

Lessons from Israel 4

The fear of Israel 2

The story of Israel is one with sad and perplexing examples of “the fear of man.” But it also provides inspiring examples of “the fear of God.”

Today, we pick up where we left off in Numbers 14, as the people receive one final exhortation from Joshua and Caleb.

Numbers 14:6-10a

6. And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:

7. And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.

8. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

9. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.

10 ¶ But all the congregation bade stone them with stones.

The message is “don’t rebel,” “don’t fear the people,” “God will keep His promises.”

But the people of Israel don’t accept this message.

And so we have later in the passage, Moses pleading to God for mercy.

Numbers 14:19-24

19 Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

20 ¶ And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word:

21 But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.

22 Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;

23 Surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:

24 But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.

There are consequences for fearing man, rather than God and they are outlined in the following verses:

Numbers 14:28-35

28 Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you:

29 Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me,

30 Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

31 But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.

32 But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness.

33 And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness.

34 After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise. [displeasure, opposition]

35 I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.

Anyone 20 years old and above would wander 40 years in the wilderness and die. The only exception being Caleb and Joshua. All those younger will enter the land.

Often, a person attempting to save their own skin by rebelling against God, will do nothing more than cause themselves greater harm and pain. That is certainly what happened here.

Let's move forward in history 40 years to the death of Moses.

Joshua 1:1-9

1 ¶ Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying,

2 Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.

3 Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.

Again, we have the promise of the land.

5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

And we have the promise that no man, no group of people, no army shall be able to stand against Israel, led by Joshua, for the rest of his life.

Each of the words in this verse are very important, please notice "as I was with Moses." This is a reminder of the ability Israel had, by God's power, to enter the land on the first attempt.

And notice "I will not fail thee." Reminding us God has all of the attributes to obtain victory. He is all-powerful and never-failing.

Also "nor forsake thee," which tells of his presence with us - always. He will not leave Joshua, He does not leave us.

But what else is needed?

6 Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them.

7 Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

Joshua, and indeed the people of Israel, would need strength and courage. To do what? Fight, battle, face enemies? No, to fully, intentionally, without deviation, obey God's commands.

Make no mistake: his commands will mean fighting, going to battle, and facing enemies, but they are not the point. He wants us looking to Him and His word. Being always ready and always willing to obey.

8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou

shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

To fear Him, to have a proper perspective of Him and act accordingly, we must look to Him. And not just casually and occasionally, but carefully and constantly. "Meditate therein day and night."

Our eyes must be on Him, not on people or circumstances. (Was this not the case 40 years earlier?)

9 Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

Do not fear. God is with you. These are not religious words that mean nothing! If we know who God is and we know he is with us, wherever we go, then we will not fear.

One of their first encounters in this land of promise serves as a reminder...

Joshua 2:1-14

1 ¶ And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there.

2 And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country.

3 ¶ And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country.

4 ¶ And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were:

5 And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them.

6 But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.

7 And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords: and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate.

8 ¶ And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof;

9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side

Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

11 And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

12 Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token:

13 And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

This seems to me a needed reminder at this point in the story, as Rahab reminds just these two men, but all of us in our study of Israel - who God is. This is key in fearing Him, rather than men.

She believed, based on what she had heard, that this God was mighty to deliver the land into the hands of Israel.

14 ¶ And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.

And these men speak in more personal terms about God, by reassuring her of his kindness and justice.

How then, does Israel proceed?

Joshua 6:1-25

1 ¶ Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in.

2 And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.

3 And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days.

4 And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets.

5 And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

I wonder if we see the fear of the Lord in this? If Israel is to follow these instructions, they must get their eyes of the circumstances and rely fully upon the word of the Lord.

There is no “wisdom of war” in these instructions. This can hardly be called a “battle plan.” Certainly Israel will not be reliant on strategic brilliance. Only the word of God.

What did Israel have to rely upon before? And where did they fix their gaze? Not upon the One who had shown them in many glorious signs and wonders His power, but upon men.

Now, they must fix their eyes upon God. Give Him proper respect and reverence, understanding who He is.

6 ¶ And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests, and said unto them, Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD.

7 And he said unto the people, Pass on, and compass the city, and let him that is armed pass on before the ark of the LORD.

8 ¶ And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns passed on before the LORD, and blew with the trumpets: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD followed them.

9 And the armed men went before the priests that blew with the trumpets, and the rereward came after the ark, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets.

10 And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout.

11 So the ark of the LORD compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp.

12 ¶ And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD.

13 And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them; but the rereward came after the ark of the LORD, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets.

14 And the second day they compassed the city once, and returned into the camp: so they did six days.

Our fear of God works its way out in our actions. Israel was taking action based on what they knew about God. They understood that He had all power, all authority, kept all of His promises, was ever-faithful, and ever by their side. And they acted accordingly.

15 ¶ And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times.

16 And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

17 And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

Israel, like their God, remembers its promises and keeps them.

18 And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it.

19 But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD.

20 ¶ So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

21 And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.

The fear of the Lord produced victory. As Israel had the strength and courage to believe God's word.

This is such a stark contrast to the weeping and complaining of the previous generation. Fear of man was successful only in making things worse.

22 ¶ But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye swore unto her.

23 And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel.

24 And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.

25 And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

The land God promised comes into the hands of Israel in this era. Joshua, the leader who is brave enough to trust God's word, brings them into it.

And included in his final comments to Israel before he dies are these:

Joshua 24:13-14

13 And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat.

14 ¶ Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.