

Only two people are qualified to tell this story. My partner is one of them. I am the other. We're spies. We are the only two who completed the forty-day mission. You may have guessed that my name is Joshua, but I'm his partner, Caleb. And yes, we are also the only two of our spy unit to survive the Hebrew's forty-year trek in the wilderness and additionally participate in the conquering of the Promised Land.

But I'm getting ahead of myself, as spies often do, especially retired spies. I want to tell you about the book of *Numbers*, the fourth book of the Old Testament. It picks up the exodus story from the end of Deuteronomy. It gets its name from the two censuses it describes – one at Mount Sinai, and the second when the Hebrews enter the Promised Land.

The first nine chapters of *Numbers* talk of the preparation of the journey of the Hebrews from the Desert of Sinai that took place approximately a year after the exodus from Egypt. God's intent was for them to go directly from Egypt to the Promised Land and take necessary provisions for it. A census showed that there were more than six hundred thousand men of fighting age among the Jews, not counting the Levites who were required to take care of the Tabernacle.¹ This section of the book of Numbers includes great detail about the Levites, health precautions, tabernacle worship, and moving the huge camp.

God spoke directly with Moses in the Tabernacle. When he was in the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum where the presence God actually dwells, the voice of God would come to him from between the two cherubim on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant.²

¹ Numbers 1:46

² Numbers 7:89

The cloud stayed above the Tabernacle. During the night, the cloud looked like fire. Whenever the cloud lifted, the Israelites moved to the next destination. When the cloud remained above the Tabernacle, the Israelites stayed put.

The next five chapters of *Numbers* tell of the journey of the Hebrews from the Desert of Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea. This is an action-packed section. I love it. First, some people complained about their hardships, and the Lord punished them by fire. Then some got tired of eating manna, and complained. They said they wanted the food they had enjoyed in Egypt. God sent so many quail for them to eat that they were overcome with them. God punished them for complaining about his provision and the leadership of Moses.

In a jealous rage, Aaron and Miriam rebelled against the authority of Moses, they complained about his wife. God punished Miriam, striking her immediately with leprosy. However, when Moses prayed for her, she was healed.

The most important part of these chapters is the story of the spies. And that's not solely because it's my personal story. It's a good one, if I do say so myself. This is the first time I am mentioned in the Bible. God told Moses to send spies into the Promised Land. Think about that, a spy mission originated by God to obtain more information so that Moses could make decisions about how to proceed. Moses chose twelve spies, one from each tribe. I was chosen from the tribe of Judah, the same tribe as David and Jesus. Joshua was chosen from the tribe of Ephraim, the smallest of the tribes.

Canaan was the land that God had promised us. So, over the next forty days, our team of twelve spies traveled throughout Canaan. The land literally flowed with milk and honey. The grapes were enormous. We brought back a branch with one cluster of grapes, it was so big and heavy that we needed two men to carry it. At the end of forty days, we returned to the Israelite camp.

We showed the fruit to the people. Told them of the milk and honey. Ten of the spies reported that Canaan's cities were large and fortified, that the people were giants and should be feared. They lacked faith in God's ability to deliver the land

into our hands. Cowards! “We can do this, take possession of the Land” I begged. With the Lord we would certainly take it.

The ten spies repeatedly discouraged the people from fighting for the land. The people were so scared that they rebelled against Moses and Aaron. They threatened to stone Joshua and me. God was furious with the people and their lack of faith. Their punishment? To wander in the desert for forty years. During this time, every adult who grumbled would die. Only Joshua and I were given permission to live and go into the Promised Land.

The third section of *Numbers* includes roughly seven chapters. It tells of our trip from Kadesh to the Plains of Moab. These seven chapters cover approximately thirty-seven years of time, so they only talk of a few things in detail.

One of the stories concerns Korah and his leading a rebellion of more than 250 men against Moses. They did not want to follow Moses. Moses set up a contest for the Lord to choose between him and them. It was no contest. The earth swallowed up Korah and his associate, their families and their possessions. The remainder of the men were burned up by fire from the Lord. About 15,000 people died as a result of this rebellion. You would think that the people would figure out not to rebel or complain against God and Moses, but they did not.

On another occasion, the people complained about not having enough water for them and their livestock. God told Moses to take his staff and talk to a rock, and water would flow from it. In his anger and pride, Moses chided the people by saying, “Must we bring you water out of this rock?” and struck it like he had the previous time. By not giving God the sole glory by doing exactly what he was told, Moses sinned. His punishment was not being allowed to enter the Promised Land.

It is possible that Paul referred to this rock in 1 Corinthians 10:4 when he said, “They drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them.” Paul seemed to think that the rock was a portable drinking fountain that moved with us.

This section ends with the Hebrews defeating Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan. By doing so, we took possession of the Amorite lands east of the

Jordan River. These lands would become the possession of the tribes of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh.

The fourth section of Numbers is about four chapters long. It is the story of the prophet Balaam and Balak the King of Moab. Balak tried to hire Balaam to curse the Israelites. Every time Balaam tried to do so, he blessed the Israelites instead.

This story has one humorous incident and one tragic incident. When Balaam first went to Balak, God decided he should not go. He placed a killing angel in his path. Balaam's donkey was able to see the angel and refused to go forward, but Balaam could not see the angel. The enraged Balaam beat the donkey to make it go forward, but the donkey balked three times. Finally, God enabled the donkey to talk to Balaam. The donkey talks so rationally to the irrational Balaam that you have to smile. It said, „Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?“ After a short conversation with the donkey, Balaam was allowed to see the killing angel and realize his brush with death.

As for the tragic incident...while Balaam was not able to curse the Israelites, he did something far worse. He taught the Moabite women how to best seduce the Israelite men so that they would join them in sexual immorality and the worship of idols.³ Many Israelite men gave in willingly, and easily, to their seduction. This had disastrous, long-term effect upon the Israelites.

The last section of *Numbers* is about eleven chapters long. This section tells of the final preparation of the Israelites to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. Once again, a census was taken, and once again there were just over six hundred thousand men of fighting age, not counting the Levites.

When the census was taken, it was determined that only Joshua and I remained from the Israelite adults who entered into the wilderness!

³ 2 Peter 2:15-16, Jude 11, Revelation 2:14

Joshua had the spirit of leadership, so God commanded Moses to give him some authority in front of the people as a sign that he would succeed Moses. This was done by Eleazar the priest in front of all the people.

I shouldn't jump ahead of the story, but like a person my age, I'm going to do it anyway. I want to tell you what happened to me.

Joshua led the people into the Promised Land. Their first victory was Jericho, when its walls fell. Then, under the leadership of Joshua, we set out to completely drive out or destroy the people living in Canaan.

I was forty years-old when our spy team had gone into the Promised Land. That means I was more than eighty-five years-old when Joshua reached the piece of the Promised Land that was promised to me. I was as strong then as when I was forty, and I was anxious to prove that I could drive out the people that the other spies feared. I did so, and my family captured Hebron, and owned it for the future.

Incidentally, Hebron was David's first headquarters as King. Remember, David and I were of the same tribe.

I wish that I had also been given the assignment to capture Jebus, the city that David had to capture a few hundred years later. You know Jebus by another name...Jerusalem. And even at 85, I would certainly have taken it so that David would have already had his capital city.