

The Rebellion

(Numbers chapters 13, 14.)

Last Minute Plans

As chapter thirteen opens God's people stand at last on the very border of the land. This has been the dream of the nation for over four hundred years. They, themselves, have had it set before them as their goal ever since they left Egypt. Moses encourages them to act at once. "Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged" (Deut. 1:21). They should have been grateful to the Lord for bringing them to this hour, and thrilled through and through with the expectation of marching across the border the very next day! Instead they hesitated in indecision.

God had assured them over and over that the land is good and that He will give it to them. Now they wanted a 'second opinion.' They wanted to 'check it out for themselves' and 'think about it' before making the final move.

There was no need to see "what the land is like ... good or bad ... rich or poor" (Num. 13:18 - 20). God had already told them, repeatedly, that it was a land flowing with milk and honey. There was no necessity to discover whether the people were "strong or weak ... few or many" or whether the cities were fortified or not (Num. 13:18, 19 - NASB). God had already promised *He would give them the land*. They didn't believe Him. They wanted to see for themselves and collect some evidence of its fruitfulness (Num. 13:20), then they would decide whether or not to obey God! They were actually putting their ultimate trust in man - in themselves - instead of in God.

Unfortunately their leader had set a precedent for them. As we saw in chapter ten, shortly before Kadesh-barnea Moses appears to have made the same mistake. Just before setting out on their journey He had been assured that God Himself would be their guide. The cloud hovering over the tabernacle would be used by Him to guide their every move (Num. 9:15 - 23). Surely He, as no other, would know the way. Yet, strangely, in what appears to have been a brief lapse of faith, Moses said to his brother-in-law, "Please do not leave us, inasmuch as *you* know where we should camp in the wilderness, and *you* will be as eyes for us" (Num. 10:31). Now, taking a leaf out of Moses' book, the people also put their ultimate trust in man. Instead of looking up to the cloud of His presence, they were looking to a committee's report. Instead of allowing the cloud to guide *them*, they were going to guide *the cloud*!

How very important it is to be an example of what we expect from others. It is not enough to take the attitude, "Do as I say, and not as I do." We must lead the way if we expect others to follow. The story is told of a man seen pulling a long and heavy chain down the road. When asked why he was pulling the chain, he replied, "Did you ever try *pushing* one?"

Paul instructed Timothy, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. ... Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:12, 16). To Titus he wrote, “In all things [show] yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you” (Titus 2:7, 8).

But was it not God Himself who decided to halt the march and send spies into the land? The first two verses of Numbers thirteen seem to indicate it was. However when we compare other Scripture we discover a different scenario. God had already spied out the land for them. “Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I am the LORD your God; In the day that I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them,¹ flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands” (Ezek 20:5, 6 – KJV).

When Moses encouraged the people to go up, without fear, and take possession of the land as the Lord had spoken, they suggested that spies be sent into the land first. “Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.’ And everyone of you came near to me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come’” (Deut. 1:21, 22).

Moses liked the idea and evidently acted upon it without consulting the Lord. Why didn’t he say, “Keep your eyes upon the cloud over the tabernacle. Listen for the silver trumpets. God knows what we should do and when we should do it and He will guide us and give us the land!”? Instead, he admits, “The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from each tribe. And they departed and went up into the mountains, and came to the Valley of Eshcol, and spied it out” (Deut. 1:23, 24).

God, accommodating Himself to their unbelief, permitted them to carry out their ill-conceived plan (Num. 13:2, 3). Later He made His opposition to it clear when He linked the time of their wanderings directly to the days spent in reconnaissance. “According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years, and you shall know *My opposition*” (Num. 14:34 - NASB). God was saying, “For forty *days* you went your stubborn unbelieving way – and for forty *years* you will suffer the consequences!”²

We must not confuse what God *permits* us to do – even in ‘serving Him’ – with what He *desires* that we do. We are “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good

¹ The NASB translates this “that I had *selected* for them” – but admits in the margin that, literally, it would be “*spied out*.”

² Graciously God gave them credit for the time already spent in the wilderness, so that they had only about 38 years left to complete their ‘sentence.’ See Deut. 2:14.

works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Paul expressed his great longing to “lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (Phil. 3:12). More than to ‘serve the Lord,’ he wanted to serve Him in the very place and very way that God had in mind when He saved him. He wanted to ‘follow the cloud and heed the silver trumpets’ – God’s Word and His Spirit. He longed to see God’s plan for him fulfilled in his life.

It is sadly possible for us to be ‘doing a good job’ teaching a Sunday School class, when God has a place of service for us in some far land. It is also possible to be struggling away in a far land when God has a Sunday School class in mind. How important it is to be walking in the Spirit and sensitive to His guiding hand in our lives! A chorus we used to sing when I was a young man expresses it well.

Follow, I will follow Thee my Lord,
 Follow every passing day.
 My tomorrows are all known to Thee,
 Thou wilt lead me all the way!

The Spies

The men selected to reconnoiter the land are not the same ones who, but a short time before, had been named to stand with Moses (Num. 1:4 – 16), and to present the gifts in chapter seven. Like them, however, they are chosen by name and represent the twelve tribes. It seems that in chapter one the emphasis in their choice was their relationship to the tribes – “each one head of his father’s house” (Num. 1:4). These in chapter thirteen are selected because of their leadership ability. “You shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, *every one a leader* among them.” (Num. 13:2 - NASB).

In the New Testament the twelve apostles were also chosen by name. Although they represented the twelve tribes they could not have been chosen for their membership in them, for there were several pairs of brothers among them. Brothers, of course, could not be one from one tribe and the other from another. Since they will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes (Matt. 19:28), they may all have been from Judah, the regal tribe. On the surface, the basis for their selection may seem to have been their ability, seen or foreseen, as leaders. Looking deeper, however, it is far more likely that they were chosen for their weaknesses. “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Cor. 1:26 – 29).

It is noteworthy that in each case all twelve tribes must be represented. This principle is borne out elsewhere. When Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal, even though only the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom were gathered about him, he acted in behalf of all twelve. When he built the altar he took “*twelve* stones, according to the

number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob” (1 Kings 18:31) and then poured *twelve* waterpots of water over the wood he had placed there. In the book of Judges, when the tribe of Benjamin was nearly exterminated by civil war, the elders of the congregation cried out, “There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe may not be destroyed from Israel” (Judges 21:17). The lists of tribes occurring in Scripture vary from one another as to which tribes are included (Levi is missing in most of the lists and Dan is missing in at least one), but always there are twelve of them.

With this in mind, it is unthinkable that on the very day the feast of Pentecost found its fulfillment one tribe should not be represented. If Matthias, the man chosen in Acts one as the twelfth apostle, was not the legitimate replacement for Judas, as some claim, then only eleven tribes were represented there. It has been suggested that the eleven went ahead of the Lord in replacing Judas with Matthias – that God had intended to replace him later with Paul.

Paul, however, did not have the qualifications for the post, as set forth by Christ Himself. “And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:27). Peter makes it even more specific. “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:21, 22). Paul became a witness of the resurrection later (1 Cor. 15:8), but had not accompanied Christ from the baptism of John. He never claimed to be the legitimate replacement for Judas, even when defending his apostleship at length in Second Corinthians, chapters eleven to thirteen. He lists himself as separate from, and subsequent to, “*all* [not all the *other*] the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:7 – 9). The twelve are linked to the *twelve* tribes (Matt. 19:28), while Paul is associated with the *one* Body of Christ. While he said, “I am the least of the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:9), he was least in comparison to them – not in association with them. He made it clear that he is “a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles” (Rom. 15:16), “an apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:13). In addition, there are solid reasons to accept Matthias as the twelfth apostle.

The Spies’ “Majority Report”

During the forty wasted days when they merely marked time, waiting for the return of the spies, the entire assembly could have already been in the land. If they had believed God - watching for the movement of the cloud and with their ears attuned to the call of the silver trumpets – they would already have had some of the promised victories behind them.

When the spies finally returned they all agreed that the land was flowing with milk and honey. They even brought back some grapes, pomegranates and figs as evidence. The assembly saw the fruit. Some of them, at least, must have tasted it. Surely this pleased them and brought smiles of anticipation to their faces.

Their smiles were turned to frowns however as they heard the report of ten of their delegation. “Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan. ... We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us. ... The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. ... There also we saw the Nephilim ... and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight” (Num. 13:28, 29, 31 – 33 - NASB).

There is no mention of God in their report, as there is in the appeal of Caleb and Joshua the next day (14:7 – 9). They forget they have His promise that *He will give them the Land*. They fail to recall what happened when the entire Egyptian army had been arrayed against them, at a time when they were totally unprepared for war. At that time God had said, “The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace” (Ex. 14:14). As they looked on in wonder the entire Egyptian army had been destroyed before their very eyes (Ex. 14:27, 28). Seeking to encourage them to enter the land, Moses had reminded them of this. “Then I said to you, ‘Do not be terrified, or afraid of them. The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes’” (Deut. 1:29, 30).

Now they are trembling at the thought of the numerous Canaanite giants they will face. They forget the song they sang with Moses right after they had crossed the Red Sea. “The peoples have heard, *they tremble*; Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; the leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them; by the greatness of Thine arm they are motionless as stone; until Thy people pass over, O LORD, until the people pass over whom Thou hast purchased. Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, The place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established” (Ex. 15:14 – 17 - NASB).

While the Israelites are trembling because of the Canaanites, the Canaanites are trembling for fear of Israel! As a matter of fact they were still trembling over thirty-eight years later, when Joshua faced Jericho. Rahab told the spies of that day, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt. ... And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Josh. 2:9 – 11).

The ten spies, and those listening to them, were seeing themselves through the eyes of the Canaanites instead of seeing the Canaanites through the eyes of God. As Donald Grey Barnhouse once put it, “The ten spies saw the giants and themselves – so

the giants looked big. The two saw the giants and GOD – so the giants looked small! You can't see God and yourself in the same glance.”

The “Minority Report”

Very frequently, today also, it is the minority - the ‘remnant’ - that stands firm for the Lord, strong in faith. Spiritual truth cannot be determined by a poll of the people – not even when the people are church leaders. A critical time in Paul’s ministry illustrates this.

In Acts fifteen Paul recalled his meeting with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. “I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain” (Gal. 2:2). God revealed to him that he should attend this meeting, but he was not afraid he had been preaching the wrong message. His concern was that the twelve might side with the legalizers. If the very apostles chosen by Christ agreed that the Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to be saved Paul would have faced such strong opposition that it would have been like beating his head against a wall to stand against it. He did not intend to get a vote on what he should preach. He was there to convince them that what he was already preaching was the truth of God for this age of grace (Gal. 2:5 – 9).

At a critical time in church history one man stood almost alone for the deity of Christ. A friend warned him, “Athanasius, the world is against you!” His reply wrote history. “Then Athanasius is against the world!” It is true that “one man – *with God* – is a majority.”

Caleb was part of a pitifully small minority, but speaking for himself and Joshua, he declared, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it” (Num. 13:30). Unlike the ten, these two believed God. The giants posed no more of a problem to them than, later, Goliath did to David.³

Subsequent history demonstrated that Caleb was not ‘just talking.’ His faith was well founded. Forty-five years later, when he was eighty-five, he said, “Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said” (Josh. 14:12). Drive them out he did!

As we focus on our fears and worries we, too, see ourselves as grasshoppers. When our eyes are on the Lord the fears and worries become grasshoppers. It was when

³ All twelve spies had seen the same giants, and they were enormous! We are told that one of them (Og, king of Bashan) had a bed over thirteen feet long and six feet wide (Deut. 3:11). Goliath was nine and a half feet tall (1 Sam. 17:4). God later describes the Amorites for us. “It was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, though his height was like the height of cedars and he was strong as the oaks” (Amos 2:9).

Peter took his eyes off of the Lord and “saw that the wind was boisterous” that he began to sink (Matt. 14:30).

The Decision of the people

The people wept all night, feeling sorry for themselves, imagining all the tragic things that might happen, and planned to return to Egypt (Num. 14:1 – 4).

What fools unbelief can make of us! These people turn away in an agony of fear from the prospect of facing giants that God has promised He will defeat. Then they plan to return to Egypt on their own. How do they think they will get along without the manna of which they are so weary, the water from the rock, the guidance of the pillar of cloud by day or the light from the pillar of fire by night? Can they fight the Amalekites without the leadership of Joshua on the battlefield and the intercession of Moses on the top of the hill? (Ex. 17:8 – 13). How do they plan to cross the Red Sea? Do they imagine they will be received back by the Egyptians with open arms?

When we turn back from a walk of faith we do not enter on a primrose path of ease and security. We still face the problems of life, but without the Lord’s help and guidance. In addition we face the prospect of His chastening, and “no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful” even though “afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11).

The next morning Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before the rebels pleading for their repentance. Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes and made a last fervent appeal to the congregation (Num. 14:5 – 9). In response, the people took up stones to slay them.

Then God spoke to Moses and Aaron. He proposed dispossessing these rebels – washing His hands of them and starting over with Moses (Num. 14:11, 12). How easily Moses could have snapped up this offer. These sons of Abraham had been a thorn in his flesh from the time he first tried to help them. They had complained and rebelled. They had accused him of many things, and now they even threaten to take his life. It would be understandable if he had said, “Thank you, Lord, for giving these rascals what they deserve,” but he didn’t. The prospect of being the progenitor of an entire nation, as Jacob had been, would be very attractive to the flesh. He could have said, “Thank you, Lord, I’m your man!” but he didn’t.

Once before God had suggested this same course of action. “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation’” (Ex. 32:9, 10). Moses did not even consider the offer. Instead, he interceded on behalf of the guilty people. When he came down from the mountain, and saw for himself what the people had done, his own anger was stirring up within him. Yet he “returned to the LORD and said, ‘Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their

sin; but if not, I pray, *blot me out of Your book which You have written*” (Ex. 32:31, 32). He was actually willing to give his own life for the wayward nation.

Moses finds himself in good company in this. Paul was willing to be lost forever if it could result in the salvation of the rebellious Jews of his day. He cried out, “I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:2, 3). Loving and generous as were the hearts of these two men, their offers of self-sacrifice were not accepted. There was One, however, whose sacrifice was accepted, and it does avail for those who believe He laid down His life for *them*. Moses and Paul both had the mind and the compassion of Christ in this matter. May God grant that we also might experience it.

As on the previous occasion, the intercession of Moses prevailed. The Lord pardoned them (Ezek. 20:13 – 17). However He determined a severe chastening upon them (Num. 14:20 – 23). The Psalmist looked back on this time and wrote, “You were to them God-Who-Forgives, though You took vengeance on their deeds” (Psa. 99:8). All those in the first census, save only Caleb and Joshua, were to wander in the wilderness for forty years and never enter the land.

When Moses told the people of the judgment against them, and God emphasized it by taking the lives of the ten spies who had inspired their rebellion, they realized they had made a great mistake. They mourned, admitted they had sinned, and decided to “go up to the place which the Lord has promised” (Num. 14:39, 40). The Lord commanded them not to go but, heedlessly, they went up anyway. When they had heard the evil report of their spies they had feared the enemy’s power, forgetting the Lord and His power. Now they faced that powerful enemy, but without the Lord – and they were soundly defeated. They had said, “We are not able to go up against the people” (Num. 13:31) and, sure enough, they were not able!

Their ‘obedience’ was too late. Obeying God at the wrong time is disobedience! When God said “Go!” they refused. When He said “Stay where you are!” they decided to go! What they did was courageous, it was belated ‘obedience’ (in their own eyes), it was repentance (“We have sinned”) and it was no doubt carried out with zeal and determination. However it was *not faith*, it was *presumption*! Notice the dispensational applications. For instance obeying 1 Cor. 14:1 –b, 39 is not real obedience today in light of 1 Cor. 13:8, and obeying Matt. 10:5 in this age of grace is not obedience in light of Rom. 10:12.

Why did Israel turn back at the last moment?

Why had they been willing to leave their homes and flee from Egypt in the first place? There had been an ever-sharpening realization of the cruel bondage they were enduring. They had seen demonstration after demonstration of the power of God working on their behalf. Their confidence in the leadership of Moses had grown as the

days went by, and they had a glorious prospect set before them – the promise of freedom and a home of their own in a land flowing with milk and honey.

They had gone through severe testing to reach the Promised Land. They had seen God’s power and faithfulness demonstrated in bringing them at last to its very border. It seems incredible that they should hesitate to take the last step! Why did they turn back?

