

#11 - Spies in the promised land - Numbers 13:1-14:41

Engage:

- In the last two stories we have seen God miraculously deliver (redeem) Israel from Egyptian slavery and present the Ten Commandments to Israel, a new nation of 2-3 million people. The Ten Commandments encompass the foundation of everything we need to know and do as God's special creation: love God (our response to God) and love one another (our response to others).

- In this story we jump from Exodus to the Old Testament book of Numbers. Israel is beginning to show the pains of immaturity in the midst of the presence of God working to accomplish His purpose. Israel is now a force to be dealt with – especially when they are faithful to God. When they are unfaithful, well, that is another story - which represents a large part of the content of the book of Numbers.

This book is a chronicle of the 40 years of wandering of in the wilderness by Israel. It begins about a year after Israel left Egypt and ends as a new generation of Israelite adults prepare to enter the promised land. The reason for the delay resulted from the unbelief and disobedience of the Israelites.

Numbers teaches the following:

- 1) While God's discipline may sometimes be severe, He patiently waits to reward those who obey His word. Therefore, God's love is both kind and severe, depending on the faithfulness or faithlessness of people.
- 2) While it may be necessary to pass through the wilderness, you don't have to live there. For Israel, a less than 2 week journey became a 40 year ordeal because of unbelief.

Thoughts About The Story:

Numbers 13:1-16 - The spies selected

- Moses was directed to send 12 men, one leader from twelve of the tribes of Israel to explore the promised land. Even though Israel was told to not be discouraged or afraid, they determined that spies were needed to check out the best route, the cities and the people they would encounter (Deuteronomy 1:20-23). Note: Israel was like us today: We would rather walk by sight than by faith.

Two of the men selected by their tribes were Caleb of Judah and Hoshea (which means "salvation" or "he saves") of Ephraim (who Moses renamed Joshua - which means "Yahweh is salvation" or "the LORD saves" - the Greek equivalent is Jesus). More about these two men later.

13:17-25 - The spies were sent (the 40 day inspection)

- They were to report back what they found out about the strengths and weaknesses of the people who lived there, the towns they lived in and the productivity of the land.

- When they returned with their report after traveling approximately 250 miles, they also brought a cluster of grapes from the Valley of Eshcol that had to be carried on a pole by two

men. They also brought back pomegranates and figs.

13:28-33 - The story of the spies had two sides

- The summary of the report was:

- 1) The land flows with “milk and honey.”
- 2) The people are “powerful, and the cities are fortified.”
- 3) Some of the people were the Nephilim, who were descendants of Anak. They were very large people.

- Two saw opportunities - Caleb spoke up and said that Israel go “take possession of it.” Joshua agreed (14:6-9,30).

- Ten saw obstacles - There other 10 spies were afraid that the people of Canaan were too strong (Deuteronomy 9:2) and that they saw themselves as being like “grasshoppers” (no doubt a hyperbole) compared to them (13:33). Had they forgotten that God had promised to give this land to them (10:29), plus all He had done in delivering them from Egypt.

Note: Have you ever been challenged by God to leave your comfort zone? What was your response?

Note: Did you ever feel like a “grasshopper”? What kind of “giants” have kept you from following God’s lead? What can you do to ensure that your fears (lack of faith and vision) do not interfere with God’s work in your life?

Thoughts about **faith** and **fear**:

- Either faith will overcome fear, or fear will overcome faith.
- Fear can cause one to have a very short memory.
- Faith seizes the opportune moment, but fear delays until it’s too late.
- “Faith is not stupidity. Faith employs human reason, faces potential problems, builds consensus, examines past history and reviews leadership credentials. But faith also makes room for God to work. Faith stretches beyond its own ability. It accepts challenges and seizes the opportunity.

If we attempt only that which can be accomplished in our own power, why call it faith? It has been well said: ‘Faith is going to the edge of all the light you have—and taking one more step.’” - Bob Russell

Numbers 14:1-10a - The people rebel in response

- In Exodus 15 they sang songs of victory because God had delivered them from the Egyptians. Now they raise voices of surrender/defeat. But here we go again (See Exodus 5:20-21; 14:10-12; 15:24; 16:2-3; 16:20, 27; 17:2-3; 32:1-4; Numbers 11:1, 4-5). The Israelites grumbled about their situation and said they wanted to go back to Egypt. They believed that they would die if they didn’t go back to Egypt. The ironic fact is that they would experience what they said - even though this was not God’s desire (see 14:28).

Note: See Matthew 12:36-37 about the importance of being careful about what we say.

Note: Do you have trouble bringing your tongue under control? Here is an idea of something you can do: “Enlist the aid of your spouse or a close Christian friend in ‘Operation Salty Speech’ (Colossians 4:6). Every time they catch you in an ungracious remark during the next

month, you must pay them 25 cents. Try it! What you *lose* in material wealth, you'll more than regain in spiritual maturity!" *Daily Walk*

- "Moses and Aaron fell face down in front of the whole Israelite assembly." Joshua and Caleb joined them by tearing "their clothes" to express their remorse. They believed that by making this choice, Israel was actually rebelling "against the Lord." They further urged the people to not "be afraid" and trust that the "LORD is with us." But the people wanted to stone them.

Note: How will your past experiences help affect the way you face your next difficult situation?

14:10b-41 - The judgment of the Lord

14:10b-12 – God appeared! God expressed His frustration to Moses. He said that He would strike the people down who refuse to believe, even though they had seen God perform miraculous signs.

14:13-19 – Moses prayed to God on behalf of unfaithful Israel – The words in this pericope reflect the great love Moses had for the Israelites and the desire he had to see the Integrity of the Lord's reputation upheld before the Egyptians and the people in the promised land. He pleaded that God would show His great strength by being "slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion" (14:17).

Note: We are like Israel. We need to experience God's patience and love when we display unbelief.

Note: See 1 John 5:10. We are told that we make God out to be a liar when we express unbelief.

Note: Some have pictured Moses as being like Jesus in this situation. Just as Moses pled the case for the people of Israel to God to save their lives, so Jesus does for us.

14:20-38 – God's answer to Mose's plea – God forgave them, but there was still punishment that must occur. The punishment consisted of having to spend 40 more years of wandering in the desert (one year for each day the spies explored the land of Canaan) for those 20 years old and older - until they all had died. These people (except Joshua and Caleb) would not be allowed to go into the promised land. Even their children would be affected because they had to stay in the wilderness for 40 years. (This is an example of how the sins of the parents can affect their children.) Joshua and Caleb were exceptions because of their faithfulness. Later, Moses would be unfaithful and denied entrance into the promised land (20:12). As for the 10 spies, they were immediately afflicted with a plague and died. The people "mourned bitterly" upon hearing this news.

Note: Even though sin can be forgiven, there are consequences that cannot be avoided.

14:29-45 – Going to battle without the Lord – The people "mourned bitterly" upon hearing this news. The next day they admitted their sin and said that they would then go. Moses said that what they were wanting to do was against God. But they went anyway and were defeated by the Amalekites and Canaanites.

Note: This is an example of repentance that comes too late.

Note: We are again reminded of the importance of having a strong faith. The Hebrew writer used this same example to remind his readers of this fact (Hebrews 3:7-12).

Note: It cannot be emphasized too much that God honors faith and brings judgment upon unbelief. "Faith leads to obedience and glorifies God; unbelief leads to rebellion and death."
Wiersbe

Quote: "No one deserves the title of "giant" when measured against the omnipotent God."

Quote: "Obstacles are those frightening things you see when you take your eye off the goal."
(Unknown)

Thought: In what character do you see your self as in the this story?

Numbers

| Chapter | Summary | Chapter | Summary |
|---------|----------------------------------|---------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Tallying Israel by tribes | 21 | Overthrow of Amorites |
| 2 | Host organized for marching | 22 | Fear of Balaam's donkey |
| 3 | Exchanging Levites for firstborn | 23 | Inspiration of Balaam's prophecies |
| 4 | Work for the Levites | 24 | Scope of Balaam's prophecies |
| 5 | Instructions for judging | 25 | Reward for Phinehas' zeal |
| 6 | Law of the Nazarites | 26 | Audit of Israel's tribes |
| 7 | Description of leaders' offering | 27 | Endowment of Joshua's leading |
| 8 | Emphasis on Levitical cleansing | 28 | Law of offerings reviewed |
| 9 | Record of the second Passover | 29 | Teachings for seventh month |
| 10 | Nation leaves Mount Sinai | 30 | Oath and vow laws |
| 11 | Elders and quails given | 31 | Conquest of the Midianites |
| 12 | Sin of Miriam's murmuring | 32 | Abode of Reuben, Gad |
| 13 | Spies sent from Kadesh-Barnea | 33 | Numbering of Israel's journeys |
| 14 | Judgment on Israel's behalf | 34 | Assigning of land borders |
| 15 | Offerings for the Lord | 35 | Appointing of cities of refuge |
| 16 | Uprising led by Korah | 36 | Necessity of tribal marriage |
| 17 | Rod of Aaron buds | | |
| 18 | Necessity of priestly service | | |
| 19 | Eleazar and red heifer | | |
| 20 | Years of wandering end | | |

This is taken from The Acrostic Bible by Barry Huddleston. It is an interesting way to outline the Bible, don't you think?