

FLEA VIDEO #6:
"HOW MUCH GREATER IS GOD - THE STORY OF JOSHUA AND CALEB"
(Numbers 13-14)
5.12.20

One of the criticisms I have heard leveled at the Bible is that, in these modern, educated, forward-thinking times, a book as ancient as the Bible is incredibly out of touch with the world in which we live. OK, so what do we see most often displayed around us these days? How about fear, and anxiety, and mistrust and anger? What makes the Bible relevant is precisely because it tells us about other people also dealing with fear and anxiety and mistrust and anger. Wow - just like now. But the Bible does far more than tell stories about people with problems - it also presents a God who has solutions to those problems. In fact, the Bible has a great many stories of people just like you and me who were faced with something scary and yet, through their reliance on God, on His strength and wisdom, we're able to claim a victory that defeated their fears because God was bigger than whatever they were afraid of.

Now one of these stories is told in the OT book of Numbers. The Israelites had just arrived at the border of what God had said was their "Promised Land." He commanded Moses: ***"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" - God speaking, Numbers 13:2.*** Among the 12 men selected were a couple of guys named Joshua and Caleb. And off they went.

They were gone for 40 days. During that time, they had a chance to see the people and their cities, and to see the land and its produce as well. They even cut off a branch containing a cluster of grapes that were growing in one of the valleys - the cluster so big that it had to be carried on a pole borne by two men.

At last they returned. As you can imagine, the people of Israel were very excited to hear the report the men would bring back. But what they were to hear was the classic "good news-bad news" story - at least according to 10 of the explorers.

First the good news: ***"We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit" - Numbers 13:27b.*** I can imagine the people crowding around to see the huge cluster of grapes with which the men had returned, along with pomegranates and figs. And the fact that they had labeled the land as a place that ***does flow with milk and honey*** referred very specifically to the promise God had made to the nation of Israel, in fact, all the way back to the time of God's initial call to Moses at the burning bush as recorded in the book of Exodus: ***"I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey" - God speaking, Exodus 3:8a.*** The idea of "milk and honey" suggested a land of rich pastures for flocks and herds, and fertile ground and climate ready-made for crops of all kinds. That phrase specifically acknowledged God's promise.

But now - the bad news, from those same 10 guys: ***"[T]he people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. 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" -***

Numbers 13:28-29. Now remember that this is being told to some 600,000 very anxious adults very excited about moving forward.

This is where Caleb stepped up. Without batting an eye, he said: **"We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it" - Caleb, Numbers 13:30b.** You can almost hear the response of his colleagues: "Are you nuts?" Or, in more Biblical language: **"We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." 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." And they concluded their rebuttal by saying, "We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them" - Numbers 13:31b-32, 33b.** And the result of hearing this? About what you'd expect: The people mourned and wept, and then threatened Moses for leading them there in the first place.

But Caleb had a reason for saying what he did. And, joined by Joshua, he wasn't done. Instead the two of them pressed their case even more: **"The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. 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. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them" - Caleb and Joshua, Numbers 14:7b-9.** It was a very similar message to the one God gave a few centuries later to the nation of Judah during a very scary moment in the time of King Jehoshaphat when their land was being invaded: **"This is what the Lord says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's'" - Jahaziel, II Chronicles 20:15b.** But the people refused to pay any attention. Why? Their sense of self was greater than their sense of God. They only saw their strength instead of God's strength. What's more, they totally ignored the strength of God's promises. This was His promise, to give them this land. How could God's word not be true? As a result of their disobedience, every Israelite adult alive that day - with the notable exception of Caleb and Joshua - would die during the ensuing 40 years of wandering in the wilderness to which God now sentenced them, the pure and simple result of disbelief and lack of faith.

One of the reasons the Bible is given to us, as Paul wrote to the Romans, was this: ***For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope - Paul, Romans 15:4.*** So when the Bible says: ***I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me - Paul, Philippians 4:13 (NKJV),*** we can believe it. When the Bible says: ***If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? - Paul, Romans 8:31b-32,*** we can believe that, too. God gives us, and provides for us, and promises us, everything we need to face whatever obstacle confronts us. We are not alone, nor are we dependent on our own strength or cleverness. We need only be dependent on God. He always has been, always is, and always will be bigger, stronger, wiser, and better than any circumstance in which we find ourselves - even pandemics. Remember: The battle is not ours, but God's!