

“An-ti-ci-pa-tion”

Deuteronomy 1:19-26

by Felton Spraggins

“Then we set out from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw, on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, just as the Lord our God had commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea. And I said to you, ‘You have come to the hill country of the Amorites which the Lord our God is about to give us. See, the Lord your God has placed the land before you; go up, take possession, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you. Do not fear or be dismayed.’ Then all of you approached me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, that they may search out the land for us, and bring back to us word of the way by which we should go up, and the cities which we shall enter.’ And the thing pleased me and I took twelve of your men, one man for each tribe. And they turned and went up into the hill country, and came to the valley of Eshcol, and spied it out. Then they took some of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought it down to us; and they brought us back a report and said, ‘It is a good land which the Lord our God is about to give us.’

“Yet you were not willing to go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God” (1:19-26).

Do you remember this ketchup commercial? The camera zooms in on an inverted ketchup bottle as the ketchup very, very slowly oozes onto a hamburger. Meanwhile, beautiful music plays as a melodious voice sings the word “anticipation,” one syllable at a time: “An-ti-ci-pa-tion!”

The dictionary defines “anticipation” as “realizing beforehand.” Anticipation is good! It is the eager and enthusiastic expectation of a positive experience in one’s life. Israel left Horeb with anticipation!

ANTICIPATION AND OBEDIENCE

Israel kept God’s commandments and arrived at Kadesh-barnea, a journey of over a hundred miles across the wilderness of Paran, “that great and terrible wilderness” (1:19). It was a journey across a waterless limestone plateau filled with days of heat and dust. The land could not support the few inhabitants it had, much less the large multitude traveling to the promised land. Even today the area is almost totally uninhabited and seldom traveled even by wandering Arabs.

Yet, everything had been done on the part of God and Moses to bring Israel safely to the land of promise. Moses stated of their journey through the wilderness:

“And in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked, until you came to this place.” But for all this, you did not trust the Lord your God, who goes before you on your way, to seek out a place for you to encamp, in fire by night and cloud by day, to show you the way in which you should go (1:31-33).

The mention of “that great and terrible wilderness” is to make them aware of the goodness of God in guiding them through so great a wilderness. The remembrance of our dangers and difficulties should make us thankful for our deliverances and the goodness of our heavenly Father.

The important part of the journey is found in the words, “just as the Lord our God had commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea” (1:19). Israel through obedience to God had been successful, and there was no reason that they should feel otherwise. They came to Kadesh-

barnea as God had commanded. They were not in the promised land, but they were close. The best was yet to come. They were at the supreme moment of their lives. All that they heard of through God's promise and had dreamed of was at hand. They had left Egypt, performed a toilsome journey for one object—to possess the promised land.

Whether or not man reaches the land of rest depends on our obedience to the Lord. Obedience is the gateway to many wonderful blessings. "Obedience (the key thought of Deuteronomy) is the *call* of the past, the *duty* of the present, and the *guarantee* of the future." The past speaks clearly that the will of God must be obeyed. Eve relates through her experience in the Garden of Eden the necessity of obedience. The guarantee of the future is directly related to our obedience to the will of God. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews related the guarantee of the future salvation to obedience with these words: "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation" (Hebrews 5:8, 9). Everyone who obeys the will of the Father can with great anticipation expect to reach the land of rest. We sing with gusto of our anticipation with these words:

To Canaan's Land I'm on my way,
Where the soul (of man) never dies.

Israel had reached the place where she could see her possession "just as the Lord our God had commanded" (1:19).

ANTICIPATION AND COURAGE

Vince Abner has said, "It is not enough to stare up the steps; we must step up the stairs." Israel was now ready to step up the stairs and fulfill God's promises (1:7, 8). Therefore, Moses exhorted the people to "go up, take possession, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you" (1:21).

As Israel stood at the entrance of the promised land, Moses encouraged them with the words, "Do not fear or be dismayed" (1:21). All

great leaders look beyond the obstacles to the objective, for they realize many people see only the obstacles. Faith in God and in His promises always has been and ever shall be a prerequisite for conquering our problems and difficulties in life.

In God's work there is every reason for courage. God is with us. As God's children, our cause is His cause. He has promised victory, and He is able to fulfill His promise. In God's Son we have this assurance: "He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

There are no limits to Jehovah's power—or what we can do as His children when we believe in His power. The past should have encouraged Israel to step forward with courage and boldness to enter their inheritance promised to them by the Almighty God of the universe.

ANTICIPATION AND UNBELIEF

Moses intended to go straight into the promised land at this point. The command was plain—"Go up and take possession." Yet the children of Israel stalled and did not immediately go up and take the land. They turned deaf ears to Moses' appeal for courage. Their stalling would later become a blanket of fear.

Moses had given them God's word, but they could not find it in their hearts to rely upon it in their times of fear and frustration. Human concepts and policy meant more to them than divine wisdom. The decision to send out spies seems quite normal in the candlelight of human wisdom. Moses said, "Then all of you approached me and said, 'Let us send men before us, that they may search out the land for us, and bring back to us word of the way by which we should go up, and the cities which we shall enter'" (1:22).

The plan pleased Moses (1:23), and he referred the matter to God for confirmation (Numbers 13:2). It was not Moses' habit to adopt measures regarding Israel without God's approval. Such should be the pattern of every leader in God's kingdom. Moses assented to their request to send the spies.

Note carefully that no mention is made that the spies were to make a decision on whether the Israelites would or would not invade the land as

God had declared. The spies were sent to map out a strategy for Israel's conquest of the land. At this point, they were only thinking of following God's instructions in the conquest of Canaan. They wanted more information than they possessed. They wanted to know the land's fitness for their permanent home and its accessibility. They wanted evidence that the land was all that God had promised them.

However, the sending of the spies was not necessary. They had been delivered from Egyptian bondage, and they had been under the spontaneous care and watchful providence of God. It was needless to send out scouts to survey Canaan which stood before them. Was not the all-seeing Father of heaven leading them?

It was inappropriate on these three accounts. First, it hindered their march as they had been commanded. Second, they multiplied their difficulties which would come only one at a time following God's plan. Third, they darkened the present by prying into the future.

Are men today any different who seek signs beyond that which is recorded in the Scripture, men who search for a special revelation to allow them to have a special feeling or knowledge instead of obeying God's simple will? Was not Israel simply going beyond that which was written or spoken? Is this not the beginning of doubt which will lead to a destruction of our very trust in God? Many are ever-seeking, but they never come to a knowledge of the truth or obey that which has been delivered unto us.

How different our lives, mingled with comforts and care, would be if we would calmly place the future in His hands. Peter wrote: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6, 7). We dishonor our God by refusing to trust Him in our daily activities. When we, with our short foresight and

little strength, foolishly face our difficulties and problems without Him, we begin to doubt that we can survive. This is dangerously walking the path that will destroy the joy of anticipation.

ANTICIPATION AND REBELLION

Moses then selected one representative of each tribe to spy out the land. The spies explored the land and took from the fruit of the land so the people might examine for themselves. Only the beautiful valley of Eshcol (literally "bunch of grapes") is mentioned in this account. Grapes were a fruit of delicacy to people of the desert and their cultivation a symbol of an established way of life.

The spies reported, "It is a good land which the Lord our God is about to give us" (1:25). God had not deceived the people; the evidence lay before their eyes. For men of faith, the report was heartening and deepened their trust in Jehovah, for it is faith that opens the door to the heart of God. Faith keeps the sails of life filled with the breath of heaven. Belief is the acceptance of a map; faith is taking the voyage.

However, Moses wrote, "Yet you were not willing to go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God" (1:26). The people listened to ten prophets of doom, with their tales of giants, walled cities, and grasshoppers (1:28, 29; Numbers 13:28-33). Unfortunately, Israel looked to the future with apprehension. Anticipation was destroyed, and apprehension took its place.

CONCLUSION

Would you have felt secure entering the promised land, or would you have wanted more information? Would you with anticipation have marched into the "good land"? Learn from Israel's mistake. "Walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7) and with joyful "an-ti-ci-pation" face the future!