

THE TWELVE SPIES

by Audrun Siebert

KEY VERSE:

Numbers 14:9 Do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.

FAITH STORY:

Numbers 13: 1-3, 17-33 and 14: 1-12, 36-45.

FAITH FOCUS:

God had delivered the Israelites from the bondage of slavery to their Egyptian task masters with great signs and wonders, bringing plagues upon the Egyptians, parting the Red Sea and allowing their escape. Miriam led them in a song of celebration after that miraculous escape, and God continued to lead them by a cloud and a pillar of fire. In the desert God provided manna, quail, and water. At Mount Sinai God provided them with laws to live in faithful covenant relation with him.

Despite the evidence of God's love and power, the Israelites complained and grumbled, saying they'd rather be back in Egypt. Finally God got fed up with their attitude, and punished their disobedience and unbelief.

Today's lesson focuses on the spies that were sent into the land of Canaan to check it out, what they reported, and how the Israelites responded. Ten of the spies returned with fear and stories of giants living in the land. Only two spies, Joshua and Caleb, were positive and wanted them to go in and possess the land. The people believed the ten, and were paralyzed with fear. Because of their fear and unwillingness to move ahead, God declared that the present generation would not live to enter the Promised Land, but would die in the wilderness. After God's judgment was pronounced, they repented and attempted to enter the land under their own power and were defeated and driven out. God left them to wander in the wilderness for forty years. Because they did not faithfully obey God, they were destined to die in the wilderness.

SESSION GOAL:

Students will be encouraged to trust God and to move ahead by faith into their own "Promised Lands."

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

- 1 Students will identify the reasons why Israel was afraid to enter the Promised Land.
- 2 Students will be able to identify some of their own "Promised Lands."
- 3 Students will list reasons why we are sometimes afraid to claim these "Promised Lands."

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Paper and pencils.
- 2 Chalk board or dry board.
- 3 Magic markers and colorful construction paper.

- 4 Milk, honey graham crackers, grapes and Fig Newton cookies
- 5 A CD of worship music and CD player

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (10–15 minutes)

Ask students to think about “What’s right about my life.” Then they may choose to portray three of those “what’s right” items by themselves or with 1-2 other students. They can create a skit, do a pantomime, draw an illustration—however they want to communicate their “what’s right” blessings.

CONNECT: (5–10 minutes)

After everyone has shared their “What’s Right,” lead a discussion about the blessings in their lives. Some questions:

- 1 On a scale of 1-10, how much do you think you appreciate all of the good things in your life?
- 2 What do you think about the most—all of the things that are right and good about your life, or the things that are negative and you want to be different?

Think about the “right stuff” in your life. What percentage of those things do you think came as a result of your hard work, and what percentage do you think have been given to you by God?

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (12–15 minutes)

Have students open their Bibles to the story found in Numbers chapter 13 and 14.

Read it together and ask students to help you make an outline of the events that happen in this story. Here’s an outline:

- 1 The spies are sent out to check out the land of Canaan.
- 2 The spies travel through the land and check it out.
- 3 The spies gather some grapes, pomegranates and figs.
- 4 The spies return and report back that the land is “flowing with milk and honey” but there are strong people and fortified towns in the land.
- 5 Caleb says “We can do it.”
- 6 The other spies emphasize how impossible it would be to conquer the land.
- 7 The people listen to the negative reports and complain about being in the wilderness.
- 8 Joshua sides with Caleb and says that God is with them and they can take the land.
- 9 The Israelites threaten to stone them.
- 10 The spies who brought a bad report died of a plague sent by God.
- 11 The people mourned and said they were sorry for their sins.

The people decide to go into Canaan but God wasn’t with them and they were defeated.

APPLY: (15–20 minutes)

Write the following questions on the chalk board or dry board:

- 1 What is your “Promised Land”? What are your hopes and dreams?
- 2 What are the “giants” that seem to stand between you and your Promised Land?
- 3 Who are the “ten spies” that discourage you?
- 4 Who are the “Joshua and Caleb” that encourage you?

Hand out pencils and paper for students to write their answers to the questions. Assure them that they will not be required to share their responses.

Set out the snacks and ask students why you choose those particular snacks. (A land flowing with MILK and HONEY, and the spies collected GRAPES and FIGS.)

Invite students to enjoy the snacks, and while they do, talk about the following questions:

What is our response to God’s gracious provisions for us? We have so much that is “right” about our lives, just as the Israelites did. Do we at times respond the same way the Israelites responded? Do we grumble and complain? Why are we sometimes afraid to move with faith in response to God’s leading? How can we respond with faith and claim everything God wants to do and provide for us?

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Play the CD and encourage students to spread out in the classroom so they can be somewhat alone. When they are situated in their “alone” spaces, ask students to spend some time thinking about their Promised Land and how they would like God to lead them to it. What do they want God to do? What do they need to do? Encourage students to spend time in prayer by themselves to close the session.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

Familiarize yourself with Israel’s story in preparation for this class period. Review the story of Israel in their journey from Egypt to this point where they are ready to enter the Promised Land. Give some thought to how God had supplied all their needs. Why were they so quick to grumble and complain? Why did they not trust God’s provision? They had enjoyed God’s protection. They benefited from God’s provision. Yet when challenges or difficulties were confronted they had so little faith and seemed to forget how God had provided for them in the past.

Amazingly, after hearing the negative report from the ten spies, the Israelites said they were even ready to go back to Israel. Were they serious? Joshua urges them not to rebel against God. He reminds them of God’s presence, but the people have no ears for what he says. When God is ready to destroy the people and make a nation out of Moses and his descendents, Moses pleads with God and haggles with God. Joshua and Caleb tear their clothes, but to no avail.

God pronounces judgment on the people. Each of the ten spies with the bad report dies. God declares that indeed the people who had seen God’s deliverance in Egypt would all die in the desert except Joshua and Caleb—a severe judgment for unbelief.

When God pronounces judgment, the people were suddenly ready to return to God. They were ready to enter the land but it was too late. Foolishly they attempted to enter on their own against Moses' advise. This failed and they were soundly defeated by the Amalekites and Canaanites. It was too late. God wants complete and instant obedience. Sometimes it is too late to obey.

What was the reason for the punishment? Were there some lessons to be learned wandering in the wilderness for forty years? It seems some things must be learned the hard way. God forgives, but God is just. God does not wink at sin.

These are hard lessons. What can we learn from them? How do we apply this today? Spend some time pondering this before attempting to teach this lesson.