

Habakkuk 2:2-5

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/hab/hab-2/habakkuk-22-5/>

The LORD responds to Habakkuk's second question/complaint by assuring him that divine justice will ultimately triumph.

Habakkuk waited eagerly to hear from the LORD. He figuratively stationed himself on the rampart like a sentinel to watch and wait patiently to see how God would answer (Habakkuk 2:1). In doing so, Habakkuk displays the wisdom of recognizing that we can acquire a true perspective only by 1) recognizing our current perspective 2) knowing that only God can provide us a perspective that is true and 3) seeking diligently to gain a true perspective from God.

The LORD answered His prophet and disclosed a revelation to him, an answer for the ages. God told Habakkuk that He is the one who controls the destiny of the nations. He would use the arrogant Chaldeans as His instrument to discipline Judah. But He would also judge the Chaldeans for their arrogance and greed.

Before disclosing the revelation to Habakkuk, *the LORD* told him to make some preparations (vv. 2–3). He instructed the prophet to *record the vision*. The word *vision* (“chazon” in Hebrew) refers to visual representations of God’s will that may or may not require interpretation (Joel 2:28). In prophetic literature, “chazon” refers to a revelation of the divine word (Isaiah 1:1). It is related to the verb translated as “saw” in the first chapter (Habakkuk 1:1).

The LORD gave the revelation to Habakkuk and told him to *inscribe it on tablets*. The Hebrew term for *tablets* (“lûah”) denotes any kind of flat object without regard for its use. The word is the same as that used in the book of Exodus to describe the stone *tablets* of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 24:12; 31:18). Tablets were an ordinary medium of writing in Chaldea/Babylonia. They were made of clay and became like stones when baked. Thus, one might assume that the *tablets* on which Habakkuk wrote the *vision* were made the same way.

The purpose for which Habakkuk had to write the revelation was to preserve it and make it known to the public so *that the one who reads it may run*. The idea of someone running with a message suggests its urgency or importance. The *one who reads* the *vision* refers to a herald or a messenger whose task is to *run* from location to location reading aloud his proclamation. Such a messenger was to *read* the LORD’s command, as Baruch “the son of Neriah” did for the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:4). He would read the divine message and proclaim it with urgency and excitement.

This mirrors a theme that runs through scripture of “hear, believe, and do.” We see this in the culminating exhortation of Deuteronomy:

“But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.”
(Deuteronomy 30:14)

This verse is quoted by the Apostle Paul to illustrate the “righteousness based on faith” in Romans 10:8. This is in fulfillment of the theme of Romans, which is that “the righteous man shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17).

A version of this principle of “hear, believe, do” is also found in Revelation:

“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.”
(Revelation 1:3)

God’s instructions to Adam relative to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil also follows this formula, asking Adam to hear His instruction, believe it is true (in his best interest), then act upon it (Genesis 2:16-17).

The LORD instructed Habakkuk to *inscribe the vision on tablets* because *the vision is yet for the appointed time*. The writer of Ecclesiastes tells us that “there is an appointed time for everything” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). God determines a time for every event under the sun. Every little thing matters to Him (Mark 21:8). He knows and controls everything.

The revelation God gave to Habakkuk was some way off. It *hastens toward the goal*. The idea of *hasten* likely does not mean time moves any faster, but rather speaks to the inevitability that what God has determined will transpire. What God has decreed *will not fail* because God is God, and what He says will come to pass. As He stated in the book of Isaiah, “My word cannot return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). Therefore, He comforted Habakkuk by giving him the *vision* and said, *Though it tarries, wait for it*. Here, God’s decree *tarries*. Though it is inevitable (*hastens*) it will come on God’s timetable, not man’s.

The LORD knows His plan. He determines how He will work it out “according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him” (Ephesians 1:9). Since He has *an appointed time* for everything, the righteous people in Judah were to read, study, and proclaim the divine message while awaiting its fulfillment. *Though it tarries, it will certainly come; it will not delay*. Our God is never late. He is always on time. His *vision* would not take any longer than He had planned. But it would also come on God’s schedule. Thus, the righteous ones were to *wait* patiently on the LORD.

Having prepared Habakkuk for the *vision*, the LORD revealed it to him (v. 4). He began with the particle “*behold*” to introduce the *vision*. The particle *behold* is often used to describe an event that is about to take place. It serves to focus attention on the statement that follows it. In other words, the speaker uses the term *behold* to focus on an event that may be surprising to his listeners.

The particle *behold* is followed by two contrasting statements. In the first, the LORD stated, *As for the proud one, his soul is not right within him*. The word translated as *proud* means impudent or brazen. It describes someone self-willed, who yields to no one. This was the attitude of the

Chaldeans who were proud and arrogant (Habakkuk 1:7, 11, 13). God emphasized this truth in the second line by saying, *His soul* [the Babylonians'] *is not right within him*.

The term *soul* is used poetically to refer to the entire being, as it often does in the Old Testament (Psalm 103:1). The term *right* is used in an ethical sense. It refers to someone who has righteous conduct (upright) that is in harmony with God's design. The Chaldeans were not upright because they deviated from the moral norm and sought a righteousness of their own definition: "Their justice and authority originate within themselves" (Habakkuk 1:7).

The Chaldean definition of "right" was for all things to be under their dominance, available for them to exploit to their own ends. They crushed any who opposed them, and took what they desired. It appears that their definition of "good" was for their own, insatiable appetites to be appeased. The Chaldeans/Babylonians then present an image of the worldly culture of carnality and exploitation. Babylon is used throughout scripture as a picture of the world's system of violence and exploitation (Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:1).

The second statement contrasts with the first, setting forth the opposite of pride (which yields wickedness), which is faith (which yields righteousness). The LORD began the contrasting statement with the conjunction "but" to establish the contrast between the prideful and the righteous. He declared, *But the righteous will live by his faith*. The adjective translated as *righteous* is "šaddîq" in Hebrew. It pertains to right conduct or good character. It emphasizes conformity to the standard of the LORD's commands by actions, which leads to peace ("shalom") and true prosperity. Righteousness consists of the actions that cause all things to work in harmony, within God's design. The core principle of God's righteousness is for neighbors to love and serve one another. The New Testament uses a well functioning body as a picture of righteousness, where all members serve their proper role to allow the body to function fully (1 Corinthians 12:12).

The verb *live* in the phrase *But the righteous will live by his faith* suggests that the core necessity to be righteous is to have *faith* as the very foundation of one's life. The Hebrew word translated *faith* is "emuwnah." It first occurs in the Bible when Israel is fighting the Amelikites after departing from Egypt. Moses watched the battle from a hilltop. When Moses lifted his hands, Israel prevailed, and when his arms tired, Israel's enemy prevailed. So Aaron and Hur each held up one of Moses' arms, and Israel prevailed. In this verse, the Hebrew word "emuwnah" (faith) is translated "steady":

"But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady ("emuwnah") until the sun set."
(Exodus 17:12)

The picture of *faith* here is of Moses doing the job he was assigned in partnership with other "team mates." Moses did his job. When he tired, he did not give up and quit, but rather received help from others, and persisted on. He was "steady" in his obedience. He did not falter, and kept doing his job, playing his role to serve his family, his community, and his nation. His goal was not his own comfort, but rather to complete the task needed to serve others.

Similarly, to be righteous means to continue steadily in doing good, even when iniquity seems to prevail. This principle is found throughout scripture. A few examples are:

“Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.”
(Galatians 6:9)

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.”
(1 Peter 5:6-9)

“... fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”
(Hebrews 12:2-3)

“If we endure, we will also reign with Him.”
(2 Timothy 2:12a)

The faithfulness that produces righteousness is a steadiness of action, walking in obedience to God’s commands. Its opposite is to be self-willed, to follow our own appetites and desires, apart from God’s direction. To be righteous requires laying aside self, crucifying the desires of the flesh (Luke 9:23; Romans 8:13; James 1:14, 21).

In the New Testament era, the first step to becoming righteous is to be born spiritually (John 3:3,7). We are born again by faith in Christ (John 3:14-15). When we are born again, we receive freely the gift of God’s righteousness being imparted upon us (Romans 3:21-22). Receiving by grace this righteousness of Christ makes us fully accepted in the sight of God.

Then to experience righteousness in living our lives requires the steadiness of obedience to God, playing our part to serve our roles as members of the Body of Christ. In living faithfully in obedience to Christ’s commands, we live a life of love toward others, and doing good toward others. In so doing, we live in harmony with God’s design for the earth.

The statement from Habakkuk 2:4 —*the righteous will live by his faith*—is quoted in three New Testament books (Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews).

In Romans, Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 in the theme verse for his letter to the church at Rome:

“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 to faith; as it is written, ‘BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’”
(Romans 1:16-17)

Paul wrote his letter to the church at Rome, which consisted of believers whose faith was being spoken of throughout the world (Romans 1:8). He was resisting the teaching of competition Jewish authorities, who maintained that righteousness required following religious rules, such as circumcision. Paul maintained that justification salvation (being declared righteous in the sight of God) came solely through grace, appropriated by faith (Romans 4:3; 5:15-16; 8:31-32). Being justified in God's sight only comes through faith in Jesus's death on the cross (Colossians 2:14).

In Romans, Paul's opponents insisted that his teaching of grace meant that we ought to sin, so that grace would abound all the more (Romans 3:8). Paul did insist that when we sin grace does abound (Romans 5:20). However, that does not mean we ought to sin, because sin brings a consequence of death (Romans 23). Paul reasons that since sin brings a consequence of death, it ought to be avoided (Romans 6:1-2). And, in fact, by walking in the Spirit, we gain great and amazing advantages, including rewards in the present life. In fact, by walking in obedience to the Spirit, we gain the experience of righteousness:

“Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?”
(Romans 6:16)

Paul used Genesis 15:6 as his primary verse to support the idea that gaining righteousness in the sight of God comes by faith (Romans 4:3). And he used Habakkuk 4:2 as the foundational scripture from which he developed this concept that the experience of righteousness comes through obedience.

In Galatians, Paul makes basically the same points as he made in Romans. He makes clear that being justified and made righteous in the sight of God is solely a matter of faith in Christ (Galatians 3:2). But living out that faith is what brings us the experience of righteousness, Paul quotes Habakkuk 4:2 in Galatians 3:11 as scriptural support to make that point. By application, to believe that following religious rules justifies us in God's sight is a matter of pride, which will not bring righteousness.

Paul emphasizes that walking in obedience to Christ is walking in the Spirit (Romans 8:4; Galatians 5:16). When we walk in the Spirit, we fulfill the spirit of the law, which is to love others as ourselves, and even to love our enemies (Romans 12:20-21; Galatians 5:13-14; 6:2).

In Hebrews, the writer emphasizes that believers should live faithfully as we await the return of Christ:

“Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE,
HE WHO IS COMING 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.”
(Hebrews 10:35-38)

Habakkuk 4:2 is quoted in Hebrews 10:38. The result of not living by faith is to miss pleasing God. Pleasing God leads to the greatest blessings and rewards of life. God never rejects His people. But to gain the great benefit and blessing that comes from following God’s ways requires obedience to God’s ways.

After the statement, *the righteous will live by his faith* in Habakkuk 2:4, the LORD described the life of the wicked. He continued the contrast between the righteous person, who lives by his faithfulness and submission to God, and the wicked one, who deviates from the moral norm and lives an arrogant life of exploiting others to his own end. Using the third person singular to describe the Chaldeans, the LORD declared, *Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man so that he does not stay at home.*

The term translated as *haughty* is “yahir” in the Hebrew language and means “presumptuous” and “proud” (Proverbs 21:24). It describes the behavior of the Chaldeans, who were intoxicated with arrogance and greed. In their sinful arrogance, the Chaldeans sought to conquer more and more nations to expand their empire like someone filled with wine and still unsatisfied. They became restless; never *stayed at home*. As is always the case with sin, the Chaldeans had become slaves to their appetites, and are addicted to the harsh master of “more.”

The Chaldeans were so greedy that the LORD compares them with *Sheol* and *death*, saying, *He enlarges his appetite like Sheol, and he is like death, never satisfied.* The term *Sheol* stands for the grave and death. It is the underworld, the realm of the dead (Deuteronomy 32:22). *Sheol*, like a greedy person, is insatiable. It demands of every single person. Death never reaches a point where it says “enough.” It always desires more. Similarly, the Chaldeans can never have enough violence, conquest, domination and exploitation.

The book of Proverbs asserts, “There are three things that will not be satisfied, four that will not say ‘Enough’: *Sheol*, and the barren womb, earth that is never satisfied with water, and fire...” (Proverbs 30:15–16). Just as *Sheol* and *death* continually open their mouth to swallow more bodies, so the Chaldeans sought to devour the nations. They were never content with the extent of their military conquests. As the next two lines state, *He also gathers to himself all nations and collects to himself all peoples.* They could never subdue enough nations or people groups. In their greed, they went beyond the assignment God gave them.

For this reason, He would not leave them unpunished. Sin has consequence (Romans 6:23). Even though God will use Babylon to achieve His own purpose to discipline His people, He is not overlooking Babylon’s wickedness. Consequences have results, and God is a righteous judge. He will bring all things to account in His own time (Revelation 20:12).

Biblical Text

**² Then the Lord answered me and said,
“Record the vision**

**And inscribe *it* on tablets,
That the one who reads it may run.
³“For the vision is yet for the appointed time;
It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail.
Though it tarries, wait for it;
For it will certainly come, it will not delay.
⁴“Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith.
⁵“Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man,
So that he does not stay at home.
He enlarges his appetite like Sheol,
And he is like death, never satisfied.
He also gathers to himself all nations
And collects to himself all peoples.**