

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

1:1-4 Gregory of Nazianzus: “[Habakkuk] utters more heated words, and is impatient with God Himself, and cries down, as it were our good Lord, because of the injustice of the judges” (*NPNF 2 7:217*). (TLSB)

1:1 *oracle*. Such as the two found here (vv. 5–11; 2:2–20). Oracles were frequently received in visions. The Hebrew word for “oracle” (possibly meaning “burden,” but perhaps only “pronouncement”) often refers to revelations containing warnings of impending doom (cf. Isa 15:1; 19:1; 22:1), but in Zec 9:1; 12:1; Mal 1:1 it refers to messages that also contain hope. (CSB)

Habakkuk. The name is probably Babylonian and refers to a kind of garden plant. (CSB)

prophet. Habakkuk is called a prophet also in 3:1, tying ch. 3 closely to chs. 1–2. (CSB)

The title gives us the author’s name, Habakkuk, and that’s really all he tells us about himself. He mentions no hometown or family tree. He lists no kings during whose reigns he lived and worked nor is he mentioned in the historical books of the OT that cover his time period, books like 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. No other prophet mentions him either, even though he was a contemporary of Jeremiah and may have known Nahum and Zephaniah, who labored for the Lord shortly before he prophesied. Whatever we do know about him – his attitude, his faith, and the like – must be inferred from his book’s content. (PBC)

RECEIVED – ESV has “saw.” God’s revelation to Habakkuk evidently had some visual aspects. (TLSB)

Habakkuk's Complaint

2 O 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.

1:2–2:20 A dialogue between the prophet and God. The basic theme is age-old: Why does evil seem to go unpunished? Why does God not respond to prayer? (CSB)

1:2 *how long* – Addressing God directly, Habakkuk demands to know how long the Lord, who promises to hear the prayers of believers, will remain silent. Like Job (Jb 19:7), the prophet cries, “Violence!” (with regard to the injustice among His people), but his prayer for deliverance remains unanswered.) (TLSB)

Violence! At this time Judah was probably under King Jehoiakim, who was ambitious, cruel and corrupt. Habakkuk describes the social corruption and spiritual apostasy of Judah in the late seventh century B.C. (CSB)

This describes the immoral or even criminal behavior evident on all levels of Jerusalem society under Jehoiakim: murder, robbery, theft, fraud, embezzlement, rape, adultery, and other flagrant violations of

God's moral law. These are sins that flow out of godless minds and unregenerate hearts. They destroy the lives of individuals and ruin the fabric of society. (PBC)

1:3 *see iniquity* – Injustice is the inability or unwillingness of society to react against and punish the “violence” it finds in its midst. Habakkuk observes that the courts are corrupt, that the processes of justice have broken down. Justice is perverted to favor the wicked intentions of the godless, and the godly who play by the rules are taken advantage of. The wicked escape punishment, and the godly find that justice eludes them, or they are ridiculed or persecuted because they refuse to condone evil but rather call for its condemnation and punishment. (PBC)

you idly look at wrong. The prophet was amazed that God seemed to condone cruelty and violence. (CSB)

The prophet is deeply troubled because God seems to tolerate iniquity and wrong—things such as destruction, violence, strife, and contention—and does nothing about it. Sin and its results abound in the land. Habakkuk echoes the sentiments of many faithful people of God who wonder why God does not deal immediately and directly with the evil that surrounds them (cf Ps 73; Jer 12:1). (TLSB)

2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

1:4 *law is paralyzed ... justice never goes forth.* Because wealthy landowners controlled the courts through bribery. (CSB)

From the prophet's perspective, the law has become ineffective because of the Lord's failure to act. (TLSB)

A paralyzed person cannot walk or move his hands; he can't work or defend himself if attacked. So likewise is the law in an immoral society. The law has become ineffective, easy to circumvent, so crippled that “justice never prevails.” There is no agreement on what is right or wrong. There is no willingness to effectively punish those who break laws. As a result, the law ceases to function. It becomes unable to dispense proper justice. (PBC)

1:2–4 Habakkuk experiences firsthand the oppressive policies of Jehoiakim, king of Judah (609–598 BC; 2Ki 23:36–37), and he feels surrounded by unchecked evil because of failure to enforce God's Law. Habakkuk grumbles against God. We need to remember that God hears our prayers and that, though we struggle when facing life's perplexing questions, nothing can separate us from His love (Rm 8:38–39). • O Lord, teach me to be patient as You carry out Your will in my life in Your own good time. Amen. (TLSB)

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.

2:1 *stand at my watchpost.* The figure of a guard looking out from a tower and expecting a response to his challenge. Any rebuke would be for questioning God's justice. (CSB)

In humility and patience, Habakkuk now quietly waits for God to answer the questions he has raised and cannot himself answer. (TLSB)

station myself on the tower. The walls of Jerusalem. (CSB)

The picture of the prophet as a watchman is a familiar one in the OT. At the Lord's direction, the prophet Isaiah once stood as a watchman on Jerusalem's walls waiting for the news that Babylon had fallen (Is. 21:6-9). (PBC)

The picture is a fitting one. The watchman had to be alert and constantly on his guard. The enemy might appear when he least expected it. Then again a messenger might come with important news, and he had to be ready to receive it. He also had to be patient. If the news that the city was waiting for was delayed and did not come as expected, the watchman still had to stay alert – to watch for the messenger and be ready to communicate the news to the rest of the city the minute the messenger came. (PBC)

The fact that Habakkuk says that he is waiting for God's answer indicates that the complaint was not his alone, but that the remnant of believers in Judah were waiting for God's answer to be communicated to them as well. (PBC)

see what he will say to me – Habakkuk has questioned God's actions (and lack of action). (TLSB)

The Righteous Shall Live by His Faith

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. 4 "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith. 5 "Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples."

2:2–3 vision. See 1Ch 17:15; Pr 29:18. The Hebrew for this word refers specifically to a prophet's vision (see, e.g., Isa 1:1). (CSB)

2:2 make it plain – Some commentators view this as making the language so clear that no one would misunderstand what he had received. Others take the Lord's instructions to mean that Habakkuk was to write out the message God gave him in such large, highly visible letters that the words could be read by any person, even one who was running or hurrying by. The "tablets" on which Habakkuk was to write in such a scenario would be placards or posters which could be erected in display. Today we would probably put them on billboards. At any rate, while the specifics of Habakkuk's instructions are difficult to understand, the general thrust of the directions is clear: God wants this message to get out; He wants others to hear or read it; He wants it to have the broadest possible audience. (PBC)

he may run who reads it. Lit. "so that he who reads it may run," i.e., so that a messenger may run to deliver the message and read it to those to whom he has been sent. (CSB)

So the words might be easily read (cf Dt 27:8). (TLSB)

on tablets – Hbr *luach*, also used for the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments (Ex 24:12; Dt 9:9–11). Habakkuk's tablets may have been wooden, though words of the prophets were also written on stone tablets (Is 30:8), signifying their extreme importance. (TLSB)

2:3 appointed time – The vision imparted to Habakkuk points forward to the completion, or fulfillment, of God's purpose at a time set by Him. (TLSB)

wait for it. The following message deals with the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C., about 66 years after Habakkuk's prophecy. The Lord tells Habakkuk (and Judah) that fulfillment of the prophecy may "linger," but that he and the people are to expect it (see 3:16). (CSB)

Waiting for the Lord is an act of faith and hope (Ps 33:20–22). This is an esp important exhortation for people in modern times, when the desire for immediate satisfaction breeds impatience and irritability. 1 Clement of Rome: "Compare yourselves to ... the vine. First of all, it sheds its leaves, then it buds, next it puts forth leaves, and then it flowers; after that comes the sour grape, and then follows the ripened fruit. You perceive how in a little time the fruit of a tree comes to maturity. Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished" (ANF 1:11). Basil the Great: "If in all this there is sorrow to be borne, I trust in the Lord that it will not be without its use to you. Therefore, the more have been your trials, look for a more perfect reward from your just Judge. Do not take your present trouble ill. Do not lose hope" (NPNF 2 8:280). (TLSB)

In this verse, the Lord goes on to talk about certain characteristics of visions and revelations – characteristics which apply not only to Habakkuk's vision but to any vision or revelation a prophet might receive from the Lord. The Lord wants His people to know about these characteristic elements of prophecy. If God's people don't know these truths, then they'll lose hope and will despair when they face oppressors like the Babylonians. There are four such characteristics of prophecies received through vision that will nurture the faith of God's people:

1. *Prophecy is for an appointed time.* To put it another way, there is an appointed time for the prophecy's fulfillment, a time determined and fixed by the Lord.
2. *Prophecy cannot wait for (literally, "pants for") its fulfillment to come.* This refers, no doubt, to the longing of God's OT people to see the fulfillment of prophecy about Jesus.
3. *Prophecy from the Lord proclaims only that which will truly take place in the future.* Prophecy from the Lord is never an end in itself.
4. *Though fulfillment may not come immediately, it will not fail to come at precisely the time that the Lord has set for it.* (PBC)

Romans 5:6, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."

2:4 *he.* Collective for the Babylonians, but with special reference to their king. *but.* In contrast to the Babylonians, whose desires are not upright. (CSB)

his soul." Person who, in pride and stubbornness, refuses to believe God's prophetic word. (TLSB)

is puffed up – Hbr means "to swell" (as a tumor), a vivid picture of bloated pride. Luther described such a person as having "stuffed ears" for refusing to believe God's vision (AE 19:123). (TLSB)

the righteous shall live by his faith. In light of God's revelation about how (and when) he is working, his people are to wait patiently and live by faith—trusting in their sovereign God. The clause is quoted frequently in the NT to support the teaching that people are saved by grace through faith (Ro 1:17; Gal 3:11; cf. Eph 2:8) and should live by faith (Heb 10:38–39). It became the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. The same principle that was applicable in the realm of national deliverance is applicable in the area of spiritual deliverance (salvation). (CSB)

This passage summarizes Habakkuk's thought. In contrast to the arrogant person, the one who lives by faith is righteous, trusting in God's promises while waiting for the Lord to act. "People are just by faith. By faith they believe that God is favorable, and he [Habakkuk] adds that the same faith gives life because this faith produces peace and joy in the heart and eternal life" (Ap IV 100). Tertullian: "[One is] justified by the liberty of faith, not by servitude to the law.... The object, therefore, of the faith whereby the just

man shall live, will be that same God to whom likewise belongs the law” (ANF 3:434). Leo the Great: “A mighty bulwark is a sound faith, a true faith.... As righteousness is gained by faith, so too by a true faith is eternal life gained.... May He make you to advance and persevere to the end” (NPNF 2 12:136). Luther: “The godly people are waiting for the Lord; therefore they live, therefore they are saved, therefore they receive what has been promised. They receive it by faith, because they give glory to the God of truth” (AE 19:123). God’s word to Habakkuk also formed the heart of the Gospel Paul proclaimed. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – 2 Timothy 1:1-14

Greeting

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, 2 To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

1:1 *apostle*. One specially commissioned by Christ. (CSB)

will of God. Paul did not choose to become an apostle, but God chose him (Ac 9:1–19). (TLSB)

according to the promise of life. † Paul’s being chosen to be an apostle was in keeping with that promise because apostles were appointed to preach and explain the good news that eternal life is available to all who believe. (CSB)

God promises eternal life to all who are joined to Christ Jesus. Although we now have eternal life by faith, we cannot see or feel this eternal life within. Instead, we focus on God’s promise. (TLSB)

1:2 *Timothy, my beloved child*. Paul is not his physical father but his father in the faith. (TLSB)

1:1–2 Paul addresses Timothy tenderly, referring to him as his “beloved child” and speaking God’s grace, mercy, and peace to him. As you speak to others, especially your fellow Christians, season what you say with God’s Word. Remind them of the grace that is theirs in Christ (e.g., “The Lord be with you”; “God’s peace to you”). God’s Word on our lips and in our hearts provides Gospel comfort to those around us. In addition, we ourselves benefit by the precious promises of the Gospel. • Give me an instructed tongue, O Lord, that I may know the Word that sustains the weary. Amen. (TLSB)

Guard the Deposit Entrusted to You

3 I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. 4 As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. 5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. 6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, 7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, 9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 10 and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, 12 which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard

until that day what has been entrusted to me. 13 Follow the pattern of the sound[d] words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14 By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

1:3 *my ancestors* – There is unity between Abraham’s faith and every Christian’s faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

The ancient people of Israel who lived by faith. (TLSB)

clear conscience ... prayers night and day. Because of the forgiveness won by Christ on the cross, even the former persecutor of the Church (Ac 9:1–2) may rejoice in a clear conscience, cleansed by Jesus’ blood. This cleansed conscience allows Paul to pray continually (1Th 5:17), rejoicing to speak praise to the God who saves. (TLSB)

1:4 *Remember your tears.* Probably refers to Timothy’s tears when Paul left for Macedonia (1Ti 1:3). (CSB)

Timothy’s sadness over his earlier separation from Paul. (TLSB)

Paul had a very close personal relationship to Timothy who was his spiritual son. The last time they saw each other there were tears, now he is looking forward to the joy of seeing him again. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

long to see you. See 4:9, 21. (CSB)

1:5 *sincere faith* – In 2 Timothy it says that this faith was his from his infancy and had come through the Scriptures. The heroes of faith “Lois and Eunice” had set powerful examples of witnesses to that faith for Timothy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

your grandmother Lois ... your mother Eunice. According to Ac 16:1, Timothy’s mother was a Jewish Christian. Here we learn that his grandmother too was a Christian. Timothy’s father, however, was a Greek and apparently an unbeliever (Ac 16:1). It was probably because of him that Timothy had not been circumcised as a child. (CSB)

Timothy’s mother and grandmother, both of them Christian, taught Timothy the Christian faith from infancy (cf 3:14–15). They passed the faith to Timothy by reading and speaking the Word to him. Both names are Greek, not Jewish, indicating three generations of Greek cultural influence in the family. (TLSB)

1:6 *fan into flame the gift of God.* Gifts are not given in full bloom; they need to be developed through use. (CSB)

Gifts don’t come fully developed. They need to be nurtured and developed. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

through the laying on of my hands. Paul was God’s instrument, through whom the gift came from the Holy Spirit to Timothy (see note on 1Ti 1:18). (CSB)

1:7 *God give us a spirit not of fear.* Apparently lack of confidence was a serious problem for Timothy (see 1Co 16:10–11; 1Ti 4:12). (CSB)

Not the Holy Spirit, but Timothy's pastoral aptitude, which apparently lacked confidence. (TLSB)

spirit...power – The result of the wisdom which brings the power of the Spirit leads to salvation and the strength to stand against all the foes of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

1:8 Paul was in a Roman dungeon because of his preaching. (TLSB)

for the gospel – Paul urges Timothy not to be ashamed of suffering for the sake of the Gospel which is what is happening to Paul. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

The Word is at work in those who believe (1Th 2:13), strengthening them in the face of persecution, temptation, and every other adversity. (TLSB)

Romans 1:16 “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

1:9 *called us to a holy calling*. Though Paul may be speaking primarily about the pastoral office that he and Timothy shared, his reference to “a holy calling” applies to all who live by faith. A Christian's daily work is indeed a holy calling and a priestly work because of God's gift of faith. (TLSB) Christian holiness is not rooted in what we do, but in God's work for us and through us in Christ. (TLSB)

not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace. Salvation is by grace alone and is based not on human effort but on God's saving plan and the gracious gift of his Son (see Ro 3:28; Eph 2:8–9; Tit 3:5). (CSB)

Christian holiness is not rooted in what we do, but in God's work for us and through us in Christ. (TLSB)

Romans 8:29-32 “²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. ³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

before the beginning of time. God's plan to save lost sinners was made in eternity past (see Eph 1:4; 1Pe 1:20; Rev 13:8). (CSB)

God knew, even before creation, that in “the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4) He would give His Son to die for us. “Before we existed, yes, even before the foundation of the world was laid—when, of course, we could do nothing good—we were chosen by grace in Christ to salvation, according to God's purpose” (FC SD XI 43). (TLSB)

This was given us before the beginning of time. The other gifts we have in family, church, and world follow this great gift. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

1:10 *appearing*. Jesus' incarnation. *abolished death*. Jesus, by His death and resurrection, destroyed death for us. Although we will die earthly deaths, we will live eternally with Him (Jn 11:26; 1Co 15:54–57). (TLSB)

through the gospel – The work of Jesus' life, suffering, death, and resurrection is the Gospel. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

1:11 *preacher and apostle and teacher.* Called to be an apostle (cf 1:1).(TLSB)

Synonyms here; may also be distinguished as separate offices and tasks. (TLSB)

1:12 *why I suffer.* In prison at Rome. (TLSB)

able to guard ... entrusted to me. Although Paul has been entrusted with the preaching of the Gospel, God ultimately sees to it that His Word is proclaimed to the world. (TLSB)

1:13 *sound word.* Timothy's pastoral task is not focused on being a creative or exciting preacher. He is to follow the same preaching he previously heard from Paul. This "pattern," in written form, will later comprise the NT and the Apostles' Creed. "In this way, much unnecessary wrangling may be cut off and the Church preserved from many scandals" (FC SD IV 36). Chrysostom: "Many things he delivered to him without writing.... After the manner of artists, I have impressed on you the image of virtue, fixing in your soul a sort of rule, and model, and outline of all things pleasing to God" (NPNF 1 13:484). (TLSB)

This is a model to pass on to others. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

faith and love that are in Christ. Faith and love through union with Christ—another way of saying "Christian faith and love" (see 1Ti 1:14). (CSB)

1:14 *the good deposit ... entrusted to you.* The gospel. Paul gives the same command in 1Ti 6:20. (CSB)

parathaka – This deposit is the gospel. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

GOSPEL – Luke 17:1-10

Temptation to *Sin*

Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. ² It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. ³ So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴ If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶ He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you. ⁷ "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? ⁸ Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? ⁹ Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

This is the final passage in a long discourse that seems to begin at 14:25 (see comments at 13:22–30, 31–35; and 14:25–35). Once again, the Lukan hearer is confronted with a series of sayings that seem only loosely related to the context. Four sayings of Jesus are positioned after the account of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19–31) and before Luke's third travel notice (17:11) and the healing of the ten lepers (17:12–

19). They continue Jesus' teaching on discipleship and instructions to the disciples concerning their future leadership in the church. (Lk 9:1–6, 10, 18–22, 23–27, 43b–45, 46–50, 52–56, 57–62; 10:1–24; 12:35–48; 14:25–35; 16:1–13) As the following schema suggests, they have a certain unity and are also a fitting interlude in Luke's continuing narrative about God's merciful order as it is reflected in the kingdom. (CC pp. 640-641)

17:1 *said to his disciples* – The evangelist records another shift in the audience—from the Pharisees (whom Jesus has been addressing since 16:14) to his disciples in 17:1. (Lk 16:1 is also addressed to Jesus' disciples.) In Luke's terminology, "disciples" includes more than the Twelve; it likely includes the seventy (-two) sent by Jesus in 10:1–12, as well as other followers. But in 17:5, only the Twelve, the "apostles," respond by requesting an increase in faith. So this whole pericope is for Jesus' close group of followers, especially those whom he sends out to minister on his behalf. The first two sayings of Jesus to his disciples conform to the first phase of Luke's prophet Christology, teaching and miracles: he warns the disciples to be careful in their *teaching* so that it will not become a stumbling block to believers (17:1–2), and he admonishes them to *forgive*. The forgiveness of sins is one of the miracles of release that Jesus brings in the new era of salvation (17:3–4). Earlier examples include 5:20–24, where forgiveness is just as much a miracle as a healing, and 7:47–50. See comments at 4:18. (CC pp. 641-642)

sure to come – ἀνένδεκτόν ἐστιν τοῦ τὰ σκάνδαλα μὴ ἐλθεῖν—The double negative could be smoothed out into a positive statement, as the RSV does: "Temptations to sin are sure to come." On τὰ σκάνδαλα, see comments at 7:23. (CC p. 639)

skandalon - A "scandal" a *trap stick* (*bent sapling*), that is, *snare*. This draws to the mind of the original hearers/readers the stick an animal stumbles over, causing the trap to shut. The Jews would see the crucifixion of the Messiah as a stumbling block because anyone killed on a cross was cursed. It was scandalous to think that their God was executed as a criminal.

Jesus' words here are harsh and parallel the kind of warnings that he has spoken against the Pharisees. This is the first "woe" in Luke that is addressed to the disciples. The only other woe addressed to the disciples occurs at Jesus' discussion of his betrayal at the Last Supper (22:22), where the two words πλήν οὐαί, "nevertheless, woe," are also found together. Otherwise in Luke woes are directed to the religious establishment (11:42–52), to all humanity (6:24–26; 21:23), and to two cities for their lack of repentance (10:13). As a result, the hearer is alerted to the seriousness of these words. The community of disciples will bear a grave responsibility. (CC p. 642)

woe to the one through whom they come – Hebrew 'oy and hoy, also translated "oh!" or "alas." Interjection expressing sadness or warning. The prophets frequently begin pronouncements of judgment with this term, which may introduce a series of condemnations. (TLSB p. 108)

Understanding the meaning of this woe depends on determining the meaning of two ideas: "stumbling blocks" (τὰ σκάνδαλα)/"stumble" (σκανδαλίση) and "these little ones" (τῶν μικρῶν τούτων). The only other occurrence in Luke's gospel of the noun "stumbling block" or the verb "stumble, scandalize" is in the context of a beatitude: "Blessed is he who is not scandalized by me" (7:23). A related phrase appears in the parable of the workers in the vineyard, where Jesus cites Ps 118:22: "What, therefore, is this that is written, 'The stone that the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner'? Everyone who *falls on that stone* will be dashed to pieces; on whomever it falls, it will crush him" (Lk 20:17–18; cf. Acts 4:11). The scandal in Luke 7 is Jesus, who is a stumbling block for those who refuse to see him as the Messiah prophesied in the OT. They take offense at him because he comes bringing mercy, compassion,

and forgiveness, instead of vengeance. This is the language of the theology of the cross, and the cross is also a stumbling block. (Rom 9:33; 11:9; 1 Cor 1:23; 1 Pet 2:8) (CC p. 642)

In Luke 17, however, Jesus is speaking of a different kind of stumbling block, namely, any impediment that might keep a believer from confessing that Jesus is *the* stumbling block, since his way of salvation is contrary to the world's expectations. This impediment may be a temptation to sin, as the RSV and many translations render it, or it may be apostasy, since that involves turning to another supposed way of salvation that does not embrace Jesus as the scandalous Savior. In the context of Jesus' teaching here, apostasy is probably meant, particularly the apostasy Jesus lamented earlier: the lawyers hold the key of knowledge and yet prevent members of the community from entering the kingdom (11:52, the final woe in a long series of woes). Jesus' warning about hypocrisy and the misuse of possessions in the previous chapter should be included as background to this woe. The disciples are in danger of succumbing to the same things as the Pharisees did, especially now that Jesus is giving them the key of knowledge. (CC pp. 642-643)

17:2 millstone. A heavy stone for grinding grain. (CSB)

These were used to grind grain to flour and were so large that it took a donkey to turn it.

one of these little ones. Either young in the faith or young in age (cf. 10:21; Mt 18:6; Mk 10:24). (CSB)

Leading esp a young or immature believer to fall away from Christ. Even infants can believe or trust (cf 18:15), as shown by the way they long to be held by parents rather than by strangers. (TLSB)

“Little ones” refers to believers, and “these” (τούτων) suggests those who are present with the disciples and Jesus. This is the only place in Luke's gospel where Jesus uses the expression τῶν μικρῶν τούτων, “these little ones,” for his followers, (Cf. Mt 10:42; 18:6, 10, 14) although Jesus has called his community “little flock” in Lk 12:32, and there may be a parallel in his reference to infants at 10:21. Since this is the community that is journeying with Jesus to Jerusalem and the passion, “these little ones” could well allude to the disciples *as catechumens* who are preparing for their initiation into Jesus' death and resurrection and for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (see the excursus “Baptism in Luke-Acts”). These “little ones” include also the seventy (-two) and the Twelve, as will be evident when Jesus speaks his only other woe at the Last Supper to the one who will betray him. Possessions and the love of power overcome Judas and he apostatizes. D. Moessner expands this idea of “little ones” as catechumens when he views them as the disenfranchised who have been the object of Jesus' teaching and miracles. Doing so provides one more connection to 7:18–35:

The identity of these “little ones” is widely debated. Are literal children signified here? Or does Jesus mean weaker and more vulnerable disciples? Or are perhaps the “poor” in the sense of 14:13, 21; 15:1–2; 16:20, 22, i.e., the sick and “sinner” outcasts of society, in mind? We have already demonstrated Luke's symbolic value of μικρός [“small”] for a “childlike” response to Jesus' authoritative presence in 7:18–35 and 9:46–48. It is significant that in the former passage the “poor,” including the “blind,” “lame,” “deaf,” and so forth, are posed as examples of those who receive salvation by Jesus in the presence of the crowds just before Jesus refers to one who is “least” being greater in the Kingdom than John. Moreover, this same passage refers to “taking offense” or “stumbling” (7:23) with respect to Jesus' bringing salvation as he eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners (7:34). Further, the Pharisees'-scribes' reaction is contrasted to that of the *laos* [“people”] and Wisdom's children (7:29–30, 35). With all of these themes and actors present immediately before 17:1–10 in 14:15–16:31, and, as we have seen, active in positive response to Jesus in the midst of

growing rejection, the reference to the “children” or “little ones” here as the “poor” and outcast is forcefully corroborated. (CC p. 643)

Thus, the disciples, as future leaders in the church, must exercise extreme caution in their preaching and teaching so that the catechumens in their care, the poor and outcast, may not be led into apostasy. (CC pp. 643-644)

17:3 *pay attention to yourself* – προσέχετε—This is the first of ten imperatives in this section (cf. 17:3: ἐπιτίμησον; ἄφες; 17:5: πρόσθε; 17:6: ἐκριζώθητι; φυτεύθητι; 17:7: ἀνάπεσε; 17:8: ἐτοίμασον; διακόνει; 17:10: λέγετε). One might also include here ἀφήσεις (17:4), a future with the force of an imperative. On προσέχετε, see comments at 12:1; 20:46; 21:34. (CC 639)

A transitional imperative (“beware”) connects these first two sayings. It is not clear whether 17:3a belongs with the previous woe (17:1–2) or with this section on forgiveness (17:3–4). But could it not be a warning that applies to both sayings? The disciples have already heard a similar command in a parallel teaching (12:1). Here Jesus commands, “Beware [προσέχετε] for yourselves,” both to avoid causing catechumens to stumble and also to forgive those within the community who sin against the disciples. (CC p. 644)

Each one bears responsibility for guiding the brother away from sin and for being ready to forgive. (TLSB)

your brother. See Mt 18:15–17; cf. Mt 12:50. (CSB)

Two other imperatives here portray the rhythm of Christian life together, particularly for those who are leaders in the church: “If your brother sins, rebuke [ἐπιτίμησον] him, and if he repents, forgive [ἄφες] him.”

This is a parallel to Jesus’ more elaborate instructions for community wholeness in Matthew 18. (CC p. 644)

Forgiveness is one of the miracles of release that Jesus came to bring to his creation (see comments at 4:18–19). Because of the reference here to sin, one may want to interpret the “stumbling blocks” in the previous saying primarily as sins, but perhaps the situation here is different. Perhaps the focus is not on misdeeds of disciples/apostles, but on the transgressions of the “poor,” that is, ordinary members of the church. (CC p. 644)

Jesus is telling those who will be his ministers to beware that when those under their care fall into sin, which they will, the leaders must do everything they can to restore them back to the community by rebuking the sin, seeking repentance, and forgiving the members when they confesses their sin. The hearer cannot help but be reminded here of the petition in the Lord’s Prayer “forgive to us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who owes us” (11:4) and the parable of the prodigal son (15:11–32). In other words, the disciples are not to become stumbling blocks by withholding forgiveness that should be extended to repentant sinners. This is to be so ingrained in the leaders that, even if these poor little ones who are being brought into the kingdom sin often and repent repeatedly—seven times a day—the disciples *will forgive them* (a future with the force of an imperative). The act of forgiving sins must be a constant in the Christian community because absolution is how creation is released from its bondage through the power of Christ’s death and resurrection. (CC p. 644)

L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 258–59, notes that this “is entirely within the framework of Jewish piety, for which forgiveness offered by God to those who repent is endless, and demands

similar forgiveness of the neighbor (cf. e.g., *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan* 41).” Cf. also I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 643. (CC p. 644)

rebuke – Drawing attention to the sin is a loving warning. “Necessity requires one to speak of the evil, to prefer charges, to investigate, and to testify.... Governments, father and mother, brothers and sisters, and other good friends are under obligation to one another to rebuke evil wherever it is needful and profitable” (LC I 274–75). (TLSB)

if he repents, forgive him – As God does the same. (TLSB)

17:4 seven times. That is, forgiveness is to be unlimited (cf. Ps 119:164; Mt 18:21–22). (CSB)

Keep forgiving, as God likewise forgives you. Aug: “What then is ‘seven times’? Always, as often as he shall sin and repent” (*NPNF* 1 6:452). (TLSB)

ἐπιτάκις τῆς ἡμέρας—The daily ritual of forgiveness reminds the hearer that only Luke has the command to take up the cross “daily” (9:23). Bearing the cross is the opposite of seeking vengeance. (CC p. 639)

forgive him – ἀφήσεις αὐτῷ—The future tense has the force of an imperative, “you shall forgive him.” (CC p. 640)

17:1–4 Disciples need to guard the faith of others with forgiveness and a helping hand. Exercise special care for the young and the young in faith. How ready God is to forgive, as He demonstrates in the love of Christ. • Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Amen. (TLSB)

Increase Our Faith

5 The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” 6 And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

17:5 apostles said – οἱ ἀπόστολοι—The “disciples” were addressed by Jesus in 17:1. Out of that larger group, “the apostles” are the ones who request more faith. See comments at 6:13. (CC p. 640)

At 17:5 the audience shifts from the “disciples” to the “apostles.” They ask Jesus (whom Luke refers to as “the Lord”), “Add to us faith.” This suggests that they understood Jesus’ previous words (17:1–4) to be addressed to themselves as well as to the larger group. In Luke, “the apostles” always refers to the Twelve. (Lk 6:13; 9:10; 11:49; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10) In the midst of this discourse, this shift is most remarkable. It suggests to the hearer that the next two sayings should be understood as directed primarily to the apostles, since this is how the apostles would understand them. (CC p. 645)

Note that v 1 has “disciples.” At times, the terms are used interchangeably in Lk. (TLSB)

Increase our faith! They felt incapable of measuring up to the standards set forth in vv. 1–4. They wanted greater faith to lay hold of the power to live up to Jesus’ standards. (CSB)

The disciples see they are unable to live up to the teaching of Jesus. The Lord shows that faith is a quality more than a measured quantity. (TLSB)

πρόσθετε ἡμῖν πίστιν—“Add to us faith,” instead of the more common “increase our faith,” accents the dative here as an indirect object instead of a dative of advantage. (CC p. 640)

The apostles' request arises from their recognition that they are unable to do what Jesus has asked in 17:1–4 because they lack the necessary faith. Whether the apostles have any faith or not is not the issue here, since at this point in the ministry of Jesus no one has faith that fully grasps who Jesus is and what he came to do. Such faith will not exist *until after the resurrection*. But clearly, the apostles have heard Jesus' hard words about discipleship and realize that they are not up to the task. Though Jesus' words sound harsh, they are meant to offer the apostles encouragement. Even though the apostles do not realize it, they have enough faith to do miraculous things, even something as remarkable as transplanting a mulberry tree, with its deep root system, into the sea. (CC p. 645)

W. Arndt, *Luke*, 368, says: “The power of faith is as unlimited as God’s power itself.” Arndt also observes, “In order to have a faith which plants trees in the ocean one must have the assurance that it is God’s will that such a miracle occur” (p. 368). (CC p. 645)

In 13:18–21, Jesus used the picture of the mustard seed to show both the hiddenness of the kingdom (represented in the small size of the mustard seed) and the fullness of the kingdom that comes when that seed grows into a tree.

The apostles have already forgotten how they were sent out to preach the kingdom and heal and that their first mission met with remarkable success (cf. 9:1–6, 10). (CC p. 645)

The success of the seventy (-two) in 10:17–20 appears to have been even more remarkable than that of the Twelve! (CC p. 645)

The apostles will be given faith to preach the kingdom of God and heal and thus keep the catechumens from stumbling (17:1–2). And they will be given faith to forgive seven times a day and thus show how true healing in the kingdom takes place (17:3–4). *The hiddenness of the kingdom in their preaching, healing, and forgiving may make them feel as if they do not have enough faith, but like a mustard seed, the smallness of their faith in Christ conceals Christ’s great power and through them Christ will produce great wonders for the kingdom.* (CC p. 645)

17:6 *faith like a grain of mustard* – ἰ ἔχετε—“If you *have* faith” leaves open the possibility that the disciples do have faith. The RSV is overly pessimistic when it translates it “if you *had* faith,” a contrary to fact condition implying that they don’t have any. BDF § 372 (1) (a) names this a mixed condition, with the present tense in the protasis and the imperfect in the apodosis: “Lk 17:6 is pregnant: εἰ ἔχετε πίστιν ... ἐλέγετε ἄν ... ‘if you really (v. 5) have—(but you do not; yet if you had), then ...’.” But the protasis is *not* clearly contrary to fact; that would require εἰ plus an augmented tense. (CC p. 640)

Ephesians 3:20-21 “²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

mulberry tree – A deep-rooted tree. (TLSB)

planted in the sea – Faith is capable of otherwise impossible things. (TLSB)

would obey you – The unclean spirits (Mk 1:27) and the winds and water (Lk 8:25) were seen to obey Jesus, so faith connects the Christian to the power of God. (TLSB)

17:5–6 The tiniest faith accomplishes remarkable things. Like the apostles, we may feel a weakness in our faith. Today, pray for the Lord’s strength. His gift of faith is anything but weak, and He will grant you

strength to accomplish the impossible. • I believe; help my unbelief, O Lord. Increase my faith in You. Amen. (TLSB)

Unworthy Servants

7 “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? 8 Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? 9 Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? 10 So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants;[e] we have only done what was our duty.’”

17:7-10 This string of sayings concludes with an illustration only found in Luke’s gospel.

