

## **“An Eleven Day Journey Became a Forty Year Agony!”**

After visiting ten plagues upon Pharaoh and the Egyptian people, through the hand of Moses, God led His people (Israel) out of the land of Egypt, where they had been so long in bondage. God mightily blessed Israel, leading them “*by day in a pillar of cloud...and by night in a pillar of fire.*”, Ex. 13:21. “*In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai,*” Ex. 19:1. At Sinai, or Horeb, God gave to Israel the Law of Moses, Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:1-22, which was to serve as a “*tutor*” to bring Israel “*to Christ,*” Gal. 3:24, through Whom we have received the New Testament, or the New Covenant, Heb. 9:15-17.

It was an eleven day journey “*from Horeb...to Kadesh Barnea,*” Deut. 1:2, which was near the promise land. However, Israel spent 40 years of agonizing wandering before ever reaching the land of Canaan! Why was that?

This brings us to the book of Numbers, often referred to as the “*Book of Wanderings.*” Being supernaturally guided by God, Who had already miraculously preserved His people, Israel should have triumphantly entered the promise land in a short time. The main reason for their failure is revealed in chapters 13 and 14 of Numbers. According to Num. 13:1-24 Moses sent 12 men (one from each tribe) to spy out the land of Canaan. “*They returned from spying out the land after forty days,*” Num. 13:25, and reported their findings. Regarding the land, it was everything God had described it to be, truly a land which flowed “*with milk and honey,*” Num. 13:27. However, regarding the people of the land, ten of the twelve men said “*we are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we,*” describing the people as “*giants,*” and themselves as “*grasshoppers,*” Num. 13:31-33. In delightful contrast, Caleb and Joshua insisted that they “*go up at once and take possession,*” Num. 13:30, emphasizing that “*if the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us,*” and they urged the people not to “*rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land.,*” Num. 14:8,9. But the people were more swayed by the evil report of the ten than by the faithful report of the two, so they mightily complained against Moses and Aaron and the Lord. God did not take kindly to their murmurings and stated that for each day the men had spent spying out the land, they would spend a year in the wilderness, until all the people, “*from twenty years old and above,*” would die in the wilderness, Num. 14:29-34. The only exceptions would be Caleb and Joshua who believed in the promises of God and brought back a good report. God is always true to His promises; hence, ultimately through the leadership of Joshua (Moses’ successor), the surviving Israelites victoriously entered the land of Canaan, Joshua 3. Hence, amazingly “*an eleven day journey became a forty year agony!*”

The Old Testament was “*written for our learning,*” Rom. 15:4, and the information pertaining to the murmuring, complaining, grumbling, unbelieving Israelites “*became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted,*” being “*written for our admonition,*” I Cor. 10:6,11. So what can we learn from their mistakes?

### **We Should Learn:**

**1. To trust in God!** According to the New Testament, Israel’s real problem was “*unbelief,*” Heb. 3:19. And that was inexcusable when one takes into consideration the ten plagues God visited upon Pharaoh and Egypt, the miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt, of their being fed with manna from heaven, etc., etc. But is it possible that, once we are faced with a

few difficult challenges, that we are equally as prone to question God's willingness or His ability to honor His promises?

**2. Not to place our trust in people who have ceased to trust God!** The Israelites believed the evil report of ten spies whose confidence in God became misdirected because of their fear of the people. But how often today do we allow nay-sayers, (who regardless of the soundness of the proposed work, saying "it won't work") to discourage us from even trying?

**3. Beware of Complainers and avoid complaining!** When they heard the evil report of ten unfaithful spies, "*all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried,*" and they "*complained against Moses and Aaron...*" Num. 14:2. They should, with all their might, have resisted the cowardly report of the ten men who, having lost their faith, also lost their nerve. It is so easy to spend more time counting our difficulties than in counting our blessings, and thus turn inward, feeling sorry for ourselves instead of being thankful for our many current material and spiritual blessing, and rejoicing in our "*hope of eternal life,*" Tit. 1:2. Question: Do we complain more about the things we don't have (but want) than thanking God for the multitude of blessing we do have?

**4. It is always too soon to quit!** God wants His people to be "*faithful unto death,*" Rev. 2:10, even if our faithfulness results in a martyr's death. Heaven makes all our labors, tears, toils, sacrifices, etc. more than worth while. Sadly, however, multitudes obey the gospel, and start out living "the Christian life," but become discouraged and then fall by the wayside. They should have taken a lesson from 2 Peter 2:21, wherein an inspired apostle wrote, saying, "*For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them,*" and he then (v. 22) likened their conduct to the most disgusting habits of formerly unclean animals — the dog returning to "*his own vomit,*" and "*a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.*"

**Conclusion:** Beloved, let us not make the tragic mistake made by the Israelites when they forgot God's past and present blessings, took their eyes off their goal, and began to murmur and complain. For them "an eleven day journey became a forty-year agony." Let us not allow ourselves to fall into the same trap, lest for us our short journey through life might become an **eternal** agony!

\*\*\* —Bobby Witherington