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LESSON

Twelve Spies

Bible Passage – Numbers 13:1—14:45

The Israelites followed the pillar of cloud from Hazeroth northward through the Wilderness of Paran, which covers a large part of the area above the eastern Sinai Peninsula. At last they came to an oasis called Kadesh-barnea (kō' dish bär' nē ə), near the southern border of Canaan. The people camped at Kadesh-barnea, for there were many springs of water and much grass for their flocks and herds.

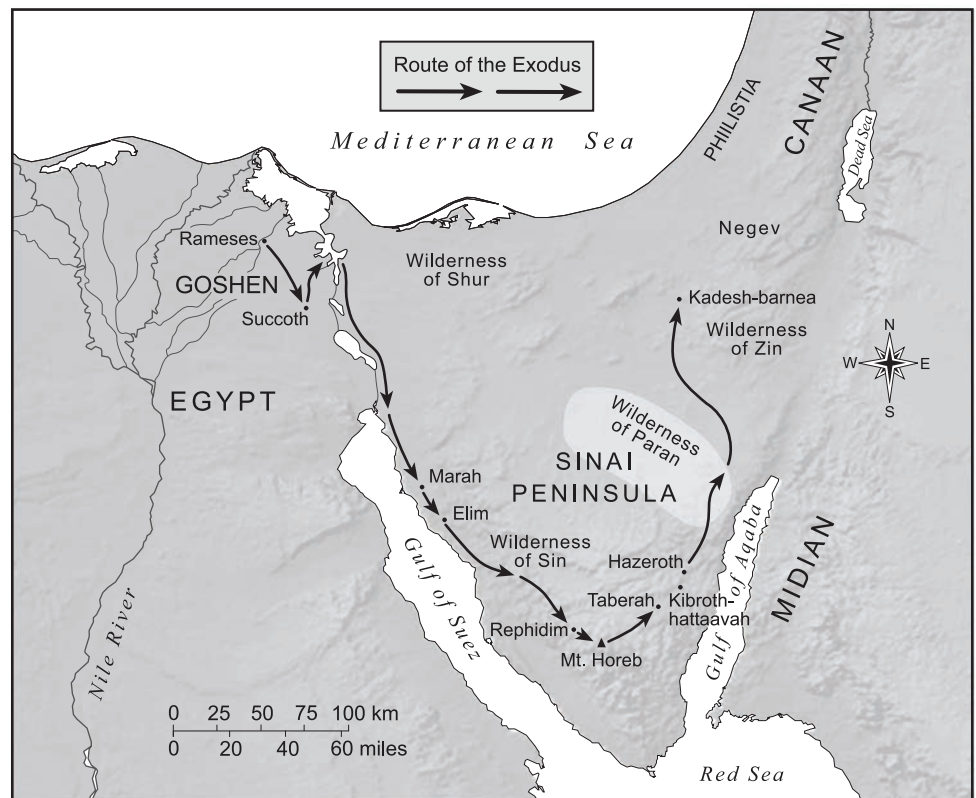
The Israelites were very near Canaan. The time had come for them to enter their new land. But they knew nothing about this new land. Was the soil good? What kind of crops

grew there? Were there forests? Were the people who lived there strong or weak? Were there many or just a few? Did they live in walled cities protecting them from enemies, or in small villages?

God told Moses, “Choose twelve men—one from each tribe—to go into the land of Canaan. Let them search the whole land and then return to report what they have seen.”

Moses chose men who were leaders of their tribes. One of these spies was Joshua, Moses' assistant. Another was Caleb, from the tribe of Judah.

The twelve men set out for Canaan. They walked north through the Negev. Once in Canaan, they crossed hills, forded streams, and passed fields and vineyards. They skirted large walled cities and examined the land from south to north and back again. It was a beautiful land! Along the way, the men gathered pomegranates and figs. They cut a large cluster of grapes and hung it upon a pole,



which two men carried between them. The people of Israel would enjoy plenty of delicious foods in such a rich land!

After forty days, the spies returned to Kadesh-barnea. They went to Moses and Aaron and described Canaan. Everyone gathered to hear the spies' report. "It is a country of plenty," they said, "a land flowing with milk and honey. Here is some of its fruit." Never before had the Israelites seen such fruit!

"But the people who live there are strong," the spies continued. "They live in cities surrounded by great walls."

All but two of the spies were dismayed at seeing these huge walled cities. "We will never be able to conquer those people; they are too strong. The people are giants. They are so tall, we felt like grasshoppers beside them."

Caleb, a brave spy, spoke up, "The land is a good land, well worth fighting for. We do not need to be afraid, for God is on our side. He will help us defeat those people."

"There is no use trying to enter the country," the fearful spies said. "We can never defeat those people."

The faithless spies' discouraging report frightened the Israelites. They did not dare to enter Canaan. They forgot that God had defeated Pharaoh for them. They forgot He had defeated the Amalekites, and provided Israel with water and food. They forgot He dwelt among them in the tabernacle. They forgot again to trust Him.

The people were so fearful they could not

sleep. All night they cried and complained. The next morning, they began to blame Moses and Aaron for bringing them out of Egypt to this place. "Let's go back to Egypt!" they cried. "We will choose another leader to replace Moses!"

Moses and Aaron were very sad. They bowed with their faces to the ground in front of Israel. Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes as a sign of their great sorrow.

"Canaan is a wonderful land. Why should we be afraid when the LORD is with us?" Joshua and Caleb pleaded with the people. "Please, don't rebel against the LORD. The people who live in that land will be defenseless; we can easily conquer them if the LORD is with us."



Library of Congress/Maison Collection

A section of an ancient Canaanite wall

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The angry people threatened to stone Joshua and Caleb. Suddenly the glory of the LORD shone from the tabernacle. Everyone's attention turned to the bright light.

"How long will these people scorn Me?" the LORD said to Moses. "Look at the miracles I have shown them. Why do they not trust Me? They will no longer be My people. I am going to destroy them. I will make your descendants a great nation and give them the land."

But Moses pleaded with the LORD to have mercy on the Israelites and to forgive them. And the LORD listened to Moses' prayer. He forgave the children of Israel. However, the LORD knew that the people did not trust Him. He knew they could not take the land from the Canaanites until they trusted Him.

So He told Moses, "None of the Israelites who have murmured against Me will enter the land that I promised them. Only Joshua and Caleb, who have been faithful to Me, will enter the promised land. All the people twenty years old and above will die in the desert. Their children, when they are grown,

will enter Canaan and possess it. Tomorrow you must turn back to live in the wilderness. There you will wander for forty years—one year for each day the spies spent in Canaan."

When the people heard God's words, they were very sorry. They changed their minds. "We have sinned," they said. "We will go into the land which God has promised us." They began to talk about marching into Canaan.

"Don't go," Moses warned. "Because you have not obeyed God, He will not be with you. You must do as He has commanded."

The people did not heed Moses' warning. A mob of men rushed forward to take the land. They were confused, without a leader, and without instructions. Most importantly, they were without God's presence. The Amalekites and Canaanites were lying in wait and attacked the Israelites. The battle did not last long, for the Israelites were quickly driven back; some were killed. They had not obeyed God, and He did not help them.

Discouraged and defeated, the Israelites at last moved back to the Wilderness of Paran.

THOSE CURIOUS CUSTOMS

❶ In Moses' day, massive walls surrounded the large cities of Canaan. The picture shows the thickness of a small wall. Two thick walls ringed some cities.

