

The Border of Blessing – Numbers 14:1-9

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Set Up

1. As we come to our study, Israel is camped at the southern border of the Land of Promise.
 - a. to the north lies the region known as the Negev, the southern buffer zone between Canaan & the wilderness of the Sinai peninsula.
 - b. the Negev was good pasture & archaeology has shown it held a good sized population.
 - c. the city of Kadesh Barnea was not far from the tents of Israel.
2. This was a crucial moment in the history of the nation.
 - a. God had delivered them out of slavery in Egypt not just so they could wander around the desert -
 - b. but to bring them *into* the freedom & blessing of the Promised Land.
 - c. the entire previous year had been a journey to their new home.
 - d. that journey had taught them Who God was & what He was like.
 - 1) they'd learned He loved them & wanted to be close to them.
 - 2) they'd discovered He was faithful & they could depend on Him to meet their needs & protect them.
 - e. the evidences of His presence & power were before them night & day in the cloud that covered them & the food they ate.
3. And now they stood on the border of the land of Promise.
4. God's salvation of Israel wasn't just *deliverance from bondage*, it was *entrance into the blessings of freedom*.
5. The problem was, just as there had been an enemy to be defeated to *deliver Israel out of Egypt*, there was opposition to be overcome to *bring them into blessing in Canaan*.
6. It seems inevitable that anything good & worth having involves some kind of struggle. So it was for Israel if they were to take possession of the Promised Land.
7. The question is: Would Israel rise to the challenge?

B. The Spies' Report

1. Ch. 13 tells us Moses sent 12 men to scout out the land.
 - a. he took 1 from each of the 12 tribes.
 - b. v. 2 tells us these men were well-respected leaders.
 - c. the task they were tasked for means they were probably *strong* men known as *courageous adventurers*.
2. They took 40 days to travel the length of the land & to see its main features.
3. When they returned they gave their report. It was the classic, "We have good news & bad news."
 - a. "first the good news – the land is incredible!"
 - 1) "it's a rich & prosperous land that produces in abundance."
 - 2) they even brought back some of the produce; 1 bunch of grapes was so heavy it took 2 men to carry it.
 - b. but then they gave the bad news –

- 1) “the people who live there are all battle-hardened warriors who live in massive, fortified cities.”
- 2) “to cap it off – living in the middle of the land are the Anakim – giants.”
 - a) these guys were well-known champions of battle & were considered unstoppable!
 - b) they were mercenaries who sold their services to the highest bidder. But they *lived* in Canaan at Hebron; that was their home.
 - c) attacking the headquarters of the Anakim would be suicide!
4. “Bottom line?” the spies said, “Forget it! There’s **NO WAY** we’ll ever be able to take Canaan. It’s too tough a nut to crack.”

II. TEXT

A. V. 1

¹So all the congregation lifted up their voices & cried, & the people wept that night.

1. Imagine the talks that took place in the tents of Israel as the people went to bed with the report of the spies echoing in their ears.
2. They had to have worked themselves into a thoroughly *demoralized & angry* place.
3. Remember who these scouts were, courageous leaders of their tribes.
4. And their recommendation was, “Go no further North.”
5. To get an idea of how discouraging their report was, imagine if the top 12 NBA players, in preparation for the Olympics, went to watch the Russian national basketball team play some games in Europe & Asia.
 - a. it’s a 40-day scouting trip – to size up the competition.
 - b. when they get back to the States a reporter asks them what they learned.
 - c. Shaquille O’Neal, speaking on behalf of the rest says, “Every player on the Russian team is at least 9’6” & can jump higher than the top of the backboard!”
 - 1) “They never miss a shot & never turn over the ball.”
 - 2) “They get every rebound & block every shot the opposing team makes.”
 - 3) “It’s pointless getting on the court with them. We’re staying home!”
6. When Shaq finishes, 9 of the other players nod their heads in hearty agreement, while 2 guys stand to the side & say, “No! Come on guys – It’s the Olympics. Let’s play!”
7. How persuasive would the testimony of Shaq & the 9 be compared to the 2?
8. There would be much talk in the homes of America over the *pointlessness* of trying to compete with a team of 9’6” highly skilled Russian basketball players.
9. This is what happened that night in the tents of Israel! It was all pointless!
 - a. the deliverance from Egypt, the last year of living in the wilderness were a colossal waste.
 - b. if they didn’t have a destination to go to, a home to arrive at, then why begin this whole thing in the first place?

B. Vs. 2-4

²And all the children of Israel complained against Moses & Aaron, & the whole congregation said to them, “If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! ³Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives & children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” ⁴So they said to one another, “Let us select a leader & return to Egypt.”

