

HABAKKUK

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LIVING BY FAITH



5 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



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SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

Living by Faith

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» HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God’s word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the things we’ve written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

The studies contain five main components:

- sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- numbered questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- sidebars that provide extra bits of background or optional extra study ideas, especially regarding other relevant parts of the Bible
- ‘Implications’ sections that help you think about what the passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage, and exploring the sidebars as you have time.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but also respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learnt.

4. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.

- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

5. Bible translation

We quote from and refer to the English Standard Version, which we recommend. There should not generally be any problems, however, if you are using a different translation. (Nevertheless, it might be useful to have an ESV on hand in case of any confusion.)

» STUDY 1

LOST AND FOUND

[BACKGROUND]

HABAKKUK IS ONE OF THE SMALLER books of the Bible—just three chapters (56 verses) in total. But it punches above its weight among the writings of God’s Old Testament prophets. Not only is the book of Habakkuk verse-for-verse one of the most quoted in the New Testament; it also helpfully addresses some of the same themes of relating to God in times of suffering as the much larger and more complex book of Job.

Habakkuk is also somewhat unusual as a form of prophecy. Rather than simply declaring a message from God to the people like all the other prophets do, Habakkuk comes to God with personal questions—which God answers for him. Then in chapter 3, as Habakkuk reflects on what God has told him, he gives us a song that could very easily slot into

the book of Psalms and which contains some of the most beautiful words of faith ever written.

It doesn’t take long for Habakkuk to get to the point either. After the simple but somewhat intriguing opening statement in verse 1—that this is an “oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw” (which we’ll come back to later)—he jumps right in with the first question:

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

Or cry to you “Violence!”
and you will not save? (Hab 1:2)

Clearly something significant is troubling Habakkuk. So before we start reading Habakkuk, let’s get a bit more of a handle on what was going on at that time.

A tale of many kings

The chequered history of Judah's kings is worth tracing through, with the bright spots being those like Hezekiah, who "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD" (2 Chr 29:2). But more common are kings like Amon, who "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as Manasseh his father had done" (2 Chr 33:22).

Josiah becomes king in 640 BC at

the ripe old age of eight, and thankfully the quality of his kingship is more like his great-grandfather Hezekiah (2 Chr 34:1-7; cf. 31:1) than his father Amon. Although Josiah was a reforming king, it is somewhat telling that many of the reforms he implemented needed to be the same ones that Hezekiah had overseen.

Read 2 Chronicles 34:14–21.

1. Inexplicably, the Book of the Law given through Moses had been lost. (How careless do you have to be to lose the word of the one and only Creator God?!) When it is found and read to Josiah, what is his reaction?

Read 2 Chronicles 34:22–33.

2. What steps does Josiah take as leader of the nation?

3. It is hard to be sure, but do you think the law-keeping of the people was genuine? (Look again at verses 32-33.)

4. Why do you think God reiterates his commitment to punish the people (vv. 24-25) rather than extend forgiveness to them in light of the apparent reforms being made?

AFTER SOME MEDDLING BY THE KING of Egypt (36:3), Jehoiakim becomes King of Judah, and the nation is once again under the leadership of one who does “evil in the sight of the LORD his God” (36:5). In 36:15-17 we get a summary of all that has happened:

“The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God,

despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.

Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans [or Babylonians]...

As we will see, this act of judgement—sending the Babylonians against Judah—is the subject of Habakkuk’s conversation with God. But to see the nature of Judah’s rejection of God’s messengers, let’s read more of the story of Jehoiakim.

Read Jeremiah 36:1-3 and 36:20-26.

5. What does Jehoiakim do when he hears the words of Jeremiah's prophecy?

6. Compare Jehoiakim's reaction upon hearing the word of the Lord to the reaction of Josiah that we read about earlier. How would you describe the reaction of each king?

Read Jeremiah 36:30-31.

7. Who exactly is at fault and will be punished by God?

HABAKKUK'S PROPHECY SEEMS LIKELY to have been given to him during Jehoiakim's reign (possibly around 608-605 BC). As we have seen, even under the reforms of Josiah (a leader who was zealous for keeping the word of the Lord), there is some doubt as to

whether the people's hearts had really become aligned with his and with their God (cf. Zephaniah 1). And under the leadership of the evil Jehoiakim, things certainly have not improved.

As we are about to discover, that is what really troubles Habakkuk.

-
- As you read the word of God, do you generally respond to it more like Josiah or more like Jehoiakim?

- God showed compassion on his people by sending messengers to warn them. But in sending his own Son, Jesus, God goes much further (cf. Matt 21:33-44). In what ways are Jesus' kingship and kingdom going to be different to the kings that have come before him and to the kingdom of Judah?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for speaking to his people through his word. As you set out on these studies, thank him particularly for this book of Habakkuk.
- Give thanks that Jesus' kingship is completely righteous.
- Pray that you will respond appropriately to hearing God's word in these studies.

LIVING BY FAITH



Have you ever found yourself wondering whether God really cares about the goings on of this world? Does he care about the violence and pain that so many people suffer? Does he even notice that most people don't even believe he exists, let alone obey his commands? Perhaps you think that asking these questions is something Christians just shouldn't do.

But imagine that you did ask God these questions, and that he chose to answer them. Imagine that he told you disaster was on the horizon, and that it was *God himself who was sending the disaster*.

How would you react? What would you do? What would you think of God?

A timely set of Bible studies for individuals or small groups.



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