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HABAKKUK

A 4-Week Group Bible Study

By Greg and Kayla Gibson

WEEK 1 OF 4 • GENERAL / MIXED GROUP EDITION

How Long Shall I Cry for Help? — Habakkuk 1:1–11

Scripture Scope: Habakkuk 1:1–11 (ESV) • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

PARTICIPANT STUDY EDITION

Synchronized Section-by-Section with the Leader Guide Edition · Includes Group Reflection Workspace

Habakkuk — 4-Week Group Bible Study (Participant Study Edition)

Week 1: How Long Shall I Cry for Help? (Habakkuk 1:1–11)

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- **The title:** The book is named for its prophet, Habakkuk (1:1; 3:1). Nothing is known of his life beyond this book. The musical notes in chapter 3 suggest a link with temple worship.
- **The setting:** Most likely the reign of King Jehoiakim (609–598 BC). After the godly King Josiah died, Judah slid into violence and corrupt justice (Jeremiah 22:13–17). Babylon, ruled by the Chaldeans, had brought down Nineveh (612 BC) and defeated Egypt at Carchemish (605 BC), and was about to sweep into Judah.
- **The form:** Not sermons to the people but a conversation with God. Two complaints and two answers (1:2–2:5), five woes against the oppressor (2:6–20), and a prayer-psalm meant to be sung (chapter 3).
- **The main characters:** The LORD, the prophet Habakkuk, the righteous and the wicked in Judah, and the Chaldeans (Babylonians).
- **The structure (four steps):**
- Question: why does God allow violence in Judah? (1:1–11)
- Deeper question: why use a nation more wicked than Judah? (1:12–2:5)
- Revelation: the woes, and the earth filled with the knowledge of God's glory (2:6–20)
- Worship: yet I will rejoice in the LORD (chapter 3)
- **Why it matters:** Habakkuk gives God's people permission to bring their hardest questions to him, and shows the way from complaint to trust. Its central line, "the righteous shall live by his faith" (2:4), became a key text for the New Testament (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). Habakkuk points to Jesus, through whom God did a work no one would have believed and in whom we can rejoice when everything else fails.

How This 4-Week Study Works

You may notice this study is shorter than our usual eight weeks. Even though we are 8weekbiblestudy.com, stretching Habakkuk to eight weeks would have left it thin on content, and we never want to trade quality for quantity.

Designed for weekly small groups, mini-churches, and community gatherings (75–90 minutes per session) rather than daily homework checklists, each week of Habakkuk invites you to walk with a prophet from honest questions to wholehearted worship together through six repeatable sections:

- **Section X.1 — Opening:** Sets the scene, the Week at a Glance, Head, Heart, and Hands objectives, the Opening Frame, and the Opening Entry Question.
- **Section X.2 — Historical & Literary Context:** Places the week's chapters inside the structure of Habakkuk and the ancient Near Eastern world.
- **Section X.3 — Movement 1:** The week's first guided passage: Guided Scripture Reading, Anchor Verses, Teaching Narrative, and Group Discussion Questions.
- **Section X.4 — Movement 2:** The week's second guided passage, following the same flow.
- **Section X.5 — Canonical Horizon:** Traces how the passage echoes across Scripture and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

- **Section X.6 — Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer:** Moves the week's study into everyday life, previews next week, and closes in prayer.

Key anchor verses are printed in each section for quick reference. Longer focal passages are read aloud together from the ESV. Habakkuk includes images of an invading army, people swept up like fish in a net, and the shameful acts of an oppressor. The study retells those images briefly in its own words and does not read them aloud, so that the focus stays on the prophet's questions and God's answers.

Choosing a Bible Translation: Top 5 Translations Compared

Every English Bible translation falls along a spectrum between two primary approaches: word-for-word translation (formal equivalence, which prioritizes literal accuracy to the original phrasing and sentence structure) and thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes immediate modern readability by translating idioms and ideas into natural contemporary expressions). Here is how five widely used English translations compare:

- **ESV (English Standard Version) — Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Follows the wording and sentence structure of the original Hebrew and Greek closely while using modern English; well suited to close study.
  - Cons: Because it tracks the original sentence structure, some phrasing can feel more formal than everyday speech.
- **NIV (New International Version) — Balanced (Between Word-for-Word and Thought-for-Thought)**
  - Pros: Widely read; balances accuracy to the original languages with natural, everyday readability.
  - Cons: Because some idioms are rendered as modern expressions, a few literal wordplays or technical terms can be less visible.
- **NLT (New Living Translation) — Thought-for-Thought**
  - Pros: Warm and conversational; reads smoothly aloud and helps readers follow the big picture of long passages.
  - Cons: Because it prioritizes meaning over literal phrasing, it can be harder to use for close word study.
- **CSB (Christian Standard Bible) — Optimal Equivalence (Balanced)**
  - Pros: Stays close to the original words where possible while smoothing awkward phrasing into natural modern English.
  - Cons: Because it is a newer translation, some well-known verses may sound different from the wording many readers remember.
- **KJV / NKJV (King James Version & New King James Version) — Traditional Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Historic cadence that shaped English literature and church history; the NKJV updates archaic pronouns ("thee/thou") while keeping the classic rhythm.
  - Cons: Often reads like older English poetry, with complex sentences and archaic or formal vocabulary that can be harder for modern readers to follow.

This study quotes the ESV.

Greg & Kayla's Recommended Study Bibles

Having a trusted study Bible on hand is one of the best ways to go deeper as you read through Habakkuk:

- **Greg's Favorite Study Bible:** The MacArthur Study Bible (ESV), which contains extensive explanatory notes beneath almost every verse, ideal for detailed study.
- **Kayla's Favorite Study Bible:** The ESV Study Bible, containing over 20,000 study notes, articles, and explanations.

The 4-Week Habakkuk Study at a Glance

Week	Title & Passage	Movement 1 / Movement 2	Canonical Horizon
1	**How Long Shall I Cry for Help?** (1:1–11)	The Prophet's Complaint (1:1–4) / Look Among the Nations: The Chaldeans Raised Up (1:5–11)	The God who does a work in our days that we would not believe
2	**Why Does God Use the Wicked?** (1:12–2:5)	Are You Not from Everlasting? (1:12–17) / The Watchpost and the Vision (2:1–5)	The righteous shall live by faith
3	**The Earth Will Be Filled with God's Glory** (2:6–20)	Woes on Plunder, Greed, and Bloodshed (2:6–14) / Woes on Shame and Idols, and the LORD in His Holy Temple (2:15–20)	The knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ, the true temple
4	**Yet I Will Rejoice** (3:1–19)	In Wrath Remember Mercy: The LORD Comes (3:1–15) / Though the Fig Tree Should Not Blossom (3:16–19)	Joy in the God of our salvation that circumstances cannot take away

WEEK 1 OF 4

WEEK 1 SESSION GUIDE · HABAKKUK 1:1–11

Week 1: How Long Shall I Cry for Help?

Scripture Scope: Habakkuk 1:1–11 (ESV) • Focal Passages: Habakkuk 1:2–6; 1:11 • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

Section 1.1

Opening: How Long Shall I Cry for Help? (Habakkuk 1:1–11)

Opening

Habakkuk does something no other prophetic book does in quite the same way. Instead of speaking God's word to the people, he speaks the people's pain to God. Judah is full of violence. The courts are corrupt, the law has gone numb, and the wicked surround the righteous. Habakkuk has prayed, and prayed, and heard nothing.

So he asks God straight out: how long? Why do you make me look at this? God answers, but not as Habakkuk expects. Look among the nations, God says. I am doing something in your days that you would not believe. I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation, whose own might is their god.

Week 1 At a Glance

Scripture Scope	Habakkuk 1:1–11 (the heading, Habakkuk's first complaint about violence and paralyzed justice in Judah, God's answer that he is raising up the Chaldeans, and the portrait of a fierce nation whose might is its god)
Focal Passages	Habakkuk 1:2–6; 1:11
Literary & Structural Anchor	The first exchange between prophet and God: complaint (1:2–4) and answer (1:5–11). Habakkuk complains that God makes him see wrong (1:3); God answers, look and see among the nations (1:5). Justice never goes forth in Judah (1:4), while the Chaldeans' justice goes forth from themselves (1:7). Habakkuk cries "Violence!" (1:2), and God's answer brings a nation that comes for violence (1:9). The section ends with a nation that worships its own strength (1:11).
Big Idea	God's people may bring honest questions about unchecked evil to him, and he answers that he is at work, even in ways they would never expect.

Week 1 Learning Objectives (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	**Know the Prophet's Question:** Understand what troubled Habakkuk in Judah and why God's answer was so shocking.
HEART	**Bring Your Questions to God:** Learn that honest lament is an act of faith that keeps talking to God.
HANDS	**Pray Honestly:** Take one concrete step to bring an unanswered question or a long-standing injustice to God in prayer.

Opening Frame: How Long Shall I Cry for Help?

Nahum announced the fall of Nineveh, and in 612 BC the city fell to the Babylonians and their allies. A few years later Babylon defeated Egypt and became the new great power. Nahum proclaimed God's justice; Habakkuk argues with God about it. Habakkuk is a book of honest questions. The prophet looks at violence and corrupt courts in his own nation and asks God how long he will stay silent, and when God answers, the answer only makes his questions harder. Habakkuk keeps bringing his questions to God, and that is itself an act of faith. This is a 4–Week study: Habakkuk's first complaint and God's answer, his second complaint and the vision, the five woes, and his closing song of trust. The question for this week: what does it look like to bring our hardest questions to God instead of walking away from him? Before we read together, take a moment to share with the group:

Opening Entry Question (Icebreaker)

> **1.1 Q1 (Opening Entry Question):** Tell about a time you prayed for something for a long time. What was the waiting like?

Section 1.2

Historical & Literary Context: Judah Under Jehoiakim and the Rise of Babylon (Habakkuk 1:1–11)

Entering the World of Habakkuk and His Times

1. Historical Background

King Josiah, Judah's last godly king, died in 609 BC. Egypt installed his son Jehoiakim, who taxed the land heavily, built lavishly with unpaid labor, and killed the prophet Uriah (2 Kings 23:34–35; Jeremiah 22:13–17; 26:20–23). Meanwhile the Chaldeans had founded the Neo-Babylonian Empire (626 BC), destroyed Nineveh (612 BC), and defeated Egypt at Carchemish (605 BC). Nebuchadnezzar soon brought Judah under his rule (2 Kings 24:1–2).

2. Cultural Setting

Imperial law was the king's decree, with no higher court for conquered peoples. Mounted cavalry and chariots let Babylonian armies move quickly over great distances, and armies took fortified cities by heaping earth against the walls (1:10).

3. Literary Structure of Habakkuk 1:1–11

- **Heading** (1:1)
- **How long?** (1:2)
- **Why make me see?** (1:3)
- **Justice paralyzed** (1:4)
- **Look among the nations** (1:5)
- **The Chaldeans raised up** (1:6)
- **A law to themselves** (1:7)
- **Their army** (1:8–10)
- **Might as their god** (1:11)

4. Key Themes

Honest lament; violence and corrupt justice; God's hidden work; God's sovereignty over nations; the idolatry of power.

5. Theological Considerations

God uses the Chaldeans as an instrument, as he used Assyria (Isaiah 10:5–7), yet they remain guilty for their violence and pride (1:11; 2:6–20). God's sovereignty and human responsibility stand side by side.

6. Relevant Scholarly Insights

The book is shaped as a dialogue: two complaints, each followed by God's reply (1:2–4 and 1:5–11; 1:12–2:1 and 2:2–5). The prophet's cry "how long?" belongs to the lament tradition of the Psalms (Psalm 13:1–2).

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.2)

1.2 Q1: Habakkuk lived when Judah's leaders were corrupt and its courts unjust. How do you think it felt to be a faithful person in that setting?

1.2 Q2: Habakkuk does not preach to the people; he talks to God about the people. What can we learn from a prophet who brings his questions to God first?

1.2 Q3: God used Babylon as an instrument, yet still held it guilty (1:11). How can both be true?

Section 1.3

Movement 1: The Prophet's Complaint (Habakkuk 1:1–4)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Summary of Habakkuk 1:1** — The heading: the oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.
- **Reader 1: Habakkuk 1:2–4** (focal passage) — How long must Habakkuk cry for help while God does not hear or save? Why must he see iniquity and wrong, violence and strife? The law is paralyzed, justice never goes forth, and the wicked surround the righteous.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

Habakkuk 1:2:

O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,
and you will not hear?

Or cry to you “Violence!”

and you will not save?

Habakkuk 1:3:

Why do you make me see iniquity,
and why do you idly look at wrong?

> Destruction and violence are before me;
>
> strife and contention arise.
>
> **Habakkuk 1:4:**
>
> So the law is paralyzed,
> and justice never goes forth.
>
> For the wicked surround the righteous;
>
> so justice goes forth perverted.

Teaching Narrative: The Prophet's Complaint

1. A Burden Seen (Habakkuk 1:1)

Habakkuk's message is something he saw and carried.

2. How Long? (Habakkuk 1:2)

Habakkuk has cried out and heard nothing. His complaint is not unbelief; he keeps speaking to God.

3. Why Make Me See? (Habakkuk 1:3)

Habakkuk cannot look away from the wrong around him, and God seems to be looking on idly.

4. Justice Paralyzed (Habakkuk 1:4)

The law has gone numb in Judah's courts. The problem is not only crime but the corruption of justice itself.

5. Honest Faith (Habakkuk 1:2–4)

The prophet's honesty is itself an act of faith. Honest questions brought to God are not a lack of faith; they are a form of faith. He takes his complaint to the one who can answer it.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.3)

1.3 Q1: "O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?" (1:2). Is it right to speak to God this honestly? Why or why not?

1.3 Q2: "Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong?" (1:3). When has God seemed silent or idle to you?

1.3 Q3: "So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth" (1:4). What happens to a community when justice breaks down?

1.3 Q4: "The wicked surround the righteous" (1:4). How can faithful people stay faithful when they feel outnumbered?

1.3 Q5: Habakkuk brings his complaint to God rather than walking away from him. What is the difference between complaining to God and complaining about God?

Section 1.4

Movement 2: Look Among the Nations: The Chaldeans Raised Up (Habakkuk 1:5–11)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Habakkuk 1:5–6** (focal passage) — God answers: look among the nations and be astounded, for he is doing a work in Habakkuk's days that no one would believe. He is raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation, to seize dwellings not their own.
- **Summary of Habakkuk 1:7–10** — They are dreaded and fearsome, a law to themselves. Their army is swift and fierce; they mock kings and laugh at fortresses.
- **Reader 2: Habakkuk 1:11** (focal passage) — They sweep by like the wind, guilty men whose own might is their god.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

Habakkuk 1:5:

“Look among the nations, and see;
wonder and be astounded.

For I am doing a work in your days

that you would not believe if told.

Habakkuk 1:6:

For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,
that bitter and hasty nation,

who march through the breadth of the earth,

to seize dwellings not their own.

Habakkuk 1:11:

Then they sweep by like the wind and go on,

> guilty men, whose own might is their god!"

Teaching Narrative: Look Among the Nations: The Chaldeans Raised Up

1. Look and See (Habakkuk 1:5)

Habakkuk asked why God made him see wrong. God tells him to look wider: God is not idle; he is at work.

2. A Work You Would Not Believe (Habakkuk 1:5)

God's answer is more astonishing than Habakkuk imagined.

3. The Chaldeans Raised Up (Habakkuk 1:6)

God will discipline Judah through Babylon. God rules even over nations who do not know him.

4. A Law to Themselves (Habakkuk 1:7–10)

Retell the army's speed and ferocity in brief.

5. Might as Their God (Habakkuk 1:11)

The instrument God uses is guilty. Babylon worships its own strength, and that pride sets up the judgment of chapter 2.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.4)

1.4 Q1: God says, "I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told" (1:5). How can God's unexpected work challenge human expectations without implying every painful event has a tidy hidden purpose? (Personal reflection may remain private.)

1.4 Q2: Habakkuk complained that God was idle, and God answered that he was already at work (1:3, 5). How can we hold on to that when we cannot see what God is doing?

1.4 Q3: God says, "I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation" (1:6). Why might God's answer have made Habakkuk's problem feel worse?

1.4 Q4: The Chaldeans are "guilty men, whose own might is their god" (1:11). What does it look like to make our own strength our god?

