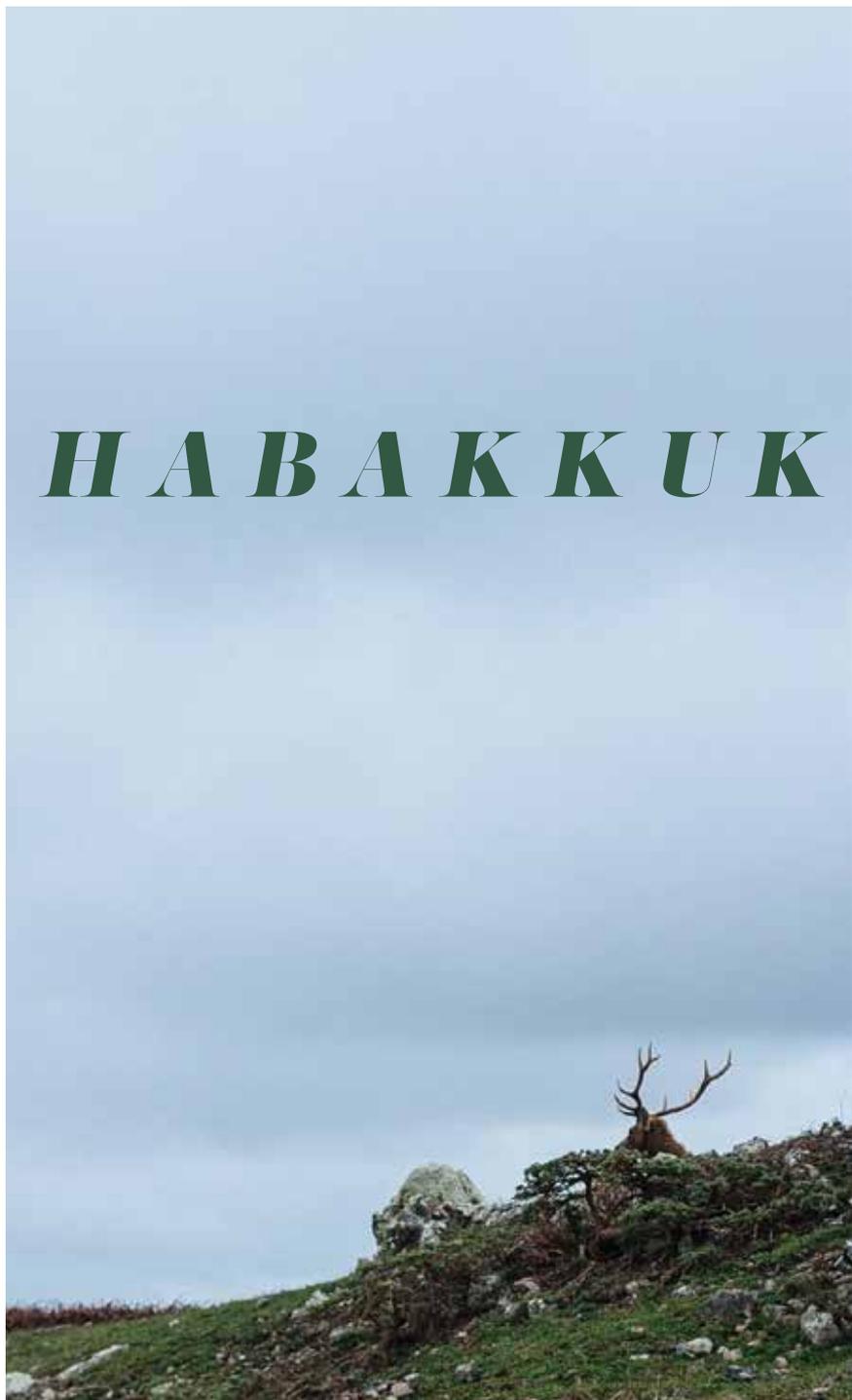


НАВАККУК



INTRODUCTION

Probably the most striking thing about the prophet Habakkuk is how little we know about him. We are given no biographical details about him in either his own book or anywhere else in the Bible. We don't even know who was king during his ministry. Therefore, we have to rely on the book of Habakkuk itself to figure out more about the prophet, the situation with which he is confronted, and what his motivations were for striking up this revelatory conversation with the LORD.

Habakkuk begins by striking up a desperate conversation with God. Faced with the reality of violence, iniquity, injustice, and wickedness, he turns to God in lament (1:2-4). Apparently, what he sees around him is so bad that he concludes that "the law is paralyzed" (1:3). The mention of the law indicates that the individuals or groups perpetuating the sin are members of the covenant people of God. If he had been perplexed by the violence being inflicted by outside nations, he likely would not have invoked the law (i.e. the Torah or Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible including Genesis-Deuteronomy). The Gentiles did not receive the law; therefore, Habakkuk would probably not have expected them to conform to it.

God responds to Habakkuk by revealing his plan to astonishingly raise up the Chaldeans as his instruments of judgment (1:5-11). Also known as the Babylonians (for their capital city), the Chaldeans were a pagan nation who found themselves in numerous conflicts throughout the Ancient Near East. When Assyria (the nation that captured and exiled the northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE) maintained its hold on the surrounding areas, Babylon fought against them several times and lost. After a significant military defeat, a four-way civil war broke out among the Chaldeans before Nebuchadnezzar came out on top, cemented his authority, and then launched an assault on the

Assyrian regime. He toppled the Assyrian capital of Nineveh in 612 BCE and landed the final blow against those enemies seven years later. The Babylonian empire eventually became the dominant military power, but God's insistence that what he is doing will cause observers to "wonder and be astounded" (1:5) implies that, at the time the prophecy was given, this outcome seemed unlikely. Considering the prophecy, we know for certain that this event occurred before the Chaldeans destroyed Jerusalem, Judah's capital. It could have occurred before or after they turned the Judean king Jehoiakim into a puppet ruler after Josiah's death in 609 BCE (2 Kings 23:28-30). Josiah himself was a God-fearing king who instituted significant religious and social reforms during his reign (640-609 BCE; 2 Kings 22:1-23:27), but scholars question to what extent these changes influenced the wider culture around Jerusalem. The forty-seven year period before Josiah was dominated by two wicked kings, Manasseh and Amon, who "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Kings 21:1-26), to the point that Josiah's reforms included putting a stop to Baal worship, sun worship, child sacrifice, sorcery, and necromancy (2 Kings 23:4-20). In addition to the rampant idolatry during his reign, Manasseh "shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another," and Yahweh eventually pronounces an oracle of judgment against Judah and Jerusalem for the sin the king enabled and committed during his rule (2 Kings 21:10-15). Considering the violence Habakkuk sees around him, this could be the period in which Habakkuk lived, ministered, and prophesied. However, commentators are divided, and we don't have enough information to make an absolute judgment. Nevertheless, we can establish that Habakkuk lives during a time period of widespread and obvious sin with overt injustice and violence.

Habakkuk's initial lament raises a primary issue that this book explores. If God is just, how can he allow evil to run rough-shod through the kingdom where he has established his covenant, given his law, and erected his earthly temple. But the LORD's response and promised solution raises a related issue. Habakkuk recognizes

God's provision of much-needed discipline for his people, but how does his unchangeable character and disdain for wrongdoing allow him to utilize a nation more wicked and self-serving than the people he is going to discipline (1:12-13). Furthermore, if these instruments of judgment are divinely appointed by God's all powerful and eternal word (the same word which spoke the universe into existence), how can God's people expect future relief (1:14-17)?

In a sense, God's response (and the entire book of Habakkuk) gives us a picture of the tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. As God has promised in Deuteronomy 28, he will hold his own people accountable to the standards of worship and living that he has established in his law. Because of their persistent sin, he will discipline them, using outside nations to demonstrate the consequences of forsaking their gracious relationship to the LORD (Deuteronomy 28:25-57). God both allows, ordains, and empowers the Babylonian conquest to serve the purposes he has established in his revealed word. But his ultimate purposes do not abdicate human beings of responsibility. He will also hold the Chaldeans accountable for the wickedness, violence, and barbarism they commit against God's people and those who clearly bear the same human dignity as themselves. God reveals to Habakkuk the self-defeating nature of human sin and pronounces punitive woe against the willful hedonism, greed, violence, propagation of sin, voyeurism of shame, and idolatry committed by fully responsible human agents (2:4-19). In a way, the answer to Habakkuk's twin dilemmas is the same: "For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end – it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay" (2:2-3). In the midst of tragedy and confusion, his people can have patience. God's word never fails, his promises are secure, his purposes will be accomplished, and his character is unchanging. When circumstances raise questions, the answer is the constancy and reliability of a God who has committed himself to his people and whose power, freedom, and wisdom ensures his promises and purposes will be fulfilled.

Additionally, when we recognize that all people are held to account by a holy, just, and impartial God, we remember that although the wicked person's "soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him... the righteous shall live by his faith(fullness)" (2:4). This posture is not easy, and in the reality of our own sin it should produce humility before the presence of God Almighty (3:16).

We live in a world riddled by the presence, effects, and consequences of human sin. But when we look to God in faith, trusting that he will fulfill his purposes for us and for the world. And we are privileged to have a fuller picture of God's faithfulness, "for the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you... was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Corinthians 2:19-20). Therefore, we too can sing with Habakkuk, "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in Yahweh; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places" (3:17-19).



how long
O Lord?



HABAKKUK 1:1-11

Before considering Habakkuk's complaint to the Lord, it is important to understand, as much as we are able, when, in history, the words that we are reading took place. There are a couple different theories but I believe that the most logical hypothesis is that Habakkuk's writings are recorded sometime after the persistent sin of Judah has been realized but before the destruction and exile of Judah at the hand of the Babylonians (2 Kings 20-25).

In Habakkuk 1:1-4, Habakkuk expresses sorrow before the Lord. Habakkuk expresses grief. At the end of verse 4, Habakkuk is right to claim these words: "For the wicked surround the righteous..." He is right to express sorrow over the sin of Judah that, for the time being, goes unpunished, for the time being. He is right to plead with God for the justice that He has promised. He sees what looks like the unpunished sins in the nation of Judah. So, he is distraught. In the reading of the first four verses, Habakkuk has an incomplete view of the Lord. In this moment, in his weeping, Habakkuk believes that God "idly looks at wrong," "the law is paralyzed," that justice is "perverted" and, thus, "never goes forth" (1:3-4). Habakkuk's view of what surrounds him is limited and based on his own understanding. But on the OT side of the covenant made in Jesus, God had revealed that he would deal justly with the disobedience of his people and their leaders of by bringing defeat upon them (Deuteronomy 28:45). But He also promised to restore his people to Himself (Deuteronomy 30:1-10). While God never gives the prophet a separate picture of this restoration, Habakkuk submitted to the truths that God revealed during that time. Having a much fuller picture of the grace and mercy of God, how is your submission before the Lord different than Habakkuk's?

God's response is a clear indicator of the goodness of His name and the glory that is due it. "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told." In verses 6-11, God makes it apparent that He is raising up the Chaldeans (the Babylonians) and they will bring devastation to Judah (2 Kings 25; Lamentations 1-2;4-5). God's first response is not a warning to Habakkuk but a reminder – a reminder to remember his own limitations and that God has none. Lamentations 3:21-42 also begins with this call to remember, "For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men." Remembering the character of God and the forgiveness of Jesus is the beginning of hope.

Habakkuk's immediate perception of God is impacted by circumstances but God's response reveals that He will not leave Habakkuk in despair. God will renew, or right, Habakkuk's faith. For the time being, the writings of Habakkuk reveal the back and forth between Habakkuk and God, the continuation of unbelief or at least despair until the end of Chapter 2. What is it that causes despair to weigh heavily on your mind and heart in a way that leads you to question the goodness and over-arching plan of a holy and just God?

The example that Habakkuk gives us is that despair and belief can occur together. But when we rest in the character of God, belief has a weightier pull than despair. On this side of Heaven, despair and belief co-exist, but this won't always be true. God will bring His just purposes to completion. He will bless those who rest obediently in Jesus and He will discipline those who do not. In Jesus, we have a fulfillment and assurance that Habakkuk didn't have, but Habakkuk demonstrates an urgent dependence on God that we need to take note of – a dependent urgency that is revealed through prayer.

HABAKKUK 1:12-2:1

Habakkuk is in the middle of a conversation with God. It began when, observing rampant violence and injustice in the kingdom of Judah, the prophet asked the LORD why he delayed in stopping it (1:2-4). God responded with a clear revelation of his planned solution. In accordance with Deuteronomy 28:25-68, the LORD will raise up a foreign power, the Chaldeans, to act in militaristic judgment against his people. But this rod of discipline does not know the hand that wields it or the demands of his Law. No, “their justice and dignity go forth from themselves” (1:7), and they will pillage with fearsome power and a proud countenance.

In renewed confusion and distress, the prophet again turns to God, confessing his bewilderment, “Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One?” (1:12). Habakkuk recognizes that God’s everlasting nature means he does not change. God has covenantally committed himself to his chosen people and, unlike us, “there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17) when it comes to the Rock of Ages. So, he can still say with confidence, “We shall not die” (1:12) for God will keep his promises. Habakkuk also knows why this will happen. As an answer to his earlier prayer, the Babylonian conquest is “reproof” for God’s people (1:12). But all the theological conviction in the world doesn’t change the fact that this is not the solution Habakkuk anticipated precisely because of what he knows about God.

He knows that God is holy and just. But if that justice cannot tolerate the sin pervading the kingdom of Judah, how can God “remain silent when the wicked swallow up the man more righteous he?” (1:13). Habakkuk also knows how powerful the Word of the LORD is, for it was by his Word that God created the entire universe. With a divine commission like that of 1:5-11, how can the Babylonians ever be stopped? Habakkuk uses

a powerful image to describe what he sees to be certain doom. God’s declared judgment seemingly empowers the Chaldean war machine to plunder the nations like a greedy, unstoppable fisherman who is never satisfied (1:14-17). Operating on God’s orders, will they not keep “mercilessly killing nations forever?” (1:17). Even worse, their supra-natural success will not lead them to a relationship with God, but only reinforce their self-worshipping idolatry (1:16; cf. 1:11). We can understand why Habakkuk’s lament seems so desperate. His immense confusion springs from a deep understanding of God’s character and his power, and conflicts with the present and impending situation.

However, notice his response. He doesn’t abandon his faith. He doesn’t forsake his calling. He doesn’t reject God. He doesn’t try to soothe his emotional distress with busyness or pleasure. And he doesn’t dismiss the reality of what is about to occur. Rather, he waits and intentionally positions himself to see how God will respond (2:1). It is all too easy to see Habakkuk’s “complaint” (2:1) as just whining. But that reading ignores the entire context of this conversation. Habakkuk isn’t grumbling to the people around him. He is taking his very legitimate concerns directly to the one being who can give an answer, provide a solution, and make sense of the confusion. This person is not some distant deity, but is Habakkuk’s God in particular. Habakkuk calls him, “My God, my Holy One.” There is a relationship of grace and access whereby God’s prophet can approach him with raw vulnerability. Dear Christian, because our sinless Savior, Jesus Christ, suffered injustice from sinful Judeans, took the force of God’s judgment, and made his perfect sacrifice for our sin, this same mercy seat is always open, and our relationship with our heavenly Father is eternally secure. When faced with the perplexities of a fallen world, let us then, in the words of Hebrews 4:16, “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”



for the
earth will
be filled
with the
knowledge
of the glory
of the
Lord

HABAKKUK 2:1-5

One of the most beautiful parts of Habakkuk is the honesty that so clearly reflects itself in the words. Chapter 2 could begin any way. It could start with God's answer, but instead, it begins with the final words of Habakkuk's complaint with a statement proclaiming to the Lord that though the craziness around him abounds, he will stand watch, look to the Lord, and seek God's answer. Sweet sister and brother, I pray that you seek God's answer today. I don't know what you're walking through or what you're feeling, but I know that God cares and has an answer for it all – even if He hasn't told you yet. That said, the chapter then dives into the Lord's response.

The first thing He states is to write down the revelation to “make it plain” so that someone can run with it (2:2). I can't help but wonder how many things the Lord has revealed to me that I have failed to write down. God's words are everlasting and He hasn't stopped talking to us. If we'd write it down in the seasons of difficulty when trouble abounds, we will be able to share it with others and remind ourselves when life hits those low points again. If His truth is unwavering, then we can always cling to it, regardless of the person, the season, and the circumstances. There's power in being able to preach to yourself, to remember His faithfulness of the past to get through the present.

Verse three makes a point that I think we all need to be reminded of: God's answer to our cries and our prayers will be made known to us at the “appointed time.” When it's hard and it hurts and we're begging for answers, we are to continue to wait for the response. Why? Because He promises us that it will certainly come. If the time is appointed, and you still don't have your answer, we have a clear example as to how we should respond to the silence in verse 1: we are to stand watch and look to Him. Ask the questions because He delights in hearing from us but wait

for the answer, because it's truth worth waiting on. Faithfully ask, but know that the answer may come on the other side of eternity. Faithfully ask, because he may just be waiting on you to ask Him why. Faithfully ask, because we have the freedom to approach the throne and ask our Father.

Remember, verse one has Habakkuk standing watch. I think it's crucial for us to mirror this for the very reasons listed in verses 4 and 5. The enemy and those who serve him is described in great detail (note: scripture is clear we can only serve one. So if those around you don't serve the Lord, they serve the enemy). So you have to be on guard. You don't see the enemy's face, just the face of those who serve him. But scripture is clear that we escape him by our faithfulness. To be made righteous starts with our faithfulness to pursue the Lord with everything we've got in the midst of the “puffed up” enemy. So that coworker who insists on belittling you and knocking you down, don't meet them where they're at. Be faithful. The enemy rears his head in those around you. So again, stand watch against those whose desires reflect verse five (arrogance, greediness, and never satisfied). I can't help but look at my own life and ask: am I satisfied? And if not, why?



HABAKKUK 2:6-20

Well, if you only saw God as the sweet old grandpa with the long beard with treats in his pockets for all the children and Bambi hanging out in the background, let this next passage humbly wake you up, for the God we serve is as equally just as He is merciful. Verses 6-8 address those who steal and are guilty of extortion. For those walking in that sin, God sees you. Verses 9-11 address those who sinfully gain from cheating others and think that deep pockets are sufficient, God sees you. Verses 12-14 calls out those who built the city on the blood of others. Note, we can work and toil for the riches we think are worth our blood and sweat, and for what? God says the nations exhaust themselves for nothing. Why? Because the day is coming when God's glory will be known by the earth in its entirety (2:14).

Verses 15-17 call out the enablers, where you allow your neighbors to drink to the point of nakedness. The lord says those enablers will be filled with shame for their nakedness will be exposed. God sees you, and every ounce of glory you thought you had will be overcome by disgrace. In verse 17, the LORD assures that he has seen the destruction the Babylonians brought upon his people and animals alike. Verses 18 and 19 should shake each of us. He asks us what value an idol has... the wood, the carved images, the football, the American dream... what value does it actually offer us? Alas, the idolaters are just as guilty as the murders, drunkards, extortionists, and the greedy.

And what does the word have to say for each of them? Woe. Woe to you. My prayer, sweet brothers and sisters, is that we would be faithful. I don't know about you, but I don't want to be told, "woe to you," by God! His judgment is just as real as His grace. We can't afford to forget it. It's as simple as that. But the story isn't

over, friends. For those experiencing the effects of all this sin, remember that God sees you. He sees the good, the bad, and all the ugly that is in this world. But He isn't finished. For "the Lord is in His holy temple; let ALL the earth be silent before Him."
Cue God's mic drop





The God
of my
Galvration

HABAKKUK 3:1-16

Yes, no, and not yet seem to be the three responses God gives to the prayers of his people. In light of God's revealed judgment on Judah using the wicked nation of Babylon (3:12-17), Habakkuk makes an implicit plea to God on the basis of his character that He would deliver the people of Israel and Judah from their impending destruction (1:12-2:1). After receiving the message that these attackers would eventually be judged according to their deeds (2:2-20), the prophet cries out again to God who is so mighty that he wields lightning bolts in His hands (3:4), splits the ground with rivers (3:9), and makes the sun and moon stand still (3:11). Habakkuk's declaration alludes to times when God delivered his people from Egypt (3:3-5; Exodus 7-14) and helped Joshua in battle (3:11; Joshua 10), and the prophet now looks back and forward to the time when God has and will destroy those nations who stood against his people (12-13). Habakkuk looks to these great times of deliverance because he desperately wants God repeat these mighty acts for Israel once again (3:2).

At the end of his prayer Habakkuk seems to know how God has answered him. He writes, "I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us" (3:16). At first glance, God's answer seemed to be no. God is determined to use Babylon as the means to judge Israel for their idolatry and rebellion. Habakkuk, however, still trusts in the Lord for Israel's ultimate deliverance and vindication from the Babylonians. It appears that he believes the answer to his earlier prayer is not yet, but it is guaranteed.

As Christians living today we still have a lot to learn from Habakkuk's prayer. First, in times of trial we must remember God's acts of deliverance to give us hope. Christ's death, burial, and resurrection is the ultimate act of deliverance that scripture

calls us to remember. The second lesson we can learn is that the ultimate redemption we find in Christ does not always deliver us from the temporary consequences of our sins. Habakkuk had confidence that God would deliver Israel and Judah even though the Babylonians were still going to invade them. We can have confidence that Christ will redeem us even though we may have to deal with the real effects our sin performs on the people around us.



HABAKKUK 3:17-19

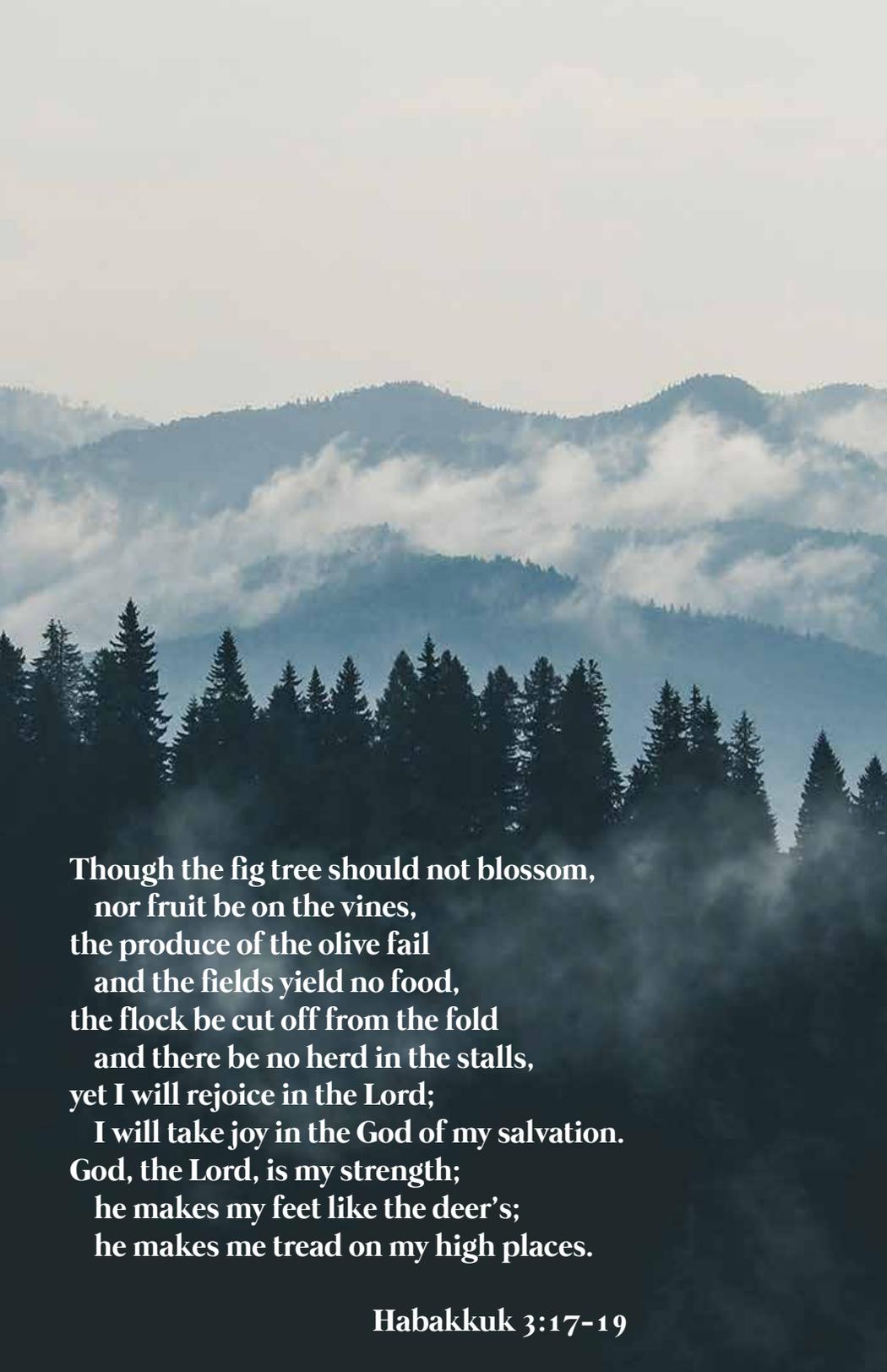
For the last three chapters Habakkuk has been crying out to the Lord, lamenting to Him about the wickedness of his people and bravely bringing his doubts and fears to God. He has seen the depth of his people's sin as they have engaged in practices that might have included child sacrifice, sorcery, necromancy, and worship of pagan gods. Habakkuk understands that Judah deserves God's wrath because of their rebellion (1:12), but he beseeches God to be merciful to His people.

But beneath Habakkuk's grief and heartbreak, there is a deep trust in the sovereign, faithful, and compassionate character of God. Habakkuk has faith in God's covenantal promise to preserve the nation of Israel. He has a faith so deep that in the middle of the darkest suffering, he is able to sing. In the last verses of chapter 3, after three chapters of discussing with the Lord the impending suffering of his people, Habakkuk writes, "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, YET I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation" (3:17-18). How is he able to praise the Lord in the midst of such desolation?

Habakkuk's song echoes the words of the Psalmist when he proclaims, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging" (Psalm 46:1-3). This genuine praise and hope is not something that Habakkuk or the Psalmist are able to generate on their own. The praise that emerges from the lips of a suffering saint is one that is only empowered by the strength of the Holy Spirit within them.

We as Christians can learn from Habakkuk's brave lament and deep trust. Despite dwelling in the darkest of times, he was able to unshakably cling to the truth of God's character as a gracious and merciful Father. It is a hard question to consider, but ask yourself this: if every single good material thing was stripped from you today, would you still be able to trust the Lord and rejoice in Him as good and gracious? When the crisis comes, and I say 'when' because it will come, when the money is gone, when the relationship ends, when a loved one dies, when everything is going wrong... will you be able to choose to sing to the Lord in praise? Only by His grace and His strength will we be able to answer "yes" to this question. Just as the prophet was able to trust in the character of God because of His covenantal promise, we too are able to trust in the promise that God is working all things for our good and for His glory and that Christ will return and set all things right in the end. We are therefore able to have immense joy in the time of suffering because Christ Himself is our present joy and our future hope. Let us not be thankless and praiseless because we are in a season of sorrow or trial. Instead, may our pain and loss bring praise to our lips as we are reminded that our Savior is our only true comfort and our only true rest.





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nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
God, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the deer's;
he makes me tread on my high places.

Habakkuk 3:17-19

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