

Fearless Obedience to God

Because God can always be trusted to keep His promises, His people can courageously obey Him in fearful circumstances



GOD'S STORY
THE TRANSFORMATION FOR ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Numbers 13-14

April 26, 2020

(Numbers 13:26-31) ²⁶ They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. ²⁹ 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." ³⁰ Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." ³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are."

(Numbers 14:6-9) ⁶ Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes ⁷ and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. ⁸ 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. ⁹ Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

(Numbers 14:17-23) ¹⁷ "Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared: ¹⁸ 'The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.' ¹⁹ In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now." ²⁰ The Lord replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. ²¹ Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, ²² not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times— ²³ not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it."

COMMUNITY – CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

- Do you tend to defer to the majority opinion and go along with the crowd? Or do you tend to speak up for what you want?
- How does this work when the group is trying to decide where to go to eat? How does it work when the church is struggling to find and obey God's will? Have you ever seen a group of Christians be talked out of following God because of fear or challenges? What happened?

In today's study, we will learn that the consequences of fearful disobedience of God are worse than any challenges that might be encountered as a result of courageous obedience. God has given strong affirmations in His Word, promises to be taken by faith, that He will support those who follow and obey His guidance. However, the difference between reading God's promises and acting upon them is as distinct as the difference between studying a map and actually traveling the terrain it describes.

CONTENT – EXPLORING GOD'S STORY

Have a volunteer read Numbers 13:26-31

- The scouts' report of a good land with large cities and abundant produce must have been enticing to the Israelites after many months in the desert. Caleb and the other scouts all saw the same evidence. What led them to make different recommendations (vv. 30-31)?

At the Lord's command, Moses sent one man from each of the twelve tribes of Israel to scout out the land of Canaan, bringing back a report on what the land was like, and bringing back some of the fruit of the land (Num. 13:1-3,17-20). Their assignment was not to decide whether Israel should possess the land. God had already decided that (v. 2). But 10 of the 12 scouts reacted based what they would be able to accomplish in their own strength. We must be careful not to repeat the scouts' error of basing our decisions on what we can accomplish in our own strength. When God's command is clear, we should trust Him and obey even if there are legitimate obstacles and concerns.

- What kinds of fears keep people from obeying God today (either individually or as a group)?
- What's keeping you from obeying God? What action is He calling you to take? What reasons are you giving to justify your choice not to obey?
- How can we distinguish between wise caution and faint-hearted disobedience? What will it take to obey even when afraid?

Have a volunteer read Numbers 14:6-9

- What points did Joshua and Caleb make as they appealed to the Israelites not to rebel against the Lord's command? Why did they say the people should not be afraid?
- In the end, whose argument was more persuasive? Why?

In Numbers 13:32-33 the majority party of the scouts appears to have added exaggerated or false details to their report to persuade the people not to risk the conquest of Canaan. They certainly emphasized the negative aspects of their report while minimizing the positive factors. Joshua and Caleb begged the people not to rebel or to be afraid. They were so dismayed over the whole situation that they tore their clothes as an act of mourning or sorrow.

- Is fear a sin? Why or why not? What is the relationship between trust and obedience?
- How would truly believing "the Lord is with us" (v. 9) impact your willingness to obey in a situation you are facing today?

Have a volunteer read Numbers 14:17-23

- What did Moses ask the Lord to do? How did God answer him?
- What truths about God did Moses declare and depend on (vv.18-19) when he asked the Lord to pardon the Israelites?
- What was the result of the Israelites' disobedience? Is this outcome a demonstration of God's faithful love? If so, how?

This wasn't the first time God threatened to destroy the rebellious Israelites and create a new nation under Moses' leadership. (See Ex. 32:1-14.) Moses intervened on behalf of the people, begging God to relent. The Israelites who disobeyed God died in the wilderness during 40 years of wandering (Num. 14:28-35). From that entire generation, God permitted only Joshua and Caleb to enter the promised land.

- If God forgives wrongdoing and rebellion, why must we still experience the consequences of our sinful choices? Is that a contradiction? Explain.
- How would you say this example compares to the way God handles our disobedience today? Explain.

The Book of Numbers is the story of God leading His people to the Promised Land. From cover to cover, this book of the Bible tells how the people continuously rebelled against God as they wandered in the wilderness. And because of their rebellion, God brings judgment. But He also shows mercy. God disciplines His disobedient people, but He also reaffirms His intent to bring them back into the Promised Land.

Because Christ bore the penalty for our sin, we may enter into God's promised rest (Heb. 4:3). We must let God's discipline guide us to the peace and rest He intends for us (Heb. 12:5-11).

- In what ways have you already begun to know God's rest? What is keeping you from knowing God's rest more fully?

COMMISSION – ENGAGING IN GOD'S STORY

It is never too late to acknowledge past sins and ask for God's forgiveness. We may not escape the consequences of past disobedience or recover lost opportunities, but we can learn from those experiences and find new ways to demonstrate faith and obedience.

