

## Faith in God's Purpose

Lesson for February 25, 2024

### Unit III: The Righteous Live by Faith

**Adult Topic:** Waiting and Trusting

**Background Scripture:** Habakkuk 1:5-2:5

**Printed Text:** Habakkuk 2:1-5

**Key verse:** *“For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.”* Habakkuk 2:3, NIV)

Waiting for God is not laziness. Waiting for God is not going to sleep. Waiting for God is not the abandonment of effort. Waiting for God means, first, activity under command; second, readiness for any new command that may come; third, the ability to do nothing until the command is given.

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We are often prone to being discouraged when navigating life's hardships. How can we endure the wait and trust that better days are ahead? God's message through Habakkuk encourages us to wait in faith and trust God's timing. (*Sunday School Commentary, 2023-2024*, Townsend Press, p. 231)

### Key Terms

1. **Ramparts** (verse 1, NIV) – A protective barrier; a broad embankment or a wall-like ridge.
2. **See** (verse 1) – To perceive by the eye; to perceive or detect as if by sight. To be aware of or recognize.
3. **Stand** (verse 1) – To take up or maintain a specified position or posture.
4. **Tablets** (verse 2) – A flat slab or plaque suited for or bearing an inscription; a thin slab or one of a set of portable sheets used for writing.
5. **Tarry** (verse 3) – To delay or be tardy in acting or doing; to linger in expectation. Wait. To abide or stay in or at a place.
6. **Vision** (verse 2) – Something seen in a dream, trance, or ecstasy, especially a supernatural appearance that conveys a revelation.
7. **Watch** (verse 1) – To be attentive or vigilant; to keep guard.

## Lesson Background

The book of Habakkuk was written between approximately 610 and 605 BC. Very little is known about the prophet Habakkuk. Some scholars believe he might have been a contemporary of Jeremiah. His message and experience can apply to any time and place when uncertainties prevail in the world regarding sickness and health, economic uncertainty and personal safety, war, and peace. The believer can go to God in prayer as the prophet Habakkuk did to seek the reason for their troubles and affirm their faith in God in spite of their dire and uncertain circumstances.

Habakkuk wrote for the Jews living in Judah prior to the Jewish exile to Babylon. Justice seems to have been forgotten in the land, as Assyrian and Babylonian powers continue to grow in strength and conquer kingdoms, threatening God's people. Habakkuk shared his concerns, likely representative of other godly people in his time, and offered prayers for God's mercy upon their people.

Habakkuk includes three chapters with two general themes. The first two chapters express Habakkuk's concerns along with responses from the Lord. His first words to the Lord ask why God was not answering his prayers for help (Habakkuk 1:2–4). God will answer that He is at work in a way Habakkuk would not expect (Habakkuk 1:5–11).

Habakkuk then offers his second complaint (Habakkuk 1:12—2:1): why would God use the wicked to punish God's people? His ways do not seem just from a human perspective. God answers that He has future plans for the righteous who live by faith (Habakkuk 2:2–20). It is in response to Habakkuk's second complaint that we find this week's lesson.

## Lesson in Depth

### I. Faith Waits Expectantly (Habakkuk 2:1-3)

**Stand upon my watch:** Comparing himself to a watchman (Ezekiel Chapters 3 and 33), standing as a sentinel upon the city walls, Habakkuk prepared to wait for God's answer and to ponder his reply. Habakkuk is speaking in this verse. He is waiting to see what God will say to him. He is not shirking his duties in the meantime. He will still act as the watchman.

We see that Habakkuk separates himself from this sinful people. He goes aside, perhaps, to a place in the mountains, until he hears from God. He is expecting God to reprimand him for the questions he asked Him (in chapter 1).

In response to Habakkuk's second complain (1:12 – 2:1), the Lord announced that He would judge the Chaldeans as well for their wickedness. His reply included:

1. The instructions to write it down, as a reminder that it would surely occur (verses 2-3).

2. A description of the character of the wicked in comparison to the righteous (verses 4- 5).

**Write the vision:** Habakkuk was to record the vision to preserve it for posterity, so that all who read it would know of the certainty of its fulfillment (similar language in Daniel 12:4, 9). The prophecy had lasting relevance and thus had to be preserved.

Although a period of time would occur before its fulfillment, all were to know that it would occur at God's "appointed time" (Isaiah 13; Jeremiah chapters 50 and 51). Babylon would fall to the Medo-Persian kingdom of Cyrus (around 539 B.C.; Daniel chapter 5).

**Make it plain:** Habakkuk first had to *see the vision*. The preacher cannot make anyone else see what he does not see for himself. Habakkuk then had to *make it known*. The preacher must do what he can to make the word of God known, and make it known in as many ways as possible. Habakkuk had to make it known as *permanently as possible* – he was told to **write the vision**. The preacher must do what he can to make a permanent impact on his listeners.

Habakkuk had to *make it plain*. The preacher must proclaim God's truth as clearly as possible. "I have sometimes thought that certain ministers fancied that it was their duty to make the message elaborate, to go to the very bottom of the subject, and stir up all the mud they could find there, till you could not possibly see them, nor could they see their own way at all.... They tell people all the difficulties they have discovered in the Bible, – which difficulties most of their hearers would never have heard of unless their ministers had told them." (Spurgeon)

Habakkuk had to *make it practical* – **that he may run who reads it**. God told Habakkuk to write His answer so large on a tablet that someone running past, perhaps fleeing from an enemy, could read it without pausing to stop. The answer God gave Habakkuk has become part of our Bible as part of God's answer in times of trouble.

**For the vision is yet for an appointed time:** Habakkuk spoke to an age beyond his own. The Babylonian conquest would not be evident in his day but in the future. The end could apply to the end of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New Covenant, or to the end of Jerusalem in the time of the Babylonians or later to the time when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, or to the time before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ or to some other end of a culture or society or country. Sometimes we must wait for God to fulfill His promises, and we are told to wait because He surely will fulfill them.

Every person who has a vision of a work God would have him do, could be inspired by these Words. God does things in His time, and not when we think it is time. Notice, in all of this, God does not scold him about the vision, or even the questions he has asked God.

## II. Faith Trusts Triumphantly (Habakkuk 2:4-5)

**Behold, his soul is puffed up:** Two opposing characteristics are here contrasted: The proud trusts in himself; and the just lives by his faith.

1. The proud, haughty Chaldeans, who will be the victors in the forthcoming conflict; and
2. The righteous ones of Judah who will appear to be defeated in the forthcoming conflict, but in reality, will be the victors because of their faith in the Lord.

All this-worldly accomplishments and endeavors, all injustices and times of oppression will end someday. The proud who survey the godless works of their hands in rebellion against God will come to an end according to God's perfect timing. Their spirit is one of selfishness and self-promotion. The righteous will live by their faith in God that leads them to obey God no matter the possible consequences and suffering to themselves personally. The righteousness of the faithful results from God's grace and their trust in God's steadfast love and faithfulness.

**The just shall live by his faith:** is often quoted in the New Testament in support of the doctrine of justification by faith (see Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). Thus, this Old Testament prophecy anticipates the New Testament gospel which shall ultimately conquer the nations and bring them to Christ.

In contrast to the proud, the righteous will be truly preserved through his faithfulness to God. This is the core of God's message to and/or through Habakkuk. Both the aspect of justification by faith, as noted by Paul's usage (in Romans 1:17 and Galatian 3:11), as well as the aspect of sanctification by faith, as employed by the writer of Hebrews (10:38), reflect the essence of Habakkuk; no conflict exists.

The emphasis in both Habakkuk and the New Testament references goes beyond the act of faith to include the continuity of faith. Faith is not a one-time act, but a way of life. The true believer, declared righteous by God, will persevere in faith as the pattern of his life (Colossians 1:22-23; Hebrews 3:12-14).

This statement is not just for Habakkuk, but for all of God's people. Our faith in God should not be determined by things we see with our eyes.

Hebrews 11:1 *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*

Our faith in God is what separates us from the world. The world has no hope. We have hope of the resurrection. Those who have confidence in themselves are not depending on their faith in God to see them through.

**... wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest:** The bitter verbal attack against the Chaldeans served as the basis for the condemnation described (in verses 6-20 beyond this lesson). They were proud and greedy. Like Sheol and death, they were never satisfied but always wanted more. There are three summary charges against the proud Chaldeans:

Notes collected and developed by Ethel Williams

1. Deceived into discontentment by strong drink

*“Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man, So that he does not stay at home.”* The treachery of wine is described in Proverbs 23:31-32. It looks so inviting in the glass but *“in the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper.”*

2. Devoted to greed and covetousness

*“He enlarges his appetite like Sheol, and he is like death, never satisfied.”*

3. Driven by ambition and lust for conquest

*“He also gathers to himself all nations and collects to himself all peoples.”*

This is speaking of a man who is lacking in moral character. He drinks heavily. He runs around. He is living for the desires of the flesh, and his flesh will die. The sad thing is, this type of person winds up in hell for all of eternity. In this particular instance, this is speaking of the Babylonians (Chaldeans). They, as a nation, are headed for total destruction in hell.

### Lesson Summary

Overall, Habakkuk 2:1-5 teaches us about the importance of patience, faith, and trust in God's timing and His promises. It reminds us to seek God's guidance and to trust in His timing, even when we don't understand His plans. Summarily, this passage teaches us:

1. **Patience and Persistence:** Habakkuk demonstrates patience by waiting for God to answer his questions and concerns. We learn that it's important to be persistent in seeking God's guidance, even when we don't understand His plans.
2. **Faith in God's Timing:** The passage emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's timing. It teaches us that even though we may not see immediate results or understand God's plans, we should trust that He is working things out according to His perfect timing.
3. **Living by Faith:** The passage also emphasizes the importance of living by faith. Habakkuk is reminded that the righteous shall live by faith, meaning that our lives should be characterized by trust and obedience to God, even when circumstances are difficult.
4. **God's Promises are Sure:** The passage assures us that God's promises are sure and will come to pass. We can have confidence in His promises and trust that He will fulfill them in His timing.
5. **Warning Against Pride:** The passage also warns against pride and self-sufficiency. Habakkuk is warned that the proud will not endure, but the righteous will live by their faith in God.