



HABAKKUK

Grappling With God

3 Studies for Life Groups

Habakkuk – Introduction

Habakkuk is one of the ‘Minor Prophets’, the short prophetic books that come at the end of the Old Testament.

We don’t have much information about who Habakkuk was, except that he was probably a ‘professional’ prophet, part of the worship team at the Temple in Jerusalem. His name possibly has the meaning of a ‘fruit tree’.

Habakkuk, like many of the Minor Prophets, lived in the period immediately before the nation of Judah was invaded by conquerors from Babylon in 587BC. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed and many of the Jews were taken away into exile. The northern nation of Israel had been destroyed by the Assyrian armies nearly a century earlier.

Habakkuk’s prophecies peer into this grim future for God’s people, and he asks for answers to how these events can be squared with the love and justice of God.

The book consists of three sections where Habakkuk has a dialogue with God. These roughly correspond to the three chapters of the book and the three studies of this series.

- 1) **Question:** How can God tolerate sin among his people?
Answer: He will bring the Babylonians to judge and punish.
- 2) **Question:** How can God use evil people like the Babylonians as his instruments?
Answer: Babylon will be judged in their turn.
- 3) **A Psalm** of praise and hope.

Habakkuk speaks to all of us today who long for God to do something about evil, but find it difficult to understand the way that he chooses to do this. This book helps us to understand more clearly how we can respond with faith to this kind of challenge of suffering and disappointment with hope in God and his work in Jesus Christ.

The theme of the book might be summarised as follows: **A matured faith trusts humbly but persistently in God’s design for establishing righteousness in the earth.**

Grappling With God 1: What are You Doing, God?

Habakkuk 1:1-11

1. What are some of the events and situations in our world that trouble you the most?
2. Does the suffering and injustice in the world and in your life ever cause you to doubt the goodness, love or power of God? How do you cope with these doubts?
3. **Read 1:1-4.** Does this section remind you of any other part of the Bible? Summarise Habakkuk's complaint in your own words.
4. Who do you think 'the wicked' in v4 are supposed to be?
5. Does Habakkuk have a good point in his complaint?
6. **Read vv5-11** to hear God's answer. Summarise what he is saying in your own words.
7. God uses many images to describe the Babylonians. Go through and find them all. Discuss the meaning and significance of each image.
8. Should Habakkuk and the rest of the Jews been surprised by God's answer? **Read Deuteronomy 28:45-52.** Why would God allow his people to be conquered?

9. The Apostle Paul quotes verse 5 in Acts 13:41. What situation was he addressing in his own time and why is it appropriate for him to recall this verse?

10. Is this promise of destruction a satisfactory answer to the problem of injustice? What would you say to God in reply to a message like this?

Grappling With God 2: I Don't Like Your Plans, God!

Habakkuk 1:12-2:20

1. Describe for each other any 'conversations' that you have had with God about difficulties or suffering in your life.
2. **Read 1:12-2:1.** In the previous chapter Habakkuk was complaining that God was not dealing with injustice among his people. What is he complaining about here?
3. Is it acceptable for God to use evil people like the Babylonians, and their violent actions, to accomplish his plans?
4. What reasons do you have in your own life for trusting in God? What reason does Habakkuk give for waiting for God's answer (1:12-13 & 2:1)?
5. Explain the meaning of the metaphor of the fisherman's net that Habakkuk uses in vv14-17. Why is this such an affront to Habakkuk?
6. **Read 2:1-20 for the Lord's reply.** Why would he want this revelation to be recorded for others to read (vv2-3)?
7. What is the key difference between the unrighteous and the unrighteous person in vv4-5?

8. There are 3 references in the New Testament to the phrase “The righteous person will live by his faithfulness” in 2:4 (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38). Divide up your group into 3 to look at each reference and report back on how this idea is used in those places.
9. There are five ‘oracles of woe’ in vv6-20 (each starts with ‘woe to him...’). What judgements are promised to these unrighteous people? Is it your observation that people usually ‘get what is coming to them’ eventually?
10. Why does Habakkuk end this chapter as he does in verse 20? Has God provided a satisfactory answer to his complaint?
11. Is there anything that you are struggling to understand at the moment about the purposes and plans of God in your life or in the world?
12. What in the Gospel of Jesus gives Christians hope that God will work things out and that we will see that ‘the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea’ (2:14)?

Grappling With God 3: I Will Worship You in Suffering, God!

Habakkuk 3

This part of Habakkuk is a psalm, meant to be used as a 'song' in worship. That is why it has musical directions at the beginning and end.

1. What has something that God has done for you that you are most grateful for?
2. **Read chapter 3.**
3. Why does Habakkuk ask God to 'in wrath remember mercy' (v2)?
4. In vv3-7 Habakkuk reminds us of some of God's actions in history. Can you figure out any of the references that he is making (*hint: where have you heard of 'plagues and pestilence' in the Bible before*)?
5. Verses 8-15 are all about God coming out in 'anger' against the world. What elements of the world experience his power?
6. In verses 8 & 15 it refers to God's triumph over the sea. Why is the sea a particular symbol of resistance to God in the Bible? Look at Matthew 14:22-32 & Revelation 21:1.
7. Why does God come out into battle (v13)?

8. What is Habakkuk's 'bodily' response to this vision of God's coming judgement on his enemies (v16)?
9. Why is Habakkuk able to remain peaceful and joyful in the face of terrible loss and suffering (vv17-19)? Can you understand and identify with his feelings?
10. What is your answer to the 'problem of suffering'? Does your answer include reference to Jesus, and in what way?