

# CHAPTER 13

It is a memorable and very melancholy story which is related in this and the following chapter, of the turning back of Israel from the borders of Canaan, when they were just ready to set foot in it, and the sentencing of them to wander and perish in the wilderness for their unbelief and murmuring. It is referred to ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 95:7, etc., and improved for warning to Christians, ~~Hebrews~~ Hebrews 3:7, etc. In this chapter we have,

- I.** The sending of twelve spies before them into Canaan (v. 1-16).
- II.** The instructions given to these spies (v. 17-20).
- III.** Their executing their commission according to their instructions, and their return from the search (v. 21-25).
- IV.** The report they brought back to the camp of Israel (v. 26, etc.).

## ~~NUMBERS~~ NUMBERS 13:1-20

### MISSION OF THE TWELVE SPIES

Here we have,

**I.** Orders given to send spies to search out the land of Canaan. It is here said, God directed Moses to send them (v. 1, 2), but it appears by the repetition of the story afterwards (~~Deuteronomy~~ Deuteronomy 1:22) that the motion came originally from the people; they came to Moses, and said, *We will send men before us*; and it was the fruit of their unbelief. They would not take God's word that it was a good land, and that he would, without fail, put them in possession of it. They could not trust the pillar of cloud and fire to show them the way to it, but had a better opinion of their own politics than of God's wisdom. How absurd was it for them to send to spy out a land which God himself had spied out for them, to enquire the way into it when God himself had undertaken to show them the way! But thus we ruin ourselves by giving more credit to the reports and representations of sense than to divine revelation; we walk by sight, not by faith; whereas,

*if we will receive the witness of men, without doubt the witness of God is greater.* The people making this motion to Moses, he (perhaps not aware of the unbelief at the bottom of it) consulted God in the case, who bade him gratify the people in this matter, and send spies before them: "Let them walk in their own counsels." Yet God was no way accessory to the sin that followed, for the sending of these spies was so far from being the cause of the sin that if the spies had done their duty, and the people theirs, it might have been the confirmation of their faith, and of good service to them.

**II.** The persons nominated that were to be employed in this service (v. 4, etc.), one of each tribe, that it might appear to be the act of the people in general; and rulers, person of figure in their respective tribes, some of the rulers of thousands or hundreds, to put the greater credit upon their embassy. This was designed for the best, but it proved to have this ill effect that the quality of the persons occasioned the evil report they brought up to be the more credited and the people to be the more influenced by it. Some think that they are all named for the sake of two good ones that were among them, Caleb and Joshua. Notice is taken of the change of Joshua's name upon this occasion, v. 16. He was Moses's minister, but had been employed, though of the tribe of Ephraim, as general of the forces that were sent out against Amalek. The name by which he was generally called and known in his own tribe was *Oshea*, but Moses called him *Joshua*, in token of his affection to him and power over him; and now, it should seem, he ordered others to call him so, and fixed that to be his name henceforward. *Oshea* signifies a prayer for salvation, *Save thou*; *Joshua* signifies a promise of salvation, *He will save*, in answer to that prayer: so near is the relation between prayers and promises. Prayers prevail for promises, and promises direct and encourage prayers. Some think that Moses designed, by taking the first syllable of the name Jehovah and prefixing it to his name, which turned *Hoshea* into *Jehoshua*, to put an honour upon him, and to encourage him in this and all his future services with the assurances of God's presence. Yet after this he is called *Hoshea*, <sup><524></sup>Deuteronomy 32:44. *Jesus* is the same name with *Joshua*, and it is the name of our Lord Christ, of whom Joshua was a type as successor to Moses, Israel's captain, and conqueror of Canaan. There was another of the same name, who was also a type of Christ, <sup><381></sup>Zechariah 6:11. Joshua was the saviour of God's people from the powers of Canaan, but Christ is their Saviour from the powers of hell.

**III.** The instructions given to those spies. They were sent into the land of Canaan the nearest way, to traverse the country, and to take account of its present state, v. 17. Two heads of enquiry were given them in charge,

**1.** Concerning the land itself: *See what that is* (v. 18, and again, v. 19), see whether it be *good or bad*, and (v. 20) *whether it be fat or lean*. All parts of the earth do not share alike in the blessing of fruitfulness; some countries are blessed with a richer soil than others. Moses himself was well satisfied that Canaan was a very good land, but he sent these spies to bring an account of it for the satisfaction of the people; as John Baptist sent to Jesus, to ask whether he was the Christ, not to inform himself, but to inform those he sent. They must take notice whether the air was healthful or no, what the soil was, and what the productions; and, for the better satisfaction of the people, they must bring with them some of the fruits.

**2.** Concerning the inhabitants — their number, few or many — their size and stature, whether strong able-bodied men or weak, — their habitations, whether they lived in tents or houses, whether in open villages or in walled towns, — whether the woods were standing as in those countries that are uncultivated, through the unskillfulness and slothfulness of the inhabitants, or whether the woods were cut down, and the country made champaign, for the convenience of tillage. These were the things they were to enquire about. Perhaps there had not been of late years such commerce between Egypt and Canaan as there was in Jacob's time, else they might have informed themselves of these things without sending men on purpose to search. See the advantage we may derive from books and learning, which acquaint those that are curious and inquisitive with the state of foreign countries, at a much greater distance than Canaan was now from Israel, without this trouble and expense.

**IV.** Moses dismisses the spies with this charge, *Be of good courage*, intimating, not only that they should be themselves encouraged against the difficulties of this expedition, but that they should bring an encouraging account to the people and make the best of every thing. It was not only a great undertaking they were put upon, which required good management and resolution, but it was a great trust that was reposed in them, which required that they should be faithful.

## NUMBERS 13:21-25

### MISSION OF THE TWELVE SPIES

We have here a short account of the survey which the spies made of the promised land.

1. They went quite through it, from Zin in the south, to Rehob, near Hamath, in the north, v. 21. See <sup>(44B)</sup>Numbers 34:3, 8. It is probable that they did not go altogether in a body, lest they should be suspected and taken up, which there would be the more danger of if the Canaanites knew (and one would think they could not but know) how near the Israelites were to them; but they divided themselves into several companies, and so passed unsuspected, as way-faring men.
2. They took particular notice of Hebron (v. 22), probably because near there was the field of Machpelah, where the patriarchs were buried (<sup>(42B)</sup>Genesis 23:2), whose dead bodies did, as it were, keep possession of that land for their posterity. To this sepulchre they made a particular visit, and found the adjoining city in the possession of the sons of Anak, who are here named. In that place where they expected the greatest encouragements they met with the greatest discouragements. Where the bodies of their ancestors kept possession for them the giants kept possession against them. *They ascended by the south, and came to Hebron*, that is, “Caleb,” say the Jews, “in particular,” for to his being there we find express reference, <sup>(44B)</sup>Joshua 14:9, 12, 13. But that others of the spies were there too appears by their description of the Anakim, v. 33.
3. They brought a bunch of grapes with them, and some other of the fruits of the land, as a proof of the extraordinary goodness of the country. Probably they furnished themselves with these fruits when they were leaving the country and returning. The cluster of grapes was so large and so heavy that they hung it upon a bar, and carried it between two of them, v. 23, 24. The place whence they took it was, from this circumstance, called the *valley of the cluster*, that famous cluster which was to Israel both the earnest and the specimen of all the fruits of Canaan. Such are the present comforts which we have in communion with God, foretastes of the fulness of joy we expect in the heavenly Canaan. We may see by them what heaven is.

## ~~0436~~ NUMBERS 13:26-33

### MISSION OF THE TWELVE SPIES

It is a wonder how the people of Israel had patience to stay forty days for the return of their spies, when they were just ready to enter Canaan, under all the assurances of success they could have from the divine power, and a constant series of miracles that had hitherto attended them; but they distrusted God's power and promise, and were willing to be held in suspense by their own counsels, rather than be brought to a certainty by God's covenant. How much do we stand in our own light by our unbelief! Well, at length the messengers return, but they agree not in their report.

**I.** The major part discourage the people from going forward to Canaan; and justly are the Israelites left to this temptation, for putting so much confidence in the judgment of men, when they had the word of God to trust to. It is a righteous thing with God to give those up to strong delusions who will not receive his truth in the love of it.

**1.** Observe their report.

**(1.)** They could not deny but that the land of Canaan was a very fruitful land; the bunch of grapes they brought with them was an ocular demonstration of it, v. 27. God had promised them a land flowing with milk and honey, and the evil spies themselves own that it is such a land. Thus even out of the mouth of adversaries will God be glorified and the truth of his promise attested. And yet afterwards they contradict themselves, when they say (v. 32), *It is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof*; as if, though it had milk, and honey, and grapes, yet it wanted other necessary provision; some think that there was a great plague in the country at the time they surveyed it, which they ought to have imputed to the wisdom of the divine Providence, which thus lessened the numbers of their enemies, to facilitate their conquests; but they invidiously imputed it to the unwholesomeness of the air, and thence took occasion to disparage the country. For this unreasonable fear of a plague in Canaan, they were justly cut off immediately by a *plague in the wilderness*, ~~0437~~ Numbers 14:37. But,

**(2.)** They represented the conquest of it as altogether impracticable, and that it was to no purpose to attempt it. The people are strong (v. 28), men

of a *great stature* (v. 32), *stronger than we*, v. 31. The cities are represented as impregnable fortresses: they *are walled* and *very great*, v. 28. But nothing served their ill purpose more than a description of the giants, on whom they lay a great stress: *We saw the children of Anak there* (v. 28), and again, *we saw the giants*, those men of a prodigious size, the *sons of Anak*, who *come of the giants*, v. 33. They spoke as if they were ready to tremble at the mention of them, as they had done at the sight of them. “O these tremendous giants! when we were near them, *we were in our own sight as grasshoppers*, not only little and weak, but trembling and daunted.” Compare <sup>(338)</sup>Job 39:20, *Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper?* “Nay, and *so we were in their sight*; they looked upon us with as much scorn and disdain as we did upon them with fear and trembling.” So that upon the whole matter they gave it in as their judgment, *We are not able to go up against them* (v. 31), and therefore must think of taking some other course.

**2.** Now, even if they had been to judge only by human probabilities, they could not have been excused from the imputation of cowardice. Were not the hosts of Israel very numerous? 600,000 effective men, well marshalled and modelled, closely embodied, and entirely united in interest and affection, constituted as formidable an army as perhaps was ever brought into the field; many a less has done more than perhaps the conquering of Canaan was, witness Alexander's army. Moses, their commander-in-chief, was wise and brave; and if the people had put on resolution, and behaved themselves valiantly, what could have stood before them? It is true the Canaanites were strong, but they were dispersed (v. 29): *Some dwell in the south and others in the mountains*; so that by reason of their distance they could not soon get together, and by reason of their divided interests they could not long keep together, to oppose Israel. The country being plentiful would subsist an army, and, though the cities were walled, if they could beat them in the field the strong-holds would fall of course into their hands. And, lastly, as for the giants, their overgrown stature would but make them the better mark, and the bulkiest men have not always the best mettle.

**3.** But, though they deserved to be posted for cowards, this was not the worst, the scripture brands them for unbelievers. It was not any human probabilities they were required to depend upon, but,

(1.) They had the manifest and sensible tokens of God's presence with them, and the engagement of his power for them. The Canaanites were stronger than Israel; suppose they were, but were they stronger than the God of Israel? We are not able to deal with them, but is not God Almighty able? Have we not him in the midst of us? Does not he go before us? And is any thing too hard for him? Were we as grasshoppers before the giants, and are not they less than grasshoppers before God? Their cities are walled against us, but can they be walled against heaven? Besides this,

(2.) They had had very great experience of the length and strength of God's arm, lifted up and made bare on their behalf. Were not the Egyptians as much stronger than they as the Canaanites were? And yet, without a sword drawn by Israel or a stroke struck, the chariots and horsemen of Egypt were quite routed and ruined; the Amalekites took them at great disadvantages, and yet they were discomfited. Miracles were at this time their daily bread; were there nothing else, an army so well victualled as theirs was, so constantly, so plentifully, and all on free cost, would have a might advantage against any other force. Nay,

(3.) They had particular promises made them of victory and success in their wars against the Canaanites. God had given Abraham all possible assurances that he would put his seed into possession of that land, <sup><158></sup>Genesis 15:18; 17:8. He had expressly promised them by Moses that he would *drive out the Canaanites from before them* (<sup><159></sup>Exodus 33:2), and that he would do it *by little and little*, <sup><160></sup>Exodus 23:30. And, after all this, for them to say, *We are not able to go up against them*, was in effect to say, "God himself is not able to make his words good." It was in effect to give him the lie, and to tell him he had undertaken more than he could perform. We have a short account of their sin, with which they infected the whole congregation, <sup><161></sup>Psalms 106:24. They *despised the land, they believed not his word*. Though, upon search, they had found it as good as he had said, *a land flowing with milk and honey*, yet they would not believe it as sure as he had said, but despaired of having it, though eternal truth itself had engaged it to them. And now this is the representation of the evil spies.

**II.** Caleb encouraged them to go forward, though he was seconded by Joshua only (v. 30): *Caleb stilled the people*, whom he saw already put into a ferment even *before Moses* himself, whose shining face could not daunt them, when they began to grow unruly. *Caleb* signifies *all heart*,

and he answered his name, was hearty himself, and would have made the people so if they would have hearkened to him. If Joshua had begun to stem the tide, he would have been suspected of partiality to Moses, whose minister he was; and therefore he prudently left it to Caleb's management at first, who was of the tribe of Judah, the leading tribe, and therefore the fittest to be heard. Caleb had seen and observed the strength of the inhabitants as much as his fellows, and upon the whole matter, 1. He speaks very confidently of success: *We are well able to overcome them*, as strong as they are.

**2.** He animates the people to go on, and, his lot lying in the van, he speaks as one resolved to lead them on with bravery: "*Let us go up at once*, one bold step, one bold stroke more, will do our business; it is all our own if we have but courage to make it so: *Let us go up and possess it.*" He does not say, "Let us go up and conquer it;" he looks upon that to be as good as done already; but, "Let us go up and possess it; there is nothing to be done but to enter, and take the possession which God our great Lord is ready to give us." Note, *The righteous are bold as a lion*. Difficulties that lie in the way of salvation dwindle and vanish before a lively active faith in the power and promise of God. *All things are possible*, if they be but promised, *to him that believes*.