

AN EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF

TEXT: NUMBERS 13:25—14:12

Introduction:

1. I have entitled this morning's message, "An Evil Heart of Unbelief" (cf. Num. 13:32a).
2. Hebrews 3:12 says, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."
3. In fact, the book of Hebrews, with all of its strong warnings about unbelief and turning back, should be studied carefully alongside Numbers 13 & 14.
4. According to the Bible, unbelief inevitably leads to other grievous sins. Unbelief leads to terrible backsliding. Unbelief provokes God to anger (Numbers 14:11).
5. Unbelief robs the Christian of the joy of the Lord and the blessings of God. God wants to bless us, but unbelief hinders God from blessing us.
6. Numbers 13 & 14 deal with the account of the spies sent by Moses into the land of Canaan ("the Promised Land").
7. Twelve spies (one from each tribe) were sent out to search the land, but ten of them brought back "an evil report" (Num. 13:32, 33).
8. This evil report discouraged the people, and fear and discouragement led to crying and murmuring (14:1-3).
9. We know from Deuteronomy 1:22, 23 that the idea for sending spies originated with the people. "And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us..." (1:22).
10. The idea pleased Moses (1:23). God allowed it as a way of testing the Israelites.
11. Unfortunately, most of them failed the test. Joshua and Caleb passed the test with flying colors (Num. 13:30; 14:30, 38). But the others failed the test and were judged by God for their unbelief.
12. God does not test us so He can learn anything. God is omniscient and He knows everything. The testing is always for our benefit (cf. Genesis 22:1, 2; John 6:5, 6).
13. Job said, "But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

I. UNBELIEF LEADS TO BACKSLIDING

1. The ten fearful spies described the fruitfulness of the land, but then added, "Nevertheless..." (13:25-28).

2. Their words in verse 27 are words of faith, but their words in verses 28 and 29 are words of unbelief.
3. It was as if they had completely disregarded what God had told them about the Promised Land. It was as if they imagined God did not know about the great walled cities, and the giants, the children of Anak, and the Amalekites, and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites (cf. Num. 10:9).
4. Faith always looks at the opportunities. But unbelief always looks at the obstacles. George Muller said he rejoiced over obstacles, because he would eagerly anticipate seeing God remove them.
5. That is faith!
6. Caleb and Joshua were men of faith. Three thousand and five hundred years have passed and we honor their memory. Their names are well known to those of us who love the Word of God.
7. But how many people remember Shammua, Shaphat, Igal, Palti, or any of the other faithless spies?
8. By the way, these Scriptures remind us of the danger of bad leadership. It is very important that those in leadership lead the right way. These ten spies led the people into fear and unbelief.
9. Faithless people even talk differently than faithful people. For example, the faithless spies said, “We came unto the land whither thou sentest us” (13:27). They should have said, “the land God promised us” or “the land God gave us” (cf. 13:32 – “The land, through which we have gone to search it.”
10. Contrast their words with the strong words of Caleb (13:30).
11. the faithless spies considered themselves as little “grasshoppers” (13:33), and in many ways they were. Today we have churches full of spiritual grasshoppers!
12. In contrast to the faithless spies’ evil report, Caleb assured the people that God would go before them and lead them and protect them and bless them (Num. 13:30).
13. Caleb was like the apostle Paul, who wrote, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).
14. “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37).
15. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13).
16. Let us look at another contrast. The ten faithless spies argued that the promised land was “a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof” (Num. 13:32).

17. Compare that with the words of Joshua and Caleb, “Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us” (Num. 14:9).
18. Joshua was originally called *Oshea* (“salvation”) in Numbers 13:8. But Moses called him *Joshua* (“Jehovah is Salvation”) in Numbers 13:16 (cf. Numbers 14:6, 30, 38, etc.).
19. Contrary to Joshua and Caleb, the unbelieving spies insisted that the situation was hopeless (13:31-33). Unfortunately, their unbelief spread like a cancer among the children of Israel (14:1, 2).
20. Unbelief always leads to backsliding – crying, murmuring, griping, complaining, and rebelling (14:1-3).
21. The backsliders wanted to turn back to bondage in Egypt (14:4). They had forgotten everything God had done for them (cf. Deut. 5:15; 7:16-18; 15:15).
22. John Newton, the wicked slave trader who was gloriously saved and went on to become a great preacher, author, and hymn-writer (“Amazing Grace”), put over the mantelpiece in his home a plaque with Deut. 15:15 inscribed.
23. “And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee...”
24. The plaque still remains in his home to this day, over 200 years later.
25. God was constantly telling the Israelites, “that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life” (Deut. 16:3; cf. 16:12; 24:18, 22; Joshua 24:6, etc.).
26. Thank God, there were still a few men of God who were not swept up in the murmuring. “Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces...” (14:5).
27. “And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes...” (14:6-9).
28. But the backsliders did not respond properly to the prayers and admonitions of Moses and Aaron, and Caleb and Joshua. In fact, they wanted to stone them to death (14:10).

II. GOD REACHES OUT TO THE BACKSLIDER

1. At first, God wanted to disinherit the entire nation of Israel, and smite them with the pestilence, and then make a new nation with Moses (14:12).
2. However, Moses interceded for the people (14:13-19). Here is a great lesson in the power of importunate, intercessory prayer.
3. And in response to Moses’ great prayer of intercession, God granted them a pardon (14:20).
4. Just like the Syrophenician woman, Moses pleaded with God. Our Lord commended her, and said to her, “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt” (Matthew 15:28).

5. In response to Moses' great prayer of intercession, God granted Israel a pardon (14:20). However, there were terms to the pardon. God does forgive us and restore us when we backslide but there are consequences. Sin always brings chastening, and sometimes it even brings death.
- "But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD" (14:21). If God's glory is to fill the earth, God's justice cannot be withheld. Therefore, there were terms to God's pardon.
 - Backslidden, rebellious Israel saw God's glory, and His great miracles, which He did in Egypt as well as in the wilderness, and yet they tempted God "ten times" and have not hearkened to His voice (14:22).
 - The "ten times" are not enumerated, but this would include their constant murmuring and complaining – at the Red Sea, at Marah, in the wilderness at Sin, etc.
 - Though the "ten times" are not listed, we can be certain God keeps an accurate record.
 - The backsliders would not enter the Promised Land (14:22, 23, 25). The LORD said, "Get you into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea" (Num. 14:25).
 - Caleb and his seed would be allowed to enter, because Caleb followed the LORD "fully" (14:24). Joshua would also be allowed to enter (14:30, 38).
 - Those twenty years old and upward would die in the wilderness (14:26-32).
 - The Israelites would wander through the wilderness for 40 years, one year for each day the spies were in the land (14:33, 34; cf. 13:25).
 - The ten spies who gave the evil report were immediately killed by God (14:36-39).

III. THE SAD FATE OF THOSE WHO ARE DETERMINED TO BACKSLIDE (14:39-45).

1. The immediate response of the backslidden people to the announcement of judgment was great mourning (14:39).
2. However, mourning does not necessarily lead to genuine repentance (illustration: 9/11/2001).
3. The people confessed, "We have sinned" (14:40b). But oftentimes these confessions are meaningless.
4. In Exodus 9:27, we read, "And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked."

5. But Pharaoh was not sincere. For we read a few verses later, “And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants.”
6. Then in the next chapter, we read, “Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the LORD your God, that he may take away from me this death only” (Exodus 10:16, 17).
7. And then a few verses on we read, “And Pharaoh said unto him, Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die” (Ex. 10:28).
8. Confession of sin means nothing if it is not genuine. Many RC’s go to their priest and confess their sins, and then turn around and commit those very same sins over and over again.
9. In Shakespeare’s play, *Hamlet*, the impenitent king Claudius tries to pray but he cannot. He says,
“My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.”
10. Many times I have prayed with impenitent sinners and insincere backsliders. Their words fly up, but not to heaven!
11. We have clearly seen how unbelief leads to terrible backsliding, murmuring, confusion, and rebellion. It also leads to insincere repentance and foolish presumption (14:44).
12. The Israelites were repeatedly told that they were to enter the Promised Land, and that God would go before them (cf. Exodus 33:1, 2).
13. But the backslidden Israelites were very confused in their thinking. They were afraid to go forward with God, but they were not afraid to go forward without God (Num. 14:40-45).
14. The idea behind the word “presumed” (14:44) is “headstrong” and “reckless.” Moses plainly told them, “Go not up, for the LORD is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies” (14:42).
15. The LORD already told them, “Get you into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea” (14:25).
16. “For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you. But they presumed to go up...” (14:43, 44a).
17. They were delusional. They ignored the warning from Moses. They ignored the Lord’s clear commandment (14:25).
18. In their haughty self-confidence they were determined to go up unto the hill top without the LORD (14:44).

19. Some people are determined to do wrong. They will not obey God's man (in this case it was Moses). They will not obey God.
20. Verse 45 says, "Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah" (the name *Hormah* means, "complete destruction").
21. Years later, this whole sad story was summarized by Moses in Deuteronomy 1.

CONCLUSION:

1. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. Do you have faith?
2. DL Moody said, "real true faith is man's weakness leaning on God's strength."
3. Are you "leaning on God's strength"?
4. George Muller said, "Faith is the assurance that the thing which God has said in His Word is true, and that God will act according to what He has said in His Word. This assurance, this reliance on God's Word, this confidence is faith."
5. God had already told the Israelites that He would give them the Promised Land – way before the spies had ever stepped foot in the land.
6. God has given us His Word. Do we have faith to believe it?