

My Notes:

Through the Passage

¹²Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.



When Bad Things Happen – What is God Doing?

- What we must not say –
- What we must not say –

¹³You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and are silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

On Self-Righteousness

¹⁴You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler.

¹⁵He brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net; he gathers them in his dragnet; so he rejoices and is glad.

¹⁶Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich.

¹⁷Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?

2:1 ¹I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

On Waiting Before the Lord



Habakkuk 1:12–2:1 ESV

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Key Lessons for the Night

• Habakkuk's Faith is Grounded in the Reality of the Character of God

Habakkuk displays a deep knowledge of the attributes and character of God as he begins to respond to God's announced judgment of Judah at the hand of the Chaldeans. He understands God to be eternal, holy, faithful to his people, and sovereign over the world. His eyes are pure in that they find no pleasure in evil and he cannot and will not tolerate sin. Habakkuk's God is not a god he imagined and made up for his liking. The God whom he calls "My God" is the creator God revealed to us in Scripture.

• God's Character and the Existence of Evil Brings Questions

Yet it is precisely his knowledge of the holiness and sovereignty of God that makes his 2nd question all the more intense. If God is GOD, then how does he permit an evil nation to go on a rampage doing this in direct contradiction to the commands of God. God does not condone sin, yet he is using sinners (and their sin) to accomplish his will. This is a deep mystery which brings an intense existential struggle to Habakkuk's soul.

• God Has Made Us Such That We Need a King

Human beings are made such that we need leaders and rulers. Yet, life in our fallen, shipwrecked world finds us separated from God, our rightful king. As such we are easily led astray and oppressed by malevolent rulers. History and our contemporary world are full of examples of man's inhumanity to man. Many times it is the case that people follow in masses after leaders who care nothing for the well being of their own.

• Human Oppression Flows From Idolatry

Rulers and Nations who step on the necks of other peoples are usually steeped in profound self-worshipping idolatry. The oppressor feels himself to be superior to other peoples and justifies the justice of his cause in his own mind. Self-worship, or nation-worship is nothing other than idolatry, a human fabricated religion that finds no place before the throne of God.



The Self-Revealed Creator God

Habakkuk introduces his second question to God by reflecting briefly on the nature and character of his Lord. In verses 12 and 13 he reflects back to God what he believes about God's identity and attributes. The language he uses reflects God as he truly is, God as he reveals himself to us in the Bible. I will briefly comment on each of the ways Habakkuk describes our great creator God and the significance each attributes holds for our lives.

The Eternal God—From Everlasting— Habakkuk uses an interesting word in reflecting on God's nature. He says that God is "*qādam*" which literally means to be "before or to go in front of all things."¹ It is derived from the word which means "from the east or the direction of the sun at the dawn"² and figuratively says that God is before or in front of even the place where the day begins. To say God is from everlasting is to say that he existed before space and time and will never cease to be. Many times people will get into a discussion about creation and ask the following question. *If God created all things, who then created God.* Although polytheists and Mormons³ might be tempted to answer this question, Christians will give no answer because one does not exist. When we say "GOD" we mean the being that has no beginning, is uncreated, uncaused, and necessary for anything to exist at all. Nobody created God, he is from everlasting, he is eternal without beginning and without end.

Our Holy God— The Scriptures frequently refer to God as holy, completely set apart from sin and devoted to his own honor. The concept of holiness throughout the Bible is something set apart for the use and worship of God. This world is stained with sin, imperfections, and is quite broken. God is not. When we cry "holy, holy, holy" in worship, we are affirming that God is unlike anything in this world. He is unique in his being and as Habakkuk says here, God is *of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong.* Part of God's holiness means that he purely understands who he is and offers himself to his creatures for worship. He seeks his own glory and honor because of his radiant goodness. The very best thing for us is to be in relationship with and to be made like the holy God.⁴

God, My God— One of the fascinating truths about God is that he is a personal God. This is unique to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Eastern religions have a concept of deity which is largely impersonal. God simply is the all encompassing reality that we are all part of—all is divine and all is one. Classical Sunni Islam presents Allah as a God who is completely separated from us such that the only way we relate is through submission and obedience to his will. The God of the Bible however is a God of personal love, grace and interaction with his creatures. He is Immanuel, God *with us.* Habakkuk calls God, "my God" - what a privilege to know the God who cares about us intimately and is not distant in our darkest hours.



YHWH—Our Faithful Covenant Keeping Lord— Habakkuk uses the name YHWH (Yahweh) for God in this passage. This is the unique name God reveals to his own people as their covenant keeping Lord. In Deuteronomy 7:9 Moses tells the people of Israel "*Know therefore that the Lord (Yahweh) your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations*" It is the unique name of the God of the Bible—he is the one who is the absolute unchangeable one, the existing, ever-living, God.⁵

Our Just God—He is Intolerant of Evil— Contrary to some popular notions of God today, God is not the great therapist sky fairy, who approves of all the actions of human beings and just feels sorry for us. The God of whom Habakkuk speaks does not like human evil. In fact, his eyes are so pure he cannot even look at it. What Habakkuk's metaphor is teaching us is this. Far from being tolerant of evil doing, God is profoundly the opposite. He is highly intolerant of evil, so much so that he will hold us accountable us for our sins. This of course is only part of the story — the rest is what gives us hope and relationship with this holy and just God.

Our Saving God—We Shall Not Die— Though not as explicit in Habakkuk 1, the message of this book, and of the whole of Scripture, is that God is a god of grace and mercy and has provided the way to life and forgiveness. Habakkuk states here "we will not die." What he is acknowledging is that God's people will be ultimately saved because of God's promises and faithfulness to save repentant sinners. In fact, Jesus promised life, even to those who die yet trust and follow him. In John 11:25 Jesus said to a woman grieving the death of her brother, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" Good question, no?

Sovereign—He establishes, He ordains— We touched on this last week, so no need to go on and on about Sovereignty again. But Habakkuk's language here is that God ordains and establishes people and nations for his purposes. I know we like to think we are in charge of things, but the Scriptures remind us that it is God, well, *who is God.*

Our Struggles with Evil

With God's attributes on display in Habakkuk, I want us to see how this actually contributes to his second question. I want it to be clear why he (and us) goes on to ask God "can you really raise up a wicked people and allow them to do evil for your purposes." Let me start by giving an example. Suppose for a moment we thought God's character to be "Unknown" that we do not know that he is good, loving, and just. When we see the evil that is in the world, we may be right to conclude that the creator of the world is a demon. Or even worse, if we thought that God was evil, there would be no questions in our souls when we see all the junk going down in us and around us. It is precisely *because* God is good, loving, and sovereign that the evils of the world perplex us as much as they do. Human struggles with the world being broken, shipwrecked, and containing evils are universal affecting us all. In other words, when you see a child dying of inoperable cancer, the ache is not reserved to certain kinds of human beings. No, we all wrestle with these issues and seek to find an answer. There are many answers flying around in the world, and equally as many questions. For our brief purposes here I want to look at how different people seek to provide an answer to the problem of suffering. These are not comprehensive,⁶ as I only have about a page of tiny font text to treat this subject—smile, but I do think that these are some of the most common explanations offered to our questions.

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Some Answers Given to the Question of Evil

The Pantheist Answer—See past the question, evil is an illusion

Pantheism is a common worldview that flows out of eastern philosophies such as Hinduism, Taoism and some flavors of Buddhism. It is a philosophy that all of reality is "one" and that all is divine. Rocks, trees, birds, bumblebees, human beings, and stars are all part of one mysteriously divine reality that we experience together. The goal many times in pantheistic views is to become enlightened to remember that you are indeed divine and at harmony with the larger cosmos. The problem is we don't realize this and persist in believing in illusions such as individuality and the existence of good and evil. Pantheists solve the problem of evil by denying it—evil and good are mere *maya* or illusion which keeps us from seeing that all is just part of the same whole. The yin-yang symbol is the most familiar signifier of this teaching. Darkness and light, good and evil are two intertwined sides of the same coin. Evil isn't really "real" so don't ask the question, only see past the illusion. The problem I see here is that evil and suffering are quite real. A child in Chechnya whose Mom was just destroyed by a terrorist bomb does not think it to be an illusion. Evil is far too real, to deny it in order to escape from painful truths.

