

LESSON 1: CALEB THE SPY

Biblical Passages: Numbers 14:20-38

In 1819, a sperm whale struck the fishing vessel *Essex*, causing the ship to flood with water and sink. Twenty sailors survived by floating in three small boats about 3,000 miles off the coast of Chile. These men were left with a difficult decision. The nearest islands were the Marquesas Islands, which were 1,200 miles away. The only problem was that the sailors had heard rumors that these islands were inhabited by cannibals. Their other option was to travel a greater distance to South America in hopes of catching winds that would push them toward dry land. This option, however, presented the very real threat of starvation, because this journey would be long and their remaining resources were limited. Fearing cannibals, the sailors decided to risk starvation and sail for South America. Tragically, less than half of the men survived the journey.

Read Numbers 14:20-38. God sent Israelites to spy out the land of Canaan, the land that He had promised to give to His people many years before. But these spies, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, chose to see insurmountable obstacles rather than the fulfillment of a long-awaited promise. Rather than obeying the Lord, they rebelled. Rather than having faith in the Lord, they doubted. Rather than trusting the Lord's promise, they trusted their fears. As we see in today's passage, this fear and unbelief lead to a tragic end for an entire generation of Israelites. Like the crew of the *Essex*, who dreaded imaginary cannibals and followed their fear on a fatal journey, the Israelites followed their fear and it led to forty years of wandering in the desert and, ultimately, death.

We must be those who imitate the faithfulness of Caleb and Joshua. Rather than giving into doubt and creating fear in the hearts of those around us, we ought to be those who trust the Lord, even against seemingly impossible odds, and encourage others to do the same.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS

1. In the opening verse of today's passage, we read that God "pardoned" the guilty Israelites. However, as we know from the remainder of the passage, these Israelites also experienced consequences for their sin. In what ways have you personally experienced both God's pardoning and also His discipline?
2. Caleb was contrasted with the other spies, because he remained faithful while others doubted. Why is it important for our behavior, as believers, to contrast the behavior of unbelievers?
3. Why did the Israelites doubt God's promise? What are a few reasons you sometimes find yourself tempted to doubt God's promises, His power, His faithfulness, His love?
4. In what ways might today's Scripture change the way we handle with our fears?