

## 8 Fears and Faith: Are they mutually exclusive?

### Part 1

“For what I fear comes upon me, And what I dread befalls me.”

Job 3:25

“. . . for the greater the love the greater the grief, and the stronger the faith the more savagely will Satan storm its fortress.”

— C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*



One spring day I sat with a group of women from a local church as we enjoyed a delicious lunch together. It was time for us to share what God had taught us through our various Bible studies over the past months. One woman stood up and said, “I learned in my class this spring—‘If you have faith you don’t have fear, and if you have fear you don’t have faith.’” This credo sounded nice and tidy, but I immediately wondered, *is it always true?*

It seemed that her teacher had not nuanced the concept of fear enough. Fear and faith are not always mutually exclusive.

What if—

just as she shared those words about faith and fear, we heard an explosion that rocked our room and knocked all of us out of our chairs and onto the floor? What if the lights went out and through the darkness we smelled the stench of burning carpet, mixed with burnt wood? What if we saw fire and smoke filling up the hallway just outside our doorway? What if we would soon be trapped inside our room by that fire? Would we have fear? Would that fear mean we had no faith?

Or what if—

just as she pronounced those words, someone came into the room and said, “We need to pray. We’ve just heard that some of our teens traveling on the church bus were seriously injured in a major accident when the bus went off the road and plummeted down a ravine.” Would we not feel fear? Would those fears mean we had no faith?

Fears come in a wide variety of shapes and forms. Some fit into normal reactions to dangers. While other fears gnaw at us throughout our days as we worry and fret. Some fears come as we look ahead and wonder how to handle a problem. Some fears demonstrate a lack of faith. Some fears indicate that there is danger. Some fears are sinful to the core. Some fears are wise responses to real problems and real evil. And fear can just be fear.

Job openly admitted feelings of normal fear and dread.

“What *I feared* has come upon me;  
what *I dreaded* has happened to me.  
I have *no peace, no quietness*;  
I have *no rest, but only turmoil.*” Job 3:25-26, italics mine

When Job expressed his real feelings of having fear and dread, no peace or quietness, and only turmoil, did that mean he had small faith? Or did that mean he had no true faith? Some have criticized Job for feeling those emotions.

Job also spoke of feeling terrified by his own dreams.

“If I say, ‘My bed will comfort me,  
My couch will ease my complaint,’  
Then You *frighten me with dreams*  
And *terrify me by visions*;  
So that my soul would choose suffocation,  
Death rather than my pains.” Job 7:13-15

Job’s nightmares combined with unrelenting pain makes him wish he could die. But because of his faith in God, despite all of his turmoil and pain, Job refused to falter in honoring God and seeking God.

Another man of faith, the prophet Habakkuk, comes to mind.

Habakkuk: Bad men are coming and God is not going to stop them

It was around 605 B.C. The Neo-Babylonian empire of the Chaldeans are now marching to the lands of Judah where the prophet Habakkuk lived. These warriors have a terrifying reputation. They are coming to maim, rape, slaughter, and haul away many of the people into

captivity. The prophet Habakkuk (perhaps a temple prophet who led worship because of his musical references and desire to use musical instruments) knew that the Chaldeans' impending attack on his own life and his entire community was due to God's judgment.

The people of Judah had committed grievous sins, sins that had gone on for decades. God would not stop this invasion. In fact he brought the Chaldeans to discipline his fallen people. This was his time for judgment for the wickedness and cruel acts the people of Judah had done. And the righteous people like Habakkuk would suffer along with the unrighteous. God knew exactly what was going to happen.

I picture Habakkuk looking out to the distant horizon as he expressed these words:

“I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us.” *Habakkuk 3:16*

Notice there are some very real and very potent physical responses that Habakkuk experienced as he dreads the evil “day of distress” soon to come. This man of faith felt severe fear.

His insides are trembling because of his fear and trepidation

His lips are quivering because he feels terrified.

His bones felt like they were being wrecked in utter decay.

He trembles as he stands.

He waits with dread, feeling the impending doom as the day of distress is coming and he can only wait.

Have we ever felt such a strong fear that our entire body was trembling? Or have our lips quivered when danger is coming through the door? Or have our terrors ever been so great that we can feel them in our bones?

How would we react knowing that warring enemies were coming to hurt us, our families, and our communities? Most of us have never had to face evil groups of men who are coming to rape, maim, torture, or kill us, or haul us off into captivity with others we love. However throughout history countless millions have had to deal with the invasion of cruel warriors, and dangerous enemies coming to maim and destroy.

