

Chapters 13-19---The Years of Wandering

HPC Trinity Class

Feb. 9, 2025

Chapter 13

Spies were sent out. **READ NU 13:1-2.**

Compare this version with **READ DT 1:21-23.**

The stories are similar, but the one in Numbers presents the events as historical fact; the longer Deuteronomy account appears to be a recounting by Moses himself many years later.

- In NU the command to send spies comes from God;
- DT has the people influencing Moses to send spies.

13:3-16 lists the names of the men selected to do the reconnaissance work. The leaders chosen are not the same men listed as leaders in chapters 1, 2, 7, and 10.

It may have been that the original leaders were old and wise, but by now they were in no shape to be tramping around foreign territory as spies.



Many of the 12 spies had meaningful and admirable names:

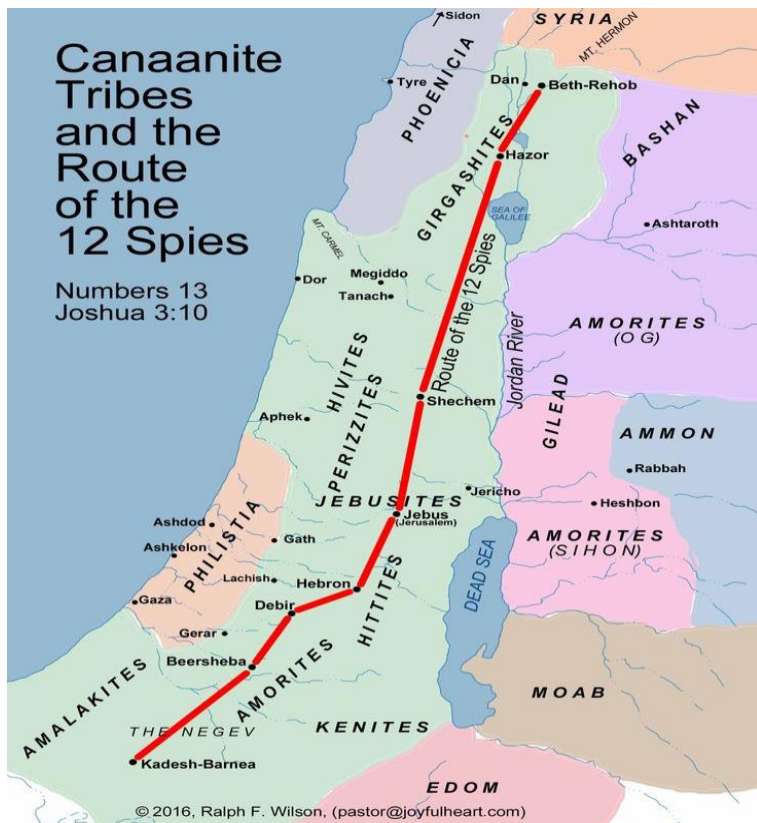
Shammua = “to hear,”

Shaphat = “to judge,”

Igal = “to redeem.”



The leader chosen from the tribe of Judah, however, was Caleb, which means “dog.” It’s believed that the ancients considered such a name to be as disgraceful as we do today because they intentionally altered its pronunciation.¹ But a dog is faithful and loyal, which may have been his parent’s rationale.



The spies took 40 days to complete their round trip of 500 miles.² Keep in mind, these men were trying to avoid detection, which would make their trip longer. If one were to attempt to walk this same route today—with many improved roads and no “cloak and dagger” avoidances-- it would take about 25 days.

13:17—Moses: “Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country.”

- The Negev is the driest, least fertile part of Canaan.
- “Hill country” extended from just south of Hebron to Mt. Carmel.
- “What kind of towns do they live in? Are they walled or fortified?”--vital info for any approaching army.

¹ Allen, pg. 808 (fn #5).

² Forty days “is possibly a round number, like saying ‘a month’ in our idiom.” Ibid, pg. 809.

13:20 uses a strong verb to demonstrate the spies' heroism, but some Bibles don't translate it very well. For example:

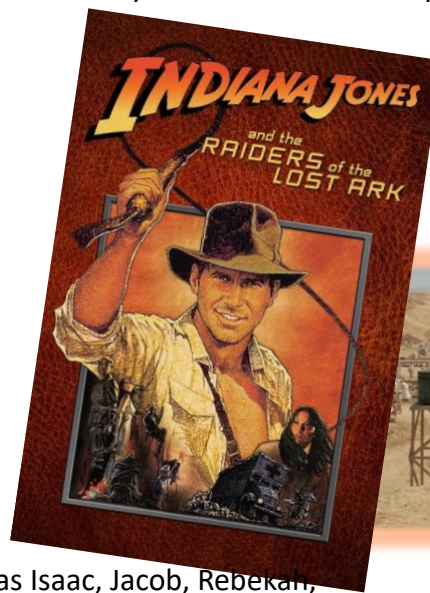
- NIV: "Do your best to bring back some fruit." (very weak translation)
- KJV: "Be ye of good courage and bring of the fruit of the land." (worse)
- ISV: "Be very courageous, and bring back some samples of the fruit of the land." (best).

13:22---Hebron was the first city the spies encountered on their trip. Moses tried to give his leaders a comparison and a point of reference by mentioning Zoan. All of Moses' followers knew of Zoan: it was Egypt's capital and had immense walls and fortifications. Both Zoan and Hebron could have been products of the same Hyksos kings of Egypt some 500 years earlier, meaning that both would have had strong defenses.

But the fact that the two cities were of equal age was where the similarity ended. Zoan, later known as Tanis, was a fortress-city. Fortunately for the spies Hebron was not: just a simple rural town comprised mostly of the families of shepherds and herdsmen... with no walls.³



Hebron: one of the oldest cities in the world



*Hollywood made
Tanis
famous in the
1980's*



Hebron is also the burial place of Abraham and Sarah, as well as Isaac, Jacob, Rebekah, and Leah (GN 23-50). Apparently, the author assumed that the spies, as well as his readers, would know this, yet he gives no mention of the location's significance.

13:23 – The Valley of Eshcol⁴ is just north of Hebron. The stealing of the fruit was probably done on the spies' return trip. Today this region continues to grow grapes.



³ Until about 1500 B.C. Hebron may have had immense walls, but these were destroyed by invading armies. The city that the spies saw was an unprotected village. New fortifications were built during the Iron Age—several hundred years after Moses' time. (Wenham, fn pg. 118, citing J. J. Bimson's *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*, pg. 202.)

⁴ *Eshcol* means "cluster."



The spies' report 13:26-33--- These guys are **big** and their towns are well fortified. Caleb (and soon Joshua) disagree.

Chapter 14 The people rebel.

...and who could blame them!

- 1+ years of travelling (wandering) in deserts;
- sustained only by a meager, boring diet;
- and now it appears that the rumors are true about these Canaanites. "There's no way we can win." Even most of the spies who saw this Promised Land didn't think they would ever have it for our own! Maybe Egypt wasn't all that bad!



READ 14:1-4

No one paid attention to Caleb's and Joshua's brave words when they said that Canaan could be easily taken. "The Lord is with us," was not heard, and now the mob's talk turned to the idea of stoning Moses and all of those who had tricked and fooled them thus far.

Then God himself intervened.

God wanted to wipe out all of these hateful children of the Exodus,
but Moses argued that doing so would be bad PR. **READ 14:15-16.**
So, God forgave these nasty followers of Moses....

but he will not leave the guilty unpunished: **READ 14:20-23.**



"Moses and Aaron were the fall guys, but the Lord was the one really to blame; he had delivered them from Egypt."⁵ The ten spies who spread the lies concerning this land would soon die of a plague (v. 37). "Modern archaeologists have found that there were indeed numerous walled fortresses throughout Canaan even in the fifteenth century B.C."⁶

This made any invasion by a foreign army difficult until
SIEGE WARFARE was perfected by the Assyrians centuries later.

⁵Ibid., pg. 814.

⁶ Key Word, fn to NU 13:28.

14:25---This verse notes the beginning of the many years in the wilderness. Unbelief has cost an entire generation of Israelites the blessings of the land that God desired to give them.

14:26-36 is basically a retelling of the events in vs. 20-25. Most scholars believe that different writers or sources contributed to this “over-telling” of the story. However, the benefit of telling it like this adds emphasis to God’s message.

14:37-45---Too little, too late. The people now belatedly decided to try to conquer the best land but are repulsed by the Amalekites and Canaanites living there. God was not with them, just as Moses had warned. The Israelites tucked tail and fell back to Hormah, which is east of Beersheba.

DOOM & GLOOM

Chapter 15

The Lord spoke again to Moses, giving instructions regarding the proper way to present offerings to him. “Speak to the Israelites and say to them:

‘After you enter the land I am giving you....’” **????**

Weren’t these the same people who were just driven back in humiliation?

Chapter 15 begins as if nothing has happened!

Doesn’t this belong in Leviticus instead of here?

YES, BUT...

