

May 28

Scriptures: Read Numbers 13 & 14

Key Verse: “Caleb... said, ‘Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.’” (Numbers 13:30)

Overview

Moses had planned to go directly into Canaan from Sinai, but those plans were changed drastically. In Deuteronomy 1:19-24, Moses gave more background information about what had happened. We learn that it was the people’s idea to first spy out the land before entering. Moses complied and the Lord allowed it, possibly as a test of faith, but they desperately failed.

The twelve able men, a leader from each tribe (except Levi), were chosen to go throughout the land and bring back a detailed report, as well as a sample of the fruit. This expedition was not really necessary, and it displayed a lack of faith, for God had already told them all they needed to know (Ex.3:8; cf. Exek.20:6). The people should have believed His promise that He would go before them and give them the land.

The mission was successfully accomplished and after forty days the spies returned. At first their report was in agreement concerning the land: “It truly flows with milk and honey” (13:27), meaning it was very fertile, and they brought proof, (13:23). However, concerning the inhabitants and their strength, it was ten against two. The ten, because of fear and lack of faith in God, said the people of the land were too strong for them and exaggerated the report saying, “we saw giants... and we were like grasshoppers” (13:33). These fearful men brought discouragement and instilled fear into the hearts of all the people who then complained bitterly, even to the point of wishing to return to Egypt! Had they forgotten so soon their sorrow in slavery (Ec.2:23) and the miracles of God?

Only Caleb and Joshua trusted in God that it was possible to be victorious and possess the land. These remarkable men of faith and courage boldly stood up against the majority opinion. Truly, the majority is not always right, and the truth is not often popular. Believers today may find themselves standing alone for the Lord at work, home, or school, but do not be discouraged: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom.8:31). He “gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57), and although we can expect trials to come our way, Jesus said, “be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Caleb’s and Joshua’s attempts to persuade the Israelites not to fear proved futile (14:8-9), The people became angry and even suggested they should choose another leader to take them back to Egypt (14:4). This was, in fact, a rejection of God, and if it had not been for His intervention in protecting Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb, they would have been stoned (14:10).

The Lord’s anger was justifiably stirred against Israel for their disobedience and faithlessness. As it was with their sin of the golden calf, God once again expressed His desire to destroy and disinherit the sinful Israelites and raise up a new chosen nation through Moses (14:12; Ex.32:10). Once again, Moses, even more fervently than before, interceded on their behalf; he even pleaded for God’s own Name’s sake and His glory and testimony among the heathen nations (14:13-16).

In his appeal, after which pardon was granted, Moses quoted God's own words about His merciful and forgiving nature (14:17-19); cf. Ex.34:6; 20:5-6). It is important to know the Word of God that we might stand more firmly in our faith and upon His promises.

The Israelites had paid a grave penalty for their disbelief, but the Lord's judgment was just. Those foolish ones who did not heed Moses' warning disobediently entered the land to fight without the Lord; they suffered the inevitable consequence (14:42-45). Success in spiritual warfare is attained only when the Lord is with us. How tragic that though they were within sight of the Promised Land, they were to turn back to the wilderness where they would remain for forty years, and where death would come upon all those men who had been numbered in the census (14:29-30; 1:45-46), except Caleb and Joshua, whom the Lord blessed and rewarded for their faithfulness.

Prayer

O Lord, grant us the courage to move boldly forward with You. May we not lean unto our own understanding, but acknowledge You in all our ways, and You have promised to direct our paths (Proverbs 3:5, 6).