

Habakkuk Chapter 2

I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

2:1 *stand at my watchpost.* The figure of a guard looking out from a tower and expecting a response to his challenge. Any rebuke would be for questioning God's justice. (CSB)

In humility and patience, Habakkuk now quietly waits for God to answer the questions he has raised and cannot himself answer. (TLSB)

station myself on the tower. The walls of Jerusalem. (CSB)

The picture of the prophet as a watchman is a familiar one in the OT. At the Lord's direction, the prophet Isaiah once stood as a watchman on Jerusalem's walls waiting for the news that Babylon had fallen (Is. 21:6-9). (PBC)

The picture is a fitting one. The watchman had to be alert and constantly on his guard. The enemy might appear when he least expected it. Then again a messenger might come with important news, and he had to be ready to receive it. He also had to be patient. If the news that the city was waiting for was delayed and did not come as expected, the watchman still had to stay alert – to watch for the messenger and be ready to communicate the news to the rest of the city the minute the messenger came. (PBC)

The fact that Habakkuk says that he is waiting for God's answer indicates that the complaint was not his alone, but that the remnant of believers in Judah were waiting for God's answer to be communicated to them as well. (PBC)

see what he will say to me – Habakkuk has questioned God's actions (and lack of action). (TLSB)

The Righteous Shall Live by His Faith

2 And the LORD answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. 3 For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. 4 "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith. 5 "Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples."

2:2–3 *vision.* See 1Ch 17:15; Pr 29:18. The Hebrew for this word refers specifically to a prophet's vision (see, e.g., Isa 1:1). (CSB)

2:2 *make it plain* – Some commentators view this as making the language so clear that no one would misunderstand what he had received. Others take the Lord's instructions to mean that Habakkuk was to write out the message God gave him in such large, highly visible letters that the words could be read by any person, even one who was running or hurrying by. The "tablets" on which Habakkuk was to write in such a scenario would be placards or posters which could be erected in display. Today we would probably put them on billboards. At any rate, while the specifics of Habakkuk's instructions are difficult to understand, the general thrust of the directions is clear: God wants this message to get out; He wants others to hear or read it; He wants it to have the broadest possible audience. (PBC)

he may run who reads it. Lit. “so that he who reads it may run,” i.e., so that a messenger may run to deliver the message and read it to those to whom he has been sent. (CSB)

So the words might be easily read (cf Dt 27:8). (TLSB)

on tablets – Hbr *luach*, also used for the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments (Ex 24:12; Dt 9:9–11). Habakkuk’s tablets may have been wooden, though words of the prophets were also written on stone tablets (Is 30:8), signifying their extreme importance. (TLSB)

2:3 *appointed time* – The vision imparted to Habakkuk points forward to the completion, or fulfillment, of God’s purpose at a time set by Him. (TLSB)

wait for it. The following message deals with the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C., about 66 years after Habakkuk’s prophecy. The Lord tells Habakkuk (and Judah) that fulfillment of the prophecy may “linger,” but that he and the people are to expect it (see 3:16). (CSB)

Waiting for the Lord is an act of faith and hope (Ps 33:20–22). This is an esp important exhortation for people in modern times, when the desire for immediate satisfaction breeds impatience and irritability. 1 Clement of Rome: “Compare yourselves to ... the vine. First of all, it sheds its leaves, then it buds, next it puts forth leaves, and then it flowers; after that comes the sour grape, and then follows the ripened fruit. You perceive how in a little time the fruit of a tree comes to maturity. Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished” (ANF 1:11). Basil the Great: “If in all this there is sorrow to be borne, I trust in the Lord that it will not be without its use to you. Therefore, the more have been your trials, look for a more perfect reward from your just Judge. Do not take your present trouble ill. Do not lose hope” (NPNF 2 8:280). (TLSB)

In this verse, the Lord goes on to talk about certain characteristics of visions and revelations – characteristics which apply not only to Habakkuk’s vision but to any vision or revelation a prophet might receive from the Lord. The Lord wants His people to know about these characteristic elements of prophecy. If God’s people don’t know these truths, then they’ll lose hope and will despair when they face oppressors like the Babylonians. There are four such characteristics of prophecies received through vision that will nurture the faith of God’s people:

1. *Prophecy is for an appointed time.* To put it another way, there is an appointed time for the prophecy’s fulfillment, a time determined and fixed by the Lord.
2. *Prophecy cannot wait for (literally, “pants for”) its fulfillment to come.* This refers, no doubt, to the longing of God’s OT people to see the fulfillment of prophecy about Jesus.
3. *Prophecy from the Lord proclaims only that which will truly take place in the future.* Prophecy from the Lord is never an end in itself.
4. *Though fulfillment may not come immediately, it will not fail to come at precisely the time that the Lord has set for it.* (PBC)

Romans 5:6, “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.”

2:4 *he.* Collective for the Babylonians, but with special reference to their king. *but.* In contrast to the Babylonians, whose desires are not upright. (CSB)

his soul.” Person who, in pride and stubbornness, refuses to believe God’s prophetic word. (TLSB)

is puffed up – Hbr means “to swell” (as a tumor), a vivid picture of bloated pride. Luther described such a person as having “stuffed ears” for refusing to believe God’s vision (AE 19:123). (TLSB)

the righteous shall live by his faith. In light of God’s revelation about how (and when) he is working, his people are to wait patiently and live by faith—trusting in their sovereign God. The clause is quoted frequently in the NT to support the teaching that people are saved by grace through faith (Ro 1:17; Gal 3:11; cf. Eph 2:8) and should live by faith (Heb 10:38–39). It became the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. The same principle that was applicable in the realm of national deliverance is applicable in the area of spiritual deliverance (salvation). (CSB)

This passage summarizes Habakkuk’s thought. In contrast to the arrogant person, the one who lives by faith is righteous, trusting in God’s promises while waiting for the Lord to act. “People are just by faith. By faith they believe that God is favorable, and he [Habakkuk] adds that the same faith gives life because this faith produces peace and joy in the heart and eternal life” (Ap IV 100). Tertullian: “[One is] justified by the liberty of faith, not by servitude to the law.... The object, therefore, of the faith whereby the just man shall live, will be that same God to whom likewise belongs the law” (ANF 3:434). Leo the Great: “A mighty bulwark is a sound faith, a true faith.... As righteousness is gained by faith, so too by a true faith is eternal life gained.... May He make you to advance and persevere to the end” (NPNF 2 12:136). Luther: “The godly people are waiting for the Lord; therefore they live, therefore they are saved, therefore they receive what has been promised. They receive it by faith, because they give glory to the God of truth” (AE 19:123). God’s word to Habakkuk also formed the heart of the Gospel Paul proclaimed. (TLSB)

2:5 *wine is a traitor.* Excessive love of wine (or wealth) beset the Chaldeans; this reckless bravado leads to their downfall. (TLSB)

His. Babylonian Empire (cf 1:15–17). (TLSB)

greed is as wide as Sheol. The grave never says, “Enough” (Pr 30:15–16). (CSB)

The insatiable appetite of Sheol was proverbial (Pr 30:16), gaping with an opened mouth to swallow its victims. (TLSB)

2:2–5 God responds to Habakkuk’s complaint by urging patient trust, for in due time the instrument of Judah’s chastisement (Chaldea) will itself suffer judgment for its cruel misdeeds. Those intoxicated with pride most often deal treacherously with others and are themselves in danger of destruction (Pr 16:18). However, the Lord declares those righteous who wait for Him, humbly trusting His promises. • O Lord, cleanse my heart of sinful pride, and renew my trust in Your comforting promises. Amen. (TLSB)

Woe to the Chaldeans

6 Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say, “Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own—for how long?—and loads himself with pledges!”
7 Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them.
8 Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.
9 “Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm!
10 You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life.
11 For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond.
12 “Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity!
13 Behold, is it not from the LORD of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing?
14 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.
15 “Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink—you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness!
16 You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The cup in the LORD’s right hand will come

around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory! 17 The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. 18 “What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! 19 Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. 20 But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”

2:6–20 This taunt falls into two halves of ten (Hebrew) lines each (vv. 6–14 and vv. 15–20), each half concluding with a significant theological statement (vv. 14, 20). Together these two statements set the five “woes” pronounced against Babylon (vv. 6, 9, 12, 15, 19; cf. Isa 5:8–23; Mt 23:13–32; Lk 6:24–26; Rev 9:12; 11:14) in a larger frame of reference. (CSB)

2:6 *take up their taunt against him.* The threatened victims of the Babylonian onslaught, especially Judah, will taunt ruthless Babylon. (CSB)

The nations plundered by the Babylonians (“peoples” of v 5). (TLSB)

Woe. The Babylonians’ greed for conquest is condemned. (CSB)

The first of five taunts (cf vv 9, 12, 15, 19). The word is an attention-getter (like “Hey!” or “Ah!”) and introduces an oracle of judgment. (TLSB)

loads himself with pledges! Possessions amassed by the greedy Babylonians do not belong to them and are viewed as heavy debts that cannot be repaid. Gregory the Great: “To pile up earthly gains into a load of sin” (NPNF 2 12:46). (TLSB)

2:7 *debtors suddenly arise* – KJV adds, “that shall bite thee.” Hebrew having a play upon words between the bite of a snake and the interest which the usurer demands. (Kretzmann)

awake who make you tremble – rather, “and those who shake thee violently,” as a creditor might shake a debtor in driving him out of his possession, “wake up.” (Kretzmann)

will be spoil for them. Chaldean wealth will become the spoils of war for the nations they formerly oppressed. (TLSB)

2:8 *remnant of the peoples.* Survivors from the “many nations” plundered by the Chaldeans. (TLSB)

2:9 *Woe.* The Babylonians’ pride in building is condemned. (CSB)

gets evil gain. Babylon is condemned for greedily seizing the possessions of the conquered nations for its own benefit. (TLSB)

This is about who accumulates the gain of wickedness for his house, seeking to establish his house by unrighteous, wicked methods. (Kretzmann)

nest on high. Like the eagle building an inaccessible nest, the Babylonians thought their empire to be unconquerable (see Ob 3–4; cf. Isa 14:4, 13–15). (CSB)

2:10 The short-lived kingdom of Babylon will self-destruct, falling in disgrace and shame. Its rulers were eliminated, historical sources tell us, by assassination and murder. (TLSB)

2:11 *The stone ... will cry out, and the beams.* The stones and beams in Babylonian houses were purchased with plunder, and thus testified against the occupants. (CSB)

The very stones and wooden beams of Babylon's supposedly secure house will cry out in a litany of destruction. The house crashing down thus becomes a vivid picture of the crumbling of the king's dynasty. (TLSB)

2:12 *Woe.* Babylonian injustice is condemned. (CSB)

When the Lord looked at Babylon's thick walls and the grandeur of the city, He saw only bloodshed and wickedness. (TLSB)

2:13 *labor merely for fire.* The cities built by the labor of the Babylonians (v. 12) will be burned. (CSB)

The sheer vanity of the Babylonians' laboring to build monuments to greatness will be exposed by the Lord's fiery destruction (Gn 19:24-28; Is 1:7). (TLSB)

2:14 The Lord's future destruction of proud Babylon and all her worldly glory will cause his greater glory to be known throughout the world (see Ex 14:4, 17-18; Isa 11:9; Rev 17:1-19:4). (CSB)

Luther sees a contrast between this verse and Is 11:9, which in similar words describes the knowledge of God's grace to be revealed through the Gospel. Habakkuk, however, refers to the knowledge of God's vengeance against the wicked, which will lead all nations to glorify Him (AE 19:129). (TLSB)

2:15 *Woe.* Babylonian violence is condemned. Her rapacious treatment of her neighbors, which stripped them of all their wealth (cf. what she later did to Jerusalem, 2Ki 25:8-21), is compared to one who makes his neighbor drunk so he can take lewd pleasure from the man's nakedness. (CSB)

makes his neighbors drink. An exploitive scheme, a metaphor for inflicting punishment on captives. Luther: "Habakkuk, therefore, is speaking about the excessive cruelty and tyrannical rule of the king" (AE 19:129; cf Is 51:17-22). (TLSB)

their nakedness! The utter disgrace and shame suffered by conquered people at the hand of their oppressor (Is 47:2-3; Na 3:5). (TLSB)

2:16 *fill of shame ...show your uncumcision.* The Lord will do to Babylon what she has done to others. (CSB)

Babylon, which had brought shame and disgrace on others, will now be put to shame by naked exposure. (TLSB)

cup from the LORD's right hand. A symbol of divine retribution (see Isa 51:17, 22; Jer 25:15-17; La 4:21; Rev 14:10; 16:19). (CSB)

2:17 *violence done to Lebanon.* The Babylonians apparently had ravaged the cedar forests of Lebanon to adorn their temples and palaces (cf. Isa 14:8). (CSB)

The prophet may be referring to Nebuchadnezzar's deforestation of Lebanon to carry out his military campaigns and building programs (e.g., his palace and the temple of Marduk, the state god of Babylon). (TLSB)

destruction of the beasts. Assyrian inscriptions record hunting expeditions in the Lebanon range, and such sport may have been indulged in by the invading Babylonians as well. Babylonian violence was destructive of all forms of life, not only of lands and cities. (CSB)

2:18 *idols.* The Hebrew for this word means “godlets” or “nonentities” (cf. Isa 41:29; 44:9; Jer 10:15 and the condemnation of idolatry in Ex 20:4–5; Ps 115:4–8). (CSB)

2:19 *Woe.* Babylonian idolatry is condemned. (CSB)

In this final “woe,” Habakkuk denounces the foolishness of worshiping or consulting idols. He ridicules them as the product of human imagination (Is 46:6–7; Hos 4:12). Silent and dead, these idols are able to teach no one. (TLSB)

2:20 *But.* The stone and wood idols of the nations (v. 19) are silent before people, but the people of the world are to be silent before the true God, who is about to judge (cf. Isa 41:1; Zep 1:7; Zec 2:13). (CSB)

In sharp contrast to dead and dumb idols (cf v 19), the Lord is present in His temple and is prepared to act on behalf of His people. The appropriate response is reverent silence. (TLSB)

The world is awaiting His judgment in silent and humble submission. If the whole earth is obliged to acknowledge His majesty and authority, then the glory and power of the Chaldean state cannot maintain itself in His sight. (Kretzmann)

holy temple. Heaven. (CSB)

2:6–20 In a series of five “woes,” the prophet derisively pronounces God’s judgment against the sins of Babylon: greed, pride, violence, shameful abuse of neighbors, and idolatry. Habakkuk’s words remain a sober reminder of God’s displeasure with human sin in all of its manifestations. We also need to hear God’s “woe” and humbly repent of our sin. As the Lord was present in His holy temple, so He is present with us in His Holy Word and Sacraments to pardon and cleanse. • Lord, we bow before You in humble fear and adoration, crying out, “Have mercy on us.” Amen. (TLSB)