Bede's Commentary on the Song of Habakkuk

The Venerable Bede (AD 673–735)

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The allegorical exposition on the Song of Habakkuk, which you asked to be explained, dearest sister in Christ, mainly declares the mysteries of the Lord's Passion. Hence, according to the custom of the holy, universal, and apostolic Church, it is solemnly repeated every week in the morning praises on the sixth day of the Sabbath, on which the same Passion was completed. But it also mystically describes the event of His incarnation, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, the faith of the Gentiles, and the perfidy of the Jews. The prophet, contemplating the state of the present age, had seen the peace of sinners and the afflictions of the righteous, had seen the wicked abound in riches, and the innocent be subjected to daily scourges; had seen impiety in the place of judgment, and iniquity in the place of justice; had seen the tears of the innocent and no consoler, nor anyone able to resist the violence of the slanderers, deprived as they were of all help. Knowing also that these and countless other such things could not have happened without divine providence, troubled greatly in spirit and sighing deeply from his heart, he cried out to the Lord: "How long, O Lord, shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save? (Hab. 1:2). And again: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, and you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.

Why then do you look upon those who deal treacherously and are silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they? Why do you make men like the fish of the sea, like reptiles that have no ruler? (Hab. 1:13-14). Yet amid these reflections, he immediately recalled the dispensation of the Lord's incarnation and passion, which he had known in the spirit of prophecy, and understood that he had complained much more bitterly than he ought about the afflictions of the saints in this life, to whom eternal rest was promised in the future, when even the Son of God appearing in the flesh was not to leave the world without the suffering of the cross, who was to be born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mother, and was to live in the world without any sin. And beginning his prayer to the Lord concerning his ignorance, he thus begins.

Commentary

[Habakkuk 3:2] -- Lord, I heard Your report and feared. The report of the Lord the Savior is what He heard from the Father, that He would come in the flesh, be born into the world, dwell among the weak as the Almighty, among sinners as the Just, among men as God, perform heavenly works, teach heavenly precepts, promise heavenly gifts, be tempted, scourged, mocked, killed, and by His death destroy our death; rising from the dead, ascend into the heavens, and having sent the Spirit from above, illuminate the world with the grace of truth. Of this report He Himself frequently made mention in the Gospel, saying: "But He that sent me is true, and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him" (John 8:26). And again: "But I have called you friends, because all things whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you" (John 15:15). Concerning this, John the Baptist also says: "He that comes from heaven is above all, and what He has seen and heard, that He testifies" (John 3:31). Therefore, the prophet heard this report of the Lord in spirit, and feared because he complained of the oppressions of the righteous in the world, while even the Lord Himself, who makes the prosperous journey for us to salvation and life, met with death's end in the world. He feared because he lamented over the tribulations of the saints, who are not only to be delivered from tribulations by the Lord but also to be crowned eternally with the Lord.

[Habakkuk 3:2] -- I considered Your works and was afraid: surely those works by which He redeemed the world, becoming obedient to the Father unto death, even the death of the cross: that, as the Apostle again says, through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil (Hebrews 2:14). Indeed, the more one diligently considers these works, the more one trembles at the works of one's own frailty. [Habakkuk 3:2] -- In the midst of two animals you will be known. It can be understood as in the midst of two animals, in the midst of Moses and Elijah. For there he was known to the three disciples on the holy mountain because he was to die, telling them that he would suffer in Jerusalem. There, he was known because he would rise again and would become immortal, with his countenance made bright like the sun, and his garments shining like snow. There, he was known because he was the Son of God, with a voice from the Father in heaven saying to him: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to him (Matthew 17:5). It can also, not unreasonably, be taken as in the midst of two thieves, among whom he was crucified and by dying was known to be a man. However, with the sun darkened, the earth shaken, and the other miracles narrated in the Gospel happening around the cross, he was known to be God. By interceding himself to the Father for his murderers, he was known to be most pious. By this same example, the prophet, who foresaw this in the spirit, was admonished not only to patiently bear the oppressions of the wicked but also to extend the grace of his kindness to those persecuting him.

[Habakkuk 3:2] -- When the years draw near, you will be known, when the time arrives, you will be revealed. The Apostles refer to this when they say: After the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law (Gal. IV, 4). The prophets foresaw these times and years from afar and

greeted them from a distance, saying that when the years drew near and the time arrived, the Lord would be revealed and recognized. For it was also heard above, as the Lord said to him: Though the vision is yet for an appointed time; it will speak at the end and will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not delay (Habak. II, 3). Hearing this, and considering the works of the passion, he feared and was in awe, because he was moved by the transitory happiness of the wicked and the temporal affliction of the good. However, for having made a penance worthy of his unaware wrongdoings, he soon trusted that he could obtain forgiveness for his error. Hence he consequently adds:

[Habakkuk 3:2] -- In that time when my soul is troubled, in the wrath of mercy you will remember. When my soul is troubled, he said, struck with worthy sorrow of satisfaction and repentance because of the fear of your wrath and judgment, which I dread to have incurred carelessly, I believe that I will more quickly obtain the mercy of the pardon desired from you: where the marvelous swiftness of divine pity should be considered. He said that he was troubled in soul only because of the wrath of God, and immediately added that he was turned to mercy from wrath. To which the Psalmist's saying is similar: I said: I will confess my injustices against myself to the Lord, and you forgave the impiety of my heart (Ps. 31:3). But such indulgence can be for the smallest faults. Otherwise, our offenses, the graver they are, the greater and longer repentance, weeping, and alms they require. Up to this point, the prophet briefly encompasses with what fear of mind he was struck, having heard and more carefully considered the event of the Lord's incarnation and passion. Then, more fully, he immediately describes what that hearing, what those works of the Lord were that he was so moved by. It follows:

[Habakkuk 3:3] -- God will come from Lebanon and the Holy One from the dense and dark mountain. Lebanon is the highest mountain of Phoenicia, notable for its lofty, incorruptible, and aromatic trees, from which the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem was also made, as Scripture testifies; hence in the Scriptures, sometimes even the temple itself is designated by the name of Lebanon. Hence, for instance, Zechariah speaks about the coming of the Chaldean army against it: "Open, O Lebanon, your gates, and let fire consume your cedars" (Zech. XI, 1). Therefore, God comes from Lebanon, because the Lord appearing in the flesh sowed the first seeds of the Gospel in that very temple, and from there filled the entire world with the seed of His faith and truth. Hence, Isaiah says, "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah II, 3). He sprinkled there the first seeds of faith not only through the apostles, who, filled with the Holy Spirit after His passion and resurrection, laid the first foundations of the Church there by preaching, whose sound then went out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world (Psalm XVIII, 5); but also through Himself, first in that very temple giving testimony of the faith to be had in Him, sitting in the midst of the doctors when He was of tender age, asking them questions as a mere boy, but answering those teaching as God of eternal majesty;

where, being sought and found by His parents, He Himself indicated that He was God and God's Son by saying: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business? (Luke

II, 49). However, it should be noted that in the Hebrew truth this verse is as follows: "God will come from Teman," that is, from the South, which has an easy sense according to the letter, because Bethlehem, where the Lord was born, is situated to the south of Jerusalem. And when He was brought to Jerusalem by His parents on the fortieth day of His birth, that an offering might be made for Him according to the law, God indeed came from the South. And he says, "the Holy One from the dense and dark mountain. The Holy One, the same Mediator of God and men, who is plainly called God above, of whom Gabriel announcing to the Virgin Mother said: "Therefore, the Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke I, 35). The mountain from which the same Holy One is sung to come can be understood to mean the kingdom of the Jews, from which He took His fleshly origin. From which also Daniel saw the stone cut out without hands, that is, Christ begotten without the work of a man, who crushing the kingdoms of the world, would fill the whole world with the glory of His name (Dan. II, 45). This mountain is rightly called dense and dark;

for it has many fruitful trees, that is, many holy men laden with the fruits of virtue, who both instruct our hunger with the sweetest taste of their doctrine, and with the shade of their intercession protect our frailty from being dried up by the heat of tribulations from the inner greenness of love. This fits figuratively with what the apostle Peter, certainly a distinguished tree of this mountain, not only refreshes the hungry and thirsty for righteousness with the fruit of doctrine but also saves the sick with the shadow of his body (Acts V, 15). These holy and sublime men can also be designated by the term "South," from whom God is said to come, on account of the fervent love with which they are usually enflamed in the Lord and the doctrine with which they enlighten men, from which South God came because He deigned to be incarnate from such men. From which South God comes daily, when, reading or hearing their words or examples, the love or knowledge of truth is more perfectly generated in our hearts.

[Habakkuk 3:3] -- His majesty covered the heavens, and the earth is full of his praise. The dispensation of the Lord's incarnation having been described, he immediately added the mystery of the ascension by which the same humanity was to be glorified, according to the saying of the Psalmist: His going forth is from the end of heaven, and his circuit reaches to the end thereof (Ps. 18:7). For his majesty covered the heavens, because he who was made a little lower than the angels through the incarnation, was crowned with glory and honor through the resurrection, and established above the works of the Father's hands through the ascension, and all things are placed under his feet (Ps. 8:6), and as the apostles preached, the earth was filled with his praise: this very thing being briefly but very clearly included at both the beginning and end of the same psalm, when it is said: O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth! for your magnificence is elevated above the heavens (Ps. 8:2). But even before the passion and resurrection, when the Word made flesh dwelt among us, his majesty covered the heavens, because the assumed humanity, though still mortal, surpassed the heavenly powers. And the earth is full of his praise, with the same heavenly virtues truly knowing that he was the creator of the earth, as of all creation by

divinity, who then dwelled on earth through humanity: from which, at his birth, they sang: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will (Lk. 2:14).

[Habakkuk 3:4] -- His brightness will be like the light. The brightness of the virtues and the doctrine of the Lord and Savior will enlighten the believers; from which he is called the Sun of Righteousness in the Scriptures; but because the same brightness could not shine perfectly in the world unless he, having tasted death for a time, destroyed the kingdom of death, and rising from the dead granted the hope and faith of rising to the world, it is rightly added:

[Habakkuk 3:4] -- Horns are in His hands. There the power of His glory was confirmed. He calls the transverse wood of the cross horns, which He held fixed by the hands, so that by overcoming all death in this manner of death, He might thus confirm the power of His glory in the hearts of the chosen, so that they are not retarded from His love by any terrors or blandishments; also promising them the glory of future incorruption, through which the last enemy, death, will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26). Finally, on the holy mountain, with Peter, James, and John present, His splendor shone like light; and they were indeed delighted by the sight of this splendor, but nonetheless, it was proven how fragile and weak they still were at the time of His passion: but after He accepted the horns of the cross in His hands, there the power of His glory was confirmed: so that it could not be driven away from the hearts of the faithful by terrors, nor wounds, nor even death itself. The kingdoms of this world can be suggested in the horns, as is the custom of the prophets. (The sublimity of the human mind, whether good or reprobate, can be designated by the term horns). And horns are in the hands of Christ, because He Himself is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15). Horns are in His hands, to humble one, and exalt another, He breaks all the horns of sinners, which are foolishly exalted, and the horns of the just are exalted, namely desires devoted to God, by which they strive to overcome all contests of the impious and vices.

[Habakkuk 3:4] -- And He placed the love firm in the strength of His fortitude. The saints indeed loved the fortitude of Christ with intimate love, even before His passion; but this very love was not firm until, having completed His passion and resurrection, He more fully gave them the grace of the Holy Spirit. Then indeed it was made so firm that not even the horns of kings themselves, namely the power of the insolent, could break it. [Habakkuk 3:5] -- The word will go before his face, and it went out into the fields. Before the Lord came in the flesh, the words of the prophets preceded, bearing witness to his coming; and these same words went out into the fields when, as the apostles preached, they were spread throughout the whole world: not only in the prophetic writings did the word of preaching precede the Lord, but also in the apostles, when they evangelized the world about the now accomplished advent of Christ in the flesh, the word went before his face, because obviously the doctrine of truth first reaches the ears of those who are to be taught, and then the faith and understanding of the Word enlightens hearts and makes them worthy for God to inhabit; this is typologically designated in the Gospel, when the Lord himself sent disciples

to preach in every city and place to which he himself was about to come: which we see done in the same order even to this day; for the Lord follows his preachers, because the word of the teacher must first be heard, and thus the light of truth is established in the heart of the listener, whence it is aptly added:

[Habakkuk 3:6] -- His feet stood, and the earth was moved. For when the steps of truth are impressed upon the minds of the listeners through the preaching doctor, soon the mind itself, troubled in its consideration, is moved. However, the feet of the Lord can not inconveniently be understood as the doctors themselves, through whom the word is ministered, for he who is present everywhere by himself is carried into the whole world through them as through his feet. These feet stand, and the earth is moved, because the more the holy doctors persist strongly in preaching and preserving the truth, the sooner the hearts of earthly people are struck to repent of their errors; and because this action of repentance should be attributed not to the human preacher but to illuminating grace, it is rightly added: [Habakkuk 3:6] -- He looked, and the nations melted away. Which is to say openly: The Lord had mercy, and the nations repented; by which gaze he looked at Peter when he denied; and he, pricked by the memory of his sin, immediately melted into tears.

[Habakkuk 3:6] -- The mountains were broken exceedingly. He calls them proud mountains, and about the vanity of this world, or kingship, or wisdom, or wealth, exalting themselves, who, with the Lord watching, were not only broken but exceedingly broken, when, by His mercy, some from such ranks not only descended from empty and proud heights but also opposed the same by living and preaching. Indeed, Saul and Matthew were mountains, the former elevated by the wisdom of carnal letters, the latter by the mammon of iniquity, but when each was converted to the teaching of humility, they were made disciples of Christ, the mountains surely were exceedingly broken. [Habakkuk 3:6] -- The everlasting hills flowed down. By the name of hills, as with mountains, proud men are expressed, but perhaps inflated with a lesser arrogance of elation, yet not free from the guilt of swelling pride, and therefore healthily inclined, so that they may deserve to be elevated by the Lord. They are rightly called everlasting hills, because while temporarily humbled, they flow down from the swelling of pride, they are glorified forever by Him who says: And everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled (Luke 14:11). Another translation for everlasting hills plainly has hills of the world, which pertains to the distinction of the hills of the Lord, that is, of holy men, who, because of the loftiness of mind, disregarding all temporal and lowly things, are worthy of such a name, about whom the Psalmist says to the Lord: Let the mountains receive peace for Your people, and the hills righteousness (Psalm 72:3).

[Habakkuk 3:6] -- I have seen His ways of eternity beyond the labors. The ways are of the temporality of the Lord, by which He came into the world, so that He might appear to men for a time; but His ways of eternity, by which, leaving the world bodily, He returned to the Father, with whom He remained eternally, even while He conversed temporally in the world: indeed, He longed for these ways, when approaching His passion, He said to the Father: I have glorified You on the earth, I have finished the work which You gave Me to

do (John 17:4). These are concerning the ways of assumed temporality, and immediately concerning the ways of eternity He added: And now, Father, glorify Me with Yourself with the glory which I had with You before the world was (John 17:5). The prophet saw these ways of eternity beyond the labors, namely of the incarnation and passion, of which it was said above: God shall come from Lebanon, or from the South, and: Rays are in His hands, and other such things, which are found many in this same song. Of these labors the Apostle says: He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8); and immediately concerning the ways of eternity, which the Mediator of God and men deserved through these labors, he added:

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and under the earth; and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-10); and because through these same labors of His, and through these same ways of His eternity, when, having completed the labors of His passion, He returned to the Father, not only the people of the Jews but also of the nations were to come to eternal rest, aptly it is added:

[Habakkuk 3:7] -- The tents of the Ethiopians will be terrified, and the tents of the land of Midian. For who does not know that the Ethiopians and Midianites are peoples of the nations? By whose names all the nations of the Gentiles are hinted, who, upon hearing the preaching of the gospel, would be shaken with a healthy fear, so that just as the prophet heard the future report of the Lord and feared, considered the future works of His incarnation, and trembled, so the nations, upon hearing the same report through the apostles, and with His works already accomplished, would begin to serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. And appropriately, he first mentioned the Ethiopians, who are at the ends of the world, to mystically indicate that the sound of the preachers would go out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world. In this mystery, the eunuch of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, as it is read in the Acts of the Apostles, the first fruits of the Gentiles, with Philip evangelizing, received the faith and sacraments of Christ. The people of the Midianites, however, descended from one of the sons of Abraham from Keturah, who was called Midian, and is in the desert of the Saracens towards the east of the Red Sea in Arabia. Therefore, let the Ethiopians fear the name of Christ, so that His faith may be signified as reaching the ends of the world.

Let the Midianites also fear, thus indicating that the Mediterranean peoples too may be saved through this. But that he did not say: The Ethiopians and Midianites will be terrified, but the tents of the Ethiopians will be terrified, and the tents of the land of Midian, is said in that manner of speech, as it is said in the Gospel: And the whole city went out to meet Jesus; and in the psalm: And your cup intoxicating (Psalm 21:5), while it was not the city itself, but those who were in the city, who went out; nor was it the cup itself, but that which is in the cup that is accustomed to intoxicate: this figure of speech is called metonymy in

Greek, that is, transnomination, when through that which contains, that which is contained is shown.

[Habakkuk 3:8] -- Is your wrath against the rivers, O Lord, or your anger against the rivers, or your indignation against the sea? By the term "rivers" and "sea," the hearts of the unbelievers are signified, which are rightly called rivers because they flow downwards with the whole force of their intention; the sea, because they are darkened within by turbulent and bitter thoughts, and they exalt themselves above others with swollen waves of arrogance. Therefore he asks, did those who sink their minds from heavenly desires into the appetite for lowly things, and those who, unstable with pride in their spirits, raise themselves against their neighbors, sin so grievously that the deserved wrath in such people should never be lifted? Or will you bestow the grace of your mercy on all those around the world sinning in either a lighter or graver manner as it appears in the world? For indeed I see that you are going to send apostles to proclaim your glory to the nations; but who will believe is known by you, not by human knowledge. This is what follows:

[Habakkuk 3:8] -- For you will ascend riding on your horses, and your cavalry is salvation. That is, you will ascend into the hearts of your chosen ones through the illumination of grace, through which, under your guidance, they will tread the path of virtues, and by preaching you across the whole world, carrying the life of eternal salvation, they will proclaim it to the world. The figure of this cavalry was also shown in the Lord literally when, while heading to Jerusalem, he rode a donkey, with the crowds that went before, and those that followed, and those that came together singing: Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord (John 12:13). In this riding, salvation was proclaimed, for surely it signified their spiritual journey, whereby with the Lord leading them through the apostles, they are led to see the kingdoms of the Jerusalem above, which is the mother of us all (Galatians 4:26).

[Habakkuk 3:9] -- Stretching, you extend your bow over scepters, says the Lord. The bow signifies the sudden coming of the divine judgment, by which he foresaw that even scepters, that is, the kingdoms of the world, should be examined. Therefore, the prophet insinuates what the Lord, ascending on his horses, that is, filling and ruling the apostles and their successors with his grace, does among them: Stretching, he says, you extend your bow over scepters, that is, by threatening through the teachers, you will threaten that your judgment will come suddenly, so that whoever is terrified at the threat of wrath, as at an extended bow, and takes care to supplicate to your piety, will not feel the release of the arrows, that is, the threat of eternal punishments. But when he added, stretching, you extend your bow over scepters, he added: Says the Lord, he signifies God the Father, about whom the Son himself says: The Father, he says, judges no one; but has given all judgment to the Son (John 5:22).

[Habakkuk 3:9] -- The earth will be split by rivers. Rivers here are not the same as those above, from which he feared the anger and fury of the Lord, but rather those about which he himself said in the Gospel: He who believes in me, as the Scripture says, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. And the evangelist explains: This he said about the Spirit,

whom those who believed in him were to receive (John 7:38). By these rivers, therefore, the earth will be split, when the hearts of the carnal, irrigated by the word of saving doctrine, humble themselves, breaking the hardness of their disbelief, and open the bosom of their internal thought, which had been badly closed, to receive the words of salutary reproof or exhortation; which is explained more broadly subsequently when it is said:

[Habakkuk 3:10] -- The waters shall see you, and the nations shall mourn. Indeed, the hearts of sinners, broken to the acknowledgment and confession of the truth by the frequent exhortation of teachers, as if by the flood of frequent torrents, see God for now through faith, and lament that they have been separated from Him for so long by their guilt; yet when their sorrow of repentance is ended, they see Him more fully in the future by sight, and rejoice forever in the blessed vision of Him. It can also be understood in this way that it is said the earth will be split by rivers, as if it were said that the earth is to be split so that newly formed rivers might arise from it—a phenomenon often recounted in ancient histories, namely, that, when an earthquake occurs, rivers that were not there appear. Whoever understands prudently does not doubt that this can happen, because the earth is as full of countless water veins as the human body is full of blood veins; according to this perception, the earth is split by rivers when a carnal conscience, broken to repentance, progresses so much over time with the help of divine grace that it can also bring forth streams of doctrines to others, watering the parched hearts of others with its example or words to bear the fruits of virtues.

