

Text: Habakkuk 2:2-4

Title: The Just Shall Live By Faith

Truth: In response to impending judgment, make sure you are right with God.

Date/Location: Sunday May 24, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

Habakkuk has planted his feet, and awaits God's answer to his second question. He asked about God's use of a wicked instrument (Babylon) to judge a nation that Habakkuk asserted was less wicked (Judah). While we found that comparative value judgment to be somewhat debatable, we can grant the larger point for the sake of argument: it is difficult to swallow that God would use such an evil nation to do His bidding, and such a brutal bidding as it was.

In another sense, however, it should be fairly clear that if God is going to use human means to carry out His purposes, which He often does, He would not hire a church choir to do this kind of work. It is a messy business, and God sometimes uses dirty people to do dirty work.

I. The Vision Will Surely Come to Pass, v. 2-3

- A. Habakkuk is instructed to write the vision in a lucid fashion. The idea of "make plain" is used in Deut. 1:5 and 27:8 where Moses expounds or explains the Law. He wrote it in a very direct, straightforward manner so that it was as easy as possible to understand. I believe this means more than "make it legible"—that is a basic requirement of any writing meant to be read. "Plain" has the added idea of making it understandable. There is no code language or hidden meaning in the text of the prophecy. It is laid out in an organized and clear fashion. Note the doctrine of the clarity (perspicuity) of all of Scripture.
- B. The purpose of making the vision easy to understand was so that "he may run who reads it." At first it might seem that the one who reads it will become afraid and take flight to escape the coming destruction. And that could be the case, but weighing against this view is that there seems to be a span of time before the vision will

be fulfilled—so running is not immediately necessary. Likely the “runner” is a herald or courier who takes the message to distant parts of Judah to ensure that the residents know what God is saying. The courier can read it and, instead of taking a Xerox copy with him, he has to take it in his mind and be able to reproduce it to his audience.

- C. Verse 3 reiterates that the vision is for a future appointed time. That its words will “speak” means that it will happen. It will not lie—God is not slack concerning His promise, nor is He a liar. It may seem to be delayed, but the people should be patient because it will surely come. It is decreed by God and it will turn out the way God has said. It will not come a moment early or a moment late, but will be right on time.

It is somewhat unique for a prophecy to be reiterated so strongly like this. The indication is that it is coming fairly soon—and certainly so. It will happen during Habakkuk’s days (1:5). Other prophecies are just as certain, but they come on a timescale that is far longer than a single generation.

II. Behold the Proud, v. 4a

- A. Who are the proud? The context directs us to the answer: the proud equals the Babylonians. They trust in their military power. They are self-sufficient. They have no thought of the true God percolating in their minds as they execute their military domination. They are their own god.
- B. The problem with the proud is that his soul is not right. He displeases God with what is going on in his mind and heart. God knows about his attitude—not only because He sees the heart and mind of each person, but also because He sees their conduct. It is obvious that these people were arrogant. Reiterate in your mind that God is just as displeased with outer sinful conduct as inner sinful thought (Prov. 23:7).
- C. The fact that this focuses on the Babylonians does not exclude the proud in Judah from taking note of what God is saying—nor the proud person today. The sin of pride knows no ethnic or national

boundaries, so if you were arrogant during the 7th century B.C., your soul was also not upright. The same is true today.

- D. This is kind of like a concession to Habakkuk's second question about the wickedness of the instrument God uses to inflict punishment. God agrees, "Yes, these people are evil." God will explain further starting in verse 5 about the wickedness of the invaders.

III. Consider the Just and His Faith, v. 4b

- A. In contrast to the proud person is the just person.¹ Placed side-by-side with the wicked, this could make you feel pretty good about yourself. But if you think about it for a minute, Habakkuk, are your people really exhibiting faith in God? Are they righteous because of their faith? Are they living justly by faith daily? Any way you interpret the meaning of the phrase (which we do below), the residents of Judah ought to pause at this point and ask themselves, "Am I living in faith to the LORD?" Am I "perfect as my Father in heaven is perfect?" (Matt. 5:48). Not, "Am I better than the Babylonians?" They would easily come out favorably in their own eyes in such a comparison. But when God's holiness drives the standard of comparison, things look a lot different.
- B. What is the bottom-line difference between the proud and the righteous? The proud is all about himself. He trusts in his wisdom, power, knowledge, ability, personal righteousness, etc. (Jer. 9:23). The righteous trust in God. The wisdom, power, knowledge, and ability of any person comes from God, and the righteous openly acknowledge that fact. They are righteous *because* of God's salvation. See Rom. 11:36, 1 Cor. 4:7, Deut. 8:18.

NKJV: "But the just shall live by his faith."

"Literal Hebrew": "But the righteous by his faithfulness will live."

- C. Suggested Meanings of "the just shall live by his faith."

1. The one who has been **justified by faith will live eternally.**

¹ I do not think the proud and the just refer to a national or corporate body, even though Babylon as a nation could probably qualify. Judah could not qualify entirely under the just category, as already made clear in 1:2-4.

2. The one who is **faithful in his conduct** will get **eternal life**.
3. The one who is just will **live physically** through the judgment because of **his faithfulness**.
4. The one who is **justified by God** will carry out his **daily life by faith**.

D. Evaluation of the possible interpretations.

1. The one who has been **justified by faith** will **live eternally**. This is true theologically because justification is by faith. And the words can be quoted to reflect that truth. But that doesn't seem to be the only force of God's statement here. In the case of the proud, He is talking about uprightness of soul *and* outward conduct.
2. The one who is **faithful in his conduct** will get **eternal life**. The strength of this interpretation is the word "faithful" translates "steadfastness, faithfulness, fidelity." But this could be misunderstood very badly. If one believes that he merits eternal life through faithful conduct, then he is in conflict with the Word of God on the subject of how any person receives justification. But outward conduct *does* evidence inward transformation. This idea we find in Matthew 12:37: "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." But one who is faithful in his conduct cannot be saved by it, because a faithful person knows and acknowledges that he is what he is because of faith in God and God's work in his life.
3. The one who is just will **live physically** through the judgment because of **his faithfulness**. This fits well with the larger context of the Law of Moses. The covenant God made with Israel promised physical blessing and longevity in the land if the nation was obedient to him. If not, then there would be an interruption in blessing and a shortening of life.
4. The one who is **justified by God** will carry out his **daily life by faith**. This is also true in general.

The reason that several of these seem to be right is that the words of God here to Habakkuk are true in a general way. People are

justified by faith; true faith results in faithfulness—although such faithfulness is not meritorious; and true faith evidences itself through daily living by faith instead of by works. We are not under the regime of the Mosaic Covenant anymore, but it is also true in a general way that if you live a godly life in a decent society, your life will be better and you will live longer. If you are in a society full of persecution, that will not be the case.

The reason it may seem to be so critical to us to interpret the verse in a very finely-tuned, high-specificity way is that we have been trained in our orbit of Christianity to think about salvation coming by an initial act of faith and that's basically the end of the important part. But the entire Bible is concerned not just with some momentary act of faith to “get saved.” The Bible teaches that the Christian life is all of faith—from beginning to end and throughout. Believers believe initially, and continue to believe through their lives. This is belief and perseverance in belief. I believe Habakkuk is talking about the *whole package*, not just the initial act and not just the ongoing faithfulness. The Christian lives by faith from beginning to end.

E. The verse is quoted in the New Testament in three places.

1. Romans 1:17. Although some take this as a reference to initial justification by faith, it seems reasonable to understand this in the broader sense that salvation—beginning, middle, and end—is all by faith. As Paul says earlier in the verse, in the gospel is revealed God's righteousness from “faith to faith.”
2. Gal. 3:11. This seems to focus in a bit more on the notion of justification by faith. But as the efforts of the Galatians were an attempt to effect a continual process of justification by works of the Law, it is again fitting to note that the whole package of the saved life is by faith from beginning to end. Both in the OT era and in the NT era a person was justified *and* lived by faith.
3. Heb. 10:38. The context here seems to lean the other way—toward the perseverance and sanctification aspects of the life of faith. One who fails to persevere will not please God. In fact, drawing back is pointed in only one direction—perdition. True

Christians are different—they continue to believe with the promised outcome of saving of the soul.

In none of these three quotations does the author mis-use or abuse the words of the Habakkuk. While the NT quote may lean toward justification or sanctification aspects of salvation, this all is included in the original context. The just person starts and continues by faith; the proud person is not upright in soul because he trusts in himself instead of in the living God.

Conclusion

Habakkuk is making plain God's message that doom is coming to the southern kingdom. The main issue that matters is not physical disaster preparedness, a go-bag, or saving precious family heirlooms. What is important is whether you are proud or whether you trust God and live like it. Which is it in your case?

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