

THE UNBELIEF OF SPIES AND PEOPLE

Moses - Part 19

Numbers 14

Intro: There really should not be a division between Numbers 13 and Numbers 14. The two chapters should be one, telling us, as they do, of one of the most tragic events in all of the Bible.

Last Sunday, for those of you who were here, I briefly reviewed for you some of the passages in which God had spoken to His people about the land which He had given to them. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in the land, but they did not possess it. Joseph was sold by his brothers out of the land, but he was thoroughly convinced that the day would come when the Lord would take His people back to the land, and then they would possess it. I don't know if there is anything quite like it in human history. This was a moment that the Lord Himself had been anticipating before creation itself. There was no place like it on the face of the earth. And He had made no such provision for any other nation. From the beginning of time the Lord had been seeking to teach His people to walk by faith. Now the moment of sight had come, and the Lord was ready to take His people into the land. But it was all too apparent that with all that these people, the people of Israel, had seen of the power of God and the wisdom of God and the grace of God, they knew practically nothing about faith, about trusting God. It was good and it was important that they recognize the obstacles which stood in the way of their entering and possessing the land, but it was sinful for the spies to base their decision upon the people of Canaan, their numbers, their size, their power, and the high walls around their cities, rather than upon God and the promises of God.

Now just to refresh our minds on the report of the spies, let us look briefly at the report the spies brought back after spending forty days searching out the land of Canaan.

In verses 26 and 27 of chapter 13 we see the beginning of the report which was good. But then the bad part of the report began in verse 28 and continued right on to the end of the chapter with the exception of verse 30 where we learn that Caleb tried to encourage the people that in spite of all of the problems most of the spies saw, Caleb believed that they could overcome the inhabitants, and he encouraged the people to get ready to go in immediately! But as we move on into chapter 14 we see that the negative report of the ten spies was what affected the people.

And so we see:

I. THE REBELLION OF THE PEOPLE (Num. 14:1-4).

It is amazing that the people could say, and would say, the words that we read in these four verses. It didn't take them long to overrule everything that God had said, and everything that God had done to bring them where they were at that very moment. They were ready to forget it all, and go back to Egypt.

But at that moment we see:

II. THE RESPONSE OF FOUR MEN OF GOD (Num. 14:5-9).

Two are mentioned in verse 5, and two more are mentioned in verse 6. Moses and Aaron talked to God; Joshua and Caleb talked to the people. Both are extremely important. This is not the first time that we have seen Moses on his face before the Lord, but here Aaron joined him. The picture is one of total humiliation before the Lord, and total trust on the Lord God of Israel. And while they prayed, Joshua and Caleb spoke, spoke to the people. That is a great combination. Note how Joshua and Caleb sought to turn the attention of the people away from the problems that they had heard about, to the Lord! (Read verses 7 through 9.)

Next we see:

III. THE REACTION OF THE PEOPLE AND OF THE LORD (Num. 14:10).

The people were ready to kill Moses and Aaron and Joshua and Caleb. Notice the word "all" at the beginning of this verse, and then it appears again toward the end of the verse. The presence of the Lord appeared to the people, all of them who were in rebellion against the Lord.

This led to:

IV. A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE LORD AND MOSES (Num. 14:11-35).

The dialogue went like this:

- 1) The Lord to Moses in verses 11 and 12.

- 2) Moses to the Lord in verses 13 through 19.
- 3) The Lord to Moses in verses 20 through 25.
- 4) The Lord continued speaking to Moses in verse 26 through 35.

It is obvious that the Lord had more to say to Moses than Moses had to say to the Lord. Let us examine what both the Lord and Moses had to say as a dialogue in which we may be able to learn something about our own needs in relation to the Lord.

A. The Lord to Moses (Num. 14:11-12).

We must take this as an answer to the praying of Moses and Aaron which is referred to in verse 5. We are not told what Moses and Aaron had to say, but we can be sure that they were seeking wisdom for themselves as well as the help of the Lord as they faced this another crisis in the lives of the people. *Twice in verse 11 the Lord said, "How long . . . ?"* The Lord had Moses and Aaron say this to Pharaoh according to Exodus 10:3, and the servants of Pharaoh had this same question which they asked about Moses in verse 6 of the same chapter. We see it again in Exodus 16:28 when some of the people went out to gather manna on the Sabbath Day when the Lord had told them that they were not to do that.

We have it again in Numbers 14:27. Obviously the patience of the Lord had been exhausted.

And then the Lord told Moses the same thing that He had told him when the children of Israel made the golden calf and were worshipping it while Moses was in Mount Sinai receiving the Law from the Lord.

Notice what the Lord said He would do to the people.

Then we have:

B. Moses to the Lord (Num. 14:13-19).

I want you to notice the nature of Moses' prayer here, which is the same way that he had prayed in Exodus 32 when the Lord was ready to destroy the Israelites and make of Moses a greater nation than they were. *Moses presented his arguments to the Lord as to why He should not destroy the nation at this point either.*

There is an interesting case of this which Job mentioned in the book

which bears his name: Job 23:3-4. Listen to what Job said:

3 Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!

4 I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.

Spurgeon preached a sermon on this text in which he showed that this is the way for us to pray when we are in certain circumstances. Moses became like a lawyer pleading his case before God in the court of heaven. *And you can see that Moses was primarily concerned for the glory of God.*

Moses knew that if the Lord destroyed the people, word would get back to the Egyptians, and to the Canaanites, that the Lord had started something that He was not able to finish. And so He had killed them. Moses was a strong believer in the power of the Lord. He knew that the Lord could not fail to do what He had started out to do, *but amazingly he asked the Lord to manifest His power in another direction: he asked the Lord to manifest His power in forgiving the people!* See verses 17 through 19 in our text. (Read.)

At this point the Lord responded to Moses. The Lord had forgiven them “ten times” before (and you can count those times if you go back over the history which Moses has written for us). Moses was calling upon the Lord to do it one more time.

This ought to make us reflect upon the number of times we have rebelled against the Lord. We didn’t deserve to be saved originally; how many times has the mercy of the Lord been extended to us since we were saved. We come to a great truth here. *The power of the Lord is more evident when He forgives us than it would be if He were to destroy us.* Let us think about this truth until the wonder of it overwhelms us. None of us has a perfect record. We may have more than ten times for which we can be thankful that the Lord has not destroyed us.

And so we come to the third part in this dialogue:

C. The Lord to Moses (Num. 14:20-25).

The Lord had already forgiven them, as He said, but we come to the first phase of judgment which the people were to experience. *None of the people who had come out of Egypt would be allowed to enter the land,*

with one exception mentioned here, and we know of a second which is mentioned in verse 30: Joshua!

The next part of this dialogue also is from the Lord to Moses, but we have the words of verse 26 inserted between the two parts to show what an overwhelming effect these words had upon the people. The details are given in the verses that follow verse 26. And we have to call this next section also:

D. From the Lord to Moses (Num. 14:26-35).

I repeat what I have said before: this is one of the saddest chapters in all of the OT. Think of what blessing the people of Israel could have experienced if they had only believed God, if they had only trusted Him to do what He had said repeatedly that He would do. Cf. Phil. 1:6. There are many trials that we will face before we reach heaven, but God will be our sufficiency in all of them (even though there will be many times when we will not be able to see how He will do it).

But what were the details given by the Lord to Moses, and which Moses was to pass on to the people?

First, the progress of the people was going to be delayed until everyone who was twenty years old and older, had died – all except for Caleb and Joshua. This was going to take forty years – a year for each day that the spies were spying out the land. See verses 33 through 35. The people had expressed concern for their children. The children would be safe under the blessing and protection of God, but it would be the older ones who would not make it. It will always be true that the safest place for us to be is in the will of God. We may be outnumbered and overwhelmed by the power of the enemy, but God in His power will prevail. Things easily can get out of our control, but that is never the case with the Lord.

Yesterday as a few of us men met to pray, I read to them a Psalm emphasizing several of the verses as I went along. The Psalm was 147, and two of the verses were 10 and 11. The Psalmist, speaking of the Lord, said:

10 He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man.

11 The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.

Here in Numbers 13 and 14 the children of Israel were influenced more

by the strength of the Canaanites and their horses than they were by the infinitely greater power of the living God.

At the end of verse 34 the Lord told the people that, as it is expressed in the KJV, “and ye shall know my breach of promise.” It means, not that the Lord was forgetting His promise, but that the children of Israel would have forty years to realize how opposed, how grieved, the Lord was over their rebellion against Him by their refusal to go into the land.

But the chapter closes with two more judgments.

V. GOD’S JUDGMENT UPON THE TEN SPIES (Num. 14:36-39).

For the ten to die, and the two to live, they would see that nothing right and wrong before God, is not determined by the numbers for a matter, but solely by what is the will of God. Nothing prospers which is contrary to the will of God.

But there was one more judgment:

VI. GOD’S JUDGMENT UPON THE PRESUMPTION OF SOME OF THE PEOPLE (Num. 14:40-45).

This chapter teaches us that there are two basic ways to sin. One is, by not doing what the Lord tells us to do. This is what we call *a sin of omission*. The other is, by doing what the Lord has not told us what to do, or by doing what He has told us not to do.

Some of the people evidently felt that by going into the land they would be able to reverse the judgment of God. But that was not to be. It was too late to undue the wrong which had been done. And the reason that their plan would not succeed, is stated twice in these verses. First in verse 42, “for the Lord is not among you.” Second in verse 43, “therefore the Lord will not be with you.”

Obviously the Lord was present with them, but His blessing was not upon them. And so many died as a result of their sin. And the chapter ends on this tragic note.

Concl: Matthew Henry concluded his comments on this chapter with the following words:

That affair can never end well that begins with sin. The way to obtain peace with our friends, and success against our enemies, is to make God our friend, and keep ourselves in His love.

Jude spoke of this in verses 20 and 21 of his epistle:

20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

But how do we keep ourselves in the love of God? The Lord Jesus answered that question in John 14:21 and 23:

21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

22 Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?

23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him (John 14:21-23).

The Lord continues to love us even when we are disobedient to Him, but we enjoy His love, and experience the blessings of His love, only when we are living in obedience to His will. Therefore, the most important concern any of us who knows the Lord should have about our own lives, is that we are living each day in the will of God – with respect to what we are, what we do, where we go, what we say, and right down to what we think.