

PRAYER FOR COMPASSION IN THE MIDST OF THE JUDGMENT—CH. 3

Hab. 3. In this chapter, which is called a prayer in the heading, the prophet expresses the feelings which the divine revelation of judgment described in Hab. 1 and 2 had excited in his mind, and ought to excite in the congregation of believers, so that this supplicatory psalm may be called an echo of the two answers which the prophet had received from the Lord to his complaints in Hab. 1:2-4 and 12-17 (vid., Hab. 1:5-11 and 2:2-20). Deeply agitated as he was by the revelation he had received concerning the terrible judgment, which the Lord would execute first of all upon Judah, through the wild and cruel Chaldaean nation, and then upon the Chaldaean himself, because he deified his own power, the prophet prays to the Lord that He will carry out this work of His “within years,” and in the revelation of His wrath still show mercy (v. 2). He then proceeds in vv. 3-15 to depict in a majestic theophany the coming of the Lord to judge the world, and bring salvation to His people and His anointed; and secondly, in vv. 16-19, to describe the fruit of faith which this divine manifestation produces, namely, first of all fear and trembling at the day of tribulation (vv. 16, 17), and afterwards joy and rejoicing in the God of salvation (vv. 18 and 19). Consequently we may regard v. 2 as the theme of the psalm, which is distributed thus between the two parts. In the first part (vv. 3-15) we have the prayer for the accomplishment of the work (v. 2a) announced by God in Hab. 1:5, expressed in the form of a prophetic-lyric description of the coming of the Lord to judgment; and in the second part (vv. 16-19), the prayer in wrath to remember mercy (v. 2b), expanded still more fully in the form of a description of the feelings and state of mind excited by that prayer in the hearts of the believing church.

Hab. 3:1. The song has a special heading, after the fashion of the psalms, in which the contents, the author, and the poetical character of the ode are indicated. The contents are called *ᵉphillah*, a prayer, like Ps. 17, 86, 90, 102, and 142, not merely with reference to the fact that it commences with a prayer to God, but because that prayer announces the contents of the ode after the manner of a theme, and the whole of the ode is simply the lyrical unfolding of that prayer. In order, however, to point at the same time to the prophetic character of the prayer, that it may not be regarded as a lyrical effusion of the subjective emotions, wishes, and hopes of a member of the congregation, but may be recognised as a production of the prophets, enlightened by the Spirit of Jehovah, the name of the author is given with the predicate “the prophet;” and to this there is added על שִׁיגִינֹתָ, to indicate the poetico-subjective character, through which it is distinguished from prophecy in the narrower sense. The expression “upon Shigionoth” cannot refer to the contents or the object of the ode; for although shiggayon, according to its etymon shagah = shagag, to transgress by mistake, to sin, might have the meaning transgression in a moral sense, and consequently might be referred to the sins of transgressors, either of the Judaeans or the Chaldaeans, such an assumption is opposed both to the use of shiggayon in the heading to Ps. 7, and also to the analogy between *’al shigyonoth*, and such headings to the psalms as *’al haggittith*, *’al n’ginoth*, and other words introduced with *’al*. Whilst *shiggayon* in Ps. 7:1 indicates the style of poetry in which the psalm is composed, all the notices in the headings to the psalms that are introduced with *’al* refer either to the melody or style in which the psalms are to be sung, or to the musical accompaniment with which they are to be introduced into the worship of God. This musico-liturgical signification is to be retained here also, since it is evident from the subscription in v. 19, and the repetition of Selah three times (vv. 3, 9, 13), that our hymn was to be used with musical accompaniment. Now, as shagah, to err, then to reel to and fro, is applied to the giddiness both of intoxication and of love (Isa. 28:7; Prov. 20:1; 5:20), shiggayon signifies reeling, and in the terminology of poetry a reeling song, i.e., a song delivered in the greatest excitement, or with a rapid change of emotion, *dithyrambus* (see Clauss on Ps. 7:1; Ewald, Delitzsch, and others); hence על שִׁיגִינֹתָ, after *dithyrambs*, or “after the manner of a stormy, martial, and triumphal ode” (Schmieder).

