

FEAR UNLEASHED

Today we are in **Week 5** of “**Promised Land**” and we are continuing our journey with Israel through the wilderness as they are making their way to the land God had promised them. We are going to be in the Book of Numbers today so if you would like to follow along in your portion of God’s Word go ahead and turn with me to **Numbers 13**. In an effort to familiarize us with how the Bible is laid out regarding the accounts describing Israel and their wilderness journey, it is important to point out that most of what takes place after the Golden Calf event that we looked at last week is recorded for us in the book of Numbers. It is called Numbers based on the numbering of the people as instructed by God in the first few chapters and again in Chapter 26. Chapters 1 through 14 take place in the first year after the Exodus from Egypt while the remaining chapters describe the 40 years Israel spent wandering in the wilderness due to their refusal to enter the land when God instructed them to. This morning as we look at what led to Israel’s refusal to enter the Promised Land, I want us to see how powerful an enemy FEAR can be and what we miss out on when we let *FEAR erode our FAITH*. Let’s **PRAY** as we prepare our hearts for what God has for us today.

At the beginning of Chapter 13 God instructs Moses to send an exploration party into the Promised Land to scope it out and to report back to the people what they find. The exploration party is to be made up of 1 leader from each of the 12 ancestral tribes of Israel (a complete representation of the nation as a whole). In total, what we have here is a 12 man exploration committee. We will pick up in verse 17 with Moses’ instructions:

Numbers 13:17-20 (NIV) When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, “Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. **18** See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. **19** What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? **20** How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land.” (It was the season for the first ripe grapes.)

This is in essence a FAITH TEST to see if the children of Israel have the stomach to take the land by trusting God for every adversity and challenge that they will face ahead. At the same time it is also a verification of the promises God has made to them regarding the type of land God is giving them. While their faith record has not been all that impressive up to this point, God’s trustworthiness has been and it should not surprise us that the land is just as God had promised them!

Numbers 13:26-27 (NIV) **26** 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. **27** 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.

But despite the confirmation of God’s earlier promise, the people will not enter into the land. It is here that I want us to see **The Power of Fear**

Numbers 13:28-29 (NIV)

28 But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. (Ancestors of Giant people who had inhabited the land - they were not only physically intimidating but they obviously had a reputation of being fierce) **29** The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.” (Not just one fierce group to overcome but add to that 5 more groups of some of the meanest and nastiest people you could come against in that region. At least this is how Israel viewed them.)

Notice what fear does! It takes what we are afraid of and elevates it as more powerful than us by comparing its greatest strength against what we consider our greatest weakness; we let fear make the wrong comparisons. Yeah, compared with themselves maybe all the things they fear are more powerful. But the wrong comparison is being made here - Israel didn't get where they were on their own merit and strength; they got there by God's grace and by God's favor. **They need to compare the things they see that are making them fearful to the God they serve, not to themselves.** This makes me think of Isaiah 6, where Isaiah had a vision of the Lord sitting on the throne, the whole train of his robe filled the temple. His voice made the foundations of the temple shake. This is the God we need to think of when fear wants to grip us and tell us we can't when God tells us we can! If they would start with God first, then the things that they perceive as being so hard to overcome would become dwarfed in the light of God's power! Especially considering all that God has done up until this point. Let's take a quick look back at what God has done for them:

- a) God brought 10 plagues against the gods of Egypt to show that they were no match for Him. As a result of this display of God's power they were released from oppression in Egypt
- b) The power displayed by God at the mighty Red Sea crossing where God single handedly crushed the Egyptian army.
- c) The power of God displayed through His provision of BREAD from heaven in the form of manna in order to feed all the people.
- d) God provided WATER from a rock when the Israelites camped in an area with no water source.
- e) Defeat of the Amalekites at Rephidim when they came against Israel in the wilderness.

What do you FEAR? Are you comparing it to the POWER of GOD or are you comparing it with yourself and your feeble human strength with all of your insufficiencies and inadequacies and all the lies spoken to you about how you'll never be good enough and will never measure up? *No wonder fear paralyzes us!* But not everyone in the exploration committee was overcome by fear. In fact, Joshua and Caleb see things a little differently.

Numbers 13:30 (NIV) 30 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.”**

Why would Caleb make such a statement? Because God is with them!! Caleb remembers what God had done for them in Egypt. He remembers what God did at the Red Sea and in the wilderness. Caleb isn't looking at the overwhelming obstacles in his way because he is looking to the Almighty God whom He serves. **It's hard to hang your head in FEAR when you have your eyes fixed on the God of Heaven's Armies!** He is a God who has not only shown them that **He CAN**, He is a God who has given them the promise that **He WILL**. It is the same promise GOD gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Unfortunately, FEAR causes us to look to ourselves rather than God. It also tends to travel faster and consume us quicker than calls to FAITH. Watch what happens next.

Numbers 13:31-32 (NIV) 31 But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." The NASB says that they are "too strong for us." The way the word 'strong' is used in Hebrew is referenced in a bad light. It refers to human strength that is violent and mean, like a team who plays dirty. **32** 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.

When fear is allowed to settle into our heart, we see **The Erosion of Faith**.

When faith begins to erode we see a spiritual domino effect begin to take place, and the first domino to fall is our HOPE.

Numbers 14:1-2 (NIV) That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. **2** All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! If we do not have HOPE in God what do we have? We end up with discouragement which leads to hopelessness!! Hopelessness ultimately leads to despair and irrational choices. Notice that the people start to grumble against the very ones who helped lead them out of slavery. And as a result, they begin telling themselves that slavery was better. This makes no sense but this is what HOPELESSNESS does.

The second domino to fall is our TRUST in God.

Numbers 14:3 (NIV) Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" We in essence question God's goodness and we question God's motives. We start to reason in our heart that the old life wasn't so bad. Since we have no one else we can trust we turn to our own understanding. This way of thinking is a stark contrast to what we see in **Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)** Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; **6** in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

We also need to understand that up until this point, the Israelites were desperate for safety and relied on God for everything they needed. Now they are comfortable where they are even without entering the Promised Land, and the fear of what lies ahead is causing them to rethink

everything. **You see, desperation will either cause you to fully trust in Jesus, or fully trust in your own self resilience.**

The third domino to fall is **our OBEDIENCE**.

If we don't trust God we certainly are not going to be obedient to what He asks us to do. By default we begin our journey back to the old way of life because that is all we have left.

Numbers 14:4 (NIV) 4 And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

But there is a price to pay! There are consequences that we choose to live with once we deny God through faithless action. And the same was true for Israel. Their erosion of faith that led to faithless action brought a heavy price.

Notice **The Consequence of Faithless Action**

Numbers 14:5-12 (NIV)

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. **6** Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh (Jeff-oo-neigh), who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes **7** and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. **8** If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. **9** Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them (remember, in Num 13:32 the others were afraid those living in the land would devour Israel!). Their protection is gone, **but the Lord is with us.** Do not be afraid of them."

10 But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites. **11** The Lord said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? **12** I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they."

Here we go again, right? If you remember, last week we saw where Moses had to plead to God to spare His people after the Golden Calf event, and now we find ourselves in a similar situation where God is infuriated at His people. **But Moses** called back to the Lord saying that Israel's enemies will hear about how God slaughtered His people in the wilderness. You see, their enemies have already heard about all the things the Lord has done in delivering Israel from Egypt. But if He slaughters his people, they will hear that, even after seeing the Lord face-to-face, even after leading them by a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud, that the Lord was not able to bring them into the land he promised them on oath. So Moses pleads that God forgive His people of their sins against Him, just as He has done time and time before.

The Lord is faithful and merciful, and listens to Moses and forgives his people... but the Lord is also *just*. The sins of His people have consequences. The Lord goes on to tell Moses that none of those who disobeyed Him would ever see the land He promised them. No one who

complained against God will see it, but because Caleb was faithful and has a different spirit and follows God with all his heart, he will be allowed to enter into the Land.

Numbers 14:20-24 (NIV) 20 The Lord replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked. **21** Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, **22** not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times— **23** not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. **24** But 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.

What made Caleb’s spirit so different?

