



**FLOURISH
BIBLE STUDY**

HABAKKUK

LEARNING TO LIVE BY FAITH



LYDIA BROWNBACK

Endorsements for the Flourish Bible Study Series

“The brilliant and beautiful mix of sound teaching, helpful charts, lists, sidebars, and appealing graphics—as well as insightful questions that get the reader into the text of Scripture—make these studies that women will want to invest time in and will look back on as time well spent.”

Nancy Guthrie, Bible teacher; author, *Even Better than Eden*

“My daughter and I love using Flourish Bible Studies for our morning devotions. Lydia Brownback’s faithful probing of biblical texts; insightful questions; invitations to engage in personal applications using additional biblical texts and historical contexts; and commitment to upholding the whole counsel of God as it bears on living life as a godly woman have drawn us closer to the Lord and to his word. Brownback never sidesteps hard questions or hard providences, but neither does she appeal to discourses of victimhood or therapy, which are painfully common in the genre of women’s Bible studies. I cannot recommend this series highly enough. My daughter and I look forward to working through this whole series together!”

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“Lydia Brownback is an experienced Bible teacher who has dedicated her life to ministry roles that help women (and men) grow in Christ. With a wealth of biblical, historical, and theological content, her Flourish Bible Studies are ideal for groups and individuals that are serious about the in-depth study of the word of God.”

Phil and Lisa Ryken, President, Wheaton College; and his wife, Lisa

“If you’re looking for rich, accessible, and deeply biblical Bible studies, this series is for you! Lydia Brownback leads her readers through different books of the Bible, providing background information, maps, timelines, and questions that probe the text in order to glean understanding and application. She settles us deeply in the context of a book as she highlights God’s unfolding plan of redemption and rescue. You will learn, you will delight in God’s word, and you will love our good King Jesus even more.”

Courtney Doctor, Coordinator of Women’s Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition; author, *From Garden to Glory* and *Steadfast*

“Lydia Brownback’s Bible study series provides a faithful guide to book after book. You’ll find rich insights into context and good questions to help you study and interpret the Bible. Page by page, the studies point you to respond to each passage and to love our great and gracious God. I will recommend the Flourish series for years to come for those looking for a wise, Christ-centered study that leads toward the goal of being transformed by the word.”

Taylor Turkington, Bible teacher; Director, BibleEquipping.org

“Lydia Brownback has a contagious love for the Bible. Not only is she fluent in the best of biblical scholarship in the last generation, but her writing is accessible to the simplest of readers. She has the rare ability of being clear without being reductionistic. I anticipate many women indeed will flourish through her trustworthy guidance in this series.”

David Mathis, Senior Teacher and Executive Editor, desiringGod.org; Pastor, Cities Church, Saint Paul, Minnesota; author, *Habits of Grace*

H A B A K K U K



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By Lydia Brownback

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Habakkuk: Learning to Live by Faith

Luke: Good News of Great Joy

Philippians: Living for Christ

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BIBLE STUDY**

HABAKKUK

LEARNING TO LIVE BY FAITH

LYDIA BROWNBACK

■ ■ CROSSWAY®
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With gratitude to God
for
Leslie Hansen Lindner,
who so beautifully lives her faith and loves her friends.

God, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the deer's;
he makes me tread on my high places.

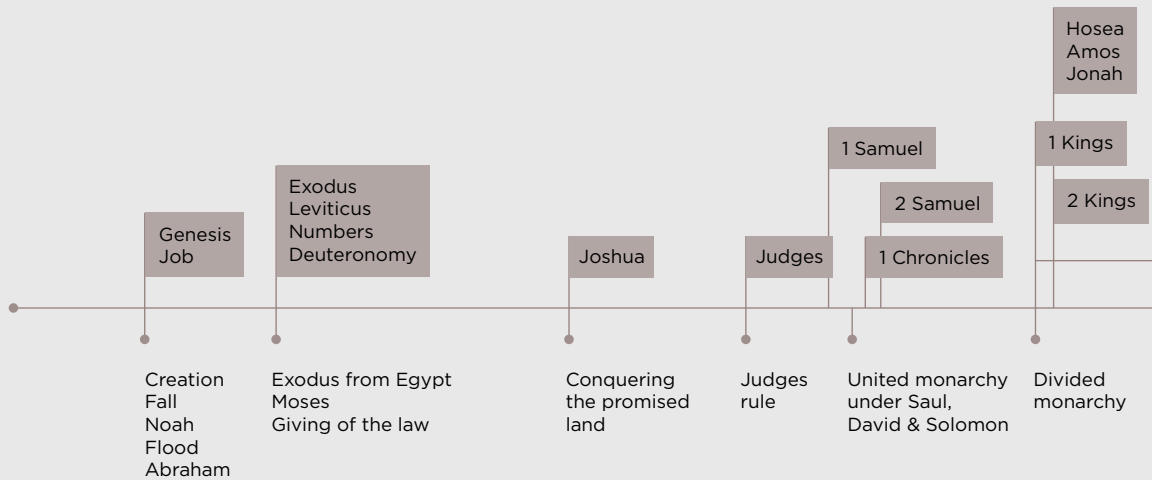
Habakkuk 3:19

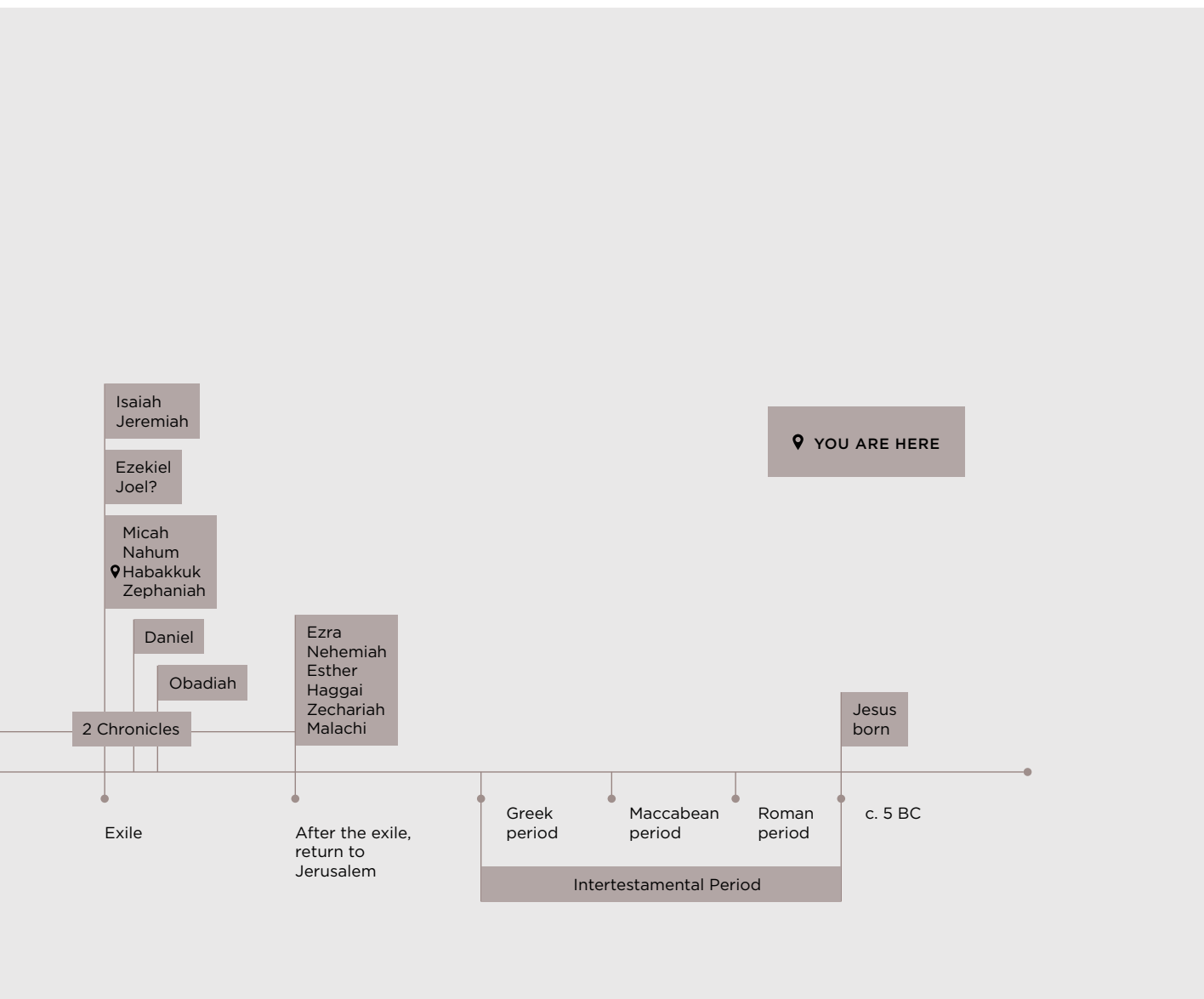
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THE PLACE OF HABAKKUK IN BIBLICAL HISTORY





