

1. My title for this lesson is "The danger of ignoring God". As Christians, we tend to think that if we ignore God for a time being, the worst thing that will happen to us is that life won't go well, but we are still saved. While that is correct, the consequences can be much more severe.
 - a) The point is when we willfully choose to sin or willfully choose to ignore what seems to be His will for us at that moment there are consequences. God desires to guide our lives and makes His desires known to us through His word, through prayer and "guidance".
 - b) Let's say we have an option to do something wrong but it is not very significant. To use a simple example, when we once checked out of a hotel room, my daughter wanted to take a bottle of water that would have been charged to us as we left. I explained that we still have to pay for that water, even if we took it. The point is to be thinking in terms of doing the right thing. That is God's way of saying to us, "Do you trust Me now, even through this situation?" That concept of trust, leads me perfectly to these two chapters.
2. Let me summarize these two chapters in a few thoughts: The Israelites had now moved from Egypt to what is just south of the land of Israel. Some scouts were sent in Israel to check it out. After they came back from a forty day journey of about 500 miles round trip, most of them stated that Israel was a good land for crops and raising animals, but there were many cities there with big walls and some of the people living there were very tall. The point is these spies stated that all of the Israelites were not able to conquer this land because of the big city walls and tall people.
 - a) Meanwhile, two of the 12 men sent to scout this land reminded the Israelites that God promised this land to them, and with His power behind them, they can't lose.
 - b) The Israelites believed the majority report and not the minority opinion. The punishment for not trusting God was they were sentenced to live out in the wilderness for the next 40 years. God's punishment was in effect, "This generation did not believe Me, and they will die out in this wilderness, while only their children can enter the land promised to them".
 - c) Some of these Israelites tried to take matters in their own hands and lead an attack into the land of Israel without God's help and to put it bluntly, they lost badly.
3. OK, this is the famous story about the Israelites not entering the Promised Land and then being sentenced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. Why should I care? To answer, remember the main theme of the book of Numbers: Just because we can be wandering in our wilderness experience does not mean we have to stay there. God allows us to go through difficult times in order to test us and ask in effect, "Do you (us) really trust Me, even through this?" That is the question for these Israelites and in effect, the question God asks you and me daily.
 - a) Next, this lesson is for us to understand what is the punishment for not trusting God in the first place. These Israelites, despite seeing all the miracles up to this point did not think they were capable of conquering the residences of this land. It is like thinking, "I know God exists and I know He can do great miracles. However, now it is up to me alone, and I see the size of the problem in front of me, and I know I can't solve it."
 - i) The answer of course, is yes, we can't defeat those "big cities and big people" based on our power. If we are trusting God, through His power, His will can get done.
 - b) So how do I know what is His will for me? Often it is matter of just moving forward in life, obeying biblical principals and trusting God to guide us. I find in most cases, it is just a matter of praying about what I can do to make a difference for Him, and then making the effort to do what appears to be the right thing, and trust in Him to guide me through that situation. If such a situation is not God's will, it will become clear to us over time. The point is simply to take steps for God and trust that He is working in our lives. That is what we should do and that is what the Israelites failed to do in the story.
 - c) With that said, we are ready to cover all of the text in more detail.

4. Numbers Chapter 13, Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses, ²"Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders."
³So at the LORD's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites. ⁴These are their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zaccur; ⁵from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori; ⁶from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh; ⁷from the tribe of Issachar, Igal son of Joseph; ⁸⁸from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun; ⁹from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti son of Raphu; ¹⁰from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi; ¹¹from the tribe of Manasseh (a tribe of Joseph), Gaddi son of Susi; ¹²from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel son of Gemalli; ¹³from the tribe of Asher, Sethur son of Michael; ¹⁴from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi son of Vophsi; ¹⁵from the tribe of Gad, Geuel son of Maki.
 - a) To explain these verses, it will help us to look at a cross reference in Deuteronomy 1:22 to this same event that was also written by Moses like the book of Numbers:
 - i) Then all of you came to me and said, "Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to." (Deuteronomy 1:22, NIV)
 - ii) The point is the idea of sending spies was the Israelites idea and not God's.
 - b) This leads me back to Chapter 13 of the book of Numbers. Apparently the Israelites as a whole were not ready to just start going into the Promised Land to start conquering it. They came up with the idea of sending 12 spies, one per tribe. As the leader, Moses took the idea to God. He said in effect, "OK, if that is what they want, go ahead".
 - c) A couple of footnotes here: These are not the same twelve leaders as mentioned earlier in the chapter. Since this journey is going to cover roughly 500 miles round trip, I figure that younger men were picked who could handle traveling that far and that fast. This means about 15 miles per day were required. How do I know the distance? It is a matter of knowing how far it is from just south of Israel to its most northern point and back.
 - d) A little more bible trivia and then I will move on. The tribes are not listed in the same order they were earlier in the book. I don't know why they are listed in this order.
 - i) If you don't know the background story, simply know that the Israelites common ancestor, Jacob gave birth to 12 sons. Those 12 sons became the twelve tribes of Israel. In effect, those 12 tribes are listed here in these verses.
 - ii) The simple point is twelve men were picked from the 12 tribes of Israel. The two spies who gave the good report are not listed first. Also notice the tribe of Levi was not listed, as they are the priests to serve God and that tribe was not required to go to war with the rest of them. (Numbers 1:47 as an example.) Therefore the "2 for 1 stock split" as I mentioned in earlier lessons is in effect, where one of the two tribes was listed separately in order to get a total of 12 tribes.
 - iii) Now that we know who is spying out the land, the scene now moves to Moses himself as he gives instructions to these twelve men.
5. Verse 16: These are the names of the men Moses sent to explore the land. (Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua.)
 - a) Verse 16 gives us a few facts to note. It was Moses who sent these men out. Remember it was the idea of the Israelites to do this, and Moses checked with God and organized it.
 - b) Next we get a small footnote that one of the 12 spies was named Hosea, and this is the same person that Moses renames to Joshua. That is worth noting:
 - i) The name "Hoshea" means God is salvation.
 - ii) The name "Joshua" means The LORD is salvation.
 - iii) OK, and the difference is? The word translated "God" is a more generic name. The "LORD" in all capitals is the same entity, but the reference is to the fact that it is the desire of God to actually guide our lives and "The LORD" leads to salvation.
 - iv) The Greek word "Jesus" and "Joshua" are essentially the same. Maybe it is just me, but I see that as a clue of the Messiah (Jesus) wanting to lead us to Him.

6. Verse 17: When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, "Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. ¹⁸See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. ¹⁹What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? ²⁰How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees on it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land. " (It was the season for the first ripe grapes.)
- a) Meanwhile, Moses is giving the instructions to the 12 spies what to do. The orders are to check out how many people are there. Is the land good for crops and animals? Are there big cities with strong walls, or small towns? Bring back some fruit, so we can have some variety from the daily manna. (OK, I made up that last part. ☺)
 - b) By the way, we know the time of year this was as grapes usually start to blossom is July. If you recall from a few lessons back, the Israelites started moving right after the Passover holiday, which is the first full moon of the spring time. The time frame from when they started to travel in this book until this moment, was only a few months.
 - c) One more bit of bible trivia while I'm in the neighborhood. The word "Negev" means south. That doesn't mean the Israelites traveled south. It just means that the area just south of Israel itself is called "The Negev" as it is just south of Israel.
 - d) I get the impression that God Himself was not crazy about this whole scouting trip. It was a concession to the Israelites. In other words, this is God not violating our free will. Now here is Moses Himself wondering about what is ahead of them. I wondered what Moses would do differently based on the size of the cities they were supposed to conquer? Would it affect how many men he would send? I do know that Moses was raised to be the next Pharaoh of Egypt. That training would include military leadership training.
 - i) I see a lack of faith by Moses Himself here. Obviously God promised this land to them. Did Moses doubt God's ability to give them good land? Possibly. Did he doubt God's ability to lead the Israelites to conquer this land? Probably not.
 - ii) My point is you don't read of Moses saying, forget the spies, let us just move forward as God told us to do. Instead, he goes along with this plan.
 - e) The point for you and me is God does not violate our free will. Obviously God knew in advance the results of this trip, but didn't stop it. God saw everyone's doubts about going forward and let the scene play out including Moses own curiosity about the land.
 - i) When we are stuck in our wilderness and are nervous about taking the next step to get out of it, God is encouraging us to go forward. At the same time, He will not violate our free will. He let the Israelites spy first just live with the consequences. Just as when we have to live with the consequences of ignoring God for a time.
7. Verse 21: So they went up and explored the land from the Desert of Zin as far as Rehob, toward Lebo Hamath. ²²They went up through the Negev and came to Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, lived. (Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) ²³When they reached the Valley of Eshcol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs. ²⁴That place was called the Valley of Eshcol because of the cluster of grapes the Israelites cut off there. ²⁵At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.
- a) This is one of those sections where it reads best if one has a geography map. As I stated in the introduction, it is about 250 miles from the furthest part of this trip (the north end) to where the Israelite camp was located. One has to travel about 15 miles per day on foot, (not counting side trips) in order to accomplish this mission. That also means not being seen by the locals, so this took a bit of work by the spies.
 - b) The text mentions that a bunch of grapes were carried on a pole along with some other fruit. My guess is the 12 spies must have been real tempted to eat that and waited until the last day to pick up that fruit. The point is simply that they brought back proof that the land of Israel was a good land for growing produce.

- c) The text also mentions the inhabitants who lived there. What I wondered is, how did the Israelites know who was who? We do have a clue by the word "Anak". These were a tribe of very tall people. Goliath was probably from that tribe. The point is a description of very tall people living there must have put some fear into those hearing the report.
 - d) Time for a little more bible trivia here. Verse 22 mentions that Hebron was built seven years before Zoan was built. Hebron (in Israel) was where Abraham buried his wife Sarah (See Genesis 23:19). Therefore, the Israelites knew about that place. Zoan was a secret city that the Pharaoh's used. If you know about American presidential politics, you may know that the U.S. President has a large private campground called "Camp David". My point is "Zoan" is like that type of campground. Moses, being next in line to be the Pharaoh, probably has been to Zoan. I have read that the location of Zoan was never known until archeologists found it within the last century or so.
 - i) My point is that it is bit of proof that Moses himself wrote this book, as he would know the age of the city of Zoan based on his time there as a Pharaoh in training. He would also know a little of the history of Hebron based on the ancient stories about the Israelites or as part of his knowledge as training to be a Pharaoh.
 - ii) Meanwhile, it is time for the spies to give their bad report:
8. Verse 26: They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷ They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. ²⁸ But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. ²⁹ The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan. "
- a) My personal picture of this scene is all of the Israelites gathered in some sort of natural amphitheatre where the report could be heard by a large percentage of the Israelites. The 12 spies were on some sort of stage holding up the fruit and describing the inhabitants.
 - b) What I wondered as I read this was, how did the spies know who was a Hittite, who was a Jebusite and who was an Amorite? Did they wear t-shirts with their tribal names?
 - i) What I suspect is someone among this group had some experience dealing with these tribes back in their days in Egypt. They knew enough to say something like, "I know that dialect, they must be Jebusites". Somehow, the spies knew "who was who" and who lived in what part of what is today, Israel.
 - ii) As far as the descendants of Anak, I suspect the spies saw a group of very tall people who must have been legends in that part of the world due to their height and said they were descendants of Anak. Does that mean that really tall people who exist today came from that group? I don't know. I just believe that at that time, there existed a group of very tall people, based on the description we have of Goliath in 1st Samuel Chapter 17.
 - c) Now imagine listening to this report. There is mention of good food. However, the spies also mentioned that these cities are fortified (think thick, high walls) and very large. The report also included the fact that a race of very tall people lived there. I don't know about you, but at this point I would be scared too, to enter this land.
 - i) Notice what was not mentioned: Any reference to God or the Israelites ability to trust God in order to conquer this land. It would be like hearing, "The enemy we are about to face is much, much bigger than you or I could ever handle".
 - ii) Getting back to us, how do we know when to tackle an enemy bigger or stronger than we are? (Other than receiving orders from a commanding officer to charge?) Again, it comes back to discerning His will by reading His word and prayer. Jesus taught that the "gates of hell will not prevail against it (the church)". That is from Matthew 16:18, (KJV) and that is the idea here.

- d) One last thing to notice about these verses. Notice that each group lived in a different part of what we call Israel today. The implication is that they were each separate groups and maybe they didn't get along with each other. One was in the South (capital "S"), one was in the hill country which is on the east side and one was by the coast and along a valley area that surrounds the Jordan River. The point for the Israelites is that no matter which way they enter the land, there are going to be distinct groups to fight.
 - i) The key to notice is the lack of faith of these spies. There was no, God can lead us to victory speech, just a report about how difficult this mission is going to be.
 - ii) Now suppose you were a general and had to lead an army against another group that was bigger or taller or had a strong fortress. Yes some strategy is needed in order to defeat such an enemy. It has been done successfully historically, but to put it simply, one cannot do it without God's help and without it being His will.
 - a) The answer is in effect, they would never know if it was possible to win, unless they tried in the first place. Here is a matter of trusting God and saying, can we do this or not? If God says "Go forward and I will lead you to victory, we have to trust in that promise". Just as Jesus said that the "strongholds of Satan" will not stand against us, so Christians can be confident that they will be victorious in spreading the Gospel to others.
 - e) Speaking of positive news, it is time for the two good spies to speak up.
