

The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: Yet I Will Rejoice in the Lord

Habakkuk 3:1–19

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson handles the soaring conclusion of Habakkuk and is the most formationally rich passage in the book, so let the spiritual formation aim lead while keeping it doctrinally grounded. What is at stake doctrinally is the true ground of Christian joy. Habakkuk teaches that joy can and must rest on God Himself rather than on His gifts or our circumstances. This directly confronts the false prosperity teaching that faith always yields health, wealth, and ease. Habakkuk's circumstances never improved, yet he ended in worship. Make clear that the goal of faith is not always changed circumstances but a transformed heart that can say 'yet I will rejoice in the Lord' when everything visible fails.

The formational aim is to lead your students into that very transformation. Most people anchor their joy, whether they admit it or not, to their gifts: their health, their finances, their families, their plans. This lesson invites them to examine where their joy actually rests and to begin grounding it in God Himself before the testing comes. Habakkuk learned to sing this song through his wrestling; help your students rehearse it now so they will know it by heart in their own day of trouble. Aim for warmth and depth here. This is a lesson to press gently and personally into the heart.

Hold honesty and hope together as Habakkuk does. He does not pretend the loss away ('although the fig tree shall not blossom') and he does not pretend the fear away ('my belly trembled'). His joy is not denial; it is trust that has looked the worst in the face and still chosen God. Point throughout to Christ, the God of our salvation, in whom this joy finds its fullest ground, and who Himself endured the cross for the joy set before Him.

Question 1

Student Question:

Habakkuk responds to God's revelation with prayer: "O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years... in wrath remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2). What does this prayer reveal about how a believer should respond to a fresh encounter with the greatness and the judgment of God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter opens as a prayer (verse 1) and verse 2 sets its tone: 'O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years... in wrath remember

mercy.' Habakkuk has heard God's answer, and his first response is reverent fear followed by intercession.

Help students see the right response to encountering God's greatness and judgment. It is not flippancy or terror that flees, but awe that draws near in prayer. Habakkuk is afraid in the right way, the fear that leads to worship rather than away from it (Proverbs 9:10).

Notice the content of his prayer: 'revive thy work.' Having seen both judgment and the promise of God's purpose (chapter 2:14), he longs for God to act, to keep His redemptive work alive even in years of darkness. This is a model prayer for hard seasons: Lord, keep Your work going.

Apply it to fresh encounters with God in worship or the Word. The right response to a clearer vision of God's holiness and power is humble prayer, not casual familiarity. Awe and intercession belong together.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Reverent fear as the right response to God's greatness (Proverbs 9:10).
- Awe that draws near in prayer rather than fleeing.
- Praying 'revive thy work' in dark seasons.
- Awe and intercession belonging together.

Discussion Prompts

- How do you typically respond to a fresh sense of God's greatness?
- What does it mean to fear God in a way that draws you near rather than away?
- What would it look like to pray 'revive thy work' in your own time?

Question 2

Student Question:

Habakkuk prays, "in wrath remember mercy," asking God to temper judgment with compassion. How does this prayer reflect a heart that has come to know God's character, and where do you need to plead for God's mercy, for yourself or for others, in the midst of deserved consequences?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question focuses on the plea 'in wrath remember mercy.' Habakkuk knows judgment is deserved and coming, yet he appeals to God's mercy in the midst of it. This is the prayer of a man who has come to know God's character truly.

Help students see the balance. Habakkuk does not deny that judgment is just, nor does he presume it away. He simply asks that mercy not be forgotten even in righteous wrath. This is exactly how God revealed Himself in Exodus 34:6-7, just and merciful together.

Apply it to interceding for others under deserved consequences: a wayward child, a friend reaping what they sowed, a society under the weight of its choices. We can pray honestly, acknowledging the justice of the situation while pleading for mercy.

Apply it also to ourselves. When we face the consequences of our own sin, 'in wrath remember mercy' is a fitting prayer. It does not excuse the sin; it casts us on God's compassion. Invite each person to name one situation, their own or another's, where they need to pray this way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Pleading for mercy without denying the justice of judgment (Exodus 34:6-7).
- Interceding for those under deserved consequences.
- Praying 'in wrath remember mercy' for our own failures.
- Knowing God's character truly shapes how we pray.

Discussion Prompts

- For whom do you need to plead, 'in wrath remember mercy'?
- How can you acknowledge justice and still pray for mercy?
- Where do you most need God's mercy in the midst of consequences?

Question 3

Student Question:

Much of the chapter recounts God's mighty past acts of salvation and power (Habakkuk 3:3-15). Why does Habakkuk strengthen his present faith by remembering what God has done before, and how does this practice of remembering anchor us when our circumstances are frightening?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 3-15 are a sweeping poetic recital of God's mighty acts: He comes in splendor from Teman, His glory covers the heavens, the mountains tremble, He marches through the earth, He goes forth for the salvation of His people. Habakkuk is remembering the God of the exodus and the conquest, the God who has acted powerfully to save.

Teach the spiritual discipline of remembering. Habakkuk strengthens his present faith by rehearsing God's past faithfulness. This is everywhere in Scripture: Israel was constantly called to remember the Lord's deliverance (Deuteronomy 8:2; Psalm 77:11). Memory is fuel for faith.

Show why this works. Faith is not believing in a God we have never known; it is trusting the God who has proven faithful before. When the future is frightening, the remembered acts of God give us solid ground to stand on. The God who split the sea can be trusted with what we face now.

Make it practical. Encourage students to keep their own record of God's faithfulness, answered prayers, past deliverances, evidences of grace, and to rehearse it deliberately when fear rises. Invite each person to recall one specific time God proved faithful and to draw on it for a present worry.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Remembering God's past acts as fuel for present faith (Deuteronomy 8:2; Psalm 77:11).
- Faith as trust in the God who has proven Himself, not a leap in the dark.
- Keeping a record of God's faithfulness.
- Rehearsing God's deeds deliberately when fear rises.

Discussion Prompts

- What past act of God's faithfulness most steadies you?
- How does remembering what God has done help you trust Him now?
- How could you keep a record of God's faithfulness to draw on later?

Question 4

Student Question:

Habakkuk admits, "When I heard, my belly trembled... I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble" (Habakkuk 3:16). How does this honest admission show that faith is not the absence of fear but trust that holds on through fear, and where do you need that kind of faith right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 16 is strikingly honest: 'When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble.' Habakkuk's faith does not eliminate his fear; he physically trembles even as he resolves to rest.

This is a crucial correction to a common misunderstanding. We often imagine that faith means feeling no fear. Habakkuk shows that faith is trust that holds on through fear. He trembles and rests at the same time. The two coexist.

Help students release the guilt that says, 'If I were really trusting God, I would not be afraid.' Fear is a human response to real danger; faith is what we do with the fear, bringing it to God and choosing to trust Him anyway. Courage is not fearlessness but trust under fear.

Apply it personally. Ask where students are trembling right now, a diagnosis, a decision, a loss they fear. The call is not to manufacture calm but to do what Habakkuk did: tremble, and rest in the Lord; feel the fear, and trust God through it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith as trust that holds on through fear, not the absence of fear.
- Fear and rest coexisting in the believer (verse 16).
- Releasing the false guilt that equates fear with failed faith.
- Courage as trust under fear, not fearlessness.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you trembling right now, even as you try to trust God?
- How does it free you to learn that faith is not the absence of fear?
- What would it look like to 'tremble and rest' in your situation?

Question 5

Student Question:

The climax of the book declares that even if the fig tree does not blossom and there is no herd in the stalls, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord" (Habakkuk 3:17-18). What does this teach about the true foundation of a believer's joy, and how does it expose the difference between joy rooted in God and happiness dependent on circumstances?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 17-18 are the summit of the book, and one of the great confessions of Scripture: 'Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines... yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.' Habakkuk lists total agricultural ruin, the loss of everything that sustained life, and then anchors his joy not in any of it but in God Himself.

Teach the difference between joy and happiness as commonly understood. Happiness depends on what happens; it rises and falls with circumstances. The joy Habakkuk describes rests on God, who does not change, and so it can survive the loss of everything else. This is the secret Paul learned: contentment in any circumstance through Christ (Philippians 4:11-13).

Expose the false foundation. Most of us, if honest, root our joy in God's gifts rather than in God Himself. As long as the fig tree blossoms, we feel fine. Habakkuk's confession reveals whether our joy can stand when the gifts are stripped away. If it cannot, our joy was never resting on God.

Confront prosperity teaching directly but pastorally. The notion that real faith always brings health and wealth is exposed as false here. Habakkuk's faith brings not full barns but a song in empty ones. The reward of faith is God Himself, which is a greater reward than any gift.

