

Live By Faith

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[0 : 00] Last week we looked at Habakkuk chapter 1 verses 12 through 17 to finish out that chapter.

! And after God told Habakkuk that he was raising up the Chaldeans to execute judgment on Judah, Habakkuk first expressed confidence in God's nature. In the first part of verse 12 of chapter 1, Habakkuk said, Are you not from everlasting? O Lord my God, my Holy One, we shall not die. However, what Habakkuk knew about God failed to square with God using a more corrupt nation to punish Judah. God appeared to be doing the opposite of what Habakkuk believed about God. The God who is too pure to look upon evil, in fact, tolerated the treacherous and stood silent while the wicked swallowed up the righteous. So one of the things that was on Habakkuk's mind was how could the Holy God use the wickedness of a pagan people to punish Judah? And how could God tolerate the wickedness of Babylon? God is holy and we know he cannot tolerate wrong, yet God did tolerate the unrighteous and in fact used the evil nations to accomplish his sovereign purpose.

[1 : 19] And so it's no wonder that Habakkuk felt confused. Look at verse 17, the last verse in chapter 1. Habakkuk asked God this question about the Chaldeans.

He said, Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever? So Habakkuk ended chapter 1 with another form of the original questions he asked in verse 3 and verse 13 of chapter 1.

Those questions really can be paraphrased as, Are you going to keep on tolerating this? And if so, how long? And as we start chapter 2 tonight, Habakkuk will begin to get his answer.

Because in chapter 2, God gives Habakkuk a long answer that actually starts in verse 2. So let's read our text for tonight. That's Habakkuk chapter 2 verses 1 through 5.

And although chapter 2 is mostly God speaking, verse 1 still has Habakkuk speaking to God. So Habakkuk starts off the chapter by saying, I will take my stand at my watch post and station myself on the tower and look out to see what he will say to me and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

[2 : 31] And the Lord answered me, Write the vision, make it plain on tablets, so that he may run who reads it. 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. Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol, like death he has never enough.

He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples. So we'll break tonight's passage into three sections, starting with just verse 1.

And in verse 1, Habakkuk says that he will watch. So watch is the first section of our lesson. Look at verse 1 again of chapter 2.

[3 : 33] It says, I will take my stand at my watch post and station myself on the tower and look out to see what he will say to me and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

Habakkuk knows that only God can straighten out his confused state of mind, and so he pauses and waits for God's reply. We shouldn't interpret this verse as an arrogant demand on behalf of Habakkuk that he's expecting God to answer and saying that God must answer.

Instead, Habakkuk really wanted to know what God would say because he, as God's spokesman, also needed to know what to say. He anticipated being challenged with the same kind of complaints when he announced God's plan regarding the Chaldeans, and he really wanted to know what he was supposed to tell the people.

So Habakkuk set himself down firmly and with determination, unwilling to leave his position until the Lord answered his questions and solved his confusion.

And actually, the rabbis of that time actually thought that Habakkuk drew a circle around himself and stood in the middle of it and actually refused to move until God had explained to him what was going on.

[4 : 44] So the picture he paints there is of a soldier that's on sentry duty, stationed at his watch post on the tower. And the metaphor of the sentry or watchman was used frequently of the prophets carrying out their duties.

And here we can really see it symbolizes the undistracted way in which Habakkuk was determined to wait for the Lord's response. Just like a watchman, he was fully alert and ready at all times.

His attitude was that of confidence because he has no doubt that God will answer. Notice there he says, Look, and that continues the metaphor of the watchman.

It involves the diligent ongoing monitoring of the situation so that he's not taken by surprise by any of the developments, just like we would expect the sentry to be. And what he will say to me actually is more general than what the original Hebrew warrants there.

What he actually wrote there was what he will say in me. So he actually said what he will say in me. And so this relates to the inner way in which the Lord spoke to him.

[5 : 49] And it shows that he was able to distinguish between his own thoughts and ideas and that what was directed by God. And such direct communication was a privilege extended to the prophets.

But the Lord's answer can come in other ways also. It may come through the circumstances of providence like it did with Jonah. Or it may come through meditating on God's word.

But as he awaits to receive the Lord's answer, Habakkuk anticipates that it's going to be difficult to grasp. And he wonders how he's going to present it to the people. And again, that's what is meant by the last part of verse 1 where he said, I want to see what I will answer concerning my complaint.

So the verse stresses the important work of humans alongside the work of God. We saw in the first half of the verse that Habakkuk determined to station himself to receive the revelation of God.

In the second half of the verse, the prophet expected that God would indeed answer his complaint and Habakkuk needed to know how to respond, both in his assessment of the injustice and in his conduct among the consequences of what he perceived as injustice.

[7 : 00] So we really see that he had a mature wisdom in his determination and he wanted his response to be shaped by what God himself would say. And so we see his wisdom there because it's a wise man who takes his questions to God for answers.

This is another case where we see human responsibility and divine providence working together. We know those are complementary teachings in the Old Testament and each of those doctrines is necessary to complete the other.

We know that God can work in this world without the cooperation of humans, but biblical evidence indicates that God chooses to use the work of his servants to accomplish his means.

Think about how God used Moses' mother and sister to preserve Moses' life. We know that Moses' mother devised a plan to save her child's life and at the same time, the biblical text shows the providence of God working in the life of Moses.

So God apparently chose to work and also to use human instrumentality to deliver the child from the plan of Pharaoh and we see God working through his prophet here too. One of the wonders of Habakkuk's message is the engagement of God with his people because God answered Habakkuk.

[8 : 18] He dealt with the prophet's complaints and answered Habakkuk's concerns, but he answered them in an unexpected way. So God's second response that we're going to see now is more than an indication of concern.

It's really an answer for all believers of every age. We'll find out that God is faithful and he calls for faithfulness on the part of his people, but the answer itself still doesn't really address the prophetic questions.

One commentator wrote, there is no more important passage in Habakkuk than this one and few in the Old Testament more significant because of the later use of it by the Apostle Paul and Martin Luther.

So let's look at the start of Habakkuk's second response in the next section of our lesson. And in this section, God tells Habakkuk to write. So write is the second piece on your handout.

And we see that in verse 2. Habakkuk begins to tell us what God said in him. And verse 2 says, So Habakkuk was very clearly told to record the vision to preserve it for posterity so that everyone who read it would know the certainty of its fulfillment.

[9 : 42] The prophecy had lasting relevance and thus it needed to be preserved. A period of time would occur before its fulfillment, but all were to know that it would occur at God's appointed time.

So God commanded Habakkuk to write the vision and to make the message plain on tablets. And we don't know what writing material he used, but the word there for tablets is the same one that's used in Exodus to describe the stone tablets for the Ten Commandments.

And sometimes these tablets were set up in marketplaces for the communication of public notices. So it was sort of like a public bulletin board. And sometimes the prophet already had possession of the tablets in anticipation of the Lord's reply, and he wrote down his message on them, and then he put it in the public places to be read by everyone who passed by.

And notice it says there that the message is to be plain enough that someone will not have to stop and look at it, but can read it while still running. So in this respect, it would be like a large modern billboard beside a main road.

You know, you don't have to stop your car to read a good billboard. You can read it as you go by. Today's English version of the Bible expresses this interpretation. Well, it translates it so that it can be read at a glance.

[11 : 04] And other ways of saying the same thing are so that it can be read easily, or that so one can read it easily. So we've seen Habakkuk say that he will watch, and we've seen God begin his response by first telling Habakkuk to write.

In the last section of the lesson, where we'll spend most of our time tonight, Habakkuk is told to wait. So wait is the next section. Look at verses 3 through 5 for that.

Verses 3 through 5 say, 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. Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol. Like death, he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples.

[12 : 14] The first part of verse 3 explains why God wanted the prophecy to be written down. It says, For still the vision awaits its appointed time. And we know that all history is under God's control, and it unfolds precisely when it suits God's purposes.

And it unfolds precisely how God desires it to occur. So we know the vision was on God's calendar. Whatever hardships and discipline they might experience in the present, the future looked bright.

And more encouragement comes next. Look at the next phrase of verse 3. It says, It hastens to the end. It will not lie. Hastens to the end could literally be translated as, it pants toward the end.

The picture there is like a runner reaching for the finish line. So reference to the end seems to signify not only the coming destruction of evil Babylon, but the broader fulfillment of messianic judgment in the fall of Babylon the Great at the close of the tribulation.

We'll get to that a little bit more in a second. But first, let's look at the statement about the vision not being able to lie. And the statement that the vision cannot lie indicates that circumstances will often suggest that the hope of believers is nothing but wishful thinking.

[13 : 35] And we know that sometimes faith contradicts experience, but that's in those times we have to remember that God cannot lie. So one thing is certain, God's revelation will never prove false.

Though to us the fulfillment may seem delayed, it will come to pass in accord with God's perfect plan. For those in Judah about to experience the Babylonian invasion and captivity, this assurance of ultimate fulfillment would have been a great comfort to them.

And their barbaric captors would themselves in due time experience God's divine judgment. So look at the next phrase of verse 3 now. It says, If it seems slow, wait for it.

So that's where we get wait for this section. And when we looked at the last phrase, I mentioned that this verse likely not only points to the deliverance of Judah after the Babylonian captivity, but also to the messianic judgment at the end of Revelation.

And the phrase we're looking at now is one of the reasons why we can say that. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the New Testament, changes the gender in this phrase.

[14 : 45] It says, Though he linger, wait for him. He will certainly come and will not delay. And the writer of Hebrews referred to this verse in his appeal for persecuted believers to persevere.

In his quote, he stressed the messianic significance of this passage in Habakkuk. And the day is coming when the King of Kings will reign on earth with perfect judgment. So listen to Hebrews 10.37.

Hebrews 10.37 says, For yet a little while, and the coming one will come and not delay. This thought is not directly expressed by Habakkuk, but his prophecy is ultimately only realized when the Messiah comes.

Because the Messiah is God's answer to the existence of evil in this world. It's an answer that's both effective and gracious. It's easy to solve the problem of evil by annihilating all that has intruded into the perfect world God created.

But that would be to let sin have the last word on God's creation. And there wouldn't be any hope for humanity in that case because we're all sinful. So in his own process, God is at work to redeem, not to exterminate, the faithful that are his people.

[16 : 02] And so the continued existence of evil in a warped world poses a problem until the final resolution when the risen Christ has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power, but himself.

So let's talk a little bit more about the last phrase of verse 3. That's where it says, It will surely come. It will not delay. Habakkuk's humanity demanded that God provide a warning about impatience.

Does anybody here get impatient waiting on God to do something we think he should do? We know it happens even more for us living in the modern society where we expect everything to be solved right away and everything should be solved in a 30-minute or an hour TV show.

Or if it's a really bad problem, maybe it might take two hours for a movie, but otherwise we expect everything to resolve quickly. But whether in prayer or prophecy, contemporary worshipers like us demand that God act according to the dizzying schedule of those that are pressed for time.

And so God reminded his prophet of the certainty of the message, but without the promise of meeting Habakkuk's time schedule. And that's a good thing for us to keep in mind as well. When he says that the fulfillment will not delay, this wording doesn't mean that the future events will come soon without that type of delay.

[17 : 25] Only God knows the time for such events. The comment means that the fulfillment will not miss God's scheduled time. It won't delay a minute past the time that God has appointed for it to occur.

So when we look at things like that, we have to remember that God is always speaking from his schedule, not ours. So when he says it won't delay, he's telling us that he's right on time. So those actions of God that seem to be a step backward, like the Babylonian conquest of Judah, seem to be to Habakkuk, may not be setbacks at all, but they may really be integral parts of God's purpose to save his earth.

So let's move on to verse 4 now. Verse 4 says, Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

The verse is short, but it's God's answer to Habakkuk's questions, whether Habakkuk realizes it now or not. God answered the prophet by the means of a strong contrast here.

The first half of the verse refers to the wicked described in verse 7, verse 11, and verse 13 of chapter 1. The second statement explicitly describes the righteous person, and the righteous person is completely different from the wicked person.

[18 : 46] The one whose life is puffed up in pride and arrogance will die, but the righteous, in contrast, by his faithfulness will live. Whether in Judah or Babylon, those in rebellion against God would ultimately die.

And wherever human beings rely on something of this earth, wherever their confidence is placed in human ability and not in God for the achievement of something, such as a secure way of life, true life is never found there.

So to really see how this verse answers Habakkuk's questions, we need to briefly revisit some of the passage we looked at two weeks ago. So look back a page or so at verses 6 and 7 of chapter 1.

That's where God told Habakkuk this shocking news. So in chapter 1, verses 6 and 7, God said, For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own.

They are dreaded and fearsome. Their justice and dignity go forth from themselves. So these verses told us that wherever the Chaldeans march, they impose their judgment on the people they encounter.

[19 : 59] So they demand submission to their will and obedience to their laws. They're totally self-sufficient, or at least they think that they are, and their judgment and dignity proceed from themselves.

So that means they derive standards from no one but themselves. And so, of course, that means they give honor to no one else, especially God. In other words, they become a monument to their own accomplishments.

And in the first part of verse 4 of chapter 2, God directly addresses the problem of the Chaldeans refusing to give God honor and being a monument to themselves. Look at the first phrase of verse 4 of chapter 2 again.

God says, Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright within him. Whenever you see Behold, you know that something is coming that's going to be very important.

It introduces the revelation of God there and it exhorts the prophets to take special notice of it. The hearts and minds of the Babylonian captors are puffed up.

[21 : 01] It could be translated there swollen because that's the literal translation of it. So they're swollen with pride and they're bloated with self-glorification. In everything they do, they act haughtily and presumptuously.

They exalt themselves above God and they seek only their own ends. So they're self-reliant and insolent people who regard themselves as indestructible and as the sole source of what they define as righteousness.

So let's contrast that with uprightness. Uprightness characterizes conduct that is in accord with the requirements of God. But the phrase that's repeatedly found in the Psalms is upright in heart.

So this emphasizes that it's not mere outward conformity to God's requirements that meets the definition of uprightness. The inner motivation must be correct also.

Remember what God told Samuel when Samuel was looking for a king. He said that God looks at the heart not the outside of a man. So the inner motivation is what we need to really worry about and those who are full of themselves give no thought outwardly or inwardly to what God requires of them.

[22 : 17] The Babylonians are crooked and uneven in their behavior. They're described as perverted and corrupt in character. Their wickedness which God actually abhors will ultimately lead to judgment and death and we'll see that later on in chapter 2.

But let's move on to the second half of verse 4 now. That's where we see the big contrast. God tells Habakkuk that the righteous shall live by his faith.

The New Testament writers quoted this part of the verse three times. It was in Romans 1.17 Galatians 3.11 and Hebrews 10.38 and Paul used this idea as the hallmark of his teaching concerning the importance of faith in salvation.

Paul took God's message to Habakkuk to its final emphasis. He said that those who are judged righteous as a result of their faith shall live. Habakkuk's questions actually supplied Paul with his beginning and ending point that faith is the key.

God recognizes the faithfulness of his people and gives life. So let's look at each of the New Testament uses of the verse before we spend more time digging into Habakkuk's wording.

[23 : 28] The first New Testament quotation comes in Romans 1.17 but we're going to start in Romans 1.16 for context. So listen to Romans 1.16 and 17.

Paul wrote there For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith as it is written the righteous shall live by faith.

The second New Testament quotation of Habakkuk 2.4 comes in Galatians 3.11 So if you want to flip over to Galatians 3.11 and just as we did in the Romans passage we'll back up one verse to get more context.

So listen to Galatians 3.10 and 11 Paul there wrote these words He said For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse for it is written Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them.

Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law for the righteous shall live by faith. You probably noticed that both New Testament quotations of Habakkuk 2.4 so far came from Paul and the third New Testament quotation of Habakkuk 2.4 comes from the writer of Hebrews who may also have been Paul and for the Hebrews cross reference we'll revisit one of the verses we looked at earlier but go all the way back to Hebrews 10.35 So listen to Hebrews 10.35 through 38 Again these are verses 35 through 38 of Hebrews 10 The writer to the Hebrews says Therefore do not throw away your confidence which has great reward for you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised for yet a little while and the coming one will come and will not delay but my righteous one shall live by faith and if he shrinks back my soul has no pleasure in him

[25 : 44] Considering that the final phrase of Habakkuk 2.4 has such prominence in the New Testament let's spend some time digging into the meaning of what the prophet wrote So first of all let's look again a little more at who qualifies as the righteous When you get right down to it the righteous are those courageous enough to accept God's word of promise in a world dominated by the horrors of Babylonian power like Habakkuk previously described and to look for salvation in a world dominated by persecution requires faithfulness world history may not indicate it but we know that God is leading this world to accomplish his purposes and the righteous are also those who correspond to God's leadership we know that the righteous are not perfect but they do live according to their relationship with God and righteousness toward God involves a strong ethical dimension it's to meet the demands of God toward God and toward others you don't have to take my word for granted about what qualifies as righteous

Psalms 15 actually has a good description of the righteous and it's only five verses so let's look at all five verses of Psalm 15 Psalm 15 is a Psalm of David and in Psalm 15 David wrote O Lord who shall sojourn in your tent who shall dwell on your holy hill he who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor nor takes up reproach against his friend in whose eyes a vile person is despised but who honors those who fear the Lord who swears to his own hurt and does not change who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent he who does these things shall never be moved and now let's talk a little while about what faith means and here's where it may seem like

