

"The Lord Would Not Listen To Your Voice"

What's the godly response to sin in your life? When you find God addressing some sin in your life, what's the right response? Well, simply put, it's repentance. But what does that look like? What does godly repentance look like?

Well, this is the general topic we'll be addressing in our passage for today. The nation of Israel is being confronted with their sin. God confronts this nation today with their sin of unbelief. How would they respond?

Recall we saw two weeks ago Israel's problem. They had finally arrived at the Promised Land. They were about to finally take hold of the land. But then they sent out spies who came back and reported how fierce the enemy was. Their faith faltered. They didn't believe God. They didn't trust that he would bring them safely into the Land as he had promised. We saw how their unbelief resulted in sinful murmuring. They were grumbling and complaining against the Lord. The end result was disobedience. They didn't go up to take the Land as God had commanded them. They just sat their pitying themselves and blaming God.

Well today we're going to focus on God's response to their disobedience, and on Israel's response to the action that God takes. And so, first we'll see God's action against Israel because of their unbelief. Then second we'll see how Israel has a misplaced repentance. Ultimately we'll think about what godly repentance ought to look like. But we'll do that from the perspective of Jesus Christ. We'll see how our repentance is ultimately effective because of Jesus.

And so let's begin by looking first at God's action against Israel's unbelief. Look with me at verse 34. It says that the Lord heard the sound of their words, and he was angry. This is referring of course back to verse 27. The people had murmured in their tents against the Lord. They might have thought the murmuring was done in private, but God heard it. God knows our sins, even our secret ones.

And so God's anger is aroused. This is a righteous anger. God is angry about the sin that's been committed against him. He's rightfully angry that the people didn't obey him as their covenant Lord. He's angry that the people didn't trust God's good promise. He speaks pretty boldly about them in verse 35. He calls them an evil generation. The book of Hebrews confirms that in Hebrews chapter 3. It says that God tested these Israelites in the wilderness and they showed their true colors. They didn't believe in God. They were characterized as an evil generation because they were a generation that didn't believe. Hebrews says that God's judgment against them here was an expression of wrath. Well that's what we see here. Wrath is another name for anger. God's righteous anger is being expressed here toward this unbelieving generation.

And so God issues his verdict. And he does it in a very solemn way. Verse 34 tells us that God took an oath. God of course doesn't lie, so when he says something we don't need to doubt it. But when the God of all truth takes an oath, then you know it's something serious. When God takes an oath,

it's very similar to him entering into a covenant. In both, he's very formally letting everyone know what he is binding himself to do. And here the binding verdict is in the form of a judgment against Israel.

We see the decision in verse 35. This generation would not enter the Promised Land. The promise given to the patriarchs which was about to be fulfilled, will now be delayed a generation.

Interestingly, it seems Moses is grouped along with this evil generation in verse 37. Now we know from Numbers chapter 20 that the fundamental reason why Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land was from a separate incident. Later, Moses would disobey a command from God, and God in turn would discipline Moses by not allowing him to enter the Land. God's emphasis to Moses at that time is that someone other than him would be the one to lead the people into the Promised Land. He had not upheld God's Word as holy before the people, and so someone else would be the leader to bring the people into the Promised Land. And yet here in verse 37, as Moses now reflects back 40 years before to this sin of the people, Moses somehow places his fate along with them. It's as if Moses realizes that his sin many years later only served to identify him with this sinful generation. Now certainly Moses was not the one who committed the sin here. He had even tried to convince the people to stop complaining against God and instead obey his command to go up and take the land. But in verse 37, Moses sees that his fate is the same as the rest of this generation. Looking back, his later sin in breaking God's command showed his identity with this rebellious generation. And so in reflecting on this judgment, it's as if Moses connects this incident with his later sin against God, and shows their shared verdict. They would not enter the earthly Promised Land.

But God did have some exceptions to this verdict. Caleb and Joshua for starters. In the original account of this even in Numbers, we see that Caleb and Joshua were both part of the twelve spies. And they were the only ones who came back of the spies that were willing to go take the land. In other words, the spies who came back were all afraid and scared, and tried to convince the people to not obey God's command to take the land. Only Caleb and Joshua were willing to go up. In Numbers 14 they actually pleaded with the people to not be afraid but to trust God. But of course the people ignored them. And so God says here that they would an exception to God's verdict. They and their families would be allowed to enter the Promised Land. Joshua himself would be the one to lead the people after Moses.

The other exception was the younger generation. God gives them a pass on this. He doesn't hold them accountable to this specific sin, because it wasn't they who had committed it. They obviously weren't the ones murmuring against God. They hadn't doubted God. They weren't even old enough to know what was going on here. And so God would keep his promise that he made to bring Abraham's offspring into the Promised Land. But he would bring in this younger generation, not the older one. God points out the irony to them in verse 39. The people had complained that God would let their children be killed if they tried to take over the Land. Now God tells them, that their children won't be victims, but instead they'll be the victors. They'll be the ones to finally taste of this promised land of milk and honey.

And so after God gives them this verdict, God then gives them a new command. Verse 40. "Turn and take your journey." Sound familiar? Well back in verse 7 of this chapter, God had told them, "Turn and take your journey." At that point, God was telling them to set out for a quick eleven day journey from

Mount Sinai to the Promised Land. Now they have a new journey to go on. God has a new plan now for their life. They would have to turn and go back into the wilderness. Now this probably sounded like the worst possible thing. They had been scared to go up into the Promised Land, but they probably thought the idea of going back into the wilderness was even worse. It was probably a revolting thought. Verse 19 had said that the wilderness was terrible. I'm sure that's the last place they wanted to go. But that's what their God was now commanding them to do.

So how did Israel respond? Did they repent of their sin? Well, at a very quick glance it might look like they did. But what we see is that they have here a very misplaced repentance. Their initial response in verse 41 is a confession of sin. They don't waste any time after God's verdict. They immediately answered that they sinned against the Lord. Well, that initial confession is good. Certainly that's one part of repentance. Godly repentance acknowledges where we have sinned. But of course, godly repentance is more than just confession. Godly repentance turns away from the former sin and looks toward obedience. Repentance involves not only confessing that your former actions were wrong, but it includes a resolve that your new actions will head in the right direction. The fruit of this sort of genuine repentance is new obedience. Now it won't be perfectly executed, as people who struggle with sin. But certainly biblical repentance should have a real desire to see a turn away from sin to obedience.

Well, at first glance, it might even look like that's what Israel is doing here. Remember, part of their sin was that they wouldn't go up to fight the enemy as God had commanded. Verse 21, God commanded them to go up and fight the enemy. Verse 26, the people would not go up. Well, after the people acknowledge that they sinned, in verse 41 they proceed to go up and fight against the enemy. They say, "Okay, okay, we were wrong that we didn't go up and fight, but we are going now." This reminds me of what children like to do. When Mom or Dad tells them to do something, they don't do it, until the hand of discipline is about to fall on them, and then suddenly they change their tone and finally start to comply. That's called delayed obedience. Charles Spurgeon said that "Delayed obedience is disobedience" (Spurgeon, "The Obedience of Faith"). I think that's right. If we know it bothers us when our children delay obedience, then we ought to think of how God considers our own delayed obedience to the things he calls us to do.

And yet for Israel here, I think the issue is even more than just delayed obedience. You see, it may seem like they are trying to repent by their delayed willingness to finally go up and fight. But don't miss verse 40. God's command had changed. God had now given them a new command. They had to go back into the wilderness. Their attempt at late obedience was irrelevant now. Since God had given them a new command now, real repentance means that they should follow this new command.

You see, that's the issue here. This is why their repentance is misplaced. It's not sufficient here for them now to try to go up and fight. God even tries to warn them about that in verse 42. His warning is an expression of God's love. They of course end up ignoring that and have to learn the hard way through military defeat. What could have been a sort of biblical holy war, turns into a very unholy war. God says that now, in light of his new command, he would not be with them if they went up to fight now. God would be with them on the journey back into the wilderness, but not if they go up to fight. Well, that's very much descriptive of their state. Their misplaced repentance reveals their real issue again. They're still operating

from a lack of faith and obedience in God. Real repentance here would have meant that they confess that their first action was sinful, which they did, but then start afresh in striving to obey God from then on. But instead, as soon as they confess their sin in verse 41, they then proceed to disobey God immediately. God's new command was to go back into the wilderness. Only through heeding that command would they be bearing fruit in keeping with their repentance. Instead they show their repentance to be lacking.

