

THE TWELVE SPIES

Numbers 13; 14

It is suggested that in all classes the teacher read Exodus 31:1-7, then say that everything was made according to the Lord's directions, and that the tabernacle was finally set up in the midst of the encampment. Then read Exodus 40:33-38. Mention again the contents of the book of Leviticus and the reason for the name of the book of Numbers. Then read Numbers 10:33-36 as the beginning of the further journeyings of the Israelites, and tell the class briefly the story of the almost immediate murmurings and rebellion culminating in the rebellion of Aaron and Miriam. This shows the state of the Israelites at that time, and leads directly into the story of the spies.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord withholds us from temptations which we are not strong enough to meet.

The giants mentioned in the Old Testament were an evil remnant from the Most Ancient Church.

Our greatest enemies are the giants of selfishness and worldliness within our own hearts, which are there by heredity.

Notes for Parents

Before the children of Israel came to Sinai, they were a mere horde of men, women, and children, uprooted from the homes in which they had grown up, and facing a wild and strange life, with no one but Moses to tell them what to do, and no knowledge of the way before them except that they were to follow the pillar of cloud and fire. In the eleven months that they stayed encamped on the plain before Mount Sinai, they were organized into a nation, given laws by which they were to be governed—not only the ten commandments, but also laws for every little thing—provided with

directions for their worship and a place in which to worship, told just how each tribe was to march and how to camp, and provided with a priesthood and with lesser judges to settle all their minor questions. This is a picture of the formation of an orderly life. If we understand our Bibles, we can see in each one of these strange laws something which applies to our spiritual life. The Lord had given the children of Israel everything they needed except the one thing he could not give them—the love of doing right. Isn't this true of us, too? We all have by gift of the Lord the means of knowing what we ought to do from day to day, but each one of us has to choose freely whether he will obey the Lord or not. The Israelites had not gone three days further on their wanderings before they were again murmuring against Moses and complaining of the kind of food given them to eat, and asking to go back to Egypt.

Then after a short time they came in sight of the Holy Land, the land their ancestors had possessed and which they had been promised by the Lord. Heaven is often called the *Promised Land*, and we know that it is where each one of us really belongs; but do we always keep steadily on the way to it? The Israelites were told to send twelve men, one from each tribe, to spy out the land and bring them back a report of it. That is just what we do when we think about heaven and try to find out what it is like. And the report is always that it is a beautiful land, a land “flowing with milk and honey.” We are even allowed to taste little bits of heaven once in a while in our lives. But we also see the false ways of thinking we shall have to overcome, like the walled cities, and the giants of selfishness in our hearts which will stand in our way. So often, just like the Israelites, we say, “Oh, I never could really be good—it would be too hard work. I'll wait until some time when it looks easier.” And, like the Israelites, we have to wander in the wilderness until all those weak, cowardly feelings and thoughts in us die out. We forget that the Lord will always help us if we really try. Now that the children have had this lesson, you can remind them of it whenever they complain that their lessons are too hard or that they are not able to do the things you ask them to help

you with at home. Children need this lesson, but so do all of us.

Primary

The story of the spies is not hard to tell. The children will be interested in the fruits which they brought back and in the fact that they saw some giants in the land. Stress the fact that the Lord would have helped them if they had not been afraid to try to conquer the land. Discuss the point that the Lord cannot help us to do what we ought to do unless we are willing to try. Nothing good is ever accomplished if we think we can't do it. This applies to lessons in school, tasks at home, and to the overcoming of our faults as well.

The children of Israel stayed nearly a year at Mount Sinai. Then the pillar of cloud and fire led them on through the wilderness.

From there they were led to camp at a place called Kadesh.

Kadesh was close to the border of the Holy Land.

What did the Lord tell Moses to do?

How many were chosen to spy out the land?

How long were they gone?

What did they bring back?

Did they say the land was a good land?

What did they find there that was not good?

Which of the spies differed from all the others?

What did these two advise?

What did the others say?

But the people would not listen to Joshua and Caleb, and even tried to stone them. They believed the ten cowardly spies, and rebelled against Moses, and talked of going back to Egypt. So the Lord said that they should never enter the Holy Land. Only their children, the ones under twenty at the time of our lesson, who were not old enough to have a voice in the people's decision, and Joshua and Caleb would be allowed to enter the land.

What punishment came to the ten cowardly spies?

What was the people's punishment?

What reward was promised for Joshua and Caleb?

Junior

With this class review the wilderness journey by the use of a map. Be sure

they get the general features of the journey clearly in mind, as well as the reason why they had to wander so long before they were ready to enter the Holy Land. Remind them that they could travel only when the pillar of cloud and fire was moving before them, and had to stop whenever it stopped. This class can easily see the general correspondence of the lesson.

In addition to the detailed instructions for building the tabernacle which the Lord gave to Moses in Mount Sinai, the Lord filled two men (Bezaleel and Aholiab) with wisdom and skill in workmanship, so that they would know just how to make the ark and the tabernacle. Read Exodus 35:30-35.

After the ark and the tabernacle had been made, the pillar of cloud led the people to a place called *Kadesh* near the northern edge of the wilderness. Here they were close to the southern border of the Promised Land, and at the Lord's command they sent spies to explore it and bring back a report of it.

How many spies were there?

How long were they gone?

What did they bring back?

The spies all agreed that the land of Canaan was a good land, “a land flowing with milk and honey.” Yet they were not in agreement as to their advice.

Which two differed from the others?

What did these two advise?

Why did they think the people would be strong enough to overcome the giants and the great walled cities?

Whose advice did the children of Israel follow?

What was their punishment?

What happened to the ten cowardly spies?

What was the reward of Joshua and Caleb?

The journey which the children of Israel were making is a picture of the journey each one of us is making when we decide that we want to serve the Lord instead of ourselves. The land of Canaan—the “Promised Land”—is a picture of heaven or of the heavenly character we must have if we are to enjoy living in heaven when we die. Do we always move straight ahead toward this kind

of character? No, we often act selfishly and weakly, and delay our progress.

The Israelites of old were very much like we are today. They murmured against Moses because they had no meat to eat, and wanted to go back to the flesh-pots of Egypt. They were not satisfied with the manna which the Lord gave them every day. The Lord satisfied their craving by sending quails again, but with them came a plague which killed many of those who had complained. At another time Aaron and Miriam, the brother and sister of Moses, became jealous of him and talked against him. Miriam was punished by becoming a leper, until Moses prayed to the Lord to heal her. We have to recognize the bad things in our characters and acknowledge them before we can make any real progress toward heaven.

The Lord wants us to choose the right way freely. He never asks us to go ahead blindly. So He commanded the children of Israel to send spies to bring a report of the Holy Land. They brought back wonderful reports of the land itself, but also frightening reports of its inhabitants. We can all see that heaven is a beautiful place where we should like to be. But we must also know that it is not easy to attain. There are giants in ourselves—love of having our own way, greediness, envy of those who have more than we have, laziness—which must be overcome before we can enjoy heaven. And there are walled cities—all the arguments which support and excuse our wrong desires. We cannot overcome these by ourselves, but the Lord can give us victory if we go forward trusting in Him.

Intermediate

The need of going forward courageously in the overcoming of our weaknesses and temptations is important for children of this age. They are willing enough to make great efforts in games and skills, but inclined to think their studies and their home chores too hard. We can do nothing unless we try. The correspondence of the fruits, of the walled cities, and of the giants should be discussed.

When the ark was actually made and placed in the finished taber-

nacle, the pillar of cloud and fire “rested” on the tabernacle. Aaron and his sons had been consecrated to the service of the tabernacle, and the people could begin to observe all the laws which had been given to them. These laws are recorded in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. Then Moses was told by the Lord to number the people. This numbering or census is the first thing recorded in the book of Numbers, and gives the book its name. After the numbering, each tribe brought an offering of silver according to its numbers. Moses was also told to make two trumpets of silver which were to be used to call the people together and to start them on the march. In Numbers 10:11-12 we are told: “And it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of the testimony. And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai: and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran.”

Do you think that the children of Israel now went forward bravely and cheerfully? On the contrary: within a very few days they were complaining again and had to be punished to bring them to their senses. We read in chapter 11:4-6: “And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.” The rest of the chapter tells what came of their complaining, and chapter 12 tells how even Aaron and Miriam rebelled against Moses; and the Lord, in order to show the people their true leader, struck Miriam with leprosy and then cured her at Moses’ request.

Then comes our lesson for today. The people reached a place called *Kadesh*, not far from the border of the Holy Land. When they camped here, the Lord told Moses to choose a man from each of the twelve tribes, and send the twelve to spy out the Holy Land to “see the land what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein,

whether they be strong or weak, few or many; and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents or in strongholds; and what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein or not.” And they were to bring back some of the fruit of the land.

This, too, is a picture of something that happens to us. However clearly the Lord shows us what we ought to do, our natural selfishness always hesitates and rebels. We can look back afterward and wonder how we could have been so foolish, but at the time, all we see is that we are not having just what we want at the moment. And we have to be reassured as to whether the heavenly life is really as happy a life as the Lord tells us it is. Our thoughts spy it out, just as the twelve chosen men did. And they bring back the same kind of report. They all recognize that the Holy Land is a beautiful country. And the Lord even permits us to taste the fruit of the land. When we have really done something good without thinking about ourselves at all, don't we usually feel very happy and lighthearted for a while? This is the taste of the fruit of heavenly living. It is said of the spies, “And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs.” They all called it a “land flowing with milk and honey.” Milk represents the truth in which there is goodness; and honey, the happiness which comes from such truth.

But our thoughts, like the spies, also bring back word that there are many enemies in the land, and strong walled cities, and even giants. When we think of really living a heavenly life, we immediately begin to see all our faults which we shall have to fight, the wrong ideas we shall have to correct, and the natural, selfish desires deep down in our hearts which will rise up like giants in our way. We should know that the giants mentioned several times in the Old Testament were an evil remnant of the Most Ancient Church and picture our deep inherited selfishness. The children of Israel were

not particularly brave people. We, too, sometimes forget that the Lord has promised to help us, even though there is always something in us to remind us of this fact, just as Joshua and Caleb reminded the Israelites that “if the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land.” We draw back sometimes, just at the time when a little more effort would have given us the victory.

What happens to most of us is just what happened to the children of Israel. It takes a long, long time to get rid of our faults. Deuteronomy 2:14 tells us that it was thirty-eight years after the time of our lesson that the Israelites finally reached the point when all the men who had a part in the decision of our lesson—“all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me”—had died. All our weak, selfish thoughts and feelings must be given up before we can really enter the Holy Land. Those who were under twenty years of age at the time were not held responsible. They represent the new and more trusting thoughts which are gradually being developed in our minds as we learn more and more of the Lord’s care and protection over us. They were the ones who entered the Holy Land under Joshua. Joshua and Caleb were the only ones of the older generation still living to see that day. Caleb represents the things in us which are fit for heaven, and Joshua—who was to be their leader after Moses—represents the truth fighting. We shall soon learn more about him.

Basic Correspondences

- milk = truth in which there is goodness
- honey = the happiness which comes from goodness and truth



Senior

A good discussion topic for this class is the origin and correspondence of the giants in the land, and also the mention of the walled cities in the same connection. Point out that our deep-seated selfishness always tries to justify itself and so builds up systems of falsity. It also turns truth into falsity.

