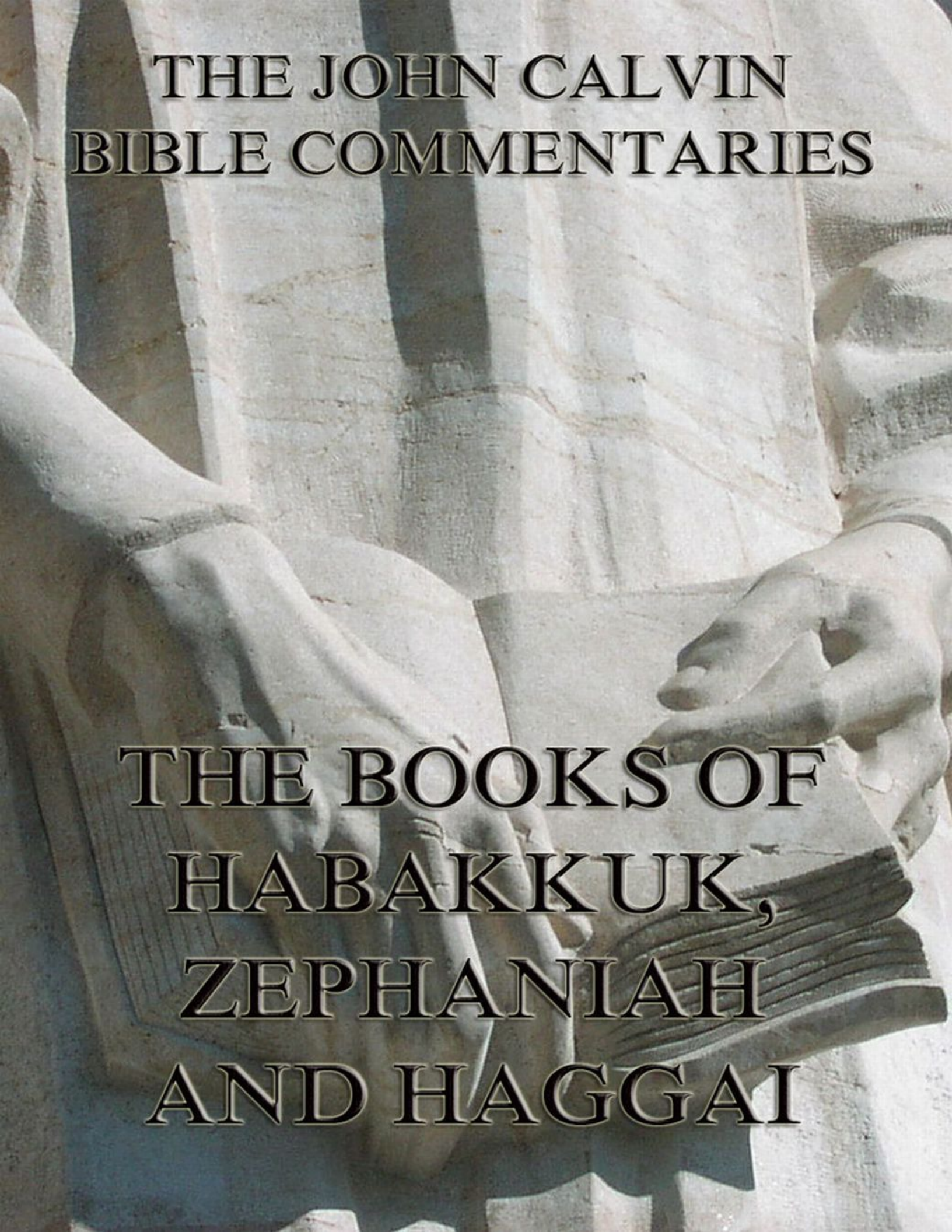

THE JOHN CALVIN BIBLE COMMENTARIES

THE BOOKS OF HABAKKUK, ZEPHANIAH AND HAGGAI

Commentaries On Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai

John Calvin

Contents:

Commentaries On Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, John Calvin
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Germany

ISBN: 9783849620523

www.jazzybee-verlag.de
admin@jazzybee-verlag.de

John Calvin – A Biography

By William Barry

This man, undoubtedly the greatest of Protestant divines, and perhaps, after St. Augustine, the most perseveringly followed by his disciples of any Western writer on theology,

was born at Noyon in Picardy, France, 10 July, 1509, and died at Geneva, 27 May, 1564.

A generation divided him from Luther, whom he never met. By birth, education, and temper these two protagonists of the reforming movement were strongly contrasted. Luther was a Saxon peasant, his father a miner; Calvin sprang from the French middle-class, and his father, an attorney, had purchased the freedom of the City of Noyon, where he practised civil and canon law. Luther entered the Order of Augustinian Hermits, took a monk's vows, was made a priest and incurred much odium by marrying a nun. Calvin never was ordained in the Catholic Church; his training was chiefly in law and the humanities; he took no vows. Luther's eloquence made him popular by its force, humour, rudeness, and vulgar style. Calvin spoke to the learned at all times, even when preaching before multitudes. His manner is classical; he reasons on system; he has little humour; instead of striking with a cudgel he uses the weapons of a deadly logic and persuades by a teacher's authority, not by a demagogue's calling of names. He writes French as well as Luther writes German, and like him has been reckoned a pioneer in the modern development of his native tongue. Lastly, if we term the doctor of Wittenberg a mystic, we may sum up Calvin as a scholastic; he gives articulate expression to the principles which Luther had stormily thrown out upon the world in his vehement pamphleteering; and the "Institutes" as they were left by their author have remained ever since the standard of orthodox Protestant belief in all the Churches known as "Reformed." His French disciples called their sect "the religion"; such it has proved to be outside the Roman world.

The family name, spelt in many ways, was Cauvin latinized according to the custom of the age as Calvinus. For some

unknown reason the Reformer is commonly called Maître Jean C. His mother, Jeanne Le Franc, born in the Diocese of Cambrai, is mentioned as "beautiful and devout"; she took her little son to various shrines and brought him up a good Catholic. On the father's side, his ancestors were seafaring men. His grandfather settled at Pont l'Evêque near Paris, and had two sons who became locksmiths; the third was Gerard, who turned procurator at Noyon, and there his four sons and two daughters saw the light. He lived in the Place au Blé (Cornmarket). Noyon, a bishop's see, had long been a fief of the powerful old family of Hangest, who treated it as their personal property. But an everlasting quarrel, in which the city took part, went on between the bishop and the chapter. Charles de Hangest, nephew of the too well-known Georges d'Amboise, Archbishop of Rouen, surrendered the bishopric in 1525 to his own nephew John, becoming his vicar-general. John kept up the battle with his canons until the Parliament of Paris intervened, upon which he went to Rome, and at last died in Paris in 1577. This prelate had Protestant kinsfolk; he is charged with having fostered heresy which in those years was beginning to raise its head among the French. Clerical dissensions, at all events, allowed the new doctrines a promising field; and the Calvins were more or less infected by them before 1530.

Gerard's four sons were made clerics and held benefices at a tender age. The Reformer was given one when a boy of twelve, he became Curé of Saint-Martin de Marteville in the Vermandois in 1527, and of Pont l'Eveque in 1529. Three of the boys attended the local Collège des Capettes, and there John proved himself an apt scholar. But his people were intimate with greater folk, the de Montmor, a branch of the line of Hangest, which led to his accompanying some of their children to Paris in 1523, when his mother was probably dead and his father had

married again. The latter died in 1531, under excommunication from the chapter for not sending in his accounts. The old man's illness, not his lack of honesty, was, we are told, the cause. Yet his son Charles, nettled by the censure, drew towards the Protestant doctrines. He was accused in 1534 of denying the Catholic dogma of the Eucharist, and died out of the Church in 1536; his body was publicly gibbeted as that of a recusant.

Meanwhile, young John was going through his own trials at the University of Paris, the dean or syndic of which, Noel Bédier, had stood up against Erasmus and bore hard upon Le Fèvre d'Etaples (Stapulensis), celebrated for his translation of the Bible into French. Calvin, a "martinet", or oppidan, in the Collèege de la Marche, made this man's acquaintance (he was from Picardy) and may have glanced into his Latin commentary on St. Paul, dated 1512, which Doumergue considers the first Protestant book emanating from a French pen. Another influence tending the same way was that of Corderius, Calvin's tutor, to whom he dedicated afterwards his annotation of I Thessalonians, remarking, "if there be any good thing in what I have published, I owe it to you". Corderius had an excellent Latin style, his life was austere, and his "Colloquies" earned him enduring fame. But he fell under suspicion of heresy, and by Calvin's aid took refuge in Geneva, where he died September 1564. A third herald of the "New Learning" was George Cop, physician to Francis I, in whose house Calvin found a welcome and gave ear to the religious discussions which Cop favoured. And a fourth was Pierre-Robert d'Olivet of Noyon, who also translated the Scriptures, our youthful man of letters, his nephew, writing (in 1535) a Latin preface to the Old Testament and a French one — his first appearance as a native author — to the New Testament.

By 1527, when no more than eighteen, Calvin's educatlon was complete in its main lines. He had learned to be a humanist and a reformer. The "sudden conversion" to a spiritual life in 1529, of which he speaks, must not be taken quite literally. He had never been an ardent Catholic; but the stories told at one time of his ill-regulated conduct have no foundation; and by a very natural process he went over to the side on which his family were taking their stand. In 1528 he inscribed himself at Orléans as a law student, made friends with Francis Daniel, and then went for a year to Bourges, where he began preaching in private. Margaret d'Angoulême, sister of Francis I, and Duchess of Berry, was living there with many heterodox Germans about her.

He is found again at Paris in 1531. Wolmar had taught him Greek at Bourges; from Vatable he learned Hebrew; and he entertained some relations with the erudite Budaeus. About this date he printed a commentary on Seneca's "De Clementiâ". It was merely an exercise in scholarship, having no political significance. Francis I was, indeed, handling Protestants severely, and Calvin, now Doctor of Law at Orléans, composed, so the story runs, an oration on Christian philosophy which Nicholas Cop delivered on All Saints' Day, 1532, both writer and speaker having to take instant flight from pursuit by the royal inquisitors. This legend has been rejected by modern critics. Calvin spent some time, however, with Canon du Tillet at Angoulême under a feigned designation. In May, 1534, he went to Noyon, gave up his benefice, and, it is said, was imprisoned. But he got away to Nerac in Bearn, the residence of the Duchess Margaret, and there again encountered Le Fèvre, whose French Bible had been condemned by the Sorbonne to the flames. His next visit to Paris fell out during a violent campaign of the Lutherans against the Mass, which brought on reprisals, Etienne de la Forge and others were burnt in the Place de Grève; and

Calvin accompanied by du Tillet, escaped — though not without adventures — to Metz and Strasburg. In the latter city Bucer reigned supreme. The leading reformers dictated laws from the pulpit to their adherents, and this journey proved a decisive one for the French humanist, who, though by nature timid and shy, committed himself to a war on paper with his own sovereign. The famous letter to Francis I is dated 23 August, 1535. It served as a prologue to the "Institutes", of which the first edition came out in March, 1536, not in French but in Latin. Calvin's apology for lecturing the king was, that placards denouncing the Protestants as rebels had been posted up all over the realm. Francis I did not read these pages, but if he had done so he would have discovered in them a plea, not for toleration, which the Reformer utterly scorned, but for doing away with Catholicism in favour of the new gospel. There could be only one true Church, said the young theologian, therefore kings ought to make an utter end of popery. (For an account of the "Institutes" see) The second edition belongs to 1539, the first French translation to 1541; the final Latin, as revised by its author, is of 1559; but that in common use, dated 1560, has additions by his disciples. "It was more God's work than mine", said Calvin, who took for his motto *"Omnia ad Dei gloriam"*, and in allusion to the change he had undergone in 1529 assumed for his device a hand stretched out from a burning heart.

A much disputed chapter in Calvin's biography is the visit which he was long thought to have paid at Ferraro to the Protestant Duchess Renée, daughter of Louis XII. Many stories clustered about his journey, now given up by the best-informed writers. All we know for certain is that the Reformer, after settling his family affairs and bringing over two of his brothers and sisters to the views he had adopted undertook, in consequence of the war between Charles V and Francis I, to reach Bale by way of Geneva, in July,

1536. At Geneva the Swiss preacher Fare, then looking for help in his propaganda, besought him with such vehemence to stay and teach theology that, as Calvin himself relates, he was terrified into submission. We are not accustomed to fancy the austere prophet so easily frightened. But as a student and recluse new to public responsibilities, he may well have hesitated before plunging into the troubled waters of Geneva, then at their stormiest period. No portrait of him belonging to this time is extant. Later he is represented as of middle height, with bent shoulders, piercing eyes, and a large forehead; his hair was of an auburn tinge. Study and fasting occasioned the severe headaches from which he suffered continually. In private life he was cheerful but sensitive, not to say overbearing, his friends treated him with delicate consideration. His habits were simple; he cared nothing for wealth, and he never allowed himself a holiday. His correspondence, of which 4271 letters remain, turns chiefly on doctrinal subjects. Yet his strong, reserved character told on all with whom he came in contact; Geneva submitted to his theocratic rule, and the Reformed Churches accepted his teaching as though it were infallible.

Such was the stranger whom Farel recommended to his fellow Protestants, "this Frenchman", chosen to lecture on the Bible in a city divided against itself. Geneva had about 15,000 inhabitants. Its bishop had long been its prince limited, however, by popular privileges. The vidomne, or mayor, was the Count of Savoy, and to his family the bishopric seemed a property which, from 1450, they bestowed on their younger children. John of Savoy, illegitimate son of the previous bishop, sold his rights to the duke, who was head of the clan, and died in 1519 at Pignerol. Jean de la Baume, last of its ecclesiastical princes, abandoned the city, which received Protestant teachers from Berne in 1519 and from Fribourg in 1526. In 1527 the

arms of Savoy were torn down; in 1530 the Catholic party underwent defeat, and Geneva became independent. It had two councils, but the final verdict on public measures rested with the people. These appointed Farel, a convert of Le Fevre, as their preacher in 1534. A discussion between the two Churches from 30 May to 24 June, 1535 ended in victory for the Protestants. The altars were desecrated, the sacred images broken, the Mass done away with. Bernese troops entered and "the Gospel" was accepted, 21 May, 1536. This implied persecution of Catholics by the councils which acted both as Church and State. Priests were thrown into prison; citizens were fined for not attending sermons. At Zürich, Basle, and Berne the same laws were established. Toleration did not enter into the ideas of the time.

But though Calvin had not introduced this legislation, it was mainly by his influence that in January, 1537 the "articles" were voted which insisted on communion four times a year, set spies on delinquents, established a moral censorship, and punished the unruly with excommunication. There was to be a children's catechism, which he drew up; it ranks among his best writings. The city now broke into "jurants" and "nonjurors" for many would not swear to the "articles"; indeed, they never were completely accepted. Questions had arisen with Berne touching points that Calvin judged to be indifferent. He made a figure in the debates at Lausanne defending the freedom of Geneva. But disorders ensued at home, where recusancy was yet rife; in 1538 the council exiled Farel, Calvin, and the blind evangelist, Couraud. The Reformer went to Strasburg, became the guest of Capito and Bucer, and in 1539 was explaining the New Testament to French refugees at fifty two florins a year. Cardinal Sadolet had addressed an open letter to the Genevans, which their exile now answered. Sadolet urged that schism was a crime;

Calvin replied that the Roman Church was corrupt. He gained applause by his keen debating powers at Hagenau, Worms, and Ratisbon. But he complains of his poverty and ill-health, which did not prevent him from marrying at this time Idelette de Bure, the widow of an Anabaptist whom he had converted. Nothing more is known of this lady, except that she brought him a son who died almost at birth in 1542, and that her own death took place in 1549.

