

THE REPORT OF THE SPIES

Moses - Part 18

Numbers 13

Intro: There is a lot of history behind the events of Numbers 13 and 14.

The first time there is a mention of “a land” in connection with the descendants of Abraham, is in Genesis 12:1 where the Lord said to Abram, as his name was then:

1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

From Stephen’s message which is recorded for us in Acts 7, we are told that the words found in Genesis 12 were first spoken to the Lord before he ever left his home in Mesopotamia, in Ur of the Chaldees. This is what Stephen said:

Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,

3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.

4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell (Acts 7:2-4).

On the basis of this promise, along with several other promises, Abram left home, got as far as Haran (north of the promised land) where he remained until the death of his father, and then he moved south into territory which was occupied by a group of nations known as Canaanites. As he entered the land, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “Unto thy seed will I give this land” (Gen. 12:7).

From that time on the land of Canaan was known as “the promised land.” We don’t know how the Lord communicated with Abram, nor how he led Abram into the land of the Canaanite, but He did both. And that is how Abram got into the land of Canaan which the Lord promised to give him.

But Abram died without ever possessing the promised land. However, when Isaac was sending Jacob away from home following Jacob’s trouble with Esau, the subject of “the land” came up again. And this is what Isaac said to Jacob, among other things, as he sent Jacob away:

3 And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and

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multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people;
4 And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham (Gen. 28:3-4).

On Jacob's first night away from home, the Lord spoke to Jacob as he dreamed. You will remember that Jacob in his dream saw a ladder reach from earth to heaven with the Lord at the top of the ladder. And this is what the Lord said to Jacob:

13 And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;

14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of (Gen. 28:13-15).

Then in the providence of God, first Joseph was taken into Egypt, and ultimately his father and his brothers all moved down there also. But before Jacob died he made his sons promise that they would take his body back to Canaan, to bury it there. And Joseph, many years later, when he was dying, said this to his brothers:

I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob (Gen. 50:24).

Joseph was fully convinced that God would ultimately take His people back to Canaan, and, like his father, he wanted to have his bones taken with the people when they finally left Egypt.

Then in Scripture we move to a time more than four hundred years later when the children of Israel were still in Egypt. None of them had known any home but Egypt. But God had not forgotten his promise, and He raised up Moses to take the people out of Egypt and back to Canaan, back to the promised land. The Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush. Moses was not in Egypt, nor in Canaan, but down in Midian where he had been living for forty years. Perhaps you remember what the Lord said to Moses out of the burning bush. This is the heart of what the Lord said to

Moses:

16 Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt:

17 And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:16-17).

The first time that Moses went before Pharaoh to tell him that the Lord had sent him to tell Pharaoh to let the children of Israel leave the country, Pharaoh not only turned down the request, but he made matters even more difficult for the Israelites. And even Moses was discouraged, and questioned the call of God in his life. But when things seemed at their worst, then the Lord appeared to Moses again, and spoke to him again about the land. Please turn with me to Exodus 6 and follow in your Bible as I read to you the first eight verses, noting particularly what the Lord said to Moses about “the land.” (**Read Ex. 6:1-8.**)

Now I have just given you a brief survey of the references that are made to the land up to the time of our text in Numbers 13. But I want you to see that from the time God promised the land to Abraham, He never changed His mind. And He hasn't changed His mind to this day. If the people had only obeyed the Lord, their history would have been altogether different from what it has been, and even from what it is today. But it is important to keep all of these facts in mind that I have been reviewing, and others that I could add to them, *as we come to that great moment in Israel's history when they could have seen prophecy fulfilled on a major scale.* The camp of Israel should have been filled with great excitement! This was the moment that Abraham had looked for, but never lived to see. All of the fathers of Israel had looked forward to this day, and now it is here!

The first point in our chapter, Numbers 13, is:

I. THE PLAN OF GOD (Num. 13:1-20).

It is always important to seek the will of God in doing His work, or His will. That is the only way to have the blessing of the Lord. After all, He is the Lord. He is God.

What was the plan? Men were chosen to go in together to spy out the land. The Lord had said many things about the land from the days of Abraham. Now one man, a ruler, was to be selected from each of the tribes, to go in to search out the land to find out what it was like. They were given the privilege of finding out by personal experience just how good the land actually was. It was to be a time of confirming all of the often-repeated promises of God.

So the men were chosen (vv. 1-16), and they were told what to do (vv. 17-20).

The next thing that we read about is:

II. THE SPIES' MISSION (Num. 13:21-25).

It took them forty days. So they had ample time to learn a great deal about the land.

This is followed by:

III. THE SPIES' REPORT (Num . 13:25-33).

It was both positive (vv. 26-27), and negative (vv. 28-33).

On the positive side, let's enlarge upon these two verses by the check list which the Lord had given them. I am referring now to verses 18 through 20.

It is interesting to me that the Lord started with the people. It was here that the report of the spies turned sour, *i.e.*, with the people. Were they strong, or weak? They were strong, very strong. There was no sign of weakness any place they went.

Were there few people, or many? There were lots and lots of people. The spies would have hoped that there were not many people, and that those who were there were weak, easily defeated in battle. Not so!

In verse 19: What about the land? Was it good, or bad? They had been told that it was "a land flowing with milk and honey." The spies found out that the Lord had been telling them the truth. What did that expression mean? Jamieson said in his commentary that this meant that it

was “a region of extraordinary productiveness.” “Flowing” means that the crops just kept coming and coming. I think that we can say that there was no other region in all the world that could match it. It is not that way today, but neither is Israel a nation that is a godly nation. But what the land once was, it could be again under the blessing of God. They were still harvesting when the next planting season would begin. So it was not only good, but it was the best!

What were the cities like? Did the people live in tents, or strongholds? “Tents” would have meant unwalled villages. But that was not the case. The Canaanites lived in strongholds. Their cities were secure behind high walls which would have made them practically impossible to conquer.

What was the ground like? Fat, or lean? It had to be fat, *i.e.*, very fertile, and evidence of that was the cluster of grapes that they brought back with them. So the people would normally have been strong physically living on such good food.

But what about **the negative side** of the report as it is given in verses 28, introduced by the word, “Nevertheless.” This is an adverb which means that however good the good might be, the bad outweighed the good.

The spies started by talking about the people. The people were strong. They lived in cities with high, strong walls. And “the children of Anak were there.” They were the Anakim, and were divided into three main tribes which are mentioned in verse 22: “Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi.” They were men of great stature and ruthless in their treatment of their enemies. We could say that they were the terrorists of the day.

In verse 29 the people mentioned how scattered over the land the people of Canaan were, which would have added to the problem of conquering them. It is worth taking the time to compare the discouraging report of the spies with what actually took place when the people of Israel invaded the land under the leadership of Joshua, remembering that Joshua was one of the original spies.

But notice what a man named Caleb, one of the spies did. It is in this chapter that we hear about Caleb for the first time. Our text says that he “stilled the people.” What does this mean? It means that the report of the spies was greatly upsetting to the people of Israel, and that Caleb sought to quiet their fears. But we are going to learn from chapter 14 that the

people did not listen to Caleb and Joshua. They might have argued, How could Caleb and Joshua be right when they were opposed 10 to 2? Surely the majority must be right. Looking ahead to chapter 14 we find two statements made by the Lord about Caleb:

- 1) He had a different spirit about him, and
- 2) He fully followed the Lord.

Caleb (and the same was true of Joshua) believed God. He was a man of faith. He believed the Lord when the Lord said that He would “give” the land to His people. It would not be without warfare, but Caleb believed that with the Lord on their side, they could conquer those nations regardless of what the opposition might have in their favor. And so he said, and rightly so, “Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (Num. 13:30).

The report of the ten is given in verses 31 through 33. They were looking at the opposition in the light of who they were; Caleb was looking at the opposition in the light of Who God is. Caleb would have agree with Paul when he said, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31b).

Yesterday we had 2 Chronicles 14 in our Bible reading as one of our OT chapters. It tells about the reign of the good king of Judah named Asa. He had an army of 300,000 men from Judah, and 280,000 men from Benjamin. But the army of the Ethiopians came against them with 1,000,000 men, and 300 chariots. Obviously there was little hope that Judah and Benjamin could stand up against the Ethiopians. But what did Asa do? He had been seeking to do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but when this emergency came up, He turned to the Lord in prayer, and this is what he said:

11 And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee (2 Chron. 14:11).

What happened? The next verse tells us:

12 So the LORD smote the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled (2 Chron. 14:12).

The armies of Judah and Benjamin completely routed the army of the Ethiopians because God was on their side.

Concl: But let me point out one more important point before I close. It is this: the men of Israel were right in one thing that they said about

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the Canaanites. Read Numbers 13:33. (Read.) “Giants” and “grasshoppers.” What a contrast! Why grasshoppers? They are small, and weak, and fearful. Why did the Lord put His people in such a precarious position? So that seeing the strength of the enemy in contrast with their own weakness, they would not flee like grasshoppers, but, realizing their own weakness, they would put their trust in an almighty God. Psalm 20:7 is a good verse to close on:

20 Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.

The way ahead may seem to be too much for many of us, and it probably is, but that is why we need to trust in the Lord and not in ourselves.