

Habakkuk 1:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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?

Analysis

Habakkuk's theodicy question addresses God's character: 'You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?' The Hebrew 'tahor enayim' (pure of eyes) emphasizes God's absolute holiness—He cannot approve or tolerate evil. Yet apparent divine passivity while Babylon destroys Judah creates philosophical tension. This verse articulates the believer's struggle when God's revealed character seems inconsistent with His providence. The prophet doesn't deny God's purity but seeks understanding. God's answer (chapter 2) affirms that judgment is certain, timing is sovereign, and 'the righteous shall live by faith' (2:4)—a text foundational to Reformation theology (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38).

Historical Context

Written circa 605 BC as Babylon emerged as dominant power, shortly before Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion of Judah. Habakkuk questioned how holy God could use wicked Babylon to punish Judah, who despite corruption remained more righteous than pagan oppressors. This philosophical problem intensified during exile when God's people suffered under brutal pagans. The prophet's wrestling models honest dialogue with God—not irreverent doubt but faith seeking

understanding. His resolution (3:17-19) demonstrates that trust in God's character transcends circumstances: though everything fails, 'yet I will rejoice in the LORD.'

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 – All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 – Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How do I reconcile God's holiness with His sovereignty over evil and suffering in my life and the world?
2. Am I willing to trust God's character when His ways seem inscrutable, or do I demand complete understanding before obedience?

Interlinear Text

בְּעֵין יָם	מְרָא וֹת	בְּעֵין יָם	תְּבִיט	אֶל	בָּעֵם ל
Thou art of purer	eyes	than to behold	evil	not look	H413
H2889	H5869	H7200	H7451	H5027	H5999

בָּגָד יְם לֹא תֹּאכַל מֵה לֹא תִּבְטַח H3808 and canst H4100 not look thou upon them that deal treacherously H3201 H5027 H898

אֵל יְהָוָה	בְּבָלָע	בְּשָׁעָה	פְּנַנְנָה יְשָׁעָה
the man that is more righteous	when the wicked	devoureth	and holdest thy tongue

מִתְּבָא

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 50:3 (Parallel theme): Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.

Psalms 10:15 (Evil): Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man: seek out his wickedness till thou find none.

2 Samuel 4:11 (Righteousness): How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed? shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth?

Isaiah 21:2 (Parallel theme): A grievous vision is declared unto me; the treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth. Go up, O Elam: besiege, O Media; all the sighing thereof have I made to cease.

Isaiah 33:1 (Parallel theme): 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.

Isaiah 64:12 (Parallel theme): Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?

Acts 2:23 (Evil): Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

Psalms 73:3 (Evil): For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Psalms 83:1 (Parallel theme): Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God.

Psalms 50:21 (Parallel theme): These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.