

CHAPTER 6, WANDERINGS

TIMELESS TRUTH: FAILURE ALWAYS BEGINS WITH UNBELIEF.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

God's plan was clear: deliver His people through a series of miracles, defeat their enemies, give them a covenant and set of laws to make them a chosen nation, and provide them a land of promise. Simple, right? God speaks, the people listen. God delivers, the people believe. God provides, the people trust. Well, maybe not so much.

God always held up His end of the bargain: He always provided, always delivered, always kept His promises. It turns out the people were equally consistent: They always forgot, always questioned, always rebelled. Their lack-of-faith list was long. When daily bread fell from heaven, they craved a taste of Egypt. Even Moses' siblings, Miriam and Aaron, grew jealous and undermined their brother's leadership.

Then they reached Kadesh and the perimeter of promise became a pinnacle of rebellion. Moses sent twelve leaders to spy out the Promised Land of Canaan. Ten of the twelve said the cities were too strong, the people too big, and God was too small. Only two, Caleb and Joshua, trusted God. They encouraged Israel to go and take what God had given them, but the people complained and failed to believe.

Failure always begins with unbelief. So, Israel spent the next forty years wandering aimlessly in the wilderness. The faithless generation would die out before they set foot on the other side of the land of promise. Only Caleb and Joshua would outlive them all to eventually cross over into their inheritance.

Forty years later, the story comes full circle again to Kadesh, the edge of the promised frontier – and little had changed. The people needed water, so they did what they do best...they complained. And God did what He does best...He provided. The LORD pointed Moses to a rock. He told him to speak to the rock and water would pour out. Moses struck it with his staff instead. The water still gushed out, but Moses and Aaron had ignored God's instruction and lost their right of admission to the Promised Land.

Moses then commissioned Joshua as Israel's new leader before giving his farewell address. He reminded them of all that the LORD had done. He told them again about their special role as His chosen nation and how they would enjoy His blessings if they would simply love and obey Him. Then Moses died and was buried by the LORD.

The wilderness wanderings remind us that faith leads to life and unbelief leads to death. Faith honors God and God always honors the faithful.

- 1. Israel believed the report of the faithless spies out of fear. What do you think was the cause of their consistent lack of faith and trust?**
- 2. The manna and quail episode ended in a severe plague (p. 71-73). What lessons was God trying to teach?**
- 3. God asks the question: “*How long will these people treat me with contempt?*” (p. 76). Do you think their actions merit such a severe word as “contempt?”**
- 4. Israel’s rebellion led to a 40 year punishment and kept an entire generation from seeing the Promised Land. How might you minister to someone whose life choices resulted in irrevocable consequences?**
- 5. Moses is described as a “*very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth*” (p. 73). What examples from his life illustrate this? How would you rate your humility level?**
- 6. Despite his years of service, Moses’ disobedience kept him from entering the Promised Land. What did Moses do wrong? Do you agree with the punishment? What does this teach you about God’s expectations for leadership?**
- 7. Moses charged Israel with passing the commandments down to their children. What is your role in teaching the next generation? What are some practical ways you can serve as a parent, grandparent, or mentor?**
- 8. Carefully reread Moses’ farewell message (p. 84-88). How does he emphasize God’s Story of redemption?**

Freedom vs. Familiarity

No fewer than six times in the chapter, the people pine for “the good old days” in Egypt:

- a) “Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD” (p. 71).
- b) “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost...” (p. 72).
- c) “Why did we ever leave Egypt?” (p. 73).
- d) “If only we had died in Egypt!” (p.76).
and 40 years later...(!)
- e) “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!” (p. 78).
- f) “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!” (p. 80).

It’s always striking to watch how people cling to the familiar, however damaging and unhealthy, over freedom from bondage. Over time, a foot conforms to a poorly fitting shoe so that when you try on a properly fitting shoe, it feels foreign and out of place. In fact, when given an opportunity to choose health or disease, we often make the unhealthy choice because it involves far less risk and engagement. Why take a chance on a potentially positive relationship, when a poorer choice would remove any possibility of future disappointment?

Few people’s words are truly, historically memorable. Fewer yet effect true change in others. From the forty years that Moses led Israel in the desert, only his final speeches are recorded to live on in history, changing hearts as God’s inspired Word.

I. Wrongdoings to die for

Israel spent forty years wandering in the wilderness for their unbelief. God told Israel to go into the Land that He would give them. But they did not trust Him.

- A. Israel grumbled about their hardships → God’s anger burned.
- B. Israel and the Egyptian rabble complained about the manna → God’s anger burned.
- C. Israel wanted meat so God gave them quail and a plague → God’s anger burned.
- D. Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses → God’s anger burned.
- E. Israel’s leaders brought back a bad report from the Land and refused to enter as God instructed → God’s anger burned.
 1. Because Israel refused to go into the Land that God had given them, He disciplined them with forty years in the desert. The unbelieving generation would die in the desert and never enjoy the benefits of the land given to Israel by covenant.
 2. Joshua and Caleb—the only two leaders who believed God’s promise to give them the land—would lead the new generation.
- F. Forty years later, the new generation was repeating the sins of their fathers.
 1. They grumbled for lack of water.
 2. They grumbled for lack of food → God sent snakes.
 3. They worshiped Baal and indulged in immorality → God sent a plague.

II. Words to live by

- A. Moses had spent forty years investing his life into the Israelites. He had faced down Pharaoh and seen God face to face! He listened to their grumbings with exasperation.

He watched the old generation die in the desert with grief and frustration. His unchecked frustration resulted in God's discipline so that even Moses would not be permitted to enter the Promised Land. But Moses was a faithful leader to the end.

- B. Moses began his ministry worried about his inability to speak well. Through his forty years of leadership, only his final three sermons are recorded in the Bible. (These make up the Book of Deuteronomy. In *The Story* they are summarized on pp. 84-87.)
- C. Knowing that he would die soon, Moses must have had a heavy burden on his heart for these people. He needed to impart wisdom and instruction to his children. He needed to pass Israel's history down to them so that they could learn from their fathers' mistakes. Most of all, Moses desperately needed to convey to them the work of God on their behalf and encourage their appropriate responses of trust, love, and obedience.
- D. The message is summarized as follows:
 - 1. There is only one God, the LORD. He loved you and redeemed you. Therefore, believe and obey.
 - 2. Obedience from the heart will result in prosperity in the land.
 - 3. Loving God results in obedience; obedience results in life.
 - 4. Turning away from God results in disobedience; disobedience results in death and you will not live in the Land.
 - 5. The LORD is your life—choose life!

III. Implications and Applications

- A. I should learn from the Israelites' examples and not grumble, commit idolatry, or immorality.
- B. God provides for my needs. I should be thankful.
- C. There are consequences for my choices of unbelief. I choose wisely.
- D. Sin leads to death, but Christ overcame death! I should trust Him for my life.
- E. Moses' final words were God-inspired and important. Therefore, I should listen carefully to the message.
- F. There are still only two choices, but only one leads to life.
- G. I choose life when I believe and obey God.
- H. Obedience is an outward expression of an inward faith. My motivation is from my heart that loves God.