

The Census of Israel

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that while death inevitably changes the generation, God's people endure perpetually under His sovereign care and purpose.

Scripture: Numbers 26:64-65, Psalm 90:10, Ecclesiastes 9:10, Psalm 34:18, John 10:28-29

Topics: "God's Sovereignty", "The Church"

Description

In 'The Census of Israel,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the spiritual significance of the biblical census taken in the wilderness and at the border of the Promised Land. He reflects on the inevitable passing of a generation and the enduring nature of God's covenant people. Spurgeon encourages believers to live with urgency and faithfulness, trusting in God's sovereign hand over life and death. This sermon offers profound insights into God's care, the Church's continuity, and the call to faithful service.

Transcript

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

"These are they that were numbered by Moses and Eleazar, the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho. But among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron, the Priest, numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. For the Lord had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun." Numbers 16:66.

WE have come to another census, an important stopping place in the march of a nation's history. This carries our thoughts back to the ancient Bible story connected with the chosen people of God. A census was taken of the tribes of Israel in the wilderness two years after they had left Egypt. It only numbered males who were over twenty—the men capable of active service in war. By thus taking a census of His people, the Lord showed that He valued each one of them. They were registered by their families and by their names, thus were they personally enrolled in the family book of the living God and He thus, in effect, said to each one of them, "I have called you by your name; you are Mine." By the registration of each man by name, he felt that he was not lost in the crowd, but was, by person and pedigree, acknowledged as one of those to whom the Lord had promised the land which flowed with milk and honey. There was good reason for taking the number of the people just as the nation was forming, so that in the wilderness they might be arranged, marshaled and disciplined for the conflict which lay before them. When commanded of God, because He saw that great ends would be served thereby—and when associated with

redemption—a census was by no means a wrong or a dangerous national arrangement. David ordered the people to be numbered, but because his motive and his method were wrong, it brought a pestilence on the land but, in itself, the taking of a census was a wise and useful thing.

Thirty-eight years had passed away since the first numbering at Sinai and the people had come to the borders of the Promised Land, for they were in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho. The time had come for another census. The wisdom which commanded the counting of Israel at the beginning of the wilderness journey also determined to count them at the end of it. This would show that He did not value them less than in former years. It would afford proof that His word of judgment had been fulfilled to them and, moreover, it would marshal them for the grand enterprise of conquering the land of Canaan! They were to go forth in their armies to fight giant races and armies versed in war. They were to dislodge nations from their ancient strongholds and, with the sword, destroy guilty aboriginal races which God had condemned to destruction. And for this, their military strength needed numbering and ordering. Here was good reason for the census, which now, for the second or third time, was carefully carried out.

Our text is from the Book of Numbers and the book well answers to its title, for it continually deals with numbers and numberings. The numbering on this occasion was not of the women and children or the infirm, for the order ran thus, "Take you the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, throughout their fathers' house, all that are able to go to war in Israel." If the numbers of our Churches were taken in this fashion, would they not sadly shrink? We have many sick among us that need to be carried about, nursed and doctored. Half the strength of the Church goes in ambulance service towards the weak and wounded. Another diminution of power is occasioned by the vast numbers of undeveloped Believers, to whom the Apostle would have said, "When for the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again what are the first principles of the oracles of God: and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." They should have become men, but they remain babes in Grace! They are sadly slow in reaching the fullness of the stature of men in Christ Jesus. How many are quite unable to bear arms against the foe, for they need to be, themselves, guarded from the enemy! To revise the Church rolls so as to

leave none but vigorous soldiers on the muster roll would make us break our hearts over our statistics. May the Lord send us, for this evil, health and cure!

When the second census was taken, it was found that the people were nearly of the same number as at the first. Had it not been for the punishment so justly inflicted upon them, they must have largely increased. But now they had somewhat diminished. They were a rapidly increasing people when they were in Egypt—the more they were afflicted, the more they multiplied! The family of Jacob increased at a marvelous rate from the time of the going down into Egypt to the time of leaving that land. This was changed during the 40 years of the wilderness, for the whole of the grown men who came out of bondage were judged unfit to enter into the Promised Land because of unbelief. And these, dying away rapidly, the people scarcely maintained their number. It is of God to multiply a nation, or a Church. We may not expect any advance in our numbers if we grieve the Spirit of God and if, by our unbelief, we drive Him to declare that we shall not prosper. Israel's growth ceased for 40 years—may it never be so with us as a Church! We would say with Joab, "Now the Lord your God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold." May the righteous seed multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it, till their number shall be as countless as the sands of the shore, or as the stars of the sky!

Concerning the second census of Israel, I would speak with you, since this is the morning of the day on which our British census is to be taken. May we gather lessons of wisdom from the theme!

I. First, observe with interest and with a design to be profited—THE NOTABLE CHANGE WORKED AMONG THE PEOPLE BY DEATH. "But among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron, the priest, numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai."

They answered to their names, 600,000 and more of them—and there they stood in their ranks, full of vigorous life. About 40 years had passed away and if these same names had been read out, not a man save Caleb and Joshua could have answered to the roll call. The entire mass of the nation had been changed! The old ones were all gone. All that stood in their places by the Jordan were men who were under age at the first census, or who were not even born at that time. "Not a man of them" remained, says the text. And it repeats the statement—"There was not left a man of them."

Such changes strike us as most memorable. They must not be passed over without remark. In the course of 40 years, my Brothers and Sisters, what changes take place in every community, in every Church, in every family! A friend showed me, last Thursday, a photograph of myself in the midst of my first deacons. It was taken scarcely 38 years ago and yet, of the entire group, only I survive! Those associates of the youthful preacher have all gone to their reward. We have likenesses of other groups of Church officers of a later date, in which I am placed in the center, and I am there still, but nearly all of those who once surrounded me have gone Home. Those who were our leaders in our days of struggle—and who saw the hand of God with us in those first years—are growing few in number. We have not yet completed the 40 years, but when we have done so, the words of our text will be almost literally applicable to our case as a Church.

The going and the coming, the adding and the taking away have changed the texture of this fabric and no thread will soon be left. Surely the Lord would have us notice this, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. A costly operation, involving so many sorrows, is not to be passed over without thought. Beloved, we, too, are passing away! The pastor and his present helpers must, themselves, be summoned Home in due course. The march of the generations is not a procession passing before our eyes, while we sit, like spectators, at the window, but we are in the procession ourselves, and we, too, are passing down the streets of time and shall disappear in our turn. We, too, shall sleep with our fathers, unless the Lord shall come speedily. I hear a clarion blast sounding out from the graves which lie behind us—"Be you also ready!" From the last closed sepulcher there comes the prophetic warning, "Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live."

This change was universal throughout the whole camp. There was a change even in the enumerators. The Sinai census had been taken by Moses and Aaron and now Moses remains just long enough to take his leading place, but his brother, Aaron, is not there. The High Priest of God has gone up to Mount Hor, has been stripped of his garments, has been buried and mourned by all Israel—and now Eleazar, his son, stands before the Lord in his father's place. It was so among the other priests and Levites and elders of the people. There was change everywhere—among the poorest dwellers in that canvas city and among the princes who dwelt beneath the standards of the tribes, all had changed. "There was not left a man of them."

Thus is it among ourselves—no offices can be permanently held by the same men—"They are not suffered to continue by reason of death." No position, however lofty or lowly, can retain its old possessor.

It is not only the cedars that

fall, but the fir trees feel the axe. "There is no discharge in that war." That same scythe which cuts down the towering flower among the grass also sweeps down whole regiments of green blades. See how they lie together in long rows, to wither in a common decay! Throughout the whole body, this change is gradually taking place. No man can climb the rock of immortality and sit there, amid the seething sea, and say to Death, "Your waves cannot reach me here!" Though vigorous in health, though sound in constitution, though guarded by all the armor of the science of health, you, too, must fall by the arrows of the insatiable archer. "It is appointed unto men once to die."

The change is inevitable. Man that is born of woman must be of few days. If it had not been for the great sin of Israel at Kadesh, many of the people might have lived to the second census and beyond it. But even then, if by reason of strength their lives had been lengthened, yet would they soon have died out in the ordinary course of nature. If 40 years had not been appointed as the end of that generation, yet without that appointment they would all have passed away in another 20 or 30 years. As Moses said in his wilderness Psalm, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

We must soon quit our tents for the last battle. When the conscript number shall be drawn, we may escape this year and next, but the lot will fall upon us in due time. There is no leaping from the net of mortality wherein, like a shoal of fish, we are all enclosed. Unless our Lord shall soon appear, we shall each one find a grave, for, as the wise man says, "All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." "We must necessarily die and are as water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again." Therefore we wisely bow before the stern decree and yield ourselves to death.

But let us not forget that all this change was still under the Divine control. Though the people must pass away, yet still, the Lord's hand would be in each death and its surroundings. If not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father's knowledge, we may rest assured that no man dies without the will of God—no man is carried to his long Home unless the Lord has said, "Return, you children of men."—

"What can preserve my life, or what destroy? An angel's arm can't snatch me from the grave—Legions of angels can't confine me there." To create and to destroy are sole prerogatives of the King of Kings! Till He speaks the word, we live not, or, living, we die not. Walking in the midst of 10,000 stricken with the plague, we are safe till God appoints our removal. Concerning those that are asleep, we know that they have not died without the will of our Father. Concerning our time, also, we know that we shall not be the toys of chance, or the victims of fate. A wise and loving God fixes the date and place of our decease, for, "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." Stern though the work may be, His great and tender heart rules the ravages of death! Let us, therefore, be comforted concerning the great changes which death is working. Here is no cause for tears, as though we were left in a monster's power and bereft of a Father's care. The Lord is still ruling and nothing happens save as He appoints.

Moreover, the change was beneficial. It was well that the first generation should die in the wilderness. The people who had been accustomed to servitude in Egypt had acquired the vices of slaves—and when they came out of the house of bondage they were fearful, fickle—the creatures of appetite and the victims of panic, selfishness and discontent. They had all the vices of subject races and were, alike, destitute of manliness and self-control. They were soon cowed by fear and baffled by difficulty. They were easily persuaded and as easily dissuaded. They were a people of whom nothing could be made. Even the Divine

tuition in which Moses and Aaron were engaged and in which miracles, and types, and laws were employed, could not teach them anything so that they really knew it. To make a nation which could preserve the worship of the one God in the world, the generation which came out of Egypt must die out. The taint of slavery and idolatry must be lessened if it could not be quite removed.

It was desirable that there should be a people trained in a better school, with a nobler spirit, fit to take possession of the promised land. The change was working rightly—the Divine purpose was being fulfilled. Maybe we do not think thus of the changes which are taking place in the communities to which we belong. We scarcely think that better men are coming on—we even fear that the coming race is weaker than the present, but then, we are not fair judges, for we are prejudiced in favor of our own generation! I do not doubt that God means well to His own Church and that the accomplishment of His eternal purposes requires that men should come and go and thus the face of society should be changed. It

is well that the age of man is not so protracted as in the days of Methuselah. A teacher influential for error dies and is forgotten. A sinner pestilential for vice passes away and the air grows pure. Imagine a gambler with 500 years of craft to guide him, or a libertine reeking with 600 years of debauchery! Surely the present narrowed limits of human life are all too wide for the depraved! We need not wish for giants of iniquity such as centuries of life would produce. The incoming of new blood into the social frame is good in a thousand ways—it is well that we should make room for others who may better serve our Master. God grant they may! Our prayer is, "Let Your work appear unto Your servants and Your Glory unto their children." We are content to take the work if our sons may behold the glory! We are glad to move off that they may rise on stepping stones of our ended lives to nobler things!

One other remark I cannot help making and that is that these changes are most instructive. If we are now serving God, let us do so with intense earnestness, since only for a little while shall we have the opportunity to do so among men. "Whatever your hands find to do, do it with all your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave where you go." Live while you live! At the same time, lay plans for influencing the rising generation. Lay yourself out to work while it is called today. If anything should be done, it were well that it were done quickly. If we wish the Truth of God to conquer and the Gospel to prevail, let us fight the Lord's battles now! And if we would see Truth prevail after we are gone, let us seek out faithful young men who will teach others that the testimony for the Lord God of Israel dies not out of the land. We must soon quit the field. Let each man set his house in order, for he must soon leave it to be gazed upon by strangers' eyes. Let us see that our lifework is rounded off and well-finished, so that in the survey of it by our successors they may say of us, "He being dead yet speaks." As we must soon be gone from among the living, let us bless them while we may. Arise, you saints, and bestir yourselves, for the day is far spent and the shadows of evening are falling! I pray that we may learn well this first lesson of our text. O Spirit of Life, teach us life even by the doings of death!

II. Secondly, we have here before us THE PERPETUITY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. There was a change in the

constituent elements of the Israelite nation, but the nation was still there. Not one man was there who was counted 38 years before, save Caleb and Joshua, and yet the nation was the same! Do you ask for Israel? There it is. Balaam can see the people from the top of the hill and they are the same people whom Pharaoh pursued to the Red Sea. The nation is living, though a nation has died. It is the same chosen seed of Abraham with whom Jehovah is in covenant. God has a Church in the world and He will have a Church in the world till time shall be no more! The gates of Hell and the jaws of death shall not prevail

against the Church, though each one of its members must depart out of this world in his turn.

Mark well that "the Church in the wilderness" lives on. There are the same 12 tribes, the same standards heading the tribes, the same tabernacle in the midst of the host and the same priesthood celebrating sacred service with solemn pomp. Everything has changed and yet nothing has changed. God has built His holy habitation upon foundations which can never be removed! Although the men who bear the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord wear other names, yet they fulfill the same office. The music of the sanctuary rises and falls, but the strain goes on. The hallelujah never ceases, nor is there a pause in the perpetual chorus, "His mercy endures forever."

The gaps were filled up by appointed successors. As one warrior died, another man stepped into his place, even as one wave dying on the shore is pursued by another. The men were not all swept away at once, but by perceptible degrees. Now and then there came an awful and sudden destruction, as when Korah, Dathan and Abiram went down alive into the pit, but, as a rule, the people dropped off gradually, as ripe fruit falls from the trees—and they were succeeded by others as the fading leaves of autumn have the buds of spring just beneath them. In the Church of God one dies in the order of Nature, but another is born into the Kingdom by the power of Divine Grace. We miss some useful Christian woman and we lament her, but before many days another Sister is prepared of the Lord to serve in her place. Baptism for the dead never ceases among us. An honored Brother falls asleep and we carry him to the grave and, possibly, we fear no other can do his work and fill the vacancy he leaves. Perhaps no one can do the same work, but yet, in some other way or form, the work is done! The vines are trimmed, the sheep are fed and the lambs are cherished. Not one dead man lies in the way to stop the march of the army, as did the corpse of Amasa, which lay dead in the road in David's day. The chosen host still marches on! Even as the stars in their courses, we still move on. God buries His workmen, but His work lives.

In Israel's case the gap were filled by their own sons. As these men passed away, their children took their places. I commend to you, my Brothers and Sisters, this fact as your encouragement in prayer for your children. Oh, that the Lord

would pour His Spirit upon our seed and His blessing upon our offspring! Oh, that every saint here may be succeeded by his own descendants! This is the Lord's frequent way of keeping alive the gracious succession. Abraham is gone, but Isaac still kindles the altar fire. In a blind old age Isaac is gathered to his fathers, but Jacob worships "the Fear of his father Isaac." Jacob gathers up his feet in bed, but Judah and Joseph, and the rest of them, continue as salt in the earth. Oh, that it may be so in all our families! May we never lack a man to stand before the Lord God of Israel to testify for Him! Among all the honors that God can put upon our households I think this is the greatest, that we should have in our families a succession of saints! It is no small privilege to look back and to remember our ancestors who feared the Lord—may we also look forward with hope that if this dispensation lasts, there may still be some of our name, bearing our blood in their veins, who shall be called by Sovereign Grace into the service we have loved so well! Search beyond the congregation for new converts, but do not forget to look within your own doors for the largest accessions to the Church! Hope that your sons and daughters after the flesh may be born into "the one family in Heaven and earth," which bears the name of Jesus! Pray that your children may be God's children—and may your prayer come up with acceptance into the ears of the Lord our God whose mercy is on children's children of them that fear Him and keep His Covenant!

All the offices of "the Church in the wilderness" were filled with fitting men. Behold Aaron, in his robes of glory and beauty! What a man is he to be the High Priest! With what grace and dignity he presides! He

dies—will not the priesthood fail? No, my Brothers and Sisters, yonder is Eleazar, who occupies his father's place most worthily! Moses also passes away. There is none like Moses. He is King in Jeshurun, without peer or rival! The Jews have a tradition that when he was called to go up to the top of Nebo to die, the people followed him up the hill, the women beating on their breasts and bitterly wailing, while the strong men bowed themselves with grief and cried, "The father of the nation is to be taken away! Alas, what shall we do?" He was bid to leave the people on the mountain side and he went up, alone, to the place where Jehovah kissed away his soul—and so he passed into his rest. Truly it was a great loss, but the Lord found a man to follow Moses. Joshua was not equal to Moses in many things and yet, for the work he had to do, he was a much more fit man than Moses. The times were red with war and Joshua was more able than Moses to fight the Canaanites and conquer the land. Joshua was the man for the sword, as Moses had been the man of the Book. And God will fill every office in His Church, not as you and I might wish, but as His infinite wisdom determines. Therefore let us be of good courage and fear no lack.

It was Israel's joy that God's love was not withdrawn from the nation. The Lord still acknowledged the tribes as His people. His Glory was still above the Mercy Seat and His fiery, cloudy pillar still guided their marching or fixed their stopping. Still the manna dropped from Heaven and still they drank of the water from the smitten Rock. Thus the Lord still has a Church and it is always the same Church, loved of her lord, indwelt by His Spirit and dedicated to His praise. Let us take courage—the Church is not destroyed! Many changes take place and many sorrows are involved therein, but the Church of God is as always as alive as her Immortal Head, who has declared, "Because I live, you shall live also." Her stars are still the hope of the world's night and her angels are the heralds of the eternal morning! She follows the bleeding Lamb who is the Doctrine of her teaching, the Model of her acting, the Glory of her hope!

III. Thirdly, let me bring before your minds THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF THE WORD OF GOD. This we

perceive in the last verse. "For the Lord had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun."

Note how unchangeable are the threats of the Lord. "Among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron, the Priest, numbered. For the Lord had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness." Take note of this, you that think God's Word can fail—you know not what you dream! His Words of righteous wrath are not lost—they

kill as with a two-edged sword. The verse says, "There was not left a man of them." Whom the Lord had condemned to die, nothing could keep alive. Therefore, do not imagine, O you that obey not the Lord, that you shall go unpunished!

The unbelievers were many, yet not one escaped. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." The rebels were a terribly large majority, but the crowds in the broad way make it none the safer. God has no respect for multitudes—"The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God." Here they outnumbered the faithful more than 10,000 times and yet the justice of God did not spare one of them! "There was not left a man of them." How can any of you hope to escape? "Your hands shall find out all your enemies." The proudest sinner shall be laid low—the thunders of Jehovah shall smite down each individual transgressor—and no one shall go away free in the day of God's wrath!

It was a long time before all the sinners died, but the long-suffering of God had its limit and, in the end, every rebel died in the wilderness. They lived on, some of them, for all the 40 years, but they could not

pass the boundary. Perhaps they said, "Ah, this ban from God will never take effect on us." Yet, before the years were up, the survivors of the doomed race had to share the common fate. Not a man of those whom Moses and Aaron numbered at Sinai could pass the line of fire which closed in the 40 years. God waits, waits in infinite mercy, but the punishment of the wicked is none the less sure. "Their foot shall slide in due time." The Lord has bent His bow and made it ready, and when their hour is come, they shall find that He is not slack concerning His Word. Do not, I pray you, doubt the terrible certainty of Divine threats because they are long in taking effect. Say not, "Where is the promise of His coming?" He will come—and when He comes it shall be "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Some of the unbelieving generation were, no doubt, full of vigor, and they said, "We are as strong as old Caleb and quite as likely as he to cross the Jordan. Our eyes are as clear as those of Moses and we shall outlive the 40 years appointed us." But death chilled the coals of juniper and quenched their vehement flame. The stalwart man of war laid down his weapons, vanquished by the unconquerable foe of men. "There was not left a man of them." How like a knell those words sound in my ears! The mighty in the day of battle were no longer mighty when their hour had come! "They could not enter in because of unbelief." "Their carcasses fell in the wilderness." All their days were passed away in the wrath of God. Beware, you that forget God, lest He tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver. It is vain for you to indulge a hope, "larger" or smaller, if you die in your sin! The Justice of the Most High is not to be escaped! In that Last Great Day, when the Throne shall be set, and every man shall give an account for the things done in his body, whether they are good or whether they are evil, the strict Judge will, by no means, clear the guilty, but they shall be driven away in His wrath to the place where their worm dies not and their fire is not quenched!

Oh that you would flee to Christ for refuge! Look to His Cross, I pray you, that you may be saved! As the Lord fulfilled His threats, so did He cause His promises to come to pass. Caleb lived on and so did Joshua. They were often in danger. Did not the rebels take up stones to stone them? They were often near to death—Joshua was commander-in-chief of the army and Caleb was a man of war from his youth up. They endured the common risks of soldiers, but nothing could kill them, for God had promised that they should enter the land! They believed God and honored Him by their conduct and, therefore, He kept them until the hour came to go in unto the land to possess it. There were only two of them, but God did not, therefore, overlook them. He keeps covenant with individuals as well as with nations! They were not men who kept themselves out of harm's way, neither were they timorous and, therefore, afraid to advance their opinions. No doubt they came in for a special share of envy and malice, but their reward with God was sure. If you believe in Jesus, though you should be the only one of your family, yet you shall be saved! Though you know none of your kin fear the Lord, yet the God of Israel will not forget the lone one who is separated from his brethren. Though the faithful should become so few that all the saints together should only make a handful, yet it is written, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

God's Word stands! "The grass withers, and the flower thereof falls away: but the Word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the Word by which the Gospel is preached unto you." Jehovah's threats and promises are of equal force. "Has He said, and shall He not do it?" There shall be no change, even, to a jot or tittle in this wondrous Book! God forbid that we should begin to doubt it, for if we once begin, where shall we end? With this striking confirmation before us, we be-

lieve that the Word of the Lord must stand. Let us be as the man whom the Lord blesses, because, says He, "he trembles

at My Word."

IV. Our last point is this—learn from my text THE ABIDING NECESSITY OF FAITH. Those people came out of

Egypt with Moses and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea when they came forth into the wilderness. One would have hoped that they all would march to Canaan, but it was not so. The first census is taken. Their names are on the roll. But, sad to say, at the next numbering all those names have vanished! What a difference between the church roll at Sinai and the Book of Life by Jordan!

If you profess to be the people of God, we count you among His children—you are written among the living in Zion. But what an awful thing it would be if your name should not be written in the Lamb's Book of Life at the last! What if you should lie on the threshing floor in the great heap before the winnowing, but should be gone with the chaff as soon as the Lord has come, "whose fan is in His hand"? Oh, that none of us may provoke the Lord to swear in His wrath that we shall not enter into His rest!

Learn, first, that no man is, was, or ever shall be saved without faith. "He that believes not shall be damned" is our Lord's solemn declaration. It is written, "He that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." This is as true today as when it was first spoken.

Learn, next, that no privilege can supply the lack of faith. We read that they heard, as you do. But some, "when they had heard, did provoke." Their provocation lay mainly in their unbelief. No hearing, no, not hearing the Apostles, themselves, could save you without faith! "The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." Hearing may minister to condemnation if the Truth of God is not believed!

