

Numbers 13:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them.

Analysis

God commands Moses to send spies into Canaan, saying 'which I give unto the children of Israel,' using the present tense to indicate the certainty of His promise despite Canaanite occupation. The scouting mission's purpose was reconnaissance —learning the land's character, the people's strength, and the cities' fortifications—not determining whether conquest was possible. God had already promised the land; the spies were to discover how to approach the conquest strategically. Tragically, ten of twelve spies would return with faithless reports, causing Israel to refuse to enter the land despite God's promise. This demonstrates how human unbelief can reject divine promises when circumstances appear unfavorable. The command to send 'of every tribe of their fathers...a ruler among them' ensured representative leadership and prevented claims that only one tribe's perspective was represented. The twelve spies were respected leaders, not random individuals, making their subsequent faithless report even more tragic. This incident teaches that spiritual leadership doesn't guarantee spiritual faithfulness, and that even leaders can fall into unbelief when trusting their own assessment rather than God's promise.

Historical Context

The scouting expedition occurred during Israel's approach to Canaan from the south, based at Kadesh-barnea in the Negev wilderness. The spies spent forty days exploring Canaan from the southern Negev to northern Lebanon ('from the

wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath,' Numbers 13:21). They saw fortified Canaanite cities, grape clusters so large two men carried them on a pole (13:23), and the Anakim giants (descendants of Nephilim) who terrified them (13:28,33). Archaeological evidence confirms Canaan during the Late Bronze Age (15th-13th centuries BCE) featured heavily fortified cities with massive walls, professional armies, and Egyptian oversight (the region was under Egyptian hegemony). From a human military perspective, Israel's conquest seemed impossible—an untested mob of escaped slaves attempting to conquer established kingdoms. Yet God had promised the land, and Caleb and Joshua's minority report ('we are well able to overcome it,' 13:30) demonstrated that faith trusts God's promise despite unfavorable circumstances.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's present-tense promise ('which I give') despite Canaanite occupation teach about faith versus sight?
2. What does the spies' failure warn about the danger of evaluating God's promises based on human assessment of circumstances?

Interlinear Text

כִּי עַל אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁלַח־ךְ
Send thou men that they may search the land of Canaan

H7971 H0 H582 H8446 H853 H776 H3667

אֲשֶׁר נָתַת־יְהֹוָה לְבָנָי יִשְׁבְּאָל אֲשֶׁר
which I give unto the children of Israel of every a man

H834 H589 H5414 H1121 H3478 H376 H259

לְמִתְהָלָל אֲשֶׁר־אָבֹתֵיכֶם כִּי־לְשִׁיאָר
Send every a man tribe of their fathers a ruler

H376 H259 H4294 H1 H7971 H3605 H5387

בְּהָמָן

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Additional Cross-References

Numbers 32:8 (Parallel theme): Thus did your fathers, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land.

Numbers 34:18 (Parallel theme): And ye shall take one prince of every tribe, to divide the land by inheritance.

Exodus 18:25 (References Israel): And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.

Deuteronomy 1:15 (Parallel theme): So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known, and made them heads over you, captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens, and officers among your tribes.

Numbers 11:16 (References Israel): And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.

Numbers 1:4 (Parallel theme): And with you there shall be a man of every tribe; every one head of the house of his fathers.

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