

# Kadesh-Barnea Again

by J. Wilbur Chapman

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*Kadesh-Barnea is a place of spiritual danger and failure, where people turn away from God and fail to trust Him, and the key to avoiding it is to be willing to surrender completely to God and trust Him fully.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 1:19, Matthew 26:24, Matthew 27:24, Mark 10:21, Luke 13:24, Acts 26:28, Hebrews 3:7, James 4:17, Revelation 3:20

**Topics:** "Faith And Trust", "Salvation And Repentance"

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## Description

J. Wilbur Chapman preaches about the significance of Kadeshbarnea in Deuteronomy 1:19, drawing parallels between the missed opportunity of the children of Israel to enter the Promised Land due to lack of trust in God and the missed opportunities for salvation in the New Testament. He emphasizes the importance of wholehearted surrender to God, using examples of individuals like Herod, Pilate, Judas, Felix, and Agrippa who were 'almost persuaded' but failed to fully commit, leading to tragic consequences. Chapman warns against stopping at the 'Kadesh-barnea' moments in life, where one is close to salvation but hesitates, risking eternal loss.

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## Transcript

"And we came to Kadeshbarnea." --Deuteronomy 1:19.

There is another interpretation of the text than the one given in the earlier part of this book; and while it would not stand as a correct explanation of the Scripture, yet to say the least it is a splendid illustration, and is a striking lesson. When the children of Israel came up to Kadeshbarnea, after the spies had made their report and the land had been wonderfully described, we find the multitudes turning away in despair, and they leave Kadesh-barnea only to fall by the wayside, and be buried in the wilderness, but never again to see the Land of Promise. This is in line with the lessons which may be drawn in such New Testament texts as these-- "One thing thou lackest," "Thou art not far from the Kingdom" "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

But the Old Testament text is more striking, and therefore may be fitly used to give to the unconverted the message of the closing chapter of this book. There was just one thing that kept the children of Israel out of Canaan, and that was their unwillingness to trust God. There is just one thing that keeps you out of the Kingdom, my unconverted reader, and that is your failure to put your trust in the Son of God.

I have always had the impression that Kadesh-barnea was a hill or a mountain, and from this point the children of Israel could see the Promised Land. But Dr. Henry Clay Trumbull, who has had the privilege of standing upon the spot, tells me that it is a depressed part of the country, and that if the children of Israel had gone into Canaan, they would have been obliged to cross over a mountain or at least a hill. This makes the illustration all the better, for between every unsaved soul and life there stands a mountain which must be crossed. It is the mountain of an unsundered will. But just as when we are traveling in the hill country in the summer days, and we see in the distance what seems to be an insurmountable barrier, and as we push on we find that the hill seems to melt away, and we are over it before we know it, so it is with this unsundered will. We simply need to be willing to be saved for God to make the way easy. The saddest thought for the children of Israel must have been that they were so near to Canaan, and after all had failed to enter in. And the saddest thought for many a man in eternity will be that he was so very near to God in the possession of eternal life; one step would have settled it, one word would have saved him; but alas! the step was not taken, the word was not spoken, and he is lost!

"So near the door, and the door stood wide,

Close to the port, but not inside,

Almost resolved to give up sin,

Almost persuaded to enter in,

Almost resolved to count the cost, Almost a Christian, and yet lost!"

There are certain men in the New Testament, who may be described as having come to Kadesh-barnea. I doubt not but the names will come to you in the nature of a surprise, but if we are surprised at the first name, we may be more so at the second, and still more at the third.

#### I. Herod

The first man's name was Herod, and he was a murderer. I do not mean that his hands were red with his brother's blood, but in the sight of God he was just as guilty as if that had been true. Some reader may ask when Herod was ever at Kadesh-barnea, or almost persuaded. It was at the time John the Baptist was preaching his wonderful sermons as the forerunner of Christ. He was probably the greatest preacher the world has ever produced, and yet he was simply (as he said) "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." In the crowd that listened to his impassioned words was Herod, the king, and Mark tells us: "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly."

I feel very sure if you would have gone up to the palace of the king, you would have found him trying to break away from some of his sins; and if ever you behold a man in that condition, you may rest assured that he is under the influence of the Spirit of God. But the trouble with Herod was he wanted to make a compromise with God; he was willing to give up much sin, but not all. And this is an eternal mistake. It is an unconditional surrender which God demands, and no man can ever have life until he reaches the place where he is willing, by God's help, to forsake every known sin. I used to have an idea that the trouble with men was intellectual, and therefore in the head; I am persuaded in these days that the real difficulty is SIN in the heart.

I was holding a series of meetings in a former pastorate, when one evening a man lifted his hand for prayer. One of my elders spoke to him, but came back to me saying that the case was hopeless, for the man was an infidel. I then sent one of the most consistent women to his home, and she came back with the message that she felt sure that he was converted; and we were urged to admit him to the membership of the church. I can see him now as he took his first communion. The second communion he was away, and the third he was still absent; and when I looked him up, I found that he was out of the city, and had been for several weeks. I left a message for him to call upon me, and a few days later he was at my study door. His face was deathly pale, and as he entered the room he looked around in a frightened way, and then asked if any one was within hearing. When I assured him that no one was near, and had turned the key in the door to satisfy him, he came very close to me and said:

"When I first saw you, I told you the reason that I could not be a Christian was found in the fact that I was an infidel, and this was partly true. My father was an infidel, and my grandfather before him, and the blood of infidelity courses in my veins; but somehow I got over that. But when I joined the church, I hardly felt that I was a Christian, for there was one sin I would not give up. My wife did not know about it, the best friend I had in the world was ignorant of it. I said, I can serve God, and continue that sin, and still be saved; but I could not. The other night on my knees I asked God to take it away, even if it took my life; and for all of these days I have been free! The peace of God has filled my very soul, and I have never been so happy." Then coming still nearer to me, he bent down and whispered one word to me, and that word was:

"MORPHINE."

"That," said he, "was my sin."

So in these days I have come to believe with all my heart that if one is just willing to forsake all known sin, by Christ's help, he may at once be saved.

You may come very near to the kingdom of God, and yet the holding of one sin may cause the loss of your soul.

Kadesh-barnea is a dangerous place to stop.

## II. Pilate

Strangely enough, Pilate was a murderer too in the sight of God, and yet I have an idea that some reader will ask:

"When in the world was ever Pilate at Kadesh-barnea, or almost persuaded?"

I think I can make it plain. When Pilate first heard that Jesus was to appear before him in trial, he was prejudiced against Him, and I can imagine he was just longing for the time to come when he could pass sentence upon Him; but when suddenly He appeared before him, hurried on by the crowd about Him, I can see Pilate's look of wonderment as he caught the first vision of His face, and I can hear him say:

"Truly this is no ordinary man."

And as he is thus thinking, suddenly a messenger comes from his wife to say:

"Have thou nothing to do with this just person, for I have been warned in a dream concerning Him."

Then to satisfy himself, I can imagine how Pilate said to Him: "Art thou the Christ, the Son of God?"

I can also see him tremble as Jesus gives him the answer. And then comes in the weakness of Pilate, when he turned to the rabble to say: "I will release this Man, for I find no fault in Him, but I will give you Barabbas to be crucified."

But they shouted: "Away with Him! let Him be crucified!" Then Pilate's conviction seems to increase, and he calls for a basin of water, and dipping in his hands, says to the people, "I wash my hands of this whole matter; take ye Him and crucify Him"; and poor Pilate must be trying to free his hands of the blood of the Son of God to-day.

Not many years ago there came across the sea a remarkable book, bearing the strange title of "Letters from Hell." The introduction was written by the celebrated preacher, George McDonald. In this book there is a picture of Pilate in the lost world, kneeling down by a running stream, and through an endless period of time, apparently, he seems to be washing his hands. Without lifting his eyes, he keeps on with his difficult task, when some one suddenly touches him and says:

"Pilate, what are you doing?"