The book of Numbers takes its name from the fact that the first incident recorded in it is the numbering or census of the people by Moses at the command of the Lord. We saw in our lesson on the Garden of Eden that to “name” a thing represented judging its quality. Swedenborg says that to “number” is always predicated of truth. So it was fitting that after all the laws had been given to the Israelites at Sinai, they should be numbered—that is, examined as to their possession of truths. The numbering was carried out by tribes, only the men fit for war being numbered; and afterward an offering of silver was brought by the heads of the tribes. This was in accordance with the law given in Exodus 30:12-13, which means that we are not to count up our knowledge and understanding without recognizing that we owe all we have to the Lord. In the Gospels we read, “Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?” (Luke 14:28) That the mere giving of the laws did not make over the children of Israel was evidenced by the fact that at their first camping place, three days’ journey from Sinai, it is recorded that they murmured again and were punished, and a little later even Aaron and Miriam rebelled against Moses and had to be taught a lesson of obedience all over again. It is after these incidents that they were led to camp at Kadesh, near the border of the Holy Land, and Moses was commanded to send out twelve spies to look through the Holy Land and bring back a report of it.

The story of the spies is a searching one in a very real sense. If the people had been willing to believe and trust the Lord, they might have entered the Holy Land at once and possessed it, but the Lord knows that trust and obedience are developed only through long experience: “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isaiah 28:10). So it is always provided that we have opportunities to “search” the land before we try to enter it. We must see clearly the enemies which are in the land (the faults in ourselves which we will have to overcome) and we must also see clearly the advantages of heavenly living (we must have a taste of

the fruits). Conquering our external bad habits is like overcoming the enemies in the wilderness, but the real work comes when we face the evils which lie deep within ourselves.

Our perceptions, like the spies, go on ahead of us to search the land. They bring back the report that it is a good land, a land “flowing with milk and honey,” rich in spiritual instruction and the happiness which goes with it. They bring back one enormous bunch of grapes—one experience, perhaps, of what it means to be genuinely good—and also pomegranates and figs—knowledge of good and truth, and experiences of natural goodness. But they show us that we have to live in a world full of strongly entrenched false ideas (walled cities) and even that we shall have to overcome the giants of self-love and self-intelligence.

Then comes the choice. All that is good and wise in us, like Caleb and Joshua, prompts us to trust the Lord and go forward. But our baser impulses say, “I am not strong enough; I was born as I am: I cannot change; I would rather go back to Egypt.” Read carefully verses 1 to 10 of chapter 14. The arguments with which we try to quiet the voice of conscience are the stones the congregation wanted to throw at Caleb and Joshua. Remember this when you are tempted to put off the effort to live a really good life. Every time we put it off, the journey becomes longer and harder.

What was true of the Israelites is true of us: We cannot enter the Holy Land until all our weak, cowardly, selfish thoughts have been put away. And when the Lord sees that we are not strong enough to do this, He makes us wait. We cannot rush ahead in our own strength, as some of the Israelites tried to do when they realized what was before them. If we are not willing to obey the Lord, the first enemy we meet will overcome us. But if we follow the pillar of cloud and fire patiently, the time will come when we find that all our foolish thoughts have one by one been left behind us.

Adult

The general lesson here is the reason for our slow progress in spiritual living.

To the end of our lives we have the tendency to say, “I can’t help it; I was born that way,” to see the beauty of the truly heavenly life but to balk at the effort necessary to attain it. Point out that we always lose when we put off the all-out effort. The topic suggested in the Adult notes is also a fruitful one: “What is the difference between the Church Universal and the Church Specific, and what is the function of the organized New Church in the world today?” Read *Heaven and Hell*, n. 308.

The book of Exodus ends with the setting up of the tabernacle and the descent of the pillar of cloud upon it. The book of Leviticus, with the exception of the account of the consecration of Aaron and his sons in chapters 8 and 9 and the brief incident of Nadab and Abihu in chapter 10:1-7, is entirely given over to laws of all kinds. With the book of Numbers the journey of the Israelites continues. The book takes its name from its first incident, the “numbering” or census of the people by Moses at the command of the Lord; but the name is also descriptive of the character of the book, since “numbering” is predicated of truth and the rest of the book of Numbers describes the testing of the Israelites as to their willingness to follow the truth which had been revealed to them. In our lives it pictures this same period of testing. In the New Church we are brought up to recognize the Word as our book of life. Theoretically we accept this fact. But we do not really “know” any truth until we have learned to practice it and proved it in practice. This is where our real testing begins.

When the cloud was lifted from the tabernacle, the Israelites resumed their march, and we read that after only three days’ journey the people began to complain again. Note that this is the same period as the three days’ march into the wilderness in the first place. The three days picture fullness of experience on the three planes of life: will, thought, and act. As soon as we bring new truth down into the plane of act, we meet temptation. This time the temptation reached even the higher thought and affection: Aaron and Miriam. We may remember the words of the serpent in the Garden of Eden: “Ye shall not surely die” if one ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree. We look about us and see people apparently blessed and happy who are not concerned about obedience

to the commandments or worship of the Lord. In chapter 12 it is said that Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because he had married an Ethiopian* woman. What they said was: “Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?” Ethiopia in a good sense represents interior knowledges of the Word. So this rebellion pictures unwillingness to look to the Word alone for leadership. Miriam’s leprosy is a clear picture of the hypocrisy involved in such apparent liberalism or “broad-mindedness.”

Finally—not long after this rebellion—the people arrived at Kadesh-barnea near the border of the Holy Land. The place has been almost certainly identified. It is only about forty miles south of Beersheba. In Numbers it is said that the Lord told Moses to send out twelve spies. The account of the same incident in Deuteronomy 1:19-46 says that the people asked that the spies be sent. Both are true. Our natural desire, before we embark on a new venture, is to look ahead and count the cost (Luke 14:28-32), and the Lord also wishes us to do so. But the Lord sees to it that in addition to our natural selfish affections and thoughts we have in us some good and true affections and thoughts represented by Joshua and Caleb. The perceptions which spring from our selfishness see the good qualities of the heavenly life—any rational person, as Swedenborg points out, can see the value of honesty and uprightness in moral and civil matters—but when it comes to a question of attempting the spiritual conquest which would give eternal value to these external virtues, they see only the difficulties in the way. They say, “Is it not enough to be a good moral person and a good citizen? No one can hope to stand against the world or to change his inherited nature.” Walled cities represent false systems of thought which have been developed in defense of selfishness, and giants stand for that deep-seated selfishness itself. The giants, we are told, were evil remnants left over from the Most Ancient Church. Selfishness is always the power behind false reasoning. This is again

*Or Cushite (from Cush, son of Ham). —Ed.

illustrated by the fact that in the time of David, the Philistines—who represent an interest in the truth without a desire to live according to it—sent out one of these atavistic giants as their champion. The arguments stirred up in our minds by evil spirits in our times of temptation always rely on our inherent selfishness as their strongest ally. These arguments are also pictured by the stones with which the people sought to destroy Caleb and Joshua.

When the people realized that because of their cowardly choice they would not be allowed to enter the land but would die in the wilderness, some of them sought to rush forward in spite of the divine prohibition and were overcome by the Amalekites. This is a picture of trying to accomplish by one's own power something which only obedience to the Lord can attain. Such an attempt is ended by the first discouragement. We recall that the Amalekites picture the discouragement which results from distrust of the Lord—they attacked from ambush and chose the stragglers and the weary as their victims (Deuteronomy 25:17-18; Samuel 15:2). We can accomplish nothing spiritually in our own power alone.

The punishment of the people for refusing to take the advice of Caleb and Joshua seems severe. Does it mean that one wrong choice will cut a person off from the possibility of entering heaven? Certainly not. All the Israelites of our story represent things within each of us. Caleb and Joshua are there as the promptings of our higher nature. The children—those under twenty years—are there as the possibilities in us which are undeveloped at the time of any given choice. Moses is there as the principle of obedience to the commandments, which continues to lead us toward the Holy Land. The people who were refused admittance to the Holy Land as a result of their choice are all those thoughts and affections in us which lean toward self and refuse to obey the Lord. They must die one by one in the wilderness. Even Moses, although he was allowed to see the Holy Land from the height of Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 34:1-4), was not allowed to enter it. We may read the story of the reason for this in Numbers 20:1-13. Literally, Moses at one time exalted himself instead of the Lord in his dealings with the

people and so was refused admission to the Holy Land. Spiritually, Moses in us represents obedience to the commandments from a sense of duty, and this often has in it something of self-praise. We do not actually enter the Holy Land until external obedience to the commandments has become a habit of which we no longer think with pride.

In Deuteronomy 2:14 we read that thirty-eight years passed after the first sojourn in Kadesh-barnea before the children of Israel were again brought to the border of the Holy Land prepared to enter it. It sometimes seems to us that we shall never reach the free and happy state which is promised to those who patiently seek to obey. The Lord alone sees the heart and knows when we are ready. We are told that He never allows us to be tempted beyond our strength to resist, if we will, and that He withholds temptations altogether from those who are not willing to attempt the conquest. Our spiritual strength is developed and tested little by little. If we can believe that the Lord is leading us, and if we can look upon every such testing as an opportunity for spiritual development, our progress will be much more rapid and easy. The constant murmurings and complaints of the children of Israel in the wilderness are recorded in the Word to show us in concrete form the folly of our own discontents and rebellions. And the patience of the Lord through all their weaknesses should help us to see and acknowledge His patience with us.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 1717: "He who supposes that the external man can be reduced into correspondence without combats and temptations is mistaken; for temptations are the means of dissipating evils and falsities, as also of introducing goods and truths, and of reducing the things which are of the external man into obedience, so that it may serve the interior or rational man, and through this the internal, that is, the Lord operating through the internal man. That these things are effected by temptations, no one can know but he who has been regenerated through temptations. But how this is done can scarcely be described even in the most general manner, since it is done without the man's knowing whence and how; for it is the Lord's Divine operation."

Arcana Coelestia, n. 1740: “That evils and falsities are conquered by the combats of temptations, and that goods and truths are thereby put on, comes from the fact that evils and falsities are thus dissipated; and when these have been dissipated goods and truths succeed in their place; and these are afterwards confirmed more and more, and are thus strengthened. For it is by evil spirits that evils and falsities are excited; and unless they are excited, the man scarcely knows that they are evils and falsities; but when excited they are manifest. And the longer the combats of temptations last, the more manifest do the evils and falsities become, until at last they are held in abhorrence.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. When the Israelites left Sinai, to what place did they come which was near the Holy Land? *Kadesh*
- J. Whom did they send out from there? *twelve spies*
- P. What did the spies bring back from the Holy Land? *grapes, pomegranates, figs*
- P. What did they report about the land? *land of milk and honey*
- J. What did ten of the spies advise? *people too strong for us*
- J. What two men reminded the people that the Lord would help them? *Caleb and Joshua*
- P. Whose advice did the people take? *that of ten cowards*
- J. What was their punishment? *forty yeárs wandering*
- P. Who were to be allowed to enter the Holy Land? *those then under twenty, Caleb and Joshua*
- J. What happened to the ten spies who gave the bad advice? *died of plague*
- J. How much longer did the people wander in the wilderness? *approx. 38 years*
- I. What does the Holy Land picture? *heaven, or the regenerate life*
- S. What is the meaning of the story of the spies? *our desire to be reassured that the heavenly way of life is really happy and worthwhile*