

Numbers 13-14: Fear and Rebellion

By
Peter Martin
May 17th 2026

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.” So Moses sent them from the Wilderness of Paran according to the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the children of Israel.”

-Numbers 13:1-3

We now reach the part of Numbers in which the people of Israel actually rebel against God. Up until this point, the nation of Israel has had some failures before the Lord that have resulted in some pretty catastrophic consequences. The first main one was their fall to idolatry in Exodus 32, and then the various episodes of complaint that we have discussed in Exodus as well as the previous chapters of Numbers (God actually claims that there were 10 instances of complaint in Numbers 14:22). But all of these failures were merely the seed of the true rebellion which takes place in Numbers 14.

To give a brief overview of these chapters, having arrived at the border to the promised land, the nation sends out twelve spies (one from each tribe) to look through the land of Israel for forty days and to give a report of the land. All of the spies return with a consensus report. While the land was indeed “flowing with milk and honey”, it was also inhabited by warrior tribes that had fortified cities and even contained “giants” in their population. Ten of the spies concluded that because of this the people of Israel had no chance at victory and should therefore run back to Egypt and rebel against God.

Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, concluded that even though the report of the other spies was correct, since God was with them to give them the victory, the nation should not be afraid of the inhabitants of Israel, (then known as Canaan) and they should obey the call of God to conquer the land in His Name. Unfortunately, the voice of the ten rebellious spies won the day and the people tried to appoint a new leader to bring them back to Egypt and murder Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb. But before they could do this God appeared in His glory in the Tabernacle of meeting.

God’s immediate response was very similar to what He said in Exodus 32, where He said that He would wipe out the nation in its entirety and then start a new nation from Moses. But, also like Exodus 32, Moses interceded for His people and God turned away

from His full wrath. Instead, God killed the rebellious spies by a plague and sentenced the nation to wander in the wilderness for forty years until all the members of the older generation, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, died and the children of the people could then take the land in their place.

Unfortunately, the rebellion doesn't end there. The nation is so distraught to hear their punishment that they rebel against God again, and try to seize the land rather than waste away in the wilderness. Even though Moses warns them that their efforts won't succeed, they go to war with the Amalekites and the Canaanites and lose badly.

Like the other stories from the book of Numbers, this is not a story of heroism and victory, it is a stern warning about the seeds of discontentment and how they lead us to rebellion against God. And in this story we get to see the vile fruit that the seed produced. Instead of mere complaint against God, the nation devolves into chaos and anarchy as they are driven by fear and self interest to fully reject the call of God and to kill those who want to follow God. So for this paper let's look at the precise mechanism of their rebellion, and the antidote that is expressed by the two heroes of this story, Joshua and Caleb, namely their courage that is rooted in their faith. By doing this we will be able to better fight this sin in our own life and develop the type of courage that saved Joshua and Caleb.

Fear And Rebellion

“So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and 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! “Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” So they said to one another, “Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.” Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.”

-Numbers 14:1-5

As stated before the source of their rebellion seems relatively odd to us. It isn't a massive satanic pride that compels the people of God to rebel against His plans in pursuit of something "better", it isn't born out of lustful desires, it is born out of fear and a lack of faith in the provision of God. Now, I won't say that fear is the "root of all sin" or anything like that. But nevertheless, it is a potent source of sin and can be just as destructive as our other vices if we leave it unattended.

I also need to mention that fear *in and of itself* is not a sin. God has given us our ability to experience fear so that we can be cautious and intentional about our behavior. In fact, the absence of fear or caution is an equally potent source of sin and we call it recklessness. This would be like a young child who doesn't yet know that the world is dangerous and so they frequently put themselves in danger, (some of it life threatening), with no concern for their safety or for the safety of others.

But it is when we are moved by fear that we tend towards cowardice, and in our cowardice we can justify all sorts of terrible sins that we wouldn't normally do in our right mind. We can be faithless to our vows, violent, brutal, self-destructive, and antagonistic towards others all in order to validate and calm our own anxiety. This is why the apostle Paul warns his protege Timothy:

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

-2 Timothy 1:7

The Greek word for "spirit" that Paul uses here is "pneuma" and it is similar to the Latin word for spirit "anima" from which we get our term "animate". What Paul is warning about here is not fear itself, but the "spirit of fear". To put it another way, it isn't the *experience* of fear that Paul is worried about, but the animating power of fear to move us towards destructive and selfish ends.

Look at the Israelites for a perfect example. The same nation that was ready to invade the land of Canaan under the leadership of Moses and Aaron, for the glory of God, is, in a single afternoon, turned from faithful obedience to God, to full on anarchy and rebellion. If you want to see a similar phenomenon, simply look at a crowd that is animated by fear. One of the worst recorded instances of this was in 2015 in Mecca. During the "hajj" or pilgrimage to Mecca that Muslims perform, the crowd broke into a panic and over 2000 people were crushed in the resulting melee.

Many similar instances have occurred throughout human history, but these are merely a visible and obvious manifestation of the same phenomenon that we are talking about here. The people of Israel are moving, not like a nation or even a tribe, but like a mob of panicked individuals. We can see something similar during the crucifixion of Christ. The same disciples that were so faithful to Jesus are so terrified by the mob that comes to arrest Him, that they all abandon Him. A larger scale of this can even be seen during the Covid pandemic of 2020. Now with hindsight we can clearly see that the bulk of the devastation didn't come from the virus, but the panic that the virus created, and the sinister individuals who capitalized on that fear.

In a similar manner, we can see in this account the fear spreading through the nation like a virus as they become increasingly unhinged. And when Joshua and Caleb try to encourage them in faithfulness towards God they respond like this:

“And all the congregation said to stone them with stones.”

-Numbers 14:10

Remember that Joshua and Caleb weren't two random people, they were chosen spies for the nation. Men who had a reputation strong enough to be hand picked in order to bring back a report of the land to the rest of the people. But, under the domination of fear, the nation is willing to throw out their faithfulness to God, the hope of the promised land, (which they had been waiting for for around four hundred years as a people, and over a year in their current form after their exodus from Egypt), to murder two of the most faithful men in their nation, and flee back to the slavery that they had just escaped. Fear is a powerful animating force that can move us from soundness of mind and the most basic dictates of love and decency.

But were there warning signs that the nation was “infected” with fear prior to this instance? The answer is yes. One of the effects of fear is hyper fixation, which is simultaneously one of its greatest strengths and weaknesses. Imagine that you are in a room having a serious conversation with someone when all of a sudden you see out of the corner of your eye a rattlesnake slithering underneath the furniture. All of a sudden, all your attention that was once on the conversation is now hyper focused on the snake and every impulse in your body is animated towards getting away from the threat. This instinct manifests itself in one of three cardinal ways, fight, flight, or freeze.

But, imagine that you lose track of the snake and can't find it. You have a sneaking suspicion that the snake is still in your home, but you can't locate it anymore. That fear impulse that was once directed at getting you out of harm's way no longer has anything tangible to lock on to, and now, in your imagination, you “see” the snake everywhere. Even if you lay down you might “feel” the snake on your body, or “hear” its rattle. The hyper focus that was supposed to keep you out of danger is now working to destabilize you and make your entire life a waking nightmare.

This is simply a tangible example to explain this point. When we are in a state of fear, we can only “see” or notice dangerous things, we can't “see” anything positive. While the state of envy and pride that we saw in the previous chapters were not caused by fear, they were cultivated through a similar mindset. Instead of noticing and being thankful for the provision of God, the people of Israel could only see their lack. Whether

it was the lack of meat in Numbers 11, or the perceived deficiencies that they saw in Moses in Numbers 12, the people of Israel were completely blind to the provisions of God. This lack of gratitude left their imagination starved for goodness, and so when a legitimate threat presented itself, they had nothing to feed their courage. Instead, all they could “see” was the looming threat that they were facing.

Prudence and Cowardice

“Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, “Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, “and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; “whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; “whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there 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. So they went up and spied out the land from the Wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near the entrance of Hamath. And they went up through the South and came to Hebron; Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak, were there. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) Then they came to the Valley of Eshcol, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole. They also brought some of the pomegranates and figs. The place was called the Valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the men of Israel cut down there. And they returned from spying out the land after forty days. Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children 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. Then they told him, and said: “We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. “Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. “The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.”

-Numbers 13:17-29

Even though the nation was already in a state of mind that was susceptible to fear, they needed an occasion to stoke their fear. This instance would have been more understandable, and forgivable, if they were confronted with an “all of a sudden” type threat. Like seeing the nations of Canaan assemble against them or something like that. Instead they were dwelling in relative safety outside of the promised land and were simply trying to get a layout of the land.

Herein lies an interesting, seeming, contradiction in the account. In numbers 13 we are told that God has the nation send out spies, yet, forty years later when Moses is recounting this story to the nation in Deuteronomy he says this:

“And I said to you, ‘You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. ‘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.’ “The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from each tribe.”

-Deuteronomy 1:20-23

In Moses’ retelling of the story, he says that it was the people of Israel who came up with this plan and not God. Why the contradiction? What Moses is illustrating in Deuteronomy is the same problem that we discussed at the beginning of this book. As we discussed a few weeks ago, the book of “Numbers” has an ominous title. To “number” something, or to “take account” of something in the Bible has certain negative connotations to it. It was David’s desire to “number” Israel in 2 Samuel that results in a devastating plague, it’s King Hezekiah’s desire to “take account” of his wealth with Babylonian emissaries that results in the nation being destroyed after his reign, and it is Caesar’s desire to “number” his new empire that sends Jesus’ parents on a journey to their place of origin in the book of Luke.

However, numbering is also something that God directs. In the beginning of this book it is clear that God is commanding the nation to be counted, and in Numbers 13 God does seem to have a hand in sending out the spies in order to “take account” of the land. However, there is an interesting connection between the virtue of prudence and the sins of pride and cowardice. The virtue of prudence is to be cautious, intentional, wise, and discerning. That means, in order to be prudent, we must “take account” of our circumstances, for it is impossible to be prudent if we are ignorant. Consider Paul’s warning to the church at Ephesus:

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise...”

-Ephesians 5:15

To be “circumspect” is to be prudent and discerning in our path. This dovetails nicely with Jesus’ exhortation to “count the cost” in our pursuit of Him (Luke 14:28) and His command to be as “wise as serpents and as gentle as doves” (Matthew 10:16). However, and this is the most frightening thing about our sinful inclinations, our sin can often parade around virtue as a disguise for something destructive and vile, and our

cowardice and pride are two sins that can easily do this. When we are acting in our pride, our desire to “take account” of our assets can be easily justified as a desire to be prudent, when in reality it is an excuse to boast of our success and justify our feelings of superiority and control. We want to believe that everything is in our control and that nothing can take us off guard.

We can see a little of this attitude in Moses when he says:

“Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, “and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; “whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; “whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not.”

-Numbers 13:17-20

This can seem like prudence, and maybe it was for Moses, but for the nation of Israel this was a pretext for pride. They weren’t going up to be circumspect, they wanted to judge the land to see if they could *control* the outcome. To be *certain* that they would come out on top. Which is also a pretext for their cowardice. A coward is someone who follows their fear. This doesn’t mean that a coward will always run away from fights, merely that they will only fight when victory is certain.

Take a school bully for instance. Sometimes a bully can be brave, but oftentimes a bully is actually a coward. The reason why the “prey” on weaker kids is to make themselves feel bold and courageous when in reality they are cowards. This is why, oftentimes, standing up to a bully will make them back down. All their bravado and violence is merely to mask their fear and cowardice.

This is exactly the motive for Israel. They weren’t there to get an honest accounting of the land, they spied out the land to make sure that victory was certain, that there was no real danger to them. This is fear masquerading as wisdom. Let’s take a passage from C.S. Lewis’ brilliant satire, “The Screwtape Letters” to show this point more clearly.

If you haven’t read this book, a little background, “The Screwtape Letters” were written by Lewis as a type of satirical look at demonic temptation. So he frames the letters as a “conversation” between a junior demon named “Wormwood” who is seeking advice from his uncle who is named “Screwtape”. In one letter, Screwtape is trying to teach Wormwood how to use fear in order to tempt the person that he is trying to destroy and he gives him the following advice:

“The main point is that precautions have a tendency to increase fear. The precautions publicly enjoined on your patient, however, soon become a matter of routine and this effect disappears. What you must do is to keep running in his mind (side by side with the conscious intention of doing his duty) the vague idea of all sorts of things he can do or not do, inside the framework of the duty, which seem to make him a little safer... By building up a series of imaginary expedients to prevent “the worst coming to the worst” you may produce, at that level of his will which he is not aware of, a determination that the worst shall not come to the worst... For remember, the act of cowardice is all that matters; the emotion of fear is, in itself, no sin...”

-C.S. Lewis - “The Screwtape Letters”

Notice that it is the “precautions” that are fuel for anxiety. The need to “control” our lives turns our innate desire for the virtue of prudence into powerful fuel for the sins of pride and cowardice. We are warned about this by King Solomon in Ecclesiastes:

“And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. For in much wisdom is much grief, And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.”

-Ecclesiastes 1:17-18

While this passage has many applications, one way to understand it is that when Solomon says he tried to “know madness and folly” he was trying to understand all ways in which he might come to ruin. But instead of finding safety and comfort, he found the effort to be vain and fruitless, and instead of making him more secure, it made him miserable, filled with grief and sorrow. But why?

Part of the reason has to do with our last study about pride. To “cautious” means to be fixated on negative things, especially to do with our own safety. This means that we become increasingly self-conscious when our thoughts are consumed with “what-if” questions.

Facing Giants

“Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.” But 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.” And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. “There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

-Numbers 13:30-33

Another part of the reason is a little more difficult for us to wrestle with and the reason why courage is so important for us to cultivate. The reality is that we live in an incredibly dangerous world filled with threats that are beyond our control. We will talk more about this later, but this is a way to understand the presence of “giants” in the land. When the spies report that they saw the sons of “Anak”, (which literally means “long necked” or “giant”), they later exaggerate the story to say that these sons of “Anak” were related to the nephilim (which is translated “giants” in the New King James version of the Bible).

The “nephilim”, or “fallen ones”, were understood by the Jewish people to be like the cyclops or the ogres of ancient myth. Not that the Jews didn’t believe in the literal existence of the nephilim, but that they used this term as an allusion to a monstrous past that they didn’t understand. Most myths and legends have this at their core. In Norse mythology the frost giants were the first creations of the world and they had to be defeated by the Norse gods. In Greek mythology the colossal Titans ruled the world before the Olympian gods defeated them. And in the Scriptures, the “Nephilim” were the monstrous offspring of the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men” who so polluted this world that God had to destroy them with the flood.

Though it is probable that the spies are exaggerating what they saw in mythic terms, which is another facet of fear, “giants” represent the monstrous unknown. A giant is like a human, but a human grown to monstrous proportions. And a monster is itself, something that we can’t identify and that fills us with fear. The word is itself derived from its Latin root “monstrum” which intimates a dark omen or evil sign. This is why most monsters are an amalgam of various predators that we fear. Like the Greek chimera which is a fire breathing monster that is a mixture of a lion, a goat, and snake. Or the more popular dragon which is a flying, gigantic reptile that can breathe fire. A monster is an amalgam because they represent a mixture of fears that come together.

When facing their fears, their fears start to fragment and come together in monstrous forms that manifest in these “nephilim” who guard the land. And the land itself is said to “devour” the inhabitants. Which means that the very land was seen by them to be monstrous, something that would eat them alive and enslave their children. Which is why the people are depicted as “giants”. The most terrifying monsters in myth are those that are supremely powerful, and also, with human intelligence. This is what makes giants so terrifying, they are infinitely more powerful than us, but they have a type of human intelligence which means they are capable of cunning, malice, and sadism.

This means that a “giant” represents the worst possible fear that we have. Something that “towers” above our understanding, and something that is too big to fight or run away from, and that is too smart to trick or destroy by cunning. They represent the worst possible outcome, the thing that we are most afraid of that can’t be “accounted” for no matter how much time and effort we expend. And in old stories, the “giants” are out there, they are in another realm, or in tartarus, or within the walls of the promised land, but they exist.

Symbolically what we are being told is that if we apply ourselves to “taking account” of our lives, we will inevitably discover “giants”. Take medicine for example. When someone studies to be a doctor they discover just how fragile human health really is. They start to see all the “monsters” that exist in the medical world and how insurmountable they really are. They discover that even with all our medical advances, death is still inevitable and that all they can do is prolong the eventuality of death.

This same idea exists in every field of study. If I want to protect my family, I will discover the same thing. That there are true “giants” in the land. Predators and vile things of all kinds that desire to “prey” on my family, and that no matter how safe I try to make my family, these things exist and can’t be fully “accounted” for. Or even if I try to preserve my society, I realize that in the annals of history, chaos and disorder are far more common than stability and prosperity. And the systems that create stability and prosperity are unbelievably fragile and can be destroyed easier and faster than we think.

Unfortunately our desire to be prudent can merely unveil for us the true danger of the world, and instead of giving us peace, it will show us that the overwhelming majority of people find their peace in their ignorance not their understanding.

True Courage and God’s Provision

“...and you complained in your tents, and said, ‘Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. ‘Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, ‘The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.’” “Then I said to you, ‘Do not be terrified, or afraid of them. ‘The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, ‘and in the wilderness where you 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.’ “Yet, for all that, you did not believe the LORD your God, “who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch

your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day.”

-Deuteronomy 1:27-33

With all that being said, remember, that in Numbers it says that God initiated, or at the very least, approved the sending of the spies. But why? God's plan for His people has always been, and will always be, to make us good, not merely innocent. This is why God allows the snake to go into the garden and why God allows the nations of Canaan to become so powerful. To be a “good” person means more than merely not sinning, it means that we have to actually be virtuous, virtuous to the point that we can actually face our sin and fight it. But in order to do this, we need courage.

In the same chapter I quoted earlier from C.S. Lewis' “The Screwtape Letters”, the demons point out that:

“...courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means, at the point of highest reality...”

-C.S. Lewis - “The Screwtape Letters”

In order to be virtuous, we must learn to be courageous, and in order to be courageous, we must learn to face down our fears for a worthy cause. Which means that the danger has to be actual and not imaginary. If God simply wiped out all the Canaanites with a plague, then His people would never have to confront their fears, they would be insulated from them. In the same way, if there was no “predator” in the Garden of Eden, the obedience of Adam and Eve would be their default, not the result of genuine virtue. In order for Adam and Eve to be truly good, not merely innocent, they would have to face the lies of the serpent and turn down his offer.

This concept helps us understand the symbolism of forty that we see in this story, but also throughout the Bible. Noah's family endures forty days of flood before the rains cease, Moses is on Mount Sinai for forty days in Exodus, the spies are in the land for forty days, and Christ is tempted by Satan for forty days in the wilderness. The number four is related to totality or completeness. There are four cardinal directions, four “corners” of the earth, four seasons in the year, and so on. This base number, multiplied by ten, which also has significance due to the fact that we have ten fingers and toes, produces a number signifying fullness or completion, but completion of what?

In these stories we see that it is something like the fullness of temptation or testing. In the Biblical languages (Greek and Hebrew) the word for “tempting” and “testing” are the same. What this means is that these languages understand that in order for something

to be “tested”, or proven, or perfected, it must first be “tempted” or subject to difficulty or stress sufficient enough to potentially break or destroy it. Consider this passage from the apostle James:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

-James 1:2-4

It is only by trials that “test” our faith that we can become “patient” or steadfast, which in turn “perfects” our faith. But notice what is being perfected here, it isn’t our strength, but our faith. Why is this important? The drive of our fears is actually to do away with faith and replace it with certainty. But the more we do this, the more fearful we become because we will have to confront the fact that the dangers of the world are beyond our control. But what should that do for us? Produce faith, or reliance upon the provision of our God, and it is this that God is seeking to produce within us.

In Genesis 15:16 we are told that Abraham found favor from God by his faith, his trust in the impossible promise that God gave him that he would have a son even though he was too old to have a son. In Christianity we believe that it is only by our faith that we have victory over the most terrible monsters in human history, sin and death. It is by faith that Christ was able to overcome His forty days of testing in the wilderness, and by faith that He endured the cross for the glory of His Father and the benefit of His beloved. Faith is precious to our Father and the most powerful weapons we have in our arsenal for the production of courage and every other virtue that comes from this. The apostle Peter sums up this point like this:

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.”

-1 Peter 1:6-9

Why is faith so precious to God, and why is it such a powerful weapon? First, it is because God desires our love not merely our obedience. And love, true love, can only grow out of the soil of genuine trust. To “believe” in God, means to rely on Him, to depend on Him, and to trust Him with all that we are. In order to refine that trust though, we have to go through the fire. We have to confront things that are beyond our control

so that we might give God the glory for His victory. This is why stories always have giants and monsters guarding treasure in the same way that the “giants” in Canaan guarded the “treasure” in the land. The treasure represents this more important spiritual gift, the gift of faith, courage, and steadfastness which are far more valuable than any physical treasure.

To use a famous story, consider the classic story of Jack and Beanstalk. Jack and his mother are starving to death, and after Jack traded his cow for magic beans which produce an enormous beanstalk that leads to the castle of a giant, he must climb the beanstalk in order to obtain treasure for him and his mother. Each time he ascends and descends the beanstalk, he receives a greater treasure, but also increases the danger to himself. This is again a picture of the treasure that the giants guard.

Jack is a young man without a father and he is learning what it means to be a man and to provide for his mother. Because of this, he must willingly face the danger of the beanstalk and the giant in order to bring back treasure that preserves him and his mother. And we can think of the treasures that he brings back, the gold, the hen that lays golden eggs, and the golden harp, as the various “lessons” that he has learned as his character is refined in “the furnace”.

But this pattern isn’t just for this story. In most mythic stories, the hero has to defeat a monster or a giant to find their treasure and establish their kingdom. Even King David has to kill a giant in order to establish his calling as the future king of Israel.

When God points to His past provision for the people of Israel that is what He is trying to articulate to them. Each miracle of provision was given during a time of testing, and within this season of testing there was a “treasure” that God wanted His people to be enriched by. Instead, as proven by their complaints and their fears, they only grew in their entitlement and their selfishness. They hadn’t come to love God more, only to love their own desires and ambitions. They would follow God only as long as God’s calling matched up with their desires. But this is not faith, this is not love, and therefore, this couldn’t possibly create genuine courage.

And here is the interesting point. A selfish person can confront their fears, but this doesn’t make them any less cowardly. Throughout history we can find people fighting for their beliefs and doing many dangerous and violent things, but this didn’t make them courageous, merely selfish and reckless. Even at the end of the story we are told that Israel did fight their enemies, but this resulted in a catastrophic outcome. Why? Because this action was a product of the same selfishness that made them want to run

from God's call. Now that God was calling them to dwell in the wilderness, they rebelled again out of their own self-interest.

We'll look at this point more next week, but we can tell that Moses understands this lesson during this chapter. We can tell this by his prayer of intercession for the people, (which is what we will study next week), but also in an interesting new name that he gives his protege Joshua:

"These are the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua."

-Numbers 13:16

Before he sends out "Hoshea" to spy out the land, he changes his name to "Joshua". Hoshea was a name that meant "salvation" in Hebrew, to add the prefix of "Ja" or in Hebrew "Ya" was to add God's covenant name, Yahweh, to Hoshea's name. Now his name doesn't just mean "salvation" it means "God is salvation", or "Yahoshea" which is the same basic name given to Jesus, or "Yeshua", over a millennium later. The message is clear. The purpose of this testing period was not merely to seek salvation, but to seek *God* as their salvation. Joshua and Caleb understand this lesson which is the source of their boldness, but the nation of Israel doesn't.

The Fear of the Wicked

"The fear of the wicked will come upon him, And the desire of the righteous will be granted."

-Proverbs 10:24

It is the curse of God that I find most interesting. The fear of the Israelites is that they wouldn't be able to protect their wives and children, a common fear for most men, but the punishment that they suffer is that they would perish along with their wives and their children would have to face the giants that they ran from. This account establishes a deep Biblical truth, if we are overcome by our fear, our fears "come upon" us.

This is not a divine curse by the way, it is merely a true statement about reality. Our fears produce the reality that we are afraid of. Take a person who is afraid they will die alone. This fear will either make them so picky when selecting a romantic partner, or so terrified of the opposite sex that they will never be able to find a romantic partner and they will end up dying alone. Or someone who is afraid of getting sick. They will be so paranoid of getting sick that they will make themselves sick in their anxiety.

The same thing is true here. If we don't willingly confront our fears, we will end up being undone by them, and leave our children with the things we couldn't confront. Let's take a common iteration of this, midlife crisis'. What causes a midlife crisis? While the actual cause is a little complex, a simple way to understand it is that when we reach a particular milestone of life, which can be different for most people, we become acutely aware of our age and our mortality.

Within this season, we are confronted with all the parts of our life that we have left unattended. We might focus on our career, our marriage, our health, and many other things and realize that we haven't attained what we wanted in any of these areas. This produces a type of fear in us that results in the familiar fight, flight, or freeze formula. As such, we are then motivated to confront these fears.

However, what many people do is they actually avoid the things that they are really afraid of and take unnecessary risks that establish their fears. Let's say a man feels unfulfilled in his career. Instead of taking concrete steps in addressing this fear, he might instead, impulsively, quit his job and put his entire family in jeopardy to pursue some fantasy. Or, maybe someone is unhappy with their marriage, but instead of doing the hard work of bettering their marriage, they will risk an extra-marital affair, or a divorce, to try to rectify their fear.

All of these solutions will, ironically, create the very problems that they were afraid of. This fits into something we talked about earlier. True courage is based in faith and care for others, it isn't selfish.

Joshua and Caleb

"But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and 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. "If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.' "Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them."

-Numbers 14:6-9

This is what made Joshua and Caleb successful in this story, and why God preserved them amongst all their contemporaries. Joshua and Caleb are not interested in personal glory, but the glory of God. They are willing to do something scary to please the Lord and so they are able to overcome their own personal discomfort and worry. They even

risk the fury of the crowd, in a way that is even more bold than Moses and Aaron. Once again this isn't for personal gain, but for the nation itself and the glory of God above all else.

This is where the symbolism of the story gets truly amazing and points to Christ in some unexpected ways. We have already talked about how Joshua's name has the same meaning as Jesus' name, and so he becomes a picture of Christ. Joshua will lead the nation into the promised land, which is a symbol of Eden, and establish the nation of Israel in a way that Moses failed to accomplish.

But his friend Caleb also has an interesting name and meaning within this story. First, we are told that Caleb is a Kenizite. The Kenizites were not Hebrews, but they were actually Canaanites. This point is further shown through his name. While Caleb in Hebrew can mean a couple things, it's main meaning is actually "dog". In the west we tend to see dogs in a more favorable light, but in the Middle East, dogs were unclean animals and were looked at as "pests".

However, in this story the one who is descended from the "enemy", the one who is called the "dog" was able to recognize a truth that the people of Israel failed to grasp. And in this, a radical prophecy is given to us about God's deliverance and salvation.

During Jesus' earthly ministry there is an instance that brings confusion to many believers. In the gospel of Matthew we are told that a Canaanite woman comes to Him asking for Him to heal her daughter and they have this interesting exchange:

"But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour."

-Matthew 15:26-28

In this account we have Jesus, who shares a name with Joshua, interacting with a Canaanite where He refers to her as a dog. Instead of getting offended though, she seems to embrace the title and still speak to Him as her "Master" at which point Jesus commends her faith and heals her daughter. This seems to be a reference to this story in Numbers. God sends out spies to see the great land that He desires to provide for the people. But the only two people who believe in the promise of God are Joshua, the man who will eventually lead the people into the land, and a Canaanite named Caleb, or "dog". Because of his faith, the outsider, Caleb, enters into the promised land and the

generation of Israelites that rejected the promises of God were kept out of the land for a generation of time.

Then in the book of Matthew, we have Jesus who is sent by God to proclaim the great deliverance that God has in store for His people. However, the majority of the Jews reject His message, but this Canaanite woman, who seems to be familiar with this story from Numbers, sees the freedom that God is offering and submits herself to Jesus in order to find freedom for herself and her family. As a result, she enters into the freedom that Christ offered while the Jews who rejected Jesus as their Messiah are kept from the promises of God, for a time.

Which leads to a final point that I wanted to make. We are told that Christ came into the world to undo the curse brought onto mankind by our own rebellion and sin against God. But when mankind were kicked out of the Garden, they continued to “fall” until God wiped out the world with a flood. The progression of this “fall” was Cain’s murder of his brother, Cain establishing a society with cities, and finally the arrival of the Nephilim and the curse of the flood.

The structure that God gave to His people in the Tabernacle was to reverse the curse of sin and death so that they could find their way to the promised land, which represents Eden, the place where God can dwell with mankind. And so, they move through the flood waters by crossing the Jordan river, they confront the Nephilim, they confront the walled cities that are established by violent and murderous tribes, and then finally into the land where God has chosen to dwell with His people.

Jesus goes through the same structure. He goes through a “baptism” of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, He enters the walled city of Jerusalem, and then confronts the real “giants” that the Nephilim are a mere picture of. The monstrous reality of sin and death that can’t possibly be defeated by mankind no matter how hard we try. He slays these giants and ascends to His own kingdom and establishes a new Eden where God and man can dwell together.

Even though this story in Numbers has a depressing ending, even in their greatest failure God reveals a pattern of salvation and deliverance that His Son would fulfill in the future. And in Christ, who is a greater “Joshua”, we find deliverance from sin and death, forgiveness for our shortcomings, and life everlasting in Him.

“He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”

-1 John 3:8