

H. Heidi Gr.

THE DISBELIEF OF GOD'S PEOPLE

4. Mose 11:1 – 17:15

Key verse 14:11

„The Lord said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? “

In the first lesson we saw how God prepared his people for his holy war to conquer the promised land. God gave his people clear order and instructions how to conquer Canaan, the promised land. We could learn that victory or defeat do not depend on external human conditions, but it depends on if God's people has God in the midst of their lives or not.

Today's lesson should be the high point and the final lesson of the book Numeri, that is the conquering of the promised land by obedience of faith. But because of their unbelief the Israelites could not enter Canaan, but a whole generation had to die in the desert. Only Caleb and Joshua would enter the promised land by faith. Although his people always became crabby and rebellious because of their unbelief, God kept to his promise for them faithfully. He also fulfills his promise, today, through those who live with his promise. Let us come to learn through today's message the serious consequences of unbelief. May God use each one of you like Caleb and Joshua who lived with God's promise, and may he fulfill his world mission, especially his awakening work through your words.

1. The repeated complaining of the Israelites (11:1 – 14:45)

Look at chapter 11:1: „Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.“ Short before, the wandering of the Israelites to the promised land had begun. They had wandered three days and camped according to the word of God. (10,31). Short after they camped, they started complaining in the hearing of the Lord, how bad their situation was. In this way, they grumbled badly against God's sovereignty and denied his grace, hope and leading. Therefore, fire from the Lord started burning among them. Moses cried to God for the people and the plague was ended. Why had the Lord punished his people so hard? He had to punish them, because they were God's chosen people that he had delivered from slavery in Egypt with his strong arm. They even were God's army, who were called by God for his holy war. God had taken care of them with everything they needed. Now, he even went ahead for them on the way to the promised land. There was no reasonable reason for them to mourn.

Where did their complaining come from? Let's read verse 4: „The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, “If only we had meat to eat!“ Now when the rabble with them began to crave other food, the Israelites also started to wail and to mourn. This shows clearly that they were complaining because of

their own desires. It was not the food that was the problem, but their own craving for more. In themselves was this unquenchable impulse to act according to their sinful desires. The food, that is the comparison between the Manna in the desert and the meat they had in Egypt, was just the external indication. Jacob 1:13-15 says: „When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.“ One young man who former lead a responseless life, had received much help through his Bible teacher, so that he could even finish his studies. But when he was asked if he wanted to establish a God- and mission-centered house-church for World Mission, he started complaining and grumbling and finally gave up his life of faith. The reason was not his conditions, but that he had wanted to continue his irresponsible life according to his desires.

Let's read verse 10 together: „Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance to their tents. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled.“ The Lord became exceedingly angry because of their wailing. Also Moses was troubled. To Moses the leading of this people became to burdensome. God saw Moses' heart and gave him 70 of Israel's elders as his co-workers who should bear his burden together with the same spirit. God also promised to give them meat. To Moses it was not only a big challenge, but an impossibility to feed 600.000 people with meat. God remained him that the Lord's arm is not too short. He made a wind come that drove quails in from the sea. It was a vast number of quails that was all around the camp, as far as a day's walk in any direction. It scattered them up to two cubits on the earth. The Israelites gathered them (11:31). They dried them without thanking God and without thinking about the reason why God had punished them. While the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the Lord burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague (11,33). The place was called Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had craved other food.

Grumbling is not a problem of conditions. The cause of grumbling is the sin of desire. Sin is a serious matter that must be spiritually treated and resolved through repentance. Romans 6:12.13 says: “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.“ It is very important for us, who are called by God as his army, what we say in our practical lives. Numeri 14:26-28 say: „The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: “How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Lord, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say.“ These verses say that God always hears what we are saying. May God help us not to be tempted by the grumbling of the unbelievers, but repent of our desires and live as his holy people a separated life in obedience to his promise.

