

The initial response to the report of the spies was to capitulate and imagine that returning to Egypt the land of their bondage was a more acceptable fate than to face their fears and invade the promised land as God intended them to do. Like so many other failing men they used their wives and children as an excuse for inaction and surrender *"that our wives and children should be a prey"*. They considered it preferable to have either died in Egypt and never left or to have perished in the wilderness during the past two years, what a travesty!

The divine analogy of the escape of Israel from Egypt being a metaphor for the deliverance from sin and death, is interesting to consider here, as this shows the idea that people would spurn the gracious offer of God and instead return to the state of condemnation in Adam, which only Christ can save them from. How many people baulk at the need to endure to the end when they follow Christ, when the going seems tough, like so many giants confronting them, these giants are more real to them than the promises God has made to save them and make them victorious!

Joshua and Caleb, always two, as no one man can fully represent the Christ, both rent their clothes because of the audacious failure of morale amongst the nation. We should not be surprised to see so many others collapse around us in light of this and it should provoke a reaction in us of deep regret and sadness. Renting one's clothes is a public demonstration that all we have done thus far to equip us for the road ahead was insufficient and that must in effect start again. It is something not done lightly but an action of profound remorse. These two faithful spies are the example that should empower us onwards to greater sympathy with the path of Truth and righteousness. However, are we not more often like the other spies who were intimidated by the fears and anxieties which this world confronts us with!

When Joshua said that the people of the land are *"bread for us"* v9, this did not mean that the Israelites would become cannibals and literally eat their enemies but rather that the vanquishing of their adversaries would strengthen them and feed them as a people to advance their cause. God provided such trials and tribulations to fashion them and we are no different in this respect.

In response to their pleas to trust God and believe in His promises *"all the congregation bade stone them with stones"*. This is indicative of the perversion of humanity which will turn things around in the opposite direction and call good evil, and call evil good, just as so many are literally doing right now over the Israeli response to the attacks by Hamas. These were their fellow Jews who were threatening them with death for daring to call the nation to account. If we stand for the promises of God over the exhibition of human fears, then we should not be surprised if we also receive a similar response to these faithful men.

God spake with Moses and offered him the opportunity to *"make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they"* v12. As when God offered this to Moses before, Exodus 32v10, the great leader of this people declined. God was testing Moses. They both knew very well that God had worked with a failing nation, because all flesh fails, and that He would continue to work with a failing nation, because He wanted to save the few, the remnant that remained. We are corrupt at our core and spoilt goods, and yet in His

mercy He continues to work with us. The nation was full of all sorts of people it was not a requirement for every Jew to be an individual believer, and indeed the majority were not. However even amongst the believers many turned back having begun the journey in faith but then subsequently reneging on their commitment. The weak fall by the wayside and no one stops to help them up. Often those that stoop to assist get snarling rhetoric in response to what they were trying to do, from the very people they were trying to help. Ow must God view such behaviour! All day long He held out His hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people, Romans 10v21.

In discussion with God, Moses almost seems to be negotiating with Him, but we must not be deluded into thinking this. It is never appropriate to think that we can bargain with God, by offering something to Him in exchange for something else. Yes, Hannah seems to do this very thing in 1 Samuel 1v20-28 however it was rather a pouring out of her soul v15, and she gave up her son not because she had made a deal with God, but because it was an appropriate thing to do – **lending him to the LORD!**

With Moses it was a record of his appreciation of the surrounding facts which they both were very well aware of. God did not need to learn any new information from Moses about the surrounding people, as if Moses understood how the Canaanites or Egyptians viewed things better than He did. God did not need to learn any information at all from Moses, as He knows everything, nor did He need to be told things by Moses in order to see things from the point of view of a human, as the potter fashioned the clay and understands it better than it does itself! God understands our viewpoint, often in all its foolishness, very well.

This was instead an opportunity for Moses to show the harmony with which he approached the subject. That Moses was beginning to think like God thought. What a thought, that we can evolve our thought processes into better channels than the foolishness of the flesh! That the New man, the mind of Christ might be in us, and eclipse and push down, although not yet eliminate, the thinking of the old man and the reasoning of the serpent.

