

# NUMBERS

## Chapter 13

### *Spies Sent into Canaan*

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them.” 3 So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the people of Israel. 4 And these were their names: From the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur; 5 from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori; 6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; 7 from the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph; 8 from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun; 9 from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu; 10 from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi; 11 from the tribe of Joseph (that is, from the tribe of Manasseh), Gaddi the son of Susi; 12 from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli; 13 from the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael; 14 from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi; 15 from the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi. 16 These were the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua. 17 Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan and said to them, “Go up into the Negeb and go up into the hill country, 18 and see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, 19 and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad, and whether the cities that they dwell in are camps or strongholds, 20 and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be of good courage and bring some of the fruit of the land.” Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes. 21 So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath. 22 They went up into the Negeb and came to Hebron. Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 And they came to the Valley of Eshcol and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them; they also brought some pomegranates and figs. 24 That place was called the Valley of Eshcol,[a] because of the cluster that the people of Israel cut down from there.

**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 spy out 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 called 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 save.” (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** *spied out 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.* 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 of the Spies*

**25 At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. 26 And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 And they told him, “We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan.” 30 But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.” 31 Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.” 32 So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, “The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. 33 And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed 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 quieted 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)