

The Ten Spies -- an Evil Report

by Daniel Steele

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in God and His promises, and the consequences of unbelief, as seen in the Israelites' failure to enter the promised land.

Scripture: Hebrews 4:1

Topics: "Faith And Unbelief", "Spiritual Blessings"

Description

Henry Burton, under the preaching of Daniel Steele, delves into the deeper spiritual meanings found in the Old Testament histories, emphasizing the prefiguring of spiritual experiences in gospel times. Drawing from the insights of inspired apostles like St. Paul, he highlights how certain events in Israel's history symbolize spiritual truths, such as the command 'Let there be light' representing the light of knowledge of God in believers' hearts. The failure of Israel to enter the promised land due to unbelief is likened to Christians missing out on spiritual blessings due to a lack of faith in God's promises.

Transcript

There is much more in the Old Testament histories than lies on the surface. Without adopting the fanciful hidden sense read into the Scripture narratives by Swedenborg and some extravagant modern typologists, we may without peril or dangerous error follow in the footsteps of inspired apostles when they assert that certain facts in the annals of Israel prefigure spiritual experiences in gospel times. St. Paul is certainly a sure guide in this matter. In the command, "Let there be light," he sees a type of the greater Fiat Lux in the heart of the believer, "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). In the emergence of our globe out of chaos into order, beauty, and life, he sees a prophecy of a more sublime creative art, not in the realm of matter, but in the sphere of the human spirit (2 Cor. 5:17). He beautifully allegorizes the history of Sarah and Hagar to set forth the superiority of love-service to law-service (Gal. 4:21-31). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, assumed by us to be St. Paul, sets forth quite extendedly the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and their wanderings in the desert, and their failure to enter into the promised land through unbelief, as a representation of the sad failure of many Christians to enter into some great spiritual blessing through their feeble grasp of the divine promise (Heb. 4:1-11). Let us first settle the important question, What is this great blessing spoken of as the rest that remaineth to the people of God? Some unwisely assume that Canaan is the type of heaven, and the rest which many Christian professors fail to attain is eternal life in heaven. The logical carrying out of the type as thus explained is something dreadful to contemplate. Of the million of adult Israelites who left Egypt but two entered Canaan; all the rest fell by the way under the frown of God. The

antitype then would be that, of the myriads delivered from bondage to sin by pardon and the new birth, only here and there one finally attains eternal life. I must not thus explain the type of Israel's failure to enter the promised land.

In the third and fourth chapters of Hebrews, St. Paul, proceeding upon the maxim that "history is philosophy teaching by examples," from the failure of Israel, urges Christians to press with all earnestness into "rest." Eleven times does he use the term "rest" in the course of a short passage beginning with a quotation from Ps. 95:7-11, where the word "rest" is substituted for "the land" in Num. 14:23. The land was to be a type of the rest, not heavenly rest, but spiritual rest on earth. For five centuries, after enjoying Canaan, David urges the people, "today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts," evidently pointing them to heart-rest in God. He could not have exhorted them to enter into rest in heaven, today, without urging them to suicide. Joshua gave physical, he could not give spiritual, rest. Only the greater Joshua can give this supreme soul-rest in this life. As God did not rest till he ceased from his creative works, so the Christian cannot rest till he ceases from his compensative works, vainly wrought as an adequate offset for acceptance with God. Faith in the great atonement is the only basis for the undisturbed repose of the soul beyond the reach of fears and doubts and sins. "For we which have believed do enter into rest." Let us thank God for this present tense, "do enter." Says Dr. Finney, "The truly believing soul rests from its own works. It sees salvation secured in Jesus Christ, and has no longer any motive to legal works. It works not from self nor for self; but its works are from Christ and for Christ. He works in the believing soul to will and to do, and, having no longer any occasion to work for self, the soul delights in rendering to Christ a full-hearted love-service. True faith works love, and love does all for Christ. Thus the believing soul ceases from its own works." Hence it follows, if a soul will fully believe in Jesus today, it will enter into rest today. Again in the exhortation, "Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest," the original for "labor" is not a word signifying long and wearying toil, but it is radically the same as that found in the Septuagint version of Joshua 4:10, "and the people HASTED and passed over." It would be absurd to exhort to hasten into heaven, but quite reasonable to urge the believer to hasten into the highest state of grace this side of glory --

Since thou wouldst have us free from sin,

And pure as those above,

Make haste to bring thy nature in,

And perfect it in love.

We find no scriptural ground for making Canaan a type of heaven and Jordan the type of death. The love of Christ fully shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit is the true Canaan, and death unto sin through entire sanctification, as the instantaneous deliverance from sin with power then imparted always to cleave unto God, is the believer's Jordan. This is the blessed rest to which Jesus invites laboring souls. Wisely indeed does the great poet of Methodism sing

"Lord, I believe a rest remains

To all thy people known;

A rest where pure enjoyment reigns,

And thou art loved alone.

A rest where all our soul's desire
Is fixed on things above;
Where fear, and sin, and grief expire,
Cast out by perfect love.
O that I now this rest might know,
Believe and enter in!
Now Savior, now the power bestow
And let me cease from sin."
C. Wesley.

God's ideal of Israel's possible future was a trustful and obedient nation marching in two or three months straight from Mount Sinai into Canaan by the way of Kadesh-Barnea, after they had received the Decalogue and had been sufficiently instructed in the Levitical law. They would be victorious in every battle, and in a very short time would exterminate every foe out of the land. What would Canaan typify in this ideal? A Christian experience well grounded in a knowledge of the law, the basis of the atonement which is the only measure of sin, advancing by rapid strides into a rest undisturbed by inward enemies, a rest from harassing doubt and tormenting fear, a rest filled with ever-increasing assurance, gladness, and strength. How different the picture of actual Israel through their perverse distrust of God and rebellion! See them rejected by him whose covenant they had broken, wandering wearily in the wilderness thirty-nine sad years in weakness, uncheered by hope, and doomed to die beneath the ban of that very God who longed to show himself strong in their behalf, if they had maintained their trust in him, and thus presented a character worthy of such interposition. They are still the people of the Abrahamic covenant. They are not as a nation cast off forever; but the blessings of the covenant are withdrawn, and they are shut out from the joyful sense of the divine favor. Alas! that this should mirror the sorrowful condition of many real Christians, who will doubtless be saved so as by fire. They have been delivered from the guilt of sin, their Egyptian taskmaster; through faith in the blood of Jesus, the Paschal Lamb, they have crossed the Red Sea of repentance, and have entered upon newness of life with the glorious possibility of perfect triumph over all their foes and a speedy settlement in perfect love; but, distrusting the ability of their great Leader, they falter and fail and grovel for years, and even scores of years, pitiable weaklings instead of conquering heroes.

The first indication of the paralysis of unbelief in Israel is their desire to send spies to ascertain whether God had told them the truth on two interesting points; first, Is Canaan worth conquering? and secondly, Is God able to conquer it through our agency? From the narrative in Num. 13, we might infer that the scheme of sending the spies originated with Moses as guided by Jehovah; but his command, as found in Deut. 1:21, 22, was "fear not, neither be discouraged." What was the reply of the people to these brave words of faith?

"And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up." As if God did not know the way, and they must help him find it! Here is the primal error, this miserable business of the spies. If they

had unwaveringly trusted God, they would never have sent the twelve spies. For Jehovah had assured them that the land flowed with milk and honey, and that he would drive out all their enemies, if they would go bravely forward and fight beneath his banner.

How strangely like this is the conduct of many Christians. Christ reveals to them the Canaan of perfect holiness of heart, and sends his Holy Spirit to bring them in and establish them there forever. But instead of perfect confidence in this wonderful revelation and an unwavering reliance on the Divine Sanctifier, multitudes, yielding to a secret distrust of Christ's word and the cleansing efficacy of his blood, demand to see somebody who has been there; and they immediately send out a gang of spies whose names are Philosophy and Speculation and Investigation and Caution and Hesitation and Suspense and Suspicion and Uncertainty and Distrust and Doubt, whose surname is Thomas.

This sorry set of spies is sent out to explore the land of Christian Perfection, and report whether Christ tells the truth about it and about the possibility of entering into it at once, when he commands his disciples to be perfect in love (Matt. 5:43-48). It does not take a prophet to tell beforehand what their report will be, "There are no perfectly holy men but dead ones. See that ye fail not after the same example of unbelief. Depravity naturally hates holiness, even that which still lingers after the new birth.

There are animals born with an instinctive knowledge of their enemies. The young partridge, just out of its shell, will skulk and hide under the leaves at the first sight of a hawk; the mouse runs into its hole the first time he sees a cat; and the little kitten, before his eyes are open, will spit and curve his little back when a hand that has just touched a dog is placed near his nose. Slavery had an instinctive dread of liberty, and raised a bloody rebellion at the very thought of the possible supremacy of freedom.

The flesh which lusteth against the Spirit, even in the hearts of believers, in their initial regenerate experience, shrinks back from the very words "sanctify you wholly," "cleansing from all sin," and raises up all sorts of doctrinal, scriptural, and philosophical objections and practical difficulties. The real difficulty is the heart's unwillingness to be crucified with Christ. This disrelish for evangelical perfection in young Christians is greatly intensified by the indifferent or hostile attitude of the older and more influential.

A majority of Israel's leaders -- for the spies were all princes of their tribes -- reported adversely to marching immediately into Canaan. That report manufactured unbelief by the wholesale among the common people in the camp. "Our great and wise men say that we cannot conquer and cast out the Canaanites. It must be so, if our leaders say so." The detailed report of the ten cowardly spies is unfortunately lost. It would be interesting and instructive to read just what each said.

But, perhaps, by a diligent study of the account and a judicious use of our imaginations, we can introduce these individual reports as they fell from their lips. Their names, who can call? If any one whom I am addressing can from memory speak one of them, let him arise and pronounce that name. We all know the two names attached to the minority report. The believing spies have written their imperishable names on the hearts of all the generations. God has embalmed them in the memories of all good men.

In every Jewish and Christian age children are proud of the names Caleb and Joshua; and when the Son of God stooped down from the skies to become the Son of Mary, the heroic name of Jesus, the Greek of Joshua, was found to be the fittest name for the Lord of glory to wear among men. But no children are named after the ten spies --

"Cancelled from heav'en and sacred memory,

Nameless in dark oblivion let them dwell."

Yet God has put their names on record. In Num. 13 they stand in the pillory of sacred history for the reproach and scorn of mankind. "Of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them."

The tribe of Reuben was represented in the exploring expedition by Prince Shammua. It is easy to reproduce his report from the general characteristics of his tribe as discerned by the keen sagacity or supernatural insight of dying Jacob: "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." Indecision marks all the Reubenites. Their spy being called on first, not knowing on which side the majority will be, finds himself in a difficult position. He is averse to committing himself. He has a good opinion of the land as every way desirable: but he fears that he shall get the name of a radical and a fanatic, if he should boldly say, "We ought to march straight into it without a day's delay." That will not sound well. "I must look to my reputation. A good name is better than great riches." So, after praising the country, he says that on the practical question of immediate conquest he has not yet made up his mind. "I prefer to announce my views after my brother spies have reported. You may reckon me on the side of the majority when I find out what it is." A good type of a Christian lacking independence, positiveness, and inflexible firmness in standing on his convictions. If he is a layman, he is always taking his religious beliefs at second hand from his influential brethren; if he is a preacher, he inquires for what he may enjoy, profess, and preach not in God's word, illumined by the Holy Ghost within him, but in the last debate of the Preachers' Meeting or Ministerial Club to which he belongs. Oh, for vertebrate men and women whose beliefs have become experiences, who have gotten hold of truth so precious that they are willing to suffer the loss of all things rather than to sell it out for human applause! (John 5:44.) Prince Shaphat of the tribe of Simeon next arises before the hushed assembly and expresses his view of the critical situation: "I cannot deny the excellence of the land. It is fertile, pleasant, and healthy. Just see this mammoth cluster of grapes and the enormous figs and pomegranates surpassing in both size and quality anything Egypt can produce. But -- but -- the people are more numerous than we. The odds are heavily against us. In my reading of history, I have discovered the important fact that the strongest battalions always win. It is best to take a sober, rational, and common-sense view of this matter, and consider it in proper military style. Numbers must decide in the long run. That is a very fanatical view which has gained some adherents in our camp, that five of us shall chase a hundred, and a hundred put ten thousand to flight. I stamp that sentiment as exceedingly visionary and perilous, if it should become so general as to shape our policy, and thrust us, all unprepared, into deadly conflict with these seven mighty nations. I counsel delay, till we have become stronger and our foes have grown weak. I have no good opinion of this foolish reliance on the supernatural. If we beat our foes, we must trust alone in our own muscle."

