

# Rejoice Anyway

Printed Text · Habakkuk 2:1-5; 3:17-19

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DISCOVER God's message of patience and assurance that God will act with justice; EXPERIENCE the feeling of joy that comes from patiently waiting on God's promises; and PRACTICE responding to difficulties by trusting in God's presence and by praising God for strength to endure.

## In Focus

He could hear the clock ticking on the wall. Warren waited in silence for the phone to ring. His foot kept tapping and he knew it was his nerves. When he stopped tapping his foot, he began to tap the pen on the table. How come they haven't called already? he thought to himself. For Warren, any longer was too much longer. He had just been in an interview after months of getting no responses from any companies he applied to. He had stepped out in faith believing God had told him to leave his job. But then again, it wasn't too hard to quit after Warren found out that his company had been engaging in dubious billing practices for years and had no intention of rectifying it after confronting them. However, the bills were piling up, and he began waking up at night, wondering how he was going to care for his wife and maintain his investment portfolio to support the more than dozen ministries his family supported. Was God hearing his prayers? There was nothing left for Warren to do. He felt like he could not go on any longer without an answer from God. Warren thought for a moment about their situation. He knew that God was in control of it all. He also knew that God deserved to be praised whether he got a job or not. So Warren began to shout "Hallelujah!" and "Thank You, Jesus" as an act of faith in God's care. While he was shouting and praising God, the phone rang. While waiting for God, hold on to every promise from His Word. Praise God for what He has done. Praise God for what He is doing. Praise God for what He will do.

## Keep In Mind

"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk 3:17-18, KJV).

## Words You Should Know

- A. **Vision** (Habakkuk 2:3) khazon (Heb.) – Oracle, prophecy, divine communication.
- B. **Faith** (v. 4) 'emunah (Heb.) – Firmness, fidelity, steadfastness, steadiness.

## Say It Correctly

**Babylonian.** bab-y-LO-ni-an

**Chaldean.** kal-DE-an

**Habakkuk.** ha-BA-kuk

## KJV

**Habakkuk 2:1** I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd.

2 And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

5 Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people:

**3:17** Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

18 Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19 The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

## NLT

**Habakkuk 2:1** I will climb up to my watchtower and stand at my guardpost. There I will wait to see what the Lord says and how he will answer my complaint.

2 Then the Lord said to me, "Write my answer plainly on tablets, so that a runner can carry the correct message to others.

3 This vision is for a future time. It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled. If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed.

4 "Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked. But the righteous will live by their faithfulness to God.

5 Wealth is treacherous, and the arrogant are never at rest. They open their mouths as wide as the grave, and like death, they are never satisfied. In their greed they have gathered up many nations and swallowed many peoples.

**3:17** Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty,

18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!

19 The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Habakkuk.** A prophet of the late seventh century. His name in Hebrew means "embrace" or "ardent embrace." As the chosen human instrument for God, he spoke the Word of God to the people. Not much is known about Habakkuk the person other than he may have been a Levite who was familiar with the temple singers. This is due to the musical notation that is found at the conclusion of the book that bears his name.

**Prophet.** One called to receive and declare a word from God after being prompted by the Holy Spirit. Prophets were usually called to speak a word concerning the present and the future. Their words could be addressed to nations as well as individuals. God used prophets to speak of injustice and wickedness in the nation of Israel. This was accomplished not only through verbal means; sometimes prophets were called to demonstrate their message through physical acts. Habakkuk was a prophet. Other known prophets are Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha.

## Background

As with many righteous religious leaders, Habakkuk faced a lot of wickedness and injustice during his time. This was a time when, after a period of reform under King Josiah, many in Israel had fallen

back into godlessness and idolatry. Instead of speaking out against national sin and addressing the perpetrators of wickedness, Habakkuk addressed himself to God. He could not stand to see the wicked get away with their crimes and sinful actions. He complained to God and asked, "How long, O LORD...?" (from 1:2). Habakkuk's personal plea was a radical departure from the usual activity of the prophets who pronounced judgement and encouraged the people to repent of their ways. This time he questioned the justice of God.

God answered by explaining His plans to judge the wicked and to assure Habakkuk to not worry. God reminded Habakkuk He is indeed righteous and will judge the wicked. The form in which this judgment would come left Habakkuk amazed and astounded: It would be through the Chaldeans. The Lord would assign a wicked nation to discipline His people. This was something that Habakkuk could not comprehend. Why would the Lord allow a nation who was more wicked than Judah to conquer them? Why would He send a pagan nation to conquer His chosen people? The Lord addressed this question and gave Habakkuk reason to rejoice and trust in Him.

## At-A-Glance

1. Habakkuk Trusts God for an Answer (Habakkuk 2:1–3)
  2. Habakkuk Must Continue to Trust (vv. 4–5)
3. Habakkuk Trusts God Enough to Rejoice (vv. 3:17–19)

## In Depth

### 1. Habakkuk Trusts God for an Answer (Habakkuk 2:1–3)

Habakkuk has asked questions of God and now stands like a watchman waiting for an answer. This attitude and posture shows that Habakkuk had faith and trust in God. His questions were not questions based on doubt, but a rock-solid faith in God. He embraced the hard questions and is willing to receive the answer that God would give.

This is the second time Habakkuk receives a response from God: "Then the LORD said to me" (v. 2, NLT). God instructs Habakkuk to write down the vision as he receives it. The written vision gives Habakkuk credibility before speaking it to the people. The written vision also serves as a guarantee God will act and does act. The Lord also assures Habakkuk of the vision's timing. The vision would come to pass in a future time. God says that the vision will be delayed, but it will come to pass. It will not be delayed indefinitely. It will be delayed but not denied! Habakkuk is given assurance that the vision will come to pass in God's timing. Then the Lord encourages him to wait for the vision to be fulfilled. The assurance that what God has spoken will come to fruition will enable Habakkuk to wait and endure the injustice of the present.

### 2. Habakkuk Must Continue to Trust (vv. 4–5)

In the vision, God assures Habakkuk to remain committed to God in the midst of the injustice and violence taking place around him. "Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked. But the righteous will live by their faithfulness to God" (v. 4, NLT). God gives Habakkuk the right way to respond to the wickedness around him: trust. Trust will separate the righteous from the wicked. Trust in the Lord distinguishes God's people from those who trust in themselves. God lets Habakkuk know that he is supposed to live by faith. Faith should permeate all aspects of his life. His whole way of being should be characterized by trusting in God, not himself. The Lord then describes the character of the wicked. They drink excessively and are full of pride. They have an insatiable greed and attempt to bring everything under their ownership. This is also a picture of the Babylonian ruler who will come to conquer Judah. It is a picture of

someone who is not in a relationship with God but is against God and His people. This is the type of person who symbolizes the opposite of God's mandate to live by faith. It is the perfect example of someone who trusts in nothing but himself. These people are self-centered and only seek their own gratification. This is not the way the righteous live. The righteous are called to live by faith in a God who takes care of them and will remedy every injustice.

### 3. Habakkuk Trusts God Enough to Rejoice (vv. 3:17–19)

Habakkuk describes utter disaster for an agricultural way of life (v. 17). Nothing that is planted grows and the animals fail to reproduce. It is a sad picture that spoke to the mostly agricultural society in those times. The first hearers would have seen this as the worst thing that could happen to someone. It is a scene where there is no sign of life or growth. There is no provision that the land can give. It is barren. This is a picture of poverty and devastation.

After painting this scene, the next words are surprising. "Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (v. 18, KJV). Habakkuk says that in the midst of utter devastation and loss, he will rejoice. The key thing to realize is what he is rejoicing in. Habakkuk does not say he will rejoice in this situation, but that He will rejoice in the Lord. His joy will come from the God of his salvation. It is not the circumstances that give him a reason to rejoice; Habakkuk rejoices because the Lord is his strength and will support him and make him firm and stable as a deer on a high mountain.

#### Search the Scriptures

1. What is the significance of Habakkuk standing on a tower to hear God answer (Habakkuk 2:1)?
2. What does it mean for the just to live by faith (v. 4)?

#### Discuss the Meaning

1. Society's moral barometer is shifting to acceptance of immoral behavior as the norm; injustices for some and justice for others. Has the body of Christ lost its hope?

#### Liberating Lesson

There are two types of people in this world: those who trust in themselves and those who trust in God. When life comes crashing down, those who trust in themselves have no reason to rejoice. They cannot sustain joy in times of disappointment. Belief, hope, and trust in God are prerequisites for enduring the daily challenges of life. When disappointment and suffering appear, our trust in God is the primary factor that can sustain our joy. In this world full of crime, economic crisis, and terrorism, we can rejoice in knowing God, who is sovereign over all.

#### Application For Activation

The problems and trials of life can bring us down. Sometimes our patience can wear thin and our joy can decrease. Think of one thing that you have been waiting for God to act on. It could be a job opportunity or a loved one coming to know Jesus. It has to be something that hasn't happened yet. Praise and thank God as an act of faith that He will bring it to pass. Let God be your joy in the absence of the thing that you have been waiting for.

#### Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

**Habakkuk 2:1-5; 3:17-19**

**1 I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd.**

Do you ever look around and think the world is an unjust place? Do you ever wonder why God allows certain things to happen? If not, you are probably not being honest with yourself. God has placed the book of Habakkuk in the Bible for us to know that He is ready for our questions. First Habakkuk looks around and sees all sorts of wickedness among his own people. He sees them perpetrating violence and destruction on one another. He asks God to show him why He is allowing these things to go on. God's answer is even more shocking: He will punish His people, the Israelites, by allowing the Babylonians (Chaldeans, KJV) to conquer them. This amazes Habakkuk. It seems to him that the sins of Israel were light in comparison with the extreme violence and destruction of the Babylonians. We can see some parallels among some African American communities. Black-on-Black crime seems to be abundant, and yet, when the police force, etc. of the mainstream move in, we may see things are even worse for our people.

Habakkuk, whose name in Hebrew is Khabakkuk (kha-bak-KOOK) and means "to embrace," fully embraces his people and his faith in Yahweh, the God of Israel, and yet he has questions. He figuratively stands at the "towers," a watchtower or siege enclosure (matsor, MAHtsor), and waits to see what God will do in answer to his doubts. "When I am reprov'd" may not be the best translation. The Hebrew for "reprov'd" is tokhekhat (toe-kheh-KHAHT) and does mean to be corrected, but whether this refers to a rebuke of Habakkuk or by him is not clear. But it is certain that Habakkuk is patiently waiting for God's answer to his complaint.

**2 And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.**

Israel lay at the crossroads for many cultures; thus they learned to write on papyrus scrolls, inscribe on soft clay tablets, and chisel on stone tablets. The picture here is probably writing on a large, wooden tablet with large, clear letters that could be easily read, so legible that even hurried passersby could read the message and pass it on. Picture the billboard on an interstate expressway, and you will get the idea. Not only is the message clear, but the message is meant to be shared.

**3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. 4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.**

Habakkuk lives between the times of the promise and the fulfillment. Although God is using the

Babylonians to punish His own people, in the end the Babylonians will be judged for their excessive cruelty to the Israelites. Habakkuk wants God to bring judgment on the Babylonians right away, but he has to wait. In verse 3 God assures Habakkuk that the prophecy will come to pass. He says it will “tarry” (Heb. mahah, mah-HAH) or linger but it will not “tarry” (Heb. ’achar, ah-KHAR) or remain behind. This word is often used in conjunction with the word for appointed time and has the connotation of being late. Habakkuk was instructed to wait because the vision would come to pass at the appointed time and not be late. This is not unlike our own lives, as we learn to wait patiently for the Lord to act. But what should Habakkuk do in the meantime? He is to continue living a life of faith.

The Hebrew word used for faith in verse 4 is ’emunah (eh-moo-NAH). The synonym for this is literally firmness and can be translated as faith, faithfulness, or moral fidelity. This reminds us that very few words can be translated exactly into another language. The Hebrew word for faith here encompasses both faith and faithfulness.

