

HIGHLIGHTS FROM NUMBERS

"Israeli Spies: Mission and Report"

Numbers 13:1-33

BACKGROUND

1. God's leadership by cloud, fire, and trumpets is patently clear (Num. 9, 10). The complaints of Israel have been considered and judged by God (Num. 11, 12).
2. Numbers 13-21 describe Israel's years in the desert (cf. Deut. 1:6-3:29). It is a record which was unnecessary because Israel failed to push from Sinai to Kadesh Barnea, 11 days journey (Deut. 1:2). 38 years in the wilderness for lack of faith is a long punishment (Deut. 2:14).
3. Now the time had come at Kadesh to move from the threshold of the land into it! Here are details of the plan!-

1. SELECTION OF SPIES vv. 1-16

a. Why?

The "spies" were not really men with surreptitious intent. Rather, the Hebrew means they were exploring or making a reconnaissance. God wanted Israel to have a first hand visible report of the land He had prepared for them. The selected men would relay that to the people.

b. Who?

Except for Caleb and Joshua (whose name is changed from salvation to the Lord is salvation, v. 13) the men selected are never mentioned again. Each name has some meaning. The men are all different from those previously noted (chs. 1, 2, 7).

2. INSTRUCTION TO SPIES vv. 17-20

a. Where to go v. 17

Generally it was the land of Canaan. Specifically it was the Negev (south) and the hill country. The boundaries of the promised land are disputed, but it obviously included modern Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and perhaps parts of modern Iran, Iraq, and Egypt (cf. Gen. 15:18-21). Obviously, they could not do this total territory in 40 days (v. 25). N.B. the El Amarna letters (14th century B.C.) illuminate the land boundaries.

b. What to see vv. 18-20

The people (v. 18), the land and cities (v. 19) and the productivity of the land (v. 20). Hence, a demographic, socio-economic evaluation was to be gained. This was an ethnography of 1400 B.C.!

c. What to do v. 20

Personal courage is exhorted and samples of

the grapes brought back. All was to say to Israel--this place is great!

3. INVESTIGATION OF SPIES vv. 21-25

a. Where they went vv. 21-22.

They traversed Canaan from south to north i.e. from desert of Zin (south) to Lebo-Hamath (north). They got to Hebron where descendents of Anak were N.B. "Anak" means "neck" which may mean they were tall people (cf. v.33). Hebron is given an historical footnote (v. 22) to show its antiquity (cf. Zoan, possibly Tanis, was built before 2000 B.C., Ps. 78:12, 43). Finally they came to Eshcol (v. 23a).

b. What they did vv. 23b-25

Eshcol means "cluster." It was probably near Hebron, an area known for its vineyards even today. The staff may have been more elaborate than a pole. It may have been a frame (cf. 4:10, 12). Because the fruits were so huge. V.24 is not useless, but noting the spies gave the name new significance.

4. EXPLANATION OF SPIES vv. 26-29

a. About produce of land vv. 26-27

The fertility of the land was without question. It flowed with milk and honey, a phrase used by the Greeks for the food of the gods, of northern Galilee (in Egyptian Tale of Sinuhe). Think of it--the spies did not call it "Canaan" nor "the land of which the Lord said I will give it you" (10:29), but "the land whither thou sentest us" (v. 27).

b. About people of land vv. 28, 29

A strong Hebrew adversative is used-- "yet" (v. 28). The spies noted the obstacles--strong people; walled cities; Anak (neck people) there (v. 28). Four groups are mentioned by name: Amalekites (cf. 1 Sam. 15; 1 Chron. 4:42, 43); Hittites (Josh. 1:4; Ezek. 16:3); Jebusites (2 Sam. 5:5-9); Amorites (21:13, 21). All were formidable odds!

5. RECOMMENDATION OF SPIES vv. 30-33

a. Minority report v. 30

Caleb (means "dog") and Joshua (14:6-9) said "go for it."

b. Majority report vv. 31-33

Don't attack. Why? 1) People of land too strong (v. 31). 2) Land eats up people i.e. hostile environment kills people (cf. Lev. 26:38; Ezek. 36:13). 3) We are grasshoppers before the giants (vv. 32, 33).

BOTTOM LINE

Take what God offers by faith.