

Numbers 13:21-24

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-13/numbers-1321-24/>

Numbers 13:21-24 contains a summary of the activities of the spies in Canaan. They obeyed Moses and spied the wilderness areas as well as places in the hill country. They also brought back a branch containing grapes as Moses requested.

Having received the instructions from Moses, the twelve spies *went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, at Lebo-hamath* (v. 21). The *wilderness of Zin* was a desert-like area between Kadesh and the land of Canaan. It comprised the southernmost part of the Promised Land (see map).

They traveled *as far as Rehob, at Lebo-hamath*. The exact location of *Rehob* is unknown, but the area of *Lebo-hamath* probably was an area north of the Sea of Galilee that included southern Lebanon and parts of Syria as well. It was this that comprised the northernmost extent of the land.

The distance between Kadesh and Rehob was probably around 150 miles (or around 240 km), making the roundtrip distance around 300 miles (or over 480 km). So, the area that the spies explored was quite large.

Their journey began in Kadesh, and the first part of it was *when they had gone up into the Negev* (v. 22). On the north side of the Negev, *they came to Hebron*. Hebron was a large city with impressive fortifications. It is significant that Hebron was mentioned here. It was where Abraham lived (Genesis 13:18), and it was where he received the promise of the land from the LORD (Genesis 13:14 – 18). It is also where he and other patriarchs of Israel were buried. *Hebron* would become an important place during the reign of King David. Hebron is where David was first declared king of Judah (2 Samuel 2:4).

During Moses' day, however, it was *where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak were*. *Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi* were the sons of Anak (Joshua 15:14). These *descendants of Anak* (called Nephilim in v. 33) were a tribe of very tall people that lived in the area around Hebron (Deuteronomy 9:2).

In a parenthetical note, Moses mentioned that *Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt*. *Zoan*, also known as Tanis, was a city in northeast Egypt built by the Hyksos in the Nile Delta. The Hyksos conquered this part of Egypt around 1730 BC. Though seemingly obscure in this context, it does indicate that Hebron was an ancient fortified town that had existed for over three hundred years. It would become the possession of Caleb (Joshua 14:13 – 15), and later David would rule Judah from Hebron (2 Sam. 2:11).

The next place they explored was *the valley of Eshcol* (v. 23), an area north of Hebron and south of Canaan on the west side of the Dead Sea. Apparently, there was a lot of agriculture there,

especially vineyards, because it was *from there* they *cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes*. This was exactly what Moses instructed. The branch was apparently too big for one person to carry, so *they carried it on a pole between two men*. Along with the *single cluster of grapes*, they came back from the journey *with some of the pomegranates and the figs*. These items would have been convincing, tangible proof that the land was very fertile and productive.

Moses then explained that *that place was called the valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the sons of Israel cut down from there* (v. 24). The word *Eshcol* means “cluster” or “bunch” in Hebrew. *Valley* (Heb. “nakhal”) is sometimes translated “wadi” in some English versions. It refers to what can be called a “river valley.”

Biblical Text

²¹ So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, at Lebo-hamath. ²² When they had gone up into the Negev, they came to Hebron where Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmi, the descendants of Anak were. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.)

²³ Then they came to the valley of Eshcol and from there cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes; and they carried it on a pole between two *men*, with some of the pomegranates and the figs. ²⁴ That place was called the valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the sons of Israel cut down from there.