9. Verse 30: Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."
- a) I thought you said there were two spies who spoke positively. There is only one that is mentioned here. The other one was Moses assistant, Joshua. If Joshua spoke, everyone would think, "Of course he would say that, he is Moses' right hand man." Having Caleb be the speaker for the minority report showed that there was at least one other person who trusted in God to lead them to victory.
 - b) By the way, Caleb was part of the lineage of Jesus. He was from the tribe of Judah and the only one of that tribe of that generation who got to enter the Promised Land. For those of you who like bible typology, here is a "type of Jesus" saying in effect, "Trust God and we can have victory over these people no matter how big or strong they are."
 - c) Did Caleb think the Israelites could scale the walls of those big cities? Did Caleb think the Israelites could defeat the really tall people? I suspect that Caleb thought correctly, that without the power of God, it is a waste of time. With God's power, anything is possible.
 - d) OK John, but don't all armies think that God is on their side? Yes, and all religions think that they are the only way to God. However, not all can be correct. That is why I trust the bible and not other so-called holy books to lead me to salvation. As far as warfare today, the results of history usually show how God is working out His salvation plans through such battles and larger wars.
10. Verse 31: But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." ³² And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. ³³ We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."
- a) Meanwhile the 10 spies who gave the bad report, I suspect tried to silence Caleb with a reality check. Notice these ten spies said nothing about God in their speech and nothing about the miracles He has done to date (think the parting of the Red Sea, the daily manna, not even to mention the plagues in Egypt they all saw). These 10 guys just focuses on the potential problems and said in effect, "we are in big trouble". They said they personally saw these really tall people who they called Nephilim (a term that described a group of people who lived before the flood) in Genesis 6:4. The crowd knew their bible stories and they would be scared by the word Nephilim or Anak, as those words means giants.

- b) If I had to summarize all of Chapter 13 in one word, it would be "fear". Fear is what gets our minds off of God. Fear is what gets us to focus on our problems and not on God. Fear is why we are afraid to trust Him. I consider fear to be the opposite of faith. It is usually in moments where we have tremendous fears, where God is saying to us, "So, are you going to trust Me, or not? This is your big test? Let's find out."
 - i) Notice the spies did what they were told. They brought back fruit to show that the land is good for growing things. They reported what they saw in the land of Israel. The fear was that they focused only on what they saw and got their eyes off of God to lead them to conquer this land. The point is they spent the 40 days looking all around them, but never up, to remember that God is leading them.
 - ii) The problem with fear is that like faith, it is contagious. The same way grumbling spread in the last chapter, so fear can spread and does spread. With that said, let's look at how this fear spread as we go into Chapter 14.
- 11. Chapter 14, Verse 1: That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. ² All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! ³ Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" ⁴ And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."
 - a) Notice the fears being spread amongst the Israelites. Listen to what they wished for:
 - i) If only we had died in Egypt. They were grumbling that it would be better to be a slave to die in Egypt than having to face the residents of the land of Israel.
 - ii) If only we could live forever in this desert. (God will grant them that wish as that is part of the punishment coming up.)
 - iii) Why should we die by the sword? (My translation: We fear being killed by those who currently lived in Israel. Therefore, God gives them what they want and will let all of them die out in the wilderness.)
 - iv) Our wives and children will be taken captive. Because of that fear, God again, gave them what they wanted, which is life in the wilderness.
 - v) Finally they said, we should choose a new leader and go back to Egypt. This is actually the worst claim of all, because it is a true rejection of God. Like I said in the introduction, God has no tolerance of sin, and the worse sin of all, is a denial of His existence as God.
 - vi) A lot of people wonder, was it fair to make this entire group live in the desert for the next 40 years to die off? In effect, God is giving them what they wanted: Life without Him guiding them. The danger for you and me as believers in Jesus is when we willfully chose to reject Him, the danger of living that way can be far worse than still trying to obey Him in the first place.
 - b) If I had to summarize this whole lesson in a single thought, it would again be, "Beware the danger of turning from God". It is more than just living in sin. It is danger of living a life that is not making a difference for God in the first place. One thing I have come to learn is that the greatest purpose one can have in life is using it to make a difference for God in all that we do. That is the lesson being wasted by these Israelites for their rejection of Him in these verses and that is why their punishment is going to be life forever in the wilderness.
 - i) Think of it this way. In life we all have problems and issues to deal with. We can trust God to get us through those issues, or we can be like this group of Israelites and say, "Forget God, I want to stay in this predicament or go back to how my life was before I trusted Him with my life."
 - ii) In effect, God gives us what we want. We want to reject Him, then fine, in our wilderness we can stay. Often we have to actually see the consequences of our sins to realize the mistakes we made, and that is the point of these verses.

