THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

The King Who Hears Our Questions

Habakkuk, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Hears Our Questions: The Book of Habakkuk, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Have you ever looked at the world and wondered, God, why aren't You doing anything? Why do cheaters win? Why do good people suffer? Why does it feel like my prayers bounce off the ceiling?

If you've ever asked questions like that, you're in good company. There's a whole book of the Bible written by a prophet who asked them out loud. His name was Habakkuk. He looked at the violence and injustice around him and basically said, God, how long are You going to let this go on? And then, when God answered, Habakkuk liked the answer even less and asked another question.

Habakkuk is different from every other prophet. He never preaches to the people. The whole book is a conversation between a hurting man and God. And by the end, his circumstances haven't changed at all, but he has. He goes from complaining to singing. If you've ever wondered whether it's okay to bring your doubts and hard questions to God, this book says yes. Honest questions brought to God aren't the enemy of faith. They can be the road to a deeper one.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Habakkuk in three chapters, one for each chapter of the Bible book: why aren't You doing anything? (Habakkuk 1), climbing the watchtower (Habakkuk 2), and even if the fig tree doesn't bloom (Habakkuk 3).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who Habakkuk was, when he lived, and what was about to happen to his nation. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as why God allows suffering, I'll try to be fair and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Habakkuk in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the thirty-fifth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Habakkuk is unique among the prophets: he never preaches to Israel. His book is an honest dialogue with God, written around 605 BC, just before Babylon invaded Judah. This book presents Habakkuk as a model for bringing hard questions and doubts directly to God, showing that honest questions are not the enemy of faith.

It covers Habakkuk's two complaints and God's answers, the watchtower and the written vision, Habakkuk 2:4 and its central role in the New Testament (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38), the five woes against Babylon, and the closing prayer-song of chapter 3 with its musical notes. Where Christians hold different views on why God allows suffering, the book presents the main ideas fairly without claiming to answer every question.

Real Talk boxes address doubt, unanswered prayer, injustice, waiting, greed and pride, worship in hard times, and choosing joy when circumstances don't change. One box gently encourages teens

who are struggling with discouragement or despair to talk with a trusted adult and lists 988 and 911.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how the New Testament builds on Habakkuk 2:4 and how Jesus stepped directly into injustice at the cross so that God's glory will one day fill the earth. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will learn to bring every question to God, and to trust Him even when the fig tree doesn't bloom.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

A Prophet Who Talks to God

Most prophets spoke for God to the people. Habakkuk spoke to God for the people. His book contains no sermons to Judah, no calls to repent, and no messages for kings. Instead, it records his prayers, his complaints, God's answers, and his final song. It's as if we're reading a page from a prophet's private journal. That makes Habakkuk especially helpful for anyone who wrestles with God.

What's in a Name?

We know almost nothing about Habakkuk's life. The book simply calls him Habakkuk the prophet. His name probably comes from a Hebrew word meaning to embrace or to cling. Some connect it with an Akkadian word for a garden plant. The reformer Martin Luther liked to point out that Habakkuk's name fits his book. He embraces his people in prayer, and he wrestles with God, holding on until he receives an answer. Chapter 3 includes musical notes, so some scholars think he may have served as a musician connected with the temple.

When Did He Live?

Habakkuk describes God raising up the Chaldeans, another name for the Babylonians. Most scholars date the book around 609-605 BC, during the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah. In 612 BC, Babylon had helped destroy Nineveh. In 605 BC, Babylon defeated Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish and became the new superpower. That

same year, Babylon's crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar, took the first captives from Jerusalem, including a teenager named Daniel. Within twenty years, Babylon would destroy Jerusalem completely.

A Nation Falling Apart

Inside Judah, things were bad. King Josiah, a good king who had led a great revival, had been killed in battle in 609 BC. His son Jehoiakim was greedy and cruel. He forced workers to build him a luxurious palace without paying them, and he persecuted prophets like Jeremiah. Violence, corruption, and injustice were everywhere. That's what Habakkuk saw when he looked around, and that's why he cried out to God.

A Famous Scroll

One of the most famous Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947, is a commentary on Habakkuk. Written by a Jewish community more than a century before Jesus, it explains the first two chapters of Habakkuk line by line, applying them to the writers' own time. It shows how much ancient readers treasured this little book.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Habakkuk 1): Why aren't You doing anything?

Chapter 2 (Habakkuk 2): Climbing the watchtower.

Chapter 3 (Habakkuk 3): Even if the fig tree doesn't bloom.

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CHAPTER 1

Why Aren't You Doing Anything?

Habakkuk 1

The book begins simply. "The revelation which Habakkuk the prophet saw." Then, right away, Habakkuk starts complaining. Not to people. To God.

"LORD, how long will I cry, and you will not hear? I cry out to you Violence! and will you not save?"

That's a bold way to start a prayer. Habakkuk doesn't open with polite words or fancy phrases. He basically says, God, I've been praying and praying, and You're not listening. I keep telling You about the violence, and You're not doing anything.

> **REAL TALK** **Is It Okay to Complain to God?**
>
> Some people think it's disrespectful or faithless to question God. But the Bible is full of people who did exactly that. David asked, "How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?" Job demanded answers. Jeremiah accused God of deceiving him. Even Jesus cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The key difference is where you take your questions. Complaining about God to others can push you away from Him. Bringing your complaints to God keeps you talking with Him. Habakkuk shows us that honest prayer is a form of faith. You only argue with someone you believe is really there.

Habakkuk keeps going. “Why do you show me iniquity, and look at perversity? For destruction and violence are before me. There is strife, and contention rises up.”

Everywhere he looked, he saw violence, arguments, and injustice. The courts didn’t work. “Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails; for the wicked surround the righteous; therefore justice comes out perverted.”

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Judah Under Jehoiakim**
>
> Habakkuk was probably describing Judah under King Jehoiakim, who ruled from 609 to 598 BC. Jeremiah describes how Jehoiakim built himself a luxurious palace using unpaid workers, shed innocent blood, and oppressed the poor. When the prophet Uriah spoke against him, Jehoiakim had him hunted down in Egypt and executed. When Jeremiah sent him a scroll of God’s warnings, Jehoiakim cut it up piece by piece and burned it in a fire. This was the kind of leadership Habakkuk saw. The law was paralyzed because the people at the top didn’t care about it.
>
> **REAL TALK** **When the System Is Broken**
>
> It can be really discouraging when the people and systems that are supposed to protect justice don’t work. Maybe you’ve seen a teacher ignore bullying, a coach play favorites, or news stories about corruption. It’s normal to feel frustrated, angry, or hopeless. Habakkuk felt that way too. But notice what he did with those feelings. He didn’t give up or become cynical. He took them to God. When you see injustice, it’s okay to be upset. Pray about it, talk to someone you trust, and look for ways you can make a difference.

Then God answered. But it wasn’t the answer Habakkuk expected.

“Look among the nations, watch, and wonder marvelously; for I am working a work in your days which you will not believe though it is told you.”

God was saying, You think I'm not doing anything? I'm doing something so big you won't believe it.

And then came the shock. "For, behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation who march through the width of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Chaldeans**
>
> The Chaldeans were a people from southern Mesopotamia who rose to rule Babylon. Their king Nabopolassar founded what historians call the Neo-Babylonian Empire. His son Nebuchadnezzar became one of the most powerful kings in ancient history. Within a few years of Habakkuk's prophecy, the Babylonians defeated Assyria and Egypt and took control of the entire region. Babylon would later destroy Jerusalem and its temple in 586 BC and carry many of Judah's people into exile.

God described the Babylonians in terrifying detail. They were feared and dreaded. They made their own rules. Their horses were faster than leopards and fiercer than wolves at evening. Their cavalry swooped down like eagles. They gathered prisoners like sand. They laughed at kings and mocked fortresses, building dirt ramps to climb over the walls. And they worshiped their own strength.

> **REAL TALK** **When God's Answer Isn't What You Wanted**
>
> Habakkuk asked God to deal with injustice. God said yes, but the way He planned to do it was terrifying. Sometimes God's answers aren't what we expect. You might pray for a problem to go away, and instead God lets you go through it. You might pray for patience, and God gives you situations that require it. That doesn't mean God isn't listening. It means His plans are bigger than ours. It's okay to tell God you're confused or upset by His answer. Habakkuk did.

That was too much for Habakkuk. So he asked a second question.

First, he reminded himself who God is. "Aren't you from everlasting, LORD my God, my Holy One? We will not die." God was eternal, holy, and faithful. He wouldn't completely destroy His people.

Then he got to the problem. "You who have purer eyes than to see evil, and who cannot look on perversity, why do you tolerate those who deal treacherously and keep silent when the wicked swallows up the man who is more righteous than he?"

In other words, God, I know Judah is sinful. But the Babylonians are worse! How can a holy God use people who are even more evil to punish His own people?

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Why Would God Use Babylon?**
>
> Habakkuk's second question is one of the hardest in the Bible. Christians have thought carefully about it. Many point out that, throughout the Old Testament, God uses nations to accomplish His purposes without approving of their evil. He used Assyria and Babylon to discipline Israel and Judah, but He also held those nations responsible for their own cruelty and pride, as Habakkuk 2 shows. God can bring good out of evil without ever being the author of evil. That doesn't answer every question, but it shows that God remains just even when His ways are hard to understand.

Habakkuk then compared people to fish. The Babylonians caught nations with hooks and nets like a fisherman hauling in his catch. And then they worshiped their nets. They burned incense to their fishing gear because it made them rich. Their military power had become their god.

Habakkuk ended chapter 1 with one more question. "Will he therefore continually empty his net, and kill the nations without mercy?" Is this going to go on forever?

REAL TALK **Worshiping Your Net**

The Babylonians worshiped the tools that made them successful. People still do that today. We can make an idol out of the things that bring us money, success, or status, like a talent, a skill, a phone, a social media account, or even a friend group. When the thing that helps you succeed becomes the thing you trust most, it has become your net. Thank God for your gifts, but don't worship them. Remember who gave them to you.

REAL TALK **Doubts and Faith**

Some teens worry that having doubts means they're not real Christians. But doubt and faith aren't opposites. The opposite of faith is turning away from God. Doubt can actually be part of growing faith, if you bring it to God and keep searching. Habakkuk had serious doubts about what God was doing. But he never stopped talking to God. If you have questions about God, the Bible, or suffering, talk to a pastor, youth leader, or Christian adult you trust. Read books by thoughtful Christians. And keep praying. God isn't afraid of your questions.

KEY VERSE

LORD, how long will I cry, and you will not hear? I cry out to you "Violence!" and will you not save?

Habakkuk 1:2 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What did Habakkuk complain about in his first prayer?
2. Why was God's answer so shocking to Habakkuk?
3. Have you ever felt like God wasn't listening? What did you do?
4. Is there a question you've been afraid to ask God? What is it?

TRY THIS *Write your own honest prayer to God this week, like Habakkuk did. Tell Him what's bothering you, what you don't understand, and what you wish He would do.*

CHAPTER 2

Climbing the Watchtower

Habakkuk 2

After asking his second question, Habakkuk did something important. He waited.

"I will stand at my watch and set myself on the ramparts, and will look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint."

Habakkuk pictured himself as a watchman standing on a city wall, scanning the horizon. He had asked his question. Now he was going to stay put and watch for God's answer.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Watchmen on the Wall**

Ancient cities had watchmen who stood on towers or walls, looking out for approaching messengers or enemy armies. They had to stay alert, sometimes all night. When they saw something, they called out a warning or announced good news. The prophets often described themselves as watchmen. Ezekiel was called a watchman for Israel. Habakkuk's picture shows a prophet who was alert, patient, and determined to hear from God.

REAL TALK **Waiting for an Answer**

We're used to instant answers. We search for something online and get results in seconds. But God doesn't always answer prayers instantly. Sometimes He makes us wait. Habakkuk shows what to do while you wait: stay in position. Keep praying. Keep reading Scripture. Keep showing up at church. Keep

watching for what God might be saying. Don't walk away just because the answer hasn't come yet.

Then God answered. "Write the vision, and make it plain on tablets, that he who runs may read it."

God wanted His answer written down in large, clear letters, like a billboard, so that anyone running by could read it. Or so that a messenger could run and carry it to others.

Then God added a promise about timing. "For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hurries toward the end, and won't prove false. Though it takes time, wait for it, because it will surely come. It won't delay."

That sounds like a contradiction. Though it takes time... it won't delay. But God's point is that His plans are always on time, even when they feel slow to us. It won't be late by His schedule.

REAL TALK **God's Timing**

Have you ever waited for something that felt like it would never come? Maybe you've been waiting for a family situation to change, for a friend to come to faith, or for an answer about your future. God's promise to Habakkuk is for you too. God's timing isn't our timing, but He is never late. Waiting is hard, but it's not wasted. While you wait, God is working, both in your situation and in you.

Then comes the most important verse in the book. "Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright in him, but the righteous will live by his faith."

God contrasts two kinds of people. The first is puffed up with pride. That describes the Babylonians, and anyone who trusts in their own strength. The second is the righteous person, who lives by faith, trusting God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Faith and Faithfulness**

The Hebrew word translated faith in Habakkuk 2:4 is emunah. It can mean faith, trust, faithfulness, or steadiness. It's related to the word amen. In Habakkuk, it describes a person who keeps trusting God and staying loyal to Him, even when life is hard and answers are slow. The New Testament writers saw in this verse a powerful truth: we are made right with God by trusting Him, not by our own goodness. True faith also produces faithfulness, a life of steady loyalty to God.

The rest of chapter 2 is a series of five woes against Babylon. A woe was a cry of grief and warning, like saying, How terrible it will be for… God put these words in the mouths of the nations Babylon had conquered. They would one day taunt Babylon.

The first woe was against greed. "Woe to him who increases that which is not his, and who enriches himself by extortion!" Babylon had plundered nations. One day the nations would plunder Babylon.

The second woe was against selfish security. "Woe to him who gets an evil gain for his house, that he may set his nest on high." Babylon tried to make itself safe by building with stolen wealth. But even the stones in the walls would cry out against it.

The third woe was against violence. "Woe to him who builds a town with blood, and establishes a city by iniquity!" Babylon was built on violence, and all its work would go up in flames.

REAL TALK **Built on the Wrong Things**

The first three woes describe people who get ahead by taking from others: stealing, cheating, and hurting people. It's easy to think that kind of success will last. But God says it won't. You might know people who get ahead by lying, cheating, or stepping on others. It might even seem like they're winning. But a life built on taking from others is like a house built with

cracked bricks. Eventually, it falls. Build your life on honesty, kindness, and faith instead.

Then, right in the middle of the woes, comes a burst of hope. "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD's glory, as the waters cover the sea."

Think about how completely water covers the ocean floor. There isn't a spot that isn't covered. That's how fully God's glory would one day fill the earth. Babylon's glory would fade, but God's glory would cover everything.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Like the Waters Cover the Sea**

Habakkuk 2:14 echoes Isaiah 11:9, which says, "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." In Isaiah, that promise comes in a passage about the Messiah, a descendant of David who would bring peace and justice. Habakkuk adds the word glory. The promise looks forward to a day when everyone on earth will know God and see His greatness. Christians believe that day began with Jesus and will be completed when He returns.

The fourth woe was against exploitation. Babylon was like someone who gets their neighbor drunk to take advantage of them and humiliate them. Babylon had done that to whole nations. Now Babylon would drink from the cup of God's judgment.

REAL TALK **Taking Advantage of People**

The fourth woe describes someone who gets another person drunk to take advantage of them. Sadly, that still happens. If you're ever at a party where someone is pressuring others to drink or trying to take advantage of someone who has been drinking, that's wrong, and it's serious. Get help from a trusted adult right away. If someone has taken advantage of you, it's not your fault. Please talk to a trusted adult, counselor, or call 911 if you're in danger.

The fifth woe was against idols. "What value does the engraved image have?" People carved idols out of wood and stone, covered them with gold and silver, and then asked them for advice. But there was no breath in them. They couldn't speak, hear, or help.

And then, after all the woes, the chapter ends with one of the most powerful verses in the Bible. "But the LORD is in his holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before him!"

> **REAL TALK** **Holy Silence**
>
> After all the noise of greed, violence, and idol worship, God says, Be silent. Not because He doesn't want to hear from us, but because He is God, and some moments call for awe. We live in a noisy world full of notifications, music, videos, and opinions. It's hard to be still. But some of the most important moments with God happen in silence. Try putting away your phone for a few minutes, sitting quietly, and remembering that God is in His holy temple. He's in control. You don't have to fill the silence with words.

KEY VERSE

Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright in him, but the righteous will live by his faith.

Habakkuk 2:4 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What did Habakkuk do after asking his second question? Why is that important?
2. What does it mean that the righteous will live by faith?
3. Which of the five woes do you think is most common today?
4. Why do you think God ended chapter 2 by calling for silence?

TRY THIS *Spend five minutes in complete silence each day this week. No phone, no music. Begin by reading Habakkuk 2:20, and then just sit quietly with God.*

CHAPTER 3

Even If the Fig Tree Doesn't Bloom

Habakkuk 3

Chapter 3 is different from the rest of the book. It's a song. "A prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet, set to victorious music."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Musical Notes**
>
> Habakkuk 3 has the kind of musical notes found in the book of Psalms. The heading uses a Hebrew word, shigionoth, which may refer to a type of song or musical style. Scholars aren't sure exactly what it means. Some think it describes an emotional, passionate song. The word Selah appears three times in the chapter. It's also found more than seventy times in the Psalms. No one knows for sure what Selah means, but it may mark a pause, a musical interlude, or a moment to reflect. The chapter also ends with a note for the music director about stringed instruments. Habakkuk's prayer was meant to be sung in worship.

The song starts with a prayer. "LORD, I have heard of your fame. I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD. Renew your work in the middle of the years. In the middle of the years make it known. In wrath, you remember mercy."

Habakkuk had heard the stories of what God had done in the past. Now he asked God to do it again. And he asked for mercy. He knew

judgment was coming. But he asked God to remember mercy, even in His wrath.

> **REAL TALK** **In Wrath, Remember Mercy**
>
> Habakkuk knew that hard times were coming. Babylon would invade, and he couldn't stop it. But he still prayed. He didn't ask God to stop all the hard things. He asked God to show mercy in the middle of them. That's a good prayer for hard seasons. Maybe your family is going through a divorce, a move, a loss, or financial stress. You might not be able to change what's happening. But you can ask God to show His mercy in it. And He will.

Then Habakkuk describes a vision of God coming in power. It's full of images from Israel's history. God came from Teman and Mount Paran, places in the south near Sinai, where God had appeared to Moses. "His glory covered the heavens, and his praise filled the earth. His splendor is like the sunrise."

Habakkuk describes God marching like a warrior. The earth shook. The nations trembled. Ancient mountains crumbled. Rivers and seas stood still. The sun and moon stood still in the sky.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Remembering God's Rescues**
>
> Habakkuk 3 is packed with images from Israel's past. The shaking mountains recall God's appearance at Mount Sinai. The splitting of rivers and seas recalls the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan River. The sun and moon standing still recall Joshua's battle at Gibeon. By remembering these events, Habakkuk was reminding himself that God had rescued His people before, and He could do it again.

"You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed." God always came to rescue His people. That's why He fought.

REAL TALK **Remember What God Has Done**

When life is hard, it's easy to forget what God has done in the past. That's why it helps to remember. Habakkuk remembered how God rescued His people at the Red Sea and in the promised land. You can do the same. Think back on times when God answered a prayer, helped you through something hard, or showed you His love. Write them down. The psalmist wrote, "I will remember the LORD's deeds; for I will remember your wonders of old." Remembering God's faithfulness in the past builds faith for the future.

Then Habakkuk admits how he felt. "I heard, and my body trembled. My lips quivered at the voice. Rottenness enters into my bones, and I tremble in my place because I must wait quietly for the day of trouble, for the coming up of the people who invade us."

Habakkuk was terrified. His body shook. His legs felt weak. He knew Babylon was coming, and he knew it would be terrible. But he decided to wait quietly and trust God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Safety: When You Feel Hopeless**

Habakkuk was so overwhelmed that his whole body trembled. If you've ever felt that kind of fear, sadness, or hopelessness, you're not alone, and you don't have to carry it by yourself. God cares about how you feel, and He has put people in your life to help. Talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, school counselor, teacher, or pastor. If you're struggling with thoughts of hurting yourself, call or text 988 any time, day or night. If you're in immediate danger, call 911.

And then comes one of the most famous passages in the Bible.

"For even though the fig tree doesn't flourish, nor fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive fails, the fields yield no food, the flocks are cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD. I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!"

BACKGROUND CHECK **An Agricultural Disaster**

For people in Habakkuk's time, figs, grapes, olives, grain, sheep, and cattle weren't just food. They were everything. They were the economy, the grocery store, and the bank. If all of them failed at once, it meant total disaster: no food, no income, and no future. When an invading army came, it often destroyed crops and stole livestock. Habakkuk was imagining losing everything. And he said he would still rejoice in God.

Notice the word yet. Habakkuk's situation hadn't changed. Babylon was still coming. The crops might still fail. But Habakkuk had changed. He went from asking, Why aren't You doing anything? to saying, Even if everything falls apart, I will rejoice in You.

That's not pretending to be happy. It's choosing to trust God and find joy in Him, even when circumstances are terrible. His joy wasn't based on what he had. It was based on who God is.

REAL TALK **Your Fig Tree**

What's your fig tree? What are the things you count on to feel happy, secure, or okay? Maybe it's your grades, your friends, your health, your family, your sport, or your plans for the future. Habakkuk's song asks a hard question: if those things failed, would you still trust God? That doesn't mean God will take them away. But it reminds us that our deepest joy should rest on God, who never fails. Paul wrote, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content in it." Contentment and joy are possible, even in hard times, because God is with us.

Then Habakkuk ends with this. "GOD, the Lord, is my strength. He makes my feet like deer's feet, and enables me to go in high places."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Deer's Feet**

The deer in this verse is probably a mountain deer or wild goat, like the ibex that still lives in the rocky cliffs near the Dead Sea. These animals can leap across steep, rocky slopes without falling. They seem to dance on places where people would stumble. David used the same picture in Psalm 18.

> Habakkuk is saying that God would give him the strength and balance to walk through dangerous, difficult places without falling.

Habakkuk started his book by asking why God wasn't doing anything. He ended it standing on the heights, singing. God didn't change his circumstances. He changed his heart. He gave him strength to stand.

> **REAL TALK** **From Complaint to Song**
>
> The book of Habakkuk shows a journey that many people take with God. It starts with confusion and complaint. It moves to waiting and listening. And it ends with worship and trust. You might be at the beginning of that journey right now, full of questions. That's okay. Keep bringing your questions to God. Keep waiting on Him. And trust that, in time, He can turn your complaint into a song.

KEY VERSE

For even though the fig tree doesn't flourish, nor fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive fails, the fields yield no food, the flocks are cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD. I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! GOD, the Lord, is my strength. He makes my feet like deer's feet, and enables me to go in high places. For the music director, on my stringed instruments.

Habakkuk 3:17–19 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Habakkuk ended his book with a song?
2. How did remembering God's past rescues help Habakkuk?
3. What changed between the beginning and the end of the book?
4. What is your fig tree? Could you still rejoice in God if it failed?

TRY THIS *Write your own version of Habakkuk 3:17-18. Fill in the blanks with things that matter to you: Even though ____, and even if ____, yet I will rejoice in the LORD.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

In the middle of Habakkuk's questions, God gave him a short sentence that would echo for centuries: "the righteous will live by his faith." Jewish readers have long treasured Habakkuk 2:4 as a call to steady faithfulness in hard times. Christians believe it became the heart of the gospel.

The New Testament quotes this verse three times. Paul wrote, "For in it is revealed God's righteousness from faith to faith. As it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith." He wrote again, "no man is justified by the law before God." And Hebrews says, "But the righteous one will live by faith." In other words, we are made right with God not by being good enough, but by trusting Him. Fifteen hundred years later, Martin Luther read Romans 1:17 and said it felt like the gates of heaven opened. Habakkuk asked why God didn't step in against injustice. At the cross, God answered in the most surprising way. He stepped straight into injustice Himself. Jesus, the only truly innocent person who ever lived, was arrested on false charges, beaten, mocked, and crucified. He even cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He took the full weight of human evil and God's judgment on sin, so that people who trust Him could be forgiven. Then He rose again. And because of Him, Habakkuk's promise will come true: "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD's glory, as the waters cover the sea."

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He welcomes your honest questions.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Habakkuk saw injustice around him, but all of us add to the world's brokenness. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus stepped into injustice.

Jesus, the innocent One, took on the worst injustice at the cross, died for our sins, and rose again.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

The righteous live by faith. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Live by faith.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Like Habakkuk, you can bring God all your questions and choose to trust Him. You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I don't understand everything. Sometimes I'm confused, hurt, or angry about what happens in the world and in my life. Thank You that I can bring my questions to You. I've gone my own way, and I can't fix my sin myself. Thank You that Jesus stepped into injustice, died for my sins, and rose again. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Help me live by faith, and rejoice in You even when life is hard. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read all of Habakkuk, then Romans 1:16-17 and Romans 5:1-5.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Keep a question journal. Write down your honest questions for God, and keep a record of how He answers over time.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Habakkuk asked some of the hardest questions in the Bible, and God didn't turn him away. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Habakkuk is right, God welcomes your questions, and He is worth trusting even when you don't have all the answers.

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

Habakkuk 2:14 (WEB)