

Daring to Doubt God!

If you were making a list of the most fragile things in the world, what would you include? One list that I found began with, silence, a soap bubble, a butterfly wing, and a spider web.

<https://thingdb.io/things-that-are-fragile/>

Other sites suggested the second most fragile thing in the world would be the **human heart** (our emotions), but the absolute most fragile thing would be our **ego (our pride)**. While admitting that our ego is way too fragile, I would suggest that even more fragile than this would be **our faith, our willingness to trust something or someone else with our well being;** that of course also makes **faith the most precious thing we possess; which is why our faith is the one thing God wants us to entrust to His care.**

The book of Hebrews (11:1) tells us that *faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. And ...*

without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11:1-6

Another reason why faith is our most important possession, is because with whom we place our faith will determine how much we will enjoy this life, as well as where we will spend our eternal life... *without faith it is impossible to please God.* Which sadly is what the story of Israel's refusal to enter the Promised Land is all about; their lack of faith; their continued unwillingness to trust God's promises.

The basic story as you learned it in Sunday School can be found in the book of Numbers, chapters 13 and 14, but if you want to get the back story, you also need to read Deuteronomy chapter 2 (vs.22-45); together they give a far more complex tale than what you had previously learned.

The portion of the story you already know is that after some 2½ years of walking and camping the tribes of Israel reach the border of the Promised Land and send in 12 spies to check out the region. Forty days later the spies return with an enormous cluster of grapes as proof that the land is indeed fertile – *flowing with milk and honey* – but it is also filled with fortified cities and inhabited by a race of giants. Joshua and Caleb, two of the spies say this is no problem, since God has given us this land, let's go take it! But the other ten exaggerate the dangers saying, this *land devours its inhabitants* and compared with the giants, *we felt like grasshoppers.*

Who do you think the people listened to?

Scripture records

*Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, 'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! **Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our***

*wives and our little ones will become slaves; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?’ So they said to one another, ‘**Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt.**’ (Numbers 14:1-4)*

Did you just hear that?!!

Having walked with God for over 2½ years, having witnessed miracle after miracle proving God’s ability to deliver on His promises, now at the border of the Promised Land they reject His promise of victory and prepare to head back to slavery in Egypt.

In response, Moses and Aaron fall on their faces in grief and prayers, while Joshua and Caleb plead with the people “*not to rebel against the Lord.*” The peoples’ response was to pick up rocks with which to stone them (vs. 9-10).

This is when God personally appears on the scene... *the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites.* With all the Israelites looking on, God asks Moses, ‘*How long will this people despise me? And how **long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?*** (Numbers 14:11)

God then tells these faithful four to get out of the way, as he intends to wipe out the rest of the Israelites in mass and start over with them; *I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they* (14:17).

Once again, as he had done before with the Golden Calf, Moses pleads with God for the life of the Israelites pointing out that if God destroyed them in mass, then the rest of the world would think He did so because of His failure to accomplish His promise of giving them the Land. Moses concludes, *Please forgive this people according to the greatness of Your steadfast love, just as You have pardoned them from Egypt even until now* (14:19)

So a second time, God promises not to wipe out the Israelites in mass, but instead now condemns this faithless multitude to a forty year pilgrimage through the wilderness until everyone of those who had refused to enter had died.

*Your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness for forty years and shall suffer for **your faithlessness** until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness... I will bring them in and they shall know the land you have despised* (14:33 & 31).

The Israelites’ lack of faith in God’s proven abilities to deliver on His promises has now condemned their children to forty more years of homeless walking.

Now here are a few more details from this story that you may not have known. Hearing themselves sentenced to 40 more years of wandering, the people change their mind, thinking that perhaps they really can take the land. So they assemble an army and tell Moses. *Here we are, we will go up to the place which the Lord has promised, for we have sinned.*

Moses replies, *Why do you continue to transgress the commands of the Lord? You will not succeed. Do not go up for the Lord is not with you because you have turned back from following the Lord, you will fall by the sword* (14:39-43).

Moses replied that their first act of faithless rebellion had now sentenced them to 40 more years of homelessness, so do not compound your sin by now refusing to accept God's judgment. Of course you can probably guess how the people responded. While Moses and the Ark of the Covenant stayed in camp, an army of Israelites went up any way and were soundly defeated by the locals who chased them all the way back to camp.

