

Coping with fear (Num 13-14)

Fear is one of the most effective devices of the devil for keeping Christians (including Christian leaders) from entering into all the good things God has for them.

The story of the Exodus wilderness wanderings provide us with a clear example of how fear caused most of the people never to reach the destination God had promised to them.

The Lord commanded Israel to spy out the promised land: “The LORD said to Moses, "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, "Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees on it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land." (It was the season for the first ripe grapes.)” (Num 13:1-2, 17-20).

The Lord’s provision to glimpse the promised blessing: “They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.” (Num 13:27). However:

A. The majority focus on the problems

1. Fear exaggerates the problem

Some people are negative thinkers and problem-orientated

- *They saw powerful enemies*

“But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there” (Num 13:28)

- *They saw numerous enemies*

“The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.” (Num 13:29)

- *They saw stronger enemies*

“But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” (Num 13:31).

Then the exaggeration began

- *It was a carnivorous land!*

“And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size.” (Num 13:32).

- *They were a gigantic people*

We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). “We saw the Nephilim [giants] there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim).” (Num 13:33)

- *They felt like telepathic grasshoppers*

“We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.” (Num 13:33). How did they know they looked like grasshoppers to the Nephilim? Were they telepathic?!

Fear leads to exaggeration and getting things out of proportion. We can all feel like this at vulnerable times like the middle of the night or just coming to in the morning.

2. Fear infects the people

- *It is spread by scaremongers/negative thinkers*

“And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud.” (Num 13:32; 14:1).

This initiates disturbing rumours: “Have you heard what so and so said/did?”

This can lead to human striving rather than trusting God.

- *It leads to grumbling against leaders*

“All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron” (Num 14:2).

This leads to depressing criticisms and statements like “And I’m not the only one who thinks this!”

- *It causes doubt of God’s love*

“Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder.” (Num 14:3).

- *It creates a desire for the “good old days.”*

“Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt." Num 14:3-4

3. Fear obscures the past

“The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?" (Num 14:11).

Cf. Prov 29:25 “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.”

B. Men of faith focus on the Lord

“Because they have not followed me wholeheartedly, not one of the men twenty years old or more who came up out of Egypt will see the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob- not one except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they followed the LORD wholeheartedly.” (Num 32:11-12).

Compare the trusting attitude of Hezekiah when he received a threatening letter from Sennacherib “Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD.” (2 Kings 19:14). He put the letter with all its threats before the Lord as a visual prayer for help and protection.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Php 4:4-7).

1. They focus on the love of the Lord for us

When we are seeking to please him the Lord is pleased with us: “Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, ‘The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us.’” Num 14:6-8 cp. 14:3

Cf 1Peter 5:7 “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

2. They focus on the power of the Lord in us

“If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us.” (Num 14:8)

Israel needed to recognise that God was leading, not Moses.

God says through Isaiah: “I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass, that you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, that you live in constant terror every day because of the wrath of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction? For where is the wrath of the oppressor?” (Isa 51:12-13).

3. They focus on the protection of the Lord over us

“Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.” (Num 14:9).

Remember God’s past deliverances

Cf. The fall of Jericho

In view of all this we can take our stand on God’s promise: “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

The majority never reached the Promised Land but Joshua and Caleb did. Will you?

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