Make it formational. The goal is not to despise God's gifts but to hold them with open hands and to root joy in the Giver. Invite students to begin practicing this now, thanking God for Himself, not only for His blessings, so that the foundation is laid before the testing comes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Joy rooted in God Himself versus happiness dependent on circumstances.
- Contentment in any circumstance through Christ (Philippians 4:11-13).
- The test that reveals where our joy actually rests.
- A direct, pastoral correction of prosperity teaching: faith's reward is God Himself.
- Holding God's gifts with open hands while resting joy in the Giver.

Discussion Prompts

- Be honest: does your joy rest on God Himself or on His gifts?
- What is the difference between joy and circumstance-dependent happiness?
- How can you begin rooting your joy in the Giver and not only the gifts?

Question 6

Student Question:

Habakkuk had to imagine losing everything and still choose to rejoice in God. What 'fig tree' in your life, if it failed to blossom, would most shake your joy, and what would it look like to begin grounding your joy in the God of your salvation before that test comes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question makes the 'fig tree' personal. Habakkuk had to imagine losing everything; the question asks students to name the specific blessing whose loss would most shake their joy, their health, a relationship, financial security, a career, a child.

Help students do this honestly and without shame. The point is not to provoke anxiety but to expose where their security secretly rests, so it can be re-anchored. We cannot ground our joy in God until we see how much of it is currently grounded elsewhere.

Teach that this re-grounding is best done before the crisis, not during it. Habakkuk learned the song through his wrestling so he could sing it in the dark. The time to build a joy that rests on God is now, in the daily practice of treasuring God above His gifts.

Move toward a concrete practice. Invite each person to name their most precious 'fig tree' and to deliberately entrust it to God, thanking Him that even if it failed, He would remain. This is not morbid; it is the loosening of grip that makes deep joy possible.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying the gift whose loss would most shake our joy.
- Honest exposure of where our security secretly rests.
- Re-grounding joy in God before the crisis, not during it.
- Entrusting our most precious gifts to God.

Discussion Prompts

- What 'fig tree' in your life, if it failed, would most shake your joy?
- Why is it better to ground your joy in God before the testing comes?
- What would it look like to entrust that precious thing to God now?

Question 7

Student Question:

Habakkuk calls God "the God of my salvation" and says "the Lord God is my strength" (Habakkuk 3:18-19). How does knowing God as our salvation and strength make joy possible even in loss, and how is this fulfilled for us in Jesus, in whom God has become our salvation in the fullest sense?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 18-19 name the ground of Habakkuk's joy: 'the God of my salvation,' 'the Lord God is my strength.' His joy is possible in loss because his God is his salvation and his strength, realities no circumstance can remove.

Help students see that joy in loss is not stoic willpower; it flows from who God is to us. Because God is our salvation, our deepest need is already met regardless of what else we lose. Because He is our strength, we are not left to our own resources. Joy rests on these unshakable facts about God.

Show the fulfillment in Christ. Habakkuk called God 'the God of my salvation'; in Jesus, God has become our salvation in the fullest sense, His very name (Jesus) means 'the Lord saves.' The salvation Habakkuk trusted by promise we now know in the person of Christ, who secures for us a salvation that cannot be lost in any earthly ruin (1 Peter 1:3-9).

Apply it to the believer's confidence. The Christian who has Christ has the one possession that no loss can touch. Invite students to rehearse this truth: whatever else may fail, the God of my salvation remains, and in Him my deepest joy is secure.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Joy in loss flowing from who God is: our salvation and our strength.
- Our deepest need met in God regardless of other losses.
- Fulfillment in Christ, 'the Lord saves,' the God of our salvation in person.
- A salvation that no earthly ruin can touch (1 Peter 1:3-9).

Discussion Prompts

- How does knowing God as your salvation make joy possible even in loss?
- What does it mean that in Jesus, God has become your salvation in person?

- How does having Christ give you a joy no loss can touch?

Question 8

Student Question:

Habakkuk ends sure-footed, with feet “like hinds’ feet” to walk upon his high places (Habakkuk 3:19). Where is God calling you to walk a difficult, high, or dangerous path right now, and how can you trust Him to make your feet steady rather than demanding an easier road?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The book ends on a note of sure-footed confidence: ‘he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places’ (verse 19). The deer’s feet are made for steep, dangerous heights; God promises to make Habakkuk steady on the hard path ahead.

This self-examining question asks students to name their own ‘high places,’ the difficult, exposed, or dangerous paths they must walk: a demanding caregiving role, a hard marriage, a frightening health journey, a costly obedience. God does not always remove the high place; He makes our feet steady on it.

