

How Long, O Lord – Part 1
Bearing the Wait – Hab. 1:1-4
Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – April 7th, 2024

Intro:

- I hope this overview video (<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/habakkuk/>) was helpful for you. Habakkuk is a short book of only three chapters composed of a lament prayer from Habakkuk, a response to this prayer from God, then a second prayer from Habakkuk expressing his astonishment and confusion, followed by a second response from God, closing with a profound hymn and prayer of faith from Habakkuk.
- There are significant spiritual truths and realities in this back-and-forth book that will help you to process and respond with faith to God as you wait for His response amid wrongdoing and wickedness. The righteous shall live by their faith (Hab. 2:4).
- “Habakkuk sees the darkness of the world as an invitation to have faith in God’s promise to one day set things right. Living with such faith means trusting that God loves this world and works to one day eradicate all evil forever” (The Bible Project).
- Let’s open our Bibles to Habakkuk, and I will give you a little time to find this sliver of a book. An easy way to get there is to look at your table of contents or go to the New Testament and turn back 5 short books. You could also grab a pew Bible and turn to page 806, or if you have an electronic Bible, just click on the link. I am reading from the NIV version. This is how it starts:

Hab. 1:1 NIV

The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received.

- We know very little about Habakkuk. More than likely, he was a Levite (those entrusted with the temple worship) because his final prayer was to be sung. His ministry spanned two kings of Israel, a good king, Josiah, who brought reforms, returning the people to worship God, and who brought justice and peace. Josiah was followed by a wicked king, Jehoiakim, who rebelled against God, disregarded His word, and “did evil in the Lord’s sight” (2 Kings 23:37).
- Habakkuk was ministering during the time of Jeremiah, the prophet, who spoke to the king and the people from God, whereas Habakkuk spoke to God for the people.
- All prophets spoke the word of the Lord, telling people what God was saying. This continues to this day as people “rightly handle the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15) by proclaiming God’s word to those who listen, conveying a “forthtelling” and communicating the Word of God in His authority.
- Sometimes, if God has revealed the future, there is a “foretelling” of what is to come to prepare His people or to declare God’s glory and sovereignty over all things. We need to recognize God’s word when it is spoken but be very cautious to embrace predictions from those who claim that God has spoken to them. These things can happen, but we need to weigh what is said to see if it aligns with the mind and heart of God as revealed in the written word which we know is the word of God. It is one thing to “predict” what will happen in the future by “cause and effect” on what we know, weighing probabilities and potential outcomes (like weather forecasters). It is another whole category to say God has revealed this to you.
- Put your trust in what is written Focus on this first and foremost, and live according to what you know is true from the written word. Be very cautious not to be led astray by people claiming “special revelation” and choosing to live your life according to what a person says versus living your life according to what you know is true from the written word.

- Now, we will turn to Habakkuk’s first lament or complaint to God, expressing his burden of waiting for God to respond.

The burden of waiting

Hab. 1:2 NIV

How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save?

- Have you felt like this? Does part of you feel this way now? This is a cry of faith out of desperation and despair of long-term suffering and surrender under the sovereignty of God. This is a prayer of lament, where the one calling out has not seen God’s help and salvation and who continues to wait and call and cry out to God. There are many lament prayers in the Bible, especially the Psalms.
- God’s children, during their lifetime, will spend time in the “waiting room” (Rom. 8:17, I Peter 4:12-19). There are numerous godly people in the Bible who have spent time in *God’s waiting room*—
 - Noah, for the rain to stop
 - Abraham, for the promised child to be born
 - Joseph, for release from slavery and prison and his dream to come true
 - Moses, for 40 years for God to deliver his people
 - Ruth, for her kinsman redeemer
 - Esther, for her life and her people to be spared
 - Job, for redemption and restoration of unimaginable suffering
 - John the Baptist, to be delivered from prison
 - Lazareth, for the voice of Jesus
 - Jesus under the hands of evil
 —they all spent time in the waiting room.
- Don’t ever think something is wrong with you if you are in God’s waiting room. You might feel a cry like Habakkuk’s or your own lament shows faithlessness, but the very fact that you address it to God is an act of faith. It may not be the final word of faith, but it is a word God welcomes. Continue to call out to God, lament, and wait for His response because it will come in His sovereign wisdom and purpose at the right time. There are millions who are in God’s waiting room now, and there are millions more waiting for final justice under the altar of God. John writes this in the book of Revelation:

Rev 6:9-11 ESV

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. 10 They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

- Ask God for deliverance. Ask God for justice. Ask God for rest and comfort, perspective and faith as you continue to trust Him and His goodness in the midst of sorrow and suffering and despair. Ask God for the strength to bear the wait.

