

Sermon #22 — *Habakkuk Series*

Title: **FACTS, QUESTIONS, AND**
 CONCLUSIONS

Text: Habakkuk 1:13

Subject: *Understanding God's Providence*

Date: Tuesday Evening — March 8, 2011

Tape # *Habakkuk #22*

Readings: *Bobbie Estes and David Burge*

Introduction:

The title of my message tonight is **FACTS, QUESTIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS**. Why do the wicked prosper, while the righteous suffer? Why do ungodly people live in ease, while godly men and women have no earthly comfort? These facts often trouble the hearts of believing people. **Many godly people have felt like David, when he wrote Psalm 73**. It appears that the wicked always prosper in the world and increase in riches, power, influence, and happiness (Psalm 73:3-12).

(Psalms 73:3-12) “For **I was envious at the foolish, [when] I saw the prosperity of the wicked**. 4 For [there are] no bands in their death: but their strength [is] firm. 5 They [are] not in trouble [as other] men; neither are they plagued

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like [other] men. 6 Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them [as] a garment. 7 **Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.** 8 They are corrupt, and speak wickedly [concerning] oppression: they speak loftily. 9 They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. 10 Therefore his people return hither: and **waters of a full [cup] are wrung out to them.** 11 And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? 12 **Behold, these [are] the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase [in] riches.**”

APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS

The wicked prosper; but the righteous are cast down. Virtue is often dressed in rags. Godly hearts are usually weeping hearts. And those who seek the glory of Christ in this world seem to reap the most of this world's sorrow, pain, and reproach. **How can we understand such apparent contradictions?**

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- **Human reason** says, — “Prosperity is the result of diligence, wisdom, and thrift. Poverty is the result of laziness, ignorance, and vice.”
- **Human religion** says, “Happiness, health, and prosperity are signs of God's favor. Sorrow, sickness, and poverty are signs of God's displeasure.”

Illustration: *Job's Three Friends!*

Very often, true believers fall into the error of the ungodly. We are all apt to think that if God lifts a man up He is pleased with him, and if God casts a man down He is angry with him. **This was a matter of such great trouble and confusion to David** that he tells us his feet were almost gone and his steps well nigh slipped. **God's prophet Jeremiah was vexed by the same paradox** (Jeremiah 12:1-2).

(Jeremiah 12:1-2) “Righteous [art] thou, O LORD, when I plead with Thee: yet let me talk with Thee of [Thy] judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? [wherefore] are

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all they happy that deal very treacherously? 2
Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken
root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: Thou
[art] near in their mouth, and far from their
reins.”

HABAKKUK 1:13

Now, turn with me to my text (Habakkuk 1:13), and you will see that **God’s prophet Habakkuk was greatly disturbed by this fact:** — The wicked often appear to be blessed of God, while the righteous appear to be under the very judgment of God and cursed of Him. — The wicked commonly prosper in their pursuit of wickedness, while the righteous suffer in their pursuit of righteousness.

(Habakkuk 1:13) “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?”

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As in all other things, so it is here: — Our thoughts are God's thoughts and His ways are not our ways! Truly, God's providence is a mystery that defies explanation upon any human terms. No philosophy can unravel the mystery of providence. No system of logic can explain it.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep, in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will!

Read my text again. Habakkuk saw the wicked Chaldeans, an idolatrous, vile, wicked, base, barbaric people used of God to destroy the holy city, Jerusalem and its magnificent temple. That wicked nation carried the children of Israel, God's chosen people, into captivity. The righteous were given as prey into the hands of the wicked; and Habakkuk was

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dumbfounded! He could not understand what was going on around him. Confused, hurt, and broken, with weeping heart, the prophet cries out to God...

(Habakkuk 1:13) “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?”

In this 13th verse of Habakkuk, the prophet of God states two facts and raises one question. These facts and questions beg for answers and conclusions.

TWO FACTS

First, Habakkuk states two facts, irrefutable facts about the character of our great God that are plainly revealed in Holy Scripture. Here’s the first fact: — **“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil.”**

Of course, God is omniscient. That means He knows all things. Habakkuk had no question about that. He beholds all things good and evil. He sees and all men

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righteous and wicked, and beholds all their actions good and evil. But He does not look upon the sins of men with pleasure and approval. They are contrary to His nature, repugnant to His will, and breaches of His holy law.

Here's the second fact. Because God is of such pure eyes, Habakkuk says, — “*Thou canst not look upon iniquity!*” He who is God, holy, righteous, just, and true, cannot look upon iniquity. He cannot abide its presence. He cannot tolerate its existence. He cannot endure its existence.

- Unlike us, the immaculate God can never get used to sin.
- Unlike us, the righteous God can never learn to live with iniquity.
- Unlike us, our holy God can never become accustomed to transgressions.

“Thou canst not look upon iniquity!”

THE DAMNED

The damned in hell scream loudly and incessantly, ages after age, and forever, that God is “*of purer eyes*

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than to behold evil” and cannot look upon iniquity (Psalms 5:3-8; 11:4-7).

(Psalms 5:3-8) “3 My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct [my prayer] unto thee, and will look up. 4 For thou [art] not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. 5 The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. 6 Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.”

“7 ¶ But as for me, I will come [into] thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: [and] in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple. 8 Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face.”

(Psalms 11:4-7) “The LORD [is] in his holy temple, the LORD’S throne [is] in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. 5 The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked

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and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. 6 Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: [this shall be] the portion of their cup. 7 For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.”

CHRIST’S DEATH

More than that, infinitely more than that, the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cursed tree, when He who knew no sin was made sin for us, declare, *“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity!”*

(2 Corinthians 5:21) “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

(Psalms 22:1-3) “1 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? [why art thou so] far from helping me, [and from] the words of my roaring? 2 O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not

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silent. 3 But thou [art] holy, [O thou] that inhabitest the praises of Israel.”

ONE QUESTION

“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.” Those are the facts. Now, here is the question asked by the prophet in the light of these two facts. “Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously; and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?” — Let’s look at Habakkuk’s questions as one question. Without question, this question, above anything else, directs our thoughts to the cruel, torturous slaughter of our Lord Jesus Christ by the will of the Jews and the hands of the Romans.

But, here, the prophet is asking about the difficulties of providence he was facing at the time, the dark, dark, heavy, heavy strokes of God’s rod upon the children of Israel. What Habakkuk saw was as disturbing and confusing to him as it was disgusting.

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The Chaldeans dealt treacherously with God, by worshipping idols. They dealt treacherously with the Jews, pretending to be their friends and allies, all the while planning their ruin and destruction. Yet the Lord God, in His providence appeared to look favorably on those treacherous, perfidious, ungodly reprobates, giving them success in everything to which they put their hands, even to the destruction of Jerusalem, His temple in Jerusalem, and the brutal captivity of His covenant people!

This was stumbling to Habakkuk, and is (to a greater or lesser degree) a stumblingblock to all of Zion's pilgrims in this world. How can such things be reconciled to the purity and holiness of God? How can God's justice and faithfulness abide such wickedness?

That wicked king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, took the last king of the Jews, Zedekiah, slaughtered his sons, gouged out his eyes, bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon. Zedekiah was the King of Judah, the King of God's Church, the King

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of God's covenant people! — And God kept silent!
No; God is the One who sent Nebuchadnezzar!

(Isaiah 45:7) “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.”

Not only was Zedekiah (with all his faults) a far better man than Nebuchadnezzar, there were among the Jews many who were truly righteous, true believers, many who loved, worshipped, trusted, and faithfully served the Triune Jehovah.

Yet, they too were devoured by Babylonian idolaters, destroyed with the sword, plundered of their substance, and carried into captivity. Again, the Lord of Israel was silent all the while. He said nothing in His providence against them, put no stop to their proceedings, and by His silence appeared to approve of what the Babylonians did!

Apply all of this to spiritual Babylon, to all the false religion of our day. By the wine of Babylon all the nations of the world are intoxicated and held in

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captivity. And this, too, is by Divine design (1 Corinthians 11:19; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-14).

(1 Corinthians 11:19) “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.”

