

## November 1, 2020

### A Bad Report/Failure of Faith

### Numbers 13-14

#### BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Oct 25	Luke 4-5	Oct 29	Luke 12-13
Oct 26	Luke 6-7	Oct 30	Luke 14-16
Oct 27	Luke 8-9	Oct 31	Luke 17-18
Oct 28	Luke 10-11	Nov 1	Luke 19-20

#### Overview of Numbers 13-14

**Numbers 13** Spies View the Land

**Numbers 14** The People Rebel

**Lesson Idea:** God's people need to have enough faith in Him to be obedient to His call. When we fail to trust Him, we miss out on the blessings of His promises, and we wander into punishment.

**Background:** About two months after leaving Mount Sinai, the people of Israel came to the entrance of the land God had promised to give to them. Spies were chosen to go throughout the land and examine it before the Israelite army went in to possess it. Unfortunately, the spies spread a bad report and faith turned into fear and led to failure.

#### Numbers 13:1-3, 17-20, 25-33 Spies View the Land

#### Questions to Ponder:

- Why did they send spies into the land?
- What did God say about the land in verse 1?
- What kind of men were sent to spy out the land?
- What were they supposed to look for?
- How long did the spies spend in the land?
- What did most of the spies say about the Land?
- What did Caleb say about the land? Why was his opinion different?

<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying, <sup>2</sup> **Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land** of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, every one a leader among them." <sup>3</sup> So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran at the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the sons of Israel. . .

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<sup>17</sup> When Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, he said to them, "Go up there into the Negev; then go up into the hill country. <sup>18</sup> See what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many. <sup>19</sup> How is the land in which they live, is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which they live, are they

like open camps or with fortifications? <sup>20</sup> How is the land, is it fat or lean? Are there trees in it or not? Make an effort then to get some of the fruit of the land." Now the time was the time of the first ripe grapes. . .

#### **The Spies' Reports**

<sup>25</sup> When they returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days, <sup>26</sup> they proceeded to come to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. <sup>27</sup> Thus they told him, and said, "We went in to the land where you sent us; and **it certainly does flow with milk and honey**, and this is its fruit. <sup>28</sup> **Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large;** and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. <sup>29</sup> Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan."

<sup>30</sup> 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.**" <sup>31</sup> 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.**" <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> 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.**"

#### NOTES:

Numbers 13:1 says that the spies were chosen and sent by the command of the Lord. When Moses retells the story to the next generation in Deuteronomy 1:31-32 he says:

*22 Then all of you came to me and said, "Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to." 23 The idea seemed good to me; so I selected twelve of you, one man from each tribe.*

Whether the idea originated with the people or Moses does not matter, because Numbers expresses that God was directing it. God assured them that He was going to give them the land. All the men who were sent as spies were leaders in their tribes and should have been men of strong faith. But they were not.

The spies spent 40 days in the land. They found it as beautiful as God had promised. They brought back a giant cluster of grapes to show the fruitfulness of the land. They said that **it certainly does flow with milk and honey** (v 27). But the majority of the spies brought a negative report about the strength of the people and instilled fear into their fellow

Israelites. Some versions translate “bad report” as “evil report.”

Caleb (and presumably Joshua as well) tried to calm the people and assure them of God’s promise of victory, but the rest of the spies exaggerated the danger in v 31-33 by saying:

**“We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us.”** <sup>32</sup> **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. <sup>33</sup> 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.”**

The spies were just supposed to examine the land and help plot the route of attack. They were supposed to see how strong the people were and if their cities were fortified. They weren’t assigned to vote on whether to go in or not! They let their **fear** overwhelm their **faith** and fell into **failure**.

### Numbers 14:1-10 The People Rebel

#### Questions to Ponder:

- **Why did the people respond with tears and grumbling?**
- **In v 4, what did the people want to do?**
- **Why did Moses and Aaron fall on their faces?**
- **Why did Joshua and Caleb tear the clothes, and what did they say to the people?**
- **What prevented Joshua and Caleb and Moses and Aaron from being stoned to death?**

<sup>1</sup> Then **all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.** <sup>2</sup> **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!****

<sup>3</sup> **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?”** <sup>4</sup> **So they said to one another, “Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.”**

<sup>5</sup> Then Moses and Aaron **fell on their faces** in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel.

<sup>6</sup> **Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes;** <sup>7</sup> **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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.”** <sup>10</sup> **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.**

#### NOTES:

Because of the bad report of the majority of the spies, the people felt that they were doomed. They responded with tears of desperation and fear and began to grumble against Moses and Aaron for leading them into the wilderness. They forgot that just one year earlier, God rescued them from the most powerful nation in the world without them having to lift a weapon!

But instead of trusting God to help them again, they accused the Lord (Yahweh) of bringing them into the wilderness to die. They decided they wanted to choose a different leader and go back to Egypt (v 4). Apparently they would rather be slaves than trust God to bring victory. But before we criticize them too much, we should remember that we often choose to remain captive to our sins, rather than trust the Lord to bless us with a better life as we obey Him. Romans 6:16-18 reminds us:

*16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*

The Tyndale Commentary maintains that *Moses and Aaron fell on their faces. . .*

*. . . not to plead for their lives, but to express their awe at the sacrilegious blasphemy of the people. To fall on one’s face is the Old Testament’s ultimate mark of religious worship and awe (Gen. 17:3; Lev. 9:24). But in Numbers it usually anticipates some great act of judgment (cf. 16:4, 22, 45; 20:6). Moses and Aaron, sensing the presence of God, fall to the ground in fear at what he is about to do. But God’s glory is not immediately manifest (10): the narrative leaves us in suspense. The people are to be given one last chance to repent, as Caleb and Joshua forthrightly plead with them to trust in the Lord. Yet the prostration of Moses and Aaron intimates that this appeal will not be heeded and that the people will fall in the wilderness (cf. 29ff.). In v 6, Joshua and Caleb *rent their clothes*, a more conventional gesture of deep distress (cf. Gen. 37:29, 34; Lev. 13:45). (Gordon Wenham, *Tyndale Commentary on Numbers*)*

Joshua and Caleb sought to persuade the people not to choose their own way and rebel against the Lord. In v 8-9, they explained that their fate depended on the Lord and His pleasure with them. Because of God’s promises, Joshua and Caleb trusted that God would remove any protection from the inhabitants of the promised land. They said:

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.”

But the people would not be persuaded and decided to stone their leaders. Verse 10 takes a dramatic turn with a simple statement: **“Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.”** When God’s glory appears, all of man’s plans have to cease.

### Numbers 14:11-45 Moses Pleads for the People

#### Questions to Ponder:

- How did God view the people’s decision, and what was His response?
- What two things did Moses base his intercession upon? (see v 13-16 and v 17-19)
- According to v 20, what did God base His pardon upon?
- In v 28-38, what did God base His punishment upon?

<sup>11</sup> 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?”** <sup>12</sup> I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they.”

<sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say, <sup>16</sup> ‘Because the LORD could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.’ <sup>17</sup> But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, <sup>18</sup> ‘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.’ <sup>19</sup> 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.”

#### The LORD Pardons and Rebukes

<sup>20</sup> So the LORD said, **“I have pardoned them according to your word;** <sup>21</sup> but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD. <sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> 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.”

<sup>26</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, <sup>27</sup> “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. <sup>28</sup> Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the LORD, **‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you;’** <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness. <sup>33</sup> 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. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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.”

<sup>36</sup> 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, <sup>37</sup> even those men who brought out the very bad report of the land died by a plague before the LORD. <sup>38</sup> 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.

#### NOTES:

Even though the people turned against Moses and Aaron and Caleb and Joshua, God told Moses that His people had actually spurned God Himself. God asked Moses: “How long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?” God said that He would destroy Israel and begin again with Moses. God threatened to do this once before after the Golden Calf incident in Exodus 32.

Just as before, Moses interceded for the people, but he did not make excuses for them. Instead Moses pleaded for God’s mercy based on God’s reputation and character. He noted that the Egyptians and the inhabitants of the land of Canaan all knew how God had miraculously delivered them from their captivity. Apparently they also knew that God led them in the wilderness through the cloud of His presence (v

14). Moses entreated God not to destroy Israel, because the Egyptians and pagans would claim that God was not powerful enough to see His people all the way into their new land. Moses was concerned about the reputation of God and the witness of His greatness.

But Moses also interceded for the people based on the character of God. In verses 17-19 Moses quoted God's own description of Himself as a merciful and forgiving God (as found in Exodus 34:6-9) and asked God to pardon the iniquity of the people.

*17 But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, 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.' 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."*

Notice in v 18, that Moses acknowledged that God does not let sin go unpunished. In v 20-21 God agreed to pardon the people according to Moses' petition, but He did so to protect His own glory (so that *"all the earth will be filled with the glory of God"*). And even though He pardoned their sin and chose not to destroy them, He still punished those who were guilty. God used their own fears against them. Because that generation had seen His power in the miracles that occurred during their deliverance from Egypt, they should have had enough faith to believe He would accomplish victory for them in Canaan. Since they did not, God declared that only that generation would perish in the wilderness. None of them would get to enter the Promised Land except for Joshua and Caleb. But since they thought their children would be killed by the enemies, God would show His power by letting the next generation do what the first generation refused to do—conquer the land. Israel's punishment would last forty years, one year for each of the forty days the spies spent in the land.

There are many interesting lessons to ponder in this exchange between God and Moses:

- The immutability of God gains clarification. Immutability means that God does not change. The Bible teaches that God's character and purposes never change. His promises are true and won't be broken. So how do we reconcile God saying that He would destroy Israel and start over with Moses (both here and in Exodus 32)?

God's promises to choose and use Israel were based on the unconditional promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But the covenant God made with the nation of Israel at Sinai was conditional (remember our lesson from Leviticus 26: "If you will... then I will..."). God could destroy all of Israel and start over with Moses, because Moses was a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He could smite all of the faithless ones and

still keep His promises to the forefathers—the remnant of Israel would just all come from Moses' line. Again, God's character, purposes, and promises would not change, only the people who got to enjoy the privileges of it. We must always remember that God is not dependent on us; we are dependent on Him. And even if we are not true to Him, God will always be true to Himself and His Word.

- The character of God is on display in other ways as well. He proves Himself to be merciful as He pardons Israel for their sin. But He proves Himself to be just as He punishes them for it. We should remember that sin always brings consequences. Fortunately, God allowed Jesus to take our punishment on the cross and pardoned us; but He still disciplines us because of His love (see Hebrews 12).
- Moses' intercession reveals the power of prayer. God declared He would smite Israel but pardoned them instead. He said He did so *"according to your word"* (v 20; see also Exodus 32:14). Moses' prayer was powerful, because He prayed towards God's glory and purposes and nature. Moses did not pray for what was best for himself, but He prayed for God's reputation not to be diminished. He also prayed according to what God had revealed about His own nature. Jesus taught His disciples to pray for *"God's Kingdom to come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10). James' epistle reminds us that *"the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"* (James 5:16, KJV). Prayer is powerful, because the God we pray to is so strong and mighty.

#### **The Rest of the Story: Numbers 14:39-45**

The people mourned greatly when they heard what their punishment would be. So the next morning they gathered together and decided to go into the Promised Land. In v 40 they reasoned: *"Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised."* Moses responded:

*41 "Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD, when it will not succeed? 42 Do not go up, or you will be struck down before your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. 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."*

They went anyway and were thoroughly defeated. If we have sinned in the past, we need to confess it and accept the consequences. Instead of trying to go backwards, we need to follow the command of the Lord for today and proceed wherever He leads.

Lesson by Bro Stan