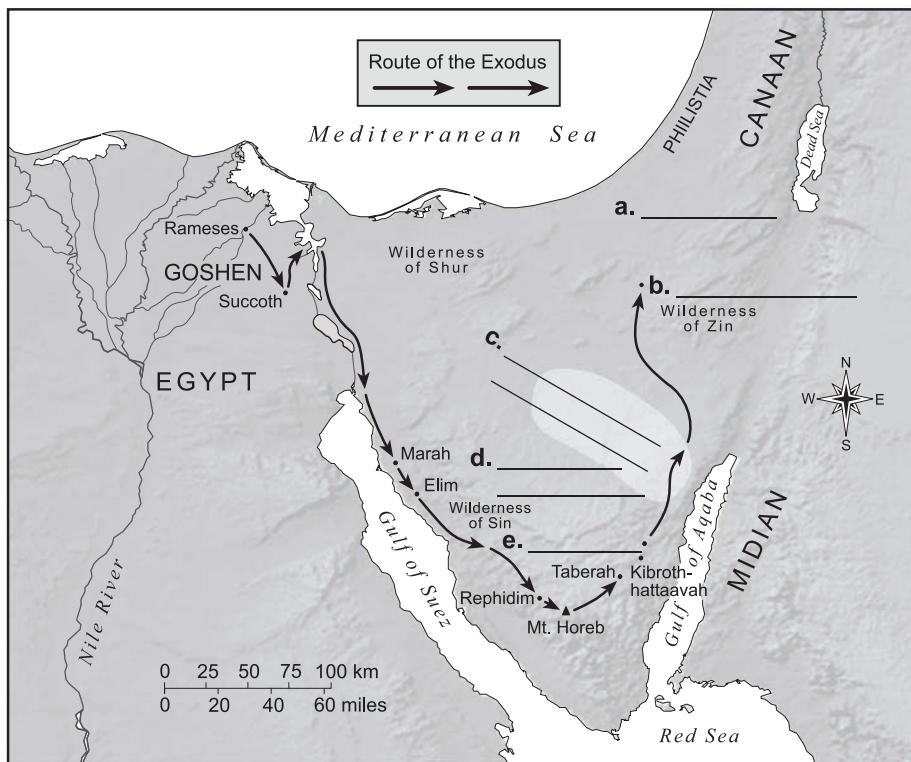
1. What caused the men of Israel to be afraid to enter Canaan? _____

2. How did Joshua and Caleb show their sorrow over the fearful Israelites' actions? _____

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Label the locations.

- 3. Negev
- 4. Sinai Peninsula
- 5. Hazeroth
- 6. a. The wilderness that covers the area north of the eastern Sinai Peninsula
- b. Write its name:



7. Kadesh-barnea

8. Why did the Israelites camp at Kadesh-barnea?

KNOW YOUR BIBLE

- 9. Why did Moses send spies into Canaan?
 - a. They were to find the best route for conquering the land.
 - b. The Israelites knew nothing about the land.
 - c. Moses wanted the spies to bring food from the land.
 - d. The people wanted to know how tall the Canaanites were.
- 10. Why was the number of spies twelve?
- 11. What did the spies bring back that showed how rich the land of Canaan was?
- 12. Why did Caleb think the Israelites did not need to be afraid of the people in Canaan?

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TAKE IT TO HEART

- 13. Why did the Israelites have to turn back and live in the wilderness? _____

- 14. What happened to the Israelites who tried to take the land of Canaan? _____

LOOKING BACK

- 15. What did a wind from the sea bring to Israel at the graves of lust? _____
- 16. Which Bible book is named after the counting of the people of Israel? _____
- 17. What does the Book of Leviticus describe? _____
- 18. What story does the Bible book called Exodus tell? _____

- 19. What journey does the Bible book called Numbers describe? _____

- 20. Which Bible book is called "In the Wilderness" in Hebrew? _____
- 21. What three things did God want to accomplish by disciplining Israel?
 - a. _____

 - b. _____

 - c. _____

- 22. What did Miriam and Aaron do because they envied Moses? _____

- 23. Who was the meekest man in Israel? _____
- 24. For whom does a prophet speak? _____
- 25. To whom does a prophet speak? _____
- 26. What is lust? _____



8

LESSON

Forty Desert Years

Bible Passage – Numbers 20:1–29

The Israelites had been close to entering the promised land. But because they did not trust God, He sent them back into the Wilderness of Paran. There they wandered from place to place for forty years. The Bible does not tell us much about what happened to the Israelites during the years they wandered in the desert. We know that God took care of His people and continued to provide manna for them as they waited for Him to lead them to Canaan. We also know that through forty long years of tramping through rocky deserts, the Israelites' shoes and clothes did not wear out!

One by one the people who had complained died. Their children grew up.

At the beginning of the final year of wandering, the Israelites returned to Kadesh-barnea on the border of the Wilderness of Zin, the desert region south of Canaan and west of Edom. The Wilderness of Zin was a northern arm of the Wilderness of Paran.