Hab. 3:2. “Jehovah, I have heard Thy tidings, am alarmed. Jehovah, Thy work, in the midst of the years call it to life, in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.” אֲשִׁרְאֵל is the tidings (ἀκοή) of God; what the prophet has heard of God, i.e., the tidings of the judgment which God is about to inflict upon Judah

through the Chaldaeans, and after that upon the Chaldaeans themselves. The prophet is alarmed at this. The word **יִרְאַתִּי** (I am alarmed) does not compel us to take what is heard as referring merely to the judgment to be inflicted upon Judah by the Chaldaeans. Even in the overthrow of the mighty Chaldaean, or of the empire of the world, the omnipotence of Jehovah is displayed in so terrible a manner, that this judgment not only inspires with joy at the destruction of the foe, but fills with alarm at the omnipotence of the Judge of the world. The prayer which follows, “Call Thy work to life,” also refers to this twofold judgment which God revealed to the prophet in Hab. 1 and 2. **פְּעֹלֶיךָ**, placed absolutely at the head for the sake of emphasis, points back to the work (*po'al*) which God was about to do (Hab. 1:5); but this work of God is not limited to the raising up of the Chaldaean nation, but includes the judgment which will fall upon the Chaldaean after he has offended (Hab. 1:11). This assumption is not at variance even with **חַיֵּיהוּ**. For the opinion that **חַיָּה** never means to call a non-existent thing to life, but always signifies either to give life to an inorganic object (Job 33:4), or to keep a living thing alive, or (and this most frequently) to restore a dead thing to life, and that here the word must be taken in the sense of restoring to life, because in the description which follows Habakkuk looks back to Ps. 77 and the *po'al* depicted there, viz., the deliverance out of Egyptian bondage, is not correct. **חַיָּה** does not merely mean to restore to life and keep alive, but also to give life and call to life. In Job 33:4, where **חַיָּה** is parallel to **עָשָׂה**, the reference is not to the impartation of life to an inorganic object, but to the giving of life in the sense of creating; and so also in Gen. 7:3 and 19:32, **חַיָּה** means to call seed to life, or raise it up, i.e., to call a non-existent thing to life. Moreover, the resemblances in the theophany depicted in what follows to Ps. 77 do not require the assumption that Habakkuk is praying for the renewal of the former acts of God for the redemption of His people, but may be fully explained on the ground that the saving acts of God on behalf of His people are essentially the same in all ages, and that the prophets generally were accustomed to describe the divine revelations of the future under the form of imagery drawn from the acts of God in the past. There is special emphasis in the use of **בְּקִרְבֵּי שָׁנִים** twice, and the fact that in both instances it stands at the head. It has been interpreted in very different ways; but there is an evident allusion to the divine answer in Hab. 2:3, that the oracle is for an appointed time, etc. “In the midst of the years,” or within years, cannot of course mean by itself “within a certain number, or a small number, of years,” or “within a brief space of time” (Ges., Ros., and Maurer); nevertheless this explanation is founded upon a correct idea of the meaning. When the prophet directs his eye to the still remote object of the oracle (Hab. 2), the fulfilment of which was to be delayed, but yet assuredly to come at last (Hab. 2:3), the interval between the present time and the *mo'ed* appointed by God (Hab. 2:3) appears to him as a long series of years, at the end only of which the judgment is to come upon the oppressors of His people, namely the Chaldaeans. He therefore prays that the Lord will not delay too long the work which He designs to do, or cause it to come to life only at the end of the appointed interval, but will bring it to life within years, i.e., within the years, which would pass by if the fulfilment were delayed, before that *mo'ed* arrived.

