A Grave Error?
Excerpted and adapted from a shiur *by HaRav Yechiel Biberfeld*
June 3, 2021
https://baishavaad.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/BAM81_004_Shelach_H
oly_Shrines_and_Kevarim_Tours-
Visiting_Kevarim_and_Davening_to_the_Dead.mp3

They went up in the south, and he came to Chevron...
                                                              Bemidbar 13:22

Why does the *pasuk* begin with the plural "they" and continue with the
singular "he"? Rashi (referencing Sotah 34b) explains that all the spies
went up in the south, but Kaleiv alone went to Chevron, to daven at the
Me'aras Hamachpeilah that he be saved from the counsel of the other
meraglim. Nevertheless, the *poskim* disagree whether it is generally
permitted to visit a cemetery for the purpose of davening.

According to R' Chaim Paltiel (cited by Bach Y.D. 217, and Shach Y.D.
179:15), one should not daven at a cemetery because it is similar to *doreish
el hameisim* (necromancy), which is forbidden *mid'Oraisa* (Devarim
18:11).[1]

The Bach (cited above) argues that davening at a cemetery is a widespread
custom and has a firm basis in the Zohar. In fact, the Shulchan Aruch and
Rama mention the custom multiple times regarding specific occasions
during the year.[2] But the Bach emphasizes that only davening to Hashem
for assistance in the merit of the deceased is permitted; davening directly to
the dead is forbidden. This approach is taken by the Mishnah Berurah
(581:16) as the practical halacha.

A third approach is mentioned by the Pri Megadim and the Elef Lamagein
(O.C. 581), citing the Shelah. In their opinion, it is permitted even to
directly ask the deceased to intervene with Hashem for salvation. According
to this approach, it would seem that the custom to daven at the cemetery is
relevant only to the graves of upright family members and *tzadikim.*

[1] See Sanhedrin 65b and Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 179:13, where the
prohibition is described as not eating and sleeping in the cemetery in order
not to invoke a spirit of *tumah.*
[2] See Shulchan Aruch and Rama O.C. 581:4, 605:1, 559:10, and 579:3.