

Before starting this lesson, read the book of **Habakkuk**. You may find it helpful to read the book, go thru the lesson and then read the book once again. Since it is a short book, it will not be difficult to do.

As we go thru the books of the prophets, it becomes harder to remember who they were and what they said. The easiest way is to associate them with a key word or idea.

For example, 2 prophets write about Nineveh.

We automatically think of **Jonah**.

The other prophet is **Nahum**.

The way to remember he writes about Nineveh is to remember both names begin with the letter "N".

Nahum - Nineveh

2 prophets focus on the **Day of the Lord**.

**Joel** uses a plague of locust to **describe** God's judgment.

**Zephaniah** gives us the **reason** for His judgment.

God's people had said God was irrelevant. He was not going to do anything good for them and He would not do anything bad against them. So there was no reason to obey. This is why God must bring judgment, known as the *day of the Lord*.

2 prophets make predictions about Jesus' birth.

**Micah** says He will be **born in Bethlehem**.

**Isaiah** says He will be **born of a virgin**.

In this lesson we are studying **Habakkuk**.

In chapter one he asks God 8 questions, one after another – *why this, why that, why the other?* He asks so many questions, that I have called him, the prophet *Mr. Why*.

Before we can study a book we need to know **when** it was written. For this, we use history.

The easiest way, is to find out who was the Jewish **king** at the time.

But Habakkuk does not mention a king. There may be two reasons for this. Altho the nation of Judah has a king and he is part of the royal family, Egypt put him in power and not the Jews themselves. So the Jews may not consider him a legitimate king. Another reason is that he is so evil.

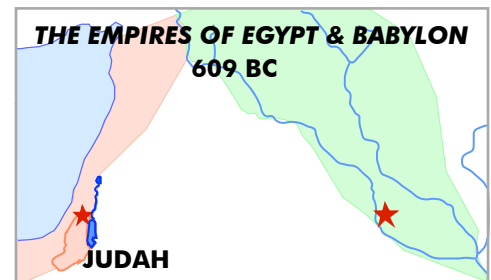
Since Habakkuk does not mention a king, we then look to see what **nations** are in power.

In chapter 1, Habakkuk says **Babylon** has conquered numerous cities and her reputation of victories is well known.

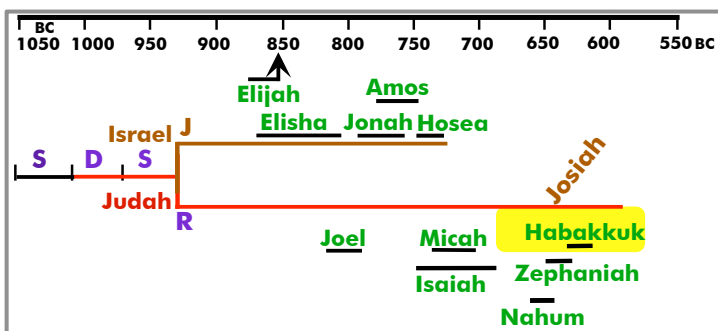
From secular history, we know Babylon conquered the Assyrian empire and their capital of Nineveh in 612 BC. Over the next 4 years she had a series of famous battles from 612-609 BC.

Chapter 1 also says Judah **will be** attacked by Babylon and it is going to be a shock to everyone.

Secular history tells us this happened in 605 BC. So the book of Habakkuk has to be written **after** Babylon is famous in battle but **before** she attacks Judah. This puts it between 609 and 605 BC. I have taken the date 606 BC.



Habakkuk is writing near the end of his ministry. He is a prophet for some 20 years from 624 to 605 BC.



This means his *first* 4 years of ministry are the *last* 4 years of Zephaniah, so they are contemporaries. However they write their books at 2 very different times in history. Zephaniah wrote when Josiah is near the beginning of his kingship. Habakkuk writes 24 years later, after Josiah has died and 2 of his sons had been appointed kings. Josiah was the last godly king the Jews had. His 2 sons and the following 2 kings were all evil.

We learn 2 facts about Habakkuk himself from chapter 3. In some of your Bibles, it begins with,  
*a prayer of Habakkuk the prophet according to Shigionoth.*  
Others mention something about *a lament, or mournful dirge.*

This may be part of verse 1, or just before verse 1. Some Bibles have left it out, thinking it is irrelevant. The actual Hebrew word is *shigionoth*. It is a musical term, explaining how these words should be sung. It means *to sing triumphantly, with abandon and with great excitement*. It would be equivalent to our musical term *fortissimo*, or *ff*.

At the end of this chapter, most translations have either a part of the verse itself or an additional line in italics after the verse, stating it is *for the director of music, chief singer, choir master, or choir director on stringed instruments*.

Habakkuk is telling the choir director to sing chapter 3 as part of the weekly liturgy in the temple. Verse 1 gives musical instruction - *how* it should be sung and verse 19 - what instruments should accompany it. God had said only those from the tribe of Levi could be temple musicians. Since Habakkuk is writing temple music and giving instructions, it means he is from the tribe of Levi. He may also be one of the musicians. (2 Chron. 34:12-13)

Habakkuk is the most unusual of all the prophets.

Others use their book to deliver a message from God.

Habakkuk uses his book to solve a problem

Others learn about future events and tell the **people**, *God is going to do this*.

Habakkuk learns about future events and asks God, **Why** are You going to do this?

#### OUTLINE

Questions	1
Answers	2
Praise	3

Habakkuk begins with questions. The answers God gives him lead to gratitude and praise. He is then told to write this down so other people can learn from his experience.

Chapter 3 is a chapter of praise. Because it is easier to learn the words of a song than to memorize a verse from Scripture, Habakkuk puts this chapter to music. It is considered so important, the Levite choirs will sing it in the weekly liturgy. As a result, God's people will remember it and be able to use it in the future when they are forced into exile.

### Habakkuk's background

A Levite, contemporary with Zephaniah. He is a prophet for some 20 years, writing his book in the last year of his ministry - 606 BC. He lives in Jerusalem. He is *Mr. Why* because he asks God so many questions.

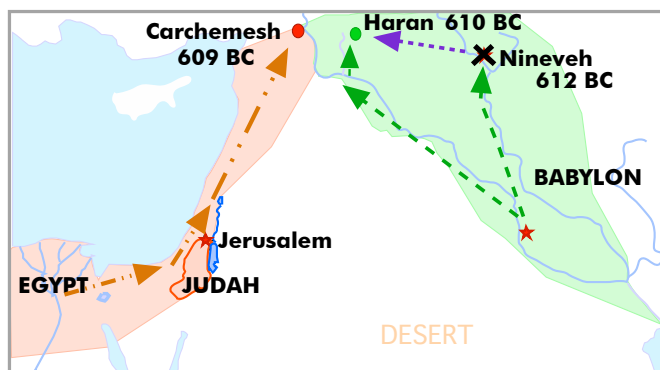
**Political background** On the world scene, major changes have taken place.

For 300 years, **ASSYRIA** had been a world power. She had taken the northern nation of Israel into exile in 722 BC. But then in 612 BC, **BABYLON** attacked her capital of Nineveh and destroyed it. This was the fall of Assyria.

However some of the Assyrian army, along with their commander, had deserted when Babylon attacked, just like Nahum had said. They escaped and set up a government in exile some 250 miles west in a place called Haran. The Babylonians knew they needed to get rid of these remaining Assyrian leaders.

So finally 2 years later, in 610 BC, the Babylonian king and his armies marched 450 miles to the northwest to fight the Assyrians in Haran. Babylon captured the city, but the Assyrian leaders once again escaped. The Babylonian army left some of their leaders in control of Haran and returned home. A year later, in 609, the Assyrian leaders tried to retake the city. Babylon came back with her armies to not only destroy this remaining Assyrian power, but now to take control of the whole area and develop her own empire.

In the south, Egypt wants to keep that from happening. She has been planning to develop her own empire. So Egypt goes north to help the Assyrian leaders in their fight against Babylon. Since this battle is to the north of **Judah**, Egypt has to travel thru or close by the land of the Jews.



During this time, **Josiah** is the Jewish king. He is more afraid of Egypt than Babylon. So without asking God's advice, he and his armies go out to stop Egypt as they pass thru the land. God did not want him to intervene. As a result, God allows Josiah to be defeated and killed in battle.

Because Egypt is delayed while fighting Judah, Babylon is able to kill the last Assyrian leader and his followers. This is now the end of the Assyrian empire. Any remaining Assyrian people will be killed over the next 50 years and they will cease to exist as a race or ethnic group.

