

BAD MEMORIES - WHEN THE ENEMY BECOMES TOO STRONG ... (Deut 1)

Who would be a politician these days?! Surely, only someone with a career's death wish, - it is not the most healthy type of ambition to follow at the moment. ... And what about being a Christian? Who would want to be a Christian, having to stand out from the crowd and be different? When your friends are having conversations that you cannot join in with ... when they are going places you know you should not be going with them ... when they are watching things you should stay away from ... *who would want to be a Christian?!!*

Do you find it easy being a Christian? Do you find it easy living life the way God commands in His Word? It's a challenge, isn't it! Paul said, [Rom 8:7](#) *the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* Likewise, James said, [4:4](#) *the friendship of the world is enmity with God.* To be a Christian is 'out of sync' and takes courage and is not a pursuit for the faint-hearted and lily-livered and popularity-seeker!

Throughout much of the wilderness wanderings Moses would not have been the most popular individual. He often had to stand out on his own and be distinct from all the rest. While in the Lord's work he took many hurts and bruises, but he had served the Israelite people faithfully and yet they had treated him so despicably.

In Deut. 1 they were at Kadesh-Barnea and they had been wandering around the desert for almost forty long years. Forty long years with these people! If he had seen all that leading them would have entailed he would have tried harder at the burning bush to convince God he wasn't up to the task!

Moses' life can be presented like this ... For the first forty years he lived in comfort, - in the palace of the princess of Egypt. For the second forty years he lived in relative poverty in the land of Midian ... and in the third forty years he not only had the basics of the wilderness to contend with, he also had a people who were moaning and groaning at every opportunity. ... But it was soon coming to an end, - they were almost there, on the borders of Canaan.

They were in Kadeshbarnea, - the name means 'consecrated'. From here, thirty-eight years earlier, Moses had sent out twelve spies into Canaan (Num. 13:3-21,26) ... and here in this chapter (Deut. 1) he was reminiscing, - he was reminding his people how the Lord had **taught** them thirty-eight years earlier...

TAUGHT

* Our history gives us a sense of our identity. In the area I come from in Northern Ireland we have a great legacy that goes back to the Ulster Plantation in the seventeenth century. In my local area there are many historical monuments back to the O'Neil's who were a powerful ruling family in the fifteenth century, and back to the fort at Navan that was busy even before the Egyptian pyramids were built.

* And you have a wonderful history here too. Tomorrow our Fraternal is going to the Covenanting sites of Drumclog (battle on 1st June 1679, with John Graham of Claverhouse, 1st Viscount of Dundee and an Episcopalian), Sorn (birthplace of Alexander Peden), Fenwick and Shotts (the revival of 1630).

* The children of Israel had their own history too and right in the centre of *their* history was God. How quickly and how painlessly they would have reached Canaan if they had been obedient to Him at the beginning, - all those years earlier. It was their own fault it was taking them so long!

* Away back in those days, ... after the nation had left Egypt they had arrived at Mount Sinai, arriving on the fifteenth day of the third month (Ex. 19:1), - God had it marked 'in His diary'! There He wonderfully and miraculously had revealed His power and His glory unto them.

* It was on Mount Sinai He delivered the law to Moses who declared it to them, and they accepted it. During this time the tabernacle was constructed and the priests and Levites were set apart to serve the Lord.

* Just a few days less than the full year, - on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year after leaving Egypt (Num. 10:11) they moved on.

* Why did the Lord keep them so long at Sinai? He kept them during that time because He wanted to give them His law and teach them how to worship Him. He wanted them to take time to learn and to understand and to make personal and national their worship of Him. This was an important 'staging post' for them, - this was where God set out the standards He was expecting from them.

* Yes, God continues to make His people different because He has special expectations for us that He does not have for the unsaved. He has set out His rules for us in His Word and He expects us to abide by them. ... Is it right to talk about God having rules for us to live by? Of, course it is. Every type of organisation has structures its members must maintain ... and God has too!

* These Old Testament people were given the Law, - God's rules for *them*. Now, the Law would never save them, - Rom. 4:1-12, Gal. 3:22 and Heb. 11:1 tell us there is no salvation through the Law. Indeed, God does not anywhere

say they could be saved by the Law. As in the New Testament, the people under the old covenant were saved by faith as we are today.

* The purpose of the Law was to reveal their sinfulness and God's holiness, and the Law explained to the people of Israel that only by faith would they know God personally and enjoy His blessing ... and God spent almost a year at the foot of Mount Sinai teaching them this lesson.

* ... I would imagine that some of them would have been content to stay there, - those were good days when God spoke to them and established the tabernacle and the priesthood, ... why move on when 'God is in this place'?

* However, the reason they had to move on was because God came to them and said, Dt. 1:8 Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them.

* *God* was moving them on! It would have been wrong for them to have stayed there, - even though that was a place where God had really demonstrated Himself to them and blessed them ... and equally it would have been wrong for them to have moved on anytime previously, i.e. before God had given them the command!

* They needed to have the tabernacle completed, and they needed to have the right men at the helm leading them in the worship of Jehovah. They dare not have taken a step out of the camp until God was ready!

* The heat of the desert, the hunger and starvation, the enemies around them ... *all* threatened the people of God ... and the people of God only dare move when God said it was right for them to move. **Taught.**

FRAUGHT

* So, when they did begin to move again, - with their new tabernacle and the new priesthood - ... and they had become became a better, more obedient God-honouring people ... yes?? ... No, not a bit of it!!

* They resented every step ahead. They griped almost about everything imaginable! ... *Captivity in Egypt was far better than this!* ... and Moses got all the blame. ... They were **fraught**, and he was **fraught!** ... He had nothing but anxious times from these people!

* "We've nothing to eat!" ... Moses prayed, and the Lord sent them manna. After a while, "We're fed up with this manna, - we wish we were back in Egypt!" ... Moses prayed, and the Lord provided them with quail. It was just one thing after another ... *and the devil wasn't even mentioned!!* God's people were giving God's servant trouble 'left, right and centre'! Yes, often the devil gets the blame when the Lord's people are perfectly capable all on their own of obstructing the plans and advance of God!!

- * Not a bit of wonder Moses wanted to quit (Num. 11:15). He just wanted to head off into the desert, - somewhere, *anywhere* and die! ...
- * He is coming to the end of his life, and there were times when it could not come quickly enough!
- * And yes, it has to be said, the only reason he has been able to keep faithful is because God has kept faithful to him.
- * He came to the point where he cried to these people, - this old man, - Dt. 1:12 *How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife?*
- * So God gave him seventy elders to help him in the day-to-day affairs of the community life in the camp. Moses could only do so much, - he was a great leader and a faithful man of God ... but we all have our limits.
- * Kadeshbarnea was the gateway into the Promised Land, ... just a short distance to go ... The land of Canaan beckoned, but then they found out about the fortified city of Jericho, and Moses could feel them starting to *gripe* again!
- * During almost a year in the wilderness, - after they left Egypt, - God had **taught** them the fundamentals of how to believe in Him and worship Him ... but when they started off again they were **fraught** in their journey because they saw all their problems to be far bigger than God. **Taught ... Fraught ...**

BROUGHT

- * What was God to do with them?! What kind of people were these who saw His power during those months at the foot of Mount Sinai and yet doubted Him in the journey?!
- * On the very edge of the wilderness, - at Kadeshbarnea, - Moses was looking back and remembering those former days, - those days long ago, - when the Lord had said unto them, v.20 *Ye are come unto the mountain of the Amorites, which the LORD our God doth give unto us. 21 Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged.*
- * Had they behaved themselves and trusted in God, they would have been in the Promised Land a long time ago and already been established!
- * However, - away back then, in that previous generation, thirty-eight years earlier, - what did they say to Him? Did they believe in God to possess the land? Did they take the Lord at His Word and trust Him? No, they got a committee together, v.22 *We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come.* “Lord, *we* have to see it in order to believe it, *we* have to check it out for *ourselves*, and then *we* shall make the decision.”

- * The twelve men chosen went up into the land, and they all brought back evidence of the fruit of the land, and they said, [v.25 It is a good land which the LORD our God doth give us ...](#) but there was a problem.
- * What was the problem? The problem was basically they did not believe God could do what He said He would do. The problem was not such the ‘hugeness’ of the Anakim, the problem was the ‘smallness’ of their faith.
- * Whether it was now or forty years from now ... the problem of those men of Jericho had to be faced, - they would not go away ... and the problem still had to be faced up to, - *did the people of Israel trust God or not?!*
- * God had **brought** them to this point whether they believed in Him or whether they did not!
- * We are reminded here as to how they decided. The rulers of the people decided not to take God up on His word and they would not enter the land, and consequently they rebelled against the Lord (v.26) ... and although they would not have said it openly, their actions demonstrated they reckoned the Lord had given them a bad deal!
- * “Look, God is about to bring us into this land flowing with milk and honey ... here is the evidence, - the fruit of the land! Come on, let’s possess the land!” said Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua ... But no, you could not reason with the people. They had made up their mind. ... The people are far too big, the obstacles for us to take the land are far too great. We are ‘in a hole’ and it is all [v.27 Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. 28 Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there.](#)
- * Who were these Anakim? They were tall Goliath-like warriors whom the Israelites feared ... Aye, but the Lord told them to go up despite the Anakim!
- * It is dangerous when the Lord expressly tells us to do something, and we disagree with Him and don’t believe Him and we want to go our own way ... and it’s dangerous when God allows us to go ahead and contradict His will ... *it’s dangerous* and it only can end in greater problems and greater heartache.
- * It is easy to be discouraged, and it was [our brethren](#) who discouraged God’s people. Often it is the doubts and fears *we* allow to enter our minds ... *even when we have proven the goodness of God!*
- * What keeps us back from telling people about the Lord Jesus? Surely, it’s because we know they won’t want to listen! ... Aye, but then how can you explain people from these shores becoming Muslims, - it’s because Muslims told them about Mohammed and convinced them of their gospel. Why do people become Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses? Because Mormons and

Jehovah Witnesses are so convinced of their gospel they are not afraid to tell people about it. ...

* But us Bible-believing, born-again Christians, we don't tell people because they won't want to listen! ... Just like these people of Israel, *we have lost the battle before we have gone out to fight it!!*

* You see, God had **brought** these people to the place in the land where they had to make a decision, - either you believe in Me and go forward, or you do not believe I am up to the task! It was to be either one or the other.

* Moses told these obstinate people, *v.29 Dread not, neither be afraid of them. 30 The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you.* ... Ah, they decided, but no! The reality is that ten of us say Israel would not be able to conquer Jericho. Twice Moses told them not to be afraid, and twice they rejected what he said.

* So what did they do? They sat in their tents and groaned and moaned and griped and sniped at Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb ... and the entire nation rebelled against God and failed to take the land He had claimed for them. *The Lord could bring them out of Egypt but He could not take them into Canaan!*

* That is the sign of an inactive unhappy believer, - sitting doing nothing ... except groaning, moaning, griping and sniping at others!

* And why did the Israelites stumble at Kadeshbarnea? What was the cause of their failure? Simply this, *Ps. 78:11 [they] forgot his works, and his wonders that he had showed them.* ... *42 They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy.* ... They had forgotten what God is able to do.

* For them, God miraculously opened up the door of captivity out of Egypt, He had parted the Red Sea for them to pass through, He had provided them with bread, meat and water ... and yet it did not increase their faith.

* Instead of opening their hearts to God, they stubbornly and provocatively hardened their hearts, *Ps. 78:22 they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation.*

* It is a proven Biblical principle that if God's goodness does not soften your heart it hardens your hearts. Either you are grateful to Him, or you take His goodness for granted ... and that was what was happening here!

* Do you thank God for what He gives you, or would you be like the child who takes it without a word of appreciation? Some people, the more you give them and the more you do for them the more they expect and the quicker they will tell you what they want!

* ... And what did God do? He decided to allow *none* of these rebels into Canaan ... and He took them from the very edge of *almost* accomplishing their dream and He **brought** them back into the wilderness for another thirty-

eight long years ... until all the people twenty years and older had died. ... All of them except Caleb and Joshua.

* Then He would take the new generation, - the little children who the parents thought the Anakim would slaughter, - and He would lead them into the land where they would conquer the enemy and claim their promised inheritance (v.39). Thirty-eight years later they would be fathers and mothers and they would walk round the walls of Jericho and they would see how the Lord would crumble the defences of the enemy ... and they and their children would go in and possess the land ... just as the Lord had promised!

* Then when the Israelites heard all Moses was saying to them, they tried to 'backtrack', "We're sorry, Moses" ... but too late, and anyway it was not true repentance, - it was simply regret and sorrow for the consequences of their unbelief. Regret is not repentance. They were not showing sorrow for their sin, or genuine repentance before God.

* So, they decided to go and fight these people anyway (v.41) ... even though the Lord told them not to (vv. 40,42), but they did anyway. When you start to make a habit of being disobedient to the Lord ... it is hard to break the habit!

* The Lord was not with them, v.42 *I am not among you* ... and the people of God, - then or now, - cannot expect the Lord's blessing and the Lord's victory if He is not with them. You cannot do the Lord's work in your own strength.

* And they came back to their tents and wept, but their tears did not change the mind of God, - *they* would not listen to Him, so *He* would not listen to them. They had to turn back into the wilderness for another thirty-eight years.

* They brought God's judgement upon themselves ... and often God's people *do* bring God's judgement upon themselves. Churches close and testimonies fade because God's people are disobedient.

CONCLUSION

* These people had no excuse. God spent almost a year when He **taught** them the manner in which He was to be worshipped and to be served.

* But these people were stubborn, and when they moved on Moses became **fraught** because they ignored the Law of God and the people themselves became **fraught** also because you cannot be happy if you profess to love Christ and yet are disobedient to His Word and out of step with His people, - *you cannot be happy!*

* You cannot get to where God has for you to be if you don't go there with Him. These people were holding back the blessing God had for them to enjoy.

* It was not the enemy, - the Anakim, - who were keeping them out, it was their own disbelief and disobedience. God **brought** them to the edge, but *they* would go no further.

* Yes, sometimes, - as they said here in v.28, - it can be **our brethren** who 'discourage our hearts'. And yes, on the Day of Pentecost everything that was done for God was successful because it was done by those who were of one accord, - united and working together in the work of the Lord ... But, don't you notice here that the Lord kept the work going in the hearts and minds of just four men, - Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua ... two old men and two young fellows! God keeps the fire burning in the hearts of His faithful people.

* God can do more with a few than He is willing to do with a multitude.

* When we look around us and we see those who ought to be faithful along with us ... and they are absent ... it can discourage, but here is a promise I hold on to in this place, - and I shall hold on to it until the Lord shows me otherwise or until He calls me away, Zech. 4:10 who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice ... I Cor. 1:27 God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

* **When the enemy seems to become too strong** ... turn away from looking at the enemy and look to God! Remember this, Rom. 3:33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? ... 34 Who is he that condemneth? ... 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... 37 in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

* Never forget what king David said to the mighty warrior, the battle is the Lord's (I Sam. 17:47).

* And how do you fight the enemy to win? You fight him with the greatest weapon in the arsenal of the believer, - you fight Him with the Word of God, because it alone Heb. 4:12 is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit ... Rev. 19:15 out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

* **When the enemy becomes too strong**, - be like Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua. See the enemy as defeated in the will and plan of God and keep your eyes focused upon the Captain of our salvation.

* And indeed, be confident and trusting in this ... I Cor. 15:57 thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.