Isaiah
Jeremiah

Ezekiel
Joel?

Micah
Nahum
📍 Habakkuk
Zephaniah

Daniel

Obadiah

2 Chronicles

Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

📍 YOU ARE HERE

Jesus
born

Exile

After the exile,
return to
Jerusalem

Greek
period

Maccabean
period

Roman
period

c. 5 BC

Intertestamental Period

INTRODUCTION

GETTING INTO HABAKKUK

I hope you'll pardon such a blunt beginning, but do you ever find yourself thinking that some of God's ways at times seem to make no sense? If you've ever been baffled about injustice or cruelty in the world or about unanswered prayer in your own life, it's likely you won't be turned off by such bluntness. It's okay to admit it, to be honest about your questions. That's what Habakkuk the prophet did. In his perplexity he cried out to God, and he came with raw honesty rather than pretty words. God *did* answer Habakkuk's cries, but not in a way that made the prophet feel happy. In fact, the answer he got left him reeling. Even so, the prophet got way more good than he'd even asked for—his faith was strengthened as his knowledge of God and God's ways grew deeper, wider, and fuller. Habakkuk also learned to wait, and because he waited, he reaped the fruit of patience, trust, and hope.

From this prophet we learn that when God's ways don't seem to make sense, it's only because we can't see the end from the beginning, and because in this lifetime we get only a beginning glimpse of the magnitude of all God is. We also learn from Habakkuk what to do in our own seasons of waiting—for a spouse, a child, a diagnosis, a job offer, a healing, whether physiological or relational. Habakkuk also shows us that God is faithful to deliver his people—including us—from every trouble in his own way and time. Will we trust? If so, we will also wait, and we will prove in our own lives that God is worth waiting for.



WHO'S WHO IN HABAKKUK

The prophet Habakkuk is, of course, the primary figure in this study. Little is known about his background, but we get a lot of insight into the prophet's heart from what he shares in his book. By the time of Habakkuk, God's people Israel had split up into two separate kingdoms. Ten of Israel's twelve tribes had become the northern kingdom and were designated as Israel. The other two tribes made up the southern kingdom, which was called Judah. Habakkuk's prophecy centers on this southern kingdom, so for that reason, Judah plays a significant role in our study. The Chaldeans, or Babylonians,

Pronunciation Guide

Assyria: ass-EAR-ee-a

Assyrians:

ass-EAR-ee-ins

Babylon: BAB-a-lon

Babylonians:

babble-OWN-ee-ins

Chaldeans: cal-DEE-ins

eschatology:

esk-a-TOL-a-gee

Habakkuk: hab-ACK-uck

Josiah: joe-SIGH-a

Marduk: MAR-duke

Pharaoh: FAIR-oh

Sheol: SHE-ole

Yahweh: YA-way

Shigionoth: shig-EE-own-oth

theophany: thee-OFF-any



the rising political power in the Middle East during Habakkuk’s life, play a big, if behind-the-scenes, role too. God reveals to Habakkuk the plans he has for the powerful, ruthless Babylonians, plans that will reshape the lives of God’s people for generations to come. Of course, the premiere role in the book belongs to God Almighty, as he’s put on display in power and glory. And long before the Lord Jesus Christ would come to earth in human flesh, his future suffering for our sins is foreshadowed here in Habakkuk when evil is allowed to flourish—for a season.

The perversion of justice in the triumph of the wicked prefigures the temporary triumph of the wicked over Christ at the crucifixion.¹

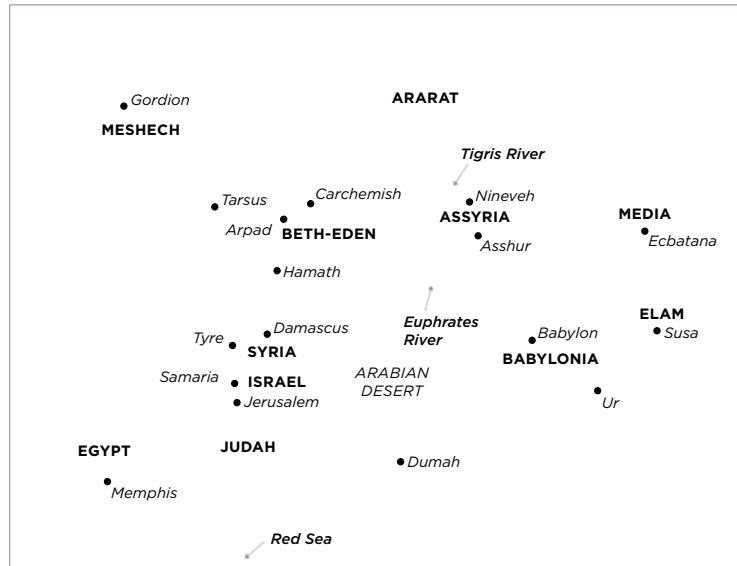


SETTING

Most likely, Habakkuk carried out his prophetic ministry a short time before Babylon conquered the powerful Assyrians and invaded Judah (for the first time) in 605 BC. The ferocious Assyrian Empire had dominated Judah for a long time—more than one hundred years—but they’d been slowly declining as the Babylonians rose up to replace them as the next world superpower. During many of those years, Judah turned away from God under the leadership of some wicked kings and became morally and

spiritually bankrupt. But a measure of spiritual health had been restored to Judah when King Josiah came to power in 640 BC. Yet when Josiah's reign ended in 609, Judah quickly resumed their corrupt ways.

The Near East at the Time of Habakkuk² c. 620 BC



THEMES

In our day, when the topic of God's *wrath* is taboo everywhere from dinner parties to pastors' pulpits, our study faces wrath head on. We'll see how God punishes evil and unrepentant sin and that he must punish sin because he is a just God. So his *justice* is another theme. At the same time, his *mercy* is also here to see, because, for his own people, his judgments are meant to restore, not destroy. Additionally, we are going to learn a lot about *waiting for God* and what he accomplishes in our lives as we look with patience and hope for understanding and answers to prayer. Finally—and perhaps most importantly—we're going to see that *God is faithful to deliver* his people, even from messes of their own making, and to save them from death and destruction.



STUDYING HABAKKUK

At the beginning of each week's lesson, read the entire passage. And then read it again. If you are studying Habakkuk with a group, read it once more, aloud, when you gather to discuss the lesson. *Marinating in the Scripture text is the most important part of any Bible study.*

Marinating in the Scripture text is the most important part of any Bible study.



GROUP STUDY

If you are doing this study as part of a group, you'll want to finish each week's lesson before the group meeting. You can work your way through the study questions all in one sitting or by doing a little bit each day. And don't be discouraged if you don't have sufficient time to answer every question. Just do as much as you can, knowing that the more you do, the more you'll learn. No matter how much of the study you are able to complete each week, the group will benefit simply from your presence, so don't skip the gathering if you can't finish! That being said, group time will be most rewarding for every participant if you have done the lesson in advance.

If you are leading the group, you can download the free leader's guide at <https://www.lydiabrownback.com/flourish-series>.

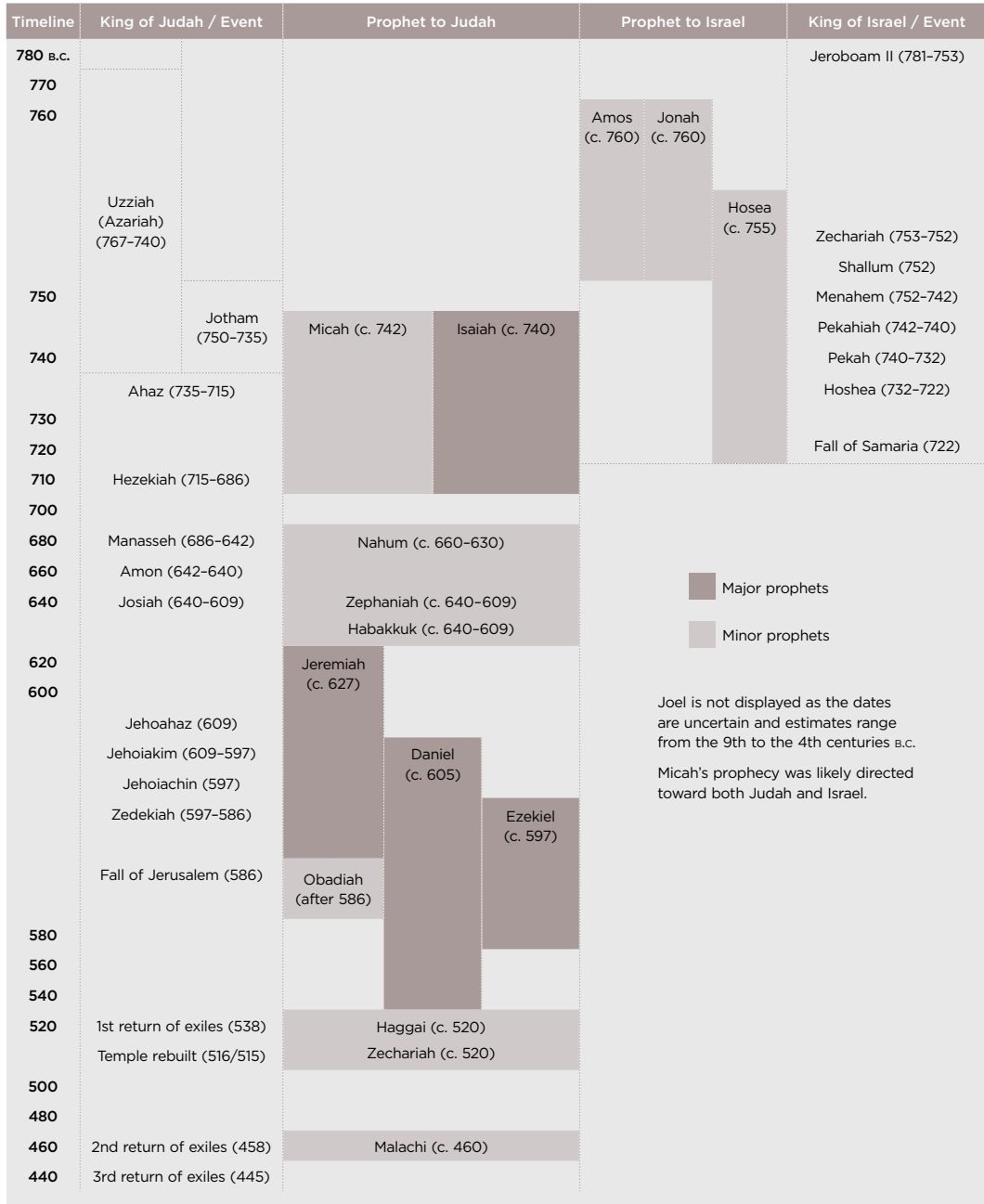


INDIVIDUAL STUDY

The study is designed to run for ten weeks, but you can set your own pace if you're studying solo. And you can download the free leader's guide (<https://www.lydiabrownback.com/flourish-series>) if you'd like some guidance along the way.

“Habakkuk’s journey into trusting faith can provide a pattern for believers through the ages as they wrestle with how God’s justice is worked out in experience.”³

Activity of the Writing Prophets during the Reigns of the Kings of Israel and Judah⁴





Reading Plan

	Primary Text	Supplemental Reading
Week 1	Habakkuk 1:1-4	2 Kings 23:1-27
Week 2	Habakkuk 1:5-11	Psalm 2
Week 3	Habakkuk 1:12-17	Luke 24:1-27
Week 4	Habakkuk 2:1-5	Romans 1:16-17; Galatians 3:11
Week 5	Habakkuk 2:6-17	Isaiah 14:12-15
Week 6	Habakkuk 2:18-20	Isaiah 44:12-17
Week 7	Habakkuk 3:1-7	Genesis 12:1-3; Psalm 90
Week 8	Habakkuk 3:8-11	Psalm 78:14-22
Week 9	Habakkuk 3:12-15	Genesis 3:15; Exodus 14; Hebrews 2:14-15
Week 10	Habakkuk 3:16-19	Isaiah 40:30-31; Romans 8:22-25





WEEK 1

HOW LONG?

HABAKKUK 1:1-4

How comforting it can be to stumble across one of those old television programs set in a simpler time. Think *The Waltons*; *Little House on the Prairie*; *Leave It to Beaver*; or *Happy Days*. Surely the real-life settings portrayed in those programs was as challenging then as now—the challenges were just different. A lot of our nostalgia for those bygone years is rooted in how family was the bedrock of our society. Back then, for example, no one questioned the