

LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 19 LECTURES ON THE MINOR PROPHETS

II

Jonah

Habakkuk

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Editor

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INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 19

THIS volume contains Luther's *Lectures on Jonah* and his *Lectures on Habakkuk*, both of them in two versions, one based on the 1525 lectures in Latin, the other on the German version of these lectures prepared for publication by Luther in 1526.

Luther lectured on the prophet Jonah in February 1525. We have used the so-called Altenburg text for the translation of the Latin version (Weimar edition of Luther's works, XIII, 241–258) and the text printed by Michel Lotterus in Wittenberg for the German version (Weimar, XIX, 185–251). The lectures on Habakkuk were held in July and August 1525. Again the Altenburg text (Weimar, XIII, 424–448) is the basis of our translation for the Latin version and the Michel Lotterus text (Weimar, XIX, 345–435) for the German version.

The complicated history of the transmission of the Latin texts of Luther's lectures on the minor prophets will be outlined in the introduction to Volume 18 of *Luther's Works*. The introduction to Volume 20 contains information regarding the transmission of the only other German text of these lectures on the minor prophets published by Luther, that on Zechariah of 1527.

The German version of the lectures on Jonah was produced by Luther in the midst of his conflicts with the Enthusiasts (*Schwürmer*). Although Luther considered his opposition to the Enthusiasts an inescapable duty, he also realized that the constant polemics this opposition entailed constituted a real danger to him and his colleagues, namely, that in their preoccupation with the polemics involved they would grow away from the normal occupation of studying the Scriptures systematically. Luther determined to counteract this danger by busying himself with a program of work in the Word itself, and what would seem more natural than to begin with some of the materials he had most recently treated in his lectures on the Bible at the university? From among the Biblical books that recently engaged his attention, the minor prophets, he deliberately chose Jonah because, as he points out in the preface to the commentary (p. 36), "Jonah is indeed well suited for this situation and represents an excellent, outstanding, and comforting example of faith and a mighty and wonderful sign of God's goodness." This witness seemed especially necessary during a time when the winners in the Peasants' War tended to blame the Gospel for inciting the uprising in the first place and the losers blamed it for bringing about their defeat and for subjecting them to worse oppression than before. The miraculous success of the preaching of Jonah at Nineveh would have to bring needed encouragement to preachers whose Word was suspect as the cause of harm all around.

The German version of the lectures on Jonah was probably published in March 1526 and enjoyed immediate popularity. April 25, 1526, Luther already endorsed a Latin translation of it by Vincentius Obsopoeus, which in turn acknowledged the existence of an even earlier Latin translation, that of Johann Lonicerus, a former graduate assistant of Luther's. The German version exists in 14 editions, and four printers issued the work twice. Besides, three Latin versions and one Low German version gained considerable currency.

A comparison between the 1526 German version and the original 1525 Latin version of the lectures shows that there are some obviously parallel thoughts and expressions, but the German version contains many new treatments and omits many thoughts of the Latin version, presents parallel discussions in new places and new connections, and gives new conclusions in parallel cases. Some parallel thoughts and expressions seem to be due to the circumstance that in their situation certain thoughts seem unavoidable because of their context, but others obviously have merely lingered on in the memory of the expositor. Luther probably did not even consult his Latin notes as he wrote the German version.

Work on the German version of the Habakkuk lectures immediately followed the German Jonah, and it was probably published in June 1526, for a Latin translation by Lonicerus was already in print in August. This commentary achieved immediate popularity in the same way as that on Jonah, and it appeared in 12 German editions. In the introduction Luther points out that Habakkuk was a natural choice for him among the minor prophets because especially the last chapter of this prophet was well known. It was one of the standard canticles for Lauds, but Luther suggests that such a favored position does not necessarily guarantee that a text will really be heard. There was perfunctory reading and singing in those days too. Luther describes it as "the way the nuns read the Psalter," and he feels he must contribute what he can to reemphasize the message of Habakkuk, so eminent in the epistles of St. Paul.

H. O.

LECTURES ON JONAH

The Latin Text

1525

Translated by

CHARLES D. FROEHLICH

PREFACE TO THE PROPHET JONAH

WHAT we have said in the case of other prophets should be applied here also. It has always been the custom of the excellent, most high God that when some extraordinary change of circumstances and some great disaster were impending, He would always send His prophets beforehand to give a warning in order that by announcing the imminent wrath of God they might turn at least some from their evil ways in order that all would not be lost. The coming of Christ into the world was the same in all respects. When Jeroboam was reigning as king of Israel, many prophets were active—Hosea, Amos, Joel, Isaiah, etc. The prophet Jonah also lived at this time, it seems to me. The reason why I feel this way is a passage in 2 Kings 14:25, which leads me to this conclusion. Describing the great happiness and power of King Jeroboam for Israel, the story says, “According to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which He spoke by His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, etc.” Although Jeroboam reigned quite successfully and restored many territories to the kingdom of Israel (as the story relates), nevertheless, all those prophets who were prophesying at that time equally condemned that prosperity and fortunate success of the kingdom. For the famous Assyrian captivity was imminent. And so in my mind there is no doubt that the prophet Jonah was a contemporary of Amos and the other prophets who were prophesying during the reign of Jeroboam. There is no truth to the Jewish fable, which even some of our men¹ have followed, according to which they imagine that the prophet Jonah was the son of the woman of Zarephath who fed Elijah, as 1 Kings 17 tells us. Since this opinion is easily affirmed by them, it is easily rejected by us, for it is not based on any statement of Scripture. I am entirely convinced that the name of Jonah’s father was Amittai, even though those people want that to be only a descriptive name.

The role of this prophet was to be the prophet to the Gentiles, and this was his special duty alone. From this fact it is plain that at the time Jonah was prophesying against Nineveh the Assyrian king had not yet destroyed the kingdom of Israel. Nineveh was the chief city and the capital of the kingdom of the Assyrians, which was at that time exceedingly powerful and very prosperous. Since this was the ease, it is easy to understand that it was a hard, difficult, and important thing that Jonah was called and sent to preach against a kingdom so powerful and against so many outstanding and powerful rulers of this kingdom. In this way we see that the excellent, most high God made this prophet important. We have here again an outstanding example of the thing St. Paul is talking about in Rom. 3:29: “Is God the God of the Jews only? Is He not the God of the Gentiles also? Yes, of the Gentiles also.” This account shows that even this wicked kingdom of the Assyrians was a concern for God—although they were uncircumcised Gentiles, not belonging to the people of Israel, whom God had chosen for Himself. And what is more, they were oppressing Israël. Thus God always has had His Christian people among all nations along with the Jews, although the Jews themselves failed to perceive this and even despised all the other nations who did not have the Law. So there is no doubt that there are here and there in the world today many Christians who are totally unknown to the world, whom God has chosen for Himself. We are taught in this account how powerful, active, and effective God’s Word is. It cannot be preached in vain so that it fails to produce, and that in plain sight. If we will think about this account in terms of the power and effect of the Word, the story becomes wonderful and full of comfort. Otherwise it seems an insignificant story. Is not the power of this preaching truly great which within three or four days has converted that very powerful nation with the result that it drives the king and all the inhabitants into ashes, repentant for the sin that was revealed by the Word?

Clear, easy to understand, and full of comfort as this story is, it has been obscured by the intricate, innumerable, and silly questions of the holy fathers, as one can easily notice in the commentaries of all of them. We are not going to deny that the fathers were holy men, but none of them was free of this weakness of the flesh, which certainly is very bad, that they judged the saints on the basis of their position

and their external acts, thinking all the while that nothing human or no human weaknesses dwelled in the saints. And yet, even the most saintly people cannot shed these weaknesses throughout their life, that is, as long as that mortal flesh remains. This truth is plain to see throughout the Scriptures, and nowhere more clearly than in Rom. 7. This very matter was an opportunity both for Jerome and all the others to torture themselves in a strange way with many different kinds of questions, both in many other passages of Scripture and also in this prophet, when they discuss whether or not Jonah sinned by ordering himself to be thrown into the sea and how it is possible for someone not to sin if he kills himself of his own free will. Jerome answered that it is permissible to kill oneself when one's chastity is endangered, etc. This is certainly a great abomination and an altogether rash judgment, a kind of poison to be guarded against by all because it is always present. St. Augustine has handled the matter better and more prudently. Summary: All the commentators, as many as there have been, have failed to note and understand accurately and completely the kingdom of grace through Christ, although they wish to seem to have both noticed and understood it. To us by the grace of God a clearer light and more accurate understanding about the kingdom of grace has come than to all those men. We cannot err at all if we will stand by the Word and will follow the decision of the Word of God when we see faith in the works of the saints, not the work itself, since works are able to deceive, however beautiful they might appear, but faith cannot deceive. Thus Scripture approves of homicide in the case of some kings, in others it condemns it; obviously because the former have killed by faith, since they have followed God's Word and have been approved, but the latter have acted without faith and have sinned—although if you examine only the work of both, both would appear equally evil.

The kingdom of grace is the kingdom of good will with which God favors the Christians who are in this kingdom. At the same time the saints in this kingdom sometimes go astray and have feelings of the flesh, a truth that we see here and there in St. Paul, who desires that Christians carry one another's burdens so that they mutually strengthen and instruct one another if some have fallen. We human beings who are still living ought not to think that the saints are so different from us, as though something higher happened to them when they lived in the flesh than happens to us, since the flesh of all is the same, a fact which those writers were not able to discern. The author of the Epistle of James is right when he says in the last chapter (James 5:17): "Elijah was a man with feelings like us." The Spirit of all is the same, the faith is the same, Christ is the same, and if we feel the weakness of the flesh against us, if we sometimes slip, let us consider that also those saints were able to slip. To return at last to Jonah, unless we can protect him with the same principle, that he did this deed full of faith, it is very sure that he sinned by lacking faith, and we must admit that he sinned very grievously by obviously treading underfoot the order of the God who was sending him, as the events which followed show. At this point all the commentaries of all the commentators pretend that Jonah was frightened by the wickedness of the kingdom of the Assyrians, supposing that they were not going to believe the Word. With such comments they wish to make that great sin seem small. Let us rather exaggerate it for our own comfort. Moreover, because Jonah was a son of grace, that sin was forgiven him, no matter how great it was. Otherwise he would have perished just as Saul perished because he did not kill Agag, the king of Amalek, for Saul had a direct command from God to kill him, just as Jonah at this time had a command from God that he go to Nineveh to preach. This certainly is a pleasant and wonderful account, that Jonah was able to remain in the faith in this way, even though his conscience was so thoroughly terrified. For he realized that he had committed a great sin. He felt this and likewise sensed the wrath of God, namely, punishment for the sin, just as he himself says later (Jonah 2:2): "I have cried from the belly of the deep, etc." All these things have been written for our comfort in order that, even though we feel our sin and the punishment for our sin, we may, nevertheless continue in faith and not despair, no matter how great the penalty and lashing of God may be. The purpose of this deliverance (which is bound to come if we keep holding the Lord's hand) is that we may say with David in Ps. 118:18: "The Lord has chastened me sorely, but He has not given me over to death." And so even if those who are in Christ's kingdom sin, still they are not condemned, since it is a kingdom of grace. The sin is forgiven and is not imputed on account of Christ. This summary, or chief point, of the kingdom of Christ all those sacred writers were not able to understand. All lacked this judgment. This is something I know for sure because I have gone through all the writings of those men.

CHAPTER ONE

3. *But Jonah rose to flee.* Undoubtedly Jonah was terrified by the magnitude of the task to which he was being sent. He was terrified also by so powerful a kingdom, by such powerful rulers, just as if someone today would be sent to the kingdom of the Turks. And the Lord increased that magnitude of the task when He said (v. 2): “Their wickedness has come up before Me.” And so by that proclamation Jonah was going to stir up against himself the very bitter hatred of all, since he was going to declare all those rulers guilty of wickedness—and yet he was himself a lonely and lowly man. But he sinned, as I said, in this respect, that he looked not to the Word of God, by whom he was being sent, but to the work itself, to which he was being sent, and to the difficulty and magnitude of that work. For the flesh is not able to believe the Word of God and entrust itself to God if it regards human advice and the possible outcomes. However, a right faith goes right on with its eyes closed; it clings to God’s Word; it follows that Word; it believes the Word even when all creatures are against it, even if it should seem to the flesh that nothing is less likely to happen than what the Word wants believed and to happen, even if heaven and earth should first seem to be destined to pass away. The result is that even if God should say that there will be a new heaven, faith, with its eyes closed and without giving it another thought and paying heed to no other objection, simply believes the Word and gives glory to the God of truth. Since Jonah did not do this but looked at the magnitude and difficulty of the task, he could not but be afraid.

2. *Their wickedness has come up before Me.* This is a Hebraism. God neither ascends nor descends, but Scripture is accustomed to speak about God according to the feeling in our conscience that God is either well disposed toward us or angry with us. God is coming down to us when we feel Him in our conscience. Our evil is arising before Him when our conscience troubles us concerning sin, etc.

Before Me, as if He were saying: “Even this kingdom appears to be outstanding and very good.”

3. *To Tarshish.* They have interpreted this to be the city in which St. Paul the apostle was born, but to me this does not seem to be at all appropriate. I definitely think that this is some special name of the sea, some inlet of the sea. The Romans have different names for the seas, as Mediterranean, Indian, Red, etc. The one which goes around the whole earth they call Ocean. There are passages of Scripture which induce me to interpret in this way, as 2 Chron. 9:21: “The king’s ships went to Tarshish with the servants, etc.”; likewise in ch. 20:36: “In building ships to go to Tarshish.” These passages cannot all be understood about a certain city, for Tarshish and Jerusalem are very different places. In the same way the passage is plain in Ps. 72:10: “May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles bring tribute.” This passage is really speaking about the Mediterranean Sea, as the Romans call it, because it has many islands. So this is the meaning of this passage: Jonah, so terrified by the greatness of the task to which he was being sent, did not decide to flee into some city but, having found a ship, he decided to flee into whatever part of the sea he would be carried.

From the presence of the Lord. The interpretation does not displease me which explains that this phrase means the same as if he were saying: “From that temporal kingdom of Israel, in which God was dwelling,” since indeed they did have the Word of God. Wherever God’s Word is, the presence of God is meant. An interpretation of others that Jonah was so foolish that he thought that he would flee to some place where he could elude the Lord does not please me. For why would he feel that way since he calls the Lord “The God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land” (v. 9)?

He went down to Joppa. Joppa is a port of the Mediterranean Sea, so that it becomes especially clear from this passage that by the word “Tarshish” the Mediterranean Sea is meant, as I mentioned before. Therefore, it should have been translated in this verse of the prophet: “In order that he might flee into the sea”; also, “He found a ship going to sea and paid the fare for it, etc.”

4. *But the Lord hurled a great wind.* This prophet is very easy, as I mentioned before, for he omits involved and obscure words and thoughts. However, although the account is simple, it demands careful attention and interest, as all accounts of this kind do. It is certainly an important thing, an arduous task, for one single man to be sent against a very powerful kingdom. And since he was so terrified by the magnitude of the task, his lack of courage caused him to underestimate the power of the Lord. This is a serious matter, a great sin, just as also the penalty for the sin was great. The penalty was that, in addition to being terrified by the wrath of the Lord in an external way, he felt the wrath of God in his conscience also. However, Jonah remained in the faith despite the fact that a much greater storm was raging in his heart and conscience than raged on the sea outside, etc. Because we are only spectators of tragedies of this

sort, they do not appear so great and so terrible to us as they really are. But if we were experiencing them ourselves in our consciences, we would understand what it is to feel God's wrath against oneself and what that faith is which even in the middle of wrath holds on to God as merciful and kind, etc. If this were happening to us, we would omit many useless questions with which we otherwise wretchedly torment ourselves in passages of this kind in Scripture because we have not experienced such temptation.

This storm on the sea was surely greater than storms usually were. For even the sailors were terrified to such an extent that they related this storm to someone's sin. This caused Jonah, who was aware of his own guilt, to hide in the lowest part of the ship, but he was nowhere safe in his conscience, since he had been touched by the wrath of God.

5. *He was fast asleep.* This sleep was altogether a sleep of sorrow, mixed with a certain feeling of death, the kind those people know about who have at some time labored with temptations of this sort themselves. And the Hebrew word used here conveys this idea nicely. All these things have been written that we might see how Jonah felt the presence of divine wrath and how great a thing is that fear of consciences when they are terrified by the wrath of God, "Who touches the mountains, and they smoke," as the psalm has it (Ps. 104:32).

Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. These sailors were not total atheists, for they called upon a god, but one whom they themselves devised. For to have gods is to form them for oneself in the heart, and the heart is the place where the beginning of a correct and proper feeling about God is located. For our god is the kind we ourselves believe him to be and the kind we imagine in our hearts, as Ps. 18:25–26 tells us: "With the loyal Thou dost show Thyself loyal; with the blameless man Thou dost show Thyself blameless; with the pure Thou dost show Thyself pure; and with the crooked Thou dost show Thyself perverse." And this feeling about a god the various cults of different men afterwards follow. As each one shapes a god for himself, so he also worships him, and the Divine Majesty is subject to the different opinions of men. Some think one way about God, others think another way, as you see in Matt. 16:14: "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets, etc." We see the same thing here in the case of the sailors: they named the true God, but there was no certainty about form or conception. The only true form of God is for us to grasp Him by faith, namely, to learn that God is always a well-disposed Father and the Father of mercies. This understanding is given only by the Holy Spirit, and this is the only true and genuine knowledge of God. All other opinions are idolatrous, as when, with our own reason as leader and teacher, we make up certain works for ourselves, by which we think that we will be pleasing to God and imagine that we are going to win His rewards or favor. It is completely idolatrous when we assign this form of our contrived works or inventions to a god. This alone is the root and the fountain of all idolatry. Of this sort are all monks, nuns, sacrifices, and whatever people consider to be a god arising from the works they themselves contrive. However, God does not wish to be shaped in this way by us, but He wishes to shape us. All He wants is that we believe in Him, that is, that we are pleasing to Him not on the basis of any work or any device of our own but because He is merciful to us, and this means that we are reborn by the Holy Spirit, as we read in John 3:5.

6. *Arise, call upon your god!* This passage is grand and worth noting. Human nature, when it is free from temptation, becomes proud because circumstances are favorable; it becomes boastful and free from worry, promising many things to itself. But when it is in adversity, when it sees that it is done for, human nature submits to all things, even to some very low things. It is this way in the case of those sailors, for they are in a desperate condition and in danger of death. They seek aid wherever they can; they flee to Jonah, about whom they had been totally unconcerned before they came into danger. This is the way human reason is; it cannot act differently in trial. Similarly, when we were hard pressed in our consciences by sin, we ran to the monks or to this or that other person to find consolation. In this way the sailors flee to Jonah, for reason thinks that it will be saved by the intercession of another person. Faith, on the other hand, as it rejects no one, also trusts no human being but depends on God alone, on whom it calls in need, etc.

7. *Come, let us cast lots.* As in very many other passages, so also in this one people have tortured themselves with papal doctrines about casting lots. To cast lots for the purpose of tempting God is an evil thing. However, in the case of urgent distress or in danger of death, to cast lots is not tempting God—unless you are openly wicked. The Lord has promised that He will give us food and all those things that have to do with providing food. However, we are not to sit around idle and fail to use our hands, which

God has given us for work. Thus it comes about that if your hand is strong and if you do not have a clear Word of God to the contrary (as Elijah had, who was fed from heaven) but you still wish to obtain your means of life (βιοφειλήματα) as something owed to you, you are tempting God. On the other hand, when you are in urgent distress, when you have been captured, and when it is impossible for you either to work or to earn daily bread—under such circumstances it is not tempting God if you hope for food from heaven. And so a judgment about casting lots must be given for all cases at this point. Those sailors were impelled by the greatest distress, and they were not able to do anything else. Although Jonah was well aware that he was guilty of a great evil, still he cast lots with them in the hope that somehow he would escape. Our incompetent commentators, who suppose that they become holy only by works, know nothing about faith, nothing about spiritual temptations. Otherwise they would make more sensible judgments. I have given sufficient warning about this at the beginning of this prophet. In principle, a deed done by some people at one time does not have the same worth in God's sight as the same deed done by other people at other times. Rather, works are rated by God on the basis of faith. This is why God approves a deed in some cases but disapproves the same deed in other cases. However, I do not excuse Jonah from sin.

9. *I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven.* At this point the confession of sin finally begins. Jonah says that he fears the God of heaven, who is angry with him and whom he is foolishly trying to escape. Furthermore, he speaks in a way typical of the Hebrews when he says that he fears God. The fear of God is reverence for God and spiritual worship of Him, for in this meaning Scripture everywhere uses the expression “the fear of God.” For the truest worship of God does not consist in works, no matter how great and holy they may be, but in true and proper respect. Such an expression occurs in Ps. 19:9: “The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever, etc.,” where they divide the fear of the Lord into different parts, but it is all beside the point, since he is speaking about the fear of God and about the law of the Lord in the same passage. This therefore is Jonah's intention when he says, “I fear the God of heaven,” namely, “I am a true worshiper of the true God.” So did Jonah feel both the wrath of God against himself and now at last also the penalty which became even greater since his sin had been revealed and brought to light.

11. *The sea grew more and more tempestuous*, that is, the sea did not cease seething, but the storm was becoming increasingly severe. And so, since the Lord was not subduing the storm, Jonah wanted to provide a cure for this misfortune by his own death. Surely this was a great sin on the part of the prophet. In addition, it was far greater and more serious because, now that he was about to die, he knew for sure that he had an angry and hostile God and that it was necessary for him to die because of the anger of God. It was a very bitter trial to look at the death that lay before him in this way, to really wish to die, and still to know that God was angry with him. The magnitude of this trial we do not see because we are at the same time looking at the fact that he was later rescued miraculously because God wanted it so. However, in all these trials, so horrible that we shrink back from them, he is a figure of the Christ, for Christ Himself interpreted it in this way, as we shall mention.

Another thing—although Jonah alone was the cause of this storm, nevertheless all these men who were with him were in equal danger of life and were suffering the same punishment as Jonah. This is an instance of what we have often said, that one ungodly person often causes an entire state and whole nation to perish and to be in great misery. The Scriptures are full of examples of this. In this way, on account of Achan, who had stolen an accursed thing, the Lord afflicted the people of Israel in a terrible way, as we see in Joshua 7. On the other hand, the single man Moses often accounted for the safety of the entire nation of Israel. Thus the author of the Epistle of James, in chapter 5:17, says: “Elijah was a man of like nature with ourselves (ὁμοιοπαθὴς ἡμῖν), and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.” These things are examples of God's judgments, who does not deal unjustly, although it seems quite different to us.

14. *We beseech Thee, O Lord, let us not perish.* That dread of death was good for them, for they were turned to the true God, etc.

CHAPTER TWO

IN order that the terror of death might be all the greater, not only was Jonah thrown into the sea, where there was no hope for help either from God or man, but when he thought that he must surely die, he was also swallowed alive by a fish, a fish the Lord provided for this very purpose. In this way it came about that, although he was in the midst of death, still he was alive.¹ This is a wonderful account, in which the excellent, most high God has wished us to become very certain that He is the Lord of death and life, that

all things are in His hand. For He Himself is the one who kills and makes alive, makes alive and kills, leads down to hell and brings out again.² From this we ought to learn that we have a God who is able to save us even in the midst of death, in the midst of sin and of hell,³ just as He here wonderfully saved His Jonah, who saw nothing, and could hope for nothing, except death. Jonah must have shrunk back in horror because, when he was thrown into the sea and was about to perish in the waves, he became aware of still another devourer who swallowed him alive in his gaping mouth. Although he was gulped down, he did not die but remained alive for three days. Undoubtedly there was a strange fight for faith going on inside Jonah. When he was not able to die but was kept alive in the belly of the fish, he felt the divine grace. Since he did not die, he felt that he was innocent, which his song indicates; and he felt that God was present, since he was not consumed. Nevertheless, he still entertained the thought that it was quite possible that he would still be consumed. This was truly a strange and serious temptation, so much so that I can hardly imagine a stranger one. In fact, I would not easily believe such things if the Holy Spirit had not written them. But as I have said, all things were written for us that we might learn from them in every adversity to rely on the kind Father, the excellent, most high God. Why should we not trust God, why should we not throw ourselves on Him in all adversities if in the midst of death, in the midst of hell, He saves His own people and has promised that He will save to such an extent that even death, sin, hell, and all misfortunes must be for good to the godly and not only not harm them but even be helpful and become instrumental for life? This is very plain to see in this story of Jonah. He who will not trust God, let him trust the devil. And so what the apostle Paul says is true (Rom. 8:28): “All things work together for good” to those who believe.

*Three days and three nights.*⁴ It is remarkable how Jonah was able to count the days, since he neither saw nor heard anything when he was shut up in the belly of the fish. But he did notice the day when he was thrown headlong into the sea and when at last he was restored to the light. Undoubtedly he was not in the fish for three whole days and nights, just as Christ did not lie in the grave for three whole days if you would count very exactly. Moreover, Scripture regularly uses the figure of speech synecdoche, that is, considering a part as the whole thing, etc.

1. *Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish.* It was not as you might think, that the prophet versified this song while he was in distress. Rather, when he was finally released, he put into an orderly arrangement the things he had been thinking about in adversity and temptation. It is a fine song and one that shows that he did not put trust in his works. For thus he spoke:

2. *I called to the Lord out of my distress.* For there was nothing else to do in such need of both body and soul but cry out. Our desires, our powers are nothing, just as Jonah here called out in pressing need. No merit was present, for he had sinned very seriously against the Lord. And so the only thing to do was to cry out, to cry out “to the Lord.” For the Lord is the only one to whom we must flee as to a sacred anchor and the only safety on those occasions when we think that we are done for. But this is the gist of the matter, that even though we feel that God is against us and that we have an angry God and that we are sinners who have deserved wrath and damnation, still it is possible for us to pray to God as to our kind and placable Father, for that is the kind of God He always is, and He ought never to be understood in any other way. And so God ought to be thought of not according to what we see but according to His promises, in which He has promised that He will be our Father and our God. When He treats us well, when He does not test or smite us, we ought not to put our trust in Him on that account, since He is doing something different from that which appears, but we should fear Him. On the other hand, when He strikes us down, again we ought not to distrust⁵ Him on that account, and there is no need to despair because He is doing something different from what we think.

And He answered me. Jonah felt that his prayer was effective, as it is impossible for the effectiveness of true prayer not to be felt. For if we do not feel that our prayer has been effective, we have not truly prayed. That internal feeling necessarily follows a true prayer, just as also preachers of the Word feel the effectiveness of the Word which they teach. For Christ says, Luke 8:46: “I perceive that power has gone forth from Me.”

Out of the belly of Sheol I cried. Jonah adapts his wording to his feelings, since his feelings were no different than if he were being kept in hell. In the same way Scripture calls serious temptations of this kind “hell,” as can be noticed here and there in the Psalms, and Scripture says that those who are in extreme temptation are in “hell.”

And Thou didst hear my voice, that is, although there was nothing to be seen except destruction and damnation, although faith was struggling, nevertheless he continued: “And therefore I was saved, Thou didst hear me,” for faith saves by the Word—even though nothing but damnation appears and no matter how great the temptations are.

3. *For Thou didst cast me into the deep*. And now, almost to the end [of his prayer], he describes his submersion.

Into the heart of the seas. This is a Hebraism, and it means “into the lowest part of the sea.” This expression is frequent in Scripture, as in Deut. 4:11: “To the heart of heaven,” which means “into the midst of heaven.” Similarly we read in Ps. 45:5: “The peoples will fall under you, into the heart of the king’s enemies,” which means “into the midst of the enemies,” that is, where they are strongest and most numerous. In the same way here “into the heart of the seas” means “where the sea is deepest.”

All Thy waves. This expression has been taken from a psalm also. “Waves” would be more correctly translated “breakers,” for it is the same word as in Ps. 93:4: “Marvelous are the uprisings (*elationes*) of the sea,” where the ancient authors have translated “heavings” (*suspensurae*). It actually designates what we Germans call *Bulgen*, or *Wellen* (“breakers, or waves”). And so this is the thought: “Every storm and every movement of the sea covered me.” Aptly he says “Thy waves,” because he means, “My conscience tells me that it is You who are bringing this punishment on me, this horror of death and of hell.” This is the punishment of consciences, that in trouble we feel the wrath of God against us, that it is He who lays these misfortunes and very great afflictions on us.

4. *Then I said: I am cast out from Thy presence*. At this point Jonah thought he was done for both in body and soul, It is as if he were saying: “All these things that You were doing to me were driving me to despair. Terrified by these signs of Your wrath I saw nothing except that I was done for, that I was hurled forth from Your presence.” This is the common factor in indescribable groanings. This is the deepest sighing and the supreme death in temptation. These are not empty words, but the only people who can understand them are those who have at some time been in this kind of trouble. Such people will know what it is to feel their conscience against them and to be truly thrown out by God. This is the way it appears to consciences⁶ of this kind, which find their root in distress, and so it also seemed to Jonah. He says, “I said,” as if to say: “I was deceived, and You are the one who deceived me, since You did something different from what I hoped would happen.” Thus there was a wrestling with despair in Jonah’s heart. However, he did not totally despair. Although despair is so great in such temptations and so powerful that even faith seems to go under, still faith endures, and strength is perfected in weakness, according to 2 Cor. 12:9. The identical thought is in Ps. 31:22, from which these words have been taken: “I had said in my alarm, ‘I am driven far from Thy sight.’”

How shall I again look upon Thy holy temple? I think this⁷ must be read and understood in a completely negative sense with this meaning: “You don’t think that I will ever see Your holy temple, do You?” For even to this day the Hebrew scholars do not agree about what this word means.⁸ Perhaps it denotes that wellknown physical temple at Jerusalem, for it had been designed by God for the purpose of prayer. Or if someone is not satisfied with this explanation, let him understand a spiritual temple, that is, where God dwells, for the prophets are accustomed to call God’s dwelling place the temple of God, etc.

5. *The sea covered my head*. Here the Hebrew word [הַיָּם] means either “the sea” or “a sedge.” And so I translate it this way: “The sedge had bound my head,” that is, “The sea, which has sedge or rushes along the shores, became a crown for my head. It was absolutely impossible for me to escape.” In this way Jonah intensifies and enlarges the temptation.

6. *At the roots of the mountains*. “I was in the roots of the mountains,” where the mountains end, that is, in the lowest part of the sea.

The earth with its bars closed upon me forever. These are only figures of speech. It is as if he were saying: “It was impossible for me to get out, because the earth had completely enclosed me with its bars. There was absolutely no more hope for me to be freed.” And this is an overwhelming sensation. All people who are in serious temptations of this sort feel this way. The result is that they do not think it is possible for them to be released in any manner.

Yet Thou didst bring up my life from the Pit. The Hebrew word [בְּיָם], which the Latin translator⁹ renders “the Pit.”¹⁰ is also in Ps. 16:10, where we read: “Thou dost not let Thy Holy One¹¹ see the Pit.” This utterance was altogether an utterance of faith, and when this is truly said by us, it is impossible for us

to perish, even if we are in the midst of death and in hell.¹² And here he prescribes for us the manner in which we must be saved from temptation, as if to say: “If someone is knocked down, if he feels the horror of death and is in hell, let him call on the Lord, just as also I have called on Him. Think on the Lord, call on Him confidently, and immediately He who has been called will be present.” Many psalms pertain to this subject.

7. *When my soul fainted within me.* This has also been taken from a psalm, Ps. 43:5: “Why are you cast down, O my soul? Why, etc.”

8. *Those who pay regard to vain idols.* Here the Spirit is immediately at work, so that the same person who has learned from his own experience also teaches others and condemns whatever it is we trust in when we are safe from temptation. The only completely true worship of God is for us in trouble to flee to Him as to a father in hope of receiving help. All our own works, desires, and efforts with which we want to help ourselves are nothing. They can help us in no way. They all collapse in temptation, for they are vain idols, as Jonah says about them here. Not only that, but people are worthless when they guard and keep vain idols. Thus worry or concern is vanity, and those very Works with which they worry themselves sick are vanity.

Forsake their mercy, that is, the mercy of God, the only thing they should have hoped for. For this is God’s mercy on us, since it is the only thing for which we ought to hope and the only thing through which we are saved in all troubles. All other things by which we want to help ourselves are vanity. We do not learn to hold on to the mercy of God except in temptation when we think that we are done for, when not only God but also all creatures seem to be against us, when we cannot be healed from misfortune by our own plans, wisdom, reason, and all our own efforts.

9. *But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to Thee.* This is the proper sacrifice of saints; this alone the Lord requires from them. These are the calves of their lips, this is their giving of thanks. Look at all of Ps. 50: “Offer to God a sacrifice of praise” (v. 14). Likewise: “He who brings a sacrifice of praise honors Me” (v. 23), namely, when we credit to God all the things we have received, and nothing to ourselves, etc.

What I have vowed I will pay. The expression “to repay vows” which occurs here and there in the Psalms means “to give thanks,” for to repay a vow is to confess and proclaim that the Lord alone is our God, who is the only one who is both able and willing to save us from every temptation and trouble. We would be done for unless He Himself would save us, etc.

10. *It vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.* In this way death and sin are an opportunity for life and righteousness for the saints; shame becomes an opportunity for glory. Truly “all things work together for good for them” (Rom. 8:28), as we have said at the beginning of this chapter. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall hunger? Shall persecution? etc.” (Rom. 8:35).

CHAPTER THREE

ABOUT the magnitude of Jonah’s task we have already said enough, and more than enough, in the first chapter.

3. *Nineveh was an exceedingly great city.* What we read in our Latin Bible, “of a journey (*itinere*) of three days,” a more accurate translation from the Hebrew would render as “of a traversal (*transitu*) of three days.” The assertion that the size of the city was remarkable does not convince me that the city could scarcely be crossed in three days. Jerome says that the city was that large in circumference. Lyra thought that such a measurement was the region surrounded by the walls. I am firmly convinced that it did not approach Cologne or Erfurt in size. And this is the reason for my thinking this way. There is a passage in the fourth chapter which influences me (4:11): “In which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons, etc.” This is certainly a small number of inhabitants for a city as large as they wish to make it. And so I come to the conclusion that this is the meaning: “Of a traversal of three days” means the distance someone could traverse step by step through all the neighborhoods, etc. Furthermore, it is also a serious mistake in the Latin Bible that the name of God has been omitted. It ought to read this way: “It was a great city of God (or to God).” All the Hebrew copies are in perfect agreement and contain this name, and Jerome did not omit it in his Latin translation. And in this passage all the interpreters go far astray. For it is certain that the city is not called God’s city because it was built by God, for Asshur built it, a fact that is very evident from Genesis, chapter 10.¹ Furthermore, the city was not called God’s city because it was founded on God’s laws. Therefore I think that the meaning is that God was concerned

about this city, that God planned that the city should not perish. This is why He sent prophets to the people there, that they might be turned from their evil way and be saved. And this is the point about which I have spoken at great length at the beginning of this prophet, that God is the God not only of the Jews but also of the Gentiles.

4. *Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey*, that is, he finished one-third of his proclamation.

And he cried. More correctly it would be translated, "And he preached."

Yet forty days. With very few words he describes the main point and the content of his preaching, but he undoubtedly explained it with very many words. When he preached, he used his own passages to prove that God's wrath was coming against the people of Nineveh. He explained to them that God had sent him, and he set forth and declared to them their sin and the cause of God's wrath, etc.

5. *They proclaimed a fast, etc.* The enemies of faith regularly throw this passage up to us because they think they have found something worthy of the palm against us. Blindly they read the words "God respected the works of the people of Nineveh" and from their own judgment bring forth a witness against justification by faith. Since our eyes have been opened, let us not be blind like these men, but let us look at the words of the Holy Spirit and more thoroughly understand that it is no accident that the first thing that is stated is that *the people of Nineveh believed God*. This is the standard and rule with which all things that are added concerning works must be harmonized. For if faith in the heart is sincere, it does not have need for any teacher of good works; it knows in itself what must be done. Thus the prophet Jonah speaks a mere word (this is what he had been sent for), commanding nothing at all about works. But since the people of Nineveh believed the Word of God, of their own free will and with their faith as the leader and originator they did these works by which they gave external proof of their internal faith. In plain words, faith alone justifies a person, Rom. 3–5. After a man has been justified by faith, it is inevitable that the fruits of justification follow, since a good tree is not able not to bear good fruits, and a bad tree bad fruits, as Christ says (Matt. 7:18). We see the same thing here in every respect, for he says, "They believed, etc." The works therefore did not make the faith, but the faith performed the works. And so this passage is not against us at all, but it supports us.

And put on sackcloth. This is a Hebraism, just as it is to say "to eat bread and to drink water," where we Germans say, "He has eaten and has drunk." And so this "to be clothed with sackcloth" is to lay aside clean and splendid clothes and to put on dirty ones. This is very plain from many Bible passages. Is. 20:2: "Loose the sackcloth from your loins"; Is. 50:3: "I clothe the heavens with blackness and make sackcloth their covering," that is, "I make heaven sad, cloudy, and obscure." And in this very prophet we see this Hebraism, for he says later (v. 8): "But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth." Sackcloth is a strange clothing for beasts of burden.

6. *Then tidings reached the king.* Here we see what I mentioned before about the power and effectiveness of the Word preached by Jonah. Although this king had not heard Jonah preach in his presence, nevertheless, after he had been informed about Jonah's preaching, he also preached and converted one-third of his own city by his own preaching. He arose from his royal throne, laid aside his purple finery, and clothed himself instead in sackcloth, a lowly and mournful garb. By doing these things along with the other citizens, he proved his internal grief.

And sat in ashes. This is also a Hebraism, for a lowly place to sit goes along with lowly attire. He sat in some lowly place where, under other circumstances, it was not fitting for a king to sit.

7. *From the mouth of the king and his nobles.* It would be more correct to translate "By an edict of the king and his princes."

Neither man nor beast, herd nor flock. The excellent and most high God does not look at the works of the beasts, nor are they pleasing to Him, but the things which are done by faith cannot fail to please God exceedingly. In this way faith does all the things that are very pleasing to God. For the things that are done from faith are right and pleasing in God's sight. On the other hand, Rom. 14:23: "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." In this sense also the fasting of the beasts pleased God, but it would not have pleased Him less if the king had fed the beasts.

8. *But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth*, that is, let them prove the sorrow and penitence for their grief over sin; let them not dress in fine clothes. Thus whatever a contrite heart does by faith is very pleasing to God—no matter how ridiculous it may look.

And from the violence which is in his hands. It is true repentance and true faith when the works correspond to it. We must not relapse from faith again into unholy living and deceive ourselves into thinking that we truly believe.

9. *Who knows, God may fret repent?* The question here is: “Why should they doubt if they had true faith?” For if they had not hoped for grace and mercy from God, they would not have shown and expressed this hope by those works. This is the matter which I have discussed above: There is a conflict between faith and despair. For in temptation, when God seems to be our enemy and to be angry with us, faith feels its strife with despair. However, faith does not yield to despair.

10. *God saw what they did.* The preceding verse, as I said, explains this verse. They believed God’s Word, and by turning away from their wickedness they proved their internal faith by their external works. On account of their faith, which was the fountain and source of the works, God looked favorably on the works of these saints. Otherwise (Rom. 14:23): “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” When the heart is impure and unbelieving, works do not please God, no matter how magnificent they are. The Holy Spirit teaches this very clearly in Scripture in the story of Cain and Abel, Gen. 4.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE beginning of this chapter seems to be said in anticipation of the events, because the same things are repeated later when Jonah returns¹ to the sequence of the narrative. It is a characteristic of the Hebrew language to have a repetitious arrangement and to repeat the same thing frequently, as in Ps. 1:4: “Like chaff which the wind drives it away from the earth.” In this prayer the pronoun “it” is clearly superfluous. What the Hebrew language does in such a short statement it also does in the long fabric of speech, as can be seen in Deuteronomy, where Moses often employs a plethora of words in describing some event. Later he usually repeats the whole thing in the same context. In this way I think that this verse at the beginning of this chapter has been said in anticipation of the events, so that this is the real sequence of the narrative: God saw their works because they had been converted from their evil way, and He did not bring misfortune upon them. Jonah did not say these words at the beginning, but after a few days he said them after he had completed his preaching and had observed that the disaster which he had predicted did not develop. Then follows the incident described at the beginning of this chapter: while Jonah was waiting for a few days and the thing he had predicted did not happen, because the people of Nineveh were regaining their senses, he “was with great distress.” The force of the Hebrew word is more like this: “Grievous trouble (הָצָרָה) did this provide for Jonah.” Christ also used this word in Matt. 6:34: “Let the day’s trouble be sufficient for the day.” Jonah was so troubled because, before he came to Nineveh, he had underestimated the Lord’s power when he had been terrified by the danger of death, as I mentioned above. A second reason was that he did not want those people to be saved, etc. He was so angry because the Assyrians, the destroyers of God’s people, were not being destroyed. Here again we see an example of what I said at the beginning of this prophet and have said often in other places and Scripture everywhere expresses: There still remain in the saints remnants of the flesh, and the saints do not get rid of them until that old Adam is completely destroyed. There is a fine passage in Acts 14:15, where Barnabas and Paul say: “We also are human beings, subject to the same troubles as you are.” And the author of the Epistle of James says about Elijah (James 5:17): “Elijah was a man of like nature with ourselves.” Those men had flesh and blood just as we have. And so, no matter how holy they were, still they sometimes lapsed in very disgraceful ways because of the weakness of the flesh, just as Jonah here, although tested in a marvelous way and exercised in his faith, still is not able to submit his will to the divine will with joy. The most excellent and highest God wanted to save the people of Nineveh; Jonah did not feel that way, but rather was irate and grumbling. Truly no suffering, no temptation is adequate for putting the old man completely to death; that old Adam does not stop being like² himself, no matter how great the temptation may be, until he finally perishes completely, when the entire old man will be choked to death once and for all. These things have been written for our comfort so that, just as divine mercy did not impute sin to them, be it ever so great, because they were the elect and were planted in the kingdom of grace, so neither will it impute sin to us, Rom. 8:1, 28: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for whom all things work together for good.” And just as those were saved under the shadow of the Lord’s hand, so also let us not despair of being saved, even if we feel the oldness of the flesh remaining in us. This flesh will not cease to exist for us (just as it did not cease to exist for the most saintly) so long as that old Adam is not completely destroyed. Meanwhile let us cling to our Head, Christ. And this is the

proclamation of the kingdom of grace, that even if there is sin left in the saints (and it cannot be otherwise), still it is not counted against them but forgiven, just as they pray every day, etc.

2. *Is not this what I said?* The Hebrew word רִכְּבָה means “a cause, a thing, a word.” It is used in this way in Deut. 16:19: “A bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous,” that is, bribes overturn just “causes.” This is the sense in which Jonah uses the word here. The Romans would say simply: “When I was still in my land, this is ‘the reason’ why I started to flee to the sea.”

That Thou art a gracious God and merciful. In the Psalms these two words are often joined. And the same word which is here translated “mercy” (רַחֲמִים) is also used by Moses in Ex. 33:19, which the apostle Paul cites Rom. 9:15: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy.”

And abounding in steadfast love. This word basically denotes kindness. Christ also used this word in the Gospel (Matt. 9:13): “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,” that is, “I want you to be helpful to others.”

And repentest of evil. God rises above evil, God is greater than the evil. God is the one who is accustomed to call back the punishment which He had decided to inflict. All these words are surely words of faith; to be able to grasp and imagine that God is this way, this certainly is life and salvation. Although this healthy and genuine faith is in Jonah, still he is angry with God. Flesh and spirit coexist in this way. Such is the battle within the saints, and there is no truce in this war, as I mentioned above.

3. *Take my life from me, I beseech Thee.* Also these are words of a great spirit desiring to be destroyed, seeking death; but this is also a fleshly desire, for he feared disgrace, since things did not turn out the way he had predicted by the Word of God.

4. *Do you do well to be angry?* This implies the answer no.

5. *Then Jonah went out of the city.* At this point he resumes the narrative. If all the events that follow in this chapter need to agree with the things preceding, they would have to be connected this way: “For Jonah had left the city, etc.” Notice the wonderful tolerance and mercy of the excellent and most high God. Notice the wonderful attractiveness of the Divine Majesty, how He handled and played with foolish, angry Jonah when He endured his anger and convicted him on the basis of his own opinion. This is the gentle, fatherly way to handle sinners. Here we certainly have a singular example of divine mercy toward those people who, although they have been justified, still sin. Notice how He winks at, how He quarrels with, Jonah’s grumbling, so that Jonah might give up his anger and stop being angry and grumbling. Divine goodness prepares a tent or a little hut for him. By sitting beneath this, he would have pleasant shade until the heat of the sun should abate.

6. *That it might save him.* The reading in the Hebrew is: “so that it might rescue him from his trouble.” This idea can be understood in two different ways. One opinion is that the Lord prepared ivy to grow above Jonah, so that the shade of the ivy would delight him and save him from his trouble, namely, from his affliction, so that the conversion of the people of Nineveh would not trouble Jonah anymore. For this is the same Hebrew word as above.³ The other interpretation is the one which is more pleasing to me, that the Lord convicted Jonah and punished him for his spiteful feeling, so that He might lead him, taught and refuted by his own example, to confess his foolish anger and grumbling. I prefer this second explanation. If someone else prefers the first one, let him adopt it. Incidentally, there has been a truly strange, cold controversy among holy men in the church about the noun “ivy.” This is the way Jerome translated it, although the old translation before Jerome had had “gourd.” Nothing is gained by fighting over a matter of no importance, since the Hebrew word means neither “ivy” nor “gourd,” but it is the name of a tree unknown to us but indigenous to that region. But Jerome gives a reason for his translating it “ivy.” For this explanation, consult the commentaries of Jerome.⁴

7. *God appointed a worm.* By doing this the Lord wished to stop the unjust anger of Jonah. Moreover, the Divine Majesty did this in a very fatherly, kind way, as I have mentioned.

So that he was faint. The Hebrew word properly means “he was overcome by the heat.” The Germans say *verschmachten* (“faint away”). It is the same word⁵ as in Amos 8:13: “The fair virgins and the young men shall faint for thirst.”

8. *He asked that he might die.* At this point Jonah resumes the narrative, for I do not think that the Lord said twice to Jonah, “You are not doing the right thing by being angry, are you?”

9. *I do well to be angry.* Notice the peevish grumbling, which was unwilling to yield to his good sense. Certainly Jonah is a strange prophet. When he is castigated by the Lord, his anger increased. In this way sin is usually increased by sin; in this way one sin gives rise to another sin.

10. *You pity the ivy, for which you did not labor.* “You have pity on your ivy, which has now withered, which you, a mere human being, did not provide. Although you did not provide it, you are angry that it has been eaten by a worm. I, who am God, who created Nineveh and the people and the numerous animals in that city, should I not pity it, should I not be patient with it, should I not rejoice over its salvation?” This is a wonderfully sweet expression of the Divine Majesty; this is a very complete promise of the incomprehensible goodness and mercy of God. This shows how much God does not desire the death of a sinner; He desires rather that the sinner be converted and live (cf. Ezek. 33:11). These things assure us of God’s grace: that He grieves about our destruction, He rejoices over our salvation, as the parable of the prodigal son in the gospel shows. In the same way as here, Christ said, Matt. 7:11: “If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven, etc.?”

11. *Who do not know their right hand from their left.* This is an idiom of the Hebrew language. We would say it differently, something like this: “They know nothing, neither this nor anything else.” We say in German, “They do not know what is white or what is black.” This means that they know nothing about salvation; they cannot distinguish between godliness and ungodliness; they do not have the Word of God. And so if they only knew as much as you know, my dear Jonah, perhaps they would be better than you—as it also turned out. For when they had heard the preaching of Jonah, they were immediately converted and, believing the Word, they repented. Jonah all the while was murmuring against the Lord and staying angry.

I commend the following as an allegory for your meditation and careful attention. For Christ Himself in the gospel applies this example of Jonah to Himself. He indicates that Jonah pointed to Him when He says, Matt. 12:39–40: “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was, etc.” This is an exceptionally wonderful story. Even Christ seems to have been delighted with it, and this is evident in that very same chapter of Matthew. When He mentions the men of Nineveh, Christ is surely speaking in a wonderful way about this story. And so this story is well known in both Testaments. Christ came into “the sea,” that is, into the world. And when He had come into the world, “the sea” was disturbed because of Him, since the Son of God was received by some but not by others. He was devoured by “a large fish,” that is, by Satan, the ruler of this world. For Satan and hell and death “swallowed” Christ when He was hanging on the cross, as if they would destroy Him, but He could not be held by them, for that was impossible, as Peter says, Acts 2:24. And so it was necessary for Him “to be vomited up.” He came back to life, and this became an opportunity for life, which before had been an opportunity for death. In this way death has become the door to life for us; disgrace has become the elevation to glory; condemnation and hell, the door to salvation. And this has happened through Christ, who was sinless, etc.