I recall standing on the high diving board at a swimming pool when I was a young man. I had vacillated between eager anticipation and fear as I had climbed the ladder. When I looked down to the water it seemed a mile away. The realization that if I took that next step there would be no turning back, that I would be irreversibly committed, overwhelmed me, and I turned back! Israel had this very natural reaction at Kadesh-barnea.

That was the problem. It was a *natural reaction*. It was not *action*, based on *faith*! God had told them that the land was a good land. The oft-repeated expression, “a land of milk and honey” was only an epitome of what He had revealed to them about Palestine. Moses had never seen the land, yet he knew a great deal about it. He was able to describe it in some detail to those who would be entering it. “For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper” (Deut. 8:7 – 9). *They didn’t believe it*; they had to see for themselves.

God had often promised them that He would give them the land. “To you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father” (Gen. 26:3). “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Depart and go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, “To your descendants I will give it. And I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite” ’ ” (Ex. 33:1, 2). *They didn’t believe it*, they had to send in spies to see how *they* could do it.

While lack of faith was the basic cause of the rebellion, as we will note more fully later, there are some practical considerations that contributed to it.

They had a severe case of mental myopia as they looked back to their past. They recalled the bondage in Egypt as the ‘good old days.’ In their near sightedness they remembered sitting by the pots of meat and eating bread to the full (Ex. 16:3). They even came to the place, later, where they described *Egypt* as a land flowing with milk and honey! (Num. 16:13). But they forgot their lives had been made bitter with the hard labor in mortar and bricks that was rigorously imposed on them (Ex. 1:16, 22 - NASB). They did not remember the agony of seeing their newborn sons slain before their eyes (Ex.

1:16, 22). They also failed to recall the way God had borne them on eagles' wings and brought them to Himself (Ex. 19:4).

When we look into the rear view mirror of our lives it is important to focus on the right things. When Paul said, “forgetting those things which are behind” (Phil. 3:13) he meant we should not dwell on our former accomplishments, lest we rest on our laurels, or our past failures, lest we be overwhelmed with discouragement. His recollections centered on the right things. He gloried in what Christ had done for him, and in him, in his past, and twice recounted his conversion at length (Acts 22:3 – 21 and 26:9 – 23). His main focus, however, was the future. “Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13, 14). With his eyes on the crowns to be had at the Rapture, he was able to fight the good fight and finish the race (2 Tim. 4:7). There was no Kadesh-barnea for Paul.

The Israelites' view of what lay ahead was as heavily flawed as their recall of the past. When the ten spies brought the evil report they confessed that God had been right about the land – it was a good land! This aspect of the report was totally ignored in the response of the people. They saw only the giants! They need not have ignored the adversaries, but their attention should have been centered on the hope set before them.

Paul faced more opposition than any of us will ever face. But he once said, “A wide door for effective service has opened to me, *and* there are many adversaries” (1 Cor. 16:9 - NASB). Notice he did not say “*But* there are many adversaries”! That one word spelled the difference between success and failure in his ministry. In the report of the ten spies they said, in effect, “Yes, the land certainly does flow with milk and honey, *but* --” and from this time on not one more word is said about the good land, either by the ten spies or the people. They were totally occupied with the adversaries! The *certainty* that the land was good was pushed aside by the *possibility* of defeat. The *assurance* by God that He would give it to them was buried under the *suggestion* by mere men that they faced disaster. No wonder they wept all night!

We, too, have much that could cause us to weep all night – every night! Natural resources are becoming exhausted, weather patterns have changed drastically, useable farmland is decreasing as the population explodes -- and the environmentalists will be unable to do a thing about it in spite of all their frantic efforts. The political situation, world wide, is all but asking for the entrance of the antichrist on the scene. Wars are epidemic, and famine engulfs major parts of the globe. Gross immorality is becoming the life style of even our own land, and the religious situation is rapidly leading up to the prophesied, satanically inspired, ‘world church,’ with little or no hope of a last minute revival.

What are we to do? As believers we are to be aware of the ‘giants’ but keep our eyes on the Lord and remember we have a blessed hope! We are not existing in dread of the ‘end of the world,’ but living in expectation of a blessed eternity with the Lord in heaven. We are not looking for the antichrist, but for Christ. We will be caught up to be

with the Lord before the Tribulation begins – and we should thankfully ponder that blessed hope every time the ‘giants’ loom before our eyes! It is sad that at the very time when the Rapture appears to be very near indeed, it is being denied, postponed into, or following, the Great Tribulation -- or simply ignored and forgotten! Our cry, as we lift our eyes heavenward, should be “Maranatha!” – “Our Lord cometh!”

Another thing, which predisposed Israel to turn back at Kadesh-barnea, was their pattern of unbelief, discontent, fear and rebellion they had been establishing ever since Moses had arrived on the scene to lead them out of Egypt. “At Taberah and Massah and Kibroth Hattaavah you provoked the LORD to wrath. Likewise, when the LORD sent you from Kadesh Barnea, saying, ‘Go up and possess the land which I have given you,’ then you rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God, and you did not believe Him nor obey His voice” (Deut. 9:22, 23). “All these men ... have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these *ten times*, and have not heeded My voice” (Num. 14:22). John Hubbard, one of our teachers in Bible school, told us, “What you will be, you are now becoming.” Israel had been practicing for their ‘opening night’ for over three years, and it went over with a bang! If we live by faith and walk in the Spirit in the daily routine of life, we will find it much easier to triumph when the great tests come upon us.

One excuse they used for turning back was the fear that their wives and children would be killed. It has been said that an excuse is “the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie.” Love for family is commendable, but here it was used as an excuse rather than a reason. Did they really think they loved their children more than God did? Did they imagine they could protect them better than the God who had spared their firstborn in Egypt? In their plan to return to Egypt did they not recall that it was there they had been forced to cast their newborn sons into the Nile?

When we were contemplating going to the Philippines as missionaries I was, understandably I think, deeply concerned about our children. The missionary who had begun the work there had lost an eleven-year-old daughter because of the primitive medical service available at that time. We would be taking four of our children with us. “What if one or more of them should die?” my heart kept asking.

Within the compass of one week two things happened that answered my question. In my Bible reading I had come to Numbers fourteen and there I read of the Israelites who said, “Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims?” (Num. 14:3). God’s reply to them seemed to speak to my very situation. “Your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness” (Num. 14:31, 32). Then one morning, a few days later, I heard of an acquaintance of mine that had taken his family to the beach over the weekend. His son had climbed up on some rocks and then fallen into the sea and was drowned. “I could lose a child here as well as there,” I told myself. “I must trust them into His hands wherever we are.”

My eldest son did very nearly lose his life in the Philippines, but he also came extremely close to a fatal accident after he returned to the States to attend Bible College. The Lord spared him both times, for which I am very thankful. But I am grateful also that the Lord didn't allow me use his safety as an excuse to keep me from the most blessed ministry I have ever experienced!

The greatest reason of all for their tragic decision, and the thing that was behind all the other reasons, was their lack of faith. Their experience at Kadesh is conspicuously missing in Hebrews eleven, the 'faith chapter'! "They despised the pleasant land; they did not believe His word, but complained in their tents, and did not heed the voice of the LORD. Therefore He raised up His hand in an oath against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness" (Psa. 106:24 – 26). "They ... entered not in because of unbelief" (Heb. 4:6 KJV).

As we think about Israel at Kadesh we do well to take heed to the lessons they can teach us. As we list their failures we can respond with a catch phrase often used by our teen-agers today, "Been there! Done that!" We have an assured prospect more glorious than a land flowing with milk and honey set before us. So let us not become engaged in fond retrospect, while looking ahead in dread. Let us live by faith, walking in the Spirit, looking forward eagerly to being with the Lord – and try to take as many as possible with us.

God's Judgment⁴ against Israel at Kadesh-barnea

When we recall how often God had 'put up with' this people's unbelief and disobedience we may wonder why He doomed an entire generation to death when finally He had managed to bring them to the very doorstep of their goal. Why had He not accepted their repentance, judged the leaders in the rebellion, as He had done before, and welcomed their renewed determination to go into the land?

"Because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it" (Num. 14:22, 23). This record stands as a solemn warning that, though God is longsuffering, His patience does have an end. Their refusal to boldly claim what God had so graciously provided was 'the last straw.' God finally said, in effect, "You have had it!"

The marvel is that He didn't do this sooner. They had been thinking lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience – and were storing up wrath for themselves (Rom. 2:4, 5).⁵ Finally the wrath they had been storing up came crashing in upon them.

⁴ This was not a penal judgment. Israel, as a nation, was a redeemed people and this, severe as it was, was a chastening (Deut. 8:2, 5).

⁵ The passage in Romans has the wrath against the lost in view. However the principle involved reaches into the area of chastening also.

This generation had been born and raised in Egypt. They had been brought out of Egypt but, evidently, Egypt had not been brought out of them. Their eyes had often looked longingly back to Egypt and they were acting like Egyptians. A new generation, most of them raised under the guidance and care of God and His appointed representatives, would be better able to face the battles ahead for possession of the land.

Thoughtlessly they had ‘prayed’ for the very judgment pronounced against them. “And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, ‘-- If only we had died in this wilderness!’” (Num. 14:2). Now they receive their answer. “Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the LORD, ‘*just as you have spoken* in My hearing, *so I will do to you*: the carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness’” (Num. 14:28, 29). This reminds us of another ‘prayer’ that God answered, much to the dismay of those uttering it. When Pilate cried out, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it,” the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children” (Matt. 27:24, 25). They did not realize it, but what they said *in God’s hearing* amounted to a prayer. Later when Peter and those with him accused the Jewish leaders of murdering Christ they forgot that in their wicked prayer they had taken the responsibility for Christ’s death upon themselves. They responded, “You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend *to bring this Man’s blood on us!*” (Acts 5:28). We should be careful what *we* speak in God’s hearing. He might give us what we ask for!

Typically, God provided for us a vivid illustration of the truth that the Canaan rest does not come through Moses and the law, but through Joshua (the Old Testament form of the name “Jesus”) and the crossing of Jordan. We will discuss this in some detail later.

It is comforting to see God’s graciousness to the rebellious nation during the following thirty-eight years. Kadesh-barnea was not the end of their rebelliousness. God later recalled, “For *forty years* I *loathed* that generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways” (Psa. 95:10 – NASB). Even though the judgement was final, it was graciously administered. Though He loathed this particular generation of Israelites, He still loved Israel as a nation.

This generation that God loathed was not executed on the spot, as they deserved (Num. 14:11, 12). He allowed them to continue with their families as long as they behaved themselves. Their deaths over the following thirty-eight years, in addition to those who died of old age, evidently came as a result of further acts of rebellion, as illustrated in Numbers 16:32, 35, 49; 25:9. They bore and raised children who would go into the land. This was a practical necessity, of course, since the new generation had to have a family to care for them as they grew up to maturity - until they were capable subduing the Canaanites. It was, nevertheless, gracious on His part (Num. 14:19).

He even continued His watch-care over them during those years. They had the tabernacle with the Shekinah Glory still resident over the Mercy Seat. They evidently did not appreciate this, for they did not fully avail themselves of its ministries. “Then God

turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: ‘Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, images which you made to worship...’ ” (Acts 7:42, 43).

Moses and Aaron continued with them as their leaders, though they didn’t appreciate this either. Soon after the rebellion at Kadesh they turned against them and their leadership! “They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?’” (Num. 16:3).

He also continued to guide them with the cloud by day and provide light from the pillar of fire at night. The manna was provided daily and He met their need for water. Their clothes did not wear out, nor did their feet swell (Deut. 8:4). “Yet in Your manifold mercies You did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day, to lead them on the road; nor the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way they should go. You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold Your manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness, they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell” (Neh. 9:19 – 21).

In considering God’s graciousness during the years they were wandering around in circles and getting nowhere we need to remember that the judgment did not affect their individual salvation. There were many among them, including Aaron and Moses, who were justified men. They went through chastening, but were not lost eternally. God does, upon occasion, bring physical death upon those who, spiritually – and by His grace - will live forever.

Paul speaks of those in Corinth who had been chastened with sickness and even death. But they were believers, for God does not chasten someone else’s children (Heb. 12:6 – 8). Paul specifically says they were chastened that they might not be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:29 – 32). He also wrote to them about one man in the congregation whom he had delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5).

This assurance of continuing salvation for the true believer, even when sin overtakes him, is certainly no encouragement to continue in sin however, for the chastening can be very severe – as the Israelites found out when they wandered around in the barren desert until they died.