

Twelve Spies Explore Canaan (Numbers 13-14)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Numbers

I. Introduction and Review from Prior Lessons

- a. The famous story we are about to study, the tragic account of the twelve spies sent to explore Canaan, provides a classic example of the three levels which early Christians would consider when reading stories from the Old Testament. The three levels are:
 - i. **Level 1:** The basic storyline.
 - ii. **Level 2:** Practical moral lessons for us contained in the story.
 - iii. **Level 3:** Faith-building prophecies and foreshadowings of Jesus, the church, etc.
- b. After being encamped at Mount Sinai for about a year, the Israelites break camp and follow the pillar of cloud and fire into the Wilderness. (**Numbers 10:11-12**)
- c. Along the journey, the people looked back longingly at the food they enjoyed in Egypt, and complained about the food the Lord provided in the Wilderness (manna). Also, Aaron and Miriam complained about Moses' leadership. (**Numbers 11-12**)

II. Overview of the Story of the 12 Spies Sent to Explore Canaan

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 1:10-46**.
 - i. Moses, at the end of the 40 years in the Wilderness, retells the story of the pivotal events that took place at Kadesh Barnea, when the 12 spies were sent out.
 1. Here we find a summary of the events described in **Numbers 13-14**. However, it also provides some important details not included in the prior account.
 - ii. Notice that it was originally the idea of the people to send out men in advance to spy out the land. They wanted to know what would be the best approach to entering Canaan, and what the cities were like.
 1. Moses liked the idea, and he then decided to select the twelve men for the mission, and gave them instructions.

III. The Twelve Selected and Sent Out

a. Read **Numbers 13:1-24**.

- i. It said in **Deuteronomy 1** that it was *the people* who first requested that men be sent out in advance, to spy out the land of Canaan. However, here we find that it was the Lord who provided Moses with more specific instructions telling Moses to select twelve men, one leader from each of the 12 tribes.
 1. Only two of the twelve are names we are familiar with: Joshua and Caleb, spiritual heroes who alone, among their generation, faithfully made it all the way to the Promised Land.
- ii. Each of the twelve to be sent on this special exploratory mission is identified by name.
 1. Recall the prophecy of **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**, where Moses had been told that the Lord would raise up a prophet “like Moses” from among their brothers, whom everyone must heed (or they would be cut off). Both Peter in **Acts 3:22** and Stephen in **Acts 7:37** identified this prophecy as referring to Jesus.
 2. **Question:** What is the meaning of the phrase “a prophet like Moses”?
 - a. **Answer:** If we look at the life of Moses, we should expect to see it foreshadowing the life of Jesus, bearing extraordinary similarities. For example:
 - i. When he was a baby, an evil king issued an edict that would result in his being murdered. However, he escaped that fate while many other innocent baby Jewish boys were killed.
 - ii. He battled to free God’s people from their enslavement, and led them out of a dark kingdom.
 - iii. His first public miracle was changing water into something else (blood in the case of Moses; wine in the case of Jesus, at the wedding in Cana).
 - iv. He met God on the mountain.
 - v. His face radiated light.

- vi. (There are many other unusual parallels; for more examples, see lesson, '*A Prophet Like Moses*', at www.walking-by-faith.org)
- b. **Question:** Does this story of Moses sending out twelve Jewish men on a special advance mission, each identified by name, remind you of anything Jesus did?
 - i. This is similar to the story in **Matthew 10**, when Jesus sends out the twelve apostles to go throughout the land of Israel.
 - ii. Read **Matthew 10:1-6**.
 - iii. Jesus went on to remind them that the people in those towns who rejected their message would face a judgment worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - iv. He also admonished the twelve *to not be afraid of men*.
- c. This story of Moses sending out the twelve is just one more example of how Moses set the pattern that Jesus would follow. Jesus was the promised prophet God who God would "raise up" (literally), who would be "like Moses".
 - i. For more on the Moses/Jesus parallels, see Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*, book 3.
- iii. One of the twelve men is given another name by Moses.
 - 1. In the list of the twelve in Matthew, it mentions that one (Simon) was also called by another name: Peter. That new name had been given to him by Jesus, as recorded in **John 1:42**.
 - 2. Likewise, it says in that "Hoshea the son of Nun", of the tribe of Ephraim, identified in **Numbers 13:8**, was given the name "Joshua" by Moses.
 - a. Read **Numbers 13:8** and **13:16**.
 - 3. Years ago, reading Justin Martyr's *Dialog with Trypho*, a Jew, I ran across a statement that Justin made to his Jewish friend, referring to "Jesus the son of Nave". In context it was obvious to me that he was talking about Joshua the Son of Nun, but I was perplexed why Justin got the name wrong (*or so I thought*).