(2 Thessalonians 2:3-14) “Let no man deceive you by any means: for [that day shall not come], except there come **a falling away first**, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; 4 **Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God**, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. 5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? 6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. 7 For **the mystery of iniquity doth already work**: only he who now letteth [will let], until he be taken out of the way. 8 And **then shall that Wicked be revealed**, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: 9 [Even him], **whose**

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coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 And with **all deceivableness** of unrighteousness in them that perish; **because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.** 11 And **for this cause** God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: 12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

“13 ¶ **But** we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: 14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

MY CONCLUSIONS

How are we to deal with these things? How are we to respond to them? Why do the wicked prosper, while the righteous suffer? Why do ungodly people live in ease, while godly men and women have no earthly

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comfort? Why does false religion prevail everywhere, while the Gospel of Christ is everywhere trampled underfoot? We've heard the facts and considered the questions.

(Habakkuk 1:13) “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?”

Now, I want you to hear my conclusions, the conclusions I am compelled to draw from these things, conclusions I have drawn from the Word of God.

1. **Fall, child of God, fall into the arms of your great God** (Psalm 115:3).

(Psalms 115:3) “Our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.”

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Here the psalmist David plainly declares **The great supremacy and glorious sovereignty of our God.** Our God is supreme over all the gods of the world. He who truly is God is God who rules over all things, at all times, in all places, absolutely. He is the absolute, unrivaled Sovereign of the universe, who always does His will in heaven, earth and hell. — *“He has His way in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him — What doest thou?”* The God I worship, trust and love is in total control of the universe!

2. **Thank God for that Righteous Man, Christ Jesus, whom the Lord God slew by the hands of wicked men in our room and stead, as our sin-atoning Substitute** (2 Corinthians 5:21).

(2 Corinthians 5:21) “He hath made Him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

With those words, the Apostle Paul sets before us **The effectual, substitutionary atonement of our**

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Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of God was made sin for His people. He died under the wrath of God for God's elect, for every sinner who trusts Him. Thus He accomplished our redemption and obtained our eternal salvation. Just as He was made to be sin for His people, even so, all for whom He died are made to be the very righteousness of God in Him, having His righteousness made ours just as our sin was made His!

3. **Trust the wise, unerring providence of God, your heavenly Father** (Romans 8:28).

(**Romans** 8:28) We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.

Here the inspired Apostle declares **The holy, wise, good, adorable providence of our God.** Nothing is more comforting to a believer's heart, nothing so effectually quietens our fears as the assurance of our heavenly Father's good providence.

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4. **Remember too that this world is not the place of punishment for the wicked.**

As a general rule, God allows the wicked to go on in their wickedness. He throws the reins upon their necks. He lets them go unbridled in their lusts. He leaves them alone. But all the while He is preparing them for judgment. (Psalm 92:7). God has set them in slippery places; and their feet shall slide in due season.

(Jeremiah 23:12) “Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, saith the LORD.”

(Psalms 73:17-20) “Until I went into the sanctuary of God; [then] understood I their end.
18 Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. 19 How are they [brought] into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. 20 As a dream when [one] awaketh; [so], O

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Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.”

(Psalms 92:6-7) “A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this. 7 ¶ When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; [it is] that they shall be destroyed for ever:”

5. And remember this: – **This world is not the place of our reward.**

In His wise providence God often casts the righteous down. The believer is often afflicted. Waves of trouble roll over the heart that is sanctified by grace. But there is another day coming, a day when the spoiled shall be the spoilers, a day when the remnant chosen of God (His Israel) shall spoil Babylon and all the nations of the world. As Israel spoiled Egypt, so the Israel of God shall yet spoil the nations of the world (Habakkuk 2:8).

(Habakkuk 2:8) “Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall

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spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.”

(Isaiah 33:1) “Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! **when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled;** and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee.”

(Revelation 18:1-6) “And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. 2 And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. 3 For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through

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the abundance of her delicacies. 4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. 5 For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. 6 **Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.**”

(Revelation 21:23-26) “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb [is] the light thereof. 24 And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. 25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. 26 And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.”

Bless God, I’ve read the last chapter of the Book; and I’m here to tell you — **There’s a better day coming!**

- All God’s elect shall be saved!

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- All things shall bow before Christ the Lord!
- The slime of the serpent and every trace of sin shall be eradicated from God's earth!
- And God shall be All in all!

(1 Corinthians 15:24-28) “Then [cometh] the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy [that] shall be destroyed [is] death. 27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under [him, it is] manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. 28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.”

Amen!