

Faith in God's Purpose

You would make a better head deacon than Deacon Frye," said Minister Montel as he patted Wesley on the back. "I think there are biblical reasons why he shouldn't even be a deacon, let alone a head deacon. There is talk at church."

Wesley had heard bits and pieces of the "talk" but had not inclined his ear or heart to any of it. Deacon Frye had been a deacon at the church for almost 15 years. Wesley had been a deacon for only two years.

After joining the deacon board, it seemed as though Deacon Frye had it in for him.

"He's jealous of you," Wesley's wife, Stephanie, had said.

Wesley had subjected himself to Deacon Frye and tried to get along with the older man as best as he could.

"Listen, if we can get Frye out," Montel continued, "wouldn't you want to be head deacon?"

"What about some of the other deacons?" asked Wesley. "I'm the newest one."

"That doesn't matter," said Montel, waving his hand.

Wesley had been hurt by Deacon Frye, and his pride wanted to retaliate and join in any effort to slander and defrock the man. But he hadn't, and he wasn't going to start now.

"Minister Montel," said Wesley, "please leave me out of it. I wish the best for Deacon Frye. I just want to serve the Lord and our church."

- 1.** *What biblical examples do you recall of pride causing someone not to do what God wanted them to do?*
- 2.** *What are the results for our lives when we allow pride to stand in the way of doing God's will?*
- 3.** *What is the outcome of a life lived in humility?*

The Watchman's Pledge

Habakkuk 2:1, KJV

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.

Habakkuk 2:1, NIV

¹I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.

In chapter 2, Habakkuk requested an answer to the questions he posed that are recorded in chapter 1, verses 12–17. At the beginning of that chapter, Habakkuk delivered a message of judgment: God was raising up the Babylonians to be His instrument of judgment on His people in Judah. The Babylonians were like fearsome leopards, wolves, and swooping eagles who would attack the people of Judah (1:8). These ill tidings come as a shock and offense, even to the prophet himself. How could God use these evil, greedy, idolatrous people for His purposes?

So, in Habakkuk 2:1, the prophet declared that he would wait for a divine response: “I will stand at my watch.” He compares himself to a sentinel who awaits the sight of news coming by standing at a high point on the city wall. From there, he may witness the arrival of a messenger. Habakkuk prepares himself to send an answer back to God, since he believes his complaint about God not stopping the evil Babylonians and their conquests is valid.

4. *To what does the prophet compare himself?*

5. *Why might Habakkuk object to God's plan to use the Babylonians?*

A Message for Judah

Habakkuk 2:2-3, KJV

2 And the LORD answered me,

Habakkuk 2:2-3, NIV

²Then the LORD replied:

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.

“Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.
³For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.”

A response from God arrived, but the response concerned a still-coming prophecy of God. When the word from God arrives, Habakkuk was not to keep it to himself but was to write down the content of his vision on public placards. Verse 2 refers to a reader’s ability to run, which has at least two possible interpretations. First, it could mean that the words as written are so legible as to allow the reader’s eyes to “run” over them (that is, read the content speedily). Alternatively, a reader could carry the message after having read it, since heralds were known to run from place to place. So perhaps the message was to be announced by messengers who ran to neighboring cities. Literacy rates in antiquity were low by modern standards, but what counted for reading may have been minimal. The residents of a city would be able to figure out the meaning of a written message, whether or not each individual could read the text independently.

The vision from God (“the revelation,” vs. 2) would be a response to Habakkuk’s plea—that the Babylonians are evil and unsuitable instruments to bring God’s order to the world. However, this vision was not arriving then; it was coming at an “appointed time” (vs. 3). Although the judgment of Babylon and the deliverance of the Jews would not come immediately, God asked His people to wait for it. God promised that it would certainly come.

From the human standpoint, it would seem like an

unreasonable delay. However, in God's time, the end will come; and the words will prove true. The word "end" in verse 3 refers to the "appointed time" mentioned in that verse and to the fulfillment of the prophecy.

6. *What was Habakkuk to do with the word he received from the Lord?*

7. *Has the message from God been delayed? Explain your answer.*

The Folly of the Proud, and the Role of Faith

Habakkuk 2:4-5, KJV

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:

Habakkuk 2:4-5, NIV

⁴"See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness—

⁵indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest.

Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples."

In verse 4, a contrast is drawn between two ways of living in a sinful world. In the first case, the one who is prideful and whose spirit is aloof is "not upright"—not living in a way that is pleasing to God. But the one who is justified or righteous before God lives by faith ("faithfulness"). This means that a person believes that God's Word is true, His judgments are fair, and God is to be trusted despite the difficult circumstances of the world.

Habakkuk foresaw that God was not going to prevent

the Babylonians from harming Judah or from ensnaring God's people, but Habakkuk was to continue to place faith in God. This verse provided a path for the individual to remain faithful, even while God was bringing a harsh judgment on the nation of Judah.

The "arrogant" person who does not remain faithful always wants more. He or she may be at risk for drunkenness, according to verse 5. This person's consumption is unchecked, and just as death steals people away and is never satisfied, the arrogant soul is never checked.

The last lines of verse 5 mention the collection of "all the nations" and "all the peoples." One of those "peoples," the Babylonians, was certainly not righteous before God, even though God was able to use them to judge Judah. They operated out of selfish ambition, which always brings ruin to both individuals and nations.

Ironically, those who wish to remain righteous before God are to keep themselves from behaving like the Babylonian invaders. For Habakkuk and his contemporaries, the task was not to imitate Judah's enemies. Rather, by humble faith

in God, a righteous person will "live" (vs. 4), which could mean survive the catastrophe that was coming to Judah. The word "live" is also interpreted by later Christian writers in a more future sense, saying we must steadfastly await the coming of Christ Jesus.



The walls of the old city of Jerusalem. They may have been what Habakkuk was envisioning when he wrote, "I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts" (Hab. 2:1).

Photo: Gary Bembridge/London

8. What does it mean to live by faith or by faithfulness?

9. How is an arrogant person like death?

Moving Away from Self-Focus

The essence of pride is to put ourselves and our interests first, above others and even above God. In effect, we make gods out of ourselves. Improving in this area of our lives involves learning to move the focus from ourselves to others.

A simple way we can start doing this is in our everyday conversations. Think about the last conversation you had. How much of it was about you, and how much was about the other person? Maybe to you it seemed 50/50. But were you really listening to what the other person was saying and following up with exploratory questions to help her express her thoughts and feelings more deeply? Or did you listen long enough to find something he said that related to your life, your thoughts and feelings, and then shift the subject to yourself?

Another example. When someone shares a problem with you, do you feel the need to solve it for that person? Why is that? Do you really want to help her, or do you want to find a quick solution, so you can get back to your own interests? If the help he needed was for you to listen, and only to listen, would you be willing to do that; or would you find it too frustrating?

In this week's Scripture, Habakkuk listened until God told him what to say, then conveyed a message that was accurate and true, not only his own opinion. He didn't use other people or God's message as a way to make himself feel self-important. Can you and I say the same?

10. *What is a situation in which it's difficult for you to put the needs of others ahead of your own?*

11. *How can your conversations leave people with the feeling they have been heard and valued as a person, not just used as a sounding board for your ideas or complaints?*

12. *When someone has a problem, is it always a good idea to respond to it with Scripture; or should you wait until they are in a receptive frame of mind to hear it?*

Pride and Humility in the Church

In Luke 18:9-11, Jesus told of a proud Pharisee who prayed in the temple, bragging about his own righteousness and thanking God that he was not like the “sinful” people around him. Meanwhile, a tax collector nearby could not even lift his eyes up to God, but beat his chest and said, “God have mercy on me, a sinner.”

► *Which of these two received God’s mercy? Which of these two could teach you the most about humility? How can you go and do likewise today?*

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, KJV

“For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.” —Habakkuk 2:3, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of February 26 through March 3

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 1 Corinthians 15:1-11—The Faith in Which We Stand.
- Tues.** Numbers 16:12-13, 23-34—Turn Away from the Wicked.
- Wed.** Genesis 18:20-22; 19:1-5, 15-17, 22-25—Flee from the Presence of Sin.
- Thurs.** 1 Peter 2:13-25—Always Do the Right Thing.
- Fri.** Genesis 5:18-24—Walk with God.
- Sat.** Jude 3-16—Contend for the Unchanging Faith.
- Sun.** Jude 17-25—Remain in God’s Love.