

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

## The PROMISED land

### GOD THE SAVIOR

#### *When Faith Fails...*

In the Old Testament faith is often described as fear of the LORD, trust and obedience. In the New Testament we read of faith in **Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> *And without faith it is impossible to please him...* We begin our new series on The Promised Land with a study about When Faith Fails. Someone has defined a committee as "a group of people who individually can do nothing and collectively decide nothing can be done." Yes, the majority rules but the majority is not always right.

Last week we finished the God Delivers series in the book of Deuteronomy with the Israelites posed for entry into the Promised Land. Once again, we find ourselves a bit out of chronological order, since this week our study guide takes us back to the book of Numbers. Numbers gets its name from the two censuses or numberings of the people recorded in this book. However, the book covers much more than just listings of names and figures. It follows the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites before they entered the land promised to their forefather Abraham. Why would it take the Israelites 38 years to travel just under 300 miles – a trip that should have taken about 30 days? Today's focal passages reveal why one month's travel time turned into nearly four decades of delay.

The 'Exodus generation' of adults experienced a faith crisis halfway between Sinai and Canaan. On the trip from prison (Egypt) to promise (Canaan), a spiritual crisis occurred and we do well to learn from their mistake. What happened at Kadesh changed the destiny of millions and erased the hopes of a generation. People all around us are at crossroads in their faith whether we realize it or not.. Our faith and our words may be just what is needed to send them in a positive direction. However, our negative, discouraging talk might cause others to journey into doubt and despair." **Matthew 12:36 (ESV)** <sup>36</sup> *I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,*

**Read Numbers 13:1-2 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,* <sup>2</sup> *"Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them."*

If we had only this account of how men were sent into Canaan to spy out the land, we would conclude that it was the LORD's idea to send in the spies. However, let's compare notes with what is related by Moses in Deuteronomy.

**Read Deuteronomy 1:21-23 (ESV)** <sup>21</sup> *See, the LORD your God has set the land before you. Go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has told you. Do not fear or be dismayed.'* <sup>22</sup> *Then all of you came near me and said, 'Let us send men before us, that they may explore the land for us and bring us word again of the way by which we must go up and the cities into which we shall come.'* <sup>23</sup> *The thing seemed good to me, and I took twelve men from you, one man from each tribe.*

Yes, it is a good idea to ‘know your enemy’ but ‘people of faith’ in God should be willing to trust that the God of angel armies keeps His promises. The LORD had promised on more than one occasion that the land would be theirs. From the details Moses added in Deuteronomy we realize the people’s request to send in the spies was the first sign of their weak faith and had nothing to do with military strategy.

We will never know what awesome event would have occurred in the history of the Israelites if they had been a household of faith instead of a bunch of doubters. In one of the *Indiana Jones* movies, Indiana Jones comes to the edge of a cliff. He was challenged to step out over the cliff even though he couldn't see a bridge before him. When he made the step, the bridge appeared. Faith is stepping out and doing what God has asked us to do even when we don't see ‘the bridge’. From the following passage we find that 10 of 12 of those ‘committee’ members who went to ‘spy out’ the land returned with discouraging words. When faith fails, we start looking at our strength instead of God’s.

**Read Numbers 13:26-33 (ESV)** <sup>26</sup> *And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation ... at Kadesh. They brought back word....* <sup>27</sup> *And they told him, “We came to the land.... It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.* <sup>28</sup> *However, the people ... are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there.* <sup>29</sup> *The Amalekites dwell in the land.... The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea....”* <sup>30</sup> *But Caleb quieted the people... and said, “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.”* <sup>31</sup> *Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.”* <sup>32</sup> *So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, “The land...is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people ... are of great height.* <sup>33</sup> *And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.”*

The ‘committee’ had spoken: *We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.* The majority’s surveillance report of the land only saw the negative because they were looking at their own strength instead of God. Without the lens of faith, the ‘committee’ members saw only giants and fortified cities. However, Caleb looked through eyes of faith. **1 John 5:4 (ESV)** <sup>4</sup> *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*

Distrust of God, is a sin that brings its own punishment. Those who do not trust in God can literally “worry themselves to death.” The next time you find yourself focusing on “what ifs,” remember that the majority of the things that we worry about never happen. Jesus said in **Matthew 6:34 (ESV)** <sup>34</sup> *“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

The Anaks were a people group of large stature who lived in Hebron and some areas of Philistia. Possibly it was one of the descendents of these folks that David, the shepherd boy who trusted God, would later go up against with a few rocks and a slingshot. The ‘committee’ also used the nephilim as an excuse. We could do an entire lesson on the nephilim and still not be sure who they were. They are mentioned in **Genesis 6:4** and some Bible scholars believe that the passage refers to an invasion of fallen angels who cohabited with women and produced giants. Warren Wiersbe say of **Genesis 6:4** that the godly line of Seth (the sons of God) was enticed to mix with the ungodly line of Cain (the daughters of men) and abandoned their devotion to the Lord. As to whether

nephilim existed at this time is up for debate. The ‘committee’ might have been doing some stress-related exaggeration. When we look at our problem through the lens of faith, we stand firm in the words of Jesus as found in **Luke 18:27 (ESV)** <sup>27</sup> ... “*What is impossible with man is possible with God.*”

If the Bible were a fairy tale or myth, Caleb would convince the crowd to take the land and the Israelites would go in and possess it and all would live happily ever after. But the Bible is not a fairy tale - it is real life. And this generation was not about to experience the ‘happily ever after.’ When faith fails, we forget God’s past power and His future promise.

**Read Numbers 14:1-5 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. <sup>2</sup> And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! <sup>3</sup> Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? ... Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” <sup>4</sup> And they said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.” <sup>5</sup> Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly...*

There is a definite pattern of faith failure of the generation that the LORD brought out of Egypt. They regretted being brought out of slavery in Egypt when they reached the Red Sea and God led them through on dry ground. They complained when the water was bitter at Marah and God made the waters sweet.. They grumbled about the food and God gave them manna to eat daily. This generation as a whole never learned anything about faith from past experiences with God. As we look back on the Israelites’ reaction to the adversities of life, we are reminded to learn from our own difficulties. **Romans 8:31 (ESV)** <sup>31</sup> *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

Are we going to always grumble and complain when the going gets tough or are we going to put on our ‘faith spectacles’ and trust God?

**Read Numbers 14:6-12 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> *And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes <sup>7</sup> and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, “The land...is an exceedingly good land. <sup>8</sup> If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. <sup>9</sup> Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.” <sup>10</sup> Then all the congregation said to stone them... But the glory of the LORD appeared... to all the people of Israel. <sup>11</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? <sup>12</sup> I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.”*

J. Vernon McGee comments, “These two men, Caleb and Joshua, brought the same facts as the others. What is the difference in their report? The difference is in their interpretation of the facts because they included God. When you see yourself as a grasshopper in the presence of giants, that is when you need God. These people certainly needed God. Caleb and Joshua insisted that if God would delight in them, He would bring them into the land. But how can God delight in them unless they believe God? They must trust Him.” If we are to make a

difference in our world, we should not give up easily. Caleb and Joshua stood their ground even when the faith of others failed.

Joshua said of the people in the Promised Land: *they are bread for us*. Today, we might say, ‘they are toast!’ If you want to have a faith in God that endures through the years, be careful not to base your decisions on what everyone else is doing. Even Christians are too quick to ask “What do the experts say?” The question to ask is “What does God say?”

Keeping your eyes on your circumstances will cause you to lose sight of God. When faith fails, we need a faithful representative to plead for us.

**Read Numbers 14:13-20 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup> *But Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for you brought up this people in your might from among them, <sup>14</sup> and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. <sup>15</sup> Now if you kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard your fame will say, <sup>16</sup> ‘It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them that he has killed them in the wilderness.’ <sup>17</sup> And now, please let the power of the Lord be great as you have promised, saying, <sup>18</sup> ‘The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.’ <sup>19</sup> Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now.” <sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, “I have pardoned, according to your word.*

As he had done when Israel worshiped the golden calf, Moses interceded for the people pointing us to the ministry of Jesus. For a second time (the first was during the golden calf incident), God offered to make a new nation out of Moses and completely destroy the Jewish people, but Moses refused. It's the mark of great and godly leaders that they think only of the good of their people and not their own personal gain.

Moses gave three ‘arguments’. The words radiated from his heart. First, Moses reasoned with God and argued that the LORD’s glory would be tarnished if Israel were destroyed. Second, Moses reminded God of the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Moses. Third, he reminded God of His own character – that is slow to anger and forgiving in mercy. And the LORD heard and answered Moses’ prayer.

In the midst of our fears, let’s remember to come to God. We can remind Him of His promises – His promise to never leave us or forsake us. His promise to direct our paths. Regarding His promises – we need to learn what they are and then take God at His Word..

Because of their lack of faith and disobedience, the Israelites were sentenced to 40 years of wandering in the wilderness during which time all who were over 20 years of age would die. God decreed that only two adults of that generation would enter the land of Promise – Caleb and Joshua – testifying to the truth that God rewards the faithful – sometimes in this life but always in the life to come.