I'm throwing you a curve but hang with me on this for a little bit the word translated faith there in Habakkuk 2.4 is actually more accurately translated as faithfulness and this means being loyal to God and obedient to his law even when outward circumstances make it difficult just as they did in Habakkuk's day in modern language we sometimes use the word integrity but this doesn't have the same religious connotation that faithfulness has so if the word faith here in Habakkuk is better translated as faithfulness what does that do to all the New Testament references we looked at just a couple of minutes ago well the answer is that those who become righteous by faith must continue in the steadfastness of that faith and this steadfastness in faith manifests itself in praise worship and godly works and this was Paul's understanding of Habakkuk and the apostle adopted it for the theme of his Roman letter a way to say it in one sentence is that faith expresses itself in faithfulness faithfulness is the only evidence we have to be able to gauge whether somebody has faith or not and so the two concepts of faith and faithfulness really can't be separated from each other God's statement to Habakkuk here has both an earthly and an eternal significance because in trying times a righteous person must trust God to handle the situation appropriately Paul in the references we looked at in Romans and Galatians saw something more in these words from Habakkuk he also pointed out that eternal life is appropriated through faith and then the evidence of that eternal life is the faithfulness that God's true people exhibit we have one more verse to cover tonight so let's look at Habakkuk 2.5 again in it God switches to his description of the unrighteous and God says there moreover wine is a traitor an arrogant man who is never at rest his greed is as wide as Sheol like death he has never enough he gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples so the way of the puffed up is addressed again in 2.5 and this time God adds three descriptive details the first one is that the Babylonians were known for their wine and for their consumption of wine we'll see that when we get into the woes later in chapter 2

excessive wine betrays or is a traitor because it deceives the drinker into feeling more important or puffed up than really is warranted the Hebrew for betrays there comes from the root word cloak as in cloak and dagger so wine is like that it is false pride and it hides danger it's a pride that's not upright and you don't recognize the danger that you're getting yourself into when you're under its influence so this false sense is treacherous for Babylon because it will lead to its ultimate demise and the second mark of the way of the puffed up is arrogance and arrogance by definition is false pride and the third thing we see is that the enemy is never at rest because he's greedy and greedy marks the way of the wicked like a gravestone because like death the Babylonians are never satisfied they consume more and more but they're never full they'll take all the cultures of the ancient

[31 : 34] Near East captive collect all the people as their possessions and bring their treasures home but they'll still be restless and this verse actually serves as a transition to the section we'll start looking at next week so we may come back to this verse then but for now let's talk about what we can learn from this passage and the first thing is that God will act in his own time remember what we discussed earlier when God says his actions will not delay his wording doesn't necessarily mean that the future events will come soon God means that the fulfillment will not miss God's scheduled time and he's promising that his actions will not wait a moment beyond the time that he wants them to occur so again we always have to remember to look at that from God's point of view the second thing we can learn from this passage is that the wicked ultimately will receive their due so the puffed up wicked ultimately will receive their due in the end the proud are going to receive their due and we'll start seeing that next week they'll be cut down but until that happens believers must expect the wicked to continue in their violence and brutality they're actually just fulfilling their job description as unbelievers so God's expansion of this point is the focus of the remaining verses of chapter two and it'll take us the next couple of weeks to get through that and the third thing is the obvious thing from this passage and that is that the righteous live by their faith so the righteous live by their faith faithfulness to God in this life provides evidence that faith is genuine and as we discussed earlier faith and faithfulness can't be separated from each other so in that sense

God's response to Habakkuk offers hope because those who have been justified by faith must continue to live a life of trust in the trying times which precede the day of the Lord when you think about it the answer that Habakkuk has been given assures him that God will act he's not to ask if God will act or when God will act God says it's going to happen at his appointed time so what the faithful are to do is to wait with confidence in their God they're to avoid the rebellious attitudes of the arrogant and they should humbly!

rely on God being sure of what we hope for and certain of the things we do not see and of course that comes from Hebrews 11:1 so in this way they will enjoy a life that's in communion and fellowship with God and will be sustained through the darkest hour and of course we need to remember the same thing today what we are to do is to wait with confidence in God and be confident that he will act at his appointed time so here are some questions for reflection for you to think about the first one is how should we balance waiting on God and taking action how should we balance waiting on God and taking action the second is how do we become righteous how do we become righteous and I would encourage you to look at those scripture passages and see for yourselves I think you know the answer is pretty clear but it is an important answer to make sure you understand the third thing is what can be cited to provide evidence that a person truly has faith or what evidence can be cited that a person truly has faith and then finally what attitude should the Christian display rather than arrogance and greed so what attitude should the Christian display rather than arrogance and greed so as you think about tonight's passage and reflect on it remember the words of Hebrews 10 verses 35 through 38 that's where the writer said therefore do not throw away your confidence which has great reward for you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised for yet a little while and the coming one will come and will not delay but my righteous one shall live by faith and if he shrinks back my soul has no pleasure in him let's pray father we thank you for this reminder that even when we may not see it you are acting according to your own time and that nothing is a surprise to you please give us the confidence as we go through this life to wait on you and be assured that you will act at the right time just as you promised and just as you always have done be with us as we go through the week help us continue to live out our faith and grow in faithfulness in Jesus name we pray amen