

Joshua and Caleb Numbers 13-14

To begin today, I want to ask the question: How does God want us to live in a culture that's deeply influenced by fear? I don't know about you, but I think we live in that kind of culture, and I think it's been brewing for a long time and getting worse. I started to see it about 25 years ago when I entered the world of adulthood. In high school and college people seemed to only care about sports, dating, friends, and popularity. But in adulthood I noticed people worried about politics, money, national security, the economy, and so on.

I noticed people would get really aggravated and worried about what they were hearing on Talk Radio. Then we started getting more and more cable and satellite along with 24-hour news coverage and that seemed to add to the agitation and fear. And of course now we have the internet, social media and podcasts and that seems to have brought worry, fear, and anger to a whole new level.

It also seems like most news and media sources, including Christian ones, are using fear and anger to draw people in. And I've seen a lot of manipulative messaging. I remember one day a few years ago when I was running on a treadmill at The Fitness Center in Amery. Fox News was on one TV and I think CNN or NBC was on the other and it was very enlightening, almost comical. It was during President Trump's first term and it was easy to see that one station was trying to make him a hero, and the other was trying to make him a villain. Both claimed to be reporting the news, but it was easy to see that both spun their messaging and stories and used fear and anger to convince people of their point of view.

That approach seems to be common across all media platforms and has been mastered by political parties, economists, nutritionists, doctors, and many others, and it's been very successful from what I can tell. A lot of people are living in fear and anger, deeply convinced of imminent danger from one thing or another and worst-case scenarios at every turn. And it's been going on for a long time. I'm not saying there's nothing we should be concerned about, or that worst case scenarios will never happen. But I do think there is a

reasonable level of caution and awareness and from what I see, our culture is way beyond that.

So, how does God want us to live in this kind of culture? Today we're going to see an infamous story of fear and rebellion in the book of Numbers that led to 40 years of wandering and death in the wilderness. But it's also a story about two men who didn't go with the flow and who weren't swayed by manipulative messaging, fear, or peer or social pressure. They didn't cave in like everyone else did and I hope their examples inspire us and show us the kind of lives God wants us to live in our day and age.

The Israelites left Mt. Sinai in chapter 10. They complained and wailed in chapter 11, which we saw last week. Chapter 12 is a story of sibling rivalry between Miriam, Aaron, and Moses. And by the time we get to chapter 13 the community has already arrived at Kadesh on the southern border of Canaan. They're at the entrance to the Promised Land and it's time to go in and drive out the wicked nations living there so they could take possession of it. Here's how the story begins...

Read Numbers 13:1-4, 17-20.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them.” ³So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the Lord, all of them men who were heads of the people of Israel. ⁴And these were their names... (I won't read the names)

¹⁷Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan and said to them, “Go up into the Negeb and go up into the hill country, ¹⁸and see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, ¹⁹and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad, and whether the cities that they dwell in are camps or strongholds, ²⁰and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be of good courage and bring some of the fruit of the land.” Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes. (late July)

So these men went up and spied out the land. These weren't just any men, but some of the prominent leaders of Israel – each in his own tribe. They were

men of influence. Representatives of the people. Men that people trusted and listened to. They spied out the land, and here is their report...

Read Numbers 13:25-29.

At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. ²⁶ And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷ And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. ²⁸ However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. ²⁹ The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan."

So that is what they found, and before we continue I want to remind you of what God had told the people about the land and the people living there. He said these things on Mt. Sinai when he was establishing his covenant with them...

Read Exodus 23:20-31.

²⁰ *"Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. ²¹ Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.*

²² *"But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.*

²³ *"When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out, ²⁴ you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces. ²⁵ You shall serve the Lord your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you. ²⁶ None shall miscarry or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. ²⁷ I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. ²⁸ And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive*

out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. ²⁹ I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. ³⁰ Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land. ³¹ And I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you.”

This is what God told them and reminded them on numerous occasions. So the people and the spies had full knowledge of these great and wonderful promises, and they had seen God do miraculous things and deliver them from Pharaoh and his mighty army. Though the Canaanites were numerous and had fortified cities and some of them were very tall, the Lord would go before them and give them the victory.

But now we’re going to see what fear and manipulation looks like in political leadership and how the truth can be twisted to control people...

Read Numbers 13:30-33.

But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.” ³¹ Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.” ³² So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, “The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. ³³ And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.”

You know what they’re doing? It’s the same thing we see all over our media today. They are twisting the truth, exaggerating, and telling lies in order to create fear and manipulate people. “The land devours its inhabitants! (exaggeration) Everyone we saw are enormous (exaggeration), we even saw the Nephilim (straight up lie), we felt like grasshoppers and that’s how they viewed us (exaggeration).”

These men were faithless and corrupt, rejecting God's promises, and leading the people astray. Very similar to what we see in our culture, and it worked...

Read Numbers 14:1-4.

Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. ²And 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 had died in this wilderness! ³Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" ⁴And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

Can you hear the fear? The panic? The lies and rebellion? This is how people behave when they ignore God's promises and believe the things that corrupt leaders are feeding them. "We're all going to die! Our women and children will be abused! If only we could go back to the way things were before this guy showed up. We need a new leader!"

Sound familiar? It sound like what happens every 4 years in our culture. We live in a land controlled by fear. Truth is twisted. Worst case scenarios. Outright lies. Promises that everything will be better if we just get the right people in office.

There was a lot of pressure to join the crowd back in Kadesh. But that's the day two men emerged as faithful to God. Men of truth and courage.

Read Numbers 14:5-10.

⁵Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel. ⁶And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes ⁷and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. ⁸If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. ⁹Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear

them.”¹⁰ Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel.

I love what Joshua and Caleb did. They told the truth. They reminded people of God’s promises. They called the people to trust in him and they would see victory. Very inspiring!

But the people didn’t listen. They bought into the lies and manipulation and were blind to the truth. They were actually going to kill Joshua and Caleb, but the glory of God appeared and interrupted their plans. God told Moses he would destroy all the rebellious people right there, but it says that Moses intervened and God relented. The ten rebellious spies died by plague before the Lord, but the rest of the congregation was spared. God didn’t destroy them right there, but he did pronounce judgment...

Read Numbers 14:26-35.

²⁶ And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, ²⁷ “How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. ²⁸ Say to them, ‘As I live, declares the Lord, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: ²⁹ your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, ³⁰ not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. ³¹ But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected. ³² But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. ³³ And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. ³⁴ According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.’ ³⁵ I, the Lord, have spoken. Surely this will I do to all this wicked congregation who are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall come to a full end, and there they shall die.”

What kind of life do you want to live in this culture of fear? Are you going to be one who is convinced of the lies you are hearing and gives in to fear and

manipulation like everyone else? I hope you can see how foolish that is for us as Christians who have been given very great and precious promises. And I hope you can see how much that kind of lifestyle displeases the Lord.

Or are you going to be like Joshua and Caleb? Men who stood firm in faith and truth. Men who believed in God and trusted in his word. Men who had the courage to stand against the lies and fear that was all around them. That's how God wants us to live in a culture controlled by fear.

I hope this story helps us see if we've become like the crowd. Let's take some time to reflect and examine our lives. Do you need to confess anything to the Lord? Have you been believing the lies around you? Are you constantly living in fear and agitation? Confess and repent and turn to the Lord. Put your phone away. Turn off the TV and spend more time in the Bible instead. Find out what promises God has given us, his children, and cling to those promises. Let those control your life, and not fear.