

- **\*READ Numbers 13:1-3\*** It must have been the moment that every Israelite had been looking forward to with such great anticipation. They were finally on the doorstep of entering into the great promised land granted to them by Jehovah. Many calculate that it had been at least two years since this great multitude had left Egypt. All along the way they had endured and witnessed so much from the Red Sea parting and their crossing, the armies of Egypt being decimated, being led through the wilderness by the great pillars of cloud and fire, the Ten Commandments being handed down, the Law being established, and even the continuous eating of manna. The very thought of finally being able to settle down in comfort and prosperity must have been a nearly overwhelming thought.
- Considering their experiences and guaranteed excitement for what stood before them, we would expect for the following verses to detail the wonderful occasion of the people entering into Canaan to great fanfare and celebration. Unfortunately....we get something else entirely. Beginning in **Numbers 14:26** we find the Lord handing down swift and severe punishments to the people of Israel for their unfaithfulness and unwillingness to trust in the promises of God. (**Numbers 14:26-30**)
- For someone reading this for the first time and even for those of us who have read this innumerable times...we are all left wondering how in the world things could take such a drastic turn for the worst in the history of God's chosen people. How could this great multitude of people go from the doorstep of a great land to a time of forty years of wondering in the wilderness so that a whole generation would die off? How is it that just two men, Caleb and Joshua, were spared from this punishment? For those who are familiar with this story, we know that it was Caleb's initial courage and Joshua joining him at his side that allowed them to escape punishment. This morning, I would like to go through this text of **Numbers 13 & 14** considering the narrative and then looking at three lessons that we can learn from what took place during this sad time in Israel's history.

## I. Israel's Approaches The Promised Land

### A. The Lord commands for spies to be sent out. (**Numbers 13:1-20**)

1. As the people of Israel find themselves on the doorstep of the promised land east of the Jordan river in the wilderness of Paran, the Lord delivered a plan to Moses for him send out twelve men who would serve as spies. One man from each tribe was to go into Canaan on a recon mission so that they might be able to check out what the land was like for themselves.
2. He wanted to know whether or not the people were strong or weak, whether they were few in number or many, whether the land was good or bad, whether the cities were strong or weak, whether the the land was lean or fat, whether there were trees or not, and he wanted them to specifically check out what the grapes were like since it was grape season. (**13:17-20**) There wasn't much complicated in this plan. The spies were simply supposed to gather some idea of the type of land and people that the Israelites were about to overtake.

### B. The spies find Canaan very prosperous. (**Numbers 13:21-27**)

1. The spies do as Moses wished. For forty days they were traveling all throughout the land of Canaan stretching from the wilderness of Zin in the south all the way up into northern Canaan where Damascus would have been. They were able to see much of the land that would eventually become the land of Israel.
2. West of the dead sea they came upon the Valley of Eshcol where they found grapes, just as Moses had requested. They cut down a cluster of grapes that was so massive that it took two men to carry it on a pole. They also collected pomegranates and figs to show off as the bounty that this land had to offer. This truly was a prosperous land that could easily support the people of Israel...and yet we don't seem that being all that motivated to make their move into this land.

C. However, they warn against entering the land. (Numbers 13:28,29,33)

1. The reason that they are not all that motivated to go into the land and make it their own is because the people currently inhabiting the land were a strong and powerful people. The spies specifically point out the descendants of Anak as being present in this place. This was especially disconcerting because the Jews feared them because of their size and believed them to be of the lineage of the great Nephilim that dominated the world prior to the flood of Noah's day.
2. Seeing these people only filled the spies with fear for they saw themselves as grasshoppers in comparison to these great people. **(13:33)** Many scholars believe these people would eventually become the Philistines that caused Israel so much trouble, and we know how massive Goliath was described as being especially when compared to the average height of a Jew at that time. These spies had seen all they needed to see, and they wanted no part in going up into this land.

