

# God Hears Our Cry

Bible Background • NUMBERS 13:1–14:10

Printed Text • NUMBERS 13:1–2, 17, 25–28; 14:1–2, 5–10

Devotional Reading • PSALM 106:1–12, 48

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **EVALUATE** the reasons for the Israelites' refusal to listen to Joshua and Caleb, **DESIRE** deeper trust in the promises of God, and **CONFRONT** the future in confidence of God's guidance and provision.

## In Focus

Clara was the only one professing faith in Christ within her extended family. She had grown up learning to be kind, but when a friend at school invited her to youth group she heard the true Gospel for the first time. Clara realized just being kind was not enough; she repented of her sins and accepted salvation that night.

When she was old enough to live on her own, Clara wanted her faith to be seen in all of her life. But her family didn't understand. Often, she came up against persecution from family members because she would not join in their parties and trips to casinos to gamble. Many of the family members encouraged her to join them and have some fun. Occasionally, two of her cousins would tease her about her faith keeping her from having a good time with the family. A few even wanted to start an argument by saying things which they thought would cause Clara to respond in negative ways. Clara did not argue with them. She simply quietly lived out her faith.

However, Clara looked forward to the gatherings at church with other Christians. She found encouragement and strength from her church family to continue to work out her salvation as she walked daily with God

*How is Clara witnessing to her extended family? Our behavior is often a powerful witness to others. How can she further her witness to her family?*

## Keep in Mind

“And if the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us safely into that land and give it to us. It is a rich land flowing with milk and honey” (Numbers 14:8, NLT)

## Words You Should Know

**A. Spy** (13:2) tur (Heb.) — To go before and search out

**B. Glory** (14:10) kabod (Heb.) — Majesty, honor, splendor; especially of God

## Say It Correctly

Manna. MAN-uh.

Jochebed. JAH-cuh-bed.

Elim. EE-lim.

## KJV

**Numbers 13:1** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

2 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.

17 And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain:

25 And they returned from searching of the land after forty days.

26 And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land.

27 And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.

28 Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.

14:1 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God 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 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:

7 And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.

8 If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

9 Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.

10 But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

## NLT

**Numbers 13:1** The LORD now said to Moses,

2 "Send out men to explore the land of Canaan, the land I am giving to the Israelites. Send one leader from each of the twelve ancestral tribes."

17 Moses gave the men these instructions as he sent them out to explore the land: "Go north through the Negev into the hill country."

25 After exploring the land for forty days, the men returned

26 to Moses, Aaron, and the whole community of Israel at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran. They reported to the whole community what they had seen and showed them the fruit they had taken from the land.

27 This was their report to Moses: "We entered the land you sent us to explore, and it is indeed a bountiful country—a land flowing with milk and honey. Here is the kind of fruit it produces.

28 But the people living there are powerful, and their towns are large and fortified. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak!"

14:1 Then the whole community began weeping aloud, and they cried all night.

2 Their voices rose in a great chorus of protest against Moses and Aaron. "If only we had died in Egypt, or even here in the wilderness!" they complained.

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell face down on the ground before the whole community of Israel.

6 Two of the men who had explored the land, Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, tore their clothing.

7 They said to all the people of Israel, "The land we traveled through and explored is a wonderful land!

8 And if the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us safely into that land and give it to us. It is a rich land flowing with milk and honey.

9 Do not rebel against the LORD, and don't be afraid of the people of the land. They are only helpless prey to us! They have no protection, but the LORD is with us! Don't be afraid of them!"

10 But the whole community began to talk about stoning Joshua and Caleb. Then the glorious presence of the LORD appeared to all the Israelites at the Tabernacle.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Promised Land.** A hill country east of the Mediterranean Sea and west of the Jordan River, also called Canaan. God promised Abraham that this land would be given to his descendants (Genesis 13:14–17). The Israelites would occupy the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, fighting or conquering such people as the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. The land was described as “flowing with milk and honey,” showing how the land could sustain not just subsistence living, but a life of abundance.

**Caleb.** This spy was from the tribe of Judah, the tribe that would be associated with royalty, as it produced King David as well as Jesus. Only he and Joshua stood as a voice of courage when the twelve spies returned from the Promised Land (v. 24), saying they could surely take the land. For his faithfulness, God promised to allow him to enter the land. Therefore, when it came time to take the land a generation later, Caleb led his clan to conquer the portion of land allotted to him. He defeated some of the toughest opponents of Canaan, the giant sons of Anak (Joshua 15:13-15).

## Background

In Numbers 13 and 14, we find the Israelites near the beginning of their journey in the wilderness to Transjordan. God commands Moses to send one man from each ancestral tribe to spy in Canaan (Numbers 13). Shammua goes from the tribe of Reuben, Shaphat from Simeon, Caleb from Judah, Igal from Issachar, Joshua (Moses changed his name from Hoshea) from Ephraim, Palti from Benjamin, Gaddiel from Zebulun, Gaddi from Manasseh, Ammiel from Dan, Sethur from Asher, Nahbi from Naphtali, and Geuel from Gad. They were to determine the quality of the land and the strength of the people. They conclude that although Canaan is full of good things, the people could be too strong to overcome. As they listed their objections to entering the land God has given them, only Caleb and Joshua dissent (v. 30). Upon hearing the report, the Israelites lament that they had not remained in Egypt and want to choose a leader to help them return. But Joshua and Caleb trust God and encourage the assembly to trust Him, too. Just as the people are preparing to stone them, the glory of the Lord (cf. Exodus 14:10) appears.

*The Israelites are tired of wandering, and they can now enter the land that God had given them. Why are they reluctant to claim what God has promised them?*

### At-A-Glance

1. Spies in Canaan (Numbers 13:1–2, 17)
2. Fear in the Land of Milk and Honey (vv. 25–28)
3. Human Rebellion and God's Grace (Numbers 14:1–2, 5–10)

## In Depth

**1. Spies in Canaan (Numbers 13:1–2, 17)** When God commands Moses to send spies into Canaan, the men Moses chooses have distinguished themselves as the leaders of their respective tribes. The twelve ancestral tribes are the descendants of the twelve sons of the patriarch Jacob, who was renamed Israel (Genesis 32:28).

One man from each tribe is sent to the Negev, which is a generally dry waste country north of the Sinai Peninsula, south of what became Judah, and to the west and south of the Dead Sea. The hill country referenced here is part of the central spine of hills that runs north and south through Canaan.

*Why did God command Moses to send one leader from each tribe to spy in Canaan?*

**2. Fear in the Land of Milk and Honey (vv. 25–28)** We see the phrase “forty days” often repeated in Scripture (Genesis 7:4; Matthew 4:2), so it is no surprise that the spies remained in Canaan for forty days. Here, we see the first reference to Kadesh, an oasis where much of the forty years in the wilderness will be spent (v. 26). At Kadesh, the spies show the assembly the fruit of the land. The spies tell them that the land “floweth with milk and honey” (v. 27). Although this is a common phrase used in the Torah to describe Canaan (Exodus 3:8; Leviticus 20:24), it is the first time it is used in the book of Numbers. However, the spies also report that the people in the land are strong and that some of them are constant enemies of the Israelites. The spies observe real danger in Canaan.

*How might we overcome our fears and follow God?*

**3. Human Rebellion and God’s Grace (Numbers 14:1–2, 5–10)** The people complain as soon as they hear the report from the spies. The people’s complaining is a common theme we see in Numbers (Numbers 11:1; 16:41). The people often complain because of the challenges of life in the desert. They long for their settled lives in Egypt and lament having left the familiar to wander into the unknown. They wish they had died in Egypt or the wilderness before reaching Canaan.

As the people rebel against God, Moses and Aaron fall on their faces as an act of contrition. Joshua and Caleb tear their clothes, which is an act of mourning, a sign of humility before God. These men foreshadow the Lord’s rejection of this generation with their words “if the LORD delight in us” and “only rebel not ye against the LORD” (vv. 8–9). They inform the people that with God, the people of Canaan will be bread to them because the Canaanites’ protection is removed. The idea of lost protection is a condemnation of foreign gods who are not as strong as the God of Israel. They assure the people that God is with them. God is faithful to keep His promise. As they encourage the people and intercede on their behalf, the glory of God appears. Like the Children of Israel, we are often afraid, and sometimes our fear leads us to rebel against God’s plan for us. When we are afraid, let us remember that with God’s help, we are more than overcomers. When God is with us, we can face any obstacle that stands in our way with confidence.

*What are some ways you have been encouraged to trust God when facing difficult obstacles?*

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. The Israelites’ experience of what happened in the past made them want to derail their future, although God already promised them the victory. Most of the assembly wanted to return to Egypt, two factors stopped them—God’s presence and His chosen leadership. Describe God’s presence in this Scripture. What difference does Moses’ leadership make in this story?
2. The Israelites long to return to Egypt where they labored as slaves (Numbers 14:1–2). Their fear of the unknown overpowered their fear of losing their freedom. Why were they so afraid of the future even though God promised them victory?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

When the Israelites wanted to return to Egypt, effective leadership became essential to the outcome of this story. God told Moses to choose one leader from each of the twelve ancestral tribes to spy in Canaan. Had it not been for two God-fearing spies, the people would have turned around. Effective and diverse leadership is essential to a functional congregation. How might we choose congregational leaders who represent the diversity of our membership?

## **Liberating Lesson**

When the Israelites wanted to return to Egypt, effective leadership became essential to the outcome of this story. God told Moses to choose one leader from each of the twelve ancestral tribes to spy in Canaan. Had it not been for two God-fearing spies, the people would have turned around. Effective and diverse leadership is essential to a functional congregation.

*How might we choose congregational leaders who represent the diversity of our membership?*

## **Application for Activation**

We are all leaders in some space, whether at home, at work, in our churches, or in our communities. Fear is a natural reaction to the unknown, but trust that God has not forsaken you. When we feel panic, angst, and frustration because we do not know what lies ahead, leaders are called to intercede on our behalf. Leaders are also called to encourage us to continue to follow God wherever the call might lead. Think about how you can be a leader this week, who encourages people to face their fears and overcome obstacles to see them succeed. God is faithful to us, and even when we feel alone, God is with us.

## **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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## **Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

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## **More Light on the Text**

### **Numbers 13:1–2, 17, 25–28; 14:1–2, 5-10**

The Lord leads the Children of Israel systematically through the barren wilderness to their destination—Canaan. It is now about two years since they departed from Egypt. They have reached the wilderness of Paran and encamped at Kadesh, a few days' journey from the Promised Land, on the southern border of Canaan. The course of the journey changes because of Israel's rebellion and faithlessness.

**13:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 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.**

Israel followed the Lord's leading into the wilderness of Paran and camped at Kadesh. Moses speaks with confidence and trust, recognizing the Lord's great deeds of the past and what God is capable of doing, and exhorts the people to take possession of the promised inheritance. The Lord orders Moses to send out men to search the land of Canaan. The word for "search" (Heb. *tur*, *TOOR*) means to go before and explore or spy. The Lord instructs Moses to choose twelve men, one from each Israelite tribe, to go and make a preliminary survey of the land and bring back reports. Moses obeys the Lord and sends the men into the land.

The phrases "every one a ruler among them" and "all those men were heads of the Children of Israel" (Numbers 13:3) are synonymous, meaning that Moses selects the leaders of each tribe (cf. 1:4). They probably belong to

the ruling class, those referred to in Exodus 18:25 as “heads over the people” or the council, which represent different groups (thousands, hundreds, and fifties). This group is, however, different from the group that conducts the census (cf. Numbers 1:5–17; 13:4–16). The number of spies is significant, both to have a representative for each tribe, but also perhaps to allow each one to spy out land for his own tribe. God directs Moses to choose the rulers or leaders, people of character, authority, and prudence who would be “credible” in their report to the people. Alas, how they failed! Numbers 13:4–16 lists the names of the spies and their tribes, and verses 17–25 narrate how the search goes and the outcome.

**17 And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain:**

Moses sends the twelve men selected from the twelve tribes to spy out the Promised Land of Canaan. The “southward” Moses refers to here is actually north of the camp through the Negev desert which lies in the southern part of Canaan. The confusion comes from Negev being the name for that region of desert, as well as the word for “south” (Heb. negeb, NEH-gev). The “mountain” (NLT: “hill country”) is where Moses instructs them to go, which gives them an elevated position from which to survey the land.

**25 And they returned from searching of the land after forty days. 26 And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land.**

In verses 18–24, there are more instructions from Moses to determine key attributes of the land during their search, such as what the crops are like, what the soil is like, and most importantly what the people are like: strong or weak, many or few. The last question becomes the point of contention later in the account. They find during their northward journey that the land is very fruitful and bring samples back for the congregation to evaluate. But they also find out the descendants of Anak the giant live there.

Here, they show their leaders and the congregation the excellent produce they found in the land. The produce is so large it takes two people to carry a single cluster of grapes (v. 23). Showing the Children of Israel the fruit validates God’s word that the land is exceedingly fruitful and plentiful. It is also evidence for them that they could have a prosperous life there and be able to farm and forage for food.

**27 And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. 28 Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.**

The spies capture the dilemma of the Children of Israel well. They give their report in response to the questions in Moses’ mission for them (vv. 18–20). God’s word is true: the land “floweth with milk and honey”; that is, it was lavish with resources. God’s provision is not simply for sustenance but for abundance. There is more than enough room to settle and food to eat. But the answer to Moses’ other question is that, despite more than enough in the land God is calling them to, giant cities filled with giant people intimidate the Israelite spies. The children of Anak are known as giants in the Bible from this point forward (Deuteronomy 9:2). The promise of God is waiting before them, but the obstacle in the way looks too great to defeat.

Verses 29–33 tell of Caleb objecting to this general report of fear. He encourages the people to take the land through God’s strength, but the other spies only reiterate their negative report.

**14:1 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.**

Nothing breaks a parent’s heart like seeing a child cry unless those tears are the fruit of selfish desires and ingratitude. The tears of the ungrateful often get an angry response. God delivers the children of the promise to

the edge of the Promised Land. Spies have been sent in and brought back a mixed report. The majority of the spies hold that the inhabitants of the land are too formidable to be conquered, and any attempt to do so would result in the destruction of the people and their children. Only two spies offer that God would be sufficient to deliver the land into the hands of the Children of Israel. The people believe the report from the majority of the spies and wept. Their loud wailing is an expression of sadness and lament. Their perspective is based on the report of the spies, not on the promises of the one true God.

**2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!**

The people forget how God delivered them from all the hardships they endured for the previous two years piled on top of each other. They embrace the report from the majority of the spies and turn on Moses and Aaron, God's appointed leaders. Nothing of the excitement and exuberance that greeted the departure from Egypt remained, and now they just want to die. They fear that they will be "prey" and envision themselves being carted off as the spoils of a losing war (v. 3). They conclude that Moses failed as a leader by bringing them to the edge of the Promised Land only to ultimately be destroyed by the giants in the land. Their earlier lust for the meat, fruit, and vegetables of Egypt help dull the memories of the harsh conditions of enslavement there (Numbers 11:4–5, 33–34). God greeted their earlier complaints with fire and holy wrath, so the people now just ask for death. If God is not going to make the task of occupying the Promised Land easy, then they will take matters into their own hands and go back to Egypt. In the following verses, they even plot to find a new leader instead of Moses who will take them back to Egypt (vv. 3–4).

