

When God Digs a Ditch: Turning Evil for Good (Part 2)

Introduction

The Text

¹The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

²O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save?³ Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.⁴ So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.

⁵“Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.⁶ For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own.⁷ They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves.⁸ Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour.⁹ They all come for violence, all their faces forward. They gather captives like sand.¹⁰ At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it.¹¹ Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!”

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.¹³ 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?¹⁴ You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler.¹⁵ He 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.¹⁶ Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich.¹⁷ Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?

¹ I 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.

² And the LORD answered me: “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.³ For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. (Hab. 1:1–2:3)

A Bitter Pill

A. I said last time that, in these verses, God is really giving Habakkuk and us a bitter pill to swallow.

1. It doesn't go down particularly nice at first, but it's what we need if we're going to move with this prophet from the cry that opens up this book to the song that closes it out.
 - a. Isn't that the trajectory we all want to be on? We want to move from the cry to the song, we want to move from the sorrow to the joy, we want to figure out how to live with hope in this broken world.

B. And that's what this book is about.

1. But to get from one place to the other, we have to swallow down this bitter pill. It's going to hurt a bit going down, but it's going to heal in the end.

C. Last time we just dug in on this idea that it hurts. If you were here, you remember we just followed the back-and-forth of this conversation Habakkuk is having with God.

1. In the first case, Habakkuk laments there in [Hab. 1:1-4](#) because he sees all this evil among his people in Judah, and it seems like God's just letting it play out. He's not protecting the violated, he's not righting the wrong, he's just letting the corruption, the toxin, spread. Like God's taking a nap or off on holiday. So he complains about it. Aren't you going to do something?
2. But then in [Hab. 1:5-11](#) God responds, and here's where we start to taste some of that bitter pill on our tongue. God responds to Habakkuk's complaint about him just letting evil run unchecked in Judah by saying, "No worries man, I'm already on it. Here's what I'm doing. I'm going to punish the nation of Judah for their unrighteousness by raising up and using a nation even more unrighteous than them. It's going to be great. You're welcome."
3. And Habakkuk just loses it at this point. So we saw that in [Hab. 1:12-2:1](#), he laments again.
 - a. This time it's not: "God why aren't you doing anything?"
 - b. Now it's: "God why are you doing that? You call that a solution? That just aggravates the problem. I said I didn't like how you were letting Judah get away with evil. Now you're going to do the same thing with Babylon who are even worse. It makes no sense. If this is the medicine, I'd rather stay sick!" It's a bitter pill.
4. But then we saw that just as Habakkuk laments again, so too God, in mercy, responds again. And we only got through [Hab. 2:3](#), but the response carries on and the essence of it is this: "Habakkuk don't worry. Though I'm using Babylon to punish the people of Judah for their sin and restore justice and make things right, I'm going to do the same with Babylon when it's all done. No one will escape my holy and righteous judgment. I'm going to make all the wrong right. And guess what: I'm going to bring my people out from the nations and back to me. And then you'll see, it's all been for good in the end."

D. Now last time we spent a great deal on Habakkuk's struggle—as he wrestles with God and how or why he would allow and even use evil and suffering in this world.

1. So this morning I want to start to consider more the healing in all of this. To do that I want to give you One Principle, Two Presuppositions, and Three Examples. 1-2-3. Nice and easy. So let's go!

One Principle

Over and Against

- A. The first thing I think we have to do is state up front as plainly as we can the principle that we are considering here.
 1. I would say that what we gather from these opening verses of Habakkuk (and elsewhere in the Scriptures as we shall soon see) is this: God is both over and against evil at the same time. That's the principle in play. That's the medicine packed inside this bitter pill.
- B. God is both over and against evil at the same time.
 1. Because he's over evil, he can use it for his own purposes in the world and ultimately for the good of his people in the end.
 2. Because he's against evil, he will still hold those accountable who commit it and will ultimately do away with all of it in the end.
 - a. He is both sovereign and benevolent; in control and in love; he has the steering wheel of the universe and he's not driving this thing over a cliff—he's taking it to paradise.
 - i. He's both over and against evil at the same time.
- C. Now I say this is a bitter pill because it rubs us wrong at first, I think. This is especially true when evil and suffering come for us in some personally devastating way, right?
 1. Maybe such a principle didn't bother you when all in your life was going pretty well, but when the Babylonians have broken down your door, what then? That's when the real struggle with this sets in.
 - a. You're going to be tempted to let go of either side of this principle, but if you're going to get through, you need them both.
- D. Some of us men went hiking at Castle Rock State Park last Saturday and, if you've been there, you know, people come up there to rock climb and things. Well, to scale these ridiculous rock faces, you need rope, and these ropes are made of interwoven threads. On their own, a single one of these threads would never hold a man, it would snap and he would fall. But when woven together, they're strong.
 1. And the two sides of this principle are kind of like these threads.
 - a. If we allow them to be woven together as they are in Scripture, then when the bottom drops out in our life, we shall find we are held up, we remain in place, we have what we need to get through.
 - b. But if we should, as a matter of taste or preference, only choose one side of this principle, one of these threads, well the rope shall surely snap, and we'll hit bottom somewhere, we won't make it.

Three Reductions

- A. Let me show you some of the ways we're tempted to reduce this principle to one or the other or nothing, and how such a thing leaves us hopeless in the face of hardship . . .

Reduction #1: God Is Against Evil But Not Over It

- A. Some of us, when evil and suffering come our way, we know God is good, we know he's against it, so we forfeit the other side.
1. "He can't be over this. This couldn't have come from him. He would never have a plan or purpose for this. God is good. This must be Satan or something like that. Evil has somehow snuck in through the backdoor of the universe. But this couldn't be in any sense from God."
 - a. We try to solve the problem this way, perhaps well-intentioned, but we just end up creating more problems.
- B. Here's what I mean. This reduction might sound right on the surface, but when we embrace it, we inadvertently gut our hope.
1. Much-beloved and clung-to verses like [Rom. 8:28](#) will ring hollow.
 - a. In the day of our trial, when we're freefalling towards the ground, as it were, we'll go to pull the rip cord, but the parachute will come out tattered and torn and the air just passes right through it. It can't hold us up in our moments of greatest need.
 2. [Rom. 8:28](#), as you may well know says: "[W]e know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."
 - a. And he goes on to talk about how all the suffering and persecution and things still can't separate us from God's love, that, in some miraculous way, God is still working all of that for our good in the end.
 3. But how can we know that if God is not somehow over and even ultimately in control of the evil that is coming at us?
 - a. If you reject this side of the principle, then the implication is that you are now no longer under the protective canopy of a sovereign God.
 - b. Instead you are subject to the erratic whims of a merciless evil, which you hope with fingers crossed that God might be able to outsmart in the end, but you don't know. God's doing his best, poor fellow that he is, but his hands are tied. He may want to stop Babylon, but we can't be certain that he will.
- C. If God is only against evil but not over it in some way, then we inevitably come to feel he must actually be under it—in some sense, we may even come to see him as the victim of it, along with us.
1. And such a position leaves us without a sturdy hope. God wants to do good, but he isn't able. He's against evil, but he isn't over it.

Reduction #2: God Is Over Evil But Not Against It

- A. Others of us end up going in the other direction with the reduction, don't we? When evil and suffering come our way, we know God is sovereign, we know he's over it in some way, so here now we end up forfeiting the other side.
1. "If he's over this, if he's in control and has somehow permitted or purposed this, he can't be good. He's not against evil. He's approving of it, he may even be the author of it." Here's where we start to grow suspicious of his heart.
- B. This is the sort of thing C.S. Lewis writes about in his little book *A Grief Observed*. He's grieving the death of his wife from cancer, and in the opening chapter he talks about his wrestling with God: "Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not 'So there's no God after all,' but 'So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer'" (6-7).
1. You hear what he's saying, don't you? "In all of my pain here, I'm not so much worried I'll stop believing in God, I'm worried I'll stop believing he's good. If he could do away with it, make it easier, change the course of it, why didn't he?"
 - a. We start to picture God as this heartless puppet master in the sky, snickering as we suffer, like he gets some sort of a kick out of it.
- C. In a show Megan and I have been watching lately, the main character reveals that when he was just eight years old he accidentally shot his dad while they were hunting. And he finally opens up about it later and he reveals how much that experience shaped him, how much it altered his view of God: "People have told me that grace is a given thing. That if you seek it, you'll find it. When I was a kid, I'd go to church, and hear the pastor preach the word. And he'd make me feel everything in my heart. And everything in the world around me would have a little more meaning. The world was a bright place. It worked on me. God was everything good. Then, when I was eight years-old, I shot my father. When I watched that stray buckshot go into his chest and blow all his insides out his back, the world went black. Like it had ended altogether. It hit me that God is everything. Everything good, and everything bad."
1. Do you see what he did there? The Babylonians had broken down his door and he didn't say: "Ah, God wanted to stop it, but he couldn't." He said: "God could've stopped it, but he didn't. Therefore, if he permits or uses such evil, he must be evil."
- D. Have you ever been there? The Babylonians are laying siege to my life, not just with the permission of God, but with his whole-hearted blessing. They didn't break through the backdoor. He let him in through the front. I'm crying out in agony, but it feels like God must be giddy with some sort of masochistic glee.
- E. If God is only over evil in some way but not against it, then we inevitably come to feel he must actually be for it—in some sense, we may even come to see him as the author of it.
1. And such a position, yet again, leaves us without a sturdy hope.

- a. In the previous reduction the issue was that God wants to good, but he isn't able.
- b. Now, with this reduction, the issue is reverse: God is able to do good, but he doesn't want to. He is over evil, but he isn't against it.

Reduction #3: God Must Not Exist at All

A. The last place people go with this is to say that God must not exist at all. Neither side is true. He's neither over it nor against. There are too many contradictions here to think that there even is a God as the Bible describes.

- 1. Many people, especially in our secular culture, have walked away from the faith for the very things Habakkuk brings out here, the problem of evil, theodicy it's called.

B. But if you just walk away from faith in God because of this problem, if you just go the way of our secular culture towards atheism, listen, again, you create more problems than you solve.

- 1. Here's what I mean: If you get rid of the notion of God and transcendent reality, objective morality, universal notions of right and wrong, how do you even begin to define good and evil at that point? Just by what feels good or bad to you?
- 2. In an atheistic universe, where there is no ultimate meaning, why is your suffering wrong in the first place? It's not—at least not in any objective sense. It just is.
- 3. Why is it wrong to murder and kill? Why shouldn't the Babylonians do that to you? Isn't that just evolutionary survival of the fittest? Get out your sword and give it a go.
- 4. If there is no God, why do you still cry at the graveside of a loved one and feel in your guts that death isn't supposed to be, that it's an intruder into the cosmos? Isn't it just natural? Aren't you just a clump of cells in your worldview? So what, the clump of cells are disintegrating. What's the big deal?
- 5. How are you going to say because there's suffering and death there can be no God? The only reason suffering and death feel so wrong to you in the first place is precisely because there is a God—and, hence, there is right and wrong, good and evil.

- a. Don't you see, you are objecting to the biblical worldview on the basis of the biblical worldview. Our objection to the existence of God on this point only ends up, ironically, making a case for it.

C. And I'll tell you one thing you certainly won't have if go with this reduction: hope. Life is meaningless. Good and evil are meaningless. Your suffering isn't going anywhere good. It just is. Life stinks and then you die.

* * *

A. So, to summarize what we've seen thus far:

1. If God is against evil but not over it, then there's no hope for us in our hardship because though he may want to turn it for good, there's no guarantee that he can.
 2. If God is over evil but not against it, then there's no hope for us in our hardship because though he may be able to turn it for good, there's no guarantee that he will.
 3. If God doesn't exist at all, then there's no hope for us in our hardship because the world is meaningless and good and evil are nonsensical categories. This place is just the outworking of natural processes and that is all. Let the fittest survive.
 4. But if God does exist and he is both over evil and against it at the same time, then, and only then, we can have hope in our hardship because we know that, not only is he able to turn all things for good, he wants to and he will!
- B. This is the biblical teaching. This is the medicine. It's a bitter pill that hurts a bit at first, but it heals in the end, and it supplies us with a stable hope that no storm can stagger.

Two Presuppositions

- A. In our text, as God is trying to help Habakkuk take the medicine bound up in this principle, he provides us with two presuppositions that, when set in place, make it all a bit more palatable.

Presupposition #1: God's Ways Are Higher (1:5)

- A. This first presupposition is given there in v. 5. This is the opening line of God's initial response to the prophet. He says: "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told." Then he goes on to talk about raising up Babylon and things.
1. But he begins with: "You won't believe it. You won't be able to comprehend it. It's going to quite literally blow your mind. Fuses are going to melt. Smokes going to be coming out your ears. We're going to fry the motherboard with this."
- B. Now I take this to mean that God's ways are higher, they are always going to be a bit beyond us. We won't always get what he's doing or how it all fits together. And, the interesting thing is that, when you step back and think about it, this is actually quite reasonable—that the creature won't be able to fully comprehend the Creator.

