

“They Might Be Giants”
[Numbers 13:17-20, 13:26-4:9](#)
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This month and next, we are studying passages from the book of Numbers, which tells us about most of the time that God was leading the Israelites from their enslavement in Egypt to the Land of Promise, where God wanted them to go and be the nation that would reveal to the world who He is.

Of course, as with any long trip with 600,000 people, there were more than a few hiccups on the way. Nevertheless, they had made it from Mount Sinai to a place called Kadesh, which was an oasis in the northeast of Sinai, right on the cusp of the land that was ruled by a people called the Canaanites.

But, in order to go and live in the land that was ruled by the Canaanites, they would have to defeat the Canaanites. In order to defeat the Canaanites, they had to get a good idea of what they were up against, so at this point in the story, we find Moses recruiting and sending out a reconnaissance team to explore the land and bring back a report.

Specifically, Moses wanted the spies to bring back samples of the land’s goodness. Surely they had heard that the land was good, and surely they had dreamt over and over about the goodness of this land where God was taking them. God had told them that He would lead them into the land, so while the spies went out for tactical information, they didn’t just go on a fact-finding mission.

They also went out on a faith-finding mission. Moses had faith that they would bring back some wonderful things to show the people: fruits, branches of trees, and all sorts of mouth-watering goodies from the land where they were going. After all, it wasn’t long before this that the Israelites had been complaining about the food that God was providing for them.

If you were here last week, you probably remember that, too. Here is what we heard back in chapter 11:

The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, “If only we had meat to eat! ⁵We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. ⁶But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!” ([Numbers 11:4-6](#))

The manna, of course, was the bland food that God was providing for them each and

every day of their journey. Think of it as a really boring trail mix. The people were making do with it, but then “the rabble,” as the group of constant complainers was called, reminded them of all of the tasty things from back in Egypt.

Moses surely remembered the rabble’s complaints, and he probably still heard those whispers from time to time. It’s kind of funny, actually, that the Hebrew word for “rabble” is “asaphsoph,” which even sounds like people whispering around: “asaphsoph, asaphsoph, asaphsoph.” Moses surely remembered these whispers and thought that if the spies could bring back some of the bounty of the Promised Land, then the people would see that they didn’t just have tasty food back in Egypt where they were slaves, but they had wonderful things awaiting them in the land where God was going to let them live free.

So, it wasn’t just a fact-finding mission; it was a faith-finding mission. Moses wanted the spies to bring back evidence that would strengthen the people’s faith.

And they did! Sure enough, the spies brought back this report: “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.”

But they also brought back this report: “But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. 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.”

And the people got scared. So there was a problem, and at this point, Moses was surely thinking, “Ugh...I shouldn’t have told them to report on all the people and the cities; I should have just told them to bring back fruit.”

One of the spies, Caleb, spoke up and said, “Oh, hush! We should just go and take the land! We can do it!” But then the other spies shouted him down and said, “Are you crazy? They’re stronger than we are!” And we are told that these other spies spread a bad report among the people...actually, a more proper translation is, “an evil report.” They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

[sigh] Why couldn’t they just focus on the fruit?

But this is how it goes in our lives of faith. It’s not like we don’t see the fruit that God can provide us, but we can’t *not* see all of the difficulty and trouble and fear that we will face in life, as well. Following God was never supposed to be the easy way, but it is amazing sometimes how quickly we can forget the fruit and focus on the hardships. This can be the case individually, but it can also be the case for a group of believers—even an

entire nation of believers.

Actually, groups of people can be deterred even more easily than individuals sometimes. If a big group of people takes a risk and jumps out in faith to do something, and it doesn't work out, then that's not just one person who is apprehensive, but many. Then, the story of that effort becomes a story of failure, and it becomes part of that group's story about itself. It gets told over and over, and it becomes bigger than it is.

