

Numbers 13 is the beginning of one of a series of sad stories.

God appeared to Moses (Exodus 3) at the burning bush and sent him to set his people free from Pharaoh.

Then comes the long saga of Moses' negotiations the seven plagues in Egypt, and finally the Israelites are released. A mighty deliverance by the Lord God.

Pharaoh changes his mind and chases them; they cross the Red Sea, but the Egyptians are drowned. A mighty victory by the Lord God.

Moses leads the people to Sinai where God appears to them on the Mountain delivers the Ten Commandments and enters a Covenant with his chosen people.

Then by the Pillar of Cloud and the Pillar of Fire the Lord leads them all through the desert to the edge of the Promised Land.

All this in quite a short time. Months.

They have seen the might of God in several ways on their short journey and miraculously, they are ready to enter the Land of Promise, flowing with milk and honey.

Now comes Numbers 13.

Enter the Land
Fishers of Men

Proper 1

Numbers 13. 1-2, 27-33
Luke 5. 1 - 11

God tells Moses - send out 12 spies -
one from each tribe - to report on the land.
Off they go, and back they came,
with some fruit and some stories.

The fruit was enormous - it was a good land.
But the stories were enormous also -
they tell tales of mighty peoples - like giants -
to whom they seemed like just grasshoppers.

Two of the spies say "We must go up into the land.
We can trust God."
Ten say "We can't go up. It is too dangerous.
God has got it wrong"

Two trust God and his proven power.
Ten trust their own estimate of their own weakness.
That is Numbers 13.

The sad bit is the unfolding of the story in Numbers 14

The people go with the ten - and decide to turn back.
And they want to elect a leader
who will take them back to Egypt.

Democracy has taken over from Theocracy.

The Glory of the Lord now appears (14. 10)
and God threatens to strike them all down.

Moses intercedes,
and God lets them turn back into the desert, and live.

But God declares on his oath
that none of them will enter the Promised Land
except Joshua and Caleb, the two good spies.
And the ten faithless spies
were struck down with plague and died.

Now the people change their mind again.
10.39 they repent and decide to enter the Land.
Only this time it is not by God's sending
but against his command!

They ignore Moses' warning
set out to attack the Amalekites and get thrashed,
because God is not with them.

And so they begin their sentence -
40 years of wandering in the desert -
until all the adults of that generation have died
except Joshua and Caleb.

And there are many other sad stories
in that forty years. - This is just the first.

God called, and they turned him down.
When God calls, he wants obedience
but our response is due when he calls.

You can't come back later - in your own time
and expect God to be waiting for your bidding.
He is the master - we are the servants.
As Israel found out to their cost.

That is Numbers 13, in a nut-shell.

Now in Luke 5 we see God calling again.
He calls the fishermen on the beach
And the response to his call requires a step of faith
just as it did for Israel.

Not as big a step,
but then the fishermen had not just been through
the Passover and the Red Sea.

Jesus teaches first - and that was always impressive
and then he says -
trust me - cast your nets again, for a very large catch.

Peter's common sense said, no,
(They had been fishing all night)
but his faith said, "do as Jesus asks."
And of course Jesus is proved right. Loads of fish.

Peter's next response is strange
- not to us - we know the rest of the gospel story -
Peter falls at Jesus' feet and confesses his sin.

Again - the eye of faith sees
what the brain cannot accept.
And he chooses to go with his faith, not his reason.
And course that step of faith leads to a life of discipleship
and the birth of the church.

God calls - and his timing is right.

Man responds, and God's blessing flows.

And what was their call - very specifically
to be fishers of men - evangelists.

For most of us, that's a call we do not want to hear!

"Here I am, Lord. Send me where you will.
But not that, please!"

It always seems to me
that the job of an Evangelist
is the "dirty" job in God's kingdom.

Perhaps because it is at the interface
between God's kingdom and "not God's kingdom".

The Evangelist deals primarily with the unsaved.
He works with the "unchurched"
just as Jesus worked
with the "unchurched" of his day.

Perhaps it seems to us to be like
the "Giants" in the Promised Land
in Numbers 13.

If God is calling us to evangelise
he is promising to deliver the land into our hands.

We can be bold when he calls.

So whatever your call is
it will probably seem daunting at the time.
But God is equipping us with faith
and calling for a step of faith.

So take courage.

Hear what God is asking.

Believe that he is faithful.

And step out in faith.

And he will bless our endeavours.

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