

Elder Vernon Johson

Numbers

Forty Days Spying out the Land of Canaan

Num. 13:1 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Send 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." God commanded that spies be sent to search the land of Canaan and bring back a report.

In sending out the spies, Moses gave them commandment as to what they were to do: Num. 13:17 "And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain: 18 And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; 19 And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds; 20 And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the firstripe grapes."

In going forth on their duty to spy out the land of Canaan the twelve men were being tested as to the report they would bring back. Likewise, when we are going forth on our duties toward the Lord, we can consider that often we are being tested as to our response in carrying out those duties and the report that we bring back.

The spies went about carrying out their duties in spying out the land of Canaan and this is what they found: Num. 13:21 "So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath. 22 And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the children of Anak, were. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs. 24 The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence. 25 And they returned from searching of the land after forty days."

Next, here is the report that they gave of what they found in the land of Canaan: Num. 13:26 "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 showed them the fruit of the land. 27 And 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. 28 Nevertheless 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. 29 The 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." Up to this point, it would appear that the spies had done well in spying out the land, in discovering what was in the land and in reporting back to the children of Israel.

The conclusion that ten of the spies drew from what they reported, however, was based on a lack of faith in their God, his power to deliver and his covenant promise: Num. 13:30 "And 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. 31 But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. 32 And 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. 33 And 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."

It was true that there were giants in the land, and it was true that they were well fortified in their positions to defend the land. From a natural physical ability, they would have appeared to be much more capable in battle than the children of Israel were. However, one only had to look back a short time to see that God had manifest much power and deliverance to the children of Israel. God had sent forth his ten sore judgments upon the land of Egypt. After these judgments, Pharaoh had agreed to let the children of Israel go into the wilderness, but then changed his mind and went with his army to destroy and bring back the children of Israel.

While Pharaoh and his host marched on against the children of Israel, the children of Israel were penned up next to the Red Sea. God sent forth a pillar of a cloud and of fire to separate between the children of Israel and the Egyptian army. The pillar was a light by night to the children of Israel, but was darkness to the Egyptians. During that night, God caused a mighty east wind to blow and to part the waters of the Red Sea so that the next morning the children of Israel were able to cross the Sea on dry ground. When Pharaoh and his mighty army assayed to follow the children of Israel, their chariots became stuck in the mud and God caused the

waters of the Red Sea to return and to drown Pharaoh and the host of the Egyptian army. Afterwards, the children of Israel sang and gave praise to the God of Israel for his great deliverance in saving them from their enemy.

The spies should have been well aware of the manifest power and deliverance of the Lord in delivering them out of Pharaoh's hand, but they also should have been well aware of the promise that God had made by covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give them the land of Canaan.

The spies report that, "We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we," showed forth a lack of faith in God and his promises and encouraged the children of Israel also to doubt the power and promises of God. The ten spies were leaders of the people, they were put to the test and failed, and judgment was to follow. In contrast Caleb and Joshua encouraged the people by saying: Num. 14:6 "And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: 7 And 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. 8 If 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. 9 Only 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."

Therefore, by the actions of the ten spies who discouraged the people, and the actions of Joshua and Caleb, the following judgment was carried out of the Lord: Num. 14:36 "And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land, 37 Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD 38 But Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of the men that went to search the land, lived still." Our faith is often put to the test, let us be found faithful in the service of the Lord and trust in Him and his promises. Our God never calls on us to do anything, but that he gives us the ability to do it or else delivers us in the trial of our faith.