

Comparison Chart Between Translations of Habakkuk 2:3-4

Early in the 1st Century, Christians used the Greek Septuagint (LXX) as their primary Bible. Our author of Hebrews weaves this exact Greek translation into an encouragement to stay strong amid persecution, warning the believers not to “shrink back.”

Habakkuk 2:3 (Translation from LXX) Hebrews 10:37 (NASB, 1995 ed.)[†]

For the vision is yet for a time, and it shall shoot forth at the end, and not in vain: though He should tarry, wait for Him; for He will surely come, and will not tarry.*

For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay.

Habakkuk 2:4 (Translation from LXX) Hebrews 10:38 (NASB, 1995 ed.)[†]

*¹If he should draw back, my soul has no pleasure in him: but the just shall live by My** faith.*

¹But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.

* “Wait for Him” (LXX) vs. “Wait for it” (Hebrew)

The Hebrew text refers to the vision itself (“wait for it”). The Septuagint personalizes the subject into a masculine pronoun (“wait for Him . . . He will surely come”), turning the verse into a direct messianic prophecy about a coming person.

** “By my faith/faithfulness” (LXX) vs. “By his faith” (Hebrew)

In the Hebrew text, the righteous person lives by their own loyalty or faith to God (“the just shall live by his faith”). In the Septuagint, God is the speaker, shifting the emphasis to God’s faithfulness or the faith belonging to God (“the just shall live by My faith”).

[†] The author of Hebrews, as translated in English (NASB 1995 Edition), follows in parts the LXX.

‡ Note the inversion of text between Habakkuk 2:4 (LXX) and that of the author of Hebrews.

Habakkuk 2:4a-b (LXX Translation) Hebrews 10:38a

If he should draw back, my soul has no pleasure in him:

But My righteous one shall live by faith;

Habakkuk 2:4c (LXX Translation)

but the just shall live by My faith.

Hebrews 10:38b

And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.

Is this inverted word order important? Yes! The author of Hebrews inverted the word order of Habakkuk 2:4 **to place the warning against "shrinking back" at the end of the sentence**. This inversion of word order serves three main rhetorical and theological purposes:

- **Rhyme and Rhetorical Emphasis:** In the original Septuagint (LXX) text, the phrase about shrinking back comes *before* the statement about living by faith. By flipping the clauses, the author finishes the thought on a stark warning: *"My soul has no pleasure in him."*
- **Direct Setup for the Next Verse:** The structural pivot allows the author to transition seamlessly into verse 39, matching the exact vocabulary: *"But we do not belong to those who shrink back..."* By placing the negative clause last in verse 38, he creates a powerful contrast to reassure his readers.
- **Adapting the Wording:** Historically, faith in the One who was coming was true when written (LXX); now it has flipped, for the One who was anticipated has come, and since then, we express our faith in this One. (Hebrews 10:38).