Let's look at chapter 12. The war of God was in a decisive phase. The Israelites were about to take the promised land. But whenever God's work enters a crucial phase, Satan attacks. This time he used the human ambition of Miriam and Aaron. Let us read 12:1.2: "Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had

married a Cushite. 'Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?' they asked. 'Hasn't he also spoken through us?' And the Lord heard this." It was at this time that a serious matter was revealed and so attacked the whole church of God. Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses because of his Cushite wife. But in fact it was not about Moses' marriage, but about their ambitions. They questioned Moses' leadership and provoked God's sovereignty and wanted to be leaders themselves. God heard this and disliked it. So he challenged them and rebuked them for their lack of fear of God (8). Verse 9 says, "The anger of the Lord burned against them, and he left them." Miriam became as leprous as snow. Aaron repented and begged Moses for forgiveness. Moses cried out to the LORD for them. Seven days Miriam had to remain leprous outside the camp, after which she was taken up again. This vicious circle repeated several times among the Israelites so that the continuation of the holy war was hindered again and again.

Look at chapter 13. The Israelites had gone all the way to Hazeroth and camped in the desert of Paran, not far from the border of the Promised Land. There God gave Moses the direction to send men to explore the land of Canaan that God wanted to give to the Israelites (13:1,2). One elder was to be chosen from each tribe of their fathers. They were to explore the land carefully.

Let us read 13:17-20: „When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, “Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land.” (It was the season for the first ripe grapes.)“

In verses 21 to 26 we learn how they explored the promised land for forty days, its inhabitants and the fruits of the land. When they came back, they gave Moses this account: “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.” (13:27) They showed the figs, pomegranates, and a grape so great that it had to be carried by two men on a pole. But in the same breath came the "but": "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.” (13:28,29) The spies could not deny that it was a land in which milk and honey flowed. The soil was fertile, and the fruits were excellent. But then they spoke of the strong inhabitants. Verse 30 says that the people began to grumble against Moses. A small "but" has such a strong influence. When the spies told how strong the inhabitants were, all the positives were forgotten. This shows that faith or unbelief makes a difference like day and night. Faith builds up. Unbelief breaks down.

Caleb tried to appease the people. He encouraged them and said: "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it". (13:30) But the other spies said at once: "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are". They went even further and started an evil rumor that the promised land would devour its inhabitants. This was a lie. With this lie they contradicted what God had said. God had already promised this land to Abraham for possession, to him and his descendants. When they were at mount Sinai God had also promised them six times to drive out the peoples of the land

before them (Exodus 23:23; 23:28; 33:2; 34:11). God had said to them that He would work through them and reveal His glory. But they said, "No, we cannot do this!" Chapter 14:1,2a say, "That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron." The unbelieving words of the spies drove all the people into unbelief, so that they spoke of setting up a leader and returning to Egypt.

Joshua and Caleb had seen the same thing as the other spies. But their report was very different. Let's read chapter 14:6b-9: "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them." How could Caleb and Joshua report in such a different way, although they had seen the same? They regarded the land with the eyes of faith. They could report with believing words, because they lived with the promise of God. They also did not know how God would do it, because of the strong buildings and inhabitants. But they did not doubt that God would fulfill his promise. They would even devour them! When God's promise was in their hearts they could report by faith and honour God. Faith is not a matter of external conditions, but a question whether we live with God's promise or not.

39 years ago, Campusmission in Europe seemed to be impossible. The Universities seemed to be like impregnable fortresses of relativism and arrogance. The students were so strong and secure in their attitudes full of relativism. But the missionaries had God's promise: "Have faith in God!". Many years they only experienced discouragements. But they believed in God. The sovereign God blessed their faith. He moved the stone-hardened hearts and broke down the most powerful fortresses. He raised shepherds and Bible teachers and used our work as a spiritual headquarter for Europe mission. God does his mighty work independent on the external conditions through faith.

Look at verse 10. Joshua and Caleb testified their belief that the protection of the Canaanites was gone, because the almighty Lord was with his people Israel and fought for them. But the people wanted to stone them. Then the glory of God appeared over the tabernacle. Let's read verses 11 and 12: "The Lord said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they." God's wrath was burning. He wanted to destroy the whole people and make a new beginning with Moses.