The language is reminiscent of a previous parable about the slaves (δοῦλοι; 12:37) who are blessed by their Lord because he finds them alert (12:35–40, which occurs in the context of Jesus’ teaching about watchfulness at the coming of the Son of Man at 12:35–48). However, there is a radical difference in these two meals in terms of the slave’s service. In the parable in Luke 12, the master girds his loins and serves his slaves—a complete reversal of normal practice—whereas here, the slave will serve his master. In the Luke 12 discourse, there is a clear Christological application to Jesus’ own table service of his disciples as he serves them at his Supper. The disciples, therefore, are called by Jesus to be faithful and prudent stewards of the Lord’s gifts (12:41–46). Is there a similar Christological application here to the apostles, although with a different twist, since the slave is called to serve his master at the table? In both cases, application can be made to the Lord’s Supper, where the Lord serves his servants and the pastor serves both the Lord of the banquet and the invited guests. (CC pp. 645-646)

The net result is to counsel the apostles to humility as they serve. They should be more mindful of their slave relationship to their Lord than of the powers they might manifest through faith. The stamp of the cross is on their service, even as it is on their Lord’s. (CC p. 645-646)

Perhaps these few verses subtly unveil the cruciform shape of apostolic ministry. “Slave” (δοῦλος) is often used of the apostles and prophets, and in Luke Jesus frequently uses the slave/master (δοῦλος/κύριος) imagery in his parables, (Lk 12:35–48; 14:15–24; 19:11–27; 20:9–19) especially parables that deal with the activities of the apostles. Lk 17:7–10 mentions the activities of plowing (17:7), shepherding (17:7), and deaconing/serving at tables (17:8). Each of these is used elsewhere as an image of the activities of pastors: on plowing, see 9:62; on shepherding, see 15:3–7; on serving at tables, see 9:16–17; 12:35–48; 22:24–27; and especially Acts 6. These three activities could correspond to the apostolic work of the early church, i.e., “the duties of traveling evangelists (cultivating the field, searching for lost sheep, inviting people to the banquet table, 14:21–23) and the duties of the more sedentary deacons.” These tasks are “all the things that are commanded of you” (17:10) by the Lord for the good and faithful apostle. Those called to the field and to the shepherding are not to denigrate the work of serving at tables, for all three activities are fundamental to the apostolic office. The slave who works in the fields and keeps the flocks should not be surprised if he must also wait on tables. And he shouldn’t look for thanks from his Master (17:9), for this is his calling as an unworthy slave who has simply done what he ought to have done (17:10). (CC p. 645)

Now, the apostles began this discourse when they asked Jesus to add to their faith because of the demands he has placed on them concerning their teaching (17:1–2) and their ministry of release (17:3–4). Jesus tells them they already have enough faith to uproot a tree and plant it in the sea, and therefore they have enough faith to accomplish the apostolic duties of plowing, shepherding, and deaconing that are part of the first phase in Luke’s prophet Christology. But could these concluding words refer to the second phase

of the evangelist's prophet Christology, in which the disciples are called to suffer as Christ has suffered? Does Jesus hint that there lies ahead *suffering* that the apostles will endure and for which they will be given sufficient faith? Jesus suffered as the slave who first girded his loins and served us with his life. So the apostles too must suffer for the kingdom they proclaim and nourish through their apostolic ministry. After all, the Table at which they serve was prepared by the giving of the Master's body and the shedding of his blood. (CC pp. 646-647)

P. Minear, "A Note on Luke 17,7–10," 85, asks,

Is it entirely coincidental that the same idioms are found in two other Lucan passages in which the master's relations to his apostles are so central—in 9:1–17, in which his command for them to "wait on tables" followed directly upon the conclusion of their field trip, and in 22:14–46, where after the conclusion of Jesus' field work they obeyed his command to prepare the Passover supper for him (22:8, 13)? Should we forget the fact that those two suppers were immediately conjoined to references to the Master's sufferings, so that the picture of the table-waiter had begun to coalesce with the picture of the servanthood of the Son of Man (9:22; 22:15, 27)? (CC p. 647)

17:7 *a servant*. A slave, used to illustrate performance of duty (cf. 12:37). (CSB)

Perhaps the household's only slave tending to outside and inside duties. (TLSB)

17:8 *will – ἀλλ'*—This is a strong adversative, which points at the exact opposite of what was said in the previous verse. (CC p. 640)

come in from the field – παρελθών—This is another example of Luke's use of a participle as an imperative. (CC p. 640)

dress properly – Clothes worn for farm labor are replaced by those fit for waiting at table. (TLSB)

17:9 *does he think* – Obviously not; a rhetorical question. (TLSB)

17:10 *done all that you ere commanded – περιζωσάμενος*—On girding the loins, see comments at 12:35–48, where a Passover context is suggested by this expression. (CC p. 640)

we are unworthy servants – Perfect service is a reasonable return to our Master, who deals mercifully with us and calls us to deal mercifully with others (vv 3–4). "These words clearly declare that God saves by mercy and because of His promise, not that it is due because of the value of our works" (Ap V 213). (TLSB)

μη̄ ἔχει χάριν τῷ δούλῳ ὅτι ἐποίησεν τὰ διαταχθέντα... —The expected answer to this question is "No!" See BDF§ 427 (2). (CC p. 640)

17:7–10 We owe God our full service and truly can do Him no favors. God does not owe us thanks for our obedience. In Christ, He does not forever punish us for our disobedience but forgives us graciously. When He returns, we will eat and drink in His kingdom as He has served us. • Grant me a willing heart and able hands, O Lord, to render thanks to You and care to my neighbors. Amen. (TLSB)