

The Righteous will live by his faith

Habakkuk was probably written about 640–615 BC, just before the fall of Assyria and the rise of Babylon (Chaldea). God used Assyria to punish Israel (722); now he would use Babylon to punish Assyria and Judah. This prophecy would be fulfilled several decades after Habakkuk, in 586.

The Babylonians had supreme confidence in themselves, especially in their military prowess, muscle and might. One can almost visualise Babylonian officers and officials strutting through the streets of Jerusalem, thumping their chests, and raising the same impudent cry the Assyrians had in Zephaniah's day: "*I am, and there is none besides me,*" (Zephaniah 2:15). Put that quote of these proud and cocky men alongside one from the God of all creation, history, and existence, who said of Himself, "*I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God,*" (Isaiah 45:5). Clearly, the Babylonians, in living out their suffocating pride, had made an idol out of their own strength. Worse yet, in their hearts they felt that they could replace God on His throne. What arrogance!

This attitude of faith in earthly power is hardly unique to the ancient Babylonians. The Assyrians entertained similar thoughts. Centuries earlier, Egypt's pharaoh had displayed the same attitude when he said to Moses and Aaron, "*Who is the LORD, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go,*" (Exodus 5:2). Centuries later it would be the dominant attitude of the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, and the other conquering nations that followed in their footsteps. More recently, during World War II, it was the attitude of the Germans and Japanese. And it was the attitude the Soviet Union expressed until it collapsed and self-destructed in the later part of the 20th century. Now today, it could be any number of different countries.

Finally, it is the attitude of every sinner ever born into the world. For sinful man, life centres on and revolves around himself. To ignore his Creator and rebel against God's will is his sovereign right - or so he claims. He stands accountable to no one - but himself. He attributes his success to the fact that he is a self-made man - a man who deserves the credit for achieving whatever he has accomplished in life and for fulfilling whatever goals he set for himself. Sound familiar? What arrogance! "*His soul is puffed up,*" (Hab. 2:4a). He - like his Babylonian counterpart of a different time and place - will be condemned.

In sharp contrast to the arrogant, puffed-up, boastfully self-reliant Babylonian, the Lord now places the righteous man, the man of faith. He says, "*But the righteous person will live by his faith,*" (Hab. 2:4b). Faith is holding firm to the God who can be trusted, even though it can't always understand His ways. Faith believes the visions and revelations God gives to His prophets, trusts in God's promises, and, in the face of trouble, difficulty, and calamity, finds its assurance there.

This sentence, "*the righteous person will live by his faith,*" forms the theme of Habakkuk's book. It's the truth which Habakkuk - and the Lord through Habakkuk - wants to live and dwell in the hearts of the faithful in Judah. Whether they were facing the wicked unbelievers in their own society or the haughty Babylonians, the believers were to know and believe that God, their faithful God, would deliver them exactly as He had promised.

The fact that this passage is quoted so often in the New Testament (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; cf. Eph. 2:8) indicates that God wants these words to live and dwell in the hearts of His people today as well. Christians - who are righteous by faith in Christ's perfect life of obedience to His Father's will and in His all-atoning death

for sin - will live their lives trusting in the Lord and the promises He has made to them. As they confront an unfriendly, unbelieving world, they will confess with Paul, *“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all - how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?”* (Romans 8:31-32). They will look to the future and the end of their life on this earth with trust in the words of Jesus, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.”* (John 11:25, 26). Yes, the righteous person by faith will live!