

## **A King Worthy of Our Trust (Deuteronomy 1:19-46)**

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**Trust in King Jesus for the fears of today because he is the LORD who mightily saved you in the gospel and lovingly cares for your every need.**

For the original recipients of this speech: Trust in God for the fears you have regarding the Canaanites because he is the LORD, he saved you from the greater enemy of Egypt, because he faithfully provided for you in the wilderness, and his presence goes before you.

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## **Introduction**

### **READ PASSAGE - Deuteronomy 1:19-46**

What is the most dangerous and detrimental thing that mankind has ever faced? Out of all the things that we have faced in our history since creation, what is the most dangerous thing to our lives?

Some might say in view of the past century or recent events that nuclear warfare would be up there, if you have an allergy maybe you would say peanuts or a bee sting. Drugs or driving under the influence... Shark attacks and grizzly bears might make that list. For residents of Virginia, we pray that 95% of the world's population of spiders that reside in the commonwealth don't form a hive mind and take over the world...

Others might go with a more internal or social factor for their answer. Poor self-esteem or depression, cyber bullying, not feeling the freedom to express yourself as you believe you should, sexual expression, inequity of outcomes...

This past summer my family went down to Florida for a vacation. And as most people do in Florida during summer, you head to the pool. It was a great day for going to the pool and Porter who was two is still trying to figure out the pool.

This was quite an experience because Porter was deathly afraid of water. Every parent can relate to this. I would have Porter sitting on my hand just below the water and he would not have it and screamed over and over again, "daddy let me hold you! Let me hold you! Let me hold you!"

Porter's perception of the joy of the pool and the fear of the pool was 100% correlated to his perception of and grip on the situation, rather than the reality of my hand holding him. What he needed in that moment wasn't swim lessons or the boyscout handbook, it was my presence and a trust in my loving care. It robbed him of joy to not trust me and it would have killed him to presume safety without my presence in that pool. Porter's action would do nothing to help him mitigate any fear of drowning because he couldn't swim. *What mattered for my son in that moment was not his grip on me but an awareness of my grip on him. Porter's issue in the pool was unbelief.*

**Answer:** Which brings me to what I propose to be the answer to the question of what the most dangerous thing mankind has ever faced: *spiritual* unbelief.

#### *Its Prevalence in the Bible*

This passage that we are studying this morning is arguably one of the most vivid illustrations of the human problem that plagues mankind throughout all of Scripture. It is the sin that got Adam and Eve kicked out of the garden: the serpent tempted them with the question "did God really say that," and Adam and Eve were moved to unbelief, not trusting that God said what he did.

When God promised Abraham a child through Sarah she laughed at the Lord because of unbelief: she didn't think God could accomplish his will with the limitations of her age, she thought the time of his faithfulness to her had passed...no way God could do that or that he would keep his promise.

Doubting Thomas not believing that Christ was alive.

Think of Peter when he walked on water and he was overcome by the circumstances around him rather than a trusting gaze at the Lord. And as you know he fell into the water, his fears overcame him and Jesus Christ extended his hand and saved him.

In Mark 9, Jesus spoke to the father of the demon possessed boy: All things are possible for those who believe," and what did the father respond with? *"I believe, help my unbelief"* and the boy was healed.

*The prevalence of spiritual unbelief in our lives today*

Unbelief is the rub with evangelism, it's not so much about logic and methodology to convince an individual to a perspective that there is a God or not (though God uses that and intends sound logic to win souls). Rather, the ultimate task of evangelism is dealing with someone's spiritual unbelief.

For us personally, in every role that the Lord has ordained us to function in: as an employee, an employer, a father or mother, a husband or wife, a member of a local church, as an individual Christian, **all sin is related to spiritual unbelief.**

Jesus in John 16:9 says that *"[God] will convict the world concerning sin...because they do not believe in me"*

***Spiritual Unbelief*** is not trusting that God is who he said he is and will accomplishing his purposes and promises like he said he would.

As we dive into this passage today, this is the takeaway:

**Trust in King Jesus for the fears of today because he is the Lord who mightily saved you in the gospel and lovingly cares for your every need.**

This is something that we could put on our mirror to preach to ourselves as we start our day

The remedy for our spiritual unbelief is a divine perspective of who God is and what he has done for us through Jesus Christ *in the face of our current circumstances.*

Easy enough to agree to this when fears are not in sight, but when they are near, oh, what a different tone this takes...

So as we prayerfully study together Deuteronomy, let us pull the hot coals of this call to trust Jesus into the present arena of our circumstances this morning...

Ch. 1 of Deut. is Moses reminding the people what happened last time they were here and a reminder of the consequences of their unbelief. This is generation two of the wilderness generation...and...

**The point of this passage is to highlight the propensity of Israel to not trust God in the present or future, despite his wondrous deeds in Egypt and provision in the wilderness.** It is stark and could be seen as a someone insensitive warning to this next generation of the consequences of unbelief. But it also is a story, much like you would hear from a spouse telling a corrective/endeoring story of the other, or a loving reminder from our spouse, where we see God's love for his people displayed despite this event 40 years in the past.

So, let us turn to God's word and look for ourselves how we should address our unbelief. And as we look, we are going to see this passage breaks up into three different scenes.

We are going to see "An Unexpected Response"

Scene two is "God's Recalling of Salvation"

Scene three "Faithless Israel"

### **(v.19-28) Scene 1 – An Unexpected Response: A Trustworthy Promise Met by Testing**

Let's start with verse 19: notice with me that this is setting the stage for the story. God's people have traveled from Mount Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea, almost to the promise land.

Kadesh-Barnea is to the south of the Canaan and they are still a good journey from where they will enter into the land in the book of Joshua. But Kadesh-Barnea represents *the* step of faith for the people to inherit the land God is giving them.

But I want you to notice two things about this verse that set the stage. Not only is this verse telling us from where the Israelites came and where they currently are located, it gives us two descriptors that are rather important.

**First**, we see that the Lord has brought them through the great and terrifying wilderness on this journey leading to the Amorites which tells us God *has been* faithful, and, it is a bit of foreshadowing of how terrifying the Amorites will be for Israel.

And the **second** thing I want you to notice from this verse that being at Kadesh-Barnea is exactly what the Lord commanded. God led them through a terrifying journey and has led them to another fearful circumstance.

So now that Israel is at Kadesh-Barnea having travelled through fearful lands and arrived in a fearful place right at the door of the promised land what does God say?

Look with me at verse 20 through 21. **READ v.20-21**

I want you to first notice how this land is being described to Israel: it is being given to them, and God has placed it before them like a gift.

But also notice the commands that God gives to Israel regarding this land being gifted to them: they're told to take possession, to not fear, and not be dismayed.

#### *The Promise to Abraham and the gift of this land*

One of the questions that we have to ask about this passage is why is God gifting this land to Israel? If you just turned on the TV and your watching the show starting at Deuteronomy, why is this happening? This is a fulfillment of all that Genesis ch12 through the exodus event has been leading to.

God made a promise to Abraham in Genesis 12

1. Nation
2. Name (and blessing)
3. Land

God made a unilateral promise to Abraham, he made a covenant with Abraham, where he walked between the two halves of dead animals saying that if he breaks the stipulations of his promise that as these animals lay dead so that would also happen to me. Abraham didn't walk through it - it was only the Lord. And this giving of the land is the Lord fulfilling this promise that he made all the way back in Genesis 12.

That being said, it should be shocking in one sense to the readers of Israel's history when in this story this generation is barred from entering that land. An unexpected turn in the story.

And we see this unexpected turn in verse 22, where Israel wants to send spies into the land to determine where they should go which again is a bit of foreshadowing to where they really didn't want to go which was where the Amorites were. The Amorites were Canaanites they didn't want to go into Canaan they wanted an excuse to not go into Canaan.

So Israel sends these spies in *and it is irony to read* what they said in verse 25: "it is a good land that the Lord our God is giving us" and they are walking in with fruit in their hands. Remember these people have been in the wilderness there's not grapes and bananas and apples in a desert. So this speaks to the abundance of provision the Lord is giving them in Canaan.

But what is Israel's response? In view of them literally out of their mouths saying in this account that it is a good land that the Lord is giving them and in their hands they are holding a wondrous provision of the Lord, they say **verse 28**:

*"Where are we going up? Our brothers have made our hearts melt, saying, 'The people are greater and taller than we. The cities are great and fortified up to heaven. And besides, we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.'"*

Israel becomes consumed with the fears of Canaan and of their inability **in the face of God's promise and provision**. Israel saw Canaanites, they did not see the Lord.

**A:** How many of us can relate to that temptation? How many of us get overwhelmed by the fears of our current circumstances in light of what God has done and promised he will do? This is why spiritual unbelief summarizes the human experience so well. As Christians we can be flooded with the great and terrifying nature of our employment, where our bank account is, the state of our marriage, the well-being of our children, the overwhelming temptation of sin, the lack of self-control that we have in our lives *and forget God is good, that he is present, and that he wants to work in that...not removing that great and terrifying circumstance, but that is where he has led you.*

***Church, the crown of our circumstances is his faithfulness.***

Our circumstances tempt us like the snake did in the garden to say Jesus didn't die for me, or for this, and there's no way that he's going to redeem this, and there's no way that this could be working towards my good, all is lost. He saved me so that I could suffer under this sin. Even though my sins are forgiven, my life from today till death looks rather grim. Have you seen how tall the Amorites are? Have you seen how fortified sin is in my life? Have you seen the state of my marriage? Have you met my boss? Have you seen the hours that I am working? No way you are providing, and your presence is definitely not here.

Unbelief directly attacks the character and beauty of God and his abundant provision in the cross of Christ.

What Israel lacked was the same thing that we lack: a divine perspective in light of our circumstances.

Israel was busy looking at how big and tall and fortified the Amorites were, completely forgetting that God had saved them from *the* world power at that time. In being overwhelmed by their current state they had forgotten about the Lord's gracious guidance and provision from Mt. Horeb to Kadesh-Barnea.

This passage is so convicting, church, because what they fail to see and what they failed to remember pales and what we have inherited in our Lord Jesus Christ. God didn't save us from a world power he saved us from the greatest enemy of all time which is our sin. And he has provided for our daily need, something far grander than manna or quail, he has provided himself through his Holy Spirit. And unbelief robs us of this joy. Unbelief belittles the work of God and puffs up, like a balloon, all our fears.

Unbelief is a forgetting of who we are and of who God is. He is God and we are not. We feel creaturely because we are the creature. Unbelief displaces that humility that we ought to have in view of who God is and instead tells us that we should be something that we're not, that we should be able to save ourselves when that is not the case at all.

Look quickly at verse 32, we see Moses' assessment, we see the **narrator's assessment** of the story: "you did not believe the Lord your God."

Brothers and sisters, that is how we know what this passage is all about. Moses gives us the ticket right here in this verse. How do you know that Deuteronomy 1:19 -46 is about Israel's unbelief? Moses tells us.

It isn't about land. This isn't an allegory for us to claim "the land" to get something like wealth or prosperity in this life. This is a text between God and his people. Faith commanded met by unbelief

Think about the Egyptian newspaper headline: Mass of people trying to get land, surrounded by army in the desert. Will they survive?

Why wasn't this the point? The most dangerous thing wasn't the lack of land or the Amorites, it was their relationship to God

The issue for us is not your overbearing boss, the crushing reality of your finances, your wayward child, the last time you looked at porn, or how many days you haven't slept with your girlfriend. The issue is your unbelief towards God who commands faith.

In this first scene we see that the Lord promises and the people respond with testing. Then, the Lord gives a foretaste of that promise being fulfilled and the people respond with unbelief in its ugliest form. In this next scene we see the Lord's response to this generation.

## **(v.29-40) Scene 2 – God's Faithfulness to his People and his Bestowal of Judgment and Mercy**

*God's Covenant faithfulness and steadfast love*

Look with me at verses 29-33 **READ**

Daniel Block helpfully observes that this passage describes God as warrior, guide, and as father.

Just from verse 30 we can see that (1) it is God who goes before Israel, (2) it is God who fights for Israel, and (3) it is God that has been faithful to Israel. Where Israel has been faithless and unbelieving, God has provided and has been trustworthy.



God not only has integrity, but he has power. He is not like you or me, who might have a good measure of integrity, but no authority or power to get things done. Our God is the LORD, the Almighty Creator and who is perfect, good, and beautiful in all that he does.

If there was a verse that you wanted to memorize from Deuteronomy this would be them vs. 30-32.

But the point, church, is not that this is merely a *wise* decision to trust the Lord as if that's where we should stop, it is *right* to trust the Lord, and trust is what God as creator asks from all creation. Spiritual unbelief is an affront to the creator. To put it bluntly spiritual unbelief is treason. It is not a neutral action.

It is misplaced faith which is why we see what follows in this passage. Look with me.

### *Judgment and Mercy*

V.34-35 are a direct result of 32: You are prohibited from the land promised because of unbelief.

There are 3 persons and groups that are excluded from this prohibition to enter the land in the current generation.

#### CALEB

**Faithful Israel.** We see that God mercifully allows him to enter the land. And Moses lets us know exactly why he's allowed to enter the land, *because he has wholly followed the Lord*. Caleb believed the Lord and that faith is described as him wholly following the Lord. His righteousness is tied to his faith, his belief.

**Gentile/faith as covenant marker.** Not only do we see that he is an example of faith, but we also see him as an example of true Israel. Of a true Israelite. Not all of Israel is true Israel. Circumcision marked all of Israel, but what God cared for was a circumcision of the heart. But here's the interesting fact, church, Caleb was not an Israelite. Caleb was a Kenizzite, who were descendants of the Edomites...the Edomites were those from Esau...Esau and Jacob...Jacob I loved, Esau I hated. True Israel was represented by a Gentile and an unexpected Gentile no less in one sense.

**Faith in the NT.** In this passage we have a foreshadowing of what we see in the New Testament come to light. The good news of Jesus Christ isn't just reserved for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. In God's people, the sons of Abraham are not those who are circumcised and come from Jewish heritage. But the mark of the covenant is faith. The New Testament people are not marked by an outward sign like circumcision or how some churches would baptize their infants as a marker for who's in and out, but the New Testament church is defined by who believes the Lord through Jesus Christ and are baptized in light of a personal response to Jesus by faith, belief.

**Caleb and Christ.** And this brings me back to Caleb. Moses even contrasted his faithlessness and prohibition from the land himself against the faithfulness of Caleb. Moses, the humblest man in the world, who led the Israelites, commends Caleb over and against himself. Yet faithful Caleb could only save himself.

His faith, his trust in the Lord God, could only save himself. No one enters the promised land because of the faithfulness of Caleb. That generation was buried in the desert and was known as that evil and faithless generation. But Caleb points to a greater faithful Israelite.

Whereas Israel was faithless Christ Jesus was faithful we see that he lived a perfect life wholly following his heavenly father and died the death that we all deserve, we deserve to be with faithless Israel dying in the wilderness.

Christ died for us *so that we look even better than Caleb*, that when God looks at us, he sees his son and because of Jesus, if we repent and place our belief in Christ, we can inherit something the land was pointing to: Christ.

So that's Caleb, who else is entering?

JOSHUA - Joshua is also given mercy and allowed to enter the land, and as we just discussed, he would be leading Israel into the promise land.

THE CHILDREN - The third group that's allowed to enter the land, is the children of this evil generation.

Look with me, parents: the first thing that is said in describing these little ones entering the promised land in verse 39: These children that you thought would be prey.

Notice how a good natural God-given concern for your children can be a rock which if overturned could be hiding unbelief. We know from this story that Israel was trying to find every reason not to trust the Lord. The Amorites were tall, mightier, their cities were more fortified, our children would be prey to them.

This word isn't just for parents this is for all of us: unbelief loves hiding in religious things, in good things, in commendable things. All of us are very good at hiding our sin the older and older that we get. May we pause and pray for the Lord's mercy. That the Lord would uncover our need for faith.

But also look with me the reason the children are allowed in the land: **they have no knowledge of good and evil.**

This is so applicable on so many different fronts. This descriptor harkens back to the garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve had no knowledge of good and evil before sin.

We first see the Lord's heart and care for children in this. That his judgment does not fall harshly on children in this passage. And this should inform our care for children.

In a culture that is voraciously attacking the family unit, the authority of parents, and the security and guidance of parents that parents provide, this verse speaks to us.

In a culture that is currently promoting the self-mutilation of children, to allow children to make decisions that will impact their bodily and mental health, and their flourishing as a human being for the rest of their lives...this verse speaks to us.

Parents, it is your God-given role to guard nurture and protect your children, for while they are young they do not have the knowledge of good and evil, they need your gospel-centered, biblically-wise care in their lives. Your charge is to steward

the innocence of your children and to protect it. Biblically literate and gospel articulate

So, after allowing Caleb, Joshua, and the children the joyful news that they would be entering the promised land he then turns his gaze back to Israel and tells them where they should go.

Look with me at the middle of verse 23. Israel wanted to double check by sending the spies into the land **to see where they should go**. Look at verse 28, **“where are we going up?”** Look at God's reminder of his provision in verse 33: **“who went before you in the way to seek you out a place... to show you by what way you should go.”**

And now look at verse 40: **but as for you, turn, and journey into the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea.**

God was clear before and he's being just as clear now with the change of plans. Whereas they were once heading towards promise and blessing, they're heading back in the direction of the Red Sea which should be associated with Egypt which again is associated with suffering and slavery. This verse queues us into the unmistakable reality that this evil generation is in judgment.

Which leads us to the last scene of the story.

### **(v.41-46) Scene 3: Faithless Israel Reaping the Fruits of Unbelief**

God had just given the command to turn around and head towards the Red Sea and what is the ironic response of Israel in verse 41? **We will go up into that Hill Country and defeat the Amorites just as the Lord commanded.** *That was not the command.*

Yet Israel ignores the command and does not hear or trust that God's promises are true, and they go up and try to fight the Amorites and are defeated! As a parent, reading this I have to say “delayed obedience is disobedience”

This section of the story is both sad, ironically humorous, but also informative to us. **Church, unbelief makes us hard of hearing.**

## **Unbelief can also make us presumptuous like the Israelites**

When we doubt the works and character of God, when we aren't attuned to listening to God, we start to presume what he, in fact, said.

This is why the third commandment is so applicable. Do not take the Lord's name in vain is exactly what happened here. It isn't about saying oh my (fill in the blank), it is about saying God is about things and blesses things that he clearly does not! And here, we see, they claimed the Lord's favor and presence and the Lord was nowhere to be found.

We see that they returned defeated and wept before the Lord, and the Lord does not listen to them.

They had a gracious amount of time to respond in faith but in this story, we see that there was a time in which God stopped listening and dealing with their unbelief. The Lord is gracious and merciful, but he had had enough. *And that is no different for today.* There is a time for faith in which the gospel heralds us and beckons us to believe in the Lord and repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. But there will be a day in which mercy will no longer be extended and where one hand has been beckoning us to come his other hand is holding back divine judgment and when his one hand falls so will his other and God's divine righteous judgment will pour forth to vindicate the righteous and to judge the wicked.

**Gospel Call:** To those who do not believe this morning, who would openly or privately say you are not a Christian, I want to speak to you for one moment. The most dangerous thing for you in this moment is your unbelief, to play chicken with God and to do whatever you like because God is merciful for this season of time. I plead with you, do not wait: for your life is in danger.

But danger doesn't have to be the end of your story. Just as the second generation heard this same story with the same intended result: believe!

*Conclusion: Hittite Treaties and the God who is Worthy of Our Trust*

Matthew had mentioned in the first sermon about Deuteronomy that this book it is in fact a series of sermons but that it is also a template of a Hittite treaty.

The beginning of these treaties were (1) a context for the covenant and (2) commendation of both nations: why both parties were awesome and coming together. "You do this good, and I do this good, and we are here to deal with this problem through making a promise/covenant together."

But in Deuteronomy that is not what we are seeing. We see the Lord of all creation making a covenant in the context of an unfaithful people. And this story starts it off to let you know why there is a covenant renewal: Israel's unfaithfulness, but more importantly, the Lord's faithfulness and grace to his people whom he loves.

This isn't the Lord brow beating, this is God saying "I see you for your flaws and your failings, and my grace is what carries you, my steadfast love and faithfulness will be your song from generation to generation."

*And for us, we have something even greater than a template of a political treaty, we have a greater covenant: the cross of Christ.*

Christ came and died for an unbelieving people so that we might believe (in view of how great he is and to the extent of what he's done). So we might believe, rather than exert unbelief.

Our King Jesus is worthy of our trust despite whatever circumstance, grief, or obstacle attempts to displace our perception of his power and care. Why would I not trust him for the fears and anxieties of today and tomorrow and why would I doubt the hope of heaven?

**Church,** Trust in King Jesus for the fears of today because he is the Lord who mightily saved you in the gospel and lovingly cares for your every need. Let's pray.