

HABAKKUK

LESSON # 2

Historical Background

1. Read through the book of Habakkuk once before continuing this lesson. Record below everything you learn about the Chaldeans from the text itself.

Whenever we study the Bible, our first goal is to find the meaning of a text in its original context: that is, we are trying to understand what the original author meant when he wrote it, and how the original audience would have understood it. Only *after* we have found this original meaning can we begin to draw out principles of application for our own lives today.

This is especially true when we are studying prophecy. The prophecies recorded in Scripture were God's words for His people at a specific time, in a specific set of circumstances. The task for the modern student is to learn all we can about that historical moment, so that we can understand what God was saying to those people. Attempting to read prophecy apart from its historical context can lead to some serious misinterpretations! Because of this, we are going to spend this entire lesson forming a picture of the historical background to this book. **DO NOT SKIP THIS LESSON!** Our ability to come to accurate understanding in all future lessons hinges on this material.

So let's set the stage: God's chosen people, Israel, were living in the land that He had promised to Abraham thousands of years before. Having rejected God as their king, they were ruled by human kings. After the third king (Solomon), the kingdom quarreled and split into two separate (and often warring) kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah.

6. 2 Kings 22:1-2 contains a summary statement about the reign of King Josiah. How was he described? How would this give hope to the righteous remnant in Judah (such as Habakkuk), and those who believed the warnings of the prophets?

7. In the 18th year of Josiah's 31-year reign, something very important happened. What was it? See 2 Kings 22:3-13.

8. How did King Josiah respond to what he heard from the book, according to 2 Kings 23:1-15?

9. 2 Kings 23:25 summarizes King Josiah's reign like this: "*Before him there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.*" But in spite of all his efforts to turn Judah back to the Lord, what startling words do we find in the very next verses (2 Kings 23:26-27)?

10. In order to understand this judgment, we must read on. 2 Kings 23:31–37 describes what happened in Judah immediately after King Josiah’s untimely death. God had graciously given His people a righteous king in Josiah; what lasting impact did his righteousness have on Judah?
11. Clearly, although Judah had been given ample opportunity to repent, they stubbornly refused to mend their ways. Jeremiah lived and prophesied at the same time as Habakkuk, and he describes his people well. Read Jeremiah 7:1–31 and make a list of what the people were like. (If you want, go back through you list and put a star by any items which describe our nation today!)
12. Given this background, how would Habakkuk, a godly man who feared the Lord, feel as he watched his own people turn back towards evil, especially after the righteous reign of Josiah?
13. Now is the time for you to locate a commentary, Study Bible, or online aid with an introduction to Habakkuk. After reading the *introductions only*, **go back to Lesson #1** and, using a different pen, fill in any additional insights you may have gained.

14. Now that you have a better sense of the historical background and context, read through the entire book of Habakkuk again. ☐ How has the historical background and/or study aids changed your understanding of this book? Is anything clarified? Do you have any new questions?

“Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart. . .

The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth.

~Deuteronomy 28:47, 49