HABAKKUK

1 An oracle which the prophet Habakkuk received in a vision.

Divine justice

2 How long, O LORD, have I cried to thee, unanswered? I cry, 'Violence!', but thou dost not save.
3 Why dost thou let me see such misery, why countenance [Or dost thou let me see] wrongdoing?

Devastation and violence confront me; strife breaks out, discord raises its head,
4 and so law grows effete; justice does not come forth victorious; for the wicked outwit the righteous, and so justice comes out perverted.

5 Look, you treacherous people, look: here is what will astonish you and stun you, for there is work afoot in your days which you will not believe when it is told you.
6 It is this: I am raising up the Chaldaeans, that savage and impetuous nation, who cross the wide tracts of the earth to take possession of homes not theirs.
7 Terror and awe go with them; their justice and judgement are of their own making.
8 Their horses are swifter than hunting-leopards, keener than wolves of the plain [Or evening]; their cavalry wait ready, they spring forward, they come flying from afar like vultures swooping to devour the prey.
9 Their whole army advances, violence in their hearts; a sea of faces rolls on; they bring in captives countless as the sand.
10 Kings they hold in derision, rulers they despise; they despise every fortress, they raise siege-works and capture it.
11 Then they pass on like the wind and are gone; and dismayed are all those whose strength was their god.
12 Art thou not from of old, O LORD? – my God, the holy, the immortal [the immortal: prob. original rdg, altered in Heb to we shall not die].
O LORD, it is thou who hast appointed them to execute judgement;
O mighty God, thou who hast destined them to chastise,
13thou whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil,
and who canst not countenance wrongdoing,
why dost thou countenance the treachery of the wicked?
Why keep silent when they devour men more righteous than they?
14Why dost thou make men like the fish of the sea,
like gliding creatures that obey no ruler?
15They haul them up with hooks, one and all,
they catch them in nets
and drag them in their trawls;
then they make merry and rejoice,
16sacrificing to their nets
and burning offerings [Or incense] to their trawls;
for by these they live sumptuously
and enjoy rich fare.
17Are they then to unsheathe the sword every day,
to slaughter the nations without pity?

21I will stand at my post,
I will take up my position on the watch-tower,
I will watch to learn what he will say through me,
and what I shall reply when I am challenged [when I am challenged: or concerning my complaint].
2Then the LORD made answer:
Write down the vision, inscribe it on tablets,
ready for a herald to carry it with speed [ready ... speed or so that a man may read it easily];
3for there is still a vision for the appointed time.
At the destined hour it will come in breathless haste,
it will not fail.
If it delays, wait for it;
for when it comes will be no time to linger.
4The reckless will be unsure of himself,
while the righteous man will live by being faithful [Or by his faithfulness (cp Romans 1.17; Galatians 3.11)];
5as for the traitor in his over-confidence,
still less will he ride out the storm, for all his bragging.
Though he opens his mouth as wide as Sheol
and is insatiable as Death,
gathering in all the nations,
making all peoples his own harvest,
6surely they will all turn upon him
with insults and abuse, and say,
Woe betide you who heap up wealth that is not yours [prob. rdg, Heb adds till when]
and enrich yourself with goods taken in pledge!
7Will not your creditors suddenly start up,
will not all awake who would shake you till you are empty,
and will you not fall a victim to them?
8Because you yourself have plundered mighty [Or many] nations,
all the rest of the world will plunder you,
because of bloodshed and violence done in the land,
to the city and all its inhabitants.

9Woe betide you who seek unjust gain for your house,
to build your nest on a height,
to save yourself from the grasp of wicked men!
10Your schemes to overthrow mighty [Or many] nations
will bring dishonour to your house
and put your own life in jeopardy.
11The very stones will cry out from the wall
and from the timbers a beam will answer them.

12Woe betide you who have built a town with bloodshed
and founded a city on fraud,
13so that nations toil for a pittance,
and peoples weary themselves for a mere nothing!
Is not all this the doing of the LORD of Host?
14For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the glory of the LORD
as the waters fill the sea.

