

### Life Group Study Guide

Habakkuk—carefully, reverently, prayerfully considered-- will change our lives. Its opening verses are a waterfall of grace and blessing that leave us in awe of God’s work in bringing us salvation. This study is based on a sermon preached Sunday morning at WEFC entitled: *Perplexed, Distraught, but Faithful* and reflects on **Habakkuk 1:12-2:5**.

**Before you begin:** *Pray* that God would be at work in your minds and hearts. There is a real difference between knowing and understanding something intellectually and having a heart that is deeply affected by the truth. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to *understand* God’s word, *welcome* it into your heart, and then *apply* it faithfully to your lives.

**Habakkuk 1:12-2:5 (ESV):**

*Are you not from everlasting,  
O LORD my God, my Holy One?  
We shall not die.  
O LORD, you have ordained them as a  
judgment,  
and you, O Rock, have established them  
for reproof.  
<sup>13</sup> You who are of purer eyes than to see evil  
and cannot look at wrong,  
why do you idly look at traitors  
and remain silent when the wicked  
swallows up  
the man more righteous than he?  
<sup>14</sup> You make mankind like the fish of the sea,  
like crawling things that have no ruler.  
<sup>15</sup> He<sup>a</sup> brings all of them up with a hook;  
he drags them out with his net;  
he gathers them in his dragnet;  
so he rejoices and is glad.  
<sup>16</sup> Therefore he sacrifices to his net  
and makes offerings to his dragnet;  
for by them he lives in luxury,  
and his food is rich.  
<sup>17</sup> Is he then to keep on emptying his net  
and mercilessly killing nations forever?*

*I will take my stand at my watch post  
and station myself on the tower,  
and look out to see what he will say to me,  
and what I will answer concerning my  
complaint.*

<sup>2</sup> *And the LORD answered me:*

*“Write the vision;  
make it plain on tablets,  
so he may run who reads it.  
<sup>3</sup> 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.*

<sup>4</sup> *“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not  
upright within him,  
but the righteous shall live by his faith.*

<sup>5</sup> *“Moreover, wine is a traitor,  
an arrogant man who is never at rest.  
His greed is as wide as Sheol;  
like death he has never enough.  
He gathers for himself all nations  
and collects as his own all peoples.”*

It's hard to be a happy prophet when all you can see with your prophetic insight is wickedness and heresy among God's people. Everybody wants to go to church and hear a happy message: "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life!" "God wants to prosper you and expand your territory!" "God wants to give you your best life now!" People flock to churches that give them those messages. But the true prophet, whose eyes can do nothing but see the truth, can do nothing but mourn and lament.

Last week we saw that God's answer to the sinfulness of his people is to raise up a new world power known for its brutality and pride. He is raising a rod of punishment for the backside of his own people. The reason this terrified the prophet is likely because God had done this before! Two generations ago, God told Isaiah: "Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger — the club in their hands is my fury!" (**Isaiah 10:5**). God told the prophet Isaiah, that he would punish Northern Israel by raising up a rod of chastisement — the Assyrians — to punish his people. Habakkuk has seen this movie before, and he is now terrified. He wanted a mild rebuke, maybe a nice plague or some locusts or an economic depression, but God knows that the sin in his people is too far gone for that. Surgery is required. God will do through the Babylonians what two generations before he had done through the Assyrians.

### 1) *Perplexed* (**Hab. 1:12-17**)

This terrible news gave rise to Habakkuk's second question: **Why do you use wicked agency to chastise your own people?** The prophet cannot believe that the Holy God of the universe would dirty his hands by using people like the Babylonians to accomplish his Sovereign purpose.

The prophet isn't asking questions of doubt. His theology is on point (**vv. 12-13**).

*"Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof. <sup>13</sup>You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong."*

Habakkuk trusts the covenant promises of the "Holy One", stating, "We shall not die." He knows that no matter what short-term judgement God brings, His people will not be completely wiped out. This is not doubt; this is a man trying to reconcile his good theology with God's inscrutable ways.

Is it fair or right for a good and holy God to use wicked people to punish and purify his own children? There is no question that God does this. He publicly proclaims it. God said in **Isaiah**: "I raised up the Assyrians for my purpose." God says here: "I am raising up Babylon for my purpose." And it's not just in the Old Testament that God says this. In the Book of Revelation, we have the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. They are table setters for the final execution of God's purposes on earth regarding wrath and

redemption. The first horse, the white horse, represents the rise and fall of empire, the horse who goes forth to conquer (**Rev. 6:1-2**). Old Testament and New, when God has a purpose to effect, he generally does it by a change in global empire. And the empire that arises is often an evil empire. And so, God's people have been asking for almost 3000 years, is this right for God to do? Is it JUST and GOOD that God uses evil agency to accomplish his purposes upon the earth? Our good theology tells us God is not the author of sin, and that God does not turn a blind eye to sin. *"He is of purer eyes than to see evil"* (**v.13**). So, how can God use a nation more wicked than Israel to punish wickedness in Israel? *"Why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?"* (**v.13b**). The cure is worse than the disease (**vv. 14-17**)!

