

# 3: THE CHALLENGE

## *Hinderances, Hang-Ups, & Hold-Outs*

God spoke, but they said, *"We are not able"* (Numbers 13:31, NKJV). In spite of *"all the signs which [He] performed among them"* (14:11), they did not believe His words and turned back from the borders of Canaan, just as they were ready to set foot in it<sup>1</sup>.

*"I tried to relieve your fears: 'Don't be terrified of them. GOD, your God is leading the way; He is fighting for you. You saw with your own eyes what He did for you... You saw what He did in the wilderness, how GOD, your God, carried you as a father carries his child, carried you the whole way until you arrived here. But now that you're here, you won't trust GOD"* (Deuteronomy 1:30-32, MSG).

The Israelites refusal to enter the Promised Land is an accurate portrayal of the beliefs that turn men away from obeying God's directive. With eyes fixed upon the difficulties of the task before them, God's instructions are easily exaggerated and altered until their emotions become their reality.

Doubt and uncertainty, fear, personal weakness, limitations and inadequacies, the opinions and counsel of others, all work against the One who conveys Truth. But every man must decide whether these things will keep him from acting on His instruction. For if a man will not believe God's words, he will remain at the border with the fainthearted Israelites.

## HINDERED

God spoke, and the Israelites understood His instruction. *"See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to your fathers"* (Deuteronomy 1:8). *"Look, God, your God, has placed this land as a gift before you. Go ahead and take it now. God, the God-of-Your-Fathers, promised it to you"* (1:21, MSG). ***"[He] has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged"*** (1:21, emphasis mine).

With these assurances, what reason(s) did the Israelites have to fear or be discouraged? \_\_\_\_\_

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Turn to the book of Numbers and read chapter 13, verses 1-3, 17-26.

Before they arrived at the border of Canaan, the Israelites were told of the land *and* its inhabitants; they were also reassured of God's promise (Deuteronomy 1:6-8). According to Deuteronomy 1:29-

33, what additional assurances were the people given on their way to the Promised Land?

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With the promised land in sight, the people petitioned Moses to “*send men before [them]... to search out the land*” (Deuteronomy 1:22). The Lord granted their request and commanded Moses to send them out (Numbers 13:1-2).

What do you believe hindered them from taking the land with immediacy? \_\_\_\_\_

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Do similar beliefs hinder you from taking God at His word, obeying His instructions with readiness?

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Does the fear of what God may ask or require keep you from taking the first step? How does uncertainty prevent you from carrying out what God asks? \_\_\_\_\_

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Were their actions revelatory of their faith and trust in God? Are yours? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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Instead of taking God at His word, the Israelites’ confidence hinged upon the reports of men. Do you find your assurance in God’s Word, or do you seek confidence in the observations of men?

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Would God have called the Israelites to the task if He knew they would fail? Does He ask you to trust and obey Him in order to disappoint you? Read 1 Thessalonians 5:24. \_\_\_\_\_

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## HUNG-UP

After spending forty days and nights in the land, there was no denying that it was just as the Lord had spoken— “*It truly flows with milk and honey,*” they said, “*and this is its fruit*” (Numbers 13:27). For those who believed God’s words, the expedition only confirmed His faithfulness. But for those who doubted, the mission only intensified their fears.

The next word that fell from the spy’s lips separated those who would follow God’s instructions from those who would not. Record the first word of Numbers 13:28. How does this word effect one’s ability to hear God’s voice? \_\_\_\_\_

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Continue reading Numbers 13, beginning in verse 27 and ending with verse 33.

According to verses 18, 19, and 20 of Numbers 13, what did the people initially seek to know about the land? About what did their investigation become? (vv.31-33) \_\_\_\_\_

How did their choice to delay entering the land prove to be detrimental? \_\_\_\_\_

The spies' observations of the land were true, but their perceptions were false. Beginning in verse 27, list the spies' findings. Separate fact from fiction by circling their opinions.

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(v.28) \_\_\_\_\_

(v.29) \_\_\_\_\_

(v.30) \_\_\_\_\_

(v.31) \_\_\_\_\_

(v.32) \_\_\_\_\_

(v.33) \_\_\_\_\_

The account of the spies "exaggerated the dangers of the people in the land, sought to stir up and instill fear in the people of Israel"<sup>ii</sup>. The people believed their report.

At the first mention of adversity, the Israelites were stricken by fear. When God speaks, do you tend to focus on everything that is difficult or could go wrong? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_

Do you often determine the outcome before taking the first step? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_

The fainthearted spies told the people that the obstacles were too great. "*The cities are fortified and very large*" (Numbers 13:28); "[*they*] are great and fortified up to heaven" (Deuteronomy 1:28).

Do the obstacles associated with obeying God’s voice seem insurmountable? In what ways have you allowed the figments of your imagination to discourage your heart? \_\_\_\_\_

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Read Psalm 18:29-36.

The spies also said, *“The people who dwell in the land are strong”* (Numbers 13:28); *“we are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we”* (v.31). *“And **all** the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature”* (v.32, emphasis mine). It would seem they had become captives of men before the battle.

When God asks something difficult of you, do you place your perceived weakness in the light of others’ strengths? If so, has this caused you to cease pressing forward? \_\_\_\_\_

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Tucked in the spies’ explanation was the declaration, *“We are not able...”* (v.31). Do you, like the Israelites, allow your personal limitations and inadequacies to keep you from obeying God’s voice?

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Consider this: Even if others are stronger or more capable, are they stronger or more capable than the God who has promised to go before you? (Psalm 136:11-15, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

The spies continued, *“There we saw giants; and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight”* (Numbers 13:33).

Why mustn’t you allow others’ perceptions of you to determine your obedience to God? \_\_\_\_\_

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Even if we are as “grasshoppers” before others, are the “giants” not as “grasshoppers” before the Lord? Read Isaiah 40:21-25.

In addition, the spies stated, *“The land...is a land that devours its inhabitants”* (Numbers 13:32). Unchecked fear led to irrational conclusions until “the spies believed that the conquest was altogether [impossible], and there was no purpose to attempt it”<sup>iii</sup>.

Man’s voice—his opinions and counsel—can easily supersede God’s instructions to us if we allow them to. How does this happen, and why? \_\_\_\_\_

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Read Proverbs 29:25. What is the fear of man likened to? Why? (Also consider Galatians 1:10.)

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## HOLDING-OUT

Continue reading, Numbers 14:1-10.

Upon receiving the report, discouragement spread quickly throughout the camp. *“So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night”* (Numbers 14:1). Warren Wiersbe observes: “When your eyes are on yourself and your circumstances, you lose perspective and say and do ridiculous things”<sup>iv</sup>.

According to verse 3 of Numbers 14, what mentality did the Israelites adopt? \_\_\_\_\_

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The spies, and the people, had exaggerated and altered the situation in their minds until their emotions became their reality. Per Exodus 3:7-9, would it have been better for the Israelites to return to Egypt? Is it *ever* better to “go back” after God has spoken? \_\_\_\_\_

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Why can't you allow your feelings to dictate your obedience to God's instruction? How often do you practice this? \_\_\_\_\_

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Return to Numbers 14. What resulted on account of the Israelites' overwhelming emotions? (vv.2-4) \_\_\_\_\_

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All of Israel began to murmur and complain, and then they began to rise against their leaders (Numbers 14:2, 10). Read Deuteronomy 1:28. Who else did the people blame for their discouragement? \_\_\_\_\_

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Who is responsible for your choice to heed God's instruction? \_\_\_\_\_

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Instead of admitting their own distrust of God, the Israelites declared their displeasure and sought to replace their leaders with men who shared their sentiments (14:4). For what reasons might an individual do this? \_\_\_\_\_

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Additionally, Numbers 14:3 and Deuteronomy 1:27 tell us that the Israelites launched an assault on God's character. Far greater than the battering of their leaders was the fact that the people did not believe God could do what He promised, would do what He said, or was capable of bringing them into the land.

What the Israelites believed about God determined their willingness to listen and obey.

Psalm 78:8 says the Israelites were *“stubborn, rebellious, and unfaithful, refusing to give their hearts to God”* (NLT). Define stubbornness and rebellion. How would you describe unfaithfulness? Have you ever thought of unbelief in these terms? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Based on the progression of events (Numbers 13 and 14; Deuteronomy 1), what led to the people’s stubbornness, then rebellion? \_\_\_\_\_  
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The Israelites placed limitations on their obedience to God (stubbornness), and then refused to obey Him altogether (rebellion) because they allowed their “reality” to supersede Him.

Return to Numbers 14 and read verse 11. Ultimately, what was the Israelites’ sin? \_\_\_\_\_  
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In the end, were the Israelites benefited by refusing Him who speaks? How then are we profited by doing the same? \_\_\_\_\_  
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While the majority gave an evil report of the land, Caleb boldly declared: *“Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it”* (Numbers 13:30); only Moses, Aaron, and Joshua agreed with Caleb (14:5-6).

Like Joshua and Caleb, what might occur on account of your confidence in God? (v.10) \_\_\_\_\_  
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Reread Numbers 14:6-9. What underlying truth enabled these men to believe God’s promises and obey His directive? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Had Joshua and Caleb allowed doubt and uncertainty, fear, personal weakness, limitations and inadequacies, the opinions and counsel of others to supersede God, had they allowed the opposition of others to dissuade them from heeding God’s voice, they would never have witnessed His faithfulness.

In closing, Hebrews 12:25 says, *“So see to it that you do not reject Him or refuse to listen and heed Him who is speaking [to you now]”* (AMP).

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<sup>i</sup> Henry, M. (1996). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Numbers 13:1-33). Peabody: Hendrickson.

<sup>ii</sup> MacArthur, J.J. (1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed.) (Numbers 13:32). Nashville: Word Publishers.

<sup>iii</sup> Henry, M. (Numbers 13:26-33).

<sup>iv</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W. (2001). *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Pentateuch* (Numbers 14:1-10). Colorado Springs: Victor Publishing.

<sup>v</sup> For further reading: Hebrews 3:7-19.