

Habakkuk 1:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you.

Analysis

Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. God's response to Habakkuk's complaint is stunning and unexpected. Rather than immediately addressing injustice in Judah, God declares He is orchestrating something so shocking that Habakkuk won't believe it even when explicitly told. The imperative "Behold" (רֵא/re'u) commands intense, careful observation—God is about to reveal His sovereign activity in history.

"Among the heathen" (בָּגְיִם/baggoym, "among the nations") indicates God's work extends beyond Israel's borders to the international stage. God is not merely Israel's tribal deity but the sovereign Lord of all nations, using them to accomplish His purposes. This cosmic perspective challenges narrow nationalism and reminds believers that God's kingdom transcends ethnic and political boundaries.

The phrase "I will work a work" (פָּעַל פָּעַל/po'el po'al) uses Hebrew repetition for emphasis—God is actively, definitively working. Divine sovereignty doesn't mean passivity; God acts decisively in history, though His timing and methods often confound human expectations. The verb tense indicates ongoing action—God is already working, though it's not yet visible.

"Which ye will not believe, though it be told you" warns that God's methods will seem incredible, even impossible. God plans to use the brutal Chaldeans

(Babylonians) as His instrument to judge Judah. This raises profound theological questions: How can a holy God use an even more wicked nation to punish His own people? This paradox points toward the mystery of divine providence—God works through human agency, including sinful agency, without being tainted by that sin and without absolving human responsibility.

Historical Context

This verse introduces God's shocking answer: He will raise up the Chaldeans (Babylonians) to judge Judah. In 605 BC, Babylon had just emerged as the dominant Near Eastern power after defeating Egypt at Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar II would soon begin his conquests, ultimately destroying Jerusalem in 586 BC and exiling the population to Babylon.

For Habakkuk and his contemporaries, the idea that God would use pagan Babylon—known for extreme cruelty, idolatry, and imperialism—to judge His covenant people was almost incomprehensible. Judah, despite its corruption, still possessed the temple, the priesthood, and the Davidic monarchy. How could God allow these covenant institutions to be destroyed by pagans?

This verse is quoted in Acts 13:41 by Paul during his synagogue sermon in Pisidian Antioch, warning Jews who rejected the gospel that God was doing a new, unexpected work through the Gentile mission. Just as ancient Jews couldn't believe God would use Babylon, first-century Jews struggled to believe God would include uncircumcised Gentiles in His covenant people. God's ways consistently transcend human expectations.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's use of wicked nations to accomplish His purposes challenge your understanding of divine sovereignty and human responsibility?
2. In what ways might God be working in your life or in world events that seem unbelievable or contrary to what you expected?
3. How does the truth that God works through all nations (not just Israel or the church) affect your view of politics and international relations?
4. What does it mean to trust God's purposes even when His methods seem harsh or confusing?

Interlinear Text

רְאָה בְּגֹויִם תָּמַם הָוֶה וְפָנֶב יְתָנוֹתָן תָּמַם הָוֶה כִּי
Behold ye among the heathen and regard and wonder and wonder and wonder H3588
H7200 H1471 H5027 H8539 H8539

פְּעַל בִּימִיכָּם לֹא תָמַם יְכוֹנֵן כִּי
a work for I will work in your days which ye will not believe H3588
H6467 H6466 H3117 H3808 H539

יָסְפֵּר:
though it be told
H5608

Additional Cross-References

Lamentations 4:12 (Faith): The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem.

Isaiah 29:14 (Parallel theme): Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.

Isaiah 29:9 (Parallel theme): Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink.

Jeremiah 18:18 (Parallel theme): Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.

Daniel 9:12 (Parallel theme): And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem.

Zephaniah 1:2 (Parallel theme): I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD.