

Faithful Despite Unfaithfulness

Numbers 13:1-2, 17-18, 25-28, 14:1-2, 5-10

SS Lesson for 09/22/2019

Devotional Scripture: 2 Tim 2:1-15

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Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Dale Carnegie (1888-1955) is probably best known for his self-help book entitled *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Carnegie authored another book of the same style; its title is *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*. In it he included this brief but thought-provoking illustration: “Two men looked out from prison bars / One saw the mud, the other saw the stars.” Two individuals can be in the same challenging, perhaps even desperate, situation and see it quite differently. The children of Israel faced the challenge of conquering the promised land. Two outlooks emerged on whether this feat was possible. This was not a matter of mud vs. stars; it was a matter of unbelief vs. faith.

The previous study covered an incident that occurred on the fifteenth day of the second month after the Israelites' exodus from Egypt (Exodus 16:1; see lesson 3). On the first day of the third month, the Israelites entered the wilderness of Sinai (19:1). There they camped before the mountain where the Lord established His covenant with the Israelites and gave His Ten Commandments and other laws to them. The Israelites stayed at Mount Sinai for a little less than a year (comparing Exodus 19:1 with Numbers 10:11), in what should have been a sacred time of dedicating themselves to be God's covenant people. But the attitude of rebellion and discontent that we saw demonstrated in last week's lesson (Exodus 16:2, 3) reappeared at the foot of the mountain. Sadly, while Moses was on the mountain receiving God's laws, the people were breaking them (specifically the first two of the Ten Commandments) by building a golden calf and attributing God's mighty act of deliverance from bondage to the gods the calf represented (32:1-4). Thus, perhaps it should come as no surprise that as the people traveled from Mount Sinai toward the promised land, their grumbling and discontent were right by their side. Once the Lord sent a fire to burn among the people, which consumed the fringes of the camp. Moses interceded on the people's behalf, and the fire died down (Numbers 11:1-3). Then the “mixt multitude” (11:4; likely comprised of non-Israelites who had chosen to journey with the Israelites; compare Exodus 12:38) initiated a complaint about growing tired of the manna provided by God. They claimed as they had done previously that living in Egypt was so much better than journeying through the desert (11:5). At this point, Moses became extremely frustrated with the people's behavior and voiced his frustration to the Lord. The Lord provided 70 men from among the elders of Israel to assist Moses with leading the people for a time (Numbers 11:25). The Lord also responded to the people's complaint with a provision of quail (11:31, 32), similar to what He had done in the wilderness of Sin (Exodus 16:1, 12, 13). Still, the grumbling did not end. Moses' brother Aaron and sister Miriam lodged their own protests against Moses, expressing an envy of Moses' position of authority (Numbers 12:2). The Lord responded by afflicting Miriam with leprosy. She was quarantined for seven days, during which time the people paused their travels. When their journey resumed, they reached the wilderness of Paran (12:16) and specifically Kadeshbarnea (Deuteronomy 1:19), where today's lesson text begins.

Key Verse: Numbers 14:8

If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

13:1-16. At last the tribes of Israel reached the Desert of Paran where they camped for a long time, probably in the great oasis of Kadesh (v. 26). Kadesh, though technically in the Desert of Zin, is here located in **the Desert of Paran** because Zin was a subdivision of the great Paran wilderness (cf. 27:14; Deut. 32:51). Here **Moses** instructed **each... tribe** to supply a spy **to explore the land of Canaan**. Each of these **leaders** is listed with his tribal affiliation (vv. 4-15). Of special interest in light of further developments are **Caleb**, the representative **of Judah** (v. 6), and **Hoshea**, the man chosen from **Ephraim** (v. 8). For reasons not entirely clear, **Moses** changed **the name** of **Hoshea** (*hōšēa* , “salvation”) to **Joshua** (*yehōšūa* , “Yahweh is salvation”).

13:17-20. The route of the explorers was north from Kadesh **through the Negev and on into the hill country**. The Negev (lit., “south”) refers to all the desert of southern Canaan, especially the area from Beersheba south. The hill country consisted of the mountains of Judah, north to the hills of Ephraim, and all

the way to the heights of Galilee. In Moses' time the hill country was populated primarily by the Amorites, and the plains and valleys by the Canaanites (cf. v. 29). The mission of the spies was clear: to determine the nature of **the land** itself and ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of its inhabitants (vv. 18-20). The reason for the route Moses suggested was probably his intention to attack and penetrate **Canaan** from that direction. There certainly was no plan originally to enter the land from the east through Jericho. That was not only far off the main Egyptian access to Canaan but it involved the hazard of passing near the heavily fortified defensive positions at Jericho and Ai.

13:21-22. The itinerary taken by the explorers began in **the Desert of Zin** and extended as far north as **Rehob at Lebo Hamath** (probably modern Lebweh, 14 miles northwest of Baalbek). Hamath was an important Aramean city in the great Central Valley known as the Beq'a. Lebo Hamath was at the lower part of that valley which began just north of the Sea of Galilee. On the way back, the 12 leaders passed through **Hebron**, a city **built seven years before Zoan in Egypt**. Zoan, otherwise known as Tanis, was built by the Hyksos when they overran northeastern Egypt about 1730 B.C. The reason for this apparently irrelevant information may be the fact that Hebron later became the inheritance of Caleb (Josh. 14:13-15) and even later than that David's capital when he reigned over Judah (2 Sam. 2:1-4). In Moses' day, however, Hebron was the home of the Anakites, a tribe of giants (Num. 13:33; Deut. 9:2) who would prove to be implacable foes of Israel for years to come (Josh. 15:13-14).

13:23-25. Near Hebron was **the Valley of Eshcol** ("cluster") where the spies **cut** a great **cluster of grapes** so heavy that **two** men had to carry it suspended from a **pole between them**. They also took samples of **pomegranates and figs** and at last, after **40 days** of searching out **the land**, returned to Kadesh. The reason for the time being precisely 40 days was probably to compare this relatively brief period with the 40 years of wandering to which they would shortly be sentenced (cf. 14:34).

13:26-29. As soon as the travelers arrived at **Kadesh** they made their report. Demonstrating the produce they had carried back, they certified that Canaan indeed was **a land flowing with milk and honey**. **But** the negative side of their report was their observation that **the cities** were **fortified and very large** and **the people... powerful**, whether **the Amalekites of the Negev** (cf. Ex. 17:8-16); **the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites of the hill country**; or **the Canaanites** along the Mediterranean coastal plain and **the Jordan Valley**. The Canaanites were the indigenous population of Canaan. The Amorites had entered Canaan from northeast Aram (Syria) sometime before 2000 B.C., had driven the Canaanites out of the hill country, and took their place there. The Hittites originated in central Anatolia (modern Turkey) about 1800 B.C. and slowly spread south and southeast, probably identifying with the Amorites in Canaan. Nothing is known of the Jebusites except that they were centralized in Jerusalem and were also considered an Amorite group (Josh. 10:5). They remained in control of Jerusalem till 400 years after Moses, when David drove them out, captured the city, and made it his capital, in 1004 B.C. (2 Sam. 5:6-10).

13:30-33. This reference to the cities and people of the land occasioned a divided opinion among the spies. **Caleb urged Moses to go up** at once **and take... the land** because he was confident they could **do it**. **But** 10 of the spies (all except Joshua and Caleb, 14:6-9, 30), discouraged the people and pessimistically maintained that the task of conquest was impossible because of the unfavorable odds. The **Nephilim** (this word occurs only here and in Gen. 6:4 were **of great size**; and the Anakites (cf. Num. 13:22), who descended from the Nephilim, were also "strong and tall" (Deut. 9:2).

14:1-4. Unfortunately **the people** accepted the majority assessment and began to protest **to Moses** that they would have been better off to have **died in Egypt or the desert** than at the hands of the Canaanites. It would **be better** even now, they said, to **choose a new leader** and make their way **back to Egypt**.

14:5-10a. On hearing this, **Moses and Aaron fell prostrate (facedown**; cf. 16:4, 22, 45; 20:6; 22:31), no doubt in earnest supplication, while **Joshua and Caleb** reaffirmed their appraisal of **the land** and their confidence that **the LORD** would deliver it and its **people** into their hands. But all this was to no avail as the people even discussed **stoning them**.

14:10b-12. In the midst of this crisis **the LORD appeared** in His **glory... at the tabernacle** (v. 10b). He asked how much longer He could be expected to tolerate the people's **contempt** and unbelief. The remedy, God said, was to **destroy the nation** and **make Moses** the founder of a new and **greater** one.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Sending Out the Spies (Num 13:1-2, 17-18)

1 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

2 "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them."

17 Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, "Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains,

18 and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many;

God's command and guidance (1-2)

A willingness to be guided that says send me (Isa 6:8)

8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

A willingness to be guided that results in humble availability (1 Sam 3:10)

10 The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

A willingness to be guided that manifests itself in an eagerness to serve (1 Peter 5:2)

2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;

A willingness to be guided that results in immediate obedience (Matt 4:18-20)

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 20 At once they left their nets and followed him.

A willingness to be guided to listen and follow (John 10:26-28)

26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

Moses leadership (17-18)

Leadership that leads to the way of God and truth (Matt 22:16)

16 They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.

Leadership that leads to the right way (Mark 10:32)

32 They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.

Leadership that leads to the Father God (John 14:6)

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Leadership that leads to a cleared way (1 Thess 3:11)

11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.

Leadership that leads to the Most Holy Place (Heb 9:8)

8 The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing.

Reporting on the Exploration (Num 13: 25-28)

25 And they returned from spying out the land after forty days.

26 Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land.

27 Then they told him, and said: "We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.

28 Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there.

Report on the provisions of the land (25-27)

Provisions through God using others (2 Cor 8:14)

14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality,

Provisions through God's supplying directly (2 Cor 9:10)

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

Provisions of faith (1 Thess 3:10)

10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

Provisions that should evoke thanksgiving to God (2 Cor 9:12)

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

Provisions through God's glorious riches (Phil 4:19)

19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Report on the people in the land (28)

Report of fear because of the influence of people (1 Sam 15:24)

24 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.

Report of fear because of rejection and ridicule (John 7:13)

13 But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews.

Report of fear because of people revolting (Matt 14:5)

5 Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.

Report of fear because of people's opinions (Matt 21:26)

26 But if we say, 'From men'-we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

Report of fear not realizing that we should only fear God (Matt 10:28)

28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Response to the Report (Num 14:1-2, 5-10)

1 So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.
2 And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness!
5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.
6 But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes;
7 and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: "The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land.
8 If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.'
9 Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them."
10 And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel.

Response of the people's complains (1-2)

Complaining only makes God angry (Num 11:1)

11 Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.

Complaining usually comes from someone who has sinned (Lam 3:39)

39 Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins?

Complaining could cause death of the complainer (1 Cor 10:10)

10 And do not grumble, as some of them did — and were killed by the destroying angel.

Complaining reveals wanting own desires to be met (Jude 16)

16 These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

Complaining against leadership also angers God (Num 12:7-9)

7 But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. 8 With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" 9 The anger of the Lord burned against them, and he left them.

Response of leader's call for faith (5-9)

Faith in the power of God (John 11:14-15)

14 So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, 15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Faith in the word of God (John 20:30-31)

30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Faith in God's indwelling presence (Exod 4:4-5)

4 Then the Lord said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. 5 "This," said the Lord, "is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — has appeared to you."

Faith in Jesus as the Son of God (John 19:34-35)

34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. 35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

Response of God's grieved presence (10)

God's grief over man's going astray (Ps 95:10)

10 For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways."

God's grief over man's rebellion (Isa 63:9-10)

9 In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. 10 Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them.

God's grief doesn't extend to His taking pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 33:11)

11 Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

God's grief over man's grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30)

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

God's is grieved over evil (Ps 5:4)

4 You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Thomas Constable

The sending of the 12 spies into Canaan (13:1-25)

When the people arrived at Kadesh the Lord told them to go up and take possession of the land He had promised them (Deuteronomy 1:19-21). Kadesh stood in the Desert of Zin, which was a section of the great Paran wilderness. The people asked Moses if they could send spies ahead of them. They did Song of Solomon, "that they may search out the land for us, and bring back to us word of the way by which we should go up, and the cities which we shall enter" (Deuteronomy 1:22). Moses allowed this (Deuteronomy 1:23) with God's permission (Numbers 13:2). Clearly the Israelites were not rebelling against God by sending the spies, but neither were they stepping forward in bold obedience with strong confidence in God, as they should have done. Why did God not lead Moses to record here (Numbers 13:1-3) the fact that the sending of the spies was the people's idea (Deuteronomy 1:22)? The reason may be that this was not the sin that resulted in God's postponement of their entrance into Canaan. Their reaction to the spies' report caused that result. The mission of the spies had some genuine value to the Israelites (Numbers 13:18-20), but it also opened the possibility of fear and failure to be guided God.

The events recorded in chapters 13-14 took place while Israel was at Kadesh.

Verses 3-16

The men named as the spies were not the same as the tribal princes (conveners; Numbers 1:5-15; Numbers 7:12; et al.). Their personal qualifications for this mission may have been the basis for their selection.

"The name, Numbers 13:16] describes a special role that Moses wished Joshua to have when he renamed him in Numbers 13:16. Joshua's earlier name, Hoshea, simply means "he has saved". In the name Hoshea, the person or god who saves is not made clear. Moses specified the LORD as the source of salvation by renaming Joshua." [Note: Richard S. Hess, Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary, p17.]

Verses 17-20

The Negev (lit. south) was the arid area of land to the south of Canaan that formed a transition between the desert to the south and the cultivated fields of Canaan to the north. Rainfall averages 8-12 inches per year in the Negev making it semi-arid. The hill country (Numbers 13:17) refers to the more mountainous sections of Canaan generally here. Later Moses used the term more specifically of part of the territory God gave the tribes of Ephraim and Judah. The time of first-ripe grapes (Numbers 13:20) would have been late July or early August.

Verses 21-25

The spies surveyed a very large area. Lebo-hamath (Numbers 13:21) stood about 50 miles north of Damascus, 100 miles north of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee). [Note: Yohanan Aharoni, The Land of the Bible, pp72-73.]

The Anakites (Numbers 13:22) were a tribe of very tall people who lived in Canaan (Numbers 13:33).

Hebron was a large fortified town. Moses gave it special emphasis here because it was near Hebron that God had promised to give Abraham the land (Genesis 13:14-18). From there Abraham had set out to defeat a coalition of kings (Genesis 14:13). The only piece of real estate Abraham possessed in Canaan was in Hebron, and there he and the other patriarchs lay buried. The spies, of course, knew these historical facts, and memories of these patriarchal events should have strengthened their faith in Yahweh as they passed through Hebron.

Zoan (Numbers 13:22) is another name for Tanis, the capital city of Egypt from which the Israelites had come. [Note: See N. Na'aman, "'Hebron Was Built Seven Years before Zoan in Egypt" (Numbers xiii22)," Vetus Testamentum 31:4 (1981):488-92.]

The valley of Eshcol was apparently just north of Hebron on the way to Jerusalem. [Note: The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, s.v. "Eshcol," by R. C. Ridall, 2:364.] The Hebrew word translated "Eshcol" refers to the stalk or stem of some fruit or flower. From this it came to mean a whole bunch or "cluster" (of grapes). A huge cluster of grapes carried on a pole between two men has long been a symbol of the land of Israel. This figure illustrates the great agricultural productivity of the land. It still is a popular symbol of modern Israel today and is the logo of Israel's Department of Tourism.

Verses 26-33

The report of the spies (13:26-33)

The spies reported that the land was indeed as fruitful as they had heard (Numbers 13:27), "nevertheless ..." (Numbers 13:28). Everything the spies said from this word on was uncalled for. [Note: See J. A. Beck, "Geography and the Narrative Shape of Numbers 13," Bibliotheca Sacra 157:627 (July-September 2000):271-80.] Their commission had been to view the land and to report back on what they saw. It was not their job to determine if the Israelites could overcome the Canaanites. God had promised that He would give the land to His people.

It was the people and cities in Canaan that discouraged the spies (Numbers 13:28). These Hittites (Numbers 13:29) were probably one of the native tribes in Canaan, not the great Anatolian Hittites (cf. Joshua 1:4; Judges 1:26; 2 Samuel 11:3). As they had despised God's provisions and plans (chs 11-12), the 10 spies now disbelieved God's promises that He would give the land and its people into their hands. They reckoned only on their own natural ability and failed to rely on God's supernatural ability (Numbers 13:31).

They described the tall Anakites as Nephilim (Numbers 13:33).

The Nephilim were, "the demi-gods who lived on the earth before the flood (Genesis 6:4)." [Note: G. Wenham, p120.]

The word "Nephilim" means strong ones or tyrants, not people of gigantic stature, though it came to imply superhuman giants. The spies concluded that the Anakites were relatives of the Nephilim.

"The use of the term *Nephilim* seems to be deliberately provocative of fear, a term not unlike the concept of bogeymen and hobgoblins." [Note: Allen, p812.]

The rebellion of the people (14:1-12)

Verses 1-4

God had just proved His supernatural power to the Israelites three times since the nation had left Sinai (chs 11-12). There was no excuse for this failure to trust Him to lead them victoriously into Canaan.

Verses 5-9

Moses and Aaron tried to persuade the people to enter the land (Deuteronomy 1:29-31). They also prayed for the nation in this hour of its rebellion (Numbers 14:5). Moreover Joshua and Caleb warned the people against turning back (Numbers 14:7-9). They rightly identified the true actions of the Israelite majority as rebellion against God and fear of the Canaanites (Numbers 14:9). They reminded the people that God was with them (Numbers 14:9).

