

Habakkuk:



Seeking God's Wisdom When
You Can't Understand Him

Consider It

Comprehend It

Connect It

A 3 C's Contemplative Study™
By Dr. Jack M. Jacob

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All Scriptures quoted, partially quoted, or adapted from the New American Standard Version of the Holy Bible with 1995 Update.

An Introduction to Habakkuk

Author: Very little is known about the author of the book of Habakkuk except what is provided within the pages of this short prophetic book. The name, “Habakkuk”, literally means, “Embraced by God”. This name, as with many of the other prophets, fits perfectly with the message God would use him to deliver. It never fails to amaze me that the words of Psalm 139 ring so true with the prophets:

“For You formed my inward parts;
You wove me in my mother’s womb.
I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Your works,
And my soul knows it very well.
My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;
Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;
And in Your book were all written
The days that were ordained for me,
When as yet there was not one of them.
How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.
When I awake, I am still with You.” Psalm 139:13-18

Another thing that amazes me about the prophets is that their parents named them for the purpose for which God would use them. This clearly shows God’s omniscience and sovereignty.

The rest we know of Habakkuk comes from reading and comprehending the text of his book. For instance, we know Habakkuk must have been from Judah because Israel is not mentioned, but also because the time in which Habakkuk prophesied was after the destruction of Israel in 722 BC and before the destruction of Judah in 586 BC.

We also know Habakkuk was not a central figure in the government because he did not criticize the king and had no response from the court, but was a defender of God’s Law and was very concerned for the sovereignty of God and the character of God. He was remarkably familiar with Temple worship and was intelligent enough to use many different literary devices in his writings. Lastly, the most unique thing about Habakkuk, when compared to the other prophets, is that instead of talking to the people for God, Habakkuk seems to talk to God for the people. This would indicate a closeness to God and a respect

and awe of God that is somewhat unique to Habakkuk but can also be seen in the Psalms.

Put all of this together and we get a picture of an intelligent prophet who saw the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom and who felt that he needed more wisdom, so he asked God, trusting he would not be reproached for asking.

Date: As mentioned above, little is known about the date of Habakkuk's writing as he did not mention serving during the reign of any king, as many other prophets did. What we do know about the date of his writing comes from the various comments throughout his work.

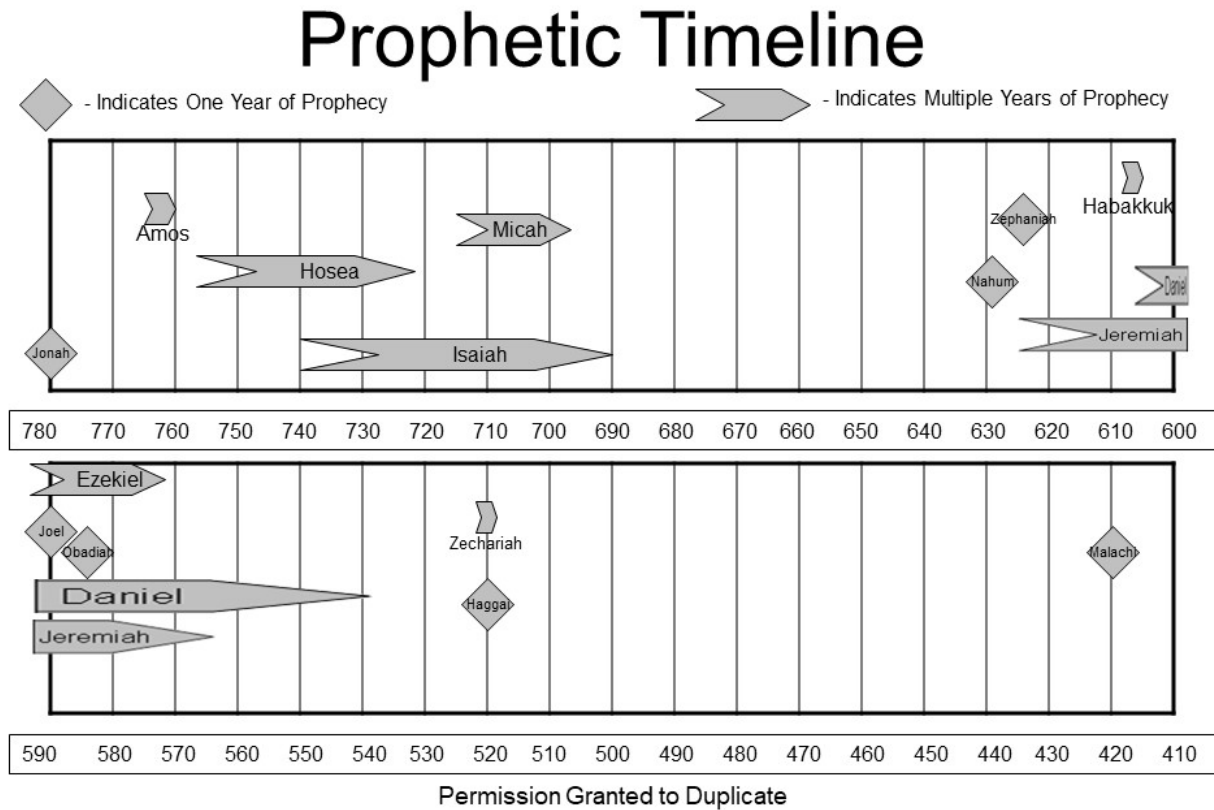
First, we know that Babylon (mentioned as Chaldeans in this book) had not risen to power yet. This is seen in the first chapter "For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs." To understand what this means, one needs to go to history, both within and outside of the Biblical source to put the bookends on when this could have taken place.

