

“The Wickedness of Unbelief”
Deuteronomy 1:22-32
(Preached at Trinity, May 5, 2024)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Deuteronomy contains three sermons preached by Moses at the end of his life just prior to Israel entering the Promised Land under the command of Joshua.
Israel is being called to remember where they stood 40 years before when they were about to enter into Canaan. This generation was not present when their forefathers were judged by God but there was corporate solidarity. They shared covenant responsibility. Their forefathers were not permitted to enter because of their unbelief.
2. Moses is preaching to the nation of Israel, reflecting on the past sins of their fathers and admonishing them to avoid the same sins when they enter the Promised Land, or they too would suffer the judgment of God.
The Israelites were a people of privilege. They were God's covenant people. God did not forget His covenant.
Exodus. 2:24-25 NAU - "God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵ God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them."
God's words to Pharaoh were, "Let My people go."
3. Forty years before they were ready to enter the Land of Promise they sent in spies and verified the riches of the land. But they did not enter because of their unbelief and distrust of God. Most people would place little significance on faithlessness. We dismiss our own unbelief. It is not a small matter. God did not see Israel's unbelief as a small matter. It was great wickedness.
They stand before us as an example and a warning.
1 Corinthians 10:11 NAU - "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."
Hebrews 3:11-14 NAU - "As I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" ¹² Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end;"
4. **Verses 22-32** describe their hardness of heart. May God grant us discernment and rightly apply it to our own life and experience.
5. How was Israel's unbelief and hardness of heart displayed?
I title today's sermon, "The Wickedness of Unbelief."
Those of unbelief continue to display these same characteristics today.

I. They called into question the goodness of God – **Verse 27**

A. God had continually displayed His goodness to Israel.

1. He was their Deliverer.

2. This was at the heart of His Covenant relationship.

Deuteronomy 5:6 NAU - "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

3. God had shown them His graciousness.

Exodus. 6:6-7 NAU - "Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. ⁷ 'Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."

4. As they stood at the edge of Canaan they grumbled and accused God of Covenant unfaithfulness, of being underhanded and deceitful.

Deuteronomy 1:27 NAU - "and you grumbled in your tents and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us."

B. Is this at the heart of our own complaining?

1. Do we question God's faithfulness?

2. Do we question God's goodness? Has He not sent forth His Son as our Deliverer?

Romans 8:32 NAU - "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

3. Do we fear the circumstances of life because we doubt God's goodness and question His actions?

II. They couldn't see beyond the obstacles – **Verse 28**

A. Their sinful eyes could not see the fullness of God's promise.

1. All they could see was the obstacles

Deuteronomy 1:28 NAU - "The people are bigger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified to heaven. And besides, we saw the sons of the Anakim there."

2. The obstacles and difficulties could not be denied. There were armies consisting of giants. Imagine fighting an entire army of Goliaths. But what is a giant before God? They failed to believe in God's greatness.

3. How often have we heard such words of unbelief?

The task is too great. There are too many risks. What are your giants?

4. I preached a sermon on the text of Ecclesiastes 11 that I titled, "Reasonable Risks." Risk taking doesn't mean leaping forth to do whatever you determine to do. It means being willing to trust God through difficult things.

Fear keeps people from boldly following Christ. It is the heart of unbelief. And it has a negative impact upon others. Moses speaks of the unbelieving spies: "Our brethren have made our hearts melt"

B. We have a powerful contrast in this passage.

Deuteronomy 1:29 NAU - "Then I said to you, 'Do not be shocked, nor fear them.'"

1. Two of the spies brought back a report of faith.

Joshua and Caleb were of a different heart. They saw the same things but knew they could trust God to prevail.

Numbers 14:7-9 NAU - "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. ⁸ "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. ⁹ "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."

2. Do we demonstrate this same confidence? May our brothers and sisters see our great faith. Not foolhardy carelessness but careful wisdom and confidence before God.

3. The faithless spies doubted God's ability to deliver. Joshua and Caleb knew that God's almighty power is unassailable.

III. They overlooked the riches of God's past blessings – **Verse 30**

A. God had demonstrated His almighty power before their eyes.

Deuteronomy 1:30-31 NAU - "The LORD your God who goes before you will Himself fight on your behalf, just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, ³¹ and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked until you came to this place."

1. Their problem was unbelief. They were blind to God's rich provision. They couldn't trust that God would be true to His promises. That He could be trusted.

2. Israel's history was a history of unbelief.

God had promised them the land of Canaan.

a. It was theirs to receive. God promised to fight on their behalf.

b. Caleb recited this to his unbelieving generation

Numbers 14:8 NAU - "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."

3. Caleb's heart was a heart of belief – God will do it. They are our prey. God is with us. Do not fear!

B. Sadly, this new generation would suffer the same sinful unbelief as the generation of their forefathers 40 years before.

Deuteronomy 1:32 NAU - "But for all this, you did not trust the LORD your God"

1. Their early days in Canaan were days demonstrating God's mighty power. Jericho's fortified walls came crashing down at God's command. Israel didn't lay a finger on the walls.

2. God continually demonstrated that the battle was His and He fought mightily on behalf of His people.
Joshua 10:8-11 NAU - "And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands; not one of them shall stand before you." ⁹ So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal. ¹⁰ And the LORD confounded them before Israel, and He slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. ¹¹ And it came about as they fled from before Israel, *while* they were at the descent of Beth-horon, that the LORD threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; *there were* more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword."
3. God demonstrated that it didn't matter how fortified their cities, how powerful their armies, how advanced their weaponry, He would destroy every enemy.
 "Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go."
4. In spite of all of God's blessings, their history would still be plagued by unbelief.

C. What is the teaching for us today?

1. Paul tells us that Israel's unbelief serves as a warning to us
1 Corinthians 10:6 NAU - "Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved."
1 Corinthians 10:11 NAU - "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."
2. God's promises to Israel were both conditional and unconditional
 - a. In terms of the physical nation, God's covenant hinged on their obedience.
 They did not believe God and continually rebelled against Him.
 - b. God's promise to Abraham was also unconditional and abiding.
 Abraham's ultimate seed was Christ. The promise was fulfilled in Christ.
 - c. The unbelief of Israel did not annul God's promise.
Romans 3:3-4 NAU - "What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? ⁴ May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar"
3. In the midst of Israel's unbelief, God always had a faithful remnant who followed Him in faith and obedience.
 Caleb was one of these.
Numbers 14:24 NAU - "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."

4. The warning to us sounds loud and clear. We must follow Christ in faith and obedience. Saving faith is always accompanied by the practical faith of obedience, of trusting God no matter what.
- Hebrews 3:12-19 NAU** - "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end; ¹⁵ while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me." ¹⁶ For who provoked *Him* when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt *led* by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Conclusion:

1. Another important truth for us: Notice the importance of the covenant community.
 - a. The unbelieving spies led the rest of the congregation into unbelief
 - b. Joshua and Caleb encouraged Israel -
Numbers 13:30 NAU - "Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it."
 - c. We find a stern warning in Hebrews 3
Hebrews 3:12-4:2 NAU - "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
2. Instead of mimicking the unbelieving heart of the unfaithful in Israel, may we look to God with faith and unwavering confidence. He will always be faithful. And may we remember we are a part of a body. May we continue to remember the impact of our lives upon others.