

Life Lesson 34
The Twelve Spies
Text: Numbers 12-14; Deut. 1:19-26; Heb. 3:12-19

Introduction

They were so close to the promised land! God did so many miracles that Pharaoh had to let the children of Israel out of Egypt. He had protected them in the desert and provided their every need. He had given them His laws, written with his own hand. Now, after a long journey full of miracles, they were just a few miles from the promised land. They were close to the wonderful things God had prepared for them. This is going to be a happy story, right? Wrong! They were so close, but something happened to ruin everything right at the last.

The Story

Moses sent out 12 men as spies to check out the promised land. Joshua, Moses' assistant, was one of them. Caleb, from the tribe of Judah, was another.

No one had been in the promised land before, so no one knew what the land was like. They didn't know if it would be mountains or plains, wilderness or plowed fields. Most of all, they wanted to know about the people who lived there. The Israelites knew those people weren't going to just hand over their property without a fight. Were they big and powerful? Small and weak? Would the cities be easy to conquer?

Can you imagine how eagerly the people waited to hear about their new home?

At last the fortieth day arrived and the spies returned. They were carrying with them something that made the eyes of the Israelites pop out of their heads! They had a bunch of grapes so big that two men had to carry it. They brought back many wonderful things that showed that the land was, indeed, the land flowing with milk and honey. That sounds

sticky, but what it means is that there was so much good grass that the cows produced lots of milk. There were lots of flowers and plants growing so that the bees could make plenty of honey.

It was a good land!

But what about the people? Most of the spies did not look happy.

“The land is great,” they said. “But the people living there are huge. We looked like grasshoppers next to them. No way will be able to defeat them!”

The people started crying when they heard that.

Even though ten of the spies said it was impossible, Caleb stood up before everybody and said, “Let’s go up at once and take over the land. We can do it!”

But the people listened to the ten spies and just kept on crying and complaining

“It would have been better if we had just died in the wilderness,” they said. “Why did God bring us out here just to have us die in battle. Our wives and children will be slaves to these awful people. We were better off in Egypt.”

“Let’s go back,” some of them said. “We’ll elect a leader and have him lead us back to Egypt.”

Foolish people! I guess they forgot that they were slaves in Egypt. They must have forgotten that the Egyptians were trying to kill them when they left. They evidently forgot, too, that God had delivered them with wonderful miracles and had provided their every need on the journey. Now, when they were so close, they wanted to give up and go home.

Joshua and Caleb talked to the people and tried to reason with them.

“If the Lord delights in us, then he will bring us into this land and give it to us. Don’t rebel against the Lord! Don’t be afraid of the people. The Lord is with us, so we are bound to win.”

But the people wouldn’t listen. They were ready to kill Joshua and Caleb by hitting them with rocks.

What do you think God thought about their attitude? He was disgusted and angry.

“How long will these people do things to make me mad?” God said to Moses. “When are they going to believe me? I will make them get sick and die. I will disinherit them and make a great nation of your children, Moses.”

Moses said “But if you do that, all the other nations will think that you weren’t able to protect your people. Everyone has heard about the wonderful things you have done. If this happens, they won’t believe or respect you any more. Please forgive the great sin of this people.”

The Lord said, “Because you asked me, I have pardoned them. But because these people have seen my power over and over and still wouldn’t believe me, they won’t get to see the promised land. When the little children who weren’t old enough to make the decision grow up, they can go in. Joshua and Caleb will get to enter the land, but the rest of the people will die in the wilderness.”

When the people heard that, they were sorry they had refused to believe. Now that God said they couldn’t go in, some of the people changed their mind and decided to march into the land.

“Don’t do it,” Moses told them. “God won’t be with you and you will be defeated.”

They went anyway, and they were chased out of the land. Many were killed.

The people turned back to the wilderness. God would take care of them, but they would miss out on the wonderful blessing He had prepared for them.

The Life Lesson

Why couldn't the Israelites go in and enjoy the wonderful things the Lord had prepared for them? Because they didn't believe God. They should have! They had seen him do wonderful, miraculous things for them over and over again. They seem really silly to us. Yet, God put this story in the Bible for a reason. It's because we are often like the Israelites. God has done wonderful things for us, too. He has great things planned for us. Yet, we often look at the scary things in our way instead of the promises God made to us.

I hope you won't be like the ten spies who saw the difficulties, but will be like Joshua and Caleb who saw God's power.

Review Questions

How many spies did Moses send into the promised land?

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What was the land like?

It was wonderful, flowing with milk and honey.

What does it mean to “flow with milk and honey?”

The grass grew so richly that the cows gave lots of milk. There were so many fruit trees and flowers that the bees could make lots of honey.

What did the spies carry back to show the people?

A bunch of grapes so big that it took two men to carry it.

Why did ten of the spies think they should not enter the promised land?

Because the people who lived in the land were big.

What two spies said, “We can do it!”

Joshua and Caleb

What did the people decide to do?

The decided to choose a new leader and go back to Egypt.

How did God punish them for their unbelief?

They were forbidden to enter the promised land.

Who were the only people who would get to go into the promised land?

The children, when they grew up, and Joshua and Caleb.

What did the Israelites do when they learned God had forbidden them to go into the land?

They decided to go in and fight.

Did they win?

No, they were defeated.