- a. I explored this further and to my surprise, discovered that Justin was absolutely correct. He was reading the Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament, abbreviated LXX, was used by the early church, east and west, for the first 300-400 years).
- b. In the LXX, which is written in the same language as the New Testament, the word that appears in **Numbers 13:16** is the exact same word (Jesus) that we find in **Matthew 1**.
 - i. Read **Matthew 1:18-25**.
 - ii. The Greek word rendered 'Jesus' in **Matthew 1:21** (where the angel said "you shall call his name Jesus") and in **Matthew 1:25** ("...and he called His name Jesus") is the exact same word found in **Numbers 13:16**.
- c. Modern readers of English language translations tend to miss this connection because they are reading Bibles where the Old Testament translation is made from (or influenced by) the Masoretic Text (which is in Hebrew), while the New Testament is in Greek.
 - i. The word 'Jesus' comes from the Greek, while the Hebrew equivalent is 'Joshua'.
 - ii. Christians in the first three centuries, who were reading the LXX, were reading that the name of "Hoshea the son of Nun" (actually, more like Auses the son of Naue, in Greek) was changed to "Jesus".
 - iii. You can see this for yourself in an interlinear Greek New Testament, when the Old Testament 'Joshua/Jesus' is referred to (**Acts 7:45** and **Hebrews 4:8**).
 1. In fact, in **Hebrews 4:8-14** it mentions *both* the Old Testament 'Jesus' and the New Testament 'Jesus' in the same discussion. There, the second one is identified as "Jesus *the Son of God*", since both men had the same name.
4. Early Christian writers saw great significance in this name change by Moses, changing the name of Hoshea to *Jesus*.

- a. **Question:** Why did the angel in **Matthew 1** specify to Joseph that the baby be named *Jesus*?
 - i. Jesus/Joshua would be the successor to Moses, the one who would finish the job begun by Moses. He would be the one to bring God's people into the Promised Land.
 - ii. He would bring in the second circumcision of God's people, the one done with knives of stone (**Joshua 5**, with stone representing the Christ in many places in prophecy; see also **Colossians 2:11-12**).
 - iii. He would be the one to lead God's people to victory in battle, under the sign of the cross, in their first battle against their enemies in the Wilderness (battle against the Amalekites, **Exodus 17**, which is the first time "Jesus/Joshua" is mentioned in Scripture).
 - iv. When Moses was told he would die, he asks that the Lord appoint another man over the congregation, so that the people would not be "like sheep without a shepherd". In the LXX, the Lord tells Moses to "Take *Jesus* [*in Hebrew*, = *Joshua*]...and put your hand on him".
 1. Read **Numbers 27:15-23**.
 2. This also recalls what Jesus said:
 - a. "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, *like sheep having no shepherd*." (**Matthew 9:36**, NKJV)
- b. For more on early Christians explaining how God provided the name of Jesus in advance, 1400 years before His birth in Bethlehem, see:
 - i. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapters 113, 132; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 255 and 265-266.
 1. Justin also points to two other stories in the Old Testament, involving other

people, where the name of Jesus is revealed in advance (**1 Samuel 6, Zechariah 3**).

- ii. Irenaeus, *Fragments*, chapters 19-20; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 571-572.
 - iii. Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, book 3, chapter 16; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, pp. 334-335.
5. Example of debate between Christian apologist and a Muslim critic. The Muslim challenged: "If Jesus is so important, why doesn't his name appear anywhere in the prophecies? In the New Testament quote from **Isaiah 7:14** it speaks of someone being called 'Immanuel', a name which Jesus was never called".
- a. The Christian apologist was not able to answer this question. Clearly, he had never read the LXX nor was he familiar with the early Christian writings.
 - b. Any early Christian apologist would have 'knocked that out of the park'. You are now equipped to do the same!

IV. The Twelve Return and Give Their Report

- a. Read **Numbers 13:25-14:10**.
 - i. The spies return. Ten of the twelve give the following report:
 - 1. **Good news:** The land does indeed flow with milk and honey. It produces wonderful fruit (giant cluster of grapes as well as figs, pomegranates, etc.).
 - 2. **Bad news:** The land is occupied by strong people and fortified cities. Giants live there; we seem to be *like grasshoppers* before them.
 - a. Actually, it appears these hard things are all true observations.
 - 3. **Conclusion (by the people):** More complaining. They say that the proposed plan to enter Canaan is hopelessly impossible. If we attempt to do that, we will all die in war, and our children and wives will be taken captive. The Lord's plan is not good. Let's pick a new leader and go back to Egypt!
 - ii. The other two (Joshua and Caleb) saw the same things, but react differently. They say:

1. **Good news:** The land is a very good land.
 - a. We can defeat them. Since the Lord has chosen us, and He will give the land to us.
 - b. Don't fear those people; "their time has come and gone".
 - c. The Lord is with us!
- iii. **Questions:** What is the difference between the two and the other ten? If Joshua and Caleb are the faithful examples that we are to follow, what should we be learning from this story?
 1. The difference is NOT simply having an optimistic vs. pessimistic attitude.
 2. Joshua and Caleb did not refute the report that the people were giants, nor that the cities were well fortified. They did not accuse the others of exaggerating the challenges. They acknowledged the great challenge that was before them.
 3. However, Joshua and Caleb were different from the others in the following:
 - a. They were not afraid of people.
 - i. They feared God, instead.
 - b. They believed that God would deliver what He had promised. God always tells the truth and He is faithful.
 - c. They believed that if God was with them, they could stand against *any enemy*. (And they believed God was with them!)
- iv. **Question:** When you are faced with extreme challenges in life, do you tend to be more like *the ten* (most people) or more like *the faithful two*?
 1. Do you fear what people can do to you, or do you fear God?
 2. Do you believe that if you are righteous and walking with the Lord, that the Lord is with you?
 3. How can you know if the Lord is with you? Is it simply a feeling, or is there more to it? Consider the following passage:
 - a. "Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin and said: 'Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and

Benjamin. The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.” (2 **Chronicles 15:1-2**, LXX, OSB)

- b. Note that God being with us is not based on optimism nor on a feeling.
 - i. It is based on a conditional promise.
 - ii. If we are with Him, He will be with us. If we abandon Him, He will forsake us. It is our choice whether we want God to be with us, or not!

4. As Peter reminds us, quoting from **Psalm 34**:

- a. “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.” (1 **Peter 3:12**, NKJV)

V. The Lord Responds

a. Read **Numbers 14:11-25**.

- i. The Lord first proposes to destroy the people, but to rebuild from Moses and his household a new (and greater) nation.
- ii. Moses reasons with the Lord, and appeals to the Lord not to carry out that plan.

1. **Reason No. 1:** The Egyptians and their other enemies will hear about this, and disparage the Lord as being unable to finish the job and bring the Jews into the Promised Land.

- a. Moses had used the same argument in **Exodus 32:12**, when the Lord threatened to wipe out the Israelites after the golden calf incident.

2. **Reason No. 2:** Moses reminds the Lord of the Lord’s character, as revealed to him in **Exodus 34:6-7**, as being “merciful, compassionate, longsuffering...taking away lawlessness and sins....”

- a. David (**Psalm 103**) and Jonah (**Jonah 4**) recounted this same statement that He had revealed to Moses, describing the character of the Lord.
- b. The Lord affirms this statement by Moses; it is the basis for the plan being revised, going forward.

iii. Here we find lessons about effective prayer, from Moses' appeal to the Lord.

1. Effective prayer can *change the plans of God* and alter history.
2. We can be bold and direct in our prayers, respectfully reminding the Lord of His character (if we understand who He really is) as well as His promises. The better we know who the Lord is, the more effectively we can pray to Him.

b. Read **Numbers 14:26-38**.

- i. The Lord revises His plan.
- ii. The punishment will correspond to the sin. The bodies of those who complained and thereby *sinned* in the desert, will *fall* in the desert.
 1. They complained that their children would be taken captive; instead, their children will be the ones to inherit the land.
 2. Only Joshua and Caleb from that generation will enter the Promised Land.
- iii. The Isrealites will end up spending *40 years* wandering in the Wilderness, before they are allowed to enter the Promised Land.
 1. One year for each of the 40 days the spies went into Canaan (a constant reminder of their unfaithfulness).
 2. This allowed time for the first generation to die off.
- iv. Significance of the number '40' in Scripture: associated with time of trial and testing.
 1. 40 days and nights of the deluge of Noah.
 2. 40 days (spies) and 40 years (wandering) in Numbers.
 3. 40 days of Jesus in the Wilderness, after His baptism.
 4. Foreshadows the time of testing and temptation we are now in the midst of.

VI. The Attempted Invasion Fails

- a. Read **Numbers 14:39-45**.
- b. True faith is more than just believing something good will happen. It is not just having a positive feeling and visualizing a positive outcome.
- c. The problem: God was not with them. They were disobedient to the Lord.

- i. They were warned, but did not listen.
- ii. This account is a reminder that *if the Lord is with us* we can be victorious. However, *if He is not*, IT DOES NOT MATTER WHAT WE DO; in the end it will not work out well!
- iii. While the Israelites lost their fear of men here (temporarily), they still lacked a healthy *fear of God*!