Hi,

I hope no one had damage from last night’s storms -- I had no idea they were a real possibility! But now we get to enjoy some cooler weather; the heat will be here soon enough.

Here are today’s updates:

* **My Tuesday class on Genesis will meet today at 11:45** on my personal Facebook page.
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). All of this week’s videos and podcasts have been posted.
* Keep sending in those movie and book recommendations.

As a nation, we are making some big decisions these days. Let’s hope we do better than some of those made by the ancient Israelites!

***Numbers 14:1-10a (NRSV)***

**Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” So they said to one another, “Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt.”**

**Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the Israelites. And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes and said to all the congregation of the Israelites, “The land that we went through as spies is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only, do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.” But the whole congregation threatened to stone them.**

After leading the people out of slavery, God met the Hebrews at Mt. Sinai. God revealed himself to them there. He taught them what it meant to be the people of God, that they were to love God and love neighbor. God told them how to build a dwelling where God would be present with his people in a way that he was present with no other people. They were to be God’s “treasured possession.”

But, of course, being shaped into God’s people meant they were being shaped for responsibility. They were to be the ones through whom God would restore all of humanity to a right relationship with God. God led them from Mt. Sinai to the borders of Canaan so that the Israelites might move into the land that God had promised to Abraham centuries before. Yet despite all that had happened, the people seemed plagued by fears, doubts, and anxieties. Sometimes they went so far as to wish they were still back in Egypt. Far from being responsible people, ready to trust God in all things, time and again they quickly forgot about their escape from Pharaoh and even the food God had rained down upon them from heaven (Exodus 16). They could see only the unknowns ahead and embrace only their own fears.

When the Israelites arrived at the borders of Canaan, at God’s instruction they sent in a team of spies to check things out. Sensible enough. However, when the spies returned after forty days, they reported that though the land flowed with “milk and honey,” the Canaanites were simply too strong and as big as giants. In their fear, the people turned back, some even desiring to return to Egypt. Despite their experiences *with* God and their experience *of* God, their faith was weak. They trusted God too little. They weren’t really sure that God would or could keep his promises. Indeed, their faith was not really placed in Yahweh, the God of Moses. Rather, their faith was in a god of their own making, a god much too small to trust with life and death. So, led astray by this tiny god of their own conception, the people would wander aimlessly for forty years until they had died, until their children were ready to trust, *fully* trust, the God-Who-Is and begin their conquest of Canaan.

*Three decisions*

In his year-long Bible study, *The Grand Sweep*, Ellsworth Kalas draws our attention to three decisions that the Israelites make after leaving Mt. Sinai for the Promised Land.

First, the Israelites make the decision to complain. Abraham Lincoln once observed that people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be. I think he was right. We can wake up each morning and decide whether we are going to have a positive outlook that day or a negative one. Yes, the Israelites were anxious and scared as they traveled through the Sinai wilderness, but they could have decided to swallow their grumbling and confidently embrace God’s promises.

Second, the Israelites decided to criticize, directing their insecurities and anxieties at Moses. In Numbers 12, Aaron, Moses’ brother, and Miriam, Moses’ sister, oppose Moses. “What makes him so special,” they think to themselves. But it was God who made Moses special and God’s anger “burned hot against” Aaron and Miriam for their arrogance. Like complaining, criticizing hardly seems like a decision. Yet, we are defined by many such decisions we make every day. Will we hold our tongue or will we lash out? Will we criticize or will we support?

Third, the Israelites decided to retreat. This one is easier to understand as a decision. Would they trust God and enter Canaan despite the fears of their spies or would they rely on their own judgment and turn back? But the grumbling begat the criticizing and the criticizing begat the retreat.

Our own lives are like this. Lots of wrong “little” decisions lead inexorably to a wrong “big” decision. Do we really think that we can deny God in the small stuff of our lives and yet trust God in the big stuff? Wise Christians know that the mature Christian life is a life led fully in God’s presence, in the small decisions as well as the big ones.

*Movie recommendation*

A couple of weeks ago, I caught the last 20 minutes or so of *Some Like It Hot*. Certainly, one of Billy Wilder’s best, the movie starts Tony Curtis, Jack Lemmon, and Marilyn Monroe. A classic that has held up really well and #22 on the AFI Top 100 list.

*Book recommendation*

N. T. Wright recently wrote a biography of the apostle Paul. Wright had to make a lot of assumptions to piece together Paul’s story, but his choices are all well-informed. If you’d like to learn more about Paul, his ministry, and his teachings, this is a good place to start. It is titled simply, *Paul: A Biography*.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott