

7. Chain reaction

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A chain reaction is a sequence of reactions where a reactive product or by-product or situation causes additional reactions to take place. An example we can hear or see on the 6 o'clock news is multiple-vehicle collision on freeways. One vehicle makes a fatal mistake and there is a chain reaction among multiple vehicles happens within a few seconds.

I am sure that we can find many other examples in our everyday physical life, but we also can find the same kind of chain reactions in our spiritual realm. Whatever the spiritual choices we make in our lives, they all have either consequences or blessings whether we like or not. In many situations, it can be eternally permanent consequences.

The author of the Book of Hebrews is showing to us a couple of events from the ancient Israelis who were escaping from the heavy hands of the Egyptian slave taskmasters – it is as known as the Exodus. These two events made such a horrible chain reaction that all the original adults who left Egypt with the exception of two didn't make their way to the Promised Land.

This is more than an ancient story, but it is a great spiritual lesson we must heed so that we will not make the same kind of mistakes that will cause fatal chain reactions of unbelief in our lives.

A. DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS

Hebrews 3:7-11 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, 9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. 10 Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.' 11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"

The author of this Book was quoting Psalm 95 in v8 through 11. To understand what the author is trying to explain to us, I believe that we need to visit the Sinai Wilderness where Moses and the ancient Israelis moseyed around 40 years. Let's go to their first sign of their unbelief:

Exodus 17:1-3 Then all the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, "Give us water, that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the Lord?" 3 And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

Before these people who got out of Egypt saw 10 plagues which brought down the Egyptians to their knees by the power of God. The Lord promised to them that He would take them to the Promised Land where milk and honey flow. But when they ran out of water for the first time, they turned against God and His servant Moses. Couldn't they think that the same God who brought all those miracles against their former slave masters would bring water to them? Not one person thought about that. Their unbelief against God started to brew.

Then, these ancient Israelites put the final nail on their coffin, so to speak, with another rebellion at the Wilderness of Paran.

Numbers 13:32-33 And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. 33 There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

Numbers 14:1-3 So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. 2 And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

Their chain reaction started at the failure to notice the true proportion. They saw their enemies all out of proportion to reality. Instead of comparing their great God against the giants in the land, they compared themselves without God against the giants. It is no wonder that they were scared.

It's not just them. We do the exact same thing like these people often. When a believer faces an insurmountable looking situation, they completely leave God out of his or her thought and says, "I cannot overcome this." What that person is actually thinking is, "Since I cannot overcome this, God cannot either." If our God is at the same level and has the same capability as ours, I don't want to worship another pathetic thing. No, our God is all powerful, merciful, and wonderful God who can do all things.

Please go back to Numbers 14:2

Numbers 14:2c if only we had died in this wilderness

The Lord tolerated their unbelief for the last time and granted their wish of dying in the wilderness, so they wouldn't have to face the giants in the land. Like litter on the side of a freeway, their fresh graves on the wind-swept hills in the wilderness were constant mute reminders of how seriously God treats the sin of a hardened heart that is started from the chain reaction of unbelief. Instead of they rest in faith of God, they tested Him to the point that He said, "Enough is enough."

On a side note, no extra charge for this, there are some Bible students and believers who think that "going into the Promised Land" is going to heaven and "crossing the River Jordan" is a picture of death. These ideas might make some nice song lyrics and story lines, but they are not completely biblical. First, in the Promised Land, Canaan, the Israelis had to fight, even were defeated. There are absolutely no biblical references of believers fighting in heaven. Second, the Israelis had to cross the river by faith to step into the Promised Land. It has nothing to do with believer's death.

Let's stop a minute here and ask ourselves:

- 1) **How am I doing with the current difficult situation that I am facing?**
- 2) **Am I facing it with my great and powerful God in mind?**
- 3) **Or am I leaving Him somewhere out of my mind so that I am overwhelmed with fear?**

All the signs, wonders, and miracles God performed to bring these Israelis out of Egypt and to sustain them in the wilderness didn't benefit them any spiritual dividends

at all. Like many of you, I've heard people saying, "If I see a miracle of God, even once, I would believe in Him." Because of such a shallow mentality of "Seeing is believing," they miss out so much what the Lord prepared for them. By its nature, faith in God does NOT include what you can see, feel, hear, or touch. It requires believing in God for who He is and what He can do without seeing anything ahead.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

B. BEWARE

Hebrews 3:12-15 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, 15 while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

The author of this Book Hebrews wanted his first century Jewish readers to learn from the horrible errors of their ancestors so that they wouldn't repeat of sins of unbelief of Jesus Christ and going back to the Judaism.