[Habakkuk 3:10] -- Sprinkling waters on the paths, the abyss gave its voice from the height of its imagination. The same teachers are symbolized by the name abyss, who are also symbolized above by the rivers, but they are called rivers because of the power of stronger reproach, by which they cut through the hardness of the earthly mind to bring it to repentance for its errors. The abyss is rightly called by the depth of knowledge with which they are filled within, attested by Solomon, who says: "Deep waters are the words from the mouth of a man" (Prov. XVIII, 4). Therefore, the abyss gives its voice sprinkling waters on the paths, when the holy preachers, filled inwardly in their hearts with the deep knowledge of truth, outwardly present the ministry of the word to those who listen, gradually and in parts according to the capacity of the weak, bringing forth what they themselves hold inwardly in much and ample measure. However, he says "on the paths" in the works, either of the same teachers or their hearers. For they sprinkle waters on their paths when they show examples of rightly living wherever they walk, with the voice of preaching always showing to those who watch. They sprinkle waters on the paths of those who watch when, by teaching and living, they show in advance by which ways of actions they should enter. If, however, it is read as some manuscripts have:

"Disperse waters on the paths," it is clearly said by God, who Himself spread the waters of life from the fountains of Israel far and wide into the nations of the whole world, saying to His disciples: "Go, teach all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Well then, when He had said that the abyss would give its voice, He added "from the height of its imagination," because that which the holy preachers proclaim

marvelously outside to us proceeds indeed from that fountain of wisdom by which they, amazed themselves, are illuminated inwardly with contemplation of heavenly joys. Did not the great abyss give its voice from the height of its imagination when the apostle Paul said: "Our mouth is open to you, O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged; you are not narrowed in us, but you are narrowed in your own bowels. I speak as to children, be enlarged yourselves also" (II Cor. VI, 11). However, from where or in what order it happened that the world was sprinkled with saving waters, and that the abyss of heavenly wisdom thundered unto the earth, is subsequently shown when it is said:

[Habakkuk 3:11] -- The sun was raised, and the moon stood in its place. For the sun, the Lord of righteousness, was raised to heaven after his passion and resurrection, and having sent the Spirit from the Father, he illuminated the Church and spread it through the whole world, so that it might stand in its place, that is, after the mystery of the Lord's incarnation was fulfilled, rising from a long languor of infidelity, standing in faith, acting manfully, and being strengthened in his love. And because he had aptly compared Christ to the sun and the Church to the moon, he immediately subjected it to the same sun.

[Habakkuk 3:11] -- In light, your arrows will go forth, in the brightness of the splendor of arms. The arrows of Christ, however, are his words, by which the hearts of men are pierced, so that with the wound of salvation inflicted, the faithful soul may say: "I am wounded with love." Certainly, these arrows go forth in light, because through the ministry of teachers, the words of truth became known openly to the world, according to what the same Truth commanded them, saying: "What I tell you in darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered, preach on the rooftops" (Matthew 10:27). And since the brightness of miracles followed the words of light, he added: "In the brightness of the splendor of your arms." For warriors strike down their adversaries with arrows, defending themselves from wounds with weapons; hence, appropriately it signifies the words of the preachers, by which they overcome the depravity of unbelievers, and the miracles by which they confirm the truth of their preaching. Therefore, the arrows of Christ go forth in light, they go forth in the brightness of the splendor of his arms, because the great deeds he accomplished, the mysteries he revealed, the commandments he set forth, the rewards he promised, are now known to the whole world more clearly than the sun through the evangelical writings. And the holy teachers, because they are children of light, whatever they do or speak with his gift, naturally shine brightly with light and splendor.

[Habakkuk 3:12] -- In your threatening, you will humble the earth, and in your fury, you will bring down nations. By threatening the severity of judgment by which the wicked are condemned, you will healthily humble those who were accustomed to place earthly things before heavenly things, so that, with earthly desires gradually diminished, they might begin to understand and seek what is above; and by inflicting fury, you will condemn forever those who, in their obstinate exaltation, despised being humbled for a time, which the Psalmist prays might not happen to him, saying: "O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor chasten me in your wrath" (Psalm 6:2).

[Habakkuk 3:13] -- You went out for the salvation of your people, to save your anointed ones. The Mediator between God and men went forth from the Father and came into the world, not to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He calls all the elect anointed ones, who are most rightly named by this title because of the anointing of spiritual grace; hence the Psalmist says about those who, wishing to harm the saints, were restrained by divine prohibition: "He rebuked kings for their sake, saying, 'Do not touch my anointed ones'" (Psalm 105:14). However, he saved his anointed ones, not those he found as anointed, but those he made his own anointed, that is, anointed ones, by going forth from the Father and appearing in the flesh through the Spirit of adoption. Concerning this anointing, admonishing his listeners, the Apostle John says: "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth" (1 John 2:27). This verse is found in some editions as: "You went out to save your people through Jesus Christ your Son," which is understood as said to the Father because he went out to save his people through Jesus Christ his Son. For God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and because the same going forth, that is, his coming into the world, was to be not only for the resurrection of the faithful but also for the ruin of the faithless, it is aptly added:

[Habakkuk 3:13] -- You sent death upon the heads of the enemies; you stirred up bonds up to the neck. For indeed, to his chosen ones, whom the prophet had called Christ's, he brought the joy of salvation, but to those who neglected his anointing grace, he sent eternal death. This was fulfilled even corporally in the very Jewish people, who pursued the Lord appearing in flesh unto death, after they crucified him, not many years intervening, when the Roman army fell upon them; excepting only those who withdrew into the faith of evangelical grace, they were condemned with an enormous disaster, and moreover deprived of their kingdom and homeland; and this is what he said: You stirred up bonds up to the neck; namely the neck of the kingdom, which they had raised against the Lord before, about which the most blessed protomartyr Stephen said to them in their fury against him: Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit (Acts VII, 51). But the Lord stirred up bonds up to the neck, when he sent the hostile army for the overthrow of the proud nation, not only of the Jews but of all who refused to accept the humility of the Christian faith. The Lord dashes pride according to what the Psalmist sings about the saints: And the two-edged swords in their hands to execute vengeance on the nations, reproaches on the peoples, to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with iron fetters (Ps. CXLIX, 6); iron, evidently, because eternal, which once taken, can never be loosed. But if anyone were to say it should be read in the plural: You stirred up bonds up to the necks, the sense is the same. For the just Lord will strike down the necks of sinners.

[Habakkuk 3:14] -- You cut off the heads of the mighty in their alienation; the nations will be moved in it. In the Greek, it is written "in ecstasy," which some have interpreted as "in stupor," others "in mental excess." Whether it is called stupor, alienation, or mental excess, it all means the same thing: when someone, astonished and bewildered by a sudden miracle, is rendered alien from their own mind, something the Evangelical history frequently recounts as having happened to the Jews, saying they were astounded and marveled at the teachings

and virtues of Jesus, saying: "Where did this man get all these things, whose father and mother we know?" (John 6:42). And in the Acts of the Apostles, when the lame man was healed by Peter and John at the temple gate, it says: "They were filled with astonishment and ecstasy" (Acts 3:10), in which ecstasy, that is, admiration or mental alienation, many people were moved to believe in the Lord; but the heads of the mighty, that is, the chief priests and elders, were cut off by not believing, from the lot of the faithful. Nations were also moved in it, when, hearing or seeing the virtues of the Lord and his apostles, they were so astonished and amazed that, anathemaing and rejecting the gods they had worshipped, they devoutly received the new faith of Christ. Regarding them, aptly it is added:

[Habakkuk 3:14] -- "They will open their mouths like a pauper eating in secret." Just as a pauper who has remained fasting for some time, if he happens to find food somewhere, hastens to refresh himself with it in secret, and does not want to bring it out in public, lest it be snatched away by another, and he perishes from hunger: similarly, the peoples of the nations, having been offered by the apostles the bread of the word, from which they had long remained fasting, immediately opened the mouths of their hearts and began to taste it with all avidity, dedicating themselves more to hearing or reading the Scriptures, the more they remembered they had long subjected their ears and minds to superfluous, even harmful, teachings in the most miserable kind of poverty. The order in which the poverty of the nations came to perceive the delicacies of the word is hinted at when it is added:

[Habakkuk 3:15] -- You sent your horses into the sea, stirring up many waters. For the sea, indeed, means the world; the horses of God, the holy preachers; the many waters, the peoples of the nations. When the horses of God were sent into the sea, the many waters were stirred up, because when the heralds of the word were scattered into the world, the hearts of the nations were disturbed, some to believe and receive the sacrament of faith, others to contradict or even persecute the heralds of this faith. Hence the Psalmist aptly says: "All who saw them were troubled, and every man feared, and they declared the works of God and understood His deeds" (Ps. 63:9). For although all were troubled, not all feared and declared the works of God, but whosoever remained rational men; and those who were estranged from human reason were compared to senseless animals and became like them. Although such people were disturbed and moved by the virtues of the saints, they neither wanted to fear God nor to declare or understand His deeds. Furthermore, it is aptly said of these horses, namely the holy preachers, earlier: "You will ascend, you will ascend on your horses," and now it is added about the same: "You sent your horses into the sea," so that from both sentences it may be gathered that the Lord sent preachers into the world in such a way that, while they preached, He was never absent, but like a charioteer to horses, He was always present to guide their minds.

[Habakkuk 3:16] -- I guarded and my stomach was terrified at the voice of the prayer of my lips. He calls his mind his stomach in the manner customary to prophets, because just as the stomach receives food by which the strength and life of the body are replenished; so are holy thoughts received in the mind, by which the life of the inner man is sustained and

maintained, lest it should fail. Therefore, I guarded, says the Prophet, carefully attending to the future passions of Christ and the subsequent glories, the reprobation of my people, the faith of the nations, the disturbance of the same nations at the new preaching, the persecution to be stirred up by unbelievers against believers; and my heart was terrified by these things which I, foreseeing, spoke of as coming. Or certainly contemplating the different states of the human race: I guarded, he says, myself, with a trembling mind more diligently, lest I should sin in deed, in word, or in thought, and lest I, while preaching to others, should become a reprobate. And it should be noted that he says he was terrified by the voice of the prayer of his lips, although he seems to have prayed nothing at all in this whole song; but only describing with fear and trembling the future mysteries of Christ and the Church; nor is he mistaken who calls his song a prayer, he who also gave it such a title: The Prayer of Habakkuk the Prophet for Ignorances, because whatever a holy man speaks, indeed the whole of this is a prayer to God; whatever he does, anyone whose sincere intention is to please the Lord, this itself intercedes with God for him, and recommends him to the Lord.