Grammatically considered, *qerebh shanim* cannot be the centre of the years of the world, the boundary-line between the Old and New Testament aeons, as Bengel supposes, who takes it at the same time, according to this explanation, as the starting-point for a chronological calculation of the whole course of the world. Moreover, it may also be justly argued, in opposition to this view and application of the words, that it cannot be presupposed that the prophets had so clear a consciousness as this, embracing all history by its calculus; and still less can be expect to find in a lyrical ode, which is the outpouring of the heart of the congregation, a revelation of what God Himself had not revealed to him according to Hab. 2:3. Nevertheless the view which lies at the foundation of this application of our passage, viz., that the work of God, for the manifestation of which the prophet is praying, falls in the centre of the years of the world, has this deep truth, that it exhibits the overthrow not only of the imperial power of Chaldea, but that of the world-power generally, and the deliverance of the nation from its power, and forms the turning-point, with which the old aeon closes and the new epoch of the world commences, with the completion of which the whole of the earthly development of the universe will reach its close. The repetition of **בְּקִרְבֵּי שָׁנִים** is expressive of the earnest longing with which the congregation of the Lord looks for the tribulation to end. The object to **תּוֹדִיעַ**, which is to be taken in an optative sense, answering to the imperative in the parallel clause, may easily be supplied from the previous clause. To the prayer for the shortening of the period of suffering there is appended, without the copula Vav, the further prayer, in wrath to remember mercy. The wrath (*rogez*, like *ragaz* in Isa. 28:21 and Prov. 29:9) in which God is to remember mercy, namely for His people Israel, can only be

wrath over Israel, not merely the wrath manifested in the chastisement of Judah through the Chaldaeans, but also the wrath displayed in the overthrow of the Chaldaeans. In the former case God would show mercy by softening the cruelty of the Chaldaeans; in the latter, by accelerating their overthrow, and putting a speedy end to their tyranny. This prayer is followed in vv. 3-15 by a description of the work of God which is to be called to life, in which the prophet expresses confidence that his petition will be granted.

Hab. 3:3-15. Coming of the Lord to judge the nations and to redeem His people. The description of this theophany rests throughout upon earlier lyrical descriptions of the revelations of God in the earlier times of Israel. Even the introduction (v. 3) has its roots in the song of Moses in Deut. 33:2; and in the further course of the ode we meet with various echoes of different psalms (compare v. 6 with Ps. 18:8; v. 8 with Ps. 18:10; v. 19 with Ps. 18:33, 34; also v. 5 with Ps. 68:25; v. 8 with Ps. 68:5, 34). The points of contact in vv. 10-15 with Ps. 77:17-21, are still more marked, and are of such a kind that Habakkuk evidently had the psalm in his mind, and not the writer of the psalm the hymn of the prophet, and that the prophet has reproduced in an original manner such features of the psalm as were adapted to his purpose. This is not only generally favoured by the fact that Habakkuk's prayer is composed throughout after the poetry of the Psalms, but still more decidedly by the circumstance that Habakkuk depicts a coming redemption under figures borrowed from that of the past, to which the singer of this psalm looks back from his own mournful times, comforting himself with the picture of the miraculous deliverance of his people out of Egypt (see Hengstenberg and Delitzsch on Ps. 77). For it is very evident that Habakkuk does not describe the mighty acts of the Lord in the olden time, in order to assign a motive for his prayer for the deliverance of Israel out of the affliction of exile which awaits it in the future, as many of the earlier commentators supposed, but that he is predicting a future appearance of the Lord to judge the nations, from the simple fact that he places the future **יָבוֹא** (v. 3) at the head of the whole description, so as to determine all that follows; whilst it is placed beyond the reach of doubt by the impossibility of interpreting the theophany historically, i.e., as relating to an earlier manifestation of God.

