

Deuteronomy 9:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Likewise when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, Go up and possess the land which I have given you; then ye rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God, and ye believed him not, nor hearkened to his voice.

Analysis

Likewise when the LORD sent you from Kadeshbarnea, saying, Go up and possess the land which I have given you; then ye rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God, and ye believed him not, nor hearkened unto his voice. The rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea represents Israel's decisive failure - when commanded to enter the Promised Land, they refused in unbelief. This sin cost an entire generation their inheritance.

The phrase possess the land which I have given you emphasizes the certainty of God's promise. The land was already theirs by divine decree; they needed only to take what God had granted. Their refusal demonstrated fundamental unbelief in God's word and power.

Three progressive failures are identified: ye rebelled (active disobedience), believed him not (lack of faith), and hearkened not (refused to hear). Unbelief manifests in rebellion, and rebellion stems from failure to believe God's promises. Hebrews 3-4 later expounds this incident as warning against hardening hearts through unbelief.

Reformed theology sees here the essential nature of faith - not mere intellectual assent but trusting obedience that acts on God's word. Saving faith always results in obedience; faith without works is dead.

Historical Context

The Kadesh-Barnea rebellion occurred after the twelve spies returned from reconnoitering Canaan. Ten spies gave a negative report focusing on obstacles; only Joshua and Caleb urged faithful obedience. The people believed the fearful majority rather than God's promise.

As consequence, God decreed that generation would die in the wilderness. Only their children, along with Joshua and Caleb, would enter the Promised Land forty years later.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does unbelief manifest in practical disobedience to God's clear commands?
2. What obstacles tempt you to doubt God's promises despite His proven faithfulness?
3. Why is listening to faithless voices more natural than trusting God's word?
4. How does the Kadesh rebellion illustrate the principle that unbelief excludes from rest (Hebrews 3-4)?
5. What does it mean that God had already 'given' them the land before they possessed it?

Interlinear Text

וּבָשֵׁל כ	יהָהָה	מִקְדָּשׁ אֶתְכֶּם	בָּרְנָע
sent	Likewise when the LORD	H853	you from Kadeshbarnea
H7971	H3068	H0	H6947
רֹאשׁ וְעַלְוָה לְאַמְרָה	אַתָּה וְרֹשׁ וְעַלְוָה	אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ	נָתָתִי
saying	Go up and possess	H853	which I have given
H559	H5927	H3423	H5414
לְכָה דְּבָרָה	אַתָּה תִּפְתַּחְרֵר וְ	וְאַתָּה	וְ
H0	you then ye rebelled	H853	against the commandment
H4784		H6310	
וְלֹא לֹא בְּאֶמְנָתְמָם	אַל הַיְכָם	וְלֹא לֹא בְּאֶמְנָתְמָם	וְלֹא לֹא
Likewise when the LORD	your God	H3808	and ye believed
H3068	H430	H539	H0
וְלֹא בְּשִׁמְעָתָה מִבְּלִלָּה			H3808
him not nor hearkened	to his voice	H6963	
H8085			

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 4:2 (Faith): For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Isaiah 63:10 (Parallel theme): But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.

Psalms 78:22 (Faith): Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation: