

Numbers 13-14: The People refuse to enter the Promised Land

Number 13:25-33, 14:1-20, 26-36

NLT 2004

Introduction: God had used Moses and Aaron to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and to the land that God had promised to Abraham. The people arrived at the entry to that land and Moses sent 12 men to check out the land. Two of the men who went were Joshua and Caleb.

Numbers 13:25-33

After exploring the land for forty days, the men returned... *and said*, “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. But the people living there are powerful, and their towns are large and fortified. We even saw giants there...”

Caleb *said*, “Let’s go at once to take the land... We can certainly conquer it!”

But the other men who had explored the land with him disagreed... So they spread this bad report about the land among the Israelites: “The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All the people we saw were huge. We even saw giants there... Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that’s what they thought, too!”

Numbers 14:1-4

Then the whole community began weeping aloud, and they cried all night. Their voices rose in a great chorus of protest against Moses and Aaron. “If only we had died in Egypt...” they complained. “Why is *God* taking us to this country only to have us die in battle? Our wives and our little ones will be carried off as plunder! Wouldn’t it be better for us to return to Egypt?”

Numbers 14:5-9

Then Moses and Aaron fell face down on the ground before the whole community of Israel*... Joshua... and Caleb... tore their clothing. They said to all the people of Israel, “The land we traveled through and explored is a wonderful land... It is a rich land flowing with milk and honey. Do not rebel against *God*, and don’t be afraid of the people... They have no protection, but *God* is with us! Don’t be afraid of them!”

Numbers 14:10-13

But the whole community began to talk about stoning Joshua and Caleb. Then the glorious presence of *God* appeared to all the *Descendants of Abraham** at the *Tent of Worship*. And *God* said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? Will they never believe me, even after all the miraculous signs I have done among them? I will disown them and destroy them... Then I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they are!”

Numbers 14:17-20

Then Moses said: “Please, *God*... *forgive** the sins of this people...” Then *God* said, “I will *forgive* them as you have requested.”

Numbers 14:28-34

God said to Moses: “Now tell them this... Because you complained against me, every one of you who is twenty years old or older ... will die. You will not enter and occupy the land I swore to give you. The only exceptions will be Caleb... and Joshua... You said your children would be carried off as plunder. Well, I will bring them safely into the land, and they will enjoy what you have despised... Because your men explored the land for forty days, you must wander in the wilderness for forty years—a year for each day, suffering the consequences of your sins.’ I, *God*, have spoken!”

Why This Story?

These fear stories as a set have been used effectively as part of an orientation course for new field personnel. Fear is a major factor for many people who venture into the unknown to follow God's leading.

Story Crafting

Aaron

If Aaron has not been introduced in your story set, you may want to omit him from this story.

Israelites

You must decide on what term to call the people. See the below note on Descendents of Abraham.

God

We have replaced the references to LORD (Yahweh) with *God*, to avoid confusion. If your audience has a name for God like the descendants of Abraham did (Yahweh, meaning "I am that I am"), you may use it in place of LORD (Yahweh), but be careful that your audience understands that there is only one true God, and that he is the God Moses serves.

Flowing with Milk and Honey

Your people may have another way of saying that the land is rich and will provide all that the people need. This figure of speech may be replaced by a local one that conveys the same meaning.

Tent of Worship

If your people know what the tabernacle was, you may use that word. Otherwise, you need a way to describe its purpose that makes sense to the people.

Wilderness

Depending on your culture and land, you may need to describe the wilderness as a desert place. It is not a jungle.

Grasshoppers

These creatures are edible and would be a small mouthful. Be sure your story illustrates that the people felt very small and insignificant next to the giants.

Words/Phrases to Consider

Please see the master glossary for a full explanation of the following terms.

Israel*

The word Israel has a number of different uses or meanings in the Bible.

1. It may refer to the name that was given to Jacob after he wrestled with the angel.
2. It may refer to the descendents of Jacob.
3. It may refer to the actual land of the Northern Kingdom when David's kingdom was divided into two parts after the death of Solomon.
4. In the New Testament, it refers to the descendents of Judah (Southern Kingdom) or to anyone considered to be an heir to the covenant God made with Abraham. Those who adhered strictly to the religious laws were considered Israelites.
5. It is used as the name for all the land given by God to Abraham and his descendents who were the chosen people. It refers to the land included in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

Today, Israel is the name of the country formed as a homeland for the Jewish people after 1948. For many people, this name is loaded politically and they have difficulty separating the current political meaning from the scriptures. Therefore, you may wish to use another word or term for Israel or Israelites. Some that have been used successfully include:

Promised Land

Northern Kingdom (for Old Testament stories)

The country

The land of the Hebrews

The Hebrews

God's people or God's chosen people

Israelites/Descendants of Abraham*

We've chosen to use this in place of "Israelites," "Jews," and "Hebrews" to show the epic storyline from Abraham. This term helps connect the stories, and helps the audience see that all of these different terms for the Jews really refer to the same people. In addition, it alleviates any prejudices people or cultures might have towards the Jews.

Forgive*

Some languages don't have an adequate word for 'forgive.' If that's the case, understanding what 'forgiveness' means is imperative to translating it correctly. Forgiveness involves two people, one of whom has done something wrong to the other and offended him. The one who was offended sets aside his rights and does not punish the other as he deserves. He does not seek revenge. If the other repents of his behavior and accepts the forgiveness, the relationship between the two is restored and the guilt is removed. With God, forgiveness is available to all and dependent on a penitent heart in that the person stops his actions and turns towards God with an attitude of faith and repentance. This results in a restored relationship between God and man.

Here are some idioms used in the New Testament to describe "forgiveness." Your language may have a similar idiom, and if so, you may use that to create a word picture for your audience.

to wipe away the sins of someone
to lift up the sins of someone
to loose, release
to throw away
to cover over
to pass by
to take away
to turn one's back on

Worldview

Falling face down in front of the people usually means that those who do it are acknowledging a higher authority in order to make a request. The prayer occurs later so it is unclear if this is just showing their obedience to God or if they have started praying at this point. You would want to describe this so that your people understand that they are worshipping God.

Tearing of clothes usually indicates mourning or sadness at a loss. Here it could also indicate a loss of honor.

Intra-Story Cohesion

Use the same words for **descendants of Abraham, forgive, and Israel** that you have been using in other stories.

Story Set Themes

Fear
Honor/Shame
Obedience
Mediator
Relationship
Forgiveness
Victory