Verses 10-12

Nevertheless the congregation violently rejected their pleas to trust and be guided God (Numbers 14:10). God Himself prevented the people from stoning Caleb and Joshua by manifesting Himself (Numbers 14:10).

". . . the majesty of God flashed out before the eyes of the people in a light which suddenly burst forth from the tabernacle (see at Ex. xxv10)." [Note: Keil and Delitzsch, 3:92.]

As a faithful mediator Moses again interceded for the disobedient Israelites.

The failure of the Israelites grew out of unbelief (Numbers 14:11; cf. Hebrews 3:19). They failed to believe that God would give them the land of their enemies as He had promised.

"Like Pharaoh, they were hardening their hearts and ignoring God's clear command (cf. Psalm 95:7-8) ..." [Note: Herbert M. Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch*, p194.]

Often in Scripture we read of people asking God, "How long?" (e.g, Psalm 6:3; Psalm 13:1-2; Psalm 35:17; et al.). However here it is God who asked this of Moses (cf. Exodus 16:28). This illustrates the intimate relationship that Moses and God enjoyed (Numbers 12:7-8).

Was God's threatened action a real possibility, or was He only testing Moses' reaction with this offer? God had threatened a similar punishment at Sinai when the Israelites had made the golden calf (Exodus 32:10). God could have fulfilled His promises to Abraham by destroying and dispossessing all the other living Israelites and by sparing only Moses and his descendants. However, God could not have fulfilled the prophetic promises that He had given through Jacob (Genesis 49) and done so. There would have to be descendants of Judah from whom a great ruler would come (Genesis 49:10) as well as some future for the other tribes. Perhaps God meant that He would completely destroy that older generation of Israelites immediately (cf. Exodus 32:10). He said that He would also give Moses and his descendants a much larger place in the nation. Perhaps then other peoples would regard Moses as the father of the Israelite nation.

". . . this passage intends to show that the people failed to inherit the Promised Land and hence died in the wilderness without inheriting the blessing, not so much for a specific act of disobedience or for fear of the battles that lay ahead, but rather for the simple fact of their unbelief. They failed to trust in God." [Note: Sailhamer, p388.]

(Adapted from URL:<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dcc/numbers-13.html>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Some Bibles print Jesus' words in red so that they stand out to the reader. Perhaps today's lesson text should be printed in yellow as a cautionary signal. The Israelites rebelled against God and His chosen leaders, refusing to trust that the Lord would lead them into the promised land. When Paul recounts the examples of the Israelites' disobedience, he emphasizes that these incidents are not just ancient history: "All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition" (1 Corinthians 10:11). We can easily read an account like the one in today's text, shake our heads, and wonder how the Israelites could have forgotten so quickly all that the Lord had done for them. Instead of becoming haughty, reading today's account should humble us (see 1 Corinthians 10:12). We can learn much from the Israelites' negative examples. We should not treat their failures lightly as we journey toward our own "promised land."

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

God delivered the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt, but sadly, that generation failed to enter the Promised Land. They refused to believe God's promise to their ancestors that Canaan would be their home. This blessed nation vacillated, neglecting to keep their eyes fixed on the almighty God. Nevertheless, God kept His end of the bargain. The children of this faithless generation took the land 40 years later.

The Spies Report - While the Israelites camped on the border of Canaan, Moses sent one man from each tribe into the new land to search out the territory. They traveled south to north, observing the inhabitants of the land, evaluating their strength and numbers, and seeing evidence of the land's fertility. After 40 days of scouting, the spies returned to the camp with good and bad news. They showed the people huge, luscious fruit from the territory and confirmed it was a land flowing with milk and honey. However, 10 of the spies said the land was impossible to conquer—the cities were walled, and the inhabitants of the land were powerful and strong. Giants lived there. God's people wept and complained before Moses.

Spies Who Believed in God's Word - However, two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, tore their clothes in grief as they listened to their fellow spies and the despairing response of the nation. They said that with God on their side they would defeat these people and the Lord would bring them into the land He promised. But the multitude refused to heed their encouragement, threatening to stone them, Moses, and Aaron to death. How soon they forgot everything God had done for them in all His miracles. They focused on the obstacles and the challenges in the land. They focused on what appeared to be humanly impossible. God is searching out believers who stand on His Word. Those are the ones He desires to support to display His power and glory. Those who focus on the obstacles and the challenges, who claim they are small and weak and that the enemies can't be defeated, fail to believe in God's Word and His promises. They will not see all that the Lord can do through them.