

LESSON 1: CALEB THE SPY

DAY 1: DOUBTING GOD (NUMBERS 14:20-23)

Why do you think it's important to test drive a car before buying it? Well, because cars are expensive investments and you don't want to put money into a car that doesn't run well, right? If you took a car on a test drive and noticed that it shook violently while driving, had bad brakes, and wouldn't go above 30 mph, would you still buy it? Of course not. But if your test drive proved the car was safe and reliable, then you'd be more likely to buy it.

Read Numbers 14:20-23. God sent twelve Israelites to spy out the land He was giving to them, the land of Canaan. However, rather than trusting the Lord to provide the land, ten of the spies mislead the people of God by causing them to fear the people living in the land and causing them to doubt God's ability to give them victory. The Israelites had experienced firsthand the trustworthiness of God, but they still didn't trust Him! They were eyewitnesses to His faithfulness and His glory and His miracles, but still they didn't have confidence in Him.

Wouldn't it be ridiculous to get into a reliable car every day and then panic because we didn't trust that the brakes would work or because we thought the wheels would suddenly roll away from under the car? Well, it's infinitely more ridiculous to doubt the trustworthiness of the Lord, because we have witnessed and experienced His faithfulness. When times are tough or circumstances becoming overwhelming, do you tend to trust God or do you tend to doubt His power and faithfulness? Why?

DAY 2: BE DIFFERENT (NUMBERS 14:24-25)

In our society, whether in the workplace or in social circles, the word "different" generally has a negative connotation. If we overheard someone say that "Bob is a little different," then we would likely take that to mean that Bob is a little off, a little strange. Because of this negative association with the word "different," many people have decided that they don't want to be different because they don't want to be singled out, exclude, or insulted by others.

Read Numbers 14:24-25. Caleb's trust in the Lord was contrasted with the unfaithfulness of the other spies who doubted God. Caleb fully trusted God's will, His plan, and His power. Although the ten unfaithful spies were excluded from entering the Promised Land, God rewarded Caleb's faith and promised that he and his descendants would be permitted to enter the land flowing with milk and honey. As we will explore further, God showed extravagant mercy on the Israelites who doubted Him by sparing their lives—all but the ten spies who sowed doubt in people's hearts—but God also displayed perfect judgment in allowing only Caleb and those who were faithful to enter the Promised Land.

In what ways are you standing apart for the glory of God? What changes can you make to be "different" than the world by following God faithfully?

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DAY 3: DO NOT FEAR (NUMBERS 14:26-30)

The term “self-fulfilling prophecy” refers to those unusual occasions when people cause a prediction to come true simply by expecting it to come true. Maybe you’ve experienced this. Perhaps you were invited to a get-together with friends and, based on nothing but a vague feeling, you thought, “This isn’t going to be fun at all.” And then it wasn’t! Conversely, maybe you walked into work one morning and thought, for no particular reason, “Today’s going to be a good day.” And then it was!

Read Numbers 14:26-30. The Israelites doubted the Lord. They did not trust in His power or His promise. Because they expected very little from Him, they did not receive what He promised them. They feared that they would not inhabit the Promised Land, despite the fact that God had promised it to them, and therefore they did not enter the Promised Land. Rather than trusting that God would deliver the land into their hands, the people of God feared death at the hands of those inhabiting it. Therefore, death was all they received. The tragedy is that the people of God chose tragedy! They could have had what God promised to them, but they chose to doubt rather than to have faith. Ultimately, they chose death in the wilderness over life in the land flowing with milk and honey.

When have you settled for less than what God wanted for you because of your fear? What did you learn from that experience?

DAY 4: JUDGMENT AND MERCY (NUMBERS 14:31-35)

Have you ever said to your child, “Because I said so”? Have you ever said these words to your spouse? Even if you’re not a parent or a spouse, in all likelihood, you’ve had firsthand experience with these four words, whether as the person speaking them or the person on the receiving end.

Read Numbers 14:31-35. In this passage, we see God’s perfect judgment and mercy. The Israelites’ unfaithfulness had severe ramifications for them and for their children. Although the children suffered *with* their parents, they didn’t suffer *to the extent* of their parents. The children’s entrance into the Promised Land was delayed, but not denied. Unlike their parents, they were eventually allowed to enter the Promised Land. In verse 35, following His proclamation, God announced “I the Lord have spoken.” God used these words as a seal on His judgment, a stamp of authority, and final approval over the sentence doled out. Parents and earthly authority figures sometimes resort to “Because I said so” when they are exhausted, frustrated, or have simply run out of words to explain themselves. However, when God announced “I the Lord have spoken,” He spoke from a place of ultimate authority, limitless wisdom, and perfect judgment.

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DAY 5: SEPARATING GOOD FROM BAD (NUMBERS 14:36-38)

A couple of centuries ago people still made chocolate by hand. Chocolate is made from cocoa beans, and these beans grow inside of shells which are inside cocoa pods. Before people could grind the beans into chocolate, they had to remove the shells from the cocoa pods and then remove the cocoa beans from the shells by hand! It was tedious work, but if the shells were ground along with the beans, the shells would spoil the rich, decadent flavor of the chocolate.

Read Numbers 14:36-38. Despite their unfaithfulness, God allowed the disbelieving Israelites to spend their days in the wilderness. Although they were unfaithful, God showed mercy by allowing them to live. The unfaithful spies, however, were not permitted to live. As the instigators of fear in the camp, as those who engendered doubt among the people of God, they died by plague long before the remaining Israelites. God had to separate the good from the bad, the faithful from the unfaithful. Otherwise, the bad would continue spoiling the good, the unfaithful would continue sowing fear in the hearts of others.

When surrounded by those who don't trust the Lord, what do you do to remind yourself of His faithfulness? What steps might you take to spread faith in the Lord and combat people's fear and doubt?