

Lesson 7 – 12 June, 2011

The Crisis at Kadesh

Lesson Scope: Numbers Chapters 13 and 14.

Lesson Focus

Israel had been delivered from Egypt by great signs, wonders, and miracles. They had received the Law in a fiery demonstration of God's majesty. Divinely provided food and water had sustained them in the wilderness for over a year. Now they were at Kadesh, about fifty miles south of Beer-sheba, preparing to enter the Promised Land. Should they not have been looking ahead in great faith? Or had the miraculous become so commonplace that they failed to see and know the God to whom they owed their salvation?

From Kadesh, Moses sent twelve spies to scout the country and gather intelligence information for an effective military invasion of Canaan (see Deuteronomy 1) Ten of the spies brought back a fearful report and stirred up the people against Moses and against God Himself.

Times of choice are defining moments for individuals and groups. Faith claims the divine promises and marches ahead to victory. Unbelief fails in the conflict with its distorted view of the Lord and of circumstances.

The conservative revival movement is now forty to fifty years old. We have reached the second and third generation.

How does the commitment in our congregations compare with what it was then? Is cross bearing a present, practical reality? Is the younger generation establishing firm conviction? We cannot tell when we might be tested severely, but we must, each day, moment by moment, walk by faith and obedience. If we as a group do this, come what may, we will experience the fullness of God's blessing and glory.

We should not expect someone else to lead or stand out. Make this personal for you and each member of your family. Each one must personally say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

Lesson Aim: To see contrasts between faith and unbelief.

Theme Verses: Hebrews 4:1-2. Let us therefore fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word

preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Lesson Text:

Faith Versus Sight

Numbers 13:1-2

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ²Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them.

Numbers 13:26-33

And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this *is* the fruit of it. ²⁸Nevertheless the people *be* strong that dwell in the land, and the cities *are* walled, *and* very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. ²⁹The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. ³⁰And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. ³¹But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. ³²And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it *are* men of a great stature. ³³And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, *which come* of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

Faith Versus Retreat

Numbers 14:2-10

And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! would God we had died in this wilderness! ³And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? ⁴And they said one to another, Let us make a

captain, and let us return into Egypt. ⁵Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

⁶And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, *which were* of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: ⁷And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, *is* an exceeding good land. ⁸If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. ⁹Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they *are* bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD *is* with us: fear them not. ¹⁰But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

Faith Versus Death

Numbers 14:11

And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?

Numbers 14:22

Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;

Numbers 14:30

Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, *concerning* which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

Questions for Study

Faith Versus Sight

1. What promises had God given Israel as a basis for their faith?
2. What did all the spies see? How did the perspective of the ten spies differ from that of the two faithful ones?
3. Explain the wisdom of Caleb's call for immediate action.
4. Give some practical expressions of the faithful minority today.

Faith Versus Retreat

5. What sins did Israel commit as they refused to enter Canaan?
6. How did Israel's godly leaders attempt to help them see their sin?
7. How can we be sure that we make the right decision in time of crisis?

Faith Versus Death

8. What qualified Caleb for God's favor?

9. How might we express unbelief despite God's signs?

Analyzing the Passage

Faith has always been the defining quality of those who walk with God. God requires faith to please Him (Hebrews 11:1-6). In fact, God arranges life so that we must trust Him in order to serve Him. From a human standpoint, the conquest of Canaan was impossible for Israel. Moses himself described the seven nations of Canaan as, each in themselves, greater and mightier than Israel (Deuteronomy 7:1). The ten faithless spies imagined a coalition of these mighty nations obliterating the army of Israel.

Faith in God is based upon our confidence in the truth of His promises and in His power to perform them (1 Corinthians 2:5). Faith changes man's view of life's circumstances and also of himself. Caleb and Joshua saw the land of Canaan as an opportunity (Numbers 14:9). Rather than men stricken with the grasshopper complex (Numbers 13:33), they saw themselves as men with the Lord on their side (Numbers 14:7-8).

The intensity of the conflict increases throughout this passage. At first Caleb was able to still the disturbed people (Numbers 13:30). But after a night of weeping, the people would not listen to reason, even though Joshua and Caleb rent their clothes (Numbers 14:6). Only the appearance of the glory of the Lord prevented Joshua and Caleb from being stoned (Numbers 14:10).

Principles and Applications

Faith Versus Sight

1. The issues of life force men to choose between faith and unbelief (Numbers 13:1-2, 26-28). We cannot be neutral. Many persons have endorsed the pragmatism of Gamaliel (Acts 5:34-39). In reality, Gamaliel maintained his identity with those who persecuted the church. Those who take a "wait and see" stance before committing themselves to a Biblical church fellowship will lose their families and possibly themselves.

2. Unbelief views God's promised blessings as good but unattainable (Numbers 13:27-28). Many persons will profess that living a Biblical lifestyle is the best choice, but they will not commit themselves to the Lord's will as the only way of salvation. Many people work along with sin in their churches and families, even though they say, "It is not as we wish it were. - Plain church groups are a favorite study for many scholars who are not

fully committed to truth themselves.

3. Viewing earthly circumstances without faith will overwhelm us with fear (Numbers 13:27-28). How do we face life as we arise each morning? Each day is a new opportunity, yet we may be filled with fear. Possible accidents, business troubles, financial obligations, health issues, spiritual attacks from Satan, and our spiritual responsibility for our children may confront us often and seriously. We need God's comforting presence and His empowering Spirit to enable us.

4. The man of faith claims the victory (Numbers 13:30). The victory foreseen by faith is not won by a slim chance or a narrow margin. Elisha said, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them- (2 Kings 6:16). Paul wrote, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37).

5. The assurance of victory energizes Christian service (Numbers 13:30). After describing Christ's triumphant victory over death, Paul encouraged his readers to continue steadfast in their service (1 Corinthians 15:57-58). Like Caleb, we can hardly wait to see the Lord's work prosper. The church should not lack mission workers, street meeting participants, literature distributors, long-term schoolteachers, happy, busy mothers, and diligent fathers. The greatest reward is just ahead!

6. Unbelief focuses on the human weakness of God's people and exaggerates the strength of the enemy (Numbers 13:31-33). God has chosen to do His work in earthen vessels "that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Do we look down on anyone with disdain thinking, "How can God use such a person because of his family, his mannerisms, his lack of education, or his lack of impressive speech?" Do we understand that God is using the meek, the humble, the obscure, the poor, and those less honored by men to do His work? Are we willing to serve despite feelings of insufficiency?

Faith Versus Retreat

7. Unbelief distorts reality (Numbers 14:2-4). For the ungodly, death is not better than life. The pleasures of the world are not worth the loss of our soul. The cross the Christian must bear cannot be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18). The unseen eternal world is far more permanent than the things we see.

8. Men of faith earnestly entreat unbelievers to consider their ways (Numbers 14:5-9). They identify sin for what it is - rebellion against the Lord. They call men to choose right because of the goodness and blessing of the Lord. In our time God has blessed our churches as we rejected public ele-

mentary schooling, higher education, radio, TV and insurance. Men of God are calling our people to continue this walk of faith without big business, expensive advertising, job-provided insurances, or cutting-edge communications technology.

9. Unbelief causes men to turn against the righteous (Numbers 14:10). A righteous life and testimony pricks the conscience of wicked men. They envy the peace and joy of the righteous. Envy put Jesus on the cross. Conviction put Abel in his grave.

Faith Versus Death

10. Unbelief provokes the wrath of God (Numbers 14:11). Unbelief is unreasonable in light of the abundant evidence of God's power and faithfulness. We see the marvels of His creation around us, we see His prophecies being fulfilled, we see the miraculous preservation of His Word, and we have the witness of His Holy Spirit in our own selves.

11. Faith and obedience will be fully rewarded (Numbers 14:24, 30). The truth of God is vindicated as the righteous experience the fulfillment of God's promises. In a growing and expanding experience, we are changed from glory to glory here and anticipate greater glory in the life to come. God's blessing in our lives grows to bless our posterity and others around us.

Important Teachings

1. The issues of life force men to choose between faith and unbelief (Numbers 13:1-2, 26-28).

2. Unbelief views God's promised blessings as good but unattainable (Numbers 13:27-28).

3. Viewing earthy circumstances without faith will overwhelm us with fear (Numbers 13:27-28).

4. The man of faith claims the victory (Numbers 13:30).

5. The assurance of victory energizes Christian service (Numbers 13:30).

6. Unbelief focuses on the human weakness of God's people and exaggerates the strength of the enemy (Numbers 13:31-33).

7. Unbelief distorts reality (Numbers 14:2-4).

8. Men of faith earnestly entreat unbelievers to consider their ways (Numbers 14:5-9).

9. Unbelief causes men to turn against the righteous (Numbers 14:10).

10. Unbelief provokes the wrath of God (Numbers 14:11).

11. Faith and obedience will be fully rewarded (Numbers 14:24, 30).

12. Men of faith turn to God in times of crisis (Numbers 14:5).

13. Faith causes one to fear God rather than men (Numbers 14:9).

Answers to Questions

1. What promises had God gives Israel as a basis for their faith?

God had promised Canaan to Abraham and his seed. God had told Abraham this would be fulfilled after a season of affliction (Genesis 15:13, 14). This land was a gift to Israel—an inheritance. In verse 2 of the lesson text, God said, "Which I give unto the children of Israel." Further, in God's promise to Moses in Exodus 3:8, the abundance of the land is described as "flowing with milk and honey." God repeats this promise to Israel in verse 17. Our lesson refers to this part of the promise in Numbers 13:27.

2. What did all the spies see? How did the perspective of the ten spies differ from that of the two faithful ones?

The twelve spies all saw an abundantly productive, good land, just as the Lord had promised. They all saw the walled cities and the giants.

Unlike Joshua and Caleb, the ten spies lacked faith in the truth of God's promises and in God's power to perform His Word. They did not give consideration to the power that God had already shown among them. Their unbelief distorted their view to the extent that they made the goodness of the land appear to be the cause of its trouble. They said, "It is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof." They filled their minds with negative (unbelieving) thoughts that soon left them in despair. In fact, the inhabitants of Canaan feared the Israelites, a fear that lingered even forty years later (Joshua 2:9-11).

3. Explain the wisdom of Caleb's call for immediate action.

Caleb combated unbelief by his frank declaration of faith, "We are well able to overcome it." Caleb called for immediate, positive action. Fear grows with procrastination.

4. Give some practical expressions of the faithful minority today.

We express faith by speaking out for the Lord's side when the truth is challenged. We believe with our whole heart in the victory of Christ and His kingdom. We build homes that reproduce faith. We are eager and zealous in supporting all the work of the church. We willingly accept the responsibilities assigned to us, and we fulfill them diligently.

5. What sins did Israel commit as they refused to enter Canaan?

They wept all night when they should have been praising the Lord for delivering them from Egypt. They murmured against the Lord's leadership. They blamed God for doing them evil. They rebelled against the Lord. They feared the people of Canaan instead of fearing God. They rejected the

message of God by Joshua and Caleb, even plotting to murder them.

6. How did Israel's godly leaders attempt to help them see their sin?

Moses and Aaron fell on their faces, first no doubt in prayer to God and then as an earnest, humble entreaty to the people not to continue on this course of self-destruction and ruin. Joshua and Caleb rent their clothes to express grief and agony at this sin and to help the people see the awfulness of their words. They also attempted to persuade them by considering the facts.

7. How can we be sure that we make the right decision in time of crisis?

While historians may highlight certain events or moments as defining for a movement or a people, often this is not clear until years later. We may not know if the events of our life are significant or not, but we can know that faith in God, obedience to His Word, and love for our fellow men will make us personal partakers of the fulfillment of God's promises for the righteous.

8. What qualified Caleb for God's favour?

Caleb had another spirit in him, and he followed God fully.

9. How might we express unbelief despite God's signs?

We might express unbelief by pursuing and trusting big business. We might take out insurance. We might lose the vision of Christ's pure, holy, committed church. We might be afraid to bring children into the world.

Summarizing the Lesson

Caleb said forty-five years later. "And Moses swore on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the Lord my God.... And now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the Lord will be with me. then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said" (Joshua 14:9-12).

Joshua said at the close of his life, "And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you, all are come to pass unto you, and not concerning one thing hath failed thereof. (Joshua 23:14).

Research Guide

1. Study Joshua 14:6-15; 15:13-1.9; 23:1-14 for Joshua's and Caleb's testimony and interpretation of these events and their declarations of God's fulfillment of His promises.
2. Read the chapter titled "Faith" in Doctrines of the Bible