

# Habakkuk 2:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

## Analysis

**Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.** This verse stands as one of the most theologically significant statements in the Old Testament, quoted three times in the New Testament (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38) and forming a foundation for the doctrine of justification by faith. The contrast is stark: the proud who trust themselves versus the righteous who live by faith in God.

"His soul which is lifted up" (הַעֲלֵלָה/uphehalah) refers to the Babylonians whose pride and self-sufficiency make them morally crooked. Despite their military might and apparent success, they are "not upright"—their internal character is corrupt. Human pride, self-reliance, and the pursuit of power apart from God lead to spiritual death, regardless of outward success.

"But the just shall live by his faith" (וְצַדִּיק בְּאֶמְנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה/vetzaddik be'eminato yichyeh) presents the alternative way of life. The Hebrew אֶמְנָה (emunah) means faithfulness, steadfastness, trust—a settled confidence in God's character and promises despite circumstances. This is not mere intellectual assent but a life posture, a way of being that looks to God rather than self.

"Shall live" (יִחְיֶה/yichyeh) indicates not just survival but flourishing, true life. While Babylon will fall, those who trust God will ultimately thrive. This points beyond temporal survival to eternal life—a theme the New Testament explicitly develops. Paul quotes this verse to demonstrate that salvation has always been by faith, not

works. The Protestant Reformation recovered this truth, with Luther famously declaring justification by faith alone based on this text.

## Historical Context

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In Habakkuk's immediate context, this verse contrasts Babylon's proud self-sufficiency with Judah's call to faithful endurance. The Babylonians trusted their military might, their gods, and their imperial ambitions. Yet God declares their pride will lead to their downfall (which occurred in 539 BC when Persia conquered Babylon).

For the faithful remnant in Judah facing exile, this verse provided crucial hope. Though circumstances seemed to contradict God's covenant promises, they were called to trust—to live by faith even when everything appeared lost. The exile would test whether Israel truly trusted God's character and promises or merely trusted in outward covenant signs (temple, land, monarchy).

The New Testament's use of this verse is profound. Paul (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11) uses it to demonstrate that justification has always been by faith, establishing continuity between Old and New Covenants. Hebrews 10:38 quotes it in the context of endurance during persecution, encouraging believers to trust God's promises rather than shrink back. This single verse became foundational for understanding salvation history and the nature of saving faith.

## Related Passages

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**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

## Study Questions

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1. How does 'living by faith' differ from merely believing certain doctrines about God?

2. In what areas of life are you tempted toward self-sufficiency and pride rather than humble dependence on God?
3. What does it mean that the righteous 'live' by faith—how is faith connected to true, abundant life?
4. How does this verse challenge both legalism (trusting works) and antinomianism (faith without faithful living)?

## Interlinear Text

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הַבָּשָׂר	עַפְלָל	הַ	לֹא	יִשְׁכַּב	הַ	נֶפֶשׁ	וְ	בְּ
H2009	<b>which is lifted up</b>	H3808	<b>is not upright</b>	<b>Behold his soul</b>		H0		
	H6075		H3474		H5315			
וְאַתָּה	בְּאַמְוֹנָת	וְ	חַיָּה					
<b>in him but the just</b>	<b>by his faith</b>		<b>shall live</b>					
H6662	H530		H2421					

## Additional Cross-References

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**Romans 1:17** (Faith): For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

**Hebrews 10:38** (Faith): Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

**Galatians 2:16** (Faith): Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

**John 3:36** (Faith): He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

**Luke 18:14** (Righteousness): I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

