

## ***FPFWC Christian Development***



## **The Righteous Live By Faith**

February 2024

Winter Quarter

*February 24, 2024*

## **Lesson #4 – Faith In God’s Purpose**

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Habakkuk 2:1-5

### **ICE BREAKERS-**

1. How could the practice of writing in a journal provide insights into the ways that God has answered your prayers?
2. How can you practice patience regarding the Lord’s answers to your prayers?

*Key Verse: “For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.—  
Habakkuk 2:3*

### **LESSON BACKGROUND –**

The book of Habakkuk gives us virtually no personal information regarding “Habakkuk the prophet” (Habakkuk 1:1). His name occurs only one other time after the first chapter (see 3:1). Even then, the text provides no further information about the man. Compared to other Old Testament prophets (examples: Isaiah 1:1; Jeremiah 1:1–3), we know nothing regarding the exact details of the life of Habakkuk.

However, some clues in the text of Habakkuk inform our educated guesses regarding the man and his times. Early in the book, the Lord promised to raise “the Chaldeans” (another name for the Babylonians) to punish the kingdom of Judah (Habakkuk 1:6). Using the then-future Babylonian exile of 586 BC as a historical marker, Habakkuk likely served sometime during the last decade of the seventh century BC; that would have been during the reign of evil King Jehoiakim (609–598 BC).

Following the split of Israel into two kingdoms in about 931 BC (1 Kings 11:43–12:24), things went pretty much downhill for both. The kingdoms of “Israel” (10 tribes to the north) and “Judah” (2 tribes to the south) glared at each other for about 200 years until the Assyrians conquered and exiled the northern tribes in 722 BC (2 Kings 17). The southern kingdom of Judah narrowly escaped the same fate (18:13–19:36), even though they were also guilty of the same behavior that led to the destruction of their northern kin (17:18–20).

About a century later, the Babylonian Empire became the regional superpower after defeating the Assyrians and Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC (Jeremiah 46:2). King Josiah of Judah unwisely interfered, contributing to the Babylonian victory; Josiah’s action also cost him his life (2 Chronicles 35:20–27). Just as Habakkuk 1:6 promised, Babylonian forces invaded Judah and overthrew its king (see 36:5–8).

For a few years, Judah’s kings served as vassals to the Babylonians. However, this arrangement didn’t last. During the final year of the reign of King Zedekiah (586 BC), Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians after about a decade of conflict (see 2 Kings 25).

There was a series of deportations from Judah by the Babylonians—one each in 605, 594, and 586 BC. Habakkuk likely served prior to the first of those, given the future tense of Habakkuk 1:6. This places Habakkuk as a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah. Both prophets received a warning that the people of Jerusalem would face dire consequences because of sinful behavior.

### LESSON COMMENTARY

**2:1.** Having asked this central question of the Lord, Habakkuk presented himself as a sentry posted on a city wall waiting to **see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved.** Habakkuk yearned for God to explain what he had failed to understand and awaited a response (cf. Ps 50:15; 91:15; Jr 33:3). He was not anticipating a reprimand from God for his questions, but rather a genuine corrective response (cf. Pr 3:11; 12:1; 15:31).

### **The Lord's Reply: The Righteous Live by Faith in God's Justice because God Will Judge the Babylonians**

The Lord's answer to Habakkuk was twofold: He would judge the Babylonians for their destruction of Judah, therefore, the righteous must trust God's actions and timing in judging the wicked.

**2:2–3.** Habakkuk was instructed to **record** God's answer **on tablets**, an echo of the giving of the law written on tablets of stone (see Ex 24:12; 31:18; 32:16). **Record[ing]** the message on stone resulted in a permanent but portable message that a messenger could deliver—the **one who reads it may run.** The message was to encourage the faithful of Judah that **the vision** of the events was **yet for the appointed time**, but it would **certainly come** and **will not delay.** Babylon did capture Jerusalem, and seemed for a while to be an unconquerable world ruler. Yet within 70 years Babylon would fall to the Medo-Persians, just as God foretold. The Lord's word is always fulfilled, but often in unexpected ways (cf. Ps 90:4; 2Pt 3:9; Rv 22:20). This verse is quoted in the NT to encourage followers of Messiah to remain faithful to Him until the Lord Jesus returns (Heb 10:37).

**2:4.** This is the key verse in Habakkuk, which contrasts the difference between the **proud** Babylonians who had made “their strength ... their god” (1:11) and the **righteous** attitude of the faithful remnant of Israel who **will live by faith.**

The indictment against Babylon is addressed to **the proud one**, the leader of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, as representative of the nation. He (**his soul**) was **not right within him** because he trusted in his strength as his god (1:11).

This **proud one** is contrasted with the **righteous** person who **will live by his faith.** This familiar verse appears three times in the NT (Rm 1:17; Gl 3:11; Heb 10:38), yet the emphasis of the verse is somewhat unclear. The Hebrew word *'emunah*, can mean either “faith” or “faithfulness,” as well as carry the emphasis of “integrity.” The question then becomes, do the righteous live by God's faithfulness to them or by their faithfulness to God?

Throughout the Scriptures, a right relationship with the Lord is based on personal faith in Him (cf. Gn 15:6; Rm 1:17; Gl 3:11; Heb 10:38), because the Lord is faithful (e.g., Ps 36:5; 86:15; 145:13). Thus these ideas are more similar than they are different. One who

has faith in God will also live in faithfulness to Him. Likely, the author intended both ideas in this verse.

All this makes it difficult to understand why Paul cited it in support of a *person* having *faith* in order to be saved. The noun *'emunah* would even be considered a work (faithfulness, constancy). Another difficulty rests in the slight ambiguity of the Hebrew. The suffixed pronoun **his** (or “its”) most likely refers to a person who is righteous, but possibly refers to God’s steadfastness or fidelity, or, even less likely, to the trustworthiness of the vision God gave to Habakkuk (see Hab 2:2, 3). But the closest antecedent is the one who is righteous, making it the likely choice.

A solution to its meaning here and in Paul’s letters may be found in similar uses of the word righteous (*tsedeqah*) and the verb “believe” (*'aman*, a cognate of the noun faith or “faithfulness,” *'emunah*, used here by Habakkuk) in Gn 15:6 (“Then he *believed* in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as *righteousness*”—italics added). It is likely that Habakkuk had in mind the Genesis passage, and that he was encouraging his people to have the kind of faith Abraham had—a faith that was grounded in God’s promises (see Hab 3:1–19 and comments there), in spite of delays in their fulfillment. A considerable amount of time would elapse for God’s promises to be fulfilled for Abraham. His trust would need to be firm, steady (*'emunah*). Likewise Habakkuk would have to wait a long time for God to judge Babylon and rescue His people (see 2:3 and 3:16 for the concept of waiting, though the two words are different). The prophet urged the righteous to be steadfast, firm, and faithful (live by his faith, *'emunah*) in his reliance upon God’s promises—even over the long period of time it would take to rescue His people (see especially 3:16–19).

**2:5.** In contrast to the righteous, the Babylonians were **haughty**, foolishly proud, and seemingly unaware that **wine betrays** them. It drove their appetite for conquest. Like **Sheol** and **death**, they were **never satisfied** in the pursuit of **peoples** to conquer. (See Pr 4:17 for affirmation of misuse of alcohol as giving rise to violence.)

**LESSON NUGGET** – The Prophet was predicting the rise and fall of Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. He was telling about the pride of Nebuchadnezzar and how it would ultimately bring him down. Now God contrasted the pride of the wicked with the walk of faith of the righteous. “But the just shall live by his faith.” It will take faith to survive a difficult time that is coming. When you can’t immediately see the deliverance that God has promised, it takes faith to survive. It is so important to understand this. Paul quoted this verse in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11, and it is also quoted in Hebrews 10:38. It is a crucial truth for us to remember as our days get dark. We must live by faith. The just always do.

***Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Word for Today Bible, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary***