



# The Land

GOD REQUIRES OBEDIENT FAITH IN THE FACE OF FEAR.

**Scripture Passage: Numbers 13:17-31    Memory Verse: Numbers 13:30**

Many basketball games come down to a last-second shot. Typically, the coach calls a timeout to set up the last play, but the five players on the court must execute. Players in such situations need to have confidence in their abilities. They have practiced for that moment, and they must act fearlessly.

Numbers 13 recounts how the Israelites had reached the edge of the promised land. Moses sent twelve spies to scout the land and to determine the best strategy for taking it. But would their report encourage the people or rattle their faith as they stood on the verge of receiving the land God had promised more than six centuries earlier?

As you prepare to teach this session, consider adults in your group who are facing tough decisions. Pray that this session will challenge them to follow God with obedient faith. Ask God to help you with any challenging situations you are facing as well.



## **Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training**

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Have you ever noticed how a project grows? You decide to clean out the backyard shed, the garage, or the closet. You are going to put down new liner paper in the kitchen cabinets. You are going to paint the kids' bedroom. You figure out how long it will take and can visualize what it will look like when you're finished. You begin—excited. But about halfway through, you say, “What was I thinking? This is a lot more complicated than I thought it would be.” (PSG, p. 19)

**What was the last project you had that was more complicated than you thought it would be? How did you handle it?**



## Understand the Context (Numbers 13:1-33)

As the people journeyed through the wilderness of Paran, God instructed Moses to send men into the land of Canaan to scout it out (Num. 13:1-2). The plan called for sending one man from each tribe so the entire nation would have representation.

Verses 4-15 list the names of the men who were chosen. Ten of them are mentioned only here in the Bible; sadly, the Bible records that the Lord later struck them down for their lack of faith (14:36-38). The two faithful men, Caleb and Hoshea (whom Moses renamed Joshua in 13:16), would play important roles in the conquest and settlement of the land.

Moses gave the twelve spies detailed instructions for scouting Canaan (13:17-20). He wanted them to bring back a detailed report describing what the land was like and what the people who lived there were like. They were to report on the fortifications they found, as well as assessing the land's fertility and suitability for settlement. He also encouraged them to bring back some fruit, probably to encourage the people.

The men moved out at Moses's command. They began in the wilderness of Zin along Canaan's southern border and traveled as far as Rehob near Canaan's northern border (13:21). The text then highlights how they journeyed through the Negev to the vicinity of Hebron—both in the land's southern region.

Three leaders of the Anakim, a group of large-statured people, lived at Hebron (13:22).

Toward the end of their journey, the men came to the Valley of Eshcol and cut down a large cluster of grapes. The cluster was so big that two men were required to carry it on a pole between them (13:23-24). After forty days, they returned upon completing their mission (13:25).

The scouts reported that the land indeed was rich (13:26-27). However, they expressed serious reservations about the strong people there and the numerous fortified cities they encountered (13:28). Formidable foes, including the Anakim, Amalekites, Hethites, Jebusites, and Amorites, controlled much of the land, while other Canaanite peoples inhabited the rest (13:29).

Caleb quieted the people and encouraged them to take possession of what God had promised (13:30). However, the ten unbelieving spies continued to insist that the obstacles were too great (13:31-33). They suggested that Canaan's citizens were too strong for them. The men testified that they had seen the Nephilim, another giant people, in the land. They emphasized how they felt like grasshoppers before them.

**As you read Numbers 13:17-31, notice the two contrasting reports of the spies when they returned. What do you think made the difference in the way they viewed the situation? (PSG, p. 20)**

## ENGAGE



**ASK:**

**PREPARE:** On a focal wall, display **Pack Item 3** (Poster: *The Journey of the Spies*). Make copies of **Pack Item 7** (Handout: *Numbers, Deuteronomy Time Line*) and **Pack Item 9** (Handout: *Complaints in the Wilderness*).

**READ:**

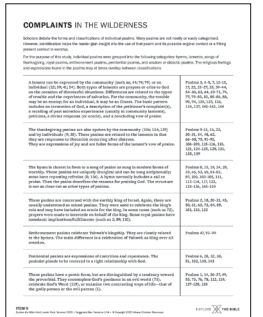
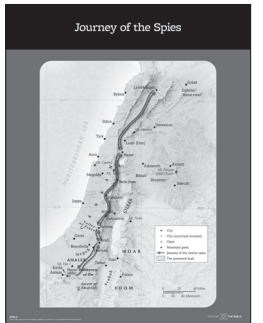
Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 19 of the PSG. Affirm that we all face situations that are more complicated than originally thought, whether it's a home improvement task or stepping out with faith in God.

**IDENTIFY:**

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 7** (Handout: *Numbers, Deuteronomy Time Line*). Point out the information for 1445 BC. Remind adults that Israel had spent a lot of time at Mount Sinai receiving the law and the instructions for the tabernacle. Now they found themselves on the brink of Canaan, the land God had promised their ancestors centuries earlier.

**TRANSITION:**

*In today's session, we'll examine how the Israelites responded to God's faithfulness in bringing them to the border of the promised land, especially after they realized the task was going to be more challenging than they expected.*



### Group Activity Option

#### Music

Provide hymnals and direct adults to turn to “Trust and Obey” (*Baptist Hymnal 2008*, No. 500). Group adults into four teams and assign one verse of the hymn to each team. Direct them to read their stanza and to identify how it highlights the relationship between trust and obedience. After a few minutes, allow the first team to share their insights, then sing the chorus together. Repeat the activity for the three remaining verses. Note that this session emphasizes the role of trusting God and demonstrating that trust through obedience.



**17** When Moses sent them to scout out the land of Canaan, he told them, “Go up this way to the Negev, then go up 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** Is the land they live in good or bad? Are the cities they live in encampments or fortifications? **20** Is the land fertile or unproductive? Are there trees in it or not? Be courageous. Bring back some fruit from the land.” It was the season for the first ripe grapes.

(v. 17) As noted, Moses gave the spies specific instructions on how to go about their business in *Canaan*. He urged them to *scout* the land. Modern translations of this word vary slightly, but they all emphasize the same basic sense. Moses sent them to gather and bring back first-hand information on the land.

The text never suggests that not entering the land was an option. The purpose of sending scouts was to determine how, not if, Israel would enter the land. God would provide the victory.

The exploration started in the *Negev* (NEH-gev; sometimes spelled “Negeb”). This was a significant part of Canaan’s southern region. Low annual rainfall rendered it less suitable for farming, but shepherds found it useful for their flocks. Centuries earlier, Abraham and Sarah settled in the Negev near Beer-sheba, as did the other patriarchs (Gen. 21:31-33; 26:23-25). Later, Beer-sheba became a significant Israelite city in the Negev.

From the Negev, the men would move into Canaan’s *hill country*. With the Mediterranean Sea to the west and the Jordan River and Dead Sea along its eastern border, the southern hill country later became part of Judah. It included Hebron, which was King David’s first capital (2 Sam. 2:1-4), as well as Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

The hill country north of Jerusalem, especially the area later allotted to Ephraim, featured excellent soil to grow grain, grapes, olives, and more. The cities of Shiloh, the site of the tabernacle (Josh. 18:1), and Shechem, the site of Israel’s covenant renewal under Joshua (Josh. 8:30-35; 24:1), also sat within the hill country.

(vv. 18-19) In addition to scouting the terrain and geography, Moses wanted the spies to examine the people and the cities. He wanted to know if the people were *strong or weak, few or many*. Again, Moses was thinking ahead. He understood that while God would give them the victory, battles against real enemies would be fought.

The nature of the Canaanite *encampments* and *fortifications* would determine Israel’s military strategy. Encampments were typically more in the open country, where residents tended to live in tents. In theory, such settlements would be easier to conquer. Cities fortified by walls would require more effort.

(v. 20) Finding the answers to Moses’s questions would not come easily. As foreign spies, the men were risking their lives on this assignment. However, Moses knew that God would be with them, so he commanded them to *be courageous*. The imperative literally means “make yourselves strong.”

Moses later used a different form of the word when he commissioned Joshua (Deut. 31:7). God also used this word to encourage Joshua after Moses died (Josh. 1:6-9). Sadly, ten spies used it to describe the Canaanites as being stronger than Israel (Num. 13:31).

In recalling these instructions, Moses noted that it was the *season for the first ripe grapes*. In addition to highlighting the fruit of the land, the term also reveals when the spies scouted Canaan. Grapevines began to mature in late spring and early summer. By late summer or early autumn, they were ready for harvesting. When the scouts returned (vv. 23-25), they were carrying a huge cluster of grapes on a pole, which suggests they finished their mission around this fall harvest.

### Key Doctrine

#### God the Father

God is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. (See 2 Timothy 1:7; 2 Peter 1:3.)



READ:

ASK:

RECAP:

ASK:

HIGHLIGHT:

ASK:

**APPLICATION POINT: Believers can depend on God to instruct them in the tasks He has for them.**

**Invite a volunteer to read aloud Numbers 13:17-20** as the group listens for the instructions Moses gave the scouts.

**What was significant about the land of Canaan?**

Direct adults to read Numbers 13:17-20 again silently and to identify the two main concerns Moses had. Summarize the following content from page 21 of the PSG to provide context:

Moses revealed his two primary concerns: the land and the people. What was the land like typographically? What challenges would the people face? . . . Moses wanted to know how densely the land was populated and how the people looked militarily—were they **strong or weak**? He wanted to know if the inhabitants were capable of defending their cities and homes.

**What do you imagine the spies were thinking while Moses explained the information he wanted them to bring back? What would have caused them to be afraid?** (PSG p. 22)

Point out Moses’s command to be courageous. Briefly discuss how believers find courage to fulfill God’s plans. Share that over the next forty days, the spies did their job and thoroughly explored Canaan, just as Moses had directed them.

**How do you typically approach a God-given task? What concerns or apprehensions arise?** (PSG p. 22)

## The Land Assessed (Num. 13:21-25)

**21** So they went up and scouted out the land from the Wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob near the entrance to Hamath. **22** They went up through the Negev and came to Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak, were living. Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt. **23** When they came to Eshcol Valley, they cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes, which was carried on a pole by two men. They also took some pomegranates and figs. **24** That place was called Eshcol Valley because of the cluster of grapes the Israelites cut there. **25** At the end of forty days they returned from scouting out the land.

(v. 21) The Hebrew spies scouted out an area known as *the Wilderness of Zin*. This vast, rocky region ran along Canaan's southern edge.

During the wilderness wandering, God's people again passed through this region (Num. 20:1). There, they again complained, especially about a lack of water (20:2-5). God told Moses and Aaron to speak to a rock and promised to miraculously provide water from it. However, in his anger, Moses struck the rock. As a result of their disobedience, God banned Moses and Aaron from the promised land (20:8-12).

The spies traveled toward *Rehob*. The expression *entrance to Hamath* may have denoted a southern district of Syria, which bordered the promised land on the north (2 Sam. 8:9-10; 1 Kings 8:65). The text thus highlights the thoroughness of the scouts' mission from south to north.

(v. 22) After leaving the Negev, the spies came to *Hebron*, a significant city in the southern hill country. Located about nineteen miles south of Jerusalem, the city had historical connections with Israel's past. Abram (later called Abraham) spent time there after separating from Lot (Gen. 13:18). He also purchased a burial place for Sarah in that area. The cave became the burial place for three generations of patriarchs (49:29-31).

As the scouts journeyed through Hebron, they would have recalled God's work in their ancestors' lives. Years later, David reigned in Hebron for seven years and six months before moving the capital to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:5).

Around Hebron, the spies also caught their first recorded glimpse of the enemies they would face: *the descendants of Anak*. Known as "Anakim" (which means "long-necked" or "strong-necked"), the relatives of Anak included three powerful leaders in *Ahiman*, *Sheshai*, and *Talmi*. The Anakim were giant people related to

the Nephilim (Gen. 6:4) and would have presented a significant challenge to conquering the land—a fact some scouts later pointed out (Num. 13:33).

The Anakim remained in the region of Hebron until Israel, led by Joshua and Caleb, defeated them. It is likely no coincidence that the two faithful scouts (Josh. 11:21; 14:12-15) played a role in the downfall of this powerful enemy.

(vv. 23-24) Next, the scouts worked their way through the *Eshcol Valley*. The Hebrew wording also allows for the name to be rendered "brook of Eshcol." The word *eshcol* means "cluster," signifying the great cluster of grapes the spies brought to the Israelite camp. However, the site's exact location is unknown. It likely lay somewhere to the south, nearer to the end of the scouts' journey.

The cluster served as proof that God was faithful to make good on His promises. Unfortunately, the people's amazement would not overcome the fears and doubts planted in their hearts by the ten unfaithful spies (Num. 13:27-29,32-33).

(v. 25) The number *forty* further emphasizes the thoroughness of the scouts' work. Based on the geographic references in the text, they probably traveled about 300 miles. Presumably, the people in the camp received little or no word from the spies during their mission. Perhaps some wondered if the scouts had survived the ordeal, just as some had wondered if Moses had survived forty days on Mount Sinai (Ex. 32:1).

## EXPLORE Numbers 13:21-25



### READ:

**APPLICATION POINT: Obedience to God includes understanding what He is calling us to do.**

**Direct the group to read silently Numbers 13:21-25, underlining the locations mentioned in the text.**

### EXPLAIN:

Allow volunteers to identify the various places they underlined as they read the passage. Show adults **Pack Item 3** (Poster: *The Journey of the Spies*) and highlight those locations. Note that they started in a desert region known as the Negev. Use information from page 26 of the Leader Guide to provide more details regarding the land.

### ASK:

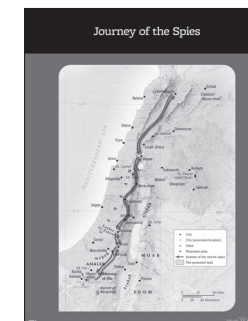
**How do we balance acting in faith and gathering information before acting?** (PSG, p. 24)

### CONTRAST:

Draw two columns on the board: *Negev* and *Eshcol*. Instruct adults to work in pairs to examine the content for verses 23-25 (PSG, pp. 23-24). After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share characteristics of the Negev and write those under its column. Encourage adults to do the same with Eshcol. Note that the promised land had a variety of regions. Share that some would appeal to farmers, while others would appeal to shepherds.

### SAY:

*Either way, God knew what His people needed and was faithful to provide for them.*



### Group Activity Option

#### Object Lesson: Grapes

Prior to the session, secure a cluster of grapes and bring it to the Bible study. As you discuss the fruit gathered as Eshcol, show adults the grapes you brought. Note that this cluster could be carried easily with one hand. Encourage adults to discuss what it must have been like to have a cluster that required a pole hauled by two men. Emphasize that God was proving His faithfulness to His people.



## The Decision at Hand (Num. 13:26-31)

**26** The men went back to Moses, Aaron, and the entire Israelite community in the Wilderness of Paran at Kadesh. They brought back a report for them and the whole community, and they showed them the fruit of the land. **27** They reported to Moses, “We went into the land where you sent us. Indeed it is flowing with milk and honey, and here is some of its fruit. **28** However, the people living in the land are strong, and the cities are large and fortified. We also saw the descendants of Anak there. **29** The Amalekites are living in the land of the Negev; the Hethites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea and along the Jordan.” **30** Then Caleb quieted the people in the presence of Moses and said, “Let’s go up now and take possession of the land because we can certainly conquer it!” **31** But the men who had gone up with him responded, “We can’t attack the people because they are stronger than we are!”

(vv. 26-27) The scouts returned to Israel’s camp in the *Wilderness of Paran at Kadesh*. A region south of Canaan, Kadesh is a shorter term for Kadesh-barnea. This location later would become part of Judah’s southern border (Josh. 15:3).

As instructed, they offered a report to the *whole community*. They shared information about the land, along with the visual evidence of the *fruit of the land*.

The scouts affirmed that the land was *flowing with milk and honey*. This expression occurs about twenty times in the Old Testament to describe Canaan. Bible references suggest wild honey was common in the land (Deut. 32:13; Judg. 14:8; 1 Sam. 14:25), but it also could refer to date honey. “Milk” likely describes the milk shepherds obtained from their goats.

(vv. 28-29) Still, fear dominated the scouts’ report. In a nutshell, they thought the people living in the land would be more than Israel—and even Israel’s God—could handle. These spies stressed the *large and fortified* cities, focusing on the obstacles rather than God’s promises.

The scouts created more doubts by describing the residents, starting with the *descendants of Anak*. A laundry list of nations would resist Israel’s efforts to claim the land. The *Amalekites* were a nomadic group which Joshua defeated as Israel approached Mount Sinai (Ex. 17:8-16). The *Hethites* (or Hittites) were already powerful during Abraham’s time (Gen. 23:3-20). The *Jebusites* controlled Jerusalem until King David defeated them and took the city for his own capital (Josh. 15:63; 2 Sam. 5:6-9). The *Amorites* were known prior to 2000 BC. *Canaanites* designates the remaining population. The scouts’ words suggested the land was totally occupied by mighty

people, and Israel’s conquest—even if possible—would prove difficult and costly.

(vv. 30-31) *Caleb* and Joshua were the only scouts who believed the people should go up and conquer the land. They had seen all the same challenges the other spies saw. However, they focused on God’s promises rather than circumstances.

Unfortunately, the negative report of the ten spies resonated with the people. Their fear overwhelmed their faith.

### Praying Scripture

#### Numbers 13:30

Spend time praying Scripture using Numbers 13:30. Read the verse, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in this verse?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

*Example:* Ask God to give you the boldness and faith of Caleb. Seek forgiveness for the times when doubts and fears have weakened your faith.

During the session, invite adults to pray this Scripture, as well. You and the adults in your group can also take advantage of the Explore the Bible Prayer Guide. This QR code also appears on page 9 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

## EXPLORE Numbers 13:26-31



### DISCUSS:

**APPLICATION POINT:** Believers can face obstacles with faith, knowing that God is with them.

Write *fear* on the board and encourage adults to list things that create fear in people’s lives. Lead a brief discussion on the power of fear and how it can overwhelm a person’s thinking and actions. Allow volunteers to share ways they overcome fear.

### READ:

Invite a volunteer to read **Numbers 13:26-31** as the group reflects on the contrast between the ten spies and Caleb.

### EXAMINE:

Direct adults to read and reflect on the content for verses 26-29 on page 25 of the PSG. Encourage them to highlight the “pros” and “cons” of entering the promised land. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share their findings. Record their responses on the board. Highlight how fear affected the spies’ faith in God and His promises.

### SUMMARIZE:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Complaints in the Wilderness*). Point out the complaints related to Numbers 13. *In the middle of the fear, Caleb took a stand for faith. He understood God’s promises and refused to take his eyes off what the Lord wanted to do among His people.*

### ASK:

**What kind of obstacles might prevent or delay us from obeying God?** (PSG, p. 26)

### PRAY:

Encourage adults to pray Numbers 13:30 back to God, using the prayer prompt on page 28 of the Leader Guide.

Complaint	Verse	Summary	Reflection
...the people living in the land are strong, and the cities are large and fortified.	Num. 13:28	The spies reported that the land was inhabited by powerful people and fortified cities, making it difficult to conquer.	How did this report affect the people's faith? How did Caleb's perspective differ?
...the Amalekites are living in the land of the Negev; the Hethites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea and along the Jordan.	Num. 13:29	The spies listed various nations living in the land, suggesting a complex and hostile environment.	How did the presence of these nations influence the spies' decision? How did Caleb respond?
...we can't attack the people because they are stronger than we are!	Num. 13:31	The ten spies concluded that the land was too difficult to conquer and advised against going up to take possession.	How did the ten spies' fear affect their judgment? How did Caleb's faith influence his response?

### Group Activity Option

#### Bible Skill

Direct adults to the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 26). Instruct the group to review Numbers 13:27-31 and to respond to this question: **Where does the unbelief show itself?** Read Joshua 21:43-45 and 2 Corinthians 1:20. **What do these verses reveal about God and His faithfulness to His promises? How should these verses guide us when we face challenging circumstances?**

## CHALLENGE

### SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 27 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *Believers can depend on God to instruct them in the tasks He has for them.*
- *Obedience to God includes understanding what He is calling us to do.*
- *Believers can face obstacles with faith, knowing that God is with them.*

### DISCUSS:

Direct the group to read the second set of questions on page 27 of the PSG. Challenge adults to consider the direction God may be moving them. Remind them that faith overcomes fear, so identifying our fears and giving them up to God is a powerful first step toward overcoming those doubts and anxieties.

### REFLECT:

If you used the Music Option for the Engage activity (p. 23), remind adults about the basic themes of “Trust and Obey.” Urge them to put their faith in God regardless of their circumstances and to demonstrate that trust through obedience.

### PRAY:

Close in prayer, asking God to help adults recognize their fears and to respond in faith when they face tasks that seem too difficult or complicated for them. Encourage adults to continue praying Numbers 13:30 during the week using the prayer prompt on page 28 of the Leader Guide.

### AFTER THE SESSION

Reinforce the session by texting or emailing the group. Remind the adults that God is faithful and will keep all the promises He has made. If possible, share an example from your own life of how God has helped you overcome fear or doubt so you could move forward in obedience. Emphasize the role of trust, noting that fear robs us of our ability to depend on God. Let adults know that you will be praying for them as they confront choices between fear and faith this week.

### ADULT COMMENTARY



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