<sup>14</sup> You [God] make mankind like the fish of the sea,

*like crawling things that have no ruler.*

<sup>15</sup> He [Babylon] brings all of them up with a hook;

*he drags them out with his net;  
he gathers them in his dragnet;*

*so he rejoices and is glad.*

<sup>16</sup> Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich.

<sup>17</sup> Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?

## 2) Distraught

We have no problem with the wicked being swallowed up and the righteous surviving, like in the great flood (**Gen. 6-9**) or at the Red Sea (**Ex. 15:4**), but what should we think when the righteous are swallowed up by the wicked? Habakkuk is saying, "You've made us like the fish!" Worse than that, "Lord, we're fish in a barrel!" Habakkuk's complaint is that God has made his people easy pickings for Babylon (**v.15**). *"He brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net;"* Worse yet, as *"he gathers them in his dragnet; he rejoices and is glad."* Babylon is going to gloat over us! A fact made worse by them being idolaters, *"Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet;"* They get rich and love the luxury their warmongering brings them (**v.16b**). Habakkuk wonders, "How is this acceptable to you, God? *"Is he [Babylon] then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?"* (**v.17**). Is this your plan, God?"

Habakkuk wants an answer to his BIG questions. He says in **2:1**: *"I will take my stand at my watch post and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint."* He will watch, like a sentinel atop a tower, waiting for a messenger to arrive. Oddly, Habakkuk says, he will watch and wait for God's answer... *"and what I will answer concerning my complaint."* It seems even as Habakkuk is offering his complaint, he knows, at some level, that he's wrong. He's anticipating that the Lord will not tie up all the loose ends as he sees them in the present, and he stands ready to consider God's answer. He has complained, and even

before God answers, he's thinking, what sort of response will I have to God's correction? That's a healthy way to offer a complaint. He has a posture of humility even as he says hard things to the Lord. One of the big lessons of Habakkuk is that it's not always about where you start out with God, but where you end. Sometimes there's a lot of meandering in prayer before you come to the conclusion that God wants you to have. What will you do with God's answer? What if he decides not to answer all your big WHY? questions to your satisfaction? Habakkuk concludes with a song of praise (Hab. 3), how will you respond to God's unexpected answers?

### 3) Faithful

Thankfully, God answers Habakkuk's questions. **Hab. 2:2-4:**

<sup>2</sup> *And the LORD answered me:*

*it hastens to the end—it will not lie.*

*“Write the vision;*

*If it seems slow, wait for it;*

*make it plain on tablets,*

*it will surely come; it will not delay.*

*so he may run who reads it.*

<sup>4</sup> *“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not*

<sup>3</sup> *For still the vision awaits its appointed time;*

*upright within him,*

*but the righteous shall live by his faith.*

We need to say a few things about this answer, and the first comes from **verse 2**, where God says: *“write the vision, make it plain on tablets.”* That is an unusual command.

Prophets usually did not carve their visions onto stone tablets, they usually wrote them on papyrus or parchment, the ancient equivalent of paper. Still, Habakkuk is told to carve them on stone. The reason given is that there will be a considerable delay between prophecy and fulfillment with respect to the evil Babylonians. God is saying: Wait. Justice will be done in the long run, and Babylon will be punished for her evil deeds, but you may not live to see it. If the scholars are right who tell us that this was written around 609 B.C., then it was, in fact, 70 years exactly before Babylon would fall to the Medo-Persians. One full human lifetime. Babylon would rise, serve God's purpose, and then fall before God's justice in one full human lifetime. God tells the prophet: “You may only live to see the front end of this process, and so it may look unfair to you, but in the end, justice will be done. Wait for it and believe in it.” God goes on to detail the judgment that will befall Babylon (**2:6-20**). What comes around goes around. The justice of God is exact.

