

TEN SPIES WHO *WOULDN'T*—AND TWO SPIES WHO *COULDN'T*!

Presented by

Blake Brown and Tyler Mullins

[NOTE TO THE READER: This sermon is roughly twice the length of the sermons that Blake and Tyler usually present, due to the fact that both boys spoke under the same title. Tyler presented the first half of the lesson, and Blake presented the second half. As you read through the manuscript, you will find a bracketed note on page 3 indicating where Tyler stopped speaking, and where Blake began his part of the presentation.]

In our Sunday-morning Bible class, “A Journey through the Old Testament,” Blake and I have learned an incredible amount of truly fascinating and useful information. For example:

- We learned that, in only six days, God created from nothing the entire Universe and everything that is in it.
- We learned how sin entered mankind’s world through the first two humans—Adam and Eve—whom God placed on planet Earth.
- We learned what happened when disobedience to God’s commands led to jealousy and anger—and caused one man, Cain, to kill his brother Abel, and thus become the world’s first murderer.
- We learned about sin’s devastating effects, which caused God to eventually send a flood to destroy all life on the Earth eight righteous people and a few selected animals.
- We learned of a faith in God which was so strong that it caused one man—Abraham—to follow God, regardless of the fact that Abraham had nothing but God’s word that everything would turn out well in the end.
- We learned that God could cause a woman by the name of Sarah, who was 90 years old, to have a baby boy by the name of Isaac.
- We learned how Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau, and that Jacob later had twelve sons of his own, through whom would one day come the twelve tribes of Israel.
- We learned why God saved a tiny baby by the name of Moses from certain death at the hand of an evil Egyptian pharaoh—and why, eighty years later, God sent Moses back to Egypt to lead an estimated 2,000,000 Israelites out of the land of Egypt and to the Promised Land of Canaan.

During our studies, we have read in God’s Word about times of great excitement and joy—like when Noah’s ark landed safely on the mountains of Ararat, and all the people and animals in the ark were able to exit safely after a year-long flood, or when Sarah learned that she was pregnant with Isaac, or when Joseph finally was reunited with his father Jacob and his eleven brothers.

But not every story that we studied ended with great excitement or joy. In fact, one story in particular stands out in our minds because of the terribly sad way in which it ended, and because of the far-reaching effects it had for many years into the future. Today, Blake and I would like to tell you about that sad story, and what we learned from it.

The book of Exodus tells us how God had miraculously sent ten devastating plagues upon Egypt, her pharaoh, and her people, and how, as a result, the Lord delivered the Israelites from more than 200 years

of slavery. As the people exited Egypt and came to the Red Sea, they looked behind them and saw pharaoh's army approaching, intent on destroying them. In fear, the Israelites cried out to Moses,

“Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness” (Exodus 14:11-12).

Unfortunately, this type of constant complaining and lack of faith in God was to become the Israelites' normal attitude as they made their way to the Promised Land. As the days, weeks, and months passed, they routinely bickered, griped, and complained. We see one of the first examples of this in the wilderness of Shur on the Sinai Peninsula. The Israelites' water reserves had been depleted, and as Exodus 15:24 explains, “The people complained against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ ” When Moses led them to a place known as Marah, the water was bitter and undrinkable—but God miraculously sweetened it for the Israelites so that they and their animals could drink freely.

The next example of the Israelites' continual complaining is found in Exodus 16:2-3, where the Bible says,

“Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, ‘Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’ ”

So, every morning God sent the Israelites sweet bread, which they called “manna.” And every evening He sent them all the quail they needed so they also could have meat to eat.

We find yet another example of the Israelites' faithlessness and grumbling once they reached Mt. Sinai, and Moses went up the mountain to speak with God. Exodus 32:1 explains what happened.

“When the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, ‘Come, make us gods that shall go before us. As for Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ ”

Aaron wrongly yielded to the people's urgings, and ended up building them a golden calf to worship, saying, “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!” (Exodus 32:4). As a result, thousands of the Israelites were slain because of God's fury and wrath.

Later, in Numbers 11, we find the Israelites in the Wilderness of Paran, where they continued to complain because they did not think they had enough grass for their cattle, or because they had to walk too far to fetch water. As a result, Numbers 11:1 tells us that “when the people complained, it displeased the Lord, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.”

Not long afterwards, the Israelites complained (again!) that they did not have enough meat. Numbers 11:4-6 says,

“The children of Israel also wept again and said, ‘Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!’ ”

So, once more God sent the people quail to eat. But God was so angry that the Israelites made such gluttons of themselves, that He sent what Numbers 11:34 calls “a great plague” among the people, during which many of them died.

This type of attitude on the Israelites’ part—complaining, griping, and refusing to have faith in God—repeated itself time and time again. But on one occasion it finally came to a head—with disastrous, long-term results. Here is what happened.

After having been camped at Mt. Sinai for more than a year, and after having wandered through the wilderness for quite a long time after that, the people finally had arrived at a place called Kadesh-Barnea, which was just across the border from the Promised Land. Before entering Canaan, Moses sent twelve spies—one man from each of the twelve tribes of Israel—into the land to spy it out and return with a report of what they saw.

Numbers 13:25 tells us that the spies returned after having spent forty days in Canaan. They had in their possession giant clusters of grapes, beautiful pomegranates, and delicious figs—as proof of some of the amazing foods that the land of Canaan was capable of producing. So what, then, did the spies say during their report? Numbers 13 tell us that ten of the twelve spies said,

“We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large.... We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we” (vss. 27-28,31).

Numbers 13:32-33 then adds,

“The spies gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, ‘The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants. We were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.’ ”

[NOTE TO THE READER: As explained on page 1, Tyler presented the first half of this lesson (above), and Blake presented the last half (below). This marks the spot where Tyler stopped speaking, and where Blake began.]

The Bible then tells us what happened as a result of the spies’ negative attitude.

“All the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, ‘If only we had died in the land of Egypt! If only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, so that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?’ So they said to one another, ‘Let us select a leader and return to Egypt’ ” (Numbers 14:1-5).

However, two of the twelve spies did not agree with this assessment, as we learn when we continue reading Moses’ record of what happened next.

“Joshua and Caleb, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, ‘The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them....’ Caleb then quieted the people before Moses, and said, ‘Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it’ ” (Numbers 14:6-9; 13:30).

What a terrible turn of events this was! God had rescued the Israelites from more than 200 years of Egyptian slavery. He had sent ten horrible plagues upon the Egyptians. He had miraculously allowed the Israelites to cross the Red Sea on dry land. He had given the Israelites manna as bread and quail as meat. He had provided sweet water for them. And He even had prevented their clothes from wearing out as they journeyed toward the Promised Land. But regardless of how much God did for the people of Israel, they **still** complained and refused to faithfully obey Him! As a result, the Bible tells us what happened next.

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?... Because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.... The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. Except for Caleb and Joshua, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in’ ” (Numbers 14:11,22-23,29-30).

How incredibly sad! When Solomon said many years later that “one sinner can destroy much good” (Ecclesiastes 9:18), he was absolutely correct. Because of the faithlessness of those few spies, every Israelite over the age of twenty was doomed to wander through the desert until, as God Himself put it, “their carcasses fell in the wilderness.” Not a one of those people (except for the houses of Joshua and Caleb) would ever enter the Promised Land. And because those ten spies **would not** trust God, Joshua, Caleb, and their families **could not** enter the land of Canaan until almost four decades later!

So what lessons can you and I learn today from these amazing, true stories from God’s Word? The first lesson we can learn is that **God deserves our gratitude for all that He has done for us**. The Israelites were really good when it came to complaining. Yet when God responded in a favorable way to their numerous complaints by helping them, did they stop to thank Him? Not at all! While the Israelites were **experts** at complaining, they were **complete failures** when it came to expressing their gratitude.

