

It Is Written

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Graves In The Wilderness

By Joe Price

Did you ever walk through a cemetery and take time to read the inscriptions on the headstones? Some are poignant, some are humorous, and some just give the name and dates of birth and death. But, all of them are reminders that life is brief, death is sure, and how we live will be remembered in eternity (Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:7). Truly, a life lived only for this world, without “fearing God and keeping His commandments,” is “vanity of vanities” (Ecclesiastes 12:8).

No more vivid example of this exists than the death of the Israelites whom God led out of slavery. The Scriptures explain why that generation did not enter Canaan: “For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Hebrews 3:16-19).

Imagine with me for a moment the enormous number of graves that were dug in the wilderness of Sinai during the forty years Israel wandered there. Before leaving Mt. Sinai, a standing army of 603,550 men over twenty years of age was numbered (Numbers 1:3, 45-46). Accounting for women, children, and the elderly, we are well within reason to believe upwards of 2 million Israelites left Egypt bound for Canaan. Yet, only two men of those above twenty years old enter the land; Joshua and Caleb (Deuteronomy 1:35-36).

A conservative estimate based on these numbers suggests over a million deaths occurred during the period of wandering. Sinai began the graveyard of rebels — each grave a landmark to blessings wasted and the tragic fruit of sin.

The rebellion of Israel in the wilderness has been written to teach us not to follow their example of rebellion (Romans 15:4). We do well to ponder those wilderness graves “lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience” (Hebrews 4:11). Let’s imagine the headstones of those buried in the wilderness. They teach us valuable lessons and warn us not to fall away from God.

“Here lies Unbelief: Disobedient to the end.”

The sin of unbelief reveals itself in disobedience (Heb. 4:18-19). In other words, disobedience occurs when there is a lack of faith. Just like Israel in the wilderness, a Christian can develop “an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). Although Israel saw God’s mighty works in Egypt and walked through the parted waters of the Red Sea, although God gave them water from the rocks, and quail and manna from heaven, still their hearts did not trust God. Although our sins have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus, we can fall back into sin through fearful, faltering and failing faith. Therefore, “watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13). It is possible to deceive ourselves about our faith. If we are not obeying the Lord, our faith is not strong. There were graves in the wilderness because Israel did not believe and obey God with her whole heart.

“Here lies Rebellion: Irreverent in life, forgotten in death.”

Israel greatly dishonored God with her idolatry, even though He delivered her, protected her, provisioned her, and guided her. Israel repaid God’s faithfulness by breaking His law and worshiping a

golden calf, even as He was giving Moses His law on two tablets of stone (Exodus 32:1-8, 15-16). Strikingly parallel are Christians who give lip-service to the gospel of Christ, yet serve the gods they have made: covetousness, pleasure, and self-satisfaction. Oh yes, idolatry is still alive and well. God will not be disrespected; He is holy and we must respect His holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16). We must honor God with God-fearing priorities in our lives. Where there is godly fear there is a yearning to love and obey the Lord with all the heart, knowing that God accepts those who fear Him and work righteousness (Acts 10:34-35). When we disrespect the Bible, the Word of God, we disrespect God. Such irreverence will prepare for us a grave in the wilderness.

“Here lies Lust: Consumed by evil desire.”

Thousands upon thousands in Israel craved evil things, and were buried in the desert (Numbers 4, 34; 25:1-9; 1 Corinthians 10:6-8). Will we ever learn that evil things always promise more than they can deliver (Hebrews 11:25; 2 Peter 2:19)? The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes turn the saint’s attention away from the Holy One to the fleeting folly of the world’s unholiness (1 John 2:15-17). When a person yields to the intense cravings of sexual sins, he or she is often reduced to poverty, especially spiritual poverty (cp. Proverbs 6:26). Fill yourself with the desire for good things, and God will fill you up.

“Here lies Certainty: He reaped what he sowed.”

God did not treat Israel unjustly: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). While we defend our freewill to “do what we think is right,” we have to acknowledge God’s punishment when we choose what is against the will of God (Galatians 6:8; John 12:48). We cannot sow sin and reap heaven’s eternal life. This compels us to “test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” so that our grave will not be in the wilderness of sin (2 Thessalonians 3:21-22).

Compasses And Bearings

By Kyle Campbell

My son is really interested in his compass. We bought him the official Boy Scout model. I’ve tried to show him how it is used it for determining one’s bearing.

In a way, this is not unlike the Bible. Samuel, in his address to the nation, said, “If ye will fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God” (1 Samuel 12:14). Someone who is going to please God will do so by walking in a direction that agrees with God.

Proverbs 15:19 says, “The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain.” In short, you need to stay on the right path. Jesus said, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). Satan will try to pull you away; will you give in? Use the scriptures daily to find your true bearings.