

*A Patristic Commentary*



# THE BOOK OF Habakkuk

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**A COMMENTARY ON  
THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK**

**BY**

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# AN INTRODUCTION

The origin of the word 'Habakkuk' is not known. Some believe that it means (the embracer or the hugger); Whereas Friedrich and Delitesch bind it to the Assyrian word 'Hambakkuk', which is a kind of garden plant<sup>1</sup>.

It is obvious from his psalm that came in the third chapter of his book, and from his instructions to the Chief Musician (3: 19), that Habakkuk was from the tribe of Levi, one of the musicians in the temple; namely, a member of the group of praisers; if not one of its leaders<sup>2</sup>.

## **A HISTORY OF THE BOOK AND ITS AUTHOR:**

Although the book carries no date; Yet it is obvious that it was written in the days of Jehoiakim king of Judah (609-598 B.C.); even though it is difficult to fix the exact date of its writing.

Because what came in the first chapter (v. 5-6) concerns what precedes the victories of the Chaldeans, That led some critics to believe that the book was written before their conquest over Nineveh the capital of Assyria, and its fall in their hand. As the Chaldeans carried out a number of revolts against Assyria, that were culminated by the fall of Nineveh in the year 612 B.C., which made their role in the world at that time more prominent, and gave them a position of leadership. Then they grew stronger by their conquest over Necho the king of Egypt in the battle of 'Carchemish' in the year 605 B.C. (2 Chronicles 35; 20; Jeremiah 46: 2); Most of the critics believe that this prophecy dates back to that particular battle.

It is obvious that this book was written during the era of the Chaldeans<sup>3</sup>, because:

a- The temple was still there (2: 20); and the musical ministry was practiced in it (3: 19).

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<sup>1</sup> J.H. Raven: *Old Testament Ontroduction*, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> *New Westminster Dict. Of the Biblr*, p. 396.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

b- It proclaims that the Chaldeans are becoming a fearful power among the peoples during that generation (1: 5, 6); And that they have already started to slay the nations (1: 6, 17).

Some believe that the prophet Habakkuk came a short time<sup>4</sup> after the prophet Nahum, and that he was a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah; although the prophetic ministry of the later has been longer and more prolific<sup>5</sup>.

### **THE CHALDEANS<sup>6</sup>:**

The Chaldeans used to dwell in 'Chaldea', south of Babylon; Were the prevailing race in Babylon since 721 – 539 B.C.; Occupied the positions of leadership; And practiced as well the priestly work in the capital, that the name 'Chaldean', according to Herodot<sup>7</sup>, was analogous to (a priest of Baal Merdoch). They were known among the people as men of wisdom and understanding, as magicians, future-tellers, and astrologers (Daniel 1: 4; 2: 2, 4).

### **FEATURES OF THIS BOOK:**

1- In our study of the book of Jonah we saw how the divine inspiration intended by it to show God's care for the city of Nineveh, capital of the heathen nation Assyria; to proclaim His love for all mankind, and His longing for the salvation of the whole world. And in our study of the book of Obadiah we noticed how the prophecy concentrated on Edom, representing the blood-thirsty and the war-loving man, who loves the earthly things (the word 'Edom' means bloody or earthly). The book of Habakkuk, on the other hand, concerns the Chaldeans who captivate the people of God, and humiliate them for the sake of their chastisement. The prophet Habakkuk entered into an open and frank debate with God, to ask Him about the secret behind allowing that evil heathen nation to humiliate His people, and not coming to their defense! It is actually the question of all generations: Why would God allow for His

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<sup>4</sup> *Jerome Biblical Comm. P. 296.*

<sup>5</sup> *J. H. raven, p 235.*

<sup>6</sup> *New Westminster Dict. P. 155.*

<sup>7</sup> *Herod. 1: 181, 183.*

children to fall under afflictions through the wicked? And as the prophet was asking with an open heart, God answered him frankly and openly.

2- This book reveals to us the concept of 'the word of God'; in that it is not a one-sided talk by God to man; But is rather a two-sided debate of love between God and man; a living and an incessant 'dialogue', in which God talks, and man listens; And man talks, and God, lovingly listens. ... The 'word of God' is a relationship of true love between God and man.

3- This book with its three chapters reveals the following attributes of that prophet or minister of the Lord:

a- **The heart, open before God;** God deals with it on a level of debate, and not on an official level of formalities; ... On the level of the son who encounters with his father with the daring of sonhood, that exalts above formalities.

b- **The heart, open toward those he ministers;** If the prophet Habakkuk suffered because of the oppression that prevailed among the people of God, Yet, when they fell under God's chastisement, on the hand of the Chaldeans, the prophet could not endure to hear his people's moans and groans; and hastened to intercede for his people, or rather for the people of God.

c- **The heart, open with joy and praise** (Chapter 3). If Habakkuk concentrated his eyes on the corruption that prevailed among his people; and on God's chastisements on them, He would have fallen into despair. But, in the midst of the sufferings, seeing the hidden hand of God works for salvation, he raised a praise of thanksgiving to God; that filled his soul with joy, and kept despair from crawling into his heart. A minister of God, amid the sufferings and pains of ministry, always needs such an attitude, filled with hope.

I believe these features to be important in the life of a true minister; integral and well-connected: Talking to God with an open heart; Ministering to people with an open inner love, whatever their reactions are; And a spiritual inner joy, satisfying to his soul.

4- This book touches the life of every believer: The first chapter, in which the prophet moans because of the corruption that prevailed among the people, refers to the inner corruption of the soul. ... The second chapter, in which he moans because of the troubles caused by the foreign Chaldean nation, refers to the outer spiritual wars. ... Then comes the third chapter, with its psalm of joy and praise; ... It is as though this book sets forth with the believer to what goes beyond the inner troubles, and the outer spiritual wars, to let him live by the spirit of joy and praise to God. ... Yes, he may indeed groans and moans because of the inner and outer anguish; Yet, together with the anguish, there are the comforts of the Holy Spirit, that bring gladness to his soul.

5- This book presents to us the problem of evil, that ends up with the victory of justice. While the wicked pass away, the righteous shall live by their faith (2: 4). The apostle Paul used that principle by Habakkuk in his preaching of faith (Romans 1: 17; Galatians 3: 11; Hebrews 10: 38)<sup>8</sup>.

6- Through this book we discover the person of the prophet Habakkuk, as someone with deep thoughts, and with a prominent experience in literature. It presents him to us, as well, according to **St. Jerome**<sup>9</sup>, as a 'wrestler with God'.

### **UNITY OF THE BOOK:**

Some critics attacked the unity of this book; looking at it as being formed of separate parts; written in different times, or different eras altogether. The following is a concise account of their views, and the rebuttals against them<sup>10</sup>:

1- As what came in Habakkuk 1: 5-6 apply to a time preceding the onset of the Chaldeans; Whereas what came in Habakkuk 1: 13-16; 2: 8, deal with their victories as past events; That led 'Wellhausen and Giesebrecht', to believe that Habakkuk 1: 5-11 represent a separate prophecy, older than the rest of the first chapter and the second chapter.

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<sup>8</sup> *Jerome Biblical Comm. P. 296.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *On Ps. 37.*

Whereas ‘Stade and Kuenen’ believe that what came in Habakkuk 2: 9-10 do not apply to the Chaldeans, and that the author of this part came in a later era.

‘Raven’ rebuts that it is supposed that the author of the whole book is one and the same – whose name the book carries – unless there is a strong evidence otherwise; which is not the case so far. ... What is needed is not an evidence of the authenticity of each part of the book; But the one who objects should present his evidences!

On another aspect, As we cannot positively and accurately fix the exact time when Habakkuk lived; Nor have details about the historical events of his days; Therefore, to suggest that certain parts of the book do not reflect the circumstances prevailing around the prophet, is something of little weight!

2- Some critics, considering that what came in the third chapter are quoted from liturgical collection, and is not the work of the prophet Habakkuk, base their view on the fact that they do not conform with the circumstances prevailing at the time. To this ‘Raven’ rebuts that, carrying the headline ‘A prayer by Habakkuk’, What came in that chapter, being a prayer, do not have to reflect the surrounding events like the rest of the book.

Anyway, talking about the features of the book, we consider it representing one integral unity, as far as the spiritual faith thought is concerned.

## **THE DIVISIONS OF THE BOOK:**

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|---|------------------|
| <b>1- A question about God’s chastisement on His people</b> | <b>Chapter 1</b> |
| <b>2- A question about punishing the Chaldeans</b>          | <b>Chapter 2</b> |
| <b>3- A psalm of thanksgiving to God</b>                    | <b>Chapter 3</b> |

## CHAPTER 1

# A QUESTION ABOUT GOD'S CHASTISEMENT ON HIS PEOPLE

Daringly and frankly, the prophet Habakkuk inquires from God about the oppression that prevailed among His people; How the wicked surround the righteous with their injustice, put the law on hold, and issued unlawful ordinances; And how the wicked are leading a healthy and peaceful life, while the righteous are in anguish and deprivation! It is as though "*the Lord has forsaken the land*" (Ezekiel 8: 12).

God's response to the prophet Habakkuk came straightforward and frank, that, even though He seems not in haste, Yet He intends to give the wicked a chance to repent; But in case they persist on their wicked ways, He will bring forth on them a very harsh tool of chastisement, which could be a heathen nation, like the Chaldeans, to captivate and humiliate them.

- 1- The question of the prophet Habakkuk                    1 – 4
- 2- The chastisement by the Chaldeans    5 – 11
- 3- Habakkuk feels compassion toward his people 12 – 17

### 1- THE QUESTION OF THE PROPHET HABAKKUK:

Daringly, the prophet cries out to God, saying that he calls Him, and He does not listen, He cries out to him once and several times about the injustice prevailing on the people, and He does not save; How the people of God have turned into a focus of trouble, plundering, violence, strife, and contention; How nobody intend to hear the law, nor to accept a just ordinance; And how the wicked surround the righteous, to suppress his breath, and to do to him what they choose!

*"O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not listen? Or cry out to You, 'Violence!', and You will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; Strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack, and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous - Therefore judgment comes forth perverted"* (Habakkuk 1: 2-4)

In an amiable admonishment he says: "*O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?*" The prophet kept on knocking on the door of God's mercy, calling and crying out to Him, if not by the tongue, it would be by the heart and the tears, because of the bitterness that prevailed on the people, and the oppression by the wicked; mixing his tears with those of the oppressed, and his moans with their moans!

In every generation, the children of God stand amazed because of the success they see of the wicked oppressors; to say with bitterness together with the prophet David: "*I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree*" (Psalm 37: 35, 36); And with the prophet Jeremiah: "*Oh, that I had in the wilderness, a lodging place for wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them*" (Jeremiah 9: 2). Although Jeremiah in his love for his people, never left them, in spite of the anguish he suffered on every level!

Getting back to the prophet Habakkuk, we find his words reveal that he was a man of God who does not endure oppression; He talked with his God in an open way, daringly, and with no formalities; but with incessant moans from his heart, and non-drying tears from his eyes. That is a portrait of the man of God, whether a priest or a

layman, whose prayers, day and night, are raised by his lips, as well as by his heart and his work.... Being sure that God is capable of working, he would incessantly and without despair, keep on crying out to God, to uproot the corruption and oppression from the fallen humanity, and to set every holy soul for Himself. And being aware that the secret behind the wickedness lies in the deviation from the divine commandment and law, he says: *“The law becomes slack, and justice never prevails. The wicked surrounds the righteous – Therefore judgment comes forth perverted”* (4). The law that would flare the heart with its fire, and would grant it life, becomes slack, with no activity, in case the wicked surround the righteous, and corrupt his thoughts about the commandment.

If the men of God in all eras have kept on crying out to the Lord for the sake of the oppression they see on the earth by the wicked, while the righteous live in anguish and bitterness; yet, by presenting their thoughts and hearts open before the Lord, they increased in honor in the eyes of the Lord. ... Whereas those, on the other hand, who see such things, and surrender themselves to thoughts of doubt concerning God’s care and His ordinance of the world, their souls would get sick. And as said by **St. Augustine**: [The Holy Book presents psalm 37 as a convenient treatment for such sickness of the soul<sup>1</sup>. It confirms that the wicked who live like grass, and seem flourishing during the winter of this world; having no deep roots in the depth of the soil, with the advent of summer, they would dry up and burn.

## **2- THE CHASTISEMENT BY THE CHALDEANS:**

The Lord’s response to the question of the prophet came as such: *“Look among the nations and watch Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans”* (Habakkuk 1: 5, 6)

Yes, God may keep quiet for sometime, not out of disregard of what goes on, nor of lack of care on His part; But to give a chance for returning without chastisement; And in case man persists on his wickedness, the Lord Himself would carry out the chastisement, using every way for edification:

a- God will work a work in their days which they would not believe, though it were told them Although He is longsuffering, yet, when He chastens, He would present a useful lesson, although it may seem cruel! As it came in the book of Deuteronomy: *“All nations would say: ‘Why has the Lord done so to the land? What does the heat of His great anger mean?’ Then men would say: ‘Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers”* (Deuteronomy 29: 24, 25). And as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [God does not mean to punish, as much as He means to reform God is Good and Loving; not only when He gives gifts, but even when He chastens; Even His chastisements and punishments are out of His goodness, and His care for us<sup>2</sup>]; And he also says: [If God has driven Adam out of paradise, yet it was to bring him back to it ... The same way, if God has allowed for the captivation of His people, It was to stir up in them the desire for the inner freedom; and the longing, not only for the earthly Jerusalem, but also for the higher one.

b- He says: *“I am rising up the Chaldeans”*. In His capacity as the Lord and the Master of history, He uses even the wicked to realize His divine plan, for the edification

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<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟! المقال الأول.

of humanity. If the Chaldeans in their love of oppression have captivated the people; yet it was through a divine allowance for the sake of the people's repentance. It is as though God has risen up the Chaldeans for that specific job.

c- The Chaldeans refer to the devil, to which we deliver ourselves by ourselves as slaves because of our sins. The Lord would protect us against him once and several times, to keep us from falling under his humiliation; But, in case we persist on submitting ourselves to him, the Lord will deliver us under into his hands to chasten us. By this spirit, the apostle Paul demands from the Corinthians to forsake the man who has fallen with his father's wife, saying: "*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*" (1 Corinthians 5: 4).

The features of the Chaldean nation came conforming to those of the devil, and to his work against us:

### **1- "A bitter nation" (6).**

The devil is not an individual, but a nation, a kingdom reigned by Satan, with principalities, powers, and rulers (Ephesians 6: 12); with hosts and angels (Matthew 25: 41); A bitter kingdom that offers what is hers, namely, bitterness; and rejoices in the calamities of others; Her goal is destruction and not edification.

### **2- "Impetuous people":**

The Chaldeans were always the source of bitterness to all the nations around them; knew no compassion nor peace, but only wars and fights; and came down upon others to captivate and humiliate. So is Satan with all his angels, who force themselves on the gates of man to enslave and humiliate him, to provoke him to work to their account. They lie in wait for him, to rush through, in the moment they see the gates of his senses or emotions open up; to proclaim their kingdom inside him; Hence the psalmist cries out, saying: "*Set a guard , O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips*" (Psalm 141 3).

### **3- "Which marches through the breadth of the earth"**

Like the Chaldean nation which used to march through the breadth of the earth to devour peoples and kingdoms with no hindrance; yet could not devour those who raise themselves above the earth; So is the devil, who, seeing the whole earth open before him, he marches through its breadth; to be called 'the ruler or archon of this world'; Yet, he is likewise limited to the breadth of the earth; And according to **St. Jerome**: [Like a serpent, he crawls with his head, his tail, and all its body; closely bound to the earth; devouring its dust<sup>3</sup>. Those of us who are earth or dust would be food for him; While those who rise with their hearts to heaven, to practice the heavenly way of life, without being drawn by the earthliest, the enemy is helpless to catch].

### **4- "To possess dwelling places that is not theirs"**

Like the Chaldeans who used to take by force the wealth and souls of others, counting themselves as having the right to everything without hindrance, as long as they have the power and authority; So is the devil who forced himself upon humanity that is not his, nor the work of his hands, but belongs to Him who: "*All things were made*

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*through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made”* (John 1: 3). The nature of the devil is to force him over what belong to God, to set his dwelling place and his kingdom in the heart he set to be his temple.