Now fast forward 40 years. As their grown children have once again returned to the Promised Land and are preparing to enter, Moses tells them the rest of the story. It seems that the original idea of first sending spies to check out the land, had not come from God, but from the leaders of the People. Moses says that he had told their parents,

See, the Lord your God has given the land to you; go up, take possession, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you; do not fear or be dismayed.'

[But] all of you came to me and said, 'Let us [first] send men ahead of us to explore the land for us and bring back a report to us regarding the route by which we should go up and the cities we will come to.' (1:21-22)

So the Israelites failure of faith had not begun with the spies' bad report... but as they arrived at the Promised Land, they were already fearful – not trusting God's ability to protect them. For 2½ years they had followed God's pillar of cloud and fire, they had witnessed multiple times in multiple ways, God's ability to deliver on His promises and yet they still refused to trust Him.

At the threshold of the Promised Land they were now preparing to stone Moses and return to a slave's life in Egypt. Their lack of faith thus dooming their children to 40 more years of wilderness wandering, but at least at the end of the time they would still be free and not slaves in Egypt. And can you imagine how tough and tenacious these Israelite children had become through 40 years of desert life; the residents of the land now had good reason to fear them.

Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:1-6). It is interesting to note that while the faith chapter in Hebrews has much to say about Moses' faith and even credits the Israelites faith for their willingness to cross through the Red Sea, the next instance of faith it records is when their children trusted God to tear down the walls of Jericho. During the 40+ years that Israel wandered through the wilderness, they did nothing worth recording in the faith chapter of Hebrews.

Now here is what I hope you take home with you from today's story of faithlessness at the border of the Promised land; it is a subtle message so please listen carefully.

You may recall that the book of Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish believers who may have begun to doubt or simply take their faith in Christ for granted. Not surprisingly, it is filled with examples from Israel's Exodus journey to show what Jesus offers is "better" than what the Israelites saw in the wilderness. Because he lives forever, according to the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is a better high priest than Aaron. Because in Heaven He entered the real Holy of Holies – rather than just a tented replica - making atonement once for all with His own blood, Jesus has offered the better sacrifice for our sins. Because the covenant of forgiveness

by faith is better than the covenant of forgiveness by law that Moses was given –Jesus is even greater than Moses.

Just before his death, Moses promised the people

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. Deuteronomy 18:15



All the apostles accepted Jesus as this new and greater Moses. As Peter preached to the crowds in Jerusalem shortly after Pentecost.

Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out from the people." Acts 3:22-23

So what the Book of Hebrews was trying to teach was that not only were the Exodus experiences of Moses and the Israelites a prophetic model, a metaphor, for the person and work of Jesus and His followers yet to come, BUT the interaction of God with the people of Moses' day should serve as a lesson for our approach to God these days.

Thus the book of Hebrews concludes beginning in chapter 12, verse 18 – and since this is a lengthy portion of scripture I encourage you to open your Bibles and read along with me (in the Blue pew Bibles it is on page 227)

*You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear.") **But** you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

Moses and the Israelites came to Mt. Sinai where they received the law and proved themselves incapable of keeping the law – and as we have learned through these stories – of trusting God to protect them. BUT we have come to something better, Mt. Zion, the city of God

and the home of the redeemed where our new Moses, High priest better than Aaron and now our savior, Jesus Christ continues to live.

So here is our warning,

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

The Israelites lack of faith and rejection of Moses and God on the border of the Promised Land, which exiled them to death in the wilderness, now serves as our cautionary example to not reject Jesus who continues to speak to us today; not to be as faithless as they were. For the Promised Land we are walking towards is no less than God's unshakable Kingdom – one day come to earth! And the only acceptable worship we can give to Him is our faith, our reverence, our awe. While our rejection can only lead to God as a consuming fire.

The moral of this story is, that without faith it is impossible to please God. Neither reject Him, nor take God for granted, so don't let your lack of faith block your entrance to God's promised land; His kingdom come.

So where are you today?

With the Hebrews of old, who refused to trust God?

Or with the Hebrews of Jesus' day, who were at risk of taking God for granted?

How has your faith, your reverence, your awe, changed your pilgrim life?

Where do you want to live happily every after?

Let's pray about this.