These people went a certain way with Moses towards the Lord's promised rest. They did come out of Egypt. They were numbered with Jehovah's people in the numbering at Sinai. They were separated from all the world in the quietude of the wilderness. But we read there was in them "an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." In heart they went back to Egypt! It is not enough to begin well—"he that endures to the end shall be saved"—and no other! They had ceremonies in abundance, but they were not saved by them. They had the morning and the evening lambs. They were circumcised. They ate the Passover. They kept the Day of Atonement. But all these things together did not save them from dying in the desert, shut out of Canaan by unbelief. "They could not enter in because of unbelief." Nothing can make up for the absence of faith. They had nothing to do all the day long in the wilderness but to learn the lessons of God. They had time for thought and they had the best of teachers to instruct them—and the best of textbooks in the ceremonial Law—and yet their knowledge did not preserve them from leaving their carcasses in the desert! They had plenty of time for meditation and contemplation. They had no care about temporals, for their bread was given them and their waters were sure. And yet, because of absence of faith, they did not learn that elementary Truth of God which would have ministered to them an entrance into rest.

But none perished who had faith—no, not one! All those who believed God and held fast to Him, were made inheritors of the land. Caleb and Joshua—these two saw the land and took their places in it. If you

believe, whatever your name may be, you shall be saved, for, "he that believes and is baptized shall be saved." It is written, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Caleb and Joshua, by faith, entered into the land promised to the fathers and you, my Hearer, can only enter in by faith! Have faith in God and you have all things! But without faith it is impossible to please God.

Mark this—while it was faith alone which saved them, faith gave these men notable characters. We read of, "My servant, Caleb." He that believes God becomes a servant of God and counts it all joy to obey his Lord! Faith is the mother of obedience. The Lord said that Caleb "had another spirit with him"—faith puts quite another spirit into a man—it is not a murmuring or a mutinous spirit. It is not an ungrateful or distrustful spirit. Neither is it a haughty, willful, rebellious spirit. But it is a spirit of love, of hope, of confidence in God. The faithful man is of another spirit from that of the world, for the Holy Spirit abides in him! Such a man chooses the way of God, so that the Lord says, "He has followed Me fully." This was well—it is wise not to run before God, nor to run away from God, but to follow Him step by step. It is wise not to follow man, but to wholly follow the Lord! It is commendable to follow Him fully with undivided, unwavering, unquestioning, untiring steps! The Lord will see that His servant, Caleb, enters into His rest—there is rest for good servants. As Caleb followed the Lord fully, it was meet that he should enter in where his Lord abides. Men of faith are

not idle men, but servants—they are not wicked men, but they follow the Lord. They are not half-hearted men—they follow Him fully. It is not their holiness that saves them, but their faith—nevertheless, where there is no holiness, there is no fruit of faith and no evidence of salvation.

As for Joshua, he was like Caleb. He was a brave and truthful man, a true servant of God. And though we have his life given somewhat at length, yet we discover no flaw in his character. It is almost a rare thing in the Word of God to find a life written at any length without a record of infirmity and sin, for the biographies of Scripture are truthful and they mention men's faults as well as their virtues. As there is no recorded fault in Joshua's career, we gather that he was of a noble character. "The Lord said unto Moses, Take you Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand upon him." So that the faith which took these two men into Canaan was in them the creator of a noble character.

Now, what do you say, Beloved Friends? Do you believe God? Do you believe His Word? Or are you of a captious and dubious spirit? Do you believe like children? Is God your Father and, therefore, is His Word your Father's Word which you cannot think of questioning? Will you follow the Lamb wherever He goes, against giants or Canaanites? Will you believe God, whatever may give Him the lie? If so, you shall dwell in the land that flows with milk and honey—and you shall have your portion when the Lord appears! But if you do not truly believe, whatever profession you may make, your carcasses must fall in the wilderness! Woe is me that I have to deliver such a prophecy! Greater woe to you if it should be fulfilled in you! Believe the Lord and you shall prosper.

This day, as you are preparing for the census of the nation, think of the time when God shall make up His last account of natives in His holy city. Will you be numbered with His people, or will your names be left out at the reading of the muster roll? God give us a place among His redeemed—and to His name shall be Glory forever and ever! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—

Numbers 1:1-5:44-46; 14:1-10,20-35; 26:1-4; 6-65.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/the-census-of-israel/>

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