1. They say, “It would be better to die of old age in slavery or out here in the wilderness than to be killed in battle with the Canaanites.”
 - a. “What shall we do? Let’s go back to Egypt! We can be there in about a month.”
 - b. “Let’s go back to bondage, to the lash of harsh taskmasters.”
 - c. “Let’s give up the hope & promise of freedom, of building our own homes & let’s go back to slavery, building the houses of the Egyptians.”
2. They even went so far as to start the process of selecting a new leader.
3. They knew Moses was determined to go up & take the land.
4. But that was now out of the question so they decided to select a new leader & make the trek back to Egypt.

-
5. What a slap in the face of God this must have been!
 6. Truly, this is one of the most appalling *rebellions* mankind has committed against God.
 7. It’s an *unreasoned*, no – more than that, it’s an *insane* way to react!
 8. Let’s rehearse the list of things God has **SHOWN** them & **DONE** for them to *prove* His ability to take them into & give them the Promised Land.
 9. There were the 10 Plagues on Egypt.
 - ☛ The pillar of cloud by day & fire by night to lead them on their course in the Wilderness.
 - ☛ Their miraculous deliverance through the Red Sea that broke the back of Egyptian military power for decades after.
 - ☛ Daily manna
 - ☛ Water from the rock
 - ☛ God’s voice from Mt. Sinai speaking the 10 Commandments
 - ☛ The provision of meat in the flocks of quail
 - ☛ if at any time they doubted any God’s reality or presence, all they had to do was look up & see the cloud over their head, a constant reminder of God’s presence, protection, & provision!!!
 10. How could they **NOT** believe God would give them what He’d promised to?
 11. But here they are talking about chucking it all & doing what? → Going back to Egypt, back to slavery!
-
12. Because most of us are so used to this story we may not be as shocked & appalled by it as we ought to be, so let me use this illustration . . .
 13. There once was a woman who was horribly abused by her husband.
 - a. he treated her like dirt; abused her physically, verbally, emotionally, every

- way you can think of – he humiliated her.
- b. when she became pregnant, he dragged her to the abortion clinic & forced her to have an abortion though she wanted desperately to have a child. This happened time & again.
14. One day, another man learned of her desperate condition & took action to *rescue* her.
 - a. He had her husband arrested & sent to prison, then filed papers with the courts to have her marriage annulled.
 - b. he took her to the hospital & had all her wounds & hurts treated.
 - c. once she was healed, he took her to the store & bought her a closet full of beautiful clothes.
 - d. he made sure she ate healthy & delicious meals & spent countless hours talking with her in a tender & loving way that slowly rebuilt within her a healthy sense of who she was & her value as a human being.
 - e. when he asked her to marry him she gladly consented.
 15. Her life as a married woman was even more rich & privileged than before & she enjoyed the best of all things.
 16. Her husband was perfect in every way, in fact, when she thought about it, she was hard pressed to think of a single fault he possessed.
 17. During the first few years of her marriage she occasionally slipped back into her old attitude of being a battered wife but he patiently bore with her until she came through it.
 18. After 5 years, she found out that her *first* husband had been released from prison & was on parole.
 19. Overcome with a desire to see & be with him, she packed a suitcase with the clothes her new husband had bought her, & went running back to him.
-
20. What would you think of such a woman?
 21. We'd say someone like that is terribly lost, mixed up, bent, & well, to be blunt – *stupid!* This is what Israel was doing!
 22. She was turning away from her Savior, her Redeemer, Healer, Provider, Faithful Lover; Her Perfect God – & was running back to WHO? Brutal, harsh, abusive, cruel Egypt!
 23. This was nothing less than INSANE – & Moses knew it. Look at v. 5

C. Vs. 5-9

⁵Then Moses & Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

1. M&A *threw* themselves down to implore the people not to do this.
2. They knew if Israel picked up & began the journey to Egypt, God would move in swift judgment on them.
3. Moses & Aaron were appalled! They were standing on the border of blessing & knew God had promised to give it to them.
4. It was unthinkable the people would balk at this moment.
5. *So what* if the Canaanites were fierce warriors! *So what* if the Anakim were there!
 - a. God said the land belonged to Israel!
 - b. the Canaanites were nothing more than squatters who had to be removed.

- c. hadn't God fought for them against the army of Egypt & given them victory just 1 year before?
 - d. all Israel had stood on the eastern shore of the Red Sea & seen the dead bodies of the Egyptians washing up on the shore.
 - e. they had put their foot on their necks & realized they were indeed free from Egypt!
 - f. well -- the Egyptians were mightier than the Canaanites!
 - g. they had defeated them time & again in battle!
 - h. Moses & Aaron knew that in the contest with the Canaanites, it would not be Israel against the Canaanites; it would be the Canaanites against God! God would fight for them as He had at the Red Sea.
6. They couldn't believe their ears when the people, *standing on the border of blessing*, balked & began plans to return to Egypt.

⁶But Joshua the son of Nun & Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; ⁷and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: "The land we passed through to spy out *is* an exceedingly good land. ⁸If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land & give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk & honey.' ⁹Only do not rebel against the LORD,

7. This was the big mistake the people were making → They were *rebellious* against God by not going into the Land.

⁹Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, & the LORD is with us. Do not fear them."

- 8. Joshua & Caleb were 2 of the 12 spies that had scouted out the land.
- 9. Their report was all good news – no bad!
- 10. Not only was the land awesome, but the people who lived in it could not stop them from taking possession of that which God intended His people to have.

END PART 1 HERE. Then, to start Part 2, back up to "B. 12. above with some introductory comments about where we are.

11. What Joshua & Caleb say in v. 9 is key & what I want to focus on in the rest of our time today –

Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread . . .

12. While the 10 faithless spies saw the Canaanites as an *impossible obstacle*, Joshua & Caleb saw them as the *means* of growth & success!
- a. they didn't see adversity as something *to run away* from but as something that would enrich & empower them.
 - b. they didn't come to this belief *presumptuously*, but because they had absolute confidence God wanted them to take the land!
 - c. God had made His will quite clear – Canaan *belonged* to Israel!
 - 1) He'd given it to Abraham 500 years before.
 - 2) that gift had been renewed to both Isaac & *his* son Jacob.
 - 3) Jacob had given it to *his* 12 sons who'd fathered the 12 tribes.

- 4) & now the tribes were there to take possession of that which *rightfully belonged* to them.
- d. if some poachers had settled in it while Israel took it's long sojourn in Egypt, then it was time for them to leave – plain & simple.
13. Joshua & Caleb rightly reasoned that if the Canaanites didn't leave on their own, then God would give them the strength to remove them.
14. They knew that it wasn't at all about their strength, their ability, their prowess in battle –*they had none* – they were former-slaves who had no experience in warfare.
15. But if the Canaanites decided to resist Israel's advance, then Joshua & Caleb knew they would learn all about battle. They would *become* warriors!
16. So, they didn't see the enemy as something to fear but as something to grow by.
- a. they would get to see God's power in even more dramatic ways than they already had!
- b. they would discover *even more* how faithful God is!
17. Opposition was not something to run away from but to get stronger by!
-
18. Friends – This is what faith teaches us!
19. Opposition isn't something to run *from*, but to *overcome*, and in the overcoming, to be shaped by.
20. Just like the children of Israel – God didn't save us from bondage to sin in this world to let us wander aimlessly through this world till the end & heaven.
21. Jesus saved us from bondage to sin, *from* this fallen world to bring us *into* the blessing of real freedom in the Spirit-filled life in the here & now.
22. Just as God planned to bring Israel into Canaan & give them homes & fields, orchards & flocks – so He wants to bring us into *Spiritual Canaan*;
- a. a life that is at rest & bears *the fruit of the Spirit*.
- b. a life that produces *spiritual offspring* in those who come to faith in Christ because of our witness.
23. But just as there were adversaries who resisted Israel laying claim to that which God had given her, so we face a host of enemies who would seek to keep us from entering into the fullness of the freedom God intends us to enjoy.
24. Israel's adversaries were both *without & within*.
- a. there were 5 peoples in Canaan to contend with; the Amalekites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Jebusites, & the Canaanites.
- b. all of these were fierce fighters, battle-hardened soldiers who'd resisted many invasions by other groups.
- c. & they had all developed their own methods of warfare & different weapons technologies.
25. In the same way, you & I face a vast array of highly-skilled spiritual adversaries who will do their level best to keep us from walking in the Spirit & laying hold of all that God intends us to enjoy.
- a. in Ephesians 6 it's put this way

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord & in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh & blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of

the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, & having done all, to stand.

- b. just as Israel faced different adversaries, so you & I face different spiritual foes who will use different tactics & weapons against us.
 - c. yet, in spite of all that – God has given us all we need to be victorious,
 - d. to be the ones who when all is said & done, it is **WE** who are standing while the enemy has been vanquished a lies defeated on the field of battle!
26. As Joshua & Caleb said to the people of their day, I say to you today – do not fear the enemy – they are our bread!
27. Because God is with us, what the enemy has meant for harm will be turned to good!
-
28. Not only was Israel challenged with *external enemies* in the form of the Canaanites, she was also troubled by *her own doubts within!*
- a. Israel’s greatest threat was *not* the Canaanites: it was her own rebellion & unbelief.
 - b. God would give her the strength to overcome her *external enemies* if she simply moved forward by faith.
 - c. what God *could not* do was *make* her believe!
 - d. that she did not believe in Him was not due to a lack of proof or evidences of God’s love, power & presence.
 - e. Israel’s unbelief was nothing more than a *choice* – a very foolish choice!
29. In the same way, the biggest threat & challenge to our entering in to all the Lord has for us right now is not the devil & his demonic army.
- a. it’s not the world with all it’s seductive enticements.
 - b. our biggest challenge is our own choice, our own decision to follow Jesus or not!
30. Let’s be honest! The world, the flesh, & the devil are not the problem!
- a. the real problem is *me*, the struggle with *self!*
 - b. the *world* would hold no attraction for me *if I didn’t let it!*
 - c. the *flesh* couldn’t influence me if I didn’t *keep* some little part of it alive instead of crucifying it.
 - d. the *devil* would have no opportunity with me if I didn’t *listen* to his lies.

D. Toughen Up

- 1. Look at Joshua & Caleb here! They know that there are some battles ahead, but they are just itching to get to it!
 - 2. Their faith in God had *transformed the adversity* the rest of Israel resisted into a *means of blessing!*
 - 3. That’s what faith in God does, it changes hardship into the means of spiritual growth.
-
4. More & more I am hearing Christians say something that is distressing to me.
- a. people will ask for counsel & direction in some matter.
 - b. most often, I ask them what they think is the right course, what does God’s word say & what He’s been telling them.
 - c. when they tell me, it’s usually what I would have said, so I just encourage

- them to follow through & be faithful!
- d. then I hear these words, “But, it’s so hard!”
5. That’s the whining of faithless Israel. It’s not the faith of Joshua & Caleb!
 6. Let’s ***stop saying*** walking by faith & living in the Spirit is ***hard!***
 7. What’s the alternative? Going back to Egypt? Going back to the world & sin, to death & bondage?
 8. Living in the spirit is only ***hard*** when we’ve not made a complete decision to put off the flesh.
 9. Walking by faith is difficult only because we’ve not decided to believe God ***all the way.***
 - a. we believe Jesus died for our sins –
 - b. do we ***really believe*** He rose again to give us a new life?

III. CONCLUSION

A. On the Border

1. In the same way that Numbers 14 marks ***a turning point*** for Israel,
 - a. right now, many of us at a Numbers 14 point in life.
 - b. some of us are standing at the border of blessing.
2. God has set us free from the ***penalty*** of sin & death.
3. Now He wants to make us free from their ***power.***
4. He longs to bring us into a life that experiences the ***blessings of the freedom*** Jesus conquered death to give us!
5. But some of us are like ancient Israel, stalled on the border of blessing & complaining about how hard it is to walk by faith.
6. Some are even toying with the thought of going back.
7. Being a Christian is more than ***spiritual fire insurance*** – it’s following Jesus ALL THE WAY to ***where ever*** He leads.

B. Let’s Reason

1. What was the ***difference*** between Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Caleb & the rest of Israel?
 2. One thing – ***faith in God***, a faith that was based on the clear evidences of God’s power, presence, provision, & protection.
 3. The proof was the same for all; the only difference between these 4 & the rest is they ***chose to believe*** it!
-
4. If, since becoming a Christian, your spiritual life has been like a long trek through a spiritual wilderness, realize something . . .
 5. The feeling of dryness is ***your own choice.***
 6. God wants to bring you into the Promised Life of Blessing, but you’ve balked. Your unbelief has barred the way.
 7. It’s time to lay down your doubts & fears & take God at His word.

C. Caleb

1. Let me end with this – God judged ***unbelieving*** Israel that day & sentenced them to spend 40 years wandering through the wilderness until the entire adultery generation died off.
2. That’s what they said would be ***better*** than entering Canaan, so God gave them what they wanted.

3. There were only 2 of that generation who went in to inherit the Promised land – Joshua & Caleb – the ones who wanted to go up in the *first place*.
4. When they finally entered the land, Joshua, who'd taken Moses' place as the leader of the nation, told Caleb to take his pick of where he wanted to make his home. His faithfulness from so many years before was to be well rewarded.
5. Caleb picked *Hebron*, the headquarters of the Anakim who were still living there!
6. Caleb was 85 years old! But he knew that God had promised to give them the land & he wanted vindication for his faith in God so many years before.
7. Though he was an old man – he knew he could *still defeat* the mightiest warriors if God was with him. Defeat them he did!
8. Friends – God is faithful – *His power* is not limited to *our strength* but *His blessing is* limited to *our faith* in Him!
9. Believe in God – trust Him – He is faithful!
10. It's time to cross the border between unbelief & faith & enter into the fullness of blessing God desires you to experience.
11. Living in the spirit & walking by faith will not be mean a life without trials & battles – but in Christ, those trials will prove to be the means by which you grow & are made strong!
12. And your enemy will become your bread!