

# WTF LIFE MAJOR LESSONS | from the MINOR PROPHETS



## LESSON 9 – HABAKKUK

### FACILITATOR'S

Note

"How long, O Lord?" This is the question we all ask and which Habakkuk asks God in his dialogue with Him. The prophecy of Habakkuk is different than the other prophets that we have studied as he addresses God Himself rather than the people of Judah. He understands that God is dealing with the wickedness of Judah by bringing punishment on them from a "more" wicked nation. This baffles Habakkuk as he questions how God could use such a cruel and wicked people to punish a people "less" wicked than the Chaldeans. God stresses to Habakkuk and His people that the truly righteous will "live by faith." Patient endurance of God's discipline will find God's grace in the end. Wickedness is wickedness, no matter how "more" wicked one is over the other. However, true wickedness and evil will destroy itself. Yet, faithfulness will find its reward in God and God alone. God wants all of us to reach the same conclusion that Habakkuk did, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places." (Hab. 3:18-19) This study relates to modern day struggles with God's justice. Spend time dealing with the hard questions that we all struggle with, "Why God? Do I really deserve this? How long?"

Through this lesson we hope to provide material that will provide knowledge (HEAD); then ask questions that will bring us understanding (HEART); and then motivate participants to go and live the Word in the world and demonstrate Godly wisdom (HANDS).

**HEAD**  **→ HEART**  **→ HANDS** 

We hope that by this study your class participants will not only hear, know, and understand the Word, but that they will also be driven to become the "Living Word" to the world around us. Your role in this process as a class facilitator is very important. Go beyond these lessons to demonstrate how what the Minor Prophets teach us can and should be lived daily. Use your life and the lives of others as examples of this "Living Word" concept.

*As always, we would encourage you to begin preparing for this lesson by digging into the Word and reading through the book of **Habakkuk**. We also encourage you to read/scan through **2 Kings 23:33-24:7, 2 Chronicles 36:1-15, Jeremiah 6:9-30; 22:13-19** as background to the book. As you move through **Habakkuk**, jot down any thoughts that come to you and particular passages that stand out and speak to you. We assure you that these will come into play as you facilitate this discussion. It is then that you should approach this lesson plan and use it (and others) only as a guide for the weeks to come. Your group is different than all the rest and so your lessons should be adapted accordingly.*

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## PRAYER



Begin your time with a prayer asking God for the guidance of His Holy Spirit as you and your class seek to encounter Him through His Holy Word.

## FOCUS

- Presentation of introductory material on the prophecy of Habakkuk.
- Understand that God is just and merciful, even though we may not always understand what He is doing.
- Wickedness will receive its due punishment, but the righteous will live by faith and receive God's mercy.
- Divine discipline is often felt through suffering. Instead of running from suffering, perhaps it is best to embrace it so God can do His work in us.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS (OPTIONAL)

- "Why God? Do I really deserve all this? I know others who have done much worse?" Have you ever asked these questions of God? What answers have you found to these questions?
- "HOW LONG, O LORD?" How about this question? Have you ever asked God this?
- These questions have been around since sin entered the story of God. We struggle with these at our core. But God is not silent in answering our questions. The real question is, will we accept His answer?

## KNOWLEDGE HEAD

### From God's Word through Habakkuk

- OVERVIEW
  - Author
    - The author is identified as "Habakkuk the prophet" and that is all we are told. The rest of what we "know" about Habakkuk comes from some educated guessing.
    - Even the name Habakkuk is not of Hebrew origin, but we can trace its root back to the meaning "to embrace" or back to the name of an Assyrian flower. Most agree with an "embrace" meaning.

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- Habakkuk seems to have prophesied shortly before the Babylonians come power, but after they had already begun to expand westward and the fall of Nineveh.
  - Habakkuk refers to himself as “the prophet” in 1:1.
  - Rabbinic tradition claims that Habakkuk was the son of the Shunamite woman of 2 Kings 4:16ff.
  - Habakkuk is unique as instead of addressing the people of Judah, he addresses God on behalf of Judah.
  - However, we really know nothing about him, where he comes from, etc. What we do know about Habakkuk is that he struggled with his faith in trusting that God could adequately run/manage the universe.
- **Date**
    - No date can be affixed to Habakkuk with certainty. We know little to nothing about the prophet and no kings are mentioned.
    - However, based on the internal evidence, it appears the prophecy took place after the fall of Nineveh and before the Chaldeans to the first captives of Jerusalem. This places the date of writing somewhere between the dates of 612-605 B.C.
    - This would mean that he prophesied in the early years of Jehoiakim’s reign in Judah (609-598 B.C.).
      - The spiritual condition of this time was wickedness, injustice, and indifference to God.
    - This date range would also mean that Habakkuk was more than likely a contemporary of Jeremiah and Zephaniah (and perhaps Ezekiel and Daniel).
  - **Key Theme(s)**
    - God is just and merciful. However, His people may not always understand His just and merciful ways (2:4).
    - Wickedness will not go unpunished. Evil is self-destructive, but the righteous will see God’s justice if they live by faith through patient endurance (2:5-20).
    - The discipline of God. God’s discipline often involves suffering, both on the individual (consider Job) and the people (as in Judah). While the discipline may appear unjust, God knows what is best for His children and what will ultimately bring about their salvation.
    - The “righteous will live by his faith” is God’s intended path for His children.
    - **Consider the theme of Habakkuk as a conversation:**
      - **Habakkuk’s questions:** “O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallow up the man more righteous than he?” (Habakkuk 1:2, 3, 13)

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- **God's Answer – Chaldea will receive due punishment:** “For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay... Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say, “Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own—for how long?—and loads himself with pledges!” Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them... You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The cup in the LORD's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory!” (Habakkuk 2:3, 6-7, 16)
- **Habakkuk's Response:** “I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us... yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.” (Habakkuk 3:16, 18-19)
  - **ASK:**
    - How do these themes apply to us today?
- **Habakkuk in the New Testament**
  - Habakkuk does not make specific mention of the Messiah.
  - “For I am doing a work in your days...” (Hab. 1:5; Acts 13:41)
  - “The righteous shall live by faith.” (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38)
- **THE TEXT**
  - The text of Habakkuk can be divided into 3 major sections:
    - **Section 1** – God brings judgment on His wicked people (Judah) through a wicked world power (Chaldeans) (1:2-2:3)
    - **Section 2** – God brings judgment on a wicked world power (Chaldeans) (2:4-20)
    - **Section 3** – Habakkuk's Prayer for God's Mercy (3:1-19)
  - **Section 1 (1:2-2:3) God Brings Judgment on His Wicked People through a Wicked World Power**
    - **1:2-11 – Habakkuk's First Question and God's Reply**
      - 1:2-4 – After briefly naming himself as the prophet in verse 1, Habakkuk kicks in with his first question, “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help...?”
        - The interesting thing about this question is that he doesn't ask “Why?”, but instead asks “How long?” This indicates that he already knew the “why” but didn't like the length of time and the way in which God was bringing about the due punishment.

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- Habakkuk had come to believe that God was not listening and indifferent to the suffering of His children.
- Habakkuk is perplexed. He wonders how God can justify His “indifference” to His people in the presence of wickedness and violence. He believes his complaints to God have gone unheeded and he does not know why.
- 1:5-11 – God responds to Habakkuk by letting him know that He is doing a work that he cannot see or fathom (v. 5).
  - God is NOT indifferent in fact, but about to work in a way that will not make sense.
  - God informs Habakkuk that He will raise up the Chaldeans to carry out His judgment against His people. A wicked people to deal with a wicked people. God highlights the violence and wickedness of the Chaldeans (vv. 6-11).
    - **ASK:**
      - Does God still use wicked people to punish His wicked children? Explain.
      - How does it make you feel knowing that God may at times use wicked people to discipline wicked children?
- **1:12-2:3 – Habakkuk’s Second Question and God’s Reply**
  - 1:12-17 – How can a holy God (who can’t look on evil – v.13) use an unholy, godless people to carry out His judgment?
    - Habakkuk acknowledges that God needs to punish His children, and even demonstrates confidence and hope that God’s people will not perish (v. 12). But how can God sit around and allow a “more righteous nation” be swallowed up by a less righteous one?
      - **ASK:**
        - Have you ever had the same confusion as Habakkuk? Why should someone who is evil have the right to hurt or oppress someone who is “less evil” (Remember, no one is good but God. We can’t ask why do bad things happen to good people.)? Why do we feel this way? Discuss.
        - Have you ever wondered why bad things happen to good people? But, the problem with that question is that we assume there are good people. There is no one good but God. There are people who allow God to do His good things through them. That’s

