

## Lesson 61

# Moses Sends the Spies

Moses sent twelve men to spy out the promised land.

# Overview

## Lesson Focus

When the time came for the Israelites to enter the land God promised to Abraham, they had a crisis of faith. Ten of the men who spied out the land were afraid of the giants and the fortified cities. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, trusted that God would give them victory.

## Key Passages

Exodus 3:8, 23:20–23; Numbers 13:23, 13:27–28, 13:32–33

## Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe God's promise of a land for the Israelites.
- Compare the faith of Joshua and Caleb with the faith of the other spies.

## Memory Verse

Deuteronomy 7:9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.

## Prepare to Share

### Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

"To your offspring 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 had promised to send an angel before Moses and the Israelites to guard and lead them. God would drive out the inhabitants of the Promised Land and bless the Israelites as they walked in obedience to his commands (Exodus 23:20–23).

The Israelites had witnessed the protection and omnipotence of God as he wiped out an entire army (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.

At the border of the land of Canaan, the Israelites revealed their complete lack of trust in God. In the second year after the Israelites left Egypt, Moses sent 12 spies into Canaan, including Joshua and Caleb. Each spy was a representative of the tribe of his fathers (Numbers 13:1–20). The land was indeed abundant 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, 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 14:2–4) and threatened to kill 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 also punished the 10 spies who spread the bad report by killing them with a plague (Numbers 14:36–37).

God is the same God today as he was then. He is immutable—he does not change. He will punish sin, but he rewards those who trust in him. We can stand on the promises as revealed in his Word just as surely as Caleb and Joshua believed him in the wilderness. He will not let us down; he will never leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6).

## Historical/Apologetics Background

We are told that when the Israelites left Egypt there were “about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds” (Exodus 12:37–38). In the second year after the Exodus, a census revealed that there were 603,550 men age 20 and above (Numbers 1:46). About 38 years after the first census, just before Israel was to finally enter the Promised Land, the total number of men age 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, and the space required for camping.

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 does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years (Deuteronomy 8:3–4).

God 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, the display of his omnipotence during the plagues that seized Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the destruction of the Egyptian army. God himself had brought his people out of Egypt, and he had decreed that they would wander for 40 years. God is the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe, so caring for them was a simple task because nothing is impossible with him (Luke 1:37).

Despite the miracles God performed on their behalf, the Israelites refused to trust and obey God at the border of the Promised Land. They feared the strong cities and giants, the descendants of Anak (Numbers 13:33). 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, Joshua, in God's strength, later led a force against the Anakim (Joshua 11:21). But some giants remained in Gaza, Ashdod, and Gath (Joshua 11:22). It was from Gath that the Philistine warrior Goliath would later threaten the Israelites under King Saul (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 was revealed through David as he took 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 God's words to Joshua: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

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