

The Twelve Spies

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The journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan was very much longer than it need have been if they had trusted in God. They might have been only a few days on the way, but because of unbelief and sin and discontent they were much longer in the wilderness.

When at last they reached the borders of Canaan, God told them to go up and take possession of it, because He had given it to them. Then they came to Moses, and asked him to send some men before them to spy the land, and see what sort of country it was, whether the people were strong, or weak.

Now God had already told them that He went before them to prepare a way for them, and that the land to which He was leading them was "a goodly land" "flowing with milk and honey." So when they sent men before them to "spy the land," they showed that they did not believe God's Word.

Besides this, God had told them not to be afraid of the people of the land, for He had given all their enemies into their hands. They had seen what God did to the Egyptians, swallowing them up in the Red Sea; and so they ought to have trusted in Him to overthrow all their enemies.

But they sent spies to see if the people were stronger or weaker than themselves. In this also they showed unbelief, and opened the way for all the trouble that followed.

Twelve men were chosen, one from each tribe, and they found a most beautiful and fruitful land, as God had promised. They gathered some of the fine fruit, to show the Israelites, and it took two men to carry one bunch of grapes!

How glad the people must have been to see what a lovely, fruitful land God had given them, you think. Ah, but there was one great drawback—there were giants in the land.

But what of that, when God had given them all into their hand? They might have gone against them in the name of the Lord, as David afterwards went against Goliath, and gained an easy victory over them all.

When the spies came back to the camp of Israel, they brought “an evil report.” They said that it was a good plan, and they showed the luscious fruit they had brought. But then they spoke much about the strong cities, which they said were “pulled up to heaven,” and the giants they had seen, so great that they themselves had seemed like grass-hoppers beside them.

Then the people were afraid, and they cried and rent their clothes. They said that they would make themselves a captain, and go back again to Egypt. They did not think of the great God who was on their side, before whom all the inhabitants of earth are as grasshoppers.

Yet there were two men who remembered Him—two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua. They brought a good report of the land, and tried to encourage the people to go up and take it, because God had given it to them, and He was with them.

But the people were so angry with Caleb and Joshua for giving them this good advice that they wanted to stone them. Just as they were going to [do] this, “the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle.” And the frightened people dropped the stones, and waited to hear the message of God.

The Lord said that because they had not believed Him, and obeyed Him by going up to take the land, now they could not go in, but they must wander in the wilderness for forty years. The spies had been forty days searching the land, and they were to spend a year in the wilderness for every one of those days.

God said that all the people who were over twenty years of age, except Caleb and Joshua, should die in the wilderness, and not see the good land that He had given them.

Do you think that was a very hard sentence? It was not the will of God that they should wander about in the wilderness. He wanted them to go right into the goodly land. But “we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.” It was only by believing God’s promise that they could go up and take the land, and so, as they did not believe, they could not go in.

How this must have grieved the Lord, all that He had done for them to bring them to Canaan.

While seeking to escape from the giants in Canaan, the children of Israel fell into the clutches of a much worse giant than any of those of whom they

were so afraid. This was Giant Despair. We read about him in "The Pilgrim's Progress," and how he shut up all his prisoners in Doubting Castle. And in the castle yard were the skulls of the prisoners that the Giant had made an end of.

This was the Giant that got hold of these poor pilgrims just as they were about to enter the promised land. He got them into Doubting Castle, and they did not use the only key that could get them out, the key of Promise. So they could not enter the land of promise, and "their carcasses fell in the wilderness."

God has promised to give to all those who believe Him and let Him lead them, a goodly land, a heavenly country, far better than any that there is now on this earth. But there are giants in the way that would try to keep us out of that happy land, and make an end of us—Giant Pride, Giant Anger, Giant Selfishness, and many others.

But we need not fear any of these, for in the strength of the Lord we can overcome them, every one, and go in and possess the land. For

"Many giants great and tall
Stalking through the land;—
Headlong to the earth they fall
When met by Daniel's band,"—

the band of those who fear and trust the Lord only.