makeup of marriage—a man and a woman. And in those earlier days, going to church and upholding the Ten Commandments were culturally respectable. Well, we can't help but recognize that those values are getting lost today. Church attendance is no longer a clear mark of respectability, and when we hold to the Bible's teachings, we might become victims of cancel culture or experience much worse forms of persecution. As we contend with these realities and worry about what the future holds, we find ourselves, like Habakkuk, wondering why God allows evil and injustice to displace and destroy what is good, right, and true. As we grapple with these questions in our own unsettled times, we can do what Habakkuk did—turn to the Lord.

1. WHAT THE PROPHET SEES (1:1)

We learn a lot about this Bible book from just the few words in the opening verse: “The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.” These words function kind of like a book title, providing us with important information about what we're about to read. For that reason, verse 1, where we see these words, is called a “superscription.” We find superscriptions at the beginning of some of the psalms and a few other Bible books.

The first thing we learn from the superscription in Habakkuk 1:1 is that the material we are about to read is an *oracle*, which means “burden” or “message.” These oracles, or messages, were given by God and were meant to be shared far and wide among all God’s people. In this case, God gave Habakkuk some seriously intense information about some frightening events to come.

✦ What do we learn about Habakkuk’s calling in this superscription?

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*God gave Habakkuk an oracle, which
means “burden” or “message.”*

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✦ How did Habakkuk receive this oracle from God?

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2. HOW LONG? (1:2)

Habakkuk is clearly distressed as he pours out his heart to God:

O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,
and you will not hear?
Or cry to you “Violence!”
and you will not save? (1:2)

He can't understand why his pleas for help seem to go unanswered. One thing Habakkuk doesn't get is why a just and powerful God would permit violent people to get away with causing harm and working destruction.