Would we feel utterly shattered to have to stay stuck in place and have to wait for our safety and freedoms to be taken away? Apparently Habakkuk has no place to run to. Century after century this has happened across the world. Our history books are full of such events. As our world becomes more chaotic and God hating, someday you and I might feel like Habakkuk here where we live. Even now, we all grieve that every day people all around the world must flee

for their lives or must be forced to wait with great trepidation for their enemies to come. Many have no place to go to find safety. They are stuck like Habakkuk waiting for their day of distress.

“And I will sing.”

After Habakkuk’s words describe his terrifying fears, we see his wondrous faith revealed in poetic song. He speaks with his whole heart—a heart that also feels something more than fear. He would sing and also wanted others in his community to sing with him. Why?

Because he knows the one who is his God. He composes a beautiful song of faith, designed to be sung by other God followers. This poem, this song he wants to be accompanied by stringed instruments (see Habakkuk 3:16). I wish we could hear the choir and musicians playing a flute or lyre, or with a tambourine and cymbals. Here are his lyrics:

“Though the fig tree should not blossom  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
*Though* the yield of the olive should fail  
And the fields produce no food,  
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
And there be no cattle in the stalls,  
Yet I will exult in the Lord,  
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.  
The Lord God is my strength,  
And He has made my feet like hinds’ *feet*,  
And makes me walk on my high places.”

For the choir director, on my stringed instruments. *Habakkuk 3:17-19*

Can you picture the ferocious and cruel Chaldean armies marching in terrifying unison as they invade nearby lands, their thundering steps pounding ever closer and closer, stirring the hearts of the people to melt in panic? In the midst of this, Habakkuk, full of faith, wants his people to join with him in song. He wants his choir director to lead the singing and use stringed instruments.

He wants those who are faithful to rejoice together with him, celebrating the God of their salvation and strength. Everyone knew what the Chaldeans would do. Yet, even if these evil conquerors wiped out everything the people needed for safety, security, and survival, he wants them to remember what is true. God is greater still. God is able take them to higher places, in the midst of losing everything.

Do you see this man’s stellar faith in the midst of utter fear (while his body shakes, his bones quake, and his lips quiver)? He would trust in and rejoice in God. God would be his

ultimate place of salvation. He wants other followers of God to sing this song with him as the musicians play their stringed instruments.

Real faith in the midst of real fear.

One (fear) does not always discount the other (faith). While feeling terrifying fear, stellar faith can be a beautifully placed within the same context. And we, like Habakkuk, and Job as well, can experience real faith intertwined with and shoved together with real fear.

Dust in the distance—when fear demonstrates a lack of faith



There are times when God’s people are exhorted to “Fear not! Be courageous! And do what I say!” And God will use his appointed leaders to make it clear that now is not a time for fear. “I am here.”

As we consider how we generally handle fear-inducing situations we must look at the Israelites, God’s chosen people. Often they didn’t handle their fear factors well.

Some of us, myself included, have a tendency to be like them. We do alright as long as we feel empowered with some sense of control to handle fear-inducing situations. We think we can come up with a plan. But wait, when we have lost all sense of control or when God tells us to quit controlling, how hard is it to let go of our “American pull up by the bootstraps” mentality? “What do you mean I can’t figure out a way to fix this?” What are we left with? Deepening fears that seem to grow ever deeper and wider. “What do you mean ‘don’t fear?’” Yet, God may be telling us, like he often told the fear-prone Israelites, “Stop what you are doing. Do not fear.” Or he would exhort them, “Go forward and fight. Do not fear.”

Remember how God used Moses to miraculously deliver the enslaved Israelites out of Egypt? Ten times God did the miraculous. In the end, after the Israelites obeyed Moses’ specific instructions, they left Egypt with the wealth of the country in their bags.

Yet as these same people camped along the Red Sea, they suddenly saw in the far distance sand being flung into the air. No need to guess. Hundreds of Egyptian chariots were

charging full speed toward them. The angry warriors were coming to get them and they would not be kind.

The people cried out, “It would have been better to be enslaved once again than to become dead corpses.” How quickly they forgot that God had just proven himself, plague after plague. Did he not just preserve them from the deaths of their firstborn sons and then delivered them from the powerful Egyptian kingdom?

