



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Exodus 14: 1-10

“Israel at Kadesh-Barnea, part II”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father we are grateful and thankful for the privilege of the study of Thy word again. We give the thanks for the power of it and we pray Lord, as we consider the unbelief of the nation Israel, as they came to Kadesh-Barnea, that we may learn the lessons that are there explicitly in the word of God that touch responsiveness to Thy word.

We thank Thee that Thou art faithful to Thy promises that Thou would fulfill them, as they are written, not as we understand them, but as they are written, and we ask that our lives may be lives that are pleasing to Thee.

Give, Lord, ennoblement from the Holy Spirit to guide our steps in a way that will be in harmony in the teaching of Thy word. Give us deeper desires to know Thee, and to experience the salvation, which is provided for us through the blood that we shed on calvarias cross. And tonight Lord, we again turn to Thee in worship and prays and in Thanksgiving. May Thy hand be upon us for good and this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] From studying the general theme From Egypt to Canaan, and in our last study two weeks ago, we came to Israel at Kadesh-Barnea. The event in chapter 13 and

chapter 14 of the Book of Numbers, as the children have drawn near to the borders of the Promised Land, and so far as we might have expected, were to go into the land and possess the land that God had promised to them. But instead of going in, in faith, they decided that they would send in some spies, and the spies went into the land and looked over the land and came back, and the spies all gave the same report, two of them, Joshua and Caleb said that it is a marvelous land and says the Lord has promised, we should surely go in and take it.

The others however said, yes, it was a good land, but we saw the children of Anak there, and we were like grasshoppers in their sight, and we are not able to go up into the land and possess it because they are stronger than we are. And so one group of the spies brought an evil report and the other brought a good report, and spoke about those jobs and others. So now at verse 33, we are continuing the story and we will read verse 1 through verse 10 tonight and this is the second of our studies, entitled “Israel at Kadesh-Barnea.”

“And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, and the whole congregation said unto them, ‘Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?’ And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.”

An incidentally in connection with that in Nehemiah, chapter 9 and verse 17, Nehemiah says that is what they did do. I am reading Nehemiah 9:17 and it says, “And refused to obey, neither were mindful of Thy wonders that Thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their

bondage, but Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and forsookest them not.” Now verse 5,

“Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes. And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, ‘The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Fear them not.’ But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the Lord appeared in the Tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.”

This is one of the great important features of the journey of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, which took 40 years, but now in July of the second year, they have come to Kadesh-Barnea, right on the border of the land, and one of course might speculate and say if they had just followed in faith the word of God, they could have gone in right then and possessed the land.

Now of course, we remember that what is the decretive will of God is not necessarily the preceptive will of God. The preceptive will of God is that which pleases him, but due to the fact that he is a sovereign God and works all things according to the council of his will, and has an infinite wisdom to which we do not have access. We know that by the decretive will of God, they were not to go into that land, but they were to spend 38 years or so, being disciplined by the lord in the wilderness, and finally they were at the conclusion of that time, they brought on to the land by Joshua.

But they are at Kadesh-Barnea and here July of the second year, after they have come out of the Egypt, they are right on the border of the land. Now this is an important crisis. You can tell it is an important crisis because in the New Testament the writer of the apostle to the Hebrews lays a great deal of stress upon this. And if you will remember in Hebrews, chapter 3 and chapter 4, he makes reference to events of this period of time, and finally he writes in the third chapter in verse 7, “Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith, today if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness. When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, they do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swore in my wrath. (Not simply grieve, but wrathful.) They shall not enter into my rest. And in verse 18 of chapter 3, we read, “And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?” So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

In chapter 4 and verse 11 too, he uses this as an instance of unbelief. In verse 11, the author after these words of exhortation says, “Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” So Kadesh-Barnea is a critical point in the experience of the nation Israel, it marked out them as a disobedient generation, and unbelieving generation; and they failed because of unbelief to enter into the land, not because of the God’s provision or lack of provision, but simply because they did not respond to the word of God.

Now it is an example of unbelief and it therefore has a lot of different types of applications. We should remember that in general, the Bible has one interpretation, but it is possible to find more than one significance in the things that are written, and so one can find in this illustration or significance touching various aspects of biblical truth. For example, it may be applied to the Nation Israel in the present age for that is the reason why Israel today does not experience the blessings of the Abrahamic and the Davidic and

the New Covenants because they have not responded in faith and in fact Paul in his great section of Romans 9 through 11 says that the one thing that is hindering Israel from entering into their blessing, is their abiding in unbelief. He says, if they abide not in unbelief they will be grafted in again.

So today we look out, we see the nation Israel scattered to the four corners of the earth, under the hand of the discipline of God because of unbelief. In this case, of course related to the sufferings of our Lord on calvarias cross. Their rejection of him is the height of rejection, and far more and more serious than the rejection of entrance into the land at Kadesh-Barnea, although in principle they are the same.

This also has application to individual salvation and we have just been reading in Hebrews 3 and 4 in some texts is there, and the author concludes let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, lest we fall after the same example of unbelief. So there is a sense in which it is possible for those who profess faith in our Lord to fall after the same kind of unbelief, and the writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews spells that out in his 13 great chapters.

There is also an application of this to individual sanctification, for let us not forget this. So often forgotten and evangelicalism today, unfortunately, is that the way of sanctification is the same as the way of salvation. And when we say to people that we are saved through grace on the basis of merits of our Lord’s saving work on Calvary’s cross, we say we are saved by grace through faith. Well the same principle pertains in the Christian life. We are sanctified through grace and the instrumentality of faith, though same principles work in sanctification.

So often today, you find people who say, “Yes, we are saved by grace. We believe that, but we stay saved by observing the law.” Or in evangelicalism if they do not believe that you should observe the Mosaic law’s code, they speak of their particular understanding of the Christian life with its particular taboos, and so to be saved is by grace. To grow in grace is, well, that is a cooperative effort. God does his part and we

do our part. I think that is largely the way that most Christians today really feel that they are to grow in grace. It is a cooperative effort, and God does his part and we do our part, but the relationship between them as far as that which is the initiating cause of our growth is a mystery to them, just as is often the originating cause of our salvation is a mystery to them. So this is an incident that has some special significance for us as well as for the Nation Israel.

Now in the passage that I have been looking at chapters 13 and 14, you can notice three general themes that pervade the two chapters. In chapter 13, there was the theme of reconnaissance in which the spies went in and gave the reports, and then we have the rebellion of the people here to the report that the spies have given, and finally next week the Lord willing we will deal with their presumption in trying to go in when God had told them, it is too late, and the further sin characteristic of them. We let us look now at verses 1 through 10, and this I am calling from my study, the Old Testament deceleration. This is the example of unbelief referred to by the writer of the Apostle of the Hebrews.

Now he describes in the first four verses the rebellion of the people. The report has been given. One group has said, the giants are there. We were like grasshoppers. We will never be able to do it. They are stronger than we are. We are not able to go up and take the land. Caleb on the other hand speaks out very strongly, we are able to go in and take the land. It is obvious that people do not have any real disposition to go in. They lifted up their voice and cried, and the people wept that night and they do the thing that is so characteristic of them, and this of course is a 1985 activity too. We are all well capable of doing this. In fact human nature is particularly skilled in what they did, murmuring.

Over and over again the Nation Israel murmurs. They have words of criticism and no for Caleb and Joshua. Those two men were very unpopular that night, and so they murmured. They murmured against Moses and evidently against their unto who thought that perhaps they should go in as well, and the whole congregation said on to them and

they do not really say, you know I do not really think it is too wise. You know they are really attacking them. They say, Would, God, that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would God we had died in this wilderness! And why has the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should be a prey?

I can imagine that would be a pretty good argument. They would like to go out and say to all their wives and all their children, and say look we have to protect them, we have to care for them. It would be very unwise to go up there with those giants there, and take our women and children, and they would be slaughtered. Well that is a good, rational argument. The only problem with it is it’s contrary to the word of God. Would not it be better for us to return into Egypt? And then they said, let us make us a captain and let us go back to Egypt. What we need is new leadership, and so if we have new leadership, everything will be hunky-dory.

Well all that we read here is that they said let us make us a captain, but then Nehemiah says, they really did appoint a captain. I do not know what his name was. There are lots of things in the Old Testament, but we only know because there is some reference to them later on in the Old Testament or even in the New Testament. For example, we would never have known the magicians that appeared before Pharaoh and Moses were not for the fact that the Apostle Paul calls them Jannes and Jambres, which incidentally is in accordance with Jewish tradition. Paul evidently learned it, put his imprimatur upon it, so to speak and said yes, that is a true piece of tradition, but that is what confirms their names to us. So they appointed a captain, all the rebellion of people who had nothing really to say, except some rationalizations.

Now Joshua and Caleb make a request,

“They fell on their faces before the assembly of the congregation and Joshua and Caleb rent their clothes. They spake on to all the company of the children of Israel saying the land, which we passed through to searched, it was an exceeding good land and if the

Lord delight in us, he would bring us into the land, and give it to us. It is a land which floweth with milk and honey, only rebel ye against the Lord. Neither fear ye the people of the land for they are bread for us. Their defense has departed from them and the Lord is with us. Fear them not.”

You see, they have done what we were talking about two weeks ago. They have not done like the children of Israel, put the difficulty between themselves and the Lord, they put the Lord between themselves and the difficulty. And so they look at this in the light of the Lord as their guide. I rather think that this was humility on their part. They were simply being submissive to the word of God. They were not bragging when they said, they are bread for us and their defense has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Fear them not. That was not pride and arrogance. That is simply responsiveness to the word of God, and they recognized that they would not be able to do this. It is the fact that the Lord is with them. They even say, if the Lord delight in us then he will bring us into the land and give it to us.

So Joshua and Caleb make an appeal to the people and here the people respond, but all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel. While here they are within a stone’s throw of the land and the congregation say, let us stone them. Now these are the leaders of the people. Here is Moses who has been the one, who has been God’s ultimate messenger, to bring his message to them and to be the captain of the Lord’s host at this point, and they are ready to stone Moses and Aaron and Caleb, and I presume others who felt that that was the thing to do.

Now there is a very simple little story, but I would like to try to ring the changes on it for a few more minutes. Let me go back and talk about the Old Testament application of this. This contagion of unbelief for example, here are individuals who just a few months previously passed through the Red Sea and this mighty work of God. They

had actually seen the Red Sea parted, and they had gone into that Red Sea, had safely traversed it in one of the great miracles of the Old Testament. In fact, it was the outstanding miracle of the Old Testament. Micah, writing hundreds of years later, puts in the mouth of the children of Israel, show us wonders like you did when we came out of Egypt, the greatest of all miracles they have seen. That is, the greatest of all miracles up to that time. And then when they passed through the Red Sea, we read that Moses and all the people sang the song of redemption. So here are the people who were singers at the passage through the Red Sea, and now they are weepers at Kadesh. And mind you, it has only been about a year, and this has happened to the nation.

Now the slander of unbelief is one of the things that you will note here. For example, in order to defend themselves, they talk, as I mentioned a moment ago, about wives and children. That is to make God sound real bad. In other words, he has not thought about wives and children. He does not really have any compassion like we have compassion. We think about these things, but God does not. He calls us into the land, but we are not ready for the land, that is obvious; we have got these wives and children with us, so how can we do that. We cannot.

I have seen this happen so often in churches. How do you expect us to build a church, if we do not have a pledge system? Well how do you expect to do the work of the Lord, if you do it simply by faith? That will not work? Everyone knows that will not work. In fact, the way to do it today is to get a spot on one of the channels and have some good entertainment, and if you have good entertainment that is the perfect atmosphere in which to get your money. And then if you can add to that 900 foot visions of Jesus, which you have every now and then, well that is bound to bring money into the coffers, and you can build big churches and hospitals and everything else and whatever you want to, and support a large anchorage of people, if you do those things.

If you look out today and take a good look at evangelicalism, I include a lot of them in evangelicalism, what you have is really entertainment. That is largely what it

comes down to, entertainment, and granted it is probably better entertainment for some people than the kind of entertainment you do see on the channels, and particularly if you are like many evangelicals, by the way, who are on the cable and now actually many evangelicals today are clued into the soft porn movies too. Do you know that? Would you think that evangelicals would do that?

I get a paper from one of the leading Christians, comes out about every week. It is called *Context*, written by Martin Marty. It has a lot of interesting statistics in it, and it is a statistical fact, so Dr. Marty says, he is one of the professors at University of Chicago, that evangelicals are clued in now to soft porn on cable. That is an interesting thing. I had not really realized it, I did not know about it, but I read it today and his little weekly context. I am not surprised though, not surprised at all because characteristic of evangelicalism today is a tendency to turn away from the kind of holiness of life that the saints of God have been characterized by, down in the past two or three centuries.

So this is the slander of unbelief, talking about wives and children and their little ones, and by the way, if you would turn over to verse 31, you will see what we read here by this now comes at later on in the chapter, but your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. So the Lord had those little ones on his heart, and so he said okay you will not go in, so you will not be able to go in, and you will die in the land, and those little ones that you were so anxious to protect and keep in your unbelief. I am going to bring them into the land, and they are going to enjoy. So the generation that rejected the appeal of the Lord God to enter into the land, did not go in to the land, but the little ones that they said that they were so anxious for, they are the ones that God had already decreed in his decretive will, they would be the ones that would render into the land because of the unbelief of their parents.

You know, if you will face up to the fact that the word of God is sufficient for life, you will avoid so many of the difficulties and problems of the Christian life. The word of

God is sufficient for theology, sufficient for ethics, sufficient for daily life. It is sufficient. So now I want you to notice another thing about the sin. So much is made over this sin in the Bible. This is a critical moment and what kind of sin is it? Pornography? Immorality? Blatant immorality? Adultery? Fornication? Uncleaness? Gossiping? Well, there was some murmuring of course. But for all of them it was not the fundamental thing. It is not a flagrant of immorality, as we tend to think of flagrant of immorality. What is it? What is the character of the sin that God is so concerned about? It is simply unbelief. A message and failure to respond to it.

It is like the Garden of Eden. What was the sin of Adam and Eve? Something immoral? No. Just do not eat the fruit. That is all. In fact, it is a simplest kind of test that makes it impossible to use a lot of these excuses that we tend to make for unbelief. Very simple. In fact, God in the Garden of Eden, gave them every freedom you could possibly have, except for the one thing, of the fruit of the trees, all the trees in the garden you may freely eat, but of the fruit of the tree, which is in the midst of the garden, just one tree, of that you shall not eat for in the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die. What more could God do? What broader attitude toward them could he have? And yet that was the test of sin.

You see, sin is basically not immorality. Sin is not rebellion. Basically, it is not self will, basically. You have all of these types of analyses, psychological analyses of what Christian sin is, but the Scriptures hone in on the one thing from which all of those things result, and that is unbelief. It is unbelief that leads to rebellion and self will, and finally issues an immorality. But the key thing, the real nature of sin is unbelief. You can see that for example when our Lord says, it is expedient for you that I go away. If I do not go away, the Holy Spirit will not come to you, but if I go away, he will come and he will convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, of sin because they are immoral? Of sin because they do not keep the law? No. Of sin because they believe not in me. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin, Paul says in Romans 14:23.

The essential nature of sin is unbelief. Responsiveness to the word of God. So it is not flagrant of immorality. The greatest failure of the church today and the greatest failure of everyone us individually is related precisely to this; That is, we tend to water, follow the things of sight. Israel incidentally had no weapons, no warriors, no knowledge of the land to speak of, the spies had gone in, but that is all. No money to buy. No money to use as bribery. They were really shut up to trust in God. What a terrible situation.

You are shut up to trust in God. Isn't it sad? Isn't it sad that we are shut up to trust in God? If we just have all these other crutches, we'd feel so good. But now we are just left with God. That is so foolish. If you did not understand the nature of the human heart, you would think that was the most irrational thing in all of this universe. And they understood too something about what it meant to have the lord with them, and what it meant to disobey him.

Back in Exodus, chapter 17 and verse 7, in their experience at the wilderness of sin, we read at the conclusion of it, and he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" So that really comes down to the point at issue. Is the Lord with us or not?

Now I would like for you to turn over to the New Testament for just a moment. We turn to the first chapter of the Book of Luke and again we will turn to one of the illustrations of the importance of this matter of responding to the word of God. By the way, this means responding to the word of God in spite of what advice you may receive from friend or from elders at the church or from the preachers at the church. To respond to the word of God and to respond to the word of God alone will get you through more trials and troubles and difficulties than counseling with 100 counselors. The word of God will be more of a help to you.

Now we have a beautiful incident here. We have a man by the name of Zacharias, a lovely man. Notice how he is described in the sixth verse of the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Perhaps I should begin with the fifth verse because Luke really begins his story here. Here is a little prologue of the first four verses. And then he says, there was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. What a remarkable testimony. Here are people who are living up to the law, as they understood the law under which they lived.

And furthermore, we read in verse 13, but the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias, for Thy prayer is heard. So here is a man who is living up to the law as he understood it and is a praying man also. Zacharias was a godly man, and you can be sure he was a godly man because later on when his lips are unsealed by the power of God, and he speaks and gives his marvelous testimony to what God has done and how in all of the past, he has got their Savior, he speaks in the language of the Old Testament. He was student of the Scriptures of course, so he is an unusual man.

Now we read in verse 11,

“And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense and when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. And the angel said unto him, fear not, Zacharias, for Thy prayer is heard; and Thy wife Elisabeth shall bear Thee a son, and Thou shalt call his name John. And Thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.”

What a tremendous thing. Here is a man who is going to have a son and is going to be a great man of God. It could not be any better blessing than that given to any man than to have a child who is going to be a minister of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the hand of the God upon him and is going to be the means of the salvation and edification of a large number of people.

By the way, you will notice in verse 13, it says, and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son. Later on, it is very clear, Luke has constructed this chapter contrasting John, the Baptist’s birth with the Lord Jesus’ birth and even the language is very similar, but in the case of Mary the mother of our Lord, it is said that she shall a bear a son, but not bear to Joseph a son, but here and that is the difference between them. He is going to be great, but not as great as the one who is to come.

Now how would you expect you should respond to something like this? An angel of the Lord has given them this magnificent promise and we read in verse 18, and Zacharias said unto the angel, whereby shall I know it? Whereby shall I know it? He has already been told it is going to come to pass. You do not say when God sends the messenger to you like an angel and says this is going to happen to you. You do not say, how shall I know it? You have already been told. It is obvious he does not really respond to the word given to him.

“So the angel answers him, says, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and I am sent to speak unto Thee, and to shew Thee these glad tidings. And, behold, Thou shalt be dumb.”

I think the Lord had already told Gabriel, look he is going to say, he does not believe it. So here is a second message that you have to give him. I am not sure about that. I just think perhaps that has happened because Gabriel does not have the power to do this, unless God stands behind him in his own especial way, but since I have never

been around too many angels, I am not really acquainted with all of the things that characterize them.

“And, behold, Thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because Thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.”

So Zacharias is an unbeliever. Now of course, you know that what happens here is repeated in a very similar way to Mary, the mother of our Lord.

“Gabriel in the six month was sent from God to the city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to the Virgin Mary, and the angel said to her, ‘Hail, Thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with Thee, blessed art Thou among women.’ And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, just like Zacharias, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, ‘Fear not, Mary, for Thou hast found favour with God, and behold, Thou shalt conceive in Thy womb, and bring forth a son, not to Joseph but juts a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great.’ The very same words he says to John, and he shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, how shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”

Now is not that the same thing, while Zacharias is whereby shall I know this, she says, how shall this be, seeing I know not a man. But Mary is not rebuked and Zacharias is. Discrimination among the angels. [Laughter] No. Look at it carefully and you will see that what Zacharias doubts is the fact. Mary questions the method. There is a whole lot of difference between saying how shall I know this, and saying how is this going to come

about, because Mary assumes this is going about, and she simply asks how it is going to be done, which is of course a natural question. And it’s asked in faith. She says it is going to come to pass, but how after all, I do not know a man. So there is all the difference in the world between them. What is result of unbelief then? Well I wonder if perhaps we are not see in this something of some significance. In Zacharias’ case, when he does not believe the word of God, we read Thou should be dumb.

Now if you will turn over to verse 62, when Zacharias has his discipline lifted from him, we read,

“And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. You see when the child is finally born, and they called the son Zacharias, after the name of his father. That is the way children are ought to be named, if they are males, they should be named after their father. That is what I believe. That is why I have Samuel Lewis Johnson, III, in my family. I persuaded my wife to name him after me in all humility [laughter]. No there is no humility, just I like the sound of my name, I guess [more laughter]. But anyway, they wanted to call his name Zacharias after the name of his father, and his mother answered and said not so, but he should be called John and said on to him there is nobody in your family called by the name John. Then they made signs to his father how he would have him called.

Now if he was dumb alone, then only would have to do would be to speak to him. He is not deaf. He is just dumb. They could have said, shake your head if you do not want to be named Zacharias and shake your head this way if you want the name John. That would have satisfied, but they had to make signs to him, and so many commentators feel that the judgment upon Zacharias was not simply that he should be dumb, but deaf also. Now that is a striking thing and if it is true, I cannot say this with dogmatism. It would suggest perhaps that he was deaf toward God and dumb toward man. That is what unbelief does. It does shut us all from the communion with God that

we should have and it also makes it impossible for us to give the kind of testimony to the glory of God that all of us as believers should be giving. And it surely prevents the enjoyment of the promises of God.

Now there is a marvelous illustration in the Old Testament of this in Isaiah chapter 7, when Ahaz is struggling with what God has been saying to Israel, God has been saying to Ahaz and to Israel, trust me, trust me. Do not be concerned about the Syrians who are coming down. Even if they come right up to the border, trust me, but Ahaz has a secret in his heart, and that secret in his heart is unbelief and being fearful. He is making alliances, trying to make plans, because after all if you do not make plans and alliances, you are cast upon God alone, and that is a pretty hopeless situation when you’ve got Assyrians coming down.

So Isaiah is sent to speak to Ahaz and he gives him a warning. He tells him that you are trust in the Lord God, and then he goes on to say, I am going to give a sign to you to show you just exactly what I can do, and the virgin prophecy is given, but in the course of it, there is a remarkable little statement. It goes like this, [Hebrew indistinct; cf. Isaiah 7:9b].

Now you can see just if you listen to that carefully there is a play on Hebrew words here. The word *aman* means to believe, to be established and things like this. It is the word from which we get Amen or truly. It has a rhythm and a rhyme. In Isaiah chapter 7 and verse 9, you can hardly render it in English, but perhaps this will do. If in God, you do not confide, surely in power you shall not abide. Or perhaps, surely if you will not believe neither blessing shall you receive. A very striking way by which God makes a special principle, plain and clear, and it rings in their ears, so they will not forget it; if in God you do not confide, surely in power you shall not abide.

Now in Zacharias’ case, he did not confide in God, as a result of that he suffered the discipline of those months of deafness and dumbness and during that time he was of little benefit to others, and at the same time was so far as his communion with God was

concerned shut off from that. Now we read later on in the chapter of course that when the time came for John the Baptist to be circumcised they called him Zacharias and so on and finally they turned to Zacharias and they ask him, what his name should be, and he said, John. He wrote on the table John, and they marveled. And his mouth was open immediately and his tongue loosed and he spake and he praised God. That comes from faith.

So what is the recourse to unbelief? Well the only recourse is to abandon it. That is what Zacharias did, when he said his name shall be John because that was what have been told to him by angelic messenger. The living God in heaven, the believing on earth, these are the two powers that meet and satisfy each other, let faith know no other measure or limit than the living God. And when a person lives in the light of this, he will speak and he will pray his God, and he will be in communion with the Lord and receiving the kinds of conversation from the Lord that will strengthen him and build him up and his Christian faith.

You can never expect to make progress in the Christian life, if you do not learn what it is to rest upon the word of God and frequently when it seems so irrational to do it. May God deliver us from unbelief and give us to trust him. That pleases him. No one likes to be disbelieved.

As you know, I teach at a theological seminary and often I hear a student say, what do you think of such and such, and I will say, well I think that that text means this. May be two months from then, I will hear, well so-and-so did not really accept your interpretation. Well that kind of gives me a bad feeling, you know. Well how do you think the Lord feels when you do not accept his interpretation of things? If I can be a little miffed because somebody does not see the obvious truth in the text, you know [laughter], well in the large case when we do not respond to his word, that's a way of saying he is unreliable. And so the Scriptures over and over again point out, he speaks

truth and he is faithful to it. Those two great words, faithful, truth. May God help us to believe. Let’s bow in a moment prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy word, for the exultation that comes to us from it. May we be by Thy grace, believing Christians. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.