To Christ be praise and glory!

LECTURES ON JONAH

The German Text

1526

Translated by

MARTIN H. BERTRAM

PREFACE TO THE PROPHET JONAH

SINCE the prince of this world has sowed his tares everywhere and Germany has become glutted with factions and spirits through whom he not only seduces many but also turns those who remain faithful to many unprofitable and vain pursuits and thereby detracts them from Scripture and entices them into his disputes and thus, in the end, cunningly catches them off the base of Scripture and works their ruin; it is imperative that we recognize this sly and malicious attack and not become too engrossed in his altercations, lest he lure us far away from our defenses and our fortress and surreptitiously defeat us. “For,” as St. Paul declares, “we are not ignorant of his designs” (2 Cor. 2:11). And St. Peter informs us that the devil does not take a holiday but “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). For some time I have entered the lists and fought against these spirits and factions. Now that

others have joined the fray, I have decided to take Scripture in hand again to feast our hearts, to strengthen, to comfort, and to arm them, lest fatigue and lassitude subdue us in our daily struggle. May God grant me grace that we, by His Word and the comfort of Scripture, may be refreshed and invigorated to fight with ever greater courage.

I am impelled to do this not only in view of spirits and factions, with whom the devil attacks us on the right side, but also because of the tyranny with which he attacks us on the left side. For the mad bishops and princes, incited by their god, rave and rage in dead earnest and plainly purpose to expel God and His Anointed and to exterminate His Word. They have already shed much innocent blood and are straining mightily to shed more. We have good reason to boast that Christendom is really coming into its own now, because it is pressed so hard from both sides, because it is being so foully damned, blasphemed, defamed, and mocked by both parties as it perhaps has never been before. This leads me to believe that the devil is trying his utmost today. He senses that the Day of Judgment is looming and is therefore determined in a final assault to employ his full power against Christ and His Word.

To endure that, we again stand in need of consolation, so that we will not be daunted but can intrepidly scorn their threats and their insolence and wrath, convinced that they are thereby most speedily expediting us to heaven and, at the same time, promptly cutting their own throats, convinced that they will, through the judgment of God, be reduced to ashes in a short time. It is a matter of a moment, and we will be viewing each other in a different light. Then the devil and his masked henchmen, that is, his princes and bishops, will find out who those are whom they at present revile, exile, and kill.

I have therefore chosen to expound the holy prophet Jonah, for he is indeed well suited for this situation and represents an excellent, outstanding, and comforting example of faith and a mighty and wonderful sign of God's goodness to all the world. For who would not trust God with all his heart, proudly defy all the devils, the world, and all the fulminating tyrants, and exult over God's kindness, when he contemplates this story and beholds how easily God's power and grace are able to preserve Jonah in the midst of the deep sea, even in the belly of the whale, thus saving him not only from one death but from various deaths, deserted and forgotten as he is by all men and all creatures? Apparently without effort God sustains Jonah and brings him back merely by uttering a word. It is as if God were saying: "Behold, this is what I can do with one word. In view of this, what do you suppose I could do with My Spirit and power?" The human mind cannot conceive of a greater work than this. For that reason Christ Himself prizes this story so highly, citing this Jonah above all other prophets as an illustration of His own death and resurrection. In Matt. 12:39 He says: "No sign shall be given this generation except the sign of the prophet Jonah, etc."

Furthermore, Jonah is also an object of comfort for all who administer the Word. It teaches them not to despair of the fruit of the Gospel, no matter how badly it appears to be devoid of fruit and profit. For here a single man, Jonah, is dispatched to the mightiest king and the greatest kingdom of that day. When we compare the two, Jonah and this king, it impresses us as ridiculous and completely impossible that such a mighty king and such a powerful kingdom should be moved, converted, and frightened by the words of one weak individual, a stranger to boot, and by a message which the king himself did not even hear—he heard it only as a report. In view of this, I am tempted to say that no apostle or prophet, not even Christ Himself, performed and accomplished with a single sermon the great things Jonah did. His conversion of the city of Nineveh with one sermon is surely as great a miracle as his rescue from the belly of the whale, if not an even greater one. For just as the whale had to spew Jonah forth in obedience to the words of God, so Jonah by the Word of God also tore the city of Nineveh from the belly and the jaws of the devil, that is, from sin and death. Would it not be reasonable to assume that such a king would rely on his great might and regard this one man a liar, a man whom even his own fellow Hebrews disobeyed? Thus the apostles and, as we hear in Ps. 2:2, even Christ Himself, were shamefully despised by kings and princes on earth. And there are princes, bishops, and lords today who are veritable beggars compared with the king of Nineveh but who rely so vaingloriously on their tawdry beggary that they do not only despise the Word of God but also persecute it.

That is why Christ in Matt. 12:41 cites the men of Nineveh against all unbelievers and scorners of His Word, saying: "The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." And that is not at all unfair, for it will forever stand as a great miracle that the people of Nineveh were converted so

quickly by a foreign preacher and by means of such simple words, without any attendant miraculous signs. And these Jews were not converted by their own Savior, who preached to them so often and lavished miracles on them. What a shame to hear that now! And what a shame it will be also to see this! But it is of no avail; they are and remain hardened. Therefore we let them go their way, and we take comfort from the prophet and learn our lesson from him as God grants us grace. Amen.

CHAPTER ONE

SOME people concur in Jerome's opinion¹ that this prophet Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath at Sidon, who fed the prophet Elijah in a time of famine, according to 1 Kings 17 and Luke 4:26. These people base their assumption on the fact that Jonah here calls himself son of Amittai (v. 1), that is, "son of the truthful one." This they relate to the widow's words to Elijah after he had raised her son from the dead: "Now I know that the word of the Lord in your mouth is true" (1 Kings 17:24). Whoever wants to may believe this; I do not. No, his father's name was Amittai; in Latin it would be *Verax*, in German, *Wahrlich*. And he came from Gath-hepher, a town within the borders of the tribe of Zebulun, according to Joshua 19:13. For in 2 Kings 14:25 we find recorded: "[King Jeroboam] restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which He spoke by His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher." Moreover, the widow of Zarephath was a Gentile, as Christ also tells us in Luke 4:26; but Jonah confesses here in chapter 1:9 that he is a Hebrew.

I am enlarging on this because I regard it advantageous to know the time of a prophet's life and the country in which he lived. Wherever available, these facts should be mentioned. It contributes to a proper understanding of a man's book if one knows his time, his place of residence, his person, and his background. Of Jonah we know that he lived in the days of King Jeroboam, whose grandfather was King Jehu, a contemporary of King Uzziah in Judah. The prophets Hosea, Amos, and Joel lived in the kingdom of Israel at the same time, although in different places and towns. From this I suppose we can infer that Jonah was an excellent and estimable man in the kingdom of Israel and that God worked great things through him, for by means of his preaching King Jeroboam was fortunate enough to recover all the land that Hazael, the king of Syria, had taken from the kingdom of Israel. He had inflicted such great injury that also the prophet Elishah had wept over it when he foresaw it, according to 2 Kings 8:11. God bestowed these favors on Israel despite the fact that the kingdom was still idolatrous, worshiping the golden calves in Samaria beside the true God. So great is the mercy when God grants a country one man with His Word and for his sake not only endures the whole country's misdeeds and disobedience but even comes to the aid of that country and showers untold benefits on it. What would God not be willing to do or abstain from doing for a country that contains more than one godly person?

Scripture does not indicate whether these events in Nineveh and in the whale happened to Jonah before he proved so helpful to Jeroboam or later, after his return from Nineveh. It seems credible, however, that he first served and aided Jeroboam in his country until he had reestablished the kingdom of Israel and that thereupon he was sent farther afield, out of his country to Nineveh. In his own country he observed with his own eyes what kindness and mercy God was showing to the idolatrous kingdom of Israel. And from this he very likely gathered that God would be just as kind and gracious to Nineveh, so that his preaching would be useless and unnecessary, as he himself angrily confesses in chapter 4:1–2.

Summary: This was the situation in the world at the time of Jonah. Assyria, with the city of Nineveh, was the foremost kingdom, or empire, in the world, as Babylon and Rome were later on. In addition, we find other countries, such as Syria, Israel, Judah, Edom, Moab, each a kingdom in itself. The kingdom of Israel surely enjoyed its independence because of Jonah, just as the kingdom of Judah did because of King Uzziah. But that was as it were the last chapter, the final blessing² God bestowed on the kingdom of Israel. For after the death of Jeroboam, when the people did not at all repent and desist from their idolatry, moved neither by punishment nor by benefactions, the kingdom disintegrated. One king always murdered the other, until the emperor of Assyria appeared and destroyed both Syria and Israel. He led both away into captivity, from which they have not returned to the present day, as the last chapter of 2 Kings attests. And now when disaster and destruction of the entire kingdom were impending on account of the people's sins, God first delegated His prophets with His Word to warn the people that they might repent or that at least a few might be saved and preserved.

For whenever God's wrath is about to be kindled, He usually first sends His Word to save a few. Thus He sent Noah before the deluge came (Gen. 6); He sent Lot before He destroyed Sodom (Gen. 19); and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob before He despoiled Canaan; Joseph and Moses before He afflicted Egypt. And thus He here also sent Jonah and Hosea before He did away with Israel, and Jonah before He determined to overturn Nineveh. And thus God also sent Christ, His Son, into the world before the appearance of the final wrath at the Last Judgment. After Christ's death not only Jerusalem but also Rome and the whole Roman orbit and empire were shattered. At present we are also enjoying this same mercy, and the bright light of God's Word is shining on us, which is unmistakable evidence of impending disaster. God wants to save a number of us before disaster strikes and destroys us if we do not improve. But sad to say, we are surely behaving badly, and the punishment has already set in to a large extent.

2. Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, etc.

We glean from this that God befriends not only the Jews but also the Gentiles. Thus St. Paul declares in Rom. 3:29: "Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also?" And there is no indication here that the people of Nineveh circumcised themselves and observed or adopted the laws of the Jews: they are commended solely because they believed the Word of God, repented, and became pious people. That strikes a mighty blow against the Jews and is a strong support of our Christian faith. We must note it well. For from this we can definitely conclude that circumcision and the law of Moses are not prerequisites for piety and for pleasing God and that the Jews were mistaken in their claim that all had to become Jews and accept and observe the laws of Moses, assuming that the Jews alone were God's people. For here stands Jonah with his book and demonstrates that the people of Nineveh please and satisfy God without adherence to laws and customs of the Jews but solely by their faith and good works and that God does not demand more than that from them. If Moses' law had been necessary for the achievement of piety, they, too, would have been obliged to accept it. But that does not happen here. On the other hand, we find that faith and good works are demanded of the Jews and that their circumcision and their various modes of worship do not avail them. Thus Is. 1:11 repudiates them with their sacrifices and their deeds. And St. Paul's statement in Rom. 2:14 is in perfect agreement here, saying that the Gentiles keep the Law without the Law and that the Jews violate the Law with the Law. Thus we easily perceive that Moses' law was imposed only on the Jews, and that just for a season, to constrain them and to humble them as with a dungeon and a jailer, as St. Paul says in Gal. 3:24; not at all that thereby they might become godly but that they might be made eager for Christ and God's grace. And now Jonah with his prophesy confirms the statement of St. Paul in Rom. 3:20, 28 that no one can become godly before God by the works of the Law but that he must become so through faith, without any works of the Law. And as we here observe in the case of the people of Nineveh, such a person will then do good works. And if the people of Nineveh were not under obligation to keep the law of Moses and to become Jews at a time before the advent of Christ when the Law was still in force and incumbent on the Jews, how much less are we bound by the Law now that Christ has come and has abolished the Law also for the Jews? Therefore the only demand made on us, as once on the people of Nineveh, is that we have a true faith that performs good works, makes people pious, etc.

I am saying this not only for the sake of the Jews and by way of refuting their claims but also for our sakes, who have more than one devil contending against this divine doctrine: first of all, the pope and his followers, who term this an innovation and impose much greater and more laws on us than Moses' law contained and who want to make us pious before God in that way. However, I hold that this doctrine is old enough, since it existed at the time of Jonah, long before Christ's birth, and that it is also sufficient, since it made the people of Nineveh pious without the law of Moses and before anyone would ever have dreamt of the papacy. In the second place, we have the factious spirits and the enthusiasts, who endeavor to encumber us with the law of Moses. They try to be our masters, even though they know neither what Moses nor what Christ is, nor the limits of Moses' authority nor the purpose he serves. Such the iconoclasts have been and those who believed that the law of Moses comprehended the sword of government and cried loudly: "Here is God's Word, God's Word, God's Word!" As though it sufficed to quote God's Word without discerning to whom it applies. The command to Noah to build the ark, to Abraham to sacrifice his son, and to Solomon to erect the temple were all God's Word; but that does not imply that I should do likewise. No, those words of God were not directed to me. But these words of general import, "Repent and believe!" as here spoken to the people of Nineveh, pertain also to me and to

all other men. Therefore we must not content ourselves to inquire whether a certain word is of God, but we must also ascertain whether or not this word is intended for us and so apply it to ourselves or not, etc.

But notice what an important office God entrusts to Jonah when He orders this one man to preach against the mighty empire of Assyria, against the king and his princes. After all, great lords dislike and resent being chided and being taken to task; they do not want to be rebuked. And now God commands Jonah here to upbraid them for their wickedness. That surely calls for genuine courage. Jonah has to open his mouth and speak. He has to say to them: “You are evil, and you stand condemned. Your respectable conduct is nothing but sham that is misleading you.” For unquestionably there were also good people in such a large kingdom whose outward life was honorable and irreproachable. To reprove these and frighten them with God’s wrath is a big job, and it is ill received, especially among the bigwigs. In brief, we are inclined to disparage this story because we view it from afar and because it does not pertain to us. However, if anything similar were ever to befall us, or if we had participated in this at Jonah’s time, we should think that we have never seen or heard of anything more preposterous or impossible than to have one single man attack such an empire. What would people think if you or I were sent to the Turkish emperor to rebuke him and his princes and his realm? How absurd did it often seem when someone ventured to raise his voice against the pope!

Well, God’s works usually begin in such an unreasonable and impossible way that reason must despair of them and sneer; but this is done for our good, that we might believe. For God carries out what He says and undertakes, no matter how foolish and impossible this may appear to us. “For the foolishness of God is wiser than men,” 1 Cor. 1:25. Jonah proves that nicely and convincingly here.

3. *But Jonah rose to flee to the sea, away from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa.*

Both the Greek and the Latin texts read “to Tarshish.” I translated this *aufs Meer*, “to the sea.” Lest the wiseacres condemn me unduly for this, I will have to adduce some reasons for my translation. They say that Jonah traveled to Tarsus, the city of Cilicia from which St. Paul came, according to Acts 9:11. But there is no basis in Scripture for that assumption. For the text does not read to “Tarsus” but into, or onto, “Tarshish.” The Hebrew tongue has two words for sea, יָם and יַבַּיִת. The former is the expression not only for the great sea but also for the large lakes. Thus Luke calls the sea on which Christ and His disciples sailed near Tiberias and Capernaum and Bethsaida a lake,³ which John 6:17 and the other evangelists call the Galilean Sea.⁴ And in Gen. 1:10 Moses says: “The waters that were gathered together God called יָם, יַבַּיִת that is, seas, or ocean. But Tarshish is really the term for the large sea which is not a lake, such as the one in which Rhodes, Cyprus, and many other islands lie and on which St. Paul set sail, according to Acts 27 f. At present the Turks, the Venetians, France, and Spain control this body of water. It reaches from Cilicia to Spain. Also the Red Sea and the other great high seas are called Tarshish.

In Ps. 72:10 we read: “May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles bring tribute,” that is, the kings bordering on the great sea and the islands in it. The city of Tarsus is not a kingdom and has never had a king, to say nothing of many kings. Thus Solomon let his ships sail on Tarshish, that is, on the sea toward the East, through the Red Sea, to get gold from India (1 Kings 9:26–28). It was obviously out of the question for ships to sail to the city of Tarsus, unless they traveled on dry land. For between Tarsus and the Red Sea there is nothing but land, as those who travel by land know. Thus Ps. 48:7 declares: “By the east wind Thou didst shatter the ships of Tarshish,” that is, the ships of the sea. And in Is. 23:1 we hear: “Wail, O ships of Tarshish,” that is, you ships of the sea. There are many other reasons that support this view, so that St. Jerome himself admits that it might be more reasonable to translate the word with “sea” than with the city of Tarsus.⁶ For Jonah was not concerned about fleeing to any particular city; he had no special destination, but he was solely bent on running off to the sea to let that lead him wherever it would. His whole mind was centered on flight, and he did not ask where this might carry him. Therefore the text states here that he “rose to flee from the presence of the Lord.” And since he had no particular place in mind, he decided to take to the sea and let the winds blow him whither they might.

יָבַיִת is Joppa, the city where people today land en route to Jerusalem. In German the name means *die Schöne* (“the Fair One”) or *die Hübsche* (“Beauty”). Joppa is the port for the land of the Jews. So Jonah has now traveled from Jerusalem and from the land of Judah to the sea toward the west. This is also shown by the expression “from the presence of the Lord.” Who can flee from the Lord? Is the Lord not everywhere? Thus Ps. 139:7 declares: “Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from

Thy presence?” Jonah was not so stupid that he did not know that God is omnipresent. Later on he himself professes that he “fears the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land” (v. 9). Jonah had also heard that God was at Nineveh, since He had proposed to punish the vileness of that city and had wanted to send Jonah there. But this must be understood thus: God has two kinds of essence, or presence—the one is natural, the other spiritual. He is present everywhere naturally. Is. 66:1 declares: “Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool.” Thus God is present also in the midst of hell, death, and sin, as the aforementioned psalm says (Ps. 139:8): “If I make my bed in Sheol, Thou art there.” Therefore no one can escape from Him. But God is present spiritually only where He is spiritually known. Wherever His Word, faith, Spirit, and worship are, there His people are to be found, who alone perceive that God is an almighty and omnipresent God. The ungodly do not feel that; they do not believe and do not know that God is everywhere, even though they hear this said and are able to repeat it. It is therefore possible to flee from God in the sense that we may run off to a place where there is neither Word, faith, and Spirit nor the knowledge of God. In that way Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord, that is, he ran away from the people and the land of Judah, in which God’s Word and Spirit and faith and knowledge were present; he fled to the sea among the Gentiles, where there was no faith, Word, and Spirit of God.

Now the question suggests itself whether or not Jonah committed a sin by fleeing from the Lord. The ancient holy fathers were all inclined to make excuses for the prophets, apostles, and great saints. They carried this silly deference to them to such extremes that they even preferred to violate Holy Scripture, to force it and stretch it, before they would admit that the saints were sinners. Although we can bear with their humility, which grew from their hatred of sin and their respect for righteousness, it is nevertheless dangerous to bend Scripture thus and to follow their interpretation. Christ speaks a different language; in Matt. 5:18 He declares that heaven and earth would have to pass away before an iota or a dot of Holy Scripture would vanish. It is better to concede the saints too little than too much; it is better to detract from them than to disparage God Himself and His Word. We can be saved without the saints but not without God’s Word.

Thus we shall stick rigidly and inflexibly to the Word of God and agree that Jonah here committed a grave and serious sin, which would have damned him eternally, had his name not been recorded in the book of life amid the number of the elect. It is obvious, and no one can deny it, that God here issues an order to Jonah, bidding him to go to Nineveh and preach there. Moreover, it is certain that God did not view this matter lightly but that He was in earnest about this, even as He was in the Garden of Eden at the time when He gave orders to Adam. He says: “The wickedness of the city of Nineveh has come up before Me.” This means that He purposed to punish the entire kingdom. In short, God is very angry. Thus it is also evident that Jonah is disobedient to this earnest command of God by fleeing and refusing to execute God’s command. Thereby he sinned as gravely as Adam did in Paradise. Jonah should not merely have accepted the divine will, but he should also have been most happy to carry it out. He should rather have suffered a hundred deaths than to become disobedient to God’s Word. For what can be more flagrant and heinous than disobedience to God’s will? Behold, what a price Adam, Saul, and the people of Israel paid for this sin! Yes, witness what happened to Jonah here because of his disobedience! It seems to me that the enormous and terrible punishment meted out to his disobedience is an index of the gravity of this sin. How miserably he evades obedience to God on the sea! I am sure that he wished he could have died three times on land instead. Since he refuses to go to Nineveh, he must sail into the jaws of the whale far out at sea.

All of this is recorded as a warning for us. From it we glean the lesson first of all that he who will not obey God’s will willingly must, in the end, bow to His will unwillingly. God’s will must prevail. We see here that he who refuses to comply with God’s small demands must suffer even graver things because of this. And consequently, there is nothing better for us than that we obey promptly and say: “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). However, the fact that God seeks out and visits Jonah so soon after his sin is a strong token of His mercy. God does not put this sin to his account, nor does he let Jonah persist in it long. And Jonah can well join David and sing (Ps. 118:18): “The Lord has chastened me sorely, but He has not given me over to death.” In the second place, we must learn to know God’s mercy well and not depend on our works, whether good or bad, but know that sin does not condemn us nor good works save us, but that only God’s grace preserves us, that both sin and good works condemn us if we despair in our sin or rely on our good works. For here you clearly observe that Jonah does not merit his

preservation in the fish's belly and his safe return to land with any good works but that he owes this solely to God's mercy, as he professes so beautifully in his song of praise that we will hear later. Again, you see that there is enough grave sin present, and yet Jonah is not condemned or forsaken. This is due to the fact that he does not despond and despair in his sin but clings firmly to God's mercy and willingly submits to His punishment. If he had despaired, he would never have come forth from the whale's belly. His strong faith in the midst of his sin makes it impossible for God to forget him; He must again deliver him. We shall have more to say about this later.

It is also a source of great comfort to us to see that even the greatest and best saints sin grievously against God and that we are not the only poor, miserable sinners. We observe that they, too, were human, that they had flesh and blood as we do, and now we, too, must not despair, even though we fall into sin. If only we do not defect from the kingdom of grace through false doctrine and superstition! For just as there is no sin so great as to be unforgivable in that kingdom, so there is no work so good, no life so holy, as not to be damnable without this grace. However, I declare that to remain in the kingdom of grace implies that we do not sin against grace. Sinning against grace is done in a twofold manner: first, by sinning against God's commandment and then aggravating this by adding the devilish sin to despond and despair, believing and disturbing my conscience with the thought that God will not forgive my sin and that there is no longer any mercy for me. Under those circumstances there is, in fact, no longer any mercy, but God with all His mercy is denied and thwarted. This is no longer a human but a devilish sin, a sin against the Holy Spirit, which is unforgivable so long as it remains, for it directly counteracts the mercy by which sin is to be remitted.

I remain in the kingdom of grace when I do not despair of God's mercy, no matter how great my sin may be, but resolutely pin mind and conscience to the belief that there is still grace and forgiveness for me, even if the wrath of God and that of all creatures would threaten to consume me and even if my conscience would bear out this wrath and say that the supply of mercy is exhausted and that God will not forgive me. That is elevating God's grace above everything else, praising and extolling it and with it defying all anger and judgment, joining in the words of the Epistle of James (2:13): "Mercy triumphs over judgment," that is, mercy asserts itself and proves stronger than all wrath and every sentence and judgment of God. And whoever believes that can therewith defy all the anger and every judgment of God. He who is unable to do that bids judgment to challenge grace. And grace must perish and judgment hold sway alone to produce death and damnation. Conversely, where grace defies judgment, judgment must vanish and grace alone prevail to produce eternal life and bliss. That is Jonah's experience here. This is no longer human righteousness based on our works and power, but it is an angelic, yes, a divine righteousness based on faith and spirit and devoid of any works. It clings solely to grace, and this no work is able to do. For all of this takes place in the heart and conscience, where there is no work and where no work can enter.

The second manner in which I sin against grace is if I perform good works with the simultaneous devilish thought that I comfort myself with these or rely on them, that I tell my conscience that I can stand before God with these, as if there were no sin here. Thereby I neutralize grace for myself, acting as though grace were neither necessary nor beneficial, since works could do this. That, too, is denying God with all His mercy, and that is no longer human but devilish righteousness, which cannot be forgiven so long as it remains and is not recognized. If a person becomes so pious in his works and his being that he does not require forgiveness or grace but regards his works in themselves good and pure enough to render grace and forgiveness superfluous, he remains outside the kingdom of grace and sins against grace. Such an attitude reverses the statement of James. It no longer reads: "Mercy triumphs over judgment," but: "Works triumph over judgment," yes, "Works triumph over mercy." This is the sin against the Holy Spirit, which cannot be forgiven, that is, it is a sin that lacks grace, the grace through which it might be pardoned, as all other sins that do not have this devilish addition may be pardoned. For with all other sins the belief in mercy remains intact. They retain the reliance on mercy and forgiveness, believing that these abound more than sin does. This sin and good works, however, lose sight of grace and do not let that triumph remain. This sin declares: There is no grace, and grace is not willing to forgive. Good works declare: Grace is nothing, and we can dispense with it. Thus both have dropped from the kingdom of grace and sin against grace.

This, I assume, will clarify Christ's statement recorded in Matt. 12:31 and in Mark 3:29 regarding the sin against the Holy Spirit, which cannot be forgiven, neither in this life nor in the life to come; also John's statement (1 John 5:16): "There is sin which is mortal; I do not say that one is to pray for that." He calls the sin against the Holy Spirit a mortal sin. All of this is tantamount to saying: "Whoever despairs in his sin or relies on good works sins against the Holy Spirit and against grace." Of course, I should intercede for such people and pray that they may be freed from that sin and be converted; but it is impossible that God be gracious to them so long as they are given to that sin, it is impossible that God's grace be of greater effect in their hearts than that sin, as is true of other sins. If I were to pray for that, I would be asking that God's grace be less effective and at the same time more effective than that sin. That is out of the question. No, I must pray against that sin, as Moses did in Num. 16:15, against Korah, saying: "Do not respect their offering." For Korah, too, aspired to esteem before God by reason of his works, and so he sinned against grace. That is an intolerable sin. All other sins which let grace triumph and reign are forgivable. May this suffice on this subject for the present.

But what led Jonah to this disobedience and bade him to be so averse to go to Nineveh? A number of reasons are intimated here. In the first place, he refused to go on this great, novel, and unheard-of mission because he, singled out from all the prophets, was sent to go all alone to such a mighty king in a foreign land. We do not read of another instance where God delegated a prophet to go so far away from the land of Israel and to such a mighty kingdom. Since this was an unusual and peculiar and unprecedented order, it puzzled and perplexed Jonah that God should select him from all others for this errand. Flesh and blood are naturally disposed to balk at anything extraordinary that God undertakes through us but not through others. Thus we read in John 21:19 ff. that when Jesus said to Peter, "Follow Me," Peter, looking at John, asked, "Lord, what about this man?" We do not perceive that in the end we must all act alone. Jonah experienced this here. He was loath to leave his family and his country. Ultimately he had to go out on the sea all alone, and all alone into the jaws of the whale, where he could not but think that he was alone in heaven and on earth with God. Oh, that is very hard to bear!

In the second place, we might say that Jonah was afraid to face the great king. Some assume that he was also hesitant because he believed that his prophesy would not come true—which, in fact, did happen. Therefore he was worried that he might be regarded a liar and false prophet, whose words were untrue and not from God. But that reason is unfounded, for Jonah did not know what was to happen. In chapter 4:5 we find him sitting outside the city, waiting to see what would happen to it. We might infer from this that he expected to see the city perish like Sodom and Gomorrah. And he became angry because he was disappointed in his expectations. We might infer that he disobeyed God's command because of his dislike for the city of Nineveh, that he still had a Jewish, a carnal, idea of God, regarding Him as the exclusive God of the Jews and not also of the Gentiles. Therefore Jonah's heart inclined to the view that the people of Nineveh were not deserving of God's grace and Word because they were not God's people, that is, not Jews, or of the people of Israel. The apostles, too, at first supposed, carnally, that the kingdom of Christ was to be physical; and later, when they recognized that it was spiritual, they still thought that it was to be confined to the Jews. Therefore they preached the Gospel only to the Jews, Acts 8, until God appeared to Peter in a vision from heaven, Acts 10:9 ff., issued a public call to Paul and Barnabas, Acts 13:2–3, and with signs and wonders and at length in a general council, Acts 15:1, convinced them that God had granted grace also to the Gentiles and that He was also their God.

In view of the passages in Scripture that spoke of Israel and Abraham's seed, declaring that only they had God's Word, divine worship, laws, and holy prophets, it was extremely difficult for the Jews to believe that others, too, outside the pale of Israel, could be God's people. That is also the main reason why St. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans, where he treats this doctrine with the greatest cogency and acumen, that God is the God not only of the Jews but also of the Gentiles (Rom. 3:29). Even today this is the great stumbling block to the Jews. They do not want to believe that the Gentiles are God's people as well as they. Jonah, too, is caught in this delusion. It involves him in such conflicting thoughts that a hard blow is required for him to learn that God regarded also Nineveh as His city and its inhabitants as His people. In addition, the lesson of a wild plant as well as a strong testimony of God from heaven are necessary. As Christ dealt charitably with the carnal thoughts of His disciples regarding the kingdom of God, so God here also makes allowances for Jonah's carnal notions. Just ponder how hard it has been hitherto to believe that there could be Christians not under the pope, although nothing but hypocrisy and

perversion of Scripture is involved there. What would it be like if the institution of the papacy were upheld by Bible verses as clear and distinct as those which prove the establishment of Judaism! How we would shun Turks, Jews, and heathen and cling solely to the papacy! That is how Jonah felt about Judaism and the kingdom of Israel.

This is why, in chapter 4:2, he states that he has fled because he knows how gracious God is, etc. He indicates that he deplores it as it were that God is so kind and extends His grace to the people of Nineveh. He would rather not preach, yes, he prefers to be dead rather than to see the grace of God, which he regards the exclusive possession of the children of Israel, imparted also to the Gentiles, who have neither the Word of God nor the law of Moses nor divine worship nor the prophets nor anything else but who even contend against God and His Word and His people. That such is Jonah's opinion is clearly reflected by God's displeasure with his words and by the anger with which God reproves Jonah for these words (4:11), saying: "Should not I pity Nineveh, etc." This implies that Jonah was loath to see God spare the city, that He did not destroy it, as Jonah had preached and as he would have wished. So this story serves us as a comforting illustration of God's mercy. In the first place, we observe that God is no respecter of persons. We learn that we must refrain from judging any person and that we must not despair of him. For Jonah is here deeply involved in respecting persons, regarding the people of Nineveh as nothing before God in comparison with the people of Israel. He straightway judges them and rashly condemns them to death. He views them as damned and considers them beyond the pale of mercy. In fact, he hopes for and expects their perdition, simply thinking: What could such sinners deserve who do not have the Law and divine worship? If they were to be granted grace, why would Israel have so many laws of God and its divine worship? They would have nothing special and no advantage over the Gentiles, and the Gentiles would be accorded this grace without such law and divine worship. That would render the Jews' laws and divine worship forever a useless and unnecessary burden for people "who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat" (Matt. 20:12), and these other people would receive the same "denarius" without carrying that burden. Should that not stir up jealousy and move us to grumble against the housefather? Indeed, should that not be regarded as impossible and as unfair before God?

But Jonah is way off, and he errs with abandon. For when he thinks it is impossible for God's grace to be in operation here and when he looks for nothing but disfavor, then God's grace is present in its prime. And when he is of the opinion that people will not hear or receive God's Word, then they receive it best of all and in the greatest humility, so that he must learn from his own experience that he must not pass judgment on anyone and must not despair of anyone and that for God's grace he must never set place, goal, time, measure, person, or merit, as the carnal thoughts of the Jews did.

Second, we must learn from this to comply promptly with God's command, to ignore all other considerations, and not ask how this might agree with other matters. We must gladly and willingly become fools for God's sake, accord Him the honor, and concede that He is wise and just in all His words and works, as Abraham did when he sacrificed his son Isaac (Gen. 22:2 ff.). He did not first ask how this would agree with God's prior statement (Gen. 21:12): "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named." For if he had reflected long on this and debated, he would have become confused and in the end have fallen into disobedience, just as Jonah does here when he compares Nineveh with Israel. He ponders this question for a long time and finally falls into disobedience. If Jonah had but thought with singleness of heart: "Why do you investigate why God provided Israel with laws and divine worship and why He did not do this for the people of Nineveh? Certainly God has the power to grant His grace to both. He does not have to accord Israel special privileges because of its divine worship, and He does not have to withhold these from Nineveh because it does not possess such worship. What is it to you that God enjoins this on Israel and not on others? Let everyone see to his own affairs." Grace extends to all, both to those who engage in performing works and those who do not, as St. Paul teaches in Rom. 4:4-5. If Jonah had observed that, he would have remained obedient as Abraham did.

4. *But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, etc.*

Here many are obliged to suffer for the sin of an individual; for this tempest arose on account of Jonah. But is it fair that one must pay before God for the wrongs of another? God cannot be unjust or commit an injustice, no matter what He does; it is not for us to prescribe laws and rules for Him. And where there is no law, there can also be no sin or wrongdoing. However, though this storm arose because of Jonah, as he himself admits, and as the storm itself demonstrated, the people in the ship were not

without fault or sin either. By reason of this they constantly deserved death and every type of punishment before God. After all, who is sinless and inculpable before God? Therefore God aims this blow at the other people on the ship as well as at Jonah, although the latter with his sin is the direct cause for this tempest. It must have been an unusual and unexpected storm that arose suddenly; for the text states that “the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea.” According to the Hebrew text, the Lord as it were hurled or slung this tempest upon the sea. Consequently the people soon detected that there was something unnatural and abnormal about this. And from this they deduce that this must indubitably be due to someone’s sin. And Jonah recognized that he himself was responsible for this storm.

5. *Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god.*

Here you find St. Paul’s statement in Rom. 1:19 concerning the universal knowledge of God among all the heathen, that is, that the whole world talks about the Godhead and natural reason is aware that this Godhead is something superior to all other things. This is here shown by the fact that the people in our text called upon a god, heathen though they were. For if they had been ignorant of the existence of God or of a godhead, how could they have called upon him and cried to him? Although they do not have true faith in God, they at least hold that God is a being able to help on the sea and in every need. Such a light and such a perception is innate in the hearts of all men; and this light cannot be subdued or extinguished. There are, to be sure, some people, for instance, the Epicureans, Pliny, and the like, who deny this with their lips. But they do it by force and want to quench this light in their hearts. They are like people who purposely stop their ears or pinch their eyes shut to close out sound and sight. However, they do not succeed in this; their conscience tells them otherwise. For Paul is not lying when he asserts that they know something about God, “because God has shown it to them” (Rom. 1:19).

Let us here also learn from nature and from reason what can be known of God. These people regard God as a being who is able to deliver from every evil. It follows from this that natural reason must concede that all that is good comes from God; for He who can save from every need and misfortune is also able to grant all that is good and that makes for happiness. That is as far as the natural light of reason sheds its rays—it regards God as kind, gracious, merciful, and benevolent. And that is indeed a bright light. However, it manifests two big defects: first, reason does admittedly believe that God is able and competent to help and to bestow; but reason does not know whether He is willing to do this also for us. That renders the position of reason unstable. Reason believes in God’s might and is aware of it, but it is uncertain whether God is willing to employ this in our behalf, because in adversity it so often experiences the opposite to be true. That is very obvious here. These people indeed call upon God and thereby acknowledge that He can help if He is thus inclined; they even believe that He may help others. But that is as far as they can go; they cannot transcend that. They exhaust every means at their command; they try their utmost. Free will cannot go beyond that. But they do not believe that God is disposed to help them. For if they did, they would not “throw the wares that were in the ship into the sea,” nor would they turn to Jonah and urge him to call upon his God. No, they would calmly await the help of God. Moreover, the sea would also have become tranquil as a result of their faith. But this situation calls for a faith that does not doubt but is convinced that God wants to be gracious not only to others but also to me. That is a genuine and a live faith; it is a great and rich and rare gift of the Holy Spirit, and so we shall see it in Jonah.

The second defect is this: Reason is unable to identify God properly; it cannot ascribe the Godhead to the One who is entitled to it exclusively. It knows that there is a God, but it does not know who or which is the true God. It shares the experience of the Jews during Christ’s sojourn on earth. When John the Baptist bore witness of His presence in their midst, they were aware that Christ was among them and that He was moving about among them; but they did not know which person it was. It was incredible to them that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. Thus reason also plays blindman’s buff⁷ with God; it consistently gropes in the dark and misses the mark. It calls that God which is not God and fails to call Him God who really is God. Reason would do neither the one nor the other if it were not conscious of the existence of God or if it really knew who and what God is. Therefore it rushes in clumsily and assigns the name God and ascribes divine honor to its own idea of God. Thus reason never finds the true God, but it finds the devil or its own concept of God, ruled by the devil. So there is a vast difference between knowing that there is a God and knowing who or what God is. Nature knows the former—it is inscribed in everybody’s heart; the latter is taught only by the Holy Spirit.

We shall illustrate this with a few examples. Let us first consider the papists and the religious. These are laboring under the delusion that God is a being who is moved and satisfied by good works. That explains their many vocations, sects, and modes of life, in all of which they presume to serve and please God. Now tell me, what are these people worshiping as God if there is no God whose mind and will conforms to theirs? Is it not true that they are honoring their own delusion and their own fancy as God? For in truth there is no God who is of one mind with them. Therefore they go awry with their illusion. They miss the true God, and nothing remains but their own false notion. That is their god. To him they assign the name and honor of God. Of course, no one but the devil can be behind this delusion, for he inspires and governs these thoughts. Thus their delusion is their idol; it is the image of the devil they hold in their hearts. For the real and the true God is He who is properly served not with works but with the true faith and with sincerity of heart, who gives and bestows mercy and benefactions entirely gratis and without our works and merits. That they do not believe, and therefore they do not know God but are bound to blunder and to miss the mark.

Here you see where all idolatry comes from and why it is rightly called idol (*Abgott*) and superstition (*Abglaube*) and idolatry (*Abgötterei*); undoubtedly because such delusion draws us away from God (*Ab-Gott*) and alienates us from the true worship of God. Indeed, this is an idol and a superstition that directs us away from God and directs us to the devil in hell. For since everybody proposes to do something which he regards and believes to be pleasing to God and imagines that God is minded as he supposes He is—but in reality God is not pleased by this, and in reality God is not minded as each one supposes—it follows that as many idolatries must arise as there are illusions of that kind. Every idea of pleasing God comes into being except that of faith; this the Holy Ghost must inspire. Thus the idol Baal came to the mind of King Ahab. Since he knew that there was a God, he imagined that it was God who was pleased with his type of worship. Thus he called God Baal, and Baal God, as is evident from Hos. 2:16.

Furthermore, King Jeroboam supposed that it was God who was pleased with the worship of the golden calves. And therefore calves had to be called the God of Israel, and, again, God had to be called a calf (1 Kings 12:28). That is like calling Christ our Lord a lover of cowls or of tonsures today because people assume that He is a God who is in love with cowls and tonsures and is well pleased with such service. I am sure that monks and priests have that conception of Him in their hearts and also call Him that. But this is an idol and superstition and delusion which falls wide of the mark; it is genuine archidolatry. There are innumerable types of idolatry; in fact, there are as many varieties as there are illusions and self-chosen concepts of pleasing God. All but faith in Christ come into this category. And since there is nowhere a God who is pleased with this service, it follows that they are all serving the devil and not God.

Thus you also note that the people in the ship all know of God, but they have no definite God. For Jonah relates that each one calls on his own god, that is, his concept of God, whatever he conceives of God in his mind. And in that way they all fail to encounter the one true God and have nothing but idols whom they call God and honor as God. Therefore their faith, too, was false; it was superstition and idolatry and of no avail. For their god lets them down in the hour of need; he lets them call in vain, so that they despair and find themselves at a loss to know where to find a god who might help them. They run down to Jonah, arouse him, and command him to call on his God. They are curious to see whether there might be another god beside their own to aid them. There you can see that a false faith will not stand the test of adversity, but that both god and faith, idol and superstition, become engulfed and vanish, and that nothing but despair remains. Therefore only the one living God is entitled to the name and reputation of being a helper in every trouble, Ps. 9:10; Ps. 46:1; for He can rescue from death, Ps. 68:20.

You also perceive how humble these people are now as they turn to Jonah in their distress, whom they had ignored so long as all was safe and tranquil. And if they had known that he was a Jew, they would have despised him still more, since the Gentiles were hostile to the Jews. But now that they are beset by perils and their idol is letting them down, how happy their proud contempt is to call on poor Jonah, expecting more good from him than from all their idols and all their power. That is always the experience of a false and fictitious faith. So long as all goes well, it retains its conceit; it is arrogant even toward God and all that is God; it is obdurate and harder than any anvil ever was. But when such a faith begins to give way and despond, then there is nothing more timid and discouraged in heaven and on earth, and it would

then like to crawl into a mousehole. The wide world becomes too confining for it, and it gladly seeks and accepts help and counsel from friend and foe, from those it respects and those it despises.

Meanwhile Jonah is sleeping down below in the ship, completely insensible to the tempest. That may indeed be termed a sleep of death, which has come over him shortly before he is doomed to die. That is always the way with sinners. God deals with them as He does here with Jonah. Jonah had sinned grievously against God. But because God remains silent, tarries with His punishment, does not restrain the sin, or does not immediately strike the offender, it is the nature and way of sin to blind and to harden man. He becomes secure and loses his fear, lies down, goes to sleep, and fails to see the disaster and the great storm gathering over him which will arouse him horribly. Meanwhile God appears to have forgotten the sins, since He delays the punishment. Thus He tests the children of men and waits to see whether they will repent, as Ps. 11:4 says: "His eyelids test the children of men." But nothing comes of this; they do not repent, they do not weigh the consequences. Jonah would probably continue to sleep to the end of his days; if God would forget his sins, he would surely never give them a thought himself. This is indicated by Jonah's deep sleep in the midst of the storm and far down below in the ship besides. It is like saying that he is blinded, obdurate, and submerged in sin, yes, dead, lying in the pit of his unrepentant heart. He would remain there eternally and perish too; for sin would not permit any power for good to bestir itself, free will or no free will, reason or no reason. There he lies and snores in his sin, hears nothing and sees nothing, nor does he feel what God's wrath contemplates doing with him.

But when the captain wakes Jonah and bids him call upon his God, matters change. He becomes aware that God with His punishment is pursuing him and that God has not forgotten his sin. Now conscience raises its voice; now the consciousness of sin is revived; now "sin is the sting of death" (1 Cor. 15:56) and manifests the anger of God. Now not only the ship but the whole world becomes too small for Jonah. The irony of it—he should now call upon God! He is more fear-stricken than all the others on the ship taken together; for he feels and senses, and his conscience also tells him, that this tempest is aimed at him and that God's wrath has overtaken him. Oh, how humble he is now. He absolves all other people on the ship from sin; he does not regard them as sinners. He sees no sin but his own. That is the way of remorse. When that comes to a person and stings and terrifies the conscience, the entire world looks pious to him, and only he himself is a sinner. Then God appears gracious to all the world but to him; then God's anger strikes none but him alone. He also assumes that there is no other wrath than that felt by him, and he regards himself as the most wretched person. That was also the experience of Adam and Eve after their fall into sin. If God had not come to them in the cool of the day, they would never have paid any attention to their sin. But when He appeared to them, they hid from Him. Peter, too, went his way after he had denied Christ. He felt no sin; he also slept as it were down below in the ship; he was dead until Christ looked at him. Then he again came to and wept bitterly. Thus we behold here how obstinate, callous, and virtually dead sin makes man; he is sensitive neither to himself nor to God and walks along securely and unafraid until God comes and arouses him. Thus the glory of free will is laid low.

Jonah shrinks from calling on his God; he sits there, trembles before God's wrath, and struggles with death, which threatens to devour him any moment. At the same time the other people cry to their gods in vain, doing all they can for their rescue. Jonah surely sees and senses that all this is happening because of him. However, he is not pious enough to come out into the open and confess his sin, but he lets these poor people endure such terror and danger and distress for his sake until he is betrayed by the casting of lots and God wrests a confession of his sin from him. That is also one of the tender virtues of sin: it renders people mute. It conceals itself; it is ashamed; it would like to remain beautiful, like Adam and Eve when they covered their nakedness with an apron and refused to come to confession. Oh, it hurts to uncover your own shame and to turn your glory into disgrace. But in the end this will have to be done, or man will find no rest and peace of mind. As Ps. 32:3 says: "When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long." Thus God ordered the children of Israel to strip themselves of their ornaments before Mount Sinai (Ex. 33:5). This is really a time for donning sackcloth and sitting in ashes, for crushing oneself before God and also, if God wants this, before man. Since these people have incurred loss and danger because of Jonah's sin, it is necessary that he, in turn, suffer loss, forfeit his honor, and speak his own shame. He must restore the honor of these people and establish their innocence. He must pronounce his own death sentence, obliging them to drown him. Thus he pays his debt and, with life and limb, with honor and goods, and with all he is and has, atones for the sin with which he has so deeply

injured his fellowmen. He has jeopardized their life against their will, and now they must take his life, also against their will, but by reason of his own verdict and wish. That, I think, is stern and righteous judgment.

7. And they said to one another: Come, let us cast lots, etc.

Since no one volunteers to confess—they were convinced that someone's sins accounted for such unnatural weather—and since no human judgment is available and no public court of justice can be set up, they take recourse to God's ordeal and judgment. They attempt to find an answer by casting lots. Oh, how tensely Jonah must have sat there! How he must have feared the casting of lots, as a bad conscience will do that cowers even before a rustling leaf.⁸ Poor Jonah has to suffer many deaths, and yet he cannot escape but must really pay for it later. Behold, to such misfortune and heartache does sin give rise if we try to hide it and refuse to confess it. And yet it must later be confessed at a double price. However, sin prevents us from doing otherwise; it will not and cannot uncover itself—that is quite impossible. Everybody wishes to appear good and pure before his fellowmen, but still he will not desist from sinning secretly. But ultimately he must let others reveal this sin and thus reap shame and harm in the bargain. One cannot heal wounds that he will not uncover. Likewise sin cannot be forgiven unless it is confessed, that is, unless it be made known.

At this juncture the question may be raised whether these people sinned by casting lots. To do this is said to be wrong, since it tempts God. But Jonah was obliged to join in this casting of lots; therefore he, too, was involved in this sin, if it be sin. I reply first of all that the nature of some acts may be either good or evil. For instance, Christ prohibits swearing in Matt. 5:34, and yet there is such a thing as a godly oath. Thus it is also forbidden to give vent to anger and to kill, and yet it is godly to punish and execute malefactors through the agency of the public court of justice. Therefore it behooves us to look upon the motive of the heart in such acts. Whoever engages in such an act to gratify himself sins, but he who does this in obedience to a command of God or for the welfare of his neighbor is in the right. We renounce him who does this without the command of God or who is not impelled by his neighbor's need but does this wantonly and for self-gratification. Such a one does not do right even if he were to kneel and pray all day, even if he were to fast night and day, yes, even if he performed miracles. Therefore the decision in such a matter is left to each one's conscience; we cannot judge his heart. If casting of lots falls into that category of acts, it does not matter whether these people and Jonah sinned here, since they were unbelieving and thus all their works were displeasing to God. It was a different question later on when they were converted, as we shall hear.

