

Moses sent twelve men to spy out the land of Canaan before the children of Israel had reached it. Despite having seen all that the LORD did to deliver them from Egypt, the spies believed that the Canaanites were too strong and that Israel could not take possession of the land that the LORD had promised them. They were trusting in their own strength rather than that of the LORD and so they saw the obstacles as insurmountable.

Numbers 13:1-25: The children of Israel have traveled from Egypt through the wilderness and are nearing the promised land of Canaan. The LORD instructs Moses to send men ahead on a reconnaissance mission in the land of Canaan in order to gain information useful for taking possession. Each of the men are to be a leader from each tribe of Israel for a total of twelve men. Moses instructs them to evaluate the land and its resources, as well as the kind of people the Canaanites are and the strength of their cities. The men depart and are gone for forty days before returning with samples of the fruit of the land, including a branch with a cluster of grapes so large that two men had to carry it suspended by a staff between them.

Numbers 13

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.

The men come back to where the children of Israel were camped at Kadesh (full name: Kadesh-barnea – Josh. 14:7), a place within the wilderness of Paran. Moses, Aaron and “all the congregation of the children of Israel” gathered to hear the men’s report as they show the fruit that they had brought back from the land. Likely “all the congregation” refers to the leadership from each tribe representing the rest of the people.

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.

These spies admit that Canaan was truly a land that “floweth with milk and honey.” They had seen for themselves that the land was fertile and produced abundantly, just as the LORD had promised in Ex. 3:8. They would not be disappointed when they would finally occupy the land.

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.

“Nevertheless the people *be* strong that dwell in the land, and the cities *are* walled, *and* very great [large]” – Having briefly mentioned the blessings of the land, they now focus on the obstacles to their occupation of the land. From a human perspective, the people of the land were not weaklings and defeating them would not be easy. Their cities had walls, making them even more difficult to conquer, and the cities were large, implying that they had large armies of men inside ready to defend them.

“and moreover we saw the children of Anak there” – The descendants of Anak had a reputation of being a very tall people, even to the point of some being giants (v. 33). The thought of facing an army of such men in battle would have no doubt been intimidating.

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.

The spies then complain that the land was full of enemies. Amalekites in the south (the direction from which Israel would most likely be entering the land), Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites in the mountains, and Canaanites by the sea and along the Jordan river. Not only was there no way to enter the land without facing the “strong” inhabitants of the land, there was also no unoccupied territory for them to enter and claim. In their opinion, the land was already full.

Verses 30-33: We discover in later verses that Joshua and Caleb are the only two spies that were advocating that enter the land and trust that the LORD would enable them to take it. In v. 30 Caleb steps forward and attempts to convince the people to trust the LORD and take the land, but in vs. 31-33 the other ten spies declare that the people of the land are too strong for Israel to overcome and the land itself was too wild to tame. Only the “men of great stature” that lived there were strong enough to survive in the land and that these “giants” made the children of Israel look like grasshoppers in comparison.

Numbers 14:1-5: Unbelief is contagious and the report of the ten spies turned what should have been a time of excitement and anticipation into a time of mourning. The people began to grumble and complain about Moses and Aaron, saying that they would have been better off dying in Egypt or the wilderness. They even began to accuse the LORD of bringing them to Canaan to be killed by the people of the land. They decided it would be better to return to Egypt and began discussing the idea of putting someone else in charge that would take them back to Egypt. Moses and Aaron fall on their faces in a show of humility toward the people and perhaps praying that the LORD would have mercy on the children of Israel. They recognized that the people’s unbelief, their refusal to enter to Canaan, their rejection of the leaders that the LORD had chosen (Moses and Aaron) and their talk of returning to Egypt were outright rebellion against the LORD.

Numbers 14

6 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, *which were* of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:

Joshua is now named along with Caleb as being the two spies that were advocating that they take the land, in contradiction of the other ten spies that were in favor of rebelling against the LORD's plan. Joshua and Caleb were so grieved by what they were hearing from the people (vs. 1-5) that they tore their clothes, an expression of extreme grief in that day.

7 And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, *is* an exceeding good land. 8 If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

“And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel” – Joshua and Caleb begin to make their case for why they should enter the land and take it.

“saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land” – The land is too desirable to just turn their back on it and leave. It is everything that the LORD had promised and they should accept the blessing that the LORD was giving them.

“If the LORD delight [to take pleasure in] in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us” – Joshua and Caleb turn the focus to where it should be: on the LORD. The LORD would certainly not delight in them if they stubbornly refuse to obey Him, but if they obey then the LORD will fulfill His promise to bring them into the land and give it to them. The power needed for defeating the inhabitants of the land would come from the LORD and He would enable them to get victory. Too often we think everything depends on us and we try to accomplish things in our own strength instead of trusting the LORD for the result.

“a land which floweth with milk and honey” – This description of the land was a reminder of the LORD's promise that He would give them a land that flowed with milk and honey.

9 Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they *are* bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD *is* with us: fear them not.

“Only rebel not ye against the LORD” – Not only had the LORD promised this land to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, but the LORD had raised up Moses and used Him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt and provided for them on their journey through the wilderness. He had done all these things for the express purpose of bringing them into the land of Canaan and giving it to them. Not only did they not believe that the LORD could give them the land, but their refusal to enter the land was rebellion against the will of the LORD. In addition, they were rejecting the men that the LORD had chosen to lead them because they were talking about setting up a new captain to follow instead of Moses. Also, they were rebelling against the LORD's will to take the land by planning to return to Egypt under new leadership.

“neither fear ye the people of the land” – There was no need to fear the people of the land because their God was mightier than them, despite their walled cities and large armies of strong men. Jacob and Caleb trusted that the LORD could deliver on His promise to give them the land.

“for they *are* bread for us” – A figure of speech with two possible meanings: 1) defeating the people of the land will be as trivial as eating bread; 2) the people of the land would be raw material for Israel when the LORD gives them the land. The survivors would serve as slaves for Israel and their possessions would become Israel's.

“their defence [shade; shadow] is departed from them” – Figure of speech referring to that which protected from the heat of the sun. Joshua and Caleb were saying that all the protections that the Canaanites had were now gone because the gods that they served could not help them against the LORD.

“and the LORD is with us” – Without any supernatural help or protection from their gods, the inhabitants of the land had only their own human strength to rely upon. Israel, however, had the power of an Almighty God on their side. Joshua and Caleb are pointing out that there was no way for Israel to fail.

“fear them not” – The obvious conclusion was that there was no reason to fear the Canaanites.

Verses 10-45: The people were so dead-set against entering the land that they began to call for the stoning of Joshua and Caleb and were only stopped by the sudden appearance of the glory of the LORD in the tabernacle (v. 10). The LORD speaks to Moses and asks a rhetorical question: When will the stubbornness of the people end so that they will start believing Him? The LORD then threatens to destroy them and create a new nation from the descendants of Moses (v. 11-12). Moses intercedes for the people, pointing out that the world would think the LORD was unable to deliver on His promises if He destroyed Israel (vs. 13-19). The LORD agrees not to destroy Israel but declares that the current generation of the people that had rebelled against Him would not see the land (vs. 20-23). The only exceptions would be Caleb and Joshua (vs. 24, 30). The LORD then has Moses announce to the people that because of their rebellion they will be forced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until everyone currently 20 years and older has died (vs. 26-35). It would be their children who would be allowed to enter the land that the LORD was giving them. However, the ten spies that turned the people against entering the land died by a plague (36-38). The people were grieved because of what the LORD said and so they attempted to enter the land despite Moses' warning that doing so now was further rebellion against the LORD and that their attempt would not succeed. Moses' words became true because they were defeated by the Amalekites and the Canaanites and Israel spent the next 40 years in the wilderness.