

Lessons From The Twelve Spies

Introduction. I have a Bible quiz for you. Do you remember Sham-mau, Shaphat, Igal, Palti, Gaddiel, Gaddi, Ammiel, Sethur, Nahbi and Geuel? If you know who these are, congratulations, you are among a handful of persons who remember these obscure characters in the Bible.

In Deuteronomy 1:20-23, Moses made it clear that the sending of the spies was the desire of the people, not the commandment of the Lord. He permitted this plan so that He might try their hearts. Sad to say, human nature prefers to walk by sight, not by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7).

The ten men mentioned earlier are the spies who went into the land. Their names are soon forgotten, but their evil deeds live on. On the other hand, Joshua and Caleb were outstanding leaders for the Israelites. Let's look at some lessons we can learn from the twelve spies.

I. *The Historical Background*

- A. The children of Israel were encamped in the Wilderness of Paran and God told Moses to send a leader from every tribe to spy out the land (Numbers 13:2; 14:6-8).
- B. After 40 days the spies returned and said that Canaan was a wonderful land that flowed with milk and honey, but ten of the spies expressed words of rebellion (Numbers 13:31-33). However, Joshua and Caleb were of a different spirit (Numbers 13:30).
 1. Nonetheless, the majority prevailed and Israel wandered in the wilderness forty years while that whole generation died.
 2. There is a lot we can learn from this familiar incident of the 12 spies from Numbers 13-14 (1 Corinthians 10:11).

II. *There Were Two Attitudes And Actions Among The Spies*

- A. The attitude and actions of the ten spies were altogether evil. Let's look closely and see if we can determine their problems.
 1. Self-depreciation.
 - a) They saw themselves as tiny, little grasshoppers who would be crushed by big giants (Numbers 13:33).
 - b) Their eyes were on the obstacles, not on the God who had led them there (cf. Nehemiah 4:10).
 2. Fear.
 - a) Fear naturally follows doubt, and it can paralyze us from doing what we ought to do (Numbers 14:9). The strong work hard at overcoming fear (2 Timothy 1:7; Revelation 21:8).
 - b) Some Christians are so afraid of failure that they become reserved, overly cautious and uninvolved. They follow a policy of

holding back time and energy from God's service. Their motto is: "To keep from failing -- don't try!"

3. Pessimism.
 - a) Negativism is one of the devil's most powerful tools, and it set in as they tried to evaluate their trip.
 - b) The devil could not stand the thought of Israel trusting God and moving forward by faith to receive the land as God had promised (cf. Genesis 3:15; 12:1-3).
4. Irrationality.
 - a) The ten spies were masters at using emotional scare tactics to arouse the people (Numbers 14:1-2). Their evil report sparked terror in the hearts of thousands.
 - b) William Drummond said, "He that will not reason is a bigot; he that cannot reason is a fool; and he that dares not reason is a slave."
5. Unbelief.
 - a) The word "unbelief" sums up their entire problem (Hebrews 3:17-19). Doubt caused them to question their ability to take the land.
 - b) The Israelites had already seen God's mighty power in the ten plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea.
 - (1) An Atheistic teacher was trying to belittle the Bible in front a class of college students by saying that the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites was no miracle because they crossed at a place where the water was only six inches deep. A young man in the class raised his hand, and said, "Praise God for the great miracle." The teacher said, "What miracle?" The young man said, "God drowned the whole Egyptian army in only six inches of water!"
 - (2) The Israelites should have trusted God. Forty years later, in their first battle, the Israelites did not lose a single soldier (Numbers 31:48-49).
6. Rebellion.
 - a) The preceding attitudes contributed to the spirit of rebellion against God (Numbers 14:3-4).
 - b) There they are, on the threshold of the promised land, but they want to return to the land of slavery!
7. Punishment.
 - a) Unbelief and disobedience brought severe punishment (Numbers 14:26-32).
 - b) Those evil spies were not given forty years but were destroyed immediately (Numbers 14:36-37).

B. The attitude and action of the two good spies.

1. Confidence.

- a) They had confidence that God was with them, and were determined to do His will (Numbers 14:9).
- b) Without confidence, God's people become weak and useless. People who are willing to risk making mistakes and failures are the ones who ultimately achieve greatness in the Lord's work (Philippians 4:13).

2. Courage.

- a) They stepped in and tried to reason and encourage the people, even when they turned against them (Numbers 14:6-8).
- b) God encouraged Joshua to have courage when leading the people into the land (Joshua 1:9), and Caleb chose to defeat these very giants (Joshua 14:12).
- c) Today, we need to bravely face the giants in our lives (suffering, hardship, etc.).
 - (1) We need to stop complaining and bemoaning the hardships we have, and bravely face them. God's grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9).
 - (2) A famous writer said, "When I was a boy, I thought life was rough because I had no shoes, until I met a boy who had no feet."

3. Optimism.

- a) All of us need to be willing and able (Numbers 13:30).
- b) A farmer once had two mules. One was named "Willing" and the other was named "Able." The story goes that Willing was willing, but was not able. On the other hand, Able was able, but was not willing. Able thought Willing should have been more able, but how could he, when he was not Able, but was Willing? Willing thought Able should have been more willing, but how could he, when he was not Willing, but was Able? All would have been great, if only Willing would have been more willing, and Able more able; but, neither Willing nor Able were both willing and able, and as you might well expect, the farmer did not get much done.

4. Rationality.

- a) When irrationality takes over, sound reasoning is ignored, and one's mind is closed to the truth.
- b) Joshua and Caleb tried to give their evaluation of the trip, but all the congregation sought to stone them (Numbers 14:10). We need good leaders and members who do not let emotions rule, but rely on God (Titus 1:7. 9; 2 Chronicles 20:20-23).

5. Faith.

- a) Their most important asset was their deep-rooted faith in God (Numbers 13:30; 14:7-8). Can we have an unwavering faith in God (Romans 4:20-21; 8:31, 37)?
- b) The story of the Pilgrims is dramatic and significant for our point.
 - (1) On December 21, 1620, the Mayflower dropped anchor in Plymouth Bay, with Captain Christopher Jones at her helm. It had been a grueling voyage, taking 66 days to make the perilous crossing. They arrived on the New England shore during a hard winter which claimed half of their number.
 - (2) However, when Spring came, and the captain offered free passage to anyone wanting to return, no one accepted. The faith of the survivors, who had signed the famous "Compact" beginning with the words, "In the name of God, Amen and Amen," was manifest. They had come to a wilderness to carve out a better way of life. Faith prompted the voyage; faith sustained them and their religious convictions constrained them to believe in God. Their hardship, sacrifice, devotion and concept of government remind us of those Bible worthies who sought a country whose builder and maker is God.

6. Obedience.

- a) The fact that they "wholly followed the Lord" is mentioned three times in the scriptures (Numbers 32:11-12; Deuteronomy 1:36; Joshua 14:8-14).
- b) Do we find this spirit in the age in which we live? Are we often encouraged to wholeheartedness?
 - (1) People in the workplace tell us, "Take it easy," "Don't work too hard" or "Don't overdo it."
 - (2) The danger in this philosophy is that it can be and often is picked up by the Christian. When it is, it spells mediocrity or failure in our work.
 - (3) Instead, we need to be encouraging one another to "give all you have got" and "do the best you can" (Ecclesiastes 9:10; Romans 12:11).

7. Reward.

- a) God abundantly blessed Joshua and Caleb.
- b) We, too, need to do as they did (Psalm 19:11; 2 Peter 1:8-11).

Conclusion. Unbelief always sees the obstacles; faith always sees the opportunities. There remains a happy Canaan land for us, the promised land of rest. Shall we follow in the steps of ten spies or Joshua and Caleb? Joshua

became their faithful leader and Caleb was faithful through the wilderness wanderings (Deuteronomy 34:9; Joshua 14:6-14).

Shall we serve God in spite of danger, persecution or hardship? Shall we serve God in spite of the fact that His way is not the most popular? Shall we serve God in spite of those who choose the opposite direction? Shall we serve God when others are having fun in sin and rebellion? If we "wholly follow the Lord," we will reach the promised land, and will be an influence for good. They did not have much of an influence during the rebellion, but they did later.