

[R4045 : page 250]

## **REPORTING FROM TWO VIEW-POINTS**

**- NUMBERS 13:17-20,23-33. - SEPTEMBER 1. -**

**Golden Text: – "The Lord is with us; fear them not."  
– Num. 14:9.**

THE journey of about 160 miles "through the terrible wilderness" toward Canaan consumed about three months, due probably to the largeness of the camp, for modern travelers have covered the distance in eleven days. Finally they reached Kadesh-Barnea, on the border of the promised land, with the hills of the latter in full view. It was here that Moses smote the rock, contrary to the divine command, and today the place has abundant springs of water and is a regular oasis. In harmony with the divine arrangement it was proposed that they go up immediately to possess the land, but caution and fear suggested that first spies be sent out, that they might have a better knowledge of the real value of the land God had given them and also a better knowledge of the difficulties to be encountered in taking possession of it. With them, as with Christians today, the opportunity was afforded of doubting the beneficence of the divine arrangement, doubting the wisdom and love of God, and conjecturing the impossibility of taking possession of the land and the probability that even then they should find it far less attractive than the Lord at the mouth of Moses had reported.

The request of the people that the land be spied and reported on before its conquest was begun was acceded to by Moses. Twelve spies were selected, representing the twelve tribes – prominent men in whose judgment the people might have confidence. Apparently these went forth in two companies: one under Joshua made a tour of the entire country from the southern part to Jericho at the north, some 300 miles. The other band under Caleb made a shorter journey, going only so far as the valley of

Eshcol near Hebron. Caleb was accordingly the first to report (Numbers 13:30; 14:24), while Joshua's report came in later (Numbers 14:6,7). The spies were commissioned to gather information respecting the fruitfulness of the land and the desirability of the country and the character of its inhabitants, and whether they dwelt permanently in walled cities, or in movable camps like the Arabs. Two reports were returned, and in most particulars they were very much alike, telling that the land was good and fruitful and desirable, but that it would be difficult to conquer; that the inhabitants dwelt in high-walled cities, which were well nigh impregnable, and that some of the people were of great stature. Although there were but few of these giants, their fame was evidently far reaching, and the spies declared with exaggeration that in their presence they felt like grasshoppers. The majority advised against any attempt to take possession of the land, and discouraged the people, leading them to believe that it would be an utterly hopeless task for them to undertake to drive out the Canaanites, the Amalekites, the Amorites, the Hittites and the Jebusites, who had thorough possession. The minority report by Caleb and Joshua differed little from the other, except that they expressed full confidence that Israel under divine guidance and by divine aid would be fully able to conquer all the difficulties of the situation.

We cannot wonder that the people were greatly disheartened from the very beginning: they were not a warlike, but a pastoral people. Indeed with the exception of the battle which Abraham waged for the recovery of Lot and his family, and the battle a year before in the wilderness with the Amalekites, the Israelites had no experience in war and quite evidently were unprepared for such a contest as lay before them if they entered Canaan and attempted to take possession. We must admit, therefore, that the report of the ten spies that the Israelites were not capable of taking possession was in many respects a wise and just one, and the people apparently were justified in accepting it. The thing lacking was

faith. They should have believed God, and have followed explicitly his leading; they should have said, Greater is he who is on our part than [R4046 : page 251] all they that be against us, and while we are under his direction we are able to do all things through his strengthening power. However, it should not surprise us that this people under all the circumstances were unable to exercise such a faith in God. Rather we might say that antitypical Israel alone might be expected to have such a triumphant faith – nor do we find that very many Spiritual Israelites today possess faith to such a degree. Indeed we should not forget that the failure of Natural Israel and the divine dealings with them in consequence were more in the sense of typical illustrations for Spiritual Israel than as real condemnations of Natural Israel. We cannot think that God expected much more of those people than was manifested in their course. Of Spiritual Israel, however, much may reasonably be expected.

### **THE MAJORITY IN THE WRONG**

How did the people receive the two reports? Almost unanimously they decided that they had been misled, that their best course was to return to Egypt and proffer their services again to the Egyptian taskmasters. They decided that their coming out of Egypt was a mistake, that the journey through the wilderness was wasted time, and that they now stood in a hopeless position, a people without a country. They proposed to select a leader to lead them back to Egypt, and threatened Caleb and Joshua with stoning for trying to perpetuate the misleading of Moses, which they seemed to have been willing to forgive as an error of judgment. At this juncture, however, the Lord intervened, and from the bright display of his presence over the Tabernacle there went forth a judgment against some of the leaders, especially the ten spies who gave the faithless report and stirred up the people to resent the divine leading which they had previously followed. The lesson was a severe one, a plague amongst the people evidencing

divine disfavor, and they were turned back again to wander in the wilderness for the remainder of forty years, a year for each day consumed in the spying of the land. The divine decree was that all the men of Israel over twenty years of age were to perish in the wilderness during those forty years of national disfavor – that not one of them was ever to enter the promised land except the two who gave the good report, Caleb and Joshua.

The commotion amongst the people incident to this report must have been great. Moses himself endorsed the report of Caleb and Joshua, and urged the people to obedience to God, as we read:

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"Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them. Jehovah, your God, who goeth before you, he will fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that Jehovah thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place. Yet in this thing ye did not believe Jehovah thy God, who went before thee in the way, to seek you out a place to pitch your tents, in fire by night to show you in what way you should go, and in the cloud by day." – Deut. 1:29-33.

But the people in bitterness of disappointment cried out, "Would to God that we had died in the land of Egypt, or would to God that we had died in the wilderness. Wherefore hath the Lord brought us into 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 to Egypt?"

Then Joshua and Caleb exhorted the congregation, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy it out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delight in us, then will he bring us into this land and give it unto us; a land which floweth with milk and honey, only rebel not against the Lord nor fear ye the people of the land."

## **SPIRITUAL ISRAEL'S SIMILAR TESTS**

Applying the lesson to Spiritual Israelites we find many correspondencies: First, we have leaders of the people, corresponding to the spies, on whose report much will surely depend as to the courage of the people in going forward with the divine arrangement. Some of these ministers so magnify the difficulties of the way that the people are discouraged and go not on, while others giving a truthful report encourage their brethren with assurances that the Lord's grace is sufficient for all who are his. Perhaps indeed it would not be amiss to suppose that the twelve spies represent the whole number of the Lord's people who in the present life enter into covenant relationship to the Lord and experience a measure of his rest. All agree that the rest of faith is a glorious one, that its fruitage is grand, and samples are presented to the people. A small minority, however, give a proper report of the possibility of Christian living – the possibility of being overcomers of the world, of fighting a good fight in the name and strength of the Lord, the possibility of entering into all the glorious things which God hath provided for them that love him. The majority, the Great Company, hold back, fail to appropriate the promises, fail to trust the Lord, and their influence is proportionately an evil one upon others with whom they have influence. Thus at the present time few by faith enter into the blessings and privileges that belong to the Spiritual Israelite, and these few are the only ones who will enter into the heavenly Canaan to take actual possession by and by; the others fail of the blessing and joy of faith in the present time, and will fail of the highest blessing in the future, whatever portion they may obtain under the Lord's grace.

Mr. Spurgeon told a story of a man who was invited to come into his orchard to eat some of his fruit. He declined because he said he had picked up some apples from the roadside that fell from those trees, and they were poor and bitter. The owner replied that

those trees were there on purpose, so that the boys would not be attracted into the orchard to steal, but assured him that in the orchard proper to which he invited him were delicious apples. As those apple trees on the outside gave not a proper sample or representation of the orchard, so many Christians give to the world a very unsatisfactory sample of the blessings of the Lord and [R4046 : page 252] the fruits of the Spirit, and in some respects bear false witness and hinder the outflow of the blessings of the Lord toward mankind in general during this age. Thank God that the time is coming when under the leadership of the Joshua and Caleb class the whole people – all who will accept the Lord and have confidence in him – may be brought into the antitypical Canaan and assisted to take possession of all the rich favors which God has promised to them that love and obey him.

"Unbelief never gets beyond the difficulties, the cities, the walls, the giants. It is always preferring them, dwelling on them, pitting them against its own resources. Faith, on the other hand, though it never minimizes the difficulties, looks them steadily in the face, turns from them and looks into the face of God, and counts on him. This is what the people failed to do, and for this they lost Canaan."

– *F. B. Meyer.*

"Oh, how many a glorious record  
Had the guardian angel kept!  
Had I done instead of doubted,  
Had I warred instead of wept!"

### **"I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENETH ME"**

There are two important lessons for Spiritual Israelites to learn: (1) Their own inefficiency – their own inability to meet the trials, the difficulties, the hindrances in their way. As the Apostle

says, We cannot do the things that we would. But our extremity is God's opportunity, and his encouraging words are, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in your weakness." The Lord could have armed and equipped the hosts of Israel in some miraculous manner, making them invulnerable to the attacks of their enemies, and giving them courage for their ordeal; but this was not his plan. He wished to develop in them the necessary faith, trust, obedience, for, "without faith it is impossible to please God." Thus in Natural Israel was illustrated the divine proceeding in Spiritual Israel. God could miraculously give us powers of mind and of body which would make us superior to every outward circumstance; but instead of so doing he merely justifies us by faith, and tells us to reckon ourselves as complete, perfect, because of the imputation of our Redeemer's merit. From this standpoint of faith all the battles of Spiritual Israel are won or lost. "According to thy faith be it unto you." Those, therefore, who can and will exercise full faith, full confidence in all of the divine promises may go from victory to victory, from blessing to blessing, from joy to joy, from one attainment to another, and have a glorious victory in the end over the world, the flesh and the Adversary, through the imputed merit and continued assistance of him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood.

To this class the giants of opposition and despair lose their power, even as did Goliath before the sling-stone of David. The pebble from the brook – the message from the divine Word – vanquishes the enemy's power to those who have the sling of faith. To these the fortresses of sin are not so strong as to be invulnerable, unassailable; entrenched depravity is recognized as being subject to divine power, and when attacked in the name and strength of the Lord and encompassed repeatedly with prayer, finally its strong walls fall down as did those of Jericho. So may depraved **[R4047 : page 252]** appetites and sinful desires be thoroughly conquered so far as our hearts are concerned, though the traces thereof may continue to some extent in our mortal flesh

– reminders not only of the weaknesses of the fallen nature, but also of the triumphs of the New Mind under the leadership of Jesus.

As these victories of faith progress the fruits of the victory become ours. The grapes of Eshcol, the figs, and all the plenty of the land flowing with milk and honey but feebly picture the riches of grace and fruitage of the Spirit which accrue to those who in the name of the Lord gain the victories of faith over the world, the flesh and the Adversary. Of these fruits and graces the Apostle speaks, naming meekness, gentleness, patience, longsuffering, brotherly kindness, love. And the assurance of the Word is that if we do these things, if we maintain this good fight of faith as New Creatures, we not only shall enjoy the spiritual refreshment, but eventually "an entrance shall be administered unto us abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." – 2 Peter 1:11.

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