And then after their failed attempt to fight the Amorites, we still see a lacking repentance. They come back in verse 45 lamenting. They weep before the LORD. But look at God's response in verse 45. "But the Lord would not listen to your voice nor give ear to you." Wow. God ignores their laments. I said earlier that confession of sins was an important part of repentance. That's true. Well, lamenting over our sin is also an important part of our repentance. Certainly that's true. Maybe that's what Israel should have done originally instead of trying so presumptuously to attack the Amorites. But you see they still have the same problem with their repentance. It's still not resulting in new obedience. Biblical repentance turns away from sin toward obedience. The fruit of repentance yields new obedience. But look at verse 46. It tells it all. It might seem like just a little historical note by the narrator. But it tells volumes about the state of their repentance. It says, "So you remained in Kadesh many days." It's not until after that when we start out in verse 1 of chapter 2 that we see the people *finally* start to obey. Chapter 2, verse 1, then we turned and journeyed into the wilderness. And so the people lay there weeping before the Lord, lamenting over their situation, but not responding in obedience. Finally in chapter 2 we see them finally begin to obey God's new command to go back into the wilderness. Finally at that point we begin to see something more like biblical repentance.

Now it would be easy to stop right here, just beating up on the Israelites. It'd be easy just to point the finger at them as if we are so much better than them. But put yourselves in their shoes. From the perspective of the earthly Promised Land, they evidently had committed an unforgivable sin. God swore an oath. He was not going to change his mind. They would not enter the earthly Promised Land. God would guide them and be with them through the tough wilderness for the next 40 years, but he would not let them enter the Promised Land.

And yet as tragic as this was for them, this whole story points to the need for Christ. They needed Christ, and we need Christ. They might not be allowed to enter the earthly Promised Land through Moses, but they could still look to enter the heavenly Promised Land through Christ. Moses hadn't been able to lead them into the earthly Promised Land. As wonderful of a leader that he was, his fate was the same as theirs at the end of the day. But look again at verses 36-38. These verses highlight the heroes of Israel in this passage. Notice how God splits up telling us about Caleb and Joshua. They'd both be allowed to enter the Promised Land, but for some reason God tells us first about Caleb, then mentions Moses, and then tells us about Joshua. Why not lump Caleb and Joshua together, and then mention Moses? Well, I think this is for rhetorical effect. This sort of sandwiching in the Hebrew is common for effect. By surrounding Moses with the reference of Caleb and Joshua, it calls us to contrast Caleb and Joshua versus Moses.

On the one hand you have Moses' inability to enter the land. But on the other hand you have Joshua and Caleb. Moses' failure is contrasted with their success. Caleb it says wholly followed the LORD. Joshua would cause

the people to finally inherit the Promised Land. Both of these men are a picture of the Christ to come, aren't they? The Christ to come, the sort of leader that the people needed, was one who absolutely, fully, would follow the LORD. Jesus did that in the fullest sense. In the same way, the Christ to come would be someone who would cause the people to inherit the Promised Land. Not the earthly Promised Land - Joshua would do that, but the Christ would cause the people to inherit an eternal heavenly inheritance.

And yet neither Joshua nor Caleb were the promised Christ. God used them in amazing ways. They had traits of the Christ to come. And yet they weren't the Christ. The book of Deuteronomy even tells us that. Even though they are contrasted here with Moses in a positive way, the book of Deuteronomy ends by telling us that God still hadn't raised up a prophet like Moses. Obviously that tells us that Joshua and Caleb, as wonderful as they were, were not even quite the same status of how Moses served God. And yet obviously here in our passage Moses was not the Christ either. As we finish the book of Deuteronomy, we are left looking for someone else yet to come to be the Messiah.

And yet when you complement the positive traits of Caleb and Joshua with the fate of Moses here, we see a fuller picture of the Christ to come. In verse 37 Moses tells us that God was angry with him for their sakes. For the people's sakes. We already said it was a separate incident of sin that kept Moses from entering the Promised Land. But nonetheless, here Moses connects that restriction on him with the people's own sinfulness. There was some way in which Israel's own sinfulness was connected with Moses not being allowed to enter the Promised Land. Moses in a real way shared in the suffering of the people. He bore their reproach. He took on the penalty of their sin.

Sound familiar? There is something said here about each of these three leaders, Joshua, Caleb, and Moses, that Jesus would himself fulfill in the most ultimate sense. Jesus, in a way better than Caleb, would fully follow the LORD. His obedience would be perfect. We call that his active obedience. Jesus, in a way better than Moses, would bear the sins of God's people, substituting in our place on the cross. We call that his passive obedience. And Jesus, because of these two things, through his active and passive obedience was able to do something greater than Joshua, to cause us to inherit heavenly treasure - eternal heavenly life.

God calls us to repent of our sins and turn in faith to him. But do you see how this repentance can only be meaningful because of Jesus? If this one act of disobedience was enough to bar the Israelites from the Promised Land, how much more do all our sins disqualify us from spending an eternity in heaven with God? If all the tears that the people shed here could not bring them forgiveness so that they could enter the earthly Promised Land, what good is our repentance to bring us into heaven? Well, the answer again is Jesus. Because Jesus did what we just said through his active and passive obedience, our repentance can be effective. As we repent of our sins, we can have complete forgiveness and grace because of the new covenant. Because God swore an oath to grant people a heavenly inheritance through the Christ. Repentance is meaningful and effective because Jesus paid the penalty of our sins and fulfilled the obedience that we needed. Our cries of repentance are heard now because of Christ. Our repenting and turning to Christ results in complete forgiveness and restoration, and sets us on the path of new obedience.

The older generation of Israelites here might have been barred from the earthly Promised Land, but this didn't have to mean that they'd be barred from the heavenly Promised Land. Would they stay sulking in disobedience, or would they place their faith in the Christ to come to lead them into a heavenly inheritance? We know Moses did. He was seen with Jesus in his state of glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Well what about you? Have you expressed biblical repentance to turn toward Christ in faith? If you have, then your inheritance is reserved in heaven for you. That means that God is leading you through the wilderness of life to bring you into a heavenly Promised Land. He will bring you safely home.

Saints of God, as we've reflected this morning on godly repentance, I hoped we've all been challenged to look at how we respond to the sins we find God addressing in our life. As Christians, we shouldn't have a lesser view of repentance than they did back in the Old Testament. If turning to Christ in faith has all the benefits we just said, that means that we should all the more seek to have the sort of repentance in our life that God calls us to have. Biblical repentance involves confession of our sins. We should lament and weep over them as well. Doing so by looking to the cross means that we find forgiveness of our sins. But then we ought to turn away from them and look to how we can now start obeying God. We turn those sins over to the cross and seek to now live our lives for Christ.

And so as Christians, when we find God working in our life over a particular sin, what do we do? Well, I hope that we respond with this sort of biblical repentance. You see, for Israel, this was an interesting situation for them. Was this action by God an expression of fatherly discipline, or an expression of God's condemning judgment? Well, for someone like Moses, we know that this was God's fatherly discipline, because we see him in heaven, so we know that's the case. For so many other Israelites, we are less sure of what ended up happening to them. Surely many of them never did truly repent from their unbelief and found eternal damnation when they died.

You see, when we see God working over an area of sinful rebellion in our life, it could be his fatherly discipline over a believer who is struggling. Or, it might be judgment to an unbeliever that has just been going through the motions. As an outsider looking at someone else going through such a struggle, we can't know what's really going on in their heart. But when we find ourselves in such a situation, we need to look at our hearts. A sign that you really are a believer who God is lovingly disciplining is that we respond to sin with real biblical repentance. That's what a Christian does by God's grace when God alerts us to a sin. It doesn't mean that we have completely victory over that sin, never to commit it again. But we do strive against it by God's power. We do look for biblical repentance and growth.

And that means we don't try to second guess God. We don't try to fix a past sin with more sin. Just obey. Look for new obedience. Turn the car around from your old way of rebellion and start heading toward godliness. If you can make some restitution in the way you sinned, then great, but only if it's keeping with the new direction that God is setting out for you in your life.

As we close today, I'd like to remind you of the immediate context for this passage. This passage is not situated at the original rebellion of these Israelites. This passage is *after* the forty years of wandering. This is *after* the old generation had died off. And so this was a message to the new generation. As this new generation was about to be faced with some of the same temptations over entering the Promised Land, how would they respond?

Would they doubt God? Would they murmur against him? When they sinned, would they seek biblical repentance? Moses was retelling this story for the benefit of the next generation. And we are hearing it today for the same reason. This is part of our family heritage.

God has given us this biblical heritage that we too would learn from the past. That we might find our strength and faith and confidence in the certain promises of God. Promises that we see already but not yet fulfilled now with the coming of Christ. That Christ has come to bring us into an eternal inheritance. And so, as we see the Israelites' struggling with a misplaced repentance here, may we be quick to analyze the state of our own repentance. That we might find ourselves challenged today like the next generation would have. This may be the struggles that our forefather's had. How now we will follow the Lord in our life? How can our repentance be pleasing to the Lord, all the more now that our Lord Jesus has come into hearts and lives! Amen.

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