

# When Faith Fails...

## Summary and Goal

The Israelites failed the test of faith as they were called to enter the promised land. In the example of the Israelites, we see what it looks like when we fail to have faith. When faith fails, we start looking at our strength instead of God's and we forget the power God has demonstrated in the past as well as His future promise. When our faith fails, we need a faithful representative who will plead to God in our place.

### **Main Passages**

Numbers 13:1-2,26-33

Numbers 14:1-20

### **Session Outline**

1. When faith fails, we start looking at our strength instead of God's (Num. 13:1-2,26-33).
2. When faith fails, we forget God's past power and His future promise (Num. 14:1-12).
3. When faith fails, we need a faithful representative to plead for us (Num. 14:13-20).

### **Theological Theme**

God punishes and redeems the faithless for the glory of His name.

### **Christ Connection**

When Israel was tempted in the wilderness, the people failed to trust the Lord and faced 40 years of wandering. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days, He remained faithful. Through His obedience, He became the representative who pleads for us before the Lord.

### **Missional Application**

God calls us not to conquer the nations but to take the gospel to them no matter the obstacles, knowing that God's power is greater than our own.

## Session Plan

# When Faith Fails...

## Session 1

### **Pack Item 1: The Promised Land**

Display this poster in a place that will help group members follow the storyline of Scripture, to remember where we've been and where we are going.

### **Introduction Option**

Before your group meets, enlist someone to share a testimony about how a decision made affected the course of his or her life. Then lead the group to understand that the decision the Israelites made not to follow through in faith cost them their inheritance in the land.

### **Pack Item 2: Joshua's Life**

Display this item prior to the group meeting. Use it to put this session and later ones in context.

### **? For Further Discussion**

Why is it important to recognize the change in our identity through Christ?

How does that identity help our faith not to fail?

## Introduction

Begin with the idea of moments of decision that come into our lives, and connect this to the Israelites' decision on the edge of the promised land (leader p. 10; personal study guide [PSG] p. 10).

- ? When have you faced a decision that required faith? What helped or hindered your faith during that time?

Use 1 Corinthians 10 to help group members see how the story of the Israelites was given as an example for us (leader p. 10). Then summarize the session (leader p. 10; PSG p. 10).

## 1. When faith fails, we start looking at our strength instead of God's (Num. 13:1-2,26-33).

Briefly remind the group of the Lord's covenant with Abraham (leader p. 11). Then read Numbers 13:1-2,26-33. *Ask group members to pair up for a moment and answer the questions about the spies' report from the passage, using the chart in the PSG; call for some responses* (leader p. 11; PSG p. 11). Further explain the spies' task and their report to the Israelites, as needed (leader p. 12).

Point out that the spies had seen firsthand what they would have if the promise were fulfilled, but fear of the enemy caused them to lose their faith. Emphasize that only through faith in God and His work do we gain a true understanding of the world and ourselves (leader pp. 12-13; PSG p. 12).

## 2. When faith fails, we forget God's past power and His future promise (Num. 14:1-12).

Read Numbers 14:1-12. Specify how this account serves as a warning for us (leader pp. 13-14). Emphasize the Israelites' total lack of memory of all God had done (leader p. 14; PSG p. 13).

- ? When do you find it easiest for your feelings and fears to overwhelm your faith?
- ? What do you turn to for strength in moments when your faith is faltering? Why?

Compare our experience with that of the Israelites facing insurmountable odds. Note that we must view our circumstances in light of what we've experienced in Christ (leader p. 14; PSG pp. 13-14).

- When have you faced a difficult circumstance similar to a time when God delivered you in the past?
- Did reflecting on God's work in your life in the past give you strength for the present trial? Why or why not?

Mention that each time God works in our lives, it is an opportunity to trust Him more deeply. Remind the group that the Holy Spirit personally resides in believers to give a witness of His ongoing work (leader p. 15; PSG p. 14).

- Why does the Spirit dwelling in us give us an advantage over the Israelites whenever our faith begins to falter?

### 3. When faith fails, we need a faithful representative to plead for us (Num. 14:13-20).

Acknowledge Moses' need to intercede for the people in this passage, and then ask for a volunteer to read Numbers 14:13-20. Further describe Moses' acting as a representative for his people by pleading with God to display His power in His ability to forgive sin rather than appealing to the Israelites' ability to be faithful (leader pp. 15-16; PSG p. 15).

- What characteristics of God did Moses mention when pleading for mercy?
- God could have displayed His power in judgment. Why do you think Moses asked for mercy?

Show how Moses gave us a picture of what was to come—the perfect representative we have in Jesus Christ. And because of Jesus, we now are able to represent God before the people of the world who do not know Him (leader p. 17; PSG pp. 16-17).

- As the people's representative, Moses showed interest in what "the nations" would think if God destroyed the Israelites. How can the church show interest in seeing that the glory of God's forgiveness is known among the nations?

### Conclusion

Express that while the world is filled with insurmountable obstacles, the good news is that God is pleased to rescue us from our sin, our fear, and our doubt through our Great High Priest, King Jesus (leader p. 17; PSG p. 17). *Apply the truths of this session with "His Mission, Your Mission" (PSG p. 18).*

### Point 2 Option

Before the group arrives, place a tear sheet on the wall with Psalm 77:11-12 written on it. As group members arrive, have them write down a time on the tear sheet that the Lord demonstrated His faithfulness in their lives.

Refer to people's responses and encourage explanations as you work through the content and questions in Point 2.

### ? For Further Discussion

What are some specific examples from our past of how we, like the Israelites, increase the enemy's size and minimize God's work (leader p. 14; PSG p. 14)?

What must we do to stop minimizing God's work?

**Christ Connection:** When Israel was tempted in the wilderness, the people failed to trust the Lord and faced 40 years of wandering. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days, He remained faithful. Through His obedience, He became the representative who pleads for us before the Lord.

**Missional Application:** God calls us not to conquer the nations but to take the gospel to them no matter the obstacles, knowing that God's power is greater than our own.

## Expanded Session Content

# When Faith Fails...

## Session 1

### Voices from the Culture

“Faithless is he that says farewell when the road darkens.”<sup>1</sup>

—J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973)

## Introduction

Life is hard. Beyond the objective realities that we face in the world, such as disease, natural disasters, and death, there are other complications that happen along the way. Every day is filled with moments for decision-making. Some are simple, and some will change the course of your life.

Moments of decision come frequently in our lives, and the same was true of the people in the Bible. As our journey through the storyline of Scripture continues, we join the children of Israel as they come to the brink of the promised land for the first time. The God who promised to bring salvation to the world through the seed of Abraham has rescued Abraham’s descendants from their slavery in Egypt. After a year in the wilderness, the Israelites have arrived at the doorstep to the land God promised. But before they enter, they are confronted with a decision that requires faith.



When have you faced a decision that required faith? What helped or hindered your faith during that time?

The apostle Paul wrote that the story of the Israelites in the wilderness was given as an example for us (1 Cor. 10). In reading these ancient stories, we see how God is faithful, even when human faithlessness leads to tragedy.

## Session Summary

In this session, we will study the story of the Israelites failing the test of faith as they were called to enter the promised land. In the example of the Israelites, we see what it looks like when we fail to have faith. When faith fails, we start looking at our strength instead of God’s, and we forget the power God has demonstrated in the past as well as His future promise. When our faith fails, we need a faithful representative who will plead to God in our place. As you work through this session, ask the Spirit to examine your heart and grow your sense of gratitude for the greatness of God’s faithfulness.

# 1. When faith fails, we start looking at our strength instead of God's (Num. 13:1-2,26-33).

The Lord once said to Abraham that He would make a great people (the nation of Israel), send them into a great land (Canaan), and provide great blessings through them (Gen. 12:1-3). Centuries later, the Lord was now ready to move this people into the land, but obstacles arose, tempting Israel to look at their own strength instead of God's.

*<sup>1</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them."*

.....  
*<sup>26</sup> And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. <sup>27</sup> And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. <sup>28</sup> However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. <sup>29</sup> The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan."*

*<sup>30</sup> But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it."<sup>31</sup> Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are."<sup>32</sup> So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. <sup>33</sup> And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."*

## Further Commentary

"The report of the scouts began on the positive side with the demonstration of the fruitfulness of the promised land. 'Milk and honey' became the classic description of the abundance of natural flora and fauna of the land of Canaan (Ex. 3:8,17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev. 20:24; Deut. 6:3; 11:9)...The tenor of the report quickly changed to a negative assessment of the possibility of conquering the heavily fortified cities and the numerous inhabitants, which they claimed included giants. The problem was that the people focused on their own strength rather than the power of God. The point of the later victories over the Midianites, Amorites, and Canaanites was to demonstrate God's strength. The power of Israel was never in her armies. Victory came at the hands of the Lord of Hosts...The negative report was circulated by word of mouth. The grumbling grew into greater discontent as the scouts exaggerated the stature and strength of their enemies."<sup>2</sup>

R. Dennis Cole,  
*HCSB Study Bible*

List what the spies reported about the goodness of the land.	List what the spies reported about the obstacles to taking the land.



## Voices from Church History

“Jesus promised his disciples three things—that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy and in constant trouble.”<sup>3</sup>

—William Barclay  
(1907-1978)



## Voices from Church History

“If my attitude be one of fear, not faith, about one who has disappointed me; if I say ‘Just what I expected,’ if a fall occurs, then I know nothing of Calvary Love.”<sup>4</sup>

—Amy Carmichael  
(1867-1951)

Ordinary men were not sent into the land to spy it out. Instead, God wanted leaders from each tribe to do the reconnaissance work. They would see what God was going to deliver and report back to the people. Then, acting on faith, the people could go forward to claim what God had promised.

The early part of the spies’ report could be summarized like this: “It’s better than you can possibly imagine!” The natural resources of the land were like nothing they had seen before. Having lived all of their lives in Egyptian slavery with a brief stint in the wilderness, such abundance was surely overwhelming, like a person living in the perpetual poverty of a third-world nation suddenly being thrust into an American buffet restaurant. Here, the abundant land promised to Abraham was now available to the nation of his descendants.

But as is often the case in the Old Testament, the Israelites faltered in their faith. Right on the heels of describing the land as everything they could hope for, the spies also described why it was impossible to possess. Note the word “however” that shows up in verse 28. With that one word, the spies’ report shifted from the goodness of God’s promise to the difficulty of possessing the land.

Words like large, strong, and fortified were at the top of the spies’ minds. When their faith faltered, they saw an unconquerable force before them. They took their eyes off the promise and put it on their enemies. By the end of the report, they weren’t focusing on the beauty of the land but on the perceived advantage and size of its inhabitants.

The spies had seen firsthand what they would have if the promise were fulfilled, but fear of the enemy caused them to lose their faith. They had let go of their identity as the people of God. They were the people of promise, saved by the one true God and commissioned to take the land God had for them. Instead, they looked at some really large soldiers and made a poor assessment of themselves, as if God were absent—“We seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers” (v. 33).

“*Like grasshoppers*” is how they described themselves, but it was not how the Lord would describe them. To God, the people were His children delivered from slavery and ready to take hold of the land of promise. This shows us that the failure of faith is both losing faith in God’s power and losing a sense of yourself as a child in God’s story of redemption.

Only through faith in God and His work do we gain a true understanding of the world and ourselves. Because of Christ’s redemptive work on our behalf, our identity has changed. We are no longer an enemy, an outsider, a rebel, or lost in the darkness. Instead, we are considered a member of God’s family, His ambassador for Christ, and a child of light.

In the face of the dangers present in the promised land, the spies lost their faith. Only Caleb and Joshua kept their faith and were ready to forge ahead, but they were outnumbered by spies who believed the fortified cities were too great even for God to overcome.

## 2. When faith fails, we forget God's past power and His future promise (Num. 14:1-12).

How did the people respond once their faith began faltering? They didn't reflect on what God had done in the past, neither did they look forward to God's future promise. They were overcome by fear of death and despair. Watch how the author describes their faithlessness:

*<sup>1</sup> Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. <sup>2</sup> And all the people of Israel grumbled 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!" <sup>3</sup> Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" <sup>4</sup> And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt."*

*<sup>5</sup> Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel. <sup>6</sup> And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes <sup>7</sup> and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. <sup>8</sup> If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. <sup>9</sup> Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." <sup>10</sup> Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel.*

*<sup>11</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?" <sup>12</sup> I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."*

When the leaders lost their faith, the people of Israel faced a crisis. Once the majority of spies said there was no hope, the Israelites went from wondering to mourning to outright rebellion. In the heat of the moment, the people's rebellion escalated. They took the position—which can only be described as ridiculous—that they would be better off dead! The people contemplated the merits of having died as slaves in Egypt or having died in the desert on the way to the promised land.

### Further Commentary

"'But all the congregation said to stone them.' This is not simply a mob-lynching (cf. Ex. 17:4; 1 Kings 12:18). The congregation had judicial authority, and stoning was reserved for the punishment of major religious crimes (e.g. Lev. 20:2,27; 24:23; Num. 15:36; Deut. 13:10) and sins within the family which symbolize breaches of the covenant (Deut. 21:21; 22:21,24). Joshua and Caleb have accused them of rebelling against the Lord (9); the congregation rejects this charge as false and proposes to exact the appropriate penalty for false witness. At the critical moment the Lord appears in glory over the tabernacle (cf. Ex. 16:7,10; 24:16-17; Lev. 9:6,23; Num. 16:19,42; 20:6; 1 Kings 8:11). The divine accusation is similar to Joshua's. 'These people treat me with contempt' (NEB; cf. 14:23; 16:30; Deut. 31:20). They will 'not believe in me, in spite of all the signs which I have wrought among them.' By signs are meant the plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the miracles of feeding, and so on (Ex. 7:3; 10:1). Though words for faith and belief in God are fairly rare in the Old Testament, that man must exercise faith in God and his word is a fundamental presupposition of all the writers. To believe in God means to accept all he says and to act accordingly: to trust his promises and obey his commands. Faith makes a man to be counted righteous before God (Gen. 15:6): its absence damns him (cf. Num. 20:12). In this instance God proposes destroying Israel and starting afresh with Moses and his descendants (12)."<sup>5</sup>

—Gordon Wenham

## Further Commentary



“Comparing Caleb to the unbelieving generation that would never see the land of promise, God said: ‘But since My servant Caleb has a different spirit and has followed Me completely, I will bring him into the land where he has gone, and his descendants will inherit it’ ([Num. 14:24]). For 40 years, these 2 men faithfully waited. Joshua became the leader that would follow Moses. Caleb was 80 years old when the day finally came for the Israelites to enter the land. This fulfilled God’s earlier promise. ‘A different spirit’—Caleb believed God; his faith and trust were not in himself, but in God. This faith resulted in his following God completely. Caleb took God at His word and willingly sought to live out that faith through obedience. Faith, faithfulness, and obedience are important qualities in the life of a child of God.”<sup>6</sup>

—George H. Shaddix,  
*Biblical Illustrator*

Here’s a warning for us: the loss of faith includes a loss of good sense. To wish for death when you are on the edge of God’s promise is the result of a faithless heart.

Choosing slavery or death at the moment seemed a better option. They were ready to stone Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb to death and then try their luck crossing the wilderness back to Egypt. Their choice was based on a total lack of memory. All that God had done was somehow no longer in their mind. They neglected the power of God displayed in the past as well as the promise of God for their future.

Moses and Aaron fell down in a posture of repentant prayer. Joshua and Caleb, the two faith-filled spies, tore their clothes as a sign of mourning. They entered into such postures because the rebellion of the people was a sin against God and grievous to the soul. These men wanted to lead their people toward faith in the God who fulfills His promises. Their slavery had been broken. Deliverance of the nation through the wilderness had been assured. The promised land they had awaited was within sight. This was all due to the gracious hand of God.

-  When do you find it easiest for your feelings and fears to overwhelm your faith?
-  What do you turn to for strength in moments when your faith is faltering? Why?

The work of God in the past is not something only for the history books. It is the assurance of what He can do in your present circumstances. As the church, we must also look at our present circumstances from the viewpoint of God’s work in the past and His promise for the future.

God freed the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. As believers, we have been freed from sin. The Israelites were facing insurmountable odds to experiencing victory in Canaan. The temptation we face is also an impossible power to overcome—when we fight on our own. The Israelites faced enemies who were bigger, stronger, and had every perceivable advantage. The church stands against the world, the flesh, and the Devil, who all seem to carry an advantage over us, but this too is just perceived.

