But the righteous\(^b\) \(\text{(person)}\) by\(^c\) faith\(^d\) will-live.\(^e\)

LEXICON—a. \(\delta\) (LN 89.124): ‘but’ [LN, NTC; NASB, NCV], not explicit [AB, BECNT, HNTC, ICC2, NICNT, WBC; all versions except NASB, NCV].

b. \(\delta\ι\kappa\alpha\omega\zeta\) (LN 34.47, 88.12) (BAGD 1.b. p. 195): ‘the righteous’ [BAGD, BECNT, HNTC, ICC2, LN (34.47, 88.12), NICNT, NTC, WBC; NASB, NET, NIV, NLT, NRSV], ‘the just’ [LN (88.12); KJV], ‘the people God accepts’ [CEV], ‘he who has been put right with God’ [LN (34.47); TEV], ‘he who is in a right relation with God’ [LN (34.47)], ‘those who are right with God’ [NCV], ‘the one who is upright’ [AB], ‘whoever is justified’ [REB], ‘he who is righteous’ [ICC2], ‘the one who is righteous’ [NRSV], ‘the person who has God’s approval’ [GW].

c. \(\epsilon\kappa\) (LN 89.77, 89.25): ‘by’ [BECNT, HNTC, ICC2, NICNT, NTC, WBC; KJV, NASB, NCV, NET, NIV, NRSV], ‘by means of’ [LN (89.77)], ‘through’ [AB; NLT, REB, TEV], ‘because of’ [LN (89.25); CEV, GW].

d. \(\pi\iota\sigma\tau\iota\zeta\) (LN 31.85, 31.102): ‘faith’ [AB, BECNT, HNTC, ICC2, LN (31.85, 31.102), NICNT, NTC, WBC; all versions except NCV], ‘by trusting in him’ [NCV].

e. fut. mid. indic. of \(\zeta\vartheta\alpha\o\) (LN 23.88) (BAGD 2.b.β. p. 336): ‘to live’ [BECNT, HNTC, ICC2, LN, NICNT, NTC, WBC; all versions except NLT, REB], ‘to have life’ [BAGD; NLT], ‘to be alive’ [LN], ‘to gain life’ [REB], ‘to find life’ [AB].

QUESTION—Is there a difference in the meaning of the quotation here as compared with the Habakkuk passage?

The original text of Hob. 2:4 is uncertain, with the Hebrew text and the various Greek translations differing from one another in some details, mainly with regard to whether a personal pronoun should be included and with regard to what it modifies: ‘his faith’ (Heb text, Aquila), ‘his own faith’ (Symmachus), ‘my faith’ (LXX), ‘my righteous one’ (some LXX manuscripts) [NICNT]. Note that the difference in emphasis between the positions listed below is not great.

1. Paul uses the quotation with a slightly different nuance of meaning here [ICC2, NAC, NICNT, TH, TNTC]. Paul’s quotation does not agree precisely either in form or meaning [TH]. The meaning in the Habakkuk passage is that the righteous are preserved through difficulties by their faithfulness or loyalty to God, but Paul uses the quote to make the somewhat different point that those who are righteous by faith will live [ICC2, NAC, TH, TNTC]. Habakkuk’s statement originally addresses the person who is righteous but who is facing difficulties along with apparent contradictions between the promises of God and historical events, whereas in Romans Paul uses the quote to explain how one can attain right standing with God, and so live eternally. However, these differences should not be magnified, because in Habakkuk faith and faithfulness are inseparable and the key point in both passages is that faith is the key to a person’s relationship with God [NICNT]. Although Paul has a somewhat different meaning than the original, the terms of what Habakkuk says are general enough to allow for Paul’s application here [NAC, TNTC].