- Not only does Habakkuk give voice to his suffering and waiting before God, but he also gives voice to ours as well. Habakkuk then moves to address another burden, the burden of wrongdoing.

The burden of wrongdoing

Hab. 1:3 NIV

Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.

- All of these things—injustice, wrongful suffering, destruction, violence, strife, and conflict—all of them have always been part of the human story because evil is the default fallen condition in our hearts (Mark 7:14-23). From the first couple, Adam and Eve, to the first children, Cain and Able, all human sons and daughters are bent toward evil.
- There are various forms of violence in our world: violence against unborn babies, violence against women and children, violence by the strong against the weak, by the many against the few, by those in authority against those unable to resist, violence which goes unchecked and unpunished. And these things continue to abound and multiply.
- Why does God tolerate wrongdoing? We will hear God’s response to Habakkuk’s lament next week. However, I want to provide you now with three ways God responds to wrongdoing.
- Number one, God deals with our hearts, our inner evil factories. He doesn’t tell us to shape up, but He gives us a “new heart” (Eze. 36:26-29), causing us to be “born again” by cleaning us with His Spirit and exchanging our heart (John 3:1-8) for His. Then He renews our minds through His word (Rom. 12:2) and gives us the power to do what pleases Him.
- Number two, now with new hearts, God’s people are to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21). *When faced with the consuming fire of overpowering evil, the people of God are to meet it with a flood of overwhelming good.* This is our calling in the face of evil.
- Number three, there will be justice; God is no fool. *He tolerates evil and injustice for a time, but He will not tolerate evil and injustice for all time.* All people “will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead” (1 Peter 4:5-6 – see also Rom. 14:12, Col. 3:6, Luke 12:4-7).
- Continue to cry out to God with the burden of waiting for His response, choosing to live by faith until He responds. Continue to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and the promise of making us new, and continue to put out the fires of evil through a flood of good.
- Abundant wrongdoing leads to the last burden Habakkuk addresses to God, the burden of wickedness.

The burden of wickedness

Hab 1:4 NIV

Therefore, the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

- Habakkuk says that because God has not helped, not saved, because God has tolerated wrongdoing, God’s laws and justice in the land never succeed, win, or prevail. He says that the wicked, those who do evil and pervert and prevent justice, far outnumber and surround the righteous, so justice, God’s justice, is paralyzed, neutralized, and marginalized.

- As you look around our world, do you think this at times? Why is there so much wickedness in this world—from homicides and genocides to wars and atrocities, as nations rage against one another? Where leaders and politicians pervert justice and abuse power for their own gain. Where churches pervert the Word of God and declare what is evil to be good and what is sinful to be celebrated. Where people perpetrate all kinds of wickedness and evil and get away with it. How long, O Lord, until you deal with your creation, show yourself in your power, declare your goodness, bring your justice, and make all things new? How long, O Lord? Help us, rescue us, save us, free us, come quickly, O Lord. Show yourself as mighty to save, strengthen your people, display your power and, show your righteousness, and heal our land.
- I have asked one of our Shepherds to tell his story of faith in the midst of personal suffering and the continued suffering of those He loves.

Testimony – Ro-Bin-San

Conclusion

- Under the burden of wrongdoing and wickedness and waiting for God, continue to cry out to Him and keep your eyes on Jesus. “Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb 12:3 NIV). He is with you. He will strengthen you. He will deliver you. He is our faithful friend, and He will not fail you.
- Continue to trust in Him; turn to the one who has done no violence (Is. 53:9) but suffered under violent men. Know that God gives people time to show their true colors, some to violence and some to suffering, and know that He will bring justice in the end. Continue to call out to Him. Continue to do His work through you. Continue to walk in faith, hope, and love. All of the suffering, and sorrow, and atrocities of this world will come to an end, and faith, hope, and love will remain eternally. (1 Cor. 13:13).
- If you are presently crying out, “How Long, O Lord,” I want to pray alongside you today. As others leave, come here to this altar as we seek Jesus together.

Closing Prayer and Benediction

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb 4:16 ESV).

Questions for Growth Groups

- What from this passage and this message is meaningful and helpful to you?
- Where is a place God is calling you to represent Him and overcome evil with good? What are you doing, or what will you do, to make a difference because of the new heart Jesus gave you?
- Is there something you have been enduring that causes you to cry, "How long, O Lord?" If so, and if you're comfortable, share with the group and have them pray with you.