In order to follow along with Habakkuk, we need to know something about this violence—who was doing it, where it was happening, and who was being harmed. We touched on this backstory in the introduction, but in order to see through Habakkuk's eyes, we need a closer look. Habakkuk most likely experienced his vision from God sometime around 609 BC. If you recall, 609 was the end of the reign of a king named Josiah, who had done a lot of good for the sin-sick nation of Judah. Josiah had restored God as the center of life and worship. But the immorality of Judah was so deeply entrenched that Josiah's reforms didn't really take root, and after his reign, Judah once again grew increasingly immoral and dominated by decadence and all-around evil. And as we know from our own day, where evil flourishes, violence is right there too. That was Habakkuk's world and what he saw going on all around him.

✦ King Josiah made huge efforts to purge the evil influences from Judah. Read 2 Kings 23:1–27, which shows us the wickedness in Judah and how Josiah dealt with it, and then answer the following questions.

- What does King Josiah vow in 2 Kings 23:3?

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- In 2 Kings 23:4 we discover that idols—false gods—have been set up in God's house, the temple. No one but the Lord God himself was supposed to be worshiped there. In verses 4–6 how does Josiah deal with these idols and with those who had allowed them in the temple?

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- What additional evil worship practice is exposed in 2 Kings 23:7?

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The remainder of the 2 Kings passage shows how Josiah destroyed the pagan worship sites, often called “high places” in the Old Testament, that had been set up among God’s people since way back in the days of King Solomon (v. 13). (You can read more about Solomon—his wealth and wisdom and, sadly, his abandonment of the Lord—in 1 Kings 1:1–11:12.) The false gods—Ashtoreth, Chemosh, Milcom—are labeled as abominations, which indicates God’s intense hatred for them. That makes sense when we learn that worshiping idols included practices like throwing children in the fire as a sacrifice.

So our look at 2 Kings 23 gives us an idea of Habakkuk’s world. Despite Josiah’s mighty efforts, the evil ways had crept back in and were dominating once again.

✚ Habakkuk isn’t the only one in the Bible to be perplexed by the fact that God doesn’t always intervene to stop evil things from happening. Habakkuk’s question, “How long?” was asked by others too. What motivates the question in the following prayers:

- Psalm 6:1–3

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- Psalm 13:1–2

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- Psalm 119:83–85

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- Revelation 6:9–11

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In each case, divine delay leads to prayer. It is the need itself and the anguish it causes that leads to cries for help and understanding. Whatever the individual circumstances, God is doing something similar in all these situations: humbling hearts to seek his face, repent of sin, trust him more deeply, and follow him more fully.

✦ God’s people ask him, “How long?” but there are times when God poses the same question to his people, often through his prophets—not because he doesn’t know the answer, but because he wants his people to examine their hearts. What does the “How long” question seek to expose in the passages below? The first one is especially in line with the situation in Habakkuk’s day.

- 1 Kings 18:21

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- Matthew 17:14–20

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3. WHY? (1:3)

Not only does the troubled prophet question God’s seeming delay, but he also wonders why: “*Why* do you make me see iniquity, and *why* do you idly look at wrong?” (1:3). Both of Habakkuk’s *why* questions have to do with *seeing*.

✝ Habakkuk first questions why God allows him to experience the ugly effects of sin. Since God loves righteousness and justice, where is his protection of his people in the midst of this moral collapse? Habakkuk is baffled about why God doesn’t shield him and other believers from this ugliness. How do the following passages help us make further sense of why God exposes his people to the outworking of evil?

