Synopsis of the Books of the Bible

Habakkuk

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

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Introduction

The ways of God developed in His word

How diverse and perfect is the development of the ways of God in His word! Not only does it contain the great events that establish the fact of His government, and the character of that government — not only the proofs of His fidelity to His people, and His estimate of the evil that led to judgment, but also His answer to every feeling caused by the series of events by which He chastised them, the relief which He affords to the anguish that must be felt by one who is faithful, on account of the affliction of God's beloved people, together with the profitable exercise of his faith. The perfect ways of God are unfolded on the one side, and on the other the heart is formed to the intelligence of those ways, and to the enjoyment of the full effect of the faithfulness of the God of love; while, during the expectation of this effect, confidence in God Himself is established, and the links of the heart with God are abundantly strengthened.

The subject of Habakkuk's prophecy

It is of the latter part, the development of faith and of spiritual affections amid the trial, that Habakkuk treats in his prophecy. It speaks of the exercise of the heart of one who, full of the Spirit, is attached to the people of God. Still, it is Israel that is brought before us.

Chapter 1

The prophet's complaint of evil

First of all, the prophet complains that the evil which exists among the people is insupportable. This is the natural effect of the working of the Spirit of God in a heart jealous for His glory and detesting evil. The heart of the prophet, formed in the school of the law, speaks perhaps of the evil in the spirit of the law. The Spirit of God does not bring him out of this position, which was properly that of a prophet before God, and he judges the evil in a holy manner, according to a heart that was faithful to the blessings of Jehovah.

Jehovah's revelation of His chastisement

Thereupon Jehovah reveals to him the terrible judgment by which He will chastise the people who thus gave themselves up to evil. He would raise up against them the Chaldeans, those types of pride and energy, who, successful in all their enterprises, sought glory only in the opinion they had of themselves. Their head, forsaking the true God who had given them their strength, would worship a god of his own.* {* Sad effect of pride, which, unknown to itself, is the parent of weakness! Man cannot sustain himself; and the pride which rejects the true God must and does make one for itself, or adopts what its fathers have made, for pride cannot stand in the presence of the supreme God. Man makes a god: this, too, is pride. But he cannot do without one; and after all, the natural heart is the slave of that which it

cannot do without.}

The wicked established in power by Jehovah for correction

But all this awakens in the prophet a different sentiment from that which he before experienced. Here was his God denied by the instrument of vengeance, and the beloved people trodden down by one more wicked than themselves. But faith knows that its God, the true God, is the one and only Lord,* and (already a profound consolation assuring the heart of salvation) that it is Jehovah who has established the wicked in power for the correction of His people. But shall they continue to fill their net with men, as though they were but fish? {* To Habakkuk of course Jehovah; to us the Father is revealed in the Son, and so one Lord, Jesus Christ.}

Chapter 2

God's clear explanation given to comfort His people

There the prophet stops, that God in His time may explain this; watches, like a sentinel, to receive the answer of God to the anxiety of his soul. God, in order to comfort His prophet and all His faithful people, commands him to write the answer so plainly, that he who runs may read it. He bears in mind the affections of His people; He appreciates them, for in truth they are given, according to His own heart, by the Holy Ghost.

God's answer to faith: sure deliverance: patience to have her perfect work

He will, even before the deliverance, comfort the heart that is oppressed by the feelings to which faith itself gives birth. If faith produces them, the answer to that faith will not be wanting. Deliverance would not yet come. The vision was yet for an appointed time, but deliverance on God's part would assuredly come. God, who sets value on faith, would Himself intervene. If deliverance tarried, the faithful should wait for it. It would surely come and would not tarry. To the heart of man it tarried. Patience was to have its perfect work. The patience of God had been long and perfect. The time of deliverance should not tarry one moment after the hour appointed by God in His wisdom.

Pride judged: the portion of the just — to live by faith and trust Jehovah

God had judged the spirit of pride, whose effects had overwhelmed the heart of the prophet. The oppressor was not upright, but the portion of the just was to live by faith, and by faith he should live. A deliverance for the people, which did not, so to say, require this faith, might have been preferred. But God would have the heart thus exercised. The righteous must pass through it and learn to trust in Jehovah, to count on Him in all circumstances, to learn what He is in Himself (come what may).

The oppressor brought judgment on himself: Jehovah in His holy temple over all

Nevertheless, although God allowed His people, on account of their sins, to be crushed by injustice and oppression, the conduct of the oppressor cried unto heaven, and brought judgment on his own head. Woe unto him! for, even apart from God's relations with His people, it is He who judges the earth and delivers it from the oppressor and the wicked. His graven image shall not profit him: what can the dumb stone do for the man that set it up? But Jehovah was in His holy place, in His temple. All the earth should keep silence before Him. It should be filled with the knowledge of His glory, as the bed of the sea with the waters that cover it. The people of the world should labour as in the fire for very vanity, and this from Jehovah; for He will fill the world with the knowledge of Himself.

Chapter 3

The solemn presence of God: remembrance of His power

This answer brings home to the heart of the prophet the solemn presence of God, and leads him to look for a revival of God's working in the midst of the people in grace, and turns him back to God's first favour, and recalls to the prophet all the glory of Jehovah, when He appeared for His people at the beginning, when He came out of His place and overturned every obstacle in order to establish His people in blessing.

At this remembrance of His power, the prophet trembles, but in the consciousness that it is the source of a perfect and assured rest in the day of trouble, when the destroyer should come up and invade the people.

The blessed result of God's lessons

He concludes his prophecy with the blessed result of all these precious lessons, namely, the expression of perfect confidence in Jehovah. He would rejoice and be glad in Him, if all the blessing should fail. Jehovah Himself was his strength, his trust, and his support, and He would set him on the high places of His blessing, giving him, as it were, hinds' feet to ascend there by His favour.

There is nothing finer than this development of the thoughts of the Spirit of God, the sorrows and anxieties produced by Him, the answer of God to give understanding and strengthen faith, in order that the heart may be in full communion with Himself.

It will be remarked here, that it is the idolatrous oppressor who especially appears, although the first invasion is described, for that was the immediate cause of the prophet's anguish. The Chaldeans, therefore, are distinctly named. It is that people, as we know, who reduced the people of God to captivity.

Summary of the prophecy

In sum, in this prophet we have (for the comfort of the faithful heart, which loves God's people because they are His, and hence is distressed by the wickedness found among them, and still more by the judgment which falls upon them) the answer of God, explaining His ways to faith, and His sure faithfulness to His promises. He knows the oppressor, but the just must live by faith.