

When God Seems Silent: A Study of Habakkuk
Lesson Eight: Honest Struggles for Honest Hearts (1:13b-17)
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Introduction:

I. ☞ "Doubt" is a great obstacle for saints – it is a deadly tool of Satan that ☞ often leads one into Despair (Proverbs 24:10).

1. The ☞ cause of doubt is clear – the Truth has disappeared and its assurance has vanished. With Truth gone one's mind is in the dark and fears dominate (Jeremiah 8:18). "Fear" marks all who struggle with doubt (Matthew 8:26, 14:31).
2. One has aptly described "Doubt" as a ☞ "Shadow Enemy" for there is no substance to it. "If thou begin to suspect evil, the next thing is to conclude it, and the next is to report it. This suspicion is a strange shadow that is cast upon our minds. Suspicious shadows soon become the interpreters of all events. Indeed, suspicion is always too hasty in concluding, and many times our distrusts prompt us to conclude that what we have surmised must be Truth. We take shadows and report them confidently as Truth, yet we never actually saw it but only imagined it in our fancies." (Foster, #5552, 611, Vol. 1)
3. Christians must beware lest they allow these "Shadow Soldiers" to invade and destroy our faith by imagined fancies!

II. ☞ Habakkuk was struggling with doubt. He has seen the Lord's answer but that answer has only caused greater pain (Jeremiah 45:3).

"How is it that though God is of too pure eyes to look at evil, this foreign invader, this insolent idolater is suffered to treat men like fish or helpless worms?" (Farrar, 168).

To Habakkuk ☞ life seems futile. The prophet is struggling for an explanation (Psalm 77:3, 7-9). How can it be "just" for God to remain silent when the Chaldeans are so evil? It is this ☞ honesty that reveals a timely lesson for us.

"Even after Habakkuk confirmed in his heart that God was from everlasting, his Creator, his Holy One, and his Rock, he was still troubled. How could his God allow such wicked and treacherous men like the Babylonians to be His instrument...It was perplexing and disturbing... Can you relate to that? Are there times when life just doesn't seem right, fair and equitable? You ask yourself, does it really pay to be a Christian, to live a holy life?" (Arthur, 97-98).

Body:

I. ☞ The CAUSE for conquests by Shadow Soldiers.

A. Hard questions that appear to have no answers (Habakkuk 1:13b-14).

1. Habakkuk ☞ vocalizes the perplexity that overwhelms us at times. While it is known that God cannot endure sin, He permits evil to arise. This is "the dark enigma of providence" (Deane, 10).
2. Habakkuk ☞ was puzzled – he saw God tolerating what God despised. He could not resolve this conflict. How could any of this be consistent with God's justice? God is in control of history – why does it all seem so confusing?
3. Habakkuk ☞ saw God permitting the weaker to be taken by the stronger, why? If God was going to judge evil and injustice, why hide it? (Job 24:1). It seemed as if Jehovah God was committing treason against His chosen nation!
4. These hard questions fashion the historical argument of atheism – the affliction of the righteous seems irreconcilable with God's goodness; the tolerance of evil seems inconsistent with God's holiness. "If God knows about the innocents suffering, why doesn't He do something? Your God must not be omniscient, omnipotent, and all-good!" This fails because...

- a. It is ☞ not inconsistent with God's character for good men to suffer because good comes from suffering (Romans 5:3ff).
 - b. It is not inconsistent with God's character for evil men to prosper because ☞ prosperity is not always a blessing.
 - c. It is not inconsistent with God's character to use ☞ evil men to afflict others because He has purposed a plan that is being accomplished.
5. Habakkuk's hard questions are not unique. ☞ This mystery has always troubled saints (Job 12:6, 21:7-13; Psalm 17:14, 15, 73:1-13; Jeremiah 12:1; Ecclesiastes 7:15; 8:14).
6. Beware of this subtle invasion of the "Shadow Soldiers" of Satan!
- B. ☞ Inhumane acts depreciating life (Habakkuk 1:15a).
1. Habakkuk's metaphor ☞ compares human life to a cheap standard. No one worries about the life of a fish. The Babylonians regarded human life with as much concern as a fisherman hauling in a net full of fish. The prophet's question—"Lord, are human lives worth that little? ☞ Don't You care about the shameless way the value of life is treated?"
 2. The image is of a people being ☞ totally helpless, without protection and then totally destroyed.
 3. "Treacherously" refers to "breakers of covenant" (Isaiah 33:1). It refers to a sinister evil.
 4. "Wicked" refers to utter depravity and godless conduct (Cooke, 662).
 5. This ☞ evil nation did not recognize the inherent value of human life. They treated it with selfishness.
 6. Such inhumanity is deplorable. It ☞ shocks us. It plants suspicions about God's care. How can a holy God watch such inhumane acts? When innocent people are helpless, without leaders, and direction, how can God keep silent and not avenge them? (☞ Job 30:20; Psalm 22:2).
 7. The inhumanity of modern times stirs similar ☞ questions about God's care. How can He allow African children to starve, Bosnian children to be blown apart by mortar fire, and Haitian children to live in the wallow of slums? Watch out for the "Shadow Soldiers" planting suspicions via these points!
- C. ☞ Rejoicing in the tragedies of others (Habakkuk 1:15b).
1. ☞ Witnessing the pain that evil bring into other's lives is bad, but to watch the instruments of that pain find devilish delight/joy from the suffering they give to others is horrible.
 2. The selfish is always trying to turn human efforts to his own use. He treats others as a "fish" or "worms" rather than with respect. He will "break covenants" or deal wickedly to gain the "upper-hand." He then "rejoices" in his evil mischief and crime – gloating about his "smart moves." (☞ Isaiah 21:2)
 3. Such was seen in the L.A. Riots of 1992. Scene after scene pictured innocent victims being beaten while the mobs laughed! The scenes of one group battering the hapless truck driver and then dancing in victory provokes the same feelings that Habakkuk shared. Those pictures sent "Shadow Soldiers" into our hearts who sought to lead us to place God under suspicion.
- D. ☞ Tolerance of flagrant irreligion (Habakkuk 1:16).
1. Babylon's pride ☞ flaunted her disrespect. The image is of a successful fisherman worshipping his nets because they provided a large catch. It was a display of haughty arrogance. They thought they were responsible for their world dominance. Intoxicated with pride, she saw only her power.

2. 🕊️ Self-reliance, self-conceit, self-exaltation, self-seeking, self-worship are evils that blind men to God's power. These lead to an over-estimate of capabilities/powers and an 🕊️ arrogant superiority toward all others (Proverbs 16:18). 🕊️ Such is contemptible to God (Proverbs 6:17).
3. This self-reliance 🕊️ deluded Babylon into thinking she was "god." What folly! In the Aeneid of Virgil, King Maxentius is portrayed as one of the worst characters. He invoked his own right hand and his spear as "These are the only gods Maxentius will invoke." For his impiety Jupiter killed him with thunder. IF such arrogance is intolerable to pagan deities, how much more so is it to the Almighty God? (Isaiah 10:12, 13) We must obey God and not self (Deuteronomy 6:17-18). Irreligion brings divine wrath (Isaiah 37:21-29).
4. Christians recognize these Truths (Deuteronomy 8:17-19). 🕊️ Why does God allow the arrogant to practice such a profane religion? 🕊️ This question is used by the "Shadow Soldiers" to plant suspicions about God!

E. 🕊️ Apparent longevity of evil (Habakkuk 1:17).

1. 🕊️ Habakkuk saw no end to this evil – the net would be filled, emptied, and filled again. He knew that God could stop it, but He did not. Why? "God how can You allow these proud people to become even prouder?"
2. Stout hearts are weakened as evil continues to advance upon a fresh course of bloodshed and it only becomes bolder! We ask with Habakkuk's perplexity, "Will there ever be an end? Will we, too, get taken?" (Psalm 73:16-17)
3. Many Christians have prayed constantly to God asking for divine intervention in the policies of evil rulers, only to see the maliciousness continue. It seems the Stalins, Hitlers, Maos, and other despots continue unchecked. The 🕊️ "Shadow Soldiers" invade our minds and silently plant suspicions which lead us to give up hope, quit praying, and give up all efforts to exert influence.

