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Spying Out the Land

13: 17-25

Spying out the Land DIG: What were the spies looking for? What did they find? After being gone forty days, what should be the people's reaction to all this? Why should the cluster of grapes have brought the spies great joy? Why didn't it?

REFLECT: Where are you in your exploration of the abundant life in Messiah? Are the "grapes" still as big, getting even bigger, or going sour? What has God done recently, to keep you on the growing edge of your faith? Who can you share that with?

The cluster of grapes should have brought them great joy, but it only brought fear.

When Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, he said: Go up through the Negev (referring to all the desert of southern Canaan, especially the area from Beersheba south), **and ascend into the hill country**, consisting of the mountains of **Judah**, north to the hills of **Ephraim**, and all the way to the heights of **Galilee (13:17)**. This implies a totality of **the Land**. In **Moses' time, the hill country** was populated primarily by **the Amorites**, and the plains and valleys by **the Canaanites**.²³² When **the spies** returned, **they** were able to report: **Amalek lives in the area of the Negev; the Hittites, the Jebusites and the Amorites live in the hills; and the Canaanites live by the sea and alongside the Jordan (13:29)**.



Moshe didn't send **the spies** out to determine whether or not **Isra'el** should enter **the Land**. That was a natural assumption. **He** only sent **them** out to determine the best way to do it. For **forty days the twelve spies** traveled throughout **the Promised Land** to see what **it** was like. To see whether, militarily, **the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land (13:18-20a).** They were to investigate the cities to determine if **they** were walled, fortified or open for seizure. In addition, they were to assess the quality of **the Land**, the topography, soil and vegetation. **They** were even to bring back samples.²³³

So, they went up and explored the land from the Desert of Zin, above the wilderness of Para, **as far as Rehob, near Lebo Homath (13:21)**. The journey of **the spies** began in the southernmost extremity of the Land (**the Desert of Zin**) and took them to the northernmost point (**Rehob, near Lebo Hamath**). This journey of about 250 miles in each direction took **them forty days (13:25)**.

As **they ascended in the Land, they entered the Negev from Hebron**. **Moshe** mentions that it **had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt** to emphasize how old **it** was. **Zoan** was the capital of the Hiksos pharaohs and considered one of the oldest cities in the ancient Middle East. So **Hebron** was a very ancient city. The first city **the spies** came to was **Hebron**. At **Hebron**, **Abraham** had purchased the Macphelah cave at **Hebron** lay **Abraham** and **Sarah**, **Isaac** and **Rebecca**, and **Jacob** and **Leah** (except for **Rachael**). Yet, the knowledge that **they** stood in the presence of **their forefathers** did not bring **the spies** any comfort. Instead of looking at the **patriarchs** and **their** promises, **the spies** only noticed the size of the buildings and the height of its inhabitants.

It was at **Hebron** that the spies encountered the tribes of **Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmi, the descendants of Anak (13:22)**. It was apparently this initial encounter at **Hebron** that so utterly discouraged **the spies**. **The Anakites** were giants (**First Samuel 17:4; Deuteronomy 2:21, 3:11, and 9:2**). When reporting back to **Moses** and **the Israelites, the spies** declared: **The people living in the land are fierce, and the cities are fortified and very large. Moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there (13:28)**. **The spies** regarded **them** as nothing less than **Nephilim** (see the commentary on **Genesis, to see link click Ca - The Sons of God Married the Daughters of Men**), even though it would have been impossible for **them** to have survived Noah's flood.

Though **the Negev** is semi-arid, it must have seemed like paradise after the harsh wilderness of Sinai. **The spies** would have observed fields, grazing lands, and soil that could be cultivated. North of **the Negev, they** would have begun the ascent into **the hill country** of **Judah** where sufficient rainfalls allowed for vines and orchards. **The ascent** into the orchards and vineyards of **the hill country** must have been like stepping into Eden to **them**.²³⁴

It was the season for the first ripe grapes, or late spring around June (13:20b). It had been a long time since **the Israelites** had tasted wine. **When they reached the Valley of Eshkol** (meaning *cluster*) **they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs. That place was called the Valley of Eshkol because of the cluster of grapes the Israelites cut off there (13:23-24)**. **The grapes** they brought back were wine **grapes**, of course. Therefore, those **grapes** were a symbol of joy **the Land** would provide for them. As is well known, the present state of **Isra'el** uses the logo of the **two men** carrying an immense **cluster of grapes on a pole** as the symbol of the Department of Tourism. The Bible does not specify which of the men carried **the grapes**; but the modern tourism department identifies **them** as **Caleb** and **Joshua!**

At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the Land (13:25). Sadly, the size of **the cluster** those **spies** brought back to the camp produced fear for the faithless. Such a large **cluster of grapes** was intimidating and demoralizing to **them**. However, it ought to have intoxicated **them** with joy; instead, **they** were drunk with paralyzing terror.²³⁵

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that no matter how many "giant problems" I face, **You** are always more powerful than the problem, and always right there with*

me to help and to guide. **For God Himself has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you," (Hebrews 13:5c).** Thank **You** so much that **You** not only paid the great price to rescue me from sin's deadly powers; but **You** also live within me. **Yeshua answered and said to him: If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home within him (John 14:23).** Living within means that **You** are right there with me at all times. How wonderful!

Praying and trusting in **You** are the wisest actions to take when trouble rears its ugly head. Thank **You** so much that as I pray according to **Your** will, you both hear each of my prayers and **You** promise to answer in **Your** way and **Your** time. **Now this is the confidence we have before Him - that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have the requests we have asked from Him (First John 5:14-15).** **You** are such a fantastically wonderful Heavenly **Father!** I bend the knee in loving worship of **You** and look forward to praising **Your** great **Name** throughout all eternity! In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen