



CWR/PTM

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

HABAKKUK,
ZEPHANIAH & ESTHER

Week 1

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Printed in the United States of America.

Before You Begin Your Journey...

The three books in this volume represent a great contrast.

Habakkuk is a minor prophet in the poor, declining nation of Judah, where crime and injustice are rampant. To Habakkuk's way of thinking, things are not the way they ought to be. There ought to be justice. There ought to be peace. Good people should not be suffering and bad people should not be prospering. To make matters more confusing, God has declared that a despotic, pagan nation will soon crush Judah. How can God let this happen to his own people?

Habakkuk struggles to understand why God works the way he does.

Zephaniah continues to sound the warning. Unprecedented destruction is coming to Judah and the surrounding nations. Zephaniah also offers a glimpse of a future time of peace. Yet how these events would all come together was not yet clear.

Then we come to the book of Esther. A century and a half have passed between the time of Zephaniah and Esther. By this time the situation has completely changed. Neither Habakkuk nor Zephaniah could have foreseen this stranger-than-fiction scenario.

The Babylonian captivity has come and gone. The Babylonian empire has fallen to the Persians, who have let the Jews return to their land. Some Jews have chosen to settle in the land of their captivity. Others have emigrated to new lands. A Jewish queen rules at the side of the Persian king Xerxes, the most powerful man on earth at the time, with another Jew as his prime minister. For the time being, the Jewish people seem to have triumphed over their enemies.

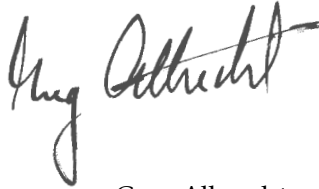
In spite of their rebellion, God has moved his people from an obscure nation to an influential people among the nations.

More traumatic changes were imminent for the Jewish people—the coming of Alexander the Great, the oppressive rule of the Syrians, the rise of the Roman Empire. But few could see God’s purpose—the stage was gradually being set for the coming of the Messiah.

Two millennia later, the way we view our world and our own personal situations is still limited. We are like the prophets Habakkuk and Zephaniah. We do not see where God is taking things. Things are not the way they ought to be. God seems to be allowing all sorts of things we would not allow, if we were Him.

Like he did with Habakkuk, God lets us question, complain and work through our uncertainty and fear.

When our temporal lives are over, and we look back from the perspective of eternity, we will see God’s purpose clearly. Until then, when we see little justice in the world, we must remember as Habakkuk did, that the just will live by faith.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Greg Albrecht". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Greg Albrecht
President, Plain Truth Ministries

How to Use the CWR Bible Survey...

1—Read and study at your own pace. This is a devotional. It is designed to help you consider and ponder the great truths of God's written revelation. It is designed to help you worship and come to know God. We plan to cover the entire Bible in 43 volumes, and while that sounds like a long time, don't be in a hurry. Take your time! Even though each volume is divided into bite-size daily lessons, you may want to take two days on each "daily" lesson.

2—We suggest you set aside a special time for the *CWR Bible Survey* every day. We recommend allowing 30-45 minutes, but even if you can only spare 15 minutes, try to make it part of your regular schedule. You will find that the *CWR Bible Survey* will be an invaluable resource for facing your daily challenges.

3—You will need a good Bible. This might be an excellent time for you to consider purchasing a study Bible. Plain Truth Ministries has reviewed many of the study Bibles that are available, and in cooperation with Thomas Nelson and Zondervan, we are pleased to be able to offer two superb study Bibles that will be an excellent resource and help to you. Please see the back pages of this book for more details.

4—Always read the assigned passage of the daily lesson in your Bible first. Each daily lesson builds upon the portion of the Bible being covered that day. You may want to begin by praying about what God has in store for you as you read, and then look at the questions and background information.

5—Consider the format of each daily lesson. Almost every daily lesson will include:

- **Opening Up to the Word** —a section designed to help you open your mind to the teaching God has inspired.
- **Digging Into the Word**—this section will encourage you to get your nose into the Bible and think deeply about what it says.
- **Living Out the Word**—here you will be challenged to consider the practical implications for your life. How does this passage help you live?

• **Window On the Word**—will offer key insights to help you more clearly understand the daily Bible passage.

6—After you finish the daily lesson, take some quiet time. You may simply think, look out the window, take a walk, or even get down on your knees. But use this time to let this daily lesson sink in. Ask God to show you what he wants you to understand from your reading and study.

7—Consider the *CWR Bible Survey* for small groups in which you may be involved. Tell your friends about it. If you are involved in a small group that meets for prayer and Bible study, introduce your group to it. Many are seeking an easy-to-read guide to help them understand the Bible and to help them know God. The *CWR Bible Survey* can do that!

• **Abbreviations Used in the *CWR Bible Survey***—

Genesis	Ge	Nahum	Na
Exodus	Ex	Habakkuk	Hab
Leviticus	Lev	Zephaniah	Zep
Numbers	Nu	Haggai	Hag
Deuteronomy	Dt	Zechariah	Zec
Joshua	Jos	Malachi	Mal
Judges	Jdg	Matthew	Mt
Ruth	Ru	Mark	Mk
1 Samuel	1Sa	Luke	Lk
2 Samuel	2Sa	John	Jn
1 Kings	1Ki	Acts	Ac
2 Kings	2Ki	Romans	Ro
1 Chronicles	1Ch	1 Corinthians	1Co
2 Chronicles	2Ch	2 Corinthians	2Co
Ezra	Ezr	Galatians	Gal
Nehemiah	Ne	Ephesians	Eph
Esther	Est	Philippians	Php
Job	Job	Colossians	Col
Psalms	Ps	1 Thessalonians	1Th
Proverbs	Pr	2 Thessalonians	2Th
Ecclesiastes	Ecc	1 Timothy	1Ti
Song of Songs	SS	2 Timothy	2Ti
Isaiah	Isa	Titus	Tit
Jeremiah	Jer	Philemon	Phm
Lamentations	La	Hebrews	Heb
Ezekiel	Eze	James	Jas
Daniel	Da	1 Peter	1Pe
Hosea	Hos	2 Peter	2Pe
Joel	Joel	1 John	1Jn
Amos	Am	2 John	2Jn
Obadiah	Ob	3 John	3Jn
Jonah	Jnh	Jude	Jude
Micah	Mic	Revelation	Rev

HABAKKUK
ZEPHANIAH &
ESTHER

Living by Faith
In Times of Uncertainty

Introduction to Habakkuk

Authorship: Little is known about Habakkuk himself. His name may come from the Hebrew verb *habaq*, meaning “to fold one’s hands or embrace.” Some have also speculated that his name is derived from *hambaququ*, the Akkadian name of a garden plant.

It seems certain from evidence in the book that Habakkuk was a prophet who also took part in the liturgy and music of the Temple. He was well-educated, sensitive and poetic in his writing style.

Date: It is generally accepted that this book was written in the 7th century B.C., sometime during the reigns of Manasseh (697-642), of Josiah (640-609) or Jehoiakim (609-598).

Setting and purpose: Habakkuk is a unique book among the Minor Prophets. While many of the Minor Prophets called the people to repentance for their sin, only Habakkuk confines his questions to God. He asked the mysterious “why?” about the evil surrounding him. Most Old Testament prophets *declared* divine judgment, while Habakkuk *pleaded for* divine judgment.

Habakkuk wrote in a time of international crisis when Babylonia was just emerging as a world power, and Assyria was trying to maintain her dominance. But Habakkuk’s concern was an internal one—the corruption within Judah. This is the background for Habakkuk’s question to God, “Why don’t you judge Judah for her sin?”

Reading outline:

I. THE GREAT BURDEN, 1

A. Is Anybody Up There? 1:1-4

B. You’re Not Going to Believe This, 1:5-11

C. From Bad to Worse, 1:12-17

II. THE GREAT VISION, 2

A. Waiting for an Answer, 2:1-5

B. Building a City With Bloodshed, 2:6-20

III. THE GREAT PRAYER, 3

A. Your Reputation Precedes You, 3:1-7

B. The Divine History Channel, 3:8-15

C. When Not Seeing Is Still Believing, 3:16-19

“How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save?”

Habakkuk 1:2



Artwork by James Tissot

Is Anybody Up There?!

DAY 1

Habakkuk 1:1-4

Can you think of a time when someone you know received a reward for doing what seemed to be wrong while someone else you know was punished for doing good?

1. Who was Habakkuk speaking to in these verses?

2. Habakkuk asked the Lord three questions. Which of the following was *not* one of them (vs. 2-3)? (a) How long must I call for help, but you don't listen or save me? (b) Why do you make me look at injustice? (c) Why do you tolerate wrong? (d) Why is everybody picking on me?

3. What two things did Habakkuk accuse God of *not* doing in verse 2?

4. Because God had not directly intervened, what did Habakkuk say had happened to the legal system (v. 4)?

1. Have you ever experienced pain and heartache for doing the right thing? What had you done, and why do you think you suffered? Consider 1 Peter 2:19-21.

2. Has it ever seemed to you that despite all your prayers, God didn't seem to be listening to you?

3. What truths can we cling to when we believe that God has abandoned us, or that he no longer seems interested in what is happening to us (see Ro 8:35-39; Heb 13:5; Mt 28:20)?

4. Can you think of a reason why God doesn't immediately see to it that all those who sin suffer immediate consequences (2 Pe 3:8-9)?

*The Hebrew word translated **oracle** literally means "burden." Habakkuk was relating that the message he brought involved serious and weighty matters.*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

You're Not Going to Believe This!

Habakkuk 1:5-11

OPENING
up to the Word

When was the last time something that you thought was impossible ended up happening? Why had you thought it was impossible?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Beginning in verse 5, the Lord answered Habakkuk's question and complaint (vs. 2-4). What unbelievable thing did God tell Habakkuk and the people of Judah to look for?

2. How does God describe the Babylonian people (vs. 6-11)?

3. In verses 6-7, God describes the character of the Babylonians. Which aspect of their violent militarism seems most dangerous to you?

4. What does the Babylonian army laugh at (v. 10)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. Has God ever used someone outside of your culture to make you aware of a wrong choice you had made? What wrong road were you walking down?

2. Do you believe that there have been times when God may have directed events to help you understand that you had made a wrong choice?

3. Is there a specific area of your life that never seems to turn out right?

WINDOW
on the Word

*The **Babylonians**, also known as Chaldeans, lived in southern Mesopotamia. As a nation they were notorious for being violent, murderous and ruthless.*

From Bad to Worse

DAY 3

Habakkuk 1:12-17

Why would God use someone who seems to have more problems than yourself to correct you? Don't you just *hate* it when that happens?

OPENING

up to the Word

1. What did Habakkuk say that God cannot look on (v. 13)?

DIGGING

into the Word

2. Habakkuk complained that God's tolerance and silence allowed what (v. 13)?

3. What moral dilemma did Habakkuk raise with God in verses 12-13?

4. God compared men to what creature in verse 14?

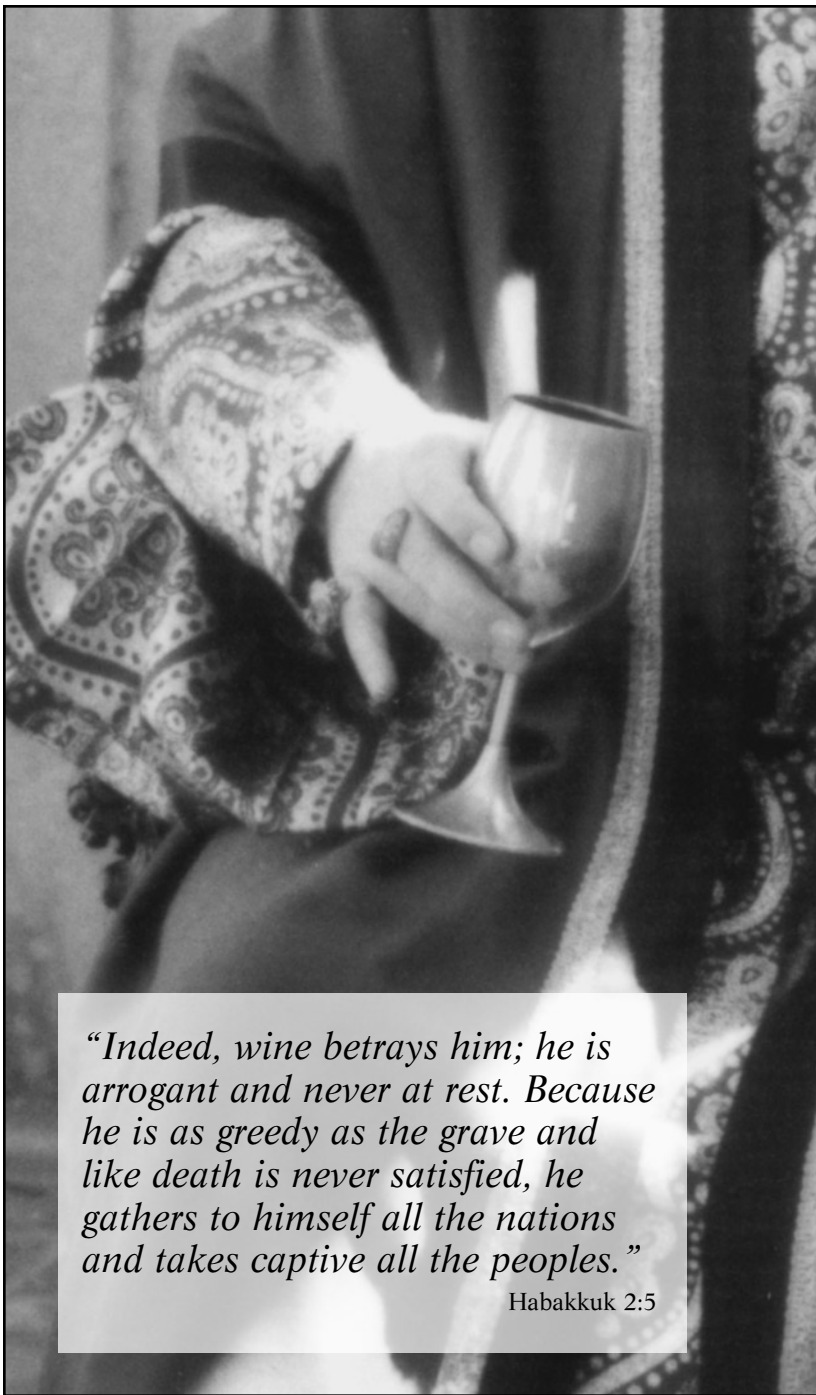
5. Habakkuk complained that when God allows the wicked to exploit the righteous, the wicked never give God any credit for their gain. What did Habakkuk remind God that the Babylonians would do after they had destroyed Judah (v. 16)?

1. If someone you don't respect points out a flaw or defect in your character or actions, are you most likely to: (a) ignore it completely, (b) take it with a grain of salt, (c) consider the source, (d) ignore the source and consider the possible truth, (e) be indignant.

LIVING

out the Word

2. What was the most difficult correction you have ever received, and why? What was your first reaction?



“Indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.”

Habakkuk 2:5

Waiting for an Answer

DAY 4

Habakkuk 2:1-5

What three questions would you most like God to answer for you?

1. Where did Habakkuk station himself to await God's answer to his question (v. 1)?
2. How did God instruct Habakkuk to record his answer (v. 2)?
3. Why did God want the revelation written on tablets (v. 2)?
4. What was the revelation waiting on (v. 3)? (a) an appointed person, (b) an appointed time, (c) an appointed event, (d) an appointed location.
5. In contrast to evildoers, by what virtue were the righteous to live (v. 4; Ro 1:17)?

1. Some people believe that words like faith and grace are only found in the New Testament. But verse 4 of this chapter seems to be quoted in Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:37-38. How do you explain that?

2. What one question are you most waiting for God to answer, and why? How and when, if ever, do you feel you might discover God's answer?

3. Do you feel God has ever answered one of your pressing questions? If so, how did he do it? Did the answer come through Scripture, an experience, prayer or some other way?

"Watch...ramparts" (v. 1) was meant to convey more of an image than a physical location. The watch was kept on the city walls or ramparts. Tablets (v. 2) were clay slabs that were written on, then baked to preserve the inscriptions. "Wine betrays him" (v. 5). The Babylonians were noted to be addicted to wine, as well as using wine to betray others (v. 15). Babylon was conquered while King Belshazzar and his officials were getting drunk at a banquet (Da 5).

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

Building a City With Bloodshed

Habakkuk 2:6-20

OPENING
up to the Word

Have you ever wished that a wrongdoer would get what is coming to him or her? Who were they and what punishment did you wish for them to experience?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Because the Babylonians had plundered many nations, they themselves would be plundered (v. 8). Today we would say, "what goes around comes around." How did Paul the apostle put this principle (Gal 6:7)?
2. On what foundations did God accuse the Babylonians of building cities and towns (Hab 2:12)?
3. What did God determine that all the Babylonians' work would ultimately become (v. 13)? What fire is God referring to here?
4. What three questions did God pose to the Babylonians who believed in their idols (vs. 18-19)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. When someone you don't like appears to get what is coming to them, are you most likely to be: (a) satisfied, (b) overjoyed, (c) relieved, (d) a little sad?
2. What Christ-centered attitude can be imparted to us, by God's grace, towards those who oppose and even abuse us? (Lk 6:27-35)?
3. If you have endured persecution and/or abuse, what did you learn from the experience?

WINDOW
on the Word

Woe (v. 6) is an exclamation of distress in the face of an upcoming calamity or judgment. "**Violence you have done to Lebanon**" (v. 17). This nation, north of Israel, was famed for its cedar groves and wild animals. The timber had been stolen to build Babylon's buildings and the animals had been slaughtered.

Your Reputation Precedes You

DAY 6

Habakkuk 3:1-7

What part of God's "reputation" were you most intrigued with before you became a Christ-follower?

1. The words of chapter 3 are a _____ of Habakkuk (v. 1)? (a) oracle, (b) prayer, (c) prophecy, (d) judgment.
2. What did Habakkuk stand in awe of and ask God to renew in his day (v. 2)?
3. To what did Habakkuk compare God's splendor (v. 4)?

1. What reputation does God have among your non-Christian friends? Among your Christian friends?
2. What one thing has God accomplished in your life that you are most in awe of? Why is it more special than all the others?
3. If you became a Christian later in life, why do you think you hadn't been drawn to God before?

On shigionoth (v. 1) indicates a type of psalm or song that is a cry for justice against sin (a similar term is used in the introduction to Psalm 7). This and the note at the end of 3:19 ("For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.") indicate that this final chapter of Habakkuk was intended to be set to music. **Teman** (v. 3) was in Edom, or Seir, which was southeast of the Dead Sea. It was traditionally occupied by the descendants of Esau (Jer 49:7-8). **Paran** was a large wilderness east of Edom. Moses had said that the Lord's appearance was like a light shining "from Seir, from Mount Paran" (Dt 33:2). The nations of **Cushan** and **Midian** (v. 7) had witnessed God's miracles at the Exodus and in Israel's wilderness wanderings. They lay on either side of the Red Sea. They were struck with fear at God's deeds (Ex 15:14-16; Jos 2:9-10, 5:1).

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

*“Sun and moon stood still
in the heavens at the glint
of your flying arrows, at
the lightning of your
flashing spear”*

Habakkuk 3:11



The Divine History Channel

DAY 7

Habakkuk 3:8-15

As you chart your own history with God, what great works of his on your behalf come most quickly to mind?

1. In this passage, Habakkuk alludes to many of God's past deeds (v. 2). What great miracles related to water might the prophet be referring to here (vs. 8-11; see Ex 7:20-21; 14:15-28; Jos 3:14-17)?

2. Read Deuteronomy 32:22, 24, and 42 and compare those verses with verse 9. Do you see any similarities?

3. Can you think of another Old Testament miracle where the mountains "writhed" (Hab 3:10; Ex 19:18)?

4. When did God cause the sun and moon to stand still (Hab 3:11; Jos 10:12-13)?

5. Which leaders did God miraculously crush in order to deliver Israel (Hab 3:13; Ex 4:23-28; Nu 21:23-25; Jos 6:2; 8:28, 29)?

1. List three interventions of God in your own history. What was it that set them apart as defining moments in your life?

2. Have you ever considered creating a spiritual autobiography to chart the deeds of God in your own life? How do you think writing your story might help you?

*The term **anointed one** (v. 13) here most likely refers not to the nation of Israel, but the coming Messiah (Ps 2:2; Daniel 9:26). Because God would deliver them even in judgment, the line of the Messiah would be preserved.*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word