While Israel was camped at Kadesh-barnea, Moses' sister Miriam died and was buried. Also at Kadesh-barnea, the people complained—again. When the Israelites last camped at Kadesh-barnea, they had found plenty of water. But this time they found none. Perhaps the oases from which they had

drawn water before were now dried up. Instead of asking Moses and Aaron to ask God for water, the people complained against Moses. This group was as bad as their parents had been. “Why did you bring us into this desert to die? Why didn't you let us stay in Egypt?” the people grumbled. “There is nothing here, no water or grain or fruit.”

Moses and Aaron went to the door of the tabernacle, where they bowed down to the LORD. The glory of the LORD came to them. The LORD said to Moses, “Take your rod. With Aaron, lead the people out to the rock that I will show to you. While all the people watch, I want you to speak to the rock. I will provide water—enough water for all the people and their animals.”

Moses and Aaron took the people out to the rock. Moses stood by the rock, the rod in his hand. But Moses did not do what the LORD had told him to do. Maybe the people were still complaining, but Moses acted in anger. “Hear now, you rebels,” Moses said, “must we get water out of this rock for you?”

Raising his rod, Moses hit the rock with it. Then again, he struck the rock. At the second blow, water gushed out of the rock, just as several years earlier water had rushed out of a rock near Mount Sinai. Once again, the

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LORD had provided plenty of water for His people and their livestock.

But the LORD was angry with Moses and Aaron, for they had not obeyed the LORD's command. He said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me and obey Me, neither of you will enter the promised land."

Their disobedience had cost Moses and Aaron the privilege of entering the land of promise. Afterward, this place was called *Meribah* (mer' i bö), which means "strife."

East of Kadesh-barnea lay Edom, the rugged, mountainous land south of the Dead Sea. Edom stretched from the Zered Brook south toward the land of Midian. A range of mountains within Edom was called Mount Seir (sē ər).

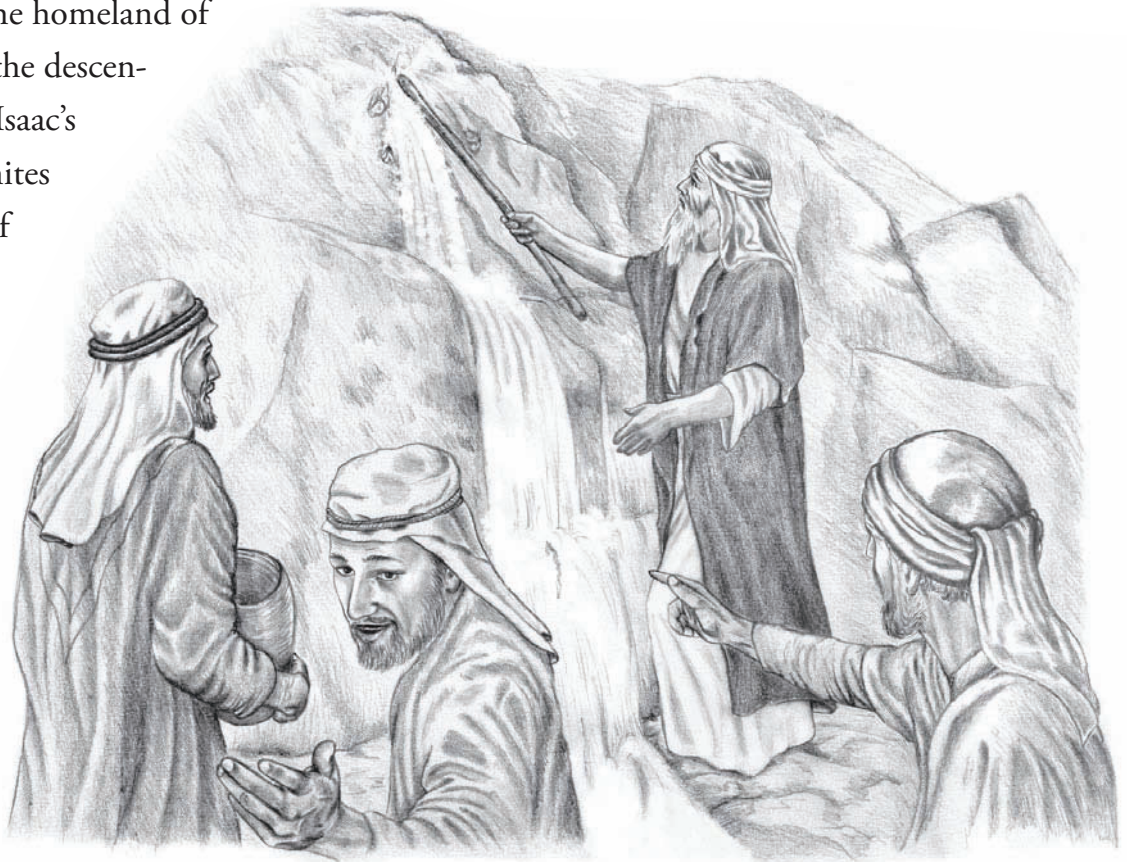
Edom was the homeland of the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, Isaac's son. The Edomites were relatives of the Israelites, Isaac's descendants through Jacob.

