

LESSON PLAN. I. The Spies Sent Out. vs. 17-20. II. Encouragements to Faith. vs. 23-27. III. Excuses for Unbelief. vs. 28-33.

I. THE SPIES SENT OUT. 17. Moses sent them—From Deut. 1: 22, it appears that the people demanded that this precautionary measure should be taken. This may have arisen from a lack of faith on their part, but there was no impropriety in the proposal itself. The promise of divine help and the assurance of final victory do not absolve the Israelites, or any one, from acting with due prudence in accordance with their own best judgment. The proposal is sanctioned by God himself, and Moses willingly gives the fullest instructions (Deut. 1: 23). "In one sense there is no need to send spies to report, either upon the fertility of the land, or on the peoples dwelling in it. Yet Divine Providence, on which men rely, does not supersede their prudence and the duty which rests with them of considering the way they go. The destiny of a life or of a nation is to be wrought out in faith; still we are to use all available means in order to ensure success" (Watson). Joshua did the same thing at a later period (Josh. 2: 1). **To spy out the land**—Learn everything about it that would be useful to know for the encouragement and direction of the host. **Southward**—R. V. "by the South." The word for "South" is *Negeb*, "the dry" region. To the Hebrews and the dwellers in the plains of the Tigris and Euphrates all southern countries seemed to be parched and barren. But "the South," pre-eminently, the *Negeb*, was the arid tract south of Hebron and north of Kadesh. Across this the spies were directed to take their course. "The *Negeb* rises in a vast steppe, about eighty miles from south to north, and gradually passes in successive terraces into the hill country of Beersheba, *Jebel Magrah*, is a great plain of fifty or sixty miles from east to west. Over all this region there still are found fertile spots, with grass and water, and signs of ancient populousness and prosperity appear in every direction" (Steel). It was the favorite home of the patriarchs. **The mountain**—R. V. "the mountains." The hilly country afterwards known as the mountains of Judah (Judg. 1: 9, 19). Some understand the term to include the whole country northward.

18. See the land—The general character has been declared already, but the spies were to bring more local and particular descriptions. Commercial intercourse was frequent between Canaan and Egypt, and doubtless Moses himself was well-informed regarding the former home of his ancestors and the promised heritage of his people, but these spies, as independent eyewitnesses, would bring details that would inspire the people with confidence. **The people**—These were nearly all descendants of Canaan. "It is well for those who march under the banners of the Most High to consider carefully what they shall have to encounter; to anticipate the dangers into the midst of which they will be thrown, and take the re-

quisite precautions to meet and overcome them." (Green).

19. What the land is—The attention of the spies is in each verse directed to a different subject of observation. In verse 18 the land is to be viewed mainly with regard to the distribution of the population. In this verse they are directed to note whether its climate is salubrious and its land arable or not, and in the 20th verse, they are to report upon its fertility and products and forests. **What cities**—The Hebrew word includes any collection of dwellings without reference to their permanency or the material of which they are built. **In tents**—The Hebrews dwelt for forty years in a city of tents. The spies were to note whether the land was inhabited by nomadic tribes like those of the desert, or by people protected by fortified positions and walled cities.

20. Fat or lean—fertile or barren (Deut. 8: 7, 8; Neh. 5: 25, 35; Ezek. 20: 6). **Wood**—Palestine was anciently well wooded, but is now entirely denuded of its forests. **Good courage**—The undertaking was perilous. Moses spoke in the same cheering words to Joshua long afterwards (Deut. 31: 6; 7: 23). In doing God's work we ought not to be faint-hearted (Ecc. 9: 10). **The time of the first ripe grapes**—At Hebron this would be in July or August. They had left Sinai early in May (Num. 10: 11), so that nearly three months had passed.

The verses omitted give an account of the routes taken by the spies. Probably they separated into groups of twos and threes, disguising themselves perhaps as Egyptian traders. They did their work thoroughly and without any recorded adventure.

II. ENCOURAGEMENTS TO FAITH. 23. The valley of Eschol (J. V.)—This is believed to be a valley to the north of Hebron, where a fine spring rises among the vineyards. "The walk up this valley" says Canon Tristram, "revealed to us for the first time what Judah was everywhere else in the days of its prosperity. Bare and stony as are the hillsides, not an inch of space is lost. Terraces, where the ground is not too rocky, support the soil. Ancient vineyards cling to the lower slopes; olive, mulberry, almond, fig and pomegranate trees fill every available cranny to the very crest, while the bottom of the valley is carefully tilled for corn, carrots and cauliflower, which will soon give place to melons and cucumbers." **Bare it between two**—To prevent its being injured, for they were several day's march from Kadesh. Clusters of grapes in Palestine often weigh 10 or 12 lbs., with the single grapes as large as a plum. A Syrian vine in England produced a cluster weighing 19 lbs. "The heaviest bunch of black grapes that has ever been recorded weighed 23 lbs. 5 oz.; length 24 in., width across 22 in." (Peloubet). **Pomegranates**