NUMBERS

Chapter 13

*Exploring Canaan*

**The Lord said to Moses, 2 “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.” 3 So at the Lord’s command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites. 4 These are their names:**

**from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zaccur;**

**5 from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori;**

**6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh;**

**7 from the tribe of Issachar, Igal son of Joseph;**

**8 from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun;**

**9 from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti son of Raphu;**

**10 from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi;**

**11 from the tribe of Manasseh (a tribe of Joseph), Gaddi son of Susi;**

**12 from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel son of Gemalli;**

**13 from the tribe of Asher, Sethur son of Michael;**

**14 from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi son of Vophsi;**

**15 from the tribe of Gad, Geuel son of Maki.**

**16 These are the names of the men Moses sent to explore the land. (Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua.) 17 When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, “Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. 18 See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. 19 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? 20 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.) 21 So they went up and explored the land from the Desert of Zin as far as Rehob, toward Lebo Hamath. 22 They went up through the Negev and came to Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, lived. (Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 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. 24 That place was called the Valley of Eshcol because of the cluster of grapes the Israelites cut off there. 25 At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.**

**Ch 13** Representatives of the tribes will act as a reconnaissance party and report to the people upon return. The Lord’s command that spies be sent was His answer to Israel’s request for an exploration of the land. (TLSB)

**13:2** *Send some men to explore the land of Canaan.* The use of spies was a common practice in the ancient Near East (see note on Jos 2:1–24). From Dt 1:22–23 it appears that this directive of the Lord was in response to the people’s request. Thus the very sending of the spies was an expression of God’s grace. (CSB)

**13:3** *from the wilderness of Paran*. After their reconnaissance, the spies returned to Kadesh, located in the northern part of a larger area called the wilderness of Paran, only 50 mi SW of Beersheba and the southern border of the Promised Land. (TLSB)

**13:4–15** The names listed here are different from those in chs. 1–2; 7; 10. Presumably the tribal leaders in the four earlier lists were older men. The task for the spies called for men who were younger and more robust, but no less respected by their peers. (CSB)

**13:4–15** Similar to the order provided in 1:5–15, but Zebulun is separated from the sons of Leah, and Manasseh is separated from Ephraim. The 12 men chosen to explore Canaan were not the same tribal leaders mentioned in 1:5–15. Only two are mentioned by name: Caleb and Hoshea, the son of Nun. (TLSB)

**13:16** *Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua.* A parenthetical statement anticipating the later prominence of Joshua. The reader is alerted to the significance of this name in the list of the spies; here is a man of destiny. Hoshea means “salvation”; Joshua means “The Lord saves” (see NIV text note on Mt 1:21). (CSB)

Moses had changed the name from Hoshea (salvation) to Joshua (the Lord is salvation). See notes, Dt 32:44; Jsh 1:1. (TLSB)

**13:17–20** Moses’ instruction to the 12 spies was comprehensive; a thorough report of the land and its produce and the peoples and their towns was required in their reconnaissance mission. (CSB)

**13:17** *Negeb*. The spies penetrated as far north as Rehob (v 21), in the vicinity of Hamath, on the Orontes River (cf 2Ki 14:28). This brief summary is followed by a more detailed account of their experiences in one of the areas (vv 22–24). In the Negeb, they were closer to their home base and were able to carry out the assignment to “bring some of the fruit of the land” (v 20). (TLSB)

**13:20** *trees in it*. Sign of fruitfulness in contrast with the wilderness. (TLSB)

**13:21** *explored the land.* The journey of the spies began in the southernmost extremity of the land (the Desert of Zin) and took them to the northernmost point (Rehob, near Lebo Hamath; see 34:8). This journey of about 250 miles each way took them 40 days (v. 25), perhaps a round number. (CSB)

**13:22** *Anak*. Lit, “necklace.” Nothing is known of these people except their reputed great size. Their descendants are called Nephilim (lit, “giants”). (TLSB)

*Hebron.* The first city the spies came to in Canaan. The parenthetical comment about the city’s being built seven years before Zoan in Egypt may have been prompted by their amazement at the size and fortifications of the city that was so closely associated with the lives of their ancestors four centuries before this time (see Ge 13:14–18; 14:13; 23:2; 25:9; 35:27–29; 50:13). In the stories of the ancestors of their people, Hebron had not been a great city, but a dwelling and trading place for shepherds and herdsmen. (CSB)

*descendants of Anak.* Three notable Anak descendants are mentioned as living at Hebron. The Anakites were men of great stature; their physical size brought fear to the people (see vv. 32–33). In a later day of faith, Caleb was to drive them from their city (Jos 15:14; Jdg 1:10). (CSB)

**13:23** *Valley of Eshcol.* See NIV text note. This valley is near Hebron; presumably the spies cut the cluster of grapes on their return journey. The size of the grape cluster should have indicated the goodness of the land God was giving them. (CSB)

Valley mentioned only in connection with the spying of the land. The name likely fell out of use. (TLSB)

*carried it on a pole*. Extraordinarily large clusters can weigh as much as 12 lb. The Egyptian story of Sinuhe (c 1960–1928 BC) celebrates the bounty of figs and grapes in Canaan. (TLSB)

**13:1–24** God permits the spies to enter the Promised Land at the Israelites’ request (Dt 1:22). Twelve spies, one from each tribe, are sent; among them is Moses’ successor, Joshua. Just as the Lord gave His people a challenging mission, anticipating great faithfulness, He likewise challenges us. As the Lord grants you the opportunity for bold service, meet that challenge with diligence. When you err, diligently repent—for He is generous in mercy. His enduring mission is to bless and provide for you, as He has done in Christ Jesus. • Grant me fruitful labor, dear Lord, in the vineyard of Your kingdom. Amen. (TLSB)

*Report on the Exploration*

**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. 27 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. 28 But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. 29 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.” 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.” 31 But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” 32 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. 33 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.”**

**13:26–29** The first part of the spies’ report was truthful, but the goodness of the land was offset in their fearful eyes by the powerful peoples who lived there. (CSB)

**13:30** *Caleb silenced the people.* Only Caleb and Hoshea (Joshua) gave a report prompted by faith in God. (CSB)

Although only Caleb is mentioned in this rebuttal to the other spies, Joshua no doubt supported him. (TLSB)

**13:31** *We are not able*. True! But the Lord was able. The events reveal the people’s lack of faith in His leadership. (TLSB)

**13:32** *bad report about the land.* The promised land was a good land, a gracious gift from God. By speaking bad things about it, the faithless spies were speaking evil of the Lord (cf. 10:29). (CSB)

Hyperbole. Attempt to support their claim that the Israelites were no match for the Canaanites. (TLSB)

**13:33** Their words became exaggerations and distortions. The Anakites were now said to be Nephilim (see note on Ge 6:4). The reference to the Nephilim seems deliberately intended to evoke fear. The exaggeration of the faithless led to their final folly: “We seemed like grasshoppers.” (CSB)

**13:25–33** The land is just as God had described it to Moses, flowing with milk and honey (Ex 3:8; Nu 13:27). Yet 10 of the 12 spies fear the inhabitants of the land (v 31), thereby doubting God. The hymn “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” says, “Oh, what peace we often forfeit; Oh, what needless pain we bear—All because we do not carry Ev’rything to God in prayer!” (*LSB* 770:1). When you face challenges, do not collapse in doubt. Instead, call on your gracious Lord, who redeemed you and will lead you. • Lord, we confess that we are not able to fulfill our calling without sin. Forgive us for Christ’s sake, and lead us through every trial. Amen. (TLSB)