

# What Defines What Lies Ahead?

January 10, 2016 – Brad Bailey

What do you see ahead of you?

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1. Don't allow changes and challenges to keep us from \_\_\_\_\_.

2. We may need "a different Spirit" to overcome the \_\_\_\_\_ that surrounds us.

Numbers 14:1-5; 10

Numbers 14:24

"...because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.

3. We do not need to deny the challenges, we need to \_\_\_\_\_ to the larger reality of \_\_\_\_\_.

"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." - 1 John 4:4 (ESV)

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## Intro

A belated welcome to the new year. The week between Christmas and New Year's...we took a family took time away in Mexico...

One of the most fascinating elements of the Yucatan Peninsula...are the cenotes...openings in the ground that go down into underground water. In many cases you see what you believe is the extent of a large cave...but in fact...the cave flows into a vast world of underwater caves ...a world so vast you can't even imagine.

I believe that it may be similar for many of us as we enter this new year. We see only a portion of what is really ahead of us.

As we stop to come before God this morning...still at the start of this new year... let me ask you:

**How big is your world?**

**What do you see ahead of you?**

If we thought about that for a few minutes...**many of us might say** our world feels a little smaller.

- Maybe you have had **some hopes** that have just **not panned out**... so what lies ahead seems a **little dimmer**.
- Maybe you have experienced a **significant loss**...and so **what lies ahead** is notably **missing someone or something**.
- Maybe you just feel the **losses many would note in our culture as a whole**... a loss of **moral and spiritual direction**... a loss of **economic horizon**.

I think for many...the **world feels a little smaller**...**what lies ahead** seems a **little darker**.

**Today...God wants us to confront how we see what lies ahead of us.**

**What defines what lies ahead?**

**The history of Israel reached a moment much like many of us may face as we enter this new year...and consider what is ahead of us.**

They had been rescued out of 400 years of slavery and oppression in Egypt.. They had walked through the Red Sea and had watched the Egyptian army drown. They had been miraculously guided through the wilderness, and been promised a land flowing milk and honey.

The children of Israel finally arrive at the border of the Promised Land.

The Lord now gives Moses this directive.

**Numbers 13:1-2 (NIV)**

The LORD said to Moses, "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders."

Since they will be **dividing up the land between the 12 tribes**, it is important that representatives from all the tribes be in on this initial survey of the land. Moses and Aaron **chose 12 men** - the top leaders out of hundreds of thousands - to explore the land.

**So 12 leaders are sent on a reconnaissance mission into Canaan.** They go north along the ridge of mountains that provide the backbone of the country...through Hebron in the south all the way to Rehob at the north end of the land. Perhaps they are posing as traders, we don't know, but along the way they observe carefully what they see: the nature of the cities and villages and their fortifications, the produce of the land and its potential.

Imagine...finally the day comes of their return...as the people are filled with anticipation of what they will hear... of what lies ahead for them.

### **Numbers 13:25-27 (NIV)**

At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.<sup>26</sup> They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land.<sup>27</sup> They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.

Doesn't that sound great? The **first part of their report** was **unanimous and very positive**. "We looked at the land & it is **exactly as God said it would be**. It is a land flowing with milk & honey." And they brought back a huge cluster of grapes & pomegranates & figs as evidence of its fertility.

But from that point on, their report was no longer unanimous. The group was divided 10 to 2, and the majority begins the rest of its report ...

### Numbers 13:28 (NIV)

But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large.

### Numbers 13:30 (NIV)

Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."

But the bad news is elevated...

### **Numbers 13:31-32 (NIV)**

<sup>31</sup> "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." <sup>32</sup> And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. ...We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

**Today...maybe you feel like a "grasshopper" facing a giant.**

The "bad report" of the 10 spies is contagious. By nightfall their report has spread throughout the camp, and with it the infectious fear of these tribal leaders.

### Numbers 14:1-45 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. <sup>2</sup> All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! ... Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" <sup>4</sup> And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt." <sup>5</sup> Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there.

**Same facts...but two views. We see the force of focusing on only the negative...and how it paralyzes the people.**

**As we face the new year and life ahead...** God can speak to us through this moment.

You and I are called by God to occupy some territory. Not physical land or property, but none the less God has called us to claim and occupy some territory. Most of the time we are afraid, the unknown is frightening to us. Much of the time our reasons for being afraid is legitimate, they are real.

### **1. Don't allow changes and challenges to keep us from moving forward.**

They had come to a certain point...and now would potentially stop.

The thought..."I guess this is it."

We can all come to a similar place.

We can become intimidated by the giants we see in the land. "Intimidation" means to make timid or fearful. I think many of us may be intimidated by what we see ahead of us.

> But it's not the end. There is a promise of what lies ahead... God had not brought them there to stop...but to go forward.

> The same is true for you. Wherever you are....there are promises that God wants to do more.

**Even more fascinating** is how **they look back on the past**...they convince themselves that they should consider **going back to Egypt**. Isn't it amazing **how short the memories** of the children of Israel were? You know, they had just been complaining about being **slaves in Egypt for 400 years**. They were complaining about making bricks without straw.

But now they find themselves in the wilderness, and they're afraid to go on. So they say, "Maybe it would be better if we went back to Egypt. At least there we had 3 square meals every day, & a roof over our heads." They were ready to give up freedom and become slaves again, just for a measure of security.

This reference to how the people looked back to Egypt has often been noted as one of the most **fascinating reflections of how deceiving our perspectives can become**. It was the place of bondage...oppression... enslaved as animals. But now...faced with challenge...they look back...and want the security of being enslaved over facing the uncertainty of what's ahead. That may sound strange...but the truth is that there can be a pseudo comfort in what we know... even it is oppressive. There is a false sense of safety in bondage. We have all heard of long-term prison inmates that were released only to be back in jail in a couple of weeks. It is said they become institutionalized. They do not feel safe outside the restrictions of that prison life. **When a person is in bondage there are no choices to make. There are no risks to take. No expectations.**

How easy it is to look back. To want to go back to some idealized past that doesn't exist. It's easy to become comfortable with what we have always known. It's comforting to do what we have always done. When times get tough we tend to want to return to what we have always done.

We have a way of looking at "the good old days" that is deceptive.

**The truth is that life doesn't generally get easier....it may demand more.** In this way the past is often an illusion... it doesn't exist in the future and what we believe it was is only a mental ideal.

**Let me ask you... How are you driving your life?** Maybe a helpful way to think about it is this: if life were a car and you were the driver...what gear are you in?

Some of us may be playing with reverse a little...always a thrill to drive a little in reverse. Maybe you have played with going back.

For some of us...maybe you have put it in neutral...sort of saying "I'm not going to go anywhere...but if God wants to push me...I suppose that's up to him."

For many of us.... We may have put life in "Park." We may have only intended to pull over for a little time of rest...but we've now been in "Park" for a long time. If the spiritual life had parking tickets...we would have a lot piling up.

**Here how the tragedy plays out:** The people stopped...began looking back...and the result was that they would now **wander in the wilderness for 40 years...** as none of that first generation in Egypt would enter the Promised Land.

**Who lost by stopping?** God. No...God would lead a people into the Promised Land... and through them bring forth the Messiah...and the breaking of His Kingdom on the earth.

It was those who stopped who lost. They would wander...for the rest of their lives. Many of us can wander for the rest of our lives.

Some of us need to consider... **have we stopped...** have we pulled our lives to the side of the road... have we allowed changes and challenges to keep us from moving forward?

Are we intent on the Promised Land, or **headed back into the wilderness?**

Life is always what is in front of you. There is only one direction that is actually engaging life...and it's forward. So today... will you take your life out of park and put it back in DRIVE? Will you begin breaking camp and getting ready to move forward?

As we do so, there's another point we can learn from this encounter.

## **2. We may need "a different Spirit" to overcome the prevailing mindset that surrounds us.**

There was a prevailing view that flowed around them. We saw how the majority mindset was focused on the challenges only. As I thought about this...I realize that it must have been hard for Joshua and Caleb to have had a distinct position. These 12 had traveled together as a small group of lives for 40 days. It couldn't have been easy to rise above the prevailing mindset.

We even read that as the masses of their own people became united against going forward...that “the whole assembly talked about stoning them.” (Numbers 14:10)

There is a lot that opposes going forward.

That lack of faith spread like an infection through the entire congregation of Israelites, who found all they had experienced by God to be blocked out.

But we see that the LORD was angry with the people and vowed that none of their generation would enter the Promised Land, only Caleb and Joshua.

God says to Moses...

**Numbers 14:24 (NIV)**

“...because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.

> They had ‘a different Spirit’ At times, we may have to embrace a different spirit as we move forward. It’s not easy... when the prevailing perspective surrounds us... it’s only natural to be effected... even consumed by it. Cynicism is the spirit of our day. It’s cool to be a cynic...to stay on the side of the road and expect nothing...and do nothing.

> **It requires a deeply personal process to make a spiritual assessment and live out of what others may not see.**

There is a **depth of strength**...something unchanging because it was decided... set.

And this leads to the final point...

**3. We do not need to deny the challenges, we need to connect to the larger reality of God.**

The challenges are real. There are people already living in the land God has promised to them. In order to claim it as their own, they’ll have to fight for it. Frankly, most of them aren’t up to that! Instantly, their enthusiasm vanishes and once again, the people of God are plunged into the throes of another spiritual crisis.

The spies explained the complications they saw in following God into the Promised Land. First, there were giants in the land. Secondly, those giants lived in fortified cities. Finally, those giants were everywhere (v.29). We face all the same things whenever we follow God.

There are giants out there! Everyone face giants...giants of disappointment... giants of opposition...giants of uncertainty. There are people in our lives who may seem more oppositional than aligning. There are problems that are way bigger than we are. Not only are there giants but those giants are deeply entrenched and fortified. We face problems that just won’t go away and everywhere we turn we run into more giants. The truth is that you can’t run away from the problems of life. We must face them in order to move forward.

The challenges are real...but only a smaller part of the real picture.

The two spies who challenged the assessment NEVER suggested they didn't see the opposition...they **didn't deny** that part of reality...they **didn't dismiss** that part of reality.... rather, they saw God in reality.

It's **not a matter of not seeing the challenges...it's a matter of not seeing God.**

The majority saw themselves as grasshoppers. They saw the enemy as giants. And they didn't see God at all.

Joshua and Caleb were connected to God. And God changes the scope of everything.

As God has declared...

"Remember the things I have done in the past. For I alone am God! I am God, and there is none like me. Only I can tell you the future before it even happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish." - Isaiah 46:9-10

The most important question is not, "How big is the problem?" or "How big am I?" ...but "How big is God?"

What will define your future...that which says,.. "but giants (are in the land)"...or "but God is in the land"?

Jesus reveals the power to always move forward...

**Matthew 19:26 (NIV)**

Jesus said, "...with God all things are possible."

**The disciple John explains...**

**1 John 4:4 (ESV)**

"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

The issue is living in relationship to God with us...in us.

Jesus reveals that the power that created the universe... in all it's massiveness ... is personal...and is present.

He is both over all and in all.

As we realize that the Infinite Creator of all... is here ...we can realize that our world is enormous.

What defines what lies ahead? For many of us...it may be the changes and challenges we feel...the losses and limits. We think they define reality...and reality may seem darkened and diminished.

But **reality is so much bigger...it's as big as God...and God is infinite....and God is with us and in us.**

[1]

And God is **not bound by the changes and challenges** we face.

**God is not going 'ut oh.'** He is not bound by who is elected as our next President. Sure that's important...sure it effects our future....but many of us let it define what lies ahead of us in ways as if it's the end of the world.

God has proven to fulfill all that he has proclaimed in the past and He will fulfill all that he has begun in us.

**Philippians 1:6 (NLT)**

God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

**1 John 4:4 (ESV)**

“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

> **That is the connection we need...and PRAYER is that connection.**

God is waiting to connect with each one of us. He wants to connect with us and work powerfully in our hearts and lives through prayer.

**Next week** we are going to **launch into a focus** to start this new year... a focus on **“Connecting with God in Prayer”**

Prayer changes the one praying, because in prayer, we are in the presence of God. Praying to God is talking to the creator of your very being. It is connecting with the God of the universe. He designed you to be in communication with Him.

**As Eugene Peterson writes...**

“The goal, the highest good, of the human creature is that the knowledge of God and prayer to God converge.”

**Lloyd J. Ogilvie adds...**

Prayer is not measured by how much we get from God, but by how much of Him gets into us and our circumstances and relationships. It is not being able to convince God of what we ought to have, but allowing Him to convince us of what we need and He is ready to give.

Prayer is to expand our hearts until they are capable not just of saying our prayers, but of receiving the Lord Himself.

If you could hear Christ praying for you in the next room, you wouldn't be afraid of a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for you. [2]

**Closing:** Are you ready to face the life ahead of you? To go forward into the life that God has called you to?

**Resources:** Some description may have been drawn from Dr. Ralph F. Wilson “Caleb's fortress-taking faith”

**Notes:**

1. We're like children... if you tell a child that it's a big world out there... they may think about the small neighborhood outside the front door. Then we learn we live in a city...then we are introduced to maps...then a globe...and finally solar system. And we think now we know all that exists. The more we look into what God tells us about eternity...the more I think we may think we've grown up and grasp it all... but may still be far more like children.

Herman Weyl an eminent mathematician and physicist of Gottingen and later a member of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, opened the Terry Lectures of Yale with these remarks  
*"Mathematics and physics make the world appear more and more an open one, as a world not closed but pointing beyond itself."* - Herman Weyl

Christ reveals that the world is bigger...and that the Living God reigns over all...the Father of all life... and that separation was never what God intended as our end...but separation reflects our own unsundered hearts of autonomy.

2. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, "Praying With Power"