

HABAKKUK: STAYING SANE IN A CRAZY WORLD by Jan Johnson

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Introducing Habakkuk

"What's this world coming to?" we hear people ask. We read about ethnic cleansing in other lands and drive-by shootings in our own; about the growing number of homeless and -- millionaires; about farm workers who don't make enough money to feed their children while the growing prison population is fed by money we pay in taxes.

How can this be? we wonder. What does this chaos mean about God and His role in the world? Should I own a gun? Should I move to the outback of Australia?

To love God is to love people, so lovers of God are often broken-hearted observers of society. The prophet, Habakkuk (Huh- back'-kuck), reflected on his concerns about injustice – and took them to God. His nation, Judah, was God's chosen people, but they didn't act like it. Habakkuk demanded to know when God would teach Judah a lesson.

God's answer seemed unfair to Habakkuk, so he asked God another question. He listened patiently to God's answer and finally rested in God's sovereignty. Even though society was crumbling around him, Habakkuk declared his faith in God, and even rejoiced in God.

Like Habakkuk, many of us are appalled by social ills. To read the newspaper is to weep. Gnawing at us are basic questions we almost dare not ask aloud:

- ◆ *Does God hear prayers?*
- ◆ *Does God rescue the oppressed?*
- ◆ *Does God intervene in tragic situations?*

This study allows you to ask those questions of God and to consider moving into Habakkuk's pattern of finding rest.

NOTES FOR LEADERS

PREPARATION

Begin your preparation with prayer and personal study.

Study the biblical context of the passage under consideration. Research any questions likely to sidetrack your group.

Study the flow of questions. These questions are designed to create a flow of discussion from beginning to end. Get comfortable with the potential directions of the study. Mark pacing notes so that the discussion will spread evenly over the allotted time. Most studies should last about an hour.

Read the leader's notes for your particular study. Mark information that you may need during the course of study in the blank spaces of your question list.

If your group time includes other ingredients such as refreshments, music, worship, sharing, and prayer, plan time divisions so that your group is able to accomplish all that is scheduled. Many lessons make suggestions for these additional ingredients at the close of the Bible study section.

Acknowledge to yourself and God that the group belongs to the people in it, not to you as the leader. This study is designed to facilitate a group discovery form of learning moderated by a discussion leader. Plan to lead with the group's welfare and interests in mind.

Pray for each group member by name.

GROUP TIME

Begin on time. No apology necessary. The group has come together for a particular purpose and has assigned you the job of leading it in study.

Take appropriate note of the narrative introduction at the beginning of the study then ask the opening question. Encourage responses from each person. When everyone seems involved in the subject at hand, the group will be ready to enter the biblical text. Since the opening questions point toward the text but do not interact with it, always ask the opening question BEFORE reading the scripture.

Read the assigned scripture passage aloud. Or ask several group members to read. Some people feel embarrassed about their reading skills, so don't make surprise assignments unless you are certain that they will be well accepted. Paragraph breaks in the text mark natural thought-divisions, so always read by paragraphs, not by verses.

Conduct a discussion of the biblical text using the questions supplied. These questions should promote multiple answers and group interaction. Allow time for several people to respond to each question and to each other. If the group does not seem to understand a particular question, rephrase it until it becomes clear, break it into smaller units, or give a brief summary and move on.

Give encouraging comments. If an answer is partially right, acknowledge that part. If an answer seems inappropriate, say something such as, “What verse led you to that conclusion?” or “What do some of the rest of you think?”

Don’t be afraid of silence. Help group members to become comfortable with the quiet by announcing a “thinking time.” Then invite them to share their thoughtful responses to the questions at hand. Learn a sensitivity to God that can come from occasional silence.

Pace the study. It is the leader’s responsibility to be sure that you finish on time and that the group has adequate time to discuss later questions. Some questions will take longer than others, so create a flexible pace with one eye on the clock and the other on interests of your group. Don’t be afraid to redirect attention to the question list or to the biblical text. If necessary, suggest that you may come back to some interesting topic after you have finished the study.

Involve everyone – more or less equally. Draw in quiet people by asking nonthreatening opinion responses. Avoid direct eye contact with someone who talks a bit too much. If necessary, point out the shared responsibility for a successful discussion.

Avoid over-talking yourself. Groups with an overactive leader get tempted to sit back and let the leader do *all* the work. Eventually, this causes people to lose the benefit of a personal encounter with the Scripture as it impacts their own lives.

Keep the discussion on track. Consider writing the purpose statement from the leader’s section at the top of your question page so that you can keep the discussion objective in mind. You can head off a tangent by gently directing attention back to the biblical text. But do consider the relative merit of any potential tangent. Sometimes apparent tangents represent real needs that the group ought to address. In that case, adjust your plan (for the moment) and follow the needs of the group. If the tangent seems of limited interest or importance, offer to talk about it in more detail at a later time. or if the tangent is of great importance, but requires further preparation, ask the group to table it for this session, but come back to it at a later meeting.

Don’t skip questions of personal application. Here is where Scripture does its most important work. As other group members respond, be ready to add your own experiences of God’s work in you life.

Open and close your study with prayer. Or ask someone in your group to do so.

Session 1: COMPLAINING TO GOD

Habakkuk 1:1-4

When the 1992 riots in Los Angeles broke out, I sat before my television and wept. For the previous ten years, I lived a mile from the flash point of those riots; when the riots occurred, I

lived a mile from the Simi Valley courthouse where a jury verdict triggered those riots. When I wasn't watching the news, I huddled in my bedroom crying and questioning God about why He allowed this chaos.

After absorbing the shock, asking questions and volunteering on a work crew, I moved into the second stage: prayer. Even as I read the newspaper, I stopped every few paragraphs to pray. My husband teased that whenever I laid the newspaper in front of me, I moved into my "Gethsemane pose": hands folded, arms extended. I could offer no answers, but I could defer to God, who knew the answers.

As the book of Habakkuk opens, Habakkuk is in the first stage, standing around demanding answers. By chapter three, his heart moves to the Gethsemane pose. In puzzling circumstances, we often move from the first stage to the next, and sometimes back and forth quite often.

What do you do when things happen that seem unfair? When your boss promotes the wrong person? When a teacher demeans your child? When your neighbor files a lawsuit against you?

We can pretend these things don't bother us or we can gripe to everyone we know or we can wrestle with them before God. But, we wonder, is it OK to complain to God?

1. Think about the last time you felt frustrated over a personal, social or national injustice. What did you do to ease your frustration?

2. Read Habakkuk 1:1-4. Which of Habakkuk's words have an accusing tone to them?

3. Describe the injustice that appalled Habakkuk.

4. What were Habakkuk's specific complaints against God?

5. What prevented the righteous people in Judah's society from curbing the violence?

6. Give some examples of how righteous people can be "hemmed in" or restricted today so that justice is perverted? (Consider the family, work place, neighborhood, nation.)

7. How would you boil down Habakkuk's complaints into one simple question?

8. Habakkuk introduced himself as a prophet. Historically, a prophet is one who proclaims God's will with confidence. From what you've read, how does Habakkuk compare to that role?

9. Do you think Habakkuk was being fair with God?

10. In what ways do the Christians that you know show that they are concerned (or unconcerned) about justice?

11. How can you show that justice is important to you in:

- personal relationships
- work-related issues

- dealing with those who have little influence (the poor, children, minorities)

12. What is one thing you could do this week to further the cause of justice?

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT:

Complete the opening phrases of Habakkuk 1:2-3 with your own heart issues:

- How long, O Lord, must I . . . ?
- Why do you . . . ?

If you already have a journal, you may wish to use that for this exercise. Or make notes in the space provided here.

LEADER'S NOTES for Session 1

Purpose of session: To see how we can approach God with the frustration we feel when we love justice but justice isn't done.

1. Encourage each person present to respond in some way. We might complain, write letters, issue formal complaints, or just try to forget it and go on with normal life. Group members may identify with injustices mentioned in the last paragraph of the introduction.

2. Because some people don't read or don't read well, ask someone whom you know reads well to read the passage aloud.

Phrases which have an accusing tone include: "you do not listen"; "you do not save"; "Why do you make me." (vv. 2, 3). Also, the use of absolutes such as *never* (v. 4) is often accusative. Habakkuk obviously didn't worry about being tactful!

3. Habakkuk was appalled by Judah's violent acts, injustice, destruction and strife (vv. 2-3). He was also appalled that God tolerated this wrong.

Most scholars believe this book was written about 600 B.C., after the reforms of a righteous king, Josiah.¹ If so, Habakkuk's complaint means that Judah had fallen back into evil ways. Habakkuk may have wondered, "Is God asleep?"

4. Your group should notice specific complaints in the text: God didn't listen; God didn't save them from violence; God made him look at injustice; God tolerated wrong (vv. 2-3).

5. If any in the group haven't yet entered into the conversation, ask them if they have thoughts on this question. Verse 4 reveals that the law was paralyzed, justice never prevailed, the wicked hemmed in the righteous and justice was perverted.

¹ Lawrence O. Richards, *The Teacher's Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1988), p. 483-484. Josiah reigned 642-609 B.C. according to Merrill C. Tenney, Ed. *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 451-452.

6. Help group members see that injustice is common. You may want to get them started with these examples: when a righteous parent can be overruled by an unrighteous, joint-custodial parent or by a government regulation; when the guilty go unpunished because friends or officials have lied to protect each other; when insurance premiums go up because people lie to insurance companies to collect benefits they don't deserve.

7. A sample complaint might say, "God, when are you going to solve this problem of Judah's wickedness?" Habakkuk was frustrated not only over Judah's wickedness but also over God's seemingly slow response to it.

8. At this point in the text, Habakkuk did not speak for God; he spoke **to** God. He did not proclaim God's will; he questioned it. Group members familiar with biblical prophets will know they usually spoke out against evil in the world and Habakkuk did that too. As they further study the book, group members will discover that Habakkuk becomes more "prophetic."

9. Opinions will vary. Some say that Habakkuk was not fair with God by saying that God didn't listen and would not save. On the other hand, Habakkuk had an overall sense of fairness because he loved justice and wanted to see it done. Because Habakkuk dared to ask tough questions, he risked sounding as if he were unfair.

10. Even though Christians' opinions vary on issues, many Christians demonstrate concern about issues of justice such as abortion, capital punishment, inadequate housing and medical care for the poor, unfair employment practices, racism, and exploiting the poor in this country and abroad.

Some in your group may feel that Christians they know are not concerned in these issues, or are concerned in self-serving ways. Some may disagree about which side of these issues is truly just. Treat each point of view with respect and encourage others to do the same. You cannot solve political differences at this point, but you can Acknowledge that God works on the side of justice (whatever that is), and His people should do the same.

11. Make it easier for group members to be transparent by telling about an area in which you are concerned about justice and one about which you would like to be more concerned.

12. If necessary, give some examples, such as standing up for someone whom coworkers usually make fun of; volunteering or giving money to a homeless shelter where guests are respected and rights and benefits are carefully explained.

For Further Thought. If your group has an extended time together, use this activity as a time for private reflection, journaling, and prayer. Invite all who wish to share the results, then pray for each other about the issues you have raised.

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Session 2: HEARING UNEXPECTED ANSWERS

Habakkuk 1:5-11

In chapter 2 of the last book of C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*,² the young honest-faced King Tirian thrills to hear that the Great Lion, Aslan, is once again abroad in the land of Narnia. But then Roonwit, the Centaur, notes that the sightings of the Great Lion, Aslan, must be false because the stars do not predict Aslan's coming.

In an attempt to explain how the sightings could still be authentic, Jewel the Unicorn states that Aslan is not the slave of the stars, but their Maker. He recalls a great truth from the old stories that explains why Aslan does not have to be predictable: *Aslan is not a tame lion*. This truth brings relief to the young king who is trying to stay steady in a world where even Aslan (God) seems to be changing.

King Tirian doesn't know, however, that an ape and a donkey have schemed to imitate the great Aslan. The sightings of "Aslan" are indeed false!

When the impostors attack Narnia, King Tirian calls out to the untamed creator, Aslan, and asks for help. Aslan doesn't come Himself, but He sends help in the form of two human children. At the darkest moment, King Tirian, unruffled by the unpredictability of Aslan, offers comfort and courage to the others: "we are all between the paws of the true Aslan."

Aslan did not fail Tirian. The golden Lion himself did appear, overcame the wicked ones and created a new land. Aslan showed that he did not have to be predictable to be dependable.

1. When has it seemed to that something unjust was occurring, but God wasn't working against it?
2. Make a quick review of Habakkuk 1:1-4. What do you see as Habakkuk's main complaint?

