

Faith in God's Purpose

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 29:8-14

Background Scripture: Habakkuk 1:5–2:5

Today's Scripture: Habakkuk 2:1-5

I. One Conversation

Habakkuk 2:1-3

1 I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.

2 And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

3 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.

1. This verse completes Habakkuk's second section of questioning that began at Habakkuk 1:12. In the verse before us, the prophet shifts from questioning the Lord to waiting for the Lord's response. When people call out to the Lord, the timing of His response is always perfect, but it is not always as fast as we desire. Habakkuk himself has been impatient in this regard (Habakkuk 1:2).

Habakkuk had no idea how long it would take—if ever—for the Lord to answer his second question. But he wasn't willing merely to toss his prayer to Heaven and then go about his daily tasks. Instead, we see a determination to stay focused as he waited for a response.

In this determined concentration, the prophet envisioned himself as a lookout who would *stand upon* his *watch* as he performed the duty of a person responsible for sounding an early warning of something that was approaching.

In describing the task of a lookout, the phrases *I will stand upon my watch* and *set me upon the tower* are similar to Isaiah 21:8: "I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights." In Habakkuk's day, lookouts were stationed at vantage points such as high towers. From such vantage points, lookouts were in a position to see things that others could not yet see. Thus, they warned of approaching enemies or visitors.

The Old Testament prophets were spiritual lookouts for the people they served. The prophets were to proclaim the arrival of the Lord's reign and warn the people of the consequences of their disobedience. In most cases, the people failed to heed the warning of these prophetic watchmen. But if their failure to heed was due to the prophet's failure to warn, then the prophet would be accountable.

The distressed prophet was obviously concerned for the welfare of his people. However, he also acknowledged that he might be rebuked (as the word *reproved* is translated in Proverbs 27:5) by the Lord.

2. As Habakkuk anticipated, *the Lord answered* the prophet's complaints. The content and form of this *vision* the prophet experienced are uncertain.

When prophets wrote messages from the Lord, they frequently did so on rolls (scrolls) of papyrus. However, the *tables* commanded of Habakkuk were likely made of stone, similar to the "tables of stone" on which the law was divinely etched and given to Moses. The content of this vision, etched plain and legible in stone, was, therefore, an almost-permanent medium for the message. Ancient scrolls were fragile and could be burned; the same cannot be said of stone.

The Lord sometimes commanded that His prophets write down His message as a witness for the people. At other times, however, the Lord sealed His message until its fulfillment. Because the Lord did not seal this particular message, the people of Judah would have immediate knowledge of its content and implications.

In ancient times, a messenger might *run* to proclaim the content of vital, time-sensitive messages. Without modern-day wireless communication, running messengers were the quickest way to convey information over distance. The speed with which the message needed to travel highlighted its importance.

3. Habakkuk had waited for the Lord (Habakkuk 1:2; 2:1), and now part of the waiting concluded as the prophet received the Lord's response. But there was more waiting to come for Habakkuk to see the fulfillment of *the vision* at an *appointed time*. God's promises would eventually be fulfilled, but not on a timetable that Habakkuk desired.

We frequently become impatient when we have to wait. Rather than wait for God to act, we may take steps to expedite God's promises. Rather than see God as long-suffering, we interpret God's silence

as His refusal to act or hear. Habakkuk needed to trust that the Lord would respond to wickedness in the Lord's own time and manner.

II. Two People Habakkuk 2:4-5

4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

5 Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people.

4a. The Lord's message distinguishes two types of people. The first type is the person whose *soul* is *lifted up* with self-assured pride and arrogance. Such a perspective was indicative of Judah's enemies during this time. The military strength of the Babylonians was undeniable, leading them to count their power as a god. Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar saw the expanse of the kingdom as the result of his power. Even as the Lord raised the Babylonians to conquer Judah, He acknowledged their pride. Similarly, when the unnamed king of Assyria looked out over his conquest, he proclaimed the strength of his hand.

Even the kingdoms of Judah and Israel were guilty of arrogance. This behavior was part of the reason that enemies conquered them. The Lord detests those whose thoughts and behavior are grounded in pride. Such people will inevitably face dramatic consequences.

4b. This half-verse offers an immediate contrast between two types of people. One type—the prideful—has just been discussed. The second type—*the just*—lives with an entirely different outlook, an

outlook of *faith*. Their lives are grounded in righteousness. Such a person follows God's standards regarding their relationships with God and others. This person lives with integrity and without blame for wrongdoing (see Proverbs 20:7).

The Hebrew word translated *faith* is also translated as "truth" in Jeremiah 5:1, 3; 7:28; 9:3. To be a person of faith goes hand in hand with being a person of truth. Unfaithful people depart from the truth. In the book of Habakkuk, God calls His people to have faith in the truth of His plans, even when those plans seemed unbelievable (Habakkuk 1:5). Although the Babylonians would prosper for a time by placing faith in themselves, the people of Judah were to depend on the Lord. The apostle Paul connected the concepts of truth and faithfulness in applying them to his ministry as an apostle (1 Timothy 2:7; Titus 1:1). We must proclaim truth and live with faithfulness as we follow God and trust Him.

Elsewhere, Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4b in explaining the nature of the gospel with regard to righteousness, which is a characteristic of God that is to be ours as well (Romans 1:16-17). In a preliminary sense, to be righteous is to do what is right in God's eyes. But having a right standing with God can't be based on mere good behavior because, as Paul later noted, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (3:10, drawing on Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; and Ecclesiastes 7:20). Instead, a right standing before God is imputed on the basis of faith. This basis is reaffirmed in Galatians 3:11-14, where Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4b again.

In a section of Hebrews that teaches the importance of the perseverance of faith, the author also quotes from a portion of Habakkuk 2:3: "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live

by faith" (Hebrews 10:37-38a). We live by faith because we can trust that God will also be faithful to His promises.

5a. In a continuation of Habakkuk 2:4a, above, the Lord's message returns to the behavior of the *proud* person. Becoming drunk, perhaps on *wine*, might follow a successful military campaign. Babylon's military successes were intoxicating, leading the nation to desire more through military conquest. Babylon was incapable of staying at rest in her homelands.

The Hebrew word translated *hell* is a vague word that occurs dozens of times in the Old Testament. In contexts involving *death*, it is translated as "hell" about half the time and "grave" about half the time. As such, it may not refer to hell as the New Testament uses that word in Matthew 5:22, 29-30; James 3:6; and elsewhere. The word in the original language has a similar spelling to the Hebrew word for *ask*. This association brings to mind a place that is always asking for more but is never satisfied. Similarly, the desires of the proud and arrogant never cease; they never say, "Now I have enough."

5b. One way that the proud expand their power is through military conquest. As a planter gathers fruit at harvest, prideful rulers gather *all nations* under their authority and conquest. During these campaigns, enemies took captives into exile and slavery.

However, such prideful behavior will not go unpunished. God will reverse selfish ambition. In response to the arrogant and destructive behavior of Judah's enemies, the Lord predicts punishment in terms of five sets of "woe" (Habakkuk 2:6-19). Although Judah was to suffer for its arrogant disobedience, its prideful and arrogant enemies would also experience a downfall equally devastating, if not more so.

Involvement Learning

Faith in God's Purpose

Into the Lesson

When was a time that you were unhappy because you had to wait?

When was a time when waiting resulted in something good?

Today, we will consider what Scripture says about waiting on the Lord. Let's learn how the book of Habakkuk can inform our waiting in faith and trusting in God's timing.

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

Into the Word

Read Habakkuk 1:2–2:5. What was Habakkuk's first complaint, and how did God respond?

What was Habakkuk's second complaint, and how did God respond?

Compare and contrast Habakkuk 1:2–2:5 with Romans 1:14–20.

Compare and contrast Habakkuk 1:2–2:5 with Galatians 3:1–14.

What messages are common to all these texts?

Compare and contrast Habakkuk 1:2–2:5 with Psalms 27 and 37.

Compare and contrast Habakkuk 1:2–2:5 with Lamentations 3.

What messages are common to all these Scriptures?

Into Life

How will you practice commitment to the Lord in light of a negative situation currently happening in your life?

Thought to Remember

The righteous will live by faith.