12. Verse 5: Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. ⁶ Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes ⁷ and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. ⁸ If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. ⁹ Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them."
- a) Meanwhile, Moses himself is starting to fear for his own life along with his brother Aaron. Let's face it, this large group could stone Moses to death at this point. Here is a good lesson in leadership when our group refuses to follow: Step one, humble oneself before God and say, "Lord, I don't know what to do here. You called me to do this task, and now I am facing rebellion. What do I do next?"
 - i) In effect, Verses 6 through 10 are answers to Moses' prayer. The two spies that gave a good report, stood up again and said in effect, "The other spies are right about the fact that this is a good land. They were wrong about the fact that it cannot be conquered. If God is pleased with us, then He will lead us to victory."
 - ii) Both Caleb and Joshua realized the bigger issue was the fact that the Israelites were rebelling against God's will for their lives and the fear of being killed by the inhabitants of the land of Israel was a big fear.
 - iii) To put all of this another way, the "status quo" is always safer than taking a big step of faith. We can easily get comfortable in our miserable situation. God is saying to us, "I can make life better, trust Me and follow Me". That is what the Israelites are refusing to do here and that is the danger to us as well.
 - b) I want to change topics for a moment and discuss why God wanted the Israelites to go kill all of these people. Does that mean God wants us to kill others? First of all, the answer is no to the last question. Over 400 years earlier, God told Abraham that the "for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." (Genesis 15:16b, NIV).
 - i) Translation: The "Amorites" is a generic name for all of those people who lived in the Promised Land at the time of Abraham. Archeologists who studied the people who lived there at that time showed that this group was big on human sacrifices of their own children to their gods. God effectively said to Abraham, "I'm giving this group 400 years to repent. If they don't, I'm going to do a "mercy killing" and I will use your descendants (the Israelites) to perform that mercy killing".
 - ii) My point is one reason God allowed this attack to happen (beginning with the next generation of Israelites) is simply to perform a "mercy killing" on a group of people that sunk to a point of sacrificing their own children to worship false gods.
 - iii) To quote one archeologist (I don't remember who), "Once you study this culture, it is amazing to consider that God waited as long as He did to wipe them out."
 - a) (I do remember this quote was taken from "Halley's Bible Handbook".)
 - c) Meanwhile, we have another problem: The group of people God wanted to perform this judgment (Israelites) were not interested in performing His will. Therefore, God will say to this group, "Fine, you all don't want to follow Me? I'll give you all what you want and let you die in this wilderness and I'll use your children to accomplish My will." By the time the next generation grew up watching their parents pay the price of rejecting God, they knew the right thing to do was to "go forward and get out of this wilderness".
 - d) With that speech out of my system, it is safe to come back to this present generation of Israelites that have decided to reject God despite the fact that Caleb and Joshua are encouraging them to go forward.
 - i) In effect, this is a "mercy killing" too. One can reject God so much, one can get to a point where He says, "It is a waste of time to keep trying and the most merciful thing I can do is take you all out of the game." That is what we will read of next.

13. Verse 10: But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites. ¹¹ The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? ¹² I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they."
- a) God was asking Moses, "why don't they trust Me after seeing all of these miracles?" The answer is the Israelites were worried about being killed by the current residents of Israel. Instead of trusting God and moving forward, there was a grumbling in the camp to stone Moses. Imagine how scared Moses was for his own life at this point. I'm sure he was on the ground praying for his life. It is at that point that God was saying to Moses in effect, "Hey Moses, do you trust Me or not? Even now, even through this?"
 - b) When God makes the statement here that He wanted to completely wipe out the entire nation of Israelites, this is God's way of saying, "Hey Moses, I got you this far, I know need you to trust me the rest of the way. I see this as God saying to Moses, "Yes, I know they want to stone you. However, it is me they are really rejecting despite the miracles that they have seen. So Moses, I am putting the choice in your hands, do you want me to start over with another group or keep going with this one?"
 - i) What God wanted Moses to say in effect is "Trust Me, I control all things and I can even control getting this group to trust in You again. Come on Moses, trust Me."
 - ii) To pound my point home, God in effect is saying the same thing to you and me. The message is always, "Hey are you (us) trusting Me, even now?"
 - a) With that deep thought in mind, ☺ we're ready for Moses' response.
14. Verse 13: Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them. ¹⁴ And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, O LORD, are with these people and that you, O LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. ¹⁵ If you put these people to death all at one time, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, ¹⁶ 'The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath; so he slaughtered them in the desert.'
- a) To explain these verses, it is best to state what Moses does NOT say: Hey God, these people are not so bad. After all their fears are justified as there are giants in the land. Also Moses does not say, it is my fault, I was not a good leader. The point is Moses appeals to God's mercy, not to his own ability to lead. There is a clue for us right there. When life gets difficult, the key is to think, what would God want me to do in this situation.
 - b) The point is that Moses appeals to God's mercy here. Moses is saying that if God did go through with this plan to kill all of the Israelites here and now, word will get around to the surrounding nations that God does not keep His promises that He made to them.
 - i) So was God aware of that possibility? Of course, by definition, He knows all things. The point is Moses appealed to God based on His mercy not our goodness.
 - ii) This is God seeing if Moses was going to trust in His mercy at this point.
 - iii) With that appeal of God's mercy understood, Moses continues in the next 3 verses.
15. Verse 17: "Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared: ¹⁸ 'The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.'
- ¹⁹ In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now."
- a) Moses is asking God to forgive the Israelites of their sins. Notice the Israelites themselves are not asking for mercy. This is Moses' himself asking God to forgive them unilaterally.
 - b) These verses are reminders of what God's character is like. Moses didn't state them for God to remember what they were like. They are written so that we remember what God's character is like. Let me explain further:

- i) Moses is reminding God of His unconditional promise: Abraham's descendants (That is the Nation of Israel) would one day inherit that land. If God wiped them out, He would be going back on that promise. That is one reason why I believe the land of Israel belongs to that nation today, because the God's promise to give them the land was never conditional. Yes, they can be removed temporarily for sin like when the Babylonian captivity happened. Still, God promised them they would always have that land and I believe it belongs to them today.
 - ii) The second principal that Moses is reminding himself and us about is that God is "slow to anger". That means God puts up with a lot before in effect, He will say a mercy killing is better than to try to save this person or this situation. That is one reason why God waited over 400 years to wipe out those inhabitants of Israel.
 - iii) The point for us is simply that God is always more than willing to forgive us of our sins, but if we willfully and deliberately turn from God enough in our lives, I do believe He says to individuals and groups, "Enough is enough".
 - a) Know that this principal applies to believers as well as nonbelievers. For believers, it is a matter of Him saying, you are not being a good witness for Me, so let Me take you out of the "ballgame" to be an example to others.
 - b) To put it another way, it is like God warning us, "Don't go that way, as the road of sin is greased. However, if we choose to go down that road, God makes it harder to turn back."
 - iv) Next comes the positive news that God never leaves the guilty unpunished. As I like to state every so often, I can sleep at night knowing that there is a God and He will judge all people fairly based on their obedience to His laws whether or not such people do believe in His existence or not. For example, someone may get away with stealing or even murder in this lifetime. However, I am convinced that since God exists and like these verses state, He does judge all of us for our sins.
 - v) Next comes the reference to punishment to the third and fourth generation. That does not mean God punishes children for the sins of their parents. It refers to the fact that the consequences of sins affect children and grandchildren. Think of someone who is an alcoholic. It affects their entire family to deal with them. Think of a child abuser. The innocent suffer due to that sin.
 - c) OK, I sort of know all of that is true. Why is Moses reminding God of these facts? What Moses is actually doing is reminding himself of how God acts. What I mean is when we are convinced there is no solution to our own wilderness problems, we need to remind ourselves of the God's great qualities as listed here and to remember that He does want to lead us through our own wilderness troubles. He still wants us to trust Him especially through the most difficult of times.
 - d) Since Moses recalled here that God is in charge of this situation, it is time for God to give His response to Moses' request for Him to actually forgive the Israelites of their sins.
16. Verse 20: The LORD replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked.²¹ Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth,²² not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times--²³ not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.
- a) First the good news. God did forgive them. That fact alone should be a reminder to us to pray for others to seek Him. The older I get the more I am convinced that people who do become Christians do so because someone prayed for them. That doesn't mean everyone we pray for will be saved. There is still "free will". I just see Verse 20 as a model for us to follow that we can "stand in the gap" for others and pray for God to forgive them of their sins so that they can seek Him with the rest of their lives.

- b) I recently saw someone I haven't seen in many years. This was the type of person that one would be convinced would never be saved. He was a hardcore drug user and didn't have much of a life back then. He is now remarried with a wonderful Christian wife. I'm still in shock about how God has rescued him out of that lifestyle. My point is simply that one never knows who will be saved and we need to pray for nonbelievers.
- c) Now comes the "but". Unfortunately in life, there is always a "but". ☺ My point is God may forgive us of sins, but He will usually allow the consequences of sins to take effect. That way we are reminded of the pain caused by sin. For the person I just described, I can visually see the long term affects of what happened to him physically. I will grant you, there are some people where God miraculously cures and there are no long term affects. In most cases, the forgiven still have to suffer the consequences of our sins if for no other reason than to remind us of the cost of turning from God with our lives.
- d) As to the specifics of the sins of these Israelites, God said they have tested me these ten times (Verse 22). Yes, I have read bible commentaries that specifically list the 10 occasions from the book of Exodus up to this point. God is saying in effect, "unless I punish these people for their sins, they will never know the extent of what their sins are."
 - i) One thing I have wondered is, why did God punish them so badly? Why didn't they just say wander in the wilderness for another few weeks? Wouldn't that be enough time for them to realize they messed up? Why 40 years?
 - ii) For starters, the number "40" is always associated with God's testing. For example, the rain for Noah's flood lasted 40 days. Jesus was tested for 40 days when He was in His own wilderness experience. Even the Israelites themselves were slaves for 400 years. My point is "40" and multiples thereof, is symbolic of God's testing.
 - iii) The answer is the main point about living in our own "wilderness experience". The only way to get out of our own wilderness is by completely trusting God with every aspect of our lives. That in effect is what the wilderness is, living in a state of mind where we may trust God with "x" part of our lives, but not "y". It is only when we are truly willing to let go and completely trust Him even through the most difficult of situations that we can get out of our own wilderness experience.
 - iv) The answer to "40 years" is in effect that is how long that generation to die off.
 - a) Think of the punishment this way. God didn't allow them to go back to Egypt. The idea is once we are born again we can't be "unborn". Once we realize that God desires to lead us out of our own bondage to sin, there is no returning to that life of "sin slavery". However, we can always be stuck out in our own wilderness forever if we refuse to trust Him with our lives completely. That in effect, is the point of this lesson.
- e) There is a classic joke that is worth sharing here: What did Moses do for the 40 years from this point on out in the wilderness? If there were over 600,000 fighting men (as counted in Chapter 1), let's say there were at least 650,000 men over 20 years old, if we include the priestly tribe and those who couldn't fight. Now we have to double that figure to add for all of the women over 20 years old. My point is a total 1,300,000 people divided by 40 years divided by 365 days in a year is about 89 deaths per day. So the answer to that joke is, what did Moses do for those 40 years? Perform a lot of funerals.
 - i) With that many deaths per day, the point is the next generation of Israelites had the visual reminder every day of the danger of turning from God in their lives. The point for you and me is that if we want to stay in our own wilderness, all we have to do is ignore God and He will let us die in that experience.
 - ii) OK John, what about people who have to suffer all of their lives with some sort of disability? How is God being fair to them? You may find it interesting that there is a very low rate of suicide amongst such people. The issue is not that God is required to cure all people. The issue is our state of mind over such issues.

17. Verse 24: But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.
 - a) Speaking of there always being a "but" in life, we read of Caleb being the one exception. So why just single him out? What about Joshua? Remember that Caleb is the one who spoke up and said, "Let's go conquer the land". God is rewarding him for taking that stand. We won't read of Caleb again until God rewards him in the book of Joshua.
 - b) As I stated earlier in the lesson, Caleb is an ancestor of "The Promised Messiah" (Jesus). Think of this as God saying, the Messiah and His believers will inherit eternal life.
 - c) Meanwhile, let's get back to punishing everyone else. ☺
18. Verse 25: Since the Amalekites and Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea. "
 - a) My loose translation: Since you fear being killed by these people, let me give you what you want. Turn away from entering this land and go back toward the Red Sea.
 - b) This is God saying, "I want you know to go that way. If you fail to go this way, all of you will be in big trouble and suffer consequences." Speaking of which, it is time for God to give to Moses and Aaron the details of living the rest of one's lives in the wilderness.
19. Verse 26: The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: ²⁷ "How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. ²⁸ So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: ²⁹ In this desert your bodies will fall--every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. ³⁰ Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. ³¹ As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. ³² But you--your bodies will fall in this desert. ³³ Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert. ³⁴ For forty years--one year for each of the forty days you explored the land--you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.' ³⁵ I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against me. They will meet their end in this desert; here they will die.
 - a) Here is where God actually tells Moses and his brother Aaron about the 40 years that the Israelites must suffer out in the wilderness. Here is a summary of the punishment:
 - i) Since you wanted spies to check out the land and they did so for 40 days, and you rejected what the land is like (and in effect rejecting God), you will now spend 40 years in the desert until everyone over 20 (except Caleb and Joshua) die off.