When we consider what we face in life, we must view our circumstances in light of what we’ve experienced in Christ. God has empowered believers to face both difficulties and temptations. God’s Spirit works in us so that we can accomplish God’s assignment for us. Looking at the world around us as if it were filled with giants who cannot be overcome is our commentary on both the enemy and God. It increases the enemy’s size and minimizes God’s work. The antidote is to remember what the Lord has done in the past as the basis for our faith in how He will continue to fulfill His Word to us.



- ❓ When have you faced a difficult circumstance similar to a time when God delivered you in the past?
- ❓ Did reflecting on God's work in your life in the past give you strength for the present trial? Why or why not?

To ensure that the people clearly understood the gravity of both their history and their present circumstances, the Lord personally visited them. As Joshua and Caleb bowed down and cried out for the people to remember God's presence among them, God did the work Himself. His glory appeared at the tent of meeting, and God challenged the Israelites to renew their faith.

In verse 11, God asked, "How long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?" This is a question believers should always consider. Every work of God in our lives is an opportunity to trust Him more deeply. It is God's way of helping us grow in our faith and follow Him with greater abandon.

As Christians, we have something the Israelites did not. We have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The presence of God is no longer at a religious, sacred construction. God personally resides in us, as believers in Jesus, to give a witness of His ongoing work. The Holy Spirit's presence with us is a down payment of what He has promised will be fulfilled in the future. He comforts and emboldens us for everyday living. All the while, the Spirit reminds us of the future glory that makes Canaan a mere shadow of God's heavenly dwelling.

- ❓ Why does the Spirit dwelling in us give us an advantage over the Israelites whenever our faith begins to falter?

### 3. When faith fails, we need a faithful representative to plead for us (Num. 14:13-20).

How did the Lord respond to the people's faithlessness? He was ready to destroy them, until Moses began to intercede for his people. God was going to send a devastating plague among the Israelites and restart the building process of His great nation. As the Lord, He held the right to do as He pleased to fulfill His perfect will. So Moses appealed not to the Israelites' goodness but to God's greatness. He lifted up the name of God and reminded God of His character:

#### Voices from Church History

"For faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience."<sup>7</sup>

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

## Further Commentary

“With this foundation laid, Moses takes his entreaty to a second level now based upon God’s attributes of long-suffering, faithfulness, loyal love, and forgiveness, while still maintaining the balance with his justice and righteousness. Moses understood that God’s strength could be magnified through the balanced application of his attributes to their current situation. On one hand he recalled the words of the Decalogue, which spoke of God’s judgment of idolatry lasting to the third and fourth generations of the rebellious, while his loyal love would endure to a thousand generations of the faithful (Ex. 20:5-6). Additionally, he remembered that Yahweh was a gracious God, who through His compassion, abundant love, and long-suffering could forgive the sinful and rebellious (Ex. 34:6-7). So often the God of the Old Testament has been presented errantly and misguidedly as a God of wrath and destruction, while asserting that the God of the New Testament in Jesus was one of mercy and love. The present appeal of Moses demonstrates that the opposite was and is true. It furthermore evidences that Moses’ understanding of God and his nature had advanced to a level of keen discernment that can only come as a result of an intimate relationship with him.”<sup>8</sup>

—R. Dennis Cole

<sup>13</sup> *But Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for you brought up this people in your might from among them,<sup>14</sup> and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.<sup>15</sup> Now if you kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard your fame will say,<sup>16</sup> ‘It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them that he has killed them in the wilderness.’<sup>17</sup> And now, please let the power of the LORD be great as you have promised, saying,<sup>18</sup> ‘The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.’<sup>19</sup> Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now.”*


<sup>20</sup> *Then the LORD said, “I have pardoned, according to your word.*

Moses stood before God as the representative for his people. He pleaded with God to show mercy so that the name of the Lord would be more widely known. Certainly, any work that God does proves His power, but Moses prayed that God would use this circumstance of the Hebrews’ rebellion to display His power in His ability to forgive sin—once again. Moses asked for God’s forgiveness.

On what grounds can we make such a request? I am a father, and my two sons have broken my rules often. When they have received my forgiveness, it was not based on their personal merits. They were not forgiven because of what they can do for me. I forgave them despite the fact that I have all of the power in the relationship and could rightfully punish them. Forgiveness was given because love takes priority.