After some negotiation Ami Perrin, commissioner for Geneva, persuaded Calvin to return. He did so, not very willingly, on 13 September, 1541. His entry was modest enough. The church constitution now recognized "pastors, doctors, elders, deacons" but supreme power was given to the magistrate. Ministers had the spiritual weapon of God's word; the consistory never, as such, wielded the secular arm Preachers, led by Calvin, and the councils, instigated by his opponents, came frequently into collision. Yet the ordinances of 1541 were maintained; the clergy, assisted by lay elders, governed despotically and in detail the actions of every citizen. A presbyterian Sparta might be seen at Geneva; it set an example to later Puritans, who did all in their power to imitate its discipline. The pattern held up was that of the Old Testament, although Christians were supposed to enjoy Gospel liberty. In November, 1552, the Council declared that Calvin's "Institutes" were a "holy doctrine which no man might speak against." Thus the State issued dogmatic decrees, the force of which had been anticipated earlier, as when Jacques Gouet was imprisoned on charges of impiety in June, 1547, and after severe torture was beheaded in July. Some of the accusations brought against the unhappy young man were frivolous, others doubtful. What share, if any, Calvin took in this judgment is not easy to ascertain. The execution of however must be laid at his door; it has given greater offence by far than the banishment of Castellio or the

penalties inflicted on Bolsec — moderate men opposed to extreme views in discipline and doctrine, who fell under suspicion as reactionary. The Reformer did not shrink from his self-appointed task. Within five years fifty-eight sentences of death and seventy-six of exile, besides numerous committals of the most eminent citizens to prison, took place in Geneva. The iron yoke could not be shaken off. In 1555, under Ami Perrin, a sort of revolt was attempted. No blood was shed, but Perrin lost the day, and Calvin's theocracy triumphed.

"I am more deeply scandalized", wrote Gibbon "at the single execution of Servetus than at the hecatombs which have blazed in the autos-da-fé of Spain and Portugal". He ascribes the enmity of Calvin to personal malice and perhaps envy. The facts of the case are pretty well ascertained. Born in 1511, perhaps at Tudela, Michael Served y Reves studied at Toulouse and was present in Bologna at the coronation of Charles V. He travelled in Germany and brought out in 1531 at Hagenau his treatise "De Trinitatis Erroribus", a strong Unitarian work which made much commotion among the more orthodox Reformers. He met Calvin and disputed with him at Paris in 1534, became corrector of the press at Lyons; gave attention to medicine, discovered the lesser circulation of the blood, and entered into a fatal correspondence with the dictator of Geneva touching a new volume "Christianismi Restitutio," which he intended to publish. In 1546 the exchange of letters ceased. The Reformer called Servetus arrogant (he had dared to criticize the "Institutes" in marginal glosses), and uttered the significant menace, "If he comes here and I have any authority, I will never let him leave the place alive." The "Restitutio" appeared in 1553. Calvin at once had its author delated to the Dominican inquisitor Ory at Lyons, sending on to him the man's letters of 1545-46 and these glosses. Hereupon the Spaniard was

imprisoned at Vienne, but he escaped by friendly connivance, and was burnt there only in effigy. Some extraordinary fascination drew him to Geneva, from which he intended to pass the Alps. He arrived on 13 August, 1553. The next day Calvin, who had remarked him at the sermon, got his critic arrested, the preacher's own secretary coming forward to accuse him. Calvin drew up forty articles of charge under three heads, concerning the nature of God, infant baptism, and the attack which Servetus had ventured on his own teaching. The council hesitated before taking a deadly decision, but the dictator, reinforced by Farel, drove them on. In prison the culprit suffered much and loudly complained. The Bernese and other Swiss voted for some indefinite penalty. But to Calvin his power in Geneva seemed lost, while the stigma of heresy; as he insisted, would cling to all Protestants if this innovator were not put to death. "Let the world see" Bullinger counselled him, "that Geneva wills the glory of Christ."

Accordingly, sentence was pronounced 26 October, 1553, of burning at the stake. "Tomorrow he dies," wrote Calvin to Farel. When the deed was done, the Reformer alleged that he had been anxious to mitigate the punishment, but of this fact no record appears in the documents. He disputed with Servetus on the day of execution and saw the end. A defence and apology next year received the adhesion of the Genevan ministers. Melanchthon, who had taken deep umbrage at the blasphemies of the Spanish Unitarian, strongly approved in well-known words. But a group that included Castellio published at Basle in 1554 a pamphlet with the title, "Should heretics be persecuted?" It is considered the first plea for toleration in modern times. Beza replied by an argument for the affirmative, couched in violent terms; and Calvin, whose favorite disciple he was, translated it into French in 1559. The dialogue,

"Vaticanus", written against the "Pope of Geneva" by Castellio, did not get into print until 1612. Freedom of opinion, as Gibbon remarks, "was the consequence rather than the design of the Reformation."

Another victim to his fiery zeal was Gentile, one of an Italian sect in Geneva, which also numbered among its adherents Alciati and Gribaldo. As more or less Unitarian in their views, they were required to sign a confession drawn up by Calvin in 1558. Gentile subscribed it reluctantly, but in the upshot he was condemned and imprisoned as a perjurer. He escaped only to be twice incarcerated at Berne, where in 1566, he was beheaded. Calvin's impassioned polemic against these Italians betrays fear of the Socinianism which was to lay waste his vineyard. Politically he leaned on the French refugees, now abounding in the city, and more than equal in energy — if not in numbers — to the older native factions. Opposition died out. His continual preaching, represented by 2300 sermons extant in the manuscripts and a vast correspondence, gave to the Reformer an influence without example in his closing years. He wrote to Edward VI, helped in revising the Book of Common Prayer, and intervened between the rival English parties abroad during the Marian period. In the Huguenot troubles he sided with the more moderate. His censure of the conspiracy of Amboise in 1560 does him honour. One great literary institution founded by him, the College, afterwards the University, of Geneva, flourished exceedingly. The students were mostly French. When Beza was rector it had nearly 1500 students of various grades.

Geneva now sent out pastors to the French congregations and was looked upon as the Protestant Rome. Through Knox, "the Scottish champion of the Swiss Reformation", who had been preacher to the exiles in that city, his native

land accepted the discipline of the Presbytery and the doctrine of predestination as expounded in Calvin's "Institutes". The Puritans in England were also descendants of the French theologian. His dislike of theatres, dancing and the amenities of society was fully shared by them. The town on Lake Leman was described as without crime and destitute of amusements. Calvin declaimed against the "Libertines", but there is no evidence that any such people had a footing inside its walls The cold, hard, but upright disposition characteristic of the Reformed Churches, less genial than that derived from Luther, is due entirely to their founder himself. Its essence is a concentrated pride, a love of disputation, a scorn of opponents. The only art that it tolerates is music, and that not instrumental. It will have no Christian feasts in its calendar, and it is austere to the verge of Manichaean hatred of the body. When dogma fails the Calvinist, he becomes, as in the instance of Carlyle, almost a pure Stoic. "At Geneva, as for a time in Scotland," says J. A. Froude, "moral sins were treated as crimes to be punished by the magistrate." The Bible was a code of law, administered by the clergy. Down to his dying day Calvin preached and taught. By no means an aged man, he was worn out in these frequent controversies. On 25 April, 1564, he made his will, leaving 225 French crowns, of which he bequeathed ten to his college, ten to the poor, and the remainder to his nephews and nieces. His last letter was addressed to Farel. He was buried without pomp, in a spot which is not now ascertainable. In the year 1900 a monument of expiation was erected to Servetus in the Place Champel. Geneva has long since ceased to be the head of Calvinism. It is a rallying point for Free Thought, Socialist propaganda, and Nihilist conspiracies. But in history it stands out as the Sparta of the Reformed churches, and Calvin is its Lycurgus.

COMMENTARIES ON HABAKKUK, ZEPHANIAH, HAGGAI

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THE present Volume, though it contains the Works of THESE PROPHETS, is yet considerably smaller in size than the preceding Volumes; but the last will more than compensate for this deficiency.

The two first Prophets, HABAKKUK and ZEPHANIAH, lived before the Captivity; and the other, HAGGAI began his prophetic office about sixteen years after the return of the great body of the people from Babylon by the permission given them by King Cyrus.

It is commonly thought that HABBAKUK prophesied *after* ZEPHANIAH, though placed before him in our Bibles. The reign of JEHOIAKIN is assigned as his age, about 608 years before Christ, while Zephaniah performed his office in the reign of JOSIAH, about 30 years earlier. Like the other prophets he is mainly engaged in reproving the extreme wickedness of the people, on account of which he denounces on them the judgments of God, while he gives occasional intimations of a better state of things, and affords some glimpses of the blessings of the gospel.

In the *first* CHAPTER he begins with a complaint as to the oppression which he witnessed, foretells the dreadful invasion of the CHALDEANS, describes the severity which would be exercised by them, and appeals to God on the subject. In the *second* he waits for an answer, receives it,

and predicts the downfal of the Chaldeans, and refers to blessings in reserve for God's people. The *third* contains what is called the "Prayer of Habakkuk," an ode of a singular character, in which he briefly describes, for the encouragement of the faithful, the past interpositions of God on behalf of his people, and concludes with expressing a full and joyful confidence in God, notwithstanding' the evils which were coming on the nation.

"The style of HABAKKUK," Says Bishop *Lowth,* "is poetical, especially in his Ode, which may justly be deemed one of the most complete of its kind."[fh1a] And in *describing* the character of this ode he says — "The Prophet indeed embellishes the whole of this poem with a magnificence equal to its commencement, selecting from so great an abundance of wonderful events the grandest, and setting them forth in the most splendid dress, by images and figures, and the most elevated diction; the high sublimity of which he augments and *enhances* by the *elegance* of a *remarkable conclusion:* so that hardly any thing of this kind would be more beautiful or more perfect than this poem, were it not for one or two spots of obscurity which are to be found in it, occasioned, as it seems, by its ancientness."[fh1b]

ZEPHANIAH was in part contemporary with JEREMIAH, that is, during the former portion of the reign of JOSIAH. He foretells the FALL OF NINEVEH, (Zephaniah 2:13,) and mentions "the remnant of Baal," (Zephaniah 1:4,) two things which prove that he prophesied during the former half of that king's reign; for NINEVEH was destroyed about the sixteenth year of his reign, and it was after that time that the worship of Baal was demolished by that king.

The sins of THE JEWS and their approaching judgments occupy *the first* Chapter. The *second* contains an exhortation to Repentance, encouraged by a promise of protection during the evils that God would bring on neighboring nations. In the *third* the Prophet particularizes the sins of JERUSALEM, announces its punishment, and then refers to the future blessings which God would freely confer on His Church.

The style of ZEPHANIAH has been represented as being in some parts prosaic; and *Lowth* says that "he seems to possess nothing remarkable or superior in the arrangement of his matter or in the elegance of his diction."[fh1c] But it is *Henderson's* opinion that *"many* of the censures that have been passed on his language are either without foundation or much exaggerated." He appears to be as poetic in his ideas as most of the Prophets, and in the manner in which he arranges them, though he deals not much in parallelisms, which constitute a prominent feature in Hebrew poetry.

The matters handled by the Prophet are said by *Marckius* to be "most worthy of God, whether we regard His serious reproofs or His severe threatenings, or His kind warnings, or His gracious promises, which especially appertain to the dispensation of the New Testament. In all these particulars he not only agrees with the other prophets, but also adopts their expressions."[fh1d] He then gives the following examples: —

Zephaniah 1:6 compared with Jeremiah 15:6.

Zephaniah 1:15 compared with Joel 2:1, 2.

Zephaniah 1:18 compared with Ezekiel 7:19, and Jeremiah 4:27.

Zephaniah 2:8, 9 compared with Jeremiah 48:2, and Ezekiel 25:1.

Zephaniah 3:3, 4 compared with Ezekiel 22:26, 27, 28, etc.

It does not appear at what time HAGGAI returned from exile, though probably at the first return of the Jews under ZERUBBABEL, before Christ 536. But he did not commence his prophetic office till about sixteen years after; and he delivered what his Book contains in the space of *three* months. His messages, which are *five,*[fh1e]are very short; and hence some have concluded that they are but summaries of what he had delivered.

Much of this Book is historical, interspersed with what is conveyed in a poetic style. The Prophet, in the *first* Chapter, remonstrates with the people, who were very attentive to their own private concerns, but neglected to build the Lord’s Temple; he refers to the judgments with which they had been visited on this account, encourages them to undertake the work, and promises them the favor of God; and then he tells us of his success. In the *second* Chapter he removes an apparent ground of discouragement, the temple then in building being not so splendid as the former, and promises an additional glory to it, evidently referring to the Gospel times. He then warns them against relaxing in their work and thinking it enough merely to offer sacrifices, assures them of God’s blessing, and concludes with a special promise to Zerubbabel.

What Lowth says of this Prophet's style, that *"it* is altogether prosaic," is not strictly true; for there are some parts highly poetical. See Haggai 1:6, and from 8 to 11 inclusive. "The style of HAGGAI*,"* observes *Henderson,* "is not distinguished by any peculiar excellence; yet he is not destitute of pathos and vehemence, when reproving his countrymen for their negligence, exhorting them to the performance of duty."

Though in some instances our COMMENTATOR may not give the precise import of a passage, yet he never advances but what is consistent with Divine Truth, and always useful and practical, and often what betokens a profound acquaintance with the operations of the human mind under the various trials and temptations which we meet with in this life; so that the observations made are ever interesting and instructive. CALVIN never deduces from a passage what is in itself erroneous or unsound, though in all cases he may not deduce what the text may legitimately warrant. There is, therefore, nothing dangerous in what he advances, though it. may not be included in the passage explained. But for the most part his application of doctrine is what may be fully justified, and is often very striking, and calculated to instruct and edify.

Some may think that our Author does not always give that full range of meaning to the promises and predictions which he explains. A reason for this may probably be found in the fact, that most of the Commentators who had preceded him had indulged in very great extravagancies on the subject; and a reaction generally drives men to an opposite extreme. But it is very seldom that CALVIN can be justly charged with a fault of this kind; for, entertaining the profoundest veneration for the Word of God, he strictly followed what he conceived the words imported, and what he apprehended to be the general drift of a passage.

Possibly, in the estimation of those who possess a very vivid imagination, he may be thought to have kept too closely to what the text and the context require; but in explaining the Divine Oracles, nothing is more to be avoided than to let loose the imagination, and nothing is more necessary than to possess a sound judgment, and to exercise it in the fear of God, and with prayer for His guidance and direction.

J.O.
THRUSSINGTON
October 1848.