 - ii) I promised to give this land to the descendants of Abraham, and only these two men (Caleb and Joshua) from your generation will go with your children.
 - b) I admit I wondered how the crowd was going to react when Moses gave this news. After all, this group did not want to enter the land, so God gave them what they wanted. The crowd also knew that God promised them this land. Personally, if I heard this news, my first reaction is to want to rebel and say, "Sorry about the last time we denied entering the land, let's go for it now". In fact, that is what we will read about in the next few verses.
 - c) If there is one key point to get out of this section, it is the concept of being too late.
 - i) Again, I don't see this as a salvation issue, but an issue of whether or not we really are going to trust God with our lives, or live out in our wilderness. With this large group of Israelites there was a point where God says, "it is too late for you, I'll try your children." Avoiding this situation is simply a matter making an effort to do things for God and trust that He working in our lives.
 - d) My bottom line here is we don't have to fear living in our own wilderness forever if we simply trust God that He will work through our lives. He desires to guide us to use our lives for His glory. Does that guarantee say, fame or prosperity? Of course not. What He does guarantee is that our lives will be used for His glory if we commit it as such.

20. Verse 36: So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it-- ³⁷ these men responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD. ³⁸ Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived.
- a) Remember the 10 guys who gave the bad report? Well, they were killed by the Israelites. It was the Israelites saying, "It is not our fault for believing the bad report and not trusting God, but it is your fault for giving us that bad report."
 - b) One has to keep in mind that dying does not necessarily mean one is not a believer. God is going to judge each of us individually based on our trust in Him as God and of course, our trust in Jesus as His son for paying the price of our sins. "Dying" as it is used in this chapter is all about failing to be a good witness for Him. There are occasions in both the Old and even the New Testament where God makes an example of out of people and says in effect, "here is the penalty in this lifetime for failing to be a good witness for Me." If that is not enough motivation to keep us on our toes, I don't know what will work.
 - c) Finally, to state the obvious, the givers of the good "minority report" were allowed to live.
21. Verse 39: When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly. ⁴⁰ Early the next morning they went up toward the high hill country. "We have sinned," they said. "We will go up to the place the LORD promised." ⁴¹ But Moses said, "Why are you disobeying the LORD's command? This will not succeed! ⁴² Do not go up, because the LORD is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, ⁴³ for the Amalekites and Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the LORD, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword."
- a) The last thing we read of in this chapter is the Israelites doing what they think is best while ignoring God's orders. They thought, "OK, we admit we blew it by believing the report of the 10 "bad witnesses". However, we have learned our lesson and we seek God's forgiveness. Therefore, let us go forward, enter this land and attack these people.
 - b) One has to admit this sounds good "on paper". This group admitted their sins, they then wanted to trust God and go forward. The obvious lesson of this last set of verses is that there does come a time where God can say to us, "It is too late for you to be a witness for Me. I ordered you to go back to the wilderness and I'm not changing my mind."
 - i) So does that mean God wants us to not follow Him at times? Of course not. The lesson here is about a lack of faith and having to suffer the consequences when we do show a lack of faith. Let me put it this way: Did God still have that manna rain down during these 40 years? Of course. Did He still cover them with the cloud as they went? Of course. Their punishment was not instant death, but for them to live out for many years and consider the cost of rejecting His will.
 - ii) That's the lesson for us. God does forgive us if we ask for that forgiveness. At the same time we usually have to pay a price for that rejection if for no other reason then to teach us what is the "heavy cost" of rejecting God's will for our lives.
 - iii) Meanwhile, these Israelites still have to learn this lesson the hard way:
22. Verse 44: Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the LORD's covenant moved from the camp. ⁴⁵ Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah.
- a) Short version: They made a run at the Promised Land. Moses, the Ark of the Covenant, and I assume some of the Israelites just stood there, while the Israelites lost badly.
23. Some final quick comments and then I'll close in prayer: I admit I covered a lot of verses and I did skip some of the details. These two chapters do read best as a single unit to describe what is the penalty for rejecting God's will for our lives. My desire for all of us is to learn how to end our own wilderness experience by trusting what is His will for our lives. That is? Trusting His guidance and His word as to what He wants us to do. The rest is between God and us.

24. I admit, this is a hard lesson to accept. It is necessary for us to understand what is the penalty for rejecting God in our lives. With that said, let us to go to God in prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to remember that there is a price to be paid for rejecting You. We know that You forgive us of our sins and that You also test us to see if we trust You. May we rely upon Your power to do Your will, and not try to please You based on just our own strength. May we use our lives to make a difference for You and trust Your guidance through both our good times and our own wilderness experiences. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.