

## **The Eye Witnesses**

Text: Numbers 13:1-33

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### **Sermon Statement**

We are God's witnesses. The world will mostly know God through what we reveal to them through our lives as His witnesses. To be effective witnesses, we need to see through the eyes of faith.

### **Introduction**

William Wilberforce (24 August 1759 – 29 July 1833) was an English politician, philanthropist, and a leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade. A native of Kingston upon Hull, Yorkshire, he began his political career in 1780, eventually becoming the independent Member of Parliament for Yorkshire (1784–1812). In 1785, he underwent a conversion experience and became an evangelical Christian, which resulted in major changes to his lifestyle and a lifelong concern for reform. He headed the parliamentary campaign against the British slave trade for twenty-six years until the passage of the Slave Trade Act of 1807.

The British initially became involved in the slave trade during the 16th century. By 1783, the triangular route that took British-made goods to Africa to buy slaves, transported the enslaved to the West Indies, and then brought slave-grown products such as sugar, tobacco, and cotton to Britain, represented about 80 percent of Great Britain's foreign income.

Most people credit William Wilberforce for the abolition of the slave trade. Actually Wilberforce never saw firsthand what happened to the slaves. It was Thomas Clarkson (28 March 1760 – 26 September 1846), who was the witness, saw firsthand what happened to the slaves and report it all to Wilberforce. Clarkson was very effective at giving the Committee a high public profile: he spent the next two years travelling around England, promoting the cause and gathering evidence. He interviewed 20,000 sailors during his research. He obtained equipment used on slave-ships, such as iron handcuffs, leg-shackles, and thumbscrews; instruments for forcing open slaves' jaws; and branding irons. He published engravings of the tools in pamphlets and displayed the instruments at public meetings. An honest and trustworthy eyewitness can make a big difference.

## Text: Numbers 13

NU 13:1 The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders."

NU 13:3 So at the LORD's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites. <sup>4</sup> These are their names:

from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zaccur;

NU 13:5 from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori;

NU 13:6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh;

NU 13:7 from the tribe of Issachar, Igal son of Joseph;

NU 13:8 from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun;

NU 13:9 from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti son of Raphu;

NU 13:10 from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi;

NU 13:11 from the tribe of Manasseh (a tribe of Joseph), Gaddi son of Susi;

NU 13:12 from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel son of Gemalli;

NU 13:13 from the tribe of Asher, Sethur son of Michael;

NU 13:14 from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi son of Vophsi;

NU 13:15 from the tribe of Gad, Geuel son of Maki.

NU 13:16 These are the names of the men Moses sent to explore the land. (Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua.)

NU 13:17 When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, "Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. <sup>18</sup> See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. <sup>19</sup> 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? <sup>20</sup> How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees on 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.)

NU 13:21 So they went up and explored the land from the Desert of Zin as far as Rehob, toward Lebo Hamath. <sup>22</sup> They went up through the Negev and came to Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmi, the descendants of Anak, lived. (Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) <sup>23</sup> When they reached the Valley of Eshcol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs. <sup>24</sup> That place was called the Valley of Eshcol because of the cluster of grapes the Israelites cut off there. <sup>25</sup> At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.

NU 13:26 They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. <sup>29</sup> 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."

NU 13:30 Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."

NU 13:31 But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." <sup>32</sup> And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. <sup>33</sup> We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them." (NIV)

The names of the leaders of Israel and their meanings are as follows:

1. Shammua ("report [of God]") of Reuben
2. Shaphat ("he has judged") of Simeon
3. Caleb (*kālēḥ* related to *keleḥ*, "dog") of Judah
4. Igal ("he redeems") of Issachar
5. Hoshea ("salvation") of Ephraim [Joshua]
6. Palti ("my escape [is God]") of Benjamin
7. Gaddiel ("my fortune is God") of Zebulun
8. Gaddi ("my fortune [is in God]") of Manasseh
9. Ammiel ("God is my kinsman") of Dan
10. Sethur ("sheltered [by God]") of Asher
11. Nahbi ("my hiding [is God]") of Naphtali
12. Geuel ("majesty of God") of Gad

As in all attempts to identify the meaning of biblical names, the suggestions here are somewhat tentative. Allen, R. B. (1990). Numbers. In F. E. Gaebelain (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 2: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* (F. E. Gaebelain, Ed.) (806–807). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

### I spy with my little eyes (The mission of the witnesses)

	Mission (v.17-20)	Report (v.26-33)		
Land	(v.19) good or bad?	(v.27) land flow with milk and honey		
Soil	(v.20) fertile or poor? trees on it or not? fruit of the land	(v.23) a cluster of grapes need two persons to carry		
People	(v.18) strong or weak? few or many?	(v.28) powerful, Descendents of Anak		
Towns	(v.19) unwalled or fortified?	(v.28) cities are large and		

		fortified		
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### The promised land (What the witnesses saw)

	Mission (v.17-20)	Report (v.26-29)		
Land	(v.19) good or bad?	(v.27) land flow with milk and honey		
Soil	(v.20) fertile or poor? trees on it or not? fruit of the land	(v.23) a cluster of grapes need two persons to carry		
People	(v.18) strong or weak? few or many?	(v.28) powerful, Descendents of Anak		

### Scary giants (the witnesses' interpretation)

	Mission (v.17-20)	Report (v.26-29)	Interpretation (v. 31-33)	
Land	(v.19) good or bad?	(v.27) land flow with milk and honey	v.32b land we explored devours those living in it.	
Soil	(v.20) fertile or poor? trees on it or not? fruit of the land	(v.23) a cluster of grapes need two persons to carry		
People	(v.18) strong or weak? few or many?	(v.28) powerful, Descendents of Anak	(v.33) We saw the Nephilim there... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."	

### God with them (What the witnesses forgot)

	Mission (v.17-20)	Report (v.26-33)	Interpretation (v. 31-33)	God with them
Land	(v.19) good or bad?	(v.27) land flow with milk and honey	v.32b land we explored devours those living in it.	God has already given them the land
Soil	(v.20) fertile or poor? trees on it or not? fruit of the land	(v.23) a cluster of grapes need two persons to carry		
People	(v.18) strong or weak? few or many?	(v.28) powerful, Descendents of Anak	(v.33) We saw the Nephilim there... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."	God will give them victory over the local population

What is at fault here is not what they saw. Their report on the land and its people are accurate. What at fault is their interpretation of what they see. They saw through their human eyes rather than the eyes of faith. In seeing through human eyes they see

(v) 33 We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.

Two points on what they should already know but have forgotten:

- (1) God has already given them the land  
One way to put it is that this is a 'done deal.' The land is already theirs and all they have to do is to claim it.
- (2) God will give them victory over the local population.  
God has demonstrated his powers by giving them victory over the mighty Egyptians. Would not God lead them to victory over the Canaanites who were vessels of the Egyptian empire?

### Some reflections on Numbers 13

- God has already revealed they are God's special people by their names (they are not grasshoppers)

- God have already given them the land
- God has shown that He is able to overcome their enemies

They are the eye witnesses. They have seen all these and yet they could not believe. They see only through human eyes. Through human eyes, what they are about to do is impossible. A group of slaves with no military training and equipment going against giant warriors and fortified cities are a sure way of committing suicide.

### **Changing the ‘eye’ witnesses to the ‘I’ witnesses or iWitnesses**

Are we credible witnesses? Do we see through the eyes of faith or through human eyes? Whether we want to are not, we are witnesses. Jesus said to his disciples before he ascended to heaven in Acts 1:8

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Like the twelve spies sent by Moses we are also witnesses to the land and its people. The land (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth) is the whole world and the people are the nations who do not know our God.

#### (1) the witnesses

We know who we are in Christ. We know we have all the Lord's blessings on us  
 "report [of God]"  
 "he has judged"  
 "dog"  
 "he redeems"  
 "salvation"  
 "my escape [is God]"  
 "my fortune is God"  
 "my fortune [is in God]"  
 "God is my kinsman"  
 "sheltered [by God]"  
 "my hiding [is God]"  
 "majesty of God"

#### (2) the land

we know the final victory has been won. We already know the end of history. God has won. The land is His. See Rev. 21: 1-3

REV 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

#### (3) the people

Ezekiel 37:1-14

EZE 37:1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. <sup>3</sup> He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

EZE 37:4 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!' <sup>5</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. <sup>6</sup> I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.' "

EZE 37:7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. <sup>8</sup> I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

EZE 37:9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.' " <sup>10</sup> So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army.

EZE 37:11 Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' <sup>12</sup> Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. <sup>14</sup> I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.' "

This prophecy is a very graphic one of the death coming back to life and the restoration of Israel. It may be also being interpreted that God will restore his people, the 'new Israel' by his Spirit and work. Our role as was the Prophet Ezekiel was to tell or witness to the people what he and we have seen.

### **What prevents us from being effective witnesses?**

Numbers 13: 33

<sup>33</sup> We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

I believe that it is fear that prevents us from being effective witnesses for God. Fear of

- Ridicule
- Humiliation
- Rejection
- Abuse
- Civil law
- Our own inadequacies
- Lack of evangelism training

To be a witnesses mean to tell honestly and sincerely what we have seen and heard.

### **To be effective iWitnesses**

- Be a friend
- Tell them about your life
- Pray for them
- Leave it to God

### **Lessons for us from Numbers 13**

The problem with the 'eye' and the "I" witnesses are

- (1) the lack of faith because of fear
- (2) failure to see through the eyes of faith

### **Conclusion**

We are God's witnesses. The world will mostly know God though what we reveal to them through our lives as His witnesses. To be effective witnesses, we need to see through the eyes of faith.

Soli Deo Gloria