If Babylon rose up to punish God's people and send them into exile, it was because God willed it to be so. And yet God is not thereby the author of all the evil that the

Babylonians did. When they raped and murdered, it was not that God made them do so. They were rapists and murderers by wilful nature, and God merely turned their wilful tendencies towards his own purpose. He used them without doing violence to their will and, in using them, did not devolve them of moral responsibility but rather established it. In His superior wisdom, He is sovereignly able to work all things, even humanity's evil tendencies, according to his purposes. (**Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:28**)

Habakkuk will need to take God at his word and exercise patient faith. He will need to trust that God sees all and that His appointed time for judgement is the right time. *“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”* (**2:3**). It's going to seem long for some of you. It may seem like it's not coming. But wait for it, the prophecy wants to be fulfilled; it will not be slow in God's timing. (**cf. 2 Peter 3:8-13**).

In **verse 5** is another description of what is coming from Babylon: <sup>5</sup> *“Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death, he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples.”*

God will have every right to judge Babylon when the time comes. Like a drunken man on a wild rampage, like a greedy, murderous man who can never take enough life, Babylon will gather nations and collect people as his prized possession, conquering enemies and nations. That's the word given to the prophet Habakkuk. And in the middle of God's answer, in fact, at the very heart of it, a great contrast is given:

*“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,  
but the righteous shall live by his faith* (**Hab. 2:4**).

This is the message the Lord wanted put on tablets and run forth. It's introduced, *“Behold,”* look, attention, listen, all caps, underline, bold, 24-point font, here it is: There is two ways to live, and I want you to run fast and furious with this message Habakkuk, post it all over Judah. The Babylonians are proud and *puffed up*, and *not upright*. And then there is this way, *“the righteous shall live by his faith.”*

Those who are arrogant and crooked will fall. It's guaranteed. The great Babylonian empire eventually collapsed. *“When small men cast long shadows, it simply means the sun is setting.”* But the righteous shall *live by faith*. It's almost as though God's answer is directly related to Habakkuk's statement of faith in **1:12**: *“We shall not die.”* Indeed, Habakkuk is correct. There is a way that you will not die; the way of faith (**John 3:16**). That does not mean the Babylonians were not still coming. But, God knows how to rescue a remnant on the Day of Wrath. It doesn't mean you won't get wet, but it does

mean you will not perish in the flood. You may not be able to avoid a virus or upheaval; you can't stop a nation from being judged, but you can keep yourself and anyone who will listen to your message from being guilty on the day of judgment. You can be preserved through death and brought safely into eternity. There has never been a time when the wrath of God was totally muted in favour of his mercy, and neither will there ever be a time when the mercy of God is muted in favour of his wrath.

**Side Note:** I do believe that in the *final* Day of Wrath, God will supernaturally preserve a remnant of his faithful *physically* from all of the political and environmental events that are foretold (**Rev. 6-18; cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18, 5:9; Rev. 3:10**). But there will also be many people during the tribulation who will place their faith in Jesus Christ and live through God's judgements and great persecution from the Antichrist (**Rev. 13:7; Dan. 7:21-22; Rev. 14:12-13**). They can not expect physical preservation, only *spiritual* (**Rev. 12:11; Rev. 7:15-17**).

**Habakkuk 2:4** is an important verse in the Old Testament and the New (cf. **Gen. 15:6; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11, Heb. 10:37-39**). Can you see how Habakkuk speaks to these different New Testament situations? How to be saved (**Rom. 1:17**). What sort of mechanism it is that saves us, "faith vs. works" (**Gal. 3:11**), and how to live as a saved person (**Heb. 10:38**). *The righteous shall live by his faith*. That's how we *get* saved and how we *live* saved lives. Are you a person of faith, building your life upon the Rock? Or are you puffed up with arrogance, building your life on sand?

How am I to be a righteous one? By faith, by steadfast trust in God to keep all of his covenant promises. **Psalm 119:30** says, "*I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me.*" (cf. **Prov. 3:5-6; Prov. 12:17; Psalm 1**). This is not faithfulness to an abstract set of theological principles, but very concretely, you must believe God in the midst of a world crumbling around you. Or, if it's not a global catastrophe, it may be cancer, the loss of a spouse, children who won't talk to you, or the loss of a job...

It's in the midst of that scenario that the Lord says, *the righteous shall live by faith*. Do you believe, dear Christian? Do you have faith in the midst of all that is going around that God is with you? Do you have faith that sin is not the last word? Do you have faith that death will lose its sting? Faith that prayer matters? Faith that God has a plan for the church and a purpose for you? Faith that heaven is real? Faith that God will not leave you nor forsake you? Faith than in all of these things we will be more than conquerors through Him who loved us? Faith that Jesus is worth it? "*The righteous shall live by faith!*"

**Close in Prayer**