Moses asked God to forgive “according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now” (v. 19). The forgiveness of our Heavenly Father is based on His love, not on our merit, penitent spirit, or ability to straighten out our lives. When God immediately pardoned the sin of the Israelites, He mentioned nothing of their ability to keep covenant faithfulness. The good news given to us by God is that His forgiveness is based on His power, not on our abilities.

 What characteristics of God did Moses mention when pleading for mercy?


 God could have displayed His power in judgment. Why do you think Moses asked for mercy?

When Moses stood before God and begged for mercy upon the people, he gave us a picture of what was to come. The people needed an advocate. They had one in Moses. The problem, however, was that Moses died, and he is still dead! This was a temporary advocacy by a temporary leader in a temporary time. We need a permanent solution.

God's pardon finds its ultimate fulfillment not in the temporary circumstance of the Israelites standing on the edge of the promised land. Rather, we have found it in the journey Jesus made to the cross, the grave, and rising from the dead. Only God in the flesh can be our perfect advocate.

Jesus lived as we do so as to sympathize with our weaknesses. Israel would spend 40 years in the wilderness, wandering around in faithlessness. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, but unlike Israel, He passed the test. As the perfect representative, He gave the sacrifice we should give so as to grant salvation by His grace and through our faith. He rose from the dead, a state we cannot overcome, so as to defeat sin, death, hell, and the Enemy. And now Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father to intercede for you and me every moment of our existence.

Furthermore, because we have been fully represented before God by Jesus, we now are able to represent God before the people of the world who do not know Him. Today, our calling is not to conquer the nations but to take the gospel to them. No matter if the obstacles make us feel like "grasshoppers," we trust that God's power is greater than our own and that He will give us all we need to accomplish His mission.

-  As the people's representative, Moses showed interest in what "the nations" would think if God destroyed the Israelites. How can the church show interest in seeing that the glory of God's forgiveness is known among the nations?

## Conclusion

The world is filled with insurmountable obstacles. We face enemies stronger than we can imagine; our hearts fill up with doubts and fears that we try to fend off. But in the end, we need our Great High Priest, King Jesus, to rescue us from our sin, our fear, and our doubt. Just as God met the Hebrews in the desert with a desire to restore, He will meet you in the desert places of life. It is God's desire to redeem, not destroy. He enjoys delivering you into the work He has prepared for His people. It is the beauty of the gospel that leads us to repent and follow Him with a growing faith.

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** When Israel was tempted in the wilderness, the people failed to trust the Lord and faced 40 years of wandering. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days, He remained faithful. Through His obedience, He became the representative who pleads for us before the Lord.



## Voices from Church History

"Give me a hundred men who fear nothing but sin and love nothing but God, and I will shake the gates of hell."<sup>9</sup>

—John Wesley (1703-1791)

## 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

### 69. Faith

Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

## Additional Resources

# When Faith Fails...

## References

1. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982), 336.
2. R. Dennis Cole, in *HCSB Study Bible* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 243-44, n. 13:27; n. 13:28-29; n. 13:32.
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6. George H. Shaddix, "Caleb: All We Know," *Biblical Illustrator* (Winter 2011-12): 62.
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## Study Material

- "The Wilderness Experience"—Pages 83-89 from *Telling God's Story* by Preben Vang and Terry G. Carter
- "Pray for the Strength That God Supplies"—Article by Jon Bloom; find a link to this article at [GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)
- Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles, including "Caleb: All We Know," can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator). Look for Bundles: The Gospel Project.

## Sermon Podcast

Rusty Ellison: "In Search of Joshuas and Calebs"

Find a link to this at [GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)

## Tip of the Week

### His Mission, Your Mission

*The Gospel Project* aims not to fill our heads with theological truth but to fuel our hearts with passion to join God on His mission to bring people to Himself. To this end, each session in the Personal Study Guide concludes with "His Mission, Your Mission" to help you lead your group to respond as missionaries, which the "Missional Application" makes clear. Here you will find mission-oriented questions and directions related to each point in the session. These will help your group apply the truths they have learned in ways appropriate for your context. Telling the story of the Bible is impossible without leading to mission, as the gospel reveals the heart of our missionary God and His desire to save people of every tribe, tongue, and nation.