

Numbers 13-14

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[0 : 00] Two men look through prison bars. One stole mud, the other stout. It's interesting isn't! how two people can look at the same thing and come to two very different conclusions.

! That's what's happening in these two chapters. The facts are not in dispute, but the committee cannot agree. So there are two reports. There is a majority report and a minority report.

Two reports. One saw mud, the other stars. Three things, three R's. Number one, the report of the spies. Number two, the response of the people. And number three, the reality of God.

Number one, the report of the spies. We're very good at receiving reports in the Presbyterian Church and finding them away and doing absolutely nothing about them. And Moses, you here notice at the start of chapter 13, he sends out these leaders of the ancestral tribes and he sends them out to suss out the land. To spy out the land. They are not a cloak and dagger type of spies. They are more like Bear Grylls, if you know what he is, than James Bond. And they are there to do the demographics of the promised land. And there in the opening verses chapter 13, you'll see that Moses sends them out to suss out the land. And here in chapter 13, you have the report that the committee cannot agree. They bring in two separate reports.

The ten and the two. There is the majority report and the minority report. The majority is accepted. The minority is rejected. Which only goes to show, doesn't it, that democracy is not all that is cracked up to be. Arnold Toynbee, the historian, said this, it is doubtful if the majority has ever been right. And that goes for the church as well as the world. Those who live by sight always seem to outnumber those who want to live by faith. And it's the word of God which should govern us not majority opinion. And that's especially so in the church.

[2 : 10] And you can see that here with these spies, Joshua and Caleb, they are outvoted ten to two with disastrous consequences. And a whole generation die in the wilderness. Because instead of following God's words, and how many churches have done this, instead of following God's word they take a vote. And you see, it's interesting, isn't it, at the beginning of the chapter. In chapter 13, in verse 1 and 2, the Lord spoke to Moses saying, send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. I'm giving to them the land. This is not a feasibility study that the spies are to carry out as to whether or not they should go in. I am giving them this land. And these leaders are meant to act on my promise. What kind of leadership is this?

God isn't asking them whether they should decide whether to go in or not. That should never be on the agenda. It's the land that the Lord is giving them. And the job of these leaders, and it is what leadership is about, the job of leaders is to strengthen the resolve of the people. To strengthen the faith of the people, so that they will go in and possess the land which the Lord their God is giving them. But look at verse 32. It says, so they brought to the people of Israel a bad report. They spread a bad report of the land, it says. We can't go in there. It's full of people. As if God hadn't told them that. Every time he mentions the land, he tells them there are Hittites and Canaanites and Jebusites, Vegemites, they're all there. And he's told them that over and over and over again. And here they are, they're on the border, and they say we can't go in because it's so full of people. All these Hittites and Canaanites, all these people there, twice our size. I mean there are giants in that land, there are basketball players in that land, there are Maasai warriors in that land. And compared to them, well, we are like grasshoppers. It's too difficult, we can't go in. It's a fortified city. And archaeologists have discovered, haven't they, very strong fortified cities in Canaan. Thirty foot, what's fifteen feet thick. And the remains of these places have been dug dug up. But God had told them that already, over and over and over again. Every time he mentioned the promised land, he said, yes there are people there already. And yes, you are going to have to fight them. But it is the land that the Lord your God is giving to you.

You see, instead of trusting in that promise, God says, I have sworn on oath. Why does God have to do that? He says, I have sworn on oath to give you this land. But instead of trusting God and God's promise, you see what they do? They exaggerate and they mythologize the difficulties. Look at verses 32 and 33 of chapter 13. So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land. They spied out saying, the land through which we've gone to spy you out is a land that devours its inhabitants. And all the people that we saw in it are of great height. All the people. And then we saw Nephilim, the sons of Anak who come from the Nephilim.

[5 : 38] And we seem to ourselves like grasshoppers, and we seem to them. Michael Vaughan was the minister who followed John Scott as the vicar of All Souls land in place.

And he tells of a building project that he was involved in the church he was in in Platt in Manchester before he went to All Souls. And one elderly parishioner used to come up to him at every opportunity during the building project saying, they'll never do it.

They'll never do it. They'll never do it. Until the day when the building was open and free of debt.

And she came up to him and said, we've done it. We've done it.

Well that was what these leaders were doing. These so called leaders, they said, we'll never do it. It's too difficult. We'll never do it. What kind of leadership is that? It's a vote of no confidence in God, isn't it? We'll never do it. I don't know if you ever hear the story of the two shoe salesmen. Two salesmen who went to the, they were sent to a South Sea island by their firm. And one wrote home to the company saying, no one wears shoes here. I'm coming home. The other one wrote home and said, no one wears shoes here yet. Send the supplies.

Send the supplies. Do you see the difference? No one wears shoes here yet. That's the difference between the ten reports and the two. The ten were saying, no one wears shoes here. It can't be done. What's the point? It's a waste of time. It's futile. Let's go back. Caleb and Joshua said, yes it can be done and it must be done. Because God has promised. And this is the report, verse 30, of Caleb and Joshua. And it's the kind of leadership we need in the church today. Look at verse 30. Caleb quietened the people before Moses and said, let's go up at once and occupy it for we are well able to overcome it. We can certainly do it. We can do it. It's interesting to compare the reports. You can do that when you get home. They agree on the facts. There's no disagreement between the ten and the two on the facts. It's a land flown with milk and honey. To this very day the logo of the Israeli tourist board is a huge cluster of grapes on a pole. Where did that come from? Well, verses 23 and 24. There are grapes here that have to be carried on poles. There is milk and honey. There's going to be more manna. It's muesli from now on, isn't it? Milk and manna and grapes. Milk and honey and grapes. Just as God said it would be. There's no dispute about that. They've sussed that out. And everybody agrees. It's exactly how God described it. It's a fruitful land full of good things. But it's fortified and full of scary people just as God said as well. No one disagrees on that. They agree on the facts.

[8 : 39] The only difference is where you put the however. Or where you put the but. The verse 27 and 28, the majority report. And they told him, we came to the land which you sent out.

It flows with milk and honey and this is its fruit. However, however, look at these people. They are strong and their cities are fortified and large. They're massive. Do you see the however, the but? And Caleb and Joshua, they don't dispute any of the facts, but they say you're forgetting God. The however should be however God. But God. Yes, there's a lamb flowing with milk and honey. Say the majority. There's too many obstacles. The people are too powerful. We'll never do it. We'll never do it. Whereas Caleb and Joshua say yes, it is a land exactly like that. It's a land flowing with milk and honey. And yes, the people are scary. The cities are fortified. But with God, nothing is impossible. And they should know that, shouldn't they?

They should know that from the geography of the chapter. I think that is why it speaks so clearly about Hebron. Because Hebron is a very significant place for Israel. It's like, it's like Westminster Abbey of Houses of Parliament. And for Brits, it's like Botany Bay for Australians. Hebron is the place where the patriarchs were buried. It's the place where Abraham's tomb was. And Sarah, his wife is buried there. And Isaac and Jacob. And it's the only place of land, it's the only piece of land, the only bit of real estate that Abraham ever had in the Promised Land. These people, when they moved into the Promised Land and they came to Hebron, they should have walked a foot taller. Because Hebron was the seal of God's promise made to Abraham 400 years earlier. Here was Abraham's tomb in the Promised Land and 400 years down the track, God is bringing them into the land.

And now they're on the borders of the Promised Land, a place called Kadesh Barnea. And that's very significant because Kadesh Barnea was the place where Isaac was born. And the very reason that we are a nation at all is because Isaac was born.

And they should have known it, this was their history. And the reason they don't want to go in is because they've not been reading their Bibles. The very reason that we're a nation at all is because God gave a baby to a 90 year old granny. And you're saying we can't do it. When Sarah heard that God was going to give her a baby in her 90s, she laughed, didn't she?

[11:36] We're told in Genesis, she laughed with unbelief. Can you imagine what they said when she turned up at the antenatal clinic? And if God can do that, listen to the story of the Bible.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive. Out of Nazareth, I have called him. Who's ever heard of Nazareth? It's the back of beyond. It's a little peasant community. And in that little peasant community is a little peasant teenage woman who brings the saviour of the world.

God is a godly impossible, isn't he? And with God, all things are possible. They should have known that. And so here they are in the very place where it happened in Canesh Barbia, where God has fulfilled his promise to Abraham and given him a son Isaac in spite of all the difficulties and obstacles and unlikeness.

And now he's saying, go into the land which I have sworn that I will deliver to you. And they say, it's not possible, we can't do it. Because they've forgotten God. They're leaving him out of it. And so they become afraid of the people.

William Still has written, I think, a really helpful book on baptism called Bringing Your Children Up in Faith, Not Fear. And in that book he describes the drawing power of a precipice.

[13:00] People are drawn up towards the edge of the cliff. You want to look over. You're drawn to it. And William Still's argument is that in the way that we bring up our children, we need to take that into account.

If we're convinced it's a bad, bad time to bring up children in this world, and this world is not a very good place to bring up children, and we're fearful, and we're constantly fearful how our children will turn out, then that is the precipice and you're drawn to it.

But what Mr. Still argues, and I think he argues very well, is that if we've got God's promise to be a God to you and to your children after you, if you've got God's promise and you believe that, and we bring up our children in the atmosphere of faith, then that is also a self-fulfilling prophecy.

I know there's concerns with that, I know there's issues with that, I know with those that have gone away, but I want to say to you, we hold on to those promises of God, don't we still?

And we bring up our children in faith. And so are you going to be believing or fearful? Which report are you going to receive? It's not just about bringing up kids, is it? It's about every aspect of life, it's about the way that we do church.

[14:19] It's about how we conduct church affairs, it's about the risk we take, it's about starting new things, it's about our witness in the world. Which camp do you belong to? The faithful or the fearful?

If you were present among these people, which report would you have voted for? To go on with the Lord, or to go back into the world? Which report? Let's say you come up to me afterwards, and you stop everyone while they're drinking tea and coffee, and you say, I want to give Paul a cheque for a thousand pound.

And you present it to me up here after the evening service. And I just tear it up and I say, your cheques always bounce. Isn't that what these people are doing? The land that the Lord their God was giving them, they've only come out of Israel 15 months earlier.

And God has taken them out of Egypt through the wilderness, and they've had all sorts of supernatural signs in the wilderness, and God was with them. And now they're on the verge of entering the promised land. All that God has promised to them, and what do they do? They rip up God's cheque, and they say, your cheques always bounce.

And is that how you treat God with contempt? Are you fearful or believing? When you look at Ealing, and when you look at London, when you look at your school, or your place of work today, no one here wears shoes, yet.

[16:03] Is that how you look at it? Is the culture a threat to you? The media? The secularist agenda?

The LGBT lobby? I want to say to you, I think it's a great opportunity for the gospel. And it's a great time to be a Christian.

None of them yet believe. Not yet. But the gospel is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes.

Matthew Henry said this a long, long time ago. He said, Of those of whom we know nothing else, we know nothing about them. Of those of whom we know nothing else, we know that they have souls.

It is an exciting time to be a Christian. If you believe in God, the question I'm asking you is this, are you willing to go on with God to all that he's promised you, or will you turn tail and turn back upon yourself into the romance?

[17:19] And you will go round and round in circles, frustrated. You've thrown away your future. Because you fail to trust this incredible God. How many of us have done that?

How many of us fail to be what we could be? We choose the wilderness. We choose to live a life of second best futility and frustration.

Just like these people. Now that brings me to my second point, and the response of the people. The report of the spies and the response of the people. And here they are, they're on the verge of entering into all that God has promised them.

And the journey is nearly over, it's within their grasp, it's the culmination of their redemption, they've almost made it. And then you read these verses in chapter 14. Let's look at them.

Ah, entrance. It's a great joy, isn't there, of only having one exit door. Right. Come on.

[18:23] Numbers 14, verses 1-5. If anybody else wants to get up and go out now, now it's the time. Get this over and done with it. Numbers 14, 1-5. Then all the congregation raised a loud cry.

And the people wept that night. 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 died in this wilderness. Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword?

Our wives, our little ones, will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt? And they said to her, let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt. And then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel.

Someone has described this as snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. Snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. It's irrational. Unbelief is so irrational or illogical.

Do you see what they're saying? We are afraid we might die in Canaan. So let's go and die in the wilderness. What's the difference? John Patton, do you remember in the missionary to the South Sea Island as someone tried to stop him going as a missionary and they said to him, you're going to be eaten by cannibals if you go.

[19:33] And he said, well you're going on one of these days you'll be eaten by worms. What's the difference? We're all going to die, aren't we? Better to die serving the Lord than serving himself and going around in circles wondering what is my life about?

So illogical. If we go there we'll die so let's die here. How stupid is that? And more than that they want to reverse the exodus. They want to cancel out their salvation.

It was only 15 months ago that God brought them out of Egypt when they crossed the Red Sea. And now they want to undo all that God has done for them. Isn't that irrational? Let me try and put this in New Testament terms.

Let me carefully say this. It's like you're saying Christ died for you and you don't give a damn. It's like you don't give a damn.

God brought them out of Egypt. He carried them on wings like eagles. He's driving them into the promised land. And they don't give a damn.

[20:44] So maybe tonight you are someone here you believe. You believe that Christ died on the cross for you but actually you don't give a damn about it. What the Bible says is that it's a very very dangerous place to be in.

To be ready to go back than to go on. Look at verse 10 of chapter 14. The people of God speak about stoning Caleb and Joshua.

That's always the case. If you don't like the messenger if you don't like the message you kill the messenger. If you don't like the preacher you probably wouldn't kill him.

But you assassinate his reputation and you start whispering behind his back. Insinuating things. There's more than one way to kill a preacher. And if you don't like the message you can kill the

messenger.

And they don't like what Joshua and Caleb are saying so they want to silence them and they stone them to death. They want to get rid of them. And not only that if you go back to verse 4 of chapter 14 they want to get rid of Moses.

[21 : 51] we should choose another leader. We want a leader but we'll lead us where we want to go. What kind of leader is that? We want a preacher who will tell us what we want to hear. How many churches are like that?

That's so near and yet so far. They've come all the way out of Egypt they've come through the wilderness to the borders of the promised land and now they want to go back. And so back they go. And it tells us doesn't it that you've got to be careful what you ask God for. He may actually give you what you want.

You say I believe these things I want to go to church but I really don't want him controlling my life. I want to control my own life and the Lord might give you that.

I don't want to surrender my life to the Lord Jesus I'll pay lip service to him but I want to keep control of my life and God may actually allow that. And these people they didn't want to go on with the Lord so the Lord said you can go back and that's what happened isn't it?

[22 : 53] Forty years one day one year for every day the spies were in the land and they wander around and round in circles and that whole generation perishes in the wilderness.

And the promise is postponed it wasn't cancelled it was postponed Israel still entered the land but it was delayed a generation. It's one of the great tragedies in Israel's history. that whole generation that came to the registry they didn't enter.

I think this passage tells us that they were forgiven. I think verse 20 tells us that they were forgiven. I don't think that they lost their salvation necessarily but they didn't enter the promised land.

They had to live with the consequences of their stupidity and their rebellion. And that's being repeated over and over again isn't it? And the New Testament picks it up over and over again. It warns us 1 Corinthians 10 these things are written down for you tonight as a warning.

They are an example to you and a warning. Or Hebrews 3.12 Make sure we see to it that none of you is a sinful unbelieving heart and turns away from the living God. Make sure you don't do what these people do.

[24 : 06] You choose the wilderness. Don't throw away your future so near and yet so far. Felix he was a Roman governor was near the apostle Paul preached to him.

Says that he was well acquainted with the way he knew the way of salvation and he and his wife they actually enjoyed getting Paul to preach to them. They had him put in prison they weren't a captive audience he was a captive preacher and every time they wanted to hear him they just got him out from the cell and he came and he preached to them.

And we're told that when Felix heard Paul preaching he trembled trembled and yet he kept Paul in prison and he kept Paul coming out to preach to them because he's expecting to get a bribe that's what the New Testament tells us.

Isn't that interesting he's under the gospel he's under the preaching of the apostle Paul and there's something that during the preaching of the gospel makes him tremble he feels something of the spirit of God at work in him it actually terrifies him he's moved by it he's touched by it he's stirred by it he's awakened by it I think we can say he's drawn and yet he's still thinking what's in it for me what can I get out of this it's so possible to be in church under the preaching of the gospel to hear the gospel clearly to be affected by it to be stirred by it to be drawn by it and at the same time not willing to give up your own self what's in this for me so near and so far Jesus says whoever wants to save his life must lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it and is that where you are tonight you're on the borders of believing in Jesus you're in the valley of decision of taking him to be your Lord and Saviour

Henry Drummond said the entrance fee into the promised land the entrance fee into God's kingdom is nothing at all it's free but the annual subscription is everything you've got and there you are you're ready to believe in Jesus and take him to be your Lord and Saviour and you don't have to do anything you just say Lord help me come into my life Lord be my Saviour and yet you're holding back because you know the implications are enormous and that finally brings me to my last point the reality of God the whole assembly is there and then something really surprising happens something they weren't expecting the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting suddenly the living God shows up and God isn't just an idea for you and I to discuss he's not a concept for you to

believe in he is alive and he is a living

[27 : 07] God he is a living presence and that is what happens when you become a Christian isn't it the living God comes into your life and God shows up the trouble is we don't take him seriously we don't believe that he is for real and they left God out of their thinking they saw the size and the numbers of the city and they say there are huge fortified cities guess what you read in Joshua 6 they come to the largest of those cities of Jericho don't they they blow a trumpet they march around they give a shout and the walls come tumbling down and they walk right in because God was with them I think of the giants one of the descendants of Anak was Goliath and a little teenage boy picks up stones and puts him in a slew and runs!

towards him and brings him down and with him the nation of the Philistines because God was with him but maybe that's where you are now these people you've left the living God out of your calculation and you think I'd like to become a Christian I'd like to enter into all this but I just couldn't keep it up I know the temptations I have there are all sorts of things that will draw me away I won't be a very good Christian of course you won't but when you become a Christian the living God comes into your life I love that quote of William Temple he says you can show me a play like Hamlet or King Lear and you can say to me write a play like that and I can't do it or you can hear a great symphony of someone like Beethoven and you can tell me write a symphony like that and I cannot do it but if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me well then I could write plays like that and if the genius of Beethoven could come and live in me then I could write music on that and if the spirit of Jesus could come and live in me then I could live like that and guess what that's exactly what it is to be a

Christian isn't it because the spirit of God comes to indwell you and the living God shows up in your life God is for real but they don't see it and their failure to take God seriously reaches a climax at the end of chapter 14 and God judges their sin and he sends them back into the wilderness and he gives them exactly what they asked for and then chapter 14 and verse 40 end of the chapter we don't have time to look at it but look what it says and they rose a bird in the morning and they went up to the heights of the hill country saying here we are Lord we will go up to the place that the Lord has promised for we've sinned the height of pick headedness and perversity God says go in and they won't they've every opportunity to go in but they refuse too late God will not be mocked you can't mess around with God it was for these people their moment of decision and they missed it and so it's nice isn't it one of the dangers of growing up in a

Christian home and one of the dangers of growing up in a church like this is you think I'll put it off to a more convenient time I'm moved yeah by what's being said I really do believe but I've got other stuff going on in my life at the moment I can't wait a while and don't play those games with God Julius Caesar the Shakespeare play act 4 there's this is a quote isn't it there is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to a fortune omitting the other way all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and miseries on such a full sea you are now afloat we must take the current when it serves or lose our ventures and so will you seize the moment will you be men like Caleb or Joshua full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit or will you wander round and round and round for the rest of your life if you're a

Christian you've tasted haven't you you've seen the land you've tasted the fruit already just like that cluster of grapes you've had a full taste of the land and Peter says don't be afraid don't be afraid in your heart set apart Christ as Lord and always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks for a reason for the hope that's within you and so what kind of report are you giving a positive or a negative one it's amazing how many Christians believe there's a good land some Christians they've tasted the fruit of the land but you'd never know it you would really never know it you'd never know it from their demeanour and from their lives and from their speech and people say if that's a Christian I don't want anything to do with it and they're right to say that it's a bad report but we must always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us people need to see that we are going places and we have a future and we have a hope and we're not in a dead end and we're not going in circles we have something to live for whatever our circumstances are tonight because we're going to the land

[32 : 18] Moses says to his brother-in-law which the Lord has sworn to give us and why don't you come with us it'll be difficult there'll be problems and obstacles but if God is for us who can be against us and if he has not spared up his own son but given him up for us all how will he along with him freely give us all things isn't that right if Jesus has died for us is he going to let us perish in the

wilderness no of course not let's sing let's sing