



Joshua, Caleb, and the Spies

12

Key Themes

- God is faithful to His promises.
- God's Word must be the absolute authority.

Key Passages

- Numbers 13–14; Hebrews 3:16–19

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe the promise of a land for the Israelites given by God.
- Compare the faith of Joshua and Caleb to the faith of the other spies.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, “Why did the Israelites wander in the desert for 40 years?”

Have students use bookmarks to mark Genesis 12:7, Genesis 26:3, Genesis 35:12, Exodus 3:8, Exodus 23:20, Numbers 14:1, and Hebrews 3:16 in their Bibles.



Studying God's Word

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When the time came for the Israelites to enter the land God had promised to Abraham, they had a crisis of faith. Ten of the spies who spied out the land were afraid of the giants in the land and of all their enemies. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, trusted God and revealed a true faith different from all the others.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.
- Print one Spies map from the Resource DVD-ROM for your use.
- Consider using a recording of Numbers 13–14 to present the Bible passages.



Activity: Promises Kept

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Students will use their own Bibles, or other study tools they have, to identify cross-references to Numbers 13 and the promises that had been given to the Israelites concerning the Promised Land.

- Cross-references, commentaries, or concordances with information on Numbers 13–14
- Student Guides



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

To prepare for this lesson, read Exodus 23:20–33 and Numbers 13–14.

“To your descendants I will give this land” (Genesis 12:7). God had promised an inheritance to Abraham—and as the years went by it was passed to Isaac (Genesis 26:3), Jacob (Genesis 35:11–12), and Moses (Exodus 3:7–10). The Lord’s promise to Moses as He commissioned him to enter the Promised Land was to send an angel before them to keep them in the way. God would drive out the inhabitants of the Promised Land and bless the Israelites as they walked in obedience to God’s commands (Exodus 23:20–23).

The Israelites witnessed the protection and omnipotence of God as he wiped out an entire army and delivered His children from harm (Exodus 14:28) and as He provided water from a rock (Exodus 17:6), bread from heaven (Exodus 16:14–15), and meat from the wind (Numbers 11:31). They had seen His presence in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). Yet they continued to doubt God, disobey Him, and complain of their hardships.

With the land of Canaan in their sights, the Israelites revealed their complete lack of faith and trust in God. The 12 spies were sent—each a representative of the tribe of his fathers—including Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 13:1–16). The land was indeed abundant in milk and honey and fruit just as God had promised (Numbers 13:27). Yet most of the spies, upon seeing the strong people, the fortified cities, and the giant descendants of Anak in the land, were overcome by fear (Numbers 13:28–33). Only Joshua and Caleb spoke favorably of the land, pleading with the Israelites to have courage and faith in God’s promises and to trust that the Lord was with them—there was nothing to fear (Numbers 14:6–9).

Their cries to the people went unheeded—the Israelites refused to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14:2) and threatened to kill both Caleb and Joshua (Numbers 14:10). God’s judgment was both merciful and righteous as He pardoned their rebellion (Numbers 14:20) yet decreed that they would not enter into Canaan to see the land sworn to their fathers—none who had rejected God would ever see it (Numbers

14:23). All but Caleb, Joshua, and those under 20 years old would die in the wilderness and never see the fulfillment of the promise (Numbers 14:29–31).

God is the same God today as He was then. He is immutable—He does not change. We can stand on the promises revealed in His Word just as surely as Caleb and Joshua could believe Him in the wilderness. He will not let us down; He will never leave us nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6).

APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

When the Israelites left Egypt, we are told that there were “about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock” (Exodus 12:37–38). In the second year after the Exodus, a census revealed that there were 603,550 men from 20 years old and above (Numbers 1:46). And later, about 38 years after the first census, just before Israel was to enter the Promised Land after the wilderness wanderings, the total number of men 20 and older came to 601,730 (Numbers 26:51). Many have estimated that when women and children are added, the total number of Israelites would have been between 2 and 3 million. That is quite a throng of people to oversee, feed, care for, and move around the desert for 40 years.

Because of this seemingly impossible task, some have inferred that the number of Israelites was likely tens of thousands rather than millions. It is true that from a purely natural perspective it doesn’t seem possible that several million people could survive in the desert all those years. Critics have mentioned the amount of food needed, the waste that would be produced, the logistics of moving such a large group of people, the space required for camping, etc.

What many people fail to understand is that the Lord supernaturally cared for His people for 40 years:

He . . . fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years (Deuteronomy 8:3–4).

He provided quail and manna for them to eat (Exodus 16:13–15), water when they thirsted (Exodus 17:1–7), and even clothing that did not wear out. This sojourn in the wilderness was far from a natural phenomenon, beginning with God appearing in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1–5) and continuing through the display of His omnipotence during the plagues that seized Egypt (Exodus 7–11) and the crossing of the Red Sea—the preservation of the Israelites and the destruction of the entire Egyptian army (Exodus 14). God Himself had brought His people out of Egypt, and He had decreed that they would wander for 40 years. As the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe, caring for them was a simple task—for nothing is impossible for our all-powerful God (Luke 1:37).

The Bible is full of the evidence of God’s ability to rule over natural laws. From creation, to the Flood, to the virgin birth of Christ, to His myriad supernatural miracles while on earth, to His resurrection and ascension—He has established that He controls all things. As Christians, we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). That faith should lead us to allow God to be God—and not insist that he “prove” Himself according to our desires.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There were giants in the Promised Land—the descendants of Anak (Numbers 13:33). As the Israelites were about to take possession of this land, the fear of facing these giants in battle kept them from moving forward, trusting God for protection, and finally seeing the land of Canaan.

Although the people were convinced not to attempt to fight the giants this time and ran in fear, we are told that Joshua, in God’s strength, later led a force against the Anakim (Joshua 11:21).

But the giants remained. And it was from Gath that the Philistine warrior Goliath would later threaten. Here again a giant stood before the army of God’s chosen people and intimidated them (1 Samuel 17:4–11). This one man terrorized the entire Israelite army to the point that they doubted God’s ability to fight for them (1 Samuel 17:24).

There will always be the courageous few whose

trust in God will bear witness to His faithfulness. In the account of the 12 spies, God’s strength accompanied Joshua and Caleb. In the account of Goliath, God’s strength is revealed through David as he takes down the giant that an entire army cowered from.

Throughout the history of mankind, circumstances have threatened to sway our trust in the faithfulness of God. In spite of the abundant promises He makes to us in His Word, we are often tempted to believe the world and deny our Creator. But we can learn from Joshua, to whom the Lord said, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

And we can learn from David, the shepherd boy, who courageously spoke to the giant Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied” (1 Samuel 17:45). Our God is a mighty God. He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1).

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Dear Lord, as I prepare this lesson, please prepare my heart as well. Help me to know your faithfulness. Help me to rely on the promises you have made in your Word. Lord, I am often afraid like the Israelites. When I fear, please bring back to my remembrance the faith of Joshua and Caleb—how they believed you, stood up for you, and did not fear! As I teach this week, Lord, please open the hearts of the students to your truths and give them more confidence in you as the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God you are. As they learn who you are, grant to them a trust in you that will not be shaken.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** You can use the provided clocks to indicate the time each section should be completed to keep the lesson on schedule. While teaching, you can compare your anticipated times with the actual time and shorten or drop sections as necessary.



Review

In our last lesson we looked at the detailed instructions that God gave to Moses for building the Tabernacle and for worshipping Him. The laws were instituted in very exact ways and with various objects put into service. We didn't read about it, but the last half of Exodus describes the building of the Tabernacle using the riches the Egyptians had given them at the Exodus. God gifted specific individuals to be able to build the articles used for worship.

As you probably recall, we looked at how several of these articles were pictures of a fulfillment that would ultimately come in Christ. When we look carefully, there are many glimpses of Christ in the Old Testament.

? Which of those connections has stuck in your mind through this week? *Discuss the various answers.*

It is wonderful to think that we have a great High Priest who did not need to offer sacrifices for His own sins as the priest serving in the Tabernacle had to. It is also wonderful to know that the sacrifice Jesus offered did not have to be repeated constantly to temporarily cover up sin—His sacrifice was perfect and final. The blood of Christ and the perfect life of obedience He lived is now credited to all who repent and trust in Him. We have forgiveness of our sins and become righteous before God through Christ's work.



Studying God's Word

► Write on the board, "Why did the Israelites wander in the desert for 40 years?"

► Students should turn to page 87 in their Student Guides.

READ THE WORD

Today, we are going to fast-forward a bit. Even before the Tabernacle had been built, God had told them they were to leave Sinai (Exodus 33:1–3). About a year later the Tabernacle was completed and after they had celebrated the second Passover since the Exodus (Numbers 9), the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle and the Israelites were to follow it (Numbers 10:11–13).

As had become their pattern, in Numbers 11 the Israelites complained against their circumstances and God consumed many with fire. Some of the non-Israelites who left Egypt with them complained against God's provision of manna, recalling the wonderful food they freely enjoyed in Egypt. This spread to the rest of the congregation and God and Moses became angry. For the second time, God sent a mind-boggling number of quail (Numbers 11:31–34) to meet the request of the people, but sent a plague to judge them "while the meat was still between their teeth."

Not only did the Israelites rebel against Moses, but Aaron and Miriam also sought to overthrow Moses, claiming to be prophets as well (Numbers 12). God judged them for this presumption and that is where we find

ourselves as we start the study today. A little over two years after leaving Egypt, God is preparing the Israelites to receive the promise they had been given through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.

Let's read Numbers 13 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Numbers 13

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

Refer to the Bible Study poster to remind your students how to dig deeper into God's Word by asking the right questions.

- ? **How many men was Moses sending into the land?** *Twelve—one from each of the tribes.*
- ? **What were the spies to do on their journey?** *They were to see: whether the people were strong; how many there were; whether the land was good; whether the cities were fortified; whether the land was rich; and whether there were forests. Moses also called them to bring back some fruit of the land.*
- ? **How far did they travel?** *They had been camped in the Wilderness of Paran (Numbers 12:16) and they traveled from Kadesh north through the Wilderness of Zin to Reboth. These represent the northern and southern boundaries of the Promised Land. They specifically visited Hebron and, on their return, a valley where they gathered fruits. Show the Spies map and point out the cities and regions mentioned in the passage.*
- ? **Whom did they find in Hebron?** *The descendants of Anak; Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi.*
- ? **Who was Anak and why is this important?** *Anak was a giant, according to verse 33. The people were afraid of fighting these giants, who would eventually be conquered by Joshua and others.*
- ? **What figures of speech do they use to describe the Anakim?** *The Israelites thought they were like grasshoppers in the eyes of the Anakim.*
- ? **What figure of speech is used to describe the land and what does it mean?** *They said that the land "flows with milk and honey." This is not to be taken literally, but is intended to convey that it is a rich and fertile land.*
- ? **How long had the spies been gone?** *Forty days.*
- ? **What did the spies report?** *The land was fertile, the cities were fortified, and the people were strong.*
- ? **What was Caleb's response to this discouraging news?** *He encouraged the people to go up and take the land immediately.*
- ? **What was the reaction of the other spies?** *They discouraged the people in fear of failing to take the land.*

Discover the Truth

The spies came back with a report of the land and showed the amazing produce of the land to the Israelites. Despite encouragement from Caleb, the people focused on the negative aspects of the report and feared taking the land. They failed to trust God.



➤ Consider using a dramatized reading of the passages for today, having students follow along in their Bibles.

➤ Show the Spies map.



Promises Kept

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Cross-references, concordances, or commentaries for Numbers 13–14

INSTRUCTIONS

Students will use any footnotes, cross-references, or commentaries in their Bibles to find the promises God made to give the Israelites the Promised Land.

Rather than looking up a specific set of verses, I want you to use your Bibles to find some of the verses that talk about the promises God made to the Israelites regarding the Promised Land.

- ? How many of you have some sort of footnotes, cross-references, or commentary in your Bibles? *Take a moment to discuss the various purposes of these tools.*
- ? How many of you have a concordance or topical guide in the back of your Bible? A

concordance or topical guide in the back would contain words like Promised Land, Holy Land, inheritance, Joshua, Caleb, spies, and other words that would relate to the topic and give useful cross-references.

If there are students who are unfamiliar with using these resources, pair them up with a student you know is capable of helping them.

I want you to use these tools to find at least three passages that talk about the promises the Israelites were failing to trust in when the spies came back with the report. You can work in groups and we will see what you found and discuss it in a few minutes.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

- ? What promises related to taking the land were you able to find? *The passages that will likely be found are Genesis 12:7, 26:3, 35:12 and Exodus 3:8 and 23:20–23. Discuss the various passages, pointing to the fact that God had clearly told the Israelites that He would fight on their behalf and deliver the land to them just as He had promised.*



READ THE WORD

Numbers 14

Let's read the rest of the account in Numbers 14 and see how God responded to the Israelites. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Now that we have read the text, let's take some time to observe what it is saying to us. This passage has a series of responses, so we are going to frame our questions around that series.