But why did Pharaoh have a change of heart and decide to go after the Israelite escapees once again? The answer might surprise us.

“Thus I [God] will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.” *Exodus 14:4*

A lot of warriors were coming after the Israelites as they camped along the sea and God had arranged it. This fear-inducing situation was designed by God primarily to teach the Egyptians something. Interesting. And the Israelites would see God’s mighty works in the process, too.

As the Jews wailed their fears, Moses exhorted with great faith, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which he will accomplish for you today!” He added, “And the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.” That’s exactly what God would do.

It’s all about God. God was showing himself as mighty over the Egyptians, and the Israelites were being tested in the middle of God’s bigger plan. The people were commanded to not fear. They were told to stand by and keep silent. Why? God was the One who would do the work.

And that very night God moved an angel into place to protect the Israelites from the Egyptians in preparation for the morning attack.

We know the rest of the story. God used Moses as he lifted his staff. Piled up walls of water on two sides produced dry land for the people to easily walk through in the middle. After they reached safety, God made it difficult for the Egyptian chariots to move so they began thinking about turning around.

And guess what, just as God had desired, the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from Israel, for the Lord is fighting for them and against us the Egyptians.” *Exodus 14:25*

Too late. God closed up the waters, and they all drowned.

How did the Israelites respond?

“When Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses.”

*Exodus 14:31*

Isn't this wonderful to read? But how long would the people continue to believe in God and Moses (God's appointed leader) when they faced new enemies? Not long.

Giants in the land.



As the Israelites prepared to move into the Promised Land, ten spies were sent to check out the neighboring tribes. The reports came back—great lands, fortified cities, strong tribes, and some super-sized warriors. “We’re just grasshoppers” (see Numbers 13:33).

After hearing these words, did the Israelites respond with, “Yes, let’s go.” We have just witnessed God doing miraculous acts to deliver us at last out of 400 years of Egyptian slavery. We have seen God just deliver us from the mighty Egyptian army by parting the Red Sea. God is clearly on our side. Remember what he has already done.”

No. Instead we see the people weeping. Grumbling. Consumed by fear. It was a lousy night. The entire congregation showed absolutely no faith.

“Then all the congregation raised their voices and cried out, and the people wept that night. And all the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the entire congregation said to them, ‘If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or *even* if we had died in this wilderness! So why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder! Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?’ So they said to one another, ‘Let’s appoint a leader and return to Egypt!’” *Numbers 14:1-4*

And in the morning Moses and Aaron fell before the people, utterly distraught with them, as Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes. “Listen.” The men of faith reminded the people of the truth. “If the Lord is pleased with us, then he will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey.”

These leaders accused the people of becoming rebellious.

“Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.” *Numbers 14:9*.

Despite these extra exhortations not to fear and wonderful reminders of their great God being powerfully on their side and fighting with them, the people still rebelled and were driven by fear.

“We’re not going.”

Worse yet, we read in Numbers 14 that the entire assembly decided to stone Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb—God’s chosen leaders. We’re not talking here about a few rebellious, unbelieving people among the group. Every person young and old wanted these men killed. How would God respond?

Then the glory of the Lord appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel. Whoa. He was not pleased.

The Lord talked with Moses.

“How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst? I will destroy them in many ways. I am done with them.” *Numbers 14:11*

We know that Moses pled with God. “Not so fast, God. Please don’t kill them. The other nations will see it differently. They will think you aren’t powerful enough to deliver the people,” Moses declared. “God, you do forgive the people and demonstrate forbearance because you are a God full of lovingkindness.”

God declared,

“Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it.” *Numbers 14:23-24*

God could have taken the Israelites, “the grasshoppers,” and made them conquerors. But their fears and lack of faith revealed hearts full of rebellion, spurning God. Their fears kept them from fighting and winning and entering the beautiful lands that God had promised for them to



enjoy. They paid a huge price for living by fear which in this situation was all out rebellion against God. They would not see God work on their behalf. They would not be given blessings.

What would have happened had they fought in faith? The battles would have been difficult for sure, but God would have brought them through. They chose the desert to the beautiful lands they could have had. Instead of a life of enjoyment in a land filled with milk and honey, they wandered for forty years in a dry, hot, miserable wilderness, and then they died.

The chronic lack of faith of the Israelites challenges all of us. Will we fight with courage and obey God when he says to go out and do so? Or will we not move because of fear? Will we wail all night and then turn against God and people of faith?

