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Numbers

Forty Years Wandering in the Wilderness

The children of Israel spent forty years wandering in the wilderness until all of those who were 20 years of age and older when they came out of Egypt had died. This was a judgment pronounced upon them of God. The reason for this judgment we will now examine.

When the spies had returned from spying out the land of Canaan for forty days, they gave their report of what they had found: Num. 13:27 "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." From this we gather that the land was a very good land and that the inhabitants of the land were strong and well fortified, with the cities walled and very great. The people of Israel would have to trust in the Lord's deliverance in order to drive out the inhabitants of the land and possess it.

There were some facts that the people knew before the spies gave their report:

1. The Lord had by a strong arm poured out his ten sore judgments upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians.
2. The Lord had parted the waters of the Red Sea that the children of Israel may pass over on dry ground, then He caused the waters to return to drown Pharaoh and his host when they marched after the children of Israel.
3. The Lord had caused water to flow out of the rock to give drink to the children of Israel.
4. The Lord had caused manna to appear on the ground each day to give food to the children of Israel in the wilderness.

5. The Lord had sweetened the bitter waters of Marah when the children of Israel were about to die of thirst when they first came into the wilderness.

6. The Lord had gone before the children of Israel in a pillar of a cloud.

7. The Lord gave light to the children of Israel at night by a pillar of fire.

8. The Lord had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give the land of Canaan to the children of Israel for a possession by covenant promise.

Next, two sets of witnesses among the spies gave contradictory conclusions:

1. Caleb and Joshua encouraged the people to go possess the land of Canaan:

a. 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."

b. 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."

2. The other ten spies discouraged the people: Num. 13:31 "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."

The reaction of the people was to disbelieve Caleb and Joshua and to believe the evil report of the other ten spies: Num. 14:1 "And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. 2 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! or would God we had died in this wilderness! 3 And 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? 4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt." Thus, the reaction of the people was to disbelieve the covenant promise and power of God. They also desired to return back unto Egyptian bondage! Further, they murmured against Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Caleb and the Lord.

Because of this, the Lord pronounced judgment against the children of Israel:

1. Num. 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; 23 Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: 24 But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it."

2. Num. 14:27 "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. 28 Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: 29 Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, 30 Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. 31 But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.

32 But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. 33 And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. 34 After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise. 35 I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die."

Further, this judgment was used as a warning to us in this day in which we live in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4. Heb. 3:7 "Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, 8 Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: 9 When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. 10 Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said,

They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. 11 So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) 12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. 13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Also, we read in Heb. 3:17 "But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."

Next, we read in Heb. 4:9 "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. 10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. 11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." Many people today do not believe in the covenant promise of rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ and are going about trying to establish their own righteousness. Subsequently, they remain in the wilderness outside the true church of Jesus Christ and find no rest from their ignorant labors in a false works system. The major lesson in all of the above is that we should believe in the covenant promises of God and rest in the power of God who has finished the work of redeeming us from our sins.