

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Why does a good God allow evil in the world?
Habakkuk 1

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Why does a good God allow evil in the world? – 26-53-01-en

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Copy pages 2 and 3 for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a series of sessions needs to have access to the "Introduction" article found at the beginning of each series (Bible Teaching #....). The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.
2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)
3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Bible Study Leader:

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Worship Time Leader:

Music Sources:

O God, Our Help in Ages Past, *The Worship Hymnal* #122; CCLI #43152 Public Domain
Everlasting God, *The Worship Hymnal* #121; CCLI #4556538
You Are My Hiding Place, *The Worship Hymnal* #125; CCLI #21442
I Could Sing of Your Love Forever, *The Worship Hymnal* #116; CCLI #1043199

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)**Why does a good God allow evil in the world?****Focal Text**

Habakkuk 1

Background Text

Habakkuk 1-3

Main Idea

People in every generation have asked how a good God could allow evil in the world. This honest question is clearly stated in the first chapter of Habakkuk. God answers that He is going to do something which would amaze the prophet and the Jewish people.

Question to Explore

Why does God allow evildoers to prosper and righteous people to suffer?

Teaching Aim

Help participants to deal with the question of evil in the world and help them recognize that throughout history people have asked why a good God allows evil.

Gathering together:

Choose to sing one or more of the following:

O God, Our Help in Ages Past, *The Worship Hymnal* #122; CCLI #43152 Public Domain
Everlasting God, *The Worship Hymnal* #121; CCLI #4556538

You Are My Hiding Place, *The Worship Hymnal* #125; CCLI #21442

First thoughts:

Habakkuk is the eighth prophetic book in the section of the Hebrew canon referred to as “the twelve” or the Minor Prophets. These include Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Habakkuk is positioned between Nahum and Zephaniah which reflects the position that they all prophesied during

the last quarter of the 7th century and/or the first quarter of the 6th century (625 BC to 575 BC). This indicates that they were contemporaries of Jeremiah.¹

There is no personal information about Habakkuk available. The traditional meaning of the prophet's name was "to caress" or "to embrace". Perhaps the name reflected the parents' wish that their son would embrace Yahweh and/or his fellow men.

This was an difficult period in the life of the Jewish nation. The northern Kingdom, Israel, had fallen to the Assyrians and now the Assyrians were conquered by the Babylonians who eventually advanced as far westward as Egypt. Judah was at risk.

Internal problems also existed. Judah had enjoyed a long period of reform under King Josiah (640-608 B.C.) but subsequent rulers allowed those reforms to lapse. They had little interest in the moral and religious concerns of Josiah. Those, like Habakkuk, who strove to call the nation back to God did so at grave personal risk.

Habakkuk voiced his questioning asking God why he stood by and did nothing. Understanding God as a God of justice led him to wonder why evil would flourish and righteousness be ignored. It is a question as relevant to us today as it was to Habakkuk.

It may be a comfort to us to realize that this great theological question has existed throughout history. The short book of Habakkuk may help us understand better how God works in the world.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

¹ (Garland, David D. "Habakkuk" in **The Broadman Bible Commentary**, Volume 7. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1972, p. 245).

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Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Why does a good God allow evil in the world?

Focal Text

Habakkuk 1

Background Text

Habakkuk 1-3

Main Idea

People in every generation have asked how a good God could allow evil in the world? This honest question is clearly stated in the first chapter of Habakkuk. God answers that He is going to do something which would amaze the prophet and the Jewish people.

Question to Explore

Why does God allow evildoers to prosper and righteous people to suffer?

Teaching Aim

Help participants to deal with the question of evil in the world and help them recognize that throughout history people have asked why a good God allows evil.

Introduction to your personal study:

Think back to times when you have personally experienced or have known others to experience a bad circumstance which caused you to ask “Why did God allow this to happen?” In Calgary, Alberta, Canada in 2016, twin brothers were killed in an accident on a bobsled run. The young men were excellent students, Christian leaders, and were loved by many. They were looking forward to university the following year and one had already received a good scholarship for university studies. The entire city asked “Why?” The parents and sister affirmed in the large gathering to remember the boys that they would remain faithful to God and depend on Him for strength.

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Background: Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Introduction**” article found at the beginning of this series (Bible Teaching #....) of Bible Study and Worship sessions. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

Focusing on the Meaning:

“Habakkuk, unlike any other Old Testament prophet, was Israel’s representative before Yahweh instead of being Yahweh’s representative to the Israelites. He took up Israel’s cause before Yahweh and sought His sympathy on her behalf. His colleagues represented Yahweh to the people and served as His spokesmen in calling them to repentance and righteousness” (Broadman, p. 247).