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when we know God is at work in His people. But in the end, more often than naught we find ourselves simply categorizing our “bad” behavior into our predetermined categories of “less bad,” “kinda bad, but not as bad as...,” “bad,” “worse bad,” and “REALLY bad”. Did you get all that? Crazy when you think of it that way, isn’t it?

- Habakkuk decides he will put himself on a watchtower and wait for God’s response to his challenge/complaint (2:1).
  - **ASK:**
    - Would you have the confidence to put yourself out there like Habakkuk?
    - This is called *chutzpah*. Hebrew’s had the gumption to ask God hard questions and wait to see how He would respond. We are a little more reserved (well...chicken) these days. Remember, God is big enough to handle our toughest questions. We just need to be ready to hear His response and be faithful to His decisions and calling.
- 2:2-3 – God’s judgment is certain. So, Habakkuk is to write it down and the readers are to “wait for it” to take place. It will come, but in God’s time.
  - **ASK:**
    - How would you like to wait for God’s punishment that you KNOW is coming?
    - This reminds me of when I was a kid. I knew when I had done something wrong and I knew the punishment that would come from my dad. I still can vividly remember my dad calling me from the bottom of the stairs to come and take my punishment. I knew I deserved, but I didn’t want the punishment. I would find myself standing at the top of the stairs looking down at my dad. He waited with arms crossed. I knew that by the time I made it to the bottom of the stairs, the punishment would ensue. So, like any “smart kid” I took my time going down the stairs pleading for mercy as I went.

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- Well, the people of God now know the punishment is coming. They are standing at the top of the stairs, but instead of having the control of going down the stairs at their pace, God is coming up them at His. And like any “smart kid” they are pleading for mercy as He comes. Yet, the punishment WILL happen.
- **Section 2 (2:4-20) God Brings Judgment on a Wicked World Power**
  - **2:4-5 – Foundational Principles in World Government**
    - **ONE: EVIL WILL NOT PREVAIL!**
      - The singular form of “soul” here refers to the Babylonian nation with a primary reference to its king. While the phrase “his soul is puffed up” refers to Babylon in this context, it could include anyone who is proud. A proud person relies on himself and will ultimately fall. Evil WILL destroy itself. However...
    - **TWO: THE RIGHTEOUS LIVE BY FAITH**
      - A righteous person relies on God. Although it will take strong faith to wait for God’s plan to unfold, the righteous know that God will accomplish it. The phrase “but the righteous shall live by his faith” is quoted in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11 (cf. Eph. 2:8) to highlight that people are saved by grace through faith and in Hebrews 10:38-39 that Christians should live by faith.
      - Habakkuk (and the NT authors) promote a faith that demonstrates a continued trust in God by holding to His promises even when things seem their worst.
    - Lewis comments on these principles by saying, *“The man whose soul is not upright within him shall fall. Wickedness will destroy itself. It will burst as a bubble; it will collapse as a wall; but the righteous man will live by faithfulness. Running the universe is God’s business. The righteous man has his daily tasks to fulfill, and by them he will live.”*<sup>1</sup>
      - **ASK:**
        - Do we have a tendency to try and tell God how to run the universe, or simply trust that He’s got it and live in His story by daily fulfilling the tasks He gives us? Explain and discuss your answer.

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<sup>1</sup> Jack P. Lewis, *The Minor Prophets*, 11<sup>th</sup> printing (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 63-64.