- 1) **Caleb wasn’t double minded** - Caleb knew in his heart that returning to Egypt wasn’t an option for him. He was ALL IN with God. When it comes to following God we cannot have a back up plan or an exit strategy. We have to be fully committed and we have to be all in. If you have a back up plan as far as God is concerned, burn it! If you have an exit strategy, barricade that door and remove the exit sign. If not, when things get challenging your double mindedness will tempt you to look for the exit door.
- 2) **Caleb’s confidence was in God not in man** - It seems as if the people were more focused on Moses and Aaron than they were on God. Caleb understood this! We need to make sure our Faith is in God not a leader. That our Faith is in God not our grandparents, parents, friends, or even a pastor. **Numbers 14:2** says Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron as if this was all Moses and Aaron’s doing. In **Numbers 14:4** Israel made threats about choosing a new leader as if the leadership was not good enough. After all, Moses and Aaron were only trying to follow God. Sure, God was using Moses and Aaron as human agents, but their decisions were not guiding this mission, God was!
- 3) **Caleb’s fear of God was greater than his fear of his circumstances** - When you boil it all down, what’s it going to be? FEAR of your circumstance or FEAR of not having God with you? For Caleb he was more fearful of a life without God!

Numbers 14:26-33 (NIV) 26 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: **27** “How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. **28** So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Lord, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say: **29** In this wilderness your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. **30** Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh (Jeff-oo-neigh) and Joshua son of Nun. **31** As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. **32** But as for you, your bodies will fall in this wilderness. **33** Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, **suffering for your unfaithfulness**, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. As parents, we need to be cautious when considering our life choices because our disobedience to God can also affect our children. Here, the disobedience of the elders not only caused them to not be able to see

the Promised Land themselves, but also caused 40 years of wandering and suffering for their children, because the elders put their fear over their faith. **How would you make different choices if you knew your faithless steps would have a negative impact on your children?**

Numbers 14:39-45 (NIV) When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly. **40** Early the next morning they set out for the highest point in the hill country, saying, "Now we are ready to go up to the land the Lord promised. Surely we have sinned!" At this point, the Israelites realized that they messed up. They realized what punishment was coming, and they weren't ready to bear that. Had they simply followed through with obedience on the LORD's terms, they would not be in this situation. Once they weighed the consequences from their decision, **they realized that the weight of their disobedience is going to be greater than their fear of what lies ahead while walking by faith.**

41 But Moses said, "Why are you disobeying the Lord's command? This will not succeed! **42** Do not go up, because the Lord is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, **43** for the Amalekites and the Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the Lord, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword." **44** Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the highest point in the hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the Lord's covenant moved from the camp. **45** Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah.

Obviously, they were not successful because God was not with them! But I want us to see that just because there are consequences for our actions, it does not mean God has given up on us. He is still true to His promises and He still provides for His children. Even though they are going to wander in the wilderness for the next 40 years God will still provide for them during this time. And just because their entrance into the Promised Land is on delay, God will still honor the promise He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!

So what's the bottom line?

I want you to **put your FAITH in the promises of God regardless of your present circumstances** and I want you to **WALK by FAITH, not FEAR.** The question is which will you choose?

Worship Team Comes Back Up

Invitation:

Fear will push us down one of two directions: it will either push us towards God or it will push us away from God.

We see that those that were pushed away from God had a desire to return to what was familiar, which in this case was Egypt, even though their living conditions were harsh and their health and safety were compromised. **What is your fear pushing you towards today?** Maybe that

familiarity is found in alcohol. Maybe it's found in toxic relationships or situations that are unhealthy for your mental health or your physical health or your spiritual health. If that's you, and you find yourself reverting back to old habits due to fear, I want you to write that down on one of our prayer cards in the seat back in front of you. I want you to lay that up here on the front of the stage as a **Show of Faith** that you are claiming God's provisions over our fear! **(instruct them to wait to lay the card down until we sing the last worship song)**

Now, **how can we allow our fear to push us towards God?** As we see with Caleb, he knew that God's strengths, his promises, and his character could cover a multitude of weaknesses. We see the Apostle Paul speak about this in his second letter to the Corinthians. Paul was asking God to take away this thorn in his side, but listen to God's response: **2 Corinthians 12:9 (NASB)** And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

So, rather than trying to focus on our weaknesses and work diligently in making them better, hand them over to God, so his GRACE can work THOUGH you! If you're here and you have a weakness that has been causing FEAR and ultimately a lack of trust in God, I want you to write that down on your card and lay that up here on the front of the stage in a **Show of Faith** that you are claiming God's grace over our fear! **(again, they will wait to lay the card down until the worship song begins)**

When we allow fear to push us away from God, we are pushed towards sin. In our sin, our path is the same as these Israelites, where we are walking towards our own death. But when we allow our fear to push us closer to God and allow him to work through our weaknesses so ultimately his glory can prevail, we move closer to eternal life. Remember, **Romans 6:23 (NASB)** For the wages of sin is death, but the gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Will you trust Him today?