Please note this: When a person has unbelief in his heart, there is a chain reaction to follow – starting with hardened heart, complain, and disobedience. Then, the carnal desires in one's heart take over the control of that person's life. From then on, there is no bottom deep enough for his fall.

I've seen one too many examples of this ugly scene from the believers who once walked with the Savior and Lord. My heart breaks for them. Seeing those terrible situations gives me a stern warning of 'what not to do.'

1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Unbelief has serious consequences both for the unbelievers and for believers. For the former, their unbelief bars the entrance to heaven; for the latter, it shuts the gate to the blessings of God's rest. This is not the unreasonable penalty imposed on helpless humanity that has no choice by some cynical twisted deity. But God of Christianity who created and owns everyone and everything in the universe gives them choices to choose from – His way to eternal blessings or their ways to eternal destruction.

In v12, we find a phrase "departing from the living God". The Greek word for 'departing' is "aphistemi" where we get our English word "apostasy" and this is the only place appeared in the Bible.

Please listen carefully. Unbelief is NOT inability to understand what God is speaking through the Bible, rather it is an individual's conscience decision of unwillingness to trust Him. It is the will of a sinner, nothing else. Unbelief is not weakness of faith in God; it sets oneself in opposition to Him.

Does it mean that any time we have a sincere doubt for not understanding the ways of God is unbelief? No. Jesus never rebuked the doubts of His disciple Thomas. He helped him understand the truth.

Then, someone will say, "I've been trying to believe in God, but it seems that it is not working for me." Faith is not like ladies' shopping – trying 20 different dresses, 30

different shoes, and still not quite sure; rather it is like men's shopping – go in, grab it, pay for it, and done. Either you believe it or you don't. You cannot try to believe.

C. NO REST FOR THE WICKED

Hebrews 3:16-19 For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? 17 Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Do you think that God is too harsh for not allowing these unbelieving people to enter into the Promised Land? Do you think that God is too harsh for not allowing unbelieving people to enter into heaven? Let's be logical. Those people choose not to believe who God is, what He does, what He says in the Bible, but they want the eternal restful life in God's heaven which they don't believe. Does that make sense to you? If they are honest, they, even themselves, should say, "No."

The greatest failure of those Israelis who came out of Egypt was not persevering in faith in God who rescued them from the mighty army of Egypt. God opened a mile wide dry corridor at the bottom of the Red Sea with the sea water standing each side of them. The same sea water that gave a way to safety for the Israelis, buried the entire Egyptian military alive and there was not one survivor. The Israelis should have remembered that incident, but they quickly forgot about it.

Exodus 14:28 Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained.

Many Bible critics who don't believe the crossing the Red Sea argue that what the Israelis did can be easily explained by natural phenomena. They suggest that there was one little stream called "The Sea of Reeds" which was only one foot deep and that a strong wind would sometimes come along and push the water out of the way, making it dry.

If that is the case, I say what they claim is a bigger miracle than what the Bible says. Because the entire brave and mighty Egyptian soldiers who were on the chariots and horseback stuck their heads in one foot deep water and drown themselves to death. I'd love to see that scene. That would have been funnier than any American Home Videos. These Bible critics are such geniuses.

Please don't think that our God sees human's unbelief as a great opportunity to punish them. It breaks His heart.

Luke 19:41-42 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, 42 saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

As Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the crowds were celebrating. Being God and having omniscience, Jesus knew these fickle people who were crying out, "Hosanna!" would soon be shouting, "Crucify Him!" He saw their unbelief.

People's unbelief and rejection break God's heart, because He knows the consequences. But when the door of the human heart is shut, He refuses to enter forcibly. He will only knock, wanting to gain admittance. He has given us the ability to choose. But when we choose the wrong thing, He knows the repercussions that will follow – in this life and the one to come. And His heart is broken.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) God's tests come to soften our spirits, not to harden our hearts. Turn to Him.
- 2) Rest in God means that I accept what He wants, not what I want.
- 3) Unbelief is not weakness of faith in God; it sets oneself in opposition to Him.