

Flesh Destroyed, Spirit Saved
(A Revisiting of Israel in the Wilderness)

- I. Bible readers everywhere are familiar with the story of Israel's wilderness experience and the judgments that befell them at that time because of their disobedience.
- A. There are references to such in *the law*. The books of Moses are his personal witness.
 - B. There are references to such in *the prophets*. **EZE 20:13-17.**
 - C. There are references to such in *the psalms*. **PSA 78:17-22.**
 - D. There are references to such in the N.T. **ACT 13:18; 7:38-42.**
- II. For varied sins, many of those whom God brought out of Egypt perished in the wilderness. Jude sums up the errors as being outgrowths of one serious fault: *unbelief*. **JUDE 1:5.**
- A. Faith and obedience are so tied together that the lack of the latter disqualifies the former. **JAM 2:20.**
 - B. Moses' disobedience at Meribah merited a charge of *unbelief, rebellion* and *trespass against God*. **NUM 20:12; 27:13-14; DEU 32:49-51.**
 - C. Israel's many wilderness sins (and especially their reluctance to enter Canaan at Kadesh, **NUM 13**) which resulted in many perishing under God's judgment outside of Canaan are basically the sin of *unbelief*. **HEB 3:8-11, 17-19.**
 - D. Paul explains that Israel's unbelief was OF THE GOSPEL! **HEB 4:1-3.**
 1. The Gospel of Christ was earlier preached to Abraham, and he rejoiced at it. **GAL 3:8 c/w JOH 8:56.**
 2. Faithful patriarchs from the beginning of the world saw gospel promises afar off. **HEB 11:1-13.**
 3. The Spirit of Christ was in the O.T. prophets. **1PE 1:9-11.**
 4. Moses highly esteemed the reproaches of Christ. **HEB 11:26.**
 5. Therefore, why should it be thought a thing incredible that Israel's unbelief was of the gospel of Christ?
- III. There are various theories about the eternal destiny of those who perished in the wilderness.
- A. The Arminian belief system tends to affirm that they are eternally damned since they were guilty of the one sin which God does not forgive (so they say): *unbelief*.
 1. Most Arminians hold that unbelief of the received gospel is unforgivable.
 2. Many Arminians hold that falling from belief is unforgivable.
 3. Paul thanked Christ that he had obtained mercy in *unbelief*! **1TI 1:12-13.**
 - B. The Calvinist commonly affirms that they could not be children of God because they did not persevere faithfully all their life.
 1. The Calvinist generally holds that all of the elect children of God would have made it into the land of Canaan.
 2. Conversely (they say), if an Israelite did not make it to Canaan because of judgmental death, he could not have been an elect child of God: he was just a reprobate mingled amongst God's elect, a *tare among wheat* (**MAT 13:24-43**).
 3. A number of Calvinists have trouble with the notion that someone may be IN Christ, yet not bear fruit. But see **JOH 15:2.**
 - C. We (and the perished Israelites) may be thankful God is neither Arminian nor Calvinist.
 - D. Scripture teaches that many Israelites who perished in the wilderness because of their disobedient unbelief were truly elect children of God whose flesh was destroyed, but no

more. c/w **1CO 5:5**.

- E. God's election is evidenced by, but not bound infallibly to man's belief. God's covenant faithfulness is well able to *maintain saving mercy* and *apply chastening rod* to His disobedient children. **PSA 89:27-34**.

IV. The following are evidences that the children of Israel who died in the wilderness were indeed children of God.

A. **1CO 10:1-6**.

1. Paul is writing to the church of Corinth which was predominantly a Gentile congregation. **1CO 12:2**.
 - a. In speaking of the Israelites that came out of Egypt, he refers to them as "OUR fathers" (v. 1). Remember that Paul was a Jew. **GAL 2:15**.
 - b. The generation which left Egypt were obviously not the genealogical or national ancestors of these elect Gentiles at Corinth.
 - c. A spiritual relationship is under consideration. Paul the Jew and these elect Corinthians had a common spiritual interest with the Exodists.
2. The fathers were *baptized unto Moses* (v. 2) the leader of "...the church in the wilderness..." (**ACT 7:38**).
 - a. Similarly, the Corinthians had been *baptized unto Christ*, the Head of the church under a new covenant.
 - b. Both parties were members of God's visible church on earth.
3. The Exodists were *spiritual* partakers of Christ. **vs. 3-4**.
 - a. Some advocate that the *meat and drink* were the elements of the tabernacle service and/or the water which Moses brought forth from the rock and the daily manna.
 - b. Those elements were physical, carnal and worldly, not spiritual. **HEB 9:1-10; 8:5**.
 - c. Paul said not, "They drank of the water that came from the rock" but rather, "They drank of that SPIRITUAL ROCK that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."
 - d. Jesus Christ is spiritual meat/bread/manna of which those in union with Him spiritually partake. **JOH 6:32, 47-51**.
4. Jesus taught that those who are spiritual partakers of Him have eternal life and are eternally secure. **JOH 6:54-56; 10:27-29**.
5. If all the Israelites who died in the wilderness because of unbelieving disobedience were not elect children of God, what would be the relevance to the elect believing children of God of the church at Corinth?
 - a. Elect church members who started out well back then suffered physical judgment because of disobedience, yet they are spiritual children of God now in heaven. Their flesh only was destroyed. c/w **1CO 5:5**.
 - b. The Exodists' physical judgments because of unbelief are obviously warnings to the believing children of God at Corinth who could likewise be judged with fleshly destruction for unbelieving disobedience. **1CO 10:6-12; 11:30**.

B. The Exodists were the objects of God's love. **DEU 7:7-8; 33:1-3; HOS 11:1**.

1. A person loved of God is eternally safe. **ROM 8:33-39**.
2. God loves His children *and* chastens them. **HEB 12:6**.

- C. The Israelites who left Egypt did so BY FAITH and are listed among the heroes of faith. **HEB 11:29.**
1. If, as the Calvinist might contend, those Jews who died in the wilderness were not God's children, where does that leave the rest of the heroes of faith in **HEB 11**?
 2. Samson, Jephthah and David were flawed, elect children of God also. **v. 32.**
 3. The Calvinist, by relegating anyone who did not make it to Canaan to the status of condemned reprobate, must also conclude that Miriam, Moses and Aaron were reprobates.
 - a. Miriam was a prophetess of God along with Aaron and Moses. **EXO 15:20; MIC 6:4.**
 - (1) Her flesh suffered by judgment because of disobedience. **NUM 12:1-2, 9-15.**
 - (2) She died in the wilderness like many others. **NUM 20:1.**
 - b. Aaron and Moses both could not enter Canaan because of UNBELIEF, just as the other Jews who died in the wilderness. **NUM 20:12.**
 - c. Why not simply recognize that Moses and the perished Israelites of whom Paul wrote were children of God who both had faith, but their faith lapsed and they smarted for it, receiving temporal punishment and missing temporal blessings in this life?
- D. If the Calvinist is correct in his assumption that the distinction between elect and non-elect is determined by entering Canaan or not entering Canaan, consider:
1. The reason that the bulk of the nation did not enter Canaan was because of their reluctance at Kadesh. **NUM 13, 14:29-30.**
 2. That judgment was ONLY upon 20+ year-old males numbered for war, the Levites being exempted. **NUM 1:45-47; 26:64-65; JOS 5:4.**
 3. The Levites, women and anyone under 20 years of age who survived the duration of the forty years in the wilderness were allowed to enter Canaan.
 4. Therefore, the Calvinist position must logically conclude that God's election of men unto eternal life was strictly divided between Levite and non-Levite, male and female; under 20 and over 20. Ridiculous.
 5. Once you make belief/faith an infallible concomitant to eternal sonship (i.e., a person cannot possibly have the latter unless he perpetually has the former), how is this any different from the old Jewish error that God's children could only be those of the circumcision?
 - a. Both errors conclude too much from TOKENS of God's covenant blessings (*circumcision* under the Law covenant; *faith* under the eternal covenant).
 - b. However, if one is looking for evidence of righteousness and eternal life in a token, *faith* is the better thing to look in. **ROM 4:10-11; HEB 11:4.**
 6. Why not just conclude the obvious about Israel in the wilderness? Some of God's elect children suffered in the flesh because of disobedience but their lack of faith does not thwart God's covenant of grace. c/w **ROM 11:27-29; 2TI 2:13.**
 7. This should serve as warning to us who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. **JUDE 1:5.**
- V. Unbelief, rebellion and disobedience will not justify us before God. God's faithfulness to His covenant promises may not be thwarted by human folly, but grace is no license to sin. **ROM 3:8; 6:1-2; HEB 3:12 c/w HEB 12:15-16.**