Let us read verse 11 once again and think about the seriousness of unbelief and its consequences: „The Lord said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them?" Here, God considers unbelief like contempt. The 10 spies treated God with contempt speaking against his words. The reason was not that the enemies were so strong, but that they had not word of promise in their heart. They lived without God's word of promise, therefore such blasphemous words came from their mouth. God said that they did not want to believe despite all his glorious signs. God does not become angry because of our weaknesses. But he becomes angry if we refuse his word

despite his wonderful salvation work.

Let us look at verses 13-19. Moses interceded for the people before God. It was a temptation for Moses that God would make him a great people. But Moses knew God's heart and fought before God for his people, reminding God of the great power and almightiness with which he had led the Israelites out of Egypt and walked in the wilderness with the pillar of cloud and fire before them day and night. If God were to destroy his people now, the surrounding nations would despise the name of God. He asked for God's mercy and grace to forgive their iniquity and transgression so that God's name would be great!

God listened to Moses' prayer. Let us see verses 20-23: „The Lord replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times— not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.” God made clear that they were his people, but not his army anymore. They had lost the blessing to take the Promised Land. God punished them with 40 years of desert wandering, until they were completely worn out, until the first generation that God had brought out of Egypt had died in the desert. But the generation of their children, whom they had said would be taken as plunder, would take the Promised Land.

Some of the Israelites wanted to forget their sin without bearing the consequences and yet go up and fight. Moses warned them not to transgress the word of God and not to go up because God was not with them. But instead of repenting, they again would not hear, but went up. And the Amalekites and the Canaanites came, attacked them, and beat them down.

Here we learn that we treat God with contempt by not believing in his promise. No one who rejects the promise of God through unbelief can obtain what is promised. Our continent Europe has experienced God's grace and received God's promise to be used by God as a missionary sending continent (Exodus 19:5,6). Christians in Europe should make every effort, according to this promise, to be used by God as a blessing to Muslim countries. But many of those whom God has set up for this work say: "We cannot do that". In Germany, the church has even almost completely removed the term "mission" from its program. Their unbelief influenced so many Christians that a whole generation was lost to God's work of salvation and Europe became a spiritual desert.

Unbelief treats God with contempt. But God works through the faith of those who obey God's promise like Caleb and Joshua. Each one of us has also experienced God's grace and received God's promise. We have also experienced God's mighty work in the 50 years of world mission work of UBF and also among ourselves. God called us for campus mission and promised us with Ezekiel 37:10 that he will make the dry bones alive through Bible study at every faculty and university and that he will raise a vast army. God fulfills this promise by those who live by faith with his promise. We must fight against the time spirit that drives us into unbelief and establish faith, like Caleb and Joshua did. God's mighty work of salvation happens through those who, like Caleb and Joshua, testify: " Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we

will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”

Let us live by faith in God's promise, encourage God's people to have faith and go up. Let us take the promised land through 10.000 Bible Study teams, the Pioneering works, the building of three mission base camps for Muslim world and the discipleship ministry and mobilization of the next generation and experience that God will use Europe once again as a missionary sending continent.

2. The Rebellion of Korach (15,1 – 17,15)

Now, the Israelites turned in order to move away from Kadesh into the desert. Many of them may have had doubts if God would really lead them into the Promised land, because of this long detour. Had he not rejected them completely? Let's read shapter 15:1.2: “The Lord said to Moses, Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘After you enter the land I am giving you as a home.’” Here God gave the people additional sacrificial laws for the time after they would have conquered the promised land. God was faithful to his promise. Independent of how hard his punishment for his people is or how long the detour seems to be, it is secure that God keeps faithful to his promise. (2 Timothy 2:13).

The first Generation had sinned against God and said, "We cannot take the land." That is why the next generation should learn from the beginning to thank God, so that they would not commit the same sin like their predecessors. God then taught them which sacrifice to offer in the event of an accidental sin in order to obtain forgiveness. But deliberate sin is punished with death. Every man sins. God is ready to forgive. But the one who deliberately sins and rejects God's grace, cannot be forgiven, but will be cut off from the people. Even he who desecrated the Sabbath and thereby trampled on the identity of God's chosen people, had to die. Finally God helped them through the tassels on their clothes to always remember the commandments of God. God is faithful. The first generation rejected His commandments and His grace. But God remained faithfully to his promise and gave them very careful instructions for their life as his holy People.

With equal care God is currently preparing the Global Leadership Empowerment Forum in this Summer. God has not rejected Germany and Europe. He is faithful to his promise and seeks some people of the next generation who are ready to prepare themselves through deep Bible study and lectures on his history for their great task in world mission. The world is not changed by a big amount of people, but through some spiritual leaders who have faith like Caleb and Joshua. Praise God for his faithfulness to his promise! May God bless all preparations for the GLEF 2019 and the May Bible Conference.

In chapters 16 and 17 we learn what evil fruit Israel's rebellion brought forth. Korah, one of the Kohathites, Datan and Abiram and On of the tribe of Reuben, and 250 Israelites openly rebelled against Moses. They were all leaders, prominent people and heads of the Community. They grumbled and accused Moses and Aaron of elavating themselves to be their leaders. As a Kohatite, Korah had the privilege to take care of the holy instruments of the sanctuary, but he and the others now also desired to take care of the Priesthood. But Moses did not discuss with them. Let us read verse 16:11: "You and all of you people,

you're making a rebellion against the LORD! It is not Aaron you murmur against." Moses made it clear that this was not a political problem. It was a rebellion against God. But Korah and his men were already too deeply entangled in their sin to listen to Moses. Datan and Abiram even went so far that they did not want to come to Moses, but stayed at home and mocked him. Moses was very angry, but he put the answer to their rebellion in God's hand. The rebels were to appear before the LORD, at the door of the tabernacle, and also Aaron, each with their pan and incense. And Korah took all the people on his side, so that all the people stood against Moses and Aaron.

What did Moses do when God's wrath broke out and he asked Moses and Aaron to separate themselves from the people in order to destroy them? Again Moses interceded for the people. Verse 22: "But they fell on their faces and said: Oh God, who you are the God of the spirit of life for all flesh, if one man has sinned, will you therefore rage against the whole community?" Moses stood before God, so that he considered the people as sheep who had been deceived by a single rebel. The rebels found a terrible end. They were swallowed up by the earth (16:31). The 250 leaders were consumed by fire (16:35).

God then instructed the priest Eleazar to smite the pans of these sinners, with which they had offered, to wide metal sheets and cover the altar with them. This was to be a memorial to Israel in the future, a clear warning not to rebel against God or to question God's sovereignty. In this way, God protected the holy priesthood and his people.

Let us look 17,6 "But the next morning all the Israelites murmured against Moses and Aaron, and they spoke: Ye have slain the people of the LORD." Moses interceded for the people with all his might and averted God's wrath. God had reacted to the rebellion of the Korah mob and had judged them. But most of the Israelites remained unreasonable. Again they murmured against Moses and Aaron. Then the LORD himself came down, and the cloud covered the tabernacle. God's wrath was so great that he wanted to destroy the whole church with a plague. But Moses immediately sent Aaron with incense from the altar to make atonement for the people. The plague was already in full swing. Aaron ran among the people and smoked incense, standing between the dead and the living, until the plague was finally fought back. But it was 14,700 men who died as a result of the plague.

Through Moses we see that even in the midst of the spiritually darkest times the Israelites had a shepherd praying for them. In today's passage alone, we find five places where Moses interceded for the unreasonable and rebellious people. Moses' prayer is the expression of his faith in the God who faithfully fulfills his promise. Our early morning prayer is also the expression of faith and a sweet incense to God. If we come to God from early morning on, our prayer for our Bible students and for the young people of this generation is like the prayer of Moses and the incense of Aaron, so that God will turn away from his wrath and raises them as his people. Because God is faithful to his promise, we can also pray to God for the young people in Europe and experience true joy and peace from God.

Today we learn that all those who live without the Word of God experience God's wrath and cannot attain what is promised. Unbelief is blasphemy and deliberate rejection of God's work and the promise of God. But God is faithful and fulfills his promise through those who live with his promise, like Caleb and Joshua. Let us enter the promised land by

believing in the promise of God and carefully prepare the next generation to write a faith history for world mission.