

# **“GOD AND THE TOLERATION OF EVIL”**

## **A STUDY IN HABAKKUK**

### Background Information on Habakkuk

#### I. Author

##### A. Habakkuk

1. Babylonian name, possibly meaning a type of garden plant
2. Contemporary of Jeremiah (Cf. Jer. 8:13, 51:58, 12:13, 33:3)

B. Habakkuk is also referenced in Apocryphal book, Bel and the Dragon

#### II. Date

##### A. As applied in reference to the Babylonian Empire

1. Nebuchadnezzar advanced against Judah about 600 BC
2. Dated around Battle of Carchemish (@ 605 BC)
  - a. Egyptian forces (allied with the Assyrians) defeated by Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar
  - b. Cf. Jeremiah 46

B. As applied to time of Josiah and Jehoiakim (Probably, shortly before 600 BC)

#### III. Occasion

##### A. The “Kings”

1. King Josiah
  - a. II Kings 22:1-23:30; II Chronicles 34:1-36:1
  - b. Jeremiah was the major prophet to Judah during this time
2. King Jehoahaz (II Kings 23:31-35; II Chronicles 36:2-4)
3. King Jehoiakim (II Kings 23:36-24:7; II Chronicles 36:5-8)

##### B. God and Habakkuk

1. Judah’s sinful rebellion resulted in God bringing the Babylonians as His rod of punishment.
2. Habakkuk’s complaints bring forth a discussion between himself and God about God’s justice and His mysterious providence over the affairs of man.<sup>1</sup>

#### IV. Historical Context of Babylonian Empire

A. Reference - (1:6) – “I am raising up the Babylonians ...” (Cf. Deut. 28:49 ff.)

##### B. Background Information on Babylon:

1. Synonymous with “Chaldeans”
2. Babylon was located in southern Mesopotamia on Euphrates River (@ 56 miles south of current city of Baghdad).
3. During Neo-Babylonian Empire period, it was largest city in the known world, covering @ 2500 acres.

---

<sup>1</sup> Think of Habakkuk as a “mini-Job” or the Cliff Notes Version of Job.

- C. Nebuchadnezzar:
1. II Kings 24:1-25:30; II Chronicles 36:6-21; Book of Daniel
  2. Son of Nabopolassar who had freed Babylon from Assyrian domination
  3. Ruled 605-562 BC
  4. Military accomplishments included establishing Babylon as the most powerful empire of its time
  5. Non-military accomplishments included:
    - a. Built structures with kiln-fired bricks (vs. the common way of using sun-dried bricks)
    - b. Allegedly built the "Hanging Gardens of Babylon" as a gift to his wife (one of 7 Wonders of Ancient World)
    - c. Built and remodeled various structures throughout Babylon, including a stone bridge across Euphrates River
- D. Babylon:
1. Center of Old Babylonian Empire under Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC)
  2. Destroyed by Hittites, circa 1531 BC
  3. Restored during reign of Nabopolassar, circa 625 BC
  4. Encompassed @ 2100 acres and walls surrounding the city that had a total depth of 57 feet
  5. Captured by Xerxes in 482 BC
  6. City where Alexander the Great died
  7. Fall of Babylon
    - a. Most well-known account is from Herodotus, a Greek historian (480-425 BC)
    - b. Some believe Cyrus diverted up the Euphrates and had his forces "wade in" the shallower areas and invade the city.
- E. The Chaldeans:
1. Semi-nomadic group first mentioned by historians circa 9<sup>th</sup> century BC
  2. "Chaldeans" and "Babylonian" became synonymous (Isa. 47:1; Dan. 9:1)
  3. Chaldean accomplishments:
    - a. Babylon became a learning center, and as a result, "Chaldean" came to stand for any type of specialty learners including priests, astrology and other educated classes.
    - b. Aramaic language began during their influence.
    - c. Ruthless for military exploits and as a result, a ruthlessness which historians believe the Babylonians also inherited / practiced
      - 1) Treatment of enemies captured in battle<sup>2</sup>
      - 2) Assimilation of captives
      - 3) Cf. Jonah's **fearful** reaction when commissioned by God (Jonah 1:1-3)

---

<sup>2</sup> E.g., the Assyrians would decapitate their captives and stack the skulls outside the city gates as a warning to those who would oppose them.

## Key Words and Phrases

1. "Animal" references:
  - a. Horses (1:8a; 3:8b; 3:15)
  - b. Leopards (1:8a)
  - c. Wolves (1:8a)
  - d. Vulture (1:8b)
  - e. Fish in the sea (1:14a)
  - f. Sea creatures (1:14b)
  - g. Sheep (3:17b)
  - h. Cattle (3:17b)
  - i. Deer (3:19)
  
2. "Geography / Topography" references:
  - a. Earth (1:6b; 2:14; 2:20; 3:3b; 3:6a; 3:9a; 3:12a)
  - b. Sea (1:14; 3:15)
  - c. Lands (2:8b; 2:17b)
  - d. Cities (2:8b; 2:17b)
  - e. Mountains (3:6b; 3:10a)
  - f. Hills (3:6b)
  - g. Rivers (3:8a; 3:9a)
  - h. Streams (3:8a)
  - i. "The deep" (3:10a)
  - j. "The great waters" (3:15)
  - k. "The heights" (3:19b)
  
3. "Military" references:
  - a. "Calvary gallops headlong" (1:8b)
  - b. "Horsemen" (1:8b)
  - c. "Hordes advance" (1:9a)
  - d. "Build earthen ramps and capture (cities)" (1:10b)
  - e. "Destroying nations" (1:17)
  - f. "Station ... on the ramparts" (2:1)
  - g. "Takes captive all the peoples" (2:5b)
  - h. "Plundered many nations" (2:8a)
  - i. "Destroyed lands and cities" (2:8b)
  - j. "Destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them" (2:17b)
  - k. "You rode with your horses" (3:8b)
  - l. "Your victorious chariots" (3:8b)
  - m. "Uncovered your bow and called for many arrows" (3:9)
  - n. "Your flying arrows" (3:11)
  - o. "Your flashing spear" (3:11)

3. "Military" references (Cont.):
  - p. "His own spear" (3:14a)
  - q. "His warriors stormed out" (3:14a)
  - r. "Trampled the sea with your horses" (3:15a)
  - s. "The nation invading us" (3:16b)
  
4. Nation, Geographical, etc. references:
  - a. Babylonians (1:6)
  - b. Lebanon (2:17)
  - c. Teman (3:3)
  - d. Mount Paran (3:3)
  - e. Cushan (3:7)
  - f. Midian (3:7)
  
5. References to God:
  - a. Lord (1:2, 1:12a, 1:12b, 2:2, 2:14, 2:20, 3:2a, 3:2b, 3:8, 3:18)
  - b. God (1:12, 3:3)
  - c. Holy One (1:12, 3:3)
  - d. Rock (1:12c)
  - e. The Lord Almighty (2:13)
  - f. God, my Savior (3:18)
  - g. Sovereign Lord (3:19)
  
6. "Negative" references: (Note: 65 negative words and phrases in 56 verses)
  - a. "Violence" (1:2, 1:3b, 1:9, 2:17)
  - b. "Injustice" (1:3a)
  - c. "Wrong" (1:3a, 1:13)
  - d. "Destruction" (1:3b, 2:17)
  - e. "Strife" (1:3b)
  - f. "Conflict" (1:3b)
  - g. "Wicked" (1:4b, 1:13b, 1:15a, 3:13b)
  - h. "Perverted" (1:4b)
  - i. "Ruthless" (1:6)
  - j. "Impetuous" (1:6)
  - k. "Feared" (1:7)
  - l. "Dreaded" (1:7)
  - m. "Fiercer" (1:8)
  - n. "Prisoners" (1:9)
  - o. "Deride" (1:10)
  - p. "Scoff" (1:10)
  - q. "Guilty" (1:11)
  - r. "Punish" (1:12)

6. "Negative" references (cont.):
- s. "Evil" (1:13)
  - t. "Treacherous" (1:13)
  - u. "Destroy" (1:17, 2:8b, 2:17c)
  - v. "Without mercy" (1:17)
  - w. "Puffed up" (2:4)
  - x. "Arrogant" (2:5a)
  - y. "Greedy" (2:5b)
  - z. "Takes captive" (2:5c)
  - aa. "Taunt" (2:6a)
  - bb. "Ridicule" (2:6a)
  - cc. "Scorn" (2:6a)
  - dd. "Stolen goods" (2:6b)
  - ee. "Extortion" (2:6b)
  - ff. "Tremble" (2:7a)
  - gg. "Victim" (2:7b)
  - hh. "Plundered" (2:8a)
  - ii. "Shed man's blood" (2:8b, 2:17c)
  - jj. "Unjust gain" (2:9a)
  - kk. "Ruin" (2:9b, 2:10a)
  - ll. "Shame" (2:10b, 2:16)
  - mm. "Forfeit" (2:10b)
  - nn. "Bloodshed" (2:12)
  - oo. "Crime" (2:12)
  - pp. "Drunk" (2:15b)
  - qq. "Disgrace" (2:16b)
  - rr. "Terrify" (2:17b)
  - ss. "Lies" (2:18a)
  - tt. "Wrath" (3:3, 3:8a, 3:12)
  - uu. "Plague" (3:5)
  - vv. "Pestilence" (3:5)
  - ww. "Crumbled" (3:6)
  - xx. "Collapsed" (3:6)
  - yy. "Distress" (3:7)
  - zz. "Anguish" (3:7)
  - aaa. "Angry" (3:8b, 3:12)
  - bbb. "Rage" (3:8c)
  - ccc. "Crushed" (3:13b)
  - ddd. "Pierced" (3:14)
  - eee. "Gloating" (3:14b)
  - fff. "Devour" (3:14b)
  - ggg. "Wretched" (3:14b)

6. "Negative" references (cont.):
  - hhh. "Quivered" (3:16)
  - iii. "Decay" (3:16)
  - jjj. "Trembled" (3:16)
  - kkk. "Calamity" (3:16b)
  - lll. "Invading" (3:16b)
  - mmm. "Fails" (3:17b)
  
7. References similar to Jeremiah:
  - a. Hab. 1:5 and Jer. 33:3
  - b. Hab. 2:13 and Jer. 51:58
  - c. Hab. 2:13 and Jer. 12:13
  - d. Hab. 3:17 and Jer. 8:13
  
8. "Famous Phrases" from Habakkuk:
  - a. (2:4) – "The righteous will live by faith"
  - b. (2:14) – "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord"
  - c. (2:20) – "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him"
  - d. (3:3) – "But God came from Teman"
  - e. (3:17-19) – "Though the fig tree does not bud ..."
  
9. Use of the word "Woe":<sup>3</sup>
  - a. (2:6) – "Woe to him who piles up stolen goods ..."
  - b. (2:9) – "Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain ..."
  - c. (2:12) – "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed ..."
  - d. (2:15) – "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors ..."
  - e. (2:19) – "Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!'"

---

<sup>3</sup> These were all spoken in reference to the Babylonians and the woes that were to come upon them.

## Outline and Study Notes

- I. Man's Dilemma: "Why Does God Tolerate Wrong?" (1:1-4)<sup>4</sup>
- A. "How long ... must I call for help but you do not listen?" (2a)<sup>5</sup>
1. A common question to God
    - a. A plea for the removal of a personal bout of suffering we are facing
    - b. Cf. Ps. 6:3, 13:1-2, 89:46; Isa. 6:11; Zech. 1:12
  2. "You do not listen"
    - a. A common accusation made against God (Cf. Ps. 10:1, 13:1-2, 22:1-2; Matt. 27:46)
    - b. God "not responding" with the answer we desire is often equated with "not listening".
    - c. Q: "Could God still be listening even though He does not answer us immediately or give us the answer we desire?"
    - d. Cf. how we often tell people "I hear what you are saying", but that does not mean we agree with them or will grant their requests.
- B. "(How long must I) cry out to you 'Violence' but you do not save?" (2b)
1. The 'violence' was probably the result of the evil that was being perpetrated by the wicked leaders of Judah.
  2. "Save" – yâsha' - "To defend, deliver or preserve; to provide victory"
  3. We are not always "protected" by God from the wicked behavior of others towards us.
    - a. God often uses wicked people as His method of discipline in order that we may share in His holiness (Cf. Heb. 12:10-12)
    - b. Cf. how God used Pharaoh (Rom. 9:6-17); Joseph's brothers (Gen. 50:19-20); Persecutors of the early church (Acts 8:1-4)
- C. "Why do you make me look at injustice?" (3a)
1. "Injustice" – 'âven – "Originally, to exert oneself in vain; later, as a reference to wickedness or idols"
  2. The injustice Habakkuk is referring to is probably that perpetrated by King Jehoiakim, under whose reign he was living (Cf. Jer. 22).
    - a. We must often live under the wickedness and injustice of rulers (Eccl. 5:8-9)
    - b. "How to live" under unjust rulers – Rom. 13:1-7; Titus 3:1-2

---

<sup>4</sup> (1) – "Oracle" – maśśâ' – "A burden, tribute or utterance; chiefly of doom" (Cf. Nahum 1:1)

<sup>5</sup> "How long, O Lord ..." – "The continuance of evil unchecked is an anomaly in the prophet's eye." – Pulpit Commentary

- D. "Why do you tolerate wrong?"<sup>6</sup> (3b)
1. "Tolerate" – nâbaṭ – "To scan or regard with pleasure" – Strong's
    - a. "Why do you cause me to see evil while you look at trouble?" – LEB
    - b. See v.13 – We believe God should not tolerate wrong, but here is a situation where He apparently does! (Cf. Job 21:7-15; Ps. 73)
  2. "Wrongs" that Habakkuk was forced to observe:<sup>7</sup>
    - a. Destruction and violence ["Destruction" - shôd shôd – "Desolation, oppression, robbery; violent treatment causing desolation"]
    - b. Strife and conflict
      - 1) "I am surrounded by people who love to argue and fight." – NLT
      - 2) Ps. 55:9-11, 120:6-7; Micah 7:1-7; II Pet. 2:8<sup>8</sup>
      - 3) Cf. the difficulty in watching strife between countries; within the USA; or between individuals and wondering why there can't be peace
    - c. The law is paralyzed
      - 1) "Paralyzed" – pûg – "To be slack or sluggish, feeble, not be put into execution; to be chilled or numbed; Cf. Gen. 45:26 – 'Jacob was *stunned*'"
      - 2) When the law is not put into effect against offenders or is "slack" when it comes to dealing with the oppressed, "it loses its authority and secures no respect". (JFB)
      - 3) "... the Law ought to be a bond of security and social welfare ..." – Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers
    - d. Justice never prevails
      - 1) "Never" – in the sense that it is much more likely that justice *will not be served* rather than it will be meted out correctly.
      - 2) Ps. 58:1-2, 82:1-5, 119:126; Isa. 1:21-23, 29:20-21, 59:12-15; Amos 5:7, 10-12; James 2:1-13
    - e. The wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted
      - 1) "Hem in" – kâthar – "To surround or compass about so as to besiege in a hostile way"
      - 2) As long as wicked people outnumber righteous people (which has been and always will be true), justice (for everyone – not just the righteous) will be perverted.
      - 3) It is folly to expect justice in this world from other men, magistrates, public officials, etc. (Cf. Ezek. 9:9 – "... the city is full of injustice ...")
      - 4) "(Justice) is either not done at all or done badly and perversely." – JFB

---

<sup>6</sup> The question for the ages: "Why does God allow evil to exist?"

<sup>7</sup> These "wrongs" possibly took place during Jehoiakim's reign (Cf. Jer. 22:13-23, 26:20-23, 36:1-32; II Kings 23:36-24:7; II Chronicles 36:5-8)

<sup>8</sup> Micah 7:7 – My solution as I observe all the injustice, hatred and bitterness that surrounds me: "I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me."



## II. God's Answer: "Look and Watch" (1:5-11)

### A. "Look, watch and be amazed"<sup>9</sup>

1. "Amazed" – tâmahh – "To be in consternation, to marvel or wonder"
2. What God was about to do with the Babylonian invasion would be a marvel, not in a positive sense, but in an overpowering sense.
3. Cf. Isa. 29:13-14

### B. "I Am going to do something you would not believe even if someone told you"<sup>10</sup>

1. "... it was done according to the will of God, and by his direction, he giving success; and, being thus declared, was a certain thing, and might be depended on, nothing should hinder it; and it should be done speedily, in that generation, some then living should see it; though the thing was so amazing and incredible, that they would not believe it ever would be ..." – Gill's Exposition
2. Cf. Jer. 25:32; Acts 13:40-41

### C. "I Am raising up the Babylonians"<sup>11</sup>

1. Ruthless and impetuous – "Bitter and hasty" (KJV); "Rough and violent" (Keil and ...)
  - a. "They sweep across the whole earth." (Some historians believe they had already subdued much of Asia, Syria and even parts of Africa. Some commentators believe that they were not perceived to be a threat to Judah at this time.)
  - b. "They seize dwellings not their own." (Cf. Jer. 5:14-17)
  - c. "As the least significant occurrence (Matt. 10:29), so the most momentous, cannot happen without the Divine permission. The Supreme is behind all second causes. He regulates the rise and fall of nations and kings (Job 12:23; Ps. 75:7), the ebb and flow of ocean (Job 38:11), the movements of the heavenly bodies (Job 38:31-33), the growth and decay of flowers (Isa. 40:7). When Nineveh is overthrown and Babylon raised up, Jehovah, unseen but all-powerful, is the prime Mover. When Judah or Israel is chastised, it is Jehovah's hand that holds the rod." – Pulpit Commentary
2. Feared and dreaded<sup>12</sup>
  - a. A law to themselves – the Babylonians didn't seek anyone's counsel or advice about how they were to function as a country, army, etc. Their terms were non-negotiable.
  - b. Promote their own honor, i.e., "their dignity shall proceed from themselves" (LEB)
3. The qualities of their armies:
  - a. Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk, i.e., like wolves who have not eaten all day (Cf. Jer. 4:13).

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Acts 13:41

<sup>10</sup> Note use of the phrase "I Am". If the "I Am" is in charge, there is no need to panic. He is in control.

<sup>11</sup> God has always used those who are not His children to accomplish His will, e.g., Pharaoh, Cyrus, Nebuchadnezzar, Balaam, etc. (Cf. Deut. 28:49-52; II Kings 24:1-4; Rom. 9:14-18; II Chron. 36:22-23).

<sup>12</sup> Any person or country that does not feel any sense of accountability or responsibility to others should be feared and dreaded.

- b. Their cavalry gallops headlong:
  - 1) Their horsemen come from afar.
  - 2) They fly like a vulture, swooping to devour (Cf. Deut. 28:49).
  - 3) They all come bent on violence, i.e., violence is their purpose.
- c. Their hordes advance like a desert wind.
- d. (They) gather prisoners like sand.
  - 1) The Babylonians, unlike the Assyrians, would take prisoners back to their homeland with them and incorporate them into their own culture.
  - 2) See Dan. 1:1-7
- 4. Deride kings and scoff at rulers ["Deride" - qâlas – "To disparage or ridicule"]
- 5. Laugh at all fortified cities:
  - a. They build earthen ramps. [A common method of laying siege to a town was to build an earthen ramp up to cities that were set on a hill. The opposing force would then march their armies up to the city gates and attack from there.]
  - b. They capture them.
- 6. Guilty men, whose own strength is their god
  - a. Their "guilt" before God was based upon their faith "in their own strength".
    - 1) "Sacriligious arrogance" – JFB Commentary
    - 2) Cf. Dan. 4 – God's discipline of Nebuchadnezzar years later; Dan. 5:22-31 – God's discipline of Belshazzar
    - 3) Cf. Isa. 14:12-14
  - b. Q: "Where do I derive my strength from? Myself or God?"
  - c. Cf. emphasis today in society where people are encouraged to "empower themselves"
  - d. "Presumptuous self-sufficiency" – Pulpit Commentary

### III. Man's Dilemma: "Why Does God Tolerate the Treacherous?" (1:12-2:1)

#### A. God's Names:

- 1. "Lord" – yehôvâh – "Self-existent or eternal / Jehovah"
- 2. "God" – 'êlôhîym – "Used of 'god's in general; great or mighty / Elohim"
- 3. "Holy One" – qâdôsh qâdôsh – "Sacred or set apart, e.g., an angel or sanctuary"
- 4. "Rock" – tsûr tsûr – "A cliff, sharp rock or boulder; a refuge"

#### B. God's Attributes ... (12-13a)

- 1. From everlasting, i.e., eternal.
  - a. God always has been and always will be (Cf. Deut. 33:27, Ps. 90:2; Isa. 40:28, 57:15; Lam. 5:19; Mic. 5:2; I Tim. 1:17, 6:15b-16; Heb. 1:10-12, 13:8; Rev. 1:8).
  - b. Whatever happens has always been part of His eternal plan (Cf. Acts 17:24-28).<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> This necessarily includes any instances of evil that occur in this world.

2. Appoints
  - a. God designates people, nations, etc. to carry out His will ... even those who are ruthless and impetuous (1:6).
  - b. Cf. II Kings 19:25 (Sennacherib); Isa. 10:5-7 (Assyria); Jer. 25:9-14 (Nebuchadnezzar & Darius, the Mede); Ezek. 30:24-25 (King of Babylon)
3. Ordains ["Ordain" – yâsad – "To settle or consult, establish"]
4. Eyes are too pure to look on evil
  - a. God does not look upon our sins with approval (Ps. 5:4-5, 34:15-16)
  - b. Q: "If God sees evil but does not approve of it, why does He allow it to continue?"
  - c. "... a quiet observance without interposing to punish ..." – Keil & Delitzsch
5. Cannot tolerate wrong (NIV only)
- C. God's Attributes and the existence of evil ...<sup>14</sup> (13b)
  1. "Why does God tolerate the treacherous?"<sup>15</sup>
    - a. "Tolerate" – nâbaṭe – "To look intently, as with favor or care"
    - b. The implication from this word is that God actually approves of the treacherous.
    - c. God will allow wicked people to have their way, just as He allows good people to have their way.
  2. "Why is God silent when the wicked harm the righteous?"<sup>16</sup>
    - a. "Silent" – chârash – "To be deaf to something; the idea of secrecy is involved, possibly in a bad sense"
    - b. God is criticized when He silent while evil is being perpetrated.
      - 1) We think of Him as either complicit (He approves) or inept (He does not have the ability to stop it).
      - 2) Cf. Ps. 35:22, 50:21, 83:1; Isa. 42:14, 64:12; See Ex. 3:3-10
    - c. "The righteous"
      - 1) Habakkuk was probably referring to the people of Judah. Note that previously, he had complained about their wickedness (1:1-4). Now, in comparison to the Babylonians, they are looking better!
      - 2) Possible reference to the righteous people who still lived in Judah (K & D)
      - 3) "Good, evil, right, wrong" can become a "sliding scale" when we are suffering.
- D. God's Attributes, the existence of evil and the Babylonians ...<sup>17</sup> (14-17)
  1. The people of Judah were "like fish in the sea ... like sea creatures without a ruler"
    - a. Men are helpless
      - 1) We are at the mercy of things we cannot control.
      - 2) The elements, natural calamities, disease, illness, etc.
      - 3) Pain inflicted on us by others (e.g., in the context, the Babylonians)
    - b. Tragedy makes most people realize they are not in control.

<sup>14</sup> The problem of evil: "How can the supposed attributes of God exist with the presence of evil?"

<sup>15</sup> "Why do you wink at their treachery?" - NLT

<sup>16</sup> The assumption is that someone can be so "righteous" that they do not deserve to suffer at the hands of the wicked or even suffer at all. And, that something is very wrong (with God?) when this happens.

<sup>17</sup> Note that Habakkuk wanted a solution to the problem of wickedness in Judah, but he did not want that solution to be the Babylonians! We, also, are unhappy with the solutions that God provides for issues we want to see resolved.

2. The Babylonians "catch" the helpless in their "nets"
  - a. Their "nets" was their power, might army, etc. that they employed.
  - b. We are at the mercy of others who would harm us
  - c. The "wicked" always seem to have the "upper hand" when dealing with the righteous (Cf. Ps. 10)
3. The Babylonians "sacrifice to (their) nets ...burn incense to (their) dragnets."
  - a. The Jews were worshipping the only God and yet, the one worshipping false gods had the advantage over them.
  - b. "By his net he lives in luxury" – the harm they inflicted and the power they had over others brought them "luxury" (Cf. Psalms 73).
4. The Babylonians destroy nations without mercy.
  - a. "Without mercy", i.e., "they do not spare them"
  - b. Q: "How can one who is so brutal and void of mercy be so blessed, i.e., so powerful and living in luxury?"
- E. God's Attributes, the existence of evil, the Babylonians and the demand for an answer!<sup>18</sup> (2:1)
  1. "I will stand ... and station myself."
    - a. The prophets were looked upon as those who would stand at the watchtower or on the ramparts, looking for a message from God.
    - b. Cf. Isa. 21:8
  2. "I will look to see what he will say to me."
    - a. Cf. Job 23:5-7, 31:35-37; Jer. 12:1
    - b. God is not so insecure that He is afraid for us to complain and then, look for an answer. The real problems begin (see Job) when God gives an answer and we continue to complain about what He has decided to do (See Rom. 9:19-21).
  3. "(I will see) what answer I am to give to this complaint."
    - a. Q: "Is Habakkuk already planning on how he will respond to God before God has even had time to speak?"
    - b. Some versions interpret this verse: "How he will answer my complaint" - NLT

#### IV. Man's Dilemma and God's Answer: "Wait" (2:2-20)<sup>19</sup>

- A. "Wait" for the revelation from God (2-3)
  1. "Write it down"
  2. "Make it plain"
    - a. On tablets – how "documents" were created / often placed in public places where they could be viewed by the populace
    - b. So that a herald may run with it – how "documents" were delivered
  3. "(It) awaits an appointed time"
    - a. "Appointed" – mô'êd mô'êd mô'âdâh – "A fixed time or season; the phrase was used in reference to meetings, solemn feasts, etc."
    - b. Everything, every event, every day runs according to God's appointed time (Cf. Acts 17:26; Job 14:5; Ps. 31:15; Isa. 45:21; Dan. 11:27, 35).

<sup>18</sup> Good things never happen to *anyone* who demands that God answer their complaints!! See Job.

<sup>19</sup> Note that 2:4 – "the righteous will live by faith" will be addressed in Section V. – "Man's Dilemma ..."

4. "It speaks of the end", i.e., the end of the Babylonians and their rule over Judah.
  5. "It will not prove false"
    - a. It won't be a lie ... it won't be in vain.
    - b. God has **never** provided a false revelation of the future.
  6. "Wait for it" ["Wait" – châkâh – "From a root word meaning 'to carve, pierce or adhere to'; to await or long or tarry for"]
    - a. Though it lingers – God's schedule was the rule here ... not Habakkuk's!
    - b. It will come true.
    - c. It will not delay.
    - d. Cf. Heb. 10:37-38 – quoted by Hebrews writer as encouragement during a time of trial and challenges
- B. "Wait" for the woes that will befall the Babylonians (4-5)
1. The "heart" of the Babylonians<sup>20</sup>
    - a. Puffed up, i.e., "elated or swollen"
      - 1) They thought more of themselves than was justified!
      - 2) Cf. Dan. 4:28-30
    - b. Desires are not upright
      - 1) "Their lives are crooked."
      - 2) Cf. James 1:13-15
    - c. Wine betrays him, i.e., when he gets drunk, his real nature is revealed (Prov. 20:1)
    - d. Arrogant (Cf. I Sam. 15:23; Isa. 2:11)<sup>21</sup>
    - e. Never at rest
      - 1) Arrogance and unrighteousness never breed peace.
      - 2) The Babylonians were never satisfied with what they had.
    - f. Takes people captive because ...
      - 1) He is as greedy as the grave
      - 2) Like death, he is never satisfied – the "true picture" of someone without God.
      - 3) The Babylonians had a "compulsion" to have everything and everyone under their control.
      - 4) Q: "Am I only happy when things are completely under my control?"
  2. The taunts against the Babylonians<sup>22</sup>
    - a. "Take up a parable" – mâshâl – "In some original sense of superiority in mental action; properly a pithy maxim" (Strong's)
    - b. "Take up a taunting proverb" – melîytsâh chîydâh – "A dark sentence or puzzling satire; a riddle which cannot be understood by the hearer"
    - c. Cf. Isa. 14:4; Micah 2:4

<sup>20</sup> See II Peter 2 – Peter's evaluation of "false teachers" is very similar.

<sup>21</sup> "Arrogance" is mentioned @ 50 times in the OT.

<sup>22</sup> "Taunt songs" – Expositor's Bible Commentary

3. The woes that will befall the Babylonians (6-19)
  - a. Woe to him who piles up stolen goods (6-8)
    - 1) Their sin
      - a) Piled up stolen goods – they were thieves in the way they stole peoples' possessions when they conquered them.
      - b) Made themselves wealthy by extortion - Babylonians were comparable to harsh money-lenders who lent money at an impossible rate of return<sup>23</sup>
      - c) Plundered many nations
      - d) Shed man's blood
      - e) Destroyed lands, cities and everyone in them
    - 2) Their sin's consequences (See Jer. 17:11)
      - a) Debtors will suddenly rise up (Cf. Daniel 5)
      - b) Debtors will wake up and make them tremble<sup>24</sup>
      - c) Will become victims to their debtors (cf. Hosea 8:7; Galatians 6:7-8)
      - d) Will be plundered by those who are left
      - e) Note that this is what happened to the Babylonians when Media-Persia conquered them (See Isa. 21:1-4; Dan. 5:25-31)
  - b. Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain (9-11)
    - 1) Their sin
      - a) Empire was built by accumulating "unjust gain" ("coveted an evil covetousness" – KJV) / Cf. Jer. 22:13-15a
      - b) Built this way for personal security, i.e., "by setting his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin"<sup>25</sup>
      - c) Plotted the ruin of many peoples ("Cut off" - qâtsâh – "To destroy or scrape off")
    - 2) Their sin's consequences
      - a) Shamed his own house<sup>26</sup>
      - b) Forfeited his life – "plotting the ruin of others" always results in punishment coming back upon oneself (Cf. Prov. 8:36, 15:32, 20:2)
      - c) Will be "publicized" to all – "the stones will cry out ... the beams will echo it" (Cf. James 5:3-4; Num. 32:23)<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Hebrew reads "to him that ladeth himself with thick clay", i.e., someone who digs gold and silver out of clay

<sup>24</sup> "He is like a debtor who increases the number of his creditors. Some day they shall rise up and exact from him the last penny." – Expositor's Bible Commentary (Cf. image used by Jesus in Matt. 18:28)

<sup>25</sup> This might be a possible reference to Nebuchadnezzar's palace and accompanying environs (Cf. Dan. 4:28-30).

<sup>26</sup> By "devising and consulting" the ruin of others, you have "devised and consulted", i.e., came up with a plan for ruining yourself.

<sup>27</sup> This is a use of the concept of "prosopopoeia".

- c. Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed (12-14)
  - 1) Their sin
    - a) Built their city (empire) with bloodshed (Cf. how Babylonians, much like the Assyrians, were known for their cruel and excessive punishment they brought upon those they conquered – see [Pulpit Commentary](#))
    - b) Established their town (i.e., the city of Babylon) with crime
  - 2) Their sin’s consequences
    - a) The people’s labor (“the people they conquered?”) is fuel for the fire (“fires of rebellion?”)
    - b) They exhaust themselves for nothing
    - c) “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the ...Lord ...”<sup>28</sup>
- d. Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors (15-17)<sup>29</sup>
  - 1) Their sin
    - a) Pour wine from the wineskin until neighbors are drunk
    - b) Purpose – so they can gaze on their naked bodies
    - c) Violence against Lebanon (possible destruction of their forests, e.g. see [NLT](#) interpretation)
    - d) Destroyed animals
    - e) Shed man’s blood
    - f) Have destroyed lands, cities and everyone in them
  - 2) Their sin’s consequences
    - a) Will be filled with shame rather than glory (Cf. v.14)
    - b) Will be exposed (“Let their foreskin be uncovered” – [KJV](#))
    - c) Will have to drink from the cup from the Lord’s right hand which is coming around to them<sup>30</sup>
    - d) Will result in their glory being disgraced (Cf. v. 14)<sup>31</sup>
    - e) Will be overwhelmed by the violence done to others
    - f) Will be terrified
- e. Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life’ (18-19)<sup>32</sup>
  - 1) Their sin
    - a) Carving out an idol
    - b) Trusting in something that teaches lies
    - c) Trusting in their own creation
    - d) Calling on an idol to “come to life”

---

<sup>28</sup> I.e., rather than the earth being filled with the knowledge of the power of the Babylonians. Keil and Delitzsch see this “consequence of their sin” as a threat from Jehovah. You cannot steal glory from God without facing the consequences (Cf. Isa. 2:12-21; 6:3).

<sup>29</sup> A possible metaphor for “getting them drunk with suffering”.

<sup>30</sup> A common metaphor used by God to describe punishment for sin, e.g., Ps. 75:8; Isa. 49:26, 51:21-23; Jer. 25:26-27, 51:57; Rev. 18:6

<sup>31</sup> If you disgrace the glory of God, God will disgrace your glory.

<sup>32</sup> A depiction of the “powerlessness of the idols of the Babylonians” – [JFB Commentary](#)

- 2) Their sin's consequences
  - a) Trusting in something that has no value
  - b) Trusting in something that is lifeless
  - c) Trusting in something that cannot speak or give guidance<sup>33</sup>
  - d) Trusting in something that has no breath in it
- C. "Wait" and be silent before the Lord (20)<sup>34</sup>
  1. "The Lord is in His holy temple"
    - a. Cf. this with vv. 18-20 – idols that are the creation of man ("cannot speak, lifeless, no breath in it")
    - b. God is still in control:
      - 1) Even with all that was going on that was disturbing and threatening, God was still in His temple.
      - 2) Cf. Isa. 6:1-4; Micah 1:2; Zech. 2:13
      - 3) God always reigns (Cf. Ps. 115:3)
    - c. Psalms 11
      - 1) (1-2) – No need to be afraid and flee if I am taking my refuge in God
      - 2) (3) – "When the foundations are being destroyed", i.e., when every thing *appears to be* falling apart or *actually is* falling apart.
      - 3) (4-5a) – God is still in His temple and still on the throne when bad things are happening.
      - 4) (5b-6) – God will not let the plans of the wicked go unpunished.
      - 5) (7) – God's righteousness and justice will prevail
  2. "Let all the earth be silent before Him"
    - a. "Silent" – hâsâh – "To hush or be still; to hold your peace"
    - b. As opposed to being anxious, taking things into my own hands, worrying about what I think might happen, etc.
    - c. "Be still and know that I am the Lord" (Cf. Ps. 46:10)
- V. Man's Dilemma Solved by Submission to God's Answer: "Live by Faith" (2:4; 3:1-19)
  - A. "The righteous will live by his faith" (2:4b)<sup>35</sup>
    1. As compared to the one (e.g., the Babylonians) who is "puffed up and whose desires are not upright" (2:4a)
    2. God interjects this thought to Habakkuk: "By the way ... you need to choose to live by faith while all this is happening rather than assessing these events with a 'living by sight' procedure."
    3. "Through long waiting-times the only source of continued life is the faith which draws all from God." – F.B. Meyer

<sup>33</sup> "How foolish to trust in your own creation—a god that can't even talk!" – NLT (Cf. Isa. 44:9-20)

<sup>34</sup> Q: "Is this a rebuke to Habakkuk? Is God saying 'I am going to accomplish my will, Habakkuk. Now, you need to be quiet about this matter. No more complaints or questions!'" (See Addendum: The Silence of God)

<sup>35</sup> See Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38 (Cf. Rom. 3:21-22; Gal. 2:16)



4. Without faith, "there is no right stability of soul resting on God to ensure permanence of prosperity". – Jamieson, Fausset and Brown
5. Gen. 15:6 – "Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."
- B. "The righteous will practice his faith in the face of difficulties" (3:1-19)
  1. By remembering who God is (2-15)<sup>36</sup>
    - a. His fame and deeds (2)<sup>37</sup>
      - 1) "Fame" – shêma' - "Speech, something heard as from a speech, rumor or announcement"
      - 2) "I have heard the report of you." – Lexham English Bible
      - 3) "I stand in awe."
        - a) It is always good to re-visit the "old Bible stories" to be reminded what God can do.
        - b) Ps. 119:120; Isa. 29:23, 66:2; Dan. 8:17; Heb. 12:21; Rev. 15:1-4
    - b. His "renewing his fame and deeds" in our day ... our time
      - 1) "Renew" – châyâh – "To nourish up, to give life to; to recover or restore; 'give it new life'."
      - 2) Ps. 85:6; **Isa. 51:1-16** (v. 9 – "O arm of the Lord; awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old.")
      - 3) God does not just show his fame and deeds to one generation. He will show it to those who pursue righteousness and seek the Lord of every generation.
    - c. His remembering mercy during times of "wrath" (2)
      - 1) For Habakkuk, this might have been a possible request for God to remember mercy when the Babylonians were invading and conquering Judah.
      - 2) It is okay to ask God to "remember" His mercy, even when we may be deserving of His wrath.
      - 3) Cf. Ex. 32:9-14; Num. 14:10-20, 16:41-50; II Sam. 24:11-17; Ps. 6:1-2; 78:38-39; Lam. 3:31-33; Zech. 1:12-17
    - d. His glory and praise (3)
      - 1) "May God come from Teman, may the Holy One come from Mount Paran." – Gill's Exposition<sup>38</sup>
        - a) Teman – a city in the land of Edom; possibly known for its wisdom (Cf. Job 2:11; Jer. 49:7; Obad. 1:8)
        - b) Mount Paran – possible mountain near Kadesh-Barnea (Cf. Deut. 33:2)<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Job 35-40 where God (through Elihu and Himself) gives an almost identical speech

<sup>37</sup> Vv. 7-15 are possible references to two of the most profound moments in Israel's history, where God's power and anger against their enemies (Midian, Cush and Egypt) was displayed. These are reminders to Habakkuk of what God has the power to do against the unrighteous, whether that be the Israelites or the Babylonians. Some commentators explain these events as just "general" descriptions of God's power but not tied to any significant historical event.

<sup>38</sup> "As the Lord God once came down to His people at Sinai, when they had been redeemed out of Egypt, to establish the covenant of His grace with them, and make them into a kingdom of God, so will He appear in the time to come in the terrible glory of His omnipotence, to liberate them from the bondage of the power of the world, and dash to pieces the wicked who seek to destroy the poor." – Keil & Delitzsch

<sup>39</sup> "Paran is the desert region, extending from the south of Judah to Sinai. Seir, Sinai, and Paran are adjacent to one another, and are hence associated together, in respect to God's giving of the law." – JFB

- 2) "His glory covered the heavens"
  - a) "His brilliant splendor fills the heavens." – NLT
  - b) Cf. how God's glory was revealed at Mt. Sinai – Ex. 24
- 3) "His praise filled the earth"
  - a) "The earth is filled with his praise." – NLT
  - b) "His splendour or majesty, spreads over the whole heaven, and His glory over the earth." – K & D
- 4) Cf. Isa. 6:1-4; Rev. 5:11-14
- e. His splendor (4)
  - 1) "Splendor" – nôgahh – "Brightness, brilliance; clear, shining light"
  - 2) Like the rays coming from the sun
  - 3) Comes forth from His hand, where His power originates
- f. His fear (5-7)<sup>40</sup>
  - 1) Plague
  - 2) Pestilence
  - 3) Shaking of the earth
  - 4) Crumbling and collapse of the mountains
  - 5) Bringing distress and anguish upon the ancient enemies of Cush and Midian (Cf. Num. 31:2-12; Ps. 83:5-10)
  - 6) Cf. Luke 21:11; Heb. 10:26-31
  - 7) Note **v. 6b** – Everything that God's wrath comes upon is temporary. In contrast, God's ways are eternal and everlasting. They cannot be destroyed.
- g. His anger (8-12)
  - 1) Key words:
    - a) Angry - chârâh – "To glow or grow warm; to be displeased"
    - b) Wrath – 'aph – "A flaring of nostrils; rapid breathing"
    - c) Rage - 'ebrâh – "An outburst of passion"
    - d) Wrath ("Indignation" – KJV) – za'am – "To froth at the mouth; fury"
  - 2) (8) – Some commentators believe these were rhetorical questions that were to be answered with "no".
    - a) The rivers, streams and sea (River Nile, Jordan River, Red Sea) were used as God's "victorious chariots" to accomplish His will.
    - b) God's anger was directed against the nations (12).
  - 3) (11) – Cf. Joshua 10:1-4<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Heb. 12:29; Ps. 50:22, 90:11; Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:5

<sup>41</sup> Lightning is frequently used as a reference to God's "arrows"

- h. His deliverance (13-15)
  - 1) God's goal is always "salvation".
  - 2) Deliverance from the Egyptians at the Red Sea or from all the "leaders of the land of wickedness", i.e., the kings of Canaan.
    - a) Some see this as a prophecy with what God will also do with the Babylonians (Cf. 16b – the "calamity to come on the nation invading us")
    - b) Imagery in Song of Moses – Ex. 15:1-19
  - 3) Cf. Judges 5:4; II Sam. 5:24; Isa. 42:13; Ps. 68:21
  - 4) God is not hostile to all nations. He is only hostile to those who oppose Him.
- 2. By waiting for God to deliver (16-19)
  - a. "I heard ... and trembled" (16a)
    - 1) His description of what he felt, i.e., 'my heart pounded, my lips quivered, decay crept into my bones and my legs trembled' is very real and normal for how anyone would respond to what was about to happen.<sup>42</sup>
    - 2) He was in awe of what he had heard of God doing in the past and what He was getting ready to do in his lifetime (Cf. comments on 3:2)
      - a) Q: "Am I in 'awe' of what God has done in my past and what His is doing today?"
      - b) Cf. Hebrews 10:32-39
  - b. "I will wait patiently" (16b)
    - 1) "I might rest in the day of trouble" – KJV<sup>43</sup>
      - a) "Rest" - nûach – "To settle down, withdraw, rest, get comfort"
      - b) Q: "What do I do when overwhelming trouble comes? Do I rest or dwell in God's comfort or do I fret and worry?"
    - 2) Concept of "waiting patiently" during difficulties:
      - a) Ps. 37:7 – "Be still ... wait patiently ... do not fret ..." (This is good for me since I fret when I see evil men carrying out their schemes, and others supporting and congratulating them.)
      - b) Cf. Rom. 8:25; Heb. 6:15; James 5:7-8
      - c) Q: "How do I wait for 'calamities', i.e., challenging times that I know are about to come upon me and cannot be averted? Fretting? Fearful? Patiently? Resting?"
    - 3) "For the day of calamity to come upon the nation invading us"
      - a) "Calamity" – gûd – "To attack or overcome, invade"<sup>44</sup>
      - b) Let God deal with your enemies. Do not take this into your own hands.
      - c) Cf. Rom. 12:17-21; Deut. 32:35
      - d) These would include any "enemies" who would be against me and my relationship with God, whether they be people, Satan, temptations, etc.
      - e) II Chron. 20:22 – "the Lord set ambushes ..."

<sup>42</sup> "The word rendered "quivered" (tsalal) is applied to the tingling of the ears ... and implies that the prophet's lips so trembled that he was scarcely able to utter speech." – Pulpit Commentary

<sup>43</sup> "I wait quietly for the day of trouble." – Lexham English Bible

<sup>44</sup> God would eventually "invade" the Babylonians just as they were about to "invade" Judah.

- c. "I will rejoice ..." (17-18)
- 1) "Though the fig tree does not bud (food) and there are no grapes on the vines (wine), though the olive crop fails (cooking and medicinal) and the fields produce no food (crops), though there are no sheep in the pen (food and clothing) and no cattle in the stalls (food and milk) ..."
    - a) These were the effects of the Babylonian invasion.
    - b) A description of the complete collapse of an economy that was agriculturally based.
    - c) Cf. Deut. 28:15-24; Jer. 14:2-8; Joel 1:6-7; Hosea 9:1-2; Amos 4:6-10; Hag. 2:16-17; Isa. 16:6-14 (Moab); Ps. 105:33 (Egypt)
    - d) "Indeed, the divine Savior and Friend is often more apparent when the fields and the farmsteads are bare." – F.B. Meyer  - 2) "I will rejoice in the Lord"
    - a) "Rejoice" – 'âlaz – "To jump for joy"
    - b) Ps. 13, 31; II Cor. 6:10 – "Sorrowful, yet rejoicing"
    - c) "God is the inexhaustible source and infinite sphere of the joy." – Keil & Delitzsch
    - d) I will be "unshaken in my confidence". This allows me to rejoice and be joyful.  - 3) "I will be joyful in God my Savior"
    - a) "Joyful" – gîyl gûl – "To spin around while under the influence of an emotion"
    - b) Reminding myself that God is my Savior will enable me to be remain joyful *even in the midst of difficult circumstances.*
    - c) Cf. I Sam. 2:1; Ps. 46:1-5, 96:10-13, 118:13-16; Isa. 61:10; Luke 1:46-47; Rom. 5:3-5; James 1:2; I Pet. 4:12-13
    - d) "Let a man lose what he may, so long as he has **God and Jesus Christ, the Bible and the throne of grace**, with the gift of forgiveness and the hope of heaven, he is not utterly undone." – Pulpit Commentary
- d. "(I will acknowledge) the Sovereign Lord is my strength" (19) (Cf. Ps. 18:32-33 – Habakkuk appears to be quoting this verse.)
- 1) Sovereign Lord<sup>45</sup>
    - a) "Jehovah Adonai"
    - b) "Yahweh my Lord" – Lexham English Bible
    - c) If I believe that God alone is Sovereign, I will be strengthened by that. That is an acknowledgment that everything else is, ultimately, unable to provide the strength that I need. Only God has the ability to do that.

---

<sup>45</sup> 289 References to "Sovereign Lord" in the OT (NIV) (Note that 210 of those times are in Ezekiel)

- 2) He is my strength
  - a) "Strength" – chayil – "A force, reference to an army or band of soldiers"
  - b) "From him (believers – GR) have their strength to perform the duties of religion; to oppose their spiritual enemies, sin, Satan, and the world; and to bear them up under all trials and afflictions, and carry them through them, and deliver out of them" – John Gill's Exposition
  - c) Cf. Ps. 18, 27:1-3, 46:1; Isa. 12:2, 45:24; Zech. 10:12; II Cor. 3:4-6, 9:8, 10:4, 12:7-10; Eph. 3:16-21; Phil. 4:13, 19; Col. 1:10-12
- 3) He makes me ...
  - a) "Hinds feet" (KJV) – "The back legs of a female deer"
  - b) Cf. deer GR saw in Sedona, AZ crossing the mountainous road / rocky trail
  - c) "Light-footedness in the path of life." – Andrew MacLaren
  - d) "The language is descriptive of one who, in the season of adversity, in the hour of trial, temptation, and danger, is quick to discern, eager in adopting, and steadfast in pursuing the path of duty, which for him, as for all, is the path of safety." – Pulpit Commentary
- 4) He enables me ...
  - a) "Enables" – dêrak – "To string a bow (by treading on it in bending), to guide or lead"
  - b) God not only makes our feet like those of a deer, but He enables us (i.e., gives us the very ability) to tread upon the heights.
  - c) Cf. Isa. 40:30-31

Conclusion: "(Habakkuk) fought his way to unswerving trust in God ..." – S.D. Hillman

## Homilies on Habakkuk

### “God’s Toleration of the Wicked”

#### Discussion:

#### I. Why Does God Tolerate the Wicked?

- A. The eternal question: “If God is with us, why are all these bad things happening to us?”
  - 1. Deut. 29:24 – “All the nations will ask, ‘Why has the Lord done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?’ ”
  - 2. Josh. 7:7 – “And Joshua said, ‘Ah, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us?’ ”
  - 3. Judges 6:13 – “ ‘But sir,’ Gideon replied, ‘if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.’ ”
- B. **Standard Conclusion:** “God must have abandoned us since we are suffering.”
- C. Our faith in God must tell us that, although things may look like God is tolerating evil, we must believe:
  - 1. 1:13a – “Your eyes are too pure to look at evil”
  - 2. Something else must be going on in God’s plans, of which we are unaware, that makes what is happening important to His plan.

