

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)
Numbers 13:21–29

Peace be with you, brothers and sisters, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time for our Bible reading again. We will continue reading Numbers chapter 13. Today, we are reading verses 21 through 29.

Moses sent out the twelve spies to spy out the land of Canaan, clearly explaining their mission: to see whether the people living there were strong or weak, few or many; to see whether the cities had strong fortifications; and to see whether the soil and crops were rich or poor. It was the season of the first ripe grapes, and Moses specifically commanded them to bring back some of the fruit of the land as a testimony that what God had given was indeed a good land.

These twelve spies were tribal leaders chosen from the twelve tribes of Israel; they were relatively mature in spiritual life and seasoned in discernment. The report brought back by these twelve spies swayed the opinion of the entire congregation of Israel; these twelve spies also became pivotal figures who determined the destiny and future of that generation of Israelites.

Dear brothers and sisters, if you were entrusted with such a critical responsibility, what would you do? This is not a hypothetical question, especially for coworkers responsible for church affairs; the opinions and perspectives expressed by coworkers often shape the direction and path of the church moving forward. Therefore, we must ask God for mercy to grant our coworkers a clear mind and strong faith, so that they do not treat their responsibilities lightly, but are willing to bring everything before God in inquiry, handling every matter and offering every word according to God's will.

Verse 21: “So they went up and spied out the land from the Wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near the entrance of Hamath.”

This verse first outlines the general route traveled by the twelve spies. They set out from the Wilderness of Paran to spy out the land of Canaan, and they had to first pass through the Wilderness of Zin. The Wilderness of Paran was quite vast, with rather indistinct boundaries. The Wilderness of Zin lay in the northeastern corner of the Wilderness of Paran, bordering the southern boundary of Canaan. The place of their departure was likely where the Wilderness of Paran met the Wilderness of Zin. Therefore, this verse notes that once they left the Wilderness of Paran, they began from the Wilderness of Zin and first arrived at Rehob.

Rehob was located in the north of Canaan, at the foot of Mount Hermon. If one entered Canaan from the South (the Negev) and traveled north along the main road, they would pass through major cities such as Hebron, Jerusalem, Bethel, and Shechem, and then pass west of the Sea of Chinnereth (which is called the Sea of Galilee in the New Testament). Rehob lay about 50 kilometers north of the Sea of Galilee, and from Rehob the route crossed Mount Hermon to the entrance of Hamath. The entrance of Hamath was at the northernmost point of Canaan, marking the northernmost boundary of the good land God promised to Israel.

These twelve spies performed their duties thoroughly. Entering from the southern end of Canaan, they traveled all the way north to its northernmost extremity—a distance of about 400 kilometers, totaling 800 kilometers round-trip. They spent 40 days on the journey, traveling at a pace of roughly 20 kilometers per day from south to north. For robust and capable spies, this pace would have left them with plenty of energy to spare. A reasonable inference, therefore, is that the twelve spies split into several groups, surveying various off-route cities beyond the 800-kilometer round-trip main road, allowing them to gain a comprehensive understanding of the entire land of Canaan.

Verse 22: “And they went up through the South and came to Hebron; Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, were there. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.)”

This verse specifically records an important city they passed through—Hebron. Entering Canaan from the South, they would first pass Beersheba, and the next major city was Hebron. This was where Abraham, the forefather of the Israelites, settled after parting ways with his nephew Lot, as recorded in Genesis 13:18. At that time, Hebron was also known as Kirjath Arba. In Genesis 23:2, Abraham’s wife Sarah died in Hebron, and Abraham purchased a field from the Hittites along with the cave of Machpelah within it to bury Sarah. Later, when Abraham died, he was also buried in the cave of Machpelah at Hebron. Years later, Isaac and Rebekah, as well as Jacob and Leah, were also buried in the cave of Machpelah. Today, when saints travel to Israel, they can still visit the tombs of the patriarchs of Israel.

Hebron was still a small village in Abraham's day, but after 400 years, by the time of Moses, it had grown into a major city. This city was built seven years prior to Zoan in Egypt. Zoan appears in Psalm 78:12 and served as the capital of Egypt during the era of Moses. It is specifically highlighted here that the descendants of Anak lived in Hebron. The Anakim were giants of towering stature, and Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi were likely three clan chiefs among the Anakim. Not only were they giants, but they also possessed tremendous strength and were fierce in battle, presenting a major obstacle to the Israelites' conquest of the land of Canaan.

Verse 23: “Then they came to the Valley of Eshcol, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole. They also brought some of the pomegranates and figs.”

They arrived at the Valley of Eshcol, which was located in Hebron. When Abraham first moved to Hebron, he formed an alliance with the local Amorites. In Genesis 14:13, Abram was dwelling by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, who were allies with Abram. Among the three brothers allied with Abraham was one named Eshcol, who likely lived in the Valley of Eshcol, a place rich in grapevines.

The twelve spies cut down a branch in the Valley of Eshcol bearing a single cluster of grapes. The grapes there were so massive that two men had to carry the cluster

on a pole. Just as Moses commanded, they carried this cluster of grapes back to show the congregation of Israel the produce of the land of Canaan. In addition, they brought back some pomegranates and figs, both of which were abundant crops in Canaan.

Verse 24: “The place was called the Valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the men of Israel cut down there.”