- How has disobedience in the past affected your relationship with God? What steps can you take today to restore your relationship and receive God's forgiveness and mercy?
- What advice would you give to a friend who is having trouble moving beyond regret for past disobedience to the Lord?
- How has God shown you mercy despite your failure to obey? How has that helped you understand His character? How does this affect your obedience today?

PRAYER: Close in prayer, asking God to keep your group members faithful to Him and to help them accept His plans for their lives. Pray that as they grow in their faith and see God's fulfilled goodness to them, their fears will take a back seat and they will testify to God's hand of blessing on their lives.

CONTINUE TO JOURNEY THROUGH GOD'S STORY

Bible Reading Plan:

DAY 1 – Numbers 20, 27:12-23
 DAY 2 – Numbers 34-35
 DAY 3 – Deuteronomy 1-2
 DAY 4 – Deuteronomy 3-4
 DAY 5 – Deuteronomy 6-7

KEY VERSE: Deuteronomy 6:4-5

H.E.A.R. Method:

Highlight a verse or two.
 Explain what the text means.
 Apply the verse to your life.
 Respond to God.

Our team has put together Bible study resources to encourage and inspire you as you engage in God's Story. Visit chetscreek.com/gods-story for videos, study guides, and more.

OUR VISION

To be a church
 for the unchurched,
 here and around the world.

ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Gospel-centered communities that aim to KNOW
 GOD together and BE CHANGED by Him in a
 way that will CHANGE THE WORLD.

Number 13:26-31.

13:26 The Israelite scouts had departed from the Paran Desert area and had worked their way north into the Negev and through what would later be Judah and Israel. The Israelites meanwhile continued their journey to the oasis of Kadesh-barnea, presumed to be the area of Quseima, at the headwaters of the wilderness basin of the Nahal Zin.

13:27 The report of the scouts began on the positive side with the demonstration of the fruitfulness of the promised land. Milk and honey became the classic description of the abundance of natural flora and fauna of the land of Canaan (Ex 3:8,17; 13:5; 33:3; Lv 20:24; Dt 6:3; 11:9). This assessment is echoed in the Egyptian travel account "The Story of Sinuhe" in which the princely emissary described the land of Yaa and its abundant produce.

13:28-29 The tenor of the report quickly changed to a negative assessment of the possibility of conquering the heavily fortified cities and the numerous inhabitants, which they claimed included giants. The problem was that the people focused on their own strength rather than the power of God. The point of the later victories over the Midianites, Amorites, and Canaanites was to demonstrate God's strength. The power of Israel was never in her armies. Victory came at the hands of the Lord of Hosts. Recent discoveries that confirm the biblical data suggest a complex composite of ethnic groups living in the land of Canaan during the Late Bronze (1550-1200 b.c.) and Iron 1 (1200-1000 b.c.) ages.

13:30 Caleb was the first to counter the objections of the majority of the scouts. The name Caleb means "dog," and it serves as an example of the danger of reading too much into the meaning of biblical names.

Numbers 14:6-9, 17-23.

14:5-9 Moses and Aaron fell down with their faces to the ground in humble submission before God at the entrance to the tabernacle where the people had gathered. At the same time they were bowing before the rebellious Israelites, propitiating God on their behalf. The faithful scouts Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes as a symbol of mourning and disdain for the defiant Israelites and their humiliated leaders. The tearing of one's garments was a gesture of mourning for the dead, for expressing lament over disease or plague, and for introducing a prophetic lament of judgment against an individual or nation.

14:17-18 Slow to anger describes God's longsuffering character. He was willing to endure the rebellion of the people for an extended period of time and to respond to their waywardness with grace and faithfulness. Later in Israelite history, the prophets responded to Israel's idolatrous practices of adopting Canaanite gods and goddesses in worship and practicing injustice against their own people by declaring that God's longsuffering would soon come to an end. His judgment was imminent and came to pass in the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions of Israel and Judah in the eighth and sixth centuries b.c.

Rich in faithful love describes God's lovingkindness and covenant loyalty to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But in spite of His love, His justice and righteousness would not allow him to leave the guilty unpunished. Moses' understanding of the balance between the love of God and His righteous judgment came through his close relationship with God.

The phrase bringing the consequences of the fathers' wrongdoing on the children meant that stemming the tide of sinfulness within the family structure often took many generations. God does not cause one's descendants to suffer because of the sins of their fathers (Dt 24:16; Ezek 18), but He does punish children who keep doing the same sorts of sins as their parents. This passage set the stage for the words of the Shema (Dt 6:4-9), which instructed parents to set an example in the worship of God in the context of the family.

14:19 Please pardon was Moses' way of asking God to show the Israelites His merciful love instead of His righteous judgment.

14:20-23 God's reputation would be preserved through the meting out of His judgment against the disobedient first-generation leaders, and His mercy would be extended to the generation that followed. In refusing to enter the promised land, the older generation had rejected an essential part of their covenant relationship with God that was set forth in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3,7; 13:14-18; 15:18-21; 17:7-8).