... the recurring phrase of chapter 15—which we see several times—is this:

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them....’”

Here God is reassuring his people that despite their initial setback he remains with them. “AFTER [not ‘if’] you enter the land...” is like God saying, “I’m still with you, and here is how you are to show your love for me,” which tells us why this chapter is where it is.



Chapter 16

16:1-2---A second revolt against Moses' leadership now appears. The Levites felt that they should be allowed to have a say in the everyday decisions which seemed to be

made solely by Moses. The Levites were led by Korah, a direct descendant of Levi. Another group of 250 well-respected community leaders joined the Levites and brought their complaint before Moses. Therefore, this large group of dissenters was not a gang of wild-eyed revolutionaries; these were highly respected individuals who believed that Moses' time had come to step aside or at least be on equal footing with these want-to-be leaders.



Perhaps Korah's true intention was to take over the reins completely from Moses. After all, both he and Aaron were well into their eighties by this time.⁷ Korah's argument sounded like a call for a democratic form of leadership, but God had not intended this. God had specifically chosen Moses, and that style of leadership is a theocracy, not some power-hungry democracy like Korah wanted. In reality, any realignment of power away from Moses would favor Korah, being the coup's ringleader.

READ 16:3. The group presents their case to Moses:

- "Aren't we all holy, not just you?!"
- "Therefore, God must be with us just as much as you, Moses."
- "So, why do you act like you're above everyone else?"

In 16:12-14 we learn of two more key players in this renegade group: Dathan and his brother Abiram. They humiliate Moses (and God) by refusing to even come to Moses and discuss the problem. [v.14 in Hebrew says, "Will you gouge out the eyes of these men?," which was the fate of many slave laborers.]

16:25-35---Moses warns the people to stay clear of the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

**The Lord will destroy these men and their entire families—
no trace shall be left to inherit the Promised Land.**

**Then the earth opened wide and swallowed these people and the other 250 rebels.
v.33 says "they went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth
closed over them, and they perished." Fire (perhaps lightning) came forth from
the Lord to finish off the job (v. 38).⁸ (The sons of Korah did not die, however,
probably because they didn't join their father in his plan to overthrow Moses.)**

⁷ Allen, pg. 835.

⁸Similar to the event in Lev 10:2.

Revolt #3 begins in v.41—the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. “You have killed the Lord’s people,” they said. By this time God was very angry, ready to destroy the entire Israelite nation. Only by quick action on Aaron’s part were the people saved from God’s wrath (vs. 46-48). Though a plague of some kind had already begun and would eventually kill thousands, the godly obedience of Moses’ plus Aaron’s supplication for atonement were able to save the community.

Chapter 17—The budding of Aaron’s staff was the final validation that God’s choice for high priest was indeed Aaron. For generations to come the priesthood’s line of succession would root in the tribe of Levi and the heirs of Aaron. Verse 8 notes that Moses finds Aaron’s staff “had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds.” Aaron passed the test and God gave him an A-plus!

- As a reminder of this event God told Moses to put Aaron’s staff in front of the Ark of the Covenant. [???—*Except for Moses, only the high priest would ever see it, and that would be only once per year. Later, this staff was apparently lost when the Ark was captured by the Philistines (1 Sa. 5:1)]*



v. 12---The people realized their sin and wallowed in their misery.
 (“We are lost! Are we all going to die?”)

Chapter 18.

Now the Lord spoke directly to Aaron, not Moses. The obligations of the priesthood were fright outweighed by the sense of importance and honor of doing God’s work.

v. 5---“You are to be responsible for the care of the sanctuary and the altar, so that wrath will not fall on the Israelites again.” Already God had twice consumed men for not making a proper offering (LE 10:2; NU 16:35).

- v.7---only Aaron and his descendants were to serve as priests.



Chapter 19 God said, “Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish.”

“Clean” and “unclean” are stressed in the entire chapter, especially in relationship to how the dead are handled. Again, today’s believers may see this as a kind of antiquated mumbo-jumbo used by unsophisticated people. However, these ancient Israelites “are not

doing something magical; rather, such ceremonies, just like ours, express the deepest truths about life as the society sees them.”⁹

Chapters 18 and 19 may seem irrelevant to us today. We moderns (both Christians and Jews) tend to look at worship in terms of what WE like. But worship is principally for God’s pleasure.

Also, “A general knowledge of the work of priests in the time of Hebrew worship gives the Christian reader significant insight into the priestly work of the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

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⁹ Wenham, pg. 146

¹⁰ Allen, pg. 850.