2. The sense and meaning is basically the same in the present context as in Habakkuk [AB, BECNT, Gdt, Ho, ICC1, Mor, Mu, NTC, St, WBC]. The OT depicts the righteous as being those who are faithful in obedience to the covenant obligations by keeping the commands of God; Paul’s emphasis here is on trust.
and reliance on God for righteousness and life, since his conception of authentic faith involves obedience, nevertheless we should not see too great a distinction between ‘faithfulness’ in Habakkuk and ‘faith’ in Paul, since in both Habakkuk and Paul there is a vital connection between faith and faithfulness [BECNT]. The Hebrew word emunah, here translated ‘faith’, can also refer to one’s fidelity or constancy, but the two concepts are not so far apart considering that one may only exercise constancy by trusting in God, and both Paul and Habakkuk speak of a humble dependence on God [Mor]. The wording of what Habakkuk says is general enough to allow for Paul’s application here [Mor, NAC, TNTC]. Paul’s use of Hab. 2:4 generally supports Habakkuk’s oracle rather than doing violence to it [Mor, TNTC]. The sense both in Habakkuk and here is that the righteous shall live through faith [AB, Gdt, NTC]. Because Paul’s comment ‘from faith to faith’ can be taken to mean God’s faithfulness reaching out to man’s faith, including both the initial reception of the gospel and the continuing process towards salvation, the Hab. 2:4 passage serves particularly well as Paul’s proof text here, which he may have cited in a deliberately ambiguous manner in order to extend the meaning; that is, someone who has a saving relationship to God because of the outreach of God’s faithfulness to his or her faith will experience the fullness of life that God intended [WBC]. Both Paul and Habakkuk affirm that faith is essential and that the righteous shall live [St].

QUESTION—With what is the prepositional phrase ἐκ πίστεως ‘by faith’ connected, and what then is the meaning?

Note that there is a certain amount of overlap possible between the positions listed below, and one does not necessarily rule out the other.

1. It is connected with the noun δίκαιος ‘righteous’ and the sense is ‘the one who by faith is righteous shall live’ [BAGD, Ho, ICC2, Mor, NAC, NICNT, TH, TNTC; CEV, NET, REB, TEV]. It is translated ‘the righteous by faith will live’ [NET], ‘the person who is put right with God through faith shall live’ [TEV], ‘whoever is justified through faith shall gain life’ [REB], ‘the people God accepts because of their faith will live’ [CEV]. The context favors this meaning since Paul’s concern at this point in the letter is how sinners become righteous, not how righteous people live [ICC2, Mor, SSA, St]. Several times in the early chapters of the epistle Paul connects righteousness with faith, but never righteousness with living by faith [SSA]. Paul consistently links faith with righteousness and his emphasis is that life is the result of that righteousness. However, the differences between the two options should not be over emphasized since both OT and NT concepts of ‘faith’ share the notion of absolute reliance on God rather than on human abilities or activities [NICNT]. Either construction is possible and the sense is largely the same [Ho].

2. It is connected with the verb ζήσεται ‘shall live’ and the sense is ‘the righteous shall live by faith’ [AB, BECNT, Gdt, ICC1, Mu, NAC, NTC; GW, KJV, NASB, NCV, NIV, NLT, NRSV]. It is translated ‘the just/righteous shall live by faith’ [KJV, NIV], ‘the righteous man shall live by faith’ [NASB], ‘the one who is righteous will live by faith’ [RSV], ‘those who are right with God will live by trusting in him’ [NCV], ‘the person who has God’s approval will live because of faith’ [GW], ‘it is through faith that a righteous person has life’ [NLT]. While it is
more likely that this prepositional phrase modifies the verb, it may be that Paul did not intend to distinguish clearly between the two options [BECNT].

3. There is probably a connection both to the verb and to the noun [HNTC, St, WBC]. Paul may have dropped the personal possessive pronouns of the Heb and LXX texts in order to extend the connection of the phrase ‘by faith’ to both the noun and the verb [HNTC, WBC]. Paul drops the pronouns, perhaps to bring out his own characteristic phrase emphasizing ‘faith all the time’; that is, if one is righteous at all, it is by faith, and also it is by faith that one will live [HNTC]. Paul drops the personal pronouns ‘my’ and ‘his’ from the older texts perhaps due to a wish to avoid choosing between them, and to broaden and extend the meaning to what he was particularly concerned with at this point, thus allowing ‘by faith’ to be associated with either the verb or with the noun [WBC]. Whichever way one understands the sentence, either rendering indicates that the righteous will live and also affirms the essential nature of faith [St].

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