Hab. 3:3. "Eloah comes from Teman, and the Holy One from the mountains of Paran. Selah. His splendour covers the sky, and the earth is full of His glory." V. 4. And brightness appears like sunlight, rays are at His hand, and there His power is concealed. V. 5. Before Him goes the plague, and pestilence follows His feet." As the Lord God once came down to His people at Sinai, when they had been redeemed out of Egypt, to establish the covenant of His grace with them, and make them into a kingdom of God, so will He appear in the time to come in the terrible glory of His omnipotence, to liberate them from the bondage of the power of the world, and dash to pieces the wicked who seek to destroy the poor. The introduction to this description is closely connected with Deut. 33:2. As Moses depicts the appearance of the Lord at Sinai as a light shining from Seir and Paran, so does Habakkuk also make the Holy One appear thence in His glory; but apart from other differences, he changes the preterite **יָבֹא** (Jehovah came from Sinai) into the future **יָבוֹא**, He will come, or comes, to indicate at the very outset that he is about to describe not a past, but a future revelation of the glory of the Lord. This he sees in the form of a theophany, which is fulfilled before his mental eye; hence **יָבוֹא** does not describe what is future, as being absolutely so, but is something progressively unfolding itself from the present onwards, which we should express by the present tense. The coming one is called Eloah (not Jehovah, as in Deut. 33:2, and the imitation in Judg. 5:4), a form of the name Elohim which only occurs in poetry in the earlier Hebrew writings, which we find for the first time in Deut. 32:15, where it is used of God as the Creator of Israel, and which is also used here to designate God as the Lord and Governor of the whole world. Eloah, however, comes as the Holy One (qadosh), who cannot tolerate sin (Hab. 1:13), and who will judge the world and destroy the sinners (vv. 12-14). As Eloah and Qadosh are names of one God; so "from Teman" and "from the mountain of Paran" are expressions denoting, not two starting-points, but simply two localities of one single starting-point for His appearance, like Seir and the mountains of Paran in Deut. 33:2. Instead of Seir, the poetical name of the mountainous country of the Edomites, Teman, the southern district of Edomitish land, is used per synecdochen for Idumaea generally, as in Ob. 9 and Amos 1:12 (see p. 168). The mountains of Paran are not the Et-Tih mountains, which bounded the desert of Paran towards the south, but the high mountain-land which formed the eastern half of that desert, and the northern portion of which is now called, after its present inhabitants, the mountains of the Azazimeh (see comm. on Num. 10:12). The two locali-

ties lie opposite to one another, and are only separated by the Arabah (or deep valley of the Ghor). We are not to understand the naming of these two, however, as suggesting the idea that God was coming from the Arabah, but, according to the original passage in Deut. 33:2, as indicating that the splendour of the divine appearance spread over Teman and the mountains of Paran, so that the rays were reflected from the two mountainous regions. The word *Selah* does not form part of the subject-matter of the text, but shows that the music strikes in here when the song is used in the temple, taking up the lofty thought that God is coming, and carrying it out in a manner befitting the majestic appearance, in the prospect of the speedy help of the Lord. The word probably signified *elevatio*, from *salah* = *salal*, and was intended to indicate the strengthening of the musical accompaniment, by the introduction, as is supposed, of a blast from the trumpets blown by the priests, corresponding therefore to the musical forte. (For further remarks, see Hävernick's *Introduction to the Old Testament*, iii. p. 120ff., and Delitzsch on Ps. 3.) In v. 3b the glory of the coming of God is depicted with reference to its extent, and in v. 4 with reference to its intensive power. The whole creation is covered with its splendour. Heaven and earth reflect the glory of the coming one. הודו, His splendour or majesty, spreads over the whole heaven, and His glory over the earth. *T'hillah* does not mean the praise of the earth, i.e., of its inhabitants, where (Chald., Ab. Ezr., Ros., and others); for there is no allusion to the manner in which the coming of God is received, and according to v. 6 it fills the earth with trembling; but it denotes the object of the praise or fame, the glory, ἡ δόξα, like *hadar* in Job 40:10, or *kabod* in Isa. 6:3; 42:8, and Num. 14:21. Grammatically considered, תהלתו is the accusative governed by מלאה, and הָאֲרֶץ is the subject.

