

The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah

Lesson 5: Yet I Will Rejoice in the Lord -- Habakkuk 3:1–19

The man who began this little book with a complaint ends it with a song. That is the journey of Habakkuk: from 'how long, O Lord?' to 'yet I will rejoice in the Lord.' Nothing in his outward circumstances had changed. Babylon was still coming. The hard answer God gave him still stood. And yet something in Habakkuk had been transformed. He had taken his questions to God, waited at his watchtower, heard God's word that the just shall live by faith, and now, on the far side of his wrestling, he breaks into prayer and praise. Chapter 3 is what faith sounds like when it has been through the fire and come out singing.

The chapter is a prayer set to music, marked 'upon Shigionoth' and ending with a note for the chief singer. Habakkuk remembers the mighty acts of God, how He came in splendor, how the mountains trembled and the deep lifted its voice, how God marched through the earth to save His people. The prophet rehearses God's power not as abstract theology but as fuel for trust. And then he tells us, with disarming honesty, what it did to him: 'When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered... I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble.' Real faith is not the absence of fear. It is trembling that learns to rest.

Then comes one of the most breathtaking confessions in all of Scripture. Habakkuk imagines the worst: the fig tree not blossoming, no fruit on the vines, the olive crop failing, the fields yielding no food, the flock cut off and no herd in the stalls. In an agricultural world, that is total ruin, the loss of everything. And in the face of that imagined devastation, he says, 'Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.' Not rejoice in the harvest, the harvest is gone. Not rejoice in security, there is none. Rejoice in the Lord Himself.

This is the deep, formational heart of the whole study, and it presses warmly into your life. Habakkuk has discovered the secret that every mature believer must learn: that our joy can rest on God Himself and not on His gifts. When every visible blessing fails, when the accounts of our lives show nothing but loss, there is still a foundation that cannot be shaken, the God of our salvation. 'The Lord God is my strength,' Habakkuk says, 'and he will make my feet like hinds' feet,' sure-footed on the high and dangerous places. May God teach us to sing that song before we need it, so that we will know it by heart when we do.

Group Discussion: Read together Habakkuk's closing confession, where he resolves to rejoice in the Lord even if the fig tree does not blossom and the fields yield no food. What is the difference between rejoicing in God's gifts and rejoicing in God Himself, and why does that difference matter so much when life falls apart?

Personal Reflection: Habakkuk learned to find his joy in God rather than in his circumstances. Where does your own joy and security most rest right now, in God Himself, or in the gifts He gives, and what would have to change for you to be able to say 'yet I will rejoice in the Lord' if those gifts were taken away?

Read Habakkuk 3:1-19

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?

5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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."

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Philippians 4:11–13, contentment and joy in every circumstance through Christ who strengthens us; Psalm 46:1–11, God our refuge and strength though the earth be removed; Romans 5:1–5, rejoicing even in tribulation that produces character and hope; 1 Peter 1:6–9, rejoicing with joy unspeakable through trials; Hebrews 12:1–2, Christ enduring the cross for the joy set before Him.

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