

Twelve Israeli Spies Scout Out the Land of Canaan

Numbers 13:1-20

Numbers 13:1-20 - *“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader 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 children of Israel. ⁴ Now 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 are the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua.

¹⁷ Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, “Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, ¹⁸ and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; ¹⁹ whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; ²⁰ whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there 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.”

Background Notes

The people of Israel were on the threshold of Canaan, and they were ready to enter the Land that God had promised them. But before they entered the Promised Land, they decided to send twelve spies to scout out the Land. The names of two of the spies are well known, because they were the faithful spies: Caleb (v6) and Joshua (v8). Notice that Moses changed Joshua's name from “Hoshea,” meaning “salvation,” to “Joshua,” meaning “God is salvation” (v16). We don't know why Moses changed Joshua's name. Perhaps it was to emphasize that salvation comes only from God.

There's a spiritual lesson here for us. **Everyone** needs salvation! People look for salvation in many different ways, but there is only one way of salvation from sin, and that's God's way of salvation, through the Lord Jesus Christ. We must come to faith in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. He died on the cross for our sins, as our substitute. This is **God's way** of salvation, and this is the **only way** of salvation.

Recently I had a nice talk with the assistant manager of our local bank. During the conversation, I asked her if she was a believer. She told me that she had been born a Christian! Well, I hope I was able to get across that no one is **born** a Christian. You have to **become** a Christian. That's true of everyone – no one is born a Christian. You can thank the Lord

if you were born into a Christian family, but that doesn't mean you were born a Christian. Of your own choice and decision, you must receive Jesus Christ as your own personal Savior. That's **God's** way of salvation!

Doctrinal Points

1. God permits His people to scout out the Promised Land.

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them’” (v1-2). The same event is recorded in Deuteronomy 1, but from a different perspective. Number 13 says that the Lord told Moses to send the scouts to spy out the land. Deuteronomy 1 says that the people asked Moses to send out the spies. How do we harmonize these two accounts? Is this a contradiction in the Bible? No, it's not a contradiction. Both accounts are true! The people of Israel requested the scouting expedition, and then God told Moses to send the twelve spies into the Land.

Was sending out spies a good thing or a bad thing? In other words, was sending out the spies God's **perfect** will, or was it God's **permissive** will? My personal opinion is that it was God's permissive will. Thus, the doctrinal point: “God permits His people to scout out the Promise Land.”

This situation is very similar to the account in 1 Samuel 8. There the people told Samuel that they wanted a king, because they wanted to be like the surrounding nations. Although this was not God's perfect will for His people, the Lord acquiesced to their requests and permitted them to have a king. 1 Samuel 8:7 *“And the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.’”* Obviously God's **perfect** will was that **God alone** would be Israel's king, so the fact that He allowed the people to have a human king was God's **permissive** will.

So in Numbers 13, God **permitted** His people to spy out the Land. Why? Because of their doubts and their lack of belief in God's promises! God had already given the Land to Israel, and told them that it was a good Land! Way back when they were still in Egypt, God had said that He would deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and bring them to “a good and large land.” Exodus 3:8 – *“I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey...”* The Lord guaranteed that the land was theirs. All they had to do was go in and possess it. Deuteronomy 1:8 *“See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to give to them and their descendants after them.”*

Sadly, the people of Israel had the audacity to question God and ask for spies! If they had simply believed God, they would not have needed the spies. But our gracious God tolerated the faithless request of the people. He permitted them to send out scouts to satisfy their doubts about the Lord's promises.

There's a lesson here for us today. God has made a “Land of Blessing” available to anyone who will believe what He says – and it's a good land! This “Land” includes more than salvation. It includes all the spiritual blessings of the

abundant life in Christ. Yes, there are spiritual battles to be fought against the enemy in the land, but victory is guaranteed! Many Christians fall short of enjoying the spiritual blessings God has provided for us. They fall short of being victorious in spiritual battles, because of lack of trust, and doubts, and even unbelief in God's promises.

God is so gracious, isn't He? He permitted His people Israel to scout out the Promised Land to "*see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land.*"(v18-21).

God permits His people today to "scout out" our "Promised Land." Psalm 34:8 says, "*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!*" Have you checked out the blessings of our Promised Land? Have you ever prayed in faith, and seen God answer your prayers in amazing ways? Have you experienced the fact that the spiritual fruit of the land is so much better than anything the world has to offer? Have you tested God in the area of tithing (in line with Malachi 3:10), and experienced the spiritual blessing of giving - and seen God provide for you? Have you ever stepped out in faith, and experienced the freedom of depending on God alone? Have you experienced the defeat of the enemy and his schemes?

God wants us to **live** in the Land every day, not just scout it out! Unfortunately, too often our doubts and lack of faith hold us back. But our God is so gracious to us. He knows our weaknesses, and He graciously tolerates our "wilderness wanderings."

God permits His people to scout out the Promised Land.

2. God expects His people to possess the Promised Land.

Although God allowed His people to spy out the Land, He didn't want His people just checking out the Land - He wanted them to **live** in the Land! In fact, God **expected** them to possess the Land He had promised them!

I'm sure by this time you realize that the journey of Israel, from Egypt to the Promised Land, is a spiritual picture of the Christian life. Egypt represents the world and our slavery to sin, from which we are delivered when we apply the blood of the true Passover Lamb to our lives. Now, as Christians, the Lord doesn't want us just barely out of Egypt, always looking back. He doesn't want us wandering in the wilderness. He wants us to possess and **live** in the "Land of Blessing"!

The "Land of Blessing" is the spiritual blessings that are given to us in Christ (Ephesians 1). And it is also the realm of spiritual battles - where we are guaranteed victory when we walk by faith (Ephesians 6). In the book of Ephesians, this land is called "*the heavnlies,*" or "*heavenly places.*" This is not "heaven" - that is to come in the future. It is "*heavenly places*" now. To learn more about our spiritual blessings and spiritual battles, read Ephesians 1 and 6.

Many Christians know about the "*heavenly places,*" but they don't live there. They don't appropriate and enjoy their spiritual blessings in Christ. They live only for the material comforts and pleasures of this world, and they are constantly

defeated in spiritual battles. They're not living in the Land! They're still living in the wilderness, or at the edge of Egypt! Is this true of you?

God expects His people to possess the Promised Land.

Practical Application

Are we passing the "Test of the Land"?

God used the Promised Land as a test of faith for His people. Would they believe what God had clearly said about the Land? Would they go in and possess it? Or would they fail the test? Sadly, they failed the test. They chose to turn their backs on God's promises.

What about us? James 1 and 1 Peter 1 say that **our** faith will be tested, and the "Test of the Land" is one test that the Lord uses. Do we really enjoy our spiritual blessings more than an increase in our financial investments, for example?

Here's an example of the test of the Land. Suppose you had to choose one of two options (you can't have both; you must choose one!):

Option 1: The value of your house will depreciate, but you will have the joy of leading your neighbor to the Lord.

Option 2: The value of your home will greatly appreciate, but you will not see your neighbor saved.

Are we passing the Test of the Land?