

Resting in the Lord

“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

... Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”

—Hebrews 4:9,11

IN THE BOOK OF NUMBERS,

chapters 13 and 14, we find the Israelites traveling through the wilderness of Paran. As they came near to Canaan they were instructed by the Heavenly Father through Moses to select from among their number twelve men, one from each of the

tribes, to serve as scouts to spy out the Promised Land. The charge they received included investigating the nature of the soil, whether or not it was rich, and the types of people who inhabited the land, as well as their numbers and strength. Additionally, the spies were to determine the types of dwellings of the inhabitants, as to whether they were tents or houses within walled cities. Furthermore, they were to bring back sample fruitage from the land.—Num. 13:17-20

Having received these instructions, the spies went into Canaan and traveled throughout the

area. At a place called Eschol, they cut a branch with a single cluster of grapes on it. It was so large and heavy that it took two men to carry it as they hung it on a pole and transported it between them. They also gathered some pomegranates and figs to bring back with them. (Num. 13:23) At the end of forty days, the spies returned and reported to Moses and Aaron what they had seen, and they brought with them the fruits which they had found. Ten of the spies brought a report of insurmountable obstacles to be faced if the Israelites attempted to enter the land. (vss. 27-33) Two of the scouts, Caleb and Joshua, brought a much different report, and encouraged the people to go up and take the land which God had promised them. They had faith and confidence in God's delivering power over any obstacles which might arise.—chap. 14:6-9

THE PEOPLE BELIEVE AN EVIL REPORT

The remarks made by the ten spies who gave an evil report contained a degree of subtlety. In their report to Moses concerning whether or not the land was rich, they indicated, rightly so, that it did appear to be very good and that there was plenty of food to eat. They added, however, that the cities were walled and the people numerous and powerful. They suggested that Israel would not be successful in their venture because it was too dangerous. In exaggeration, they stated that the Canaanites were so big that the Israelites appeared to be as grasshoppers in comparison and would be easily defeated. Despite the protestations of Joshua and Caleb, the people at large began to weep, because they took the words of the ten cowardly spies instead of the

encouragement which Joshua and Caleb provided them. They murmured against Moses and Aaron, stating that they should never have left Egypt. They questioned why God had brought them into this place where they would be killed by their enemies.—vss. 1-3

The people went so far as to enter into a conspiracy, determining to select another captain to lead them back Egypt. As Caleb and Joshua persisted that they should be courageous and proceed in the Lord's strength to conquer the land, the people even wanted to stone them. (vss. 4,10) God was most displeased with the response of the people of Israel. He told Moses he was going to send a plague to destroy them and no longer have them as his people. Furthermore, God indicated that Moses' descendants would become an even greater nation and take the Israelites' place. In nobility of character, Moses prayed to God that the people of Israel not be destroyed. Ultimately, the Heavenly Father granted Moses' petition, but not without punishment upon the nation. Because the people had disobeyed him so often, in spite of all of his blessings to them, God indicated that for forty years the nation would wander in the desert until all those adults who refused to go into the land were dead. Only their children and the two spies, Joshua and Caleb, who gave the good report, would live throughout this period and enter Canaan.—vss. 11-38

When the people heard this, they were sorry for what they had done and expressed to Moses that they now were willing to enter and invade the land. Moses cautioned them not to do that, because God would not be on their side. Nevertheless, they

disobeyed Moses and went up against the Canaanites. The inhabitants of the land came out against the Israelites, fought and drove them back to the desert again.—Num. 14:39-45

LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S EXPERIENCE

Here are some observations drawn from lessons learned from Israel's experiences as recorded in Numbers 13 and 14.

1) God's patience and longsuffering may be extended to even those who doubt him.

The Heavenly Father's direction to Moses that representatives should be sent to spy out Canaan was in response to an earlier petition by the people to have the land scouted before attempting to conquer it. If the Israelites truly had confidence in God's providences on their behalf, there would have been no need for them to request a mission to search the land before entering it. Not only had God delivered them from Egyptian captivity, but he had made abundant provision for all of their needs through the supplying of water at Marah and Meribah. He had also given them manna and quail to eat. Even with all their murmurings, he said, "I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite: Unto a land flowing with milk and honey." (Exod. 33:2,3) Surely, the fact that God continued to promise protection and success for his people should have been more than enough to give them confidence. Nevertheless, in his patience and longsuffering, God acceded to their request to spy out the land as a prelude to conquering it.

2) Israel desired to walk by sight and relied upon human wisdom.

The people depended upon human agencies to tell them what lay ahead in Canaan instead of relying upon the Word of God as to how they should proceed. The findings by ten of the twelve spies proved to be an evil report because they did not limit it to a factual description of what they saw—a land of milk and honey, with grapes, figs, pomegranates, and much fruitage. When they saw the walled cities and supposed “giants,” they discouraged the people from proceeding forward by counseling that they would be defeated because of their enemies’ strength. This was an affront to God in supposing the Canaanites were stronger than his almighty power. It also disregarded his previous providence on their behalf in providing water, quail, and manna as they traveled in the wilderness.