- Psalm 71:17–21

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- Luke 22:31–32

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- Philippians 2:14–15

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- 1 Peter 5:8–10

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“God sometimes answers our prayers by allowing things to become much worse before they become better.”⁵

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- ✦ Habakkuk wonders why God allows wickedness to flourish, and people in our day ask the same question. Asking certainly isn’t wrong, but it matters tremendously how we go about looking for an answer. Some people search the Scriptures in order to better know God and his ways. That’s the right way. Others, sadly, don’t bother to seek God for answers. Instead, they simply assume that either God isn’t powerful enough to stop evil, or he just doesn’t care. Those who study the Bible gain insight into God—his character and his ways—and they find answers to many of their questions. What do we learn in Genesis 3:1–19 about why evil is allowed to wreak havoc on earth?

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- ✦ In verse 3 Habakkuk identifies specific ways that evil is flourishing all around him. What evil does he see?

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4. WHEN EVIL SEEMS TO WIN (1:4)

We want to remember that the evil Habakkuk sees everywhere is going on right there in Judah among God’s very own people:

So the law is paralyzed,
and justice never goes forth.

For the wicked surround the
righteous;
so justice goes forth perverted.
(1:4)

The prophet laments that God’s law—the stipulations he set up for his people to live in a relationship with him—is being ignored. Because of that, wickedness has intensified, bringing harm to the few who still do want to walk faithfully with God.

Habakkuk mentions *justice* twice in verse 4, pointing out two ways that justice is getting trampled by evil.

✦ What happens to justice when God’s law is forgotten, or, as Habakkuk puts it, “paralyzed”?

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✦ What happens to justice as the wicked take over everyone and every place, infesting Judah at every level of society?

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The Law of God

The Lord revealed his law to his people Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20-23; 25-31). God’s law begins with the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-21), what theologians call the “moral law.” Added to this were lots of specific laws regulating civic activities in Israel as well as instructions for worship. More of the Lord’s covenant instructions are recorded in Leviticus and Numbers. After Jesus died on the cross, the ceremonial and civil laws were no longer necessary. Through his perfect life and sacrificial death, Jesus fulfilled the requirements of those laws once for all. The moral law is still binding on Christians today.



As we consider Habakkuk’s prayer here in verses 1–4, we might find ourselves asking the same questions: Why does God delay? Since he is a God of justice, why doesn’t he intervene to stop the evil? Psalm 37 can help us answer these questions. The psalm shows us that God is most definitely intervening! His timing might be slower than we’d like, but he is actively at work even in the midst of what seems to be out-of-control evil.

✦ Read Psalm 37, and in the chart below, note the contrasts between God’s dealings with evildoers and with people of faith.

Answers to Our <i>Why</i> Questions in Psalm 37		
	People Opposed to God	People Who Live by Faith in God
vv. 1-6	<i>Fade and wither away</i>	<i>Desires granted, experience righteousness and justice</i>
vv. 7-9		
vv. 10-11		
vv. 12-13		

Answers to Our <i>Why</i> Questions in Psalm 37		
	People Opposed to God	People Who Live by Faith in God
vv. 16-17		
vv. 18-20		
vv. 21-22		
vv. 28-29		
vv. 32-33		
vv. 34-36		
vv. 37-38		





LET'S TALK

1. Describe an experience of struggling to understand God's way with you or with something or someone in your life. If the experience is now in the past, what helped and what hindered as you wrestled through it? If it is a present struggle, what stands out from this week's study that might help you press forward?

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2. We can have one of two not so good reactions to the evil we see and read about and encounter in society. Either (1) we can try to tune it out altogether, or (2) we can react in fear and anger. What does the Bible say? The Bible teaches us that it's right to care about society. We Christians aren't called to insulate ourselves in our holy huddle while the world self-destructs. Years after Habakkuk's prophecy, when God's people had been captured and forced to live in Babylon, the Lord instructed them to seek the good of that place:

Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29:7)

And much later the apostle Paul wrote:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who

are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1–4)

The call on God’s people is the same in both Old and New Testaments. And it’s a call not only for Bible times but for our day as well. How do you tend to respond to the evil all around you? Would you say that you’re frequently caught up in one of those two not-so-good reactions? Discuss some practical ways to more fully live out the biblical position in your own sphere of influence.