Do you see it? Sometimes our fears lead us to lose out on what God wants for us. We lose out on even more opportunities to see him work when we decide not to do what God asks. We may be rebelling against God as we live by our fears. We may spurn him as the Lord of our lives. “No, God. I won’t do what you want me to do.”

#### Job and his fears

“For what I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me.” *Job 3:25*

What do we fear? What do we dread? Job fully understood how it feels to have what we fear or dread actually happen in his own life. Tragically, he lost all of his children. He lost most of his servants and major means of income were destroyed. And he lost his health.

What did Job do when the worst in his life, all that he feared and dreaded actually happened? He grieved deeply, he bemoaned his painful situation, but continued on walking with God. Although he felt God had slain him, he trusted God. He spoke openly to God about his misery and yearned and complained for God to help defend him. But he didn’t turn his back on God while he waited and endured.

“*Oh*, that God would decide to crush me, that He would let loose His hand and cut me off! But it is still my comfort, and I rejoice in unsparing pain, that I have not denied the words of the Holy One. What is my strength, that I should wait? And what is my end, that I should endure?” *Job 6:9-11*

Amazing faith. “God can crush me, cut me off yet I will endure and wait for him.”



So, sometimes the fear-inducing evils that come to us are for our discipline (as in the days of Habakkuk). Sometimes the evils come to us and others in order for God to show himself as the mighty and one true God to the non-believing world (as the Israelites are freed from Egypt and are to take the promised lands). We don't always know the real reasons for our adversity and testing. Sometimes, while we feel overcome with fear, we need to go out and fight.

The many stories involving fear and faith encourage us not to refuse to step out in faith and thereby lose out on the blessings of conquering "the giants" we may face. May we become more like Caleb, with a spirit to trust God, even if we feel and know that we are mere grasshoppers. May we be like Job when all he feared and dreaded actually came upon him, and he still followed after God. "I will not deny the words of the Holy One."



Thought questions—

~Read Job 3:25-26, 7:13-15 and Habakkuk 2:4, 3:2, 16. When have you felt fear or terror? What were your physical and emotional responses?

~What are possible reasons why people quote Habakkuk 3:17-19 but do not include verse 16 that comes before this passage? Also, why do people naturally focus on Job's amazing words, "God gives and takes away. Blessed be God ..." and not quote Job's strong emotional responses found in Job 3:25-26 and Job 7:13-15? And why do people often quote the first half of Job 13:15: "Though he slay me yet will I trust him" and not the second part? Job said. "Nevertheless I will talk with God exactly about how I feel. I am upset."

~As you read through Numbers 13-14, do you think that you would have followed Joshua and Caleb's call to fight in faith or listen and respond to the other ten spies' warnings and real fears and refuse to go out to face imposing enemies? Why or why not?

~Has there been a time when you allowed your lack of faith, when you heard of dangers all around, and started feeling like a grasshopper that eventually led you into disobedience? In Numbers 14:1-4, the entire congregation panicked. When have you disobeyed God along with others? Did others influence your fearful decision? What has helped you to step out and obey God despite your fears?

~What did Caleb get because of his faith as you read Numbers 14:23-24? How have you seen God bless the faith of those who do what God wants them to do despite fear-inducing circumstances?

~How do you feel about the initial quote by C. S. Lewis. “. . . for the greater the love the greater the grief, and the stronger the faith more savagely will Satan storm its fortress,”

What do you think Lewis meant about “the greater the love, the greater the grief?”

Lewis also notes that “Satan wants to storm our fortresses of faith” when we have strong faith. How might Satan do that? Think of Job and others who have gone through deep suffering. What are ways that Satan can attack us when we are trying to walk with God with deep faith?

What are some of the lies Satan wants you to believe? Are there fears Satan wants you to live by? Are there actions of fear that you are doing that Satan is also using to harm you?

What are some practical ways that you have found to counter Satan’s attacking lies and ways when he tempts you to turn from God, especially during times of grief—when your faith is being tried the most?

Notes:

1. Habakkuk was perhaps a temple prophet of the tribe of Levi who were involved with the worship aspects within the temple. See <https://jesusplusnothing.com/series/post/Habakkuk3>, (accessed 11/29/2021).

Images:

1. Photo of fire, by Ricardo Gomez Angel, <https://unsplash.com/photos/LXFVPMrTINE>, (accessed 7/5/2021).
2. Photo of dust in desert, source unknown.
3. Drawing of grasshopper by Kristi Miller.