CALVIN'S PREFACE TO HABAKKUK

Now follows THE PROPHET HABAKKUK; [fh1] but the time in which he discharged his office of a Teacher is not quite certain. The Hebrews, according to their usual manner, unhesitatingly assert that he prophesied under the king MANASSEH; but this conjecture is not well founded. We are however led to think that this prophecy was announced when the contumacy of the people had become irreclaimable. It is indeed probable, from the complaint which we shall have presently to notice, that the people had previously given many proofs of irremediable wickedness. To me it appears evident that the Prophet was sent, when others had in vain endeavored to correct the wickedness of the people. But as he denounces an approaching judgement on the CHALDEANS, he seems to have prophesied either under Manasseh or under the other kings before the time of ZEDECHIAH; but we cannot fix the exact time. [fh2]

The substance of the Book may be thus stated: — In the First chapter he complains of the rebellious obstinacy of the people, and deplores the corruptions which then prevailed; he then appears as the herald of God, and warns the Jews of their approaching ruin; he afterwards applies consolation, as God would punish the Chaldeans when their pride became intolerable. In the second chapter he exhorts the godly to patience by his own example, and speaks at large of the near ruin of Babylon; and in the third chapter, as we shall see, he turns to supplication and prayer.

We shall now come to the words.

CHAPTER 1

LECTURE ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTH.

HABAKKUK 1:1

1. The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. **1.** Onus quod vidit Chabakuk Propheta.

THE greater part of interpreters refer this burden to the Chaldeans and the monarchy of Babylon; but of this view I do not approve, and a good reason compels me to dissent from their opinion: for as the Prophet addresses the Jews, and without any addition calls his prophecy a burden, there is no doubt but that he refers to them. Besides, their view seems wholly inconsistent, because the Prophet dreads the future devastation of the land, and complains to God for allowing His chosen and elect people to be so cruelly treated. What others think is more correct — that this burden belonged to the Jews.

What the Prophet understood by the word açm, *mesha*, has been elsewhere stated. Habakkuk then reproves here his own nation, and shows that they had in vain disdainfully resisted all God’s prophets, for they would at length find that their threatening would be accomplished. The burden, then, which the Prophet Habakkuk saw, was this — That God, after having exercised long forbearance towards the Jews, would at length be the punisher of their many sins. It now follows —

HABAKKUK 1:2, 3

2. O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! **2.** Quousque, Jehova, clamabo, et non exaudies? Vociferabor ad te ob violentiam, et non servabis?

3. Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. **3.** Quare ostendis mihi iniquitatem, et moestiam aspicere facis? Et direptio et violentia in conspectu meo? et est qui litem et contentionem excitet.

As I have already reminded you, interpreters think that the Prophet speaks here of future things, as though he had in his view the calamity which he afterwards mentions; but this is too strained a meaning; I therefore doubt not but that the Prophet expostulates here with God for so patiently indulging a reprobate people. For though the Prophets felt a real concern for the safety of the people, there is yet no doubt but that they burned with zeal for the glory of God; and when they saw that they had to contend with refractory men, they were then inflamed with a holy displeasure, and undertook the cause of God; and they implored His aid to bring a remedy when the state of things had become desperate. I therefore consider that the Prophet here solicits God to visit these many sins in which the people had hardened themselves. And hence we conclude that he had previously exercised his office of a teacher; for it would have been otherwise improper for him to begin his work with such a complaint and expostulation. He had then by experience found that the people were extremely perverse. When he saw that there was no hope of amendment, and that the state of things was becoming daily worse, burning with zeal for God, he gave full vent to

his feelings. Before, then, he threatens the people with the future vengeance of God, he withdraws himself, as it were, from intercourse with men, and in private addresses God himself.

We must bear this first in mind, that the Prophet relates here the secret colloquy he had with God: but it ought not to be ascribed to an unfeeling disposition, that in these words he wished to hasten God's vengeance against his own kindred; for it behaved the Prophet not only to be solicitous for the salvation of the people, but also to feel a concern for the glory of God, yea, to burn with a holy zeal. As, then, he had in vain labored for a length of time, I doubt not but that, being as it were far removed from the presence of all witnesses, he here asks God, how long he purposed thus to bear with the wickedness of the people. We now apprehend the design of the Prophet and the import of his words.

But he says first, *How long, Jehovah, shall I cry, and thou hearest not? How long shall I cry to thee for violence, that is, on account of violence, and thou savest not?* We hence learn, that the Prophet had often prayed God to correct the people for their wickedness, or to contrive some means to prevent so much licentiousness in sinning. It is indeed probable that the Prophet had prayed as long as there was any hope; but when he saw that things were past recovery, he then prayed more earnestly that God would undertake the office of a judge, and chastise the people. For though the Prophet really condoled with those who perished, and was touched, as I have said, with a serious concern for their public safety, he yet preferred the glory of God: when, therefore, he saw that boldness in sin increased through impunity, and that the Jews in a manlier mocked God when they found that they could sin without being punished, he could not endure such unbridled wantonness. Besides, the

Prophet may have spoken thus, not only as expressing his own feeling, but what he felt in common with all the godly; as though he had undertaken here a public duty, and utters a complaint common to all the faithful: for it is probable that all the godly, in so disordered a state of things, mourned alike. *How long, then, shall I cry? How long, he says, shall I cry on account of violence?* that is, When all things are in disorder, when there is now no regard for equity and justice, but men abandon themselves, as it were with loose reins, unto all kinds of wickedness, how long, Lord, wilt thou take no notice? But in these words the Prophet not only egresses his own feelings, but makes this kind of preface, that the Jews might better understand that the time of vengeance was come; for they were become not only altogether intolerable to God, but also to his servants. God indeed had suspended his judgement, though he had been often solicited to execute it by his Prophet. It hence appears, that their wickedness had made such advances that it would be no wonder if they were now severely chastised by the Lord; for they had by their sins not only provoked him against them, but also all the godly and the faithful.

