

April 7, 2019 - Num 13:1 – 14:10 - Report of the Spies
Torah Reading: Numbers 13:1 – 14:10 - Report of the Spies
Psalm 100
Haftarah: Joshua 2:1-9, 23-24

The spies were important leaders from each tribe. This is why the eventual "evil report" was so damning - they were princes of Israel, rulers over thousands.

Every tribe was represented except the tribe of Levi, because they were to have no inheritance in the land (**Deuteronomy 10:9**). But then, to make up the number twelve, the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, are reckoned as two tribes

Numbers 13:1-2 - "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 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."

In Deuteronomy there is more detail about this incident. Moses is speaking:

- **Deuteronomy 1:22** - "And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come. And the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe"

A Kernel of Unbelief

The proposal by its nature contained a kernel of unbelief. God had already said the land was good - a land flowing with milk and honey. Israel began to sin by wanting to send spies rather than trust God's word.

See **Exodus 3:8** - "And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites."

Rashi - "Send thou men" - I am not commanding you, but if you wish, you may send. Moses took counsel with the Shechinah . He [God] said, "I told them that it is good, as it says, 'I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt...' (Exod. 3:17). By their lives! Now I will give them the opportunity to err through the words of the spies, so that they will not inherit it." - [Midrash Tanchuma 5]

Why is the section dealing with the spies juxtaposed with the section dealing with Miriam? Because she was punished over matters of slander, for speaking against her brother, and these wicked people witnessed [it], but did not learn their lesson. — [Midrash Tanchuma Shelach 5]

Still, the spies could have brought an unbiased report, and God could have incorporated

this event into His own divine plan, as He did with their later desire for a king. Moses and Joshua both sent spies on other occasions (**Numbers 21:32; Joshua 2**) so there is nothing inherently wrong with it.

Numbers 13:4-15 - The spies are listed

Numbers 13:16 - "These are the names of the men which Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Oshea the son of Nun Jehoshua."

Rashi - And Moses called Hoshea...: He prayed on his behalf, "May God save you from the counsel of the spies." [The name יהוֹשֻׁעַ is a compounded form of יהוֹשִׁיעַךְ, May God save you.]- [Sotah 34b]

Joshua's new name - created by the addition of "Yah" for Yahweh to Oshea. "Yehoshua" means "Yahweh is salvation." Aramaic renders it *Yeshua*. The Septuagint Greek of *Yeshua* is *Jesus*. Among the early Church Fathers, Joshua is considered a type of Jesus Christ (**Hebrews 4:8-10**).

Numbers 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:"

Rashi - This was the inferior part of the Land of Israel. This is the custom of merchants; they show their inferior goods first and afterward display their best. — [Midrash Tanchuma 6]

The Targum of Jonathan is, "the day on which they went was the twenty ninth of the month Sivan, the time of the first ripe grapes"

Numbers 13:22 - "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.)"

The Hebrew says "he came" - Caleb, according to Rashi. (It appears that the spies did not go together, but perhaps singly, and at most but two together). Caleb went there alone [hence the singular "he came"] to prostrate himself on the graves of the patriarchs [in prayer] that he not be enticed by his colleagues to be part of their counsel. Thus, it says, "I will give him [Caleb] the land on which he has walked" (Deut. 1:36), and it is written, "They gave Hebron to Caleb" (Jud. 1:20). - [Sotah 34b]

The Cluster of Grapes

Numbers 13:23-24 - "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. The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from

thence."

Rashi - "They carried it on a pole between two [people]": From the implication of what it says "they carried [in the plural] it on a pole" do I not know that it was [carried] by two? So what does "[between] two" tell us? [The answer is:] With two poles. How was it done? Eight of them took a cluster [of grapes], one took a fig and one took a pomegranate. Joshua and Caleb did not take anything, for the intention of the others was to present a slanderous report, [namely,] just as its fruit is extraordinary, so its people are extraordinary.

40 Days

Numbers 13:25 - "And they returned from searching of the land after forty days."

The Targum of Jonathan adds, "on the eighth day of the month Ab." Others say it was the ninth of Ab; hence the tradition, that it was decreed on the ninth of Ab concerning their fathers, that they should not enter into the land (Seder Olam Rabba, c. 8. p. 24. and Misn. Taanith, c. 4. sect. 7.)

The Evil Report

Numbers 13:27-29 - "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. 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. 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."

The rabbis detect a problem with the term "nevertheless." With that word, the spies were no longer reporting facts, but had positioned themselves as "advisors" to God.

Caleb's Good Report

Numbers 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."

Rashi - They all became silent so they could hear [what they assumed would be] his defamation [of Moses]. But he said, "Didn't he split the sea for us, bring down the manna for us and cause the quails to fly down to us?" - [Sotah 35a] We can surely go up: even to heaven; if he tells us, "Make ladders and go up there," we will succeed in whatever he says. — [Sotah 35a]

Evil Report Continued

Numbers 13:31-33 - "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. 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. 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."

Here they carried their complaints to "the Children of Israel" rather than to Moses.

"They are stronger than we" - the phrase in Hebrew can refer to either the first person plural "we" or third person singular "Him."

Rashi - "for they are stronger than we": Heb. מִמֶּנּוּ, [which may also be interpreted as, they are stronger than he.] They said this in reference to the most High, as it were, [as if to say that the people are stronger than He. — [Sotah 35a]

Compare the expanded report in Deuteronomy:

- **Deuteronomy 1:28-30** - "Where can we go? Our brothers have made our hearts melt, saying: 'The people are larger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the heavens. We even saw the descendants of the Anakim there.'" So I said to you: "Do not be terrified or afraid of them! The LORD your God, who goes before you, will fight for you, just as you saw Him do for you in Egypt."

The Anakim

Rashi - the giants: Heb. נְפִילִים, giants, descended from Shamhazai (Nidah 61a) and Azael (Yoma 67b), who fell (שָׁנַף לוֹ) from heaven in the generation of Enosh.

Anak and his sons were giants. The Bible describes them as very tall descendants of the Nephilim (**Genesis 6:1-4**). They are also described as Rephaites (**Deuteronomy 2:11**). Rephaim are the inhabitants of Sheol, the underworld (e.g. **Isaiah 14:9-11; 26:13-15**) or "weakeners." The Ammonites called the Rephaites "Zamzummim" (**Deuteronomy 2:18-21**).

The Valley of Rephaim was the location of a victory by King David over the Philistines at Baal-perazim ["Yahweh burst-through"] (**2 Samuel 5, Isaiah 28**).

They were eventually totally destroyed by Joshua (**Joshua 11:21**).

The Evil Report Causes Murmuring

Here the people cement their rejection of the Promised Land. This is the sin that causes God to condemn that whole generation.

Numbers 14:1-4 - "And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. 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! 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? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt."

The chapter emphasizes that "ALL the congregation" participated in this rebellion.

And they actually DID appoint a new leader to return them to Egypt:

- **Nehemiah 9:17** - "And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not."

Although the idea was madness, it's possible they thought that since Egypt's army had been destroyed, they might negotiate a return into Egypt. But that is speculation.

Other rabbis said this referred to appointing an idol, like the golden calf, over them instead of God.

Numbers 14:5 - "Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel."

Recognizing what might be God's response to this shocking proposal, they prostrated themselves in supplication to God for mercy upon the people, and hoping to sway the people to repent.

Joshua and Caleb's Response of Faith

Numbers 14:7-8 - "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. 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. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not."

Bread for Us

"for they are bread for us" - Instead of being a danger, the challenge of confronting these enemies from a standpoint of faith will actually sustain and nourish our spirits, because we will see and experience new ways for God to display His power. In truth, we can see all tribulation, suffering and disappointment in the same light. God transforms it into spiritual food.

Numbers 14:10 - "But 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."

Like Moses, King David was threatened with stoning by the people (**1 Samuel 30:6**) as was Jesus (**John 8:59**).

"And the glory of the LORD appeared" - In later Jewish writings the 'Glory' came to be considered almost as a personal representation of God, and was known as the Shekînah — 'that which dwells [sc. among men].' This thought was taken up and given its fullest depth of meaning in the N.T.

- **John 1:14** - "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth."

A warning for us -

- **Hebrews 4:1** - "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."

The bottom line is that by rejecting the Promised Land, the children of Israel were rejecting God Himself.