

LESSON 5



SPIES VIEW CANAAN

Scripture Texts: Numbers 13:1-33; 14:1-10, 28-45

About fifteen months after Israel left Egypt, God was ready to lead them into Canaan, the land He had promised them. The nation was now ready to move forward. They were prepared physically and spiritually to go in and claim God's promises. But at the threshold of achievement, Israel failed. Why did they fail? Because of unbelief.

By examining the causes and consequences of Israel's failures, we will have a better insight into the reason why people today so often fail God and fail also to lay hold on His promises.

MEMORY VERSE: *If so be the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord saith.*

—Joshua 14:12b

Spying Out the Land

Numbers 13:1-25 No doubt following the request of the people, the Lord commanded Moses to send twelve men, one from each tribe, to **search the land of Canaan**. Each spy must be a head of his group. They were prominent men, but they were not men outstanding for their spiritual qualities. This is a mistake that has often been made. Often too much emphasis has been put on the ability of men, their cleverness, position, and wealth and too little emphasis upon their spiritual qualities. They were to bring back information concerning 1. the people, their number and strength; 2. the land, whether fruitful or barren, whether there were wood and fruit there; and 3. the cities, whether they be of tents or strongholds. We read in Deuteronomy 1:20-21 that Moses urged the Israelites to rely upon God's promise and to march straight into the Promised Land to possess it. But they disobeyed and asked and asked that a committee be sent in to look things over. This was not God's perfect will, but His permissive will. They searched the land for forty days.

The Spies' Report

Numbers 13:26-33 When the spies returned forty days later, having traveled the whole land of Canaan, they were agreed that it was a good land flowing **with milk and honey**. The land was everything the Lord had said it was. They showed the samples of fruit they had found. But the majority—ten of them—**brought up an evil report** concerning the walled cities and the giant people there. Themselves were as grasshoppers beside them. **We be not able to go up against the people**. The minority—two of them—said, **Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it**. The committee was split into two groups. One group saw only the difficulties revealed by the expedition. The other two, Joshua and Caleb, were men who trusted God. They saw God bigger than any problem they faced, and that He would fulfill His promises. Two were godly-minded; ten were worldly-minded men.

The Result of False Reports

Numbers 14:1-9 The people listened to the report of the ten and seemed not to hear the words of Caleb. All the

people **wept** and **murmured against Moses and . . . Aaron**. They appeared in complete despair. The false reports turned the people against the man of God. False reports seem always to have a way of closing the ears of the people to truth. They even went so far as to choose captains to lead them back to Egypt.

While the ten spies saw only objects, Joshua and Caleb saw underlying principles. They saw 1. the Lord was directing all this; 2. success depended upon their pleasing the Lord; 3. the people's rebellion was against God; 4. their lack of faith brought fear. Bravely facing the mob, they urged the people to **rebel not . . . neither fear . . .** If they would have faith and obey God, He would give them the land. Disobedience brings bitterness, and from bitterness springs rebellion.

The Result of Rebellion

Numbers 14:10 But the congregation would not listen. They **bade stone them with stones**. God heard. **The glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle . . . before all the children of Israel**. It meant God was the One to be obeyed. To Moses and Aaron, it meant encouragement. To Joshua and Caleb, it meant approval. To the people, it meant disapproval, anger, and destruction. The Lord told Moses He would destroy and disinherit the Israelites and raise up a greater nation from Moses. The Lord was with them. They were looking at the situation through anointed eyes. This is the key to any success in our gaining ground for the Lord.

The word to us is the same as the word that Caleb and Joshua spoke to the people: Go into the Promised Land at once and possess it. If God delights in us, then He will cause His promises to be fulfilled in our lives. It will not be without struggle that we gain the victory, but gain it we will. Moses pled for their forgiveness for the honor of God before other nations. The Lord forgave but sent a punishment.

The Forty-Year Sentence

Numbers 14:28-45 To all the nations that had murmured against Him, God said, **Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness** (as they had rashly wished, Numbers 14:2), all those **twenty years old and upward**. This was their tragic punishment. The ten spies died of a special plague (Numbers 14:36-37). The people would **wander in the wilderness forty years**, a year for each day the spies had searched the land, until all the rebels were dead. Their children would enter Canaan. Only Caleb and Joshua would live to see the glory of the land of Canaan, the new day, a reward for their faithfulness.

God's punishments were so immediate, severe, and final because He was setting up standards for us to learn from. Those people lived under the cold Law, we, under the warm grace of God. Even though sins appear to pass unnoticed in our day, judgment is just as certain now as then (Hebrews 2:1-3; 12:25).

The people, as before, tried to remedy what they had done, but it was too late. How sad! Moses told them, **Go not up, for the Lord is not among you**. Still will we, if we try to accomplish goals without the Lord's presence.

The wilderness today is the dwelling place of those who are afraid to trust God and to claim His promises. We cannot cast the promises of God over our shoulders and find happiness or success in life. God will be kind and feed us with manna, but if we turn away from the promised land, He takes us at our word and gives us the wilderness to dwell in. Our promised land is abundant life through Jesus Christ while we live here and eternal life after death. Lay hold of God's promises, and go in.

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Mary Lehmann.
It is revised and posted here with written permission from
(c) Bible Paths Publications, PO Box 299, Keithville, LA 71047