

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



The Consequences of a Faith Failure

KEY PASSAGE: Numbers 14 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Numbers 13:27-33 | Joshua 1:1-9
Galatians 6:7 | 1 John 1:9

► SUMMARY

Christians may be tempted to think that doubting God now and then is no big deal.

In fact, we all do it at times, especially when facing challenging situations. What we may not realize is that a blessing is on the other side of that problem if we will simply trust and obey God. But if we doubt and disobey Him, the consequences may be serious and irreversible. This is exactly what the Israelites discovered when they yielded to fear and refused to obey the Lord.

► SERMON POINTS

After living in Egypt for 430 years, the children of Israel were rescued by God from slavery. He miraculously parted the Red Sea for their escape, drowned the pursuing Egyptian army, and led the people through the desert to the edge of the land He'd promised them.

Moses sent 12 spies into Canaan in preparation for the conquest. They returned to report that the land was good and fruitful but added, "Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak (giants) there" (Num. 13:28).

Caleb, one of the spies, quieted the people and trusted the Lord, saying, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it" (v. 30). But some of the other spies gave a bad report because they doubted God. "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us ... and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size ... and we became like

grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight" (vv. 31-33).

The Israelites' Faith Failure

The congregation wept loudly all night and accused God of bringing them to this land to be killed by their enemies, who would then take their wives and little ones captive (14:1-3). Instead of trusting the Lord to overcome the inhabitants of Canaan, they wanted to go back to Egypt, the land of their former slavery.

Caleb and Joshua encouraged the people to trust God and warned them not to rebel against Him or fear the people of the land since the Lord was for the Israelites and had removed protection from their enemies (vv. 6-10). However, instead of heeding the faithful spies' advice, the people wanted to stone them. Then God said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?" (v. 11).

In His goodness, mercy, and love, the Lord had offered them an amazing blessing—a land of their own—but they refused to believe Him. A faith failure is a failure to trust God when confronted with a challenge, trial, or temptation. Instead of believing that His promise was certain, they made the biggest mistake of their lives by listening to the wrong voices and rejecting the Lord and His land.

Israel's Response

■ **They were bitterly disappointed.** While standing on the border with God's promise in sight, they responded by weeping and crying all night, and grumbling against

Moses and Aaron, because they didn't believe they could conquer the land.

■ **They had a distorted view of their circumstances.**

Although Israel had repeatedly experienced God's faithfulness, they quickly forgot all He had done for them in the past and were overcome with doubts of His goodness, power, and truthfulness. As a result, they refused to enter the land as He had commanded.

- **They caused others to suffer.** Although Moses interceded for Israel, and God pardoned them for their sin, the severe consequences of their disobedience remained. "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it" (vv. 22-23).

The penalty for their disobedience was death. "Your corpses shall fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me. Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb ... and Joshua" (vv. 29-30).

Their disobedience also affected their children. "Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey—I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected" (vv. 31). "Your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they will suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness" (v. 33).

- **They made things worse by trying to correct their disobedience without the help of God.** When Moses told the people of the Lord's decree, they mourned greatly and tried to change the outcome. "They rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying,

'Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised'" (vv. 39-40).

Although God is faithful to forgive the sins of the genuinely repentant, He doesn't always erase the consequences (1 John 1:9; Gal. 6:7). Israel's attempt to avoid God's penalty for their disobedience only resulted in further rebellion against Him. Moses warned them saying, "Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD, when it will not succeed? Do not go up, or you will be struck down before your enemies, for the LORD is not among you" (Num. 14:41-42). But they refused to listen, and as a result, suffered a great military defeat.

The Correct Response

This segment of Israel's history has lessons for us because we too struggle with faith failures. When we listen to the wrong voices, we lose our focus on the Lord and His Word. Then we forget His past faithfulness to us, develop a distorted view of the situation, and back away in fear from the opportunities God places before us.

The solution to a faith failure is to get into God's Word and let it become our focus. Then we must remember that the Lord is always faithful to His Word, and promises to be with us wherever we go (Josh. 1:9).

► RESPONSE

- Have you ever doubted that God would fulfill one of His promises to you or for you? What was the focus of your thoughts? What scriptural truths about the Lord could have built up your faith?
- In order to avoid negative consequences, have you ever tried to correct an act of disobedience with your own solution? Why does God see this as further rebellion?
- Have others been impacted by your faith failures? How have you been affected by someone else's disobedience?

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