Observe the Text

- ? How did the Israelites choose to respond to the news from the spies? *They were greatly discouraged and complained against Moses and Aaron, calling for a new leader to be chosen to take them back to Egypt.*
- ? How did Moses and Aaron respond? *They fell on their faces, probably crying out to God.*
- ? How did Joshua and Caleb respond? *They tore their clothes and tried to convince the people to take the land.*

- ? **What reasons did Joshua and Caleb give for taking the land?** *If God blessed them, they could take the land in His power if they did not rebel against God.*
- ? **How did the people respond?** *They wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb and, presumably, Moses and Aaron as well.*
- ? **What stopped them from stoning their leaders?** *God's glory appeared from the Tabernacle.*
- ? **When God told Moses He was going to kill all of the people and start over with Moses, how did Moses respond?** *Moses pleaded with God to spare the people lest the other nations hear of what God had done to His people He had delivered from Egypt and think He was not powerful enough to preserve them. He prayed that God would pardon the sin of the people.*
- ? **How did God respond to the intercession of Moses?** *God relented but said that those who had tested Him 10 times and rejected Him would not see the land. God decreed that every person 20 years and over would die in the wilderness and that their families would wander in the wilderness for 40 years (one year for each day they had spied out the land).*
- ? **What happened to the 10 faithless spies?** *God killed them with a plague.*
- ? **In verse 25, God had commanded the Israelites to return to the Wilderness of Paran the next day. What did they do instead?** *They tried to go and fight the Amalekites and the Canaanites against the command of God and the advice of Moses.*
- ? **What was the result of their disobedience?** *They were defeated in battle.*
- ? **How does Hebrews 3:16–19 help us understand this passage?** *The Israelites sinned against God by disobeying Him and not believing in His promises. They did not enter the rest of the Promised Land because of their unbelief.*

Hebrews 3:16–19

Discover the Truth

In an unbelievable repeat of doubting God, the Israelites continued to focus on their earthly troubles. Rather than trusting in God, they were looking to their own strength to take the land.

- ? **What attributes of God were they failing to acknowledge?** *Faithful: God had promised to give them the land; Omniscient: God knew what was to happen; Omnipotent: God has all power; Sovereign: God is in control of His creation and has the authority to remove one people and install another in their place.*



FAITHFUL
OMNISCIENT
OMNIPOTENT
SOVEREIGN



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

After all they had experienced in the Exodus and the events that followed, the Israelites continued to rebel against God and doubt His faithfulness. However, there is always a faithful remnant. In this account, Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua trusted God and His promises. They recognized that God had promised to deliver the land to them and to fight for them. These men had faith in God and God affirmed that faith.

The other spies had no faith in God or His promises. They discouraged the Israelites and told them they could not take the land. Actually, they were right—they could not conquer the land in their own strength. They needed God to fight for them. They chose to focus on themselves and their own limitations rather than trusting God’s mighty power.

There is no doubt that we tend to do the same thing. The events and consequences may not be as dramatic as conquering many nations, but we often doubt that God will fulfill His promises to us. By using the faith that God gives us, we can trust in His ability to fulfill those promises, just as Joshua and Caleb did.

GOD’S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? **Why is it important to have a solid understanding of God’s faithfulness as we walk through this world?** *We live in a broken world and if we focus on our circumstances life can become discouraging. When we place our faith in God and trust that He can and will do as He has promised, we can have hope in our trials.*
- ? **When we speak of putting our trust in God’s Word, we are referring to the Bible. How was that different, yet the same, for the Israelites at the time?** *They did not have the full Bible as we know it today, but they had heard from God and had the written words of Moses to know God’s promises. They had personally experienced God’s provision in saving them from enemies and giving them food and drink, yet they constantly doubted Him.*
- ? **Do you think we are really that different from the Israelites in our trust of God?** *If we stop and honestly analyze ourselves, we find that we forget God’s promises often and lean on our own understanding. We must constantly find strength in God and look to the faithful record of His provision as a source of strength. That is something the Israelites failed to do.*
- ? **How could you use this passage of Scripture to help others understand their need for a Savior?** *You could contrast the faith of Joshua and Caleb with the lack of faith of the other 10 spies, and describe the sinfulness of every action not done in faith (Romans 14:23). Failing to trust God is a sin and that sin can only be forgiven by repenting of it and trusting in Christ’s work on the Cross.*



MEMORY VERSE

Exodus 20:1–5a And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.”



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Praise God for His perfect faithfulness.
- Ask God for the faith to trust His promises.