

Outline: Habakkuk 1:1-11 Lesson 1

The Christian Problem of Evil: *“... in theoretical terms, evil and suffering constitute a uniquely Christian problem. Christians struggle mentally with the problem of evil in a way that others do not. I don’t mean that non-Christians do not suffer mentally or wrestle mentally with the terrible enigmas of suffering and evil. Of course they do. Some of the greatest human art, literature, and music have emerged out of that mental and emotional wrestling with the reality of suffering and evil. What I mean is that the existence of evil in itself is not quite the fearsomely contradictory challenge to other worldviews that it certainly is for the Christian worldview. When you think of what we Christians believe about God and the world, the existence of evil really is a problem.” - N. T Wright*¹

Theodicy: From *theos*, “God,” and *dike*, “justice,” the theological or philosophical vindication of the justice of God, in view of His toleration of the existence of evil, both in the sense of wickedness and of calamity, in the world. G. C. Berkouwer defined it as “a justification of God’s providential rule.”²

Psalm 73:3 For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.⁴ For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek....

Job 3: 25 For the thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me.²⁶ I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, but trouble comes.”

Relevance:

“Christians, the most important thing about you is what you believe about God. What you believe defines you. What you believe determines how you live.” –Kent Hughs³

Background

Hab. 1:1 “The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.”

A. Author-

B. Genera-

C. Dating-

¹ Wright, C. J. H. (2008). *The God I Don’t Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (p. 25). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² Cairns, A. (2002). In *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (p. 481). Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International.

³ Hughes, R. K. (2004). *Genesis: beginning and blessing* (p. 623). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

D. Social/ Political Setting-

E. An “oracle”-

Part 1: Habakkuk’s First Complaint:

² O LORD, **how long** shall I cry for help,
and you will not hear?

Or cry to you **“Violence!”**
and you will not save?

³ **Why** do you make me see iniquity,
and why do you idly look at wrong?

Destruction and violence are before me;
strife and contention arise.

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

For the wicked surround the righteous;
so justice goes forth perverted.

A. V2 How Long?

“Of all Judah’s evil kings, only of Jehoiakim is it said that he killed a prophet. Manasseh had shed much “innocent blood,” but only Jehoiakim had a prophet killed who is specifically named in the Old Testament (Jer 26:20–23).”⁴

- Q: How can a righteous God allow the murder of his prophets, and seemingly, without consequence? If this can stand is there anything that can’t stand? And yet, we’re told that God hates violence?

B. V3 Why?

- The grief is over what is happening within (as opposed to without) the Theocracy

“...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

⁴ Barker, K. L. (1999). *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Vol. 20, p. 297). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

reigning without restraint among men, and especially in the Church of God.” – John Calvin⁵

C. V4....Consequence: “So the law is paralyzed,...”

Observation 1: Boldness of Prayer:

“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?”- Calvin⁶

1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Observation 2: We must never doubt God’s abhorrence of evil....

- God is love and cannot tolerate evil:

There is no other religion that even comes close to saying God so understands unjust suffering that he took it into his belly. –Timothy Keller⁷

When I was in college, I was very naïve. I thought, “Oh, all of the religions teach as an essential message that the main thing about God is he is a God of love,” and it’s just not the case. There is no other religious text ... There is no other religion that puts love as the central message at the very center of what God is.

I’ve been taken down very respectfully and graciously by friends who were Buddhist, or friends who were Muslim, who said, “That’s not what we would say about God at all.” Where did you get the idea? Where did anybody in the world ever come up with the idea that this infinite, transcendent God behind nature is a God of love? –Timothy Keller⁸

⁵ Calvin, J., & Owen, J. (2010). *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (Vol. 4, p. 18). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

⁶ Calvin, J., & Owen, J. (2010). *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (Vol. 4, p. 18). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

⁷ Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church. Problem of History; Does The Harshness Of Life Make Sense?

⁸ Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church. Listening to the Word

- Therefore: If God allowed His Son to be crucified and killed according to His definite plan at the hands of lawless men, is there not just as definite a plan to deal justly with them as well?

Part 2 The Response of God:

A. Verse 5 “Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded.

For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.

“... most incredible is the fact that God’s own people could be cast off, and at the hands of Gentiles more wicked than they...”

“...The prophet Habakkuk had prayed, hoping for some form of purging of the wicked element of the nation. But the divine response speaks of such an utter devastation that even greater puzzlement will grip the mind of the pious prophet.”
- O. Palmer Robertson ⁹

- **Pattern of warning and judgement:**

Habakkuk 1:5 “Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.

Acts 13:40–41 Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: ⁴¹ “‘Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.’ ”

Matthew 24:2 But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

1 Thes. 5:2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

B. Description of Chaldeans: Habakkuk 1:6–11

⁹ Robertson, O. P. (1990). *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (p. 146). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

⁶ For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own. ⁷ They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour. ⁹ They all come themselves. ⁸ Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their for violence, all their faces forward. They gather captives like sand. ¹⁰ At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it. ¹¹ Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!”

Part 3 Application: How Little We See

‘How little we see!’ is a true maxim. Let me provide an example. Daniel Webster Whittle was a major in the Union army during the American Civil War during the 1860s. He later became a well-known preacher of the gospel, and he often related how he became a Christian during the bloody conflict between the States. He said:

When the Civil War broke out, I left my home in New England and came to Virginia as lieutenant of a company in a Massachusetts regiment. My dear mother was a devout Christian, and parted from me with many a tear, and followed me with many a prayer. She had placed a New Testament in a pocket of the haversack that she arranged for me. We had many engagements, and I saw many sad sights, and in one of the battles I was knocked out, and that night my arm was amputated above the elbow. As I grew better, having a desire for something to read, I felt my haversack, which I had been allowed to keep, and found the little Testament my mother had placed there. I read right through the book—Matthew, Mark, Luke, to Revelation. Every part was interesting to me; and I found to my surprise that I could understand it in a way that I never had before. When I had finished Revelation, I began at Matthew, and read it through again. And so for days I continued reading, and with continued interest; and still with no thought of becoming a Christian, I saw clearly from what I read the way of salvation through Christ.

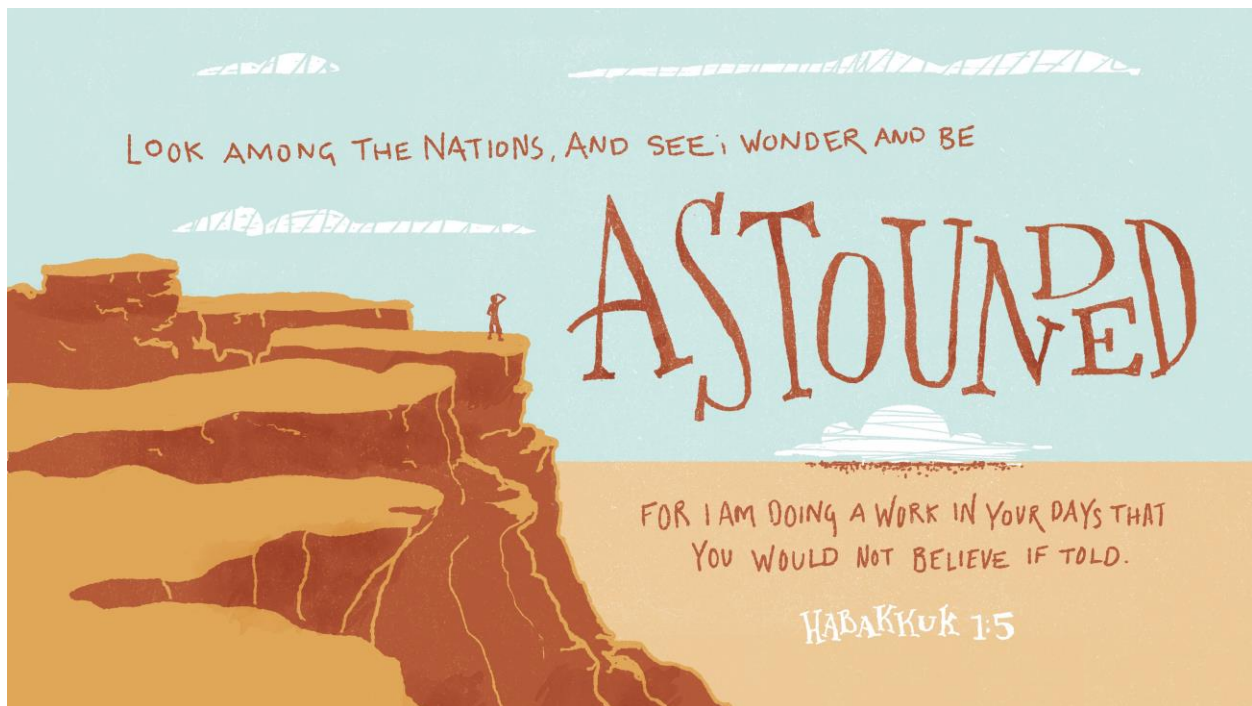
And then a most amazing event happened in this prison hospital. Whittle continues with his description:

While in this state of mind, yet still with no purpose or plan to repent and accept the Saviour, I was awakened one midnight by the nurse, who said: ‘There is a boy in the other end of the ward, one of your men, who is dying. He has been begging me for the past hour to pray for him, or to get someone to pray for him, and I can’t stand it. I am a wicked man, and can’t pray, and I have come to get you.’ ‘Why,’ I said, ‘I can’t pray. I never prayed in my life. I am just as wicked as you are.’ ‘Can’t pray!’ said the nurse; ‘why, I thought sure from seeing you read the Testament that you were a praying man. And you are the only man in the ward that I have not heard curse. What

shall I do? There is no one else for me to go to. I can't go back there alone. Won't you get up and come and see him at any rate?'

Moved by his appeal, I arose from my cot, and went with him to the far corner of the room. A fair-haired boy of seventeen or eighteen lay there dying. There was a look of intense agony upon his face, as he fastened his eyes upon me and said: 'Oh, pray for me! Pray for me! I am dying. I was a good boy at home in Maine. My mother and father are members of the Church, and I went to Sunday School and tried to be a good boy. But since I became a soldier I have learned to be wicked. I drank, and swore, and gambled, and went with bad men. And now I am dying, and I am not fit to die! Oh, ask God to forgive me! Pray for me. Ask Christ to save me!'

Whittle got on his knees and prayed earnestly for the boy, and the boy pressed his hand as he pleaded the promises. When he got up from his knees, the boy was dead, yet Whittle believed he had his attention fixed on Christ when he died and that he had trusted in the Saviour. And right there at that very hour, Whittle himself got down on his knees and came to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Over the years, Whittle the preacher was overheard saying, 'I was the second person that I led to Christ.' How little we see of the providence of God! —
John Currid ¹⁰



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¹⁰ Currid, J. D. (2009). *The Expectant Prophet: Habakkuk Simply Explained* (pp. 44–46). Darlington, England: EP Books.