[Habakkuk 3:16] -- And trembling entered into my bones. Just as Scripture sometimes designates our carnal actions by the name of flesh; so by the name of bones it usually designates strong and spiritual deeds. Therefore, he says, my heart was terrified by the things I foresee coming into the world, and whatever spiritual strength I thought was within me, all of this trembled as if fragile, while I observe the greater virtues and passions of the blessed Christ and His apostles; which is more clearly explained by the following word, when it is said: [Habakkuk 3:16] -- And beneath me, my strength was disturbed. However, he rightly says that his strength was disturbed not in himself, but beneath himself, because the prophet, having been taken up to the contemplation of heavenly mysteries, saw himself, as it were, elevated above himself; and the higher he is made by the light of contemplation, the more he sees himself as imperfect by the merit of his actions. For being lifted up to the sight of the highest things, he is rightly disturbed by the things he has done in the lowest. Yet the prophet's strength was disturbed, his bones trembled, his belly shuddered, not only because he knew himself to be less perfect in action, but also because all who wish to live piously in Christ are said to suffer persecutions; and he saw that even Christ Himself, who entered the world without sin, would not leave the world without the punishment of sin, as he had also indicated at the beginning of his song. Nevertheless, the same fear and trembling did not remain devoid of consolation, for the hope diminished the adversity present, and made lighter the rewards of the future. This is what follows:

[Habakkuk 3:16] -- I will rest in the day of my tribulation, that I may ascend to the people of my transmigration. For he rests not only in the day of retribution, but also of tribulation, who does not doubt that he will obtain eternal joys through temporal afflictions, according to the saying of the Apostle: For we are saved by hope (Rom. VIII, 24). And again: Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation (Rom. XII, 12). And this is the rest of the elect in this life, that, leaving the desire for lowly things, they strive with the whole intention of their mind and with daily steps of good works to ascend and migrate to the fellowship of those who

have preceded them in Christ; and, with the struggles of their sufferings finished, they may receive the crown of life in the example of those who, having been once transported to Babylon from Judea, returned again to their homeland under the leaders Zerubbabel and Jesus, whom the scripture calls the sons of the transmigration. It is recorded that with great devotion they restored the sacred things which the enemy had destroyed; which is the clearest figure of our state. For we were transported in our first parent from the heavenly homeland and brought into this world's Babylon, that is, confusion; but by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great King and High Priest, whose type Zerubbabel and Jesus bore, we are rightly recalled again to the homeland and the vision of supreme peace, which the name Jerusalem signifies;

provided that, meanwhile, laboring in the Jerusalem of the present Church with pious works, we prepare ourselves in due time for entry to the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all. If it is read indifferently, as it is found in some Codices: I will rest in the day of tribulation, and my is not added, it can be understood according to that which is sung in the Psalm about the just man: In the evil day the Lord will deliver him (Ps. XL, 2), that is, in the day of judgment, when eternal tribulation will seize the reprobates, eternal rest will oppose and receive the just; but even before that final and general judgment, the saints rest in the day of tribulation, ascending to the people of their migration, when through good works transported from the world, they are united to the joys of the just who preceded them in the heavens, while equally their persecutors, taken from this life, undergo the eternal torments of hell, to be punished forever. Moreover, the day of tribulation can also be understood in this life, when, with the scarcity of temporal goods increasing, those who loved such things excessively, as if surrounded by miseries, grieve; but each chosen one, although enduring the same troubles bodily, has rest in the Lord with fixed hope of mind, knowing that the more he is weighed down in the lower things, the higher he will ascend after the pressures to the eternal fellowship of the celestial citizens.

And this understanding aptly agrees with what follows:

[Habakkuk 3:17] -- For the fig tree will not bear fruit, and there will be no generation in the vineyards. The work of the olive will lie and the fields will not yield food. The sheep have failed from their food, and there will be no oxen in the stalls. But I will glory in the Lord, and I will rejoice in God my Savior. For when the opulence of worldly things fails, carnal and lovers of this life are troubled, the righteous do not grieve over the loss of temporal goods but rejoice in the possession of the heavenly kingdom promised to the poor of Christ, mindful of the promised consolation of Him who said: Do not fear, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom. And what wonderful faith, hope, and love of the prophet! The Son of God had not yet appeared in man receiving the name Jesus from His parents, and he, foreseeing the same name in the Spirit, testifies that he rejoices in Him amidst adversities, who would open the gate of the heavenly homeland for His faithful long after being born in the flesh. If anyone also seeks to expound these verses figuratively, the fig tree, vineyard, and olive were the synagogue of the Jews, which brought forth the

sweetness of good works, the fragrance of fervent love, and the richness of a merciful soul devoted to God. Sheep and oxen were typically in the same people;