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- **2:6-20 – The Five Woes of the Chaldeans (A Taunt Song)**
  1. Woe upon greedy conquest (vv. 6-8)
  2. Woe upon relying on treasures and wealth for protection (vv. 9-11)
  3. Woe upon violence and injustice (vv. 12-14)
  4. Woe upon violence to its neighbors (vv. 15-17)
  5. Woe upon idolatry (vv. 18-20)
    - In this section, key in on v. 14 and v. 20. These two verses demonstrate that God is God and in control. The earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. And, He is not like worthless idols that have no life in them. No, He is a God who is very much alive and at work in His temple. BE SILENT AND CONSIDER THE AWESOMENESS OF GOD!!!
    - **ASK:**
      - How might these woes relate to our current situation today (both domestic and globally)? What is most important based on verses 14 and 20?
- **Section 3 (3:1-19) Habakkuk's Prayer for God's Mercy (A Psalm)**
  - This Psalm is used in the synagogue on Pentecost. It is set to music and vividly captures the coming of the Lord and the impact of His coming. Read through this prayer psalm together and key in on:
    - Vv. 1-6
    - v. 13
    - Vv. 16-19
      - The very thought of God's coming causes Habakkuk to tremble in his boots. He stand in reverence and awe of God. Too many people have a "You take care of me and I'll take care of you" attitude with God.
      - In contrast, Habakkuk makes a bold statement of faith that no matter what may come, "I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. (Habakkuk 3:16, 18-19 ESV)
      - Habakkuk has made a journey with God. A journey from "How long?" to "Wait for it" to "I will wait and trust in the Lord, my GOD, no matter what comes my way." In life we take the same journey. We move from a lack of faith, to a conditional faith, to an unconditional faith that rests solely on the grace of God with full confidence that "He's got this!"

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- **ASK:**

- Where are you on your journey of faith with God? Do you lack faith and feel an indifference from God? Do you have faith that God must discipline those He loves and are willing to wait for His judgment out of obedience and reverent fear? Or do you have faith that simply rests in the sovereignty (rule) and providence (wisdom) of God (no matter what may come)?
- Remember, this is a marathon, not a sprint. Along the way we will encounter difficulties and God will discipline us toward growth and maturity. But “the righteous will live by faith” and God will reward them with salvation that comes only through Him. Praise God!

## UNDERSTANDING ♥ HEART

- What are some of the modern-day messages that we have heard through Habakkuk today?
  - Do we find ourselves trying to define God’s justice and mercy by human standards rather than by God’s standards? How and why?
  - Do find yourself comparing your level of “bad” with others in order to excuse your behavior or diminish your punishment? Explain.
  - Where do you find yourself on the journey/marathon of faith and how might you move forward?
    - **Do you lack faith and feel an indifference from God?**
    - **Do you have faith that God must discipline those He loves and are willing to wait for His judgment out of obedience and reverent fear?**
    - **Do you have faith that simply rests in the sovereignty (rule) and providence (wisdom) of God (no matter what may come)?**
  - Do you run from God’s discipline or embrace it? Explain. Divine discipline is often felt through suffering. Instead of running from suffering, perhaps it is best to embrace it so God can do His work in us.

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## WISDOM HANDS

- What messages did you hear in this lesson that need to be shared with people you know?
- Who in your group of friends or family do you need to share the message of faith found in Habakkuk with TODAY? Think specifically.
- Commit to each other that you will have the courage to share the message. Pray NOW and then pray for each other through the week to have the boldness to share.

## PRAYER



End your time together with a prayer. Ask God to strengthen your faith in order to wait patiently on Him and to help you in sharing His Gospel message of Love and Grace to a lost world. Ask Him to open the eyes of our hearts through this study so that we may know Him more and develop an intimate relationship with Him.

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## SEMESTER OUTLINE (SPRING 2016)

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS – Why Study This? (January 3)
2. HOSEA – PART 1 (January 10)
3. HOSEA – PART 2 (January 17)
4. JOEL (January 24)
5. AMOS (January 31)
6. OBADIAH & NAHUM (February 7)
7. JONAH (February 14)
8. MICAHA (February 21)
9. HABAKKUK (February 28)
10. ZEPHANIAH (March 6)
11. HAGGAI (March 13)
12. ZECHARIAH – PART 1 (April 3)
13. ZECHARIAH – PART 2 (April 10)
14. MALACHI (April 17)
15. CONCLUSION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS (April 24)