The Atheist's Answer—There is nobody to ask, God does not exist

On the opposite extreme is the answer of the atheist. In this view, the reality and existence of evil should tell us that there is no God in existence. It is just wishful thinking to posit a good God behind this evil cosmos. There are major problems with this view which go beyond the scope of these notes. To put it simply, to declare something "evil" the atheist betrays himself in that he knows both good and evil. If there is such a thing as evil, then there must be good, if there is true and real goodness, there must be a way to discern the difference. If atheism is true, then the cosmos is a random, a-moral occurrence, where there is no real good and evil. There is just stuff we like and don't like. We are left in a bog of relativism with the atheist having nobody to be angry at for all the evil in the world, nobody to question, no real definition what "evil" even is. We are all just random blips of energy in this worldview—but we know we want to ask the question. To whom shall we bring our complaints?

The Christian Answer— We wrestle with God and live in hope⁷

The Christian believer understands the world to be in a temporary fallen state where a good God is active in achieving his purposes for the world. He is saving people who are themselves evildoers while holding back his hand of judgment until his appointed time. He will then judge all evil fully and eliminate it forever. While we may not know the ultimate "WHY" for everything that happens, we trust the character of God amidst our suffering. At the same time there are many reasons given in Scripture as to why evil currently exists. The moral choices of human beings cause much of it, the design of the physical world which operates according to natural laws teaches us responsibility for our actions and has resulting dangers, and the truth that our present suffering has a transforming power in our lives which drives our loves and allegiances towards God and away from temporary things. It is precisely this last answer we see in the book of James chapter 1:2-4 *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Should we ask the questions we feel when confronted with evil? Yes, it is more than an illusion, evil is a display that something is wrong with the world, there is a good that is missing in things. Should we deny the existence of God because we do not understand his purposes for a world that contains both good and evil? No, we should come to him in repentance of our own evil and for his comfort and grace to live in a shipwrecked world. Should we live in the tension? I think yes. From Habakkuk's wrestling with God we see both a good and just God and a very gritty world full of his goodness and our evil doing. At times this world causes us to scream, but we do have the company of one who weeps with us (see John chapter 11). He sees and knows our pain — he subjected himself to it with the sacrifice of his own beloved Son. For our evildoing and by our evildoing he was slain. For our salvation and his glory he redeems and will judge. We will do well to close with the words of the apostle Peter: *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

Trusting Him With You



Notes:

1. Ludwig Köhler William Lee Holladay, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 313.
2. James Swanson, Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament), electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), HGK7710.
3. Mormons believe that the god of this world was once like a human being in this world. The god of this world, according to Mormon theology, has a creator. For more see Frank Beckwith, *The Mormon Concept of God*, available online <http://www.equip.org/free/DM410.htm>, accessed February 22, 2007.
4. For more on God's holiness in relation to God seeking his own honor/glory see Chapter 12, Section 9—*Holiness* in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) or John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006)
5. Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs, Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, Strong's, TWOT, and GK References Copyright 2000 by Logos Research Systems, Inc., electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), xiii.
6. For more on the Problem of Evil see the following resources. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith—see Objection 1*, CS Lewis' *The Problem of Pain*, Ron Nash's *Faith and Reason*, and for answers from more of a Reformed perspective see John S. Feinburg's Chapter *Why I Still Believe in Christ in Spite of Evil and Suffering* in Geisler and Hoffman's *Why I Am a Christian, Leading Thinkers Explain Why They Believe* and John Piper's restating of Jonathan Edwards thought, *Is God Less Glorious Because He Ordained that Evil Be* which is available online at <http://www.desiringgod.org/>
7. Other theistic faiths like Judaism and Islam also see God as having good purposes for permitting evil. However, the cross gives the Christian story a unique view of God's relationship to evil. He does not conquer in spite of evil and suffering, he conquers through the suffering of his own Son at the hands of evil people.