

The entire book of Deuteronomy consists of a single speech by Moses, delivered just before his death. This speech was a review of the forty years Israel had spent wandering in the wilderness. And Moses delivered it to a new generation of Israelites.

At the time, the people were perched at Kadesh-Barnea, an important place in their history. They were at the border of Canaan, the promised land. It was the same spot where their fathers had stood thirty-eight years before. It was also the place where God had prevented that older generation from entering into the promised land. The Lord sent them back into the wilderness, to wander until the whole generation died out, except for Joshua and Caleb.

Now Moses was reminding this new generation of their fathers' story. He wanted them to know exactly why the previous generation had died as despairing rebels in God's eyes. Moses urged them to learn from their parents' tragic mistakes, saying, in so many words:

"You know your fathers' history. They were a people called, chosen and anointed by God. But they lost the vision. The Lord so loved them that He bore them up in His arms and carried them, time after time. Yet over and over, they murmured and complained against Him, grieving Him.

"Finally, God's patience came to an end. He saw that they were committed to unbelief. And there was nothing he could do to change their minds. No miracle He performed could fully persuade them of his faithfulness and goodness. Their hearts were like granite. So God told them, 'Not one

The Lord will fight for you

of you is going to enter My promised land. Instead, you're going to turn around now. You're going back into the wilderness."

What powerful words. Yet Moses wasn't just speaking to a new generation of Israelites. He was also addressing every generation of believers to follow, including us today. Like all the Old Testament accounts, this one was written "*for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come*" (1. COR 10:11).

Moses was showing us the danger of unbelief. And he warned that unless we take heed, we'll suffer the same awful consequences as those who fell before us: "*Lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief*" (HEB 4:11). He's saying, in essence, "It doesn't matter what impossibilities you face, or how hopeless things may appear. You are not to fall into the same sin of unbelief. Otherwise, you'll end up in a terrible wilderness, as they did. And you'll wander through it for the rest of your life.

"God is faithful to lead you. And He led our fathers into their crises for a reason. It was to teach them to trust Him. He wanted a people who would be unshakable in their faith. They were to come out of the wilderness with a tried faith that was as pure as gold. He wanted

them as a testimony to the world of His goodness toward His people."

I believe our generation has taken the sin of unbelief too lightly. And right now, we're seeing the tragic results. I see many believers today full of depression and unrest. Of course, some suffer these things for physical reasons. But many others endure such sufferings because of their spiritual condition. In my opinion, their depression is the result of God's displeasure with their continual unbelief.

The Lord always uses strong language when He refers to unbelief among His people, words such as wrath, anger, abhorrence, tempting Him. Moses made a point to remind the younger Israelites of this: "*Thou hast seen now that the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went... And the Lord heard the voice of your words [of unbelief], and was wroth, and sware, saying, Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I sware to give unto your fathers*" (DEUT 1:31, 34-35).

Moses then describes the tragic mistake their fathers had made at Kadesh-Barnea. It happened shortly after the Red Sea crossing. God had commanded Israel to go boldly into Canaan. And He'd given

them this powerful word of assurance:

“The Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged.... Dread not, neither be afraid of them. The Lord our God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes” (1:21, 29-30). What an incredible promise. None of their enemies would be able to stand up to them (see 7:24).

But Israel staggered at God’s promise. Instead of taking Him at His word, they insisted on sending spies into Canaan. And those spies brought back an “evil report,” full of unbelief. They spoke of giant men and high, walled cities. And the people believed their report: *“Ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God”* (1:26). Now Moses is telling the younger generation, “They should have moved instantly on God’s Word. The Lord had said He would fight for them. But they rebelled.”

Can you see what happened to the older generation? Sending those spies into Canaan was an act of unbelief. And while the spies were there, they were influenced by satan. They were subject to the enemy’s lies, because they hadn’t taken God at His Word. So they came back to camp as instruments of the devil.

After hearing the evil report, the people shook their fists at God, accusing, “You’ve abandoned us, God. You brought us here to die.” Just months before, these same people had been set apart by God, made special in His eyes, and miraculously delivered. But now the whole camp was in confusion. They wondered aloud to each other, “Is God even with us anymore?” Soon they were weeping over their children, crying, “Our kids will starve to death in this wilderness. God hates us!”

Moses reminded the younger Israelites of their parents’ accusations: *“Ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the Lord hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us”* (1:27).

Kadesh-Barnea is where God brings all of his children for the ultimate testing of their faith.

Kadesh-Barnea is a place of in-your-face impossibility. The name itself comes from a Hebrew root word meaning “fugitive, vagabond, wanderer.” In short, if you make the wrong choice here, you’ll end up wandering through a wilderness all your life.

Many Christians are in this very place right now. God has given them His covenant promises. He’s given them a wonderful history with Him, providing miracle after miracle of deliverance. But the devil has come to them with lies, telling them they’re not going to make it. He’s convinced them they’re not good enough, that God is still mad at them for their past sins, and that He’ll never forgive them.

Tell me: have you begun to accept such lies? Do you think God is going to fail you in your crisis? If so, then at some point in your walk, you stopped taking God at His word. You didn’t act on His command. And what was true for Israel is also true for you: the test you face at Kadesh-Barnea will determine the course of your remaining years.

Like Israel, you’ve been carried by God through an awful wilderness. As you look back, you can recall the terrible testings you faced, the painful failures you endured. You went through trials you never thought you’d come out of. But God was faithful to you in every one. Each time, He mercifully reached down and picked you up. And now you can say, “God has never failed me. I stand here today by His grace. It’s true, God bore me in His arms, the way a father carries his child.”

Moreover, God brought you out in order to bring you in. There is a promised land ahead for you, just as there was for Israel: *“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God”* (HEB 4:9). The Lord saved you to bring you into a place of rest. What is this rest? It’s a place of unshakable faith and confidence in the Lord. It’s a place of trust in His promises, to see you through your most difficult times.

But to get to this place of rest, you must first pass through Kadesh-

Barnea. When you’re there, you come face to face with a battle that’s so intense, it’s beyond anything you’ve experienced. There are enemies, giants, high walls, things that look utterly impossible. And you have to place your absolute trust in God to bring you through.

We’ve already seen how the Israelites hesitated to act on God’s Word at Kadesh-Barnea. As a result, satan brought them under the influence of ten demon-inspired liars. The result? The people ended up believing God was out to destroy them. And the same holds true for us today. When we refuse to act quickly on God’s promises, we open ourselves to ferocious demonic lies. And those lies are meant to destroy our faith.

Satan wants us to think God has left us to fight for ourselves. He tells us the walls before us are too high, that there’s no way over them to victory. He says we’re going to fail, that our entire walk with Jesus has been in vain. He whispers that it’s no use, we might as well quit. I tell you, this is why God always wants us to act quickly on His Word. He doesn’t want the devil to have an opportunity to assault us with lies.

You may think, “I could never believe God hates me. How could I ever think the Lord is out to destroy me?” Yet, if we listen to satan’s lies, this is exactly what we end up saying: “God has brought me into an impossible situation. There’s no evidence He’s making a way out for me. Yet He said He wouldn’t allow me to endure more than I can take. And right now, this is more than I’m able to bear.” Such thoughts are a direct accusation against God. They accuse Him of not being with us in the midst of our trial.

We see such unbelief in Israel again, when they came to Rephidim. This was the driest location in the wilderness, and another place of crisis. Soon the people began to agonize with thirst. And once more, they lost all confidence in God. They cried out, *“Is the Lord among us, or not?”* (EX 17:7), meaning, “If God were with us, we wouldn’t be in this crisis. This one is absolutely impossible.”

The root cause of Israel's unbelief is the same cause of unbelief in the church today.

Simply put, God's word wasn't enough for Israel. The Lord had given them incredible promises. Yet in the midst of their crises, Israel never trusted in His Word. In spite of every promise, every ironclad pledge to see them through, they rendered His Word useless. How? They never mixed it with faith. *"The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it"* (HEB 4:2).

Instead, the people always demanded a new word from God. We see this in their question, "Is God with us, or not?" In other words: "We need to know whether God is with us in this crisis, not our last one. We've got to have a new revelation from Him, for this new situation." I ask you: how could anyone forget so quickly all that God had done for them? Israel had removed from their memory every past instance of God's deliverance. They never allowed His past supernatural works to build up their faith in Him.

Yet, in spite of their accusations against Him, God spoke another word to Israel. He instructed Moses to tell them, *"Dread not, neither be afraid of them [your enemies]. The Lord your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes"* (DEUT 1:29-30).

Now, this wasn't a new promise. God was simply re-stating what He had already told His people: *"The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace"* (EX 14:14). He was reminding them, "I told you in Egypt I would go before you. I said I would dwell among you, and fight for you against all your enemies." And He had done just that. God had delivered them at every turn, through every trial.

Over and over God had told them, "I am with you. I'm going to fight for you. Now, lay hold of this promise, and don't forget it." Yet, here they were at Kadesh-Barnea, trembling before their enemies and focusing on their own weakness. Finally, they reasoned, "We're not able to go up against them." It was blatant doubt — doubt of God's call on their lives, doubt that he'd sent

them, doubt of his presence in their midst.

You may think you would never react this way. Yet so many Christians today say similar things: "Lord, are You really with me? I know what You promised me. But is it really true? Can I trust in what You've said? I've got to hear from You afresh once again. I need a new word. Please, give me some more assurance."

We end up trembling before the enemy of our souls. And it's all because we don't believe what God has promised us. We act as if He's never said a word to us. And that's precisely when we "tempt" Him. Even though He's proven himself to us again and again, we continually ask him to prove His faithfulness anew, to send us yet another faith-building word. But God will speak only one word: "Believe what I have said to you."

Do you tremble before some besetting sin that towers over you like a walled city? If so, what has God said to you about this enemy stronghold? All through His Word, He has promised: "I will fight for you. You're not to be afraid. Greater is He that's in you than he that is in the world. No person, no enemy, can pluck you out of My hand. I will cleanse you and sanctify you, by My Spirit. Trust in My revealed Word to you."

Unbelief is an even greater sin in the New Testament than in the Old.

Jesus came as a prophet and a miracle worker to His own house, Israel. Yet, we're told, *"He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief"* (MATT 13:58). What an incredible statement. Unbelief limited even Christ's power to work.

We see other tragic results of unbelief throughout the New Testament. The disciples couldn't cast out a demon from a small child because of their unbelief. And Jesus rebuked them for it (see MATT 17:14-21). After the resurrection, Christ was shocked again by their unbelief: *"And upbraided [disgraced] them with their unbelief and hardness of heart"* (Mk 16:14). Moreover, Paul says of the Jews, *"Because of unbelief they were broken off"* (ROM 11:20).

Why is God's judgment of unbelief so severe in the New Testament? It's because believers today have been given something that Old Testament saints could only dream of. God has blessed us with the gift of His Holy Spirit. Under the Old Covenant, believers were only occasionally visited by God's Spirit. They had to go to the temple to experience the Lord's presence. But today God makes His dwelling place in His people. We're His temple, and His presence abides in every believer.

In the Old Testament, Abraham was only occasionally visited by an angel or given a word from God. And he believed what he was told. Abraham trusted that God was able to do all he pledged. He *"staggered not at the promise of God"* (ROM 4:20). Yet, today, Jesus is available to us at any hour of the day. We have the ability to call on Him our entire lifetime, and we know He'll respond. He invites us to come boldly to His throne room, to make our petitions known. And He gives us comfort and guidance through the Holy Spirit.

Yet, in spite of these blessings, we still doubt God in our times of extreme testing. Jesus rebukes such unbelief, saying, *"Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"* (LK 18:7-8). If Christ were to return today, would he find faith in you?

Here are the consequences of unbelief.

"The hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them...until all the generation of the men...were wasted out from among the host" (DEUT 2:15, 14). Here is some of the strongest language in all of the Bible regarding unbelief. You may say, "But that isn't the language of grace. God doesn't deal that severely with unbelief today."

Not so. The Bible says that today, under grace, *"Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* (HEB 11:6). Here are some consequences of unbelief:

- Unbelief defiles every area of our lives. This sin can't be isolated to a single issue in our lives. It spills over into everything, tainting every detail of our walk.

Israel's doubt wasn't just limited to God's ability to slay their enemies. Their doubt spilled over into their trust for daily provisions. They doubted God's ability to protect their children. They doubted whether He would lead them into the promised land. They doubted He was even with them. That's why God told them, **"Turn you, and take your journey into the wilderness... I am not among you"** (DEUT 1:40, 42).

If we have unbelief in one area, it spreads like cancer into every area, defiling our whole heart. We may trust God in certain matters, such as believing He saves us by faith, that He's all powerful, that His Spirit abides in us. But do we trust Him for our future? Do we believe Him to provide for our health and finances, to give us victory over sin?

- Unbelief leads to the sin of presumption. To presume is to dare to think we know what's right. It's an arrogance that says, "I know the way," and acts on its own.

Here is yet another sin that Israel committed in its unbelief. When God told them to turn back to the wilderness, they didn't want to obey. Instead, they came to Moses saying, "Okay, we sinned. But we've got it figured out now. We're ready to obey God's command to go up against the enemy." And they took matters into their own hands.

Here is where many doubting believers make a tragic a mistake: when they fail in a matter of faith, they turn to the flesh. They do what they think must be done, but in their own wisdom and skill. Faith, however, always resists acting in fear. It waits for God to work. Faith is never willing to make something happen by going ahead of God.

This band of Israelites went ahead of God by organizing a small army. They planned a strategy and struck out on their own. But when the enemy saw them, they chased the Israelite soldiers **"as bees do"** and destroyed them (DEUT 1:44).

I've seen horrible cases of believers who never did enter into God's rest. The Lord brought them to a place of severe testing — a family crisis, a financial struggle, a marriage problem — but they didn't wait for God to act. Instead, they accused Him of neglect, and tried to solve their crisis on their own. Today, those believers have no rest, no peace, no sense of God's presence. Instead, they live in constant doubt. And they seem to go from one crisis to another. All they can talk about is their latest problem. Yet every bit of their confusion is caused by one thing: unbelief.

The Psalmist says, **"We spend our years as a tale that is told"** (PSA 90:9). This psalm is speaking of unbelievers. What's the title of their tale? These All Lived and Died in Vain. It's the same story we hear people tell of unbelieving grandparents: "They lived all their years in gloom. They did nothing but murmur and complain. And they died alone and forgotten."

This is the dread of unbelief. It cuts off your spiritual history, so that all that's remembered of you is a wasted life. When Israel's young generation asked, "What about Grandpa and Grandma?", they were told, "They only murmured and complained. They had nothing to live for, so they just sat around waiting to die."

Many Christians have yet to enter into the rest that God has for them.

"Some must enter therein" (HEB 4:6). True believers are determined to trust God even if their prayer isn't answered. It doesn't matter if all their goods are taken away, or even if they face death. They desire to enter God's rest. What is the evidence of such a life? They have **"ceased from (their) own works"** (4:10). They no longer lie awake at night, trying to solve their problems in their own wisdom and skill. Instead, they turn everything over to Jesus. It doesn't matter whether they end up in gain or loss. Their only focus is that God has a plan, and that He's working it out in their lives.

I want to close with an experience I had recently. One Saturday evening, I walked down to Times Square, as it bustled with tourists

and others doing holiday shopping. It's estimated that at rush hour, nearly a quarter of a million people pass by here. Now, as I stood there, I prayed while watching the masses of people go past.

At one point, the Holy Spirit whispered to me, "David, take a look at these throngs. Multiply them several times, and that's how many of my people died in the wilderness. Out of all those masses, only two entered into my rest, Joshua and Caleb. All the others died before their time, in despair and unbelief."

The thought was overwhelming to me. I looked more closely at the multitudes going into Broadway theaters, restaurants, department stores. I saw wealthy people, homeless people, middle-class people, homosexuals, drag queens...and I realized God was probably not in any of their thoughts. I thought of the football stadium across the river, the basketball and hockey arenas, and all the people filling them, with only a few who truly loved God. I looked around at all the movie theaters in Times Square, and thought of the thousands seated in them, mocking all that's holy.

As I watched these masses of people, I realized they all had the gospel message available to them at any time, through television, radio, literature, even free Bibles in their hotel rooms. If only they wanted to know, they would be told that the same God who performed miracles for ancient Israel does the same for all who love Him today. Yet these don't want to know Him. If they see someone handing out a gospel tract, they race by and wave him away. They have no gods but pleasure, money and possessions.

Suddenly, I began to see the value in God's eyes of a single believer. And I hear Jesus asking the same question today: "When I return, will I find faith in the earth?" I see Christ, the searcher of men's hearts, scouring all these venues, and finding few if any who truly love him. I see Him searching college campuses, asking, "Who here will believe me?" I see Him searching Washington, D.C., for those who would accept Him, and finding few. I see Him searching entire nations, and finding only a remnant. I see Him searching the modern

apostate church, and finding no faith, only deadness.

Finally, He searches His church, looking for servants with a true faith. Yet, what He sees breaks His heart, grieving Him deeply. I hear Him cry as He did over Israel, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*" (MATT 23:37).

What's the reason for His anguish? God has sent His Son to reveal the Father's love to His beloved

children. He has sent the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide them. Yet still, multitudes in His house have no faith. They don't believe He answers their prayers. They murmur and complain, accusing Him of neglect. And they grow fearful and despairing, as if God has abandoned them.

As a minister of the Lord, I bear my Shepherd's burden. And I feel His grief. Right now, I hear Him saying, "Even in My house, I find so few who have faith. Many of My own children, including My shepherds, faint in their times of trial. They

don't trust Me for their families, their jobs, their futures. Indeed, many have made their choice."

So, what about you? The Lord comes to all of us, asking, "Will you believe Me? Do you trust Me? When I come, will I find faith in you?" How will you respond?

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