D. Caleb encourages the people to have faith. (Numbers 13:30)

1. At least that's what most of them said. Then we find in **13:30** that one of the spies, Caleb of the tribe of Judah, stands up, quiets the people, and reminds the people that they should in fact go up into this land and give effort to possess it.
2. His words are important to note, *"for we will surely overcome it."* Caleb seemed to have confidence that regardless of the size of the people or the fortification of the cities, that the people of Israel could overcome and make this land their own land. At this point, the people have the testimony and thoughts of two different sides. The vast majority of the spies warned against entering into the land while only Caleb seems to be vocal at this time concerning their need to go up into the land and take it as their own. Guess which side prevails at this point?

E. The bad report has great influence on the whole congregation of Israel. (Numbers 13:31-14:5)

1. Unfortunately, the naysayers are able to have the most influence over the congregation of the people of Israel. The doubting spies rebutted against Caleb's confidence by reaffirming that they were not able to go up against such a people for they were much too strong for them to be able to overcome. *"The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size."* **(13:32)** They not only told this to Moses and Aaron, but this was the message to the entirety of the people, and it caused them all to doubt their next move.
2. The people sided strongly with the negative spies, and it caused them all to lift up their voices together in crying all night long. What had been such a promising next step in Israel's history had become another disappointment. *"Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bring us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"* **(14:2,3)** Their negativity and pessimism went so far to the point that they even began to ponder the option of appointing another leader that would take them back to Egypt! **(14:4)** Moses and Aaron seem to be at a loss for what to do next, so they simply fall on their faces before the congregation of the people. The people were on the brink of total ruin, and their leaders weren't able to do anything...they needed someone to step up, and that is where Caleb and Joshua come into the spot light.

F. Caleb and Joshua again try to encourage the people, but they are nearly killed. (Numbers 14:6-9)

1. Caleb and Joshua were so distraught over the doubt that had enveloped the people of Israel that they tore their clothes as a sign of distress and stood up to speak before the people. They wanted to lay things out before the people from the perspective of God and not the mind of doubting men that had been fueled by the negative report of the other spies. Their argument for why they should go up into this land was very simple: *"God told us to go up and therefore we need to go up! The Lord will be with us if we do as He says!"* **(14:7-9)**

2. Unfortunately for Caleb and Joshua, the people were not so inclined to hear what they had to say. Instead of considering the great and awesome power of their God, the people embraced the negativity of the other spies and sought to silence Caleb and Joshua by killing them with stones. Thankfully, it was at this moment that God made His presence known by His glory appearing there in the tent of meeting with all of the people. Caleb and Joshua were saved, but the news wasn't so good for the rest of the people.

**G. God punishes the people for their lack of faith and trust, but Caleb and Joshua are spared. (Numbers 14:11ff)**

1. The Lord seems totally fed up with the people, and says that He is going to give them up as His people and kill them with pestilence. **(14:11,12)** Thankfully for all of them, Moses steps in and seeks to plead for leniency on the behalf of the people. He even goes so far as to say that if God killed them all now that the people of Egypt would revile His name for not being able to get His people into the land as He said He would. **(14:13-16)** He appeals to the lovingkindness and forgiving nature of God so that He might forgive the sins of the people while still holding the people accountable for the sins that they had committed. **(14:17-19)**
2. Luckily for the people, God was willing to listen to Moses. He pardoned the people, but He does so while acknowledging just how frustrating it was for these people to still doubt Him after everything He had done for them up to this point. They might not be killed right now, but they would die before they saw the land of promise. **(14:20-23,28-35)** Only Caleb and Joshua are spared from this punishment because as it was specifically said about Caleb, *"he has had a different spirit and has followed me fully."* **(14:24,30)**
3. The people were sentenced to forty years of wandering which was equivalent to the number of days the spies had spent in the land gather recon and intel. Those spies who gave the bad report were swiftly killed by a plague, and the people mourned their great loss. **(14:36-39)** However, the people decide they could still go up into the land even after Moses told them this wasn't going to work. Without the ark of the covenant or Moses, the people go up to the ridge of the hill country where the Amalekites and the Canaanites killed them. **(14:40-44)**

**II. What can we learn from Israel's failures and Caleb's courage?**

**A. Pessimistic attitudes have the potential to negatively affect the people of God.**

1. Sadly, this wasn't the first or the last time that a pessimistic or negative attitude would be present among the people of Israel. How many times before or after **Numbers 13 & 14** could we find the people embracing negativity, pessimism, and/or complaining? Here are just three examples from before and after the first approach to Canaan where the people only had a mindset of pessimism which led them to complain against Moses and the Lord.
  - a) *"The sons of Israel said to them, 'Would that we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'"* **(Exodus 16:3)**
  - b) *"Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst."* **(Exodus 17:3)**
  - c) *"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?"* **(Numbers 21:5)**
2. This type of mindset was so bad because it caused for them to not be able to see past the immediate problem that was right before their eyes. They only saw a lack of food, water, and comfort at the present moment, and they completely forgot about the mighty works that God had already done to get them to this point. They had forgotten about the ten plagues in Egypt. They had forgotten about the Red Sea being parted, and Pharaoh's army being engulfed. They had forgotten the mighty power of God to provide.

3. This forgetfulness was especially harmful when they were on the doorstep of the promised land. All they saw was the monstrous natives who stood in their way, and they completely forgot about the mighty God who had led them to this point. They allowed this pessimistic attitude that was fueled by a lack of faith, an abundance of doubt, and an overly strong focus on the immediate difficulties to stop them from moving forward by God's might and grace.
4. And friends...they're not alone in doing this. How often do we hear our own brethren doubt that the church can find success in the world that we are living in? How often do we hear that the wickedness of this world is just too much to overcome? All this does is discourage disciples from living out the command to be light and salt in this world. We might not mean it, but such attitudes only hinder the good efforts of those who are working hard, and it completely strangles the potential growth that could be experienced. When this takes place then we are no different from the doubting spies and the people who sought to silence those optimistic with stones.

#### B. We must learn to trust in the promises of God.

1. Instead, we need to learn to be like Caleb and have the courage to stand up and state that God will surely strengthen us to do exactly as He has commanded us to do. If God has said that the remedy for the wickedness of this world is the Gospel then we best be living it out in our own lives and sharing it with others as often as we have opportunity. This was exactly the mindset of Paul as he wrote in **Romans 1:16**, *"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."*
2. I have to ask...Do we believe and trust that this is still true? Do we believe and trust that there is great power in the Gospel? Do we believe and trust that the Gospel has the ability to change people from workers of evil and darkness into workers of goodness and light? We might say that we do, but do we actually? Can we truly say that we believe and trust in the power of the Gospel all while doubting and being pessimistic? I don't see how those two things can be true at the same time. We must put our full trust in the power of the Gospel and recognize that it is the only solution to the ills that so greatly plague the culture all around us.

#### C. God will strengthen and encourage those who are courageous in His name.

1. Additionally and finally, if we believe and trust in the power of the Gospel and if we believe and trust that it is our duty to get it to the lost and dying world around us then we best believe that God is going to be right there with us all along the way as we're busy doing the work. The problem the Israelites faced was that they thought they were entering the promised land by themselves! They had completely forgotten that the mighty God of their forefathers who had freed them from the bondage of Israel was going to be with them every step of the way so long as they were faithful to Him in everything they did.
2. This was exactly what God would eventually tell them and we read that at the opening of our assembly from **Joshua 1:6-9**. God told them to only be strong, courageous, and faithful as they went up into this land and He would take care of the rest. Friends, that is exactly what God continues to tell us. It was what Paul recognized in his own life. He was confident that the Lord would strengthen him to do as He desired for him to do (**Philippians 4:13**), and as he looked back at the end of his life he recognized that the Lord had done exactly that...*"But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was recused out of the lion's mouth."* (**II Timothy 4:17**)

What about us? Will we live with the courage of Caleb to go out into this land and claim it for the Lord through our faithfulness and trusting in His plan for us as disciples? Or will we cower in fear and have a pessimistic attitude that leads to inaction? The choice is entirely up to us, and it is my hope and prayer that we will each embrace the task set before us. May we enter the land with resounding confidence knowing that our Lord will surely be with us every single step of the way as we work for Him and His glory.