

## SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**NUM. 13:1** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

**2** Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them.

**3** And Moses by the commandment of the LORD sent them from the wilderness of Paran: all those men *were* heads of the children of Israel.

**17** And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain:

**18** And see the land, what it *is*; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they *be* strong or weak, few or many;

**19** And what the land *is* that they dwell in, whether it *be* good or bad; and what cities *they be* that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds;

**20** And what the land *is*, whether it *be* fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the firstripe grapes.

**25** And they returned from searching of the land after forty days.

**26** And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto

them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land.

**27** And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this *is* the fruit of it.

**28** Nevertheless the people *be* strong that dwell in the land, and the cities *are* walled, *and* very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.

**29** The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.

**30** And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.

**31** But the men that went up with him said, We *be* not able to go up against the people; for they *are* stronger than we.

**32** And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, *is* a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it *are* men of a great stature.

**33** And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, *which come* of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

### NOTES

# The Mission of Twelve Spies

Lesson Text: Numbers 13:1-3, 17-20, 25-33

Related Scriptures: Deuteronomy 1:1-28; Psalm 106:1-25;  
I Corinthians 10:11-13

TIME: 1443 B.C.

PLACE: Desert of Paran

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it" (Numbers 13:30).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **SELECTION OF THE TWELVE SPIES—Num. 13:1-3**

The Lord's message to Moses (Num. 13:1). The opening verse of this passage makes it clear that the Lord spoke to Moses on the matter at hand. Once again, we see God at the forefront of Israel and speaking directly to Moses.

But a request to send spies into the land to scout it and bring back a report had also been presented to Moses by the people. God met the Israelites where they were and guided the process, still speaking through Moses.

**The selection process (Num. 13:2).** While still encamped in the wilderness of Paran, which was located on the Sinai Peninsula south of Canaan, God told Moses to go ahead and send out twelve men to spy out the land of Canaan.

In order to make sure that each tribe was equally represented in this matter, one leader from each was to be chosen as that tribe's representative.

**The sending of the spies (Num. 13:3).** Moses did exactly as God commanded and sent the twelve spies out

from the wilderness of Paran to scout the Promised Land.

### **MISSION OF THE TWELVE SPIES—Num. 13:17-20**

**Directions on where to go (Num. 13:17-18).** In order to successfully complete their scouting mission, the twelve spies had to be instructed as to what part of the land to inspect.

Moses gave two purposes for this mission: to scout out the land and check out its people.

**Directions on what to look for (Num. 13:19-20).** The main goal of the mission of the spies as ordered by Moses was to discover the quality of the land as well as the strength of its cities and citizens.

As Moses sent the spies away, he told them to be of good courage. He fully expected the spies to bring back a good report.

Knowing that the time of harvest had arrived, Moses instructed the spies to bring back some of the fruit of the land. This would give him and the nation firsthand information about the fruitfulness of the area.

## REPORT OF THE TWELVE SPIES— Num. 13:25-33

**Return of the spies (Num. 13:25-26).** After being gone a total of forty days, the twelve spies returned to the Israelite camp.

**Report of the spies (Num. 13:27-29).** The twelve spies brought back a full report.

The spies announced that they had inspected the land as they were commanded, and just as God had said, it flowed with milk and honey.

In giving their report on the richness of the land, the spies demonstrated the veracity of their opinion by bringing fruit from the land, just as Moses had ordered.

While there was no doubt about the abundance of the land, the spies did not have such a good report concerning the people of the land. They reported that the land they saw was inhabited by strong people and was full of large and fortified cities, impregnable strongholds that could resist any attack.

To make matters worse, the spies saw what they described as “the children of Anak” living there (vs. 28). This reference will be explained further a bit later.

The spies gave the geographic locations of specific peoples.

**Caleb’s contrary report (Num. 13:30).** The negative report of the spies was not unanimous, however. Caleb, who was the representative from the tribe of Judah (vs. 6), quieted the people and encouraged them to move at once to occupy the land, declaring that they were fully able to defeat the enemy.

**Rejection of Caleb’s report (Num. 13:31).** The other spies were not swayed by Caleb’s words.

The representatives who gave the bad report contradicted Caleb by stating that the people of Israel were not able to defeat the enemy.

**Exaggeration of the grim picture (Num. 13:32-33).** To emphasize the supposed impossibility of taking possession of the land, the spies greatly overstated the size of the inhabitants. They reported that among the natives of Canaan were the “sons of Anak,” who are also described as “giants,” or *nephilim*. The Nephilim were giants who lived before the Flood (cf. Gen. 6:4).

While the people certainly were familiar with stories concerning the giants who lived prior to and during Noah’s lifetime, it was impossible that those giants had any descendants after Noah, since the Nephilim were completely destroyed in the Flood and left no offspring.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## QUESTIONS

1. Whose idea was it to spy out the land originally?
2. How many men were chosen to spy out the land of Canaan?
3. Why was a spy chosen from each Israelite tribe?
4. What two important purposes did Moses give for the mission?
5. What did Moses tell the spies to bring back with them?
6. How long did it take for the spies to return from their mission?
7. What report did they give regarding the land itself?
8. What report did the majority of spies give concerning the people in the land?
9. How did Caleb’s report contradict that of the majority?
10. What makes it clear that the majority were exaggerating the size of the inhabitants they saw?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God sometimes calls us to search out His promises to us to demonstrate the greatness of His faithfulness (Num. 13:1-3).
2. When God calls us on a mission, we should proceed with confidence (vs. 17).
3. Even when God is with us, we must assess the situation so we can be wise in our pursuit of His will (vss. 18-20).
4. God is patient with us and takes the time to assure us that our pursuits in His name will be fruitful (vss. 25-27).
5. When we are overwhelmed by discouragement, we can always look to God for peace and comfort (vss. 28-20).
6. We know following God's commands is rewarding, but we must have faith to overcome obstacles (vss. 31-33).

—Megan Hickman.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think God asks us to do some things that require us to overcome great obstacles?
2. God gives us many promises in the Bible. Can you think of any? How do these encourage you?
3. Why is it dangerous (and wrong) to believe that if you are doing God's will, life will be easy?
4. The church is full of sinners, so conflict is inevitable. How should we handle conflicts when they arise (Eph. 4:1-3)?

—Megan Hickman.

## Golden Text Illuminated

**“Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (Numbers 13:30).**

Our golden text for this week presents us with a righteous, courageous contrast. Caleb here speaks against the majority report of the Israelite spies who were sent by Moses on a reconnaissance mission to evaluate the agricultural capacities of the land and the tactical capabilities of the Canaanite peoples they planned to attack.

Ten out of the dozen spies who were sent up to appraise the situation brought back an “evil report” (vs. 32). Only Caleb and Joshua were of the opinion that the conquest of Canaan was well within the Israelites' capabilities (cf. 14:6).

Caleb and Joshua maintained their faithfulness to the Lord over many years of wandering in exile along with those who were cursed for their unbelief. They also lived to see the realization of their victorious vision for God's people.

Being the lone faithful voice for God is never an easy role to embrace, especially in a society that is addicted to the assumption that the majority should always prevail. Standing up for God's Word will most often draw the ire of those around us. As the Apostle John wrote, “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13). Jesus said, “I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19). But in these times of opposition, we can be assured of being part of the Lord's final victory.

—John Lody.