The reigning power of the world at this time was the Egyptians. They had killed Josiah in the valley of Megiddo (Armageddon) in 609 BC. Pharaoh Neco rose to power after killing Josiah and defeating the Assyrians. Given this date, the book of Habakkuk would have to be written after this time because Josiah had led a revival of the nation of Israel back to the laws of God. Habakkuk is dealing with situations that are anything but following God's laws.

The next significant date is the actual rise to power of Babylon (Chaldeans). The Chaldeans marched into and destroyed Nineveh (the capital of the Assyrians) in 605 BC. This officially made them the power of the known world at that time. Again, Habakkuk 1:6 says God is going to raise them up to power, so they could not have been in power when Habakkuk wrote, thus, the writing would have to be prior to 605 BC.

Putting it altogether, this would make the writing of the book of Habakkuk around 607-606 BC. This would allow time for Assyria to gather against Nineveh, the Chaldeans to lay siege to the city, and the news to travel to Judah about what was going on.

Contemporary Prophets: In order to see the contemporaries of Habakkuk, refer to the following chart:



Historical Situation: Some of this will be repeated from the section, **Date**, on page 3. After Egypt killed Josiah at Megiddo, Jehoahaz rose to the throne. His reign only lasted three months because Egypt came in and captured him and took him to exile in Egypt, where he lived until he died (2 Kings 23:30-34).

Pharaoh Neco placed Eliakim on the throne and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was a puppet king and served the interests of Egypt while on the throne. He was forced to pay large amounts of tribute to Egypt to remain safe. In addition to the domestic situations described above, the world was drastically changing.

God was raising up the Babylonians (Chaldeans) to take over the known world. The Babylonians were known more for their severity than for their cruelty in that they would have a fairly lax policy for those who resisted them but would be increasingly cruel with each rebellion. Isaiah and Jeremiah both attempted to warn the people of this, but Habakkuk had heard their message, and this caused the questions he would ask of God.

God was about to send the Babylonians (Chaldeans) to judge both Egypt and Judah, hence, Jeremiah's message not to run to Egypt for help. Both nations needed to surrender to God's plans and surrender to the invading armies of Babylon (Chaldees) to survive. Habakkuk could not reconcile the evil of the Babylonians (Chaldeans) with Judah's standing as the people of God known for righteousness. He failed to realize how far they had left that reputation behind.

Main Focus of the Book: The main focus of the book of Habakkuk is the sovereignty of God. This might sound strange, but this was the driving force behind both the questioning of God and the resolve to trust Him. The message of the book is more than a public proclamation of the sovereignty of God, it is a look at the inner struggles of a prophet of God as he attempts to reconcile God's reputation as holy and immutable with the fact that God was using evil people to accomplish His purposes. In other words, Habakkuk was trying to reconcile how he expected God to act with what God was actually doing.

