

Habakkuk 1:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention.

Analysis

Habakkuk's complaint intensifies: 'Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention' (lammah tar'eni aven ve'amal tabbit veshod vechamas lenegdi vayehi riv ummadon yissa). The prophet sees injustice (aven, iniquity), trouble (amal, toil/grievance), destruction (shod, spoiling), violence (chamas), strife (riv), and contention (madon) permeating Judean society. God doesn't merely allow Habakkuk to see this corruption—the verbs 'shew me' (tar'eni) and 'cause me to behold' (tabbit) suggest God actively directs the prophet's attention to it, making him acutely aware of moral breakdown. This creates the problem: why would God make His prophet intimately aware of evil yet not immediately intervene? The question resonates with all sensitive believers who, once awakened to injustice and suffering, cannot ignore it yet wonder why God seems slow to act.

Historical Context

Habakkuk describes conditions in Judah under corrupt kings Jehoiakim and perhaps Jehoiachin. Jeremiah, prophesying contemporaneously, confirms this picture: widespread idolatry, oppression of the poor, corrupt judges, false prophets, and leadership profiting from injustice (Jeremiah 22:13-17, 26:20-23). The legal system had broken down, the righteous were oppressed, and wickedness flourished openly. Habakkuk's complaint wasn't exaggeration but accurate

diagnosis of terminal societal corruption. This moral collapse would soon result in Babylonian conquest and exile—divine judgment executed through human agency. The prophet's lament models how godly people should respond to systemic injustice: not cynical resignation but anguished prayer seeking divine intervention.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Why might God make believers acutely aware of injustice and suffering without immediately intervening?
2. How should Christians balance prophetic denunciation of social evil with patience for God's timing?
3. What does this passage teach about bringing honest, even difficult questions to God in prayer?

Interlinear Text

לָמָּה	תִּרְאֵנִי	אֲיָן	יַעֲמֵל	תִּבְיט
H4100	Why dost thou shew	me iniquity	grievance	and cause me to behold
	H7200	H205	H5999	H5027
וְשָׂדַי	וְחַמָּסִי	לִנְגִּידִי	רִיבִי	וּמַדּוֹן
for spoiling	and violence	H5048	H1961	strife and contention
H7701	H2555		H7379	H4066
וְשָׂא:				
are before me and there are that raise up				
H5375				

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 20:8 (Sin): For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily.

Ecclesiastes 5:8 (Parallel theme): If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.

2 Peter 2:8 (Parallel theme): (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)

Ecclesiastes 4:1 (Parallel theme): So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.

Matthew 10:16 (Parallel theme): Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

Ezekiel 2:6 (Parallel theme): And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house.