Read aloud Habakkuk 1:5-11

3. Verse 5 begins with God telling Habakkuk that he will be "utterly amazed." What all did God say that must have astonished and confused Habakkuk?
4. Find all the animals and forces of nature that you can in verses 8-11. How would these natural beings and elements contribute to the terror Habakkuk must have felt?
5. What, according to this passage, was the normal way that Babylonians did battle?
6. Look more carefully at verse 7, 10-11. What words and phrases describe the attitude of the Babylonians toward authority?

² C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1976), pp. 15-16, 72.

7. What do you think the phrase in verse 11 means, that Babylon's "strength is (her) god"?

8. Why would this view of strength be an insult to Habakkuk and to God?

Why is strength a tempting god?

9. What can we do to remember that whatever strength we have is God's gift to us, not a god in itself?

10. Review the passage one more time. What can you find in God's answer to Habakkuk that would let him know that, even though Babylon would be a fierce enemy, God was still in charge?

11. From what you know about God, why does it seem possible that He would work even through the Babylonians?

12. What kinds of prayers (if any) are you likely to pray in the midst of natural disasters, civil disorders, or unjust circumstances that upset you?

13. God allowed the prophet Habakkuk an unusual view of the coming disaster on his people. How does it make you feel to know that because we can't draw back the curtain of heaven, we may never understand many circumstances here on earth? Frustrated? Hopeful? At rest? Explain.

For Further Thought. Find a quiet, solitary place and read these two Scripture passages twice. Close your eyes and meditate on the sureness of God's dependability even though we may not understand or predict His actions. Feel free to respond to God in prayer or by recording your thoughts in the space provided.

- "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV).
- But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in Him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit (Jeremiah 17:7-8).

LEADER'S NOTES for Session 2

Purpose of Session: To understand that God is still at work even though He answers our prayers in unexpected ways.

1. You may wish to refer to current national or world crises to get the discussion going. It may have looked as if God was behind Hitler to the Poles, French and anti-Hitler Germans.

2. Look for an experienced reader to read the text aloud. Even though the Babylonians were a violent people (vv. 7-10) whose strength was their God (v. 11), God was raising them up to accomplish his work (v. 6)! God even predicted that this would amaze Habakkuk (v. 5).

3. The Babylonians swept across the earth, seizing dwelling places; promoted their own honor; their cavalry galloped headlong; they were bent on violence and gathered prisoners (vv. 6-9).

4. God compared the Babylonians to leopards, wolves, a vulture (v. 8) and the desert wind and sand (v. 9).

5. Phrases such as: promote their own honor, law to themselves, deride kings, scoff at rulers, laugh at fortified cities (vv. 7, 10).

6. Babylonia relied heavily on their own expertise, strength and abilities. They didn't seek God.

7. We can thank God for deliverance and strength; seek His guidance in making decisions; accept recognition, but not seek it.

8. In vv. 5-6, God said, "I am going to do something . . ."; "I am raising up the Babylonians . . ." Behind the scenes, we see that God knows the future and raised up the Babylonians to seize Judah.

9. God is good and just and the Babylonians were not. The Babylonians didn't rely on God's principles or even on His strength. History, as well as the Bible, tells us that they worshipped many gods while Judah supposedly worshipped God only.

11. If group members seem agitated that this session paints a puzzling picture of God, remind them that God is still a Being of love and grace (1 John 4:7-12; Rom. 5:8). Sessions 4-8 will address this turmoil. Even so, it's normal to feel perplexed by God's ways and it is a great spiritual skill to learn to attentively wait to understand.

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Session 3: QUESTIONING GOD

Habakkuk 1:12 - 2:1

"But what if --?" I quizzed my substitute teacher third grade teacher.

"Don't talk back to adults," she snapped.

I was stunned. I'd never been accused of "talking back," and I didn't know what it meant. The regular teacher welcomed my questions.

Was it disrespectful to ask an adult a question? Was it wrong to wonder why things happened as they did? Was I sassy because I'd thought of a way of fulfilling what the teacher wanted without rewriting my paper? What was the difference between "talking back" and asking honest questions?

Now, as a parent, I'm discovering what backtalk is. It's when children mutter clever comebacks at you or about you -- usually as they're walking away. It's those signs of rebelliousness and loathing -- the cluck of the tongue, the roll of the eyes. It's those subtle forms of name calling and accusing.

I've also discovered that sometimes when kids resort to talking back, muttering and rolling their eyes, they've lost hope that the people in charge are fair. They're not sure these adults listening to them and willing to help. When children dare to ask difficult questions, they're often showing their confidence that the adults in authority have a heart for them. At the core, these questioning kids are hopeful and solution-oriented, albeit somewhat frustrated.

I see now that the substitute teacher mistaken. She thought I was being rebellious when I was actually expressing confidence in her ability to help me be a good student. Questioning authority and rebelling against it are two different things.

1. When you question authority figures (such as supervisors or police), what kind of attitude do you usually display? What do you usually feel?

Read aloud Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

2. Find each question Habakkuk asked in this passage. What did Habakkuk really want to know?

3. Notice, in verse 12, the names Habakkuk used to address God. What do each of these names suggest about God's character?

Select one of God's qualities that Habakkuk used to address God. What do each of these names suggest about God's character?

4. The phrase, in verse 12, "we will not die" , is generally thought to refer to the covenant God made with Abraham -- that He would make a great nation of the Hebrews and their descendants, the Jews. Why do you think Habakkuk would mention this covenant at this time?

5. In v. 13, Habakkuk said that God is pure. How can people today imitate God's purity in areas described here. (Be as specific as you can.)

6. Habakkuk complained, in verse 13, that God was silent about the evil of the Babylonians. What current evils do you wish God would address?

7. In verse 14, Habakkuk implied that God's part in Babylon's treachery was that He made people like fish in the sea without a ruler. Do you agree that this is an accurate picture of people? Explain.

8. How did Habakkuk describe what the Babylonians did to their enemies?

9. The "net" in verses 15-17 symbolizes Babylon's power and brute military strength—and the success it brought. What does the text say about the way Babylon viewed her military power?

10. What did Habakkuk intend to do after he finished voicing his complaint?

11. Many people voice concerns, feel better, and then walk away. How was Habakkuk's attitude different?

12. If you were to have a conversation with God, as Habakkuk did, what questions would you ask Him?

13. Look once again at Habakkuk's four questions to God in this passage – and also at his names for God in verse 12. How would reflecting on his description of God help Habakkuk deal with the four questions?

How might reflecting on God's character help you cope with your own questions about God?

For Further Thought. Skim through the Psalms below looking for the ways that the Psalmist questioned God. After you've found the questions, read the entire Psalm in light of the questions that it contains. How is the Psalmists' attitude similar (or different from) Habakkuk's attitude of respectful complaining?

- Psalm 42
- Psalm 74
- Psalm 80

LEADER'S NOTES for Session 3

Purpose of Session: To examine how godly people can question God.

2. Four questions occur in vv. 12, 13, and 17. They are direct, nearly accusative. The two questions in v. 13 are "why" questions. In v. 17, Habakkuk wants to know the future -- as all of us do. Since these questions form an outline for the rest of the book, be sure your group takes appropriate note of each question – and its implications.

3. In v. 12, "Lord" means master; "My God" is personal; "Holy One" is respectful and notes God's righteousness; "Rock" indicates faith in God's stability. Habakkuk also speaks of God as "from everlasting," acknowledging that God is (and was) forever present. Help your group

members to point out and define these names. Then encourage them to talk about how one of these qualities impacts their life and worship.

4. Perhaps he was reminding God of the promise as part of a plea to save Judah. He could have been expressing confidence that God's promise meant that the Babylonians couldn't extinguish the nation of Israel. He was also expressing faith in God's faithfulness.

5. According to verse 13, pure people do not look on evil: they don't tolerate wrong or treacherous people: they speak out against the wicked. We can imitate God in these areas by not tolerating wrong, by walking out of a lewd or violent movie, by refusing to cooperate with someone who wants to mislead someone. Help your group members to be creative and specific as they talk about ways that they can reflect God's purity in their everyday surroundings.

8-9. Babylonia rejoiced at how they gathered up enemies (v. 15); they saw this "net" as a source of pleasure, helping them live in luxury and enjoy choice food (v. 16). They worshipped {sacrificed to and burned incense to} their own strength (v. 16). Your group may also notice the relationship between the "gods" described here and the god described in verse 11. Some who have spiritual sensitivity may point out that jobs (nets) and strength (power) are frequent gods today too. And they are a constant temptation to God's people.

10. Habakkuk said he would stay alert for answers, using the military metaphor of standing at his watch (literally, a watch-tower, a place to quietly wait and observe) and stationing himself on the ramparts (literally, the walls of a fort).

11. See Habakkuk 2:1. Habakkuk wanted an answer and confidently expected one, standing "at attention," so to speak. The words, "I will . . ." occur twice, perhaps indicating a spirit of determination. He seems to have felt the pressure of reporting to himself and perhaps others the God's answers to the questions ("What answer am I to give?").

13. Sometimes our best act of faith is not to try to answer life's hard questions, but to reflect instead on the character of God. This is what Habakkuk did. Use this question to help people see once again the outline of Habakkuk's dilemma. If people need more specific guidance, ask: What is one question that Habakkuk asked? Which of his statements about God would help him with that question? How?

For Further Thought. If your group has an extended time together, use this activity for a time of private reflection. Then reconvene and share the results. Use the responses as a bridge into a session of worship and prayer.

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Session 4: WAITING FOR GOD TO WORK

Habakkuk 2:2-5

Joseph was a spoiled kid. His father, Jacob, favored him and didn't even try to hide it. Jacob gave him a very special garment in an era when garments didn't hang on racks for the choosing.

But the spoiled boy's world turned upside down. First, his jealous brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. Yet because Joseph lived by the high principles his father taught him, he became the chief household slave. When his owner's wife tried to seduce him, Joseph showed the moral fortitude that would make others consider him a monk today. He refused her day after day until in scorn she accused him of rape. So for his great moral stand, he was put in prison.

From favored son to filthy slave, from favored slave to filthy prisoner, Joseph trusted God. The warden put him in charge of the other prisoners and Joseph relied on God to tell prisoners what their dreams meant. After interpreting a political prisoner's dream, he pressed the prisoner to remember him after his future release. As far as we know, that was Joseph's only attempt to raise his status.

After years, the freed prisoner did remember, and Joseph was summoned to interpret the Pharaoh's dream. With God's direction, he did. He also used the wisdom of God to make practical suggestions to avoid ruin and starvation. Pharaoh was so impressed that he made Joseph second in the kingdom. Eventually, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy grain and he reconciled with his family.

The steady faith of this formerly spoiled boy is astonishing. He trusted God to carry out justice and did not make grand attempts to vindicate himself or to get even with his brothers. He believed that God rescues those who trust Him and punishes those who do evil.

1. God often seems to be asking us to wait for Him to rescue us. What kinds of things do we do instead of waiting?

Read aloud Habakkuk 2:2-5

2. In verse 1, we see Habakkuk waiting for God to answer his second set of questions and complaints. What phrases in verses 2-3 suggest that the message Habakkuk is about to hear is important?

3. How do you explain the apparent contradiction in verse 3 that revelation “awaits an appointed time, “yet “well not delay”?

4. Look more carefully at verses 4-5. What phrases here stand out as particularly significant or prophetic? (What pictures do they create in your mind?)

5. The word he in verses 4-5 refers to Babylon. What character flaws of Babylon did God point out?

6. Verse 5 uses the term “as greedy as the grave.” What does this phrase suggest about the manner and the success of Babylon’s efforts?

7. From what you've read so far in Habakkuk, what would you say that Babylon was greedy for?

8. How do you see greed evidenced in our culture even by the nicest people – including yourself?

9. How does true faith affect the natural human desire for more: more possessions, more power, more money?

10. Habakkuk was about to witness a time of unsurpassed hardship for his people. Yet God assured him in verse 4 that, "The righteous will live by his faith." Why would faith be difficult during the coming events?

11. Whose faith has inspired you as that person lived by faith, or even spoke out in faith during situations of hardship and injustice?

12. When has your own faith endured, or even grown, through hardship or injustice?

13. What current hardships or injustices test your faith?

14. How can other believers support your faith during this time?

For Further Thought. Write a poem (rhymed or unrhymed, even rap) about what it means to wait for God's justice to prevail. If writing a poem sounds too intimidating, look through a hymnal or songbook and find one or two lines that describe trustful waiting for God to work out His plans. Make notes in the space provided below.

LEADER'S NOTES for Session 4

Purpose of Session: To believe and act upon the truth that God rescues those who trust Him and punishes those who destroy.

2. Your group should pick out phrases such as: write down, revelation, make it plain, herald may run with it, appointed time, speaks of the end, not prove false, will certainly come (vv. 2-3). Some may wish to express why these phrases express importance and urgency.

3. Your group may muddle with this question a bit. People should soon figure out that though God's judgement would not be fulfilled soon, it also would not delay in the sense that it would come too late. This text sounds as if God had carefully chosen the perfect time for His revelation to be fulfilled, and Habakkuk merely had to wait for it.

5. God pointed out pride (being "puffed up"), desires that weren't upright, drunkenness, arrogance, greed, and the sinister devotion to gathering people and taking them captive. It will help your group to stay together if each person mentions verse numbers along with responses.

6-7. From previous passages, your group will know that the Babylonians seemed greedy for honor (1:7), military power (1:8-10), strength (1:11), luxury and choice food (1:16).

8. Babylon had an insatiable desire for more. Today, materialism is normal. Consumerism tells us that we should want a better house or car or boat or wardrobe or set of tools.

9. This is not an easy question. Encourage people to speak honestly of their own struggles in figuring out how much (of anything) is enough. Faith tells us that because God meets our needs, what we have been given is enough, yet it is only human (and sometimes responsible) to use our natural ability for personal or family gain. Love compels us to put everything in our lives at God's disposal.

Times of war and captivity create fear and worry in us, which can make faith difficult. In addition, Judah might question God (as Habakkuk was doing) about why He would allow such an unjust nation to take His people captive. Like the Nazi holocaust, it would not make sense.

For Further Thought. If your group has an extended time together, use this activity for a time of private reflection. Then reconvene and share the results. Use the responses as a bridge into a session of worship and prayer. For an alternate closing, use the hardships mentioned in the closing questions and pray for each other either as a group or in pairs.

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Session 5: WATCHING FOR THE COMING OF GOD'S GLORY

Habakkuk 2:6-14

Oliver Twist was a victim of fate: his mother died when he was born; Oliver grew up in a cruel orphanage; he was taken in by people who treated him worse than a servant; he was used by a gang of pickpockets.

But through ironic circumstances, Oliver turned from victim to victor. When the bandit, Bill Sykes, forced Oliver to help him rob a home, the owners of the home caught Oliver and discovered that his mother had been a member of their family. The family welcomed Oliver into their home and in a final skirmish with Bill Sykes, young Oliver escaped and Sykes died.

Over and over we find the stories we love show a victim becoming a victor. The three little pigs capture the big bad wolf in a cauldron of boiling water. Robin Hood organizes the victimized poor and robs the rich landowners. The terrified seaside town of Amity achieves victory over a great white shark in *Jaws*. After years of abusive relationships, Celie finds family, friendship and financial freedom in *The Color Purple*.

Movie theaters ring with cheers when the alien or the bad guy gets what's coming to him. In these classic stories, we already know that the good guy will win, but we want to see it happen. We Christians have seen the same kind of victory played out in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we long to see it again when Christ returns and brings justice with Him. The desire for justice to overcome injustice is universal.

1. Name a character from a book, movie, or cartoon strip who is a good example of an underdog winning freedom over a powerful enemy.

Read aloud Habakkuk 2:6-14

2. If you were the prosecuting attorney in the imaginary case of "God versus Babylon," what charges would you bring against Babylon from this passage?

3. Verses 6-20 are a "taunt song," much like a group of street children might sing to the town bully. How do the previous sections of Habakkuk help you know who will sing this song of taunt – and why?

4. Imagine yourself as one of the Hebrew people in the process of being deported by vicious Babylonians. Why might it help you to have this song in your memory?

5. This taunt song begins each new section with the words, "Woe to him who ..." What do you see in each of the three sections here as the major areas of God's concern?

6. Each section lists consequences the Babylonians would eventually suffer. In what ways do the consequences resemble the wrongdoing?

7. Verses 9 and 12 describe Babylon as a builder. What did she build and how did she build it?

8. Who or what would deliver these consequences?

9. Reread verse 13. What do you think it means that the people's labor was only fuel for the fire?

10. What would you say to someone who objects to this section of Scripture, saying that people who love God (and even God Himself) should be more merciful to the wicked?

11. What appropriate prayers can we offer for an evil person or group in a situation that is crumbling?

12. Verse 14 begins with the word *for*, as if to suggest a reason for all of this promised destruction. How are the words of that verse a fitting ending to these three "woes"?

13. What practical help is it to you to believe that someday God will overcome all that is evil?

14. Who are the “Babylonians” in today’s world?

15. Take a few moments to pray together for the people or nations you have mentioned. Close your prayer time by reading verse 14 in unison as a way of saying that you agree with God’s purposes.

For Further Thought. For three days, keep a pad of paper in the place where you read the newspaper or watch or listen to media news. Write down situations in which it seems as if a bully (person, group, or nation) is defeating an enemy. Pray for these bullies to repent, as well as other concerns addressed in question 11. Note some of your finding in the space below.

LEADER’S NOTES for Session 5

Purpose: To see how God intervenes and administers justice to evil doers.

2. Your group should notice such wrongdoings as: the Babylons’ piling up stolen goods (v. 6), plundering many nations, shedding people’s blood by destroying lands and cities and everyone in them (v. 8), plotting the ruin of many people (v. 10) and building a city on bloodshed (v. 12).

3. Habakkuk 2:6-20 is a *taunt song*. This is a literacy form much like the street song of a child taunting the town bully. In this case the taunt is from the conquered nations including Judah. (See versed 1:6 and 2:5b.) God planned the Babylonian victory - not because Babylon was superior but because He could use Babylon as an instrument of judgement on his straying people (1:1-5). But Babylonian victory would be temporary. She too would fall – in punishment for her own sins.

It may take a few moments for your group to come to these conclusions, but they are important in order to catch the rhythm of this book: Habakkuk complains; God responds. Habakkuk complains again; God responds again. Habakkuk worships God. This song of taunt with its five woes is, in effect, a comfort and encouragement to Habakkuk. God saying, “I will not ignore the evil your people have done. I will bring the Babylonians (who are even more evil) to destroy them. But I will not ignore the evil of the Babylonians either. Even while you watch Babylon destroy your people, you may sing this song. Because in time your people will be free - and purified. And your conquerors will be destroyed.”

5. Help your group to define the reasons for God’s anger in these three units: verses 6-8, 9-22, and 12-13.

6. Babylon acted as a terrorizing thief but she would be startled by those she terrorized (v. 7). Babylon would be plundered as she had plundered others (v. 8). Babylon took many lives (v. 8), but she would forfeit lives of her own (v. 10). Previous passages detailed the noisy advance of an army (1:8-10) with galloping, scoffing and laughing. In justice, even the walls and woodwork would cry out (v. 11).

7. Babylon built a dynasty ("realm" or "house") with other people's money and tried to remain out of their reach (v. 9). She built cities with bloodshed and crime (v. 12).

8. Answers include: debtors (v. 7); peoples who would be left (v. 8); the Lord Almighty (vv. 13-14).

9. All of Babylon's building, conquering, and self-exalting would not last, but would literally go up in smoke. It was fuel for the fire because the great things she built would make the destruction even greater -- "the bigger they are, the harder they fall." It could mean that the more Babylon labored, the more they made people angry and doomed herself. In any case, "the Lord Almighty determined" that Babylon's labor would backfire. As your group discusses this question, it should come to these, or similar, conclusions.

10. People in your group may have a variety of opinions here. Help group members to be respectful of each other's views. It may help to note that this is *God's* speech – not Habakkuk's. Judah was not, at this point, gloating over Babylon's death. But God was promising to administer the same consequences to Babylon that Babylon had heaped on others. Babylon's evil was intentional and premeditated. (According to verse 10, she "plotted the ruin of many peoples.") Stopping Babylon stopped injustice against those she could have devastated.

11. Your group may have a variety of ideas. Among them: We can pray that they will repent from their evil; that those who didn't participate in the evil will not be harmed; that the destruction will somehow create opportunities for hope; that everyone involved will cry out to God: that the conquerors will understand that they are being used by God and not become tyrannical themselves; that they will be just in their conquering.

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Session 6: Quieting Ourselves as God Works Out Justice

Habakkuk 2:15-20

As an eight year old, I stood in front of a local bakery, waiting for my mother to fulfill her promise of buying me a cake shaped like a lamb with frosted curls and a red bow around its neck. But I forgot about the unusual cake as I stared at a poster of then Soviet premier Nikita Krushchev. Below the picture of his angry face were printed his words, "We will bury you." I recalled how my friend and I played house in her family's bomb shelter. I wondered, *Would we all live there some day?*

Without even knowing about the atrocities of Stalin or the sixty- six million prisoners who died in Soviet "corrective labor camps" (writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's estimate), the Soviet Union was a great fear in our lives. Today, the Soviet Union has crumbled and people speak of the "cold war" as if it were ancient history.

We speculate about God's involvement. Certainly there were Habakkuk-like believers in conquered countries such as Afghanistan who complained to God about the heartless Soviet military. Beyond the reasons for collapse pinpointed in the news magazines, it would seem that a divine hand chose to topple warlord-like leaders greedy for power and worshipers of the state.

Over the years people may have supposed that God lay sleeping in the choir loft, but we now see that He was intervening in economics and politics. We try not to be stunned that in one generation a godless force in a fierce nation has been quieted -- under God's hand.

1. When have you been appalled by the evil in a group, a person or a situation?

Read aloud Habakkuk 2:15-20.

2. Find a phrase that repels you and tell why.
3. In the use of alcohol, how did the people of Babylon move beyond merely intoxicating and endangering themselves?
4. History speaks of Babylon as a nation of high education and culture, yet God condemned the way she treated people. How do relatively nice people sometimes try to achieve glory for themselves in ways that seem benign?
5. In view of what you have studied so far in Habakkuk, what is the significance of the statement in verse 16, "The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming around to you."
6. According to verse 17, what ecological atrocities did Babylon commit? (Keep in mind that Lebanon was known for its large forests and lush vegetation.)
7. In verses 18-19, God spoke of Babylon's religion. Why were her idols useless?
8. After each of the five times God said, "Woe to him who..." (2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19), God described Babylon's crimes and punishments. What relationship do you see between what Babylon had done wrong and her predicted punishment?

Why do you think no punishment is stated after the fifth "woe" of verse 19?
9. What modern situations have you seen where wickedness catches up with individuals or nations, and they suffer the consequences?
10. How does the picture of God in verse 20 contrast with the previous description of idols?
11. Of what use is it to be silent before God?
12. What setting in your daily routine could provide a few moments in which you could pay attention to God and enjoy silence before Him?

For Further Thought. Experiment with silence in one of the ways listed below:

- ◆ While praying, spend a few minutes sitting in silence, soaking up God's majesty and love for you.
- ◆ While waiting for someone or for an appointment, quiet yourself, close your eyes and silently focus on God.
- ◆ While doing manual chores (gardening, cooking, repairing a broken item), quiet your inner self and focus on God's great creativity -- perhaps through the uniqueness of the green peppers or doorknob in front of you.

LEADER'S NOTES for Session 6

Purpose: To view God as the turnaround agent even among the most disgusting atrocities.

3. Babylon is pictured as a person giving drink to his neighbors, in such excess as to pour it directly from the wineskins into their mouths. In addition, verse 15 says that the Babylonians got their neighbors drunk, with the purpose of shaming them by staring at their naked bodies.

4. People today may try to impress others by achieving goals or accumulating wealth, by taking advantage of those with less status or money, or even hurting them with barbs of unkind humor. Your group may think of some specific ways that they have seen people glorify themselves -- or ways that they themselves have profited by someone else's embarrassment or expense.

5. Help your group to study the details of verse 16 and relate them to what God had said thus far. It seems that even though God planned to use Babylon's evil force to achieve His own purpose, in time the nation of Babylon would suffer similar treatment. In the midst of evil, God is the turnaround agent – a comforting principle to us all.

Other verses that use this phrase indicate that God's right hand is part of a "mighty arm" and a powerful tool to save. (If you want to do a word study, see also Exodus 15:6, Psalm 20:6, 98:1, and 118:15.) Habakkuk 2:16 may be indicating that this cup is filled with shame or disgrace.

6. Babylon destroyed animals and also "destroyed lands." Unlike some conquering countries which left cities intact, Babylon destroyed cities and their inhabitants, leaving desolation. Many believe that the violence "done to Lebanon" refers to a destruction of the forests and vegetation, including the "cedars of Lebanon," mentioned several times in Scripture such as Psalms 104:16 which says: "The trees of the Lord are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted." Notice in the psalm text how personally God relates to the natural environment.

7. Help your group to study the details of verses 18 and 19. The idols could not lead people, for it was people who created them. Instead of being a source of truth, they were a source of lies, leading people away from the true God. Idols couldn't speak, give guidance or even breathe. Anyone who made and worshiped an idol wasn't believing in something greater than himself but in something greater than himself but in something lesser – because he or she made it.

8. Perhaps the punishment for the last woe is implied by the word “lifeless.” The lifeless gods of the Babylonians could not help them. You may want to skim over the other four “woes” to find the punishments. (See verses 8, 11, 13, 16.)

9. The tyranny of Stalin has resulted in his being defamed. Nazi leaders were brought to their knees and have become a sign of infamy. Your group may think of other examples – much closer to home.

10. Verse 20 is the climax to this entire section of “woes.” Encourage your group to dwell on it long enough to fully absorb its impact. People should come up with ideas such as: In pagan religions, people (who could speak) worshiped idols who could not speak. In verse 20, worshiping God involved people choosing to be silent before God who not only speaks, but has spoken for most of the book of Habakkuk. While idols are created in men’s workshops, God resides in his temple – heaven. While idols do not actually exist as beings, the “Lord is.”

11. Being silent before God teaches us to rest in Him and enjoy His presence. It gives us an opportunity to meditate on who he is – to stop focusing on ourselves and our own activities. Occasionally when we sit before God in silence we hear Him speak through thoughts or remembered Bible passages.

12. Give people in your group a few minutes to think about their routines. You might want to spark some thoughts with these ideas; lying in bed as we first wake up or as we fall asleep; finding a solitary place during coffee breaks at work; taking walks in the morning or evening.

For Further Thought. If your group has additional time, ask people to experiment with the first suggested activity. Reread Habakkuk 2:20. Then allow five or ten minutes for people to move anywhere they wish and take this time for solitary silence. Ask that they return to the main group and express in sentence prayers their responses to God. They may also want to debrief what they discovered about themselves and about God in their time of silence.

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Session 7: REVIEWING GOD'S TRACK RECORD

Habakkuk 3:1-16

The first time my husband, Greg, was laid off, I felt panic the entire seventeen months that he was unemployed. We sold our second car and I took a part-time second job. I dumped my fear on unsuspecting sales people who called: "You want me to sail to Tahiti? I'm just trying to keep the electricity on!" I fretted night and day, crying out to God to rescue us.

But temporary jobs came easily to Greg. On the last day of the last month of our temporary health plan, Greg got a job with a new health plan. The savings we had tucked away for a dream vacation was almost gone, but we had never missed a house payment.

So when Greg was laid off the second time, you'd think I would have been calm and trusting. But this time, we had little savings and our health care was enormously expensive. Besides, temporary jobs were scarce.

When I tried to take back the tennis racket Greg had bought me before the layoff, he said, "Let's see what happens. Remember last time."

Greg did find a job, only to be laid off eleven months later -- a month before Christmas. This third time, I cried for a few minutes, dried my eyes, and went back to work. I didn't feel like panicking anymore.

My friend nudged me, "This isn't like you at all."

Remember last time?" I said quietly. "It will work out."

1. When has past success made it easier for you to face a challenge?

Read aloud Habakkuk 3:1-15

2. What words and phrases in this text help you to picture God's majesty and power?
3. Verse 2 begins, "I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord." Describe a time when you, like Habakkuk, have stood in awe of God.
4. Verse 2 packs many ideas into a few words. What are some of the ideas that Habakkuk talks to God about as he begins, once again, to pray?
5. Habakkuk asked that God would, "In wrath remember mercy." What all does this request suggest that Habakkuk believed about God?
6. Do you think that God is better known in our culture today for His wrath or His mercy? Explain.
7. What vivid details in verses 3-7 remind you of events in world history and biblical history?
8. What images of military and natural forces do you find in verses 8-15?

What does this mixture of military and natural suggest about God?
9. The words, "wrath," "anger," and "angry" appear five times in this passage (verses 2, 8, 12). How do you respond to God's anger as it is described in this passage?
10. Page back through the book of Habakkuk and find each question that Habakkuk asked for God. In view of all you have read here thus far, try to answer each of his questions.

11. Once Habakkuk understood what God was about to do, he did not question God further. Instead, he prayed for mercy. For what people or situations could you ask that God “in wrath remember mercy”?

12. Describe a past experience in your life that reminds you that God rescues us and helps us.

For Further Thought.

- ◆ Go alone or take a friend from this study to a private place. Open your Bible to Habakkuk 3. Read Habakkuk 3:1-20 aloud, pausing when you come to the word, "Selah." (Its meaning is unknown. Some think it means that listeners should say, Amen or Hallelujah; others think it means to pause to reflect on what was read.) As you pause, picture in your mind the wild events you've just read.
- ◆ Praise God as you reflect on the passage.
- ◆ After you've done so, read the passage aloud with as much inflection as possible.
- ◆ If you wish, stay in that place and pray for a few minutes.

LEADER'S NOTES for Session 7

Purpose of Session: To appreciate how powerfully and majestically God has worked in the past and, therefore, can be counted on to do so again.

2. Every verse here contains words and phrases that picture the power of God. Encourage your group to pick out and reflect on these graphic images. If someone asks about the words, “shigionoth” (v. 1) and “selah,” you can comment that these are probably musical terms that were useful when this poetic passage was used in temple worship.

4. Your group should study verse 2 phrase by phrase. People should point out such concepts as: Habakkuk acknowledged God's reputation He admitted to being in awe of God's deeds. he pleaded with God to do great deeds once again. He wanted God to do those deeds “in our time” against the Babylonians. He acknowledged that God's wrath was certain, but asked him to include mercy as well.

You may want to point out that God did, in fact, grant Habakkuk's request. The Babylonian captivity was short – only seventy years. The Hebrew people deported to Babylon enjoyed relatively good care there. And, in the end, they were allowed to return to their homeland – even given help to rebuild their temple. (See 2 Chronicles 36:22-23)

7. Members of your group may speak of plagues, wars, and earthquakes, or their own experiences with God. Habakkuk may have been reminded of God's history with his own people. The details are the same as at the giving of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:16-19): thunder, lightning, a thick cloud over the mountain, a loud trumpet blast, everyone in camp trembling, Mt. Sinai covered with smoke, God descending in fire, mountain shaking violently, trumpet getting louder and louder. Cushan was a Midianite or Arabian tribe, and probably one of the nearby nations that was thrown into fear at God's mighty acts, especially the crossing of the Red Sea. If someone asks about Teman and Mt. Paran, they were both located in Edomite territory adjacent

to Mt. Sinai. Use this question to help your group examine the details of the text as they reveal God's work throughout history.

9. The purpose for the wrath is revealed in verses 12-13, as God defends his people from forces of wickedness. It's interesting that Habakkuk, who accused God of not saving his people (1:2) and remaining silent (1:13), seemed shocked and apprehensive at God's wrath.

10. Your group should find Habakkuk's seven questions in 1:2-3 and 2:12-13, 17. Help them to paraphrase each question, then answer it – in view of God's revelations to Habbakuk.

11. Encourage group members to mention people, nations, organizations, or situations (perhaps even themselves) where they feel that this prayer is appropriate. In truth – all of us deserve God's wrath. If time permits, pray together for God's mercy in these settings.

For Further Thought. Call attention to this follow-up on today's study and preparation for the next. Suggest that they take time for it during the week.

###

Session 8: HOPING AGAINST ALL ODDS

Habakkuk 3:16-20

Missionary Hudson Taylor was a pioneer. He spearheaded a missions movement into inland China, he was one of the first European missionaries to wear Chinese clothing, he trusted God for financial support without even alerting others of his needs.

All those achievements flowed from an inner ability to depend on God. Taylor and his wife, Maria, experienced countless difficulties, including the death of their daughter. They lived in a climate as one here, "...nerves get so fretted...that temptations to irritability, hard thoughts, and sometimes unkind words are all the more difficult to control."³ Yet Taylor wrote, "If God should place me in great perplexity, must He not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? No fear that His resources will be unequal to the emergency! and God's resources are mine -- for He is mine, and is with me and dwells in me."⁴

Near the end of Taylor's life, when the riots and massacres of the Boxer Rebellion drove him to a quiet spot in Switzerland, he heard how refugees in China's mission stations were hunted down. Taylor grieved for his people. He wrote, "I cannot read, . . . I cannot pray, I can scarcely even think -- but I can trust."⁵

1. When kinds of circumstances make it difficult to hope?

³ Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 159.

⁴ Taylor., p. 166.

⁵ Taylor, p. 230.

Read aloud Habakkuk 3:16-19

2. What impresses you about this passage?
3. How would you describe Habakkuk's spiritual health?
4. All of chapter 3 is a prayer, Habakkuk's response to God. How did Habakkuk respond physically to God's display of power described in Habakkuk 3:1-15?
5. How do you explain Habakkuk's ability to wait patiently for calamity while he was terribly frightened?
6. What do you think prevents people from sensing awe toward God?

Why might an awe of God's great terrifying power help us to trust Him?
7. What signs of devastation did Habakkuk expect?
8. Page back through the book of Habakkuk. What passages here would cause Habakkuk to trust God, even though he could see enormous destruction ahead?
9. What can people do when trusting God is difficult?
10. What situations (personal or worldwide) seem hopeless to you at this time?
11. In what, exactly, did Habakkuk rejoice? Tell why.
12. Describe the strength Habakkuk sensed from God (See verse 19).
13. What can you say about hope to someone who says that you or the world have no reason to hope?

For Further Thought.

Meditate on the closing words of Habakkuk's book:

¹⁷ Though the *fig tree does not bud* and there are *no grapes on the vines*, though the *olive crop fails* and the *fields produce no food*, though there are *no sheep in the pen* and *no cattle in the stalls*,

¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

¹⁹ The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.

- ◆ Try writing your own version of Habakkuk 3:17 using circumstances that are fearsome to your own sense of security. Use the space below.
- ◆ Rewrite and read aloud verses 18-19 to express your hope in God.

LEADER'S NOTES for Session 8

Purpose of Session: To observe how others have trusted when every hope has been swept away except for hope in God.

2. Linger long enough for each person to absorb the impact of this lofty climax to the book of Habakkuk and express some reaction to it.

3. Habakkuk seemed content. He trusted in God, yet was realistic about losing his sources of livelihood.

4. Help your group to take appropriate note of the information in verse 16.

5. Patience isn't always peaceful. Habakkuk's relationship with God was close enough that he could see the reality of the terrifying situation yet still trust that God would bring about deliverance in some way. The "calamity...on the nation invading us" refers to all five "woes" described in chapter 2. These were the judgements God promised to bring to Babylon. Habakkuk would need patience, however, because before Babylon was destroyed, she would first destroy and deport Judah, his own nation (1:5-11).

7. His crops (figs, grapes and olives) would not be fruitful and he would have no herds of sheep and cattle. This meant that many of the people of Judah had no to make a living and few would have anything to eat.

8. God had rescued Israel before at the Red Sea (3:1-15); God obviously had a plan to take Judah captive, so it wasn't as if Babylon was in charge (1:5-11); God planned to punish Babylon too for her misdeeds (2:2-20). Encourage your group to identify specific phrases within these sections and explain why they would inspire trust.

9. Invite suggestions that grow out of personal experience.

10. Besides fluctuating economic and social conditions, we all have a deteriorating body to look forward to! Your group may suggest a variety of situations that appear to defy hope.

11. He trusted in the Lord Himself. The term, "God my Savior" (other versions say, "God of my salvation") hints at his trust in God to save him in some way. "My" indicates that he believed in a personal deliverance. Perhaps this rejoicing was facilitated by the frank dialog God and Habakkuk had just engaged in. Stripped of everything else, Habakkuk would still had God.

12. Habakkuk described a swift, overcoming strength pictured by a deer prancing swiftly and lightheartedly. The picture communicates a fresh and joyous strength. Encourage people in your group to describe their emotional responses to this image.

For Further Thought. If your group is accustomed to doing this section, provide time and opportunity for people to write their own paraphrases of the text. Then read them aloud to each other as statements of commitment to God.

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ABOUT THIS STUDY

This study was published as a book by Victor Books in 1995 as part of the Truth Seed Series. When the series was put out of print a few years later, I obtained the rights and have been able to distribute it to those who have continued to ask for it. Those who have attended my first retreat, *Rekindling Your Spiritual Hunger*, will remember how I used Habakkuk as an example of what it means to stand firm even when you have enormous doubts about what God is doing. May this study empower you to have those enlivened conversations with God!