

# Numbers 13:3-16

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-13/numbers-133-16/>

*Numbers 13:3-16 contains a list of the names of the men sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan. The tribe of Levi was exempted from sending a spy, and Joshua was sent instead.*

Moses again obeyed the LORD's command by sending the Israelites *from the wilderness of Paran* (v. 3). As stated in Numbers 12:16, the *wilderness of Paran* was the northern side of Sinai and just south of the land of Canaan. According to verse 26, they were at Kadesh-Barnea, which is in the *wilderness of Paran* just south of the border of Canaan.

This was done *at the command of the Lord*; it was not just Moses' idea.

Moses did not send just anyone into Canaan. Instead, he selected *men who were heads of the sons of Israel*.

Specifically, *these then were their names* (v. 4):

- *From the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur.*
- *From the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori* (v. 5).
- *From the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh* (v. 6).
- *From the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph* (v. 7).
- *From the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun* (v. 8).
- *From the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu* (v. 9).
- *From the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi* (v. 10).
- *From the tribe of Joseph, from the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi* (v. 11).
- *From the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli* (v. 12).
- *From the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael* (v. 13).
- *From the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi* (v. 14).
- *From the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi* (v. 15).

This list of tribes contains the following:

- *Reuben* was listed first because he was the oldest of Jacob's sons.
- Moses changed the name of *Hoshea* to *Joshua* (v. 16).
- *Levi* was omitted because it had been set apart to serve the LORD (Numbers 1:49).
- *Joseph* was included with the reference to the tribe of *Manasseh* in verse 11. This was because *Manasseh* was a son of *Joseph*.
- *Ephraim* was also a son of *Joseph*, but *Joseph* was not mentioned in verse 8.

It is consistent in scripture that there are always twelve tribes, but which tribes are listed varies. Sometimes it is each of the original twelve sons (Genesis 35:22-26). Sometimes, as here,

Ephraim and Manasseh are both counted, and Levi is left off. In Revelation, Dan is left out, and Joseph is included in place of Ephraim, but Manasseh (Joseph's other son) is also included.

Scripture does not explain this pattern, but perhaps it is a part of the scriptural principle of wholeness consisting of many as one, and one as many. This is the case with God, who is One, and three (Deuteronomy 6:4; Genesis 1:26; Matthew 28:19). It is true of marriage, where two become one (Matthew 19:5). It is true of Israel, where twelve tribes make up one nation, and one nation twelve tribes. Perhaps the "floating" extra tribe presages the addition of the nations/Gentiles to be grafted in to the olive tree that is Israel (Genesis 12:3; Romans 11:17).

In summary, *these are the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land* (v. 16). In addition, *Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua*. The two names are similar. *Hoshea* means "salvation" and *Joshua* means "the LORD saves." The reason Moses changed his name is unclear. It could signal the special relationship between the two.

It has been suggested that the name-change was the way Moses ritually adopted Joshua. In the ancient world, it was customary for a superior king to "adopt" an inferior king as a reward for faithful service (for more, [read our Tough Topics Explained article: Suzerain-Vassal Treaties](#) ). God uses this custom to show His extreme pleasure with Jesus for His faithful service (Hebrews 1:5). The Bible indicates that Jesus will share this adoption with believers who are faithful (Hebrews 2:10).

There are some interesting observations that can be made relating to the changing of Joshua's name from Hosea/Hoshea. Hoshea means "Salvation" while Yeho-Shua (Joshua) means "Yahweh is Salvation." Joshua ben (son of) Nun is a messianic type of Jesus. The name "Jesus" is a transliteration of the Hebrew "Joshua."

Hebrews 4:8 says, "For if Joshua [ben Nun] had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that." This could be thought of as another day where another "Joshua" (Jesus) would give them rest. The "rest" in this Hebrews passage refers to the full possession of an inheritance.

Jewish tradition recognizes the prophetic prediction of two messiahs, or "anointed ones." Jesus fulfills the prophetic picture of both. What was not recognized is that one person, Jesus, would satisfy each prophetic prediction, but in two different advents upon earth.

One messiah from Jewish tradition is Messiah son of Joseph, the son of Jacob. Jesus' earthly father (by adoption) was Joseph son of Jacob. This was God's way of telling the Jews, "Here He is!" Messiah son of Joseph fulfills the messianic predictions that depict a suffering servant.

The other messiah from Jewish tradition is Messiah Son of David. This picture satisfies the prophetic images of a Son of David who is a conquering king. Jewish tradition links Joshua and Joseph as both having a special anointing from the following verses:

- of Joshua in Numbers 27:18, "So the LORD said to Moses, 'Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him'" and

- of Joseph in Genesis 41:38 “Then Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?’”

Jesus of course was also anointed, as the Spirit descended on Him in the form of a dove (Luke 3:22).

### **Biblical Text**

<sup>3</sup> So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran at the command of the Lord, all of them men who were heads of the sons of Israel. <sup>4</sup> These then *were* their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur; <sup>5</sup> from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori; <sup>6</sup> from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; <sup>7</sup> from the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph; <sup>8</sup> from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun; <sup>9</sup> from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu; <sup>10</sup> from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi; <sup>11</sup> from the tribe of Joseph, from the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi; <sup>12</sup> from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli; <sup>13</sup> from the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael; <sup>14</sup> from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi; <sup>15</sup> from the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi. <sup>16</sup> These are the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land; but Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua.