

The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah

Lesson 4: The Righteous Shall Live by His Faith -- Habakkuk 2:1-20

After Habakkuk poured out his complaint, he did something remarkable. He climbed up to his watchtower, set himself on the rampart, and waited. 'I will stand upon my watch,' he says, 'and will watch to see what he will say unto me.' He had brought his hardest questions to God, and now, instead of stomping off, he posted himself like a sentry and watched the horizon for God's reply. There is a whole spirituality in that posture: ask honestly, then wait expectantly. Habakkuk did not demand that God answer on his timetable. He took up his station and waited for the word.

And the word came. God told him to write the vision plainly, large enough to read on the run, because it was for an appointed time and would surely come. Then God spoke the sentence that would echo through the rest of the Bible: 'the just shall live by his faith.' Five words in Hebrew, and they would later become the heartbeat of the gospel, quoted by Paul in Romans and Galatians and by the writer of Hebrews. In a world where the proud trust their own strength and the violent build empires on blood, there is another way to live, the way of humble, persevering trust in God.

The rest of chapter 2 is a series of five 'woes' pronounced against Babylon, the very nation God was using to discipline Judah. So God answers Habakkuk's deepest worry: no, the Babylonians will not get away with it. The plunderer will be plundered. The one who built a town with blood will see his work go up in smoke. The proud who puffs himself up will fall, but the righteous will live, and keep living, by faith. Justice is coming. In the meantime, the faithful are called to trust.

This lesson sits at the theological center of the whole study, because 'the just shall live by his faith' is one of the most important sentences in Scripture. But we must understand it rightly. This is not faith as a one-time feeling or a bare mental agreement. The faith Habakkuk describes is a living, faithful, enduring trust, the kind that keeps believing and keeps obeying through the long wait, when the vision tarries and the answer is delayed. The just do not merely begin by faith; they live by it, day after day. Let us learn what that kind of faith looks like.

Group Discussion: Read together the verse at the heart of this chapter, "the just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). What do you think it means to live by faith, and how is that different from simply believing certain things are true? Where do you see the difference play out in real life?

Personal Reflection: Habakkuk had to keep trusting God in a long season of waiting, when the answer was promised but not yet visible. Where in your life are you being asked to 'live by faith'?

right now, trusting God before you can see how things will turn out, and what makes that hard for you?

Read Habakkuk 2:1–20

Study Questions

1. After his complaint, Habakkuk says, “I will stand upon my watch... and will watch to see what he will say unto me” (Habakkuk 2:1). What does this posture of expectant waiting teach us about how to seek God after we have brought Him our hard questions, and why is waiting on God an act of faith rather than passivity?
2. God tells Habakkuk to write the vision and make it plain, “though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come” (Habakkuk 2:3). Where are you tempted to give up on a promise of God because it seems delayed, and how does this verse strengthen you to keep waiting?
3. At the center of the chapter stands the great declaration, “the just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). What does it mean that the righteous live by faith, and how does the New Testament show this to be a key gospel truth (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38)? How is saving faith more than mere intellectual agreement, and more than ‘faith only’?
4. Habakkuk contrasts the proud, whose “soul is lifted up” and “is not upright,” with the righteous who lives by faith (Habakkuk 2:4). Where do you see pride and self-sufficiency competing with humble trust in your own heart, and what would it look like to live more by faith and less by your own strength this week?

5. The five woes of this chapter condemn greed, exploitation, violence, drunkenness, and idolatry (Habakkuk 2:6-19). What do these woes reveal about the kinds of sin God especially opposes, and how do they show that ill-gotten gain and human empire-building ultimately destroy themselves?
6. God says that those who built by violence labored only “for the fire,” and wearied themselves “for very vanity” (Habakkuk 2:13). Where might you be wearying yourself for things that will not last, and what would it mean to redirect that energy toward what God says endures?
7. God promises that “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14). How does this glorious promise reframe the whole chapter, and how is it being fulfilled as the gospel of Christ goes out to fill the earth with the knowledge of God?
8. Twice the woes expose the futility of idols, “a teacher of lies,” unable to give breath or guidance (Habakkuk 2:18-19). What ‘idols’ do you turn to for security or guidance that cannot truly deliver, and how can you replace that misplaced trust with trust in the living God?
9. The chapter ends, “the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him” (Habakkuk 2:20). How does this call to reverent silence answer Habakkuk’s earlier turmoil, and how does it relate to the faith of 2:4, that the righteous live not by understanding everything but by trusting and reverencing the God who reigns? Tie together how saving faith, according to the New Testament, is a living trust that hears, believes, repents, confesses, and obeys the Lord (Acts 2:36-38; Romans 6:17), rather than a mere feeling or a one-time decision.

10. Look back across this central chapter. Name one specific way the Lord is calling you, through “the just shall live by his faith,” to live by a deeper, more persevering trust in Him, and to become more like Christ, who is Himself the perfectly Faithful One in whom our faith rests.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Romans 1:16–17, the gospel as the power of God, where the just live by faith; Galatians 3:6–14, faith versus works of law and the curse Christ bore for us; Hebrews 10:35–39, persevering faith that does not draw back; James 2:14–26, faith that is living and shown in obedience, not faith alone; Genesis 15:6, Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.

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