He afterwards adds, *How long wilt thou show me iniquity, and make me to see trouble?* Here the Prophet briefly relates the cause of his indignation, — that he could not, without great grief, yea, without anguish of mind, behold such evils prevailing among God’s chosen people; for they who apply this to the Chaldeans, do so strainedly, and without any necessity, and they have not observed the reason which I have stated — that the Prophet does not here teach the Jews, but prepares them for a coming judgement, as they could not but see that they were justly condemned, since they were proved guilty by the cry and complaints made by all the godly.

Now this passage teaches us, that all who really serve and love God, ought, according to the Prophet's example, to burn with holy indignation whenever they see wickedness reigning without restraint among men, and especially in the Church of God. There is indeed nothing which ought to cause us more grief than to see men raging with profane contempt for God, and no regard had for his law and for divine truth, and all order trodden under foot. When therefore such a confusion appears to us, we must feel roused, if we have in us any spark of religion. If it be objected, that the Prophet exceeded moderation, the obvious answer is this, — that though he freely pours forth his feelings, there was nothing wrong in this before God, at least nothing wrong is imputed to him: for wherefore do we pray, but that each of us may unburden his cares, his griefs, and anxieties, by pouring them into the bosom of God? Since, then, God allows us to deal so familiarly with him, nothing wrong ought to be ascribed to our prayers when we thus freely pour forth our feelings, provided the bridle of obedience keeps us always within due limits, as was the case with the Prophet; for it is certain that he was retained under the influence of real kindness. Jeremiah did indeed pray with unrestrained fervor (Jeremiah 15:10): but his case was different from that of our Prophet; for he proceeds not here to an excess, as Jeremiah did when he cursed the day of his birth, and when he expostulated with God for being made a man of contention. But our Prophet undertakes here the defense of justice; for he could not endure the law of God to be made a sport, and men to allow themselves every liberty in sinning.

We now, then, see that the Prophet can be justly excused, though he expostulates here with God, for God does not condemn this freedom in our prayers; but, on the contrary, the end of praying is, that every one of us pour forth, as it is said in the Psalms, his heart before God. As, then, we

communicate our cares and sorrows to God, it is no wonder that the Prophet, according to the manner of men, says, Why dost thou show me iniquity, and make me to see trouble? Trouble is to be taken here in an active sense, and the verb mybt, *tabith*, has a transitive meaning. [fh3] Some render it, Why dost thou look on trouble? as though the Prophet indignantly bore the connivance of God. But the context necessarily requires that this verb should be taken in a transitive sense. “Why dost thou show me iniquity?” and then, “and makest me to look on violence?” He says afterwards, in the third place, in my sight is violence. But I have said, that the word trouble is to be taken actively; for the prophet means not that he was worn out with weariness, but that wicked men were troublesome to the good and the innocent, as it is usually the case when a freedom in sinning prevails.

And *why*, he says, *are violence and plunder in my sight? and there is he who excites, etc.?* The verb açn, *nusha* means not here to undertake, as some render it; but, on the contrary, to raise. Others render it, “Who supports,” but this is frigid. Therefore the translation which I have stated is the most suitable — *And why is there one who excites strife and contention?*

But the Prophet here accuses them only of sins against the second table of the law: he speaks not of the superstitions of people, and of the corrupted worship of God; but he briefly says, that they had no regard for what was just and right: for the stronger any one was, the more he distressed the helpless and the innocent. It was then for this reason that he mentioned iniquity, trouble, plunder, violence, contention, strife. In short, the Prophet here deplores, that there was now no equity and no brotherly kindness among

the people, but that robberies, rapines, and tyrannical violence prevailed everywhere. It follows —

HABAKKUK 1:4

4. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgement doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgement proceedeth. **4.** Propterea dissolvitur (*vel*, debilitatur) lex, et non egredietur perpetuo judicium (*vel*, non egreditur:) quia impius circumdat justum, propterea impius circumdat justum, propterea egredietur judicium perversum.

The Prophet confirms here what I have already said, and brings an excuse for his zeal; he proves that he was not without reason led to so great a warmth; for he saw that the law of God was trodden as it were under foot; he saw men so hardened in every kind of sin, that all religion and the fear of God had nearly been extinguished. Hence I have already said, that the Prophet was not here impelled by a carnal passion, as it often happens to us, when we defend ourselves from wrongs done to us; for when any one of us is injured, he immediately becomes incensed, while, at the same time, we suffer God's law to be a sport, His whole truth to be despised, and everything that is just to be violated. We are only tender on what concerns us individually, and in the meantime we easily forgive when God is wronged, and His truth despised. But the Prophet shows here that he was not made indignant through a private feeling, but because he could not bear the profanation of God's worship and the violation of His holy law.