The Scriptures make it clear that genuine, heartfelt gratitude is something on which God places a very high premium. For example, God once told King David, “The sacrifice that honors Me is a thankful heart” (Psalm 50:23, CEV). In addition, both the Old and New Testaments speak to us frequently about the gratitude that we should express to God as a result of all He has done for us. David wrote, “Tell the Lord how thankful you are because He is kind and always merciful.... The Lord is my God! I will praise Him and

tell Him how thankful I am” (Psalm 118:1,28, NCV). The apostle Paul said in Ephesians 5:3-4, “You are God’s people, so do not let it be said that any of you are immoral, indecent, or greedy.... **Instead, say how thankful you are**” (CEV). And in Colossians 3:15 Paul wrote, “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you are called in one body; **and be thankful.**”

We often hear comments in Bible classes or sermons about “the **sin** of ingratitude.” Such comments are based in Scripture. In 2 Timothy 3:2-4 Paul presented a lengthy list of all sorts of sins. During that discussion, Paul said that some people were “lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, **ungrateful**, and unholy.” When we read statements such as those, they should serve to remind us that God has every right to **expect** us to be grateful to Him because He truly is, as the old song suggests, “the fount of every blessing.” As James put it, “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17).

The second lesson we can learn is that **we cannot afford for God to be mad at us**. The prophet Micah once told the people of Judah, “The Lord has a complaint against His people!” (Micah 6:2, NRSV). If God is angry with us, we obviously have done something wrong. The prophet Jeremiah warned, “Let everyone deliver himself from the fierce anger of the Lord” (Jeremiah 51:45). The writer of Hebrews explained why we should do that when he said, “Our God is a consuming fire; it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31; 12:29). When we talk about God’s wrath, we are not talking about some kind of rash, spontaneous fit of anger that God expresses on a whim. Rather, “the wrath of God” refers to the righteous judgment against sin that springs from God’s essence as a perfectly holy and moral Being.

The Bible speaks frequently and sternly about God’s wrath (also known in Scripture as “the fierce anger of the Lord”). The prophet Zephaniah warned, “Before the Lord’s fierce anger comes upon you, seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth” (Zephaniah 2:2-3). The New Testament likewise speaks in somber terms about God’s wrath. In Colossians 3:6 the apostle Paul warned that “the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience” (cf. also Ephesians 5:6-7). And in Romans 1:18 Paul stated that “the wrath of God” will be “revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” This, no doubt, is why Paul warned, “Consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His righteousness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Romans 11:22). Revelation 14:10 speaks of “the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation.” What human in his right mind would **ever** want to experience the “**full strength**” of God’s righteous indignation? The Israelites came to a point in their lives where “the Lord had a controversy” with them. And look what happened as a result! We need to be smart enough not to make the same mistakes the Israelites made. Instead of complaining and disobeying God, we need to offer Him our heartfelt gratitude and be obedient to Him.

The third lesson we can learn is that more often than not, **our sins do not affect only us, but also affect those around us as well.** The Bible is clear regarding the fact that God has endowed us with freedom of choice. When we use that freedom of choice to act correctly, it is a good thing. But when we use that freedom to sin, it is a bad thing. From the beginning to the end of our lives, we interact socially with others. When we make bad decisions, it can adversely affect family members, friends, and loved ones. In Exodus 20:5 God warned the Israelites, “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.” This was a clear warning from the Lord that one generation’s sins could affect the people of future generations. And is that not exactly what happened when the ten spies refused to believe that God would help them win the Promised Land? Because of their faithlessness, countless thousands of other Israelite families perished in the wilderness, and were unable to enter the land of Canaan.

As Tyler said when he introduced this two-part sermon series, in our Sunday-morning Bible class, “A Journey through the Old Testament,” he and I have learned an incredible amount of truly fascinating information. But we also have learned something else. When Paul said in Romans 15:4, “Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction,” **he really meant it.** The stories that we are studying in the Old Testament contain important lessons that, in many cases, apply just as much to us today as they did to the people of those days. God does not like complainers. He wants us to be grateful. And He expects us to have faith in Him and obey Him. I certainly hope that **we learn those lessons better than the Israelites did!**