Correct a common expectation. We often pray for an easier road; Habakkuk shows us a God who instead gives surer feet for the hard road. Maturity is learning to ask for steadiness to walk the path rather than always asking for the path to be removed.

Apply it with hope. The same God who brought Habakkuk from complaint to confidence will steady our steps. Invite each person to name one ‘high place’ they must walk and to ask God for hinds’ feet, trusting Him to keep them sure-footed rather than demanding an easier way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God giving surer feet for the hard path rather than always removing it.
- Naming our ‘high places’: the difficult paths we must walk.
- Maturity as asking for steadiness, not only for ease.
- Confidence that God will keep us sure-footed.

Discussion Prompts

- What ‘high place’ is God calling you to walk right now?
- Why might God give you surer feet rather than an easier road?
- How can you trust God to steady your steps on the hard path?

Question 9

Student Question:

The whole book moves from honest complaint to confident worship, yet Habakkuk's circumstances never improved. How does this show that the goal of faith is not always changed circumstances but a transformed heart, and how does this guard us against the false teaching that genuine faith always produces health, wealth, and ease?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, gathering the whole movement of the book: from complaint to worship, with circumstances unchanged. The doctrine at stake is the true goal of faith and a direct rejection of prosperity theology.

State the pattern plainly. Habakkuk's situation did not improve; Babylon was still coming. What changed was Habakkuk. The book teaches that the goal of faith is not always altered circumstances but a transformed heart that can trust and rejoice in God regardless. This is one of the most important lessons the prophets teach.

Confront the false teaching directly and pastorally. The prosperity gospel claims that enough faith guarantees health, wealth, and ease, and that suffering signals deficient faith. Habakkuk demolishes this: here is a faithful prophet whose faith produces not full barns but a song in empty ones. Jesus Himself promised His followers tribulation in this world (John 16:33), and the apostles suffered greatly. Faith is not a technique for escaping hardship; it is trust in God through it.

Show the New Testament harmony. Paul rejoiced in tribulations because they produce endurance, character, and hope (Romans 5:3-5); Peter spoke of rejoicing through trials that refine faith like gold (1 Peter 1:6-7); James said to count trials joy (James 1:2-4). The consistent witness is that God uses hardship to form Christ in us, and that mature joy rests on God, not on ease.

Bring it to the heart. The most precious gift this passage offers is not a changed situation but a changed person who has learned to find God Himself sufficient. That is a treasure no prosperity can buy and no adversity can steal.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goal of faith as a transformed heart, not always changed circumstances.
- A direct rejection of prosperity theology (John 16:33; the suffering of the apostles).
- Suffering as God's tool to form Christ in us (Romans 5:3-5; 1 Peter 1:6-7; James 1:2-4).
- Mature joy resting on God, not on ease.
- Habakkuk's faith producing a song in empty barns, not full ones.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is a transformed heart often a greater gift than changed circumstances?
- How does Habakkuk expose the error of prosperity teaching?

- How have you seen God use hardship to grow you?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over Habakkuk's journey from "how long?" to "yet I will rejoice." Name one specific way the Lord is calling you, through this passage, to root your joy more deeply in Him, and to become more like Christ, who "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross."

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question invites students to look back over Habakkuk's whole journey, from 'how long?' to 'yet I will rejoice,' and respond personally. The aim is that they would let God do the same deep work in them: rooting their joy in Him.

Help them locate themselves on the journey. Some are still in the 'how long?' stage and need permission to wrestle honestly. Some are learning to wait and trust. Some are ready to make Habakkuk's confession their own. Honor where each person is.

Point them to Christ as the perfection of this joy. Hebrews 12:2 says Jesus 'for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.' He is the ultimate 'yet I will rejoice,' finding His joy in the Father and in our salvation even through the agony of the cross. To become like Christ is to learn His kind of joy, a joy rooted in God and strong enough to endure suffering.

Invite a concrete response: one 'fig tree' to entrust to God, one 'high place' to walk by faith, one practice of rejoicing in God Himself to begin. Encourage each person to name it, write it down, and perhaps to memorize Habakkuk 3:17-18 so they will have the song ready in their own day of trouble.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Letting God root our joy in Himself as Habakkuk's journey models.
- Christ enduring the cross for the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2).
- Becoming like Christ: joy rooted in God, strong enough to endure suffering.
- Memorizing and rehearsing the song before the day of trouble.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you on Habakkuk's journey from 'how long?' to 'yet I will rejoice'?
- How does Christ's joy through the cross shape your own?
- What one step will you take to root your joy more deeply in God this week?