**The Spies Incite Rebellion**

In my early teenage years, I discovered a foolproof plan to become wealthy. It occurred to me that a modest number of cows could be parlayed into a massive herd in no time due to exponential growth as the cows reproduced. I calculated the fortune I would make from this scheme and presented the plan to my father fully expecting not just his approval but participation. Normally an optimistic man, he surprised me with his negative reaction. His lame excuses had to do with feed, vet bills and the like. Turns out he was right, I have yet to meet anyone who became rich by raising cows. I will reserve judgment on the Martin cattle venture although I will note that the first batch of cows disappeared into the woods never to be *herd* from again. Maybe they preferred the bucolic surroundings offered at Moore Estates. The present generation of Martin bovines appears more compliant, perhaps due to the sturdy fencing that has been erected at no small cost. As I aged, my optimistic nature dimmed to a more pessimistic (some might say realistic) view of the world. Numerous times in my banking career, I encountered those who retained their sunny disposition into adulthood and presented me with business plans complete with bullish projections to justify the loan. Strangely I was never shown a projection that predicted failure. In our study of Numbers chapter 13, we see the pessimism of the Israelites on display as they sought information to justify a decision already made.

The chapter begins with God telling Moses to send some men to explore the land of Canaan. There is some speculation that it was not God’s original idea. In Deut. 1:22 Moses said that the people had presented the plan to send men to spy on the land. One man from each tribe with the exception of Levi was appointed to go. Moses sent them through the Negev desert on to the hill country, a mountainous region stretching about 240 miles from Beersheba to Mt. Hor. Moses gave instructions to see what the land and its people were like. They went as far north as Rehob and visited Hebron where the bones of Abraham, Isaac, Rebecca. Jacob and Leah were buried. They brought back a cluster of grapes from the Valley of Eshcol which was so large, 2 men carried it slung on a pole.

After 40 days they returned and reported their findings to Moses, Aaron and the whole assembly of the people. They confirmed God’s description of the land as flowing with milk and honey but tempered that positive news with a report of inhabitants so powerful they could not be overcome. They claimed to have seen descendants of Anak there who were thought to be remnants of the Nephilim (giants in KJV, see Gen. 6:4), a race of large men that would later include Goliath. Before any of the men voiced an objection to going into Canaan, Caleb spoke up and said they should go up and take possession of the land. He was confident they could do it because God had promised the land to them. The other men objected and worse, they spread word throughout the camp that led the people to fear going into Canaan. They saw themselves as grasshoppers in comparison to the Nephilim. James Coffman observed “They had a small eye upon themselves, a big eye upon their enemies, and no eye at all upon God”.

The Israelites had 3 choices to consider regarding a mission to scout Canaan. The first choice and the correct one was to not send anyone to explore the land. God had already told them everything they needed to know about the land. He had chosen it for them to dwell in and that should have sufficed. Furthermore He told them to take the land and promised to send an angel before them to drive out the tribes occupying the land (see Ex. 33:2).

Their second choice would have been to send men ahead to scout the land in anticipation of all the tribes following them. They could determine the best route to take although all they really needed to do was follow the pillars of cloud and fire.

The third choice and the one they made was seeking confirmation of what they had already decided. The people and their leaders had displayed a pessimistic attitude about the journey to Canaan soon after they left Egypt. No amount of miracles wrought by God could change their minds. It is telling that they waited patiently for 40 days for the men to return instead seeking new gods. They had more faith in men than they had in God. I am reminded of the old joke about the man who fell off a cliff and was hanging by the limb of a tree. He cried out “God save me!” God answered “Let go of the limb and I’ll catch you”. The man asked “Is there anyone else up there?” (see Gen. 6:14-21, Josh. 6:2-5, Judges 7:1-7).