

Habakkuk 1:7-11

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The LORD proceeds to describe the military strength and pride of the Chaldeans.

In verses 7–11, the LORD gave a vivid description of the military strength and pride of the *Chaldeans*, or Babylonians. This is relevant because God disclosed to Habakkuk that He intended to direct the Babylonians to invade Judah as chastisement for its violation of the covenant law through the spread of violence and exploitation rather than self-governance and neighborly love (Habakkuk 1:6). In verse 7, He said, *They are dreaded and feared*. The adjective *dreaded* refers to someone who spreads terror. The word *feared* refers to human panic for physical safety in threatening situations and the perils of everyday life.

The *Chaldeans* had a strong military army. They instilled fear into the hearts of the other people groups. Their military power caused them to become arrogant and self-sufficient: *their justice and authority originate with themselves*. In other words, the *Chaldeans* were so proud that they established their own rules of righteousness. They determined what was right and what was wrong in their own eyes. They did not accept any other laws, except their own, because they thought they were superior to the other nations.

That the *Chaldean* army was strong is clear in the next verse, where the LORD described their rapidity: *Their horses are swifter than leopards*. In ancient times, *horses* were often used to form cavalries for purposes of war (Exodus 14:9; 1 Kings 4:26). In the early periods of the world, they were used especially by kings and warriors, either mounted or harnessed to chariots (Exodus 14:9, 23). Horses were also instrumental in battle due to their strength and speed (Jeremiah 12:5; Joel 2:4). In our passage, the LORD stated that the *Chaldean horses* were so rapid that they ran faster than *leopards*.

The term *leopard* refers to a large hunting cat known for its fierceness and swift attacks (Isaiah 11:6). It swoops upon its prey suddenly and causes a violent death. Likewise, the *Chaldean* army would invade the people of Judah with such a tremendous speed that they would be unable to escape.

Not only were the *Chaldean horses* faster than *leopards* but they were also *keener than wolves in the evening*. The term “*keener*” means “quick” or “sharp,” like a sword (Ezekiel 21:14–16). In our passage, the term describes the cruelty of hungry *wolves*. Wolves usually travel in packs (Jeremiah 5:6). *Wolves* are ravenous and savage (see Genesis 49:27 and Acts 20:29 respectively). They devour and destroy their prey (Ezekiel 22:27). These nocturnal predators lie low during the day and begin to hunt at dusk. Yet, the *Chaldean* army was more dangerous than *wolves*. This fact alone could strike fear in the hearts of the nations.

Moreover, the *Chaldean horsemen come galloping*. Yes, *their horsemen come from afar*. The Hebrew word translated as *horsemen* here may refer either to horses or to their riders. Since the verb “*come galloping*” refers to the action of horses, it is best to view the word *horsemen* in the

first statement as *horses*. Thus, the meaning is that the *Chaldean horses* gallop and cover great amounts of ground while their *horsemen come* from a great distance, that is, from Babylon. (See map in the right sidebar).

Nevertheless, the distance was not an issue for the *Chaldean* soldiers because *they fly like an eagle swooping down to devour*. An *eagle* is a powerful bird with a wingspan up to seven and a half feet. It hunts high in the air and swoops down on its prey at great speed. In the ancient world, the *eagle* was known for its keen eyesight, power, sharp beak, and strong talons (Deuteronomy 14:12; 32:11). In our passage, the *Chaldean* army is compared to an *eagle* because they would approach swiftly to destroy Judah.

The *Chaldean* soldiers are described as seeming to enjoy war, and the destruction of war: *All of them come for violence*. Their motive seemed to go beyond mere conquest. They seemed to enjoy violence as an end to itself. *Their horde of faces moves forward*, literally, “the totality of their faces is toward the east.” The term translated as *forward* means “east.” It likely refers to the east wind, a deadly “sirocco” blowing in across the land from the eastern Arabian Desert. That wind is so powerful that it can potentially destroy human endeavors (Ezekiel 27:26; Psalm 48:7) and blight vegetation (Ezekiel 17:10; Jonah 4:8).

The point is that the *Chaldean* soldiers would approach Judah with great power and would *collect captives like sand*. The mention of “*sand*” speaks of a vast quantity (Genesis 22:17; 2 Samuel 17:11; Hosea 1:10). That is, the *Chaldean* soldiers would defeat Judah and take captives so easily and so numerous that it was as if they were gathering grains of sand.

Not only did the *Chaldean* soldiers relish violence, they also had wicked behavior. They were so arrogant that they were not afraid of other nations. *They mock at kings, and rulers are a laughing matter to them*. The verb *mock* means to make fun of someone or something. For example, when the prophet Elisha was on his way to Bethel, “young lads came out from the city and mocked him and said to him, ‘Go up, you baldhead; go up, you baldhead!’” (2 Kings 2:23). Here in our passage, the *Chaldean* soldiers made fun of foreign *kings and rulers*, showing no respect for them. *They even laugh at every fortress*. They feared nothing, and considered their military prowess to be so vastly superior that they considered any who would oppose them as a joke.

The term *fortress* denotes a walled area set to provide refuge for people. It was often built on high mountains and was meant to be impenetrable. Its purpose was to protect the citizens of a country against the attack of their enemies (Hosea 8:14; 10:14). But such a fortress was but a joke to the Chaldeans because they would *laugh at it and heap up rubble to capture it*. The method of heaping up rubble involves making a ramp of dirt to create a siege ramp over which the army could march and attack the fortress. (Jeremiah 32:24; Ezekiel 17:17).

This indicates that the *Chaldeans* built earthen ramps against the walls of the fortified cities they encountered to seize them. Then, *they will sweep through like the wind and pass on*. Like the *wind* blows and disappears, so the *Chaldeans* would besiege a city easily and continue their progress with success. But *they would be held guilty, those whose strength is their god*.

Although the LORD used the Chaldeans/Babylonians as His tool, they did not acknowledge Him as faithful servants. They were simply a useful instrument for God's purposes. They refused to see God as the One orchestrating all the events. In their arrogance, they thought their *strength was their god*. But as the book of Proverbs makes clear, "Pride goes before destruction" (Proverbs 16:18). Therefore, God would use them to do His bidding, but would ultimately hold them accountable and would punish them severely.

Biblical Text

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And keener than wolves in the evening.
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⁹ **"All of them come for violence.
Their horde of faces *moves* forward.
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And rulers are a laughing matter to them.
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But they will be held guilty,
They whose strength is their god."**