

Habakkuk Study Qs

1. Concisely, what answer is given to the problem of evil in Habakkuk compared with Job?

Job teaches that we cannot understand the suffering of evil by the righteous because God's wisdom far surpasses ours but God is righteous and will accomplish all that He plans.

Habakkuk teaches that God only tolerates the suffering of evil by the righteous (who are hemmed in by the wicked) for a season but the appointed time will hasten toward its goal and not fail.

In both God is accomplishing His purposes through His control of evil; Job emphasizes our inability to grasp it all (but it is sure) and calls for humble repentance. Habakkuk emphasizes the certainty of God's time table of judgment and calls for faithful and joyful endurance.

2. How can Paul (Rom. 1:17) use Habakkuk 2:4 to support justification by faith without good deeds (by faith alone) when Habakkuk says the righteous will live by his faithful deeds?

Paul looks to Habakkuk 2:4 when he argues for justification by faith (Rom. 1:17).

Justified goes with being righteous prior to living through the hard times. Those who are righteous live through the judgment on Israel and the nations by faith deeds. But they are already righteous in God's sight when their faith deeds are manifested. They live and are not consumed for their wicked deeds because their deeds are faith deeds.

This is how they are spared temporal judgment for their sins; even if they suffer in the crossfire, a) it is not for their sins, they live by faithful deeds, b) they live (even if swallowed up by the wicked, 1:13) and c) they display the faith acts of patience, joy, and strength (3:16-19).

The righteous are thus people of faith who display their faith. Thus it is not that they are righteous by their faith deeds because it is *life* that they have by faith deeds not the standing as righteous. This suggests that they are deemed righteous through their faith that gives them life when it manifests itself in faith deeds: the righteous [by faith] live by their faith deeds.

Is this a valid inference? According to Paul it is. In Romans 1:17, Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 in support of justification by faith (cf. righteousness from beginning to end by faith, 1:17 with Rom. 3:21-26, righteousness and justification apart from law defined deeds). He is expounding on the "righteous" so he drops the emphasis on deeds and stresses the faith: the righteous live through God's judgment by faith which equals "are justified and not condemned by faith."

So two strands are in Habakkuk 2:4.

1) First, there is the living of the righteous by faith deeds through which they are spared God's judgment against unrighteous deeds.

2) Second, there is the being righteous by faith through which they are spared God's judgment against unrighteous deeds.

Paul cites the second strand in support of justifying righteousness apart from good deeds.

The gospel of how people are righteous before God was given by Habakkuk: the righteous have life, they live, they are restored from the fall, by faith. These are the true people of God in the midst of the nations; they are not forgotten. Though hemmed in (Hab. 1:4) and swallowed up by the wicked (1:13), they live.