3) Israel was ungrateful for the Heavenly Father’s providential arrangements.

The people murmured against Moses and Aaron, whom God had appointed to lead them. Incredibly, they blasphemed the character of God by suggesting he had brought them and their wives and children to perish in the wilderness. Additionally, in their irrationality, they desired to have another leader than Moses who would return them to Egypt. Doing this, they disregarded how much they had groaned previously for deliverance from Pharaoh, and how in mercy, their pleas had been answered in such a miraculous fashion by God. The Israelites’ ungratefulness was almost beyond measure.

4) Faithful servants of God manifest nobility of character even in the midst of unthankfulness.

We are struck with the attitude of grief displayed by Joshua and Caleb, who rent their clothes in sorrow for the people's blasphemy against God and sedition against Moses' leadership. Yet, in an attempt to recover the Israelites from their folly, they again asserted the need for trust in God to give them the victory over the Canaanites. In the midst of this, however, the people's perversity was manifested in their desire to stone these two faithful servants.

The character of Moses in pleading to God not to utterly destroy these rebellious, unthankful people, and establish him and his posterity as inheritors of the promises, is also particularly noteworthy. Rather than being concerned with himself, he desired that no reproach should come upon the name or glory of Jehovah. Israel's enemies would not properly have understood such disinheritance as a sign of God's justice in dealing with them for their continued provocations. They, rather, would have wrongly attributed it to the failure of God's power to accomplish his designs and to keep his promise to bring the Israelites into the possession of Canaan.

5) God's mercy and justice are in perfect harmony.

God's mercy, and the value of intercessory prayer, were demonstrated in that he hearkened unto Moses' request by not destroying all of the Israelites. Nevertheless, he indicated that because the Israelites had failed to appreciate all of his wonderful miracles and leadings on their behalf, those adults who left Egypt who were above twenty years of age would spend forty years wandering in the wilder-

ness. Justly, he pronounced that they would all perish and only their children, and Caleb and Joshua, would ultimately enter the promised land. God's justice was further manifested in the sudden death of the ten evil spies, whose report instigated Israel's refusal to go up and possess the land of Canaan.

6) Hardness of heart was a continuing problem during the Israelites' wilderness experience.

Even with all the chastisements they received, the people were neither contrite nor repentant, nor did they listen to God's further instruction. Despite the edict that they should not possess the land at this time, and Moses' declaration not to proceed further, they in their rashness and continued rebellion tried to do so. Although Moses and the Ark of the Covenant remained in the camp, some of the Israelites went up against their enemies. The Amorites came out of the mountain, chased them "as bees do," and routed them. (Deut. 1:44) Truly the Israelites' perversity against God's commands was remarkable.

PAUL'S TESTIMONY

In the New Testament there are numerous references that address the experiences of Israel as being prophetic. In the 3rd chapter of Hebrews, verses 16-19, the Apostle Paul refers to this same apostasy. He points out that by the time those forty years of wandering ended, the wilderness was dotted with the graves of all those who rebelled against God's direction and who did not heed the good report given by Joshua and Caleb. Paul says they were excluded from the privilege of entering Canaan "because of unbelief."

Although much of the content in the book of Hebrews is addressed largely to Jewish Christians living in the first century, its principles have applicability to all believers throughout this Gospel Age. "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." (Heb. 4:1) In this passage, the spirit begotten of this Gospel Age are admonished to take heed to the example of fleshly Israel. We should manifest a reverent sobriety with regard to our walk, lest we fail to properly act upon the exceeding great and precious promises which are given to us. These promises from God are for the purpose of helping us attain the heavenly rest of the divine nature by making our calling and election sure.

"Unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." (vs. 2) The good news has been preached to us, and we have received the invitation of the High Calling to be part of the spiritual seed of Abraham which is to bless all the families of the earth. Although the Law was a schoolmaster to bring the Jews to Christ, except for a remnant, they did not manifest in their heart the spirit of the Law. Hence, when Jesus presented himself to the nation as their promised Messiah, because of their unbelief and hardness of heart, they were cast off from favor and lost the exclusive right to become the body of Christ.

ENTERING INTO SPIRITUAL REST

"We which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall

enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.” (vs. 3) God, through his son, has extended to us an invitation to partake of the redemptive merit of Jesus’ sacrifice by making a full consecration, resulting in justification and forgiveness of sins. True believers enter a rest of faith when accepted in the Beloved. By serving the Lord, and doing his will and that of the Father, we develop fruitage and a sense of increasing joy as we see the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Thus, consecrated and sanctified believers in Christ presently enter into an additional rest, a rest from our own works. As we grow in grace and knowledge along our pilgrim journey, our faith is strengthened and our rest increases. If we continue to progress by being obedient to the Father’s will to the greatest extent of our ability, then we will realize the hope of eternal rest in glory.

“He spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.” (vs. 4) This verse alludes to the seventh day of the Genesis account in which God rested from his creative work with regard to the earth and the human family. Surely, this was not because of any weariness on his part. On the contrary, although the Heavenly Father ceased his immediate work with regard to mankind, he continued with his ultimate purpose toward man. This purpose was that his son would become the Head of the seed of the woman which ultimately will bruise the serpent’s head and do away with sin and death. (Gen. 3:15) If we are faithful, we will be a part of this seed class. (Gal. 3:16,29) This

New Creation has been in the process of development during this Gospel Age, while the world of mankind has largely been left alone to fend for itself until Christ's kingdom of righteousness is ushered in.

OPENED TO THE GENTILES

"In this place again, if they shall enter into my rest." (Heb. 4:5) The *New International Version* renders the same passage, "They shall never enter my rest." This confirms that God's Sabbath rest was still in effect when these words were uttered. It also points out that Israel as a nation had failed to enter into the rest of faith in God's spiritual promises. Since natural Israel was typical of the New Creation, this statement reemphasizes the earlier caution that we should not follow the example of unbelief which prevented those Israelites who came out of Egypt from entering the Canaan of rest. Like Caleb, we of the Gospel church, under the leadership of Jesus, the antitypical Joshua, now enter this rest of faith.

"Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief." (vs. 6) In a literal sense, those who died in the wilderness because of their unbelief, failed to enter literal Canaan. The initial offer of entering into the antitypical Canaan of rest was made to the nation of Israel at the time of Jesus' First Advent. Because of their blindness and hardness of heart under their leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, Israel failed to avail themselves of the opportunity of having the exclusive right to enter into this special

arrangement of the High Calling. Only a comparatively few Jews, a remnant, were of such a mind and heart to accept the privilege of discipleship offered at Pentecost. Ultimately, the opportunity of entering this rest of faith was opened to the Gentiles as well, commencing from the time of Cornelius' conversion, even to the present harvest time of the Gospel Age.

SPIRITUAL REST A LIMITED OPPORTUNITY

“Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” (vs. 7) The principle of hearkening to God and obedience to his will for protection has always been operative—from the time of Adam, during the Patriarchal Age, and throughout the Jewish Age. Nevertheless, this verse expresses urgency to each Gospel Age believer—antitypical spiritual Israelite—with regard to fulfilling our covenant of sacrifice. A time will come when there will be no more opportunity to run for the mark of the prize of the High Calling. “He limiteth” this period of time, after which there will be no further opportunity to be of the church class.

“If Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.” (Heb. 4:8) In the *Marginal Translation*, it is noted that Jesus is the New Testament equivalent of Joshua in the Old Testament. This passage is merely a continuation of the thought that, prior to the Gospel Age, the rest described here was not obtained. This is discerned when we remember that even with Israel's actual entrance into literal Canaan, there

was continual conflict, sickness, sorrow, and ultimately, death.

FUTURE REST

“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” (vs. 9) This verse provides the climax to which the preceding ones have led. It points to a future and more complete rest when the church experiences its resurrection change and is united with Christ. All of our preparatory works of obedience, faithfulness, and sacrifice will be ended—we will rest from those works. If we attain such a station, whatever we have endured on this side of the veil will be as nothing in comparison to the glory which shall be revealed in us.

In our lesson, Joshua typically represents Christ Jesus, and Caleb represents the church. The children of that generation which perished in the wilderness may well picture the world of mankind. After the establishment of Christ’s kingdom, they will be led into their earthly Canaan of rest under the provisions of the New Covenant. This covenant, so much better than any previous to it, will be in effect to provide blessings to all the obedient of mankind so that they may obtain everlasting life upon the earth.

ADDITIONAL LESSONS

In drawing this consideration of resting in the Lord to a close, let us remember and note well five additional points from which we can draw needed lessons:

- 1) We have the privilege of entering into spiritual rest by our justification in Christ. This is a prelude to that still more glorious rest of our

Heavenly Canaan, if we prove faithful unto death.

2) The spying out of the land may well represent our investigation and appreciation of the message of truth. Its harmonious doctrines and the Bible's teachings demonstrate the magnificent character of God and the wonderful provisions which he has made to bring about the blessing of all the families of the earth.

3) The twelve who were sent to spy out the land might well represent all the spirit begotten of this age. These all experience a measure of the Lord's rest. The ten spies, however, seem to represent those who fail to properly appropriate the promises given to them—fail to have complete confidence in the power of God that they might be more than overcomers. Thus, they perhaps give an evil or discouraging report either by word or actions to others with whom they come in contact.

4) The Israelites' enemies, who inhabited Canaan, may well represent the various fleshly weaknesses which beset us as spiritual Israelites. These must be overcome, with the Lord's help and by his grace, before we can take possession of, and inherit, heavenly Canaan.

5) A major theme contained in this study is the necessity for continual faith in God. As the Heavenly Father's children, we above all others should see his leadings in our lives thus far. As such, we should trust him implicitly so that no matter what his Word reveals, to the very best of our ability we should be obedient to it. ■