

Faith Sees God's Promises as Greater Than the Obstacles

Numbers 13 and 14

Introduction - read verses 1-3

1. Numbers 13 and 14 describe one of the great turning points in Israel's history: the fateful mission to spy out the Land of Canaan and the consequences that followed.
 - a. Two years after their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, Israel finally arrives at the border of the Promised Land.
 - b. They have witnessed the power of God in numerous ways; everything has been building toward this moment, of entering into the land God had promised to Abraham almost 400yrs earlier.
 - c. This should have been a moment of great rejoicing and anticipation. Yet instead of entering the land in victory, this generation, except for two men, would spend the next forty years wandering and eventually dying in the wilderness.
2. By studying key verses from these chapters, this lesson explores the contrast between unbelief and faith, and offers practical lessons resisting faithless fear and trusting in God's promises, even in the face of serious challenges.

I. The Mission and the Blessings - Numbers 13:1-24

A. Mission of Faith - vs.1-3

1. The Lord instructs Moses to send twelve men to spy out the land—one representative from each tribe.
2. They were on a spying mission - carefully observing and taking note of what they saw - gathering information.
3. Yet this mission was to be carried out in faith. They were entering a land that God had already promised and determined to give to them (vs.2).
4. Their mission was to gather information on the land they were to go and conquer. This was to be a faith-building mission.

B. Preparation for Victory - vs.17-20

1. Their assignment is straightforward. Moses instructs them to survey the inhabitants—whether they were strong or weak, numerous or few; whether the cities were fortified or open; whether the land was fertile or barren—and to bring back some of its produce as expected there would be.
2. One area of special concern was military strength. Earlier, God had led Israel by a longer route because He knew that if they saw warfare too soon they might turn back to Egypt (Exodus 13:17). Now, not only will they see war, but the potential of facing a might enemy.
3. What had once been a point of weakness had now become an opportunity for growth. God allowed this reconnaissance to become an opportunity for Israel to demonstrate faith in God and His promises.
4. This connects with a broader biblical principle: God allows His people to face circumstances that reveal and strengthen their faith. Trials are not designed to destroy faith but to expose where it truly stands.

C. The Reconnaissance and Evidence of God's Goodness - vs.21-23 (read)

1. So the twelve men go in as instructed, and for forty days they witness a land that is not only real, but richly abundant—exactly as God had promised.
2. They find grapes so large that a single cluster has to be carried on a pole between two men. They also gather pomegranates and figs, demonstrating that the land was not barren, but one prepared for them.

II. The Majority Report of Fear - Numbers 13:27-29, 31-33

A. The spies return and present their report to Moses and the assembly - vs.27

1. They present the fruit of the land and confirm what God had promised: "The land certainly does flow with milk and honey" (cp. Exodus 3:8, 17; 33:3). Seeing what God was about to give them should have brought them great joy and readiness to go in and conquer the land.

B. The "However" of Doubt - vs.28, 31-33

1. But the report does not end on that high note. In a display of unbelief, the spies shift the focus from God's faithfulness and power to the obstacles standing before them. They go to describe the people as strong and the cities as large and fortified - meaning inaccessible or beyond their reach. There are giants or the Nephilim, the descendants of Anak, renown warriors (Genesis 6:4). There are many enemies - Hittites,

Jebusites, Amorites and Canaanites.

2. To all intents and purposes, this is factually accurate report and answers the specific enquiries they were sent to make. The problem was the intent behind the presentation of this information, which was to instill doubt and fear in the minds of the people. This is exactly the effect it has on the people, as Caleb is said to 'quiet' the people.
3. To further their cause, the spies then start to exaggerate by describing the land as devouring its people, all the men are tall; and of the giants: "We became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight." This is what we might call the "grasshopper complex." It describes a mindset where a person sees themselves as small, powerless, and incapable, causing them to magnify obstacles and withdraw from action
4. Their conclusion "...we are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us" (vs.31).
5. In one sense, they were right—Israel was not strong enough to conquer the land on their own. Their mistake was not recognizing their weakness; their mistake was forgetting God's presence and assuming the outcome depended upon their own strength rather than God's power.
6. The same danger exists for us. When we evaluate life primarily through our own strength and resources, fear, temptation, suffering, uncertainty, or opposition can begin to seem larger than God and cause us to lose confidence in His promises.

III. The Minority Report of Faith - Numbers 13:30; 14:6-9

A. Amidst the panic of the assembly, Caleb steps forward and makes a call to bold action.

1. "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" (Numbers 13:30 NASB).
2. While the other spies focus on the difficulties, Caleb focuses on God's promise. He sees the same giants, the same cities, and the same challenges—but he draws a very different conclusion. The difference was not what he saw, but what he believed. Caleb trusted God's word that He had already given them the land. They had just to go in and take it.
3. Caleb did not deny the size of the challenge—he trusted in the greatness of God (14:6-9)

B. God appears in a cloud to judge the rebellious and reward the faithful - vs.22-24

1. As a consequence of their unbelief and refusal to trust God's promise, the generation that rebelled would wander in the wilderness for forty years until they perished. Only Caleb and Joshua would enter the land. Concerning Caleb, God said: "He has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully" (Numbers 14:24).
2. Are we people of a different spirit? Do we follow God only when obedience feels safe and comfortable, or do we trust and obey Him when the path is difficult?

IV. What Can We Learn From Israel's Failure and Caleb's Courage?

A. Focus on God, not the Giants

1. The majority looked at their circumstances; Caleb and Joshua looked at God.
 - a. Notice that the challenges they faced were real. Hunger was real. Thirst was real. The fortified cities of Canaan were real. The giants in the land were real. Faith does not deny reality or pretend that difficulties do not exist. Rather, faith recognizes that God is greater than every obstacle that stands before His people.
 - b. The same danger exists today. We can become so focused on problems that we forget God's faithfulness. If we focus exclusively on the obstacles before us, discouragement will naturally follow. Discouragement itself is not unbelief, but discouragement becomes dangerous when it causes us to forget God's character and promises. We must constantly remind ourselves of God's faithfulness and His power to accomplish His purposes.
 - c. Scripture repeatedly warns against focusing on giants to the exclusion of God: "For we walk by faith, not by sight--" (2 Corinthians 5:7 NASB).

B. We must learn to rely on God's promises

1. In contrast to the ten spies, Caleb and Joshua viewed the situation through the lens of God's promises.
 - a. They had access to exactly the same information as everyone else. They saw the same giants, the same fortified cities, and the same military challenges. The difference was not what they saw—it was what they believed.

- b. Caleb understood that God's promise was more certain than the obstacles standing in the way. That is why he could confidently say, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it" (Numbers 13:30). Caleb's confidence was not rooted in Israel's military strength. It was rooted in God's power and faithfulness.
- c. Scripture continually calls us to trust God's promises - (2 Corinthians 1:20; Hebrews 11:6; Luke 1:45)
- d. Question: What promise of God am I allowing fear to overshadow (cp. Matthew 6:33; Ephesians 1:3-14; Hebrews 13:5-6; 1 John 1:9)?

C. God strengthens those who faithfully trust and obey Him

- 1. Caleb and Joshua understood a truth that many of their countrymen had forgotten:
 - a. Victory was never dependent upon Israel's strength. It depended upon God's presence. As long as God was with them, they had every reason to move forward in confidence.
 - b. The Israelites acted as though they were being asked to conquer Canaan by their own power. They forgot that the same God who had sent the plagues upon Egypt, parted the Red Sea, provided manna from heaven, and guided them through the wilderness would also be with them in battle. Years later, God would remind Joshua of this very truth: "Be strong and courageous... for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)
 - c. The same assurance appears throughout NT - (Philippians 4:13; Romans 8:31; 2 Corinthians; Ephesians 6:10)

Conclusion

- 1. The contrast between the ten spies and Caleb and Joshua could not be clearer. They all saw the same land; the same giants; the same fortified cities. Yet ten concluded that the obstacles were greater than God's promises, while Caleb and Joshua concluded that God's promises were greater than the obstacles.
- 2. That same choice confronts us today. Will we focus on the challenges before us to the exclusion of God, or will we focus on the God who has promised to be with His people and provide us with all things necessary for life and godliness. Faith sees God's promises as greater than the obstacles.