II. The CURE for the suspicions of the "Shadow Soldiers."

A. 🕊️ Recognize that God is the Sovereign God!

1. Even though beset with questions, Habakkuk's faith never wavered. He confidently asserted God's control – "Thou." He had not lost his faith (verses 13-14).
2. He knew God was in control (1:12) and he relied upon known facts about God to strengthen his faith.
3. The main consolation for saints is 🕊️ God's immutable character (Psalm 89:28; John 10:28; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Hebrews 12:10, 11). As we are besieged by the suspicions of the "Shadow Soldiers", let us magnify God's character (2 Corinthians 1:3; Deuteronomy 33:27).

B. 🕊️ Recognize that evil is never beyond God's sovereign control – its terror will be confronted.

1. Habakkuk's faith believed that 🕊️ punishment would come because evil's perpetuation was impossible (verse 17; verse 13). Habakkuk may have been confused/uncertain about many things, but one thing he knew – God and evil were incompatible!
2. God is the "Holy One," the "Rock," and thus 🕊️ evil will receive its recompense!
 - a. Evil's triumph is short (Job 20:5; Psalm 37:35, 36).
 - b. Evil's prosperity will end in misery and ruin (Psalm 73:18-20).
 - c. Evil's reign will be terminated (Psalm 145:20; Matthew 21:11; 1 Corinthians 15:25).

3. We must 🕊️ trust in God's justice! (verse 11).

C. It is reported that Martin Luther was generally cheerful in disposition. However, at one time he struggled with life's injustices. His wife tried to encourage and cheer but it was for naught. When all

seemed to fail, he decided to take a trip in hopes that his cheer would return. He returned with a cloudy and dejected countenance. He walked into his house and found his wife sitting in the middle of the room, attired in black and with a mourning cloak thrown over her while pressing a handkerchief to her eyes as if weeping bitterly. He quickly asked what had caused her grief. She answered, "Only thing, dear doctor, our Father in heaven is dead! Judge if I have not cause for my grief!" As soon as he understood her riddle he laughed and embraced her said, "You are right, dear Kate, I am acting as if there were no God in heaven." With that understanding his melancholy left him. (Foster, #1590, 199, Vol 1).

☞ "Shadow Soldiers" will plant suspicions which will stagger our faith because we are incapable of comprehending God's plan. We must trust confidently and abide patiently whenever doubts plant suspicions about God's justice (Psalm 73:17).

Conclusion:

- I. ☞ This is the only paragraph in the prophecy without an answer from God! ☞ Total silence greeted Habakkuk's cry!
 1. But this ☞ silence should not be understood as equivalent to God's consent that evil was "just" (Psalm 50:21).
 2. ☞ God is not silent to our cries today! In a sense God is silent for He does not audibly speak. But in another sense, He is speaking very plainly to us (Hebrews 1:1-2).
 - II. Have you ever watched a bird sleeping on its perch and never falling off? How does it do this? The secret is the tendons of the bird's legs. They are so constructed that when its leg is bent at the knee, the claws contract and grip like a steel trap. The claws refuse to let go until the knees are unbent again. The bended knee gives the bird the ability to hold onto his perch tightly. This is also the secret of the Christian's power to hold onto faith when surrounded by injustices. ☞ The secret is the bended knee in prayer, seeking to get a firmer grip on spiritual strength, which enables us to persevere in earthly life. When we hold firmly to God in prayer, we can rest assured that he will hold tightly to us when we struggle with trials (Psalm 34:15-22; 42:5).
- ☞ Our Next Lesson: "Gaining Perspectives in Life's Struggles"