

### NUMBERS

#### Lesson 15 - Chapters 13 and 14

Numbers chapters 13 and 14 are really just one long story. We probably ought to read them one immediately after the other, but they are each substantial in length, so we'll read 13, discuss it, and then read 14.

Let's remember that chapter 12 ends with the incident of Aaron and Miriam complaining against Moses; the result being that Miriam was afflicted with **Tzara'at**, a skin disease that was caused as a direct divine judgment upon her by God. And, out of respect for Miriam, the entire camp of Israel decided to wait (rather than move on) during the 7-day purification period from her Tzara'at, in which she was put outside the camp and could not come into contact with anyone.

Once the purification period passed, the Israelites moved on to the area of the Paran desert. It is widely assumed that all that will occur in Numbers 13 and 14 happens while they are camped at Kadesh..... also called Kadesh-Barnea.....also called Ein-Mishpat. This is an enormous and lush oasis on the desert's edge, on the southern border of the Land of Canaan.

#### READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 13 all

It is difficult to understate the enormity of the rebellion against the Lord, and the catastrophe that is described here. And as we get into chapter 14 we'll see the consequences begin to unfold. Like the story of Joseph a pattern and type is set up here that is at once true and historical with meaning and poignancy all to itself; as well as being prophetic and a metaphor; a type that will (in so many ways) be repeated not just by the Israelites in later eras but by the Church.

What we witness here is nothing less than (if it were a novel) an event we could call The First Fall of Israel. What should have been a wonderful story about triumph and prosperity..... a tale of Israel inheriting the Land and all the goodness that the Lord had prepared for them.....instead turns into a tragic narrative about disbelief, failure, weakness, and a direct repudiation of God's grace. In its effect this story is not completely unlike Adam and Eve, and the Fall of Man. Adam and Eve had no sooner been created by the Master Potter than they succumbed to their evil inclinations, and fell from grace. In our story Israel had only days and weeks earlier been consecrated by the Lord, given His Torah, and were basking in the constant presence of Yehoveh; but now they throw it all away to obey their own fears and desires. So please grasp that we are reading of one of those history-changing moments in the

story of mankind.

Israel had trekked right up to the edge of fulfilling centuries of promise, and then they quit. Just as victory was in their grasp they drew back in fear. They turned back and refused to enter into that promise. Oh how on a razor's edge we all had lived until that moment we accepted God's Messiah; and we had no idea of the danger we were in.

Our account opens with Yehoveh instructing Moses to send a group of men to scout out the Land of Canaan. And that group was to consist of but ONE man from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. Immediately, however, we run into a bit of a Scriptural dilemma. Because, later in Deuteronomy, we're told this: **NAS Deuteronomy 1:22 "Then all of you approached me and said, 'Let us send men before us, that they may search out the land for us, and bring back to us word of the way by which we should go up, and the cities which we shall enter.' 23 "And the thing pleased me and I took twelve of your men, one man for each tribe.**

Do you see the dilemma? Numbers 13 says God told Moses to send spies yet Deuteronomy 1 says that the PEOPLE of Israel approached Moses and said that THEY wanted to send spies, and Moses thought it was a good idea so he handpicked the 12 men. What are we to make of this?

The answer according to a rabbinical writing is contained in a key Hebrew word used in Numbers 13 verse 1: the Hebrew word for "send". In Hebrew the word is **Shelah-lekha**; which literally means, "send for **yourself**". In other words God is telling Moses, "if you want to send some spies, you have my permission". What we see in verse 1 is not God, on His own impetus, just suddenly saying: "Hey, Moses, come here a minute.....I want you to send out some scouts.." Rather it is that God was responding to a request from Moses, and Moses was responding to request of the people by taking the matter to the Lord; so Yehoveh tells Moses to go ahead and satisfy himself (and the people's request) by sending out these scouts. After all God knew what was there in the Land of Canaan. It was the people of Israel who were unsure.

Let's be clear on something: there is a difference between spying and scouting. Some bible versions say the 12 were scouting, others spying. It's a little like the difference between shoplifting and shopping. What was instructed in Numbers was to go scout out and see the land in order to reassure the people. It was like searching for a new community to buy a house, not like the preliminary to a military operation. And if it had been a military operation, most certainly the leaders of the tribes would not have gone, and they wouldn't have sent 12; 2 or 3 would have been more appropriate because stealth would have been key; and later in the Bible when we see actual military "spying" it will indeed usually be 2 or 3 men at most.

Now the leaders chosen for this mission are very high leaders, but not necessarily THE prince, or Chief, of each tribe. But, notice that there is ONE tribe that is left completely out of the mix: Levi. This is but further confirmation that the split between the priestly tribe of Levi and the other tribes of Israel was complete; complete enough that Levi wasn't referred to as a normal part of Israel any more.

In verse 16 we get this interesting little aside, that one of the tribal leaders eventually had his name changed by Moses: Hoshea, son of Nun. Hoshea became known as Joshua...or, more accurately in the Hebrew, Yehoshua. So what's the difference between Hoshea and Yehoshua? Well in some ways it is quite astounding. Hoshea means "God saves". Yehoshua means "Yehoveh saves". Part of the reason for the name change is that Hoshea was born in Egypt, obviously well before the Exodus. What we learned back in the book of Exodus was that God did NOT reveal His own personal name.... YHWH.... Yehoveh.....UNTIL later, when He gave it to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Therefore, the name Joshua, Yehoshua, could not have existed when Israel was in Egypt.....because God's name wasn't even known, yet.

And of course our Savior's given Hebrew name was Yeshua, which is just a contraction of Yehoshua.....Yehoveh saves. Jesus, Joshua, Yehoshua, and Yeshua are all the same name, just in different dialects and languages, from different eras. And looking ahead to the book of Joshua it will be Yehoshua (Joshua) and NOT Moses that leads the people into the Promised Land. Moses leads them up to it, but not INTO it. In a direct parallel The Torah of Moses leads people up to the ultimate Promised Land, but not INTO it.....for that it took Yeshua, Jesus the Christ.

Moses instructs the group of 12 to go up through the Negev (a barren desert) into the hill country. In essence they weren't really scouting out the Negev, as it was simply a place that had to go through to reach their goal.....the hill country. Or, really, it is indicating the general area surrounding Hebron. And their mission is to determine several things as referenced in verses 18 - 20.

So let's read Numbers 13:18-20 again.

### **RE-READ NUMBERS 13:18-20**

So the scouts were to check out the people, check out the land, check out the towns, see if there are wooded areas, and see how well things grow in the soil.

Most of the great Hebrew sages agree that this was all about things like climate, fertility of the soil, and the availability (or not) of natural resources. Whether the people of Canaan were fierce warriors was not really the issue as far as Moses was concerned, though certainly it was important to know under any circumstances. After all under no circumstances were the Canaanites going to be thrilled when 3 million Hebrews showed up with an eviction notice.

And we're given the season in which this scouting mission happened: the time of the first grape ripening, which means it was in the summer, in the July/August time frame. It was going to be HOT going through the Negev.

So in verse 21 off they go; and they looked the place over; and it's a big place. They began by taking a route through the low-lying desert and then on up into Hebron, and then eventually they travel all the way to a place called Lebo-hamath. There is some disagreement over the exact location of that place, but for sure it was well north.....even into what would eventually be

called Syria and Lebanon.....an area that would, under Kings David and Solomon, actually be an official part of Israel. It was probably a distance of about 250 miles from Kadesh to Lebohamath. So, it's no wonder it took 40 days for them to go there and back.

Now why was Hebron a destination? Simple. Abraham was buried there. It was in Hebron that Abraham was first promised the land. Hebron was where Abraham first settled to any degree in the Land of Canaan, and it was the stomping grounds of all the Patriarchs to one degree or another. It was beautiful and fertile; good for pasture and good for crops. Hebron would be the unnamed capital of Israel for the first few years of their living there; because of the Hebrew history of the place, it therefore was also a sacred place for the Israelites.

And the verses say that along the way the scout party ran into 3 men called Anakites. Exactly who or what the Anakites were is uncertain. The one thing we do know is that they were a race of tall people, and they were compared to the Nefallim and Refa'im spoken of in Genesis, pre-Flood. Recall that the Nefallim and refa'im were a race that Scripture says was caused when sons of Heaven had intercourse with daughters of men. In other words, angel-like creatures had relations with human women and the result was a line of big, strong, fierce, evil people. Now, were the Anakites the latest version of the Nefallim, or were they just being compared to Nefallim in a rhetorical way? Hard to know. Goliath (the giant warrior slain by David) was an Anakite (or, in Hebrew, **Anakim**). In any case, these Anakites made quite an impression on the 12 scouts.

Then for some reason Scripture pauses to inform us that Hebron was founded 7 years earlier than Zoan. There is nothing but speculation as to why this was even brought up. But the one thing that IS now known is that Zoan would later be called Tanis, of Egypt. And Tanis was made the capital of Egypt at about the same time that King David made Jerusalem capital of Israel.

Next they go to a place called Eschol and find grapes of enormous size. So large that a single cluster has to be strung between two poles to be carried. This is not real; it is a metaphor for explaining the extreme fertility of the land. It is no different than our saying that we found a watermelon the "size of a house". No one in our culture would take that to mean that the watermelon was 30 feet around; it is just a modern saying that explains it was unusually large. Same thing is happening here.

It is also interesting to note that the word Eschol MEANS "cluster".....like a "cluster" of grapes. This was a grape growing region so things were given "grape" names. So you see how in the Bible the place names and the stories can all intertwine, and sometimes it's hard to know which came first: the story or the name of the place. In other words did the place get named after something that happened there, or was a story developed around the name of a place. Remember: all of what we are reading was handed down word-of-mouth for centuries. So, many literary and phonetic devices were used to make stories easier to remember and to recite. If we knew Hebrew better, we'd see that many of the verses of the Bible rhyme..... again, because these were originally created in a way to be handed down orally. And, just as children are taught songs as memory devices for certain facts, so the ancients used rhyming, and poems, and unusual word structures in the telling of tales.

Anyway these tribal leaders return almost 6 weeks later, and they go straight to Moses and Aaron and report what they encountered. They first tell Moses what they saw, and then tell "the whole community" of Israel. This does NOT mean all of the Israelites. It just means the elders and leaders of Israel. And we don't have to read too far before we get a little hint of the bent of these scouts because they say "we came to the land WHERE YOU SENT US". Not the land the Lord promised or the land that was sworn to Abraham. In other words they disassociated themselves from the Promise, from the covenant, and from God. For them this was simply a political/economic matter.

And in the first part of their report the group of scouts offers a very positive view. Oh, yes, they say, it IS a land flowing with milk and honey. And this is in response to Moses' instruction as they were readying to go on their mission to determine if the land was fertile. And, they also show Moses the fruit they brought back; this is in response to the question of "was the land wooded".... meaning, did it support larger plants and not just underbrush.

But in answering the question about the strength of the people of Canaan, they answered that they were powerful; as for the cities, they were large and well defended. And, BTW, that was not an exaggeration. Most of the walls of the walled Canaanite cities that have been excavated have been found on average 30 to 50 feet high, and 10 to 15 feet thick. The scouts also say that the "tall people", the Anakites are present there. And the Amelekites..... thought to be the dominant people (wanderers) of the desert regions of Canaan and the Sinai..... were also there in great number. The Hittites.....a highly advanced civilization with it's center in modern day Turkey; the Jebusites, the original builders of the city of Jerusalem; and the Amorites, probably Abraham's original tribe, a very fierce group who sought power and dominance and was always a bother to their neighbors. The Canaanites.....a conglomerate of many of the offspring of Noah's grandson Canaan tended to live along the coastal plains of the land. All of these groups were there, and well entrenched. And, they undoubtedly had no interest in turning their city-states over to these Hebrews.

Let's understand something: the scouts' assessment was well balanced and not exaggerated. They were telling the truth and the truth was scaring the daylights out of the leaders and elders of Israel who had gathered around them to hear the scouting report. We can easily imagine the rising clatter of the people expressing anxiety and fear; a growing din of complaint and rebellion. Because verse 30 says, "Caleb **hushed** the people....." Caleb told them to quiet down and settle down. And Caleb says, OK, enough reality. We know what we're up against; now let's go and take the land because surely we'll overcome all of these obstacles.

This is not the same conclusion that those within earshot had already come to. The other scouts, and the elders, had decided that it was suicide to take-on these formidable people of Canaan. To make their point, they abandon their balanced report and say that the Anakites are so big, that WE looked like grasshoppers next to them! It was a hopeless situation, in their estimation.

But, here's the problem. The scouts and the elders were in rebellion not against Moses, but against Yehoveh. Their refusal to take God at His word was the greatest affront to His holiness. And, there would be grave repercussions.

Fellow Believers let me tell you something: often we think that the main thing we're to listen to the Lord about is to NOT do something that we shouldn't. But equally as often.....and as the case in point with the 12 scouts.....our rebellion against God is that we DON'T do things that we clearly SHOULD do. Instead we focus on the obstacles and look away from Him and grow afraid and impatient. We think: well if it's difficult and dangerous CERTAINLY it can't be from the Lord. If God has set this deal up, it's going to be easy and without problems. If we encounter problems and difficulties and it doesn't go like we envisioned, we MUST be going against God's will. That kind of thinking has probably snatched more blessings and victories away from individual Believers and groups of Christians than any other. It is a false assumption.

I would like to draw a parallel about this story of the 12 scouts for you that perhaps you haven't thought about. It is a very contemporary parallel and one that is going to have a deep and lasting affect on we the Church.

God had led His people, Israel, to the Promised Land; but 10 men...trusted and respected leaders.... decided to stand in the way of God's people entering that land of promise. These men did what any good leaders would do: investigate, evaluate, and then come to an honest and pragmatic conclusion without emotion. Ten leaders who lacked faith and trust but who had authority denied 3 million Israelites (who looked to them for leadership) their God-ordained inheritance. And many within the Church today are doing the same thing by working so diligently and effectively to introduce us to the Messiah but then denying His (and thus OUR) connection with His own people, the Jews, and His own land, Israel.

Who can look at the Bible and find one word that abrogates God's often stated covenant that the Land of Canaan belongs to His people Israel? Where do we find a single statement that says for the sake of world peace and humanity Israel should be pushed to give up part....if not all.... of their sacred land inheritance? Yet at least half of the Church today sides with Israel's enemies and the matter of land. Entire denominations have openly denounced Israel's right to the very land spelled out in detail in the Word of God. Some of the Pro-Israel half believes it's only fair to divvy up at least some of that land and give it to those poor Palestinians. After all isn't that just simple love and justice like Jesus taught us? And if we love the Palestinians the only possible response is to carve off some of the Promised Land and force Israel to give it to them for their own nation.

The consequences for those who seek to thwart God's plan for His people, Israel, to claim their land inheritance is severe. Ten of those 12 scouts were about to find out just how seriously God takes His covenants, His commands, and the rights and DUTY of His people to assume their place in the Land of Promise. The Church today is also about to find out that the Lord God does not change, and He does not make idle threats, and that He has not gone back on His promise to the set-apart nation He created through Abraham.

Let's go to chapter 14.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 14

### READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 14: 1 - 12

Verse 1 sums it all up well: the whole community broke into loud cries, and the people wept that night. That is the elders and leaders started yelling and screaming and bickering, and the people seeing what was happening, broke down into one giant panic attack. The community of Israel was united against Moses and Aaron and therefore against God. Note to the wise: you can't be against God's mediator on the one hand and on the other say you're for God. Then the blasphemy that was in their hearts came pouring out of their mouths: "if ONLY we had stayed in Egypt". Translation: we prefer slavery to our former evil taskmasters than redemption from the Lord because the slavery was more comfortable and familiar and did seem to have its perks.

Why God, they ask, did you bring us here to be slaughtered by the Canaanites? Do you HATE us? Now as much as we all might have a tendency to listen to this and shake our heads side to side in disgust at these Israelites, have we not all done the same thing from time to time in our walk with the Lord? Have we not all during a challenging moment, looked up and said, "why God"? Why are you doing this to me?

And the elders' solution to the problem is what one might expect: "let's appoint a DIFFERENT leader and go back to Egypt". Let's go back to slavery and captivity. At least we ate better. At least we had houses to live in and we weren't required to fight and put our lives at risk. Aren't humans funny creatures? How quickly we forget the pain and anguish of our past lives, our lives before God, and we'll go back for more even after we've escaped it for a time. This truth is so prevalent among men that there are Proverbs written to warn and remind us about our self-destructive human tendencies.

Many years ago when I married my wife she owned a nice house in California. And when a friend of hers heard that she would be moving out of that house, he asked if she would consider renting it to him so it could be used as a home for abused girls..... and so it was for over 15 years.

Scores of abused girls and many run-a-ways picked up by the local police, many taken from their abusive parents by social services, lived there over that time. And in some of our conversations with our friend and overseer of this program over the years, he told us of his greatest disappointment and frustration: that several of these girls, many of whom had permanent injuries and scars from the abuse, would run away from this safe house, and an opportunity for a better life, to go back to abusive environment. He said it was always to go back to what they knew and were used to. It was to shun what was new and better for what was familiar and comfortable.

This is what we do, as Believers, when we accept our Salvation, and then go right on living as though it never happened. God brought us up to the promised land, and then we got cold feet and ran right back to the world. And, usually, we think we're taking God with us when we choose to go back to the world. But is that really the case? We'll see the answer to that question, the next time we meet.