

The Book of Numbers

Lesson 7

Chapters 13:30-14:45

The spies had returned to the camp at Kadesh Barnea with the grapes that Moses requested as well as other fruit. It was time for the report of the trip and Caleb spoke first.

Caleb's Report

^{13:30} Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it."

Just to put this in plain English, Caleb's position was "Pack Up! Let's Go!" Caleb was positive that the LORD would provide and protect them in the journey to take the land! But Caleb's position was in the minority among at least ten of the other men.

Majority Report

^{13:31} But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us." ^{13:32} So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "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. ^{13:33} "There also we saw the Nephilim (~~the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim~~); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

When the spies were in the land where Anak lived, they were able to get close to them and compare their size. The *men of renown* (the translation of the word Nephilim) were taller than the Israelites. Generally speaking, the Israelites were small in stature and still are today. If Moses was more than five feet six inches, we would be surprised. We do not know how tall he was; the Scripture makes no comment on his stature. Nevertheless, Israelites have on average been no taller than 5.4 to 5.7 in accordance with the report of the exhumed bones of ancient soldiers by the following authority.

The ancient soldier was shorter and weighed less than his modern counterpart, varying in average height from 5.4 to 5.7 feet, or about the same height as the average adult male in the nineteenth-century industrial West. (*Soldiers' Lives Through History – the Ancient World* [Greenwood Press, 2007] 10)

As the report indicates, the Israelites must have felt small and inferior when they met the descendants of Anak, the *tall and long necked* ones, that they met on their investigation of the Promised Land.

Israel Desires a New Leader

Num 14:1 Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. **14:2** All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! **14:3** "Why is the LORD bringing 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?" **14:4** So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."

After dark, rebellious moans began to spread through the congregation of the Israelite camp at Kadesh Barnea. Moses and Aaron were in the firing line, but the people were angry with the LORD. They began to imagine their doom; they began to express their concern; they began to forget their slavery in Egypt; their motive began to display their true nature; their mood began to turn against their leader. "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt." They had barked up the wrong tree; they had attacked the wrong person; they had infuriated the LORD; they had set their feet on a path that would never allow them to see the Promised Land.

Reaction of Moses, Aaron

14:5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel.

Leaders must know how to react! This story is a perfect example of the correct way leaders should react when faced with a rowdy assembly. No doubt Aaron did not know what to do on his own, but he knew enough to follow his brother who knew exactly what to do - fall on his face.

Even though the text states that "Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly," we do not know if it was to show humility before the congregation or humility before God. If before God, it was to seek refuge from the stiff-necked rebels in the crowd. That is probably the reason. Falling before the assembly to show humility before the congregation makes no sense at all. Because of human nature, it is hard to believe that Moses' actions before them would produce a change of heart toward Moses.

Caleb and Joshua Speak to Israel

14:6 Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; **14:7** and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. **14:8** "If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey. **14:9** "Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them."

Young Joshua and the older Caleb were on the right track. They had a trust in the LORD that the others did not have. If the LORD had promised to fight for the Israelites, that He would do. If

the Creator of the universe did the fighting, then the Israelites should not worry about any group they met along the way.

The LORD Reacts to Threat of Stoning

^{14:10} But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel. ^{14:11} The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst? ^{14:12} "I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they."

We must wonder if the people heard the LORD speaking to Moses in this passage. Was Moses still on his face before the people? The congregation wanted to stone Moses and Aaron despite the fact that they were angry with the LORD. The LORD could read their hearts! The LORD knew their intent! The LORD proclaimed His judgment upon them. He would smite them! But the promise to Moses was still, "I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they." The congregation of those in rebellion would die! The people who were not rebelling would become a "greater and mightier" nation after the destruction of those in rebellion. What a promise! Yet, that would take time. The LORD had all the time in the world. He could wait! They could not! His time was limitless. Their time was limited. He knew how long it would take. They did not. Yet, when the LORD was finished, they would be gone, and the congregation would be greater than ever before.

Moses Replies to the LORD

^{14:13} But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst, ^{14:14} and they will tell *it* to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. ^{14:15} "Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say, ^{14:16} 'Because the LORD could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.' ^{14:17} "But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, ^{14:18} 'The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.' ^{14:19} "Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

Moses understood the LORD. He must have immediately known the true intent of the LORD. The people would be punished in His way and in His timing. The LORD's wrath would be slow in its coming but it would come! The LORD would forgive the iniquity and the transgression but there would still be consequences. Eventually, Egypt and the nations around the area would hear about the fate of the Israelites in the desert, but that took time! The Israelites were not a full two years out of Egypt yet and until they had arrived at Kadesh Barnea, they were out of the reach of

Pharaoh. But at Kadesh, the camp was literally on the border of Egypt and Canaan. The same Pharaoh they had run from was still in power. He was brave enough to cross that border low enough in the desolate desert of the Negev that if he had heard that they were there, he would have attacked. But in reality, Kadesh was in just the right place in the desert to deter a runner from tattling on the Israelites. But if they stayed there long enough, Pharaoh would hear and it would be reasonable to him to make an attempt. However, if the LORD allowed the Israelites to enter Canaan Land, no doubt the victories would cause Pharaoh to think more than twice about trying to subdue them. But the LORD was not going to allow that to happen either! Neither was he going to punish all the Israelites at Kadesh Barnea although He would speak the Word of His Judgment on them there.

Israel Pardoned

^{14:20} So the LORD said, "I have pardoned *them* according to your word; ^{14:21} but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD.

The congregation was pardoned from their sin so that the LORD would not slay them immediately in the desert of Kadesh Barnea. That did not mean that there would not be consequences for the sin they committed that night. But what were they pardoned for? Forsaking God's authority or the threat of stoning God's leader? I think the second! Because they did not stone Moses, they were pardoned. Moses had interceded for them. But because they forsook the LORD's authority, they would still be punished.

This passage says, "all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD." The Hebrew is *kol haarets* which means *all this land* which is a direct reference to the Land of Canaan rather than the whole earth or the world as westerners would interpret it. Surely the LORD is correct, the whole land of Canaan will be filled with the Glory of the LORD, but not yet; He will patiently wait four decades for that to begin.

Not All to a See Promised Land

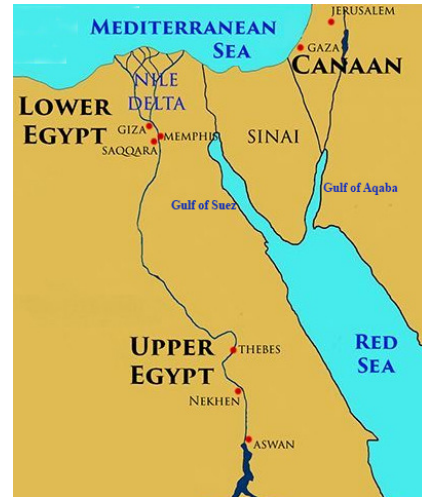
^{14:22} "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, ^{14:23} shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. ^{14:24} "But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it.

The Israelites had damaged themselves by their response to the report of the spies and their disgust with Moses and Aaron on account of the LORD. He lowered the hammer and declared that the Israelites would be in the land one day and not one man would actually see the land or enter it at all save Caleb. He had followed God fully! He had obeyed the LORD without reservation! He would see the land! Joshua was not included here but he will be soon in the next passages.

Head to Red Sea

14:25 "Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites live in the valleys; turn tomorrow and set out to the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea."

The cloud would lead them away from Kadesh Barnea when the sun rose in the morning. It would lead them back to Mount Sinai by way of the Red Sea. In the day of Moses, both fingers at the top of the Red Sea were called by the same name. It will be many years before the two fingers will be called “gulfs” and acquire the names of Suez and Agaba. “By the way of the Red Sea” means that the camp will return to Mount Sinai on the same side of the Red Sea they had left a few months before. It does not mean that they will go west toward Egypt and make the crossing of the Red Sea as they had previously done while running from Pharaoh. The LORD will keep them far away from Pharaoh’s land.



Twenty Years and Older to Die in Wilderness Except Two

14:26 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 14:27 "How long *shall I bear* with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. 14:28 "Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; 14:29 your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. 14:30 'Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

The LORD was finished with His message. When the camp left Kadesh Barnea, death would eventually take the life of everyone over the age of 20 at that time except Caleb and Joshua. The camp was pardoned for staying their threat to stone Moses and Aaron but they were not pardoned for rebelling against the Lord’s authority and divine will. His mind was made up. Israel would take the land as a great nation, but it would be a new generation, not this one.

Children to See Promised Land

14:31 'Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey—I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected.

That which disgusted the LORD the most was when they said, "Why is the LORD bringing 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?" (14:13) The little ones will get to see the Promised Land when they are adults, when their parents have died and are buried in the shifting sands of the desert where no tomb could survive and no name could be memorialized in stone.

Forty Years in Wilderness

^{14:32} 'But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness. ^{14:33} 'Your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they will suffer *for* your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness. ^{14:34} 'According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, *even* forty years, and you will know My opposition. ^{14:35} 'I, the LORD, have spoken, surely this I will do to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be destroyed, and there they will die.'"

It would take forty years for what should have been a twenty month sojourn out of Egypt. It would be one year for each day the spies were in Canaan. One year of guilt for each day of exploration.

Fate of Spies

^{14:36} As for the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land and who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing out a bad report concerning the land, ^{14:37} even those men who brought out the very bad report of the land died by a plague before the LORD. ^{14:38} But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive out of those men who went to spy out the land.

The death of the ten spies occurred immediately with a plague from the LORD that night. The forty-day exploration they took to see the Promised Land ended on the night of their return. Buried! Dead from the plague! Immediate. Why? Because of their report and their failure to trust in the Mighty God Who had promised to fight their battles for them. When the LORD promises, He takes offence toward those who doubt His Word. He is a jealous God and that has not changed to this very day. He is offended as much today as He was then by those who doubt His Word, the Bible, the Holy Writ, the ancient writings of the men who recorded the words breathed though them by the Holy Spirit onto the pages of His Book, the Book, the Holy of Holy Scripture!

People Change Their Minds but Too Late

^{14:39} When Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly. ^{14:40} In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, "Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised." ^{14:41} But Moses said, "Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD, when it will not succeed? ^{14:42} "Do not go up, or you will be struck down before your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. ^{14:43} "For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there in front of you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned back from following the LORD. And the LORD will not be with you." ^{14:44} But they went up heedlessly to the ridge of the hill country; neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses left the camp. ^{14:45} Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down, and struck them and beat them down as far as Hormah.

As the morning dawned, the lay leadership of the camp realized their error. Even though the ten were dead, they thought the LORD would reconsider and rescind His judgment. After all, after the golden calf debauchery, yes, some died, but life went on in the camp. After all, after the murmuring at Taberah, yes, some died, but they were able to move on and follow the LORD to Kilbroth. After all, after they complained about the lack of meat and the LORD, in His anger, sent quail for a month until it came out of their noses, yes, some died, but they were able to go on to Hazeroth. After all, after Miriam and Aaron challenged Moses and God, yes, she contracted leprosy, but after her brother prayed, God punished her for only seven days and, yes, He returned her to the camp. The Israelite camp failed to see the end of His grace coming! Surely they thought, “God will change and support us and continue to bless and forgive the forty year judgment.” They were wrong – after all!

Here is what they did. They told Moses they changed their minds and expected Moses to intercede for them with God. But he did not! On their own, they were determined to show God their will and willingness to follow His original plan. But Moses warned them that that time was over. Moses warned them that the LORD would not protect them. Moses warned them that the LORD would not fight for them. The Israelites did not take the warning! In spite of their leader, who had the authority to lead that congregation, they refused to let him lead them, they took the God given authority of Moses and, without God, moved to attack the Amalakites as originally directed by the LORD. They found themselves on their own - without God. Be not surprised! Even today, God gives divine opportunities to greatly bless those whom He loves! But God never allows His opportunities to be open forever. Yes, He already knows what you will do! Yes, He already knows where He will take you if you take the opportunity He offers. Yes, He also knows when you will choose not to take His offer and He will provide a lesser place, with or without blessing, in a different direction until He is through with you! Choose wrong and miss your Promised Land. Choose right and enter your Promised Land. But when the LORD closes the door, do not dare kick the door open because the LORD will not be with you, He will not be protecting you, you will be on your own!

A classic example is found in Genesis with Abram. His father had died and it was time for Abram to start his journey with the LORD. He left Haran when he was 75 with his wife who was 65. But he did not leave Haran alone. Tagging along were hundreds of servants, cattle, flocks, goods and supplies. Between Bethel and Ai he built an altar to the LORD and worshiped Him. For several hundred miles he had trusted the LORD completely! Then after he worshiped the LORD for the first time on the land that was promised to him and his descendants, it came time for the LORD to test his trust. A famine was sent. Instead of trusting the LORD, he headed to Egypt without the LORD's permission. Abram went to Egypt. The LORD did not go with him. The LORD remained at the altar of Bethel/Ai. Down in Egypt, Abram lied about his relationship with Sarah. Pharaoh took Sarah, a 65-year-old woman, because Abram told him she was his sister. He placed her in his harem and planned on attempting to have a child with her. Pharaoh was childless and desperate for an heir with any woman regardless of her background or nationality! Thankfully, the LORD intervened with Pharaoh. He protected Pharaoh, not Abram. Pharaoh sent Abram away with everything he had given him and that included the Egyptian

maid, Hagar. Pharaoh did not want anything touched by Abram or Sarah left in Egypt to taint it any more than it already had. Add a few years and Sarah offered Hagar to Abram so that he could have a son. Abram made a horrible choice. He took Sarah's maid as a concubine, a secondary wife, and had a child. Fourteen years later, when Sarah's son Isaac was four years old, Sarah and Hagar had a full melt down. Hagar belonged to Sarah but Sarah put it on Abram to get rid of her! Abram fell into that trap and sent her away. Had Abram not gone to Egypt, there would have been no sin of lying about Sarah, no sin of having a child with Hagar. Her son's descendants, the Ishmaelites of today would not have been there to hate with their desire to destroy the nation of Israel. Abram had kicked the door open! Abram had traveled to Egypt on his own. Abram had made the wrong choice. But stepping back in the story, when did Abram return to the LORD? You will find that Abram finally found the LORD when he returned to the altar where he had left Him at Bethel/Ai. The LORD had never left that altar of worship. Abram had left the altar and he had left the LORD. And because of that, Abram's wrong choice led him down a path that the LORD knew he would choose, on a path that would cause him and his descendants grief until the Second Coming of the LORD when He will finally destroy all the Ishmaelites before He sets up His Millennial Kingdom. Although the LORD will use all things for His good, not all things along the way are the right choices, at the right time, in the right way. Abram made a mistake and went out on his own and he never got over it and neither has the world. See what it got him and the world! Back at Kadesh Barnea, the Israelites had made a mistake when they went out on their own in to attack the Amalakites. See what it got them. A terrible beating and a mass of death and blood!