The prophet Jeremiah expressed this satanic feature by the parable saying: “*As a partridge hatching what it did not lay, So are all who amass wealth unjustly; in mid-life it will leave them, and at their end they will prove to be fools*” (Jeremiah 17: 11). **The scholar Origen** interprets this parable, saying: [The partridge is known as a crafty bird that roams around the feet of the hunter to distract his attention; and once it is sure that its young got safely away, it flies away from the hunter. By that it likens the devil who preoccupies man with earthly things, to deprive him of both the earthliest and the heavenliest. The partridge is known to brood eggs that are not it’s own; and when they hatch it keeps the young with her. But once the true mother comes along, and produces a sound known by the young, they forsake the deceiving partridge and return to their mother. This is a living portrait of what happened when the devil seduced humanity with his deception; In the midst of his days, the Lord Christ came along to grant humanity the voice of His love, practically proclaiming it on the cross, drawing the deceived humanity to return to her true Creator. The devil lost what he unjustly acquired; and at the end of time, he will prove to be a fool, as he is utterly destroyed in hell<sup>4</sup>.

If the devil, like the Chaldeans, possessed dwelling places that are not his; or like the partridge brooded what he did not lay; he surely lost everything, even his own soul through the cross, that brought the believers back to their Creator and Savior, condemned the devil and his hosts, and nailed them on the cross; “*disarming principalities and powers, made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it*” (Colossians 2: 15).

#### **5- “They are terrible and dreadful” (7).**

The devil is terrible and dreadful; But he who is hidden in Jesus Christ, who “*went out conquering and to conquer*” (Revelation 6: 2), has no fear of him, but is rather feared by him. Let us hide in Him who alone “*can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods*” (Matthew 12: 29). If the enemy is strong, the Lord bound him by the cross, took back from him his spoil; namely humanity, and He Himself became the Leader of the spiritual battle. Father ‘Theophan’ the hermit says: [You should know that our enemies and all their evil plans are in the hand of our Lord Jesus Christ, our divine Leader, for the sake of whose glory and greatness you fight. As long as you let Him lead you in the battle, He will surely keep away any violence from being used against you; and will never allow the enemy to prevail on you, unless you choose to take his side by your own free will<sup>5</sup>.

#### **6- “Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves”.**

The Chaldean nation used to have a high regard of her own opinion, and would never submit to any law that does not conform to her liking. And because the devil in his dealing with us; likewise is not governed except by his own rules, and it is rather useless to debate with him; The church fathers advise us not to give our ears to his words, and not to enter into a debate with him, which would be full of deceit, and would never be edifying.

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<sup>4</sup> On Ps. Hom 3.

<sup>5</sup> الحاربات الروحية ج1، فصل 15.

## 7- “Their horses are swifter than leopards” (8).

In this chapter, the divine inspiration presents to us a living portrait of the horror of Satan, the true enemy, who strives to enslave us:

He is swifter than the leopard;  
His works is in the dark, and is more violent than the wolves;  
His range of work is limitless; setting his nets everywhere;  
With huge possibilities, he is capable of coming down from afar upon his unaware prey;

Like an eagle, he is capable of snatching the prey, then flying away with it;  
His law is that of oppression; with no mercy or negotiation;  
In his nature, he is a vicious animal, with his face pressing forward;  
His captives are innumerable like sand;  
He humiliates kings, scoffs at rulers, and all his victims are strong;  
His destroys the strongholds, and uses their accumulated dust to the account of his kingdom;

He is iniquitous by nature.

Let us now speak about each of these features in more detail: As to his swift motion to devour, he is swifter than the leopards; beside being crafty; using every chance of slothfulness or negligence to draw the soul into his net. ... The believers, on their part, are likewise alert, and use every possible chance to grow, and to enjoy the crown... The spiritual life is actually a process of using chances, whether by the believer or by his enemy; It is a perpetual spiritual struggle by each to reach his own goal; which we can realize from the words of **St. Agnatius of Antioch**, who hastened to write to the Roman followers, to ask them to quit their efforts to save him from martyrdom; Although he acknowledged it as being done out of love, yet not at the appropriate time; Counting it as an opportunity that might not come again, Why should they deprive him of it?! So he says: [I beg you not to offer me compassion; Let me become food for the fierce beasts, As through them I will reach God Being the bread of God, Let me be ground by their fangs; Let them be my tomb; Let them leave nothing of my body; So that in my death, I would cause no trouble for anyone to bury me! Pray to Christ for my sake, to let me become a sacrifice for Him; I wish the beasts are impatiently waiting to devour me; which I shall certainly provoke them to do<sup>6</sup>!!]

## 8- “They are more fierce than the evening wolves”

If Satan moves by day like a leopard, lightly and craftily; By night, he would not stop, but comes out to hunt like the evening wolves; As he knows no rest by day nor by night, we should be equally alert; ... Even in the moments of our sleep, our souls should say: “*I sleep, but my heart is awake*” (Songs 5: 2).

**Father Theophan the Hermit**, believing that the believer should, not only be alert against the strikes of Satan, But, by the power of the Spirit, he should stir up war against him, to get back every location he has previously occupied in the heart; he says: [To get a swift and an easy victory over your enemies, your spiritual war has to be continuous, incessant, and supported by an alertness and courage of the soul; which are

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<sup>6</sup> *Ad. Hom. 4, 5.*

easy to reach if you pray for them as gifts from God. Therefore, be persistent in your battle, with no hesitation<sup>7</sup>.

He, like the evening wolves, works in the dark to hide his tricks and wiles (Ephesians 6: 11). And as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [This enemy fights us, not openly, but through hidden plots He does not suggest to us the sins in their true colors, but concealed and clothed in another garment, to make them more acceptable<sup>8</sup>.

### **9- “Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar”**

The devil sets his traps everywhere; and exerts all his energies to catch the soul of man, even in a holy place. He dared to fight the Lord Christ on the pinnacle of the temple. The Lord allowed him to do so in order to warn us, that our enemy fights everywhere, at home or at work; in the church, or on the street; in our secret place, where we pray, as well as in the collective prayers; wherever we are, he crawls toward us, with the hope to find a place in our hearts.

Coming from afar means that he fights us where we do not expect him; Therefore it is befitting of us to have a flaring spiritual insight, to comprehend the secrets of spiritual wars; and to know the tricks and deceptions of the devil.

### **10- “They fly as the eagles that hastens to eat”**

**The scholar Origen** says that, Like the eagle which can see its prey from an extensively high altitude; very swiftly dives on it, then flies up again; and no one can take it away from it; So the devil or his hosts, watch the soul, to know when to dive on it; and through the astounding surprise, man may, in a very short time, go down into sin, to find himself losing much. ... If the process of building needs a long time; That of destruction needs only very short moments. So are the holy virtues, They require a long strife in the Lord to acquire, Yet destroying them is realized through very simple moments of negligence. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Like a swift strike of a sword, that takes only a moment, would cause a wound that may need long years to heal, and may even put an end to man’s life; The enemy strikes by his sword during moments of our negligence; Yet these moments may corrupt a strife of long years!

### **11- “They all come bent on violence” (9)**

The devil works, by the ‘law of violence’. He only seeks to deprive us of the greater good, and to draw us away from the heavenly life, so as not to be bound to the divine law, namely, the truth. **St. John Chrysostom** says about the devil: [He does not struggle to gain anything for himself; only to corrupt us.he does his best to drive us out of heaven<sup>9</sup>].

### **12- “Their faces pressing forward”**

He probably means that they are not like men whose faces are up, seeking heaven; But, like fierce animals their faces are pressed forward to devour mercilessly.

### **13- They gather captives like sand”**

Gatheing innumerable souls, and captivating them like sand, the devil is called “The ruler of this world” , and “*The prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience*” (Ephesians 2: 2). **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Why

<sup>7</sup>المحاربات الروحية 1: 15.

<sup>8</sup> In Eph. Hom 22.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

does the apostle call the devil the ‘ruler of this world’? Because almost the whole humanity has gathered around him, and became his slaves by their own free will].

#### **14- “They scoff at kings, And princes are scorned by them” (10).**

Every time the people fall under captivity, the king and the great are humiliated and scorned. When Nebuchadnezzar captivated Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, he gave the command to have king Zedekiah’s sons killed before his eyes, then Zedekiah’s eyes were put out, and he was taken to Babylon, there to be humiliated (2 kings 25). In a similar way, the believer, once he falls under the hand of the devil, is humiliated because of his slothfulness.

If in Christ, the King of kings, we became spiritual kings (Revelation 1: 6; 5: 10); the devil exerts all his energies to captivate us.

In our study of the book of Hosea we saw that the king refers to the human will that reigns over man and controls all his activities; And the rulers refer to man’s energies and talents. When the enemy captivates man, he make him lose his human will (the king), to live the rest of his life, humbly doing according to the will of his new master (Satan); And scatter his energies and talents (the rulers), to make them subjects of ridicule and scorn! The devil works on depriving man of everything, his will, energies, talents, and even his body; and finally, he carries him along to perpetual perdition.

#### **15- “They deride every stronghold”**

As no stronghold could stand before the Chaldeans; namely the devil, No one can take refuge in his long experience, nor his possibilities, talents, mental knowledge, honor, or the nature of his work Deriding all these strongholds, There would be only one stronghold which the devil cannot approach; namely, the Lord Christ, the ‘Rock of Ages’.

**St. Jerome** says that the Lord Christ is the Rock (1 Corinthians 10: 4), the smooth Rock on which the serpent cannot climb; and in which, anyone who takes refuge would be protected against the enemy – the ancient serpent.

#### **16- “For they heap up mounds of earth and seize it”**

The enemy keeps on hammering the mighty stronghold, and turns it into dust, which he then uses to the account of his kingdom, namely, to his own account. This is a living portrait of the work of the devil in the life of those captivated by him; He turns their life into dust, when he draws their hearts to the earth, and corrupts their nature. He then uses this dust to make earthen vessels that carry his features, to catch others.

Having fallen down from heaven, the enemy keeps on exerting all his energies, not only to deprive his victim of the heavenly life, and to bring him down to the love of earthly things, but he uses him as well to provoke others to fall, and be deprived of the heaven that is inside them.

#### **17- Then they sweep by like the wind, they transgress and become guilty, imputing this power to his god” (11)**

They sweep by like the wind; namely, they change to what is worse; sweep from evil to evil and from iniquity to another .... imputing their transgressions and iniquities as the power of their god, who grants them conquest over peoples. Counting their god mightier than the God of Israel, they became more abiding to their idolatry, and more proud of it.

### **3- HABAKKUK FEELS COMPASSION TOWARD HIS PEOPLE:**

The prophet Habakkuk, so filled with zeal on the glory of God, to cry out and to moan, and to ask God, why does He keep silent, seeing how the wicked surround the righteous, and corrupt his mind and life: ... And when, by the spirit of prophecy, he sees the Jewish people, characterized by violence and oppression at that time, fall under the bitter servitude of the Chaldeans, he could endure no more. As much as this prophet used to talk to God with an open heart, daringly and frankly, with no formalities; Yet he as well, with great love for his people, could not see them suffering under such a bitter and vicious nation; even though through a divine allowance for the sake of chastisement. He could not endure to hear the moaning, and to watch the bitterness of his brethren; As though he says together with the prophet Jeremiah: "*For the hurt of the daughter of my people, I am hurt, I am mourning; Astonishment has taken hold of me*" (Jeremiah 8: 21).

God indeed may allow for the chastisement of His children over their sins; Yet, while chastening, He cannot see anyone gloat over them; But demands from us to moan together with them, to cry out for the sake of alleviating their sufferings, and contrite with their contrition. When God chastened Judah by the Babylonian captivity, and the Edomites stood gloating over their calamity, God rebuked them, saying: "*You should not have gazed on the day of your brother in the day of his captivity; nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of their distress*" (Obadiah v. 12)

Feeling compassion toward his people, fallen under the yoke of the Chaldeans, Habakkuk dared to admonish God, saying: "***Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One?***"; ***As though he says to Him:*** How could You, being the Holy One who endures no evil, endure to see the Chaldeans, the wicked nation, pillage and oppress Your own people, and keep silent;?! You are my God who is committed to my peace and security, If You care for me, Would You not care for all Your people as well?!

How wonderful are these feelings of the prophet; when, in the moments of bitter admonishment, he calls the Lord: "*O Lord my God, my Holy One*"; As though in the anguish of his soul, he finds God attached to him, cares for him, and embraces him; being referred to him, his Holy One!

We, as well, may admonish God with bitterness; Yet, in our admonishment, when we see how attached He is to us, and how He refers us to Himself; We get attached to Him more closely, and throw ourselves into His bosom, believing in His work with, and in us.

Opening our hearts with love toward others, praying for them, and, interceding on their behalf; God, being attached to those who love, and proud of His children with spacious hearts, would refer Himself to us

The prophet goes on admonishing God, saying: "***We shall not die. O Lord, You have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, You have ordained them to punish***" (12).

Saying: "***We shall not die***". The prophet realizes that the Lord his God and His Holy One, Everlasting in His love for His people, extends His features on them: Being Everlasting, beyond the limit of time, He grants 'eternity' to His children, and "*they will not die*" ... Even though they are worthy of death, Yet, in the Lord they will live; according to His words: "*Because I live, You will also live*" (John 14: 19). Although He delivered them to the Chaldeans, Yet, as the Psalmist says: "*The Lord has chastened me severely, But He has not given me over to death*" (Psalm 118: 18).

He might have given the Chaldeans the authority to chasten His people, *“To seize the spoil, to take the prey”* (Isaiah 10: 6); Yet not authority without limit, but to the extent that God sees enough for the salvation of His people; Hence, the prophet says: *“You have appointed them to Execute judgment; O Rock. You have ordained them to punish”* (12). He limits that authority to be only for judgment and chastisement, and not for perdition. That is why, when Satan asked God to allow him to stretch his hand to ‘Job’; The Lord answered Him, saying: *“Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life”* (Job 2: 6). And the Lord said to the sea: *“This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop”* (Job 38: 11).

As far as we are concerned, God may allow Satan to attack us, yet within limits; Despite his attack, If we are alert and thanksgiving, we will overcome him, and our war against him will turn into our conquest and victory; Whereas in case we persist on being slothful and negligent, We, ourselves, would be the cause of the harm he would bestow on us. And as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [Someone may say: Hasn’t Satan harmed Adam, and caused him to lose the paradise?! No! It was Adam who, because of his slothfulness and lack of self-restraint, has brought the harm upon himself! If Satan, using so many and so powerful plots, could not submit the righteous ‘Job’, How could he, by less effective ways, submit Adam<sup>10</sup>!]

While proclaiming that he is sure that his Holy and Everlasting God would never allow for His people to die, but that He uses the Chaldeans only for their chastisement; Yet he goes on with his admonishment, saying to the Lord: *“You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. How do you look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours one more righteous than he?”* (13).

The prophet Habakkuk, being aware of what the Psalmist David said: *“You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, Nor shall evil dwell with You”* (Psalm 5: 4); And realizing what Jeremiah has realized, that the Lord hates abomination (Jeremiah 44: 4); Yet he was confused, How could God keep silent before what the wicked Chaldeans are doing to His people; How could He holds His tongue when the wicked devours one more righteous than he! Here he does not say, ‘devour the righteous’, as the people, although wicked, yet, compared to the Chaldeans, they were more righteous than them.

The word ‘see’ or ‘behold’ here, do not imply mere vision; as God is Omniscient, nothing is hidden from Him, and He is not in need of beholding to see; But he means that He endures the deeds of the wicked, and gives success to their ways. And to show the features of those wicked Chaldeans, whose ways God caused to succeed (albeit for a limited time), the prophet goes on saying to God:

*“You have made men like the fish of the sea; like crawling things that have no ruler over them? The enemy brings all of them up with a hook, He drags them out with his net, and gathers them in his seine; So he rejoices and exults. Therefore he sacrifices to his net, and burns incense to his seine, because by them his portion is sumptuous and his food is plenteous. Is he then to keep on emptying his net, and continue to slay nations without mercy?”* (Habakkuk 1: 14-17)

The enemy look at the other nations as the fish of the sea, owned by no one, that they have the right to catch to eat and be satisfied; and as priceless crawling things, to do

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<sup>10</sup>المؤلف: القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، 1980، ص 330.

with them what they choose. They rejoice and exult when their hook catch a fish, and when their net gathers men; And they offer sacrifices and burn incense to their gods who provide them with such sumptuous and plenteous harvest; It is as though the prophet say to God: Are You content to see Your people dealt with as priceless fish, caught in heathen nets, and devoured by wicked people, who offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and burn incense to their idols?! Your people, despite their corruption and perversion, Yet, In Your eyes they are precious; How could You forsake them to be caught by those wicked Chaldeans?!

The Chaldean nation rejoices in catching this specific people more than catching any other people; As according to the words of the prophet: “*Because by them (by the hook and the net), his portion is sumptuous and his food is plenteous*”; Or according to the Septuagint version: “*his food is of the choicest*”. The devil aims his arrows more to the choicest of believers to draw them away from their faith; Or, according to **St. Jerome**: [The devil does not care for non-believers; he intends only to corrupt the church of Christ<sup>11</sup>].