Habakkuk, much like Moses, seemed more concerned with how the nations would interpret an enemy victory over God's chosen people. When Habakkuk asked, God simply said, "The righteous shall live by faith (2:4)." In other words, if you truly trust Me, then place your faith in the fact that I both know what I am doing and am in control. This leads to the final section.

In the final section, Habakkuk displayed trust in God even when he didn't have the answers. This also communicates the sovereignty of God. Habakkuk resolved to worship God, in faith, and to trust God to do what is best and right, even though he might not understand what God was doing. This is biblical faith.

Outline of Habakkuk

- I. God's Methods of Judgment Questioned
 - a. Habakkuk asks, "How can You act this way?" (1:1-4)
 - b. God's Response (1:5-11)
 - i. I am allowing the Chaldeans to execute my judgment. (1:5-6)
 - ii. I am not fooled; I know their ways. (1:7-11a)
 - iii. They will not rule forever. (1:11b)
 - c. Habakkuk asks, "How can You reward them, if You already know they are evil?" (1:12-2:1)
 - d. God's Response (2:2-20)
 - i. Write this down: they will rule for a certain time as my judgment. (2:2-3)
 - ii. Their greed will cause them to take foolish risks. (2:4)
 - iii. Their seizing of others' properties will lead to seizing of their own properties. (2:9-11)
 - iv. Because they used violence to build their nation, violence will undo it. (2:12-14)
 - v. Because they influenced others for evil, that evil will be used against them in judgment. (2:15-17)
 - vi. Their worship of false idols will not save them from the wrath of the Living God. (2:18-20)
- II. Habakkuk's Song of Surrender (3:1-19)
 - a. Title of the Song (3:1)
 - b. Petition of the Song (3:2)
 - c. Acknowledgement of God's Judgment (3:3-7)
 - d. Surrendering to God's Plan (3:8-15)
 - e. Resolving to Worship God No Matter What (3:16-19)

Personal Word: In a time when much of the church in North America acts no differently than the rest of the world, it would be a shock to many Christians to find that God would use pagans, Satanists, Muslims or some other non-Christian group to judge the Church. This is the equivalent of that with which Habakkuk was struggling. David struggled with this as well in Psalm 35.

To take this a step further, most Christians in North America struggle with the idea that God would want to take things away from us as a means of ministering to us, but that was God's plan for Judah.

In the midst of all this chaos, some Christians might think it improper or even disrespectful to God for us to question what is going on. If the questions come from a genuine sense of understanding His plans, they are just as appropriate as those we find in Habakkuk. If they are questioning God's right or ability to

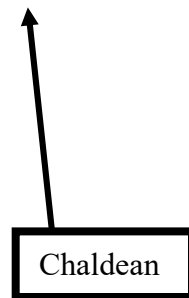
do such things, we have crossed a line that is quite different from the one Habakkuk stood behind.

As you study this little book, I hope and pray it will help you to grow in faith and trust in the sovereignty and goodness of God, even when you don't understand what He is planning.

May God richly bless you as you study His word.

Dr. Jack M. Jacob

Map of Geography of Habakkuk



1

¹ J. J. Bimson, J. P. Kane, *The New Bible Atlas*, Intersociety Press, Leicester, England, 1985.

Reading Record for Habakkuk

- Chapter 1
- Chapter 2
- Chapter 3

Record Observations Below:



Lesson One: Wrestling with Understanding Habakkuk 1:1 through 2:20

Many people find it hard to understand what God is up to at times. One particular story illustrates this. Jenny was a beautiful girl with a dark past. This is her story.

“I used to go to church, pray, read my Bible and even served in church on occasion. I enjoyed being with the people and the peace it gave me to know my life was in the hands of Someone bigger and stronger than me. But I realized all of that was just a pipe dream made up by people who want to control you and get you to behave as they want.”

“I guess I just realized there is no God because of what happened to me. I grew up in an abusive family. As a young girl, I turned to church and God as a means of comfort. At first it was wonderful. I got lots of attention. People seemed to genuinely care about me. When I ‘got saved’, people were incredibly happy, and some people even cried tears and told me they were proud of me. At first, they were immensely helpful. They helped me to learn about God and Jesus.

When I got older, things began to change. First, people seemed to not really notice me as much. Some of the people that had been so happy at my ‘decision’, soon seemed to not even notice I was there. Those that did notice me, seemed to always be correcting me.”

“One night, after a youth event, one of the boys in the youth group gave me a ride home. Only we didn’t go home. Instead, he drove me to a dark street and said he ‘wanted to talk’. I agreed and soon we were engaged in much more than just ‘talking’. I was okay with it because my father had told me that doing things with the boys would make me popular. At first, it seemed sort of wrong, but I figured, “If the chairman of the deacons’ son did it with me, it couldn’t be THAT wrong.”

“Pretty soon, much of the youth group was talking about what we were doing and some of the other guys asked me out and we fooled around. That was, until the day I realized church was for suckers.”

“I had invited a friend from school to our youth group because our Youth Pastor had said it was important to invite people to church. Annie came with me to Youth Group. Many in the group knew that she was known for being with many guys at school. She came to church and the Youth Pastor preached about sexual sins and about how God forgives. I asked her if she would like to ask God into her heart and then it happened.”

“Annie stood up and said, in front of everyone and in a much louder voice than necessary, ‘Why do I need to be forgiven? Jenny is with guys all the time and

with guys from this youth group!’ How dare she out me in front of the whole youth group! Many of the youth asked if I needed prayer or if they could help! Some of them were the guys I had been with!”

“I thought, ‘How dare God let this happen to me! I had served Him and gone to church and been heavily involved! How could He use some girl like Annie to make me look like a fool! I hadn’t been with nearly as many guys as Annie AND she was also a gossip and cheater and I even heard she had undergone an abortion.’ I decided right then and there, ‘If God would let someone like that judge me, I was out of there.’ I haven’t been back to church since.”

How about you? Would you struggle with God using someone less righteous to judge you? That is what he told Habakkuk in these lesson chapters and Habakkuk had to wrestle with how to respond.

Describe a time when God did not act like you anticipated and you were “let down”.

How did it feel to be treated by God this way?

How did you respond?

Consider It

1. What complaints did Habakkuk bring to God in the following verses:
 - a. 1:2
 - b. 1:3
 - c. 1:4
2. How did God respond to Habakkuk's complaints? (1:5-11)
3. Why were the Chaldeans going to be able to conquer the known world? (1:5-11)
4. How did God describe the Chaldeans? (1:5-11)
5. What did God say would be the results of the Chaldeans marching forth? (1:5-11)
6. What hope did God offer to Habakkuk after describing the Chaldeans? (1:5-11)
7. Why was God going to judge the Chaldeans? (1:5-11)

8. Did Habakkuk accept God's explanation? (1:12-17)
9. What additional questions did Habakkuk ask of God? (1:12-17)
10. Who was Habakkuk referring to as "those more righteous"? (1:12-17)
11. What did Habakkuk do after asking God this series of questions? (2:1)
12. What did God tell Habakkuk to do with God's answers to Habakkuk's questions? (2:2-3)
13. Why did God tell Habakkuk to do this? (2:2-3)
14. What did God tell Habakkuk about this vision of the Chaldeans overrunning Judah? (2:2-3)
15. How did God say Habakkuk would recognize the righteous? (2:4-8)

16. God gave many reasons for judging the wicked. Fill out the chart below from 2:4-20.

Verses	Sin Being Judged	Judgment	Did it apply to Chaldeans?	Did it apply to Judah?
5				
6-8				
9-11				
12-14				
15-17				
18-20				

17. What remedy did God offer for these judgments in the following verses:

a. 2:14

b. 2:20

Comprehend It

1. What was Habakkuk’s major argument?

2. God says, in 1:6, He raised up the Chaldeans to conquer the world. Why was this a problem for Habakkuk?
3. If God raised up the Chaldeans to judge Judah, then why did God hold them guilty and promise to punish them?
4. Is this fair? Why or why not?
5. Judas Iscariot was born to betray Jesus. Was his punishment fair? Why or why not?
6. Habakkuk seemed to acknowledge God's plans in 1:12 but continued to ask questions. Was this a lack of faith? Why or why not?
7. Did Habakkuk's view of the "more righteous" agree with God's view? Why or why not?
8. What did Habakkuk accuse the Chaldeans of in 1:15-17?
9. Who else was guilty of this sin?
10. Why did Habakkuk not see the others who were guilty?

11. What did God mean when He said, “Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within Him; But the righteous will live by his faith?”
12. What did God say was the downfall of the haughty man?
13. What did He mean?
14. What was God trying to get Habakkuk to see in His descriptions of the sins of chapter 2?
15. Did Habakkuk understand this? Why or why not?
16. Which verse of chapter 2 gives God’s overall purpose for this prophecy? Why?

Connect It

1. When you don’t understand what God is doing in your life, is it okay to ask questions? Why or why not?
2. What did God say about the activity of the Chaldeans?
3. How does this help you understand circumstances you go through?

4. Habakkuk complained about God's method of judgment, but not His judgment. Do you ever complain about God's activity in your life?
5. When might this complaining be legitimate?
6. When might it not be?
7. God claims He will hold guilty those who serve His purpose for judgment. What is your reaction to this truth?
8. God was telling Habakkuk all who are guilty will be punished. How would this message have been received differently by Judah than Habakkuk?
9. Jesus said, before you can help someone else with a speck in his eye, you must first take the plank out of your own eye (Matthew 7:3-5). How does this apply to Habakkuk's complaints?
10. Have you ever prayed and asked God to judge somebody for wrong they had done to you or others? Why or why not?
11. Have you ever complained to God about how circumstances in your life are going? Why or why not?
12. Based on these chapters, how will you react next time?

13. Martin Luther's life was changed by Paul quoting Habakkuk 2:4b. As you look at your own life, do you live by your faith? Give RECENT examples.

14. What needs to change in your life for you to live this way?



Lesson Two: A Heart Resolved Habakkuk 3:1-19

A little boy came home from school one day and found a number of cars at his house. As he walked in the door, a lady, who called herself, "Aunt Tootie" came over and hugged him tighter than he wanted (like he wanted

to be hugged by a girl anyway). She kissed him and then licked her handkerchief and wiped the lipstick off his head. The next step found a person referring to himself as, "Uncle Marvin" shaking his hand and saying over and over, I am so sorry. The little boy assumed that was for the kiss he had just gotten from "Aunt Tootie", so he said, "It's okay, I guess." As the boy went into the kitchen, he noticed the preacher there with his mother at the dining room table. It looked like she had been crying. He had been in trouble before, but never had he had this much of an audience to get punished. It worried him greatly.

Mother started to speak, then started to cry, composed herself and started to speak again. She said, "Johnny, I have some bad news." "This can't be good," the boy thought to himself. He had done some pretty bad things, but he had never seen his mother have difficulty with correcting him. It was at this point that he noticed his father was not there. He looked around the room at men and women from the church who looked vaguely familiar. But father was always there when mother corrected him. Father was usually the one who spanked him when he was bad. The questioning looks on his face must have caused his mother to decide to continue.

"Johnny, something bad has happened to your father." She said. Johnny's stomach felt like it fell right off and hit the floor. "What happened?", he asked. His mother responded with trembling hands and searching eyes, "He was driving home when a drunk driver hit his car. Johnny, Father's gone." Johnny could not believe what he had just heard! "Gone where?", he asked. Pastor Jim responded when mother could not, "Johnny, your father has gone to heaven to be with Jesus."

Johnny was stunned. The entire world seemed to stop. He searched the room for someone who could not keep a straight face with the joke, but he found none. He turned and ran outside and found his dog, which was named Dog, and hugged him tight and cried like he had never cried before.

After what seemed like forever, Mother came out carrying something in a frame. She sat down next to Johnny and stroked Dog while she searched for words that seemed to take forever to come. Finally, she said, "Johnny, do you understand what Pastor Jim said?" Johnny felt like his throat had swelled shut and, with tears streaming down his face, he slowly nodded. Finally, he shouted,

“How could God do this?!” Mother turned the picture around so that Johnny could see it was the needlepoint she had worked on that Christmas. Johnny had always admired that picture and his mother for making it. Mother continued, “Johnny...you like this picture, don’t you?” Again, Johnny only nodded. “Well, can I show you something?”, she said. Again, a nod. Johnny watched as mother took the back off of the picture. What he saw amazed him. The back of the needlepoint was a jumbled mess! There were knots, extra thread, and fuzz.

Mother replaced the back on the picture and slid it back into the frame. She said, “Johnny. I know that you are upset, and it may be really easy for you to get mad at God and blame Him for this. It may also be tempting for you to think that God is not good and that He did not do enough to protect Father, but what we see right now is like the back of the needlepoint. It looks like a mess. God sees the other side. It all makes sense to Him. He has His plans and He knows what He is doing to make this turn out beautifully. I don’t know how it could ever look right, but I am going to trust God to do what is best for making things beautiful. Don’t you think He might know more than we do?”

Johnny responded, “I guess so.” Mother said, “We have to believe that and trust Him, right?” Johnny nodded and he and Mother sat outside with Dog and cried together. After a while Johnny prayed, “God, I don’t understand, but I trust you. I sure hope You know what You are doing. I am going to trust You, but can You help me feel like my world isn’t over?”

Like Johnny, we may not understand all that God is doing in our lives, but in order for our faith to carry us through the difficult times, we must decide to trust God to work it all out. We can ask him to help us feel like our world isn’t over, but we have to trust that He will.

Have you ever had a moment in life that you had to decide to trust God even though you did not understand what He was doing?

What helped you to trust Him?

How has He worked since that time?

Consider It

1. How did Habakkuk first use this chapter? (3:1)
2. What petitions did Habakkuk make of God? (3:2)
3. What report had Habakkuk heard regarding God? (3:2)
4. What did Habakkuk mean by “in the midst of years”? (3:2)
5. Who was full of God’s praise? (3:3-7)
6. How did Habakkuk say the earth would respond to God’s presence? (3:3-7)
7. How was God going to come forth? (3:8-15)
8. How was God going to act when He came? (3:8-15)
9. In what was Habakkuk placing his faith? (3:8-15)
10. Why was Habakkuk frightened? (3:8-15)

11. What caused Habakkuk to change from telling of God's deliverance back to His justice? (3:16-19)

12. What did Habakkuk say would not keep him from worshipping God? (3:16-19)

13. What did Habakkuk resolve to do? (3:16-19)

14. What final reason did Habakkuk give for this choice? (3:16-19)

15. How did Habakkuk expect this to be used in the future? (3:16-19)

Comprehend It

1. Using the map on page 9, locate Judah, Egypt, and Babylon. How does this help you understand Judah's situation?

2. What is the overall tone of this prayer?

3. Is this what you would expect of Habakkuk after reading chapters 1 & 2? Why or why not?

4. Why did Habakkuk not ask for immediate deliverance?

5. How does 3:3 differ from Habakkuk's complaints in chapters 1 & 2?
6. To whom does Habakkuk give credit for the coming judgment and destruction?
7. Why is this important?
8. What did Habakkuk mean by saying God was riding on horses and the chariots of salvation?
9. From your study of the Old Testament, did the Chaldeans (Babylonians) destroy Judah?
10. What does this tell you about God's plans?
11. To what did Habakkuk look forward?
12. If this was his hope, then why did he tremble?
13. What does this tell you about Habakkuk?
14. What does this tell you about God?

15. What does this tell you about the situation?

16. Habakkuk acknowledged bad times were on the way. How did this affect his faith in, trust in, and love for God?

17. What purpose would this song serve for later Israelites?

Connect It

1. In the face of destruction, Habakkuk prayed. What can we learn from this?

2. Have you ever heard any news of God, or His activity, that caused you to fear? If so, describe it.

3. How does this fit together with John's declaration that God is love in 1 John 4:16a?

4. Habakkuk was reminded of God's mercy and salvation in the middle of dark times. Have you ever experienced this? If so, describe.

5. How can you be more aware of God during times of difficulty?

6. Habakkuk surrendered to God's plan and trusted Him for the results. What are you struggling with right now that you need to surrender to God?
7. What is holding you back from totally surrendering that situation right now?
8. Habakkuk chose to surrender even though he acknowledged things were going to get worse. How does that example help you with your struggle?
9. Habakkuk ended by remembering God's activity in the past on his behalf. Do you have examples of how God has worked for you in the past? If so, list them below.
10. How do those lessons apply to your current situation?
11. Will you surrender to God, right now, that situation?
12. If not, why not?
13. Based on your study of Habakkuk, what needs to change in your walk with Christ?
14. How do you plan to make that change?

This page is for any additional thoughts or observations.

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