



A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

THE NEED TO BE A FAITHFUL PEOPLE (13-15)

The Place of the Passage

The book of Numbers might have ended at this point if the people had trusted God and entered the land at His command. Instead, rebellion brings an extra 40 years of wanderings. It is the people's rebellion at this center point in the book that introduces one of the greatest surprises of the Old Testament. The exodus from Egypt is the preeminent Old Testament example of God's redemption; yet, the very same generation that experienced the exodus becomes the preeminent Old Testament example of stubbornness. How can it be that those who have seen the great works of God's salvation are so hard-hearted? This passage is a turning point in the book and a crucial witness to all believers who follow after, "that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation".

The Big Picture

Rebellion results not from a lack of evidence that God is good but from an unwillingness to trust in His goodness.

Gospel Glimpses

YAHWEH SAVES. When Moses selects men to spy out the land, each is a "chief" from his respective tribe (13:2). This is not a military deployment but a selection of leaders who would be able to inspire the people through their reports of the land's goodness. Their mission is one of encouragement, not advanced conquest. The lead member of the expedition is a chief from the tribe of Ephraim named Hoshea, whose name means "he saves." Moses changes his name to Joshua, giving the revised meaning, "Yahweh saves" (13:16). It is Yahweh whose salvation will bring His people to their new home. (Note: the name "Jesus" is the Greek version of the name Joshua.)

Whole Bible Connections

MILK AND HONEY. The spies characterize the Promised Land as a land of "milk and honey" (13:27; 14:8). This phrase becomes a stock description for Canaan's bounty. Milk (particularly its cream) was a luxury product from livestock farming. Honey was a luxury product from farming the land. It refers not to bee honey but to a sweet paste made from figs, dates, or even grapes (Genesis 43:11; II Kings 18:32; Ezekiel 27:17). Sometimes, the same term is used also for the sweet product of bees, but ancient Hebrews did not keep bees. They enjoyed honey from beehives only when they found it in the wild (Deuteronomy 32:13; Judges 14:8). As a phrase for possessing and farming the land, the expression "milk and honey" represents the

pleasures enjoyed from an idyllic land for keeping livestock as well as crops and orchards; it is a foretaste of the glorious pleasure of our future promised land, the new heavens and the new earth, in which we will dwell with the Lord forever.

Theological Soundings

FAITH. All 12 spies encounter the same evidence. But the 10 doubting spies let that evidence alone form their conclusions about God's ability to give them the land, and they doubt. Caleb and Joshua allow their knowledge of God from his past deeds to form the basis of their conclusions about the evidence they encounter in Canaan. The heart of doubt needs to reprove God's trustworthiness with every trial (14:11). The heart of faith is able to rest in the great goodness of God abundantly demonstrated already, framing each new trial by what is already known of God's faithfulness; also David's perspective on Goliath versus that of his brothers in I Samuel 17.

FORGIVENESS. In his prayer, Moses quotes a catechism-like statement found frequently in the Old Testament: "The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and fourth generation". This statement reminds us that God is full of grace and quick to forgive those who repent but that he will "by no means" ignore sin. There must be repentance, not only for the sake of the sinner but also for the sake of his or her household. The phrase "third and fourth generation" represents the members of a typical Hebrew household. The idolatry of a head of household has consequences for his children and grandchildren (and sometimes great-grandchildren) who grow up in such an idolatrous household. This catechetical statement captures a sobering reality, but it does not mean that children are judged for a parent's sins. When children abandon the sins of parents, there is full forgiveness (Exodus 20:5-6; Ezekiel 18:1-32), as illustrated by the second generation in the book of Numbers.

Glossary of Terms

YAHWEH. The likely English form of the name represented by the Hebrew letters YHWH. The Lord revealed this unique name for Himself to Moses at the burning bush and told him to instruct the Israelites to call on Him by this name (Exodus 3). English translations of the Bible usually render this term as "Lord," with small capital letters. (YHWH can also be translated "God," in small capitals.)

SIN. Any violation of or failure to adhere to the commands of God, or the desire to do so.

Please answer the following questions:

Chapter 13

1. How many men did Moses send to explore the land of Canaan? (14-15)
2. What were the men to find out about the land? (17-20)
3. What were the men to bring back? (20-24)
4. How long did the men explore the land? (25)
5. What report did the men give Moses? (26-29)
6. Who encouraged Moses to take possession of the land? (30)
7. Why were the rest of the men afraid to attack Canaan? (31-33)
8. What is a “grasshopper complex”? (33)
9. The spies’ mission is not a feasibility study. The Lord makes His promise clear (13:2): this survey is to bring back encouragement (“be of good courage”; 13:20) concerning the land. What evidence of the land’s goodness do the scouts find?

Chapter 14

10. Where did the whole congregation desire to return? (1-4)

11. How did Joshua and Caleb respond? (6-9)

12. What did the congregation want to do to Joshua and Caleb and why? (10)

13. What did the Lord tell Moses that He would do? (11-12)

14. How did the Lord respond to the intercession of Moses? (20)

15. Who would die in the wilderness? (22-29)

16. Who would enter in the promised land? (30-31,38)

17. How long would they wander in the wilderness? (32-34)

18. What happened to those who searched out the land but brought back the report of unbelief? (36-37)

19. What did the people decide to do after the plague? (39-40)

Chapter 15

20. How did the offering of the Israelites compare with the offerings of the strangers who dwelled with them? (13-16)

21. What type of sin is being forgiven in verses 24-29?

22. What type of sin resulted in being cut off from the people? (30-31)

23. What happened to the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath? (32-36)

24. Why were the Israelites to put tassels on the hems of their clothing? (38-40)

25. Laws about forgiveness (22-31) add further comfort. The Hebrew verb translated “sin unintentionally” means literally “to commit a sin of wandering,” as when a sheep wanders from its shepherd. Sins of wandering are those committed by one whose desire is to be right with God but who is led astray by deception or who falls through weakness or sins in ignorance. Sins committed “with a high hand” are those committed in frank defiance. These were atoned for not through the regular sacrifices but only on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:16). How should Old Testament laws like these inform the way we view our own sins, with some being more severe than others but all finding atonement through Christ?