In the second place, I declare that I am not so sure that casting of lots is forbidden. It is, admittedly, forbidden to tempt God; but to cast lots and to tempt God are two radically different things. The apostles cast lots over St. Matthias, as we read in Acts 1:26. Solomon declares (Prov. 16:33): "The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the Lord." God does not denounce casting lots in those instances but rather approves of it. To be sure, some of the fathers say that such examples must not be imitated. But they have no good reason for this view. It is my opinion that casting of lots is in itself a real act of faith, subject, of course, to misuse by idle curiosity and self-gratification, similar to the misuse of sword and oath. That, however, is not the fault of the act but of the person, as we have already said. The fathers give no proof that casting of lots is tempting God. I tempt God when I arbitrarily satisfy my own inquisitiveness, without any pressing need fix a definite goal, hour, place, measure, person, mode, and work for God which He is to fulfill and thus give tangible evidence of His presence, for instance, when the Jews in the wilderness demanded that God supply them with food and drink and specified a definite time for this and did not trust God and leave this to Him. Thus the Jews also demanded a definite sign from heaven, as they thought best, as we hear in Matt. 16:1. But this is different in casting lots. There two, three, or as many as choose, agree to decide a question in this way or in that—for lots are of various kinds. No individual person decides the question at issue; it is left to God to determine on whom the lot will fall. They agree in advance that he on whom the lot falls will be regarded the one chosen by God.

To be sure, such casting of lots may be done without God, at random, as the heathen do who do not believe that God controls the lots but that all is determined by blind luck, as happens in dice and other games of chance. It is fitting that Christians abstain from casting lots in a spirit of levity. They must believe that God directs the lots and rules our fates with sovereign power; they must not doubt that gain or loss of lot and game is decided by God. In the instance of an oath one also believes that God is present to accept the oath and to judge all concerned in accord with it. But since man does not determine how God is

to judge the oath but leaves this to Him and is content with His decision, there can be no question there of tempting God. Likewise, since we in casting lots do not determine whom God is to favor but are satisfied to leave this to His judgment, there is also no tempting of God involved; it is a good work in itself, and if performed in faith, it is a godly act done to the honor of God. And that which is assigned to a person by lot is rightly his, and he who would take this from him would thereby oppose God. What else is this but a mutual agreement to decide a matter at issue in favor of the one or the other? There is nothing reprehensible here, only a peaceful and voluntary assent to relinquish something or to acquire something, depending on the favorable or unfavorable outcome of the lots.⁹ Christians, however, add that as God does and disposes everything, so He also does and disposes this. The heathen do not believe this, or they give it no heed.

But what are we to say about lots in which a person's death is involved, or in which a person's secret sin is to be sought out, as is true here of Jonah, as Saul did with his son Jonathan (1 Sam. 14:42 ff.), and as Joshua did with Achan (Joshua 7:18)? I reply: Let the ungodly cast lots on questions involving life and death, whether in a spirit of levity or of earnestness. What do they who do nothing that is right concern us? However, the lot per se does not require someone's death. Nor do pious Christians cast lots with death at stake. In our text, too, we find that the people in the ship were not contemplating to kill Jonah, but they wanted to search out and remove the cause of their adversity. They did not want to kill Jonah, although he bade them to; they wanted merely to take him to land. But since this was impossible, they realized that it was God's wish that they comply with Jonah's suggestion. Although they do this unwillingly, praying diligently, they see that it is their duty. Saul, too, did wrong when he wanted to kill his son; he should not have carried lots to that extreme. It was a different story with Joshua, whom God commanded to do as he did. Why should the people in our text not be justified in agreeing that he upon whom the lot fell would be the guilty one? Especially since exigent need impelled them to save others, and since God's justice and fairness will not permit the lot to make an error. Similarly, they, too, are blameless who regard as innocent a person who swears an oath, though in fact he may be guilty and may be perjuring himself. But let this suffice on this subject for the time being.

9. I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.

Now Jonah's confession is forthcoming; now the sin is brought to the light of day. Now the real struggle between Jonah and death ensues, although the most difficult phase of the conflict is over. For although death and the wrath of God advance on Jonah and furiously attack him, the heavy burden of sin has already been rolled from his heart, his conscience has become lighter through his confession of sin, and his faith begins to catch fire, though only dimly. For Jonah confesses the true God, Creator of heaven and earth, and this is no insignificant beginning of faith and of bliss. A despondent and despairing conscience will not open its lips that far; it grows mute or blasphemes God, and it cannot think, regard, and mention God otherwise than as a horrible tyrant or as a devil. It would only like to flee from Him and put as much distance as possible between itself and God. Indeed, it would prefer it if He were not God, so that it would not have to experience this at His hands. Such a conscience also is unmindful of confession and does not admit its sin. It is so lost in fear and so hardened that it sees and feels nothing but fear and thinks only about ridding itself of this fear, which is impossible, since it keeps on charging itself with sin. And thus it remains engulfed in sin and in death eternally.

From this let us learn the real art and skill of extricating ourselves from all distress and fear. To do this, we must first of all take note of our sin, forthwith make a clean breast of it, and confess it. That disposes of the most urgent danger and need. For help must first be brought to the heart; this must be lightened and given air to breathe. Then it is easier to aid the whole person. Thus the conscience must first of all be disencumbered and given room to breathe, and then aid can be found for all trouble. Two things are involved when God's anger strikes, sin and fear. Imprudent hearts cope with this situation incorrectly. They let the sin remain and are intent only on ridding themselves of the fear. That will not profit them, and they must despair. That is the way reason, if not accompanied by grace and spirit, always attacks the problem. But sensible hearts turn their minds away from fear and concentrate mainly on sin, confess this, and free themselves of it; and no matter if they should be haunted by fear forever, they reconcile themselves to this, as Jonah does here. But it is the way of all the ungodly that they fear and heed the punishment but pay no heed to the sin. They would like to continue to sin with impunity; but that is not possible, since punishment regularly follows in the wake of sin. On the other hand, it is in the nature of the

godly to fear and to heed sin and to have less regard for the punishment. They would rather suffer punishment and be delivered of sin than to remain in sin and be free of punishment.

Jonah's words "I fear the Lord, the God of heaven" are a Hebraism, for "to fear God" is the Hebrew way of saying to worship God, as is evident from Is. 29:13, where God says: "Their fear of Me is a commandment of men," that is, "they suppose that they are honoring and serving Me with the commandments of men" (cf. Matt. 15:8). Jonah joins the two together and says: "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven." He had, to be sure, scorned and disobeyed God up to this hour, but he means to say: "I do not honor and serve strange gods, as you and other heathen do, but I worship the one true God." It magnified Jonah's sin and shame that he, a servant of the true God and a member of the holiest land and nation, should turn out to be the worst and most grievous sinner, worse than the idolatrous heathen, so that on his account the idolatrous heathen had to be exposed to this peril and distress, whereas, as a rule, other sinners are aided by the servants of God, as King Ahab and his descendants were by Elias and Elisha. Here we find the direct opposite. Usually the evil people derive benefit from the pious. Here the evil must expiate for the pious man; the most pious becomes the basest, and the first becomes the last. And that is why Jonah was ashamed to confess his sins before the people; for he did not wish to appear viler than the heathen, and yet he had to be revealed as such.

12. *Throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.*

Let Jonah here serve to demonstrate to us the power and the effect of a pure heart's faith. This presents the fine example of faith to which we referred earlier,¹⁰ saying that it is virtually omnipotent, overcoming all obstacles. In the first place, Jonah assumes the sins of the others and confesses that he is the cause of the tempest. Thereby he excuses and absolves all the others. He alone is culpable, and the others are blameless now. Thus he renders satisfaction to love and makes amends to the people for subjecting them to danger. He suffers for all himself. Now love again finds a pleasing and grateful abode. For these good people do not demand such a costly expiation but stand ready to forgive him his sin. His public admission and confession suffice them. They bend every effort to take him back to land again and thus to repay love with love. However, this was not to be.

In the second place, Jonah accepts and bears such a burden of sin on his conscience also before God. He stands disgraced also before God, his heart bearing powerful witness and confessing that he sinned heinously both against God and man. This disgrace, that he must blush with shame before God is a thousand times greater. He finds no nook or corner in all of creation, not even in hell, where he might crawl in; but he must needs expose himself to the gaze of all creatures and stand before them in all his ignominy. So will a bad conscience prick a sinner. For here you must not think of the later Jonah, when he is again delivered and his honor is restored, but you must see him in his shame without any hope of regaining his honor. For if such a heart would know of or detect a way of escape from its shame, it would not be so oppressed by this disgrace and by conscience. But God now strips Jonah of all honor and all consolation. Nothing but shame stares him in the face. And that is what makes him so wretched.

In the third place, punishment in the form of death now follows naturally on the heels of sin. Thus St. Paul states in 1 Cor. 15:56: "The sting—or cutting edge—of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law." Jonah fully realizes that nothing but death is in store for him. He reconciles himself to his fate and even pronounces his own verdict, saying: "Throw me into the sea." It is as if he were saying: "I must die, or the sea will never again grow tranquil." Here again you must not view Jonah with his entire story in mind. Since we are familiar with the end of his narrative and know that he was delivered from it all, this phase of his life seems relatively insignificant to us and fails to move us very much. But you must visualize Jonah's frame of mind in this dilemma. He does not see a spark of life left in him nor any hope of rescue; nothing but death, yes, death, death confronts him, and he must despair of life and surrender to death. If it would please God to let us perceive life in the midst of death,¹¹ or if He showed our soul its ultimate dwelling place and room and the manner and way in which it should maintain itself and reach its goal, death would not appear bitter, but it would seem like a leap across a shallow stream, with safe and solid banks on both sides. But as it is, God does not show any of that to us, and we must leap from the safe shore of life into this abyss without seeing or feeling a sure footing under us. We must leap, as it were, at random, merely trusting to God's supporting and saving hand. That is the way Jonah is thrown out of the ship; he plunges into the sea, feels no bottom, is deserted by all creatures, and looks solely to God's sustaining power.

In the fourth place, Jonah endures God's wrath in death. For he feels that death comes over him not as a token of grace but of anger and in consequence of his sin. But death would be tolerable and not so acutely painful if it would not result from God's anger, as is true when a person is innocently condemned to death, and when he dies for God's sake, as the holy martyrs do, who know that men are dealing unjustly with them before God. Their death for a good cause before God leaves them confident that God is gracious and not angry, and so they recognize that their death is not due to God's anger but to His mercy and good pleasure. However, where death is brought down on a person's head by sin and where this fate is consequently deserved, there God's wrath accompanies death and makes it unbearable; there nothing but death can be seen and felt.

Behold, each of these four parts is hard to bear by itself, even for the saints, and it is intolerable for the ungodly. For who is so stalwart as to retain a happy frame of mind and peace of heart when he perceives that God's wrath is upon him, even though he does not die? This has already made many ungodly people mad and insane. Or, who is there who does not shrink from death and tremble before it, even if he does not feel or know the wrath of God, as in the case of the heathen, or perceive a gracious God, as in the case of the saints? Thus there is no worse burden on earth than sin and conscience. For who can bear to be in disgrace before God and the world? Who would not prefer death to such a life? But all four of these things fall on poor Jonah at once and drive him to utter despair of God's grace and urge him to depart from faith. What a battle must have raged in his heart! He, too, might well have sweat blood in his agony. He is compelled to contend simultaneously against his sin, against his own conscience and the feeling of his heart, against death, and against God's wrath. His soul must have been suspended by a silk thread over hell and eternal damnation. Oh, a mighty work was wrought in his heart by the power of God to sustain and to preserve him! His deliverance gives convincing proof that he remained in the faith; for God never rescues an ungodly person from such death and misery. Thus Jonah himself confesses that he is God's servant, and he submits to the punishment, which ungodly people would be unable to do. They would all despair in sin.

But in the, fifth place, still more misfortune awaits Jonah. The sea becomes his deathbed. There he must die all alone, with no one about to comfort him. The people in the ship sail away and leave him to the solitude of the deep, convinced that he has drowned and is lost. In the sixth place, his misery does not even terminate here in the sea. One death does not suffice, and he must pass through the jaws of the whale. God takes on a glowering mien. It seems that His anger is not appeased by the death and the penalty, to which Jonah is willing to submit, and that He cannot avenge Himself fiercely enough on him. It must have been a horrifying sight to poor, lost, and dying Jonah when the whale opened its mouth wide and he beheld sharp teeth that stood upright all around like pointed pillars or beams and he peered down the wide cellar entrance to the belly. Is that being comforted in the hour of death? Is this the friendly glance in dying, that dying and death are not even sufficient? This is real faith, it seems to me; yes, a battle and struggle of faith. Here we find victory and triumph concealed in the greatest weakness. How mightily God here demonstrates the power of His Word and of faith! No creature is able to rob Him of it, not even God's anger itself can work it harm, no matter how fiercely and furiously all may rage. But by this, Jonah had to show the whole world the real condition of his heart and the disposition of any believer's heart in like temptation, as we shall see later. For as the tumultuous sea wants to drown Jonah, and as the whale devours him and wants to consume him, so a conscience feels nothing but the tempest of God's wrath and of death, and hell and damnation threaten to make short shrift of the soul and consume it, etc.

17. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah must have thought these the longest days and nights ever lived under the sun. It must have seemed an interminably long time that he sat there in the dark. Yes, I suppose, that he occasionally lay down and stood up. He saw neither sun nor moon and was unable to compute the passage of time. Nor did he know where in the sea he was traveling about with the fish. How often lung and liver must have pained him! How strange his abode must have been among the intestines and the huge ribs! However, death was crowding in upon him, and he paid scant attention to the fish. His one thought was: When, when, when will this come to an end? O God, what a great miracle this is! Who can really comprehend how a man can survive three days and three nights within a fish, in the middle of the sea, all alone, without light and without food, and in the end return to dry land again? That must have been a strange voyage. Who would believe this story and not regard it a lie and a fairy tale if it were not recorded in Scripture?

God proves here that He holds death and everything in His almighty hand and that it is an easy matter for Him to help us even in indescribable and desperate situations. This seems incredible to us. He is present everywhere, in death, in hell, in the midst of our foes, yes, also in their hearts. For He has created all things, and He also governs them, and they must all do as He wills. This story is recorded for our sakes, and God's omnipotence is here displayed so forcefully to induce us to trust and to believe Him, whether we find ourselves in the grasp of death or in the hands of our enemies. It was not necessary for God to have this story recorded for His own sake, nor for Jonah's own good. The world can talk glibly about divine omnipotence, and it seems easy for everyone to believe that God is almighty whenever this is asserted, but experience demonstrates how many really and genuinely believe this when it is a question of staking life and limb on God's omnipotence and when it is a matter of experiencing the truth of these words for oneself in death and in sin. To come by this truth is hard even for the greatest saints. And yet, to know this and to be familiar with examples illustrating it is comforting. Thus the prophet glories in Ps. 119:52: "When I think of Thy ordinances from of old, I take comfort, O Lord."

The people in the ship are convinced that Jonah must drown and die. This is evident from the fact that they pray God not to let them perish because of Jonah's soul nor to hold them responsible for innocent blood. Thereby they imply that they consider him dead; in fact, they themselves had to be instrumental in killing him, although reluctantly and only in compliance with God's will. However, now that Jonah has disappeared from sight, now that he has died to himself and to the world and that all hope for his life is abandoned, his life and the fruit of his death first begin; for in death he is mightily kept alive. And in that way the people in the ship are also delivered from death, also from unbelief and from sin, and they are brought to a knowledge of God so that they now become pious and true servants of God, such humble and timid servants that they even fear and stand in awe of sinning where they are in reality doing nothing but obeying God. They would like to preserve Jonah's life. They are apprehensive of murdering him by drowning him, although they see that God wants it that way. What pure, God-fearing, and Christian consciences these people now have! The same people who prior to this did not hesitate to commit murder and who were entirely indifferent to obeying God now proceed to make sacrifices to God and to make vows. The various gods on whom they had called earlier are all forgotten. And this was all effected by Jonah and his dying. A servant of God must prove himself so useful that there is nothing about him that does not accrue to the benefit and the welfare of others. We stated earlier¹² that the fear of God is just another term for the service of God; for true service of God is to fear and to honor God. Thus these people, too, feared God, that is, they became God's servants and God-fearing men.

CHAPTER TWO

1. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying.

THIS does not mean that Jonah prayed these very words with his lips, that he uttered this well-chosen speech. His mood when surrounded by this horrible death was not so cheerful as to compose such a fine song. He merely indicates here how he felt, reproducing the thoughts his heart harbored when he contended with death. For as I have already said,¹ we must peer into Jonah's heart prior to his delivery from his dire predicament and death. We must envisage him as doomed. For he was unaware of his delivery, and did not think any other way than that his death was certain and imminent. Thus he felt and tasted death; he died unremittingly. But later, after his recovery and his quickening, he relived the past and in retrospect committed this prayer to writing to the glory of God and the welfare of man. May those gather around here who are of a prying mind and are curious to know about the state of the dead. There are many who would gladly have questioned Lazarus about what he did, thought, felt, and saw during the four days he lay in the grave, John 11:44, as also other dead people whom Christ, the apostles, and prophets raised from the dead. Frivolous babblers appear on the scene and indite a description of the terrible things they beheld, so terrible that they could never regain a cheerful spirit to the end of their days. Others content themselves with the statement found in Wisd. of Sol. 2:1, saying: "No one has been known to return from Hades" to inform us about conditions in yonder life. I will dismiss Lazarus and other deceased people from my mind and adhere to Scripture, which declares that they are asleep. It seems to me that this slumber dominates them so that they see and perceive nothing. They are more insensible than one is in natural sleep. When they are awakened, they are unaware of where they have been. We want to consider those who do not sleep in that manner and yet are dead, who feel death and hell in death, whom we know still to be alive. However, so far as their perceptions go—which, after all, must be considered,

and not our knowledge of them—they are dead and without life. These must reveal the real truth to us and satisfy our curiosity regarding the life hereafter, especially the life of the evil people.

2. I called to the Lord out of my distress, and He answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and Thou didst hear my voice.

Jonah begins by praising God's mercy and help and by thanking Him for His deliverance from distress. Thus he first of all holds God's goodness up before our view and then his own need from which he was helped. This first verse of Jonah's prayer teaches us two important and necessary lessons: first, that we must above all else pray and cry to God in time of adversity and place our wants before Him. For God cannot resist helping him who cries to Him and implores Him. His divine goodness cannot hold aloof; it must help and lend an ear. All depends on our calling and crying to Him. We dare not keep silent. Turn your gaze upward, raise your folded hands aloft, and pray forthwith: "Come to my aid, God my Lord! etc.," and you will immediately find relief. If you can cry and supplicate, then there is no longer any reason for worry to abide. Even hell would not be hell or would not remain hell if its occupants could cry and pray to God. It is vain to lament and to bemoan your condition and to fret and to worry about your sad estate and to cast about for a helper. That will not extricate you from your woes; it will only drag you in deeper. Listen and hear what Jonah does. He, too, consumed himself a long time with his distress before he resorted to prayer, as he himself will tell us later. If he had not delayed, he would presumably have been delivered sooner. He also bids and teaches you not to emulate his example in this respect, but he immediately states that he prayed and thus was granted deliverance.

No one will believe how hard and difficult it is to cry and to pray thus. To howl and to lament, to tremble and to doubt, and to cringe and to cower are easy for us; prayers, however, will not pass over our lips. Our bad conscience and our sins make them stick in our throats and weigh heavily on us. Moreover, we feel that God is angry. These are burdens that outweigh the entire world. In short, it is impossible for nature alone or for an ungodly person to throw off such impediments and at once to supplicate that same God who is angry and who punishes and to refrain from running to someone else. Thus Isaiah declares (Is. 9:13): "The people did not turn to Him who smote them." Nature is far more adept at fleeing from God when He is angry and when He punishes, to say nothing of turning to Him and calling upon Him. It always seeks help from other sources; it will have nothing of this God and cannot abide Him. Therefore human nature forever flees, and yet it does not escape but must thus remain condemned in wrath, sin, death, and hell. Here you can glimpse a goodly portion of hell; you see how sinners fare after this life, namely, they flee from God's anger but never elude it, and yet they do not cry to God and implore Him. On the other hand, we hear Isaiah's declaration in chapter 28:16: "He who believes [in the precious Cornerstone] will not be in haste." It is as if he were saying: "All ungodly people are forever fleeing from God and His wrath, and yet they fail to escape. The believers, however, are secure through Christ from such terrified fleeing."

It is impossible for nature to act or conduct itself contrary to what it feels. And now that it feels God's anger and punishment, it cannot view God otherwise than as an angry tyrant. Nature cannot surmount the obstacle posed by this wrath, it cannot subdue this feeling and make its way to God against God and pray to Him, while regarding Him its enemy. Therefore when Jonah had advanced to the point of entreating God, he had gained the victory. And thus you, too, must be minded; thus you, too, must act. Do not cast your eyes down or take to your heels, but stand still, rise above this, and you will discover the truth of the verse (Ps. 118:5): "Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me." Take recourse to the Lord, yes, to the Lord, and to no other. Turn to the very One who is angry and punishes, and resort to no other. The Lord's answer consists in this, that you will soon find your situation improved; you will soon perceive the wrath abating and the punishment lightened. God does not let you go unanswered so long as you can call upon Him, even if you can do no more than that. He does not ask about your merits. He is well aware that you are a sinner deserving of His anger. If it were not for that, God would not punish us. But nature cannot but constantly insist on contributing something to the conciliation of God; however, it can find nothing. Nature does not know and does not believe that it suffices to call upon God to appease His wrath, as Jonah teaches us here. All men are constituted thus. When God holds His anger in check and His punishment in abeyance and fills our wants and treats us well, we are so insolent, bold, arrogant, and saucy that no one can get along with us. No menace of God, no alarm of God, no example of His anger avail there. We meet everything with mockery and contempt. And on the other hand, when God does

punish us, we grow so dejected and despondent that no consolation, no kindness, no mercy is able to revive our courage and to strengthen us. No matter how God deals with us, we are obnoxious. Behold, how haughty the peasants and how abject the lords were in the recent horrible uprising.² Attempts to plead with and to frighten the peasants availed not, nor did consolation and exhortation serve their purpose with the lords. And today the lords' defiance and arrogance again knows no bounds. Again, to threaten and to alarm is useless. They will not mend their ways until they again feel God's wrath. For human nature will ever remain the same.³

The second lesson that we derive from this is that we must feel that our crying to God is of a nature that God will answer, that we may glory with Jonah in the knowledge that God answers us when we cry to Him in our necessity. That means nothing else but to cry to God with the heart's true voice of faith; for the head cannot be comforted, nor can we raise our hands in prayer, until the heart is consoled. And as I have already said,⁴ the heart finds solace when it hastens to the angry God with the aid of the Holy Spirit and seeks mercy amid the wrath, lets God punish and at the same time dares to find comfort in His goodness. Take note what sharp eyes the heart must have, for it is surrounded by nothing but tokens of God's anger and punishment and yet beholds and feels no punishment and anger but only kindness and grace; that is, the heart must be so disposed that it does not want to see and feel punishment and anger, though in reality it does see and feel them, and it must be determined to see and feel grace and goodness, even though these are completely hidden from view. Oh, what a difficult task it is to come to God. Penetrating to Him through His wrath, His punishment, and His displeasure is like making your way through a wall of thorns, yes, through nothing but spears and swords. The crying of faith must feel in its heart that it is making contact with God, just as Christ felt that "a power had gone forth from Him" when He had stopped a woman's flow of blood (Mark 5:30). One perceives that the Spirit's words and works hit their mark and do not miss. But if we cry and pray indifferently, hit or miss, we accomplish nothing. That is rather mockery and hypocrisy in the sight of God.

The second part of this verse is a repetition of what has already been said. For to call on God in the hour of need and to be answered, or to call on God in the belly of hell and to have the voice heard, is really one and the same thing. But Jonah relates this twice to make it more sure and to induce us to believe more firmly that God deals with man as he said. For it is not unusual for Scripture to repeat a truth in order to emphasize it and to make it doubly sure. According to Gen. 41:25, Joseph interpreted the two dreams of Pharaoh identically to show that his interpretation was sure, etc. When Jonah speaks of "the belly of Sheol," he means the belly of the fish. He calls it the belly of Sheol not because the fish is hell, but because the fish's belly was as dreadful as hell to him; Jonah experienced hell in it. He might have used the term "the belly of death"—not because the fish was the same as death, but because Jonah was suffering the agonies of death in it. Jonah is here describing not the fish but his emotions in the fish, namely, that he seemed to be descending into hell when he entered the belly of the fish. Therefore he might have said "out of the belly of my Sheol" or "out of that which was my Sheol."

I am not so sure what hell is like before the Day of Judgment. The notion that hell is a specific place, now tenanted by the souls of the damned, as artists portray it and the belly servers preach it, I consider of no value, for we know that the devils are not yet in hell, but as Peter declares (2 Peter 2:4), they are "in ropes of nether gloom." And St. Paul speaks of "powers and world rulers in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). Christ also terms the devil "the ruler of this world" (John 14:30). To dominate the world, to commit so much villainy, and to create so much misery would be impossible for the devils if they were confined to hell. The agony of hell would surely deter them from this. Scripture also says of many saints that they went down into hell, as Jonah does here. Thus we hear this of Job (Job 17:13), and Jacob laments (Gen. 37:35): "I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Scripture uses the word "Sheol" graphically to describe the anxiety and the agony of the dying. It adapts itself to their mood and feelings. And the dying do feel as though they were descending into hell, that is, into God's wrath, although they know of no specific place to which they are departing. Everybody carries his hell with him wherever he may be so long as he feels the final anguish of death and God's anger. In conformity with this, St. Peter in Acts 2:27 interprets Ps. 16:10 as spoken by Christ: "Thou dost not give Me up to Sheol, etc.," and he says (v. 24) that God "loosed the pangs of death." St. Peter wants us to think of "Sheol" as the pain of death that Christ felt when He died on the cross and when He departed this life and passed into the power of God. However, on the Last Day this will assume a different aspect. Then hell will be a particular place and the

abode of those consigned to it and the eternal wrath of God. But let this suffice. It is not very important whether or not one pictures hell as it is commonly portrayed and described. The fact remains that hell is far worse now—and will be even worse than it is now—than anyone is able to say, depict, or imagine.

3. *Thou didst cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood was round about me; all Thy waves and Thy billows passed over me.*

Now Jonah comes forward with statements that reveal the emotions that his heart felt before he cried to God. Here we behold his faith embattled and all but defeated. Now he is oblivious of the people who cast him into the sea, saying that this was done by God. “Thou didst cast me into the deep,” he says. For that is the way it feels in our conscience, that every misfortune that befalls us reflects God’s wrath. Every creature seems like God and God’s anger, even though it be but a rustling leaf, as Moses says, Lev. 26:36: “The sound of a driven leaf shall put them to flight.” Is this not amazing? Nothing more than a dry leaf lying on the ground, over which little worms creep and which is too weak to protect itself from a speck of dust, shall do this. Job could not think of anything more insignificant and trivial when he wanted to depreciate himself, before God than to compare himself with a withered leaf in the sight of God (Job 13:25). Yet when the hour is at hand, rider and mount, spear, armor, kings, princes, the power and panoply of armies, and such defiant, fussing, and fuming tyrants as otherwise cannot be terrified with hell, God’s wrath, and judgment, but who only grow more arrogant and hardened, shall be startled by a rustling leaf. What valiant fellows we are! We do not stand in awe of God’s anger but remain unmoved, and yet we fear and flee from the anger of a frail, withered leaf. The rustling of such a leaf must make earth too confining for us and must become an angry God for us who dared a moment before to challenge and defy heaven and earth. We surely have scant reason to boast of our strength and might! If a dry leaf sways us so, how much more might the deep sea do, of which Jonah speaks here? Yes, what power will the fire of hell and the majesty of God Himself together with all angels and creatures exert on us on the Day of Judgment?

Jonah does not simply say: “The waves and the billows passed over me,” but: “Thy waves and Thy billows, etc.,” for he feels in his conscience that the sea with its waves and billows serve God and His wrath for the punishment of sin. And so he says: “All Thy waves and Thy billows passed over me,” for it seems to him that every wave in heaven and on earth were encompassing him and that God’s wrath had concentrated solely on him and that all creatures were in league with God against him. Thus others, too, who are in great distress say: “It seems to me that heaven and earth are pressing down upon me.” That is the truly agonizing experience awaiting sinners after this life. Thus the anger of God and His judgment begin and endure forever. This verse bears a resemblance to the word spoken by the prophet in Ps. 42:7: “All Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me.” It is possible that Jonah borrowed his speech from that psalm.

4. *Then I said: I am cast out from Thy presence; how shall I again look upon Thy holy temple?*

Now punishment visits the conscience. For Jonah intended to flee from the face of the Lord in order to evade his mission to Nineveh. This was his sin of disobedience. Now he feels that he is really cast out from the Lord’s countenance in punishment for his sin that he did not wish to remain in His presence, and he dislikes the thought. Now his heart throbs and tells him: “Look, it seems to me that you have really fled afar from the Lord and have put distance enough between the Lord and yourself.” Now sin begins to sting him, and anguish of heart also oppresses him. Jonah’s words “I am cast out from Thy presence” may admit of a twofold interpretation. In the first place, it may be understood in a physical sense. Jonah’s heart may have told him that he had to die. He may have despaired of ever returning to land alive again and of moving about before God among his people in the land of Israel, from which he had fled. As we heard earlier,⁵ Jonah’s “to flee from the presence of the Lord” meant to flee from the land of Israel, where God had His abode and where He was worshiped. Similarly, we often read in the Second Book of Kings that God removed Israel from His sight and that He threatened to do the same with Judah, that is, to banish the people from the country where His Word and worship prevailed (2 Kings 17:18; 24:20). This interpretation is supported by the subsequent statement of Jonah that he would not again be able to look upon God’s holy temple, that is, the temple in Jerusalem. That proves that he was in the throes of death, that he was convinced he was about to die. Here his faith was assailed by great distress and anxiety. There was little room for ewing to God; this was despair of life. And this is not surprising; for who could entertain much hope for life when engulfed in the depth of the ocean and, in addition, when swallowed by a whale?

In the second place, these words may be taken in a spiritual sense. Jonah may have felt that he, by reason of his disobedience, was eternally east out from God like one of the damned. David often expresses that thought in the Psalter, for instance, when he says in Ps. 31:22: "I had said in my alarm, 'I am driven far from Thy sight.' " In one's conscience sin surely gives voice to such thoughts, particularly in the anguish of death. Therefore Jonah, too, surely felt this as he contended against his despair of God's grace and mercy before he regained his faith and called on God again. All kinds of instances of God's anger and of His punishment of sinners must have come to his mind, for example, Adam and Eve, Cain, the Deluge, Sodom and Gomorrah. This is one of the types of the real pain of hell that will overtake the ungodly after this life. These two interpretations portray to you what the sinners will do and think after this life; they demonstrate that nothing but dread and fear of death, trembling, and despair will be in store for them eternally. These thoughts of despair came to Jonah when he felt the wrath and the punishment of God physically and externally, as he was cast into the deep and as the waves and the billows passed over him. This he told us in v. 3 above and continues to tell us in what follows.

5. *The waters closed in over me, the deep was round about me; weeds were wrapped about my head.*

"How might I be comforted and be hopeful of life with the waters encompassing me round about in the midst of the sea and with weeds wrapped about me and covering my head?" This is like saying: On the shores of the sea, of large lakes, and of ponds it is common to find reeds and cane, and he who is submerged in the ocean is covered by the reeds, that is, he is under the water in which the reeds grow. Thus everything on the banks of the water and in the water covers him, also the earth of the shoreline. This is indicated by the words that follow.

6. *I sank beneath the roots of the mountains. The earth's bars closed on me forever.*

All oceans, seas, and other deep bodies of water are situated in valleys between mountains. They cannot remain on level ground. Thus "the roots of the mountains" are the deepest vales and holes in the sea, where the mountains come together below. Jonah utters all of this as a person drowning in the ocean and pondering his fate, or as a person who witnesses the drowning of another and who reflects on his fate. As he thinks about himself, he beholds the waves closing in over him and sees the shore on both sides, the reeds, and the land, or the earth. As he is drawn down, it seems as though he were sinking to the very bottom of the mountains. And down there the earth "has closed its bars on him forever," that is, he cannot but think that he must remain down there forever and will never get out again. Like a person confined to a dungeon or prison, with doors and windows barred, so also a person sinking into the ocean's depth is doomed to remain there. In this way the bars of the earth, that is, the mountains between which the ocean lies, have closed on him, that is, the water has trapped him and held him captive and cut off his escape. There you behold again what kind of thoughts Jonah harbored in the belly of the whale. To food and drink and all else he gives no thought as he grapples with nothing but thoughts of death. Indeed, he despairs entirely of life and gives himself over to death. Crying to God under those circumstances is still out of the question.

Yet Thou didst bring up my life from the Pit, O Lord, my God.

Now the situation is improving. Different thoughts come to mind. Faith again raises its head and strives to win the victory. The despondent thoughts abate. "Just when I lay in the depth of death, when hope was at lowest ebb, yes, when it seemed impossible that I should live, then You appeared on the scene with Your might and miracle and led my life way from death and perdition." The rope breaks when it is at its tightest. Therefore God is called a Helper in need, because He lends His aid when our position is desperate and impossible. But what are the circumstances that are attendant upon God's help? Listen to this!

7. *When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to Thee, into Thy holy temple.*

First God grants grace and spirit to cheer the heart, He reminds it of God's mercy, dismissing thoughts touching on God's wrath, turning the heart from God the Judge to God the Father. But this does not lie in the power of man; for Jonah says here that his soul fainted within him and that faintheartedness was the strength and power of his soul. But the fact that he thinks about himself and begins to have faith is not the work of his soul. The Spirit, and no one else, can bring the Lord to mind. And when it comes to pass that the heart is reminded of the Lord, a new light flares up, life again raises its head, and the heart is emboldened to cry in supplication; and thus its petition also surely finds an ear. That is what Jonah wants

to tell us when he says in v. 2: “I called to the Lord out of my distress, and He answered me.” Now death, wrath, sin, hell, and every vestige of perdition come to an end; all are overcome and consumed by faith based on God’s mercy.

When Jonah declares: “My prayer came to Thee, into Thy holy temple,” he again refers to the temple in Jerusalem, where God at the time dwelt bodily. The people of Israel were enjoined to pray nowhere but at God’s dwelling place, which He had chosen and designated. Thus God declares in Ex. 20:24: “In every place where I cause My name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.” Therefore all who lived in the land or outside the land were obliged to address their prayers and fix their hearts to the place where God sojourned bodily through His Word, to assure that they would worship no other God than Him who sat enthroned over the cherubim on the mercy seat. All prayers had to be directed thither, just as today in the New Testament our petitions must be addressed to Christ, who is our mercy seat, lest we acknowledge any other god, pray to him, and worship him besides Him who dwells bodily in the Man Christ Jesus. And, in fact, there is no other God.

8. They who observe lying vanities forsake mercy.

The Hebrew text reads: “They forsake their own mercy.” However, since this lends the impression in German that Jonah is referring to mercy which is man’s own, mercy that he himself shows, I have omitted the word “their own” and for the sake of clarity have used only the word “mercy.” For Jonah here speaks of God’s mercy and goodness, which is ours, that is, which is offered, promised, and presented to us. It is as though I were to say of Christ: “Who forsake their Christ, or their faith, or their Gospel, etc.” After all, not one of these is ours but God’s alone, who gives them to us. And yet they are called ours because they are offered and given to be accepted and appropriated by us. With this verse Jonah rebukes the foolish work-righteous and hypocrites, who do not rely solely on God’s grace but on their own works. He rebukes the same people because they do not know what faith is, because they have never been in distress where they might have learned how beneficial faith is and how ineffective good works are, and because they do not change but they depreciate grace and appreciate their own doing. Jonah declares that this is vanity. In German this means: “It is nothing and avails nothing before God. Before Him nothing counts but His goodness and mercy, apprehended and confessed by true faith and given us without any work and any merit.” It is futile for them to rely on such vanity, he says; it is in vain, and it is lost effort. For it is of no help to them, since their trust and reliance are as invalid as their actions and their vanity are on which they depend. Jonah alludes particularly to his people of Israel, who relied on the Law and on works and who not only snubbed the Gospel or God’s grace but also persecuted it, even though it should have been theirs before all other people, for they were the ones to whom it was promised.

9. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to Thee; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the Lord.

Here Jonah again refers to the Jews with their sacrifices and their works. He joins as it were in the words of Ps. 50:13: “ ‘Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?’ They assume that they have discharged their full duty when they have sacrificed bulls and goats. But I hold that a sacrifice of thanksgiving is the truly acceptable offering before God, whereby we praise, extol, and proclaim God’s goodness, granted to us unworthy people.” Jonah says here: “Because help has been given to me.”⁶ The others, however, do not praise God but rather want to be praised and acclaimed by God for having served and benefited Him greatly with their works. Jonah had possessed this knowledge of the grace of God also prior to this, although not in the same measure in which he has now acquired it in the tempest. For here he truly realizes that God respects no person and no merit, since He helps such unworthy sinners. Before this Jonah was also steeped in the delusion that God esteemed the person and his work, particularly that of the people of Israel. Even now he has not entirely divested himself of this.

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Jonah's declaration "What I have vowed I will pay" does not imply that he had pledged anything in particular. For we read nothing of that, nor do we find any reference to this in the thoughts he expressed while in the belly of the whale. All we find there is his prayer, We have to familiarize ourselves with the language of Scripture. Where the dear saints speak about a vow and about paying a vow, they do not have a specific vow of their own in mind but the general vow of all who constitute God's people. In that vow we pledge that we will have no other god than Him alone. For that reason the words "to pay what I have vowed" have no other significance than to confess, to praise, and to proclaim the Lord and thus to honor and to serve Him, as we have it in Ps. 50:14: "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High"; and in Ps. 116:14: "I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people." In that manner Jonah, too, resolves to pay his vow, that is, he is determined to laud and to preach Him as his only God because he has received help.

10. And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

To say that God does and effects all things by means of speaking or through the agency of words is fully in accord with Scripture. In John 1:3 we read: "All things were made through the Word, and without the Word was not anything made that was made"; and in Ps. 33:9: "For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood forth." Thus the fish was kept from digesting Jonah. Not only was the digestive process of nature in the fish suspended, but the fish also had to vomit the food out again; it had to disgorge Jonah and return him to land unharmed. Thus God worked great miracles in Jonah. Now the former order of things is reversed: What a moment ago served the purpose of death must now serve to further life. The fish who was but recently the tool of death must now be life's implement; it must be a gateway to life, though just a short time before it held Jonah captive and consigned him to death. The ocean, too, must make way for Jonah and give its guest free access to the land. The roots of the mountains no longer hold him; earth's bars are pushed aside; the weeds cover him no more, etc. All of this is a source of comfort and confidence for us. It teaches us to rely on God, with whom life and death are alike. They are both trivial to Him, playthings as it were, as He bestows the one and takes the other, or exchanges one for the other. But for us these are momentous and impossible things, which God employs to display His power and skill to us, as Ps. 104 declares.⁷

CHAPTER THREE

1–2. Then the Word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying: Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city.

THIS is written that we may guard against undertaking anything without God's word and command. The first command of God had been nullified by Jonah's disobedience. Thus if God had not repeated His order, Jonah would not have known whether or not he was still to execute it. He might have shared the experience of the children of Israel (Num. 14:1 ff.; Deut. 1:41 ff.), who at first refused to comply with God's command to fight and later presumed to do this on their own responsibility and then suffered defeat because of their presumption. It is utterly futile and wrong for man to undertake a project of his own choosing and will without God's command and word. Moreover, this second commission contains the added command to preach what God tells him. Thus both the office and the Word employed in the office must be comprehended in the divine command. If that is done, the work will prosper and bear fruit. But when men run without God's command or proclaim other messages than God's Word, they work nothing but harm. Jeremiah, too, drives both these facts home, saying (Jer. 23:21): "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied." You who are to preach, impress these two points on your minds! Note them well! They are directed to you and the people; they enable you to instruct souls. Peter also emphasized these two facts (1 Peter 4:11): "Whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies," so that he may be sure that both the Word and the office are divine and commanded by God. For it is decreed that whenever God speaks, it comes to be (Ps. 33:9), that all things are to come to pass by His Word (John 1:3).

Therefore “every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up” (Matt. 15:13). Even if they are planted and begin to sprout, they will not reach the state of fruition. Thus man’s petty baubles may have their day, but they work havoc and do not effect their purpose; after they have run their course and wrought enough harm, they perish.

3. *Nineveh was a city of God,¹ three days’ journey in breadth.*

Why does Jonah call Nineveh “a city of God”? After all, it did not possess the divine worship, the temple, or the prophets. I assume that it is called thus in view of the fact that God befriends it, that He is loath to destroy it, that He solicitously dispatches a prophet to the city for its salvation. The city must have believed in the true God and Creator of heaven and earth. God also knew in advance that the people of Nineveh would give ear to His prophet, accept the Word, and repent. Thus Scripture also relates that God helped Syria through Naaman (2 Kings 5:1) and that God called the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, His servant (Jer. 25:9), to indicate that He is also the God of the Gentiles and not only the God of the Jews, that He had His children also among the former.

The remark that Nineveh was a city of “three days’ journey in breadth” is interpreted by some to mean that this refers to its circumference, that it required three days to walk around it. Well, I’ll let those people have their interpretation, but this would have to be a nice little town indeed, with encircling walls measuring between 12 and 15 German miles. It would indeed have to be 5 or 6 miles long and wide. I understand these words to mean that Nineveh was so large that one needed three days to traverse all its streets, not chasing, but with a leisurely gait such as one usually adopts when strolling on a street. For later on (v. 4) we read that Jonah walked a day’s journey into the city and preached. That, I believe, indicates that it was a city which one can leisurely traverse in a day. The word מַהְלָךְ, *transitus* (“traversal”), would tend to support this view. This refers to an entry such as a person may make back and forth in a city. Thus Moses states in Ex. 11:4–5 that the Lord went forth about midnight in the midst of Egypt and slew all the firstborn. Such a walk does not imply a beeline course, but a walk hither and yon, here and there. However, everyone may adopt whatever view he will.

4. *And he cried: Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*

Jonah goes into the city “a day’s journey” and preaches. It is not known, however, how many days he spent before he covered that area with his message. His sermon is briefly summarized in the words: “In forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown.” Undoubtedly he did not confine himself to these words, but he must have enlarged on the themes why such wrath of God would overtake them, what sorts of wickedness were rampant in the city, how one should be a godly person, and all that is involved in this. We are still in the habit of summarizing a sermon today, saying, for example: “He preached on sin,” or, “He preached on the Mass.”

5. *And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.*

I hold that none but saints inhabited the city and that Jonah rightly called it “a city of God.” Show me another city in the wide world comparable to Nineveh, even if it were the holy city Jerusalem. Just look at this city! Jonah preached only a day’s journey, and not every citizen heard him; yet they were all converted. Neither Christ nor all the apostles and prophets were ever able to bring Jerusalem to that point by means of their words and their miracles, though they ministered to it for a long time and preached from one end of the city to the other. God might exclaim here, too, as Christ did in Matt. 8:10 about the centurion: “Not even in Israel have I found such faith.” Yes, in the days of Jonah Israel and Jerusalem were very wicked as Nineveh turned to God. If Jerusalem had done this, as it did in the days of David, Solomon, Ezekiel, and Josiah, it would not have been so miraculous, since it had the Law, many prophets, many God-fearing kings, princes, priests, and other excellent people who daily preached and admonished. However, at the time of Jonah Nineveh was the best and greatest city on earth, a city without equal.

The sophists usually apply this passage of the prophet Jonah to works, saying: “There you see that God regards the works and that the people of Nineveh merit grace by virtue of them, heathen and unbelievers though they are. Free will can indeed prepare itself for grace with works, etc.” I retort: Jonah anticipated such inane talk when he first of all praised the faith of these people before referring to their works, saying: “The people of Nineveh believed God.” The sophists deftly flit across such a verse and glibly point us to the works. Furthermore, Jonah calls Nineveh “a city of God.” To be a city of God and to believe in God surely precludes that free will performed these works, but it forces us to concede that

God's grace and faith effected them, and that they were acceptable to God by reason of such grace and of such faith. In this way these people gave outward evidence of faith and of grace in their hearts; it demonstrated the fruit which Jonah's sermon had brought about. And what might further displease God if the heart harbors faith and grace? Even the residue of sins can work no harm any longer.

Take note that the people of Nineveh do some things that God does not command them. Yet Jonah relates this. For instance, they fast and put on sackcloth. What does God care about fasting and sackcloth? He wants the heart; He wants to see a person's whole life transformed. Also, God did not demand these things from them through Jonah. All He asked was that they cease their villainy. A person may go about dressed in sackcloth and fast and yet be a knave in his skin, as the monks in their cowls are. Therefore Jonah does not praise their fasting and their sackcloth later on, but he reports that "they turned from their evil way" (v. 10). The idea of wearing sackcloth and of fasting was transmitted to them by their ancestors who habitually humbled themselves before their god in that manner. The same applies to the fact that the king with his princes sat down in ashes and foolishly decreed that also the beasts, the herds and the flocks, should abstain from eating and drinking, that they, too, should be covered with sackcloth and cry to God. Who ever heard that dumb animals should fast, put on sack-cloth, and call to God? Is God interested in any such actions of beasts?

Fasting and sackcloth of animals is, admittedly, just as valid before God as that of man; and, conversely, fasting and sackcloth of man is just as valid as that of animals. A fearful heart, a humble and frightened conscience, may of course also do foolish things to evidence its intense seriousness. If it were possible, I suppose, such a heart and conscience would coerce stone and wood to mourn and force all creatures to join it in weeping. And yet it would seem that even this would be inadequate. It is impossible to express and to comprehend in what deadly earnest a contrite heart really is. It supposes that the whole world must be like-minded and do as it does. St. Paul expresses this aptly in Rom. 8:26 when he calls the Spirit's sighing "too deep for words." And David declares in Ps. 32:3 that he had "roared" like a lion as he sighed in his heart, that is, the contrite sighing of his heart was so strong and vehement that it sounded like an angry lion. When God observes such earnest intent, He is satisfied, and He is pleased to look benevolently at such foolish things, which He would not be disposed to do in the absence of such earnestness. Therefore it was with the powerful stroke of a master that Jonah exalted the contrition and the penitence of the people of Nineveh as intense, sincere, and active.

If the sophists insist on glorifying the works as enjoying validity before God, we shall not prevent them; however, then let them see to it that they also laud the zeal that gave birth to these works. For if they view and accept these works only per se, devoid of such earnestness, comparable to the customary works performed in cloisters and churches, particularly during Lent and Holy Week, then these are indeed found to be sheer buffoonery, as if one were to bid the beasts fast, confess their sins, and pray without any concomitant penitence on the part of man. That accomplishes nothing, for that is to mock God and provoke Him to still greater wrath. Therefore eschew such works by all means, or pursue them with genuine earnestness of heart. Free will or our own power cannot impart such earnestness; this is done by faith bestowed by the strength of the Holy Spirit. We observe here that the people of Nineveh do not stop short with these silly acts, but they go beyond fasting and the bellowing of beasts and attack the real issue, commanding: "Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in his hands." One is so prone to praise the good works of these people and ignore the attendant injunction to piety. In that way you offer nothing but chaff without the grain, husks without sap, shells without the kernel; and God must be your fool and object of derision. Let people first show piety and perform the good works of which they boast, and then our quarrel will automatically cease. But now they squabble about good works, none of which they intend to do or are able to do. They incessantly prate about them and claim to excel in them.

"To cover oneself with sackcloth" is a Hebrew expression. It means to put on plain clothes, bare of any ornaments, such as mourners habitually wear. It does not necessarily imply the wearing of floursacks or sackcloth. In Jer. 4:28 (cf. Is. 50:3) we read: "I clothe the heavens with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering," that is, "I shall cover the heavens with clouds and thus darken them." And in Rev. 6:12 John says: "The sun became black as sackcloth." In that way the beasts here also cover themselves with sackcloth figuratively, that is, they must mourn and put on a sad mien. Similarly, when the Hebrew uses the words "bread and water," he thinks of eating and drinking. "To sit in ashes" means to humble oneself and not to strut haughtily and in an overbearing way. It does not imply that they literally had to confine

themselves to bread and water or that they really had to squat in ashes in front of the stove or the hearth. No, since there is no simpler food and beverage than bread and water and no plainer material than sackcloth and no humbler place than in the ashes, these terms represent all sorts of simple fare, clothing, and places. Thus Isaiah addresses Babylon and says (Is. 47:1): "Come down and sit in ashes, O virgin daughter of Babylon."

