

Habakkuk

Student Guide

The righteous will live by faith.

Habakkuk 2:4

The following Bible study was written by WELS Women's Ministry executive team member Naomi Schmidt and member of Christ Lutheran Church, Denmark, WI. This study has been theologically reviewed by Professor-emeritus Joel Gerlach.

The narrative sections should be read by participants.

Habakkuk

Lesson 1 - Introduction

There are times in our life when we look around and wonder if things could get any worse. Whether we are looking at the national economy or world politics, things can seem out of control. The media inundates us with stories of hardship and trials, injustice and disaster. We wonder how long the earth can endure such pain; how many more bad things can happen?

Would it surprise you to find out that hundreds of years before Christ was born, God's people felt the same way? As you listen to Habakkuk's story, put yourself in his shoes – it is quite easy. He is overwhelmed because things seem to be spinning out of control. He calls out to God – and he gets an answer. But just as we often experience, God's answer isn't what Habakkuk expects.

God calms Habakkuk's heart without changing his circumstances, and He often does the same for us. Our pleas for help are not always answered the way we want but our faithful God does hear and answer us. Studying these few short chapters will bring a renewed appreciation for the power and mercy of our God. He will reveal Himself as the Lord of history, the Master of kings and a personal Savior who knows and loves us intimately. These verses are a beautiful example and encouragement for us as we long to be reminded of God's sovereignty.

The Author

We don't know too much about Habakkuk, but Luther said his name "signifies an 'embracer' or one who embraces another – takes him into his arms; that is, he comforts them and holds them up, as one embraces a weeping child to quiet it with the assurance that if God wills, all shall soon be better."

- Read 2 Corinthians 1:4 and talk about comfort. Explain how God has brought you through hardship to equip you to help someone else. As we read Habakkuk, listen to his complaints and relate to his cry for help. Watch how God changes Habakkuk's heart in the midst of his unchanged circumstances and equips him to comfort God's people.

- We know we can't always just make things better. Talk about the true messages of hope God has given us in His Word that we can share with others.

The Historical Setting

The book was written around 626-605 BC. At this time the Assyrians would have been defeated and Babylon was beginning to take power. God's people in the Old Testament had many struggles. Complacency and unfaithfulness filled their hearts but they also faced brutal armies and relentless attacks at their borders.

- Think of how God's people were oppressed by Babylon, Assyria and Persia and recall some of the familiar stories from this approximate time in history.

Israel's leadership had split hundreds of years earlier into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom (Israel) had already been taken captive by Assyria but Habakkuk was part of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) which remained. King Josiah, a good king, had brought reforms to God's people that resulted in a spiritual revival, but he was followed by King Jehoiakim who brought back godless attitudes and behaviors. This was the setting when Habakkuk was writing. It was a time of national corruption and international crisis.

- Discuss what the setting looks like today and evaluate how we manage those conflicts as Christians.

Outline of the book

Lesson 1	1:1-11	Habakkuk's First Question and the Lord's Answer
Lesson 2	1:12-2:20	Habakkuk's Second Question and the Lord's Answer
Lesson 3	3:1-19	Habakkuk's Concluding Song of Praise

Read Chapter 1:1-11

1. Generally speaking, what is Habakkuk's complaint?

2. Restate his complaint for the 21st century.

3. Look at verse 3 - Several translations say, "Why do you tolerate wrong doing?" but the ESV (English Standard Version) says, "why do you idly look at wrong?" Both imply an attitude of indifference. Discuss whether God is ever indifferent about sin. If He isn't indifferent, what's going on?

4. Look at verse 4 – Does it ever feel like the law is paralyzed? In what way?

5. What is the Lord's answer?

6. Restate the Lord's answer for the 21st century.

Closing Prayer

Habakkuk

Lesson 2

Read Chapter 1:12 - 2:1 (the second complaint)

1. How does his second conversation with the Lord begin? Restate verse 12a.

2. What is his second point?

3. Do NOT miss Habakkuk's final statement of his second complaint in 2:1. Memorize his two respectful "I will" statements!

Habakkuk is not idly shaking his fist at God. He is pouring out his heart with the confident assurance that God will answer him!

Habakkuk confidently waited for God's response. What does that say about his faith?

How do you feel when you're waiting for an answer? Read James 1:5-7 and describe active, faith-based waiting.

Have your children ever played in the outfield and been distracted by a butterfly or bored because the ball never comes? Then when a fly ball is hit, they are not ready. How much better they play when their head is in the game and they know the stats on who is hitting, where the base runners are, and how many outs they have. They are watching attentively and waiting to see what happens. That is how we wait for answers to our prayers. Not in a ho-hum, casual way but with expectation, anticipation and readiness. We WAIT for answers – not WONDER if we'll get them.

Read Chapter 2:2-20 (the second answer)

1. How did God respond to Habakkuk in 2:2-3? Restate His answer.

Your bible may have a footnote saying the word “herald” could include “anyone who reads it.” Like a poster you read and tell someone about (or theses on a church door).

Note also that God states “it speaks of the end and will not prove false”. Even though it may take a while (v. 3b) it is coming and you can be sure of that.

2. What does that mean to us?

3. Now God shows a contrast between Babylon and the righteous – read verse 4.

4. The second part of this verse seems extremely significant. Look up these verses:

Romans 1:17

Galatians 3:10-12

Hebrews 10: 38

Talk about that passage in your own words.

5. There are some little phrases in Scripture that are poetically beautiful. See the gem in verse 5.

6. Listen to God's angry thunder as He bellows judgment 5 times, "Woe to him..."
Read verses 6, 9, 12, 15 and 19.

7. Discuss this concept: God is using the Babylonians for His purpose and then He will turn around and judge them for their sinfulness.

8. Listen to the majestic and final chorus of the Lord's reply in verse 20! Just when His thunderous judgment sounds ominous, the heavens burst forth with beautiful reflections of Isaiah 6. Let this verse bless you with confidence in your Savior God and fill your heart with quiet peace.

Closing Prayer

Habakkuk

Lesson 3

Read Chapter 3 (Habakkuk's Song of Praise)

1. Note the little comment in the introduction of this chapter (v. 1) that this is a prayer, then it says, "On shigionoth." If you skip ahead to the last line, it also says "For the director of music. On my stringed instrument." Habakkuk is bursting out in song to praise God!
2. Verse 2 says, "I have heard of your fame." In verses 3-15 he recounts some of the glorious and powerful works of the Lord. Talk about the importance of retelling these accounts to our children and being familiar with Old Testament history.
3. "I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day." What a great prayer refrain for us to sing daily! What a great thought to fill our minds with as our day lingers on.
What stories do you think of most frequently?
4. It seems like a rapid succession of God's power in verses 3-15 then he abruptly stops in verse 16, overwhelmed at the Lord's might. Read that verse. Sometimes we are overcome with emotions in our spiritual life – and sometimes we aren't. Talk about that.
5. How much faith do you think it takes to say, "Yet, I will wait patiently for the day of calamity." Maybe you have said that or heard it from a loved one when the diagnosis of cancer comes. Perhaps it was a different tragedy. Sometimes we do know that hardships are ahead of us but Habakkuk is STILL singing! This is part of his praise! See how he overcomes his fear by recalling what a powerful God he has. What passages or thoughts from Scripture calm your fears?
6. Watch and listen as Habakkuk transitions from fear and awe to quiet trust in verses 17-18a. Imagine a change in the music from the booming glory of God's deeds to the soft meter of this reflection. What do you hear?
7. Now the final crescendo - rise in ovation for the glory of God! The Sovereign Lord IS my strength! The word "sovereign" reflects His all-encompassing rule, a perfect closing to Habakkuk's conversation with God about who is in control. Feel the Lord's sovereignty resonate like the crash of a cymbal! Then imagine lightness in the music like swift deer dancing on the rocks with ease and energy drawing us to see the true source of our

power. It is God who enables us to love Him, God who daily gives us our ability to praise Him and live for His glory. God who brings us into His presence! Hallelujah! (Do you hear trumpets??). Make a comment.

8. What about Habakkuk's situation changed? What reminders and rebukes from God changed his heart and mind? What will you tuck away for future reference?

Closing prayer