

The Land

GOD REQUIRES OBEDIENT FAITH IN THE FACE OF FEAR.

Numbers 13:17-31

17 When Moses sent them to scout out the land of **Canaan**, **A** 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**? **B** 20 Is the land fertile or unproductive? Are there trees in it or not? **Be courageous**. **C** Bring back some fruit from the land.” It was the season for the first ripe grapes. 21 So they went up and scouted out the land from the **Wilderness of Zin** **D** as far as Rehob near the entrance to **Hamath**. **E** 22 They went up through the Negev and came to **Hebron**, **F** where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the **descendants of Anak**, **G** 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** **H** they returned from scouting out the land. 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**, **I** 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** **J** 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!”

Exploring Key Words

- A** Generally, the territory promised to Abram “from the Brook of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River” (Gen. 15:18), and from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River.
- B** The spies were to assess the military strength of the inhabitants. Fortifications were more permanent, like a city wall, while encampments were weaker.
- C** True courage is not based upon one’s own abilities but on faith in what God can do.
- D** A rocky desert between Kadesh-barnea to the Dead Sea in southern Canaan. It later became part of Judah (Num. 34:3-4; Josh. 15:1,3).
- E** The term regularly described the northern border of Israel (Num. 34:7-8; Josh. 13:5; 1 Kings 8:65; 2 Kings 14:25,28).
- F** An ancient city in the hill country of Judah where Abram sojourned (Gen. 13:18) and purchased a cave to bury Sarah. Caleb specifically asked that the city be deeded to him during the conquest forty years later (Josh. 14:12).
- G** Anak was the patriarch of a clan of giants who were also known as Nephilim (Gen. 6:4; Num. 13:33). He had three sons—Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi—who lived in Hebron.
- H** Later, Israel would spend forty years in the wilderness, one year for every day of the spies’ mission (Num. 14:34).
- I** A metaphorical statement describing a land abundant in its agricultural bounty. “Milk” refers to the blessings of flocks and herds, while “honey” refers to an abundance of food.
- J** Ten spies saw only obstacles, while Caleb saw opportunities. Unfortunately, the majority opinion, moved by fear, won out (v. 31).



The Task Outlined (Num. 13:17-20)

- As the Israelites neared Canaan, God commanded Moses to send out spies to assess the land. He chose twelve men, one man from each tribe.
- Moses instructed the chosen scouts to assess the land, the people, and the cities. He also told them to bring back fruit from the land.

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

- The scouts explored the land from the Wilderness of Zin to Rehob. They were gone for forty days.
- In addition to looking at the people and their cities, they gathered grapes, pomegranates, and figs.

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

- The scouts reported back to Moses about the land and its fruitfulness. They were favorable in their evaluation of the land and its produce. However, they also noted that the cities were well fortified with strong people living in them.
- Despite the negative report of ten spies, Caleb declared that God's people should go and take possession of the land at that time. He was certain of their ability to conquer it with God's help.
- The other scouts disagreed, saying they should not attack due to the strength of the current inhabitants.

Summary Statements

God requires obedient faith in the face of fear.

- 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.

Memory Verse

Numbers 13:30

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.)

ENGAGE

What was the last project you had that was more complicated than you thought it would be? How did you handle it? (PSG, p. 19)

- 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."

Bonus: How do you respond when things get complicated? Why?

EXPLORE

1. THE TASK OUTLINED (NUM. 13:17-20)

Bonus: How well do you follow instructions? Why is that important to you?

- At God's direction, Moses enlisted twelve spies to scout out the land of Canaan. They would start in the "Negev," a desert region in southern Canaan, and work their way north through the "hill country."
- Moses directed them to evaluate the people and the land. Concerning the people, Moses wanted to know how densely the land was populated and how the people looked militarily.
- Regarding the land, he wanted to discern whether it was "good or bad." Moses also directed them to bring back samples of the fruit. Above all, he challenged them to "be courageous."

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)

2. THE LAND ASSESSED (NUM. 13:21-25)

Bonus: How do you go about breaking down a large project into smaller pieces? What is the wisdom of this process?

- The spies "went up" and "scouted out" the land, exactly as Moses had commanded them. They went from the Wilderness of Zin (the land's southern border) to Hamath (the land's northern border). They were gone for forty days.
- At Hebron, a city with ties to Abraham (Gen. 13:14-18), they identified the sons of Anak. This clan was known for their unusual size and strength.
- The Hebrew word "Eshcol" means "cluster." The spies probably gave it this name because of the large cluster of grapes they brought back to the Israelite camp.

The grapes, along with the other produce, served as evidence that God was keeping His promise to lead them into a fertile and productive land.

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

3. THE DECISION AT HAND (NUM. 13:26-31)

Bonus: When it comes to facing obstacles, do you lean to "fight" or "flight" responses? What do you need to change about that?

- In their report, the spies initially focused on the land and how agriculturally productive it was. The phrase "milk and honey" highlights the rich resources of Canaan. God used this phrase at the burning bush (Ex. 3:17).
- The word "however" stands like a massive barrier in the flow of the story. The spies shifted their report to a negative recounting of fortified cities and powerful enemies—including giants like the descendants of Anak.
- Caleb spoke out against this negative report. He was ready to "go up now and take possession" of the land. He had seen the same obstacles as the other spies. Rather than be intimidated with fear, though, Caleb was motivated by faith in God. Still, the majority voices expressed doubt and urged the people to give up plans to conquer the land.

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

CHALLENGE

As a group, consider new challenges God may be presenting and identify obstacles that need to be overcome.

What new ministry opportunity has the Lord put in front of your Bible study group? What actions (if any) have you taken to begin? What steps can you take to start implementing this ministry opportunity? (PSG, p. 27)

Challenge individuals to evaluate why they might be delaying in their obedience to God's plans.

What steps do you need to take to move you closer to beginning that undertaking? What will you do this week to move you forward? (PSG, p. 27)

FURTHER DISCUSSION



Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week's study.

BIBLE SKILL (P. 26, PSG)

Use multiple Scripture passages to better understand a Bible passage.

Review Numbers 13:27-31. *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?*

Encourage the group to share some examples of events or situations they would not have believed if they had not seen them for themselves. Direct them to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 26 of the PSG. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share their responses to the questions in the activity. Note that often the things that God does—or promises to do—might seem unbelievable. But, unlike the ten unfaithful scouts, we can trust Him to keep His word to us.

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 in the Valley of Eshcol, show adults the grapes you brought. Note that this cluster could be carried easily with one hand, unlike the cluster described in the passage.

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. Remind adults that God always has a plan, and God always keeps His word. Note that He had promised Canaan would be a land of abundance, but it was up to the Israelites to believe and obey.

GIANTS IN THE LAND

There are few joys like that of hot blackberry cobbler, especially with a scoop of ice cream on it. But anyone who has picked blackberries knows that there will be some difficult (and possibly painful) work involved before the joy of eating is realized. Blackberry bushes have thorns, which can make picking the sweet fruit a challenge.

Like picking blackberries, many of God's gifts have some thorns to work through before we can enjoy them. A farmer must labor in the field to enjoy the bounty of a good harvest. The promise of a harvest comes at the end of a lot of hard work.

There is a tension in God's promise between "I will give you the land to possess" and His command "take possession of the land." The joy of victory is ensured by God. He left no doubt that He would make sure the Israelites captured the land He promised to their ancestors. But they needed to remember that it would require the blood, sweat, and tears of His people to attain it. They would have to put in the work and overcome the challenges, the "thorns," in faith.

But what about the giants in the land, the obstacles that get in the way? Must the victory be readily evident to take the first step toward that victory?

Those questions are as relevant for us as they were for the Israelites in Numbers 13. And, simply put, we have a choice to make.

That's because the text presents two distinct views of reality. Both the ten spies and Caleb saw the bounty of Canaan. They both saw the giants and enemies. The ten saw the barriers and impediments without the eyes of faith. Thus, their response was "We can't attack the people because they are stronger than we are!" (v. 31).

In contrast, Caleb's view was not clouded by an evaluation of Israel's abilities. Instead, he stood on his faith in a God who is greater than any enemy: "Let's go up now and take possession of the land because we can certainly conquer it!" (v. 30).

The ten may have had an orthodox profession of faith, but their attitude revealed that they were disconnected from God. In contrast, Caleb's perspective proved that he truly believed that God is alive and well. He is God Almighty, and He will do what He promised.