

The People's Reaction to the Spies' Report

Numbers 14:1-19

"So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. ² 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!" ³ 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?" ⁴ So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt."

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

⁶ 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; ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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.'^[a] ⁹ 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."

¹⁰ And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel.

¹¹ Then the LORD said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? ¹² I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."

¹³ And Moses said to the LORD: "Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, ¹⁴ and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, LORD, are among these people; that You, LORD, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. ¹⁵ Now if You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying, ¹⁶ 'Because the LORD was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness.' ¹⁷ And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, ¹⁸ 'The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.'"

Background Notes

Numbers 13 gave the account of the twelve spies scouting out the land of Canaan. Numbers 13:17-20 - *“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.”* The scouting mission took forty days, and the spies traveled about 500 miles. They went as far north as the country of Lebanon today.

When they returned, the spies reported the good news: the Land of Promise was a good and productive land. It was a land that “flowed with milk and honey,” just as God had promised. They even brought back a bunch of grapes so large that two men had to carry it on a pole between them!

But their report also contained bad news: Israel would not be able to enter the Land because the cities were heavily fortified, and the people were too strong to be conquered. Not only that, there were “giants” in the land, and these giants were so huge that the spies felt like grasshoppers in comparison! So ten of the twelve spies said that it was a hopeless cause. The people of the land would surely overpower Israel.

Only two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, had the faith to believe that the fortified cities and giants were no problem for God. Joshua and Caleb said, “No problem! One + God is a majority, so we can do it!”

Unfortunately, the people of Israel believed the negative report of the ten spies - and they were wrong! They compromised; they didn't trust the Lord. They didn't stop believing in God, but they stopped believing in **what God could do**. Only a short time before, God had brought them out of Egypt after the ten plagues. God had parted the Red Sea for them, and the Egyptian army drowned in the sea. But now, instead of trusting God to bring them into the Land, they began to talk about going back to Egypt! Can you imagine **that** scenario? Go back to Egypt? How do you think the new Pharaoh would have treated those escaped slaves? And yet they actually talked about going back to Egypt!

The people even considered stoning Joshua and Caleb to death! Was this the same group of people who sang in victory after they crossed the Red Sea? What a change! What had happened to them? They had compromised in their faith. One of the definitions of compromise is “to make a shameful concession” - and that was certainly true here. The people of Israel made a shameful concession when they heard the negative report of the ten spies.

Doctrinal Points

1. The sin of compromise results from unbelief in the human heart.

The sins of the wilderness could be pictured or diagramed as a tree. Draw a picture of a tree with roots, trunk, branches and leaves. Label the trunk of the tree “**Pride**”—it's the “Tree of Pride.” Now label the roots of this Tree of Pride “**Self**,”

and label the ground containing the roots the “**Sinful Nature.**” The Tree of Pride, with the roots of Self, is rooted in the Sinful Nature that we all possess.

The title of our Tree Diagram: “**The Sins of the Wilderness.**” Now think of four branches on this Tree of Pride. Label them the branches of **Discontent**, **Jealousy**, **Unbelief**, and **Rebellion**. Each of these branches has leaves - “**C**” leaves.

1. The branch of **Discontent** has leaves of **Complaining** (Numbers 11).
2. The branch of **Jealousy** has leaves of **Criticism** (Numbers 12).
3. The branch of **Unbelief** has leaves of **Compromise** (Numbers 13 & 14).
4. The branch of **Rebellion** has leaves of **Contempt** (Numbers 16).

All these leaves and branches apply to us today, just as much as they applied to Israel then. You can be sure that when the leaf of complaining is in your mouth, the sin of discontent is in your heart. When the leaf of criticism is in your mouth, the sin of jealousy is in your heart. And whenever you make concessions, and compromise in your walk of faith, there is some measure of unbelief in your heart. The sin of compromise results from unbelief in the human heart.

Now remember – we’re not talking about salvation. You are saved and a true Christian if you’re trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior. We are talking here about **living** the Christian life **by faith**. Do we **really believe** the promises of God, and the Word of God - or are we making concessions, and compromising in some way in our walk of faith? Do we doubt God’s ability to guide us and give us victory? Or should we be labeled “people of compromise”? Are we fully committed to trust Him with our lives? The sin of compromise results from unbelief in the human heart.

2. The sin of compromise results in loss of the abundant life.

God had **promised** His people a good land, and victory, and His blessing! He had miraculously led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness, and He was ready to take them into the Promised Land. But the people of Israel failed in their faith. They compromised, and believed the negative report of the ten spies. Even though on that very day they were eating God’s miraculous provision of manna from heaven, yet they would not believe God’s promise to give them victory in the Land!

“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?” (v2-3). Sadly, they would get their wish – all of them, except for Caleb and Joshua, would die in the wilderness, and would never enter the Promised Land. Ironically, the very children that they claimed to be worried about would eventually enter the Land – but not until forty years later.

The lesson for us is obvious. The sin of compromise results in the loss of the abundant life that God has promised us. In John 10:10, the Lord Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”* So here’s the question to us: Are we living and experiencing the abundant life as believers? Or is our life filled with the “D’s” – **doubt, discouragement, depression, dismay, despair -- and other “D’s”?**

These “D’s” are the fiery “D” darts of Satan, and they’re not being quenched in our lives when we compromise in the faith. They’re not quenched when don’t put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6). What’s the underlying sin here? The underlying sin is **unbelief!** We don’t **really believe** that the abundant life - the life that’s associated with 100% commitment - is a far better life than what this world has to offer! Oh, we may say that we believe it, and we may even agree that it would be a better life. But if we **really believed** it, most of us would have to make some changes in our lifestyle. Right? The sin of compromise results in the loss of abundant life.

Practical Application

Let’s be more concerned for God’s glory than for our own glory!

Verses 17-19: *‘And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, ‘The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.’*

If God said to you that He was going to remove the rebellious people and make a great nation from your descendants instead, what would you have said? I probably would have said, “Go ahead, Lord! Who am I to interfere with your plans?” But not Moses! Moses was concerned for God’s Name, and God’s honor, and God’s glory! Moses was concerned that the Egyptians and Canaanites would be able to say that the God of Israel was weak and unable to fulfill His promises!

So Moses prayed for forgiveness for the people. What an example for us! Moses knew that God must judge sin, and that the effects of sin ripple down through the subsequent generations (v18). But Moses also knew that God was glorified in His abundant mercy and in His grace and loving kindness (v19), and he prayed on that basis. Let’s be more like Moses! Let’s be more concerned for God’s glory than for our own glory.