“The just shall live by faith” was the standard upon which the Protestant Reformation was started—the phrase that helped Martin Luther see that buying indulgences, performing good deeds, or living a moral life could not give us salvation. Salvation only comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This is how the New Testament writers interpreted this verse. Paul quotes this phrase in Romans 1:17 and in Galatians 3:11. Hebrews 10:37–38 quotes verses 3–4 in this way: “For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.” The New Testament writers clearly saw this as referring to the second coming of our Savior. Habakkuk 2:3 refers to “it,” but the writer of Hebrews makes clear that “it” is not a thing but a “He”—Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah. Biblical prophecy is often that way; there is a partial fulfillment soon after the prophecy—the Babylonians were already poised to conquer Israel, but they would be totally out of the picture in seventy years, when the people of Judah had the opportunity of returning to their land. Then there is a grander fulfillment of biblical prophecy, often referring to the first or second coming of Jesus. The life of the believer or just (whether in the Old Testament or the New) is to be a life of faith, putting our full trust in our Lord.

The fourth verse begins with the phrase “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him.” This refers to the Babylonian king or the Babylonian people who would soon conquer Judah. In so many words, this description calls them arrogant, which contrasts with Habakkuk and God’s chosen people who are to humbly trust and wait for God.

**5 Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people.**

The Babylonians and other imperial powers were well-known for their over-indulgence in alcoholic beverages and drunkenness. For example, Babylonia was overthrown while their leaders were in the midst of a drunken feast (Daniel 5). The Bible warns in several places of the dangers of drinking, especially drinking to excess (Proverbs 23:31–32). Secondly, the Babylonians are called “proud” (Heb. yahir, yah-HERE), which also means arrogant or haughty, just as the accusation in verse 4. And thirdly, the Babylonians are portrayed as rapacious, seeking to devour all the surrounding nations, just as death and hell seek to swallow everyone.

**3:17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: 18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.**

Habakkuk is not an unrealistic optimist. He knows that God is going to bring awful judgment upon

His people through the Babylonians. This ruthless army will not only take all the food that God's people are growing, but they will destroy the trees and vines so that for years to come, no olives, grapes, or figs will grow. In addition, they will take all the herds—the sheep, the goats, and other animals. But in the midst of all this, Habakkuk gives a ringing testimony that he will trust in the Lord, no matter what the situation. So in spite of everything, Habakkuk will rejoice.

The third and last chapter of Habakkuk is a prayer in the form of a psalm. After all the questions, Habakkuk sings of the power and justice of God that bring him to the triumph of faith. We tend to think that the beauty of psalms lies in their ability to express the feelings that are in our own hearts, and they certainly do that. But our singing can be a spiritual discipline in which the very character and feelings of God's people become impressed within us. As we take within ourselves the words of Habakkuk, the inspired words of God are being planted in our hearts. Imagine composing a tune to go with verses 17 and 18—what increasing faith will grow in our hearts, even in the midst of difficult circumstances!

**19 The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.**

The reason for Habakkuk's confidence in the midst of the expectations of great horrors for the Israelites is his trust in the Lord God. The Hebrew for "LORD" is Yahweh, which is the personal name by which God identifies Himself to His chosen people. Vowels were not written in ancient Hebrew and so the translators of the KJV Bible surmised that the pronunciation for "LORD" was Jehovah. Today we say YAHway, but it is impossible to know how it was pronounced in ancient Israel. This epithet came to be pronounced 'Adonai (ah-doe-NIGH), meaning "my Lord" and is a common title for God.

The hind can be a variety of animals that are swift and sure-footed, such as deer or gazelles. These animals can confidently climb up the mountains with their nimble feet and strong legs. Habakkuk is imagining himself climbing upon spiritual mountaintops because God is giving him the strength and confidence so that even when troubles come he can trust in the Lord.

Evidently this chapter was written for the Levitical choir, accompanied by stringed instruments.

Habakkuk himself may have been a Levite, one of the official temple workers, but not descended directly from the Aaronic priestly line. Two of the stringed instruments mentioned in the Old Testament are the lyre and the harp. The lyre was shaped like a rectangle or a trapezoid and had a varied number of strings. It was used to accompany singing, either sacred or secular. The harp had its origins in Egypt and was used primarily in temple music. So you can imagine whatever your favorite string instruments—guitar, violin, or harp—being used to accompany these beautiful verses.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **Monday**

Habakkuk 1:12-17

## **Tuesday**

Habakkuk 2:1-11

## **Wednesday**

Habakkuk 2:12-20

## **Thursday**

Habakkuk 3:1-7

## **Friday**

Habakkuk 3:8-10

## **Saturday**

Habakkuk 3:11-16

## **Sunday**

Habakkuk 3:17-19