1.4 Q5: God rules over nations that do not know him. How does that comfort or challenge you when you watch world events?

Section 1.5

Canonical Horizon: The God Who Does a Work in Our Days That We Would Not Believe

Tracing the Thread Across Scripture

Paul quoted Habakkuk 1:5 to announce the unbelievable work God did in Jesus (Acts 13:38–41); wicked hands crucified him, yet it was God's plan (Acts 2:23), Jesus himself cried out in anguish on the cross (Matthew 27:46), and he taught his disciples always to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1–8). Turn to each passage as the connections are traced.

1. The Unbelievable Work (Acts 13:38–41)

In Acts 13:41, Paul reapplies the Greek form of Habakkuk 1:5 to warn his hearers not to scoff at God's astonishing work: forgiveness of sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

2. Wicked Hands, God's Plan (Acts 2:23; 4:27–28)

At the cross God used wicked hands to accomplish his saving plan, while still holding them accountable.

3. Jesus Cried Out (Matthew 27:46; Hebrews 5:7)

Jesus himself cried out to God in anguish, so he understands our "how long."

4. God Hears (Luke 18:1–8)

Jesus told a parable to teach his disciples always to pray and not lose heart, promising that God will give justice to those who cry to him day and night.

5. How Long, O Lord? (Revelation 6:9–11)

Even in heaven the martyrs cry out how long, and God answers with patience and a promise.

Anchor Verse (ESV)

Habakkuk 1:5:

“Look among the nations, and see;

wonder and be astounded.

For I am doing a work in your days

that you would not believe if told.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.5)

1.5 Q1: Paul warned his hearers that God was doing "a work that you will not believe" in Jesus (Acts 13:41). How is the cross the most unexpected answer God ever gave?

1.5 Q2: At the cross, wicked people did what God's hand had planned, yet they remained morally responsible (Acts 4:27–28). How does that help us read God's use of Babylon without excusing evil or claiming hidden purposes for anyone's personal suffering?

1.5 Q3: Jesus told a parable so that his disciples "ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). What helps you keep praying when the answer is slow?

Personal & Group Application (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	Habakkuk brought honest questions about violence and injustice to God, and God answered that he was at work, raising up Babylon in ways no one would believe.
HEART	God hears our cries, and in Jesus he did the most unexpected work of all.
HANDS	Faith brings its hardest questions to God, keeps praying, and trusts that he is at work.

Section 1.6

Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer

Application

Take a few minutes to move this week's study into everyday life. Discuss these three questions together and write down what you want to remember:

1.6 Q1: What honest question or lament might believers bring to God in prayer this week—knowing that honest struggle is welcome and personal struggles need not be shared aloud? (Feel free to pass.)

1.6 Q2: Where is God asking you to trust that he is working, even when you cannot see it?

1.6 Q3: Who around you is crying "how long?", and how could you pray with them or stand with them?

Looking Ahead to Next Week

Recap: In Week 1, Habakkuk cried out to God about violence and injustice, and God answered that he was doing an unbelievable work, raising up the Chaldeans.

Transition: God's answer raised a harder question. How can a holy God use a nation more wicked than Judah? Next, Habakkuk asks, then climbs his watchpost to wait for an answer.

Week 2 Overview — Why Does God Use the Wicked? (Habakkuk 1:12–2:5): Movement 1, Are You Not from Everlasting? (1:12–17), covers Habakkuk's second complaint: God is holy and everlasting, so how can he watch the wicked swallow the righteous? Movement 2, The Watchpost and the Vision (2:1–5), covers Habakkuk waiting for God's reply and God's command to write the vision plainly: it will surely come, and the righteous shall live by faith. The Canonical Horizon traces the righteous who live by faith.

Focal Readings to Preview

- Habakkuk 1:12–13
- Habakkuk 2:1–4

My One Concrete Step for the Week Ahead

Write down or name aloud the specific rhythm, boundary, or conversation you want to practice before next week's gathering:

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by inviting each person to share a one-sentence takeaway or prayer request, then pray together along these lines:

Closing Group Prayer

LORD, we bring you honest words about the violence and injustice we see. Thank you that you hear us, even when you seem silent. We pray for victims of crime and corrupt justice, and for those who have waited a long time for an answer to prayer. We trust that you are at work in our days. Thank you for Jesus, who cried out in anguish, and through whom you did a work no one would have believed. Give us faith to keep praying and not lose heart. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.