Moses wanted to lead the Israelites through Edom on their way to Canaan because it was the most direct route. He sent a message to the king of Edom, reminding him of their kinship and asking permission to pass through his country.

The king of Edom refused. "You may not pass through my country," he replied. "If you do, my army will come out to fight you."

The Israelites would have to travel around Edom. After leaving Kadesh-barnea, the Israelites came to Mount Hor, near the border of Edom. While they camped there, the LORD told Moses and Aaron that the time had come for Aaron to die.

"Take Aaron and Eleazar, Aaron's son, up on the mountain," the LORD said. "Take off



Aaron's priestly clothes and put them on Eleazar." Eleazar would take his father's place as high priest, just as the LORD had ordered in His Law.

The three men climbed Mount Hor. When they reached the top, Moses removed the high priest's robes from Aaron. Moses placed them on Eleazar. And there, on top of the mountain, Aaron died at the age of one hundred twenty-three years. Moses and Eleazar buried

Aaron's body, and then they returned to the camp.

When the people saw that only Moses and Eleazar had come back, they realized that Aaron had died. They saw Eleazar wearing the high priest's robes and understood that God had chosen Eleazar to take Aaron's place as high priest. For thirty days, the whole nation of Israel mourned Aaron's death at Mount Hor.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

- ① Several nations lay on the east side of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea: Edom, Midian, Moab, Ammon, and the Amorite nation. Edom and Midian were descendants of Abraham. Moab and Ammon were descendants of Lot. Only the Amorites were not directly related to the people of Israel. All of these peoples spoke languages similar to Hebrew. They could converse easily with the Israelites.

Edom is the first of these nations you will learn about. Esau had traveled east from Isaac and Rebekah's home in Beersheba. He had settled the region south of the Dead Sea. God gave this land to Esau's descendants—the Edomites—as a homeland.

For hundreds of years, the Edomites carried Esau's grudge against Jacob. Eventually, when the Babylonians conquered Israel in 587 B.C., the Edomites helped the Babylonians and then took some of southern Israel for themselves. Even so, God forbade His people to hate their Edomite brothers, and He allowed any Edomite who so wished to become a part of His people (see Deuteronomy 23:7-8).



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Do these exercises.

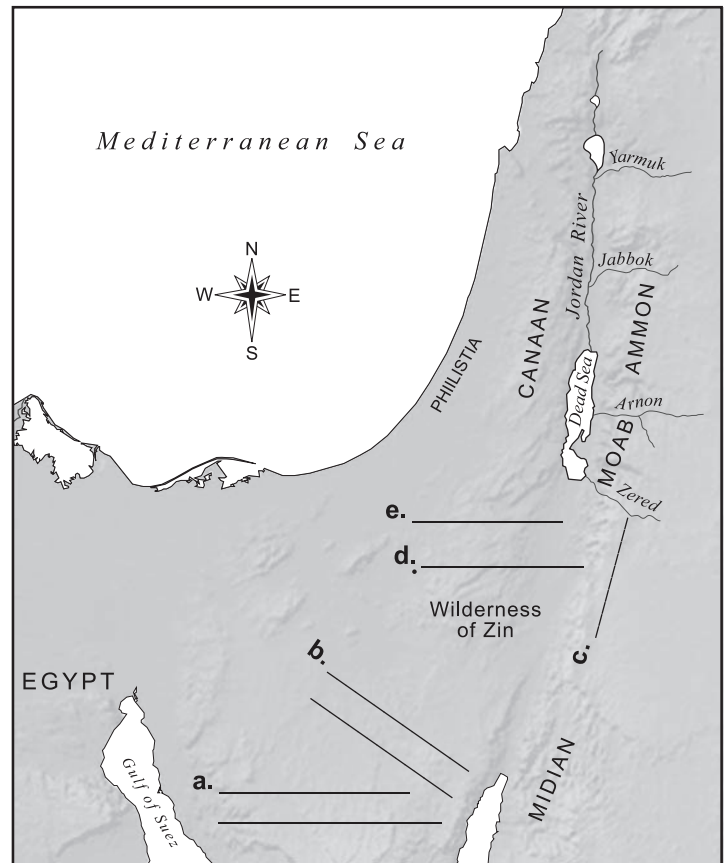
1. Name a later event in Israel's history that showed that the Edomites continued to carry Esau's grudge against Jacob. _____

2. Label Kadesh-barnea.
3. Label the Sinai Peninsula.
4. Label the Negev.
5. a. Which wilderness covers the area north of the eastern Sinai Peninsula?

b. Label this wilderness on the map.

6. Write *Edom* over the area that was Edom.
7. Circle the Wilderness of Zin.
8. Edom was home to which people?

9. From whom were these people descended? _____



KNOW YOUR BIBLE

10. Name two ways God miraculously provided for the children of Israel during their forty years in the wilderness.

a. _____
 b. _____

11. Why did Moses want to march Israel through Edom?
- There was plenty of water and food in Edom.
 - The Edomites were friendlier than the other nations in the area.
 - The weather in Edom is cool and the land is flat.
 - The shortest route to Canaan ran through Edom.
12. Why did Moses put Aaron's clothes on Eleazar? _____
- _____

KNOW GOD AND TAKE IT TO HEART

- ① The people of Israel continued to complain because they still lacked gratitude. The LORD had fed them and given them water. He dwelt among them and defeated their enemies. The goodness of God surrounded His people, but they thought only about the hardships they faced. The result? They could never be satisfied. They accused God of neglecting them.

The books that describe Israel's years in the wilderness teach us many things about God: that He is good, forgiving, perfectly patient, and kind. But we also learn that God desires His people to show these same qualities. Even during difficult times God expects us to trust Him and to be good, forgiving, patient, and kind. Bitterness and impatience do not please God. This is one of the messages of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

13. Why were the people of Israel dissatisfied, even though God had done many good things for them? _____
14. According to the message found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; what does God expect us to do? _____
- _____

LOOKING BACK

15. How did ten spies respond to seeing the strong, giant people and the city walls of Canaan?
- They looked forward to the challenge of conquering such strong people.
 - They hoped God would help them conquer Canaan.
 - They were afraid and believed they could never defeat the Canaanites.
 - They thought the land was worth fighting for.

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16. Why did Joshua and Caleb tear their clothes after they returned from spying out the land of Canaan?
 - a. They were dismayed at the strength of the Canaanites and their cities.
 - b. They wanted to show their sorrow over the Israelites' actions.
 - c. Tearing their clothes was a sign of the way the Israelites would destroy Canaan.
 - d. Tearing their clothes was a sign that the Canaanites would defeat the Israelites.
17. Where did the Israelites camp because there was an abundance of water and grass?
 - a. Kadesh-barnea
 - b. Horeb
 - c. Taberah
 - d. Hazaroth
18. What did the fruit from Canaan show the Israelites about the land?
 - a. The fruit was large and good; a sign that the land was fertile.
 - b. Canaan could grow only one kind of fruit.
 - c. Fruit did not grow well; the soil was poor.
 - d. The Israelites would have to work very hard to grow enough food for everyone.
19. How did Caleb respond to the strong walled cities of Canaan?
 - a. He wondered how Israel could ever conquer them.
 - b. He invented a method of overcoming walled cities.
 - c. He did not fear, because he was trusting God to fight for Israel.
 - d. He dreaded the Canaanites because of the strength of their cities.
20. Why were the Israelites easily driven back by the Amalekites and Canaanites who were lying in wait for them?
 - a. The Amalekites and Canaanites were giants compared to the Israelites
 - b. The Israelites could not break through the thick walls.
 - c. The Israelites did not wait for Moses to lead them in their attack.
 - d. The Israelites had rushed ahead against God's command and without His help.