Sure, it was only a small blip in the life of that group, but it becomes a big story of failure and fear and apprehension the next time an opportunity comes around. It becomes, "oh, we tried that before," or, "we all know how that turned out," and the refrain of failure actually becomes a core part of the group's identity. Rather than being a people who tried together in faith, they identify themselves as a people who failed together, and in some kind of twisted way, that collective self-doubt becomes celebrated. That refrain of failure becomes like a psalm that that group of people has written about its walk with God.

Every organization has those kinds of psalms. Every church has those kinds of psalms. Every family probably has those kinds of psalms. Psalms are the songs that the people of Israel wrote about their walk with God, and we have our own psalms, too. We may not write them down and sing them, but we certainly rehearse them (and most of the psalms were initially passed down orally from generation to generation, anyway). [See [Psalm 106](#) for Israel's retelling of their shortcomings as God tried to lead them during this time]

We have those kinds of psalms in our own personal lives, as well. Individually, we can be deterred so easily by setbacks and by risks that didn't work out for us. A friend of mine is a pastor in a big city, and he decided that he was going to do a sermon series on evangelism in order to help the folks in his congregation become more comfortable with talking openly about their faith. About halfway through the series, he realized, "you know, I'm not sure *I'm* even comfortable talking with other people about my faith, so I should probably try it."

So one day he went down to the local Barnes and Noble to get a coffee and just sit and wait for an opportunity. Sure enough, after a few minutes, a young woman sat down at the table next to him and just started crying. Well, after giving her a moment, he leaned over and asked her what was wrong. She told him that she had just choked in a job interview and she felt lost.

This was his opportunity! So, he opened his mouth...and couldn't think of a single thing to say! So he just said, "it's gonna be alright," and she smiled and said, "thanks," and he picked up his newspaper and left before he could embarrass himself even more.

And he left thinking that he had completely botched his opportunity. He had been trying

to help his congregation find ways to share the good news of Jesus with other people around them, and he couldn't even do it himself. He left that encounter and was only focused on his own shortcomings.

But later that night, he was talking with his wife about it, and she had a different perspective. Instead of focusing on what he couldn't do, she saw the situation this way: He had wanted God to give him an opportunity. God gave him an opportunity. He wanted to help make a difference for that young woman, and he did—maybe just a small one, but a difference nonetheless. The young woman went into Barnes and Noble intimidated and crying about a job interview, and an older man shared a kind word of encouragement.

Think about how that young woman felt. She was in a vulnerable spot, and if you're in a vulnerable spot and you are trying to keep it together but you break down crying in a public café...

...well, let's think about what else could have happened. There were other people at other tables in the café, as well. If they had been sitting and having coffee together and suddenly this young woman sat down and started crying next to them, what would have been the most common thing to happen?

The people around her probably would have started whispering amongst themselves, "what do you think happened?" "I bet she broke up with her boyfriend." "I bet he cheated on her." "Maybe she just got fired." "I wonder what she did." "Who comes into Barnes and Noble by themselves and starts crying." "This is so awkward; can't she hold it together."

Asaphsuph, asaphsuph, asaphsuph.

But no, in her vulnerability, one man leaned over and told her it was going to be ok. Sure, maybe he didn't convince her to follow Jesus right then and there, but he was able to shine a little bit of light in a dark time.

Of course, he didn't realize this at the time, because he could only leave thinking about how he had fallen short of doing something good. But in that moment, he was focused on his own shortcomings rather than the little bit of fruit that God was able to produce out of his effort to be a disciple of Jesus. Fortunately, his wife was able to help him write a different psalm about his experience. Instead of a psalm of facts, he was able to write a psalm of faith.

That's what God wants for us, and that is what He wanted for the Israelites, as well. They had fallen short over and over as He tried to lead them through the wilderness, but He kept giving them opportunities to take a leap of faith and trust Him. God's primary

mission was to lead them out of slavery and form them into a people who would follow Him.

In fact, God is always trying to lead us out of slavery, whether it is slavery in Egypt, or slavery to our own fears, our own doubts, and our own sins. That's why the report of the ten spies who were afraid to enter the land of Canaan wasn't just called a "bad report;" it was called an "evil report." It was evil because it led the people away from what God wanted for them—and it even inspired them to consider throwing away everything God had done and marching back to Egypt.

The passage says that they wanted to overthrow their leaders, but they weren't just trying to overthrow Moses and Aaron—they wanted to overthrow the whole mission of God, over which God had appointed Moses and Aaron. They didn't just want to get rid of their leaders; they wanted to get rid of their leaders' purpose.

But despite Joshua's last-ditch effort to convince them otherwise, the people still wanted to stone Moses and Aaron, until the glory of the Lord appeared before them. God actually threatened to destroy the people, but Moses pleaded for mercy by asking God, "what does it say about you if you lead us here and then slaughter us?" So, instead of destroying them, God decided that they would spend another 40 years in the wilderness. He said, "if you'd rather die in the wilderness, then fine, I will grant your wish." Those who complained and were governed by fear would never see the Promised Land, but their children would.

After all, God had all the time in the world, and his promise wasn't to those specific Israelites, that they would each see the Promised Land, but rather to the nation. God's promise would be realized by whichever generation decided to follow Him.

And that is a fascinating thing. God's promise wasn't simply a promise; it was a call—a call to follow Him in faith.

Those grapes and figs and pomegranates were supposed to be a sign of what lay ahead if the people followed their call to follow the Lord. But, if we can get into the Israelites' heads, they might have seen the bounty of the land ahead of them and been intimidated. Back then, different nations had different gods, and if a nation had abundance, then it was assumed that they were greatly blessed by whichever gods they followed. So, the Israelites might have thought, "Oh, these people have wonderful food and great harvests, and we only have manna. They live in a land of milk and honey, and we're out here in the desert. Their gods must be more powerful and generous than our god. They might be giants. How can we defeat them?"

But "having" was not the point. Following was the point, and the Israelites missed it. If they had followed their calling, then they would have had those things, as well—not just

because God was rewarding them, but because the land itself was good. After all, their God was *the* Lord, and the Canaanites' gods didn't really exist. God didn't promise a land to them because of who they were; He wanted them to follow Him to a great land.

Now, does this mean that if we follow God, we are going to have wealth and riches beyond our wildest dreams? Well, no, but it does mean that if we follow Him, we will realize the goodness of whatever He gives us, whether it's manna or grapes and figs and pomegranates. In fact, as we follow God, the things that we see as plain, bland manna now might become in our eyes the delicious gifts of God.

After all, we now know that God's purpose is not to simply give us a land or shower blessings upon us, but to lead us into a knowledge and understanding of His gifts. The land He promises isn't just a place where we have abundant harvests, but an eternal kingdom where we are completely sustained by Him.

The people of Israel eventually got to the Land of Promise, but their story did not end there. They kept messing up, and God kept trying to correct them, and eventually God decided that the only way to make His purpose clear to them was to become one of them, and to show His grace not simply in forgiveness, but in giving them His ultimate promise. So he came to us in Christ, and he bore all of the punishment for our sins Himself, to show us that if we follow Him, then He has indeed prepared a place for us.

God's promise to us dwells in Jesus. Instead of simply dwelling behind a curtain in a tent, as He did for the Israelites, God has dwelt with us as Jesus, and continues to do so in the Holy Spirit. As the writer of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews tells us, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf." ([Hebrews 6:19-20](#))

So how are we to live? Well, the author of Hebrews continues:

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. ([Hebrews 10:19-25](#))

So, if we have that kind of confidence, then what should we do? We should follow the

fruit instead of our fear. We should write psalms of faith for our lives, knowing that as we follow, God is at work. We should see the fruit of what God is doing and be inspired to follow in faith, no matter how great the obstacles ahead of us might seem.

As we consider how to follow God's fruit in our lives, let us come together over the fruit that He has provided for us in Christ as we take together the Lord's Supper, acknowledging what it says about God that he leads us here, and laid down his own life so that we may know Him in this life and the next.