#### II. God Uses the Wicked to Accomplish His Will

- A. Cf. the sins of the Babylonians mentioned in Habakkuk
  - 1. Ruthless (1:6)
  - 2. Impetuous (1:6)
    - a. Synonym for “rash”
    - b. Cf. Num. 30:6-8 (making a rash promise); Ps. 106:33 (rash words from the mouth of Moses); Pr. 13:3 (speaking rashly invites ruin); Pr. 20:25 (dedicating something rashly); Is. 32:4 (the mind of the rash becoming knowledgeable); Acts 19:36 (be quiet & not act rashly); II Tim. 3:4 (terrible times when people are rash)
  - 3. Seize dwelling places not their own (1:6)
  - 4. Law to themselves (1:7)
  - 5. Promote their own honor (1:7) – i.e., complete opposite of humble
  - 6. Bent on violence (1:9)
  - 7. Deride kings and scoff at rulers (1:10) – i.e., no respect for authority
  - 8. Guilty men, whose own strength is their god (1:11) (cf. Dan. 4:29-30)
  - 9. Treacherous (1:13)
  - 10. Wicked (men) who swallow up those more righteous than themselves (1:13)
  - 11. Sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet (1:16)

12. He is puffed up (2:4)
  - a. Arrogance – cf. how many nations, both ancient and modern, have been destroyed by this sin (cf. v. 5a)
  - b. Ps. 10:2, 31:18, 94:4, 119:51, 119:78, 123:4
  - c. Prov. 8:13, 21:24; Isa. 2:17; Isa. 13:11; Mal. 3:15
13. Greedy (2:5)
14. Never satisfied (2:5b) (Cf. Prov. 16:8)
15. The leader of the land of wickedness (3:13)
16. Gloating (3:14)
- B. God will use the wicked to carry out His eternal will<sup>46</sup>
  1. (1:6) - "I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people"
  2. God will use wicked people and their plans to carry out His will
    - a. He will use wicked rulers today
    - b. He will use wicked people who come into my life to help me become more like Jesus (see Ps. 37:1, 7-8)
  3. Cf. Hab. 1:12b – "You have appointed them ... you have ordained them ..."
  4. Rom. 9:17 – "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth'."
    - a. Pharaoh was one of the original users of genocide (cf. Hitler)
    - b. God used him as His tool so that God's power might be displayed
  5. Hebrews 12:3-13
    - a. God often uses others (including the very wicked) as a means of disciplining / discipling us
    - b. He did that for Jesus (cf. v. 3 – "endured such opposition from sinful men")
  6. I Peter 2:21-23
    - a. (v. 21) – "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps"
    - b. (v. 23b) – "He entrusted himself to him who judges justly"
    - c. Psalms 118:8-9

### III. God's Sovereignty Over the Wicked

- A. (1:12) – "O Lord, are you not from everlasting?"
  1. If God is everlasting / eternal, some questions must be raised:
    - a. "Why did he not see this coming?"
    - b. "If He is truly in control, why did He allow this bad thing to happen?"
    - c. "If He can 'see' into the future, why does He not just stop bad things from happening?"

---

<sup>46</sup> "How, then, does he "raise" them up? He permits them. He could prevent them; but he allows them. He gives them life, capacity, and opportunities; but he does not inspire or coerce them."- D. Thomas, Pulpit Commentary

2. The "everlasting nature" of God does not demand that He stop every bad thing from happening.
  - a. Gen. 21:33 – "Abraham ... called upon the name of the Lord, the Eternal God." (Heb., El Olam - El Olam is "a phrase unique to this passage")
  - b. Ps. 90:2 – "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."
  - c. Ex. 15:18 – "The Lord will reign for ever and ever."
  - d. Job 36:26 – "How great is God – beyond our understanding! The number of his years is past finding out." Because of God's greatness, I will never be able to figure out why He does what He does (see Isa. 55:8-9; Rom. 11:33-36).
  - e. You cannot put a "date" on anything about God's nature.
  - f. If God is eternal (and all-loving and all-powerful) but evil things still happen, then the issue is *our* view of how all this is intertwined is wrong. We need to change our thinking about what this means.
  - g. Bigger Issues Might Be at Stake:
    - 1) Therefore, what we might think should be stopped should continue because God can see into the future!
    - 2) See Matthew 16:21-23 and Matthew 26:50-54
- B. (3:6b) – "His ways are eternal."
  1. In the middle of all the things that were happening that were overpowering to Habakkuk, he needed to see that God was eternal. Difficult circumstances will come and go, but God alone remains eternal.
  2. Also, in the instance of suffering, I need to realize that eternal issues and events may be at work that I do not know about. All I am allowed to see is the temporary nature of it. I need to trust God while it is going on, because He may never show me why this suffering had to happen in my life (II Cor. 4:16-18).
  3. There is "something bigger" going on here than I may realize.
    - a. For example, with Job, the issue was not Job just suffering for suffering's sake. It had to do with God's confidence in men (1:8-12), the justice of God, etc.
    - b. With Paul's suffering (II Cor. 12:7-10), it had to do with showing the power of grace.
    - c. With Ezekiel, the issue was not just the punishment of the Jews for their disobedience. There was an eternal issue in reference to the Sovereignty of God being addressed on another level.
    - d. "Battles" may be being fought on an eternal level that I will never know about. My suffering might be directly tied in with them in some way, e.g., cf. Luke 2:8-15 and Revelation 12:1-9



#### IV. The Wicked Will Reap What They Sow

- A. (2:6) – “Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion” (Cf. Eccl. 7:7; Jer. 22:11-17; Psalms 73)
1. Characteristics of Babylonians:
    - a. Would pile up the goods of those nations they conquered, and as a result, became wealthy (see II Kings 25, II Chron. 36).
    - b. The duty they also required from the nations they conquered lent to their wealth.
    - c. Results: “You have plundered many nations ...You have shed man’s blood ...You have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.”
  2. Eccl. 7:7 – “Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.”
  3. Jer. 22:15, 17 – “Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? ... But your eyes and your heart are set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion.”
- B. (2:9) – “Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin!” (Cf. Jer. 17:11)
1. Cf. someone who profits from others unjustly (stealing, fraud, theft) and then, uses that money to build up his own personal “realm” (e.g., his business, accumulating possessions, property, power & influence) ... like a gangster who tries to become legitimate!
  2. Jer. 17:11 – “Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means. When his life is half gone, they will desert him, and in the end, he will prove to be a fool.”
- C. (2:12) – “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!” (Jer. 51:58; Luke 12:33)
1. Ps. 127:1 – “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.”
  2. Jer. 51:58 – “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Babylon’s thick wall will be leveled and her high gates set on fire; the people’s exhaust themselves for nothing, the nations’ labor is only fuel for the flames.’ ”
  3. Luke 12:33 – “Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.”
  4. (v.13) – How God views the ultimate result of all human endeavors: “The people’s labor is only fuel for the fire”

- D. (2:15) – “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies.” (Cf. Mt. 16:23; Mark 9:42; Rom. 1:32; Rom. 14:13)
1. The sin of causing others to stumble, i.e., putting others in situations which will encourage them to sin
  2. Cf. Mt. 16:23; Mark 9:42; Rom. 1:32; Rom. 14:13
  3. Cf. Women who were downfall of Josh Hamilton, Texas Rangers’ baseball player
  4. Vv. 16-17 – “Reaping what you sow” / Note what God said would happen to the Babylonians:
    - a. “You will be filled with shame instead of glory”, i.e., it was a guarantee from God that they were going to suffer because of the suffering they had brought upon others.
    - b. (16) – “Now it is your turn. Drink and be exposed.”
    - c. Job 4:8 – “As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.”
    - d. Prov. 22:8 – “He who sows wickedness reaps trouble, and the rod of his fury will be destroyed.”
    - e. Jer. 12:13 – “They will sow wheat but reap thorns, they will wear themselves out but gain nothing. So bear the shame of your harvest because of the Lord’s fierce anger.”
    - f. Hos. 8:7 – “They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no head; it will produce no flour.”
    - g. Hos. 10:13 – “But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil; you have eaten the fruit of deception.”
    - h. II Cor. 9:6a – “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly.”
    - i. Gal. 6:7-8a – “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction ...”
- E. (2:19) – “Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life!’ or to lifeless stones, ‘Wake up!’”
1. Traits attributed to idols:
    - a. “A man has carved it” (Rom. 1:22-23)
    - b. “An image that teaches lies”
    - c. “He who makes it trusts in his own creation” (Isa. 44:12-20)
    - d. “Idols that cannot speak” (I Kings 18:25-29)
    - e. “Can it give guidance?”
    - f. “It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it”
  2. Idol worship is not a “cultural” issue with God (Ex. 20:3; Mk. 12:29-30)

# "The Silence of God"

## Introduction:

- Cf. following translations of Habakkuk 1:13:
  1. "Should you be silent while the wicked destroy people ...?" – New Living Translation
  2. "So why are you silent while they destroy people ...?" – Good News Translation
  3. "Why do you say nothing when the evil-doer ...?" – The Bible in Basic English
  4. "So why don't you do something about this? Why are you silent now?" – The Message / Remix
- Q: "How comfortable am I with God not saying anything? Apparently, not doing anything?"
- Habakkuk was not comfortable with it either!

## Discussion:

### I. The Silent God (1:13)

- A. "Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (1:13)
  1. Ps. 22:1 ff., 28:1, 35:22, 83:1, 109:1-5
  2. Cf. Isa. 42:14, Prov. 25:2
- B. (2:3c) – "Though (the revelation) linger(s), wait for it" <sup>47</sup>
  1. Is. 8:17 – "I will wait for the Lord who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob. I will put my trust in him."
    - a. God's nature is, at times, to "hide his face" (Cf. Deut. 31:17-18).
    - b. This requires the greatest of faith to trust God *and wait*.
      - 1) Those times when I have been faithful and joyful during events such as these are the ones I recall with the most satisfaction in my spiritual life.
      - 2) E.g., losing jobs, during illness, changing sinful patterns, etc.
  2. Ps. 37:7 – "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes."
    - a. Cf. following this advice through the "United Guaranty issue". This is the way God always wants you to deal with disappointment.
    - b. ***"Wait patiently for the Lord and do not fret!"***

---

<sup>47</sup> "Waiting on the Lord", especially when He is silent, challenges our faith like nothing else.

3. Is. 30:18 – “Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. ***Blessed are all who wait for him!***”
  - a. Blessed – “How superlatively happy are ...”
  - b. You can still be happy while you are waiting for God (Cf. Ps. 33:20-22 – “we wait in hope”)
    - 1) Ps. 27:13-14 – “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”
    - 2) My nature is to be sad, fretting and disappointed while I am waiting. That is *not* how God expects me to wait.
    - 3) God expects me to wait happily and hopefully. I am to be the same, whether I am waiting for them (the next contract job, getting ready for the ½ marathon, prepping for teaching, etc.) or actually have these things I desire in my possession (working, running in the race, teaching the class). There is to be *no difference in my demeanor* of faithfulness or trust in God.
4. I Cor. 4:5 – “Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness ... ”
  - a. Spoken in the context of people in the early church who unfairly judged whether Paul was an apostle or not.
    - 1) Paul tells the disciples not to worry about that issue.
    - 2) God reveals the truth in His appointed time.
    - 3) He brings things to light that are not revealed.
  - b. There are things right now that are “hidden” to me (e.g., future contracts, my health, our retirement, ability to run, getting to teach). *Do not worry or make a judgment* about God’s plans for you in these matters. He will reveal the truth about all these in *His* appointed time.
  - c. Cf. how in the past you made judgments about how you thought God was not going to do something you had wanted to be done. However, in His time, he did it. Learn from that. Wait on the Lord and do not think you know what the final outcome will be.
  - d. Prov. 3:5-6 – “Lean not on your own understanding ... particularly of events as they *appear* to be!”
  - e. James 5:11 – “You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what *the Lord finally* brought about.”

## II. The Silent Earth (2:20)

- A. Spoken in the context of not putting your faith in idols (which is what the invading Babylonians did)
  1. There is “no breath” in man-made idols
  2. God ***is*** in His holy temple
    - a. He does exist
    - b. He is to be submitted to
    - c. There is to be silence before Him due to who He is (which is probably what Habakkuk needed to know since he kept raising these complaints to God. See God’s reaction to Job [Job 38:1 ff.] after a certain point).

B. "Be silent before him"

1. Lev. 10:3 – "Moses then said to Aaron, 'This is what the spoke of when he said: Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of the people I will be honored.' Aaron remained silent."
  1. Nadab and Abihu had offered strange fire and as a result, been punished by the Lord.
  2. Moses was gently reminding Aaron, their father, that God was to be honored as holy and anything less would result in punishment.
  3. Aaron knew this was not something God felt was in the realm of discussion – he chose to remain silent.
  4. There are some things that God is more than happy to discuss with us. Habakkuk, Job and others are examples of those who argued with God about life's issues (justice, fairness, problems of human suffering, etc.).
  5. **A discussion of God's holiness is always "off limits"**. We are *always* to be silent about that! It is not to be questioned.
2. Isa. 41:1 – "Be silent before me, you islands!"
  - a. Zephaniah 1:7 – "Be silent before the Sovereign Lord, for the day of the Lord is near."
  - b. God is Sovereign, i.e., He is in control of the situation. I don't need to think like I am in control or even feel self-imposed pressure to be in control.
  - c. Again, "the Lord is near". I am working within God's concept of "nearness". That is totally different from my concept, especially when it involves "nearness" of events and time! God is on a different schedule. I must be silent before Him and "allow" Him to bring about things in His own appointed time (see James 5:11).
3. Ps. 4:3-5 – "The Lord will hear when I call to Him ... when you are on your beds, search your heart and be silent."
  - a. "The Lord will hear" – He may not give me the answer I want or the timeframe I want it in, but God always hears my prayers.
  - b. "Search your hearts and be silent" – What is going on in my heart during these times? What is God trying to teach me about my heart?
  - c. "Offer right sacrifices and trust in the Lord" – Again, when God is "silent" is when I need to trust Him the most. Skepticism cannot invade my heart.
4. Ps. 39:9 – "I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for you are the one who has done this."
  - a. Spoken in the context of being rebuked and disciplined by God (v. 11)
  - b. When God is disciplining me, I need to learn to be quiet. It could be that He is trying to teach me a lesson, and if I will just be silent, I will hear what He is trying to say!
5. **Ps. 83:1** – "O God, do not keep silent; be not quiet, O God, be not still."
  - a. A prayer for when we see that God is being silent!
  - b. Maybe when God has chosen to be silent would also be a good time for me to be silent.

6. Eccl. 5:1-3 – “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. *Go near to listen*, rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools ... Do not be *quick with your mouth*, do not be *hasty in your heart to utter* anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so *let your words be few.*”
7. Ps. 76:8-9 – “From heaven you pronounced judgment and the land feared and was quiet.”
  - a. It is the time to be quiet when God is pronouncing judgment against us.
  - b. Q: “Are we are more likely to argue with Him when this is happening?”
  - c. See Rom. 9:19-21 – Who are we to talk back to God?
8. Ps. 131:2 – “But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother ... ”<sup>48</sup>
9. Lam. 3:26 – “It is good *to wait quietly* for the salvation of the Lord.”
  - a. Spoke in the midst of suffering and facing judgment from God
  - b. This “lament” from Jeremiah was spoken around the same time that Habakkuk was prophesying.

### III. The “Silent” Fig Tree (3:17-19)

#### A. “Bad Times”

1. What Habakkuk saw that was either going on or was about to happen:
  - a. “The fig tree does not bud”
  - b. “There are no grapes on the vines”
  - c. “The olive crop fails”
  - d. “The fields produce no food”
  - e. “There are no sheep in the pen”
  - f. “(There are) no cattle in the stalls”
2. Application:
  - a. Possibly a ‘prophecy’ of what things would look like once the Babylonians were through destroying Judah. Consider how devastating this would be to an agrarian based economy.
  - b. Q: “How do I react when ‘bad times’ comes upon the physical things that I value the most, e.g., my health, my relationship with Christy, my relationship with my children, my job, my financial security, my sports teams?”

---

<sup>48</sup> Psalms 131 is the chapter to remember when I want to argue with or criticize God for the way He is doing things!

B. "Faithful Response"

1. "I will rejoice in the Lord"
  - a. "Rejoice" – 'âlaz – "To jump for joy (e.g., as in a triumphant way)"
  - b. Phil. 3:1 – "...rejoice in the Lord."
  - c. Phil. 4:4 – "Rejoice in the Lord **always**. I will say it again: Rejoice!"
2. "I will be joyful in God my Savior"
  - a. "Joyful" – gîyl gûl – "To spin around, as when under any violent emotion"
  - b. Even though bad things are happening and everything that he (and his people) values has been taken away, he still sees God as his Savior.
  - c. This is the one thing that truly can never be taken away! (cf. John 10:27-29 – This security is in **the power of the shepherd** ... not in the goodness of the sheep. See NIV Study Bible note)
  - d. When everything else is taken away from me due to circumstances, aging, the sin of others or anything else, I will still have my salvation, the thing that matters most. Therefore, I can still be joyful. (cf. Rom. 8:28-39)

C. "Sovereign Lord" (see p. 4 – "References to God")

1. "He is my strength."
2. "He makes my feet like the feet of a deer."
3. "He enables me to go on to the heights."