9. *Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from His fierce anger, etc.*

Here the king talks as though he were in doubt and uncertain whether or not God would be gracious to them, whereas faith demands conviction, or it is no faith. However, he does not really doubt; otherwise he would not have deported himself as he did; for doubt does not cry to God and does not manifest such earnestness. This is the way it goes: A truly contrite heart wrestles with fear and with doubt and has not yet gained a full victory. That is why it speaks as though it were uncertain. But it really sounds just as if it had not yet fought its way through to complete victory but were still engaged in the struggle and distress. If there were no faith, it would never be able to stand its ground in this struggle and distress. Therefore these words are, rather, evidence of faith, but of a faith that trembles with fear and that still contends for mastery, but that all the while keeps God's grace before its eyes, saying: "God may yet repent and turn from His fierce anger, etc.," that is, grace still hovers in the background, and all is not wrath.

It is superfluous to enter on the subtle question here how God can repent, turn from and regret His anger, since He is unchangeable. Some people are deeply concerned about this; they complicate the matter for themselves unnecessarily. Let us, rather, observe what a fine faith dwelt in these people, who did not only believe Jonah's announcement that the city would perish but also sought comfort in God's mercy, although they had no promise of this from Jonah, for they heard nothing but his threat. It is, in the first place, a marvelous thing that such a powerful city and king become alarmed so soon, that they stand in such great awe of God, that they humble themselves so deeply before one man's single sermon, and that they do not pause to ponder why just they should stand condemned as sinners before all other cities in the world. How obstinately Sodom and Gomorrah withstood Lot! How obdurately Pharaoh resisted Moses and Aaron! How hardened Jerusalem remained against Christ and the apostles! How furiously Rome raged and raved against all Christians! How princes and bishops still defy the Gospel! Indeed, the whole world is composed of nothing but knaves, yes, devils, when compared with these people of Nineveh. The latter appear as pure angels next to the former.

It is, in the second place, still more remarkable that they do not despair in their fear and fright, though they have no promise of mercy. My dear man, what mainstay do they have to hold despair off? We have so many prophets, so many apostles, so many writings, so many books, pastors, and comforting words, and yet we do not trust in God aright. The plenitude of our possession of God's Word might be called an ocean over against the little drop which they had. For they could not have heard more of God's Word than the news that He is the Creator of heaven and earth, that He is the true God, that is, that He is gracious and merciful. This little fragment of information they use to such good advantage for their salvation that they put both Jews and Christians to shame. These do not utilize their superfluity of God's Word half as well. For that reason Christ cites their example for the Jews and all of us in Matt. 12:41, saying: "The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." And that remonstrance is very fair, for we do not show one half the zeal, though we are admonished with so many thousands of threats and promises; and the people of Nineveh demonstrate such a rich faith, though they are frightened by only a single word of threat and though they are without the solace of one word of promise. But that's the way it goes: Where the Word of God grows sparsely, there the hunger for it and the earnestness with which it is sought are strong; but where it flourishes abundantly, there a satiety and a disdain for it are found.

10. *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, etc.*

Here, yes, here the works are lauded. What are we to say against that? Here the work-righteous have carried the day. Far from it! Scrutinize the text! It reads: "God saw what they did," that is, God was pleased with what they did. And what did they do? The prophet mentions it himself: "They turned from their evil way." If you perform and teach that type of work, we are not only willing to listen to your exalting it, but we will join you in your praise of it. "To turn from one's evil way" is not a trivial work; it does not involve fasting and wearing sackcloth, but believing in God with all one's heart and loving the neighbor as one's self; that is, it demands piety and righteousness in one's whole being, both inwardly and

outwardly, in body and soul. God wants the entire person. He has an aversion to shilly-shallying and hypocritical people.

CHAPTER FOUR

1–2. *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord, etc.*

THIS is, I think, a queer and odd saint who is angry because of God's mercy for sinners, begrudging them all benefits and wishing them every evil. This militates against the nature of love, which does everything good and wishes everything good even to enemies. It is still more amazing to find this attitude in Jonah after he had experienced the great sternness of the divine will in the ocean and in the whale. He does not even change when God punishes him for this unreasonable anger. And yet he has enough faith at the same time to ask God to let him die; he does not care to live any longer. He could not have prayed thus if he had not trusted God implicitly. What comment are we to add here? How can such faith and such evil exist side by side? Here questions are pertinent. Here you might benefit by them. We cannot deny that Jonah is angry without cause and that he is indeed doing wrong. This is evidenced by the fact that God punishes him for this with words and with deed, and that He chides him with the token of the wild plant. But at the same time we must concede that he remained in the faith and was acceptable to God, since He conversed so affably with Jonah and granted him a token, acting like a man who chats and deals in a friendly way with his fellowman.

Even if one could close an eye to this misdemeanor, it is inexcusable that he, as it were, tries to justify and defend his first disobedience and his flight because of which God had punished him so severely. He attributes the fault to God's mercy, saying: "I pray Thee, Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to fly to Tarshish, etc." Is that not like saying: "Did I not do the right thing when I fled and refused to come here? If anyone is to blame, is it not You with Your kindness?" What is Jonah attempting to do? Is he not defying God? Is he not tempting God anew to cast him into a thousand oceans and whales because of his murmuring against God and his trying to justify himself? If Saul or someone else were to do that, what do you suppose would happen to them? If works would count with God, or if they were the atoning agency before God, Jonah would needs be hurled into the abyss of hell here as in his anger he is stiff-necked in his rage against faith and love. He brings charge against God's goodness and begrudges his fellowman mercy and everything good. Are these good works? If they are not vices, I ask you to define the term. I should be at a loss to know how to answer.

We must note first of all how wondrous God is in His saints,¹ lest we be tempted to judge and condemn them thoughtlessly because of any of their actions. This work here may be evil—as indeed it is. But for all of that, I must not despise and reject the person. For if we regard Jonah in this act, we must agree that his actions are surely wrong; for God Himself punishes him. And yet he is God's dear child. He chats so uninhibitedly with God as though he were not in the least afraid of Him—as indeed he is not; he confides in Him as in a father. Second, we learn that God permits His children to blunder and err greatly and grossly. We see in the gospels that Christ does likewise with His apostles. This redounds to the consolation of all believers who sin and stray occasionally. Third, we observe how very kindly, paternally, and amiably God deals with those who place their trust in Him in times of need. The Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 12:11) tells us how gracious God is to us after first whipping and flogging us, which punishment "yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." For here we perceive that this cannot harm us nor be imputed to us as sin, though, in fact, it is sin and culpable. But it is the daily sin of a child that the heavenly Father willingly bears in His mercy. However, God does not treat the ungodly in that manner. Nor would such treatment befit their character; for they grow inordinately insolent and ungovernable when they sense that God is gracious and inclined to spare them. They demean themselves as though God should be expected to endure and tolerate their ungodly conduct.

However, it is not at all surprising that Jonah is loath to see God's grace extended also to the heathen. For judge for yourself and consider that the Jews always believed that Israel alone was God's people, as I have said before, and that all the Gentiles were under God's wrath. Thus Ps. 79:6 exclaims: "Pour out Thy anger on the nations that do not know Thee and on the kingdoms that do not call on Thy name." Consequently, they insisted that no man would partake of God's grace before he adopted the laws of Moses and became a Jew. The apostles and the other early Christians conceived of this matter in the same way. Luke writes in Acts 8² that they went about preaching the Word to none but the Jews, and he writes in Acts 10 and 11 that the Jews were displeased with Peter because he had preached to the Gentiles. And it

is nothing short of a miracle that Jonah was not persecuted and killed by the Jews because he had preached in Nineveh and had called it a city of God. The mere thought that Jonah should praise the people of Nineveh as being people of God, without having and without observing the laws of Moses, was intolerable to the Jews. And I ask you, what judgment can all they expect today who teach that there are Christians and that there may well be Christians who do not have and do not observe the ordinances of the pope and the customs and precepts of the Roman church? They must, of course, be accounted heretics, yes, heretics, and are fit to be burned at the stake.

It seems plausible to assume that this was the true reason why Jonah was so unwilling to go to Nineveh, why he grumbled because the city was not destroyed, and why he preferred death to the spectacle of seeing people in receipt of God's grace and of being regarded as people of God without adoption of the laws of Moses and the customs of the Jews. What else was that than infamy for the people of Israel, implying that their laws were useless and unnecessary, since a man could well be saved without them? Would it not be reasonable for them to say, as the men do in the gospel (Matt. 20:12): "Why are we slaving and drudging if these last arrivals work but an hour and receive the same compensation as we who have borne the heat and toil of the day?" Should that not cause eyes to go green with jealousy? Should they not be regarded as better than the others? Should they not receive more? Thus it also happens here that the people of Nineveh obtain mercy without the Law and the Prophets, and the Jews, despite their great labors, receive no more than they; yes, in the end the Jews forfeit grace completely. Their grumbling and their jealousy demand something better than the Gospel. They begrudge the Gentiles the privilege of becoming Christians. It is the expectation that he should convey these benefits to the people of Nineveh that irks Jonah so. To think that he should be the first to make Judaism contemptible and superfluous! How could he, under those circumstances, remain in his country? It was not without cause that he fled and refused to preach. For to be a Jew and yet to proclaim that Judaism was unnecessary and that God's grace was available without it is the same as to depreciate and disparage his fellow countrymen and to exalt the Gentiles. That was the experience of Paul, as we find recorded by Luke in the Book of Acts (13:45 ff.).

In order to dispel Jonah's scruples and also to supply him with an answer to give to his angry fellow Jews, God toys with him and gives him a sign, just as He did to Peter in Acts 10:11 ff., when Peter labored under a similar illusion as Jonah here. God showed him a vision from heaven, a linen cloth containing all kinds of animals, and told him that everything was pure, although he saw nothing but heathen without the laws of Moses, etc. Thus God also gives Jonah a sign here. He causes a wild plant to grow that provides Jonah with a delightful arbor. And now while he is enjoying this shelter, the Lord creates a worm early in the morning before Jonah is aware of it. This worm "attacked the plant, so that it withered," and that deprived Jonah of his great joy. Furthermore, God let the sun burn down on his uncovered head. This vexed Jonah again and added indignation to indignation. Everything goes contrary to his wishes. And in order to forestall further disappointment, Jonah again asks God to let him die. And now God appears and silences him. Like the householder in the Gospel, He announces that He can do as He wants (Matt. 20:15). He also shows that Jonah is annoyed without cause. "Behold," He says, "you are angry because an insignificant plant withered and did not continue to flourish. Of how much less value is such a shrub than a person, to say nothing of such a city? Should you who wish to see the wild plant preserved not also wish and rejoice to see the city saved?" What could Jonah say to refute this? He had to remain mute, vanquished in his own judgment, to which he had nicely been misled on the spot concerning the plant. So human ingenuity is a lost cause before God.

The teachers of old have tested their learning on the plant called קִיָּץ in Hebrew, which is here given as קִיָּץ יוֹן, that is, a small קִיָּץ. The earliest scholars called it a pumpkin. Then Jerome came along and translated it with the word *hedera*, that is, "ivy." He declared that this plant was not found in Latin lands, but in Syria; that it is a plant that grows very fast and affords shelter and dense shade very quickly; that it has leaves like that of the grapevine. Perhaps this prompted the fathers to think it was a pumpkin vine. We are of the opinion that it was the plant that natural scientists call *vitis alba* in Latin. In German this is known as the *Wildrube* ("wild rape"). Our pastor, Mr. Johann Pommer,³ reports that it is called "holy root" among his fellow Pomeranians and that it grows profusely enough to cover a house. In that respect it resembles the nightshade. Jerome can hardly be correct with his assertion that this plant was an ivy, as he himself says, since the ivy is not supported by a stem, as קִיָּץ יוֹן is, but clings to walls and trees.⁴ It seems

probable that those who called this a pumpkin plant came much closer to the mark, although Jerome makes sport of them and dubs these men pumpkin heads.

Well, this question is not so vital, and we need not squabble so vehemently about the words, so long as we are sure about the facts. Although the plant in question may grow fast by nature, nevertheless, it is true that God prepared it here in the course of one night in a miraculous manner. And this He did for Jonah's sake. Jonah sat in the plant's shade for a long time, perhaps until the 40 days had elapsed; for the text says that Jonah went out of the city when he saw the people converted. He sat clown and waited to see whether the city would be destroyed. It already irritated him to see the people repent, and now he undoubtedly feared that the city would not perish. Thus after the expiration of the 40 days, when he noticed that the fixed time had passed, he became angry because nothing would come of his sermon. Then he murmured against God, and he had to learn a lesson. Now he had to return home, shamed and humbled; however, with great awe and with increased understanding.

From all of this we learn that God is a helper of all men, not only of the Jews. Thus St. Paul says in 1 Tim. 2:4: "God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." We learn that we are heathen who have come into God's grace in the last hour without having toiled and with no promise of God's grace such as was given the Jews. God grant that we might show our gratitude and avail ourselves of this as these people of Nineveh did, lest we also finally perish more miserably by reason of our ingratitude, as the people of Nineveh did later on. The story of Jonah has been transmitted to us because God wants to show us His miracles, namely, that God's Word bears fruit mainly where this is least expected and, conversely, produces least where most is expected. Here we find the heathen of Nineveh coming to faith, though they had not heard the Word of God before; and we find that the Jews, who heard the Word of God daily, abandon their faith. From this we must learn, on the one hand, not to despair of anyone and, on the other, not to place undue confidence in anyone.

Jonah relates here that Nineveh had a population of more than 120,000 people. On the basis of this remark we can judge the approximate size of the city. Since he speaks of 120,000 plus inhabitants, he informs us that the city did not have a population of 130,000; otherwise he very likely would have spoken of more than 130,000 or 140,000 or 200,000. A city of 200,000 is not unusually large, especially if it is advantageously situated and if it is a prosperous city, such as the royal city of Nineveh was, the capital of the Assyrian empire. Someone might interpret the words "who do not know their right hand from their left" as pertaining to the children and the fools of the city and thereby imply that the adult population ran far higher. However, I do not share that opinion, but I believe that Jonah means to say that all the people in the city did not know the difference between left and right, that is, as we commonly say, they were not conversant with divine matters. Unlike the Jews, they had no law of Moses and no prophets that could have taught them how to conduct themselves before God both in spiritual and in physical matters, both externally and internally. For the words "the right hand" might refer to the spiritual and the words "the left hand" to the physical realm, the one to internal, the other to external matters. We must serve God with body and soul. Let that suffice on this subject. Now we must also consider the spiritual meanings of this book; they are three in number.

I

In the Hebrew tongue Jonah means "dove." In the New Testament the dove is a symbol for the Holy Spirit, as we see in Luke 3:22 and John 1:32, especially of the revealed Holy Spirit, who is bestowed for the proclamation of Christ in all the world through the Gospel. Thus Jonah with his name is a prototype of the Holy Spirit and of His office, namely, of the Gospel. Thus all apostles and pastors must also be Jonahs in possession of the dove, that is, of the Holy Spirit, teaching and doing nothing impulsively and without the Spirit. Christ Himself enjoins His disciples in Matt. 10:16 to be "innocent as doves and wise as serpents," that is, to preach the Word of God in its simplicity and purity, without any addition, as the Spirit provides it, and not to deal deceitfully with anyone, neither in works nor in doctrine. In Hebrew the word "Nineveh" means "pretty," or "beautiful," as a neat, well-planned city is beautiful. That typifies the world, which lives and has its being beautifully and attractively in its wealth, pleasures, wisdom, strength, holiness, and honor; but below the surface is sheer abomination and sin before God. But the fact that Nineveh hears the Word of God, accepts it, fasts, puts on sackcloth, and sits down in the ashes signifies that God's Word brings fruit, transforms everything, and prompts the city to regard its holiness, power, riches, pleasures, honor, and goods as sin, weakness, poverty, repugnance, shame, and loss and to despise

it all. That is the proper way of sitting in the ashes, of wearing sackcloth, and of fasting. Then even the beasts, that is, their bodies,⁵ must fast and wear sackcloth, that is, they must mortify their flesh and chastise themselves.

That Jonah is sent from the land of the Jews into a foreign country symbolizes that the Spirit and God's Word were to be taken from the Jewish people and bestowed on the Gentiles. Thus Christ says in Matt. 21:43: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it, etc." Jonah's flight and the perils he encountered on the sea represent the cross and the persecution which the Gospel will experience in the world. It appears as though the Christian ministry were taking to flight, perishing, and vanishing from the scene. It seems so frail over against the fury of the world, since the persons administering the office are fugitives, that is, feeble and insignificant people. The ocean is the world, vast and mighty with its raging billows. The whale is gruesome and terrifying with its jaws and teeth. This animal represents the prince and god of the world, the devil, who ruthlessly murders and kills through his princes and great lords, etc. But despite all of these, Jonah is preserved mightily by God's power, and his message cannot be frustrated either by his own flight or by the ocean's fury, but it makes its way and penetrates into Nineveh. Thus, though pastors may be weak and the world powerful, God's Word, the holy Gospel, is still mightier, and no obstacles can impede its progress. And even if all pastors were to be devoured, the Gospel will make its way into the world all the better and transform the world. It is consoling for us to observe that this was the experience of the apostles. And we, too, must not be terrified by ocean and whale, convinced that our Word or Gospel is mightier than all else.

II

The second interpretation pertains to spiritual persecution. We perceive how a sinner fares when he dies spiritually and then lives again, that is, when he is justified and his sins are remitted. This is the way that happens. Sin represents the first step in the process. We all fell into sin by reason of Adam's disobedience. This sin we have increased and aggravated by our own disobedience. Thus we have fled from God's countenance, inasmuch as we do not do the will of God, especially when we commit that nice sin, hypocrisy and false worship of God, defection from the true Word of God. This is for us the disobedience and the flight of Jonah from the face of God. For since we are in sin, we do not behold God but are far removed from Him, like the prodigal son in the Gospel (Luke 15:11 ff.). The fact that Jonah runs away to sea, with no particular destination in mind, denotes that the sinner fleeing from God follows no definite goal but wanders and strays, prompted by flesh and the world, wherever the devil leads and urges him to go. Nor does he care whither he goes, except that he does not wish to remain in the country and live in obedience to God. He wants to lead his life according to his own discretion.

Jonah comes to Joppa, where he finds a ship going to sea, pays his fare, enters, lies down, falls asleep, and sails along aimlessly. The name Joppa means "pretty" or "fine." That points to the ungodly multitude, who lead a glittering life, marked by disobedience to God. This city is well adapted to disobedience, self-will, and self-chosen righteousness. In Joppa the prophet finds a ship, that is, a good means and a doctrine to chart his course, as for example, the law of God as conceived by human delusion. Then there are mariners, that is, teachers of such law and of their own works, who lead man, who knows where, out upon the vast sea. And there we find no firm and established conscience before God, but one that is tossed about by the billows of the sea, etc. Jonah pays his fare to these mariners; for these teachers are belly-servers who teach and administer their office as mercenaries. People are very willing to give them money and make them rich because of their works—just as God gave the country of Canaan to the children of Israel. But people give the apostles and evangelists nothing; no, they rather take from them what little they have. Now Jonah enters the ship, delivers himself into the hands of the mariners, lies down below in the ship and snores, that is, he is secure, thinks that he is taken care of now, and in that opinion he sails along. So all the work-righteous do. In their delusion they, as it were, lie down far below and sleep and are unaware what evil they are doing. Solomon declares in Eccl. 5:1: "To draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know that they are doing evil." Lo, that is what one may aptly call "going down to Joppa and into the inner part of the ship." That is, indeed, traveling from the eminence of Jerusalem and from the obedience to God down into the pit of disobedience and self-will.

But now God comes along, determined to arouse His disobedient saint and publicly label his holiness as sin. He causes a tempest to arise, that is, He lets people feel His wrath and judgment. Then all self-

chosen holiness sinks into the deep, both teachers and pupils despair; then the works will not stand the test; then the ship threatens to burst asunder and founder. At such a time everyone calls on his own god, that is, he wants to take comfort from his own good conduct. But not one of the idols hears the cry, not one of them renders assistance; for these people are not acquainted with the true God. Now they arouse Jonah from his sleep, that is, now they become true teachers of the Law, and now the Law performs its proper function. It no longer teaches works, nor does it create a false sense of security of conscience, but now it points to sin and to God's wrath, now it terrifies the conscience. The mariners now cast lots and search out sin. And the lot falls on Jonah. The Law does not cease to search and to torture the conscience until it discovers the sinner and wrests a confession of guilt from him. Thus David says in Ps. 32:3: "When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away, etc." The casting of lots signifies that sin finds us without fail and that the Law strikes us; not when we expect it, but when we least look for it, the householder appears and finds us. Now Jonah must come out from the inner part of the ship and confess to the Law and acknowledge that he is a sinner. "Otherwise," he says, "the storm will not abate." Although they bend every effort and row strenuously to reach land, it is of no avail; that is, although such a conscience is beaten down, and though it must acknowledge that such a verdict is fair and deserved, it is still reluctant to suffer the sentence of death. Thus Jonah does not jump into the sea voluntarily, but he is hurled into the water.

Finally the mariners bow to the inevitable and cast Jonah into the sea. At the same time, however, they pray God not to take them to account for this. They fear and serve God. This agrees with St. Paul's statement in Rom. 7:12: "The Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good," and yet it kills me and renders God angry with me. May that suffice on this subject. The fact that the mariners now fear and serve God signifies that the Law serves God when it really performs its true function; that is, it creates frightened and humble servants of God. Prior to this, however, while it was still at Joppa, it served the belly with deception and misuse of works. It took the fare and made snoring, secure, and work-righteous people. Now the whale, that is, death and hell, appears and devours Jonah. This is the sequence: first the Law, then sin, and finally death. Thus St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:56: "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law," that is, if sin did not nest in the conscience, death would be impotent; it could neither sting nor bite, neither murder nor torture; it would have neither sting nor blade, but it would be dull; it would be nothing. But when sin is present and makes itself felt in the conscience, death is immediately armed with spear and sword and forthwith aspires to murder man. In fact, death does murder man unless help is brought to him. Likewise, if there were no law, that is, if there were no true and properly functioning law, there would also be no sin, that is, one would not perceive sin. Sin would be enfeebled and would not sting as it does where the Jonahs and the work-righteous people are asleep in the ship. And so it is also in nature that where there is no law, there can also be no sin; but as soon as the Law appears, sin also appears on the scene and is felt in the conscience. As gruesome as the whale and its jaws were to Jonah, so terrifying is the threat of death to the sinful, frightened conscience.

Now Jonah dies for three days and nights in the belly of the whale, that is, the sinner lies terror-stricken in the throes of death and wrestles with death until he utterly despairs. Within the span of three days it is easy to determine whether or not a person is dead. And he who lies in the bonds of death for three days is beyond hope. It is not necessary for him to lie thus for fully three days; even if he lies in death throughout a whole night and day, he is done for. Of course, he may lie thus one hour of one day and one hour of the second day following. In spiritual dying three days are but a short span of time, for it happens in a hurry that death and terror drive man to despair.

Then comes the living Word of God, the Gospel of grace, and addresses the fish, that is, it commands death not to touch man. That is where faith sets in, and man is freed both of sin and of death and lives in grace and righteousness with Christ.

There Jonah learns to sing the song (2:9): "I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to Thee, etc.," and he chides those who rely on vain things and disregard grace. For such people will experience that works and the life of the Law are completely useless and that God's grace alone must avail. In that way people are engendered who are real benefactors of the world; for they can teach, counsel, and govern aright because they derive their knowledge not only from books and words but from the Spirit and their own experience. Whatever they teach cuts through and is effective. This is typified here by Jonah and his sermon in Nineveh.

III

In Matt. 12:39–40 Christ Himself drew an analogy between Himself and Jonah. This is not a complete allegory but just an illustrative comparison. For Christ refers only to Jonah's sojourn in the whale, saying that He Himself will lie in the bowels of the earth as Jonah did in the whale. He calls it "the sign of the prophet Jonah"; that means, it is a sign which bears resemblance to an experience of Jonah. He does not assign a spiritual significance to those three days, as is proper in spiritual interpretations. Therefore this is a comparison rather than an allegory. And no one would be authorized to interpret it as we do if Christ had not done so Himself. Well, there is not much to be said about this, since it is common knowledge throughout the world that Christ died and rose again and that this was the miraculous sign given to the unbelieving Jews, yes, proclaimed to the entire world through the Gospel to inform all how they are redeemed by this same miraculous sign and eminent divine work and that they must adhere to this in true faith. But the whole world takes offense at this sign, particularly the Jews; it is a stumbling block and foolishness to them. However, it will remain intact for all of that. They would prefer to have a different sign, but none will be given them. For as Christ says (Matt. 12:39): "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." More has been said about this elsewhere.

Finally we have the plant and the worm which attacked the former at the dawn of day. This phase of the story pertains not only to Jonah, to his anger and his thoughts described in the text, but it is applicable also to Judaism, which was a real wild plant. The plant, in the first place, has large leaves. That is its best part, as these leaves afforded Jonah welcome shade. It formed a sheltering hut against the sun's heat over his head. Nothing is said about fruit. In fact, the plant bore no fruit. The leaves represent the words and laws of God. St. Paul says in Rom. 3:2: "The Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God." Jonah is seated under these leaves, that is, the prophets and holy fathers dwelt in the midst of Judaism as under a temporal hut and given to external divine worship until the days of Christ. It was an arbor for the summer season or a tabernacle which served but for a time and then ceased to exist. But it bore no fruit, for the Law, devoid of the Spirit, could profit no one of itself, although many holy people dwelt under it in the Spirit. Therefore Christ cursed the fig tree, which had leaves but no fruit, and it withered (Matt. 21:19). The same fate befell the wild plant in our story. However, Jonah takes delight in the arbor as he there awaits the devastation of the city of Nineveh. For the Jews gloried in and also boasted of the exclusive possession of God's Word and divine service. They regarded the Gentiles as altogether doomed, just as Jonah does the people of Nineveh here.

And now while the Jews complacently rely on being God's people to the exclusion of all others, and just as Jonah is basking in the enjoyment of this wild plant, God appoints a worm to smite the plant. This signifies that Christ appeared with His Gospel at a time when the Jews vaunted most vaingloriously that they alone were God's people. He attacked the wild plant, that is, He preached against it and abolished the Law through His Holy Spirit and liberated us all from the Law and its power. Therefore Judaism withered and decayed in all the world, and thus we see it today. Its verdure is gone, it flourishes no longer, nor is there a saint or a prophet sitting in its shade today. Its day is spent. Christ is a worm, as He says in Ps. 22:6: "I am a worm, and no man." He is this by reason of His shameful crucifixion and the shame heaped upon Him. And yet this poor crucified Worm stings such a fine shrub that it withers. With this slight sting, that is, with the despised Gospel, He dashes such a mighty kingdom and people to pieces.

The fact that the worm works this harm not in the evening but early in the morning, at the break of day, signifies that this fall of Judaism occurred at the dawn of the day of grace, of the New Testament, at the time when the era of grace broke upon the world through the Gospel. For He who caused the plant to grow so marvelously also permitted the worm to attack it and make it wither. Similarly, Judaism sprang into being overnight and prospered through many marvelous miracles of God's might; it did not grow by its own power and strength. The history of Moses, of all the kings, etc., demonstrates that adequately. In like manner it also withered and perished by God's will and command when the hour of the Gospel had struck. Jonah is vexed here for two weighty reasons: first, because the plant withered and deprived him of the enjoyment of its shade; second, because Nineveh is not to perish. It seems unfair to him, as it also did to several great saints, that the Jews should be so forsaken and wither and come to an end and that the people of Nineveh, the Gentiles, should accept the Gospel and become God's children. Then the sun beats upon Jonah's head, and a sultry east wind appears, and he becomes faint. The thought of the perdition of

the Jews also caused St. Paul much anguish of heart in Rom. 9:3, and he was ready to wish that he himself “were accursed and cut off from Christ” for their sake. But Jonah is informed that it would be better for him to display this anger over the prospect of Nineveh’s destruction than over the withering of this plant, that it would be better that Nineveh be preserved than this plant. This reflects what St. Paul says in Rom. 11:11: “Through their (the Jews’) trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles,” that is, it is better and fairer that Judaism should die (which, after all, was unprofitable and without spirit, all leaves and no fruit) than that it be preserved and the whole world be brought to ruin. That is the judgment which was pleasing to God. And therefore it is fitting that we Gentiles thank Him for His mercy. For the Jews sustained no loss if they were willing to believe and abandon their Judaism; and for us, all of salvation depends on this. May God help us to attain this. Amen.

LECTURES ON HABAKKUK

The Latin Text
1525

Translated by
CHARLES D. FROEHLICH

THE PLAN OF THE PROPHET HABAKKUK AND THE TIME WHEN HE PROPHESIED

THERE is no agreement among ecclesiastical authors about the content or the purpose and the time of this prophecy. Jerome and those following him think that Habakkuk prophesied at the time of the Babylonian captivity and that he directed his prophecy against the king of the Chaldeans,¹ who had wretchedly afflicted the people of God. To support their opinion, they have something or other which they have made up, or a story from Daniel about Habakkuk’s being seized by an angel, etc., but because the story they adduce is not in the Hebrew canon,² nothing definite can be decided from it. However, on the basis of the circumstances of the text, I conclude that the opinion of Jerome and all those who follow him does not fit at all. Therefore it turns out that in this respect I disagree with them. For there is no doubt in my mind that Habakkuk was a prophet who prophesied before the Babylonian captivity and that he was prophesying to the two remaining tribes about the king of the Chaldeans who was to come. To summarize, then, my opinion is that this is what Habakkuk is doing: first, he prophesies to the two tribes still remaining that their destruction is coming, that is, that the king of the Chaldeans will come against them as God’s judgment and will destroy all things. His second prophecy is that the king himself will be destroyed, no matter whether he might subject many kingdoms to himself and everywhere acquire rule over the lands. For the supreme control of affairs at that time was in the hands of the Chaldeans, etc.

CHAPTER ONE

1. *The prophet.* This is a proud, dignified title, for hardly any prophet calls himself a prophet except Habakkuk.

2. *Violence.* He means to say: “I do not stop shouting, preaching, and showing the people their wickedness; I call the people back from violence and injustices, but I do all this for nothing, for they hardly listen to me.” This seems to me to be the meaning of this verse. Jerome and his followers, as I mentioned above, think that this ought to be applied to the king of the Chaldeans, which I cannot accept. Let him who wishes adopt Jerome’s opinion; I do not adopt it. For this is in keeping with the Scriptures everywhere (as I have mentioned several times before)¹ that when God is about to punish a wicked nation, He sends His prophets ahead to smite them, to announce His Word, to reveal their sin, and to declare the coming wrath of God on account of their sins. God does this with the intention that there might be some who will be converted. In addition to this, the circumstances of the text keep me from subscribing to Jerome’s interpretation. I will mention this later at the proper place wherever the references apply.

3. *Why dost Thou make me see wrongs and look upon trouble?* Holy Scripture has often employed these two words. In fact, it almost always joins them. But the Latin translator,² since he enjoyed using a large Latin vocabulary, almost everywhere has translated them differently—although in the Hebrew language they are the same words, for example, in Ps. 90:10: “Their span is but toil and trouble”; also in another place (Ps. 10:7): “Under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.” Here are the same words, with the

meaning: “What is this? Why have You sent me to preach? I do not improve them; they do not come to their senses, and so I am forced to see only miseries and calamities while I preach for nothing so long as they in their blindness persist in their character. I see nothing but grief and disaster.”

Violence is before me. I understand this to refer to the wickedness of God’s people, as I have mentioned. I think that all these words apply to God’s people, not to the king of the Chaldeans. All the words that follow from this passage to where it says “strife and contention arise, etc.,” must be deleted,³ because they are not in the Hebrew text but have perhaps been added by someone not sufficiently informed. Therefore we read only the things that are in the Hebrew texts.

Strife and contention arise. This is like saying: “Concerning no lawsuit is judgment given and pronounced on the basis of the laws, no cases are heard, none are settled; but those who are in power reign and abuse all the laws and judgments as they wish. They support judgment with strife and quarrels. Justice is not equal for all. To such an extent all things have become violent and tyrannical.” And in that vein the prophet continues.

4. *So the law is slacked.* There is no place for laws. There are none who stand by the laws; there are none who pronounce equal justice, but tyrants make up their own laws and change them as they please.

And justice never goes forth. Here he is speaking in the Hebrew manner. There is a similar way of speaking in a psalm, to the effect that no one carries out what has been established by the laws.⁴ All these things cannot be understood as applying to the king of the Chaldeans. For what is the relation between weapons and laws? “Laws must be silent when weapons speak,” the well-known author says.⁵ “Force settles matters.”⁶ “The savage soldier is the darling of the hour.”⁷ “They would rather use the sword to reclaim their possessions.”⁸ Etc.

For the wicked are stronger than the righteous. You would translate the Hebrew word more accurately this way: “For the wicked surrounds the righteous, etc.,” for it really means “to go around,” “to encircle,” “to catch,” as in Ps. 22:12: “Many bulls encompass me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me.” Here he gives the reason why the judgments are perverse and the Law is tottering and reeling (this is what the Hebrew really means). Since the kings deal in force, he says, they do not stand by the laws, and they oppress just men; therefore it is inevitable that their judgments will be distorted and outrageous. It is not rightly called justice, but the kings make their pronouncements as they wish. And so they go astray like people on byways. This is the way it ought to be read on the basis of the Hebrew text. All the things that follow agree very closely with our interpretation, which cannot happen in Jerome’s interpretation. But not only in this passage in Jerome’s comment but here and there in all the prophets, in fact, in every chapter of almost every prophet, as long as people somehow manage to twist things in their own way, it happens that they handle everything piecemeal and that the things that precede are in no way connected with the things that follow, and vice-versa.

5. *Look among the nations and see.* Luke has quoted this verse in Acts 13:41. It is apparent that he quotes from the Septuagint, for he has added many words that are not in the Hebrew. The Hebrew “Look among the nations” Luke has translated “Behold, you scoffers.” This error could easily have arisen from just one letter in the Hebrew word.⁹ Perhaps it happened that the letter was changed by a mistake of the copiers. However, since all the books today agree, we also will read “among the nations.” Perhaps a poor translation was made by the Seventy,¹⁰ in whose translation there are many other errors as well, since they were yawning and paying too little attention. It is inevitable that such errors occur when a translator is not careful and fails to keep his eyes open. A second point: Our reading *both wonder and be astounded* is only one word in Hebrew, but it is repeated: “Wonder, wonder.” It is characteristic of the Hebrew language to repeat the same word either for the sake of emphasis or distribution,¹¹ for example: exulting, I will exult; rejoicing, I will rejoice, that is, I will rejoice exceedingly. Also Moses customarily repeats distributively when he says, “Take a man and a man,” that is, “Take one man each.” There is the same kind of distribution in this passage.

Because a work is done in your days. The word “is” makes me think that this prophet prophesied before the time of the Babylonian captivity, for he is obviously speaking about the king of the Chaldeans who will come, etc. This is the meaning: “Your sins predominate, you despise my words, I produce no fruit in you. Therefore, look around and see in all the nations: ‘Wonder and be astounded,’ a new thing will happen, punishment will not be delayed, a very great catastrophe is threatening you, which you do not believe, although it is already being told you.” In a general way this thought applies to all unbelievers,

who do not believe. Until they fall into misfortune, they keep on despising all the threats of God, just as they despise all His promises. And in this way an answer can be given to the question that might be asked: Why has Luke applied this passage to Christ and the grace of Christ, since the prophet whom Luke was quoting was looking at something altogether different, namely, the king of the Chaldeans, whose coming against them he was threatening? In what way is Christ related to the Chaldeans? It is also strange how Jerome has ignored this question, who otherwise regularly tortured himself in such a strange way in explaining questions of this kind—which can be sufficiently noticed in Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians,¹² if nowhere else. And so I answer this way: Both Christ and the apostles were accustomed to apply certain general thoughts not only to the immediate circumstances but also to many other similar instances. Examples of this sort include “A blind man leads a blind man” (Matt. 15:14); “He who exalts himself will be humbled” (Luke 14:11). This thought teaches humility (ταπεινοφροσύνη), which Christ applied to the proud guests, as the gospel account has it. All God’s works are of this kind, so that the judgment of the flesh is to disbelieve them completely, to fail totally to understand any of them because they transcend all understanding of reason, but this happens to our very great detriment, etc.

6. *That bitter and hasty nation.* In this way the Lord is all in all: without His will nothing happens; He is the one who arouses both the good and the evil men to vindicate Himself.

Who march through. These words point out the vast number and strength of the Chaldeans.

To seize habitations not their own. This statement refutes the false prophets who were trying to prevent the people from believing the true prophets, who were predicting the devastation which was coming. To make their point, the false prophets were using those Scripture passages and promises which God had given to His people to the effect that the Lord would not desert His people, in whose midst He had promised to stay. Also He had promised them an eternal kingdom, that it would not happen that they would be led into captivity, etc., as I have mentioned before in the case of almost all the other prophets.

7. *Their justice and dignity proceed from themselves.* This means: “You have neglected justice, you have changed the Law as you pleased, you have not rendered equal justice but have done all things with violence. Therefore, because you have been unwilling to judge fairly, a judge will come against you eventually who will teach you how to judge. His justice and dignity will proceed from him himself. Since you do not follow righteousness, therefore the justice and dignity of the Chaldeans will come upon you, so that the truth of the jingle will mock you: ‘If you do not wish to judge, you will be judged by him.’ ”

8. *More fierce than the evening wolves.* In two passages in Scripture I know that I have read this about evening wolves just as our version¹³ translates—in Zeph. 3:3 and in this prophet. But the meaning of the word translated “evening” is uncertain, and there is a difference of opinion among the linguists whether it ought to be translated “evening wolves” or “wolves of the desert.”¹⁴ Jerome translated “evening wolves,” influenced by this line of reasoning: Since evening wolves have suffered hunger throughout the day, they attack a flock more viciously than other wolves do, and they do not leave until they have filled themselves. Who does not see that such an interpretation is weak? Therefore I prefer to adopt the other interpretation, so I translate “wolves of the desert,” that is, wolves that are fierce and untamed. The Germans also have this way of speaking: “May savage wolves tear you apart!”¹⁵ And Christ calls the wolves ravenous (Matt. 7:15). Therefore, the word refers to the fury and aggressiveness of the Chaldeans.

Their horsemen press proudly on. This is the same word Moses often uses When he describes leprosy that has spread¹⁶ on a person’s skin.

9. *They all come for booty.* The prophet is continuing to describe the power and troops of the Chaldeans, who will come so well armed and trained that no one will be able to escape. However, I translate this way from the Hebrew: “All will come for violence against them like the east wind.” This means that there will be no hope that anyone will be able to resist the Chaldean; for he comes violently like a wind, he will come with force and will seize all things. And when Habakkuk compares the Chaldean with the east wind, he is not only showing that the Chaldeans dwell in the east but also that their force and violence are just as violent as the east wind. Moses everywhere calls it a burning wind, as can be seen in Exodus (Ex. 10:13; 14:21), for that wind is accustomed to dry things up, as the south wind is accompanied by rain. In fact, the Latin poets call the south wind “rain-producing.”

They gather captives like sand. “Just as no one is able to keep the wind from breaking forth, so the Chaldean will rush in with so many troops and such great power that you will not be able to prevent him

from gathering all the nations as a wind gathers the sand of the sea.” He describes the captives as so innumerable and countless.

10. *At kings they scoff*, that is, not only the Jewish kings but whichever kings he will lead away captive and show off in a triumphal procession.

And of rulers they make sport, that is, so great will his power be that he is going to conquer them all for fun and laugh at those who try to resist him.

They laugh at every fortress. There will be no city so well fortified that he will not easily destroy it.

For they heap up earth and take it. Jerome writes that Nebuchadnezzar made Tyre, which formerly had been a complete island, into a peninsula. Certainly it required great effort, very great power and expense for him to accomplish this. However, it is very sure that he fought very fiercely against Tyre, as is plain in Ezek. 29:18, for the city was very well fortified and very rich. In fact, it is described as “fortified” in Joshua 19:29. Habakkuk seems to be referring to this also.

11. *Then his spirit will be changed, and he will pass away*. This verse is hard to understand. I translate it from the Hebrew this way: “Then his heart will be exalted, and he will continue and will sin.” This is the way human affairs usually turn out. The human heart is far too weak to enjoy favorable circumstances modestly. It cannot keep from becoming unruly, for favorable circumstances torment even the souls of wise men. All the histories of all nations attest this, and so do the most elegant songs of the poets. “When things are going too well, passions usually indulge to excess.”¹⁷ Or, “O human mind, that does not know its future fate and lot, nor how to control its ways when excited by prosperous circumstances.”¹⁸ Scripture also points this out when it says: “You have set your heart like the heart of God.”¹⁹ The Romans, the Persians, the Medes, and all the other very powerful kingdoms illustrate this. At this point Habakkuk is saying the same thing about the king of the Chaldeans, namely, since he will enjoy such great success in all his affairs, he will boast of his own powers, he will wax proud, he will not be able to make the most of his victory (as that what’s-his-name demanded as a first requisite in a king),²⁰ but he will attribute to his own idol the victory which he has gained. Therefore he will sin, as Habakkuk adds here:

Whose own might is their god! In this way Habakkuk separates Nebuchadnezzar’s idol from the true God. An idol is one’s imagination about God, but it is a false god whom we strive to please with our own efforts and works. However, the true God is the One who wants to help us. He does not demand our goods or our works, as I have mentioned amply about idolatry in my commentary on Nahum.²¹ All nations, however wicked, boast about the name and worship of their god, but they are mistaken, etc. And our own opinion is our idol.

12. *Art Thou not from everlasting, O Lord?* At this point the prophet again uses his own manner of speaking, which is different from that of the others. Earlier he was contrasting the two gods, the true and the false, as if to say: “The king was attributing victory to his own god, failing to realize all along that You are the true God, my God,” so that the emphasis and the stress are on the phrases “his god” and “my God.” In this way the prophet is speaking in the place of the people. This is what the prophet was thinking: “Why, O Lord, do You permit this wicked enemy to trample all over Your people, who are better by far than the enemy, who does not even recognize that You are the One who has won and given him the victory? You are my God, aren’t You?” This is the way Scripture usually names God: “The God of Israel and the Holy One of Israel,” just as also here the prophet calls Him the One who is both holy Himself and the One who makes Israel holy. This is the meaning therefore: “You give good fortune to the wicked kings, although You are my God and my Holy One,” so that from this we might see that there is no salvation and no victory except from heaven, for there is no safety in the strength of the horse or in the legs of a man, etc. (Ps. 147:10). Hope for safety placed in a horse is a misplaced hope (Ps. 33:17).

We shall not die. Earlier I have said that the same thing must be watched for in all the prophets, for all the prophets keep in sight the fact that the nation will still be safe and that the kingdom of Judah will continue until the coming of the Christ,²² as Jacob had promised in Gen. 49:10. But the captivity was arguing against these words of the prophets and against the promises about the eternal kingdom. After all, who could hope for an eternal kingdom when all had been carried away into captivity into very distant lands and while the tribes were perishing? In such conditions human reason was not able to trust God. Therefore the prophets encourage the people not to doubt—not even in the middle of captivity—that they would be brought back and would remain safe, etc. Habakkuk is talking this way here also: “Even in this condition You are our God and our Holy One, so that, although we are afflicted, although we are led away

as captives, still we will not perish. Rather, by this treatment You are only punishing us to show us our sin, not to destroy us,” as is shown by what follows:

O Lord, Thou hast ordained them as a judgment; and Thou, O Rock, hast established them for chastisement. He calls the king of the Chaldeans God’s scourge with which the Lord would punish them. This is the way Scripture in a number of passages calls kings whose service God has used in overturning some kingdom “the rod or switch of the Lord.” For example, in Is. 10:5 He speaks of Assyria as “the rod of My anger.” Those people who triumph in this way with God’s help (for God is the one who is moving and leading them) do not realize that God is working through them, because they are wicked, but they attribute their victory to their own strength, to their own weapons, not realizing that they are able to do nothing more than the Lord allows, while they keep shouting, “Raze it, raze it! Down to its foundation!” (Ps. 137:7). The prophet Habakkuk is saying the same thing here, namely: “Although the king of the Chaldeans thinks that he is going to eliminate us totally, nevertheless he will be able to accomplish nothing, for we will be brought back to our land from which he leads us away as perpetual exiles. You have only used him for punishment and for judgment. Otherwise he would have been able to do nothing by himself. And he will not be able to keep us in captivity, because You are the Rock; You have appointed him only to punish us. Except for You, we would not be able to endure.” But all these things are understood only by faith. The flesh neither believes nor understands any of these things at all, as he said above (v. 5): “You would not believe if told, etc.” In temptation the flesh cannot but despair; it is not able to see and perceive life in the middle of death, glory in shame, etc. Only faith can do this.

13. *Thou art of purer eyes.* All these things belong with the preceding. It is as if he were saying: “The Chaldean sacrifices to his own god, although he ought to sacrifice to You, who hand us over to him for chastisement. Why, therefore, O Lord, do You permit that wicked king to become so haughty that in this way the worse one prevails twice against us who are far more upright than he is? We would endure this with an unruffled mind if it were some godly king coming against us. Therefore, because Your eyes are pure and because You are not able to endure toil,” *Why dost Thou look on scorners, and art silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?* Then he continues:

14. *For Thou makest men like the fish of the sea,* that is, “You bring it about that You set all the remaining men before Nebuchadnezzar as fish and snakes, that is, wanderers without a leader set forth to become prey. For just as fish are eaten up, so You set forth all the men to be devoured by him.”

15. *He brings all of them up with a hook.* He now continues to the end of the chapter with the figure of speech taken from fishing. “All of them,” that is, all the kings, all the nations, he brings up with a fishhook. In this way he compares the plundering of the king to fishing, as if to say: “First of all he takes the more powerful men in the nation; then, after the kings, the rulers, and the foremost of the people have been taken, all the rest are taken, the way ordinary fish usually are.”

16. *Therefore he sacrifices to his net.* From this the thing I mentioned about an idol a little earlier becomes very evident, namely, that the prophets call that thing a strange god in which anyone trusts, just as here in plain words the prophet says that the king of the Chaldeans will sacrifice to his net, that is, his army, with which he captures all the nations. Earlier he had said that he would sacrifice to his god. Therefore the thing in which he trusts is a person’s god, as power, troops, works, etc.

For by them his portion has become so fat, that is, “he does not give credit to You for the victory he gained, but he gives it to his army, to his own powers.”

And his share is rich, rich and strong, that is, very powerful and very rich kingdoms.

17. *Therefore he keeps on casting out his net.* Captivated by the sweetness of the plunder, he does not stop but continues to seize and devour; he can never get enough; the more he takes, the more he wants. He wishes to subject all things to himself; he is not content with those very abundant kingdoms. Such is the wickedness of the human heart and the ardent desire for possessing that it is never able to be satisfied. It always wants to have more and better things, just as Alexander was not content to have subjected the whole world to himself but desired still another world—and I don’t know what other things he wanted.

CHAPTER TWO

In the previous chapter Habakkuk has described the strength and the very powerful troops of the king of the Chaldeans and his attack on all nations and against all kingdoms. From this it becomes clear that we are right in thinking that this prophet lived before the time of the Babylonian captivity. In this second chapter, on the other hand, he prophesies punishment and revenge against the Chaldeans because they had

destroyed everything, especially Jerusalem and the Holy Land. The punishment and revenge were finally completed after the Babylonian captivity. And so Habakkuk's prophetic activity covered the periods before, during, and after the Babylonian captivity. Or, if someone prefers, in the prophetic manner he described as past or as now present things that were still in the future. For it is Habakkuk's desire or aim (this is true of all prophets) to keep the people in faith, to strengthen them with much consolation and a declaration of the will of God on the strength of promises God has made so that the people in affliction might not doubt but rather give glory to the God of truth. This promise was that the people would not perish but would remain in the land until the coming of the Christ, just as the prophecies stated. For the flesh is neither able to believe in God when in temptation nor to trust that God is reliable and certain to keep His promise. So at this point Habakkuk fights against that doubt of the flesh, and he comes finally to the climax of the matter, that is, to strengthen and sustain those who are weak in faith. For just as above he described the battle of the army of the Chaldeans against the kingdoms and all the nations, so here he describes his own fight and conflict against those whom the temptation to doubt disturbed, so that those who had been crushed by misfortunes were not able to believe that God would save His own people, who thought that both they and the whole kingdom were done for, since that terrible captivity was near and, in fact, they had all been carried off into captivity already. He begins this comfort with the illustration of a good, diligent sentinel on a watchtower carefully observing the advancing enemy and so defending against them, etc. This seems to me to be the meaning of this chapter. Unless we understand it this way, we will be at a loss to explain this passage, as Jerome and all the other writers were. For the comments they have made on this passage are altogether nothing and lack all sense, and they are not to the point.¹

1. *I will take my stand to watch and station myself on the tower.* He strengthens himself and encourages his heart and mind in trust against a people who were in a state of agitation and distrusted the promises of God, since they were terrified by the captivity. In effect he was saying: "Although you are doubting and accuse me of a lie, you will not deter me from remaining completely unafraid and in full trust in the promises that God has made to us."

And look forth to see what He will say to me, that is, "The Lord will say something to me. I will learn from what I hear, from what the Lord reveals to me, so that I will answer you who complain against me," as he says:

And what I will answer those complaining against me. On this word depends the chief point and purpose of this whole chapter. For he is fighting, as I said, against the tongues of doubters who thought that the kingdom was now done for, since the city had been burned, the kingdom had been destroyed, and they themselves had been led into captivity. Therefore they were accusing the prophets of lying, those prophets who had promised them that the kingdom would be safe, etc. So it is against such poisonous accusations as these that he addresses himself, saying that he will stand as a faithful guard in order to see how the Lord is going to save them and that he will listen for the plan of the Lord.

2. *Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets.* This was a prophetic practice which had been taken from Deuteronomy, where instruction was given to polish and smooth the stones on which the second giving of the Law was to be written plainly and clearly.² Besides, God has always had a way of strengthening the words of the prophets with some sign or of adding a sign to the visions. Thus when Isaiah was predicting the destruction of Egypt, he confirmed his prediction with a sign, namely, that he walked around naked and barefoot, as we see in Is. 20:2–3. With an act, or sign, of similar nature he illustrated the event he was threatening for Egypt. In this way for us in the New Testament Baptism is a sign to show the need of putting to death the entire old Adam. For we are baptized into the death of Christ, as Paul says in Rom. 6:3. There are many signs of this kind, in Is. 8:1–2 there are those about a book, about witnesses, etc. This sign in Habakkuk is of this kind. He predicts that there will be a sure and faithful vision about saving the kingdom. He is ordered to write this so clearly, openly, and appropriately that all will be able to read it without any hesitation. By this sign he is indicating nothing else than that the thing he promises will most surely happen. In addition he calls the vision in a general sense a prophecy about the Christ and the kingdom of the Christ, which had already been prophesied earlier in all the prophets. And so in this way he is talking not about a vision he saw at that time but about the vision of the prophets, that is, about the prophecy that had been spoken about the coming Christ in order that he might show it on a tablet and put it on display very clearly and point it out, as it were, with his finger. That the word "vision" ought to be understood in this general way is very evident from Dan. 9:23: "Consider the

word and understand the vision, etc.” Again, Dan. 9:24: “That the vision and the prophecy may be fulfilled and the Holy of Holies may be anointed.” In this passage he calls the vision a prophecy about saving the people of Judah, a prophecy which had now for a long time been prophesied, and about the coming of the Christ, etc., for, except for Michael,³ Daniel saw nothing at all, etc.

So he may run who reads it, that is: “With a very bright light and clearness show forth the writing so that the writing, clearly and plainly set forth, will not delay the one who reads it but that he will be able to read it even while he is on the run.” Then he adds the vision, or message:

3. *For so far the vision is seen from a distance*. This entire verse has been translated poorly⁴ from the Hebrew. I translate it this way: “Because the vision still is at its set time,” or more clearly: “It has its own time.” This means that the vision which has been prophesied by the prophets still has its definite and prescribed time; it will not deceive us; without a doubt that thing which has been predicted will come to pass at its own time. Then follows: *And it will freely become publicly known*. Our translator has done a bad job here. This is the word which the evangelist Luke was in the habit of translating with the word παρρησιάζειν.⁵ This is the way it is in Ps. 12:5: “I will deal confidently with him.” In the same way we have it somewhere else in a psalm: “He will speak with confidence with his enemies” (cf. Ps. 127:5). This phrase the evangelist John almost everywhere expresses like this: “Ah, now You are speaking plainly, etc.” (John 16:29). And so this is the meaning of the prophet: “We must wait for the end, until those things which have been promised about the Christ happen.” He had to use these symbols and words and signs to build up the people who were becoming desperate in a calamity that was already so great and was getting more serious every day.

If it seem slow, wait for it. He brings abundant consolation with great power. The thing he had expressed negatively shortly before he expresses positively at this point, and he answers, as it were, those who might be able to object to him: “You promise us a deliverer; you promise us a safe kingdom; but when will it come? It is always delayed. In no way do we see how we and the kingdom will remain safe, since the kingdom is destroyed and we are carried off as captives, etc.” To people with such objections the prophet responds: “Wait, even if it is delayed and that vision does not come true immediately, even if we do not see the liberation right now, finally we will see it; it really will come and will not delay.” In this way the prophet stands firm in his duty and strengthens those who are weak in faith, whom the temptation to despair was upsetting because the calamity kept getting worse. Not only this, but he also cries out against his attackers, whom he rebukes in turn and accuses of wickedness as he adds:

4. *Behold, he who is unbelieving*. This is another poor translation. I would translate it this way: “Look, he who is going to remain stubborn—his spirit will not be pleased by it.” This means that he who opposes it and isolates himself from that prophecy and with stuffed ears, as it were, refuses to hear it, who stubbornly isolates himself, such a person will not be pleased, will take no delight in that vision, will get no benefit from it, etc. As I said, the prophet is saying this against the blasphemers, as if to say: “Watch out, you people, whom neither a clear picture nor a word affects, because if anyone continues to resist this promise stubbornly, he will be in trouble, he will have no share in this vision, he will get no benefit from it. He who has been promised will come at the time when it will be fulfilled.” What he is saying is that such a person’s soul will have no pleasure in that promise. This is the same thing Christ in the parable in the gospels said in different words about those who were invited but refused to come (Luke 14:24): “None of them shall taste my banquet, etc.” The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has cited this passage in Heb. 10:38, and he translates: “But if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” He has followed the Septuagint translation, but the Hebrew text is quite different. For the Septuagint translators refer it to the soul of God, which is not appropriate. Although the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has erred in his wording, still he has captured the real meaning of the prophet quite clearly and suitably, etc.

But the righteous shall live by his faith. This verse has been handled eminently by the apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 1:17) and in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 10:38), just as it deserves to be handled. In summary form Habakkuk presents the following thought: The godly people are waiting for the Lord; therefore they live, therefore they are saved, therefore they receive what has been promised. They receive it by faith, because they give glory to the God of truth, because they hold the hand of the Lord. And so the prophet is looking not only to this promise but also to all the other promises about preaching the Gospel or revealing grace. And so this is the thought: “I cannot force it into your hearts. You have the clear written record (*pictura*) and Word. If you believe it, you will live, because the

righteous lives by his faith as long as he waits for the Lord. If you will not believe, you will not live, etc.” These things seem completely impossible in the judgment of the flesh, which cannot but look at the present calamity, the misfortune that is present. This is how it happens that it forgets the promises. For what seems less likely to the flesh than to look at wretched captivity, destruction of the kingdom, and deportation of the inhabitants and still to be required to believe that the kingdom is going to be saved, that the people are going to be safe in their own land, etc., as the prophecies say? So the prophecies seemed completely contradictory. I have treated this matter sufficiently in the preface to Jonah and other prophets when I discussed the passage about the purchase of the field, Jer. 32:6–15. These works and words of God are so wonderful that they are neither understood at all by the flesh nor can be believed by it, as the prophet said earlier. Faith alone knows these things and understands and believes them. In the same way we also believe that we are going to be brought back at the end with the body and soul together through Christ and with Christ. This of course is absolutely impossible for the human nature to believe if it has not been born again through the Spirit, etc.

This is the first and most important part in this prophet, where he promises that the Christ is going to come and that the promises which have been made to the fathers are going to be fulfilled. The second part now follows, in which he describes the destruction of the kingdom of the Chaldeans, although it was a very powerful, very wealthy, and famous kingdom. In this way he has prophesied two things, both of which seem completely impossible in the opinion of the flesh. The first is that people who had been led away into captivity, whose land had been laid waste by fire and robbery, would be brought back and relocated in their former kingdom, etc. The second is that he who was such a powerful king that he had subjected all kingdoms to himself, in whose hands was the supreme control of all things, that he would be punished in turn and that his kingdoms were going to be destroyed and snatched from him, etc. In this way he weakens all the arguments of the flesh so that with our eyes closed we might just cling to the Word of God and give glory to the God of truth.

5. *Moreover, wine is treacherous.* The Hebrew means: “As wine makes someone worthless or bad, so will he become an arrogant man. As wine makes men to be lewd, to act unjustly and shamelessly, as gluttons usually are who gorge themselves with wine, so My Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Chaldeans, will be with his men, who are already drunk with wine, that is, who have gorged themselves with very great wealth and have filled their caves to the top.” Their lot will be what the common proverb says: A drunken house spits out its master.⁶ And so he adds here:

Therefore the arrogant man will not be praised, or more correctly: “Therefore he will not abide nor be honored.” This means that they will not remain in their palaces, in that abundance of all things. No longer will the supreme control be in their power, but it will be taken away from them, and they will be worthless in the land, etc.

His greed is as wide as Sheol. He is giving the reason for the things which he said above; he is explaining that the excessive drunkenness of the king of the Chaldeans was his excessive greed and insatiable passion for possession. It is as if he were saying: “He could not get enough, so he robbed and robbed as long as he could. He was never able to control his lust for possession.” His greed was like hell, which cannot be satisfied, as we see in the Proverbs of Solomon (Prov. 30:15–16). There is a similar passage in Isaiah (Is. 5:14).

He gathers for himself all nations, that is, the fortunes of all the nations, the wealth, and all the best kingdoms of the world. But he will perish by that violence of his; he will not be able to endure, since “Excessive force falls of its own weight,” as the well-known author wrote,⁷ and as a popular saying goes, “No violence lasts forever.”⁸ He immediately adds:

6. *Shall not all these take up their taunt against him?* They will take a witty saying or riddle or an adage with which to insult him; they will hurl at him proverbs and will reproach him very boldly and openly because they have no fear. So Habakkuk vehemently describes the wretched and disastrous destruction of the kingdom of the Chaldeans, just as Ovid speaks about the destruction of Troy: “Now there’s a cornfield where Troy used to stand, and all ready for harvest’s sickle and cord is a land fertile with Phrygian blood.”⁹ Now he adds the first of his proverbs:

Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own, that is, “Goods ill got must ill be lost.”¹⁰ Easy come, easy go. It will agree with you as grass does with a dog.¹¹

He gathers against himself thick mud. In Hebrew there is one word which our translator has translated with two words. The Hebrew word means “mud.” He censures the king’s greed, which was so great that he kept acquiring many kingdoms. These will all become a burden and destruction for him at last. He compares them with mud, with which he says he is weighed down. The meaning is the same as what the well-known author wrote very correctly and very wisely: “The person whom many people fear must fear many people.”¹² “To gather against himself thick mud” is to rule in such a way that you are feared. It happens as Ennius said, “Let them hate, so long as they fear.”¹³ The prophet means that all the kingdoms will rise against the king, since he has acquired his power by force.

7. *Will not those who bite you suddenly arise?* He states how heavy the mud will be by using the figure of speech of a sleeping king who is by nature fearful. It is as if he were saying: “Now you are safe; under the present favorable circumstances you are confident that you will continue in your kingdom and your despotic rule. However, when you do not expect it, those who are going to bite you will suddenly rise up against you, those very people from whom you now consider yourself safe. You will be booty for them; they will seize you just as you have seized them and made them pay tribute to you by violence.”

8. *For the blood of men and violence.* The prophet designates as the main sin of that king that he had led away God’s people captive and destroyed Jerusalem, the city of God, where the Word of God was. For emphasis, he calls Jerusalem *the* city, as though that were the only city in the world where the Word of God was. The king of the Chaldeans fought against Jerusalem, and that was the first sin for which the prophet blames him. All these things are said for the consolation of Judah, whom the prophet was trying to strengthen so that they would not despair but rather believe that their kingdom would be safe until the Christ would come. But as I have said, he was prophesying something that seemed unbelievable to both the Jews and the Chaldeans. For the Jews he was prophesying safety and a safe kingdom; for the Chaldeans, destruction and death, just as it turned out. For Cyrus, the king of the Persians, overthrew the whole kingdom of the Chaldeans, etc.

9. *Woe to him who is greedy to the detriment of his house.* He points out another sin, the excessive greed of the king and his princes, by which they weakened and thinned out all the nations by heaping up for themselves more than was necessary, exacting intolerable tributes from their subjects so that they could build for themselves well-fortified and very beautiful citadels, in which they might safely reside, etc. He says that this greed would be a disaster for his house, as if to say: “At the end it will prove to be injurious and disastrous to your house.”

10. *You have devised shame,* that is, “All of this will roll back to the shame of your house. All the things which you have feared will return upon your own head.”

Your soul has sinned. When he mentions the soul, he is including the entire will, that is, the ardent, very full desire. Moses speaks about Pharaoh in the same way (Ex. 15:9): “And my desire shall have its fill of them, etc.,” that is, “I will vent my spleen on them.” We have the same manner of speaking here: “You have sinned with your soul,” that is, “You have sinned out of sheer spite, that you may vent your spleen.” What follows shows that this is the true meaning.

11. *For the stone will cry out from the wall.* That tyrant has so little courage that he is nowhere safe; he does not even trust any of his own people; he is even afraid of a shaking leaf. In exactly the same way, he says here, as it were: “You will be so afraid of yourself that when settling walls make a creaking sound, you will think that your misfortune is at hand.” He refers to this when he speaks about the noise of the walls, for he will be reminded immediately that all those buildings and all that wealth had been acquired by evil schemes, by the sweat of poor men. Therefore: “They will convict your conscience because you have acquired your wealth unjustly by violence and robbery, etc.” For men of that kind, when their conscience accuses them, think that their sin is open to all creatures, as popular sayings have it: “The world is too narrow for him” and “I think that even the walls are observing me.” The prophet has spoken like a poet, for poets are accustomed to speak of cornfields as happy and of meadows as laughing, etc.

12. *Woe to him who builds a town with blood.* He is describing the third sin. He is accusing the king and his men of greed, not only because they had exacted and extorted tribute money violently but because they had acquired many things by blood. In other words, they had killed many innocent people, whose goods they had then snatched for themselves. They had oppressed many innocent people, against whom they had pronounced unjust laws and unfair sentences in order to make money after they had condemned many people in this way, and so he speaks here of *iniquity*, that is, unfair judgments.

13. *Peoples labor only for fire*, that is, “For that wickedness of yours you will pay this penalty to God: Babylon and your whole kingdom will be burned, and so all things will be destroyed by fire. Meanwhile the inhabitants will take great pains to extinguish the fire, but they will not be able to do it; their efforts will be in vain. It turns out that they will be tormented in two ways: first, their goods and all the things they own will be burned; second, while exerting great effort and much sweat and exertion to save their things, which they will not be able to save, they will themselves fall.”

14. *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.* There is a similar passage in Isaiah (Is. 11:9), where he describes the grace to be revealed through the Gospel, saying that the Gospel will be preached everywhere in the world, the forgiveness of sins will abound, etc. But here the prophet is not speaking about grace to be revealed, but he is speaking, just as other prophets are accustomed to speak, about the knowledge of the vengeance of the Lord against the wicked whom He is punishing, for instance: “As I live, the earth will be covered with the glory of the Lord” (cf. Num. 14:21), and as the Lord said to Pharaoh in Exodus (Ex. 9:16): “For this purpose have I let you live, to show you My power, so that My name may be declared throughout all the earth.” Here the prophet Habakkuk is saying the same thing: “As the Lord was glorified because He killed wicked Pharaoh and others whom He was punishing, so He will bring it about that, after Babylon has been destroyed, all the nations will glorify Him, give thanks to Him, and acknowledge that the Lord has given them the victory.”

15. *Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink of the cup of his wrath, and makes them drunk, to gaze on their shame!* The stories of the Jews which they base on this passage are of no value. These stories tell about a cup given to Hezekiah the king by the king of the Chaldeans to make a treaty with him and all kinds of other things. The Jews are remarkably skillful in explaining their own affairs. However, what we really have here is a figure of speech that Scripture often employs. For by cup and drink Scripture signifies anger and punishment, as in the psalm (Ps. 11:6): “A scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.” Jeremiah and Isaiah used this figure of speech very frequently. “To drink a cup,” therefore, means to suffer misfortune and punishment; “to give to drink” means to inflict punishment on someone. Habakkuk, therefore, is speaking about the excessive cruelty and tyrannical rule of the king. The king had exercised excessive tyranny over those whom he had conquered in war; he had mistreated them more than the Lord had wanted, as he mentioned earlier in the first chapter (1:12): “Thou hast ordained them¹⁴ as a judgment ... for chastisement, etc.” The Lord intended that the king only chastise the people, not destroy them, as the king had in mind. This is what the prophet calls “the cup of his wrath.”

To gaze on their shame! The metaphor is that of a drunken man who lies nude, exposed for all to see, as Noah was (Gen. 9:21–23). Therefore this is the meaning: “You have taken away all their wealth, power, and troops, so that nothing at all remains for them anymore except disgrace and greatest poverty, etc.”

16. *Drink, yourself, and be circumcised!* This is the correct translation from the Hebrew. The meaning is: “I will make you drunk in turn so that you will lie nude and disgraced. All the nations will circumcise you in your totally drunken condition, that is, they will rob you while you are down and out and will take all your goods from you.”

The cup of the Lord’s right hand will come around to you, that is, “Your calamity will be very great.”

The vomit of disgrace. In Hebrew there is only one word, which our translator¹⁵ has translated with two words.¹⁶ I admit that I do not know what the real meaning of the Hebrew noun is. Therefore, until I learn its meaning, I will follow our translator in interpreting this as “the vomit of disgrace,” that is, ignoble and indecent. This is the meaning: “As one who vomits shows that he has drunk or eaten too much, so all will report about you that you were stripped of all glory, wealth, and honor—you, who until now stood alone as the richest and most honored one. To such an extent you have gorged yourself, etc.”

17. *The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you.* Habakkuk is saying that the principal reason for the overthrow of the kingdom of the Chaldeans is that they had opposed Judah, God’s people, and had very savagely attacked Jerusalem, God’s city, in which the Word of God ruled. For this is the way Satan especially employs his forces where he sees God’s Word ruling. In accordance with the custom of Scripture, Habakkuk calls Judea “Lebanon,” for in remote regions they used to call Judea by the names of wellknown mountains or rivers, as is evident in the psalm (Ps. 42:6): “I will remember Thee from the land of Jordan, etc.”

The destruction of the beasts, that is, “You have devastated the land; you have led away all the cattle; in accordance with your own wishes, you have exercised tyranny against the men whom you conquered. The same thing will happen to you, etc.”

18. *What profit is an idol?* Up to this point we have seen the threats of the prophet against the kingdom of the Chaldeans. Finally he adds here a kind of taunt, imitating Moses in this respect, who in a similar way taunted the children of Israel when they were idolaters who had departed from the true God and His worship, saying to them, “Where now are your gods, etc.?”¹⁷ In this manner the prophet is here also taunting the king and the kingdom of the Chaldeans, as if to say: “See, I have predicted that misfortune will come to you; you will be destroyed, you will lose your kingdom, your captives will be led away because all your sins have deserved this. But now let your gods help you whom you worship and pray to as true gods! Call on them! Let them now free you from this catastrophe, etc. But how will they be able to help you since they are mute statues, silent stones?” With a strong emphasis he calls their idols “mute statues and silent stones.” In fact, he is saying: “At last you understand that your idols are not true gods. When you are in the depths of despair, when they especially ought to help you, they cannot help you.” This is the way the Jews used to taunt other nations, as in the psalm (Ps. 115:3–6): “The statues of the nations are silver and gold, the works of men’s hands; they have a mouth, but they do not speak; they have ears, but they do not hear, etc. However, our God is in heaven. He has done all things that he wished.” In the same way the prophet is adding this comparison, for he is contrasting the true God with the idols of the nations.

20. *But the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before His face*, that is, our God lives in such a way that the entire earth trembles and is silent before Him. The world becomes dumb, does not dare even to whisper before Him, just as we have it in Isaiah (Is. 41:1): “Let the islands keep silent before Me, etc.” This is a brief sentence, to be sure, but, as brief as it is, it contains things of the greatest importance, for it includes both Testaments, the Old and the New. The expression “the face of the Lord” in Scripture indicates either the knowledge or the coming of the Lord when He becomes known and is revealed to us. And so before the Gospel was revealed, God was known in the world, but since the revelation of the Gospel He has become known much more fully. From this knowledge of God every man has his crowning glory so that no one has anything in which he can boast other than in the Lord alone, etc. This is what the prophet means here by “all the earth keeping silence before the face of the Lord.”

CHAPTER THREE

THE prophet Habakkuk has suffered serious loss in this prayer of his not only at the hands of translators but also at the hands of commentators. Almost all the commentators have devised such different opinions that to this very day it remains uncertain from all their writings what the prophet saw in his prayer. For even to the present time writers in both the Greek and Hebrew language disagree with one another. Jerome has often rambled horribly, not only in his judgment about the prophet’s meaning or intention but even in matters of grammar. His mistakes in grammar are so serious that sometimes a person with only a limited knowledge of Hebrew letters can be very certain that Jerome has made a mistake. The thing I especially wonder about is why the excellent and most high God has permitted men so eminent and singularly learned to make such childish mistakes. Then they treat the thoughts piecemeal; they explain one passage about the king of the Persians—and I do not know what else—and another passage about the suffering of Christ. As far as I am able, I shall go straight to the real meaning of the prophet, rejecting the opinions of all those commentators.

1. *A prayer of Habakkuk on behalf of the ignorances.* The title clearly affirms that it is a prayer rather than a song, for he confesses and praises God and asks for deliverance from captivity. This is the summary of the whole thing, just as Moses prays rather than sings, prostrating himself before God, confessing his calamity, and praying to be delivered, etc. Habakkuk adds in the title the phrase “on behalf of the ignorances,”¹ just as Ps. 7 does in its title. Ignorance, therefore, stands for nothing else but innocence, as is plain when Job says (cf. Job 9:21): “If I shall be whole, my soul will be ignorant of this very thing,” that is, “Even if I were whole, still I would be forced to conduct myself before God as though totally ignorant of anything, as though nothing pertained to me.” The entire Seventh Psalm points in this direction when it says (Ps. 7:3): “O Lord my God, if I have done this, if there is wrong in my hands, etc.,” which means: “Blame is thrust on me of which I am totally unaware; they accuse me of wickedness, although I am innocent in this matter, etc.” Therefore the prophet prays “for the ignorances,” that is, for himself and for

the other godly people who were innocently captive. He prays that the Lord would be willing to bring them back, since indeed their conscience is ignorant of the sin for which others had deserved captivity. In this way he is complaining that the guilty and the innocent are being afflicted equally, as often happens in wars. For example, the prophet Jeremiah was led off into captivity with many other godly people. This seems to me to be the meaning, and I cannot understand it in any other way. In this way the prayer agrees very well with the preceding prophecy. Although I have myself as the only authority for this interpretation, still I do not think that I am mistaken.

2. *O Lord, I have heard the report of Thee, and I feared.* Habakkuk is doing the same thing in this prayer that other prophets also are accustomed to do, as one can see in Scripture, that is, that they set forth immediately at the beginning in a few short verses a summary of the whole matter. Then they expand it to give in great detail the wonderful works of God. This they do as praise and thanks to God. In Judges, chapter 5, Deborah and Barak do the same thing after a victory has been gained. First they set forth in a few words the gist of the matter; then they immediately proceed to recount the exodus of the children of Israel out of Egypt and tell of the marvelous works of God, as one can easily see in that passage. The same thing happens in Ps. 18:7. First of all the prophet David discusses his cause, his affliction, but he soon directs his attention to the narrative of the exodus from Egypt when he says: "Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled, etc." Similarly, in Ps. 68:7–10 David was going to speak about the Christ, who would arise from the dead and ascend to heaven, about the grace to be revealed through the Gospel. He prepared the way by repeating the earlier stories of ancient times, that is, he set forth the miracles performed by the hand of the Lord for the Israelites when He led them out of Egypt, when He went before them, when He guided them, when He gave them food from heaven, etc. It is a characteristic of the Hebrew language that they repeat this account of the exodus from Egypt as the starting point for all the other stories, and they frequently mention it, repeat it, and connect the other stories to it. At this place the prophet Habakkuk is clearly doing the same thing. When he asks for redemption, he inserts first of all this marvelous work of God and weaves it in like a tapestry in which he enumerates the various marvelous deeds of God, just as if someone would explain fully and place before the eyes a painted picture that describes Christ's suffering. He also strengthens himself by all these miracles of God, etc. And so this is the thought: "O Lord, I have heard what is said about You, that is, about all Your miracles, about the acts of Your kindness, which You have done with Your people, to whom You have shown Your eminent goodness." The same idea is also in the psalm (Ps. 44:1): "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, etc."

I feared, that is, "Because of the greatness of those marvelous deeds of Yours, a certain reverence came over me and made me terribly frightened when I felt this great majestic goodness that is Yours." This is the way spiritual people become frightened and feel awe when they hear about such marvelous deeds of God and instances of divine goodness, since they reflect on the matter by pondering a little more deeply. The other people, however, who only read these things in an offhand manner, do not feel such reverence and fear.

Thy work, O Lord, in the midst of the years renew it. The word "it," which the Latin translator has added, is unnecessary. The Hebrew language very frequently places a relative pronoun at the head of such a clause, as in Ps. 1:4: "Which the wind drives it from the surface of the earth, etc."² In my opinion this is the meaning: "O Lord, do the thing You are accustomed to do. This is the thing You have been accustomed to do, namely, in the middle of the years You would bring Your work back to life, You would make it known, and You would remember mercy in wrath." In strange ways all the interpreters have tortured themselves in an attempt to find out what the prophet means by the phrase "in the midst of the years." With general agreement they want it to refer to the donkey and the ox, between whom the infant Christ lay in the manger, as the story goes.³ Who does not see how inept this opinion is and how improper for this passage? First, I translate from the Hebrew: "Lord, renew Your work within the years." The meaning is: "Do not for years delay Your work, for which I am asking now. Help us. Set us free from captivity, since the time of captivity seems too long to us. O Lord, make Your work to stand; make it live. Fulfill what other prophets have promised, for to us the delay seems too long, etc." He is using very intense words, the kind of words people use who are in serious trouble, who are suffering, who are in the greatest danger. When they think they are already done for, when everywhere there is despair and no hope of escaping, then the Lord is present and helps them. In this way the Lord is present in the middle of the

years, that is, He is the Helper in the middle of troubles and at the right times, as we have it in the psalm (Ps. 138:7). Job also speaks this way: “When you think you are done for, etc.”⁴ He is teaching us in an eminent way all those things about the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt through the sea, how they passed through the sea safely, although Pharaoh was pressing on and pursuing them with his entire army and they already thought they were done for. He gave them water out of a rock in the desert; food fell from heaven, etc. What follows is the same.

In the midst of the years make it known, that is, “Show Yourself at last, O Lord. Many years have passed; our captivity is oppressive. Therefore end the delay and waiting; cut off the waiting and delay. Show that You are our God. Redeem us; dear Lord, make an end of it, etc.”

In wrath remember mercy. I translate this way from the Hebrew: “In trouble remember mercy.” He is not speaking about the trouble with which God was troubled but about the trouble with which we were troubled. Bernard treats this passage beautifully, but his opinion is not stated in this verse; it is not pertinent at this point. The Hebrew word which we translate “trouble” in this verse is also in Ps. 4:4: “Be angry, but sin not.” This means, “Do not be, troubled, do not be so impatient that you sin, that you give place to wrath, etc.” And so this is the meaning of the prophet: “Lord, remember mercy in our trouble or our agitation, so that we will not be overcome by the trouble,” as that psalmist says in Ps. 85:8: “Let me hear what the Lord says to me, etc.,” lest the saints be turned to foolishness, that is, lest they, overcome by a long temptation, grumble at last against God. The Lord is present in His own place and at His own time, as the apostle says (1 Cor. 10:13): “God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape.”

3. *God came from the south*.⁵ As I mentioned before,⁶ it is the custom for the prophets and other holy men in Scripture, when they pray, to set forth their proposition in the very first verses and then to expand it in a long prayer in praise of God. They base this praise on all God’s marvelous works. It is evident that the prophet Habakkuk is doing the same thing here; he is laying out, as it were, a tapestry into which all the things which he asserts about God are woven, as I have mentioned. And so here nothing but figures of speech are going to be composed, and the verbs in the future tense must be read in the present indicative. Then the things will be understood more easily, in the same way that someone with his finger would point out to a person the history of the suffering of Christ painted on a wall as he recounts all the things in their sequence. In this way Habakkuk also must be understood when he recounts the marvelous works of God. First of all he remembers the exodus from Egypt as the starting point, so to say, of all the well-known miracles of God for His people Israel. Egypt lies to the south; therefore he says that the Lord has come “from the south.”

Paran is the proper name of the desert near the tribe of Judah, in which the Israelites tarried for a long time, etc., as sacred history tells us (Num. 12:16). It is also called by another name in Scripture, Kadesh-Barnea.

His glory covered the heavens. Many psalms are full of this thought, the praise of Him over heaven and earth. Example: “Because Your glory is chanted above the heavens” (Ps. 8:1). Habakkuk is saying the same thing here: “Everywhere in all lands His name, glory, and magnificence were being praised because of that wonderful work of His, that He led out of Egypt the people whom He had chosen for Himself.” The things which follow show that this is the true meaning.

And the earth was full of His praise. This is the way Rahab speaks in Joshua 2:9–11: “I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you, etc. For the Lord your God is He who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”

4. *His brightness was like the light*. What our translator⁷ translated “brightness” would be translated more accurately “ray,” “radiance,” that is, His rays are spread abroad. The meaning is that the showing forth and revealing of God, the proclamations of His power, are so widely disseminated and are becoming so well known that they spread out to very great distances; within a short time His deeds are made known everywhere in the lands.

Horns are on His hands. The horns mentioned are also to be understood figuratively for the rays or for the brightness. This is the way Scripture speaks about the face of Moses (Ex. 34:29): “The face of Moses was horned,”⁸ that is, he was emitting from himself rays that give off light and look like pointed horns.

Then the Hebrew must be read this way: “The horns from His hand.” This phrase means that marvelous works were being disseminated from His hand like rays of light.

And there He veiled His power. In that light, in that projection, in that proclamation and publication of His marvelous deeds His power tarried. In other words, He was not proclaiming those marvelous deeds of His; He did not permit His rays to shine forth in other lands but only in the south and in Paran.

5. *Before Him went death.* Here Habakkuk begins a new section, for he is obviously painting a new picture, as he will recount many pictures one after another in great abundance, as prophets ordinarily do. We shall see this passing parade of pictures. Here he is painting an accurate picture in which he will describe, just as in the other pictures which follow, what he has called the light and the rays of the Lord, namely, His very famous marvelous works which have become known to the nations, especially to those who lived round about. The Hebrew noun [מָוֶת] means both “death” and “pestilence.” In this passage I translate it “pestilence,” for it denotes the plague with which the Lord smote the Egyptians with the result that in one night all the firstborn died, both of men and of beasts. Then, what follows,

And the devil followed close behind, I translate: “And fever went out at his feet,” because the Hebrew noun does not mean “the devil,” as those other people⁹ think, but some kind of destructive fever. Fevers of this kind are usually very harmful. In this way the same thought is stated twice. For it is not only the prophets who often repeat the same things, but the other writers in Scripture follow this pattern also.

6. *He stood and measured the earth.* Another picture is drawn, which Moses also describes in Ex. 14. After the children of Israel had departed from Egypt, Pharaoh followed with a fully armed band, with chariots and horsemen, intent on wiping out God’s people. When God was saving His people in this way, an angel stationed himself midway between the two armies to prevent the Egyptians from following on that night and injuring Israel. Moses very clearly states that it was an angel of the Lord who stood between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of the Israelites, etc. (Ex. 14:19–20). This is what Habakkuk means when he speaks about “measuring the earth.” Then, when he adds:

He looked and shook the nations, Habakkuk has used almost exactly the same words that Moses used in Ex. 14:24–25, for Moses says the same thing with the same words: “The Lord in the pillar of fire and of a cloud looked down upon the host of the Egyptians and discomfited the host of the Egyptians, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily.” God fights just by looking when He strikes terror and fear into the hearts of those whom He wishes to destroy. Then they are easily conquered and fall, no matter how well armed they are, and flee; they are not able to endure when they feel the presence of the Lord in their heart, just as the Egyptians also said (Ex. 14:25): “Let us flee from before Israel; for the Lord fights for them against us.”

Then the eternal mountains were scattered. Figuratively Habakkuk calls the rulers and aristocrats “eternal mountains,” because the supreme control of affairs was in their hands. Moses speaks the same way in Deuteronomy (cf. Gen. 49:26)¹⁰: “According to the desire of the eternal hills.” That scattering or abasement of the leaders was brought about

By His ways in the world. This is the way I translate from the Hebrew, for the Hebrew word¹¹ means both “eternity” and “world,” as in Ps. 24:7: “Be lifted up, O doors of the world,” where we read “eternal doors.” Therefore the Lord dispersed the nations and abased the leaders of the world, because He Himself walked in the world, that is, He lived with His people, walked in their midst as leader and victor, as He had promised.

7. *I saw the tents of Ethiopia in affliction.* Our Latin translation is so hard to understand that you might rather call it an incantation than a prayer. Nothing can be concluded from this verse. This is again another part of the picture, another “ray” of the Lord. Since our Latin translation¹² is very bad, I translate it this way from the Hebrew: “I saw the tents of the Ethiopians in grief, the curtains in the land of Midian were troubled.” The word “affliction” in our translation is the word מַשָּׁח in Hebrew, about which we have said several times before that it means “toil,” in German “exertion” (*Mühe*), as is plain in Ps. 90:10: “Yet what is left of them¹³ is toil and trouble.” And so this is the meaning: “The Ethiopians, the Midianites, and all the other nations were disturbed and smitten with great fear when they heard about the coming of His people, whom the Lord had brought out of Egypt both so wonderfully and with such a powerful hand and such great signs. The Lord had delivered His people from the hand of Pharaoh and had led them wonderfully through the Red Sea at the very time when Pharaoh, together with his whole army, was drowned, etc.” The Ethiopians and the Midianites were nations who lived nearby, especially those who are

called Egyptian Arabs, dwelling on the western shore of the Red Sea, for at that place there is a passage to Egypt, as the maps show.

Tents, for they did not build so expensively as we do in Germany or in other regions, but they lived in tents. So our Turks today laugh at the foolishness of the Germans because they build so magnificently—as though they were going to remain here forever. But they have received this tradition from their ancestors, that is, the Arabs, from whom they derive their origin. *Curtains*,¹⁴ that is, tents made out of curtains.

8. *Was Thy wrath against the rivers, O Lord?* This entire verse can be understood as a question expecting either a negative or a positive answer. The prophet gives free rein to his feelings in this verse. He stops at this point in admiration of that great work about which he had spoken before. And so, if we should wish to expect a negative answer to the question, the meaning would be that he is speaking about the grace and the goodness of God by which He saved His people and truly caused the light to come forth. If we should expect an affirmative reply to the question, he is speaking about the wrath and anger of the Lord with which He opposed Pharaoh and drowned him in the sea with his entire army. However, in my opinion the Hebrew question ought to receive a negative reply, as in the psalm (Ps. 95:11): “Therefore I swore in My anger that they should not enter My rest.”¹⁵ And thus, by means of a negation, he makes an affirmation in this way: “You were angry with the adversaries; You destroyed them, but You saved us.” “Surely those were not signs of His wrath against us, that He led us through the rivers, were they? By no means. For He watches us with such great kindness when all the nations are raging against us. He leads us safely through the rivers in a wonderful way.” The thing that causes me to approve this meaning is that the prophet at this point is describing the safety that comes from chariots, for the Israelites went out of Egypt armed, namely, equipped with wagons and carts, as is plain from the Book of Numbers (cf. Num. 7:2 ff.). In this way, with strong feeling, the prophet basks in the recollection of God’s kind deeds and strengthens himself, as if to say: “These are the strong horsemen and swift chariots in which God rides.”

9. *Thou didst strip the sheath from Thy bow.* This is another part of the picture. In this picture he includes the encounter¹⁶ with Sihon, the king of the Amorites, and with Og, the king of Bashan, which the historical books of the Old Testament (Num. 21:21–35; Deut. 2:24–3:11) and the Psalms (Ps. 135:11; 136:19–20) narrate fully. For after they had passed through the sea, they were attacked by these kings, whom they conquered through the Lord. The way it sounds, the word “bow” very simply means the soldiers and their weapons. It is not necessary to understand a spiritual bow, as some have imagined, for it is obvious that the prophet has used the same word in Ps. 78:9: “The Ephraimites, armed with the bow, turned back on the day of battle,” that is, the tribe of Ephraim was brave, was waging war, had a military tradition, etc. The meaning of the expression “the Lord stripped the sheath from His bow” is that He used His soldiers in the service of His own people, made His people strong with His own strength, so that His people might escape victorious over all the enemies, just as He had promised both that He would give victory and that He would be an enemy to their enemies.

At this point the word *Selah* occurs again, which was also added once before.¹⁷ What this word really means has been discussed among all the churchmen, both Greek and Hebrew, from the earliest days of the church until this day. The Septuagint translators have translated it διάψαλμα, that is, a pause or a stop. I agree completely with those who say that it is some kind of addition to fill in a gap or an empty space in the verse, just as also our Latin and Greek poets often needed to insert into their verses fill-in particles to complete the metrical schemes of the verses. Otherwise they could be omitted, since they add nothing to the meaning of the verse, etc.

Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. Now he is describing the passage through the Jordan. These are nothing but personifications, which also appear in the psalm verse “The hills gird themselves with joy” (Ps. 65:12); also in “The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs” (Ps. 114:4). I think that this is a synecdoche, so that by the mountains are meant the people dwelling on the mountains. It is as if he were saying: “You are able to divide the rivers, and men have seen this; therefore they grieve, they bring forth to birth (this is the force of the Hebrew word), that is, they have been in as much pain as those who give birth, they are in agony. They have been perplexed and placed in anguish, they despaired of their own powers as they saw that You were so powerful with Your people that Your people were able to walk through the waters” (see Joshua 5:1).

10. *The deep gave forth its voice.* He sums it up in the figure of speech ἐπιφώνημα¹⁸ as if to say: “So deep and high are the things that serve God’s people.”

11. *The sun and moon stood still in their habitation.* Here he combines two events. The first occurred when the sun and the moon stood still until the Israelites could avenge themselves on their enemies (see Joshua 10:12–13). The other event follows.

At the light of Thine arrows as they sped. This, too, is described in Joshua 10 when, on the occasion of the killing of the five kings, the Lord sent large stones from the sky on those who were fleeing, as the stow relates. Here he is describing this storm. He calls the flashes of lightning “arrows,” for the flashes of lightning are the arrows of the Lord, as we have it in the psalm (Ps. 144:6): “Flash forth the lightning and scatter them, send out Thy arrows and rout them!”

12. *Thou didst bestride the earth in fury.* I translate this way from the Hebrew: “In wrath You walk on the earth, in anger You trample the nations,” namely, Canaan. This means: “You walk with a certain majesty of wrath, because many are the adversaries of Your people, all of whom You destroy.” In this verse Habakkuk is grouping together all the remaining peoples of Canaan who opposed Israel, the people of God, as one can see in the Book of Joshua.

13. *Thou wentest forth for the salvation of Thy people.* Up to this point he has portrayed all the incidents that occurred after the departure from Egypt until the fathers gained possession of the Promised Land. Now he adds those incidents by which he shows what works the Lord did in the peaceful kingdom after they had thoroughly defeated the hostile nations and were able to remain at home. He describes the things accomplished under the kings, especially under Saul and David, when they had seized the land and dwelt in it. Therefore he describes them as marching out to war. He calls both Saul and David “the anointed” (*Christum*)¹⁹ king of the Lord, for Scripture ascribes this title even to Saul, although he was wicked. For often even Saul fought very successfully, and this success came about for the sake of the people, to whom the Lord had promised both that He would be with them and would fight for them, according to the promises which they had, etc.

Thou didst crush the head of the wicked. The Hebrew reading usually joins these words with the preceding words. However, if I may be so bold, I would prefer to join them with the following words. And yet I leave you free to decide which interpretation seems better, for it can be understood in two ways. One explanation is that what is expressed in the singular number is plural, as he also called kings “the anointed one” of the Lord. This is the interpretation that I do not approve of, that he is talking about different kings, that is, about the king of the Moabites, the king of the Ammonites, the kings of Syria, etc., all of whom he speaks of as shattered, namely, by the kings of Judah and Israel. But I would prefer to understand this about the king of the Assyrians, that is, that He had shaken him from the house of the wicked one. This means that He deprived him of his rule, etc. However, if someone does not approve of this meaning, I will not argue. Moreover, “to make bare the foundations and to crush the head” is to scatter the kingdom and to take away their king, whom Scripture calls the head. To leave the people without a king and a ruler is what Scripture calls “to make bare,” just as Moses speaks about making the head bare.²⁰

To neck. This metaphor is extremely harsh and is unique to this prophet. He is inserting a double metaphor, with which he denotes the rulers in two ways. When he speaks about laying the foundations bare, he is calling the rulers the foundations. In the second place, he calls them heads, etc.

14. *Thou didst curse his scepters with the head of his cities.* This is especially directed against the king of the Chaldeans, for here the prophet is again drawing a new picture. He involves him with the king of the Assyrians (for in this way, I think, the former passage must be understood about the king of the Assyrians) when he adds the word “his,” as though still speaking about only one Assyrian. And so this is the meaning: “The kingdom of the Chaldeans has not yet been destroyed, as the other kingdoms and kings have, but now the destruction of that kingdom is imminent also. The verdict has been rendered, You have cursed his scepters. Therefore, O Lord, bring it about that the thing which You have threatened will happen. Let the king of the Persians come and avenge our disgrace, etc., because You have cursed his scepters with the head of the cities, Babylon.”

Who came like a whirlwind to scatter me. In Hebrew there is only one word where we read “who came like a whirlwind” just as if he were saying “who came storming.” For in this way the Hebrew language is accustomed to use such elegant words. This is the meaning: “Until now our kings have suffered much, we have been miserably mistreated by the other hostile kings and nations. Nevertheless, you, O king of the Chaldeans, have been our fiercest enemy of all, you who have overwhelmed us like a storm and miserably mistreated us. You have led us away into captivity; and not only that, but we have become a laughingstock

to you. You laugh at us; you are so arrogant about the victory you have gained that you even rejoice if some wicked man oppresses a poor person in secret, that is, without being punished, where there is no judge who might avenge the injustice.” This is what the prophet means when he says *rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret*.

15. *Thou didst trample the sea with Thy horses*. Formerly we used to conquer our enemies everywhere with the help of God, no matter how powerful they were, just as he said before (v. 8): “Thou didst ride upon Thy horses, upon Thy chariot of victory.” But now we have been overwhelmed by tribulation. “Now You have trampled us in the sea, that is, in tribulation.”

The surging of mighty waters. The same expression is in Ps. 69:1–2: “For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me.” All these expressions indicate excessive tribulation. Obviously the meaning of this passage is the same, as he further explains that trampling when, in the words that follow, he recounts how the Chaldean scattered them.

16. *I hear, and my body trembles*. “You were afflicting us extraordinarily, you were oppressing us; we were crawling, as it were, in the mud of many waters. When I was listening to these things, my stomach was troubled and my lips trembled. The boasting and insulting by your horsemen and soldiers, who were trampling and mining us, greatly grieved me.”

Rottenness enters into my bones. This is another expression unique to this prophet. The meaning is: “My bones were weak from fear and from confusion when I was forced to hear all these things.” *My steps totter beneath me*, that is, “In my solitude I was shaken where I stood,” or as we say in German, “I sat and ate my heart out.”²¹

I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us. “Our nation has been taken into captivity; those who robbed us and captured us with their army prevailed against us.” This is what the Hebrew word means: “The Lord had allowed them to prevail against us; no prayer had any effect,” just as Isaiah says (Is. 64:7): “There is no one that calls upon Thy name, that bestirs himself to take hold of Thee, etc.” “But now peace will return to us; we will be led back safe to our kingdom; we will be delivered from the captivity with which you now oppress us, and then the curse will come upon you. For this reason I was not able to rest when you were oppressing us in this way.”

17. *Though the fig tree do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines*, that is, “All things had been destroyed. So great was your wrath against us, so great your tyranny.”

The produce of the olive fail, that is, “Fruit was not coming forth from the olive tree, no matter how well it was cultivated.”

The flock be cut off from the fold, that is, “The Chaldeans were seizing all things, so that nothing remained in our land.”

18. *Yet I will rejoice in the Lord*, that is, “I will give thanks to the Lord for our salvation. It will happen some day that the king of the Persians will triumph over you; you will no longer be able to exercise your tyranny over us; your destruction is drawing near. We, however, will be led back safe to Jerusalem, and therefore there will come a time when I will again rejoice and praise God.” This is the same thought that the prophet David expresses in the psalm (Ps. 43:5): “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my Help and my God.”

19. *He makes my feet like hinds’ feet*. These words have been taken from a psalm, for the same words are also in the psalm (Ps. 18:33): “He made my feet like hinds’ feet, etc.,” that is, “He will cause the progress of my affairs to be favorable, there will be success, He will keep me safe as I run both in the ministry of the Word and in a safe kingdom,” as he here adds:

He makes me tread upon my high places, that is, the kingdom will still be strong, for he includes here the kingdom of the return from captivity, as if he were saying: “It will happen that I will be brought back again to glory from this mud in which you are now trampling us.”

For the victory on musical instruments. This word occurs very often in the titles of psalms as לְמִנְצָח, which is translated with the Greek word ἐπινίκιον, that is, “song of triumph.” So this is the meaning: “I will again ride on high, I will be established on high again with songs of triumph on my musical instruments.” In my German translation of the Psalms I have translated this word “to sing high,”²² that is, this kind of psalm ought to be sung with a high and sonorous voice, the voice we ordinarily refer to as

discantus.²³ And so this is the meaning: “I will sing in the high range with joy and gladness; at the present I am being afflicted, at the present I am being oppressed, but within a short time I will glory again, I will rejoice and triumph. This will happen when we will be brought back from captivity.” This is a brief ἐπιφώνημα²⁴ of all that has preceded. In this way he is indicating the complete enjoyment of redemption from captivity.²⁵

LECTURES ON HABAKKUK

The German Text

1526

Translated by

MARTIN H. BERTRAN

PREFACE TO THE PROPHET HABAKKUK

I RESOLVED to expound this prophet Habakkuk¹ so that he, too, may finally come to light and that his contents may be learned, and that we may note what the Holy Spirit says and teaches us through him. For I believe that he has not seen the light of day since the time of the apostles. This is due in part to the unfamiliarity of the Hebrew tongue. It is impossible to understand a number of passages of Scripture, in particular the prophets, without a knowledge of Hebrew. Moreover, the ancient and early teachers² who were conversant with that language were prevented by other causes from applying themselves diligently to this task. And yet it would have been meet and right, also useful and necessary, to expound Habakkuk clearly, because the last chapter, his prayer, was used daily; it was both sung and read in all the churches,³ but probably according to the proverbial saying “the way the nuns read the Psalter.”⁴ St. Paul honors Habakkuk greatly, quoting his statement “The righteous shall live by faith” (Hab. 2:4) more than once (Gal. 3:11; Rom. 1:17).⁵ He immediately makes this the theme of his finest letter, the Epistle to the Romans. Furthermore, Luke cites him twice in the Book of Acts.⁶ This reflects the high regard Habakkuk must have enjoyed among the apostles. Although we may not boast over against the ancient fathers (for God alone lays claim to such a judgment, 1 Cor. 3:21), yet we must confess and cannot deny that we, by God’s grace, possess more clarity and light on many Scriptural passages than they did. May God also grant that we be grateful and that we may bear all the more fruit. Amen.

