



"The past history of human belief is a cautionary tale."
—Michael Crichton

17-Apr-20

Fear and Faith (Part Two)

In the book of Deuteronomy, [Moses](#) recounts the history of the Israelites' travels up to that point. About eighteen months into the Exodus, the Israelites had come to Kadesh Barnea, which [God](#) had given to them ([Deuteronomy 1: 19-20](#)). God wanted them to use Kadesh Barnea as a base camp for their assault on the land of Canaan. Moses rouses the people with a stirring speech in verse 21, and they reply in verse 22:

"Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; *do not fear or be discouraged.*" And every one of you came near to me and said, "Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come."
(Emphasis ours throughout.)

God had promised them the land, and they had seen miracles daily, but when the time came to move in, they could not do it. They put it off with a suggestion to send in spies. Moses admits, in verse 23, that the plan to send the spies "pleased" him. Did he later regret sending them? He says *every one of them* came to him suggesting this, and he liked it.

However, [Numbers 13:1-2](#) makes it sound like it was God's idea: "And the LORD spoke to Moses saying, 'Send men to spy out the land of Canaan . . .'" Is Moses' memory faulty? After all, he is 120 years old, and 38 years have passed since the event. No, commentators feel that the idea came from the people, and God endorsed it as both a trial and a punishment.

As we know, the spies came back with a discouraging report of strong fortifications and great warriors. Moses relates the Israelites' reaction in [Deuteronomy 1:26-27](#), 29-30: "Nevertheless, you would not go up, but rebelled . . .; and you complained in your tents . . . Then I [Moses] said to you, '*Do not be terrified, or afraid of them* [the Canaanites]. The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you." Some ancient texts translate verse 30 as, "the Word of the LORD shall fight for you"—the One who became [Jesus Christ](#), our Intercessor, Elder Brother, and Trailblazer will go before His people and fight for them!

"[Y]ou saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place" (verse 31). When my family lived near Stone Mountain, Georgia, we would often hike the mile-long trail up the side of the mountain and back down. Down is not so bad, but going up, it gets a bit steep near the top. When my son, Cody, was small, I would put him on my shoulders when he got tired. How many times has God carried us in a similar way? Do we even realize He is doing so when it happens?

Verse 32 concludes, "Yet, for all that [all God did for them], you did not believe the LORD your God." According to tradition, the spies returned with their report on the eighth of Av, and that night, as the ninth of Av began, the people murmured in their tents. So began a long list of calamities to befall Israel on this date, most especially to the Jews, who are something of the "face" of Israel to [the world](#). Both the First and the Second Temples suffered destruction on the ninth of Av. After the Second Temple fell, the Jews declared that the ninth of Av would be a perpetual fast day. Later, in AD 135, the Battle of Betar was lost on this day. In its aftermath, the Roman Emperor Hadrian massacred so many Jews that the Talmud says, with some hyperbole, that the horses were submerged in blood up to their nostrils!

The Jews were expelled from England (July 18, 1290) and from Spain (July 31, 1492) on the ninth of Av, and to them, both World Wars began on it (August 1, 1914, and August 2, 1941). The latter date may require explanation: August 2, 1941, is the day when Heinrich Himmler received approval for the "Final Solution," the Holocaust in which one-third of the world's Jews were exterminated. So, Jews consider August 2, 1941, the true starting date of that war.

Is it a coincidence that all these tragedies fell on the anniversary of the Israelites' total breakdown in [faith](#)? It makes one think!

Here again, we have a situation in which the Israelites reacted with fear rather than with faith. God could not have been more encouraging to them, offering to go before them into the land of Canaan and fight their battles for them. "The sons of the Anakim" ([Deuteronomy 1:28](#)) could not stand before Him! He also pointed out all the times He had "carried" them over rough spots in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet they would not believe that He would get them over the obstacle before them, which, to God, was no more difficult than the others they had faced.

But they refused God's command to take the land, so He condemned them to wander another 38 years through the wilderness until all the adults of that generation were dead ([Deuteronomy 1:34-40](#)). Only Caleb and Joshua, who had given faithful reports, were spared.

Too often, we react like Israel when significant trials arise before us. *This* trial always seems bigger and more dangerous than the ones in our rearview mirror. So, we react with fear rather than with a faith that is supported by perhaps years or decades of experience of God helping us overcome similar huge, crushing trials. Our study of Israel's fearful reactions should clue us in that reacting in fear does not end well.

Next time, we will consider a final example of Israel's fear-or-faith opportunities.

- Mike Ford (1955-2021)

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Numbers \(Part Three\): Poised at the Jordan](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh, reflecting that all of us have anticipated a magic day, like graduating, getting married, birth of children and grandchildren, or getting a promotion, cautions that we must be prepared to wait for the event to happen, living our lives one day at a time. We get ourselves ready for that special day. In the last eleven chapters of the book of Numbers, our forebears spent considerable time waiting, until the first generation who rebelled had perished. Their descendants had grown into a large group, waiting for their time to enter the Promised Land. Are we experiencing the same sensation, waiting in a holding pattern? God wants us to develop patience as we wait for the Kingdom of God. The last chapters in Numbers describe a hard-to-endure, lengthy holding pattern—not much happened. But significant things did occur during that time. The plodders will be the ones to make it into the Kingdom; God calls us to follow Him as obedient children, teachable and leadable. The second generation of Israelites were more teachable as obedient children, unlike their recalcitrant, rebellious parents. Joshua, a type of Jesus, took over the leadership of the people (as a military leader and a shepherd), bringing the gospel of the Promised Land. The antitype of Joshua, Jesus Christ, brought significant change—elevating the law above the letter to the realm of the spirit, laying bare the contents of the mind or heart. We have been called into the chosen generation, a royal priesthood, with minds transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We are required to bring sacrifices of a broken spirit and contrite heart. God wants us to eradicate every single sin, from secret to blatant. As we are waiting to enter the Promised man, we must learn to judge with revealed wisdom.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Wandering the Wilderness in Faith](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Christians must live by faith. But what is faith? John Ritenbaugh navigates the misconceptions of this topic, emphasizing just how vital it is!

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