the sheep, namely, in those who humbly heard the voice of the supreme Shepherd; the oxen, on the other hand, were in those who, zealously bearing the yoke of the law, by diligently teaching and correcting the hearts of listeners, as it were plowing the land of the Lord, prepared for the fruits of good works; and for those living spiritually, the fields of the divine Scriptures most widely made spiritual foods, with whose nourishment he who was made like a beast before the Lord delighted, and always adhered to Him, saying: The Lord is my shepherd, and I shall not want, in a place of pasture, He has placed me there (Ps. 22:1). But this fig tree, to which the Lord came the third time, that is, in the legislation through Moses, in the diligent rebuke and exhortation through the prophets, in the offering of grace through Himself, neglected to bear the fruit of virtue, because of which it was condemned to eternal dryness by His curse. The generation in the vineyards of the Lord once failed, that is, the fruit of charity failed among the crowds of the Jews, because they offered vinegar to Him who thirsted instead of wine, that is, the sweetness of virtues He sought in them, they brought forth the bitterness of vices desiring virtues. The work of the olive lied, when that people anointed the heads of the wretched with the oil of flattery, and echoed the true words of the prophet falsely, saying:

But I, like a fruitful olive tree in the house of God, have trusted in the mercy of God (Ps. 51:10), wherefore at the time of the final retribution, bringing forth extinguished lamps, with their own darkness, they will be excluded from the entrance to the heavenly homeland. The fields do not yield food when the same people, opening the pages of divine writings, cannot rightly understand and find the pastures of truth. The sheep fail from their food, for those whom the refreshment of internal sweetness is absent, whence the innocence of a simple life may not come forth. Thus it was said: the sheep have failed from their food, that is, because food was lacking, as the Prophet in the Psalms: And my flesh, he says, was changed because of the oil (Ps. 108:24), that is, because the oil with which I might be refreshed or anointed was not there. Indeed, some Codices have it this way: The sheep have failed because they did not eat, and there are no oxen in the stalls. For although there are abundantly in the Jews the stalls of heavenly writings; yet because they do not taste the food of heavenly understanding in them, those who bear the sweet yoke of the Gospel are absent.

Considering all these things that are to come upon the perfidious part of his people, the prophet immediately shows what he himself would do with the faithful of the same people, or rather with the society of the Church, which was gathered in Christ from all over the world, or elected: But I, he says, will glory not in my own righteousness, but in faith in the divine protection, I will rejoice in God my Savior, that is my Savior, because I perceive salvation to be not in me, but in Him. And as if we were to ask him why he glories in the Lord and rejoices in God his Savior, whom he called his own with great affection of love, he immediately, as if insinuating the most just cause of the same joy, ended his song thus:

[Habakkuk 3:19] -- The Lord God is my strength, and He will make my feet as sure as deer's, and He will set me on high places, so that I may triumph in His glory. As if He openly says: Indeed, beneath me my strength is troubled, that is, while I contemplate the condition of human frailty, which is below; and while I lift the eyes of my mind to the grace of divine help, I trust that I can make strength in Him. He is able to lead the steps of my works to the completion of a firm end; He can set me on high so that we may utterly despise all the loftiness of worldly power by the contemplation of eternal goods. I shall overcome all temptations which come to me either from the adversities or the blandishments of the world in His love through which I will be, that is, while in all things I do not seek my own glory, but His, from whom I remember that I have received whatever good I do. For deservedly, they are helped by the Lord, that having overcome temptations, they, having been proven, may reach the prize of the heavenly calling, who refer the entire cause of their victory to His praise. Some manuscripts have: And I will triumph in His Song, which looks to the same sense.

For whoever knows how to give thanks to Him from the heart in all the tribulations he suffers, he triumphs in the Lord's Song, knowing that all things work together for good to those who love God, and as accustomed with blessed Job: Blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21). Finally, the apostles Paul and Silas, amid beatings, darkness, and chains of prison, sang a hymn to God; and thus divinely helped, they suddenly emerged as victors, for indeed, although their feet seemed to be tightly bound in stocks, the steps of their works were made complete in virtues. Beautifully, the end of this prophetic song corresponds to its beginning. For he who, having heard and considered the works of the Lord appearing in the flesh, faithfully fears and trembles, is made so that, despising those things which in this life are borne in various states like the waves of the sea, he may glory and rejoice in Him alone whose joys he can perpetually enjoy; helped by Him, so that he is neither broken by the adversities of the present world nor enervated by its allurements; he sings the praises of His grace both in the present, that he may deserve to conquer, and in the future, because he has conquered, he should never cease to sing.

It also happens that such a soul overcomes the world in the glory of the Lord, namely, by His same glory, both often recalled to memory in times of struggles, and beheld perpetually in times of rewards, according to what He promised: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8). It should be noted, however, that with the prayer or song of Habakkuk explained, his name, which is interpreted as embracing, corresponds to the sense of the same prayer. For it is clear that he embraced the Lord with the inward love of the heart and adhered to Him, who testifies that he glories and rejoices in Him alone. May it happen, dearest sister and virgin of Christ, that also we, loving Him, may be made worthy of such a name. If indeed we strive to embrace Him with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength, He will deign to embrace us with the arms of His love, mindful of His promise where He says: He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him (John 14:21); and thus we will deserve to be numbered among the members of that bride who is accustomed to joyfully sing to her Creator, her heavenly

spouse: His left hand is under my head, and His right hand shall embrace me. Amen (Song of Solomon 2:6).

It concludes with the song of the prophet Habakkuk to the virgin sister of Christ.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.