“The prophet found himself faced with two problems. First, believing as he did in the justice of God, he could not understand why the righteous must suffer; and second, he was troubled by the prosperity of the wicked. Both of these problems had to do with the justice of God; and the prophet was trying to understand, or at least find a suitable explanation for the fact that God had done nothing in response to the wide-spread injustice which he saw in the land” (Broadman, p. 249).

Habakkuk was well aware of the sinful condition of his people, but may have felt that their sin was not comparable to the evil of the invading conquerors which he vividly describes in Chapter 2. Furthermore, he would have realized that within the Jewish community there were always the faithful. And he certainly knew that they were a Covenant people – chosen by God for His purposes. Why then did He not intervene on their behalf?

Verse 1 ***The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received*** tells us at least two important things. An oracle in this context would be a revelation – a word from God which is given to a prophet who is a person entrusted with communicating God’s message to the people. The word prophet is not used lightly in Scripture.

***How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?
Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save?***

***Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrong?***

***Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife and conflict abounds.
Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails.
The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted. (vs. 2-4)***

These verses were entitled “Habakkuk’s Complaint” in one Bible translation, but they are so much more than a complaint. A complaint may sound trivial – one complains about poor service in a restaurant or about the bad weather.

Habakkuk is voicing a heartfelt sense of despair. As we read these words in the early years of the 21st century we feel that he is talking about our world.

There is violence. There is injustice, wrong, destruction, strife and conflict. The law seems to be paralyzed. For Habakkuk this would refer to the law of the Torah or Old Testament books and probably only secondarily to the law of the land.

Habakkuk teaches us that we can tell God about our concern. God will not consider us unfaithful if we express to Him our despair over world conditions.

“There must be a unity deeper than the area of conflict (*between righteousness and evil*). This unity is in God, so that back of all the outcrying against evil, back of all protests, lies the conviction that rejects evil as ultimate. This assumption is present all through the utterances of Habakkuk. The deep confidence that life will not finally sustain evil is a part of the distilled wisdom of the race, and the door of hope through which the generations have passed into the city of God”²

However, to our human perception “the ‘evilness of evil’ seems to be more dynamic and energizing than the ‘goodness’ of good.”³

Verses 5-11 may rightly be called The Lord’s Answer.

“Look at the nations and watch – and be utterly amazed.

For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.

I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own.

They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law unto themselves and promote their own honor.

Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk.

Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar.

They fly like a vulture swooping to devour; they all come bent on violence.

Their hordes advance like the desert wind and gather prisoners like sand.

They deride kings, and scoff at rulers.

They laugh at all fortified cities; they build earthen ramps and capture them.

² **The Interpreter’s Bible**, Vol. 6, New York: Abingdon Press, 1956, p. 981.

³ **The Interpreter’s Bible**, p. 981.

Then they sweep past like the wind and go on-guilty men, whose own strength is their god.”

It is important to remember here that in Habakkuk’s oracle or revelation, God is speaking to him in a very personal way.

God tells Habakkuk that He is still involved in what is happening in the world. In fact, God speaks of the fact that He is ***“going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.”***

This is not good news. God describes the power of the Chaldeans (the latter group of the Babylonians were known as Chaldeans). They are ruthless and hasty to act. They sweep down and capture places not their own. They are a feared and dreaded people – a law to themselves. They have swift horses; are fierce like wolves, are like vultures. They have no respect for authority. They are skilled fighters who are audacious enough to build ramps leading to the city wall to be able to come over the wall and take the city.

But – God also says that they are guilty men. They are so proud of their own strength that it is worship. A student of history would be able to list a great many civilizations which have felt they were invincible. This is an extremely meaningful verse ***Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—guilty men, whose own strength is their god.”***

This portrayal of human behaviour is a warning for us. However strong a nation may become militarily or financially it must beware of the worship of that strength. This is true on the corporate and individual level.

“All events in life take place somehow within the divine context.” (The Interpreter’s Bible, p. 980). This foundational truth we must emphasize again and again. This means that God uses every occasion, whether good or evil, to pursue his ultimate goal of redemption.

