the Chaldean empire.

Verse 10. **Hast sinned against thy soul.**] Thy *life* is forfeited by thy crimes.

Verse 11. **The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.**] This appears to refer to the ancient mode of building walls; *two* or *three courses* of *stone*, and then *one course* of *timber*. See ^{<1056>}**1 Kings 6:36**: thus was the palace of Solomon built. The splendid and costly buildings of Babylon have been universally celebrated. But how were these buildings erected? By the *spoils* of conquered nations, and the expense of the *blood* of multitudes; therefore the *stones* and the *timber* are represented as calling out for vengeance against this ruthless conqueror.

Verse 12. **Wo to him that buildeth a town with blood**] At the expense of much slaughter. This is the answer of the *beam* to the *stone*. And these things will refer to the vast fortunes gained, and the buildings erected, by means of the *slave-trade*; where, to a considerate and humane mind, the *walls* appear as if composed of the *bones* of *negroes*, and *cemented* by their *blood*! But the towns or houses *established* by this *iniquity* soon come to ruin; and the fortunes made have, in most cases, become as chaff and dust before the whirlwind of God's indignation. But where are the dealers in the souls and bodies of men? Ask *him* who has them in his keeping. He can tell.

Verse 13. **The people shall labour in the very fire**] All these superb buildings shall be burnt down. See the parallel passage, ^{<25158>}**Jeremiah 51:58**, and the note there.

Shall weary themselves for very vanity?] For the gratification of the wishes of ambition, and in buildings which shall be brought to naught.

Verse 14. For the earth shall be filled] This is a singular and important verse. It may be *first* applied to *Babylon*. God's power and providence shall be widely displayed in the destruction of this city and empire, in the humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar, ^{<2047>}**Daniel 4:37**, and in the captivity and restoration of his people. See *Newcome*, and see ^{<2110>}**Isaiah 11:9**.

Secondly. It may be applied to the *glorious days* of the *Messiah*. The *land of Judea* should by his preaching, and that of his disciples, be *filled with the knowledge of God*. God's great design fully discovered, and the scheme of salvation amply explained.

Thirdly. It may be applied to the *universal spread of the Gospel* over the habitable globe; when the fulness of the Gentiles should be brought in, and the Jews gathered in with that fulness. The *earth* cannot perish till every continent, island, and inhabitant, is illuminated with the light of the Gospel.

Verse 15. Wo unto him that giveth his neighbour drink] This has been considered as applying to *Pharaoh-hophra*, king of Egypt, who enticed his neighbours Jehoiachin and Zedekiah to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, whereby the nakedness and imbecility of the poor Jews was soon discovered; for the Chaldeans soon took Jerusalem, and carried its kings, princes, and people, into captivity.

Verse 16. The cup of the Lord's right hand] Among the ancients, all drank out of the same cup; was passed from hand to hand, and each drank as much as he chose. The Chaldeans gave to the neighbouring nations *the cup of idolatry* and of *deceitful alliance*: and in return they received from the Lord the *cup of his fury*. So *Grotius*.

Verse 17. For the violence of Lebanon] Or, the violence done to *Lebanon*; to *men*, to *cattle*, to *Judea*, and to *Jerusalem*. See the note on the parallel place, ^{<3008>}**Habakkuk 2:8**. This may be a threatening against *Egypt*, as the former was against *Chaldea*.

Verse 18. What profiteth the graven image] This is against idolatry in general, and every species of it, as well as against those princes, priests, and people who practice it, and encourage others to do the same. See on the parallel passages in the margin.

Dumb idols?] *μyml a μyl yl a elilim illemim*, “dumb nothings.” This is exactly agreeable to St. Paul, ~~<K08>~~ **1 Corinthians 8:4**, who says, “An idol is nothing in the world.” What signify the idols worshipped by the Chaldeans, Tyrians, and Egyptians? They have not been able to save their worshippers.

Verse 19. Wo unto him] How foolish and contemptible to worship a thing *formed by the hand of man* out of *wood, stone, gold, or silver!* The meanest *brute* is superior to them all; it *breathes* and *lives*, but they have *no breath* in them. However, they are said above to be *teachers of lies*; that is, they appeared to give out *oracles*: but these were *lies*; and were not given by the *statue, but by the priest*.

Verse 20. The Lord is in his holy temple] Jehovah has his *temple*, the *place* where he is to be *worshipped*; but *there* there is no *image*. *Oracles*, however, are given forth; and every word of them is *truth*, and is fulfilled in its season. And this temple and its worship are *holy*; no *abomination* can be practiced there, and every thing in it leads to *holiness* of heart and life.

Let all the earth keep silence before him.] Let all be dumb. Let none of them dare to open their mouths in the presence of Jehovah. He alone is Sovereign. He alone is the arbiter of life and death. Let all hear his commands with the deepest respect, obey them with the promptest diligence, and worship him with the most profound reverence. When an Asiatic sovereign goes to the mosque on any of the eastern festivals, such as the *Bairham*, the deepest *silence* reigns among all his retinue, viziers, foreign ambassadors, &c. They all bow respectfully before him; but no word is spoken, no sound uttered. It is to this species of reverence that the prophet alludes, and with this he concludes the *prophetic* part of this book. What God has threatened or promised, that he will fulfil. Let every soul bow before him, and submit to his authority.

HABAKKUK

CHAPTER 3

The prophet, being apprised of the calamities which were to be brought on his country by the ministry of the Chaldeans, and the punishments which awaited the Chaldeans themselves, partly struck with terror, and partly revived with hope and confidence in the Divine mercy, beseeches God to hasten the redemption of his people, 1, 2. Such a petition would naturally lead his thoughts to the astonishing deliverance which God vouchsafed to the same people of old; and the inference from it was obvious, that he could with the same ease deliver their posterity now. But, hurried on by the fire and impetuosity of his spirit, he disdains to wait the process of connecting these ideas, and bounds at once into the midst of his subject: "God came from Teman," &c., 3. He goes on to describe the majesty and might which God displayed in conducting his people to the land of promise, selecting the most remarkable circumstances, and clothing them in the most lofty language. As he goes along, his fancy becomes more glowing, till at length he is transported to the scene of action, and becomes an eyewitness of the wonders he describes. "I beheld the tents of Cushan in affliction," 4-6. After having touched on the principal circumstances of that deliverance which he celebrates, he returns to what passed before them in Egypt; his enthusiasm having led him to begin in the midst of his subject, 7-15. And at last he ends the hymn as he began it, with expressing his awe of the Divine judgments, and his firm trust in the mercy and goodness of God while under them; and that in terms of such singular beauty, elegance, and sublimity, as to form a to proper conclusion to this admirable piece of Divinely inspired composition, 16-19. It would seem from the title, and the note appended at the end, that it was set to music, and sung in the service of the temple.

NOTES ON CHAP. 3

Verse 1. A prayer of Habakkuk—upon Shigionoth.] See the note on the title of ^{<190701>}**Psalm 7:1**, where the meaning of *Shiggaion* is given. The Vulgate has, *pro ignorantibus, for ignorances*, or sins committed in ignorance; and so it is understood by the *Chaldee*. The *Syriac* has nothing but merely, *A prayer of Habakkuk*. And the *Septuagint*, instead of *Shigionoth*, have **μετα ωδης**, *with a hymn*, which is copied by the *Arabic*.

I suspect that the *title* here given is of a *posterior* date to the prophecy. It appears to interrupt the connection between this and the termination of the preceding verse. See them together:—

ⲥⲟⲩⲁⲓ Habakkuk 2:20:

*“But the Lord is in his holy temple:
Be silent before him, all the earth.*

ⲥⲟⲩⲁⲓ Habakkuk 3:2:

*O Lord, I have heard thy speech:
I have feared, O Lord, thy work.
As the years approach thou hast shown;
As the years approach thou makest known.
In wrath thou rememberest mercy.”*

The prophet may here refer to the *speech* which God had communicated to him, ⲥⲟⲩⲁⲓ Habakkuk 1:1-11; 2:4-20, and the terror with which he was struck, because of the judgments denounced against Jerusalem. I have followed the version of Apb. *Newcome* in this *first* verse. The critical reader may consult his notes, and the *various readings of Kennicott and Deuteronomy Rossi*.

Verse 2. In the midst of the years] ⲙⲓⲛⲧⲃⲣⲓⲃ *bekereb shanim*, “As the years approach.” The nearer the time, the clearer and fuller is the prediction; and the signs of the times show that the complete fulfilment *is at hand*. But as the judgments will be heavy, (and they are not greater than we deserve,) yet, *Lord, in the midst of wrath*—infliction of punishment—*remember mercy*, and spare the souls that return unto thee with humiliation and prayer.

Verse 3. God came from Teman] Bp. *Lowth* observes: “This is a sudden burst of poetry, in the true spirit of the ode; the concealed connection being that God, who had formerly displayed such power in delivering the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, might succour their posterity in a like wonderful manner.” Hence the prophet selects the most striking facts of that first deliverance; and to decorate and render them impressive, brings forth all the powers of his genius, in all the strength and elegance of his language. “What crowns the sublimity of this piece,” says Bp. *Lowth*, “is the singular elegance of the close; and were it not that antiquity has here and there thrown its veil of obscurity over it, there could not be conceived a more perfect and masterly poem of its kind.” See, for more particulars, his *twenty-eighth* Prelection.

I shall endeavour to show the *facts* in the *deliverance from Egypt*, to which the prophet refers.

Temán] This was a city, the capital of a province of Idumea, to the south of the land of Canaan. ^{<04121>}**Numbers 20:21;** ^{<24407>}**Jeremiah 49:7.**

Parán] Was a city which gave its name to a province in Arabia Petrea. ^{<01212>}**Genesis 21:21;** ^{<05312>}**Deuteronomy 33:2.**

Selah] This word is not well known; probably it means a pause or alteration in the music. See it in the Psalms, and its explanation there.

His glory covered the heavens] His glory when he descended on Mount Sinai, and in the pillar of fire by night.

The earth was full of his praise.] All the land was astonished at the magnificence of his works in behalf of his people. Instead of *praise*, some translate *splendour*. The whole land was illuminated by his glory.

Verse 4. He had horns coming out of his hand] **מַנְרָק** *karnayim*, rays.

His *hand*-his *power*-was manifested in a particular place, by the sudden issuing out of pencils of rays, which diverged in coruscations of light, so as to illuminate the whole hemisphere. Yet “there was the hiding of his power.” His Majesty could not be seen, nor any kind of image, because of the insufferable splendour. This may either refer to the *lightnings* on Mount *Sinai*; or to the *brightness* which occasionally proceeded from the *shechinah* or glory of God between the cherubim, over the mercy-seat. See *Capellus* and *Newcome*. If *lightnings* are intended, the *dense cloud* from which they proceeded may be meant by the “hiding of his power;” for when the lightnings burst forth, his power and energy became manifest.

Probably from this the *Jupiter Keraunos* or *Jupiter Brontes* of the heathens was borrowed; who is always represented with forked or zigzag lightnings in his hand.

Verse 5. Before him went the pestilence] This plague was several times inflicted on the disobedient Israelites in the wilderness; see ^{<04113>}**Numbers 11:33; 14:37; 16:46;** and was always the proof that the *just God* was then manifesting his *power among them*.

Burning coals event forth at his feet.] *Newcome* translates, “And flashes of fire went forth after him.” The disobedient Israelities were consumed by a *fire* that went out from Jehovah; see ^{<05102>}**Leviticus 10:2;** ^{<04110>}**Numbers**

11:1; 16:35. And the burnt-offering was consumed by a fire which came out from before Jehovah, ^{<B1124>}**Leviticus 11:24.**

Verse 6. He stood, and measured the earth] *xra* *erets*, *the land*; he divided the promised land among the *twelve tribes*. This is the allusion; and this the prophet had in his eye. God not only made a *general assignment* of the land to the Hebrews; but he even *divided* it into *such portions* as the different families required. Here were both *power* and *condescension*. When a conqueror had subdued a country, he divided it among his soldiers. Among the Romans, those among whom the conquered lands were divided were termed *beneficiary*; and the lands *beneficia*, as being held on the beneficence of the sovereign.

He beheld, and drove asunder the nations] The nations of *Canaan*, the *Hittites*, *Hivites*, *Jebusites*, &c., and all who opposed his people. Even his *look* dispersed them.

The everlasting mountains were scattered] Or, *broken asunder*. This may refer to the *convulsions* on Mount Sinai; and to the earth quake which announced the descent of the Most High. See ^{<B1918>}**Exodus 19:18.** “God occupied the summit of the eternal Mount Sinai; and led his people over the eternal mountains of Arabia Petraea; and this sense is preferable to the figurative one, that his ways or doings are predetermined front everlasting.”—*Newcome*.

The epithets *d* [*ad*, and *μῖ ᾧ*] [*olam*, *eternal*, and *everlasting*], are applied to mountains and immense rocks, because no other parts of nature are less subject to *decay* or *change*, than these immense masses of earth and stone, and that almost indestructible stone, *granite*, out of which *Sinai* appears to be formed. A piece of the beautiful granite of this mountain now lies before me. This is a figurative description of the passage of the Israelites through the deserts of Arabia, over mountains, rocks, and through the trackless wilderness; *over* and *through* which God, by his power and providence, gave them a safe passage.

The following beautiful piece from the Fragments of Æschylus will illustrate the preceding description, and please the learned reader.

Χωριζε θνητων τον θεον, και μη δοκει
Ομοιον αυτω σαρκινον καθεσταναι,
Ουκ οισθα δ αυτον, ποτε μεν ως πυρ φαινεται

Απλαστον ορμη, ποτε δ υδωρ, ποτε δε γνοφος.
 Και θηρσιν αυτος γινεται παρεμφερης,
 Ανεμω, νεφει τε, καστραπη, βροντη, βροχη.
 ^Υπηρτει δ αυτω θαλασσα, και πετραι,
 Και πασα πηγη, χ υδατος συστηματα,
 Τρεμει δ ορη και γαια και πελωριος
 Βυθος θαλασσης, κωρεων υψος μεγα,
 Οταν επιβλεψη γοργον ομμα δεσποτου.
ÆSCHYLI Fragm.

*Confound not God with man; nor madly deem
 His form is mortal, and of flesh like thine.
 Thou know'st him not. Sometimes like fire he glows
 In wrath severe; sometimes as water flows;*

*In brooding darkness now his power conceals
 And then in brutes that mighty power reveals.
 In clouds tempestuous we the Godhead find;
 He mounts the storm, and rides the winged wind;*

*In vivid lightnings flashes from on high;
 In rattling thunders rends the lowering sky;
 Fountains and rivers, seas and floods obey,
 And ocean's deep abyss yields to his sway;*

*The mountains tremble, and the hills sink down,
 Crumbled to dust by the Almighty's frown.
 When God unfolds the terrors of his eye,
 All things with horror quake, and in confusion lie.
 J. B. B. CLARKE.*

Verse 7. I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction] *Cush* is Arabia. The Arabians dwelt in *tents*, hence they were called *Scenitæ*. When the Lord appeared on *Mount Sinai*, the *Arabs* of the Red Sea abandoned their tents, being terror-struck; and the *Midianites* also were seized with fear. See the desolation wrought among this people by Phinehas, ^{<04310>}**Numbers 31:1**, &c., on account of their having enticed the Israelites to idolatry, ^{<04250>}**Numbers 25:1**, &c. Either *Cush* and *Midian* lay contiguous to each other; or, these names are poetically used to express the *same place*.

Verse 8. Was the Lord displeased against the rivers?] *Floods*; here is a reference to the passage of the Red Sea. The Lord is represented as

heading his troops, riding in his chariot, and commanding the sea to divide, that a free passage might be left for his army to pass over.

Verse 9. Thy bow was made quite naked] That is, it was *drawn out of its case*; as the *arrows* had their *quiver*, so the *bows* had their *cases*. A fine *oriental bow* and *bow-case*, with *quiver* and *arrows*, are now before me; they show with what propriety Jehovah is represented as taking his bow out of its case, in order to set his arrow upon the cord, to shoot at his enemies. It is not the *drawing out*, or *making bare* the *arrow*, that is mentioned here; but the taking the *bow out of its case* to prepare to shoot.

This verse appears to be an answer to the questions in the preceding: “Was the Lord displeased,” &c. The answer is, All this was done “according to the oaths of the tribes;” the covenant of God, frequently repeated and renewed, which he made with the tribes, to give them the land of the Canaanites for their inheritance.

Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.] Or, “Thou didst cleave the streams of the land.” Or, “Thou cleavedst the dry land into rivers.” This may be a reference to the passage of Jordan, and transactions at *Arnon* and the brook *Jabbok*. See ^{<0213>}**Numbers 21:13-15**.

In this verse we have *Selah* again, which, as before, may signify a *pause*, or some alteration in the *music*.

Verse 10. The mountains saw thee] This is the continued answer to the questions in ^{<0308>}**Habakkuk 3:8**. These are figures highly poetic, to show with what ease God accomplished the most arduous tasks in behalf of his people. As soon as the *mountains* saw him, they trembled, they were in *pangs*. When he appeared, the *sea* fled to right and left, to give him a passage. “It uttered its voice.” The separation of the waters occasioned a terrible noise. “And it lifted up its hands on high.” Its waters, being separated, stood in *heaps* on the right hand and left. These heaps or waves are poetically represented here as the *hands* of the *sea*.

Verse 11. The sun and moon stood still] This was at the prayer of Joshua, when he fought against the Amorites. See ^{<0601>}**Joshua 10:11, 12**, and the notes there.

At the light of thine arrows they went] I think we should translate,—

*By their light, thine arrows went abroad;
By their brightness, the lightning of thy spear.*

Calvin very justly remarks that the *arrows* and *spears* of the Israelites are called those of *God*, under whose auspices the people fought: the meaning is, that by the *continuation* of the *light of the sun and moon*, then stayed in their course, the Israelites *saw* how to continue the battle, till their enemies were all defeated.

Verse 12. Thou didst march through the land] This refers to the conquest of Canaan. God is represented as going at the head of his people as general-in-chief; and leading them on from conquest to conquest-which was the fact.

Thou didst thresh the heathen in anger.] Thou didst *tread them down*, as the oxen do the sheaves on the threshing-floor.

Verse 13. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people] Their deliverance would not have been effected but through thy interference.

For salvation with thine anointed] That is, with *Joshua*, whom God had *anointed*, or solemnly *appointed* to fill the place of Moses, and lead the people into the promised land. If we read, with the common text, *Ēj yvm meshichecha*, “thy anointed,” the singular number, Joshua is undoubtedly meant, who was God’s instrument to put the people in possession of Canaan: but if, with several MSS. and some copies of the *Septuagint*, we read *Ēyj yvm meshicheycha*, “thy anointed ones,” the *Israelites* must be intended. They are frequently called *God’s anointed*, or *God’s saints*. The sense is very far-fetched when applied to *Jesus Christ*.

Thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked] This alludes to the slaying of the *first-born* through all the land of Egypt. These were the *heads* of the *houses* or *families*.

By discovering the foundation unto the neck.] The general meaning of this clause is sufficiently plain: the government of these lands should be utterly subverted; the very foundations of it should be *razed*. But what means *unto the neck*, *rawx d[ad tsavvar?* Several critics read *rwax d[ad tsur*, “Unto the ROCK,” that on which the house is founded: and this very intelligible reading is obtained by the *omission* of a *single letter*, *a aleph*, from the word *r[wax*, This conjecture has been adopted by

Newcome, though unsupported either by MS. or *version*. But is the conjecture necessary? I think not: read the verse as it ought to be read, and all will be plain. “Thou hast wounded the head even unto the neck, in the house of the wicked, by laying bare the foundation.” The whole head, neck, and all are cut off. There was no hope left to the Egyptians, because the *first-born* of every family was *cut off*, so that the very *foundation* was *laid bare*, no first-born being left to continue the *heirship* of families.