Hab. 3:4. A splendour shines or arises like the light. תהלה does not point back to תהלתו, “splendour like the sun will His glory be” (Hitzig); but it is the predicate to *nogah* in the sense of to become, or to arise. האור is the light of the sun. Like this light, or like the rising sun, when the Lord comes, there arises (spreads) a brilliant light, from which the rays emanate on its two sides. קרנים, according to קרן in Ex. 34:29, 30, is to be taken in the sense of rays; and this meaning has developed itself from a comparison of the first rays of the rising sun, which shoot out above the horizon, to the horns or antlers of the gazelle, which is met with in the Arabian poets. מידו, from His hand, i.e., since the hand is by the side, “at His side” (after the analogy of מימינו and משמאלו), and indeed “His hand” in a general sense, as signifying the hand generally, and not one single hand, equivalent therefore to “on both sides” (Delitzsch). As the disc of the sun is surrounded by a splendid radiance, so the coming of God is enclosed by rays on both sides. לו refers to God. “Such a radiant splendour (קרנים) surrounding God is presupposed when it is affirmed of Moses, that on coming from the presence of Jehovah his face was radiant, or emitted rays” (קרן, Ex. 34:29, 30). This interpretation of the words is established beyond all doubt, not only by the מימינו of the original passage in Deut. 33:2, but also by the expressions which follow in v. 5, viz., לפניו (before him) and להגליו (behind him); and consequently the interpretation “rays (emanating) from His hand are to Him,” with the idea that we are to think of flashes of lightning darting out of God’s hand (Schnur., Ros., Hitzig, Maurer, etc.), is proved to be untenable. According to Hebrew notions, flashes of lightning do not proceed from the hand of God (in Ps. 18:9, which has been appealed to in support of this explanation, we have ממנו); and קרנים does not occur either in Arabic or the later Hebrew in the sense of flashes of lightning, but only in the sense of the sun’s rays. וְשֵׁם הַבְּיּוֹן עֲזָה, and there—namely, in the sun-like splendour, with the rays emanating from it—is the hiding of His omnipotence, i.e., the place where His omnipotence hides itself; in actual fact, the splendour forms the covering of the Almighty God at His coming, the manifestation of the essentially invisible God. The cloudy darkness is generally represented as the covering of the glory of God (Ex. 20:21; 1 Kings 8:12), not merely when His coming is depicted under the earthly substratum of a storm (Ps. 18:12, 13), but also when God was manifested in the pillar of cloud and fire (Ex. 13:21) on the journey of the Israelites through the desert, where it was only by night that the cloud had the appearance of fire (Num. 9:15, 16). Here, on the contrary, the idea of the splendour of the rising sun predominates, according to which light is the garment in which God clothes Himself (Ps. 104:2, cf. 1 Tim. 6:16), answering to His coming as the Holy One (v. 3). For the sun-light, in its self-illuminating splendour, is the most suitable earthly element to serve as a symbol of the spotless purity of the Holy One, in whom there is no variation of light and darkness (Jas. 1:17; see at Ex. 19:6). The alteration of וְשֵׁם into וְשֵׁם (he provides or contrives the concealment of His power), which Hitzig proposes after the LXX (Aq., Symm., and Syr.), must be rejected, inasmuch as in that case the object, which he makes into the covering (cf. Ps. 18:12), could not be omitted; and this thought

is by no means suitable here, and has merely been brought into the text on the assumption that God appears in a storm. As the Holy One, God comes to judgment upon the unholy world (v. 5). Before Him goes debher, plague, and after His feet, i.e., behind Him, resheph, lit., burning heat, or a blaze (Song of Sol. 8:6), here the burning heat of the pestilence, fever-heat, as in Deut. 32:24. Plague and pestilence, as proceeding from God, are personified and represented as satellites; the former going before Him, as it were, as a shield-bearer (1 Sam. 17:7), or courier (2 Sam. 15:1); the latter coming after Him as a servant (1 Sam. 25:42). This verse prepares the way for the description, which commences with v. 6, of the impression produced by the coming of God upon the world and its inhabitants.

Hab. 3:6-7. “He stands, and sets the earth reeling: He looks, and makes nations tremble; primeval mountains burst in pieces, the early hills sink down: His are ways of the olden time.” V. 7. I saw the tents of Cushan under affliction: the curtains of the land of Midian tremble.” God coming from afar has now drawn near and taken His stand, to smite the nations as a warlike hero (cf. vv. 8, 9, and 11, 12). This is affirmed in עָמַד, He has stationed Himself, not “He steps forth or appears.” This standing of Jehovah throws the earth and the nations into trembling. יִמְדַּד cannot mean to measure here, for there is no thought of any measuring of the earth, and it cannot be shown that *madad* is used in the sense of measuring with the eye (Ros. and Hitzig). Moreover, the choice of the poel, instead of the piel, would still remain unexplained, and the parallelism of the clauses would be disregarded. We must therefore follow the Chaldee, Ges., Delitzsch, and others, who take מְדַד as the poel of מוֹד = מוֹד, to set in a reeling motion. It is only with this interpretation that the two parallel clauses correspond, in which יִתַּר, the hiphil of נָתַר, to cause to shake or tremble, answers to יִמְדַּד. This explanation is also required by what follows. For just as v. 7 unquestionably gives a further expansion of יִתַּר גּוֹיִם, so does יִתְפַּצְצוּ... לְעוֹלָם contain the explanation of יִמְדַּד אֲרָץ. The everlasting hills crumble (יִתְפַּצְצוּ from פוּץ), i.e., burst and resolve themselves into dust, and the hills sink down, pass away, and vanish (compare the similar description in Nahum 1:5 and Mic. 1:4). הַרְרֵי־עֵד (= הַרְרֵי, Deut. 33:15 (in parallelism with גְּבֻעוֹת עוֹלָם are the primeval mountains, as being the oldest and firmest constituents of the globe, which have existed from the beginning (מִנִּי עֵד, Job 20:4), and were formed at the creation of the earth (Ps. 90:2; Job 15:7; Prov. 8:25). לֹא הֵלִיכוֹת עוֹלָם לוֹ is not to be taken relatively, and connected with what precedes, “which are the old paths,” according to which the hills of God are called everlasting ways (Hitzig); because this does not yield a sense in harmony with the context. It is a substantive clause, and to be taken by itself: everlasting courses or goings are to Him, i.e., He now goes along, as He went along in the olden time. הֵלִיכָה, the going, advancing, or ways of God, analogous to the דֶּרֶךְ עוֹלָם, the course of the primitive world (Job 22:15). The prophet had Ps. 68:25 floating before his mind, in which *halikhoth 'elohim* denote the goings of God with His people, or the ways which God had taken from time immemorial in His guidance of them. As He once came down upon Sinai in the cloudy darkness, the thunder, lightning, and fire, to raise Israel up to be His covenant nation, so that the mountains shook (cf. Judg. 5:5); so do the mountains and hills tremble and melt away at His coming now. And as He once went before His people, and the tidings of His wondrous acts at the Red Sea threw the neighbouring nations into fear and despair (Ex. 15:14-16); so now, when the course of God moves from Teman to the Red Sea, the nations on both sides of it are filled with terror. Of these, two are individualized in v. 7, viz., Cushan and Midian. By Cushan we are not to understand the Mesopotamian king named Cushan Rishathaim, who subjugated Israel for eight years after the death of Joshua (Judg. 3:8ff.); for this neither agrees with אֲהָלָי, nor with the introduction of Midian in the parallel clause. The word is a lengthened form for *Such*, and the name of the African Ethiopians. The Midianites are mentioned along with them, as being inhabitants of the Arabian coast of the Red Sea, which was opposite to them (see at Ex. 2:15). אֲהָלָי כ, the tents with their inhabitants, the latter being principally intended. The same remark applies to יְרִיעוֹת, lit., the tent-curtains of the land of Midian, i.e., of the tents pitched in the land of Midian.