

01

SESSION ONE

The Report of the Twelve Spies

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will study the story of the Israelites failing the test of faith as they were called to enter the promised land. Like the Israelites, when our faith fails we start looking at our strength instead of God's, and we forget both the power God has demonstrated in the past as well as His future promise. When our faith fails, we need a faithful representative who will plead to God in our place. As you work through this passage, ask the Spirit to examine your heart and grow your sense of gratitude for the greatness of God's faithfulness.

SCRIPTURE

Numbers 13:1-2,26-33; 14:1-20

THE POINT

Even through our faithlessness, God remains faithful.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Life is hard. Beyond the objective realities that we face in the world like disease, natural disasters, and death, there are other complications that happen along the way. Every day is filled with moments for decision-making. Some are simple, and some will change the course of your life.

Moments of decision come frequently in our lives, and the same was true of the people described in the Bible. As our journey through the story line of Scripture continues, we join the children of Israel as they approach the brink of the promised land. The God who promised to bring salvation to the world through the seed of Abraham has rescued Abraham's descendants from their slavery in Egypt. After years of traveling through the wilderness, the Israelites have arrived at the doorstep to the land God promised. But before they enter, they are confronted with a decision that requires faith.

- **When have you faced a decision that required faith? What helped or hindered your faith during that time?**

Option 2

Is it OK to be afraid of some things? What's the difference between healthy and unhealthy fears? Display a variety of emotion-stirring images, such as a kitten, puppy, snake, shark, and so forth. What is your reaction to each of these? What emotions are stirred by each image?

Invite students to name some popular horror movies they're familiar with. Share that in 2013, the top 11 horror movies brought in \$1.75 billion dollars worldwide.¹ What do you think is the draw of scary movies?

- **How are these fears similar to the fear you face when it comes to making big decisions, or finding out a close friend or family member has been critically injured or diagnosed with a terminal illness?**
- **How does this kind of fear affect you emotionally? physically? psychologically? How does it affect your faith in God?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Even through our faithlessness, God remains faithful.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land
- **Caleb and Joshua:** Israelite spies appointed by Moses to scout the land of Canaan

PLOT

As we continue our adventure into God's story, we pick up where we left off with Moses and the people of God on their way to the promised land. We have seen a lot unfold since the Israelites departed from their Egyptian captivity until now. The people have experienced more of God's faithfulness and sovereignty, but they've sinned more as well. And as they stand on the precipice of the promised land, they are going to once again see how the human heart fails to trust in God, despite all of what God has done for them.

The apostle Paul wrote that the story of the Israelites in the wilderness is given as an example for us (1 Corinthians 10). As we look into this story, it is important that we look past the Israelites and into ourselves, seeing if we, too, fall victim to unbelief within our own lives.

Remember, every time you see this bar in the leader guide, it indicates the same material is also found in the personal study guide as well.

THE PEOPLE LOOK TO THEIR OWN STRENGTH

The time had come for the Israelites to move into the land God had promised. Centuries earlier, the Lord said that through Abraham He would make a great people (the nation of Israel), send them into a great land (Canaan), and provide great blessings through them. Now, the Lord is ready to move them into that land. But here is where the obstacles arise, tempting Israel to look to their own strength instead of God's.

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them." [...] And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan." But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." (Num. 13:1-2,26-33)

Consider the incredible report the spies brought back about the beauty of the land. Moses, Aaron, and all of the Hebrews received amazing news.

The early part of the spies' report could be summarized like this: "It's better than you can possibly imagine!" They said it "flows with milk and honey." The natural resources of the land were like nothing they had seen before.

But, as is often the case we find in the Old Testament, the Israelites faltered in their faith. Right on the heels of describing the land as everything they could

TIMELINE

SCOUTING THE PROMISED LAND

The spies deliver their report.

THE BRONZE SERPENT

The people look and are healed.

THE PARTING OF THE JORDAN

God calls Joshua to lead His people.

hope for, the spies also described why it was impossible to possess. Note the word *however* that shows up in verse 28. With that one word, the spies' report shifted from the goodness of God's promise to the difficulty of possessing the land.

In the face of the dangers present in the promised land, all but two of the spies lost their faith. Joshua and Caleb were ready to forge ahead, but they were outnumbered by spies who believed the fortified cities were too great for God to overcome. When their faith had faltered, and their eyes were no longer on the promise, they only saw an unconquerable force before them.

- **Provide paper and instruct students to make two columns. In one column, guide students to list the good things the spies reported about the land. In the other column, list the obstacles that were mentioned.**
- **Which list received more attention? Why?**

THE PEOPLE FORGET ABOUT GOD'S PAST WORK IN THEIR LIVES

How did the people respond once their faith began faltering? They didn't reflect on what God had done in the past, nor did they look forward to God's future promise. They were overcome by fear of death and despair. Watch how the author describes their faithlessness:

Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel. And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they." (Num. 14:1-12)

When the leaders lost their faith, the people of Israel faced a crisis. Once the majority of spies said there was no hope, the Israelites went from wondering, to mourning, to outright rebellion. In the heat of the moment, the people's rebellion escalated. They took the position—which can only be described as ridiculous—that they would be better off dead! The people contemplated the merits of having died as slaves in Egypt or having died in the desert wanderings. Here's a warning for us: The loss of faith includes a loss of good sense. To wish for death when you are on the edge of God's promise is the result of a faithless heart.

Choosing death or slavery at the moment seemed a better option. They were ready to stone Moses to death and then try their luck crossing the wilderness back to Egypt. Their choice was based on a total lack of memory. All that God had done was somehow no longer in their minds. They neglected the power of God displayed in the past as well as the promise of God for their future.

Moses and Aaron fell down in a posture of repentant prayer. Joshua and Caleb, the only two spies who had kept their faith, tore their clothes in a sign of mourning. They responded this way because the rebellion of the people was a sin against God and grieved their souls.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

To ensure that the people clearly understood the gravity of both their history and their present circumstances, the Lord personally visited them. As Joshua and Caleb bowed down and cried out for the people to remember God's presence among them, God did the work Himself. His glory appeared at the tent of meeting, and God challenged the Israelites to renew their faith.

In verse 11, God asked, "How long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?" Because of the people's unbelief in the promises of God, it would be forty years before the people would be able to enter into the promised land. Because of their rebellion and unbelief, the Israelites would have to wait for a younger generation to arise and follow in the footsteps of Caleb and Joshua, believing that God would deliver on His promises.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Faith

Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by receiving Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith; rather, it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

TIMELINE

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

Rahab helps the Israelites in their conquest of Jericho.

CONQUEST OF AI

How one man's sin can negatively affect everyone around him.

THE CHARGE TO ISRAEL

The people must make a choice: worship God alone or follow after false idols.

Remember, these sections are optional and can be skipped if preferred.

Whenever you see PSG page numbers listed, it indicates that there is a section in the personal study guide for students to interact with.

- What assumptions did the Israelites make? What did their fear reveal about their trust in God? What did it cost them? (p. 11, PSG)
- How does fear sometimes keep you from following God's plan? (p. 11, PSG)

CHRIST CONNECTION

In this story, we see Moses standing before God as the representative for His people after witnessing their unbelief and sin. We see him pleading with God to show mercy, praying that God would use this circumstance to display His willingness to forgive sin. Listen to the entire account:

But Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for you brought up this people in your might from among them, and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if you kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard your fame will say, ‘It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them that he has killed them in the wilderness.’ And now, please let the power of the Lord be great as you have promised, saying, ‘The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.’ Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now.” Then the LORD said, “I have pardoned, according to your word.” (Num. 14:13-20)

When the men stood before God and begged for mercy upon the people, they gave us a picture of what was to come. The people needed an advocate. They had it temporarily in Moses. The problem for us is that Moses died. On top of that, he is still dead! This was a temporary advocacy by a temporary leader in a temporary time. We need a permanent solution.

Only God in the flesh can be our advocate. He lived as we do so He could sympathize with our weaknesses. Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness, wandering around in faithlessness. Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, but unlike Israel, He passed the test. As the perfect representative, He gave the sacrifice we should give in order to grant salvation by His grace and through our faith. He rose from the dead state we could not overcome so as to defeat sin, hell, and the Enemy. And now Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father to intercede for you and me every moment of our existence.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **In what types of circumstances do your fears tend to overshadow your faith? What do you turn to for strength in moments when your faith is faltering?** *Answers will vary, but for the first question may include things like stress from school, disappointments over a relationship, trouble at home, and so forth.*
- **Recall a difficult situation from which God delivered you in the past. How can reflecting on the ways God has worked in the past give you strength for your present trials?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What does this story teach you about trusting God with your future?** *One of the things it teaches is the fact that you can trust God to uphold His promises within your life because God is always faithful. He will never leave you or forsake you.*
- **When our faith falters, what advantage over the Israelites do we have today because of the Holy Spirit living in us? What are some ways we can rely on the Spirit's power as we trust God's future promise?** *Unlike the Israelites, Christians have the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which means, among other things, that the presence of God is no longer at a religious and sacred building, but now residing within them. Because of this indwelling, the Spirit comforts and emboldens Christians for everyday living, reminding them of both God's past faithfulness and the certainty of His future promises.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

The Israelite spies lost sight of their identity as the people of God. They were the people of promise, saved by God and commissioned to take the land He had for them. Instead, they looked at some really large soldiers and made a poor assessment of themselves. “Like grasshoppers” is how they saw themselves, but that is not how the Lord saw them. A failure of faith is not only losing faith in God’s power, but losing a sense of yourself as His child.

- **Share of a time when you allowed circumstances to negatively affect your sense of identity.** *Responses will vary, but it may help to offer an experience from your own life to get the conversation started.*
- **Why is it important to know that our identity as Christians can never be changed or altered because of what Christ has done for us?** *For those without Christ, having a sense of identity can be a real struggle, especially when they seek it in accomplishments, activities, or in their personal self-expression. For Christians, however, it is comforting to know that our identity as children of God and followers of Jesus never changes, giving us a foundation for a joyful and God-honoring life.*



HEART

Like the Israelites, we can fall victim to unbelief when it comes to promises of God. One could argue that we do this with every instance of sin in our lives. Every time we lie or covet or lust, our hearts fail to believe in the promises of God that not lying, coveting, or lusting will bring more joy than the fleeting pleasures of sin. We should learn from the Israelites, trusting that because God has always been faithful, we can trust in His promises to work for our good and His glory.

- **Why is God’s past faithfulness a reason to trust His future promises?** *God’s future promises, and the fact that He will always keep them, is rooted in the goodness of His character.*
- **Why do you think faith in God’s future promises comes easier to those who memorize the promises of God recorded in Scripture?** *One of the reasons it comes easier is because having God’s promises on our minds and in our hearts equips us to fight against unbelief. By knowing the promises of God, we can cling to them each day, trusting that God will fulfill each and every one.*



HANDS

Because we have been fully represented before God by Jesus, we now are able to represent God before the people of the world who do not know Him. Today, our calling is not to conquer the nations but to take the gospel to them. No matter if the obstacles make us feel “like grasshoppers,” we trust that God will give us all we need to accomplish His mission.

- **What is an instance of God’s past faithfulness in your life you can share with someone this week?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What is a future promise from God found in Scripture you will share with someone this week?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #4, which contains cutout quotes from Corrie ten Boom you can distribute to students.

SOURCES

1. Mark Hughes, "Top 20 Highest Grossing Horror Movies of the Last Two Years," *Forbes* [online], 31 Oct. 2014 [cited 18 Aug 2015]. Available from the Internet: www.forbes.com.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

Don't forget to check out these additional resources to help equip you for each session.