Mysterious Orthodoxy

- A. I wrote about this a long while back for us in what's now the [Covenant Membership Expansion Packet](#). There I was outlining for us what I call "Mysterious Orthodoxy." It's this idea that many of the orthodox positions in the church call us to embrace biblical teaching that we can't fully comprehend—the matter remains a bit out of reach for us, a bit mysterious.
1. Is God one or is he three?
 2. Is Jesus fully God or is he fully man?
 3. Is God sovereign or is man responsible?
 - a. The answer to all of these, of course, is simply: "Yes."

- b. But when you ask me how such things are so, the answer, I suppose, is equally simple: “I don’t know.”
- B. You can imagine these seemingly contradictory propositions as lines running vertically. “God is one.” “God is three.”
 - 1. We want to know how can they both be true, how can they come together, and we trace them out, we try to make sense of it, but we never quite get there. We come to realize that, while the two lines do come together somehow, in some way, they converge in the clouds.
- C. I think of Moses ascending Sinai, or the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. You remember, God is there at the top of the mountain, his presence identified by way of this enveloping cloud.
 - 1. There’s a reason why God’s presence is often pictured as a cloud in the Scriptures. Have you ever been in a cloud or thick fog? You can’t really see. It’s a bit disorienting.
 - a. And I think that’s the point. We aren’t going to fully get God. He’s always going to be a bit beyond us.
- D. And it’s the same for the matter before us in Habakkuk.
 - 1. How is God both over and against evil? How does he permit and even use evil without becoming somehow stained or incriminated by it. How does he remain sovereign and yet human beings, like the Babylonians, remain free and accountable for the wrong they do?
 - a. I don’t know. And, ironically, it is actually quite reasonable that I don’t.
- E. On this point, let me quickly read you a bit from that article I wrote: “To say that God will, in some sense, always be unreasonable to us, is, in fact, one of the most reasonable things we can say. For how unreasonable is it to think that the infinite, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, holy one could be fully contained within the miniscule compass of a creature’s mind? He is the Creator, we are the creature. Can an ant comprehend the full extent of human complexity? Certainly we would not say so. And yet the distance between man and God is infinitely greater than that between the ant and man. How much more so should we be willing to admit, then, that some mystery will, even must, subsist at the very core of our faith. And so it does! . . .

Now, we are not saying that we are not to think deeply about the revelation he has given us in the Scriptures. . . . But we do mean to say that, when at last we have studied and prayed and inquired, and still we don’t know how God can be both one and three, or how Jesus can be both God and man, or how God is absolutely sovereign and yet man is still responsible—we don’t throw it all out, but accept it on faith—not blind faith, but a faith that sees clearly: he is God, and we are not. We embrace the mystery, because he is Savior, because he is Lord, and we trust him.

 - 1. Can you say that? Are you there?

Proverbs 21:1

- A. Now, having said all this, as we return to the matter at hand—as we’re with Habakkuk trying to wrestle through how exactly God relates to evil and how it’s a good and healing thing—though I just

made the point that we can never fully comprehend it, I do want to try to get you as high up the mountain as I can.

- B. Recognizing the limits of our intellects and even of our imaginations, I'll put forward one recent discovery of mine in the Scriptures that has clarified things for me a bit on this issue and really put a helpful image on it all for me.
 - 1. It's from what I'm about to show you now that I actually got the title for these last two sermons: "When God Digs a Ditch: Turning Evil for Good."
- C. It comes from [Prov. 21:1](#), which reads as follows: "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will."
- D. Now, at first you might look at this and immediately run towards that second reduction we looked at: that God is over evil but not against it, that God is actually the author of evil that men or kings might commit.
 - 1. It would certainly sound here like he is taking command of the king's heart and steering it wherever he desires it to go, the way a pirate might commandeer a ship or something.
 - a. So if God is raising up the king of Babylon to come against Judah in some vicious and violent way, well he's the one ultimately responsible for it, and the king himself is relieved of any guilt, right?
 - i. Well, not so fast! There are a few things in the immediate context that push against this . . .
- E. For one thing, if we were to take [Prov. 21:1](#) as relieving the king of any personal responsibility (for the Lord "turns" his heart), then the very next verse immediately counters.
 - 1. For here we see that the Lord doesn't just turn his heart, he also "weighs" it! "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart" (v. 2).
 - a. So it can't be that the king is without personal responsibility for his actions. The Lord is weighing his heart. And yet somehow the Lord is also sovereign over it, directing it. How do we make sense of that?
- F. Well, the two come together when we fully comprehend the image given in [v. 1](#). For there what is translated into our English as "stream" (Heb. [peleg](#)) would better translated as "artificial water channel," "canal," or "irrigation ditch."
 - 1. The image, then, is that of a skilled farmer taking the inherent wild and free-flowing nature of water and harnessing it for his own wise and good ends.
 - a. So, if we follow this out, there is both freedom and personal responsibility with regard to the king (water is flowing) and sovereignty and providential directing with regard to YHWH (this flowing water is captured and turned by the dug waterways of his sovereign will).