Verse 14. Thou didst strike through] The Hebrew will bear this sense: “Thou hast pierced amidst their tribes the head of their troops,” referring to Pharaoh and his generals, who came like a *whirlwind* to fall upon the poor Israelites, when they appeared to be hemmed in by sea, and no place for their escape. If we follow the common reading, it seems to intimate that the troops of Pharaoh, in their confusion (for God shone out upon them from the cloud) fell foul of each other; and with their staves, or weapons, slew one another: but the *head of the villages* or *towns*, i.e., *Pharaoh*, was drowned with his army in the Red Sea.

Verse 15. Thou didst walk through the sea] There was no occasion to *hurry* across; all was safe, for God had divided the waters: and his *terrible cloud* had removed from *before*, and stood *behind* them, so that it was between them and the Egyptians. See ^{<2149>}**Exodus 14:19, 20.**

Verse 16. When I heard, my belly trembled] The prophet, having finished his account of the wonders done by Jehovah, in bringing their fathers from Egypt into the promised land, now returns to the desolate state of his countrymen, who are shortly to be led into captivity, and suffer the most grievous afflictions; and although he had a *sure word of prophecy* that they should be ultimately *delivered*, yet the thoughts of the evils they must previously endure filled his soul with terror and dismay; so that he wishes to be removed from earth before this tribulation should come, that his eyes might not behold the desolations of his country.

When he (Nebuchadnezzar) *cometh up unto the people*, (the Jews,) *he will invade them* (overpower and carry them away captive) *with his troops*.

Verse 17. Although the fig tree shall not blossom] *j rpt tiphrach*, “shall not flourish,” shall *not put forth its young figs*, for the fig tree does *not blossom*. The *young figs appear* as soon as the *old ones* are *ripe*, as I have often had occasion to observe.

This verse most nervously paints the desolate state of the land of Judea during the captivity. In its hemistich form, it may be translated thus:—

*For the fig tree shall not flourish,
And there shall be no fruit on the vines;
The fruit of the olive shall fail,
And the fields shall supply no food:
The flocks shall be cut off from the fold,
And no herds shall be found in the stalls:
Yet in Jehovah will I exult;
I will joy in the God of my salvation.*

The *Vulgate* has:—

*Yet I in the Lord will rejoice,
And will exult in Jesus my God.*

The Targum countenances this version:—

[wba yyd armymb anaw veana bemeimra dayai abua, “But in the WORD of the Lord will I rejoice,” i.e., the *personal, substantial* Word of Jehovah.

These two verses give the finest display of *resignation* and *confidence* that I have ever met with. He saw that evil was at hand, and *unavoidable*, he *submitted* to the dispensation of God, whose Spirit enabled him to paint it in all its calamitous circumstances. He knew that God was merciful and gracious. He trusted to his promise, though all appearances were against its fulfilment; for he knew that the word of Jehovah could not fail, and therefore his confidence is unshaken.

No paraphrase can add any thing to this hymn, which is full of inexpressible *dignity* and *elegance*, leaving even its unparalleled *piety* out of the question.

Verse 19. The Lord God is my strength] This is an imitation, if not a quotation, from ^{<191832>} **Psalm 18:32, 33**, where see the notes.

Will make me to walk upon mine high places] This last verse is spoken in the person of the people, who seem to anticipate their restoration; and that they shall once more rejoice in the hills and mountains of Judea.

To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.] This line, which is evidently a *superscription*, leads me to suppose that when the prophet had

completed his short ode, he folded it up, with the *above direction* to the master singer, or leader of the choir, to be sung in the temple service. Many of the *Psalms* are directed in the same way. “To the master singer;” or, “chief musician;” to be sung, according to their nature, on *different kinds* of instruments, or with particular *airs* or *tunes*.

Neginoth, **twnygn** which we translate *stringed instruments*, means such as were struck with a *plectrum*, or *excited* by some kind of *friction* or *pulsation*; as *violins* and *cymbals* or *tambarines* are. I do not think that the line makes any part of the prophecy, but merely the *superscription* or *direction* of the work when it was finished. The ending will appear much more dignified, this line being separated from it.