Babylon has just won the battle at Haran and moved west to Carchemish. At this point Egypt and her army arrives on the scene. There is a battle between the two nations at Carchemish, which has become famous in history. (609 BC). Egypt wins the battle and the Euphrates River becomes the dividing line. Egypt takes control of everything to the south while Babylon takes everything to the east. The armies of Babylon return home. Egypt spends the next few months establishing an outpost at Carchemish to show this is her northern boundary.

Then Egypt heads south, taking control of each area as she goes thru it. When she arrives at Judah, she finds Josiah's oldest son is king. He hates the Egyptians because they were the ones who killed his father Josiah a few months earlier. He has let everyone know he supports the Babylonians. This is why Egypt takes him prisoner and puts Josiah's son #2 in power. His name is **Jehoiakim**. Since he never thought he could be king, he is thrilled with the opportunity. Naturally he thinks Egypt is great. He does not mind that Egypt now controls Judah, because at least he has the title of king. His older brother is taken to Egypt as prisoner and eventually dies there.

Three more years go by. It is now 606 BC. For the people of **Judah**, they can hardly believe what has happened in the last 6 years.

- ✿ The Assyrian empire is gone.
- ✿ Now there are 2 empires surrounding them - Babylon and Egypt.
- ✿ Josiah, their king for 31 years, was killed in battle.
- ✿ Egypt has taken his oldest son as prisoner and is now in control of their nation.

With all these **political** changes, God's people are living in fear. Money and security is all they think about. In their **social** life, ethics, morals, honesty and compassion has disappeared.

But strangely, God's people think everything is still OK **spiritually**. After all, they talk about God. On the weekend there are huge crowds at temple worship. However, Jehoiakim the new king is not interested in God. He has told the people they do not have to accept God's rules; they can pick and choose which rules they want to obey.

It is in **this** environment and background that Habakkuk writes his book. Being a Levite, he is involved in the temple services. He looks at the majority of God's people as they worship on the weekend and then watches how they live during the week. He is shocked at how they are breaking God's rules and see nothing wrong with it. Some of the believing Jews who are in the minority, have asked him why God has not taken action. Habakkuk has no answer. (2:1) In fact, this has been **his** question as well. In desperation he starts praying and asking his questions.

## Chapter 1

*O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not hear? Or cry to You, Violence, but You will not save? **WHY** do You make me look at wickedness? **WHY** do You tolerate wrongdoing?... the law is paralyzed and justice never prevails. For the wicked surround the righteous; justice is perverted. 1:2-4*

The laws of the land have become powerless and useless because there is now, more sympathy for the criminal than for the victim. It has become impossible to find justice. Habakkuk has a heavy heart as he looks at his nation. This is God's people, but society has become totally corrupt. Habakkuk is shocked that God does not intervene and **do** something about all the injustice, violence and evil.

God replies,

*Habakkuk, I see it and I **am** going to do something. I'm sending a nation to attack you and it will be in your lifetime. 1:5b – For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.*

According to verse 6, it will be the *Chaldeans*, meaning the nation of Babylon.

The name *Chaldean* is used because all Babylonian leaders came from the southern district, known as Chaldea. The Babylonians are going to attack the nation of Judah.

God now describes the Babylonian army.

*...That ruthless and impetuous people who march across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own. 1:6*

*They are a feared and dreaded people. They are a law to themselves. They promote their own honor. 1:7*

*They are fierce and fly like an eagle swooping to devour 1:8*

This means they will come quickly. Babylon won their battles by arriving and attacking before anyone expected them. This military tactic later became known as the *blitzkrieg*.

*They gather prisoners. 1:9*

*They mock kings and scoff at rulers.*

*They laugh at all fortified cities; by building earthen ramps they capture them. 1:10*

When a city is protected by a wall, they just heap up dirt until it is equal to the height of the wall and then go over the wall.

They brag and point to the greatness of their strength and power. *Their strength is their god. 1:11*

Habakkuk wanted God to intervene and stop the Jews from their wickedness. But God does not work that way. Instead, He brings problems that people cannot solve. When they realize they need God, He lets them choose whether they will turn **to** Him or **from** Him. If they turn to Him, He will solve the problems. If they turn from Him, He will allow the problems to get even worse so it becomes the consequence and judgment of their wrong choice.

Habakkuk asked, *God, why are You not doing anything about the condition of our country?*

God answered, *I am doing something. I am going to send Babylon to attack you.*

Habakkuk is in shock.

*God, I want You to deal with our country, but not **that** way. **WHY** would You use a pagan nation to punish us. They are far more sinful than we are. And besides, in warfare, everyone suffers. **WHY** would You let godly people suffer along with the guilty? **WHY** will You let a heathen nation prosper when they will give all the credit to their idols?*

These questions are found in the rest of chapter 1.

The question about **God using a more sinful nation** is found in verse 13.

*Your eyes are too pure to look on evil. You cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are You silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?*

Habakkuk knows God's character. Because God is holy, He cannot ignore the disobedience of His people. There comes a point when He must respond. Habakkuk takes this concept and now applies it to the Babylonians. *God, if you cannot look upon **our** sin without doing something, then what about **them** and the terrible things **they** do. Surely You have to respond to them also.*

At the beginning of the chapter, Habakkuk is shocked at God's lack of action. When he finds out what God's action will be, he is shocked at God's method – that God would use a pagan, more evil nation to bring judgment on them.

The question about **letting the godly suffer** along with the guilty is in verses 14-15.

*You have made people like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler. The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net. He gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad.*

When people go fishing, they usually choose which fish they want to catch. But when a dragnet is used, all the fish in the area are caught. Habakkuk says the Jews will be like fish caught in the Babylonian dragnet. *Everybody* will experience national punishment - the guilty and the innocent.

Between the lines, Habakkuk is asking,

*God, why not protect the godly and just let the guilty suffer in this coming battle? Oh...and if I have to go thru the conflict, will I die along with the ungodly? That does not seem fair.*

The question about **Babylon's success** is in verse 17.

*Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?*

In plain English he is asking, *Will Babylon have power forever?*

Habakkuk has asked a lot of questions and all of them are significant. But for him, the most important question is,

***How can I answer the questions of the people when these are my questions as well?***

He decides to stop teaching until he gets some answers. And he only wants answers that come from God Himself.

*I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what He (God) will say to me and what answer I am to give to this complaint of the people. 2:1*

Using picture language of a tower, Habakkuk says he is going where he can be alone and quietly consider what he knows about God and what God has just told him. He goes to listen and wait for an answer. Habakkuk is not defiant; he has legitimate doubts and questions.

One of the reasons this is my favorite book of the Old Testament is because of Habakkuk's honesty as a spiritual leader. He will not teach others while he is still confused and doubting. When he does not know the answers, he does not make up answers to give to others in order to look good. He stops teaching. This book is both practical and realistic.

Thruout the Bible, and especially this book, we discover it is never wrong to have questions and doubts. But how we handle the doubts may *become* wrong.

Doubts can either cause us to become defiant and drive us **from** God – obviously this is wrong.

Or doubts can drive us **to** God - this is wonderful.

For Habakkuk, his questions in chapter 1 drive him **to** God.

**Chapter 2** Habakkuk tells us the answers God gave him. It centers around the phrase - ***the just will live by his faith.***

Habakkuk needs to believe...

### 5 TRUTHS ABOUT GOD.

**God is perfect in wisdom** - God knows what He is doing in bringing this crisis.

**God is always faithful** - God's help may seem delayed, but He will respond

**God provides what is needed** - God will give him the ability to go thru the suffering.

**God is just and fair** - God will deal with the Babylonians and bring punishment on them.

**God is absolutely holy** - God will always do what is right for the situation.

Having seen the big picture, now let's look at what God says about each of these.

- ✱ Habakkuk needs to believe in God's **wisdom**.

At this point, an attack by the Babylonians is the only way God's people will see they need God.

- ✱ He needs to believe in **God's faithfulness**. God says,

*Tho it (My answer and My deliverance) linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. 2:3*

At the moment, Habakkuk can only see one small part of God's plan and it looks terrible.

- ✱ He needs to believe in **God's provision** – God says,

*See, the enemy, meaning both the wicked Jews and the wicked Babylonians - he is puffed up; his desires are not upright - **BUT** the righteous - the just will live by his faith. 2:4*

Your translation may be a little different. But the point of the verse is to make a comparison.

In time of national crisis, everyone goes thru suffering. **How** they go thru it is determined by their faith.

The arrogant will continue to believe they do not need God.

The righteous know they need God and will turn to Him.

The result is:

*The **righteous** (just), by his faith or because of his faith, will live - will survive and know what to do*

To Habakkuk and each godly person, God will give living grace.

And when the time comes, God will also give dying grace.