- i. God takes that which is already flowing in the hearts of men and directs it towards his own good and glorious ends.
- G. It's as one commentator writes on this verse: “[In the Scriptures we are given many] examples of autocrats who, in pursuing their chosen courses, flooded or fertilized God’s field as he chose” (cf. Tiglath-pileser [Isa. 10:6, 7], Cyrus [Isa. 41:2–4] and Artaxerxes [Ezra 7:21]) (TOTC).
 - 1. These kings took the course that they chose, freely, of their own accord, but God, through their actions, flooded or fertilized his field as he chose.
 - a. He is not the author of their evil, but in his sovereignty he is able to dig a ditch, as it were, and turn that evil in the direction of his own desire.
- H. Bringing this closer to home: This means that God is able to take the furious flood of your enemy and use it to water the garden of your joy. He is able to take what they mean for your destruction and turn it for your benefit.
 - 1. When the monsoons of the wicked burst with floodwater, God digs a ditch, he channels it, directs it, domesticates it, as wild as it may seem, and he makes it useful, and he brings blessing to you with it.
 - a. That’s what’s happening with Babylon in Habakkuk. That’s what you need to know when hardship and suffering come for you. You might not know how it all fits together intellectually. But you know it’s true. God’s digging a ditch.

Presupposition #2: God’s Plans Take Longer (2:2-3)

- A. The second presupposition I’ll need to put forward only briefly. It’s simple enough. It’s that God’s plans take longer to unfold than we are often willing to wait. What at first seems horrible to us ends in something wonderful if we would let it play out as God has designed.
- B. I get this from the opening verses of God’s second response to Habakkuk there in [Hab. 2:2-3](#), where he says this: “²Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. ³For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.”
 - 1. The idea here is that you simply won’t see it at first. When Babylon is breaking down your door, you will not get what God is doing. It seems all horrible. But hang on. Wait. You’ll see more of what he’s after in time.
- C. I thought of what Paul says in [2 Cor. 4:17](#): “[T]his light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” You say: “I think this is destroying me.” God says: “It’s preparing you for glory.” Hang on!

Three Examples

- A. Let me now just give you three quick examples of the sort of thing we've been talking about and then I'll draw all this to a close . . .

Example #1: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome

- A. Remember that in the OT, in all that happens, God is ultimately preparing the stage of human history for the arrival of his Son, Jesus. He's preparing for not only the accomplishment of the gospel there in Jerusalem, but for the advance of it throughout the world. Jesus will die and rise. And his people will go and tell.
 - 1. And what's amazing to see now in retrospect is how God, with every king and kingdom that he raises up, seemingly over and against his people, he's actually moving things one step closer to this desired end, making things more suitable for the accomplishment and advance of the gospel.
 - a. Let me show you this just at a high level . . .
- B. If we begin with Babylon, God raises them up and what happens? The people of Judah are thrust out of the Promised Land and into exile. Seems horrible. And, in one sense, it is. But God's digging a ditch.
 - 1. And as a result of this exile, the Jewish people begin spreading throughout the ancient world. It's in this time that synagogues begin forming, local places of worship.
 - 2. Before this it was all centered on the temple in Jerusalem. But because the temple was destroyed and the people were dispersed, synagogues are set up.
 - 3. And as a result, Jews are forced to engage more with the cultures and peoples around them. And the cultures and peoples around them, therefore, are primed for receiving biblical truth and ultimately the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - a. If you've ever read the book of Acts, you realize that these synagogues become the beachheads by which Christian missionaries reach into the broader Jewish and Gentile world. They're always going to the synagogues in every city first because they already have common ground there.
 - i. Well how did these synagogues get there? The exile, Babylon. God dug a ditch and he turned evil for good.
- C. But after Babylon, do you remember who God raises up next? It's the Persians, with guys like Cyrus and others. And they permit the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple things ([2 Chron. 36:22-23](#))—though now the synagogues remain and many of the Diaspora Jews remain.
 - 1. Now we have this religious center into which Christ will come live, die, and rise again. And we have the potential for spreading abroad.
- D. But what about language? How do you spread the good news of the gospel if you can't speak the language of the people you're trying to reach?

1. Well after the Persians, God raises up the Greeks, under men like Alexander the Great. And what does Alexander do? He promotes Greek culture and the Greek language and by the time of Jesus it's the near universal language of the ancient world.
 - a. When Jesus shows up on the scene, the OT has already been translated into Greek for this very reason. The NT would be written in Greek for this very reason.
 - i. So because of the bloated ego of men like Alexander the Great, the good news of a God who can save us from our egos and sin can be spread more swiftly abroad.
- E. But then after the Greeks God raises up the Romans. With Rome we get what's called the Pax Romana, "Roman peace"—a unique period in history marked by stability and an extended period of peace.
 1. It was in this time, and because of this peace, that the Romans famously built and maintained roads throughout their entire empire, so travel became easier than it had ever been. This is how the gospel could spread so rapidly through the ancient world.
- F. So listen, if you sit there with Habakkuk at the end of the 7th century B.C., contemplating Babylonian depravity and savagery, you don't see any of this. But God digs a ditch and he turns it all for good!

Example #2: Joseph

- A. We could consider a personal example now with Joseph, one of Jacob's twelve sons. This is about as clear as it gets, that God can take evil and turn it for good.
 1. His brothers were jealous of him, hated him, and they wanted to kill him. He had the favor of their father and it just angered them to no end. So they imprison him in a pit and ultimately sell him into slavery in Egypt.
- B. And you have to know, Joseph is struggling at this point. Where's God? What's he doing? I'll tell you what he's doing: he's digging a ditch . . .
 1. God's going to raise Joseph up in the ranks there in Egypt and use him to save countless lives and even the lives of his own family from famine and things.
- C. So, when it's all said and done, Joseph can say to his brothers, without stuttering in [Gen. 45:5](#): "[D]o not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life."
 1. He makes an even more pointed statement later in [Gen. 50:20](#): "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." God dug a ditch. He turned it for good.

Example #3: The Cross

- A. And, of course, the clearest most profound example of all is the cross of Jesus Christ.

- B. To everyone standing around the cross that day it looked like evil had won. The devil was dancing.
1. Where was God—when his Son was hanging there lifeless, beaten and bloodied by brutish men with no regard for true righteousness or justice?
 2. Where was God—even Jesus himself would cry out as much: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). “Babylon has broken down the door and I’m being carried off in the torrent of their wrath. Where are you? What are you doing?”
 - a. I’ll tell you what God is doing. He’s digging a ditch. He’s taking the most damnable act in the history of the world and turning it for the world’s salvation!
- C. It's as the early Christians declare in Acts 4:27-28: “²⁷ [T]ruly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”
1. All the leaders and the people had assembled against God’s anointed—Jew, Gentile, it doesn’t matter. We’d be there if we could. We’d all be there. They had a plan—one thing in mind. Oh but God had another.
 - a. We spilled Christ’s blood to shut him up, to kill him, to get God out of our lives forever.
 - b. God spilled Christ’s blood to ransom us, to wash us, so that he could be in our lives forever.
 - i. What we meant for evil, God meant for good!
- D. I know that it’s rough when Babylon breaks down your door. When it seems like God invites them in to make a mess of your dreams and things. But God is digging a ditch in those moments. And he’s able to turn whatever evil may befall you for your ultimate good. You can trust him. You can have hope. This bitter pill hurts a little going down, but it heals in the end!
- E. I told myself that, if I had time, I’d close by reading you the lyrics of an old hymn that so eloquently sums up all we’ve been looking at today. It’s by a guy named William Cowper, entitled *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*: “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 sov’rign will.
 Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; / The clouds ye so much dread / Are big with mercy and shall break / In blessings on your head.
 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, / But trust Him for His grace; Behind a frowning providence / He hides a smiling face.
 His purposes will ripen fast, / Unfolding every hour; / The bud may have a bitter taste, / But sweet will be the flow’r.
 Blind unbelief is sure to err / And scan His work in vain; / God is His own interpreter, / And He will make it plain.”