“Eshcol” means “a cluster of grapes,” and the place was named the Valley of Eshcol because the children of Israel cut down a cluster of grapes there. The twelve spies journeyed through the land of Canaan, inspecting its customs, inhabitants, military fortifications, and agricultural productivity. In this passage, two details stand out in particular: first, giants lived in Hebron; second, the grapes from the Valley of Eshcol were so large that two men were needed to carry them on a pole. On the one hand, the land was indeed exceedingly good, full of abundant produce; on the other hand, it was inhabited by intimidating giants who inspired dread.

Verses 25–26: “And they returned from spying out the land after forty days. 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.”

The twelve spies were gone for 40 days, traversed the entire land of Canaan, and returned to Kadesh in the Wilderness of Paran to report their findings to Moses, Aaron, and the entire congregation of Israel, displaying the fruit they had brought back to the Israelites.

There are two important facts here: first, they traveled for 40 days. “40” is a number associated with testing and trial. In Genesis 7:12, when God judged the world with the flood, rain fell for 40 days and 40 nights. In Exodus 24:18, God called Moses up onto the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights, during which the Israelites

below failed the test and began worshiping the golden calf. In the New Testament, in Luke 4:2, before Jesus began His ministry, He was also tempted by the devil in the wilderness for 40 days. Here, the twelve spies entered the good land to explore it for 40 days, and their faith was put to the test; meanwhile, the people of Israel waited in the wilderness for 40 days, and their faith was likewise tested.

Second, the twelve spies departed from Kadesh in the Wilderness of Paran and subsequently returned to Kadesh. The Hebrew root of “Kadesh” means holy, set apart. Kadesh was a pivotal location that determined the destiny of the Israelites in the wilderness. The text states that Kadesh was in the Wilderness of Paran. The name “Paran” means “place of caves,” denoting a great and terrible wilderness. Maintaining holiness in harsh circumstances requires exceptional faith. In the Wilderness of Paran, the Israelites failed, resulting in nearly 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

In Numbers 20:1, in the first month of the fortieth year after leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrived at Kadesh once again. There, however, Scripture records it as being in the Wilderness of Zin. Most commentators agree this is the same Kadesh, since it lay right on the border between the Wilderness of Paran and the Wilderness of Zin, yet chapter 20 specifically identifies it with the Wilderness of Zin. The word “Zin” carries the idea of flat or level. At this Kadesh, the Israelites made a fresh start, and God prepared a level path before them.

Though it was the same Kadesh and the same calling to pursue holiness, their faith determined whether they found themselves in a vast and terrible wilderness or on a level plain. Dear brothers and sisters, we all share the desire to pursue holiness; our faith will determine whether we wander in the wilderness or walk along the level path of sanctification.

Verse 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.’”

Sent out by Moses, the twelve spies returned after 40 days to deliver their reconnaissance report, and their words would shape Israel's future. The text does not specify who spoke; it appears there was no unified consensus among the twelve on how to present their findings. Most likely, each person chimed in with what they had seen, speaking turn by turn to Moses, Aaron, and the whole congregation of Israel.

They began with the good news, stating that they had reached the good land of Canaan—the land God promised and to which Moses had sent them. Indeed, it was a land flowing with milk and honey. “Milk” represents the essence of animals, while “honey” likely refers to date syrup, sweet and rich, representing the essence of plants. In a single brief phrase, they affirmed that the land of Canaan was fertile and hospitable for human dwelling. They also brought back a large cluster of grapes requiring two men to carry on a pole, alongside pomegranates and figs. Look, this is the fruit of that land! Yet they brushed past the goodness of Canaan in just two short sentences.

Verses 28–29: “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. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.”

These two verses form an entirely negative report concerning the land of Canaan. In terms of Chinese character count, the good report used only 17 characters, while the bad report spanned 65 characters—nearly four times as long. This simple comparison reveals that as the spies delivered their report, their mindset was distinctly negative.

“Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large”—underlying these words was the implication: they are huge and powerful, their fortifications are strong, and they wait comfortably for our approach. We have journeyed from afar; how can we ever defeat them? Not only

that, but we also saw the descendants of Anak there—they are giants, mighty in stature and strength, and we are no match for them at all.

Furthermore, the Amalekites lived in the South, the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites lived in the mountains, and the Canaanites lived by the sea and along the Jordan. In other words, every part of Canaan—north to south, mountain to plain—was densely populated. With Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and Canaanites everywhere, there was no room left for us to settle.

Dear brothers and sisters, what these spies reported may well have been the actual circumstances they observed with their physical eyes, just as they viewed Israel's condition through physical eyes. The Israelites were exhausted after long travels; they had just passed Kibroth Hattaavah, where many driven by greed were buried, and Hazeroth, where the prophetess Miriam was struck with leprosy for defying authority, delaying Israel's journey by seven days.

Morale was low across the camp of Israel, and evaluating everything solely by what they saw with physical eyes, the twelve spies rendered their verdict and emphasized the bad news. They completely overlooked the fact that God had been with them ever since the Exodus—it was God who fought for them, and God who performed countless signs and wonders in their midst. They forgot the dimension of faith. If they had cleared the eyes of faith, they would have seen an entirely different picture. Are we not often just like them?

Let us pray together: Lord, through the report brought back by the twelve spies after spying out the good land, help us recognize that what the physical eye sees is not the true reality; what is seen in faith is Your true leading. We ask You to help us truly clear the eyes of our faith. As Paul said, we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Help us in every situation to practice receiving Your guidance in faith. Unbelief is our greatest hindrance in following You. When the church is to move forward, how we need a body of saints full of faith, holding firmly to Your promised Word, following the leading of the Holy Spirit, and pressing boldly ahead. Lord, please

bless the church where I am. In the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray,
Amen.