It is amazing that the devil, like the Chaldeans, the more sumptuous his portion is, the more his appetite grows, and the more his heart flares to catch others; hence the words said by the prophet: “*Is he then to keep on emptying his net and continue to slay nations without mercy?*”

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<sup>11</sup> Ep. 22: 4.

## CHAPTER 2

### PUNISHING THE CHALDEANS

Having asked the Lord about his position toward the Chaldeans, whom He used as a rod of chastisement against his people; Then they counted themselves as though they are conquering the nations by their own power and might, and that was all within their right, God gave the prophet Habakkuk a comforting answer.

<b>1- The prophet watches for the Lord's response</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2- God takes great interest in the prophet's question</b>	<b>2 – 3</b>
<b>3- Punishing the Chaldeans</b>	
<b>a- The pride of heart and the inner void</b>	<b>4 – 8</b>
<b>b- The ugly gain</b>	<b>9 – 11</b>
<b>c- The violence</b>	<b>12 – 14</b>
<b>d- Getting drunk, and giving drink to others</b>	<b>15 – 17</b>
<b>e- Idolatry</b>	<b>18 – 20</b>

#### 1- THE PROPHET WATCHES FOR THE LORD'S RESPONSE:

*"I will stand at my watchpost and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what He will say to me, and what He will answer concerning my complaint"* (Habakkuk 2: 1)

We often have on our mind questions that are not only befitting of us to direct to the Lord, But to stand as though at a watchpost waiting for His response to them; To station ourselves as though on a rampart; And to have complete faith and sure trust that God, the Lover of mankind, would not hide His secrets from us, and would never do except what is for our edification. That what the prophet Habakkuk did after raising his question at his watchpost, He waited to hear the Lord's voice inside him; And took refuge in the rampart, lest the questioning would shake his faith. That watchpost and that rampart are nothing but the Person of our Lord Jesus, by whom we understand the exalted divine secrets, as though through an exalted Watchpost. In Him we take refuge, being the true Rock, on whom the church was established. He is the Watchpost, without which we would not be able to know the Father, according to His own words: *"No one knows the Son except the Father, Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him"* (Matthew 11: 27). And He is the Rock in which the church takes refuge as a dove, He calls: *"O my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, Let Me see your countenance, Let Me hear your voice"* (Songs 2: 14).

*St. Jerome*<sup>1</sup> believes that Habakkuk, standing as though at a watchpost to watch, and stationing himself as though on a rampart, is executing his role as a spiritual soldier, persistently wrestling against the devil, and meditating in the works of God and His secrets, particularly those concerning the cross, to get filled with strength for his spiritual war against evil.

#### 2- GOD TAKES GREAT INTEREST IN THE QUESTION:

As long as the soul seeks and watches for the words and the response of the Lord, takes refuge in Him as her Rampart, stands ready for the spiritual strife through the divine knowledge; The Lord, on His part, would not forsake her; As according to the prophet: *"Then the Lord answered me and said: 'Write the vision and make it plain on tablets,*

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<sup>1</sup> Ep. 53: 8.

***so that a runner may read it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come. It will not delay***” (Habakkuk 2: 2, 3)

It is as though the Lord demands from him, not to bring over paper and pen to write down what he sees and hears, but the need is for tablets to inscribe on them the words of God, so clearly, that even a runner can read them<sup>1</sup>. ...In the book of Isaiah, it is said: “*Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and note it on a scroll, that it may be for time to come, forever and ever*” (Isaiah 30: 8). As this vision may not be promptly realized, but at the appointed time, it would be befitting of the prophet to wait with complete trust that it would surely come, It will not tarry.

This vision is nothing but that concerning the secret of the cross, that would be realized at the fullness of time, when the Word of God will incarnate; He who wrote down the divine love, not on paper and by ink, but, by his bloodshed, drew it on the two boards of the cross, the horizontal and the vertical, drawing all toward Him.

Let us therefore run by the Holy Spirit to the cross to read what the only begotten Son has inscribed, to proclaim to us the exalted divine secrets! There, we shall see the utter collapse, not of the wicked Chaldeans, but of the devil Himself, together with all his hosts; To see their perdition with everything they have confiscated.

### **3- PUNISHING THE CHALDEANS:**

Raising His prophet Habakkuk up to the vision concerning the cross that will destroy the kingdom of the devil, The Lord again reveals the works of the devil in the life of the wicked Chaldeans, that will be destroyed by the cross; As though He reveals the evil plant, that was not planted by the Father, but by the devil, about which the Lord said, that it should be uprooted (Matthew 15: 13); which are:

#### **a- The pride of heart and the inner void:**

***“Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him, But the righteous shall live by his faith. Indeed, wine betrays him; He is arrogant and never at rest”*** (Habakkuk 2: 4, 5)

If God allowed for his people to be chastised by the heathen Chaldeans. Those later got arrogant, and boasted that the victory and conquest they had, were realized through their own power and might. That is why, after realizing His goal; namely, the chastisement of His children, the Lord will punish the Chaldeans for the pride of their heart. As it was said by the prophet Isaiah, that, Although Assyria was the rod of God’s anger, and the staff in whose hand is His indignation (Isaiah 10: 5); Yet, “*It shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem that He will say, ‘I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks’. For he says: ‘By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent; Also I have removed the boundaries of the people, and I have robbed their treasuries; So I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man. My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people, And as one gathers eggs that are left, I have gathered all the earth; and there was no one who moved his wing, nor opened his mouth with even a peep’. Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw magnify itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against*

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<sup>1</sup> Jerome Biblical Comm, P 297.

*those who lift it up, or as if a staff could lift up, or as if it were not wood!*” (Isaiah 10: 12-15).

That is the work of the devil in the life of man – to put pride in his heart; by which he would assume that by his might and wisdom he could realize his goal; and would not apprehend that every energy or talent in him is from God, even though man has distorted their nature, and deviated them from their goal<sup>1</sup>

Through pride, Satan fell from his angelic rank, and was cut down to the depths of Sheol (Isaiah 14: 12; Obadiah v. 4); That is why he keeps on striking humanity by the same infirmity, in an attempt to take her down from the life of faith, and to deprive her of the enjoyment of the divine kingdom. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Whoever lifts himself up, haughtily above all mankind is actually degrading him to a level lower than the irrational creation<sup>1</sup>].

If the wicked will perish by the devilish pride, *“The just shall live by his faith”* (Habakkuk 2: 4).

Some scholars believe that this phrase *“The just shall live by his faith”* is the heart and nerve of the prophecy of the prophet Habakkuk. These famous words which summarize his whole vision<sup>2</sup>, were quoted by the apostle Paul to confirm that it is not possible to be justified by the works of the law; but by faith in Jesus Christ, hidden in His righteousness. And **St. Augustine** says: [In Him we are resurrected, and in Him we set forth to the Father to become perfect, and to be justified in an unseen way; As righteousness requires the sound and non-deviated faith<sup>3</sup>]; And he also says: [where there is no sound faith, there will be no righteousness; as *“The just shall live by his faith”*<sup>4</sup>].

Pride is planted by the devil in us to deprive us of the life of true faith, and to take us away from the righteousness in Jesus Christ; to find out that this vain pride gives the soul a kind of inner hunger and thirst, through which man seeks satisfaction, not with the righteousness of God, but with what is earthly, through violence and oppression ... And the more he gets, the more his inner void grows, to remain unsatisfied all the days of his life.

By such a spirit, the Chaldeans attacked the nations, and humiliated mankind without real satisfaction: *Because he enlarges his desire as hell, and he is like death, and cannot be satisfied. He gathers to himself all nations, and heaps up for himself all peoples. Shall not all these take up a proverb against him, and a taunting riddle against him, and say, ‘Woe to him who increases what is not his – for how long?’ And to him who loads himself with many pledges? ‘Will not your creditors rise up suddenly?’ Will they not awaken who oppress you? And you will become their booty, because you have plundered many nations, All the remnant of the people shall plunder you. Because of men’s blood, and the violence of the land and the city, and all who dwell in it”*(Habakkuk 2: 5-8)

If we take it literally, we may say that the Chaldeans have enlarged themselves as a grave, swallowed peoples like dead, and with no satisfaction; In an incessant attempt to take over the nations and the peoples by violence and oppression. But that would eventually come to an end, after which everything will turn around, and the captivated

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<sup>1</sup> In Philip. Hom 7.

<sup>2</sup> Jerome Bibl. Comm, p. 297.

<sup>3</sup> Ser. On N.T. 93: 4.

<sup>4</sup> SER. ON Mount 1: 5.

nations will wake up, be liberated, to gloat at the Chaldeans, and to scoff at them, saying: *“Woe to him who increases what is not his – For how long?”* They will pour woes on the Chaldeans, who proudly assumed that they have loaded themselves with plenty, which are actually not theirs; and will give back their spoil!

*“Who loads himself with many pledges* “What they have gathered was not real wealth, but rather no more than dense mud; Not gold or silver, but dust that would weigh upon their souls with the love of the earthly world.

*“Will not your creditors rise up suddenly? Will they not awaken who oppress you?”* In a moment not expected by the Chaldeans, those who were as though sleeping, will eventually wake up to turn the Chaldeans who plundered them into their booty; *“Because you have plundered many nations, Al the remnant of the people shall plunder you”* And the way they shed blood, their blood will be shed; And the way they wasted the lands and the cities, they will be, themselves wasted.

It does not stop at losing their satisfaction, But the Chaldeans will also lose what they have assumed to be their profit; They will lose both their wealth and honor ... To be ultimately told: *“As you have done, it shall be done to you; Your reprisal shall return upon your own head”* (Abadiah v. 15).

#### **b- The ugly gain:**

*“Woe to him who covets evil gain for his house, That he may set his nest on high, That he may be delivered from the power of disaster! You gave shameful counsel to your house, cutting off many peoples, and sinned against your soul. For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the timbers will answer it”* (Habakkuk 2: 9-11)

This is the second woe. The first was because of the sin of pride, that brings no satisfaction to the soul, but only perdition. While the second is because of the ugly gain. The wicked assumes that he is filling his house with goods, Not knowing that, actually, he is gathering evil gain that will bring a curse over his whole household; according to the wise words *“He who is greedy for gain, troubles his own house”* (Proverb 15: 8). He covets the ugly gain, thinking that it will carry him on its wings to set his nest up high, where no one can approach him; when he actually does himself wrong by building his house with shame. The stones he acquired by oppression to build his house, would cry out testifying to his wickedness; And the wooden beams by which the building is held together, would not keep silent. The building he builds by oppression would turn into a musical choir that sings a sad lamentation on its owner!

Ahab the king and his wife Jezabel thought that they have killed Naboth the Jezreelite and inherited his vineyard; and nobody would hold them into account for what they did; When they have actually acquired their own perdition; As the words of the Lord to Ahab through the prophet Elijah were: *“In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth the Jezreelite, dogs shall lick your blood”* (1 kings 21: 19).

#### **c- The violence:**

*“Woe to him who builds a town with bloodshed; Who establishes a city by iniquity! Behold, Is it not of the Lord of hosts that the peoples labor to feed the fire; And nations weary themselves in vain? For the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea”* (Habakkuk 2: 12-14)

This is the third woe that will dwell upon man, who in his love of evil or ugly gain, transformed into a vicious beast, builds his town with bloodshed, and establishes his

city by the law of iniquity. **St. John Chrysostom** says that man became more evil than wild beasts; that would not devour one another of the same kind; Whereas man would devour his brother in humanity; and assumes that he is not able to build a city to dwell and find comfort, except at the expense of his brother's blood.

Anyway, the earth would eventually be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God, when the world sees that the oppressive blood-shedders have labored, not to build towns, nor to establish cities; but to become, themselves, fuel for the fire; They labor in vain until they are overcome by infirmity or exhaustion, and with no profit altogether!

If our bodies through bloodshed or iniquity has become earth; Through receiving the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, they will become filled with the glory of God, to bear the Spirit of our meek Savior. And if our life has become a saline sea, The sweet water of the Holy Spirit will transform its nature.

And finally, if the oppression would reach its maximum horror, when man turns into a blood-shedder, **St. Jerome** believes that the heretics are the worst blood-shedders; As they do not kill the body, but the soul, by deviation from the living faith; Namely from the truth; saying: [The heretic, by his deception, kills many souls; he is both deceptive and a blood-shedder!<sup>1</sup>].

#### **4- GETTING DRUNK, AND GIVING DRINK TO HIS NEIGHBOR:**

*“Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor. Pressing him to your bottle, Even to make him drunk, that you may look on his nakedness! You will be filled with shame instead of glory. You also – drink! And be exposed as uncircumcised! The cup of the Lord’s right hand will be turned against you, And utter shame will cover your glory”* (Habakkuk 2: 15, 16)

The fourth woe is on the sin of getting drunk, On finding himself losing his dignity and inner balance, he gives drink to his neighbor, pressing him to his bottle to seduce him by its shape; So that, the way he lost his purity, he desires to look on the nakedness of his neighbor; namely on his inner secrets, to corrupt his depths.

Who is he who gives drink to others, but the devil who seduces man, pretending to be his friend, in order to let him lose his true Christ, and to turn him to disgrace. This does not add glory to the enemy, but shame; And If by that, he assumes that he establishes his kingdom and widens its range; he is only filling the cup of God’s wrath on himself, to drink of what he gave us with double bitterness *“In the cup which she has mixed, mix for her double”* (Revelation 18: 3,6).

*“And utter shame will cover your glory”* (16). When those around him look at him, and see neither true glory nor real riches, they will vomit on his vain glory! ... So will be the one who gives drink to others; He prepares for himself those who are going to vomit on him and to cover him with shame!

What we say concerning the sin of getting drunk, to which the devil draws us; We also says concerning those who lead a life of looseness and spoilage; the kind of life that carries in itself the death of the soul, and the shame instead of glory. And as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [He who leads a life of pleasure; living only for his belly, is dead while living; He who spends his life in banquets and drinking, Is he not dead, and buried in darkness<sup>2</sup>?!]

#### **5- Idolatry:**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Hom 2.

<sup>2</sup> In Tim hom. 13.

***“Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it; a cast image that teaches lies? For its maker trusts in what has been made, though the product is only an idol that cannot speak! Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life’, Or to lifeless stone, ‘Wake up! Can it give guidance?! Behold, It is overlaid with gold and silver. And there is no breath in it. But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him”*** (Habakkuk 2: 18-20)

This last woe is addressed to the Chaldeans who boast their gods, the product of their own hands. Although they reveal that they were clever and elaborate in handicraft; and have spent a fortune to cover them with gold and silver, yet they are no more than lifeless and spiritless stone or wood.

What benefit would such idols bring them?! They ask the wooden Baal to come to life to save them; and the stone Ashtoreth, his wife to wake up to see what has dwelt upon them, and show compassion on them. But neither one is able to save them. They are indeed beautiful, but utterly helpless; whereas, before the true God in His holy temple, the whole earth would keep silent.

How ridiculous for man to forsake His true God, set in his heart, as though in a heavenly temple; And resort to his own thoughts, that, although they may look beautiful and like shining gods, yet they are lifeless and helpless to provide him with salvation. How miserable he would be, he who rejects the Grantor of salvation, who would turn his heart into heaven; and worship the human deceptive thoughts and philosophies, which would turn him into earth! Helpless to oppose God, he would hearken the voice saying: ***“Let all the earth be silent before Him”*** (20).

We hope not to be a soundless and wordless land in front of God but to be like a spiritual heaven carries the Words of God, joyful voices and persistent angel praising

## CHAPTER 3

### A PSALM OF THANKSGIVING TO THE LORD

Although the prophet Habakkuk entered into inner suffering and outer anguish, yet, in the midst of all his sufferings and bitterness, he enjoyed the comforts of the Holy Spirit, who reveals to the believer the divine secrets, to turn his whole life into a praise and glory to God. The prophet ends his book by a praise of thanksgiving, or a praise of glory to God, by which he presents:

1- God's works along the years	1 – 2
2- God's works on Mount Sinai	3 – 12
3- The rejoice of salvation	13 – 19

#### 1- GOD'S WORKS ALONG THE YEARS:

*“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet on Shigionoth. O Lord, I have heard of Your renown, And I stand in awe of Your work; O Lord, Revive them in our day ! In our time make them known; In wrath remember mercy”* (Habakkuk 3: 1, 2)

Having stood on the watchpost waiting for the word of God; and having stationed himself on the divine rampart, the prophet's soul exulted inside him, despite all the difficult circumstances surrounding him. While moaning for the sake of the people of God, The Lord revealed to him His salvation plan along the years that culminated on the cross. He was exulted, and held the spiritual musical instrument, to play on its strings a psalm of praise, saying:

*“O Lord, I have heard of Your renown (Your words), And I stand in awe of Your work”*; Namely, my soul got filled with fear; as You revealed to me Your secrets; I stand in awe!

His vision getting beyond the works of God in his days, and extending to see them along the ages; He realized that God in His love, even though He got angry to chasten, yet even in His anger, He does not endure to hear the moans of His people, but would return to have mercy. *“O Lord, Revive your work in our day; in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy”*. Yes indeed, the Lord may get angry on the wickedness of man, Yet in the midst of His wrath, His mercy moans; Something that the prophet Hosea magnificently expressed, saying on the tongue of the Lord: *“My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of my anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst; And I will not come with terror”* (Hosea 11: 8, 9).

If God, according to the prophet Isaiah, *“hides himself”* (Isaiah 45: 15), Yet He proclaims Himself to His people along the generations through His mercies that He reveals, even in the moments of the divine wrath and chastisement; which is practically apparent in raising the fallen humanity after getting corrupted. And according to **St. Jerome**: [God keeps on performing wonders every day; You, yourself are a demonstration of the amazing works of God – Yesterday, you were an oppressor of what belong to others; But today, you give others what is yours!<sup>1</sup> This change is the goal of the word of God proclaimed through the Mosaic Law that was perfectly consummated through the incarnation of the divine Word, and His proclamation of salvation on the cross. That is why the prophet Habakkuk gets back to the works of God with His people

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Hom 10.

in the wilderness, starting by providing Moses with the law on Mount Horeb, then setting forth to His works through the Savior Messiah].

## 2- GOD'S WORKS ON MOUNT SINAI:

The prophet's heart was drawn back to God's work, when the prophet Moses ascended on the Mount to be delivered the law of God, When the Mount got filled with splendor and glory; And when God shined with His light on His people, to make them, by their heart and tongue, soul, and body, sing the praise saying:

***“God came from Taman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, And the earth was full of His praise”*** (Habakkuk 3: 3)

Here he refers to God's appearance with His glory in an apparent way, when Moses was delivered the law; As it was written: *“Then the lord came down on Mount Sinai”* (Exodus 19: 20); And, *“The sight of the glory of God was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain”* (Exodus 24: 17); and, *“The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran”* (Deuteronomy 33: 2)

Having come to us through the law, His splendor covered the heavens, and the earth was filled with His praise. What are these heavens and earth, but the human soul and body, sanctified by the word of God: The soul shines with the glory of God, and the body gets filled with rejoice and exultation. By the divine word, the soul is filled with divine light and heavenly knowledge; whereas the body is transformed with all its members into a harp in the hands of God, on which He plays a unique heavenly praise. In other words, God would transfigure in man's life as a whole: in his soul, as well as in his body. **St. Jerome** says: [Sing a true praise; Sing with your whole being; Let your hand sing through giving, and your feet sing through haste to do good; Let all your strings give sound; as if one string is lost, the harp would lose its integrity; What would be the use, if you are chaste, Yet you are greedy?! What would you gain, if you are pure and generous in giving, yet you are envious?! Or if you have good six strings, yet the seventh one is broken?! As that would deprive the harp of its ability to give an integral melody<sup>1</sup>].

According to the Septuagint version, “God comes from the South; The Holy One from the shadowed Mountain”; On which **St. Jerome** comments, saying: [God comes from the South, refers to the birth of the Savior in Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem<sup>2</sup>]. While **St. Dedymus the Blind** believes that the South refers to the hot south wind which blows on the soul and flares it by the Spirit, or with warm love; Whereas the North refers to the cold north wind, to the work of the devil, who corrupts the warmth of the soul. That is why in the book of the Songs (4: 16), the bride wishes that the north wind, (referring to the work of the devil), would be taken away from her, and the south wind (referring to the Savior, her Groom, Himself)<sup>3</sup> would come.

Then the prophet Habakkuk goes on to say: ***“The brightness was like the sun, rays came forth from his hand, where the power lay hidden”*** (4). As though he says: I was assuming that things were happening haphazardly; the wicked devours the righteous, and the Chaldean nation swallows the rest of the nations, with no one to hold her into account, or to oppose her. Then, when I realized the secrets of Your knowledge, I saw you as the eternal Light that reveals the hidden secrets; Nothing is hidden from Your

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Hom 25.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 33.

<sup>3</sup> تفسير سفر زكريا.

eyes. When you stretch your hand to work, and rays come forth from them, to expose those who walk in the darkness, all will realize your might that lay hidden for some time.

According to the version by the Jesuite fathers, it came as: “Two horns in His hand” (of the rays of the sun); These two horns refer to the two tablets of stone, on which the law was written, delivered to the prophet Moses; according to what is written: “*From His right hand came a fiery law for them*” (Deuteronomy 33: 2)

***“Before Him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind”***

***“He stood and measured the earth; He looked and scattered the nations. And the everlasting mountains were shattered, The perpetual hills bowed. His ways are everlasting”*** (Habakkuk 3: 5, 6)

His appearance drives away the pestilence of evil and darkness, And by His authority the fever and plague are chased out.

He stood to measure the earth, which He created and cares for, and for whose sake He works without rest; and when His ordinances are proclaimed, the wicked nations tremble, and the everlasting mountains and perpetual hills are shattered. He is the eternal God who ordines everything in the proper time. It is as though he says: I assumed that the world is like a sea full of fish, caught by the wicked nation without control; But I realized that nothing is hidden before Your eyes.

If the earth, as we already said, refers to the body, God stood to measure it, a sign of caring for it and sanctifying it; To scatter the heathen nations dwelling there; namely, to take away from the body every evil and spiritual weakness; To shatter the mighty mountain; namely, the seemingly very serious sins, that no one can move; Before God, the perpetual hills of the body that weigh down the soul, would bow.

Here the prophet refers to God as though taking a standing posture: “*He stood and measured the earth*”. According to St. Jerome, God does not change, nor take bodily posture; But He is said to stand, when He deals with the righteous; To walk when Adam and Eve fell in sin (Genesis 3: 9); To sit, being the divine judge and King (Isaiah 6: 1); And to sleep, as He did in the boat with His disciples; when man is going through storms of temptation<sup>1</sup>. Here, therefore, talking about the earth, having enjoyed sanctification, and the gladness of His salvation, He appeared standing to measure it (6).

***“I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; The curtains of the land of Median trembled”*** (Habakkuk 3: 7)

The name of the tents of Cushan was never mentioned before in the Old Testament; it is probably an old, unused name of Median. Therefore, if the vision of God to Habakkuk is transfigured<sup>2</sup>; and the Lord is coming from Mount Sinai; everything opposing power will collapse before Him.

It is probable that the tents of Cushan appeared in affliction, and the curtains of the land of Median trembled, when God delivered the land of Canaan to His people, and all the surrounding nations trembled with fear.

Some scholars believe that the tents of Cushan became in affliction, when the Lord sold the children of Israel into the hand of Cushan-Rishatham king of Mesopotamis for 8 years; And when they cried out to the Lord, He delivered them by the hand of

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Hom 14.

<sup>2</sup> Jerome Bib. Comm, p. 298.

Othniel the son of Kenaz the judge (Judges 3: 8-11), to whom He gave the power to humiliate those who submitted them.

As to the curtains of Median; they trembled when Gideon's companion saw in a dream: "*A loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Median; it came to a tent and struck it, so that it fell, overturned, and collapsed*" (Judged 7: 13). That was a reference to the sword of Gideon the son of Joash who killed the Medianites.

In other words, Habakkuk praises the Lord on His works, granting His children the conquest, the victory, and even the authority over their enemies; the demons, who would tremble before them, and come to be in affliction.

***"O Lord, were You displeased with the rivers, Was Your anger against the rivers, Was Your wrath against the sea, That You rode on Your horses, Your chariots of salvation?"*** (Habakkuk 3: 8)

If the waters refer to peoples (Revelation 17: 15); the people of God are likened to rivers with sweet water; While the heathen peoples are likened to the sea with saline water. His anger would be on the rivers, when he chastens His people because of the injustice found in their midst; And His wrath would be against the sea. When He punishes the heathen nations, because of the evil they have done against His people.

God's wrath was aroused against the rivers and the sea that obstructed the march of His people, on their way from the land of Egypt to the Promised Land; When He split the Red Sea and the river Jordan, to let His people pass through their waters. As the Leader of the procession of salvation, He carried His people as though on chariots of salvation; bringing them over from the servitude of the devil to His heavenly Kingdom.

The believer is the horse that bears God, its Leader inside it; About which **St. Jerome** says: [This is said about us being the horse ridden by God<sup>1</sup>]; And **father Theophan the hermit** says: [He fights for you by Himself, and delivers your enemies into your hands, whenever, and however He so chooses; according to what is written in the Scripture: "***For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you, and give your enemies over to you***" (Deuteronomy 23: 14)<sup>2</sup>.

***"Your bow was (uncovered) made quite ready; Oaths were sworn over Your arrows"*** (Habakkuk 3: 9)

What is the bow that was uncovered to strike with its arrows, but the divine incarnation through which we enjoyed the Word of God, as an arrow that destroys the evil reigning inside us?!... Let the Word of God enter into us like an arrow that wounds our heart with love, and takes away from it every evil corruption, set by the enemy in it; to say together with the bride of the song: "*I am lovesick*" (Songs 2: 5).

***"You split the earth with rivers"*** (Habakkuk 3: 9)

Receiving the incarnate Word in us as a divine arrow that wounds our heart with love, and takes corruption away from it; He, in turn, seeing that it has become earth instead of heaven, loving temporal, and not eternal things, would split it through the fellowship of the cross and the suffering; to turns the earth into rivers of living waters; according to the words said by the Savior: "*He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water*" (John 7: 39).

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<sup>1</sup> PL 25: 1317.

<sup>2</sup>المحاريبات الروحية 1: 15.

Do not be afraid for being a barren land, because the Lord, by His cross, will create in you fountains of His Holy Spirit, as rivers of living water, to dampen your land, then flow from it everywhere through testimony.

**St Jerome** says [The Lord Christ, as are the fruit of His work in us, is the main River that flows into little rivers on our land. These little rivers testify to the true River, praising Him, not only by words, but also by work; As the Psalmist says: *“Let the rivers clap their hands”* (Psalm 98: 8). I wish that the little rivers in us, that that are fed by the Source – Jesus Christ – clap their hands. The work of the saints is to praise God, not by words, but by work; God seeks action and not just sound<sup>1</sup>].

***“The mountains saw you and writhed; Torrents of water swept by. The deep roared, and lifted its waves on high”*** (Habakkuk 3: 10)

If the Word of the Living God, by His cross splits our land, to make out of it rivers of water that sing and praise Him by true spiritual work; By His dwelling in us, the heavy mountains of our sins would flee in terror before His face. What we count as being well established mountains, that no one can move, would, by the cross, become plains; As it is said in the book of the prophet Zechariah: *“Who are you, O Great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of ‘Grace, grace in it’”* (Zechariah 4: 7). In our study of the book of Zechariah<sup>2</sup>, we saw how the evil mountain is swept away, and how the Lord Christ, the Capstone, full of grace, will appear; ... Cut out without hands, and not coming from the seed of man, He would become a great mountain that fills the whole earth (Daniel 2: 34, 35). By that, the grace of God will flow like water without limit, to give a sound of inner praise; and the inner hands of the soul will be lifted up high to practice the heavenly work.

***“The sun and the moon stood still in their exalted place, at the light of Your arrows speeding by, at the gleam of Your flashing spear. In fury you trod the earth, In anger You trampled nations. You came forth for the salvation of Your people, for salvation with Your anointed”*** (Habakkuk 3: 11-13)

Praising God on His work along the ages, the prophet goes with his memory back to the days of Joshua the son of Nun, when he prayed for the sun and the moon to stand still in their habitation in heaven, till the people of God had revenge upon their enemies (Joshua 10: 12, 13). As Joshua in the light of the day, has overcome the enemy; In the field of the battle, namely, the holy church, the opponent of the devil; the shining of the Lord, the Sun of Righteousness, will scatter the darkness of the enemy, And the Lord will remain shining until the victory is completely realized.

He probably also means that, to the salvation work of God, the whole nature, even the sun and the moon, would submit; They would work together according to His ordinance to realize His Kingdom of light, and to destroy the kingdom of darkness.

And we can also say that the sun and the moon also stood still in their habitations, on the day of the cross, when they disappeared before the glory of the Sun of Righteousness, in protest, and feeling shame of what humanity has done; They stood still in awe, seeing how the Lord Christ has destroyed the devil and all his hosts, to liberate man from his servitude, as from that of the heathen nations; saying: *“In fury You*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Hom 25.

<sup>2</sup> راجع تفسير زكريا 4: 7.

*trampled nations; You came forth for the salvation of Your people; For salvation with Your anointed”.*

### **3- THE REJOICE OF SALVATION:**

***“You came forth for the salvation of Your people; For salvation with Your anointed” You crushed the head of the wicked house, laying it bare from foundation to neck. You pierced with their own arrows, the head of his warriors”*** (Habakkuk 3: 13, 14)

The prophet ends his praise by revealing the salvation of man by God, through destroying the devil’s authority on us, and by granting us the spirit of joy. By the cross, He crushed the head of the evil devil, laying him bare from foundation to neck, exposing his hidden deceit. The arrows that the devil has aimed toward us, will get back to him to destroy him completely, that he will have no more authority on us, or a place in us.

The fathers have often talked to us about the destruction of the devil’s authority, to give us the hope of the spiritual work without fear nor faltering; Of their words:

❖ On the cross, Christ put the devil and all his hosts to shame. When Christ was crucified with His body on the cross, He crucified the devil as well; the cross was a sign of conquest and a banner of victory. By being raised on the cross, the goal of the Lord Christ was to lift us up from the ground; I believe that the cross of our Savior was the ladder seen by Jacob.

**(St. Jerome)** <sup>1</sup>

❖ We learn the art of war so as to be able to wrestle, not against people, but against spirits. We are told by Him who dwells in us: *“I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy”* (Luke 10: 19; Namely, you are given the option, to wrestle or not to wrestle; If we choose to wrestle, it is because we are slothful. The apostle Paul did not choose to wrestle, but said: *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”* (Romans 8; 35); and he also said: *“And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly”* (Romans 16: 20). He carried authority when he said to the evil spirit: *“I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her”* (Acts 16: 18). This is not the language of someone wrestling; As he who wrestles has not yet conquered, and he who has conquered does not need to wrestle any more.

❖ If we so choose, God will make the devil trampled under our feet. What shame and misery to see him, instead, trample upon our heads, he, on whose head we are given the authority to trample?! How could this happen?! It is because of our slothfulness! It is our choice to make our enemy great, or to make him weak and helpless. If we are cautious, and stand beside our King, he will withdraw, and in his war against us, he would be like a little helpless child!

**(St. John Chrysostom)** <sup>2</sup>

That was the secret behind the rejoice of the prophet; when he saw the salvation work of God, by the destruction of the devil’s authority to the account of the kingdom of light. His heart indeed trembled when he saw the Chaldeans corrupt every fruit; Yet he

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. Hom 21.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Eph. Hom 22, In Philip. Hom 6.*

eventually realized that behind that chastisement, there was great benefit, when God turns it into a rejoice of salvation.

The prophet says: **“When I heard, my body trembled, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones; and my legs trembled, Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us”** (Habakkuk 3: 16)

His body trembled, his lips quivered, and decay crept into his bones, when he saw the enemy corrupt every spiritual fruition; Figs no more blossomed, vines no more gave fruits, and olive trees dried up. This is a portrait of man fallen under the devil; he will not enjoy the unity of the spirit (the fig) <sup>1</sup>, nor the work of the cross (the pressing of grapes), nor the inner peace (the olives); Namely, he will loose his inner life through his deprivation of the work of the Holy Spirit, and its connection to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It does not stop at the corruption of the inner depths, But even the body would loose its sanctification, to become like a dead corpse.

**“... The fields yield no food; Though the flock be cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls”** (Habakkuk 3: 17)

Finding no spiritual food, the body would hunger, get sick, and eventually spiritually die; Man would become like a fold without flock, and like stalls with no herd. ... That is what the enemy seeks: a loss of the holiness of the soul together with the body.

Yet, God would never forsake man like this, but would grant him back the rejoice of salvation; by presenting Himself as strength for him, and giving strength to his feet to set forth to heaven, to walk like deer on the holy hills, and never to descend to the mire and dust of the world; saying:

**“Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, He will make my feet like deer’s feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills. To the chief Musician, on my stringed instruments”** (Habakkuk 3: 18, 19)

The book started by suffering, and feeling anguish with bitterness, because of the inward and outward troubles; But, once the prophet entered into an open debate with God, stood as though at a watch post, and set himself on a rampart, to see the works of God; He realized that God Himself is the strength to His children; gives strength to their feet, and lifts them up high by His Holy Spirit above all events; He could then end his book with rejoice and joy

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<sup>1</sup>راجع تفسير "هوشع" المقدمة.