“The LORD is long suffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation” v18. This statement by Moses is an echo of Exodus 34v6,7. He had been listening. He was in tune with the sentiments of the Almighty. That this was restated in the context of open rebellion and national condemnation, of which the Holy Spirit comments retrospectively in Hebrews 3v16-19, is interesting. It shows that we must never lose sight of divine mercy even when God is punishing the unbelievers with death. Not then divine mercy for the individuals who rebelled, but rather divine forgiveness for the nation as a whole, because of the Fathers and because of the Word, they were and are the people of the Book and were used by him, even in unbelief, to preserve and perpetuate the Word, even as unbelieving so called Christians have been used by Him in subsequent eras to preserve and perpetuate His Word in the New Testament also.

There was to be mercy and forgiveness for the few who are prepared to strive to honour God and keep His commandments, not mercy and forgiveness to the wanton sinners who rejected Him. God is not a man that He should repent, and He punished the nation

of Israel severely in many ways down through history, recorded in the bible and in secular annals, including the holocaust. Forgiveness is not unconditional and is to be tempered with *"and by no means clearing the guilty visiting the iniquity of the fathers..."* We reap what we sow, make no mistake. The Truth allows us to keep sowing every day, in the hope that new and acceptable growth may emerge from the spirit word implanted in our brains bringing forth godly actions and indeed thoughts!

Why the third and fourth generation? Elsewhere ten generations are mentioned, so it is not a universal principle, see Deuteronomy 23v2,3. The idea seems to be linked with the family influences that pervade down through the generations. As people, we are not really influenced by our ancestors' views and opinions further back than our grand parents or possibly our great grand parents thus the punishment seems to be linked with mindset. Children brought up in a cultural environment will not escape the warped mindset, often of evil, until time has passed, and new and more powerful influences have been sown and have taken hold.

In the current context if we think Gaza, it will be hard for subsequent generations to have any inkling of what life was like under the Turkish occupation before Britain freed them from the Ottoman domination of centuries. That their oppressors were fellow Muslims makes them forget that they were second class citizens to the Turks, something they have no actual experience of, nor their third or fourth generation family. That is why it will take time for Christ to eradicate the bias and wrong thinking of the people who currently inhabit the land, whether they be Jews or Arabs, and why there will be a real need for a millennium of righteous rule to more fully prepare the world for the arrival of the Father Himself.

"But as truly as I live all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD" v21. This is a wonderful promise, linking the very existence of the Creator Himself with His ultimate purpose. It will happen although much is still required to be accomplished but it is as inevitable as His being, He has told us this. It is incumbent upon every true believer to embrace this hope, this promise, and to understand its implications. Sadly, so many millions claiming Christ have no correct appreciation of this prophecy. It has certainly not yet been fulfilled!

In verse 28 God adds a further indictment based on His existence, terrible to consider. *"As truly as I live saith the LORD as ye have spoken in my ears so will I do to you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness"*. This was not merely the threat of death, but of the lack of hope that they would ever rise again in resurrection. The next generation which was permitted to go in to the land would nevertheless *"bear your whoredoms"* v33. Every sin has an effect, which although a penalty is paid or forgiveness is granted, still has evil ramifications for the surrounding innocents, that is the nature of sin, it is corrupting and pernicious and cannot be controlled.

In verse 34 the day for a year principle is given. This equivalence is found elsewhere in scripture and is a theme which the Holy Spirit once established often returns to, in other sections of scripture. The nation was to wander for forty years because of their rebellion. There was no escape from this sentence regardless of any individual righteousness. Joshua and Caleb, although both faithful shed this fate and hardship. This was just and right by God because they were members of the nation of Israel, and

it was the nation of Israel not the actual sinners who were sentenced to this tribulation. The individual sinners would take that long to die off, for them the tribulation was actually less than those who survived it. Death does come to all, but these were to die in unbelief, having no future hope, no future gift from God, only the future promise of receiving their wages in death.

The immediate sinners, the ten evil spies who slandered God, were killed there and then by a plague from God, verse 36,37. The people thought that they could undo their foolishness by belatedly seeking military victory, as if that was what was necessary, however the adversaries who were at hand, the Amalekites and Canaanites “*smote them and discomfited them*”. It is not up to us to think we can make good God's promises at a time of our choosing, and in a manner we think fit, how utterly foolish and destined for failure!

The Ark of the Covenant and Moses departed not out of the camp. Only inside the confines of Truth, can truth prevail and safety be secured.

A Voice from the Altar

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