

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C, Chicago, IL

“I WILL REJOICE” ~ Habakkuk 3:1-19

Habakkuk is an intense book, filled with anguished lament and hard questions.

- The very first words, verse 1 of chapter 1, set a somber tone. It does not sound so serious in many translations: {NIV} “**The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received**”; {TNIV} “**The prophecy that the Habakkuk the prophet received**”; {NLT} “**This is the message that the prophet Habakkuk received in a vision**”; and so forth.

📖 However, the basic definition of the Hebrew word *maśśā'* is not “**oracle,**” “**prophecy,**” or “**message.**” It is “**burden.**” It can be physical cargo that we carry in our arms or on our backs, or a spiritual load which we bear in our hearts and minds.

This is one of those rare instances in which the KJV is the better translation. It reads, “**The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.**” Or, as *The Message* puts it: “**The problem as God gave Habakkuk to see it.**”

Granted, what follows is a prophecy. Yet it is also a burden, for stewarding a message of divine judgment is no easy task. It is a weighty obligation, a heavy responsibility, a difficult commission.

{Hab 1:2, 3} Habakkuk is laden with grief over his people’s moral insanity. He pleads, “**How long, LORD?**” “**Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?**”

Next, he is horrified at YHWH’s plan to unleash the armies of Babylon to punish Judah. The prophet cries out, in effect, ‘How can you do this, LORD?’

Two-thirds of this book consists of the prophet’s complaints and God’s vow to judge the sinners of Judah and Babylon. Would anyone here call Habakkuk “light reading”?

Nevertheless, several great lights shine brilliantly through the gloom of grief and horror.

- ★ The first great light is the presence of the Living God. YHWH listens patiently, compassionately. He does not give up on Habakkuk even when he borders on shrillness. The LORD tenaciously engages in genuine dialogue with his exasperated prophet.

- ★ The second great light is the promise of justice. Holy God pledges to take righteous, proportional action against the wicked. His purpose is not merely to punish, but to purify sinners and protect others from immorality, injustice, and idolatry.

- ★ {Hab 2:4; Ro 6:23; Ro 4:22-23; Eph 2:8} The third great light is life abundant and eternal. Merciful God says, “**the righteous will live by... faith.**” If indeed “**the wages of sin is death,**” then you and I deserve to die. Yet the LORD regards us as “**righteous**” because we have faith – even though our faith is itself a gift from him!

- ★ {Hab 1:3-4; 2:14} The fourth great light is God’s glory. YHWH’s perceived slowness to correct Judah’s “**violence, strife...conflict**” and corruption and his plans to make use of Babylon seem to cast doubt on his goodness and greatness. But in fact, the means and the timing of his intervention will reveal his magnificence.

**For the earth will be filled with the
knowledge of the glory of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.**

God dispels the gloom by his presence, his promise of justice, his gift of life abundant and eternal, and his glory. The message of Habakkuk is somber, yet it does not leave us in despair. It gives hope to all who will listen.

That is not all! This dialogue of agonized complaints and alarming judgments ends on a resounding note of joy!

■ In the second to the last verse (3:18), the prophet declares:

**I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.**

- This is the same man who pleaded,

**How long, LORD, must I call for help,
but you do not listen? (1:2)**

- He is the same one who protested,

**Why are you silent while the wicked
swallow up those more righteous...? (1:13)**

And now he proclaims,

**I will rejoice...
I will be joyful... (!)**

☑ {Lesley Gore} Has he gone crazy? Has his burden broken him? Has he retreated into a fairytale world of “**sunshine, lollipops and rainbows**”?

■ By no means! Verse 18 follows verse 17, in which Habakkuk says,

**Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,**

This is a foreseeable outcome of any Babylonian invasion. Their armies won't just lay siege to the cities; they will wreck the orchards, ruin the vineyards, burn the fields, and slaughter the livestock.

Can we grasp the catastrophic impact? A paraphrase might help us get a better feel for it:

Though the markets crash
and entire industries collapse,
though there are massive lay-offs
and no one is hiring,
though there are no groceries in the stores
and no money to buy them if there were,

– even though all this happens – “**yet**” (v 18)

**I will rejoice...
I will be joyful...**

? How can he say this? Where does this come from?

★ His joy comes from hope. “**I will rejoice**” and “**I will be joyful**” are statements of expectation for the

future. Habakkuk is confident that his grief will be mingled by rejoicing and his affliction will be leavened by joyfulness.

★ And his joy comes from resolve. **“I will rejoice”** and **“I will be joyful”** suggest deliberate intent. Habakkuk is committed to finding joy in loss and suffering.

Clearly, the prophet’s hope and resolve are not contingent on the political, economic, military, or spiritual vitality of Judah. If they did, he would be consumed by despair and done in by weakness.

Neither are they based on his personal situation, his disposition, or his wherewithal. There is no indication that this guy is inherently cheerful or uncommonly well-resourced.

Habakkuk’s hope and resolve depend on the Living God. He says,

**I will rejoice *in the LORD*,
I will be joyful *in God my Savior*.**

Rejoicing **“in the LORD”** and being **“joyful in God [our] Savior”** grows out of sacred memory and deep engagement.

★ First, Sacred Memory. This is knowing what God did in the past and finding our place in that history.

■ 3:3-16a recount how the Almighty intervened to save Israel from Egypt. Listen to this description.

■ Verse 7:

**I saw the tents of Cushan in distress,
the dwellings of Midian in anguish.**

■ Verse 16:

**I heard and my heart pounded,
my lips quivered at the sound.**

The Exodus occurred 650 years earlier, yet Habakkuk speaks as though he was present! His awareness of God’s redemptive work is so deep and fresh that he has found his place in it.

We can too – only our defining event is not rescue from slavery in Egypt, it is liberation from sin and death, which has been accomplished through the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

{Ro 6:3-4} **“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into death? We were... buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”** That is sacred memory in action.

★ Second, Deep Engagement. This is pursuing the LORD and being pursued by him. It is getting to know *about* him and getting to know him. It is planned and spontaneous interaction by way of prayer, worship, study, and service.

Even when the prophet complains, he is not turning away from God; he is turning toward him. He is not pulling back; he is pushing in. This is faith seeking understanding. It is anguish seeking solace.

- Hence, in the final verse, 3:19, he declares:

**The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.**

YHWH gives him firm footing on treacherous paths and empowers him to faithfully follow in hard circumstances.

Habakkuk's joy comes from hope and resolve in the LORD, activated by sacred memory and deep engagement. This is how we tap into God's joy, even as our world is spiraling down into moral insanity. We can have his joy even if he unleashes "Babylon" on us.

Yet we have a great advantage over Habakkuk in this. In Abraham's Covenant there was the promise of Immanuel, God with us; but in the New Covenant we have his actual presence.

{Jn 15:4; 9-11} God the Son invites us to **"remain in me, as I also remain in you."** This enables us to find a joy that was not accessible to Habakkuk. Jesus says **"If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love... I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."**

To **"remain in [his] love"** through obedience exceeds natural human capability. It is beyond us.

{Gal 4:6; Eph 2:22} But it is not beyond the Holy Spirit at home within us! Since **"we are his [children], God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts."** In Christ we **"are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."**

{Gal 5:22; Neh 8:10} And the Holy Spirit endows us with a supernatural capacity to find joy in hardship and disaster, because **"The fruit of the Spirit is... joy."** For **"The joy of the LORD is [our] strength."** Amen?!

Habakkuk grieved as his people sank into the quicksand of immorality, injustice, and idolatry. He agonized over Judah's impending destruction.

Even so, the man of God found joy!

**"I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Savior."**

What about us? Our culture is much the same as the prophet's. Sovereign God would be completely justified to judge the U.S. in similar fashion.

There is joy in the LORD no matter what happens. By the grace of God, let us find it!

Habakkuk is the word of the Lord.