Yet you were not willing to go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God; and you grumbled in your tents and said, ‘Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us. Where can we go up? Our brethren have made our hearts melt, saying, “The people are bigger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified to heaven. And besides, we saw the sons of Anakim there.”’ Then I said to you, ‘Do not be shocked, nor fear them. The Lord your God who goes before you will Himself fight on your behalf, just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, 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” (1:26-33).

In 1682, the Swedish battleship Vasa made its maiden voyage. It was a huge ship with sixty-four guns on two decks and the pride of the Swedish navy. A great crowd was present as the new warship sailed proudly from the harbor and promptly keeled over and sank. At least fifty lives were lost, and the hull remained at the bottom of the sea until it was salvaged in 1961 and put on display. Our failures are not usually put on public display, nor so tragic as that, but they hurt all the same.

Israel had such a failure. Her failure stands forth as an example of unbelief throughout the pages of history. God used Israel’s failure at Kadesh-barnea as an example of disobedience and unbelief to every child of God. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews recorded Israel’s failure as an example to Christians with these words:

And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard (Hebrews 3:19—4:2).

Our text, therefore, becomes extremely important in light of these verses. Many believe we do not need to study the Old Testament, since we are under the perfect law of liberty found in the New Testament. Yet Paul encourages us with these passages referring to the Old Testament:

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Romans 15:4).

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Corinthians 10:11).

A study of Israel’s rebellion will aid us in developing our spiritual lives and will increase our knowledge of God and how He deals with man.

Despite the positive report the spies brought back (1:25), Israel was unwilling to go forth against the people of Canaan. Moses charged that the Israelites were guilty of three sins at Kadesh-barnea. They had rebelled, they had grumbled, and they had refused to trust the power and goodness of God.
A MONUMENT TO REBELLION
Moses stated that they had “rebuled against the command of the Lord your God” (1:26). Literally, they had rebelled against the mouth, the express will, of Jehovah their God.
Disobedience and rebellion against God’s law is the breaking point of God’s relationship with anyone, now or then. It was a refusal to go forward under the banner of their sovereign ruler. Israel chose to follow a course of mutiny instead of obedience. Israel had not learned to take God at His word. Israel failed to enter the promised land because of disobedience (Hebrews 4:11). Their refusal to go forth was the outward sign of the real problem Israel faced. Moses, step by step, leads us to the reality of their problem.

A MONUMENT TO GRUMBLING
Instead of mobilizing for war, they were demobilizing by remaining in their tents and grumbling. They murmured among themselves instead of coming together. Their doubt continued to grow as they fed each other’s fears. They did not go to God but turned to themselves.
The child of God should from the very beginning of any problem or difficulty turn to God. Guidance is never wanting to those who need it. As God’s children we should learn the art of “casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).
They justified themselves by blaming others for their mistakes, a mistake that man has made since the beginning of time. Eve blamed the serpent; Adam blamed Eve; and we blame others for our mistakes.
First, they blamed God for their difficulties. God had intended to lead them victoriously into Canaan. Instead, they reasoned that from the beginning He had intended their defeat. What greater perversion of God’s providence could human nature be guilty of than the words in verse 27: “Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us.” They had been delivered from Egypt, had seen mighty miracles, had been brought across the Red Sea, and had been strengthened to conquer the Amalekites, but in it all, they had misread the providence of God.
In the detailed account of the spies’ report given in Numbers 13, no mention is made of God. Jehovah is no longer in their thoughts. Too busy dealing with the facts, they were setting goals without faith, which is intimidating for God’s children. Without faith, they would be forced to believe that the project might be bigger than their God. Facing the fear of the unknown without faith makes man negative.
Second, they blamed their brethren. “Our brethren have made our hearts melt, saying, ‘The people are bigger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified to heaven. And besides, we saw the sons of the Anakim there’” (1:28).
They complained that their brethren had made their hearts melt. The spies’ report of the imposing stature of the Anakim and the walled cities of Canaan made them think it was impossible to possess the land. The spies reported: “There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight” (Numbers 13:33).
In their excited imagination, the walls of the cities seemed as if they reached the sky. So it is when men cease to have faith in God. Their difficulties appear insurmountable, and the power of adversity is exaggerated. Courage is paralyzed, and despair will soon banish all hope.
As Israel listened to such a report, they began to lack self-confidence. They saw themselves as weaker than their enemies. They focused on the negative rather than the positive. They saw themselves as inadequate and perceived that their enemies saw them in the same light. They looked for reasons why something could not work instead of visualizing ways in which it could be made to work.
A humanistic reasoning could have reached no other conclusion. They became a people who made swift, sweeping passes over a new way of life, scanning it with a negative eye, looking only for the distasteful aspects. Their attitude produced doubt, stimulated their fear, and generated a mental climate of pessimism and fatigue.

A MONUMENT TO FEAR
While their brethren were discouraging them, Moses encouraged the Israelites to remain faithful to God’s commands. He saw their fear and said, “Do not be shocked, nor fear them” (1:29). Moses’ words put into action could have turned their dreams into exciting achievements, their
obstacles into rare opportunities, and their tragedies into inspiring triumphs.

Fear was the primary emotion the spies left in the hearts of the people. The text states: “Our brethren have made our hearts melt” (1:28). The spies, except for Joshua and Caleb, failed in their examples to Israel. They became fearful; therefore, the people also became fearful. It is important that we have men leading who are not fearful of the world! We need men who are courageous and trust the Lord completely, for if we are not careful we also can be led astray.

A MONUMENT TO INGRATITUDE
Moses gave two examples as evidence of God’s power and goodness. As proof of God’s power over their enemies, he referred to what had been done in Egypt. He reminded them that “the Lord your God who goes before you will Himself fight on your behalf, just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes” (1:30). God had shown His powerful works before their eyes!

As for God’s goodness toward them, Moses referred also to what the Lord had done in the wilderness to insure their safety from Egypt to their present location. They had been guided “just as a man carries his son” (1:31). The thought is laden with God’s compassion for Israel. We see the tender love of a caring father, the constant and unceasing love a father gives to his son, and the comprehensive love which embraces every want of the son’s life. Through the wilderness, God took the whole responsibility upon Himself of leading them, feeding them, and sheltering them until they reached their final destination. This is also the Christian’s daily security (Matthew 6:25-34).

The more Israel received from God, the more they seemed to take Him for granted. In spite of God’s power and tender care, they still turned deaf ears to Moses’ words of encouragement.

The decision was one-sided. They had forgotten who had brought them this far and had delivered them from every problem and possible disaster that they faced. A bright side to the spies’ report existed as well as a dark side, but nothing would make the Israelites look on the bright side. Incidentally, the same two sides—a hopeful side and a difficult side—exist in every situation. Which side we choose becomes a test of character.

God was their Commander-in-Chief. They forgot that they followed the Invincible One who cannot be destroyed. Our decision would also be one-sided if we set aside the leadership of Christ while facing life’s problems. Christ is ever-ready to encourage and strengthen us.

Their decision was ungrateful. After all the love they had received, they turned to themselves. God had delivered them through the difficult periods; they had been victorious. Are we not doing the same as Christians when we turn our backs on the One who died on the cross for us?

A MONUMENT TO UNBELIEF
Moses said, “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” (1:32, 33).

The rebellion against God’s commandment was the result of unbelief. Failure to fulfill their hopes is found in their unbelief. An unbelieving heart was the foundation of their grumbling and rebellion. They were doubting the active and providential sovereignty of Jehovah. Faith cannot grow in an atmosphere of doubt.

CONCLUSION
Men fear the giants and their castles. God offers salvation and a good land to those who will believe and obey His commands. Faith will carry us through.

May these words ring in our hearts: “Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).