15Woe betide you who make your [prob. rdg, Heb his] companions drink the
outpouring of your wrath,
making them drunk, that you may watch their naked orgies!
16Drink deep draughts of shame, not of glory;
you too shall drink until you stagger.
The cup in the LORD’s right hand is passed to you,
and your shame will exceed [will exceed: prob. rdg, Heb unintelligible] your glory.
17The violence done to Lebanon shall sweep over you,
the havoc done to its beasts shall break your own spirit,
because of bloodshed and violence done in the land,
to the city and all its inhabitants.

18What use is an idol when its maker has shaped it? –
it is only an image, a source of lies;
or when the maker trusts what he has made? –
he is only making dumb idols.
19Woe betide him who says to the wood, ‘Wake up’,
to the dead stone, ‘Bestir yourself [prob. rdg, Heb adds he will teach]’!
Why, it is firmly encased in gold and silver
and has no breath in it.
20But the LORD is in his holy temple;
let all the earth be hushed in his presence.
A prayer for mercy

3 A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk.
   2 O LORD, I have heard tell of thy deeds;
      I have seen, O LORD, thy work [prob. rdg, Heb adds in the midst of the
      years quicken it].
      In the midst of the years thou didst make thyself known,
      and in thy wrath thou didst remember mercy.

3 God comes from Teman,
   the Holy One from Mount Paran;
   his radiance overspreads the skies,
   and his splendour fills the earth.
4 He rises like the dawn,
   with twin rays starting forth at his side;
   the skies are [the skies are: prob. rdg, Heb there is] the hiding-place of his
   majesty,
   and the everlasting [Or ancient] ways are for [and ... are for: transposed
   from end of v6] his swift flight [his swift flight: transposed, with slight
   change, from v7].
5 Pestilence stalks before him,
   and plague comes forth behind.
6 He stands still and shakes the earth,
   he looks and makes the nations tremble;
   the eternal mountains are riven,
   the everlasting [Or ancient] hills subside,
7 the tents of Cushan are snatched away [are snatched away: prob. rdg, Heb
   under wickedness],
   the tent-curtains of Midian flutter.
8 Art thou angry with the streams?
   Is thy wrath against the sea, O LORD?
   When thou dost mount thy horses,
   thy riding is to victory.
9 Thou dost draw thy bow from its case [Thou ... case: prob. rdg, Heb Thy
   bow was quite bared]
   and charge thy quiver with shafts.
   Thou cleavest the earth with rivers;
   10-11 the mountains see thee and writhe with fear.
   The torrent of water rushes by,
   and the deep sea thunders aloud.
   The sun forgets to turn in his course [The sun ... course: prob. rdg, Heb The
   sun raised the height of his hands],
   and the moon stands still at her zenith,
   at the gleam of thy speeding arrows
   and the glance of thy flashing spear.
12 With threats thou dost bestride the earth
   and trample down the nations in anger.
13 Thou goest forth to save thy people,
thou comest to save thy anointed;
thou dost shatter the wicked man’s house from the roof down [the wicked ... down: prob. rdg, Heb a head from the house of the wicked],
uncovering its foundations to the bare rock [bare rock: prob. rdg, Heb neck].
14 Thou piercest their [their: prob. rdg, Heb omitted] chiefs with thy [prob. rdg, Heb his] shafts,
and their leaders are torn from them by the whirlwind,
as they open [from them ... open: prob. rdg, Heb obscure] their jaws
to devour their wretched victims in secret.

15 When thou dost tread the sea with thy horses
the mighty waters boil.
16 I hear, and my belly quakes;
my lips quiver at the sound;
trembling comes over my bones,
and my feet totter in their tracks;
I sigh for the day of distress
to dawn over my assailants.
17 Although the fig-tree does not burgeon,
the vines bear no fruit,
the olive-crop fails,
the orchards yield no food,
the fold is bereft of its flock
and there are no cattle in the stalls,
18 yet I will exult in the LORD
and rejoice in the God of my deliverance.
19 The LORD God is my strength,
who makes my feet nimble as a hind’s
and sets me to range the heights.