***O Lord, are you not from everlasting?
My God, my Holy One, we will not die.
O Lord, you have appointed them to execute judgment;
O Rock, you have ordained them to punish.
Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;
You cannot tolerate wrong.
Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?
Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? (vs. 12-13)***

Habakkuk, the prophet and the believer in the everlasting God affirms his belief in the God of creation – the Lord who has always existed. And this is not an impersonal God, but ***my Holy One***. This is a beautiful expression of faith and love.

Nonetheless, Habakkuk continues to question why the God who cannot tolerate wrong continues to tolerate the wickedness of the treacherous. His questions resonate through the ages. ***Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?***

The righteous would refer to those who live according to the law – the Jewish law. Those books in our Bible which record that law or the Torah are the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. That would require adherence to the festivals and sacrifices indicated, but would also require a high level of moral purity and concern for the community.

Jesus speaks to the keeping of the Law in Matthew 5:19 when he said ***Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come to fulfill them.*** The following verses in Chapter 5 & 6 & 7 speak to the higher requirements of followers of Jesus which involves a true heart renewal and understanding of faith.

“God still controls history. He used the Babylonians to punish Judah. From our limited perspective, we may not understand God’s purposes in history. We tend to judge events in relation to self-interest or national concerns instead of God’s providential guidance of history. Our suffering and the world’s evil can be explained only in light of God’s perspective and purposes, including His purpose of relating to free humans who choose to sin.

God intended to use the irreverent and self-serving Babylonians to accomplish His justice. The prophet was bewildered but recorded the revelation. God can use unrighteous people to correct human abuses. Habakkuk withheld judgment, waiting for God to explain and complete His work. Faithful followers interpret even when they do not understand what God is doing. God is active amid the confusion of human history.

Our theology forces us to ask questions about the kind of world we live in. Habakkuk knew God was pure and could not tolerate the presence of evil. He also knew of the treacherous and inhuman treatment his people were suffering from Babylon. Could God allow such unjust sinners to punish His people? The prophet knew his people deserved punishment, but he questioned whether a holy God would punish them through such an unjust agent. We live in a world in which God allows human evil to win at times to accomplish His ultimate purposes. Living under the momentary triumph of evil, we raise serious questions and wait for God to answer. We may have to endure His silence before we receive His answer.”⁴

The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad.

⁴ **Disciple’s Study Bible.** Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1988, p. 1126.

Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food.

Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy? vs. 15-17

Chapter 1 concludes with the descriptive picture of helpless sea creatures pulled up in a net. But this is not the honest fisherman seeking to earn a living. This is the vain owner of a luxury craft who catches dolphins and porpoises without even noticing their presence. His/her life is one of luxurious living with no thought for others.

We return to the description of the evil men given in verse 11:

Then they sweep past like the wind- and go on-guilty men, whose own strength is their god.”

These evil ones sacrifice to their net – it has become their god. The instrument of destruction is more important than anything else – they must their trust in their own strength.

The image of destruction given by the prophet in verses 15-17 is an apt picture of those who sell drugs to innocent people around the world. New and potent drugs can be purchased online. There is no regard for the lives destroyed – for parents left grieving and children left homeless. There is only a desire for more riches.

In chapters 2 and 3, Habakkuk will reaffirm his faith in God.

The word picture of the watchman on the wall is found throughout Scripture. It speaks to us of our responsibility to watch and pray. We may watch many days before we can shout “Babylon has fallen”. Habakkuk affirms his responsibility to stand at his watch – wait to see what God is going to do in the world.

He affirms his faith again in Chapter 2: 20 ***But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him*** and again in Chapter 3:19 ***But the sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.***

The rich book will encourage those who read and study it to trust that the Lord – the Sovereign Lord is the Lord of history who is actively at work in the world today.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

Help participants to deal with the question of evil in the world and help them recognize that throughout history people have asked why a good God allows evil. Further, guide

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them in understanding the eternal considerations of learning to live in and trust in God who loves them, regardless of how it sometimes seems through our human understanding.

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the **Focal Text** in their Bibles. Also, share with them the **Main Idea** to be learned from the Scriptures, and the **Questions to be Explored** by the group.

Why does a good God allow evil in the world?

Habakkuk 1

Focal Text

Habakkuk 1

Background Text

Habakkuk 1-3

Main Idea

People in every generation have asked how a good God could allow evil in the world? This honest question is clearly stated in the first chapter of Habakkuk. God answers that He is going to do something which would amaze the prophet and the Jewish people.

Question to Explore

Why does God allow evildoers to prosper and righteous people to suffer?

Teaching Aim

Help participants to deal with the question of evil in the world and help them recognize that throughout history people have asked why a good God allows evil.

Connect with Life: Remind the group that the title for today's study is "Why does a good God allow evil in the world? Ask the group to share times when they asked or were very tempted to ask that question.

Guide the Study:

Say: Our three week study in the book of Habakkuk will help us understand that asking God such a question is not sinful, but is part of the process of our understanding God's sovereignty in the world.

"Habakkuk, unlike any other Old Testament prophet, was Israel's representative before Yahweh instead of being Yahweh's representative to the Israel. He took up Israel's cause before Yahweh and sought his sympathy on her behalf. His colleagues represented Yahweh to the people and served as his spokesmen in calling them to repentance and righteousness".⁵

Have a person read Habakkuk 1:1.

Define the meaning of oracle. (Revelation; a word from God)

Inquire: How important is it to view Habakkuk as a prophet of God? (A prophet in the Old Testament was one who had a word from God for the people. A prophet did not so much tell what would happen in the future as interpret present and future events for the people).

Have the same reader to continue reading Chapter 1: 2-4.

Ask: What are the issues which the prophet is bringing to God's attention: violence (physical, emotional, spiritual), injustice, wrong, destruction, strife, conflict, law unable to function?

Mention that, for the prophet, law would mean the law of the Torah—the law of the Jewish nation.

Ask: What does it mean to say that the wicked hem in the righteous?

Discuss what righteousness would have meant to the prophet. (Obeying the commandments – the law; worshipping God; moral purity; caring for his fellow man)

Comment: The books in our Bible which record that law or the Torah are the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Seek an answer: How would we define righteousness? Have someone read Matthew 5:17. Allow time for discussion. (Monitor time as a study of Matthew 5:17 would be another complete Bible study).

⁵ Broadman, p. 247.

Have someone read 1:5-11.

Discuss the following statement in the light of the teaching of Habakkuk's teaching:
"All events in life take place somehow within the divine context." God used the Babylonians to punish the faithless Jews. However, faithful Jews were also sent into captivity. God's ultimate purpose was to bring people back to Him.

Now ask: What are some of the characteristics of the Babylonians? (Ruthless; acting without thinking; sweeping across countries to seize land not their own; a law unto themselves; proud; own swift and fierce horses; scoff at authority)

Have someone read and comment on verse 11. (Guilty men whose own strength is their god).

Have someone read 1:12-13.

Consider what Habakkuk's relation to God is. (God is from everlasting; He is Holy; He is personal)

Discuss what righteousness would have meant to Habakkuk? (Living according to the Law contained in the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This could include adherence to the festivals and sacrifices indicated as well as a high level of moral purity).

Suggest: Those books of mid-eastern and north African history called the Torah contain a lot of interesting and informative subjects and stories. If you have not read some of those books, take a look at them. Try reading them only a chapter a day. You will discover a whole world and way of thinking that will broaden your understanding of mid-eastern thinking and culture which affects our world today as much as it did 3 or 4,000 years ago.

Have someone read and comment on Matthew 5:19

Tell the group: God still controls history. He used the Babylonians to punish Judah. From our limited perspective, we may not understand God's purposes in history. We tend to judge events in relation to self-interest or national concerns instead of God's providential guidance of history. Our suffering and the world's evil can be explained only in light of God's perspective and purposes, including His purpose of relating to free humans who choose to sin.

Have another person read 1: 14-17.

Ask the group what the word picture in these verses means. (Men are like helpless sea creatures destroyed by a fisherman. The picture is of one who recklessly destroys

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animals like dolphins and porpoises all for his own pleasure. His pleasures have become his god).

Have a person reread verse 11.

Explain: The wicked person worships his own strength.

Conclude by emphasizing: In chapter 1 we have seen Habakkuk express to God his frustration that evil people have power over righteous people. He asks plainly **Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong?**

In chapters 2 and 3, Habakkuk will reaffirm his faith in God.

Share: The word picture of the watchman on the wall **I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me (Chapter 2:1)** is found throughout Scripture. It speaks to us of our responsibility to watch and pray. We may watch many days before we can shout “Babylon has fallen”. Habakkuk affirms his responsibility to stand at his watch – wait to see what God is going to do in the world.

Continue: He affirms his faith again in Chapter 2: 20 **But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him** and again in Chapter 3:19 **But the sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.**

Confirm: This brief yet rich book will encourage those who read and study it to trust that the Lord—the Sovereign Lord is the Lord of history who is actively at work in the world today.

Encourage Application:

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If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.  
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Ask the group to bow their heads and silently tell the Lord what issues or complaints they have. This may be concern over family issues, national or world-wide issues.

Say: Habakkuk teaches us that we can ask “Why?”

<p>Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.</p>
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YOUTH!!! TAKE TEN

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

Why does a good God allow evil in the world?

Habakkuk 1

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

If God is Sovereign, Then Why?

Many teens may have asked this very question “Why does a good God allow evil in the world”. The study of Habakkuk 1 teaches us that God is open to hearing that question.

The sovereignty of God is a big term for the understanding that God will use every event in our personal lives and in history to bring people to Himself.

Discuss this as a group and then remind yourselves that this is a truth your parents and leaders also struggle to understand. It will probably be a lifelong struggle for most people.

Share those issues which you have which you are comfortable telling the group.

Remember to pray for understanding and peace as you deal with the complicated issues of life.

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)**Beginning the Service:**

Sing the following or another of your choice:

I Could Sing of Your Love Forever, *The Worship Hymnal* #116; CCLI #1043199

Offering:**Praying for the World:**

France faces huge difficulties these days as it tries to manage the immigration of many mid-eastern and African people. Christian believers in Central France have been gathering to pray and learn more about the people around them. Pray that they will embrace the people from Northern Africa and the Middle East and guide them to the Light of the world.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

Rejoice in the Hope of the Glory of God 2 Corinthians 12:9; Romans 5:2-6

Paul gives this affirmation ***My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (1 Corinthians 12:9)***

A poem by Leslie Savage Clark is called **Who Can Forget?**⁶

The poem is called **Sovereignty** and it goes like this:

**This is the greatest proof of power—
The strength to lay it down.
The dust of centuries lies deep
Upon the once-proud crown
Of Nineveh or Babylon;
Though few remember them,
Who can forget a lonely hill
Outside Jerusalem?**

Romans 5: 2-6 states: ***And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.***

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

The words of the poet said “The dust of centuries lies deep upon the once-proud crown of Nineveh or Babylon; Though few remember them, Who can forget a lonely hill outside Jerusalem?”

When Habakkuk and other Old Testament prophets were alive, they could not see how the power of Babylon could ever be defeated. Yet they understood that God was above even that invincible power.

⁶ With all Thy Heart: Devotional Vignettes of Bible, Poetry and Prayer. Nashville: Broadman Press. 1957, p. 69.

We, too, look at our world and feel that the power of evil only grows stronger and stronger. At times we are able to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Seldom are we able to rejoice in our sufferings. We have difficulty seeing how God can bring good in our lives through them. Do our sufferings – either on an individual or a corporate level – bring perseverance, character and hope.

Do we believe that at just the right time, Christ entered the world and through the Holy Spirit continues with us in the world to mold our character and make us all God intended for us to be?

“Because Paul recognized that sufferings could have several good consequences, he rejoiced in sufferings. He did not deny the pain of the suffering but saw past its immediate circumstances to its final results in his life. Suffering teaches us to continue trying rather than quitting. This strengthens and matures our basic character as persons. In maturity we gain a new perspective even as we suffer, looking on life with hope rather than despair, a hope based on enduring experience with God and growing faith in God’s promises as enforced in our life by the Holy Spirit. (Disciple’s Study Bible, p. 1423).

Habakkuk ends the third and final chapter of his book with these words:

***Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.
The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
He enables me to go on the heights.***

Today, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, we can affirm as well:

The Sovereign Lord is our strength.

Call to Commitment:

In the Gospel of John, we find several instances when the disciples could not understand why evil continued to take place. Their friend Lazarus dies, they nearly die in a storm, Jesus is betrayed by one of their own, Jesus is tortured and dies a horrible death, and other moments of despair surround them. Yet, each of them learns that faith in Jesus is the only answer worthwhile. Faith in Him will sustain them all the way to eternal life with Jesus.

No, in the time each of us has on earth, we will never answer the question of this worship session: “Why does a good and perfect God allow evil in the world?” But complete faith

in our God will sustain us until He, Himself, will explain it all to us when we are in His loving arms in Heaven.

Concluding the Service:

Leader: Ask the church to bow their heads in reverence before God and hear this blessing:

Then say: Hear God's holy word to us through the writer of the Book to the Hebrews.

from Hebrews 13, verses 20 and 21: **Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Hebrews 13:20,21**

Go now, in God's peace and grace.