

“THAT IS...INCREDIBLE!”

Presented by

Tyler Mullins and Blake Brown

[**NOTE TO THE READER:** This sermon is roughly twice the length of the sermons that Tyler and Blake usually present, due to the fact that both boys spoke under the same title. Blake presented the first half of the lesson, and Tyler presented the second half. As you read through the manuscript, you will find a bracketed note on page 4 indicating where Blake stopped speaking, and where Tyler began his part of the presentation.]

As all of you know who are listening to me preach today, for the past several months those of us here at Mill Creek have been involved in a class on Sunday nights titled, “All about the Bible.” We started our class with an overview of how the Bible came into existence, and how it came to be in its present form. We then began studying each of the books in the Old Testament. So far, we have completed the five books that compose the Pentateuch, as well as the books of Joshua and Judges.

Along the way, we not only have learned a **lot** of extremely valuable and useful information, but we also have witnessed some incredible events. Now, when you hear me say “incredible,” you might think I am referring to such amazing things as God’s destruction of the entire ancient world by a global flood, or God’s miraculous opening of the Red Sea so that the whole Israelite nation could walk across it in a single night to escape death at the hands of a wicked Egyptian Pharaoh, or God’s causing the thick walls around the city of Jericho to fall down flat without a single person laying a hand on them. While it is true that all of those things are truly remarkable, they are not at all what I have in mind when I use the word “incredible.” Let me explain.

In our daily conversations we routinely use the word “incredible” to mean something that is “astounding,” “marvelous,” or “spectacular.” However, the actual dictionary definition of the word “incredible” is: “something that is beyond belief or understanding.” In my sermon today, that is exactly how I will be using the word “incredible.” Once more, let me explain.

In Deuteronomy 7:6 Moses told the Israelites, “You are a people **holy to the Lord your God**; the Lord your God has chosen you **out of all the peoples on earth** to be His people, **His treasured possession.**” Many years later the prophet Isaiah repeated that sentiment when, speaking for God, he referred to the Israelites as “**My chosen people**...the people whom I formed for Myself, that they might announce My praise” (Isaiah 43:20-21). God genuinely loved the people of Israel—and had a future in store for them that they could not even begin to imagine, much less adequately appreciate. God sent ten horrible plagues to ravage the nation of Egypt in order to remove the Israelites from more than two centuries of bondage and servitude. During the Israelites’ pilgrimage to the Promised Land, He fed them, kept their clothes from wearing out, and protected them in a myriad of ways. Then, when it came time for Him to give the Israelites the land of Canaan as He had pledged to do, God kept His promise by stopping the wa-

ters of the Jordan River, demolishing the seemingly invincible walls of Canaanite cities, and granting the Jews victory after victory in their battles against idol-worshiping pagans. Many years earlier, God had asked Abraham, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14). Time and time again God answered that question for His “chosen people” by showing them what He could (and would!) do for them as “His treasured possession.”

So how did the Israelites repay God for all He had done for them? As a result of the recent studies in our Sunday night class, we know the answer to that question, don’t we? The Israelites constantly griped, complained, bickered, and exhibited an ungrateful attitude. They refused to go to God for guidance. They ignored and disobeyed His commands. They failed to teach their children His divine precepts. And eventually they abandoned Him altogether. After all that God had done for them, I would say that such actions on the part of the Israelites definitely could be classified as...well...**incredible!**

This afternoon, I would like to invite you to take a close look at each of those failures with me in this lesson. And as we proceed, I hope you will ask yourself this one question: What does all of this say to us today about our relationship with God?

First, I want to direct your attention to how—no matter what God did for the Israelites or how often He did it—they **constantly complained, griped, bickered, and exhibited an ungrateful attitude**. In fact, those types of actions and attitudes—which were to become a recurring pattern in their lives—began early on. The Israelites barely had crossed over the Red Sea before we read in Exodus 15:24, “And the people complained against Moses.” One chapter later, in Exodus 16:2, we see that “the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.” Another chapter later we read in Exodus 17:3, “The people complained against Moses, and said, ‘Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?’” Numbers 13:1 records, “And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron.” Numbers 21:5 tells us that “the people spoke out against Moses and against God.”

But surely the worst example of the people’s complete lack of gratitude for all that God had done for them is recorded in Exodus 33:1-6 where God promised to give them the land of Canaan—which the Bible describes as “a land flowing with milk and honey.” When God told them, “I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite,” what was the Israelites’ reaction to this wonderful news about their idyllic future home? Exodus 33:6 answers that question when it sadly records, “**When the people heard this bad news, they mourned!**” Can you believe that?! God promised to give them a land that He Himself described in Deuteronomy 6:10-11 as containing, “large, beautiful cities that you did not build, houses full of all good things that you did not buy, wells that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant.” And all they could do was complain, gripe, bicker, and exhibit an ungrateful attitude.

So what was God's reaction to this shoddy behavior on the Israelites' part? Moses warned the people in Exodus 16:8, "The Lord hears the complaints that you make against Him." Later, in Number 11:1, Moses went even farther when he told the Israelites that their constant complaining "displeased the Lord...and His anger was aroused." God blessed the Israelites in a way that He had never blessed any nation before—and all they could do was moan, groan, and complain. If you ask me, that is...**incredible!**

Second, quite frequently the Israelites **did not go to the Lord for guidance**. Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, once posed a powerful question to the prophet Jeremiah when he asked, "**Is there any word from the Lord?**" (Jeremiah 37:17). The Israelites who lived during the time of Joshua and the various judges would have been wise to ask that same question. But they did not. For example we read in Exodus 34:12 that God had specifically commanded His people, "Take heed to yourselves, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, and it become a snare in your midst." Yet when the people of Gibeon requested that the Israelites form a pact with them, Joshua 9:14 specifically states that "the men of Israel...**did not ask counsel of the Lord.**" As a result, the Israelites ended up entering into a treaty with the Gibeonites that led them into all-out war with the kings of not one, but **five** surrounding nations! Furthermore, the act of refusing to go to the Lord for guidance ultimately became an everyday thing among the Israelites, as Judges 17:6 reminds us when it observes that "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." That is—in a word—**incredible!**

Third, on many occasions—which are far too numerous to recount here—the Israelites **blatantly disobeyed God's direct commands**. In our study of the books of Genesis through Judges, we routinely were exposed to this type of rebellious behavior on the part of the Israelites. Judges 3:12 notes, "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." Judges 4:1 repeats that refrain when it says, "The children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord." Judges 6:1 continues in the same vein when it states, "Then the children of Israel once more did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." From worshiping a golden calf at the base of Mt. Sinai (as the Israelites did in Exodus 32), to engaging in gross sexual immorality with the pagan Canaanites (as the Israelites did in Numbers 25), the Israelites repeatedly broke the commandments that God had given them.

In Leviticus 10 we witnessed one of the most astonishing cases of this type of defiant disobedience—in a wicked act that desecrated the tabernacle and devastated the lineage of Aaron, Israel's beloved first high priest. In Leviticus 16:12, God explicitly stated where the fire was to originate that was to be used to light the altar of incense: "Then the priest shall take a censer full of burning coals of **fire from the brazen altar before the Lord.**" Yet Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu, ignored God's command when, as Leviticus 10:1-2 informs us, "Each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered **strange fire** before the Lord, **which He had not commanded them.** So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them." Nadab **would have been** the next high priest of Israel. But when he disrespected God's

divine authority and disregarded His commands, God did not hesitate to slay him. Nadab had seen more than 3,000 Israelites die when the Levites went through the camp and killed those people who had worshipped the golden calf. He knew firsthand the wrath of God. Yet he still chose to disobey the Lord. That is—in a word—**incredible!**

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Fourth, the Israelites **failed to teach their children God’s laws and tell them all that He had done for them.** After God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law at Mt. Sinai, He specifically instructed them,

“These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. **You shall teach them diligently to your children,** and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

Yet compare that to the assessment found in Judges 2:10, which says, “Another generation arose after them **who did not know the Lord or the work that He had done for Israel**” (Judges 2:10). If a generation arose who “did not know the Lord,” **or** “the work that He had done for Israel,” what does that tell us? That is the Bible’s way of letting us know that the Israelites **failed miserably** in teaching their children God’s precepts, as well as in explaining to those children the many marvelous things that God had done for the Jews throughout their history as His chosen people. It has been correctly said, “All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.” The Israelites surely could be called the “poster children” for such an assessment, don’t you think?

In Psalm 127:3 the inspired writer noted that children are “a heritage of the Lord.” In the very next verse, he went on to comment on the specific nature of that heritage when he observed that “as arrows in the hand of a mighty man, so are the children of youth” (vs. 4). The Israelites failed in two critically important areas. First, their children had been given to them by God. As such, those children were “His heritage.” The Israelites—because of their unfaithfulness to God—squandered that precious heritage. Second, instead of launching their children “as arrows in the hand of a mighty man” toward an eternal home in heaven with their Creator, the Israelites led those children into open rebellion against God by setting for them a daily example of “every man doing that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6). Instead of rearing their children “in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4), the Israelites, by their wicked actions, allowed their children’s minds to be infiltrated by every kind of pagan god and false belief imaginable. The end result was the eventual demise of the entire nation of Israel.

Parents not only have an **initial impact**, but also a **continuing effect** upon their offspring. We children are born with sponge-like minds that begin basically as “blank slates” upon which our parents have a grand opportunity (and an awesome responsibility!) to write. It has been said that a child’s mind is like Jell-O, and that the parents’ job is to “put in all the good stuff” before that mind “sets.” The Israelites ignored God’s instructions to “teach diligently to their children” His divine precepts and covenant laws. As a result, their children lost their faith and fell away from God. That is—in a word—**incredible!**

Fifth, a time came when the people of Israel **completely abandoned God altogether**. The seeds of this future mutiny against their Master were sown early on in the Israelites’ history. In Exodus 32—even after personally hearing God’s voice thunder in their midst from the burning crags of Mt. Sinai as He gave them the Ten Commandments—they begged Aaron, “Come, make us gods that shall go before us” (Exodus 32:1). They knew full well that the first of those commandments was, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” But they didn’t care. And look where **that** attitude got them!

Numbers 25:1-3 tells us, “The people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab, who invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods. And the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel.” On that occasion, **24,700** Israelites died in the plague God sent among them because of their worship of the pagan god Baal. But did that stop the Israelites from doing it again? Hardly! Judges 2:11-12 records, “Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baal; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers.” One chapter later in Judges 3:7 we read, “The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord; they forgot the Lord their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs.” As Judges 2:19 sadly says, “The people did not cease from their own doings or from their stubborn way.” They abandoned God—and died by the thousands as a result. Yet they kept right on ignoring God. That is—in a word—**incredible!**

In this sermon, you have been exposed to multiple instances of the Israelites’ failures in their relationship with God. They constantly griped, complained, bickered, and exhibited an ungrateful attitude. They refused to go to God for guidance. They ignored and disobeyed His commands. They failed to teach their children His divine precepts. And eventually they abandoned Him altogether. Considering all of those things, the question that then begs to be asked is this: **What price did the Israelites pay for their faithlessness in all of these areas?**

The truth of the matter is that the penalties inflicted upon the Israelites because of their stubborn refusal to seek God’s counsel and to obey His commandments were severe indeed. Here are just two examples out of many that could be offered.

(1) On the day when the twelve spies whom Moses had sent to spy out the land of Canaan came back to the Israelites’ camp, ten of those spies presented to the people what Numbers 13:28-33 calls “a bad report,” stating, “The land through which we went as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants. The

cities are fortified and very large; the people who dwell in the land are strong, and all the people whom we saw are men of great stature.... We are like grasshoppers in their sight.” What was the Israelites’ response to this depressing report? Numbers 14:4 provides the answer to that question when it tells us that the people rose up and said, “Let us select a leader and return to Egypt!” As a result of the Israelites’ complete lack of faith in God, He told them that they would wander in the wilderness for forty years while “the carcasses of those who have complained against Me fall in this wilderness” (Numbers 14:29). From that day until the time the Israelites finally crossed over the River Jordan into the Promised Land, **no less than 42,650 of them perished!** Does that tell you how God views people who complain, lack genuine faith, and refuse to obey Him? The psalmist wrote, “The kingdom is the Lord’s, and He rules over the nations” (Psalm 22:28). **If only the Israelites had believed that—how much better their lives would have been!**

(2) In the book of Judges we routinely see statements like the following repeated over and over again:

- “God gave them over into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them” (Judges 2:14).
- “God sold them into” the hands of their enemies (Judges 3:8).
- “God delivered them into the hands” of their foes (Judges 6:1).

The writer of Proverbs spoke of people who “left the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness” (Proverbs 2:13). That describes the Israelites perfectly, does it not? Later, the writer of Proverbs observed, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34). When nations do what God has commanded, there is less sin. And anytime there is less sin, God is happy, and His people fare better. God repeatedly tried to teach the Israelites that important lesson. But they steadfastly refused to learn it—and suffered immeasurably as a result. How **incredible** is that?!

At the beginning of this lesson we asked the question, “What does all of this say **to us today** about our relationship with God?” I hope that by now the answer to that question is obvious. In Deuteronomy 26:17-19 Moses told the Israelite nation:

“Today you have proclaimed the Lord to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice. Also today the Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the Lord your God, just as He has spoken.”

Earlier, in Exodus 19:5, God Himself had said to the Israelites, “If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people.” Now listen to what God has said to **us** in the New Testament:

“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Because Christians are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God’s own special people,” the question we need to be asking ourselves today—in light of what we have learned from the Israelites’ failures in the Old Testament, and in light of all that God has done for us through His Son as explained in the New Testament—is this: “How should **we** then live so as to be pleasing to God all the days of our lives?” To answer that question, let us do something that the Israelites **failed** to do. Let us “seek the Lord’s counsel.” In Romans 4:3 the apostle Paul inquired, “What does the Scripture say?” So, here, from the Scriptures, is the answer as to how we today should be living if we want to honor God and Christ:

“Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:11-14).

If the Israelites had “denied ungodliness and worldly lusts,” and had “lived soberly, righteously, and godly,” the history of their entire nation would have been vastly different. It makes you wonder, doesn’t it: When **our** history is written, what will it say?