And as he lifts his hands they are red as the blood of the Son of God could make them; and when the other beholds them, with a shriek that echoes and re-echoes through the corridors of the lost world, Pilate exclaims, like one of Shakespeare's characters: "Will they never be clean? Will they never be clean?" Poor Pilate! they never will.

It is not a difficult matter to determine what was the cause of Pilate's failure to take his stand with Joseph of Arimathea, with Nicodemus and with the faithful everywhere. Pilate had not the courage of his convictions. When he knew that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, it would have been better for him if he had gone himself to be scourged or prostrated himself upon the cross to be crucified. He would have been heroic beyond all others in this. And many a man has lost his soul because of the same weakness. He realizes that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died to save him, but he fails to receive Him and confess Him, because he lacks courage.

The old clock in a church steeple in the city of Edinburgh was striking nine o'clock one night when a company of young men were just passing the church on their way to a place of sin. Suddenly one of them stopped and said:

"I cannot go with you."

When they pressed him for an answer, he said; "When I left my home in the country, my old mother said, 'My boy, you are going to a wicked town, and your temptations will be strong, but your father and I will pray for you without ceasing; and at 9 o'clock every evening we will be on our knees saying, Oh, God, save our boy'; and," said he, "I will not break their hearts."

They jeered at him, and mocked him, but he turned back to his room, fell upon his knees and cried out to God, for mercy; and to-day he is not only a Christian, but also one of the leading merchants in Edinburgh. Having the courage of his convictions saved him. Many a man has come to be almost persuaded, but failing in this, he has lost all. Kadesh-barnea is a dangerous place to stop.

III. Judas

I can easily understand how one would at once exclaim, How was it possible for Judas the traitor to have been "almost persuaded"? but I am certain that it is perfectly natural to suppose that there were times without number when Judas was almost ready to step over the line into the real service of the Son of God. I believe when he heard Jesus Christ preach, and saw Him in His life, a wonderful illustration of all His preaching, he must have said:

"I would to God that I were a true disciple."

I feel very sure that when he saw Him touch the eyes of the blind man, and bless them first of all with the vision of His own face, he must have said, "Oh, God, if I were only right"; and that is what will make eternity so hard for Judas. He can never forget the face of the Son of God when He said: "One of you shall betray Me." He can never be free from the clinking of the thirty pieces of silver, and throughout eternity his conscience will condemn him. I can imagine his experience to be like that described in the poem:

"I sat alone with my conscience

In a place where time had ceased,

And we talked of my former living

In the lands where the years increased.

"And I felt I should have to answer

The question it put to me,

And to face the answer and question

Throughout an eternity.

"The ghost of forgotten actions

Came floating before my sight,

And the things I thought were dead things

Were alive with a terrible might.

"And the vision of all my past life

Was an awful thing to face,--

Alone with my conscience sitting

In that solemn, silent place."

We say in this world that we forget, and we think we do. But there is coming a day when God will touch the secret spring of our memory, and say, "Son, remember"; and we will remember our rejection of every offer of mercy, and the lost world will be an awful place. We shall call to memory that we were almost persuaded, and yet lost! If I had made up my mind never to be saved, I should never again hear a sermon preached; I would positively decline to listen to the name of Jesus Christ as it might be spoken; I would flee away from the singing of a Gospel hymn; for we carry into the next world the memories of this, and the

time will come when the recollection of all our rejections will cause weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

In one of Mr. Moody's meetings a man lifted his hand for prayer, and Mr. Moody at once made his way to his side, and said he was glad he was determined to be a Christian; but said the man:

"Not so fast, Mr. Moody. Some day I will settle it, but not now."

The next time he saw him, he was very ill, and he said, "I would not settle the question now, for they would say I was frightened into being a Christian."

His next interview with him was when he was convalescent, and he said, "I am going to move into another State, and when I have new friends I will be sure to become a Christian."

The next word that came to him was to the effect that he had suffered a relapse, and was dying. Mr. Moody says he went to his home, and tried his best to talk to him, but it was useless. He said that it was "too late," and when he was told that the thief on the cross came at the last hour, he said, "Ah, yes, but he had never heard of Jesus until then, and I have always known about Him." And when he was told that the eleventh hour was not too late to repent, he replied, "This is the twelfth, and it is too late!" and while prayer was being offered for him, he passed away with the heart-breaking expression:

"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved!"

Mr. Moody said: "We wrapped him in a Christless shroud, we put him in a Christless coffin, we bore him to a Christless tomb, he went into a Christless eternity." Kadesh-barnea, and LOST!

Felix and Agrippa

Before these two men the Apostle Paul stood and told the story of his remarkable conversion; as he pleaded with them, filled as he was with the power of God, it is said that Felix "trembled"; and as the apostle continued to plead on, he turned to him to say:

"Go thy way for this time. When I have a more convenient season, I will call for thee."

I used to have an idea that he never had that convenient season again, but this is not true. There was another time when the apostle stood before him, pleading with all the power of God; but the second appeal was absolutely powerless in its influence upon him, and he heard it without even trembling for a moment.

It is a dangerous thing for any one, when he is moved by the Spirit of God, to resist; and if today there is one single particle of desire in your heart to be a Christian, in the name of God I beseech you and encourage you.

It is said that during a revival at Princeton College, Aaron Burr went to the president of the college to say that he was almost persuaded to be a Christian, and asked the president's advice as to what he should do.

"Well," said the president, "if I were you, I would wait until the excitement was over and then come."

Aaron Burr bowed his head for a moment, and replied, "That is what I shall do"; and it is said that never again did he have the desire to be a Christian.

Whether this story is true or not, the principle is true, and may God keep you from resisting the Spirit of God!

Agrippa was certainly at Kadesh-barnea. I know there are those who say that when he said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," he was speaking in irony; but I never could understand that, for if Paul stood before us today with his hands manacled, and his feet chained, and if he should appear to us as he did to Agrippa, and step forward with uplifted hands, saying, "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?" I think the most natural thing would be to exclaim, "Almost thou persuadest me." But Agrippa never entered into life, and Kadesh-barnea is still to be lost.

"Almost persuaded! harvest is past,

Almost persuaded! doom comes at last.

'Almost' cannot avail; 'almost' is sure to fail.

Sad, sad, that bitter wail. 'Almost, but LOST!'"

The "Royal Charter" had been around the world. A magnificent ship she was. She had touched at every important port, and was homeward bound. She had arrived at Queenstown, and a message was received that she would touch her dock at Liverpool the next morning. One of the members of my church told me he waited on the dock all night to see her come in. The Lord Mayor of London was there, and the Lord Mayor of Liverpool. Bands of musicians and thousands of people waited to give her a welcome home. But the "Royal Charter" went down in the night time between Queenstown and Liverpool, losing almost all on board. The wife of the first mate was a member of Dr. Wm. M. Taylor's church in Liverpool, and he was told that he must tell her that her husband was lost. He said that he felt like an executioner when he reached the cottage where they lived. He touched the door bell, and a bright-faced, sunny-haired little girl sprang out and said:

"Oh, Dr. Taylor, I thought it was my papa. He is coming home to-day!"

"When I stepped into the house," said Dr. Taylor, "I found the breakfast-table spread in the sitting-room, and the wife of the first mate came forward and said:

"Dr. Taylor, you must excuse us for having the table here and at this hour, but you know my husband is coming home to-day, and if you will stay, it will make the day like heaven.'

"I took both her hands in mine," said Dr. Taylor, "and held them for a moment, and then said, 'My poor woman, the "Royal Charter" went down last night, and your husband was lost, and can never come home again.'"

She looked at him just a moment, and then as she drew away her hands, she shrieked out:

"Oh, my God, so near home, and yet lost!"

I have known men nearer than that. Between them and eternal life was just one word, and they would not speak it; between them and hope there was just a line, and they would not cross it.

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