

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

May 10, 2020

- I. Reminder of why we are looking at the OT
 - A. Today, we are going to look at the first part of the story of Israel's 10 to 2 vote against going into the Promised Land. We find this story in **Number 13-14**.
 - B. Prayer

- II. Israel spies out the Promised Land, decides it is too dangerous to enter
 - A. We begin today's story in **Numbers 13:1** . . . Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying, [2a] "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**;
 1. *The words, "**which I am going to give to the sons of Israel**" is an important statement, and the fact that it is placed at the beginning of the story reinforces its importance. You see, **God was giving this Land** to the Israelites as a gift.*
 - a. *In other words, the Land was God's to do with as He pleased.*
 - b. *It was God's gift to the Israelites – even though they would have to put forth a lot of time and energy to possess it fully.*
 - c. *And in giving this gift, God promised to bear the responsibility of making sure Israel had the power, the means, and the wisdom to possess it.*
 2. *For me, the realities surrounding and included in Israel's possessing the Promised Land have much to teach us about the realities surrounding and included in our possessing a godly, Christ-like life.*
 - a. *And the primary lessons is this: In spite of what we are up against in relation to growing in godliness – such as our old nature, the ungodly influences of the world, and the temptations of the devil – in spite of all that, and in spite of how much and how challenging the work is that we have to do to become Christ-like, the reality is, **God is the One who has gifted us and is making it possible for us to possess this new nature, new way of thinking, and new ways of speaking and behaving.***
 - b. *Paul affirms that God doing what only God can do so that we can do what He asks us to do in **Philippians 2:12-13**, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."*

3. *And so, as we continue looking at this story, I am encouraging you to keep in mind that this is a story about us and our trusting God enough to possess the new life in Christ that He has given to us.*
- B. [2b] you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, every one a leader among them." [3] So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran (*PAY ruh*n) at the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the sons of Israel.
1. In vs 4-15 we have a list of the spies and which tribe they came from. I want to mention only two – Caleb came from the tribe of Judah, and Joshua came from the tribe of Ephraim.
 2. In vs 16, we learn that Moses called Hosea (*hoh SHEE uh* – which means *salvation*) Joshua (*which means **the Lord is salvation***).
 3. In vs 17-20 we have the instructions Moses gave the spies, which included seeing what the land was like, what the produce was like, if the people were strong or weak, many or few, and if the people lived in unprotected villages or in fortified cities.
 4. And in vs 21-24, we have the account of the spies travels and activities.
- C. Moving on to **Numbers 13:25**, we read, When they returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days, [26] they proceeded to come to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Paran (*PAY ruh*n), at Kadesh (*KAY desh*); and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. [27] Thus they 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 (*or produce*). [28] **Nevertheless**, the people who live in the land are **strong** (*which implies they had well equipped armies*), and the **cities are fortified and very large** (*like Jericho*); and moreover, we saw the descendants of **Anak** (*AY nak* – *giants*) there.
1. *Anak* (*AY nak*) is considered the father of a race of people who were giants. **Genesis 6:4** speaks of this race as *Nephilim* (*NEF uh lim*), and **Deuteronomy 9:2** speaks of them as the *Anakim* (*AY nak im*).
 2. *In other words, in spite of the Land being a wonderful place to live, the spies implied it could not be possessed because there were well-equipped armies, fortified cities, and giants living there. And it was this triple threat that shook the faith of the ten spies and discouraged the rest of Israel from trusting God enough to even enter the Land in order to possess it.*
 3. **Vs 29** continues with a description of the various people groups in the Promised Land and where they lived.

D. [30] Then Caleb (*from the tribe of Judah*) quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of [the Land], for we will surely overcome it." [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.**" (*This time the spies didn't just imply it, they clearly stated it.*) [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.** [33] There also we saw the Nephilim (*NEF uh lim – giants*) (the sons of Anak (*AY nak*) [who] are part of the Nephilim); and **we became like grasshoppers in our own sight** (*in comparison to them*), and we were [definitely like grasshoppers] in their sight."

1. *Let's review the two reports. Caleb did not downplay the challenges they would face in taking the Land from its inhabitants. He did not imply victory would be easy.*
 - a. *What he did was to speak honestly, and in his honesty he spoke of **OVERCOMING** the inhabitants of the Land – which means **conquering and subduing them in battle** in spite of having to face well-equipped armies, fortified cities, and giants.*
 - b. *In other words, Caleb was convinced they could conquer the inhabitants of the Land **if** they would engage them in battle. And though it would not be easy, they would come out victorious because of the direct involvement and empowerment of God.*
2. *Though the other ten spies began their report by saying the Land was fertile and prosperous, God called it a bad report because –*
 - a. *They also said, "**We are not able** to go up against the people, for **they are too strong for us.**" In other words, these ten spies believed the Israelites **could not** overcome the inhabitants of the Land, but instead would be overcome by them!*
 - b. *Then these spies supported their claim by pointing out it was a land filled with well-equipped armies, fortified cities, and giants.*
 - c. *Beyond that, the 10 spies said that the average sized male was bigger than the average sized Jewish man – so even though they were not all giants, the Jews would still have to fight against men who were bigger than them.*
 - d. *And as if that were not bad enough, the spies said that the Land devours its inhabitants – which seems to imply the spies saw a lot of funerals during their 40 days of travel throughout the Land.*

3. *For me, the most prominent lesson we can learn from these two very different reports is that as Christians, “our point of view” matters.*
 - a. *And I am not talking about an optimistic verses a pessimistic point of view, or a positive mental attitude verses a negative mental attitude.*
 - b. *I am talking about an honest point of view that is realistic about the situation, yet also takes into account the presence, power, wisdom, justice, love, promises, specific will, and general word of God.*
 - (1) *Or in other words, a realistic view that includes an unwavering confidence in the presence, power, and work of God both in the situation and on your behalf.*
 - (2) *And though you may not get what you want from God, you will get what is best for you and all involved.*
 - c. *My point is, Caleb was not unrealistic. He was not a diehard optimist. He was not trying to sway the nation with a positive message. Rather, he was honest about what they would face while at the same time affirming victory – because **it would be God and not them who would ensure victory.***
 - (1) *Do you see that this is just the same today in relation to fighting our old nature, the ungodly desires of our flesh, the influences of the world, and the temptations of the devil?*
 - (2) *Sadly, too many take the view of the 10 spies – believing victory is impossible or too hard because of the size and power of the foe. So they don’t try. And for those who try, many grow weary of fighting and give up before victory is won rather than persevering to the end.*
 4. *I know you have heard this many times before, but I want to say it again. If you will **go to war and persevere** in fighting against the sin that so easily besets you, or against those sins that seem minor yet hard to put off, you will gain the victory **because of God’s involvement and God’s empowerment.***
- E. **Numbers 14:1** . . . Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. [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! (*Are you seeing a pattern of complaining and feeling like a victim on the part of the Israelites? If so, are you using that same discernment to look for similar patterns in your life?*) [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?"

1. *Once again, the Israelites took **what they could see** and used it to **project what would be**, and since what they could see looked bad, they projected doom. What they neglected to take into account is what they could not see – which was how God was going to accomplish and therefore fulfill His promise that the Land with well-equipped armies, fortified cities, and giants would be theirs.*
 2. *What is important for us to see is that in any trial or tribulation, in any threatening or seemingly disastrous situation, **the unseen part** – which is God – is not only just as real as the part we can see, but the most important part, because God is the part that determines the ultimate outcome.*
 3. *It is for this reason that we read in **Hebrews 11:1**, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” In other words, faith is the confidence that what we cannot see is just as real yet far more important than what we can see.*
- F. [4] So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."
1. *For the Israelites, the situation seemed so hopeless that the only solution they were willing to consider was to remove Moses as their leader and replace him with a leader who would do for them what they wanted done and lead them where they wanted to go.*
 2. *What is truly sad about the decision on Israel's part is that God was visibly with them – in the cloud and pillar of fire – and they had recently experienced a sufficient number of His powerful saving acts to trust Him.*
 3. *However, in being afraid and distrustful of God, what they knew to be true was not enough in the face of what they assumed would be true. Therefore, they believed their only hope was to get out of there as quickly as possible and return to a familiar place that held no such surprises or daunting threats to their well-being.*
 4. *Imagine, choosing the stability of their old life – which included a cruel form of slavery and the systematic killing of their newborn sons, over the unfamiliar and difficult challenges of a new life that promised as good a life as life can be on the earth. And as for replacing Moses, what they were really choosing was replacing trust in God with trust in themselves, and replacing submission to God's will with living according to their own will.*

5. *Could it be that sometimes and in some situations we are like those Israelites – choosing the old way over God’s way because the old way seems easier, more comfortable, less costly, and less scary?*
 6. *May we choose wisdom, and in wisdom heed Paul’s words in **1 Corinthians 10:1-12** about learning from Israel’s foolishness so as not to do the same ourselves.*
- G. [5] Then Moses and Aaron **fell on their faces** in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. [6] **Joshua and Caleb**, two of the twelve who had spied out the land, **tore their clothes**; *(These actions by Moses and Aaron, and Joshua and Caleb were a show of humility before God and before those who were angry with them. And it was a show of broken-heartedness over the foolish, God-rejecting, self-destructive choices of the Israelites.)*
- H. [7] and [Joshua and Caleb] 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. [8] **If the LORD is pleased with us** *(Notice the conditional “IF” here. Joshua and Caleb understood that distrust of God leading to disobedience of God would not be pleasing to God and therefore might remove the empowerment, provision, and protection needed from God for taking the Promised Land.)*
- I. [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. [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**, *(because their time was up – God’s judgment was upon them)* **and the LORD is with us**; [therefore] do not fear them."
- J. [10] But *(the Israelites were so consumed by fear, and so committed to projecting doom, and so convinced that trusting and therefore obeying God was just plain foolish that they wanted)* to stone [Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb]. **Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.**
1. *How sad that we sometimes think so little of God that we are willing to distrust Him and criticize Him – as if we are wiser than Him, and know more about what is best for us than Him, and are better able to take care of ourselves than He is.*
 2. *How sad that the more commonly manifested forms of God’s presence are not enough to compel us to believe that He is with us and is bringing about good on our behalf. Are we not like doubting Thomas when we treat God as if He is absent or uncaring unless or until He takes extra measures to prove His presence and work miracles for us?*

3. *And how sad that there are times when we would rather return to the pleasures and rewards of what we have been saved from – even though they include suffering and death – than to endure the challenges and difficulties of pressing on to possess what we have been saved to.*

III. Conclusion

- A. *The last words of Numbers 14:10 were, “**Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.**”*
 1. *This does not mean that God was absent and then appeared – for God was there all along. What it means is that God took extra measures in revealing Himself so that even the doubters could not miss recognizing His presence.*
 2. *Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb did not need this level of proof, as is proven by their willingness to risk being stoned for telling the Israelites the truth, and exhorting them to trust and to obey God by going into and taking the Land.*
 3. *What do you need in order to trust God as you ought and as He deserves? How much more than He has already done must He do to convince you He is worthy of your trust and obedience?*
- B. *In light of this part of the story, I am exhorting you – along with myself – to trust God implicitly, to believe that God’s way is the way of life, health, security, and blessing – in spite of how hard it may be at times, and to live in such a way as to please God – for as Joshua and Caleb implied by what they said, “If the Lord is pleased with us He will bring us into the life for which Jesus saved us.*