

Habakkuk- Finding Faith in Trying Times Faith in Unexpected Times [Hab. 1:5-12]

A resident of northeast San Antonio found out the hard way that appearances can be misleading.

After rescuing what appeared to be two abandoned kittens, **Jane Dinscore**, a passionate animal care activist, attempted to bring them home and nurse them back to health. Believing that they were Bengal kittens, she tried to give them milk.

So aggressively did the two kittens respond to the milk that they destroyed the feeding bottles she used to administer it. After enduring a few nasty scratches along the way, Dinscore **realized her initial assessment was off, and contacted the local Animal Control Service.**

It turns out the two kittens were bobcats from the wild. An ACS spokesperson commended Jane's motive, but does not recommend similar actions in the future.

Jane encountered an unexpected situation. She knew how to take care of kittens. In matters of faith, its easy to worship when all is well. **What happens when life gives you a bobcat?**

Today's Message is entitled: Finding Faith in Unexpected Times

Last week we began a new series entitled "finding faith in trying times." We found in the book of Habakkuk a prophet, a man of God, asking penetrating heart felt questions of faith: Does God listen? Does God save? Does God care? Today in Habakkuk 1:5-12 we find the divine answer to the prophet's earthly inquiry. **What happens when God's answer is not what you expect or want?**

What happens when you don't feel the presence of God? What happens to your faith when you don't receive the answer you have been praying for?

Read [Habakkuk 1:5-12] and pray

What if God's plan is not what you expect (1:5-6)?

If you know nothing of Habakkuk, a minor prophet, don't fret. Most have not heard a message on Habakkuk, judging by our informal poll on Wednesday. If you have heard any truth from Habakkuk it is most likely verse 5. Look and be amazed!

Verse 5 is the immediate response of the Lord to Habakkuk's questions in 1:2-4 (Are you listening? Do you care? Do you save?) The Creator of the universe answers with **three imperatives**: Look! Observe! Be Astounded times two (The **root** meaning is "be astounded, dumbfounded, bewildered," with an element of fear, whether because of an amazing or fearful sight). These words help you feel the weight of God's answer.

This answer is an immediate reminder that **it is impossible to assume what we always know how the Lord will deal with the events that happen in the world.** Just when you think you have everything figured out about God's plan and purposes we find that His ways are higher than our ways. **Do not assume that you know all of God's plans.**

There will times in your life when you will not believe God's purpose is working out in your life even if an angel of the delivered it himself. **What happens to your world when God's plan is not what you expect?**

Dejection? Bitterness? Exasperation? Doubt? Hurt? Here is the gracious truth about not knowing fully all of His sovereign will. **Remember that what looks like a hopeless Godless situation, has eternal purposes.** What looks like total darkness still has a glimpse of the light of Jesus Christ.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come; Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

When the route home is unexpected, don't give up because the Lord is doing something!

Habakkuk was learning to trust in the **redemptive history** of the Lord. The Lord instructed the prophet to look among the nations.

This must mean that God's work already could be seen by the person attuned to the "unexpected work" and the "unfamiliar task" of the Lord (Isa 28:21). Come thou Fount of every blessing- Tune my heart to sing they grace

When you understand that the Lord is not only **above** historical events but working for redemptive glory **within history**, this frees up your spirit **to see the unexpected works** of

the Lord in your life. **Have confidence that Yahweh is working in the unexpected.**

The point is that God is already at work. Habakkuk and his hearers would be surprised at the Lord's answer.

***God is not confined to the nation Judah.** Many people in the ancient Near East assumed that each nation had its gods. People who moved to Judah came under the sway of the God of Judah.*

Naaman asked for two mule loads of dirt to take with him to Syria, apparently so he could worship the Lord in Syria. He assumed that he had to be on the Lord's land in order to worship the Lord (2 Kgs 5:1–19).

Do you feel like you are beyond the grace of God? Do you feel like someone else is beyond the mercy of the Savior? Do you feel like your situation is hopeless and godless?

*What if God's plan is not expected? **There is no place, no person, and no situation that is beyond the redemptive plan of Jesus Christ. Never put limits on the power of Christ in your life.***

What if the medicine is bitter (1:6)?

A well-known psalm in the life of God's people, attributed to the sons of Korah (temple choral singers in the time of David), triumphantly proclaims in *Psalm 48:4 Look! The kings assembled; they advanced together. They look and froze with fear; they fled in terror.* And now God's answer to his prophet is antithetical to this well-loved hymn. The Chaldeans will not look and freeze with fear but they will cause fear because they are fierce and terrifying.

Look and listen to God's description of the Babylonians. These are not isolated individual "bad apples," this whole nation may be characterized as irritated and ill tempered.

Bitter-hasty- justice (they were their own gods). 1:8 they were **fiercer** than wolves at night. Wolves are nocturnal, hunt in packs, and can be extremely vicious. **Horses swifter than leopards** would frighten and fascinate the people of Judah and the surrounding region because of their relative scarcity in the area. Horses and chariots made sense in other areas, but not in the central hill country of Judah. Solomon's dynasty at its height had 4,000 stalls for horses and 12,000 horsemen (2 Chronicles 9:25).

1:10- They **mock** kings and rulers are a joke to them. Everyone should fear one in whom no fear exists. The Babylonian army mocked kings and made rulers objects of derision. They had “contempt for all other authority.” 1:11- **Strength** The emphatic position of this statement about the **godlessness** of the Babylonians beckons the reader to expect more.

*This cannot be the entire answer of God to the prophet's lament. **Surely God will deal with the godless.** What happens if the medicine is bitter? What happens when the answer to your prayer is difficult?*

Bitter pills. We often must give our pug medicine because of his extreme allergies. Sometimes when we run out of his normal regiment we give him Benadryl as per the vet's instruction. What the dog knows is that these pills are bitter. Now keep in mind this dog eats anything and everything. But he does not like this medicine because it has a pungent taste. He has adopted and can now eat peanut butter, dog food, or cheese and spit out the pill. **What we know- and he does not-** is that although the medicine taste bad in the moment- it is for his good long term.

Will you trust God when His plan for your life is difficult and bitter? Put your confidence in Christ when all else is failing because He alone is unfailing. Know that God is working in you an eternal glory for your good.

What if it takes pain to bring you into the presence of the Almighty (1:5 and 12)?

This concept of Look and be utterly astounded is not only found in the OT. Paul uses Habakkuk 1:5 in Acts 13:41 as a warning. The heart of justification of the impending doom at the hands of the Babylonians is the forgiveness of sins.

The apostle says therefore, let it be known to you brothers and sisters, that through Jesus forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you (Acts 13:38). Acts 13:41 Look, you scoffers, marvel and vanish away,

because I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will never believe, even if someone were to explain it to you.”

For the people of Judah, Habakkuk's community, it would take a bitter captivity to make them turn back to their first love.

Fanny Jane Crosby wrote more than 9,000 hymns in spite of her blindness. One well-meaning pastor remarked: “I think it is a great pity that the <Aster did not give you sight when he showered so many other gifts upon you.” Her response: “f at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been that I was born blind. Because when I get to heaven the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior.”

What if pain brings you into the presence of the Almighty?

Hab. 1:12 Are you not from eternity, LORD my God? My Holy One, you will not die.

My Holy one you will not die. What a proclamation of faith. Six hundred years later, The Holy one would die. What happens if it takes pain to bring you into the presence of the almighty? **The cross of Calvary was the weight that the Son of God bore for your sake.**

The Cross was bitter, impetuous, fierce, terrifying, violent, Jesus was mocked as the “king of the Jews” and for many was a joke. Why? Because **It is through the pain of the cross that we have peace with God.**

Col. 1:20 and through him to reconcile everything to himself,
whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making **peace through his blood**, shed on the **cross**.

In the Pain of the Cross you find Peace with God. Do you need this peace today?

What if God’s plan is not what you expect (1:5-6)? Habakkuk 3:17. Put your confidence in Jesus until your heart rejoices in the joy of your salvation.

Notes

Hab. 1:5 Look at the nations and observe
be **utterly astounded!**
For I am doing something in your days
that you will not believe
when you hear about it.

The Lord answers Habakkuk with three imperatives: Look, observe, and be astounded x2

This speaks of the impossibility of assuming we always know how God will deal with the events that happen in this world. Just when we think we have everything figured out about God's purpose, we come to learn that His ways are higher than ours (Fentress, 188).

The new order imposed by Babylon contrasts markedly with the perverted world order described by Habakkuk in verse 4 (Berit Olam).

The total absence of rebuke to the complainer also should be appreciated for its disarming effect. The Lord himself is fully in sympathy with the prophet's agony over the suffering righteous ones (NICOT).

From the perspective of Israel, this is an antithetical response to Psalm 48 which previews the destruction of approaching kinds.

Psa. 48:4 Look! The kings assembled;
they advanced together.
5 They looked and froze with fear;
they fled in terror.

Also Paul uses Habakkuk 1:5 in Acts 13:41 as a warning. The heart of justification of the impending doom at the hands of the Babylonians is the forgiveness of sins (NICOT).

Babylon as an instrument of justice reflects redemptive history. Paul echoes this by his use of the OT quotation. "Everything that happens in your life has gospel purposes."

- In the Hebrew text the first four verbs are plural imperatives ("be **utterly amazed**" translates two Hb. verbs which are different forms of the same root).
 - The use of the imperatives emphasizes the urgency of the command as well as the incomprehensible nature of the revelation of the Lord.
 - Such use also shows that God directed his answer to a group of people supporting the prophet, not just to the prophet himself. Prayer for help was and is the occupation of more than one

person in God's community of faith.

- The Lord instructed the prophet to look among the nations. This must mean that God's work already could be seen by the person attuned to the "strange work" of the Lord (Isa 28:21).
- Does this imply that Babylon already had begun to move against the nations? Practically any date between 612 B.C. and 605 B.C. would fit such a context
- **The point is that God is already at work.** Habakkuk and his hearers would be surprised at the Lord's answer. Who could expect that the Lord would use such a wicked instrument to judge a nation more righteous than they?
- Habakkuk argued in just this way in his next question (1:12–17). The Lord's answer indicates his sovereignty. He is not bound by the listener's whims or by their standards of "fairness." He responds according to his sovereign will. He is the Lord of history who works in history to accomplish his purpose.
- Habakkuk's questions reflect the questions of many people. Especially when we deal with personal affronts, difficulties, and disappointments, we desire to know where God is and what he is doing. Habakkuk reminds us that God is at work. He is the Lord of the universe who works to accomplish his purpose in his world and in our lives.

6 Look! I am raising up the Chaldeans,
that bitter, impetuous nation
that marches across the earth's open spaces
to seize territories not its own.

Interestingly Revelation 20:9 echoes precisely the LXX rendering of the phrase. Satan goes out to deceive the nations and his target is the camp of God's people, the city he loves (NICOT).

9 They came up across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the encampment of the saints, the beloved city. Then fire came down from heaven and consumed them.

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- These are not a few isolated individual "bad apples," this whole nation may be characterized as irritated and ill-tempered (NICOT).
- Who could have believed that God's answer to the wickedness in Judah would be "Babylon"? Who are these Chaldeans?⁷³
 - Chaldea lay in central and southeastern Mesopotamia between the lower stretches of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in modern Iraq, close to the border with Iran, touching the head of the Persian Gulf.
 - Several Aramean tribes entered the area between 1000 and 900 B.C. They found a homeland with few natural resources, a flat alluvial plain, marsh lands, flooding, and hot summers.
 - They rejected all urban society and its customs and manner of life but gradually developed military power under Merodach-Baladan and then a century later under Nabopolassar, who founded a Chaldean dynasty in Babylon, defeated the Assyrians, and captured Nineveh in 612 B.C. This was the Neo-Babylonian Empire.
- *In case anyone needed a history lesson, the Lord described them as "ruthless" (or "bitter") and "impetuous" (or "hasty"), that is, they were known for their cruelty and speed in conquering most of*

western Asia

- “In effect the Lord’s answer to ‘violence’ is ‘violence,’ as stipulated in the ‘law,’ whose paralysis with regard to injustice is only temporary (cf. Isa 55:11; 2 Tim 2:9).”
- In this vivid description of a seemingly unstoppable power, one of Habakkuk’s great theological themes begins to surface: **Evil has within itself the seed of destruction**. Babylon will not have the last word after all, for within the empire are self-destructive traits: greed (1:6), cruelty (1:7), arrogance and self-sufficiency (1:7), haughtiness (1:10), and blasphemy (1:11).”
 - Smith similarly explains, “God allows tyrants to spring up and flourish for a little while, but they become guilty by the abuse of their power and, like a plant before it is firmly rooted, God blows on them and they wither.”⁸⁰
 - This is the God Hosea pictured as the husband, the family leader of Israel. The family leader has authority over much more than a family.
 - He is sovereign over all the nations. He has the power and right to use a wicked foreign power to punish his wicked people.

7 They are fierce and terrifying; their views of justice and sovereignty stem from themselves.

- These verses (1:7–11) vividly describe the arrogance (v. 7b) of the Babylonians along with their unrivaled military power. Peoples of the world rightfully dreaded the power of Babylon. Who tells Babylon what to do?
- The surprising, shocking news beyond understanding was that God would use a people who acted like this and would underline the terror and violence they would use. “A nation that deified itself shall be an instrument of the true God!”⁸⁶
- **God is not confined to the nation Judah. Many people in the ancient Near East assumed that each nation had its gods. People who moved to Judah came under the sway of the God of Judah.**
 - Naaman asked for two mule loads of dirt to take with him to Syria, apparently so he could worship the Lord in Syria. He assumed that he had to be on the Lord’s land in order to worship the Lord (2 Kgs 5:1–19).
- God’s raising the Chaldeans showed that he is sovereign over the whole earth. He is not confined to one nation or one people (cf. Amos 9:7). God can work through other peoples to accomplish his purpose.

8 Their horses are swifter than leopards and more fierce than wolves of the night. Their horsemen charge ahead; their horsemen come from distant lands. They fly like eagles, swooping to devour.

- The following verses describe the fierceness of the Babylonian army

- Horses would frighten and fascinate the people of Judah and the surrounding region because of their relative scarcity in the area. Horses and chariots made sense in other areas, but not in the central hill country of Judah.
 - Solomon's dynasty at its height had \$4,000 stalls for horses and 12,000 horsemen (2 Chronicles 9:25).
 - The Philistines probably failed to dominate Israel because of the uselessness of the chariot in the hill country. On the Philistine plain horses and chariots ruled the day but proved worthless in mountainous terrain.

- Babylon's horses struck fear in the hearts of the people of Judah. Most of the biblical references to horses are connected to warfare.
 - Using horses for agriculture or for pulling burdens was practically unknown.
 - The Lord described the horses as swifter than leopards and more fierce⁹² than wolves at dusk.
 - The literal Hebrew expression describes "wolves of the evening," that is, a hunting, feeding, hungry wolf.
 - In Palestine wolves hunted during the evening hours, which meant that the wolves would be hungrier and more fierce after not eating for a period of time.
- The second half of v. 8 presents several translation difficulties though the meaning is clear.

9 All of them come to do violence;
 their faces are set in determination.
 They gather prisoners like sand.

Faces- difficult to translate but apparently describes the ranks of Babylonian soldiers facing forward as they engage in combat (Berit Olam).

- Babylon's purpose was clear. They were bent on violence, the same Hebrew term the prophet used to describe the situation he complained to God about in v. 3 and about which he cried to God in v. 2.
- "Their hordes advance like a desert wind" is a conjecture in the NIV.⁹⁷ Since the first word in the line is found only once in the Old Testament, the translation has been almost impossible. The NIV carries the idea of the swiftness of the hordes that are bent on violence.⁹⁸
- The result would be clear. The Babylonians would sweep into the region with faces determined to take Jerusalem. The number of their captives would be like grains of sand. No wonder God told the prophet he would not believe what he was told.

10 They mock kings,
 and rulers are a joke to them.
 They laugh at every fortress
 and build siege ramps to capture it.

- Everyone should fear one in whom no fear exists. The Babylonian army mocked kings and made rulers objects of derision. They had “contempt for all other authority.”
- One method of defeating a walled city or fortress involved making a ramp of dirt the attackers would climb and then overtake the city. The Romans took Masada with this strategy. The Babylonians followed the practices developed by the Assyrians in besieging a city. After building a ramp or a causeway, the attackers constructed war machines mounted on four or six wooden wheels.
 - At the appropriate time the full-scale assault would begin, led by heavily armed infantry scaling tall ladders. Archers then increased the attack with their arrows, which served to protect the infantry. No wonder the Chaldean attackers scoffed at kings. No one seemed able to stand before them.

11 Then they sweep by like the wind
and pass through.
They are guilty; their strength is their god.

- Though ordained of God to carry out his purpose (1:6, 12), the Babylonians worshiped only might and the strength of their hands. They bowed to no man and listened to no god.
- Thus the person coming under the sway of the army had little hope.
- This bitter and hasty army swept the earth like the wind and hurried on to plunder other nations.¹⁰⁴ “Such people acknowledge no accountability, seek no repentance, and offer no reparations, while violating the most fundamental order of created life.
- The emphatic position of this statement about the godlessness of the Babylonians beckons the reader to expect more. This cannot be the entire answer of God to the prophet’s lament. Surely God will deal with the godless.

Hab. 1:12 Are you not from eternity, LORD my God?
My Holy One, you will not die.
LORD, you appointed them to execute judgment;
my Rock, you destined them to punish us.

- The verses function as a resumption of the lament in vv. 2–3,
- Habakkuk’s complaint indicates the prophet’s familiarity with both the Lord and the Babylonians. Israel’s prophets showed an amazing understanding of how the world worked.
- Habakkuk’s question dealt with the nature of God. “O LORD, are you not from everlasting?” Habakkuk used the covenant name of God in his address. The “I AM WHO I AM” (Exod 3:14) is the God who promised to be with his people.
- These two descriptions of God cut directly to the problem Habakkuk encountered. God had “appointed” and “ordained” Babylon to execute judgment against Judah and to punish¹²³ the wicked in Jerusalem.
 - How could the holy and everlasting God do such a thing? “Instead of reproof it appears that the Babylonians aim at extinction of their victims.”
- The modern reader of the Bible might ask similar questions. How could God set up a godless nation to

punish a nation filled with Christian churches?

- This was something of Habakkuk's dilemma. Habakkuk saw that the Babylonians had been established by God to do this. The Lord controlled history and worked his will among the nations.

Illustrations

God is not looking from the ramparts of heaven observing how history unfolds.

Application

Not a weak faith but a perplexed faith torments Habakkuk in 1:12 (NICOT).

“Frankly this cure is worse than the disease” (Begg).