- ✱ Habakkuk needs to believe in **God's justice**

In 2:5-19, it is as tho God is talking directly to the Babylonians. God does this to assure Habakkuk that He knows exactly what the Babylonians are like and how He intends to punish them.

Their sin of **aggression** - *because you, Babylonians, have plundered many nations. 2:8*

Their **greed** and **exploitation**. *Woe to him to builds his realm by unjust gain 2:9*

Their **inhumanity** - no concern about killing people in order to get what they wanted. 2:12

*Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed.*

Their sin of **drunkenness** and **immorality** 2:15

*Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies.*

Babylon was known for its drunkenness. In 70 years God will use **this** sin to bring about her downfall. The Medes and Persians will conquer Babylon while king Belshazzar and the entire city are drunk at a banquet.



Their sin of **idolatry**. Woe to him who says to wood, Come to life. Or to lifeless stone, wake up.  
*Can it give guidance?* 2:19

God lets Habakkuk know His plans for the Babylonians. Habakkuk can be sure of God's **justice**

- \* He needs to believe in **God's holiness** – God says,  
*But the Lord is in His holy Temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him.* 2:20  
It is time for Habakkuk to stop asking questions and let his mind be at rest.  
Because God is holy, He **will** do what is right for the situation.  
In spite of the circumstances, Habakkuk can experience peace.

God has given Habakkuk time to ask all his questions and time to hear the answers. He has explained what it means to live by faith.

*Believe – count on – hang onto* - 5 truths about God. **God's wisdom, His faithfulness, provisions, justice and holiness.**

Now Habakkuk is to stop and assimilate – to absorb - these answers so they become part of his very being.

As he begins to do this, the things that God has done in the past come flooding into his mind. The memory of Jewish history brings an ah-ha moment – **God IS in control**. Soon his heart and mind are so filled with thanksgiving that he writes a song of praise – praise for God's actions in the future, in the past and in the present.

### Chapter 3

At first, his praise is blended with prayer for God's action in the future.

*Lord, I have heard of Your fame. I stand in awe of Your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day. In our time make them known; in judgment, remember mercy.* 3:2

Habakkuk knows God is fair. His nation has disobeyed. So he asks that in the future, when God brings judgment, He will also include mercy. *In Your judgment, remember mercy.* What an accurate prayer. How much God's people needed both – judgment and then mercy to get thru it and mercy in how long the judgment would continue.

In the next verses Habakkuk praises God for what He did in their past history. The more he thought about God's actions, the more his confidence was renewed.

So now, as God's prophet, he wants to build the confidence of God's **people**. To do it, he is going to remind **them** of their history with God. He uses vivid picture language to get them excited about God. For the Jews, Habakkuk's words have tremendous meaning.

Because it is not the way we talk, we need an explanation.

Verse 5 reminds them of their slavery in Egypt and how God used plagues to set them free.

*Plague went before Him; pestilence followed His steps.*

Verse 8 uses extreme words and picture language.

*Were You angry with the rivers, O Lord? Was Your judgment against the streams? Did You rage against the sea when You rode with Your horses and Your victorious chariots?*

Do not take this literally. God does not ride in chariots and He never literally raged at any body of water. The picture language is talking about the times when God's people faced injustice from their enemies. God used water in miraculous ways to deliver them. The Jews would immediately remember the Reed Sea and the Jordan River. God had made a dry path right thru the middle of the water, so they could get across. He first used water get them out of their slavery in Egypt and then He used water to get them into the Promised Land.

The word pictures go on to remind them of God's power at Mt. Sinai in lightning and thunder. Other pictures remind them of what He did so they could enter the Promised Land and what He did to keep them in the land when their enemies attacked them.

These word pictures of praise are going to be sung every week in the temple service. They have just one year before Babylon will attack them. By then they will know these words and music by heart. Then as they go thru suffering, this psalm will come to mind. They faced impossible situations in the past. Yet God was with them and had preserved them as a people. So **now** He will be with them. They as a people and race will not be destroyed. As they sing these words, their faith will be strengthened.

Habakkuk has praised God for what He will do in the **future** and what He did in the **past**.

Now he praises God for what He is doing in the **present**.

But first, he is honest about his own feelings.

*I heard about the coming battle and my heart pounded. My lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones and my legs trembled. 3:16*

When Habakkuk thinks about the coming warfare, he is fearful. He is shaking in his boots. Anyone should be afraid at the news of disaster or danger.

But, in his fear, Habakkuk does not go to pieces. He begins to live by faith.

He believes in **God's wisdom and holiness**.

That enables him to believe in **God's justice**. God will be fair. So he continues...

*...Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the **nation invading us**. 3:16b*

Eventually God will judge the Babylonians.

He also believes in **God's faithfulness and provisions**. When **he** has to go thru the battle and face the time of danger, God will give him what he needs.

*Tho the fig tree does not blossom nor fruit be on the vines; the produce of the olive fail and the fields produce no food; tho there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God the Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; He enables me to go on the heights. 3:17-*

Notice, Habakkuk is not claiming by faith that **his** crops will produce and **his** farm will survive. His faith is not about claiming *material* things. His faith is knowing and claiming his *spiritual* resources. Even when he is afraid he will lose everything, he knows God will provide strength and inward stability to get thru it. The words *rejoice* and *joyful*, in the Bible, never mean *feeling happy*. They mean an inward stability because the focus is on God.

Habakkuk lived in a day when the foundations around him were crumbling – nationally, socially and spiritually. He expected God would intervene in some way. Perhaps He would punish or zap the ones who were most guilty; or send national revival like in the days of Josiah; or miraculously protect the godly from any suffering. But at least God would do something.

How similar our circumstances today. Foundations around us are crumbling – nationally, socially and spiritually. Everywhere we look there is evil, violence, injustice and suffering. Ethics, morals, honesty and compassion have disappeared.

As believers we have prayed for **God** to change things.

**We**, the Christian world, have also tried to change things.

The Christian world has tried political influence to change laws.

We have tried creating revivals thru human plans and formulas.

We have thought if churches looked and acted more like the world, the world would listen to us.

We have tried changing God's values and rules to be more accommodating to others.

But the more the Christian world has tried **these** methods, the worse the world has become.

It has not changed anything.

So first of all we, as *individual* believers, need to change **our** thinking.

When foundations crumble, God must bring consequences – to individuals, societies and nations. And no one can stop His judgment. This is when we pray for our nation, *God, in Your judgment, remember to also show us mercy*.

Then we live by faith, being confident in and counting on **5 TRUTHS ABOUT GOD**.

God has all **wisdom**. He knows what He is doing in letting these crisis continue.

God is always **faithful**. His help may seem delayed, but He will respond to our prayers and be with us.

God will **provide**. He will give us the ability to go thru whatever suffering we face.

He will give us living grace. And when we need it, He will also give us dying grace.

God is **just** and **fair**. Eventually He will deal with the evil and injustice.

God is **holy**. He will always do what is right for the situation.

When foundations crumble, we build *our* confidence...

By taking time to examine and assimilate – to absorb what we have learned and know about God.

By remembering all the things God has done for us in the past

He has answered so many of our prayers, provided our needs, healed our bodies and emotions.

He intervened for us.

If He has done all of this for us in the **past**, surely we can believe He will do it in the **future**.

Then we will lift our heart in thankfulness and praise. Like Habakkuk, we can say for our culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century...

*Even if I feel insecure, if my family brings me sorrow, if I lose my health, if I am fearful of the future... Even if – (any situation you want to fill in) – Even if ... yet I will find joy in my relationship with the Lord --I will be joyful in God who has given me assurance of eternity with Him. He is my strength. He will enable me to do whatever is necessary in my life.*

**This** is what it means to live by faith.

### **EXTRA INFORMATION FOR THE STUDIOUS AND INQUISITIVE**

The Hebrew in 3:19 can be understood to read:

*on MY stringed instruments* meaning that Habakkuk is going to be the one playing.

Important dates and details involving the fall of Assyria and the rise of Babylon

610 BC –

Assyrian king Ashur-u-ballit forced to abandon Haran, the Assyrian provincial capital, because of Babylonian armies under king Nabopolassar

609 –

Ashur-u-ballit tries to retake Haran

Egypt under Pharaoh Necho comes to his aid, but is delayed when Judah's king Josiah tries to stop him at Megiddo.

Babylonians take Haran and kill Ashur-u-ballit.

Carchemish however, is taken by Egypt and becomes their stronghold.

The Euphrates River becomes the dividing line between Egyptian and Babylonian control

605 –

General Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king's son, leads the Babylonian armies to capture Carchemish.

He defeats the Egyptian armies and garrison located there as well as in Hamath and drives Egypt out of Syria.

He would have continued south, but gets word that his father died; he returns to Babylon to be crowned king.