

Twelve Lessons

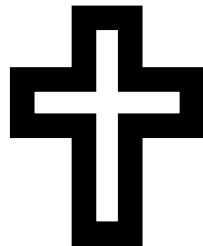
on

Habakkuk

Compiled and Written

by

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INTRODUCTION TO HABAKKUK – LESSON 1

Habakkuk 1:1-4

Introduction: Habakkuk's prophecy puts into words a struggle and triumph of faith that took place in the soul of the prophet himself. This book is so descriptive of the Christian's struggle about why the wicked prosper. The answer is perspective. Notice the scriptural outline of the entire book:

- I. Chapter 1 – the prophet is a man with a burden – on the ground looking around – Hab. 1:1
- II. Chapter 2 – He is a man with a vision – on the watchtower looking out – Hab. 2:1,2
- III. Chapter 3:1,2 – He is a man with a prayer – in the sanctuary looking up – Hab. 3:1,2
- IV. Chapter 3:17-19 – He is a man with a song – on the heights looking down – Hab. 3:17 - 19

Andrew Telford in his book "*Studies in Habakkuk*" outlined the book this way:

- I. Chapter 1 – Faith is Puzzled, or the Believer is Tested
- II. Chapter 2 – Faith is Patient, or the Believer is Trusting
- III. Chapter 3 – Faith is Praising, or the Believer is Triumphant

Suggested Outline

- I. Worried with Conditions
- II. Watching with Confidence
- III. Worshipping with Contentment

Suggested Outline

- I. Prophet of Faith – 2:3
- II. Prophet of Patience – 2:3
- III. Prophet of Hope – 2:20

Suggested Outline

- I. Chapter 1 – The Prophet Sighing
- II. Chapter 2 – The Prophet Silenced
- III. Chapter 3 – The Prophet Singing

Lesson Goals:

1. To study Habakkuk's background.
2. To understand the burden that Habakkuk carried for his people and country.
3. To get a sense of the bitterness Habakkuk felt as he viewed the situation around him in light of God's seeming indifference.

Definitions of Important Terms and/or Phrases:

1. Burden – A heavy load or weight. This weight can be a literal burden (Ex. 23:5) or a figurative burden (Num. 11:11,17). The prophets frequently spoke of their messages as burdens. A prophetic utterance or oracle usually was ominous and foreboding, a denouncing of evil and a pronouncing of judgment against a place or a people (Is. 13:1; Ezek. 12:10; Hos. 8:10) (Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary).
2. Bitterness – In a figurative sense, extreme enmity, grudge, hatred; or rather an excessive degree or implacableness of passions and emotions; as the bitterness of anger (Eph.4). In the "gall of bitterness", in a state of extreme impiety or enmity to God (Acts 8). A "root of bitterness", a dangerous error, or schism, tending to draw persons to apostasy (Heb.12) (Webster's 1828 Dictionary).

I. HABAKKUK'S BACKGROUND

A. His name – Habakkuk – "to embrace" – "one who takes another to his heart and (into) his arms, as one who soothes a poor weeping child, telling it to be quiet."

B. His occupation – Habakkuk 3:19 – The last sentence reads, "*To the chief singer on my stringed instrument*" suggests that Habakkuk was a Levite and a singer in the temple.

C. The theme – A question: "*Why do the wicked flourish while the godly are oppressed?*" It could be said this way: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Suffering brings about such questions from:

1. The troubled man or woman who has just come from a discouraging diagnosis at the doctor's office.
2. An educated person who sees no sense in the seemingly unfair distribution of suffering in the world.

D. The answer – God anticipated that need and years ago worked through the life and experiences of Habakkuk to provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of injustice and suffering. There are two answers:

1. A defense of God's goodness and His omnipotence in view of evil.
2. Illustrations on the ways in which the just shall live by their faith.

II. HABAKKUK'S BURDEN – On the ground looking around – man's perspective

A. The Burden – vs. 1 – “*The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see*” – A personal problem

1. “*Burden*” – *massa* (Heb.) – In non-prophetic passages – a load to be lifted, but in prophetic passages such as the book of Habakkuk, it announced heavy judgments upon the people.
2. “*See*” – *chazah* – to gaze at, mentally to perceive – He envisioned this burden from man's perspective. According to the context, Habakkuk prophesied in the reign of Jehoiakim who was a selfish ruler.
 - a. The country was heavily bankrupt because of a tribute (payment under duress) imposed by Pharaoh Neco.
 - b. Jehoiakim developed a passion for regal grandeur. Jeremiah records that he built, by means of forced, unpaid labor, a spacious place, “*cieled with cedar and painted with vermilion*” (Jer. 22:14). His eyes and his heart were set upon dishonest gain, and he shed innocent blood from one quarter of Jerusalem to another.
 - c. As a consequence, those in positions of power in Judah abused their authority and indulged in lawlessness, injustice, dishonesty, and oppression (Jer. 11:10; 14:7; 10-12, 20).

B. The Bitterness – 1:2-4 – a perplexing problem – His bitterness was a result of God's apparent indifference.

Habakkuk felt like he had been neglected and abandoned by God. Every preacher has felt this way: He preaches but to no avail; his word is despised instead of received; no one becomes better; they only become continually worse. Especially young preachers feel that everything should instantly have feet and hands, and that it should be immediately done and changed! These footsteps of faith are often forced upon us.

1. God's apparent indifference to his prayers – 1:2
 - a. Length of his prayers – “*O Lord, how long shall I cry*” – indicates he had prayed many times.
 - 1) God delays answers
 - 2) God denies answers
 - 3) God does answer
 - b. Languish of his prayers – “*of violence*” – He was actually blaming God for not intervening and vindicating the righteous.
2. God's apparent indifference to Israel's sin – 1:3-4
 - a. Extent of sins – The city was permeated with sin from the poor to the palace.
 - b. Endurance of sins – It seemed as if God was tolerating sin.
 - 1) God's silence caused Habakkuk to believe that God was indifferent. In the next section, we see God was working behind the scenes in answer to His servant's prayers. Habakkuk's problem was that he thought God ought to act as speedily as his anger prompted him. Thank God, He is more patient than man!
 - 2) What Habakkuk did not expect was that God was doing it according to Habakkuk's plans. Instead of alleviating the oppressed, as Habakkuk expected, God was going to judge the oppressors. His judgment, though long delayed, was certain. “God does not always pay at the end of every day but in the end He pays.”
 - 3) Sometimes the future help, which He has prepared, is perhaps, for the moment, heavier to bear than the present burden.
 - 4) His reason for delay is greater than the escape from the burden!
 - 5) His reason for delay may be:
 - a) Imputed to His wisdom, putting his children to the trial of their faith by affliction.
 - b) Imputed to His justice, making one of them, who have corrupted their ways, a rod to scourge the other.
 - c. Expulsion of sins – “How long will God suffer his people to pray and still neglect to hear?”
 - 1) Until they see the plague of their own hearts.
 - 2) Until they remove the hindrances which prevent the revival of His work. Many stumbling-blocks are in the way and He can do nothing, and will not hear until they are removed.
 - 3) Until they are willing to give God the glory.
 - a) We may pray for selfish reasons, and withhold what is due God.
 - b) If in pride and success we claim the blessing, this will silence devotion.
 - c) Wrong in spirit and purpose, we cry, “O Lord, how long?”