But before beginning with the text, I must pave the way with a general introductory remark. This is necessary and useful for a better understanding not only of this prophet but also of most of the others. For it has been most confusing in the past to hear the prophets speak of the Jewish kingdom and then to break off so abruptly and intersperse remarks about Christ. Everybody who is not familiar with their method regards that as an odd way of doing things, and he supposes that they observe no order but ramble along from one subject to another. This seems incomprehensible to all; people cannot get used to it. It is indeed very irritating to read a book that observes no order, in which statements are so disconnected that they do not fit together and therefore lack proper coherence. All of that may reasonably be expected of correct and proper speech. Thus the Holy Spirit was accused of an inability to express Himself properly, of talking like a drunkard or a fool, of mixing everything together and of delivering Himself of wild and odd words and statements. But it is we who were at fault; we did not understand the speech, and we were not acquainted with the method of the prophets. For it cannot be otherwise: the Holy Spirit is wise, and He also makes His prophets wise. Now, a wise man must necessarily be able to speak well; this can never fail. But to him who does not hear well or is not sufficiently conversant with a language, to him a speech may seem faulty because he hears or understands hardly half of the words. That has been our experience to date with Scripture. That is why we, too, groped in the dark so, aped others, and often missed the mark and arrived at another meaning. As the saying goes: He who cannot hear well, invents well.⁷

It is certain, first of all, that all the prophets direct their prophecies primarily toward Christ. St. Peter shows in Acts 3:24 that all the prophets spoke of the time of the New Testament. Moreover, the entire Old

Testament has been nothing else but a preparation for and forerunner of the New Testament. It is comparable to a tutor who rears and trains the master's son so that he might one day become a competent master and father himself. Thus Paul declares in Gal. 3:24: "The Law was our custodian until Christ came, etc." The fact that the prophets meanwhile reprove the people, that they pronounce many prophecies that pertained only to their own time and served only their time, also that they have interspersed prophecies regarding heathen kingdoms and principalities, also the fact that they have performed miracles—all this has been done to train the Jewish people and to prepare them for the advent of Christ. Similarly a Christian must do many things—eat and drink and perform other physical acts—not just to nourish the body; no, the body is thereby sustained and nourished to enable the mind to serve God here on earth in faith and with the Gospel. We in Christendom and in the New Testament must also do that, namely, teach the people to live right; and yet both our doctrine and our life are directed to the expectation of the Last Day and of eternal life. In no way does this suggest that we intend to remain here on earth.

In the second place, when the time had come for Christ and the New Testament to appear, as all the prophets had foretold and as they had pointed out to the people, then God, in His divine way, acted as though nothing were to come of this. He made it appear as if He would turn out to be a liar in all the prophets. He destroyed the country and its inhabitants through the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Now the prophets had to take it on the chin. They were accused of not having spoken by God but by the devil, because the events and the fulfillment of their words turned out so absurdly and far differently than these had been understood by the people. Here is an illustration: When the people occupied the country, had kings and princes; when they were waiting and gaping for the Messiah and His new kingdom, about which the prophets had spoken so grandly and with which they had consoled the people; indeed, when the people felt most assured and assumed that all was well and the Christ⁸ was about to come: then the king of Assyria appeared and led all the people away into Assyrian captivity. What a splendid advent for the Christ and His kingdom! Don't you suppose many people at that time said, "May the devil believe a prophet in the future! They are all rascals and liars in disguise"? Jeremiah quotes these people (Jer. 14:19): "We looked for peace, but no good came; for a time of healing, but behold, terror." "Did they not deceive us beautifully with their prophecy of the Messiah?"

However, one hope still remained. The tribe of Judah was still dwelling in the country, and through King Hezekiah God had miraculously preserved the city of Jerusalem. Now the hope that the Christ would appear in such a time of peace still survived. But then our Lord God shattered that hope thoroughly and completely, for He also permitted Judah and Jerusalem to be destroyed, and that far worse than Israel had been. While they were waiting for the Christ, the king of Babylon appeared and dealt worse with Judah than the king of Assyria had dealt with Israel. My dear man, who could believe the prophets any longer under those circumstances? What hope remained now that the country was ravaged and devastated, now that kings, princes, priests, prophets, and all others had vanished and only the peasants remained in the country and alien, pagan princes ruled at will? Is that what you call the coming of the Christ and the establishment of a new, great, and mighty kingdom that would reign throughout the world? Indeed, that is what you call destroying kingdoms and laying them waste. No, they did not understand this work of God; for it is impossible for flesh and blood to comprehend that life should originate where life ends, that honor should come forth where dishonor appears, and that a kingdom should arise when captivity is at hand. For all of this is entirely contrary to and beyond the thinking, the custom, and the experience of the whole world. But God does not act otherwise and cannot act otherwise. It is as Scripture says of Him in 1 Sam. 2:6 f.: "The Lord kills and brings to life; He brings down to Sheol and raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich, etc."

Now the prophets had to bestir themselves. That was a time to preach and to comfort lest the Jews despair of the advent of the Messiah and of His kingdom. Here Jeremiah, Ezekiel, also Isaiah and many others before them, had to proclaim that this would not prevent the advent of the Christ, so that, even if not all believed this, at least some would be preserved in faith and become partakers of the coming Christ. One of these prophets was our Habakkuk. His entire prophecy aimed at proclaiming that the king of Babylon would appear and devastate the land of Judah because of the sin of the people; that God would punish them in that way; however, that this would not prevent or delay the Christ's advent, but that God would carry out His work in this way, that the king of Babylon, without knowing it, would execute this punishment and then would perish. As the saying goes: "A father uses the rod to punish a child and then

casts the rod into a fire.” For just as God deals with each person individually, elevating him to the highest point when He casts him down to the lowest, thus God also deals with a whole nation, indeed, with the whole world. To be sure, to endure and bear that requires faith and the Word of God. The Jewish nation, too, experienced that. Their kingdom perished when Christ appeared. For everything that happened to this nation after the Babylonian captivity is nothing more than a brief and quick preparation for Christ’s coming. After its destruction the country was restored a little, and the people gathered again for the sole purpose that Christ might have space and people for His preaching and for initiating His kingdom.

Thus our Habakkuk is a comforting prophet whose mission was to strengthen and to sustain the people, so that they would not despair of the Christ’s coming, no matter how difficult the situation might appear to be. To this end he employed all means and methods to fortify their faith in the promised Christ in their hearts. Thus he proclaimed: It is true indeed that the country must be destroyed by the king of Babylon by reason of their sins, but that this would not stay the coming of the Christ and of His kingdom. Moreover, even the destroyer, the king of Babylon, would not enjoy his good fortune very long; he, too, would perish. For it is God’s way and method to help when help is needed and to appear exactly at the proper time, as Habakkuk’s song sings: “He remembers mercy when tribulation is present.”⁹ This agrees with the saying: “The rope breaks when it holds you most tightly.” We, too, must sustain Christians for the Last Day with the Word of God. Even though it seems that Christ is tarrying very long and will not come, He will come, as He Himself says, when this is least expected, when people engage in building, in planting, in buying, selling, eating, drinking, in marrying and in being given in marriage, etc. If not all, at least a few can thus be preserved in faith. For as we perceive so clearly every day, this calls for faith and for preaching.

From all of this we can infer that our prophet Habakkuk lived prior to the Babylonian captivity, perhaps at the time of Jeremiah. This also makes it easy to understand his meaning. But there is nothing to support the assertion of several books that Habakkuk brought Daniel food to eat from the land of Judah during the latter’s captivity in Babylon. And I suppose it does not agree with the chronology either, since there are so many prophecies of Habakkuk that show that he antedates Jeremiah. The latter experienced the destruction of Jerusalem; Habakkuk foretold it. But Daniel lived later than Jeremiah; and he lived a long time before he was east into prison. Habakkuk’s name befits his office. For in German the word Habakkuk means *Herzer* (“one who caresses”), or one who caresses another and takes him into his arms. And that is exactly what he does with his prophecy. He caresses his nation and takes it into his arms, that is, he comforts and encourages it as one fondles a poor weeping child or other person, quieting and pacifying it with the assurance that, if God wills, conditions will mend.

CHAPTER ONE

1. The burden of God which Habakkuk the prophet saw.

It is clear from the text itself that Habakkuk lived long before the Babylonian captivity, because he states that he “saw” the burden. In the Hebrew tongue the prophets are called “seers” or “beholders” because they see and behold future happenings with their mind’s eye. Therefore Isaiah also calls his book a “vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem” (Is. 1:1) in which he speaks of the future events beheld by him. And Obadiah calls his book “the vision of Obadiah” (Obad. 1). And Amos writes that Amaziah bade him flee, saying (Amos 7:12): “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah.” We must familiarize ourselves with such terms to know that in Hebrew a prophet is called a “seer” who beholds future and hidden events, which others do not see. In that way Habakkuk, too, has seen the disaster that would one day befall Jerusalem through the king of Babylon. And he consoles the people and encourages them to believe and to hope.

But why does he speak about a “burden” when his intent is to console? For he comforts far more than he distresses. It is the custom of the prophets to call their prophecy a “burden,” *אַשְׁמָנָה* in Hebrew. As Jeremiah indicates, this derives from the fact that the prophets generally reproved the people and threatened them with God’s wrath. And it is necessary for a preacher always to reprove people, because the godly are few and the ungodly many in number. But when they did this, it became proverbial to ask: “What did he preach?” And the reply was: “He surely preached at us. We are always the target of his threats.” As the saying goes today: “They make hell hot and paint the devil black for us.” Since the prophets constantly preached about some evil that would befall them, they termed their sermons a “burden,” that is, something that would tumble down on them, something that was poised and suspended

over them and would soon strike them. Thus God's wrath and punishment are constantly poised and suspended over the ungodly, even though they do not perceive this. In Jer. 23:33 you may read that they called God's Word **אִי־שָׁלוֹם**. This angered God, and He forbade it. And since Habakkuk, too, preaches about future punishment on Jerusalem (although he comforts more than he frightens), he terms his sermon a "burden" in agreement with the custom of all the prophets and of the people. For here, too, he first threatens them to humble and to frighten them, so that they might mend their ways, be converted, and thereby avert the future punishment.

2. *O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and Thou wilt not hear? Or cry to Thee "Violence!" and Thou wilt not save?*

Here he begins to rebuke the people for their transgression and sin because of which the wrath of God and the burden had to come upon them. He introduces this with a passionate outcry and a supplication to God. It sounds as though he were angry with God because of His long-suffering with the sins of the people, which permitted them to transgress so smugly. It is as though he were saying: "I am preaching much, but all to no avail. My words are despised, and no one mends his ways. On the contrary, people are getting worse all the time. Therefore I have no other recourse than to pour out my complaint to You. But You, too, pretend neither to hear me nor to notice me." But Habakkuk does not do this by way of quarreling with God or by way of chiding Him. To be sure, that is the impression his words lend. No, he wishes to frighten the people and move them to repent. He wants to show how the wrath and burden will justly overtake them, since they heed no preaching, threatening, admonishing, and also no pleading addressed to them. In the first place, he serves notice that he has preached very passionately and has taken great pains to correct the people but that this has borne no fruit; in the second place, that he was deeply concerned and worried about the people because of their future punishment and burden. He would like to save them and avert all of this. But they pay no attention to either. They do not believe that a burden is imminent; nor do they want to refrain from sin. That is the way of sinners: because they do not feel it, they refuse to believe it, no matter how one may threaten and rebuke them.

3. *Why dost Thou make me see toil and trouble? Why dost Thou show me robbery and iniquity round about me?*

Here we note that Habakkuk is speaking of the Jewish nation and not yet of the king of Babylon. For he is bemoaning the evil conditions in his country, he laments that wickedness is so rampant round about him and that he is obliged to look on helplessly. In view of this, he is growing tired and weary of preaching. That is the experience of every godly preacher who is so eager to avert punishment from his people and to make them godly. When he sees that he is not progressing in this but that conditions are, as it were, growing worse, he almost despairs of his preaching. And yet he may not and dare not desist from it because of a few elect. And this happened and was recorded for our consolation and for our admonition, lest we be taken aback and lest we regard it strange when but few people are reformed by our teaching or when people even grow worse. For preachers generally assume, especially when they are novices and have just come off the production line,¹ that things will prosper as soon as they speak, that all will come about and change in a moment. But that is far from true. This did not happen to the prophet either, not even to Christ Himself. The saying applies: "You are too young to reform old rascals." That was also the experience of our good friend Habakkuk. He is grievously vexed that his teaching is not translated into pure works and deeds.

The two Hebrew words **אִי־שָׁלוֹם** and **עָמָל**, which I reproduced in German with *Mühe und Arbeit* ("toil and trouble"), are often used together, especially in the prophets. We must familiarize ourselves with these words. They are used in two different meanings. In the first place, they denote displeasure and trouble. When speaking of difficult situations and troublesome, evil matters, we say in German: Here there is "toil and trouble." Thus Ps. 90:10 declares of old people that, at best, the span of their life covers 80 years and that anything in excess of that is **אִי־שָׁלוֹם** and **עָמָל**, "toil and trouble," because old age is a difficult and unpleasant existence and life. The second meaning is: wrongs, vice, and wickedness. It is used in that sense by the prophets when they rebuke the ungodly and the evildoers. They call their evil life "toil and labor." Thus Ps. 10:7 says of the Antichrist: "Under his tongue are toil and trouble." That is so because false teachers and evil men cause others much unhappiness with their wicked conduct and teaching. For instance, they rob them, defraud them, steal from them, oppress them, mislead them; furthermore, they

burden and they harass them with useless laws and intolerable works. Similarly, we use the word misfortune in two different ways. In the first place, we use it simply to designate a mishap, an accidental injury. This does not involve any sin. In the second place, it also applies to vice and villainy. For instance, when we see a villain perpetrate an evil deed, we say that he is going to serve up a misfortune, that is, a wickedness that will result in misfortune to others and, ultimately, also to himself. This distinction and usage of language must be observed in keeping with the occasion and the context in which the term is used.

With this expression Habakkuk describes the condition in the country at the time of his preaching; namely, toil and trouble prevailed there. That is, there was no love, no friendship, no fidelity or faith among the people. Everybody was bent on his own welfare, defrauding his neighbor, cheating him, grasping, robbing, and stealing wherever possible. That is the way Habakkuk himself interprets and explains this as he says: "Why dost Thou show me robbery and iniquity round about me?" It is as though he were saying: "I mean such toil and trouble by which one robs his neighbor of his property and treats him with violence." For the Hebrew words for "robbery and iniquity" are strong terms. The former does not mean simply to rob but also to destroy and to devastate, as a house or a city is destroyed and devastated. The prophet wishes to say that the one destroys the other and reduces him to beggary, so that he loses house and home and all his goods as though these had been destroyed and devastated. That is what usually happens in cities and countries that are without law and order and when the rich and the tyrants do as they wish. Therefore the second word is "iniquity," that is, violence, as of people who respect no law. In German we reproduce the meaning of these two words by saying: "They indulge in sheer violence and destroy one another in the city."

But you do not find Habakkuk chiding the Jews here because of idolatry or other sins that are committed against God, but solely because of sins committed against one's neighbor. So there must still have been some godly people at the time who preserved the pure worship of God. The great multitude, however, was devoid of faith and of love. They were obsessed with greed, usury, and injustice. But no worship is pleasing to God, no matter how good it may be otherwise, so long as one at the same time inflicts wrongs on his neighbor, as He declares in Hos. 6:6: "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice"; and in Matt. 5:24: "Leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother." Because they are destroying each other and doing violence to each other, He threatens that they will be destroyed in return and that they will suffer violence at the hands of the king of Babylon. For it is God's way to judge and to punish everyone as he deserves.

Might goes before right.

Here Habakkuk himself explains what he means with toil and trouble, iniquity and destruction. He means to say that no rights are protected or observed but that nothing but might is employed. Here he refers to the bigwigs and masters in the country. To assail the mighty with his preaching and chiding entailed danger enough for himself. He might also have been condemned as a revolutionary, as one who tried to induce the subjects to treat their government with disdain. For he is commonly dubbed a rebel who reproves the lords with God's Word, who does not let them do as they choose, and who, over and above this, fails to praise and honor them in their evil plans. Now, it is no one's fault but the government's if injustice prevails in a country, for sword and punishment of wrong are entrusted to it by God. And now the government not only permits injustice to prevail, but it also commits injustice itself. Whenever a government administers laws strictly, the subjects will probably refrain from doing what they might otherwise do.

But Habakkuk carries through; he is not afraid of being called a rebel. He rebukes the sins of the mighty most of all, blaming them for all the misfortunes that will befall the country in days to come. For, as I have already said, he does not chide them because of idolatry and idols, nor because of any common sins rampant among the people, such as lying, cheating, adultery, carousing, etc., but because of violence and of judicial injustice. All of his preaching is addressed to the lords and judges, as is borne out by the punishment meted out later. For the king of Babylon led all the great men of the country into captivity and left only the poor, lowly plowmen and vinedressers behind, as we see in 2 Kings 25:11 f. It is as though God wished to declare emphatically: "The great alone deserved this; therefore they are the ones who must suffer the punishment." All of God's punishments commonly follow this pattern: The government is punished most; it is overthrown, whereas the people remain in the country. For after all, the people must

have a government, and they must be subject to it as a horse is subject to its master. And if government and masters are rascals, it is quite indifferent to the people to have another master appear and depose the other, no matter whether he be more godly or just as wicked. God's punishment on earth is, as it were, the drama of which Mary sings (Luke 1:52): "He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree." From the beginning of the world to the present day we witness that God always deposes one king through another, one lord through another, and that he leaves the people and the country intact, unless it is His purpose to destroy country and people, as was the case with Sodom and Gomorrah and the like.

Thus He dethroned the king of Israel by the king of Assyria, and, in turn, the king of Assyria by the king of Babylon, the king of Babylon by the king of Persia, the king of Persia by Alexander, the king in Greece, the Greek kingdom by the Romans, the Romans by the Goths and the Turks. And if the world stands long enough, the Turks, too, will find someone to knock them off. That is the way it goes on and on, both in great and in small governments; both among emperors and kings we behold a constant seating and unseating. The whole world with its governments appears to be God's cavalry tournament, with all of His horsemen stabbing and unseating each other. The rule is: Whoever lies prostrate, lies prostrate; whoever is mounted, is mounted. And all of this happens because of their injustice and their violence, and because it is their fault whenever evils and injustices prevail in a country. The devil, the supreme prince of the world, goads them on, so that they do not use the sword, committed to them by God, aright, just as the world also misuses all the other gifts of God. And yet the sword is necessary, as eating and drinking are. But because of their abuse of it God constantly wrests the sword from the fist of one and gives it to another. Sword and government always remain in the world, but the persons sitting on thrones must continue to topple and tumble as they deserve.

But that is what deceived the Jews and hardened their hearts, so that they did not believe Habakkuk. Since they did not commit adultery and had no idols at the time, they assumed that they were godly and had a gracious God. Consequently they were not at all expecting God's wrath. That is peculiar of these people down to the present day, as it is of all hypocrites and work-righteous: they always imagine that they above all others are the dear children. They cannot believe that they are deserving of wrath. They say, as we read in Micah 2:7: "Should this be said, O house of Jacob? Is the Spirit of the Lord impatient? etc." For if they had acknowledged that they are sinners, they would have obeyed Habakkuk. They would have reformed fearfully and humbly, as the Ninevites did, and averted the punishment. But since they did not do this, it is certain that they regarded Habakkuk as a fool and idle preacher but themselves as godly, as innocent, and as the true children of God. And this is what we see our own clergy do even today. Amid the most terrible sins and blasphemies they think that they are serving God and are pleasing to Him.

Therefore Habakkuk's statement "might before right" will remain operative in the world. This is also a common saying used by everyone to complain about and to decry violence. But it should not surprise us; this is the way things must be, and this is the world's true color. For when things are right, that is no longer the world or the government of the world but the government of God Himself. And if might would no longer go before right, the devil could no longer be the prince of the world. Then that would really be God's government. And yet God does not permit this to go unpunished. As the world does not cease sinning, God does not cease punishing. He continues to remove one after another and to set up others, as Dan. 2:21 says: "He removes kings and sets up kings," and as Solomon declares in his Prov. 28:2: "When a land transgresses, it has many rulers; but with men of understanding and knowledge its stability will long continue."

4. So the law is slacked, and justice never goes forth.

This means: Things are not done in keeping with the law of God, but the Law must be bent, and it must yield to their whims. For Habakkuk here assails those who boast of justice and who by no means wish to be regarded as acting contrary to justice. But they pick up a few letters of the alphabet and force them to yield their own meaning. That is what shrewd jurists of our own day also do with their severe justice. When they have a bad and evil cause, they thumb their noses at justice and make their cause appear right and good. That is what Habakkuk here describes with the phrase "the law is slacked" as he points out that every good cause is hindered and kept from being carried out. The true meaning of the laws is thus east to the winds and is disregarded. Then they go their way, they have gained their point in keeping with law, but law bent to their mind. The world is full of such people. They are called godly; nor

may they be called otherwise. And yet God judges and punishes them and threatens not to spare them. In short, but few good causes get into the hands of jurists and judges. They themselves feel that and admit it. The good causes do not yield any money. And the jurists, who are all gold and silk today, would indeed be beggars if it were not for the evil cases in court.

For the wicked defraud the righteous, so justice goes forth perverted.

We note here that Habakkuk is thinking of the craftiness which one employs against another in court. Thus Micah also says (Micah 7:3): “The prince and the judge ask for a bribe.” All the bigwigs talk about their mischief and thus aggrieve the country. For when Habakkuk states here that the wicked defraud the righteous, he expresses the same thought as St. Paul does in 1 Thess. 4:6 with the word *circumvenire* (“circumvent”), to trip him up and to surround him with trickery, so that the righteous suffer injustice. Such men are far baser rogues than public thieves and criminals. For the latter violate the law openly, so that anyone can understand and perceive this, whereas those people presume to pose as godly; they want to see injustice regarded as justice. That makes them rogues doubly: first, because they commit wrongs; second, because they want to adorn and defend these same wrongs with justice. The second is worse than the first. For when Habakkuk indicates here that the law is slackened and that false judgments are made, he clearly refers to those who deal wrongly with the law and judgment, as they cloak their injustice. So we see now what conditions in the country were like. The country was full of villains, especially among the bigwigs. And yet these did not want to be regarded as such. In that way they harmed others with double villainy: first, by doing them injustice; second, by violating the rights of others and making these appear as wrongs. Thus feigning piety, they are really vile rogues. That is most offensive both to God and to the world. And therefore God cannot tolerate this for long but punishes it, as we see from the following words.

5. *Look among the heathen and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.*

Here he begins to threaten the afore-mentioned villains with the penalty. To begin with, he strips them of the defiance and of the security on which they had relied. For they had relied on the fact that they were God’s people and that God dwelled in His holy temple in Jerusalem. Up to that time this city had several times been saved most miraculously by God, not only from the surrounding countries, principalities, and kingdoms, but also from the Assyrian empire, which had previously destroyed all of Israel and led the people away into captivity. However, in the days of King Hezekiah this empire had been utterly confounded before the gates of Jerusalem. There its army had lost 185,000 men in one night and had to resort to flight (2 Kings 19:35 f.). That is why it sounded ridiculous and foolish to the Jews to hear Habakkuk and other prophets say that Jerusalem would be destroyed. In fact, they could not believe this up to the last hour before it occurred. So firmly did they rely on the fact that God dwelled among them in Jerusalem. To be sure, this was no slight cause for reliance; and reason was loath to surrender it. Moreover, false prophets abetted this faith, citing verses in which God promised Christ’s advent and said how glorious David’s throne would be, and the like. Over against this Habakkuk and his kind, who declared the opposite, had to appear as liars. For the two statements that a glorious kingdom should be established and that it should be destroyed could not be harmonized.

And now Habakkuk attacks their defiance and their boasting, saying: “Look among the heathen, and see; wonder and be astounded,” as if to say: “You look to yourselves, you consider only yourselves, you have a high opinion of yourselves. You are sure and convinced that God works great things only through you, things about which the heathen will be amazed, as He did in the past. But now mark what I am going to do through the heathen. I am going to change the order and perform something through the heathen, and this will seem so strange and odd to you that you will not believe it until you have experienced and felt it. In fact, all will regard My prophets Habakkuk, Jeremiah, and others like them as fools and liars and will not believe that the words they utter are My words.” In the same way King Zedekiah could not believe what Jeremiah said about this. He summoned him and asked him whether this was really God’s Word, Jer. 37:17; 38:14 ff. What stranger thing could God do than to use His enemies, the heathen, for the destruction of His throne, His temple, His city, His people, whom He until now had glorified and preserved from all the heathen and whom He had promised that He would be their God and Protector forever?

Thereby God shows us clearly that He does not want us to rely on anything at all except solely on His grace and mercy. For you note here that it does not help the Jews that they are God's people, that they are the seed of the fathers, that they possess God's law, temple, throne, city, and country and are His people; nor does it help them that so many miracles have been wrought on them heretofore, nor that they have God's promise. Why not? Because all of this may be held without faith and spirit. And the majority of the Jews did possess all of this devoid of faith and spirit. But where this is so, the debt before God is merely increased. For from him who has much much will be demanded (Luke 12:48). And besides, this begets proud, defiant, smug, presumptuous, arrogant people who exalt themselves above all others who do not have it. They claim to be God's people and possession alone; they despise and condemn all others. And God cannot tolerate that anyone relies on anything but on His grace. He destroys any other object of reliance together with all who rely on it. However, flesh and blood cannot believe this. This seems much too strange to them. They feel so smug in their defiance until they learn from experience. That is what is happening to the Jews here. For they paid no heed to faith and spirit, assuming that it sufficed that they were called the children of God and had received protection. Because of that they perish utterly. All of this is also written for us who bear the name and the semblance of Christians, who boast of Baptism or of clergy status and office over against heathen and Jews, and who, despite this, are devoid of faith and spirit just as they are. In the end we, too, must perish at the hands of those whom we despise and regard as worse than we are, just as the Jews did at the hands of the Chaldeans.

Here the question arises how this text agrees with its citation by St. Paul in Acts 13:40 f.: "Beware, therefore, lest there come upon you what is said in the prophets: 'Behold, you scoffers, and wonder, and perish; for I do a deed in your days, a deed you will never believe if one declares it to you.'" As is cogently indicated by the context, St. Paul is undoubtedly referring to Christ's resurrection. The Jews do not believe in that to the present day. Habakkuk, however, applies it to the coming destruction of the country by the king of Babylon because of the people's sins. We can clearly infer that from his speech. The answer is that St. Paul's statement is a general saying, used in a similar way. For one may say of any future event of God: "Behold, God will do something which no one believes," whether we sing it or say it; for the world does not believe God's Word until it experiences its truth. Therefore Habakkuk applies this saying correctly to the great work of God's coming destruction of the country, and Paul applies it correctly to God's greatest work, the resurrection of Christ, which had taken place. For both were not believed. We may still similarly adduce daily against the pope and the ungodly all the sayings of Scripture which the prophets uttered concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. I may say, for example, that no one would have believed what God did to the papacy, no matter who had said it, and that He will still do something to the papacy that no one will now believe even though he is told. But he will experience it. Thus Habakkuk, too, wishes to say here: "Behold, God will do something which you do not believe so long as you are merely told about it. You will not believe it until you experience it." The fact that St. Paul says "you scoffers" and Habakkuk says "among the heathen" is due to a varying translation chosen by Paul. That is quite indifferent; the general meaning is still the same.

6-7. *For lo, I am rousing the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize habitations not their own. Dread and terrible are they.*

This is the threat against the wicked and hardened sinners. But as I have said, they mocked and ridiculed and acted just like the sons-in-law of Lot in Gen. 19:14. They did this even though the prophet made the danger loom so fierce and great. He wanted to frighten them and move them to repentance. He declares that these are not feeble enemies whom God will arouse against them, but the Chaldeans, that is, the emperor of Babylon. For at that time this empire was the dominant power and was constantly increasing in might. That was very much like threatening us with the Turks today. They would prove too strong for us and too angry with us. That sounds far more terrible than being threatened with some ordinary prince in our neighborhood. He says furthermore that this is a bitter nation, that is, an evil and violent nation which deals angrily and tyrannically with country and people. For it wants to be feared and respected. Resistance by anyone provokes the Chaldeans to run full tilt against him. Therefore the Jews certainly had reason to fear. They could depend on no lethargy or slothfulness on the part of the Chaldeans. In addition, the Chaldeans are also quick and show great speed. The Jews need not suppose that they were so far away and would not appear for a long time. It is as though Habakkuk were to say: "Repent, dear children, and do not trust your notion that the Chaldeans are not so fierce and that they are

still far away. They are bitter and angry especially and above all others with you Jews; and they can come quickly.”

In the third place, Habakkuk points to their great numbers. “They march through the breadth of the earth,” that is, the country will be filled with Chaldeans, it will fairly swarm with enemies. It is as though he were to say: “If it fails to frighten you that such a mighty empire is aroused against you, the knowledge that it is a bitter and wrathful nation and that it is angry particularly with you should terrify you indeed. And if that does not do it, let it frighten you to know that this nation is so quick and so well armed and equipped against you. And if that does not do it either, then remember that they are so many and you so few that they could surely trample you to death.” The Jews must have felt very smug, and they must have been very reckless to provoke the prophet to frighten them so vehemently and fiercely. For as I have already said, they relied on the fact that they alone were God’s people and that they would not perish so. Therefore the prophet continues, painting the picture still darker. He says that the Chaldeans will “seize habitations not their own,” that is, “they will seize all your cities and houses, which they did not build but which you built for yourselves. They will not be concerned about that. Nor will it help you that Jerusalem is God’s city and habitation.” The Jewish people banked so strongly on that. But that is vain, the Babylonian people will occupy everything, even though it is not their own; for they are a ruthless and terrible nation. Habakkuk chose the words “habitations not their own” very wisely, as though tacitly saying, “also the habitations of God, such as Jerusalem and the temple.” For at that time it was most hazardous, offensive, and blasphemous to say that Jerusalem, where God Himself dwelled, would be lost. The common man could not bear to hear that. Therefore Habakkuk avoids such words, and yet he says as much, namely, that all of this is included.

7. For they will judge and oppress in their own way.

Here Habakkuk explains why the Babylonian nation is so ruthless and terrible. It does not judge or act according to any nation’s laws or customs. “Nor will it be governed by your law, but it will deal with you according to its own whims. It will take advantage of its victory as it pleases. It will allow no one to curb it, but its judgment of you will be dictated by the bitterness and wrath it harbors against you. And it will match its judgment with its action; it will enact and execute its judgment on you.” That is what Habakkuk means when he says here: “They will judge and oppress in their own way,” that is, not pursuant to any law but according to their own disposition and pleasure. For that is what cruel tyrants are accustomed to do. After they have gained a victory, they know no mercy, no law, no fear of God, no fairness, no patience, no acknowledgment of their own sin and of the punishment they deserve, but like wild wolves they vent their wrath according to their evil and angry will and avenge themselves most ruthlessly. See how this is exemplified in our own day by the bishops and the nobility. They have avenged themselves and still daily avenge themselves on the peasants without restraint.² The innocent have to suffer with the guilty. They are not content with having carried the day and with being established again. There is no thought of acknowledging that they, too, are guilty and that they also deserved to suffer not only a temporary loss from God as a moderate penalty but also death and hell as proper punishment. There is no other way; they demand restitution down to the last penny, without the least abatement of punishment, as though they themselves had never committed a sin against God. And why? To the end that they, too, may receive no mercy from God for their sins, that their hearts may be hardened so that they cannot see their sin, and that their lips may be closed and be unable to pray: “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive, etc.,” and that they may finally also perish without mercy. Therefore it is not without meaning that noblemen commonly show a lion, a bear, wolves, and other wild beasts in their coats of arms. This reflects their nature.

8. Their horses are swifter than leopards, more agile than the evening wolves.

I have never seen leopards, but travelers report that this is an animal with many spots on its fur and that the females are fiercer than the males. Some people translate “evening wolves” as wolves from the desert. The Hebrew letters admit either one.³ However, I believe that these are evening wolves. I think that this means to say that wolves, which are rapacious, ravenous, murderous beasts by nature, are far more so in the evening because they have not roamed about during the day and their hunger looks to the evening. Therefore the term “evening wolves” is practically synonymous with “hungry wolves” who have not eaten for a long time. Thus Zeph. 3:3 says of false teachers: “Her judges are evening wolves that leave nothing till the morning.” Habakkuk wishes to say here that the leopards or wolves are swift, not that they are faster than other animals by nature, but that they rush and hasten to reach their prey when they are hungry

and that they are more ruthless and voracious at such a time. He compares the Babylonians to leopards, rushing and hastening to rob and to destroy the Jewish country. Also this comparison is made by him to terrify the people and to move them to reform.

Yea, their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour.

A part of the text is omitted here.⁴ It should read: "Their horsemen spread out, and their horsemen come from afar, etc." Here the prophet vividly portrays the Babylonian army to the Jews just as though he could see their approach. For such is the picture that presents itself when an army approaches from a distance. At first only a detachment of horsemen is seen; but the longer they approach, the more they grow in number, and they seem to multiply as they come. That is what Habakkuk means when he says: "Their horsemen are spreading out," that is, to the view their number seems to increase as they approach. And the fact that they "come from afar" also makes the host appear more numerous. As they come from afar, there seems to be no end to them, and more and more of them seem to be behind them in the distance. Thus they also "fly like an eagle swift to devour." Here Habakkuk refers to the swift pace as this appears to a viewer of an army's approach. It seems particularly swift to him if he knows that the march is directed against him. Then the army seems to be coming immediately and before he can arm himself for defense. Thus Habakkuk employs the art of a painter here, portraying the approach of a foe and, in addition, describing the emotions of those against whom this is aimed. Their one thought is that they will be devoured as when an eagle devours a carcass that cannot fend the eagle off.

Here we note how beautifully and fittingly the prophets are able to speak, and how they can briefly and yet amply depict a subject. For anyone else would have reported this with one word and said: "The Babylonians will come and destroy Jerusalem." Habakkuk employs many words here. He portrays everything realistically and embellishes it with figures of speech. And it is necessary to do that when preaching to a hard and rude rabble; one must paint it for them, pound it into them, chew it for them, and resort to every means to see whether they can be moved. At least, it helps as much as it can. On the other hand, it is easy to preach to a sensible person. Therefore Habakkuk continues and says:

9. They come only to commit iniquity. They rush along like an east wind.

Earlier I explained the meaning of "committing iniquity."⁵ So it is to be understood here too. The prophet wants to say that the Babylonians are coming for the sole intent of exercising might. They pay no heed to rights or to mercy. The guilty and the innocent have to suffer alike. That always happens when a country as a whole is punished; the innocent cannot be set apart. In fact, they generally suffer most. Here Habakkuk indicates that the Babylonian king has no just claim on the land of the Jews nor on the other countries he destroys, for he says: "They come only to commit iniquity." Whoever commits iniquity and uses violence does not act justly, nor has he any right to do this. And yet, this is a description of all empires on earth, especially those whose glory is in war, and that is why Ps. 76:4 calls them "mountains of prey." Therefore they must also be destroyed again in the end, as were Babylon and Rome. Thus Augustine says very aptly: "What are great empires but great robberies?"⁶ However, God still uses their might to punish whom He will.

The east wind is the wind which comes from the east. The Latin Bible calls it *ventum urentem*;⁷ that is, it is the wind that scorches and dries and is more injurious than the sun's heat. The wind from the west, on the other hand, is moist and fruitful. The wind from the south brings storms; the wind from the north brings fair weather and drives the clouds away. Each operates in its own way. As the east wind sears and extracts strength and moisture from the earth and from all that grows, so the Babylonians will come and destroy everything in all the countries. And as no one can stay the east wind, so no one can resist the Babylonians either. The prophet draws a gruesome, elaborate picture of the Babylonian host in order to move and to frighten the stiff-necked Jews.

They gather captives like sand.

This means that many people in these countries will be captured and led away together with all their property, without distinction, the rich and the mighty, and without mercy all will be gathered in a heap, as hay or straw is raked together. The Hebrew tongue characteristically compares a multitude to sand. In Gen. 22:17 God says to Abraham that He will multiply his descendants "as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore." In Judg. 7:12 we read that the Midianites were "as the sand which is upon the seashore for multitude, etc." And here we read that "they gather captives like sand," that is to say, extraordinarily many.

10. *At kings they scoff, and of rulers they make sport. They laugh at every fortress, for they heap up earth and take it.*

Here Habakkuk deprives them of all comfort and of all defiant boasting. The Jews cannot rely on any human help. Even if kings, princes, and fortified cities, such as Jerusalem and Tyre, should oppose him, the power and might of the Babylonians is too great, and nothing will avail. Indeed, the conquest will be so easy for them that they will make sport of anyone's attempt to oppose them and defend himself against them. Thus no numbers or might of people will help here, nor will any wall or fortress provide protection. When they cannot knock the walls down, they will pile up dirt round about them so high that they can shoot across the walls and run over them. With these words the prophet is referring chiefly to the city of Jerusalem, on which the Jews also relied because it was so strongly and well fortified. Much has been said and written about that.

11. *Then their heart will be exalted and they will continue and sin; then their victory must be the victory of their god.*

Here Habakkuk describes how the Babylonians will misuse their victory for their own haughtiness and their blasphemy of God. Thereby they commit sin and constrain God to topple and to destroy them, too, in the end. For no human heart can do otherwise than exalt itself and boast when it fares well and is attended by good fortune. Not only Holy Scripture points that out, but also the heathen testify to that from experience and admit it. Thus the poet Vergil speaks of *Nescia mens hominum ... servare modum rebus sublata secundis*, "the human heart that does not know ... how to control its ways when excited by prosperous circumstances."⁸ The reverse is also true: it cannot be moderate when evil befalls it. Then it cannot but despair and be despondent. A heart is too soft and too feeble for either fortune or misfortune; but it is much feebler for bearing the former than the latter. As the saying has it: "You can endure everything else, but not prosperity." And: "It would take very strong legs to carry good days." Experience also confirms that wherever riches, honor, and all sorts of fortune fall to a man's lot as he likes it, he cannot cease revelling, defying, strutting, raging until misfortune strikes home and curbs him. Thus the saying goes: "Fortune begets courage, courage begets arrogance, arrogance begets poverty, but poverty hurts, and hurt again seeks fortune."⁹ That is the sequence and the circle followed in the course of human events in the world. This will never change.

That is illustrated by the recent peasant revolt.¹⁰ That evil example will deservedly be remembered forever and will never be forgotten. When the peasants succeeded in achieving their aims, O God, what defiance, conceit, boasting, bragging, mischief, and arrogance of every type they displayed! They would no longer look or listen; there was no moderation whatsoever; they had to have their way. They soared high yet never arrived anywhere. On the other hand, when this misfortune struck the lords, how depressed and despondent and crushed were they who had been so lionhearted before! There was no longer any trace of courage or glory but nothing but flight and faintheartedness. However, now that the tables are turned and the lords are victorious and fortunate and the peasants defeated, there is no moderation on either side. The lords are at a loss to know how to vent their wrath sufficiently, and the peasants are so dejected that they do not know what to do. May God grant that this will not develop into something still worse and that both masters and subjects will not founder completely. As we shall hear, that is what happened to these Babylonians in the end.

For when the king and his people observed that things were prospering and succeeding so well for his kingdom and that no king, prince, city, or country could withstand them, their courage grew, and as Habakkuk says here, "their heart was exalted," that is, because of their great success they first became really defiant and still prouder than they had been before. They could not observe moderation or recognize their own lot, nor could they give God the honor, although this entire success was nothing but an undeserved gift from God. Similarly, our princes and bishops fail to give God the honor for their survival; nor can they acknowledge their guilt and humble themselves. "They go on," says Habakkuk, "and sin," that is, they continue to boast and defy, they flaunt and they strut along as though they were assured now and had leaped across all mountains. Thus they commit two horrible sins, and in the end these will effect their terrible fall. One sin is the haughtiness which they vent on those people whom they have conquered. On these they practice their tyranny so arbitrarily. The other sin is their blasphemy. They fail to give God the honor but assume that they are so pious and worthy in God's sight. Those whom they have vanquished they despise and revile as people whom God has condemned and rejected as they deserved. There they

really run afoul of things and also sin against God. Thus they incur the enmity both of God and of man and become unbearable to both. They will come to an early end. In fact, they are striving toward that goal.

The first sin, haughtiness over against other people, grieves the human heart; but the second sin, blasphemies against God, grieves the prophet and all saints far more. Therefore Habakkuk expounds these further, enlarges on them, and comments on them. To the first he simply applies a common name, saying: "They sin with their haughtiness." But he assails the other sin with sharp and harsh words, saying: "Then their victory must be the victory of their god." That is to say that they are not content with their haughtiness, with defeating and oppressing people, but they must also honor their idol in Babylon as if he had given them that strength and victory. Of course, the true God in Jerusalem did not do that, being a much weaker and lesser God; He had been defeated together with His people, the Jews, and had succumbed to their Babylonian god. It is his great victory, and to him it must be attributed. Now, where is the God of the Jews? In 2 Kings 18:33–35 we hear something similar. There the chief cupbearer of the king of Assyria declared that his lord had defeated all the gods in the surrounding countries and that the God of the Jews would not be able to withstand him either. It really provokes the prophet that the ungodly not only fail to recognize the source of their strength and their victory but that they are also hardened in their wickedness, that they blaspheme God so freely and defiantly. They attribute to the devil what they really have from God. They make a virtue of their wickedness and let the people of God appear as sinners and rogues. Therefore the prophet concerns himself with this sin and talks himself blue over it to the end of the chapter. He really becomes angry and impatient with the Babylonians' claim and boast to be in the right and with the inference that the people of God are in the wrong, merely because the latter suffer misfortunes and the former enjoy success.

In the same way the Jews, too, defied Christ when they had the upper hand and had crucified Him. Then they blasphemed, saying (cf. Matt. 27:40, 42): "If He is the Son of God, let Him save Himself." They said this just as though God were on their side, just as though they were entirely in the right and Christ were wrong. Then their strength and their victory also had to be accounted their god's strength and victory, that is, their devil's and idol's. They did not know and did not believe that the true God had thus forsaken Christ and had delivered Him into their hands, yet loved Christ nevertheless and was angry with them. That is what all ungodly tyrants do. They judge God's grace by temporal fortune or misfortune. That is what our bishops and princes do today. Because God has granted them victory over the peasants and at the same time has permitted them to torture and persecute many innocent Christians, they are convinced that their cause is just and right and pleasing to God. They are defiant and insolent and "suppose that they are rendering God a service" (John 16:2). They cannot imagine that their god and their cause are sheer devilry, because they note the success attending them and the misfortune besetting the Gospel. But they do not know that the God and the cause of these same persecuted Christians are right and that God has given these Christians into their hands, just as He did Christ Himself and all the saints. And so they also continue and proceed to blaspheme, saying: "Now, where is your Christ? Have Him help you!" Their might and their victory must also be accounted their god's, and they must be in the right. This constitutes the real Christian cross: not only to suffer evil but also to be regarded to be in the wrong and, like Christ, to be numbered among the malefactors (Mark 15:28).

However, they will come to an ugly end. Now that they have sown their honey, a very sharp mustard will grow up. For since they do not fear God in His judgments and works and do not humble themselves, He lets them rush confidently along to ruin, attended abundantly by victory and good fortune, and makes fools of them in their smartness and smugness. Now they fill the measure of their sins and become hardened until the hour strikes when He will tend to them as He did to the Babylonians and the Jews and all such tyrants. For where are they now who said to Christ (Matt. 27:43): "He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him"? Where is their god to whom they ascribed their victory? Christ has remained, but they are dispersed and scattered like the dust of the field. We, too, may take comfort from that today. For the hour will come very soon when it will be said of our tyrants, bishops, and clerics: "Where are they? Where is their god now? Where is their precious, just cause? Where is their Christian church? Where are they who said: 'Let Christ help you and your Gospel'?" The fact that they are victorious now, that they are raging, defying, strutting, and attributing their victory to their god, as though God were on their side and against us, tends to make them confidently rush along to ruin, become fools,

become hardened, and become very ripe for punishment. Even if they are told this, they will not believe it but laugh it to scorn, lest they be converted and saved.

12. *Art Thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? Let us not die, but let them, O Lord, be but a punishment, and let them, O our Shelter, only chastise us.*

Here he reproves the sins of the blasphemers, rebuking them and comforting his own people. He wants to say: “The fact that the Babylonians are victorious and that we are suffering and were defeated by them does not mean that the Babylonian god to whom they ascribe such might is a true God, nor does it signify that they are so pious and just and that we are sinners and unjust. No, it is You, O Lord, who is doing all of this, who is forsaking us and exalting them. It is Your will. This they do not know. They are contending against You with what You are giving them, namely, power and victory, and they ascribe this to their god. There are two reasons why You are accustomed to do this. In the first place, You use their wickedness as a rod with which to chastise those whom You love. Thus we read in Is. 10:5: ‘Assyria, the rod of My anger,’ and in Rev. 3:19: ‘Those whom I love I reprove and chasten.’ This happens, secondly, so that they rush along to ruin and become fools over Your plans, with which they are not acquainted, and then perish,” as I said earlier and as Habakkuk will say further in chapter three. For the saying goes: “After a father has chastised a child, he casts the rod into the fire.”

The prophet pleads with God to confine Himself to the punishment and not let the Jewish people perish completely. Now he says, in the stead of the people and together with the people: “O Lord my God, my Holy One!” For no nation under the sun had the true God or knew the true God except the Jewish people alone. Therefore they alone could say “My God.” He calls Him his “Holy One” as the prophets usually call God “the Holy One of Israel.” Is. 1:4: “They have despised the Holy One of Israel.” Ps. 89:18: “The Lord is our shield, the Holy One of Israel is our king.” So we read here, too: “My God, my Holy One.” This term is used to indicate that they were holy by reason of their God and nothing else. As God says in Lev. 20:8: “I am the Lord who sanctify you.” So we today become “Christians,” that is, saints, through Christ and nothing else, not through our works or merits, etc. Habakkuk continues: “Art Thou not from everlasting?” It is as though he were to say: “O Lord, there is of course no God except You, the ancient, true, and eternal God, and there is no new, false god, such as the god in Babylon and others who were invented and appeared on the scene in the course of time.” With this he consoles himself and his people and simultaneously defies and derides the Babylonian god, whom the Babylonians exalt so highly. For the conviction and firm faith that there is only one God and that this God is our God, our Holy One, who is on our side, generates strong courage. In the face of this, what can all the other gods on earth accomplish? “Because You alone are God and our Holy One and we are Your people and all rests in Your hands, be gracious to us and do not let us die or perish at the hands of the Babylonians but just chasten and chastise us, so that, in keeping with Your promise, seed may remain for Your people.” For this prayer is based on God’s promise, in which He told the people that He would not forsake them entirely, even though He will not save them all. See Rom. 9:29 (Is. 1:9).

In Hebrew this text reads better than it can be reproduced in German, namely: “Is it not true, O God, that You are my God, my Holy One, from everlasting, so that we will not die?” In these words the prophet briefly comprehends all of God’s promises and wonders that the Jewish people experienced. It is as though he were to say: “Do You not know or do You not remember that You promised to be our God and that You have not let us perish to the present day? And You will not let us perish now either. For, as You told us, You are our God, in whom we live and do not die.” In the Hebrew the words that follow are joined to these and may also be read as a question, thus: “Is it not true, O God, that You are my God, my Holy One, from everlasting, so that we will not die but that You will use them for punishment, O Lord, and for chastisement, O our Shield?” He converses with God by way of a question, asking whether He will deal with them thus and only chastise them. Not that he doubts this, but he wants to show how faith lives amid trials and temptations (*Anfechtung*). Then faith appears so feeble. When confronted and oppressed by great misfortunes, it seems that it would immediately sink into doubt. For even though faith remains firm, it nevertheless cracks a bit and speaks quite differently when engaged in battle than it does when it has gained a victory. Thus it was difficult for the people to believe that they would be preserved in the Babylonian captivity or ever return home, and that this was to be but a chastisement. Therefore these words follow:

13. *Thou who art of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on wrong.*

It is as though Habakkuk were to say: "All right, if You are of pure eyes, so that, as is proclaimed of You, You cannot bear evil, that You are just and let no wrongs go unpunished, how, then, does it happen that You act quite differently, that You tolerate such wrongs and fail to punish them?" In the Hebrew this reads thus: "*mundare oculis*" vel "*sis plane mundus oculis,*" *et est amara concessio in opere contrario.*"¹¹ Of a person of good repute but of contradictory conduct we say in German: "All right, you are pious, but why do you act thus? Is that proper for a pious man?" Similarly here: "All right, God, You are just, that is what they say of You, but where is Your justice now?" These words of Habakkuk present the thoughts that occur to a struggling faith. It believes that God is just, but when He tarries so long and looks on the evil committed, faith is tempted to think that He is not just, but that He delights in these rogues. That is what we, too, are prone to think now that God permits our Gospel to be persecuted and reviled so miserably, as both violence and the sects increase daily in opposition to it. We, too, are inclined to say: "To be sure, You are of pure eyes and are loath to see violence and injustice. But when will You give proof of this also by Your action? It seems to us that You think that we are in the wrong and they are in the right; nevertheless, we are convinced that we are in the right and they are in the wrong."

Not only the common people but also the prophet himself, together with other prophets, experienced such weakness, or such trials (*Anfechtung*), of faith. For instance, Jer. 12:1 ff. speaks in the same vein: "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, when I complain to Thee; yet I would plead my case before Thee. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? Thou plantest them, and they take root; they grow and bring forth fruit; Thou art near in their mouth and far from their heart." And Ps. 73:2 f. reads: "But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked, etc." For it hurts exceedingly when the unrighteous prosper so long, earning their great good fortune, as it were, with their wrongs, and the righteous earn so much misfortune with their piety. However, all of this happens to let those people properly run to ruin and to increase our faith and make it strong and rich in God, as Habakkuk says later about the king of Babylon and as the aforementioned Ps. 73 also declares (v. 18) that God lifts the evildoers up high so that He might hurl them down far. And the above quotation from Jeremiah is immediately followed by the words (Jer. 12:3): "Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and set them apart for the day of slaughter."

Why dost Thou look on scorers, and art silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

Here struggling faith comes to grips with the good fortune of the ungodly; it mentions point after point, as though it were to say: "I believe and am certain that You alone are God and that the ungodly are impotent to do anything without Your will. But why, then, do You stand by silently?" He employs strong terms, calling the ungodly "scorners." This refers to the iniquitous, smug, and insolent people who regard God's Word and work far beneath anything else, so that no one can despise anything as much. In Eph. 4:19 St. Paul calls these people ἀπηλγηκότες. We translated this into German with the word *Verrüchte*.¹² To say it in Latin: *qui non solum contemnunt sed etiam negligunt, quasi indignos habeant, quos contemptant.*¹³ In Hebrew: ¹⁴ בִּזְיוֹן This is the way we view the Jews and the Jews view us, the one regarding the other as absolutely nothing. At present some ungodly people also despise the Gospel similarly; to them it is nothing but a joke. They are convinced of nothing so much as that there is nothing to it. These people who feel nothing and accept nothing are called genuine בִּזְיוֹן and ἀπηλγηκότες and *verruht*, with not so much as a semblance of taste or smell¹⁵ remaining, but with everything vanishing from their hearts. The heathen writer tells us that the tyrant Dionysius, who had robbed a temple and was then favored with good weather for sailing, boasted: "Behold what fair weather God grants the despoilers of a church!"¹⁶ In the absence of Christian patience flesh and blood might well wish ten thunders upon the head of such a person to strike him nine yards into the ground. Anyone who dares to do that without fear we call foolhardy. This practically agrees with the Hebrew *boged*, or *woged*.¹⁷

Habakkuk states, in the second place, that God does nothing at all to such foolhardy, unconcerned people. He simply holds His peace, and this even encourages them. They assume that it is indifferent how they conduct themselves, that God is unconcerned with regard to them as they are with regard to God, that He feels nothing and is not interested. This pits two foolhardy parties against each other: God and the ungodly. Oh, that presents a vexatious silence on the part of God and an intolerable contempt on the part of those foolhardy people. Thus Habakkuk here also describes the Babylonians as foolhardy and so

cocksure in their cause that they would have believed anything else rather than that God regarded the Jews as His people and the Babylonians as His enemies. To them there was nothing more certain than this: "We Babylonians are God's children, and the Jews are His foes." They were so thoroughly deceived by their good fortune. That is the way with all ungodly people. Well, it is not so unbearably difficult for a prophet to engage in such a struggling faith for himself; but when he enters his office and is expected to console and preserve an entire nation engaged in the same struggle—this entails work, misery, and trouble. The people flounder about, with scarcely two or three of the entire multitude believing and struggling with him. All the others are offended by the foolhardy tyrants, thinking: "We don't have a chance; God is against us. Don't you see how He exalts them and carries them along, whereas He forsakes and despises us? Indeed, preach as you will; I can see the meaning of all this." This is what also happened to Moses at the Red Sea (Ex. 14) and with Korah at Paran (Num. 16). Mere talk and advice are useless. Therefore Habakkuk stresses this subject with so many weighty words; he wants to strengthen and console the people as well as himself.

The third point is that God grants the ungodly such great good fortune, enabling him to devour those more righteous than he is, that is, in particular the Jews, and in addition also many other countries and nations that were more righteous than the Babylonians. For this is what happens: Wherever great wealth and might are found, there great sins and wrongs also prevail. Money begets thieves, good fortune begets rogues.¹⁸ As I have already said,¹⁹ good fortune is too heavy a burden for man to bear. It would not be quite so bad if the evil would devour not the righteous but only those who are more evil than they or only those who are just as evil as they. However, as it is, God permits them to devour the most righteous. And again, it would be easier to bear if the evildoers would merely chasten the pious or afflict them with a slight sorrow; but the great pity is that the ungodly devour and consume the righteous completely, let nothing survive but destroy everything. It is as Ps. 79:7 says: "Lord, they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation, etc." And over and above all of this, they have the glory and the honor that God is with them and that they were entirely in the right, as Habakkuk said earlier with words of bitterness: "Then their victory must be the victory of their god."²⁰ All of this poses a real cross for the children of God. Their suffering consists not only in their defeat, but in addition they also find themselves regarded as being in the wrong. They have to witness both their enemy's victory over them and also his boast that God is on his side. Thus Christ, too, says in John 16:2: "The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God." That is what Christ Himself experienced on the cross. But that is where the sublime and profound wisdom of God lies hidden; that is where He deals wonderfully with His saints (Ps. 4:4), indeed, even with His enemies. All of this transcends all human reason and experience.

14. *For Thou makest men like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler.*

All of this is still spoken by a struggling faith about the good fortune attending the ungodly Babylonians over against other countries and nations. "How do the fish in the sea fare? They have no government or order to defend them against anyone; they just drift along. Whoever catches them, catches them; whoever snatches them away, owns them. There is no one to fend off anybody or to protect them. Such fish are practically placed right before the eyes of the devourers. Men catch and eat them; large fish and otters eat them; eagles, hawks, and other birds eat them; beavers and other animals eat them. They are nothing but food for man, for birds, for animals, and for other fish. And that is what You permit all countries and nations to be to the Chaldeans, who do nothing but capture, eat, and swallow up." Now, is it not vexatious that all righteous countries and nations are to serve as little fish for the kitchen of such evil, ungodly people who capture, slaughter, and devour them at will? Thus St. Paul quotes (Rom. 8:36) the saying from the Psalms (Ps. 44:22): "For Thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." The other words, "like crawling things that have no ruler," express the same thought. In my opinion Habakkuk is not referring to the worms on land but to the crawling creatures in the ocean; for instance, to the small fish of which Ps. 104:25 speaks: "The sea ... which teems with things innumerable." For the Hebrew word *וִרְמָה* applies to everything that crawls and creeps. I choose the word "worms," although this term is too narrow. However, I have no better one. We speak of something abounding in, and teeming with, something. Habakkuk adds these words to indicate which fish he means, namely, the small ones. These are really small worms over against their devourers. For man is equipped with fishhooks, nets, seines, creels, bow nets, and all sorts of apparatus for catching and eating them, to say nothing of what birds and large fish do with their beaks and claws. All these fish have no ruler, that is,

they have no order. Nor do they know how to get help from anyone, but they just drift along aimlessly, only to serve as food for others.

15. *He brings all of them up with a hook, he drags them out with his net, he gathers them in his seine.*

Habakkuk calls the Chaldeans fishermen, just as Moses in Gen. 10:9 calls Nimrod a hunter. As I said earlier, man is equipped with various gadgets for catching fish. Therefore Habakkuk here says of the king of Babylon that he is a great and clever fisherman who drags up everything, catches, and collects it with various types of power. These hooks, nets, and seines are nothing but his large and mighty armies, with which he has conquered all countries and nations and gathered all the world's goods, gems, silver and gold, tribute and revenue to himself in Babylon, taking also the vessels in the temple in Jerusalem away. For when such a great king sends his armies forth over a country and vanquishes it, he confiscates all the money and the jewels, also leads the people into captivity, and finally also appropriates the revenue and tribute in that country. How does that differ from a fisherman who casts out his net, gathers all that he catches, and keeps whatever is good?

So he rejoices and exults.

How it vexed the prophet to see the ungodly Chaldeans have such good fortune and rejoice over it, while all other countries and nations weep and mourn! They are happy and suppose that they have done the right thing. Lo, how this victory and good fortune tickles them! They are jubilant, but they do not know that God is thereby fattening them for the slaughter. All of this is written also for our sake. Such and similar examples should comfort us when we, too, behold the wicked faring so well and when they boast and rejoice over us in our misery. Then our one thought must be that they are cattle fattened for slaughter (Jer. 12:3). For fattened cattle are not raised for anyone's amusement nor to serve any other purpose than to be slaughtered for the kitchen. But the animals which are raised for man's amusement or for other purposes are kept lean and slender. God is a great cook. He also maintains a large kitchen; therefore He fattens large animals, that is, mighty kings and princes. He fattens them well, giving them a greater abundance of goods, honor, pleasure, and power than He does all others. He lets them exult and dance even for the necks and bodies of His children. That is how Herod's²¹ daughter danced for St. John, and that is the way the world exulted when the apostles sorrowed, as Christ says (John 16:20). Thus this tickled the king of Babylon and his people uncommonly, especially when he defeated the Jews, who were reputed to be invincible because of their God. And with them he dealt more cruelly than he did with others.

16. *Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his seine; for by them his portion has become so fat and his share so rich.*

Earlier²² Habakkuk had said: "Then their victory must be the victory of their god." This means that he accords his idol Bel and Nebo (that is what Is. 46:1 calls the god in Babylon) the honor and not the true God in Jerusalem. Habakkuk remarks that "he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his seine," although we just said that his net and his seine symbolize the might of his army. How, then, can he sacrifice to these and simultaneously give his god the honor? The answer: The prophet is so incensed over the Chaldeans that he, in his great zeal for God and His people, mocks the king of Babylon and his people together with their god and their worship of him. It is as though he were to say: "To whom do you burn incense, and to whom do you sacrifice? For after all, there is no God here." Nor is the idol anything, as St. Paul declares in 1 Cor. 10:19. "Indeed, I will tell you to whom you are sacrificing and to whom you are burning incense, namely, to your net, to your might. For whoever boasts of anything and rejoices and exults over it, as you are doing over your good fortune, and does not thank the true God, as you also are failing to do, makes an idol of himself, gives himself the honor; he does not rejoice in God but in his own strength and work. Therefore, even though you mention God with your lips and bring sacrifices and burn incense before the idol with your hands, this is actually and really meaningless; it is nothing. No, you regard yourselves highly and are very pleased with yourselves because of your achievement. You assume that you are deserving of this, that you merited it. Therefore it is your net, that is, your power and might; it is your god to whom you sacrifice and burn incense. For you rely so defiantly on your power, you boast of that and exult over that. If it were not for that, your idol would indeed help or delight you little." Is. 2:8 says something similar: "They bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made." And in Acts 7:41 Stephen says: "They rejoiced in the works of their hands." For whatever one rejoices in, upon whatever one relies, that is one's god, since one must not rely on anyone but God nor

rejoice in anything but in God. The ungodly, however, must take solace from their works and their power. That is their god. They cannot do otherwise.

The prophet wishes to say: “What a fine god you have! Your net, your own might, is your god. But, after all, you derived this might from none other than from our God.” At the same time he reproves their blasphemy, their failure to accord God the honor. He accuses them before God of such ingratitude and of such false and blasphemous idolatry. It is as though he were saying: “This is the fruit of Your failure to punish them and of granting them such good fortune that they not only oppress people but also attack You and give Your honor to their net, to the power which they have from You. That is why ‘his portion has become so fat and his share so rich,’ that is, he has come into such great possessions and into the kingdom by means of such might; he is well fattened.” But to be well fattened makes for idolatry. Thus Moses says in his song (Deut. 32:15): “He has waxed fat, he has grown thick, he has become sleek; therefore he has become refractory.” The two items of worship, to sacrifice and to burn incense, are practically identical in Scripture. They derive from the law of Moses. But the question whether also the Babylonians had these two, or whether the prophet merely wanted to refer to their worship in general with these names, I shall leave to everybody’s own opinion. It is quite indifferent.

17. *Therefore he keeps on casting out his net and does not want to cease slaying people.*

The more money acquired, the greater the greed. Man can never be sated with wealth; but his appetite for it grows and grows. The same is true of all other evil human lusts. The more honor a man receives, the more he covets. The more land and power, the greater the desire to increase these. The heathen writers²³ report that Alexander the Great was not satisfied with the conquest of only one whole world. For when he heard a philosopher speak of the existence of many more worlds than just one, he sighed and declared: “And I have not yet conquered one!” Thus Habakkuk here reproves the insatiable greed of the king of Babylon. He rebukes him because he will not content himself but keeps on casting his net to conquer more countries and nations, even though his portion is so fat. He calls this “slaying people.” For the conquest of countries and people always involves the slaying of people. But murderous greed does not worry about that so long as it can become rich and fat. Here you can see for yourself that the net symbolizes his power, by which he slays people and takes over their possessions.

CHAPTER TWO

1. *I will take my stand to watch and station myself on the tower and look forth to see what I am told and what I will answer him who chides me.*

HERE Habakkuk really takes up the subject of which I spoke earlier,¹ namely, that the prophet not only engages in a struggling faith for himself over against the great good fortune of the Babylonians but that he must also contend against and combat the unbelief of the people to whom he is preaching. He must comfort them and strengthen them. Therefore, before he prophesies against the Babylonians and announces their downfall, he must first chide the unbelieving people to induce them to stay and listen to his sermon. It is as if a pastor today preached about a present or future evil and the people began to despair and ran away as though the situation were hopeless. He would indeed have to be bold, praise his office, and admonish the people to make them stay and hear him to the end and discover how things would develop and how God would again punish such wickedness and deliver them. That is what Habakkuk, too, must do here for the sake of those who would experience and live to see the advent of the Babylonian tyranny of which he spoke. Otherwise they would despair, as if all hope were gone. God had promised the people that the Christ would come and establish a magnificent kingdom in Jerusalem. They were persuaded of that and were awaiting it now. Therefore they also assumed that Jerusalem would have to remain before the whole world and that they would also have to abide in the country. Consequently they could not believe Habakkuk’s prophecy concerning the coming of the Babylonians. But when the latter did appear and they experienced the fulfillment of the prophet’s prophecy, they believed this too thoroughly. Now they also despaired of the future kingdom of the Christ, since this did not appear while Jerusalem was intact and while they dwelled in the country. Then these and similar words must have been current: “Alas, where are the prophets now who promised us the Christ? How nicely they have duped us! Indeed, let him who will believe that He will come! How could He come? Jerusalem is reduced to ashes, and we are led away to strange countries. Fie upon you prophets, on all of you! After all, you are nothing but rascals who deceive the country and its people.”

That is how reason carries on when God fulfills His words differently than it had imagined. For reason always presumes to dictate measure, time, and manner to God for keeping His promise; otherwise it refuses to believe any longer. Therefore God cannot but fulfill His words strangely and far differently than we expect. Thus it happens that man refuses to believe God at any time. When He threatens, our present good fortune and the fact that we do not yet feel the coming misfortune keep us from believing His threats. When He promises mercy, the present misfortune and the fact that we do not yet feel His future mercy keep us from believing also His promise. Then the prophets have to devote their attention first of all to the faint-hearted, unbelieving people. For how could God have initiated Christ's promised kingdom more foolishly and strangely than by having Jerusalem, where His kingdom was to be, destroyed by ungodly scorners and by His enemies and while He had His own people led away into exile? How could they believe that Jerusalem lying in ashes could at the same time become the most magnificent kingdom? Here reason had to sink and despair. And whoever could have sustained himself would have had to soar above all his senses and his reason to adhere solely to God's Word, beholding a new Jerusalem which was as yet not visible anywhere. He would have had to be so assured of an invisible Jerusalem as though it were standing where the visible one lay in ashes before his eyes. A very fine illustration of this is found in Jer. 32:24 f. There the prophet is very surprised that it might be possible for God to have Jerusalem devastated and simultaneously be raised again, enabling people to buy and trade there. Read that chapter, for it serves as a true commentary on this.

For that is what Habakkuk is also doing here: he proclaims destruction and yet promises that all prophecies pertaining to the Christ will be fulfilled, contrary to and beyond all senses and reason. Therefore he says now: "I will take my stand to watch and station myself on the tower." He acts the part of a soldier who stations himself on a tower for the purpose of defense. But to whom does this waiting and watching pertain? Against whom does he contend? Against the unbelief and the impatience of the people, as though he were saying: "You are grumbling, you are impatient; and you also make many others unbelieving so that they do not believe me and all the other prophets, but despair of the promised Christ. All right! But despite that I shall not cease, but I shall prepare and oppose you and preach all the more, so that at least a few might be preserved in faith. Therefore I am like one standing guard on a fortress and fighting. Thus I am guarding and fighting valiantly and staunchly for the weak in the faith against you unbelieving and depressed people. I am standing so firmly that you shall not push me over, for I 'station myself on the tower,' that is, I have God's Word on my side. I rely on it and believe it. Therefore I am talking and preaching to the others." When the people are faint-hearted, it is very necessary, as I said before, for the prophet to stand firmly on his word, to cling to it strongly, and not yield and not swerve because of misfortunes, unbelief, murmurings, and blasphemies among the people. For if he who is to administer the Word and dispense comfort yields and swerves, all goes to pieces, the banner lies in the dust, and the watchman is dead. But if he stands his ground, at least a few will adhere to him and look to him.

He says: "I look forth to see what I am told and what I will answer him who chides me," that is to say, "I am awaiting the blows of the unbelievers and blasphemers to see how I must answer those who pervert and dishearten the weak and who chide me and all the prophets as though we were liars, because God's Word takes a course different from what they thought. For if I did not answer them and did not preach against them but suffered their rebuke in silence, they would completely divert the whole nation from God's Word, and no one would any longer look forward to Christ's future kingdom, but all would despair of it. Therefore I will obstinately attend to my office and protect whom I can." Here you see that the prophets were so intent on preserving the people's faith in the advent of Christ. They adhered to Christ with the Word so that they believed in Him as we now adhere to Him and believe in Him. Therefore the prophet is disinclined to bear the chiding and the slander, although we, to be sure, must endure shame and slander gladly for God's sake. We are to suffer it when it pertains to us; but when it relates to the doctrine, we must answer and defend it as Christ did in John 8:14 ff. and before the priest Annas (John 18:19 f.). For he who permits doctrine and the Word to be slandered, when he can defend these, contributes to making the weak fall prey to unbelief. Therefore it behooves us always to be on guard, to teach, to admonish, to reprove, to preach, and to emphasize in order to preserve the elect. But as St. Paul declares in Titus 3:10, those who will not believe we let go their way after two or three admonitions.

The words “what I am told” could perhaps be interpreted thus: “I will see what God will say to me,” because the Hebrew reads: “what someone in me will say.” Consequently, this phrase may be understood to refer to God’s Word and the following one to the words of the blasphemers. But it seems to me that both refer to the blasphemers, who talk and chide in Habakkuk, that is, who speak against him and against his words and accuse him of lying. Thus we also read in Zech. 3:2: “The Lord chide against you, O Satan!” That is to say, “May the Lord interrupt your words, interfere with your plans, and resist you.” For since Habakkuk has taken his stand to watch, and stationed himself on the tower, he already has God’s Word, on which he is based. And because he looks about him to see what is said to him, it is well to note that such looking and seeing is directed to men who talk against him and that he stands and looks in order to console and preserve the weak over against those who contradict and rebuke him. This is followed by the Word of God, which he must hold before both the weak and the rebukers. He says:

2. And the Lord answered me: Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets, so that he who runs past may read it.

He introduces the name of the Lord in order to frighten his detractors and to strengthen the weak the better, since not he himself but God was saying and commanding this. Since in divine matters everything proceeds so profoundly and strangely, it must be noted here that senses and reason must be dismissed here and that a person must cling solely and only to God’s Word; otherwise God’s plans will be sheer tomfoolery and folly, I Cor. 2:4 ff. To strengthen faith, God usually adds an external feature or sign to the Word, which is similar to attaching a seal to a letter. Thus Jeremiah had to carry a wooden chain about his neck. This accompanied the words which proclaimed captivity to all countries, which the king of Babylon would bring about, as Jer. 28:10 ff. tells us. Isaiah was obliged to go about naked when he proclaimed that Egypt would be despoiled (Is. 20:2). Likewise Jeremiah in chapter 32:8 relates that he had to purchase a field from his friend in conjunction with his announcement that Jerusalem would be rebuilt. And so on in many other passages. Also in the New Testament Baptism and the Sacrament were instituted as visible signs in addition to the Gospel. That is what Habakkuk, too, is doing here by divine command. In addition to the words which proclaim the advent of the promised Christ and of His kingdom and the restoration of Jerusalem, he enacts the external sign or feature as he takes a tablet and inscribes on it with clear and large letters these same words, which tell that the prophecies of the Christ are certain and will be fulfilled; they will not be hindered by the king of Babylon, though he reduce Jerusalem to ashes and lead the people away into exile. This tablet had to hang in a public place such as the temple or the marketplace, enabling all to see it and read it. In that way the detractors’ tongues were silenced, and the faith of the weak was preserved as much as possible.

That is the meaning of his words “write the vision; make it plain upon tablets.” What sort of a vision? Not the one Habakkuk beheld, but the vision of all prophets who foretold of the Christ. For in the Hebrew tongue prophecies are called “visions,” and prophets are called “seers,” or “beholders.” That is clearly shown by 1 Sam. 9:9.² In Dan. 9:24 Gabriel, too, says that the vision and prophecy would be fulfilled, as though he were saying: “All the prophets’ visions and prophecies point to the Christ; therefore, when He appears, the vision is fulfilled.” We gather from this that among the common people the prophecies of the Christ were generally termed “visions.” Thus Habakkuk’s words here mean to say: “Take a tablet and write the vision on it,” that is, “inscribe something about the prophecy of the Christ on it, what one is to think regarding it, since the Jews are so timid, thinking that all is at an end.” For Habakkuk was unable to write the vision, that is, all the prophecies of all the prophets who spoke of the Christ, on the tablet. That would have required an exceedingly large tablet, especially since he is to record it in such large letters that a person could read it on the run. “Writing the vision” means writing an opinion regarding it, namely, the words that follow. And to make it plain or to interpret it means nothing else than that he should inscribe it clearly and plainly and distinctly, so that one need not stand in front of it and gape, recite the letters and fit them together, as is done with small or abbreviated script. The letters should be very large so that one can survey and read it at a glance and comprehend everything on the run—although not on a fast run, but so that a person should still be able to recognize the letters when he is running. For it is possible for a person to run so fast that he could not read the letters though they be as huge as the pillars in a church.

It is all-important to the prophet that this be seen and read with certainty. He wants to indicate that with the words “make it plain,” that is, “make it clear, distinct, and intelligible.” He wishes to signify that, just as this tablet can be clearly, surely, and distinctly read and seen, being intelligible also to one hurrying

past, so it will also be certain that the Christ will come, in accord with the prophets' visions and words regarding Him. He says this, lest they be too terrified by the destruction of Jerusalem and by the captivity they will suffer at the hands of the king of Babylon. Therefore he writes:

3–4. *For still the vision will come true in its own time; it will finally act freely, and it will not fail. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. But if anyone resists it, his soul will succeed in nothing, for the righteous lives by his faith.*

This is the text that was clearly and distinctly inscribed on the tablet. For that is what Habakkuk was to write about the vision. And we note that these are beautiful, consolatory words and promises for the weak touching the future fulfillment of all prophecies in the Christ. Here the belief in the Christ, who was to come, is stored and preserved, lest one accuse God of lying in His prophets, as though His promise were false. For although Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were led away into captivity, the Jewish kingdom still survived, comprehended in the Word of God; and prophets remained who encouraged and exhorted the people to endure such a penalty for a season. This did not happen to the Jews later in the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, when they were also driven away. Then there was no prophet to comfort and encourage them to endure such a penalty for a season. Nor was their kingdom comprehended in the Word, but they were completely forsaken, both by prophets and by royal personages. That was not the case in the Babylonian destruction.

Thus Habakkuk is here saying: "The prophecies or visions of the advent of the Christ and of His kingdom are not at an end, even though we are being destroyed for a time, but they still stand and remain firm, just as they were spoken by the prophets. However, this involves a definite time, which is known to no one but is committed to God. And when this vision comes to pass in its own time, it will act freely and not fail, or lie." The Hebrew reads: "It will act freely and not lie." I translated that: "It will not fail to come." That is what Habakkuk, too, wants to express when he says that "it will not lie or fail." And his words "to act freely" have no other meaning than the same words³ used in Ps. 12, where we read (Ps. 12:6): "I shall raise up a salvation which shall act freely in them." All of this is tantamount to saying: "When the prophecies of the Christ are fulfilled, that which now lies concealed will be free and come into the open, so that it will be preached and proclaimed in all the world and no one will be able to hinder this, even though the gates of hell set themselves against it." For the Hebrew word for "to act freely" connotes to burst out freely and openly with one's speech, to speak confidently and boldly of a thing and without regard for anyone. Thus Luke reports of Paul, Apollos, and others that they acted cheerfully and boldly, speaking "quite openly and unhindered"⁴ of Christ (Acts 28:31; 18:26; 4:13).

And then Habakkuk exhorts the weak who find it hard to believe the promise. They might be inclined to say: "Indeed, I do hear that this will come to pass in the course of time. However, when will this time come? This is lasting too long. We are constantly being put off, and people tell us what Is. 28:13 says: 'Wait, and wait once more. Here a little, there a little.' One is told that it will be now, one is told it will be then. After all, when will it be? I realize that if we listen and wait long, we will finally be engulfed and destroyed." To such and similar remarks, which all prophets had to hear in abundance from unbelievers or from the weak in faith, Habakkuk replies: "All right, even if it is delayed a little, wait for it; it will surely come and not delay or tarry long." In addition to such promises and exhortation Habakkuk also resorts to threats, as he seeks out every method by which they might be sustained and preserved in the faith. For more methods for strengthening faith cannot be found than these three inscribed on this tablet, namely, promise, exhortation, and threat. If these do not help, nothing will. But in keeping with good order, threat is the last and promise the first. For if we promise good things and then implore and exhort, we must let anyone go his way who will not abide by that. Only as a final measure do we resort to threats. So one says to the disobedient: "All right, go your way; you will find out." That is a correct, godly, and natural pedagogical method. For also Christ and the apostles, as well as Moses and all the prophets, observe these three items.

These are the threatening words: "But if anyone resists it, his soul will succeed in nothing." The Hebrew word **הַפְּלִי**, which is translated *contentio et pertinacia* in Latin, signifies resistance, such as the stiff-necked employ who set themselves against God's Word and will simply not be told. In Rom. 2:8 St. Paul calls these "factious," saying, "those who are factious and do not obey the truth but obey wickedness, etc." With these words he identifies the same people whom Habakkuk here describes with the word **הַפְּלִי**. They always cavil at God's Word, lest they be constrained to believe—a vexatious people that

heeds neither promise nor exhortation nor threat. And Habakkuk does not conceal what they gain thereby. He says: “His soul will succeed in nothing.” Isaiah utters a similar threat against them (Is. 7:9): “If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established.” And Moses declares in many passages that they will not succeed if they fail to obey God. And that is exactly what happened and always will happen. Christ Himself declares (Mark 16:16): “He who does not believe will be condemned.” For how can anyone do well who contends against God and does not regard God faithful and truthful? Such a person condemns God, and God condemns him in return. And even though he prospers for a season, his loss and his condemnation will be all the greater in the end.

Habakkuk concludes this inscription on the tablet with a masterly statement: “For the righteous lives by his faith,” that is, “If anyone is to be righteous and live, he must believe God’s promise.” There is no other way. On the other hand, the ungodly dies of his unbelief. Thus this applies also here: “If you wish to abide and be preserved, you must believe this inscription on the tablet, which says that the Christ will come with His kingdom. You dare not be confused by the fact that matters appear far differently externally, since you are being troubled. For such is the way of God’s Word, that it projects matters that are absurd and profounder than all the senses and reason can comprehend and experience can perceive. You behold and perceive the ruin of your kingdom; therefore you must soar above your perception by means of your faith and be persuaded even in the midst of ruin that your kingdom will come and will be gloriously established.” Here we see that the prophets preached and stressed faith in the Christ as much as we do in the New Testament; here we see that Habakkuk is so bold as to condemn all other works and attribute life exclusively to faith. For he states plainly enough that the unbeliever will succeed in nothing. Let him pray and wear himself and work himself to death. His works already stand condemned as counting for nothing at all; nor will they help him. And the believer shall live by faith without works.

St. Paul quotes this verse in Rom. 1:17, and very pertinently. For this is a general saying applicable to all of God’s words. These must be believed, whether spoken at the beginning, middle, or end of the world, The Epistle to the Hebrews cites many examples of faith since the beginning of the world (Heb. 11) and applies this verse to them all. Habakkuk quotes it with regard to faith in the writing on the tablet. Paul quotes it (Gal. 2:16) with regard to faith in the Gospel. In Gen. 15:6 Moses says the same thing in different words when he declares: “Abraham believed the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” What else does that say than that Abraham lived as a righteous person by reason of his faith? I am saying this because of the Jewish objections to which some devote themselves so zealously. They want to be smart and condemn Paul as quoting Habakkuk incorrectly, as dragging him in by main force, because Habakkuk is speaking about his tablet and not about the Gospel, even though this tablet is also speaking about the Gospel, but of the future Gospel, whereas Paul, they say, is speaking not of the tablet but of the present Gospel. Still it is one and the same Gospel, which was future and has now appeared, just as there is one Christ, yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8); the only difference is in the mode in which He is proclaimed before and after His advent. However, that makes no difference; it is nevertheless one faith and one spirit that believes in Him.

But they act still smarter when they drivel that St. Paul did not translate Habakkuk correctly. For they allege that Habakkuk is not speaking about faith, but about truth, because he says: “The righteous lives by his אֱמוּנָה.” And אֱמוּנָה, they say, means “truth,” and truth and faith are not the same. I reply: It is true, in Hebrew the two words אֱמוּנָה and אֱמֶת sound very similar; moreover, both are derived from the same stem, which is אָמַן. Therefore, they say, since אֱמֶת means truth, אֱמוּנָה must also mean truth, as the Greek and Latin Bibles have translated it from the Hebrew.⁵ But that is not correct. Paul translated אֱמוּנָה differently and correctly, namely, “faith,” For even if we would admit that אֱמוּנָה also means “truth” in Hebrew (which they cannot prove), the common usage of Scripture shows everywhere that אֱמֶת means truth in the sense that a pious person is truthful and faithful and keeps his word. אֱמוּנָה, however, is the truth a person has in his heart, the truth with which he clings to another person’s truth and fidelity. Therefore those are called אֱמוּנִים who trust and believe, or who rely on and cling to another person’s truthfulness. Ps. 31:23 says: “The Lord preserves the אֱמוּנִים,” that is, those who trust and believe Him. Now I will let anyone who insists on being so contentious say “truth” or whatever he will for that sentiment of the heart which clings to another as to a faithful and truthful person and relies on him.

Paul and we do not know what else to call that state of mind but “faith,” and those who harbor it “the faithful.” For thereby they also become truthful, that is, righteous, faithful, pious people. So God is sometimes called *Deus* אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱמֻנָה (“God of truth”) in Scripture, as in Ps. 31:5, sometimes *Deus* אֱלֹהֵי הָאֵמֶן (“God of faith”), as in Deut. 32:4. For both are His, both His truth and our faith. But enough of that.

5. But wine is treacherous to an arrogant man, so that he cannot abide, which opens his soul as wide as hell and is like death, which cannot be satisfied but gathers all heathen to himself and collects all peoples to himself.

In the first chapter the prophet threatened the people of Israel and proclaimed destruction. There he complained bitterly about the destroyer, the king of Babylon. In the second chapter he again consoled them by words and external signs with the advent of the Christ and of His kingdom. And now in the third chapter⁶ he utters many threatening words and verses against the king of Babylon and his empire. All of this is done to keep the Jews from despairing, as if their captivity were to last forever, and to console them with the news that their enemy will, in turn, be destroyed, and that they will be delivered and attain far more glory, as indeed he will encourage them in the fourth chapter by pointing to the past miracles of God. For, as already said,⁷ it is the purpose of Habakkuk and of all the other prophets to comfort the people and to preserve them in faith and in hope for the advent of the Christ. They should be taught not to despair just because they are faring so badly and all seems irretrievably lost. Similarly, the apostles also encourage us Christians even amid our afflictions to hope for and firmly believe in an eternal life and a kingdom in heaven.

Earlier⁸ Habakkuk compared the king of Babylon to a fisher who gathers everything to himself and eats and devours it. Here he compares him to a drunkard who gorges himself to the point of vomiting. He wishes to say: “At first the wine goes down so smoothly and sweetly, especially when the drunkard is a show-off and wants to be praised as being a beer-hero or a wine-knight. When the drunkard wants to achieve a prize with his guzzling, it is easy to drink the wine down. But finally the guzzled wine will attain the mastery in the head; now it hurls the tipling knight under the bench and makes him a filthy pig. Now he vomits and soils everything, so that house and yard reek. Now the proud man and fine hero lies there like a dumb, senseless beast, as a sow might lie, with no trace of the human being remaining except his human form. And that is a disgrace to behold and to hear. The more decent he should have been, the greater the disgrace. So the wine betrayed him.” In Hebrew this reads: It disgraced him so that he is despised and no one has any regard for him. Not even a child fears him any longer, indeed, not even the sows, though they eat his vomit round about him. For what could a drunk person do? Bereft of all senses, speech, reason, and strength, he can neither speak nor work. There he lies like a log. Even though he had shortly before been gruesome Hector or Achilles, now he is nevertheless the object of the children’s mockery and songs. They point at him with their fingers, laugh at him, and ape him with jeering words as they wish. Thus also the Latin sages wrote that a drunkard is neither alive nor dead.

The king of Babylon, too, is a great and arrogant drunkard—not one who guzzles wine but, as Habakkuk himself interprets, one who opens his mouth as wide as hell and, like death, cannot be sated, who grasps and guzzles and devours every country and nation. Good and well, the wine goes down sweetly; for it feels soothing and good to subject such great countries and nations and to become so mighty, that is, so full and drunk. But in the end it is most disgraceful when he must spew them all out and release them again, when he really comes to grief and retains no kingdom, country, people, or city. That is what happened to the king of Babylon when he was destroyed by the Persians. Then came to pass what Habakkuk records here: He was obliged to spew forth again so disgracefully what he had guzzled down. For he had to surrender all the countries and peoples, and he himself had to perish too. That is what is meant with the words “wine is treacherous to an arrogant man, so that he cannot abide.” For the term “is treacherous” is what we mentioned earlier, in chapter 1:14, ⁹ בִּגְדָל. It describes a person who is completely ruined and despised, convincing us at once that he is nothing and is esteemed as nothing. Also, when the prophet says, “he cannot abide,” this means that he is driven from his kingdom, retaining neither house nor habitation.

We Germans have a proverb which is very much akin to this statement of Habakkuk. We say: “A drunk house spews out its owner.”¹⁰ If we would now apply that, as Habakkuk does, to a tyrant who flays and skins the people as several bishops and princes are doing today, we would be tempted to say: “Alas! He guzzles and drinks himself full. The drunk house will spew out its owner.” This means that he robs and

oppresses so severely that he is despised and must finally also come to ruin. Indeed, he is not only despised, he is also hated. No one is well disposed toward him, all are hostile to him. But kingdoms which are maintained by malevolent tyrants through fear and force and not also through the love and the good will of the subjects cannot endure. All of history bears witness to that, and every experience proves it. And Habakkuk is borne out in his pronouncement that wine brings arrogant tyrants into contempt and spells their ruin when they guzzle too much and gorge themselves with the property of country and people. For the neighbors find a tyrant's might intolerable; they fear that it might grow too strong also over them. Therefore they put their heads together and set themselves against him. That marks the end of his might. Because his own nation, country, and people are against him and hostile to him, they wish for other masters. And his foes rely on that. Thus he is without esteem within his country and outside his country, and he must spew forth what he has guzzled down. That is what happened to the king of Babylon. His neighbors, the Medes and the Persians, set themselves against him and destroyed him, much to the delight of many of his countries and nations.

But note the sharp and bitter words with which the prophet upbraids the king's tyranny. First he calls him "an arrogant man." For that is what tyrants are. They act so arrogantly with their might that the common man must hate them; for they do not only flay him and oppress him, but, in addition, they treat people most arrogantly and haughtily and with obvious malice. In the second place he compares the king of Babylon to the jaws of hell, which are wide enough to devour the whole world and still do not close. Death is similar. It is not satisfied though it swallow the whole world. These words speak eloquently of the insatiable greed of tyrants. And at the same time the prophet also shows the disposition of the human heart when it covets goods and honor; namely, the more it has, the more it wants. If it possessed the entire world, it would like to have two worlds; if it had two, it would like to have ten. In short, when hell and death are sated, then a greedy heart, too, will have enough, but not before. Therefore we must not give thought to finding ways to satisfy greed, death, and hell, giving them so much that they will say: "Enough!" No, greed must be killed as death and hell are killed. But as no one but Christ alone can kill death and hell, so no one but Christ can kill greed as well as all other sins; except that physical death carries the miser away so that he can no longer practice his greed. As the saying goes: "Greed can be satisfied only with a load of earth."¹¹ And yet greed accompanies the miser and remains with him, just as other sins do. As the heathen say: "A miser can do no good on earth except when he dies."¹²

6. Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, in scoffing derision of him, and say.

The prophet continues his comparison to a drunkard, showing how he comes to shame and, as was said before, how people point their fingers at him who was once so strong that everybody feared him but is now so drunk that he lies there like a sow; or when he walks, he totters and reels so comically that people have to laugh at him. He wants to do so much but can hardly stand on his legs. That is what in the end also happens to the glory of tyrants. They not only lose their might and their goods and, like drunkards, cannot stand and abide anywhere, but over and above this they are taunted and derided with both open and veiled sneers: "Where are you now, sir? Where is your wrath?" In short, people taunt them with an obscenely clenched fist.¹³ Now he is despised as much as he was feared before. That is, as we observe, the way of the world. That is what is also happening to the pope and his ilk today. Now everybody who formerly did not dare to mumble or mutter sings, rhymes, laughs, jeers, and mocks. Here Habakkuk proclaims a similar taunting and deriding of the king of Babylon in all the countries in which he appears so awesome now. However, if anyone had told him that, he would have thought this impossible and foolish. But this is being proclaimed as consolation to the Jews, although but few believed it.

God often acts in the strangest way. He says that people will laugh at the tyrants, and yet these are established so firmly and are rooted so deeply, as Jer. 12:2 declares. In agreement with Ps. 2:4, Jeremiah also says that God laughs and scoffs at the heathen, at princes, and at kings who set themselves against His Christ. But is that laughing and scoffing at them when they gain a mighty victory and crucify Christ, persecute and kill all His disciples, and still abide in the country in the possession of their power? Indeed, that is why this calls for faith. These are sermons of faith which do not display what they state but promise it for the future; they run counter to whatever presents itself to the eye now. Christ's Gospel prospered most where it was least tolerated. For when the hour struck, the tyrants perished, and the Word carried the day. Jerusalem and Rome serve to illustrate that. And also today, where princes and bishops oppose the Gospel most vehemently, there it must take root and flourish most. And then people will taunt and say:

“What has now become of those who would not tolerate it? They are reposing in their graves, the worms are consuming them, and the Word of God still remains and abides in their dominion.” Thus Annas and Caiphas were obliged to let Christ abide with the Word in Jerusalem, and they had to take the taunts in the bargain. But wherever Christ’s Word is and abides, there Christ’s victory and kingdom abide. He, of course, holds the field with His doctrine, and other doctrines must remain silent as mice. This we see from experience.

Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own—for how long?—and loads himself with much mud.

Here Habakkuk enumerates some of the taunts against the Babylonian tyrant that will be current in the countryside. There are four of them; the fifth, I suppose, is added by Habakkuk himself. And the fact that he makes so much of the mockery and that he taunts the most powerful king must mean that his heart is set on consoling the Jews, lest they despair of the advent of the Christ. For, as I have already said, the foremost purpose and aim of the prophet is to comfort and to sustain the weak in view of the destruction of Jerusalem, etc.

The first satire that will be spoken and sung of this impotent, drunk tyrant in all countries touches his greed, with which he has wrung great wealth from all countries. For this is the way and order of the world: first it strives for money and goods; then it begins to build; then joy and pleasure are sought; and finally might and honor. We shall also note these four items, one after the other, here in the satire on the drunken tyrant. The prophet says that he increased his goods, not with God’s blessing and as His gift, as the kings of Israel and Judah did in their own countries, but he wrested the goods from others by force, that is, he conquered all countries and imposed tribute and all kinds of assessments until he had taken possession of everything in the country. And he did not do this by command of God (although with God’s sufferance), but he was prompted by avarice and pride. That is the way of tyrants and all kingdoms that rise up, through war and violence without God’s command. For that reason such kingdoms are also called “mountains of prey” in Ps. 76:4.

“For how long?” This means that he acts as though this would last forever. People would never have dared to sing such satires while the king occupied the kingdom; he would not have tolerated this. For the tyrants claim that they are in the right, and they deny that it is the property of others they gained in that way. But now that he is gone, people sing this song freely, and they confidently and to his great shame make fun of his greed, saying that he perished justly as a manifest robber of land and that he has held the property of others so long, which to his great disgrace he now has to return. And Habakkuk calls such possessions much thick mud, not only with a view to the possessions, but also in view of the fact that he thereby burdens himself with the hatred, the envy, and the enmity of all people. Under this burden he must choke and smother, unable to turn it aside or cast it off. For in the mud a person can move neither backward nor forward; he is stuck fast. Therefore, whoever forfeits the prayers and the favor of the people is lost and devoid of all comfort.

7. Oh, how suddenly will those awake who bite you, and those arise who thrust you aside. Then you will be booty for them.

Habakkuk speaks of this as pertaining to the future; and yet these words are to be the mockery of those who will see Babylon destroyed. These people will have to say: “Behold, how soon have they who bit you appeared!” But since this had not yet happened, Habakkuk uses this to console the Jews and to threaten the king. He describes what happens when a tyrant is securely established and is then suddenly overtaken by misfortune. This he illustrates with a sleeping, snoring person. He lies sleeping securely and does not stir. But if something appears to bite or sting him sharply, for instance, a hornet or a worm, he is startled from his sleep, is frightened, and jumps up as though the country were filled with enemies. That is what the king of Babylon also experienced. When he felt secure, ate, drank, and was of good cheer, as Daniel writes, the Persians and Medes suddenly appeared, conquered Babylon, and killed the king in the same night, according to Dan. 5:30. Then the king stirred and awoke, and, as the text states here, he was “thrust aside.” He was chased from the safe camp and yet could not escape but had to “be booty for them.” The Persians and the Medes divided his possessions, the countries and peoples, between themselves. It pains most grievously to try to escape and to be unable to do so and to become the booty of the enemy. In that way he is paid back for what he did to others. This we see from what follows.

8. Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you for the blood of men and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell therein.

The fact that the tyrant plundered other heathen and subjugated them with his might Habakkuk appraises as of least significance. But for the consolation of the Jews he mentions particularly that he destroyed the country of Judah and the city of Jerusalem with its inhabitants in order to increase his possessions. For when he says “for the blood of men,” he refers to all the other heathen who were not Jews but were like other people. To defeat these, he had to spill much human blood for no other reason than to become a rich and great lord. With these words Habakkuk calls him a gruesome murderer because of his shameful avarice. Thus worldly bishops and princes even today care not how much human blood it costs so long as they can become rich and great lords. Such is the course of the world and the rule of the devil.

But Habakkuk regards the iniquity perpetrated on the land of Judah and the city of Jerusalem as greater because God had His abode, His worship, His people, His temple, and His Word there. Therefore the king sinned most grievously there with his desecration, that is, with violence and injustice against divine and sacred things. Therefore Habakkuk does not mention the country, the city, and the people with a specific name, but only with generic terms, as though there were no country or city or people left which the king had not destroyed. For what he did to other, ungodly countries is insignificant by comparison with what he did to this country. Histories also relate that all acts of desecration committed against sacred objects are as a rule soon and quickly avenged. That gave rise to the proverb: “It is imprudent to trifle with saints. They are apt to perform miracles.” Also: “One does not believe saints unless they perform miracles.” Thus it is said of Cn. Pompey, the luckiest person in Rome, that he never succeeded in anything after he desecrated the temple in Jerusalem.¹⁴ And Babylon, too, reached its peak when the king destroyed Jerusalem. Soon thereafter the decline set in. He himself became a brute beast. No one attained the same power again. And in the third generation, following his son’s reign, the kingdom collapsed entirely, as Dan. 5 records.

For God guards His name so zealously that He will not even have it blasphemed in the idols, since all idols bear the name “god.” They let themselves be called gods. Yet they who mock the false gods or blaspheme them are often punished, as pagan books report. This inspired people with such awe that they feared also the false gods. This does not imply that idolatry is right and blameless, but it shows that a heart which is coarse and insolent enough to mock a false god will be just as prone to mock the true God because of the name “God.” For it is not actuated by faith, as Christians are, but by a wicked disposition and by arrogance. So God permits the devil to punish and to plague them. Thus in our own day St. Antony, St. Valentine,¹⁵ and others like them have often plagued such blasphemies, that is, the devil did it with God’s sufferance, because such blasphemers and offenders would be just as ready to do this to the true saints and to God Himself as they do it to those whom they only regard as saints. Therefore, as I said, this gave rise to the proverb: “The saints are apt to perform miracles.” For whatever is regarded as holy, even though it is not holy in itself, is nevertheless holy to him who regards it as such. For he takes God’s name, which alone is holy, and misuses it, blasphemes Him and sins against it. But enough of that.

9. Woe to him who is greedy to the detriment of his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm.

The second satire that will be sung pertains to his firm building. For this is what happens: After a person has gained much money and property, land and people, he is intent on ways and means of guarding and retaining these. Here greed first really begins to bestir itself, indeed, just as much as in gaining it or even more. Now it busies itself with the construction of solid and strong rooms, castles, and cities to be safe from the enemies. For since they did not acquire these possessions from God by faith but by avarice, they are also unable to commit and commend them to God. No, they themselves have to try to preserve and defend these with great ingenuity, with wise deliberations, and with great skill. Thus miracles upon miracles are recorded about kings who erected strong cities. For instance, in Judith 1:2–4 Arphaxad, king of the Medes, built Ecbatana. The walls were 30 cubits thick and 70 cubits high. The towers were 100 cubits high. That surely required many people and, I suppose, much work. But far greater things were reported about this Babylon. It was such a magnificent and incredible piece of work that Aristotle¹⁶ declared that the walls encompassed not merely a city but an entire country. For as Pliny¹⁷ writes, the encircling wall was 60,000 paces long. This is approximately equal to 15 German miles. But 15 miles within the encircling wall contain a city which is, I suppose, 5 miles long and wide. Thus the walls were 50 feet thick and 200 feet high. One foot is reckoned as nearly the length of an elbow, that is, as long as

three large fingers. And there were 600 city halls in it, and many more other things. Therefore Babylon was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the world.¹⁸ It is indeed a miracle that man was capable of such a structure.

