

# Habakkuk 1:5-6

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/hab/hab-1/habakkuk-15-6/>

*The LORD tells Habakkuk that He will use the Chaldeans as His instrument to carry out His judgment on the people of Judah.*

In the previous section, Habakkuk asked the LORD why He allowed him to witness wickedness and injustice that remained unaddressed in his society (vv. 2–4). In the present section, the LORD answered the prophet. In doing so, He used the second person plural “you” to indicate that the response was not for Habakkuk alone; it was also for the people of Judah.

Habakkuk was a prophet (v. 1). As such, one of his roles was to serve as a mediator between the LORD and His covenant people. That is why the LORD addressed Habakkuk and the people of Judah together. God told them He was aware of the problems in Judah and would deal with them accordingly in due time. God’s timetable is seldom ours. There are a number of verses that exhort us to not lose heart in doing good while waiting on the Lord (Galatians 6:9; 1 Peter 5:6).

In addressing both the prophet and the people, the LORD issued a twofold command. In the first part, He said, *Look among the nations! Observe!* The verb translated as *look* is “rā’â” in Hebrew. It denotes the experience of seeing something as a totality, in which sensation and perception merge. The seeing person experiences a detachment from distractions and can comprehend its meaning, character, and nature. The verb translated as *observe* [“nabat” in Hebrew] means to watch, to look at or to look in a specific direction. The form of the verb in our text connotes paying close attention to something. Thus, it is used synonymously with the verb “see.” In short, God instructed His covenant people to be receptive to what He was about to do *among the nations*. The people were to take their eyes off the immediate situation in Judah to see what the LORD was doing on the international scene.

In the second part of the command, the LORD declared, *Be astonished! Wonder!* The verbs *be astonished* and *wonder* translate two forms of the same Hebrew verb “tāmah.” The verb describes the reaction of human beings when their lives are exposed to an unexpected event (Psalm 48:5). The repetition of the same verb not only intensifies the command but also highlights the force of the shock Judah would feel about the surprising event. Thus, the second part of the command can be translated as “be utterly amazed.”

The LORD asked His covenant people to gaze at *the nations* in astonishment. He told them why they were to do so: *Because I am doing something in your days—You would not believe if you were told.* The Suzerain God to whom they owed their allegiance under the Mosaic covenant was about to do something utterly amazing and surprising. That is why it would be difficult for the people of God to understand, even if God would disclose the information to them.

In verse 6, the LORD described what He was about to do to discipline His covenant people. He began with the particle *behold*. In the Bible, the term *behold* is often used to describe an event that is about to take place. It serves to focus attention on the statement that follows it. In other

words, the speaker uses the term *behold* to focus on an event that is surprising or unexpected for his listeners.

Here, the surprising event was a turning point in Judah's life. For some time, wickedness and injustice prevailed in Judah. Habakkuk thought God was silent. But God is a just judge. God also often allows substantial time for repentance. For example, God deferred judgement on the wickedness of the Amorites for four generations (Genesis 15:16). But now, it was time for judgment, and God would deal with the people of Judah according to their deeds. How was He going to fix the problem?

Habakkuk and the people of Judah knew that God would not leave wickedness and injustice unpunished because He "does not show partiality" (Deuteronomy 10:17). Thus, the discipline of God was not surprising to them. The unexpected part of God's justice, however, was the channel through which He would dispense His judgment because He said, *I am raising up the Chaldeans*.

The *Chaldeans* were a tribal group occupying the region of southern Mesopotamia called "Chaldea." At first, they lived in tribal settlements, rejecting the urban society of the Babylonians to the northwest. As the years went by, they acquired domination in Babylonia gradually. By the time of the prophet Habakkuk, the *Chaldeans* took on the title "Babylonians" or "Neo-Babylonians." Thus, throughout the Middle East, the terms *Chaldeans* and Babylonians became synonyms, as evidenced in several books of the Bible (2 Kings 24:2; Jeremiah 21:4, 9; Ezekiel 1:3; Daniel 1:4).

The LORD declared that He would *raise up* the Chaldeans, describing them as *fierce and impetuous people*. The Hebrew word for *fierce* means "bitter" and emphasizes the viciousness of the *Chaldeans*. The Hebrew word for *impetuous* means "hasty" or "quick." It emphasizes the speed of the *Chaldeans*. With such cruelty and hastiness, they would *march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places that are not theirs*. That is, they marched throughout the entire region to conquer them, gaining political power as they subjected nations under their rule, and seized their possessions.

This passage demonstrates that the LORD controls the nations for His purposes. Everything belongs to Him (Psalm 24:1). He oversees all His creation and directs the steps of every human being. As Daniel states, "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding" (Daniel 2:21). The Babylonians had no intent to submit to Yahweh, but they would be doing His will.

## **Biblical Text**

**<sup>5</sup> "Look among the nations! Observe!  
Be astonished! Wonder!  
Because *I am* doing something in your days—  
You would not believe if you were told.  
<sup>6</sup> "For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,  
That fierce and impetuous people**

**Who march throughout the earth  
To seize dwelling places which are not theirs.**