

Lenten Midweek 1

The Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years

Deuteronomy 8:1-18

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors....a land with rivers, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, grapes and figs, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where you can dig iron and copper out of the hills.

40 years is a long time to be in the desert.

The Israelites wandered the desert for 40 years – a whole generation died out. Not one of those who were saved from Egypt entered the promised land.

You know it wasn't God's intention to have an entire generation die out. It says the Israelites didn't believe in him - they didn't trust him - and they complained bitterly about Him.

It says God became so angry that he cursed every Israelite to die in the desert.

It says their bodies littered the desert over the next 40 years.

It says God did it as a father would discipline a child.

He wouldn't get away with that today – he would be reported to Child Safe before he could blink.

I cannot explain God's standards and wisdom compared to ours. All I can say they made him angry and they made him do it.

It's like this:

God heard his people cry. He rescued them from Egypt, from slavery, from certain misery and death.

He promised to take them to "the Promised Land" – the land of milk and honey.

They marched through the Red Sea on dry land – their enemy, the Egyptians, were drowned in the same sea.

They walk to the edge of Promised Land - an easy walk – it took 11 days.

God reminds them that this land is all there's. He reminds them that he loves them - that he will enter the land with them and never leave them.

God is excited and tells them what it's going to be like for them in the Promise Land. He describes abundance, and love - living right next to God for the rest of their lives, and their children', and their children's, children's lives.

God's motto, "I will be your God and you will be my people"

Would you enter this Promised Land? Sounds good to me.

This what they did. They sent in 12 spies – like snivelling foxes – 12 "spies" to see what it's really like? Can you smell a rat?

They have been told by God exactly how great it will be – but they send in 12 snivelling spies to see if God was telling the truth.

The 12 snivelling spies explored the Promised Land for **40** days. They came across a single bunch of grapes at Eshkol that was so big that they decided to bring it back for proof - it took 2 men to carry the single bunch of grapes.

When the spies got back – quite a bit fatter – the Israelites gathered excitedly for their report. (Remember God has already told them what it's like.)

This is what it says:

"We went in and it does flow with milk and honey! It's full of fruit, and grain, and olives. Here, look at this giant bunch of grapes.

But the people who live there are powerful, and their cities are like fortresses. The land is full of Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, Canaanites and Amorites. They are giants. We felt like grasshoppers.

"Don't go in there – don't do it – don't believe God – don't do what he says – you'll be crushed like ants."

Well, what would you do?

They told God what he could do with his giant bunch of grapes.

They told God he was a miserable fraud to take them away from Egypt just to die in the desert.

God's dream to save his people – to gather them like a chook gathers up her chicks – to love them – to protect them – was shattered by 12 snivelling spies.

(Well actually it 10 snivelling spies - Spy Caleb, and spy Joshua, trusted God but the other 10 talked the Israelites into cursing God.

That's why God burned with anger and sent them into the wilderness for 40 years until that unbelieving generation died out.

Only believers get to the Promised Land. Right?

Unbelievers don't get to the Promised Land. Right?

Are you going to the Promised Land?

Only those who believe God's promise of heaven, through Jesus get there. Right? Those who don't believe in him don't go there – it's as blunt and as simple as that - during lent

40 years is a generous gift of time from God – a time to repent – a time to believe God – a time to reject the lies of the spies.

40 years, burning anger, fiery snakes – seems extreme?

God calls this discipline – extreme action to bring about an extreme result. God's very own people were bound to die in unbelief – this extreme act of discipline saved them.

Repentance saves you and me.

Repentance is turning away from evil, evil talk, evil ways, toward God.

The French word for repentance is *converté*.

One day you're driving down the road in a car – a normal car - and with the press of a button the roof slides back, the wind is in your hair, and you're driving a convertible – completely changed – not the same car.

We find over history that God gives his people the number 40 – 40 hours, 40 days, as in Nineveh, 40 years, he gives 40 as a blessing of time – time enough for people to repent, convert, believe and be saved.

40 is a blessing.

We now have the 40 days of Lent – to repent and believe.

40 years in the desert, God's burning anger, snakes: What seems harsh was in the face of blatant hate in the one who saved them – “we'll send in spies to see if God knows what he is talking about – clearly he is setting us up for a bloodbath against the giants”.

Hebrews Chapter 3 – it explains God's desperate measures so much better than I can:

Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, focus your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our saviour.

“Today, if you hear God’s voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, and during the time of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested and tried me.

That is why I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they did not trust my plan to saved them and bless them.’

So, I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’

See to it, dear brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another every day...so that none of you become hardened by sin and lies. We have come to share in Christ, if we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.

I say it again:

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.”

Lent is prep stuff.

See to it, dear brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

Peter says it another way: The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

Amen

Lord, we seem to be more prepared to believe false news than your Good New - We pray that your Holy Spirit helps us turn away from evil, and evil talk – toward your word of love and forgiveness and comfort. Amen.