

THOUGH IT TARRIES, WAIT FOR IT

The righteous will live by his faith

Habakkuk 2:1–4; 3:16–19

Why this text this morning

We have been walking through Ezekiel, and we have seen that the Glory has left the city. God has promised to be a sanctuary for the scattered and to give them one heart and a new spirit.

Habakkuk stands in the same generation as that crisis. He has already been told that Babylon is coming. He does not yet see the end of the matter. His question is the question in the room after the glory leaves: if God has spoken, and the devastation is real, how does a righteous man live while he waits?

Where Habakkuk is Standing

The book opens with the prophet's complaint. Violence fills Judah. The Law is ignored. Justice is perverted. Habakkuk cries, "How long, O LORD, will I call for help, and You will not hear?" (1:2). The Lord's answer is not what he wanted. God is raising the Chaldeans, "that fierce and impetuous people" (1:6), to judge Judah.

Habakkuk's second complaint is honest: how can the Holy One use a nation more wicked than Judah as His rod (1:12–17)? Chapter 2 is not a new subject. It is the prophet taking his post to hear God's answer to that question.

Habakkuk 2:1 The watch post

*I will stand on my guard post
And station myself on the rampart;
And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me,
And how I may reply when I am reproved.*

Habakkuk does not storm off. He stations himself. A guard post and a rampart are military language. He is on duty until the Lord speaks. He also expects to be reproved. He knows his questions may need correction. That is not unbelief. That is a man who still treats God as God.

Authorial intent: the righteous response to a hard word from God is not to invent a better timeline. It is to wait where God can be heard.

For the assembly: much of our restlessness is a refusal to stand on the rampart. We prefer a theory that makes the delay feel finished. Habakkuk stays put.

Habakkuk 2:2 Write it so a man can run

*Then the LORD answered me and said,
"Record the vision
And inscribe it on tablets,
That the one who reads it may run."*

The vision is not a private comfort for the prophet. It is to be cut into tablets, public and durable, plain enough that the reader can run with it. The image is that one may take it to others in haste. God intends His answer to travel.

The content of that vision includes the woes that follow in 2:5–20 and the certainty of 2:3–4. Babylon will be judged. The proud will not stand. The righteous will live by faith. Judah must carry that word through the years even when it does not look like God is fulfilling His word. Even today, 2500 years later, Israel should be waiting on the Lord bit as we have seen in Ezekiel and Isaiah, they have blinded themselves and they have closed their ears to the truth and promises of the Lord.

We also do not keep God's word as a mood. We keep it as a written word that can be read even when it seems that God's justice will not be completed.

Habakkuk 2:3 The appointed time

*“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.”*

Two clocks are running in the same sentence.

“Appointed time” is a set moment. God has dated the fulfillment in His own counsel. Habakkuk is not told the year. He is told that a year exists.

“It hastens toward the goal” is literally that the vision pants toward the end. From God's side the word is already in motion. It will not fail. An alternate translation is “it will not lie.” The vision does not deceive.

“Though it tarries, wait for it” in the moment this is how it feels. Days pile up, people become anxious, doubts begin to surface. For Habbakuk, Babylon still looks unstoppable. The righteous man is commanded to wait, not to revise or reinterpret the words of prophecy.

“It will not delay” is how it stands with God. What feels late to us is not late to Him. Hebrews later picks up this exact line: “FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY” (Heb 10:37).

Do not ignore the entire statement. If you only hear “it will not delay,” you will begin to try to figure out the date. If you only hear “though it tarries,” you will decide the vision has failed. Habakkuk is told both: wait, because it is coming on time.

This is the word a congregation needs after Ezekiel 11. Glory has departed in that book. Restoration has been promised. Neither fact licenses us to write the schedule.

Habakkuk 2:4 Two kinds of life

*“Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith.”*

The Lord sets two men side by side.

The proud one

His soul is not right, not straight, not aligned within him. In the book, this is first the Chaldean: swollen, gathering nations, never satisfied (2:5). It is also any man who reads the present scene and concludes that power, timing, and safety are in his own hand. Pride here is not manners. It is a soul that will not take its life from God's word.

The righteous

“The righteous will live by his faith.” The Hebrew noun behind “faith” is *emunah*: the doctrines and promises of God believing those truths to be true. In Habakkuk’s own sentence it is the righteous man’s living by the doctrines and promises of God who just spoke verses 2 and 3. He lives, he keeps living, by clinging to that word while the vision tarries.

Paul takes this line into the gospel without changing Habakkuk’s God. “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’” (Rom 1:17). “Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, ‘THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH’” (Gal 3:11). Life with God is not gained by the works of the Law. It is gained by faith in what God has said and done.

Hebrews uses the same text for the already-righteous who must endure: “BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul” (Heb 10:38–39). That is not a second justification. That is the life of a justified man refusing to throw away his confidence (Heb 10:35).

Keep the two uses distinct, because the text will let you. Faith is how the unrighteous man is declared righteous. Faith is also how the righteous man walks when Babylon is still on the road. Do not turn *emunah* into “your covenant performance keeps you saved.” Do not turn it into a bare nod that never waits and never obeys. Habakkuk’s righteous man trusts God, and therefore he waits.

Habakkuk 3:16 Faith that still trembles

*I heard and my inward parts trembled,
At the sound my lips quivered.
Decay enters my bones,
And in my place I tremble.
Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,
For the people to arise who will invade us.*

Chapter 3 is the prophet’s prayer after he has seen the Lord come as He came at the Exodus and at Sinai. The vision of God as warrior does not make Habakkuk casual. His body fails. Lips quiver. Decay is in the bones. He now accepts what he argued against in Chapter 1. The invaders will come. He must wait quietly for that day.

“Wait quietly” is not indifference. It is the end of the debate. He is no longer telling God a better plan. He is still afraid of the historical cost. Faith in this book has a pulse and a stomach.

Application: do not tell the assembly that trust means they will not shake. Habakkuk shook and was still the man who lives by faith. The opposite of faith here is not trembling. The opposite of faith is the proud soul that will not wait.

Habakkuk 3:17–18 When every token is gone

*Though the fig tree should not blossom
And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail
And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold*

*And there be no cattle in the stalls,
Yet I will exult in the LORD,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.*

This is not a bad season. Fig, vine, olive, grain, flock, herd: that is the whole working life of the land under the covenant. Habakkuk names the collapse that invasion and drought would bring. He does not deny it. He does not call it good. He places a “yet” over it.

The object of joy is not a secret fig tree somewhere. “I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.” Salvation here is deliverance, the God who saves. Habakkuk’s circumstances will not carry his praise. God will.

This is the farthest point from the proud soul of 2:4. The proud man needs the stalls full to be at peace. The righteous man can lose the stalls and still have the Lord.

For the believer: joy is not the denial of loss. It is the decision, in the loss, to go to the God who saves rather than to the empty wallet. For the assembly: we do not require the visible center to remain intact before we will honor God. Ezekiel 11 has already shown the glory leaving the city. Habakkuk shows a man who can still rejoice in the God of his salvation when the nation itself fails.

Habakkuk 3:19 Feet for high places

*The Lord GOD is my strength,
And He has made my feet like hinds’ feet,
And makes me walk on my high places.
For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.*

What does this verse mean? “Lord GOD” is Adonai YHWH. “Strength” is not a mood. It is resource, might, the capacity to stand. Hinds’ feet are the sure feet of a deer on rock that would throw a man. High places in this line are not an escape hatch out of history. They are the footing God gives inside it: stability and a place to walk when the valley has been stripped.

The last line matters. “For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.” This is not a private journal entry. It is given to the congregation to sing. What Habakkuk learned on the rampart is now the assembly’s song.

What we take with us

- God has an appointed time. The vision pants toward it. It will not lie. Wait for it. Do not date it off a headline, and do not bury it because it tarries.
- Two souls are on the field. The proud soul is not right within him. The righteous man lives by faith: he is justified by faith, and he keeps living by that same trust when the vision has not yet arrived.
- Faith may tremble. Habakkuk’s bones failed him. He still waited quietly.
- Joy is located in the God of salvation, not in the fig tree. When the land is empty, the Lord GOD is still strength, and He still makes feet for high places.
- This hour does not finish Ezekiel. It teaches the church how to stand in the gap Ezekiel 11 has opened: God has spoken, the city is not safe, and the righteous still live by faith.

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The question after Ezekiel 11

God has spoken. The glory has left the city. Restoration has been promised. How does a righteous man live while he waits? Habakkuk answers from the same hour of history, without taking up Ezekiel 12.

The text

2:1 The watch post

Habakkuk stations himself to hear. He expects to be reproved. The righteous response to a hard word is not a new calendar. It is to wait where God speaks.

2:2 The tablets

The vision is written, public, and plain, so that the one who reads it may run. God's answer is not a mood. It is a word that can travel.

2:3 The appointed time

Two clocks: it tarries to us; it does not delay with God. The vision pants toward its goal and will not lie. Wait for it. Hebrews 10:37 takes up this line of the Coming One.

2:4 Two souls

The proud one: his soul is not right within him. The righteous will live by his faith (emunah: trust, firmness). Paul reads this as justification by faith, not by the Law (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11). Hebrews reads it as the justified man enduring, not shrinking back (Heb 10:38–39). Faith is how we are declared righteous. Faith is how the righteous man walks while the vision tarries.

3:16 Trembling and quiet waiting

Habakkuk's body fails him. He now accepts the invasion he feared. Faith is not numbness. The opposite of faith is the proud refusal to wait.

3:17–18 The empty land

Fig, vine, olive, field, flock, herd: the working life of the land is gone. "Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation." Joy is located in God, not in the stalls.

3:19 High places

The Lord GOD is strength. He makes feet like the deer's on rock. This is given to the choir director. The assembly is to sing what the prophet learned on the rampart.

Carry this

- Wait for the appointed time. Do not date it. Do not bury it.
- Live by faith: justified by faith, and walking by that same trust.
- Trembling is not unbelief. Leaving the watch post is.
- When the fig tree fails, the God of salvation has not.