

Unbelievable Works, Habakkuk 1:5-11

Main Idea: When God finally breaks his silence, his answer often confronts us with a sovereignty wider and wiser than our expectations, calling us to trust Him.

I. The Reorientation | Habakkuk 1:5

Habakkuk's first complaint ended with clear uncertainty. The law was paralyzed, justice had been corrupted to serve the wicked, and God seemed silent to the issues. When God finally speaks, he does not begin where most of us would expect him to begin. He issues a command. "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded." God is not only addressing Habakkuk as an individual prophet; he is addressing the whole community through him. **The reorientation Habakkuk needed is the reorientation every faithful gathering of God's people has always needed when the visible circumstances of life appear to contradict the confessed character of God.** What God is correcting is not unbelief but narrowness of focus. Habakkuk has been watching Judah with the intensity of a prophet who genuinely loves his people, and there is no rebuke here for that love. God is addressing the assumption that God's activity must show up within the realm of Habakkuk's expectations. **This is one of the dangers we must watch for. We begin to define in advance what God's faithfulness will look like, and then we judge his presence or absence by whether God acted according to our desires.** Isaiah speaks to this same habit in Isaiah 55:8-9, where the distance between our thoughts and God's thoughts is described not as a gap to be bridged by effort, but as the distance between the heavens and the earth. The point is not that God is distant; the point is that his actions are always larger than our human perception.

Scripture itself speaks of a God who hides himself. Isaiah 45:15 says, "Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, Savior." **This is not God withholding himself from his people. It is God working in ways that are deliberately concealed from human observation, because the hiddenness itself is part of how he grows faith.** Habakkuk has been praying as though the problem were God's inaction, when in reality the problem was that God's action had not yet been disclosed. The same is true of almost every season of waiting a believer walks through. The question is rarely whether God is working, the question is almost always whether we are willing to wait for the answer on his timing rather than ours.

God also tells Habakkuk, "For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told." The work God is doing is of such vastness that the natural response to hearing it would be disbelief, because it is so far outside the expectation his people have been using to imagine what faithfulness should look like. Ephesians 3:20 describes a God who "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think." The God of Scripture consistently works in ways that leave his people, even his most faithful people, astonished. Habakkuk, standing in the ruins of Judah's reform, could not possibly have planned what was coming. **When God reorients us, He responds to our lament and struggles by enlarging our focus. This is the kindness of a Father who knows that what we need is our life more easily managed, but deeper trust and rest in Him who manages all things.**

To Ponder:

1. Many popular Christian books and sermons today promise that if you pray with enough faith, God will answer in the way you are hoping. How does Habakkuk's experience challenge that teaching, and what does a healthier understanding of prayer look like?
2. What does this passage teach us about the nature of God's love that he would sometimes answer a lament with a correction rather than a comfort?
3. When God feels silent, where do you tend to go for answers instead of continuing to wait on him? What does that default reveal about where your trust actually rests?

II. The Instrument | Habakkuk 1:6-11

Having reoriented the prophet's gaze, God names the instrument of his discipline. "For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation." The Chaldeans, better known to us as the Babylonians, were one of the most fearsome military powers of the time. By the late seventh century BC

they had decimated Assyria and defeated Egypt at Carchemish in 605 BC. They were known for siege warfare so efficient that cities often surrendered before the engines arrived, for a religion that credited every victory to their own gods, and for a practice of deporting conquered populations to dissolve national identity. This is the empire God says he is raising up. **The scandal is not only that God would use a pagan nation; Assyria had already served that role under Isaiah. The scandal is that God would use a nation even more violent and idolatrous than Judah to discipline Judah.** The lesser wickedness was about to be judged by the greater.

Verses 7-10 describe the horrors of Babylon's might. They are dreaded and fearsome. Their justice and dignity proceed from themselves, which is a Hebrew shorthand for a people who have become a law unto themselves, accountable to no one above them. Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than evening wolves. They gather captives like sand. They scoff at kings, laugh at fortresses, and heap up siege ramps to destroy the walls of the mightiest cities. **God wants Habakkuk to understand exactly what kind of instrument is in His hand.** And then, in verse 11, God declares Babylon to be "guilty men, whose own strength is their god." **The Babylonians are genuinely used by God, and they are genuinely guilty before God, at the very same time.** Their instrumentality does not excuse their idolatry, and their idolatry does not cancel their instrumentality. Isaiah 10 says almost the same thing of Assyria, God wields them as the rod of his anger, and in the very next breath he promises to punish them for the arrogance with which they swung.

This should guard us against two opposite errors. The first is to, in some way, try to argue that God did not really ordain the painful thing, he only permitted it after the fact, as though sovereignty were a kind of damage control. God says I am raising up the Chaldeans. The active voice is unavoidable. The second error is to say that because God ordained it, the people who did the harm were not truly responsible. They are guilty men. The clearest place this concept is seen in Scripture is the cross itself. Peter preaches in Acts 2:23 that Jesus was delivered up by the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, and in the same sentence says that lawless men crucified and killed him. **The most ordained event in the history of the universe was also the most wicked, and the Bible holds both truths together.** When God raised up Babylon, he was doing more than one thing at once. He was disciplining Judah, judging the pagan nations around her, preserving a remnant, and the book of Daniel tell us that He was setting up the circumstances that would carry Daniel and his friends into Nebuchadnezzar's court, where the faithfulness of four young men would become the means by which the most powerful king on earth would eventually confess that the Most High rules the kingdom of men. God's providences are never single stranded. Romans 8:28 is not a sentimental promise; it is a statement about the vastness of God's purposes. The hardest providences in the life of a believer are always doing more than one thing, and usually we only ever see one or two of them this side of glory. **God may use instruments his people would never have chosen to accomplish purposes they desperately needed.** The sovereignty that brings the storm is the same sovereignty that holds us through it.

To Ponder:

4. Our culture tends to treat suffering as either meaningless or as proof that God is absent. How should the church speak about suffering differently, and where have you seen Christians absorb the culture's view without realizing it?
5. If God may be accomplishing multiple purposes through a single act of providence, how should that shape the questions we ask ourselves in the middle of difficulty? What are better questions than "why is this happening to me?"
6. Is there an area of your life where your confidence has shifted from God to your own strength, the way verse 11 describes? What are the signs that your own strength has become a functional god?