HABAKKUK

 $\mathbf{1}^1$ An oracle which the prophet Habakkuk received in a vision.

Divine justice

²How long, O LORD, have I cried to thee, unanswered? I cry, 'Violence!', but thou dost not save.

³Why 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, ⁴and so law grows effete; justice does not come forth victorious; for the wicked outwit the righteous, and so justice comes out perverted.

⁵Look, 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. ⁶It 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. ⁷Terror and awe go with them; their justice and judgement are of their own making. ⁸Their 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. ⁹Their whole army advances, violence in their hearts; a sea of faces rolls on; they bring in captives countless as the sand. ¹⁰Kings they hold in derision, rulers they despise; they despise every fortress, they raise siege-works and capture it. ¹¹Then they pass on like the wind and are gone; and dismayed are all those whose strength was their god. ¹²Art 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

3¹A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk.

²O 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.

³God comes from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran; his radiance overspreads the skies, and his splendour fills the earth.

⁴He 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].

⁵Pestilence stalks before him, and plague comes forth behind.

⁶He stands still and shakes the earth,

he looks and makes the nations tremble;

the eternal mountains are riven,

the everlasting [Or ancient] hills subside,

⁷the tents of Cushan are snatched away [are snatched away: *prob. rdg, Heb* under wickedness],

the tent-curtains of Midian flutter.

⁸Art thou angry with the streams?

Is thy wrath against the sea, O LORD?

When thou dost mount thy horses,

thy riding is to victory.

⁹Thou 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;

¹⁰⁻¹¹the 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.

¹²With threats thou dost bestride the earth and trample down the nations in anger.

¹³Thou 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].

14Thou 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.

¹⁵When thou dost tread the sea with thy horses the mighty waters boil. ¹⁶I 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. ¹⁷Although 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, ¹⁸yet I will exult in the LORD and rejoice in the God of my deliverance. ¹⁹The LORD God is my strength, who makes my feet nimble as a hind's and sets me to range the heights.