**5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.**

Both Moses and Aaron know that the actions of the people will not be pleasing to God. They fall on their faces, whether in a posture of begging them to stop or in anticipation of what they felt God is about to do. Earlier complaining resulted in fire and plague from God, and now in the face of outright rejection by the assembly, Moses and Aaron do not know how God will react. They only know that it will not be pleasant.

**6 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: 7 And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.**

As Moses and Aaron lay prostrate on the ground, Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who came back with a message of faithful anticipation that God will give the people the land, "rent" (Heb. qara', kaw-RAH, to tear or cut) their clothes, step up, and address the people. Though they are the two spies who returned and gave the minority report concerning the Promised Land, Joshua's name is not mentioned until this time. Now he stands in support of Caleb and tries to help persuade the masses not to reject God and His appointed leaders. Though the journey had been difficult, they had not lost faith in God or His plan for Israel's future. They remind the people that the land is truly a marvelous place.

**8 If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. 9 Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.**

Torn clothes show their great sorrow. Caleb and Joshua stand before the people and try to make their case not to abandon God. Earlier, the people seen a single branch of grapes, cut from a tree in the Promised Land, which required two men to carry back to the encampment (Numbers 13:23). Caleb and Joshua do not refute the report of the other spies but simply try to remind the people that the God who promised the land to them is sufficient to fulfill His word and deliver that land. They emphasize that if God delights in His people, the land will be

theirs. Thus they encourage and warn the people not to rebel against God. They also indicated that, because God is with the people, the inhabitants of the land will be defenseless. Joshua and Caleb are reminding the people of the power of the same God who delivered them from Egypt. Yet the people already have their minds made up not to listen.

**10 But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.**

As Caleb and Joshua plead with the people to remember God, the crowd becomes more and more convinced that they want nothing to do with the things they are saying. As a response, they call for them to be stoned to death. Stoning is a legitimate judicial punishment that an assembly has the authority to exact upon anyone they feel is guilty of a religious crime (e.g., witchcraft, blasphemy, or breaking the Sabbath; Leviticus 20:27, 24:16; Numbers 15:32–36). The people do not believe that Caleb and Joshua are communicating the will of God to them. Rather, they feel they are false witnesses and worthy to be stoned. The congregation allows itself to become convinced that God is in favor of their desire to return to Egypt.

The Children of Israel feel justified in their belief and actions until God's glory appears before them and speaks to Moses. The glory of the Lord is a special manifestation of His presence. The word literally means heaviness or weightiness, as we might talk about a "weighty subject"; however, it is always used in a figurative way to refer to glory, splendor, and majesty. While the word is used to refer to a nation's or a person's glory (Job 19:9; Isaiah 60:13), no human can rival God's glory. His fiery presence overwhelms His priests and prophets (2 Chronicles 7:1–3; Isaiah 6:1–5). Here in the wilderness, God's glory descends and causes the Israelites to cut themselves short of further sin against God and His messengers.



# Daily Bible Readings

## **MONDAY**

Praise the Lord!  
(Psalm 106:1–12, 48)

## **TUESDAY**

Spying Out the Land  
(Numbers 13:17–24)

## **WEDNESDAY**

Reporting Mixed Reviews  
(Numbers 13:30–33)

## **THURSDAY**

Moses Resists God's Proposal  
(Exodus 32:7–14)

## **FRIDAY**

God Decides Who Will Enter Canaan  
(Deuteronomy 1:34–40)

## **SATURDAY**

Moses Intercedes for God's People  
(Numbers 14:13–20)

## **SUNDAY**

Don't Doubt; Trust God's Promises  
(Numbers 13:1–2, 17, 25–28; 14:1–2, 5–10)