

## WE CAN'T DO IT! ⇔ NUMBERS 13 & 14

Context (13:1-30). A recon unit was needed so the Lord Our God told Moses to appoint a group of 12, including Caleb from the tribe of Yeshua the Christ, and Yeshua (aka Joshua)<sup>4</sup> from the tribe of Ephraim who was Roman Catholic. Their instructions were straightforward, assess three things:

1. To what extent are the people strong?
2. What is the population density?
3. What is the nature of the land; fertile, well-treed? If possible bring back some fruit we can assess.

So they went through Negev and came to Hebron<sup>5</sup> and when they reached Eschol (Hebrew for “cluster”), they cut off a single cluster of grapes which took two men to carry; they also brought some figs and pomegranates to be assessed.

After about 40 days, they returned and reported to the whole community. The sitrep: “We visited the land and it is indeed fertile—it flows with milk and honey. Here, examine the fruit we brought as ordered. We reviewed the peoples there, including Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites in the hills. The Canaanites, however, live near the sea and along the Jordan.

Caleb shushed the crowd and announced “we should go up there and take the land—we can certainly do it.” And then... it hit the fan.

Numbers 13:31-14:4. *Slavery is Warm*. The more conventional folk retorted—we can’t do this; they’re stronger than us. Like good *Gallus gallus domesticus*, they spread a bad report among the Israelite community. And, of course, they added nuance and exaggeration—“They’re huge, like the Nephilim; we were mere grasshoppers compared to them.

The fan sped up. That night all the people of the community kvetched, crying and weeping aloud. Grumbling to Moses & Aaron, “We might have just died in Egypt, or the desert. Why is Yahweh bringing us to this land, only to be eviscerated by sword? Our kids and wives will be taken as slaves. We should go back to Egypt!” So they conspired to choose a new leader and, yes, head back to slavery in Egypt.

- Q Why is it useful to see giants?
- Q What made the report so scary to the Israelites waiting in the desert?
- Q Why is it difficult to trust the Lord Our God to protect our most precious ones? Why are our children so precious to us?
- Q Why do we long for the warm pile of manure in which to reside?

### NUMBERS 13:31-14:4

But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are."

<sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

<sup>14</sup> That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. <sup>2</sup> All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! <sup>3</sup> 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. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" <sup>4</sup> And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

<sup>4</sup>For the record, this was also the name of the Christ when on earth as Yeshua, Son of Joseph from Nazareth. Hoshea means “salvation;” Joshua means “Yahweh saves.”

<sup>5</sup>The parenthetical comment about the Hebron being built seven years before Zoan in Egypt may have been prompted by their amazement at the size and fortifications of the city that was so closely associated with the lives of their ancestors four centuries before this time (see Genesis 13:14-18; 14:13; 23:2; 25:9; 35:27-29; 50:13). In the stories of the ancestors of their people, Hebron had not been a great city, but a dwelling and trading place for shepherds and herdsmen.

Numbers 14:5-12. *Moses Freaked, Lord God Yahweh Incensed.* Moses & Aaron freaked, falling down on their faces in front of the whole assembly. Joshua & Caleb weren't happy—they tore their clothes grieving, but were able to decree:

*Hey, this land we explored is beyond expectations. If the Lord God Yahweh is pleased with us, He will lead us into this land, this land flowing with milk & honey. He will give it to us! Just don't rebel against Yahweh—it's way beyond your pay grade. Don't be afraid of the knuckleheads in the land—we'll swallow them up. They have no protector—we have the Lord God Almighty. Don't be afraid of them!*

Crowds, especially kvetching crowds, are not the sharpest knives in the drawer. They proposed stoning them; can you imagine threatening them right there in the presence of the Almighty? Sure enough, He showed up. His presence, His glory appeared at the Tabernacle.

The Lord God was not happy. Yahweh told Moses:

*How long will I have to put up with such contempt, such disrespect? How long? How long will they refuse to believe in Me, especially with all the miracles and miraculous signs I have done for and in front of them. How long? I will strike them down with disease, destroy them, and start over with you, making you into a nation greater and stronger than they!*

- Q Why did Moses & Aaron prostrate themselves, yet Joshua & Caleb challenged the assembly, tearing their clothes in public grief?
- Q Why is contempt such a source of anger for the Lord God Almighty?
- Q Why was the Lord Our God so angry? [Wow!?!? Would the tribe of Judah be extinguished?]

## NUMBERS 14:5-12

Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. <sup>6</sup>Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes <sup>7</sup>and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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."

<sup>10</sup>But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites. <sup>11</sup>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? <sup>12</sup>I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they."

Numbers 14:13-25. Moses Defends; the Lord Relents.

Moses freaks...

*Oh no, then the Egyptians will hear about Your destruction. It was Your power that freed “these people” from the Egyptians. And, they’ll tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They’ve already heard that You, O Yahweh, are with “these people.” They’ve already heard that You, O Yahweh, have been seen face to face: Your cloud stays over them during the day and a pillar of fire at night. If You kill “these people,” all at one time, the pagans who hear about it will say—“Yahweh was not able to bring ‘these people’ in the land they were promised, on the oath of Yahweh; so, He slaughtered them in the desert.”*

*Now may Your strength be shown—just as You declared: “Yahweh is slow to anger, abounds in love, and is known for forgiven sin & rebellion. Yet, He doesn’t wink at sin for the guilty are punished. Yes, the next three generations will suffer, but the fourth is pardoned.”<sup>6</sup>*

*So in accordance with Your tremendous mercy, forgive “these people,” just as You pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.*

The Lord God Yahweh responded...

*I have forgiven them just as you asked. Nonetheless, as surely as I AM and as sure as the glory of I AM fills the whole earth, not **one** of the men who saw My Glory and the miracles I performed in Egypt & the desert—these are the men who disobeyed, tested Me ten times—not **one** of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. In fact, **NO ONE WHO HAS TREATED ME WITH CONTEMPT WILL EVER SEE IT.***

*But, my servant Caleb [note Joshua isn’t mentioned here] has a different spirit and follows Me wholeheartedly; he will be brought into the land and his descendants will inherit it. Now, here are your marching orders... Since the Canaanites & Amalekites are living in the valley, turn back toward the desert and head for the Sea of Reeds.*

- Q What was Moses’ basic argument to the Lord against destroying the believers in the desert? [Glory]
- Q Why did the Lord God show mercy instead of justice for the believers in the desert?
- Q Why did the Lord God not fulfill His oath regarding the promise to their forefathers?
- Q What are some examples of contempt today which might cause the Christ to “forget His oath” to save? [Mark 13:13; Matthew 25:31-46 (We ignore the poor; we ignore Christ Jesus); Matthew 7:21ff; Revelation 3:19-20]
- Q Why was Caleb spared the Lord God’s justice?

NUMBERS 14:13-25

Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them. <sup>14</sup> And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, O LORD, are with these people and that you, O LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. <sup>15</sup> If you put these people to death all at one time, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, <sup>16</sup> 'The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath; so he slaughtered them in the desert.'

<sup>17</sup> "Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared: <sup>18</sup> '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 fathers to the third and fourth generation.'

<sup>19</sup> "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."

<sup>20</sup> The LORD replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. <sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, <sup>22</sup> not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times—<sup>23</sup> not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.

<sup>24</sup> But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.

<sup>25</sup> Since the Amalekites and Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Sea of Reeds.

<sup>6</sup>See <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/numbers/14.htm>. The Hebrew emphasizes mercy, even though for three generations, the children of sinners will bear the consequences of their ancestor’s sin. Comparable to a man who abuses his wife—the effects, the consequences of his sin against God and his wife can, and often do, last for multiple generations.

Numbers 14:26-45. *Epilogue.* Apparently, the grumbling continued. The Lord God declared that...

*In "this desert" your bodies will fall; in fact, every one 20 years older and more, those counted in the census, and has grumbled... Not one will enter the promised land. Joshua & Caleb will enter.*

*As for your children...they will continue, but your bodies will rot in the desert. You'll now be shepherds in the desert for 40 years. I the Lord God Yahweh have spoken — this whole wicked community who banded against Me — they will meet their end, not in the promised land to be buried with their forefathers, but in the desert.*

The people mourned; the people wept. And then they confessed their sin and decided to take the land as God had promised. They still weren't listening; Moses warned them of their disobedience, again, and again we didn't listen. Sure enough, the Canaanites and the Amalekites beat the snot out of us. We were driven all the way back to Hormah.<sup>7</sup>

Q What presumptions do we make when we've confessed our sin and continue anyway to disobey, to not listen to the Lord Our God? Example?  
[I shouldn't have. Sorry God. Now, let me/let's do it again.]

## NUMBERS 14:26-45

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: <sup>27</sup>"How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. <sup>28</sup>So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: <sup>29</sup>In this desert your bodies will fall--every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. <sup>30</sup>Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

<sup>31</sup>As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. <sup>32</sup>But you--your bodies will fall in this desert. <sup>33</sup>Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert. <sup>34</sup>For forty years--one year for each of the forty days you explored the land--you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.' <sup>35</sup>I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against me. They will meet their end in this desert; here they will die."

<sup>36</sup>So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it-- <sup>37</sup>these men responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD.

<sup>38</sup>Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived.

<sup>39</sup>When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly.

<sup>40</sup>Early the next morning they went up toward the high hill country. "We have sinned," they said. "We will go up to the place the LORD promised."

<sup>41</sup>But Moses said, "Why are you disobeying the LORD's command? This will not succeed! <sup>42</sup>Do not go up, because the LORD is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, <sup>43</sup>for the Amalekites and Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the LORD, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword."

<sup>44</sup>Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the LORD's covenant moved from the camp. <sup>45</sup>Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah.

<sup>7</sup>**HORMAH** (Heb. *hormah*, a devoted place). Here the disobedient Israelites were defeated by Amalekites and Canaanites (Numbers 14:45; Deuteronomy 1:44). In the war with the king of Arad the place was taken by the Israelites and given the name Hormah, meaning "devoted," because it was devoted to destruction (Numbers 21:1-3). In the list of kings conquered by Joshua it appears with Arad (Joshua 12:14). Hormah was originally given to Judah (Joshua 15:30), but shortly after was allotted to Simeon (Joshua 19:4) because Judah's portion was too large for them. Judah and Simeon subdued Zephath and renamed it Hormah (Judges 1:17). David sent part of the spoil of Ziklag to Hormah, as one of the cities of Judah (1 Samuel 30:26-30), but Hormah was reckoned among the cities of Simeon "until the reign of David" (1 Chronicles 4:30-31). — Adapted from Comp-ton's Interactive NIV, © 1996.