

# Spies

God tells Moses to send in men "latur" to go around, the same word in Hebrew we use for tourist in English. One man per tribe. They were not actually called spies. They were important men of high reputation. Although their names are surprising, three goats, a horse, a camel, a dog and a secret. Moses specifically asked them to consider the lie of the land, the cities, the inhabitants and the produce. In his mind, he was asking for information alone.

They went in and came back with examples of how exceptional the produce was. They described the cities and the inhabitants. They agreed it was a wonderful land but they said the people and the cities were strong and powerful. In other words, after the facts, they made a value judgment that it would not be easy.

The people immediately responded with anger. Caleb and Joshua gave the minority report. They agreed with the analysis but concluded the Israelites could win. But then the ten spies came back and reiterated their anxieties about the people there, the strong tribes and huge men and added a comment about feeling like grasshoppers in comparison.

The children of Israel respond to the reports of the spies with dismay. Instead of focusing on the positive, the quality of the land, they think only of the problems of the local inhabitants. As a result they give up. They lose their will to fight. They want to go back to Egypt.

Again, Caleb and Joshua try to reassure them the population might look big and strong but they were not to be feared, it was all bluff and show. But too late. The damage was done.

The response of God and Moses of course is dramatic. The discouraged people will not now be allowed to invade until the next generation emerges.

This is demoralizing for an already disillusioned first generation, that hoped to inherit the land. Some of them decide, despite the judgment, to try to invade after all. A small group dashes up the mountain to attack, in what looks like an act of desperation. They are defeated and no further attempt is made for another forty years.

The moral of the story: morale is crucial to any serious victory but so is planning and co-ordination. We see this in the Middle East today. You need the morale that Israel has, the determination to fight regardless of the challenge. And at the same time one needs not bravado, but serious planning and cool headed consideration of the options. Those who tried to invade were showing how last minute, desperate, unconsidered tactics are unlikely to succeed.