Now the king and the Babylonians defiantly relied on such a city. They were arrogant, and they were convinced that it would be impossible to conquer it or to destroy the kingdom. Thus Is. 47:8 relates how Babylon boasted, saying: “I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children, etc.” And it is not surprising that a human heart would rely on such great power and possessions, since it, in fact, defiantly relies on lesser possessions. But it was hard for the Jews to believe that they would ever return from Babylon, being captured, despoiled, and destroyed by such a great power. Therefore also the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk here cry out against this city with all their might in order to comfort the people and preserve their faith in the advent of the Christ. For who could believe the proclamation now that such a mighty kingdom would easily be destroyed and the captives would be delivered? That was so far above and beyond all reason and senses.

Even if God performed no miracles otherwise, He would still have proven amply by this city and this kingdom that no might or power whatsoever avails if He removes His hand and that no structure or fortress can stand if He ceases to protect it. Thus Ps. 127:1 declares: “Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.” There He has surely proved that He must be feared also by all the great lords on earth and that they should not be proud of their possessions and might. For if Babylon was unable to survive, how will the Turk, how will our emperor, kings, and princes survive, who could hardly qualify as citizens in Babylon? On the other hand, this also brings consolation to all who are persecuted, taken captive, and plagued by tyrants. For if He was able to deliver the Jews from Babylon, which contained such arrogant, mighty, and evil tyrants, why should He not be able to deliver from far lesser tyrants? And this is how Habakkuk is here consoling the Jews with their future deliverance, taunting the tyrant in Babylon and singing: “Just as the great possessions in Babylon, wrested from all the heathen, were dispersed and destroyed, so the huge, solid, and precious structure will be destroyed and razed when the hour strikes.”

Now the satire reads: “Woe to him who is greedy to the detriment of his house,” that is, “Oh, how badly this will end! How you will be taunted because of the avarice with which you built your house and made the city of Babylon so firm and strong! What will it avail you? Nothing more than that you incur all the greater misfortunes for yourself and your house. For if you build much, much will be broken down; if you invest much, you will lose much. Your disgrace and your loss will be the greater since you are being destroyed together with such a beautiful building. You will have built in vain, and all the world will taunt you now and say: ‘Where is that fine building now? Where is that strong city which claimed to be secure against the entire world? Of what use were expenses and labor? How nicely the city was preserved! Boastfully it defied the whole world, and it was conquered and destroyed so shamefully. It would have been less unfortunate and disgraceful if they had not built so firmly, if they had not been so avaricious and skinned and flayed to fortify themselves.’ ” Was that not the way things developed also in the recent insurrection?¹⁹ There were castles and houses which, prior to that, would have defied the Turk. However, when the peasants but rapped at their door, they were laid waste. Why? Were they not strong enough? To be sure, they were. But the true Builder and Protector was absent; He was not at home. Therefore no structure and no defense sufficed. And yet the human heart is so stone-blind and so hard that it will not recognize this.

But with the words “who is greedy” Habakkuk indicates that the king of Babylon did not erect his building with lawful possessions but that he greedily seized these from other countries and people, that is, he did not content himself with the fair and just income from countries and people, but he imposed taxes—construction money; he levied assessments of various kinds here and there. That is what is usually done when lords undertake the construction of huge buildings; then they get after the common man. Therefore the following inscription might well be painted over all such buildings: “Woe to him who is greedy to the detriment of his house!” For whatever is built with unjust goods comes to an evil end, especially if one also presumes to rely on this and fails to keep God in mind as the true Protector. When Habakkuk says, “To set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm,” he indicates that this structure was erected as a fortress against enemies. For in his conscience [the builder] surely felt that not many good prayers were spoken for him by the common people in view of his tyranny, his avarice, and his taxation. Therefore he

had to be afraid, and he could trust no one. He had to worry about mishaps on all sides. To forestall these and ward them off, he begins to invoke wood and stone. He builds and fortifies himself with these; they are to protect him. Yet wood and stone provide but a wretched cover and protection for a man when God and man forsake him and hate him. Tyrants themselves have often admitted that.

Habakkuk calls the kingdom “a nest” and speaks of a fortress “on high.” The builder’s security is described as “to be safe from the reach of harm.” For the Hebrew language usually calls dwellings or houses “nests,” which birds, especially large birds such as hawks, herons,²⁰ and eagles, habitually build up high to make them safe for hatching, feeding, and protecting their young. That is what the rich and great lords also do, and so Obadiah says of Esau (v. 4): “Though your nest is set among the stars, thence I will bring you down, says the Lord.” For even though we build and toil long, we have no more than a nest on earth, even though it comprised all the world’s goods, in which we hatch, feed, and nurse the young. Along comes a beast or some mishap and ruins nest and young, or it is torn clown with its young and everything. That is the way of temporal life and existence. It is temporal, and it must vanish as it came.

10. But your counsel will bring shame on your house.

This means to say that such building and such preparations are futile. As I have said, the damage and the disgrace will be the greater, since it is man’s counsel and undertaking and is devoid of God and of His counsel. Habakkuk says, “Your counsel,” as though he were to say: “Oh, you are undertaking this very wisely and devising good plans for building and fortifying. But they are still your own devices.” We like to say: “This is an oaken device,” whereas we really mean to say: “This is your own device.” Similarly, one says: “Oaken foliage stinks,” whereas one means to say: “Self-praise stinks.”²¹ This is true because all of one’s own counsels will certainly fail. And one’s own counsels are those not given by God but suggested and devised by one’s own reason. All of Scripture declares that these are vain, for example, 1 Cor. 3:20: “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile”; and I Cor. 1:19: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise.” And all of Ecclesiastes rejects such “oaken” devices. For man is vain, that is, he is nothing; therefore his devices, too, are nothing.²² But “the counsel of the Lord stands forever” (Ps. 33:11). Thus this device of the Babylonians failed disgracefully. For they supposed that this was an eternal kingdom. But before they knew it, it was reduced to ashes. The Romans, too, believed that their empire would endure forever. And they had many indications and plans for that. But all has vanished now. Even to the present day I behold no better Mardi Gras mummery than that which pope, emperor, and princes enact with their god, the devil, as they take counsel to wipe out the Gospel. How often have they failed in this? And they still fail, so that we can understand what is described in Ps. 2:2 f.: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Christ. But He who sits in the heavens has them in derision, etc.” But although they are often given the lie and come to shame, they do not desist for all of that; so they will perish completely with sin and shame, as the same psalm says (v. 11): “His wrath is quickly kindled.”

For you have battered too many nations, and you have sinned deliberately.

“Therefore,” he says, “your strong building will not help you. For you have carried things too far. God and man are hostile to you, because you were so tyrannical and flayed the people with your might and seized and appropriated their property.” With these words Habakkuk wants to move his conscience and frighten him with God’s wrath. For the words “you have battered too many nations” indicate the magnitude of sin. He has carried things too far. “Battering them” here means that he plagued them in their possessions. He decreased and reduced their sustenance in order to enrich himself and acquire strong dwellings. That is the fate of people who are so harassed with compulsory labor and servitude that they cannot eke out an existence. Also their sustenance is reduced. It is just like being harmed and battered by robbers. And the words “You sinned deliberately” read in Hebrew: “You sinned with your soul.” This means that a person sins purposely, venting his spleen on the people. And to indulge this haughtiness is such a pleasant and gentle sensation for him as if his soul, that is, his life’s salvation, were involved. Ezek. 25:15 also expresses that thought: “The Philistines acted revengefully and took vengeance with malice of heart,” that is, they did so from the heart, to vent their spleen. Also Ex. 15:9: “My desire shall have its fill of them,” that is, “I shall vent my spleen on them,” The king, too, did that. When anyone resisted and refused to yield to his avarice and his imposition of taxes, he vented his spleen on him and exercised his wrath on him. That is what we witness also today in the treatment of the poor people by our bishops and tyrants.

11. *For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond.*

How does that happen? Is that the strong city and the high nest in which the stones and the beams crash and cry out against and about their lord? If even the house opposes the landlord, what, do you suppose, will the enemies do? One is inclined to interpret the stones and beams as representing the king's own people and subjects, who should really assist and help him but who, because of his treatment of them, are hostile to him, forsake him in his need, cry out about him, and join and aid the enemies. This is comparable to a house that cracks and snaps and frightens the occupants out of the house and makes them more afraid inside than outside the house. And precisely where they should seek protection and safety they find it necessary most of all to flee. Therefore it is not a good curse that reads: "May an old wall slay you!" But I believe that the prophet is appealing to the conscience of the king and his people and that he means to say that his best and strongest building will not only be lost and be useless but will also prove harmful to him and oppose him. For when his enemies fought against him, God gave him such a timid and disheartened spirit that not only his own building but the whole world became too confining for him. And whenever a beam or a pillar on the house snapped, he thought that the enemies were breaking in.

For God is a most efficient fighter. First he removes heart and spirit. Thus He has Ps. 76:12 say of Himself: "Who cuts off the spirit of princes, who is terrible to the kings of the earth." But after heart and spirit are gone, manliness is gone, and a man becomes cowardly and disheartened. Such a person serves no good purpose and is useful only for being struck like a log. Even if he had all the walls and ramparts and every kind of defense in front of him, this would not help him. Whenever he hears a beam snap, he is frightened and supposes that stone cannonballs are falling on him like hail. And Habakkuk wants to say here that the king will become so craven amid his destruction that his own building on which he relied will terrify and plague him when but a stone on the wall cries out, that is, snaps, and the beams respond, that is, when stones and beams snap alternately or together. Experience teaches all of this, that a timid, despondent man is so startled when he is alone in a house and then hears a piece of wood in the wall snap. And at times he imagines that he hears or sees something which he in reality does not see or hear.

Is this not an amazing judgment of God, that conditions become so completely reversed in the life of such a great king? That he who had conquered the whole world and was an object of terror to all should be so dispirited when his hour strikes? That he should not only be unsafe in the country but also be terrified in his own building by the snapping of the beams? That surely is chasing a person with a dried bladder and three peas.²³ Where is that strong "nest on high" now? How does all the money now help that was extorted from all the countries for the construction of a strong castle? I do believe that avarice is avenged, now that such fortresses turn about and do as much with snapping as enemies with weapons. Such is the fate of him who is avaricious and builds with disdain for God. Such a building cannot promote a person's welfare and good, but, as he says here, it must bring about his misfortune and disaster. That is what it means to presume to be strong but not "toward God" (Luke 12:21). If princes and lords wish to build solidly, they should lay a proper and good foundation, that is, they should first ask God for heart and spirit, which might sustain the building in time of need. Then a castle would stand firmly on a true foundation. But if no provision is made for the spirit but only wood and stone are erected, then things must finally develop as our text says here, and a snapping of the beams and a cracking of the stones will terrify them. I believe that we, too, experienced that this year when the peasants destroyed strong castles in the insurrection.²⁴

12. *Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity.*

The third satirical song pertains to the beautiful building which adorns and beautifies the entire city and is delightful to behold. For since he had money and wealth in abundance, he first constructed his house, that is, his castle, making it strong and beautiful, as we have heard. Then he also adorned the city with many beautiful buildings. Much has been written about the king's constructions in Babylon. Among other things, it was hailed as a great miracle that he diverted the water of the river Euphrates through the city; the Greeks, to be sure, attribute that to the Queen Semiramis. But they have little reason for doing that, for Daniel records (Dan. 4:30) that the king boasted of having built the city of Babylon. There were also the great pleasure gardens which he had built for the queen on pillars high above the roofs. Josephus writes about this.²⁵ When kings have too much money, they tend to erect many useless buildings; for instance, those constructions in Egypt with their great pinnacles, towers, and tombs. Habakkuk says that such a beautiful, magnificent, and costly building will become the object of scorn and shame. Why? Because [the builder] is doing all of this with the sweat and the blood of the poor, with unjust goods,

acquired through imposition of taxes and through threats of physical harm. For as we have heard, he conquered such great countries and nations with much needless bloodshed and with injustice. That is why Habakkuk here speaks of building the city through or with blood; the money was gained through the shedding of blood, and in that way he wronged the people. The prophet Micah uses almost the selfsame words against the kings of the Jews, saying in Micah 3:10: "You built Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong." It seems that this was a common saying among the prophets against tyrants.

13. *Is it not so that this will happen by the Lord Sabaoth: What the toil of the nations gained for you will provide fire in abundance, and that on which the people became weary will produce empty cities aplenty?*

For the erection of such huge and monstrous buildings requires the toil of many people. This work is of two kinds: first, it is the work of those who have to contribute the taxes used for building; second, it is the work of those who have to slave and labor with their own bodies. Both are hard for the people and weary them. Thus tyrants employ the people's labor for their own pleasure. However, you just go ahead and build boldly, make it beautiful, force the people and weary them. The time will come when we sing and say of you: "Behold, that pretty and costly building is erected solely to give the fire more to consume. And the people had to weary themselves in constructing it to make that empty, desolate castle all the larger." For in Hebrew this reads: *Que populi laboraverunt, in abundantia ignis erunt. Et in quo lassati sunt, in abundantia inanitatis erit.*²⁶ For if people want to ridicule a great work, they say that it was undertaken in vain and did not achieve the end contemplated for it. For instance, the papacy collected so much money for no other end than to make it possible to take so much more away from it; and it climbed so high only that it might fall so much lower. One is always tempted to sneer like that when a lord surrounds his castle with many bastions and walls and all of this proves labor lost, saying: "Good and well, let him build. It will furnish good fuel for a fire." That is tantamount to saying: "He is a fool; the more he builds, the more fuel he will provide for others."

Thus Habakkuk is here mocking the building of the great king. It is as though he were saying: "Oh, you are erecting something very costly here! But what a great fire will arise from the building on which so many people are laboring at present! How many fine, empty plots of land there will be where so many people are working themselves weary now! Your plan will be completely reversed. It will not materialize as you wish. You want it to adorn and embellish the city; but it will mar and disfigure it. Where you are now laying out pleasure-gardens, burnt-out and desolate areas will be found. But this will not be perpetrated by your subjects; there will be no rebellion. No, by the Lord Sabaoth. To be sure, He will find people to do this, namely, the Persians and Medes." And this is surely a fair, just, and proper judgment. He slew many people and reduced and lessened their sustenance in order to make his building large, filled, and strong. But he in turn will be reduced and lessened, and his building will lie in ashes, a scene of desolation and conflagration. And because he built it with blood and injustice, the Lord will not wash it off with water but will burn it out completely with fire, so that blood and injustice are no longer detected there. But how difficult it was to believe all of that when it was said and not yet seen, namely, that such a mighty thing would be laid waste by fire. Therefore the Spirit had to be present here to say it and also to instill faith in the Jews. If the Babylonians had heard this, they would have jeered, especially because such a punishment was said to come from "the Lord Sabaoth," that is, from the God of the Jews, whom they despised, since they had destroyed His people. Similarly, the Jews and the Romans derided the idea that Christ, the crucified God, whose saints they slew daily, would destroy them. And even today our junkers ridicule the thought that the God whose Word is being proclaimed now might harm them, since they persecute this Word daily.

14. *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

The prophets borrowed this verse from Moses, who says of king Pharaoh in Ex. 9:16: "For this purpose I have let you live, to show you My power, so that My name may be declared throughout all the earth," that is, "You despise Me as an inept God of a wretched nation and as having no great reputation. All right, I shall make an example of you, so that I will no longer be so condemned and despised. On the contrary, all the lands shall sing and speak of My power." Also Num. 14:21: "Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord," that is, "You tempt Me and dishonor Me, but I Shall manifest Myself on you and assail you so that the earth will be filled with My glory; that is, people will sing and speak of Me, praise, honor, and fear Me everywhere when they hear what I did to you who tempt Me so." Thus Is. 11:9 also says of Christ's kingdom: "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the

waters cover the sea,” that is, that the whole world is hearing the Gospel of Christ richly and is learning to know God in it. We must get accustomed to this manner of speech. For to sing, preach, and speak about God is termed “to be filled with glory,” as if we were to say of Alexander the Great or of Julius Caesar: “The whole world glorifies the heroes, and the praise of their great deeds resounds everywhere.”

Thus Habakkuk here also threatens the king of Babylon. He wishes to say: “You despise the Lord Sabaoth, our God, as though He were scarcely a feeble fly over against your god Bel. Because you are doing such great things, you assume that your god is giving you this and that our God has to suffer it in us. But you shall discover very soon that our despised God will gain honor from you and your god and treat you in a manner that all the world will sing and speak about it, mock you and your god, but laud and magnify our God everywhere for having done this to you.” And so it turned out too. For after Cyrus, the king of Persia, had destroyed Babylon, he professed publicly—and also had this published in writing in all the countries—that the God of heaven, who resided in Jerusalem, had granted him that victory, power, and kingdom. In gratitude, as Ezra 1:2 ff. reports, he had the temple in Jerusalem restored at his own expense. This means that as the sea is full of water, so shall the earth be filled with the praise of the Lord Sabaoth. This praise is not like the water in a brook, which may be drained or diverted; but it is comparable to the water in the sea, which no one can drain or divert. Similarly, the honor and the glory of the Lord shall prevail in all countries, so that no one can silence or hinder it. As I have said, all of this is proclaimed to console the Jewish people and to preserve them in the faith.

15. *Woe to you who make your neighbors drink of the cup and mix your wrath into it and make them drunk to gaze on their shame!*

This is the fourth satirical song. It deals with his arrogance and iniquity. A proverb states: “Wealth inspires courage.”²⁷ When tyrants are firmly entrenched, have wealth and honor in abundance, possess strong and beautiful homes, they are still not satisfied with all of this but soon grow arrogant and insolent and resort to all kinds of violence and mischief. They will not yield, and they will not listen. And when things do not come out as they wish, they rave and rage. Read Dan. 3:1 ff. There we find that the king erected a column of gold and forced the people to worship it. Also chapter 2:1 ff. There he asked the sages and scholars of Babylon to advise him and interpret his dream. Here we discover what a rogue he was—a fine, thorough tyrant, who wanted his will respected as the will of a king; moreover, a highly intelligent and clever man, who would not be refused with words nor led by the nose, but one who wanted to make short shrift of the scholars when these were unable to tell him the dream and pretended to be able to interpret it despite that. I suppose he thought this was trickery.

Here we must again get used to the Hebrew manner of speech. The Hebrew language is replete with figurative words and similes. Thus we heard earlier, in chapter one,²⁸ that the king of Babylon was called a drunkard who drinks up all the countries. There guzzling means as much as taking, robbing, and seizing the property of others. Thus Christ also says of the Pharisees (Matt. 23:14) that they “devour widows’ houses.” Job also uses similar words.²⁹ But here in this and other passages, drinking or guzzling means as much as suffering misfortune; and to pour out or to give to drink means as much as to punish, to torment, to torture, and afflict in all sorts of ways. The common expression in the Psalter, “the Lord’s cup,” derives from that.³⁰ Also: “Their cup is full of brimstone” (cf. Rev. 14:10). Rev. 18:6 f. also speaks of the red whore, saying: “Mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed. . . . So give her a like measure of torment and mourning.” Also read Jer. 25:15 f., where he bids all kings drink from the cup of the Lord, that they might become drunk, vomit, and fall, etc.

In order to understand this fully and clearly, let us point out that a person who is drunk with wine in a physical sense typifies two other kinds of drunkenness excellently—first, to be drunk with great delight; second, to be drunk with great sorrow. These two types behave just like a physically drunk person. The latter staggers, falls down, vomits, talks silly and foolish stuff, and is unashamed, etc. Similarly, a person who feels too happy, has wealth and honor, pleasure and power aplenty, is really a drunk man. He does not know what to do in his exuberance. He staggers, falls down, vomits, chatters, acts unashamed; that is, even though he perpetrates something disgraceful and blasphemous, which does not at all become him and which is a shame, he is unabashed about that, he has no fear, no timidity and no moderation. He is uncovered in front and in back, that is, his vice and shame are visible everywhere. And yet he persists in this and pays no attention to it. That is what we are now witnessing also in our tyrants. In that way the king of Babylon, too, was drunk with sheer exuberance and delight, as I said earlier.³¹ It is very prudent to

get out of the way of such a drunkard. As the saying goes: “Even a load of hay must make way for a drunkard,” for “You cannot argue with a fool.”³²

On the other hand, anyone drunk with grief also conducts himself like a drunkard. He staggers, is confused, laments, screams, and behaves so badly that nothing but shame is seen in him. Some blaspheme both God and man, give vent to their impatience, also reveal all they are and all they know. Their whole behavior is foolish and irrational like a drunkard’s. That is what Habakkuk is here saying about the king of Babylon, namely, that he made many drunk when he himself was full and drunk with exuberance; that is, he was a wicked tyrant and aggrieved many nations and oppressed particularly the Jewish people unmercifully. Therefore Is. 47:6 says to Babylon: “I was angry with My people, I profaned My heritage; I gave them into your hand, you showed them no mercy.” Also Zech. 1:15: “I am very angry with the large nations; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster”; that is, “I merely wanted to chasten, but they want to destroy My people utterly; they are carrying things too far for Me.”

But it is in accord with God’s judgment that he who is drunk in the first way must also become drunk in the second. Thus this prophet says that as the king became drunk with the possessions of all nations and made many drunk with sorrow, he, in turn will be mocked. In every country people will sing and say that he, too, became drunk. Thus Is. 14:10 declares of him: “You, too, have become as weak as we.” That is what the heathen say. This means: “You have slain us. I believe that you have been struck and slain in return.” Alas, if a person could await that in patience! This is especially remote and incredible when the tyrants occupy the nest.

This is what Habakkuk is saying here: “You poured out richly for your neighbor and made him drunk.” And lest anyone doubt that he is speaking of the second drunkenness, the drunkenness with grief, he interprets himself and says: “You mix your wrath into it.” That is stating clearly enough that he gave the people to drink of the cup of his wrath, that is, he saddened them grievously with deliberate tyranny and brought them to shame, so that their shame was seen; that is, he stripped them of all honor, so that they became poor, captive, afflicted people about whom nothing glorious is said. Here the prophet recalls the story recorded in Gen. 9:21. When Noah was drunk and lay uncovered, one could see his shame. This symbolizes nothing but shameful suffering and misfortune. For to be victorious, to attain wealth and honor is something glorious in the eyes of the world, but to succumb to the enemy, to become poor and disgraced is something shameful. That is why it is called “to gaze on the shame” when somebody is defeated, destroyed, and impoverished. Thus this king had brought the Jews and many countries to shame, while he, a hero, retained victory and honor.

16. You will be sated with contempt instead of glory.

This means: “You, in your turn, will be given to drink and made drunk, so that also your shame will be seen. For you, too, will be defeated, and your might will come to nothing and to shame. Then you will be filled and sated with shame ‘instead of glory’; that is, instead of the great honor and glory you now have you will have nothing but contempt and no honor. And the people will sing all of this about you with great glee. In addition, they will mock and ridicule you. For everybody is wishing you that fate, and you surely also deserve it.”

Drink, yourself, and stagger.

That is what drunkards do—they stagger and cannot stand up. Similarly, those who are full of pain and sorrow know not where to abide. The world is too confining for them. They are helpless and know not what to do. That is the fate he is wishing the king and announcing to him, namely, that the Persians and Medes would come and pour out grief and every misfortune for him, so that he must guzzle and then stagger, unable to remain upright. This is the way Ps. 60:3 speaks: “Thou hast made Thy people suffer hard things; Thou hast given us wine to drink that made us reel,” so that we know not where to abide. And Is. 51:22: “Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering, the bowl of My wrath.” Also v. 17 of the same chapter: “Rouse yourself, Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl of staggering.” From these and similar verses one can easily gather what the prophets mean when they speak of the cup, of drinking, of staggering; it clarifies their manner of speaking.

For the cup in the Lord’s right hand will surround you.

This means: “You will not be able to escape or ward off the cup and the disaster, for the Lord has become your cupbearer; He will present the cup to you to drink, and you must drain it. And there is no

escape. Who can resist God? If it were a man's will and decision to make you drink thus, you might find help and means to resist. But now that the Lord Himself is sending this to you, you have to suffer it. The cup will hem you in on all sides, so that you cannot escape it anywhere." This is easily understood from what has preceded.

And you must shamefully vomit for your glory.

"As you violently guzzled down many countries and peoples and became drunk and raving, so you will be obliged to vomit them forth and return them again." The Book of Job speaks similarly (cf. Job 20:15). It says that the ungodly must spew forth again what they robbed and what tasted so sweet when they drank it and took it. For it is true that wine is sweet and pleasant to drink; but to vomit it forth again is bitter and painful. Thus robbery and every sin are sweet when they are committed but most bitter when they are punished. So Habakkuk wants to say that the king will not only be forced to vomit forth again what he robbed but that he will suffer disgrace in the bargain. That will be a shameful vomiting, with all the world standing by, mocking and ridiculing him because he has to give it all up again. The words "for his glory" mean to say: "As great as your glory now is while you are guzzling and robbing, so great will be your shame when you have to spew it forth again and lose it."

17. *The Violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you; the destruction of the beasts will terrify you.*

This means, as I said above,³³ that he will not have heart or courage but be dispirited. He will sense that this is not the wrath of man but the cup of the Lord. For even his conscience will oppose him and chastise him because of "the violence done to Lebanon." Then Mount Lebanon will come to Babylon, regardless of the distance. Indeed, it, together with all the beasts he destroyed there, will come into his chamber and into his heart, and it will trouble his conscience and make him cowardly. How will that come to pass? In this way: The conscience feels this and thinks that Lebanon with all its beasts is present and that all whom he previously offended want to devour him. For when remorse makes its appearance, sin brings these along with it and puts, yes, presses all who were offended forcibly into one's heart. Some interpret Lebanon to represent the temple in Jerusalem, etc. But I believe that Habakkuk is applying this name to the entire country from the Lebanon Mountains, as Ps. 42:6 refers to it with Mount Hermon and the waters of the River Jordan, saying: "I remember Thee from the land of Jordan and of Hermon." For Lebanon and Mount Hermon are one and the same. Therefore this is the sense: "You have perpetrated much wickedness in the land of Lebanon, that is, in the Jewish country, and destroyed the beasts there, that is, the people and inhabitants. Therefore such wickedness will weigh heavily upon you and your conscience, and it will frighten you; and you, in turn, will have to suffer the same and much more."

For the blood of men and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell therein.

This text has been expounded above.³⁴ For the prophet points out especially the sin and iniquity which the king committed not only on Lebanon and the entire country but chiefly on the land of Judah and the city of Jerusalem.

18. *What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For the workman trusts in his own creation when he makes dumb idols!*

The fifth satiric song deals with his worship. Here the prophet mocks the king very sharply and caustically. For these are very taunting and cutting expressions, which state that the king had made an idol image into a god and that he was the creator of this image and god; and yet he worships his own work. How could anyone be a greater fool! Fie upon the god and the worship of god when the god is an image and the servant of god is the creator of the god whom he worships! Also, when he says that it is a false image, that is, a fraud and a lie with which the people are misled, thinking that they are serving God and relying on such lies and fraud as on the real truth. Also, that he worships dumb idols who cannot speak, much less do or make anything. Therefore he now says defiantly: "How nicely will your god forsake you when the Lord's cup 'will surround you.' How could he help you? After all, he is but an idol and an image. However, let him help, call upon him, let us see him appear to help you! Our God, though He chastens us for a season, will deliver us again, but your god will never help you." I believe that Habakkuk in this text refers, among other images and idols, to the chief idol in Babylon, called Bel. For Isaiah mainly mentions these two, Bel and Nebo (Is. 46:1). To this same Bel he erected the large golden image of which Dan. 3:1 says that it was 60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide. It was a lot of good and useless gold that those people owned. This was due to the fact that the empire was so large and so rich and that it had appropriated the wealth of all the countries.

19. *Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a dumb stone, Arise!*

This is the mockery that will be sung and spoken at the time of the destruction: “Ho, now call upon your wood and stone that you made into gods and regarded as gods! How miserably and shamefully they forsake you! Now you can see that they are wood and stone. For though you call on them, saying: ‘My god, help! Awake, my Bel! Arise, my Nebo! Save me!’ he will not hear, for he is wood and stone overlaid with gold.

Can this give revelation?

This means to say: “How could he be able to give good advice? After all, it is only a mute stone.” Obviously it behooves a real God to teach and counsel His people with His Word.

Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it.

A poor, wretched god who lets himself be compressed and caught in gold and has no breath and life in him! The prophet indulges in such jeering and spewing for the consolation of the Jewish people. They should be convinced of their deliverance, as I have said, lest they fall into unbelief and be offended in God’s work and Word. For this they had great cause and reason, because Babylon was so mighty and so firmly established, while they, on the other hand, were utterly forsaken and destroyed.

20. *But the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.*

He is not cast or compressed into silver or gold but “is in His holy temple,” that is, in His castle and royal hall, which is heaven and wherever He resides through His Word. And yet He is so mighty and resplendent that all the world must stand in awe and keep silent before Him, so that He may deal with them according to His will. That is, He is mighty and reigns to the end of the world. That must indeed be a true God; for when the heathen and the heretics rave and rage against Him, He lets this go on for a while, but soon He can set an example and show them that they will all perish and be annihilated and that they must keep silent before Him when He comes. For in Hebrew the expression “before Him” or “before His countenance” means as much as when He comes or when He, coming to us, turns His face toward us. Thus Mal. 3:1 writes of John: “Behold, I send My messenger to prepare the way before Your countenance,” that is, “before Your advent, or when You come.” Habakkuk wants to say: “But when our God comes with His visitation, all the earth will keep silent,” For then everybody will go into hiding; then strutting, boasting, and all haughtiness will come to an end. For He punishes the ungodly and helps the godly. Thereby He sets things aright and effects silence wherever He comes. No other god can do that.

May that suffice on Habakkuk’s prophecies. Here we see how many words are required to preserve faith in the people, particularly when they are weak and the trials are strong and powerful, as was the case in the Jewish nation. How he chastised, implored, contended, prophesied, admonished, and consoled! And again, how he chided, jeered, and threatened Babylon with God’s judgment and wrath! And yet this proved of help only for a few; “for not all have faith” (2 Thess. 3:2). And now he adds a prayer in the form of a song, in order to console and strengthen the weak in faith still more. He collects and gathers many of the ancient wonderful deeds of God, which He showed His people in times past and by which He often delivered them miraculously. They must bear these in mind and not doubt that their God, who often delivered them mightily in the past, will also deliver them now from Babylon. For it is most heartening to faith to recall miracles of the past. Thus the prophet often professes in the Psalter and declares (Ps. 119:52): “When I think of Thy ordinances from of old, I take comfort, O Lord.” Also (Ps. 77:11–12): “I will remember Thy wonders of old. I will meditate on all Thy work.” Thus pious Judith consoled her fellow citizens (Judith 8:21 f.), and Mattathias consoled his sons, the Maccabees, saying (1 Macc. 4:9): “Remember how our fathers were saved, etc.” We now want to take a look at the prophet’s song. Its title reads:

CHAPTER THREE

1. *This is the prayer of the prophet Habakkuk for the innocent.*

SUBMITTING his innocence to God, David, too, uses such a title in Ps. 7:1. But in Hebrew this means as much as *ignorantia et ignorantiae*, “ignorance.” If we were to speak Latin, we might choose the word *inconscientia*—when a person is unaware of something or when this does not touch his conscience, as was true of David in the aforementioned psalm. When Shimei accused him (2 Sam. 16:7 ff.) of having wrested the kingdom from Saul, he indicated that his conscience knew nothing of this. He called it *ignorantia*. In the absence of a better German term, we must translate this with *Unschuld* (“innocence”). However, this is too strong a term. For it sounds far humbler and far more Christian to boast before God not of one’s

innocence but of one's conscience. For a person may not feel any evil in his conscience and yet not be innocent, as Paul declares in I Cor. 4:4: "I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me." Thus Abimelech, too, had a clear conscience when he took Sarah; and yet his deed was wrong before God, Gen. 20:3 ff. Thus Habakkuk here wants to pray for the godly, who were led away to Babylon together with the ungodly. For undoubtedly there were many godly people among these, such as Daniel and his companions. These were innocent, that is, they had no bad conscience, they were not aware of any evil; and yet they had to go along. For, as St. Paul says, it is God who judged them. In Jer. 25:29 God Himself professes that they did not deserve to drink such a cup. But call it innocence, ignorance, a free conscience, or whatever you like—as long as the correct meaning is present, one may be patient with the term. I believe that we Germans express this best when we say: "A prayer for the innocent."

THE FIRST VERSE

2. *O Lord, I have heard the report of Thee, and I am afraid.*

As is proper for a good prayer, he begins the prayer with praise and thanks. For he enumerates many great miracles that God had shown the fathers, saying: "I have heard much said about You; for our fathers told us, leaving this behind them in writings." Thus Ps. 44:1 declares: "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, etc." "Such a report and proclamation of You causes me to fear; that is, I regard You highly, I fear You and stand in awe of You. I do not despise You as the ungodly do, who hear nothing about You or know nothing of You, or hear with unbelief and ignore it."

For Thou dost impart life to Thy work in the midst of the years; Thou makest it known in the midst of the years. In tribulation Thou rememberest mercy.

"This is the report that causes You to be feared and revered. For it is said of You, and the histories also attest this, that You are this strange God, who helps in the midst of need. You lay low, and You raise up; You permit things to break apart when You want to build, and You kill when You wish to impart life (of. 1 Sam. 2:6 ff.). You do not do as the world does, which fends off evil in the very beginning, or remains stuck in it completely. No, You let us sink into the midst of it, and yet You pull us out again. You want to give us the Christ's kingdom, and at the same time You have us driven to Babylon into the pit of servitude; and yet You do not leave us there. That is the pattern You follow in all Your works; that is Your method. That is what is sung, heard, and said of You, namely, that You are indeed a God to be feared and honored and praised greatly in such works."

The text is obscure here; that is to say, it is very Hebrew. Therefore many have tripped over it. "To impart life to the work" means nothing but to help in time of need. For to be in need is practically the same as to be in death. And when a person is helped, he feels as though he had been made alive and born anew. "In the midst of the years" expresses as much as "at the right time." It signifies that God does not appear as soon as the need begins, as though any time were the right time. Nor does help remain away forever, as though every time for helping had passed. But He comes in the midst of time, that is, He knows how to follow a middle course, so that He does not help too soon and also not too late. For if He would help too soon, we would not learn to despair of ourselves but would remain arrogant. If He would be too tardy with His help, we would not learn to believe but would despair of Him. But now that He adopts a middle course, He also holds us in the middle. In Hebrew "in the midst of the years" does not imply that something constituted the beginning and something the end. It means: *Intra vel inter annos, id est, suo tempore*; that is, He chooses the hour for His help from among the years or within the time. Just as I say that the sun is among the stars, not exactly in the middle of the stars, but mingled among the other stars, so the hour of help is also in the midst of the years, that is, among the years or amid the time, so that He will not let all the years come to an end and forsake us eternally, until no more years are left. But he says "in the midst of the years" and not "in the midst of the days," because he is speaking from the heart of those in need. For them a day is as long as a year; indeed, every period of time is long for them. He uses the phrase also because a year is the longest measure of time. Through summer and winter the world always becomes new again in a year, and thus year is added to year. By the years we compute the length of time thus: "Lord, You help among the years, that is, in the course of time. When the time seems so long to us, You will appear in the course of that time." He speaks about many years because he speaks about many miracles and works of God, each of which is performed in its time and in its year, making the years as

many as the works. In His works He always arranges to come within the year's needs, that is, in the course of the need.

"To impart life" and "to make known" are practically identical, except that the former means to perform the miracle and to provide help, whereas the latter means that this is also felt and that it affords pleasure. In Hebrew the words "in tribulation" read *in turbatione*, that is, also in the midst of need, when worst comes to worst, when fear and trepidation are greatest; "then," he says, "You remember mercy, then You help. Now, whoever wants to be saved must learn to know You thus." This is comforting to believers, but unbearable for the ungodly.

THE SECOND VERSE

3. *God came from the South, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah.*

Here he begins to portray the ancient miracles as on a tablet or cloth, one after the other. The first: when He led the people from Egypt, through the wilderness, into the land of Canaan. Paran is the mountain range that borders on the land of Canaan on the south. When God broke in here with the people of Israel, He came upon the Canaanites directly from the south and defeated them. The fact that Israel marched out of Egypt and through so many nations and wildernesses and drove out so many peoples was as miraculous as their deliverance from Babylon. And yet this happened when the hour came. We should surely be used to it that Scripture calls God "the Holy One." For wherever He is, He hallows through His Spirit. The meaning of "Selah" has been sufficiently explained elsewhere, especially in Ps. 68.¹

THE THIRD VERSE

His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise.

That is to say, with such a work He caused people to speak of Him everywhere in the countries under heaven. Here is another Hebrew obscurity. It reads: His glory covers the heavens. Not above but below. The Psalter also speaks about covering heaven with clouds. Habakkuk wants to say that God's praise resounded so fully everywhere under the heavens that, if this praise had been clouds or fog, it would have covered the heavens. We speak of this as of covering the heavens from beneath. It is the same as when Moses says to Pharaoh in Ex. 9:16: "For this purpose have I let you live, to show you My power, so that My name may be declared throughout all the earth." It is also characteristic of the Hebrew tongue to speak of heaven as of many heavens. For every country speaks of heaven as far as it can be surveyed by the eye in that country as of its own heaven. That is why we say in the Lord's Prayer "Who art in the heavens,"² that is, in all heavens to the end of the earth. Thus God's praise was in the heavens that were above these countries. And His glory was in whatever country His praise was.

THE FOURTH VERSE

4. *His brightness was like the light, rays flashed from His hand; and there He veiled His power.*

That is why heaven and earth were full of His praise. For His might, that is, His kingdom, was veiled in the people of Israel. For no one beheld Him. But when He did such wondrous things, these works were as light that manifested His presence. They emanated from Him like brightness from the sun in the clouds and like rays from His hands, that is, from His strength which He demonstrated. For although the sun is hidden under the clouds, its light reveals its presence. Thus this brightness issued not from the countenance of the Lord—He was concealed there—but from His hands; that is, His presence was evident from His works. And of this it is said that heaven and earth were full of His praise. The Hebrew language calls such rays "horns." According to Ex. 34:29 ff., Moses had horns, that is, brightness, in his face.

THE FIFTH VERSE

5. *Before Him went pestilence, and plague issued at His feet.*

One of the rays that sprang from His hands was His smiting of Egypt, killing all the firstborn in one night. That was *Passa Domini*, His passing. That is where He left these footprints. Wherever He stepped, pestilence came forth at His feet (Ex. 12:27 ff.).

THE SIXTH VERSE

6. *He stood and measured the earth; He looked and broke up the heathen; so that the mountains of the world were shattered and the hills in the world had to bow down when He walked in the world.*

Another ray: When He walked on the earth at the Red Sea, He stood between Israel and the Egyptians, measuring the land so that the Egyptians could not proceed beyond the place He had measured off for them. Furthermore, in the morning He looked at them and broke them up so that not only their order was dissolved but that also the great princes, who are like mountains in the world, were drowned in the sea by

a glance and were smashed. Thus the proud hills, the bigwigs, the hills of the earth, had to bow down and be humbled before Him when He took such a devastating walk among them on earth.

THE SEVENTH VERSE

7. I saw the huts of the Ethiopians troubled and the tents of the Midianites saddened.

The fact that such great countries round about were frightened and terrified by such rays constituted a part of His praise under the heavens. Some will not accept the translation “huts of the Ethiopians” here. They say that in view of the word “Cushan” found here this refers to the king of Mesopotamia, Cushan-rishathaim (Judg. 3:8). I do not accept that. It does not fit into the context of things. It is well known that in Hebrew Cus and Cushan may be the same. It is a matter of an “n.” Thus also Moses sings in his hymn of praise found in Ex. 15:14 f. that all the surrounding countries were frightened when they heard of such deeds. That is the meaning of the prophet’s words “I saw” (that is, someone had seen) that the Ethiopians at the Red Sea, the neighbors of the Egyptians, were frightened, were troubled, were in pain and in fear; likewise their other neighbors on the other side of the sea, the Midianites. They were all afraid of the God of Israel, who dealt thus with Pharaoh.

THE EIGHTH AND NINTH VERSES

8. Wert Thou not angry, Lord, in the flood, and was Thy wrath not in the waters and Thy anger in the sea, when Thou didst ride upon Thy horses and Thy chariots were salvation?

This verse may be construed in a positive sense and in a negative sense. I prefer the latter in accord with the Hebrew manner of speech. And then this is the meaning: After the prophet has related a few miracles of God, he rejoices in the Lord and speaks lovingly to Him, saying: “I believe indeed that it was mercy and not anger when You rode in the flood of the sea and its waters on Your horses and on Your chariots, that is, on the horses and chariots of Israel. For You were present and led them through, effecting complete salvation and victory. There no trace of wrath or anger that You might have entertained could be detected.” But if the positive construction appeals to anyone, as we find it translated here, he must refer the wrath and anger to the Egyptians, whom He smote to save His people. However, no one may doubt that the children of Israel had horses and chariots; for, as Moses says in Ex. 13:18, they “went up out of the land of Egypt” like an army “equipped for battle.”

THE TENTH VERSE

9. Thou didst awaken Thy bow, as Thou hadst sworn to the tribes. Selah.

With “the bow” he refers to the entire armor. Thus Ps. 78:9 speaks of the Ephraimites who were to wield the bow. In Gen. 49:24 God said through the patriarch Jacob that Ephraim’s bow should “remain firm, etc.” That is what Habakkuk here calls “sworn to the tribes” of Israel. This verse shows one of the rays by which God manifested Himself. It may be the battle that Joshua waged against the Amalekites, Ex. 17:13, or against Arad, Num. 21:1 ff., or against the Midianites and Moabites, Num. 31, or against the kings Sihon and Og (Num. 21:23 ff.), or against all of these. He wishes to say that God had awakened and strengthened their bow to make them successful in battle.

Thou didst divide the streams into the land.

That was also a ray when from the rocks He provided water that provided streams in the wilderness so that both man and beast could drink thereof (Num. 20:2 ff.).

THE ELEVENTH VERSE

10. The mountains saw Thee and were frightened; the raging waters swept on; the deep gave forth its voice; the summit lifted up its hands.

Here he summarizes all the rays of the works accompanying the children of Israel when they went through the Jordan. For then “the mountains were frightened,” that is, the great lords in the land of Canaan or in the country which is very mountainous, together with its inhabitants. Thus Moses also says in Ex. 15:15: “Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed; the leaders of Moab, trembling seized them; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.” At that time the Jordan also flowed away and became dry, Joshua 3:16. Also “the deep gave forth its voice, and the summit lifted up its hands,” that is, everything that was deep and high stirred and moved with fear. Neither the deep waters nor the high mountains could help anyone. Everything had to yield and give Way.

THE TWELFTH VERSE

11. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation.

This means that they stood still contrary to their nature and habit and served Joshua, according to Joshua 10:13.

Thine arrows sped along refulgently, and Thy spears with the flash of lightning.

That is the story of the great storm and the hail with which God slew the heathen at Azekah, Joshua 10:11. For Scripture calls hail and lightning God's arrows and spears. Thus Ps. 18:14 declares that He sent out His arrows and frightened them at Mount Sinai. And as the text reads here, one might well say and interpret these arrows and spears as referring to the battles that Joshua waged against the cities Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron, Debir, as we have it in Joshua 10:28 ff. For these were conquered, one after the other, with such ease that one was obliged to say that the Israelite arrows and spears were God's and that He was shooting and stabbing mightily with them. The prophet says that they "glitter and flash." That is what weapons do in battle—they glitter and gleam. They do not do this when sheathed. And I like this interpretation best.

THE THIRTEENTH VERSE

12. *Thou didst bestride the earth in fury, Thou didst trample the nations in anger.*

This happened when Joshua smote the remaining kings by the waters of Merom, Joshua 11:7.

THE FOURTEENTH VERSE

13. *Thou wentest forth for the salvation of Thy people, for the salvation of Thine anointed.*

This happened in the days of Samuel, Saul, David. When they went forth to war, God helped them everywhere, as the First and the Second Book of the Kings attest.

Thou didst crush the head in the house of the wicked, and didst lay bare the foundation to the neck.

These heads and foundations are the kings in the surrounding countries, such as Edom, Ammon, Syria, Philistia, which David defeated and subjugated. For "to crush the head" means to occupy a kingdom, so that it no longer had a head or its own king but was subject to David. The other expression, "to lay bare the foundation," refers to these same kings and princes. To lay them bare means to dispose of them up to the neck. The trunk and the body remain and become subject to David. For a king is the head and the foundation in a kingdom, the people and the country are the trunk and the body. Up to this point Habakkuk gratefully depicted and related the rays of the divine hands in order to console the people; and heaven and earth have been filled with the praise of these. Now he begins to plead against the king of Babylon.

THE FIFTEENTH VERSE

14. *Oh, that Thou wouldst curse his scepter together with the head of his towns, who come like a whirlwind to destroy me and rejoice as though they were devouring the poor in secret.*

This means: "Oh, that You would not be gracious but unmerciful to the kingdom of Babylon 'together with the head of his towns,' that is, to the city of Babylon, which is the head of all of his cities. To be sure, other kings and other heathen also plagued us, but they permitted us to remain in the country. The Babylonians, however, came rushing along like a whirlwind and scattered us away from our country. Not satisfied with that, they also mock us and rejoice over our misfortune, 'as though they were devouring the poor in secret,' that is, as though there were no judge and they would go unpunished." "To devour in secret" means to say that they suppose that God does not see it or does not regard it as wrong and that no outcry or judgment is made over this.

THE SIXTEENTH VERSE

15. *Thine horses tread in the sea, in the mire of great waters.*

This means: "While You helped us, our mounted soldiers and our army were so completely successful and victorious and moved along mightily, as though flying in the air; but now that You are forsaking us, they tread in the mire and in deep water, that is, in misery and want, and can no longer accomplish anything."

THE SEVENTEENTH VERSE

16. *I hear, and my body trembles, my lips quiver at the sound.*

This means: "I am not eating and drinking now to make my belly happy, but I am fasting and mourning. Nor do I sing, as is customary in joyful times. Then people eat, drink, and sing. But instead of laughing and singing, my lips are now quivering when I hear of such misery.

Rottenness enters into my bones.

This means that my marrow and bones are pining away. These are all Hebrew expressions: A happy heart fattens the bones; a sad or jealous heart makes the bones fester. It is equivalent to saying that a happy mind is half a body, a sad mind also weakens the bones. That is all borne out by experience. As follows:

For I am saddened within me.

This means, as I said, that my sadness causes this condition in my belly, my lips, and bones.

Oh, that I might rest at the time of trouble when we march against the people who make war on us.

This means: "I wish I were dead and reposing in my grave rather than to be constrained to hear of the misery of leaving our country and going to the land of the enemy, who leads us away as he wars against us. For conditions in the country will be bad." As follows:

THE EIGHTEENTH VERSE

17. For the fig tree will not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; the produce of the olive will fail, and the fields will yield no food; the flock will be cut off from the fold, and there will be no herd in the stalls.

This means that the land will be desolate because the people are led away. There will be no real farming or raising of stock. Everything will be in a most wretched condition. Thus also Is. 5:5 ff. declares that the land will become cheap because of the few inhabitants remaining there. Also Moses says in Lev. 26:34 that the land will have its Sabbaths after they have been ejected from it.

THE NINETEENTH VERSE

18. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

This means that in all such affliction and distress I take comfort from the fact that God will again help us. For the visions of the prophet are not yet at an end. The Christ will still come. And then we shall again rejoice.

THE TWENTIETH VERSE

19. God, the Lord, is my strength; He makes my feet like hinds' feet, He makes me tread upon high places as I sing joyously to my stringed instrument.

This verse is taken from the Psalter, for in Ps. 18:33 David says: "He makes my feet like hinds' feet and sets me secure on the heights." That is equivalent to saying: "The Lord is still my God and my whole strength, We shall rejoice over that, skipping about and leaping like hinds. That is how our feet will be, no longer wading and crawling in the mire but soaring and flying joyfully on the heights. We shall do nothing but sing happily, play, and express our joy in every way. That will happen when the Babylonian scepter is cursed and destroyed and we are delivered and the Christ has appeared with His kingdom. Amen."

This is Habakkuk's prayer and song, composed for the solace of the Jews, but with very inadequate expressions, with words which are unfamiliar to us Germans. However, we must familiarize ourselves with Hebrew poetical language. For if they would hear our songs, I am sure they would sound just as strange to them as their songs do to us. But I hope that we have hit the prophet's meaning. Eternal praise and thanks be to God for that.

AMEN.

¹Luther, M. (1999, c1974). *Vol. 19: Luther's works, vol. 19 : Minor Prophets II: Jonah and Habakkuk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Ha,2.19). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.