Here is the type of the naturalistic Christian! How strange a combination of words, in view of the facts of a miraculous gospel history, and of the spread of Christianity against such tremendous odds arrayed against it by Judaism and Paganism, by learning, wealth, and power, by imperial persecutions, and brutal mobs. Yet we live in a day when myriads wear the name of Christ, the Wonderful, from whose faith the supernatural has entirely evaporated. The naturalistic Christian may be known by his little faith in sudden conversions, and instantaneous sanctifications, and baptisms of the Spirit, and in discouraging efforts to promote sweeping revivals of religion. If the exact census of Christendom should be taken, we fear that a wide column would be filled with this class of professed Christians.

Prince Igal of the tribe of Issachar is now eager to report "I bear witness to the truth of the old description of the land which had so delicious a sound around our cradles and in the brickyards of Egypt. It is a land

which floweth with milk and honey.

"Being of antiquarian turn of mind, I recall that I saw in Egypt the records of Rameses II chiseled in stone. That great king brought back from Canaan, he tells us, gold, glass, gums, cattle, male and female slaves, ivory, ebony, boats laden with all good things, horses, chariots inlaid with gold and silver, goblets, dishes, iron, steel, dates, oil, wine, asses, cedar, suits of armor, fragrant wood, war galleys, incense, gold dishes with handles, collars and ornaments of lapis lazuli, silver dishes, vases of silver, precious stones, honey, goats, lead, spears of brass, colors, beer, bread, geese, fruit, milk, pigeons -- the plunder, in fact, of a rich and civilized country. The meadows of Palestine, its fortresses, its groves, and its orchards, are mentioned, showing that prosperity of every kind abounded. It is no savage nor unoccupied region, therefore, that is to be conquered by us, but a land strongly defended, full of people, and is provided with all appliances for resistance. Nor is it without marked culture, for its libraries gave a name to some of its cities. But, nevertheless in my reconnaissance of that interesting country, I was alarmed at the extraordinary stature of the people. They actually stand seven and eight feet high in their stockings. Our party of spies -- you see that we are good-sized men -- were as grasshoppers in their sight, and we felt like grasshoppers in our own sight. There is no use of attempting to cope with a race of demigods. It would be worse than a crime, it would be a blunder, for us pygmies to rush madly against a host of giants. Pause! Pause, fellow Hebrews! before you rush headlong into a position where a battle will be certain defeat, or a retreat a national disgrace or a national extinction. Meanwhile we are very comfortably off where we are: we have abundant cool, sweet water out of the rock, and bread rained daily upon the camp; and though the manna is rather flat to my taste, yet it is much better than nothing. I think we can very profitably spend a score or more of years here reflecting on the greatness of our deliverance from the yoke of Pharaoh. This eagerness to press forward to the land of promise indicates a lack of appreciation of the great emancipation of our nation. We ought not to forget this glorious event, as we evidently are forgetting, in our haste to push forward. There is something wrong in that song I have been pained to hear everlastingly resounding along the column as we have followed the pillar of cloud.

'Forget the steps already trod,

And onward urge your way.'

"We should hold the past in grateful memory, and magnify our abundant present blessings, and not dwarf them down by contrasting them with some great imaginary blessings in Canaan. In fact, we are already in Canaan as much as we ever shall be. This I can prove from Jehovah's own word in Ex. 23:31, 'I will set thy bounds from the Red Sea even unto the sea of the Philistines.' We stepped into Canaan when we came up out of the Red Sea and set our feet upon the eastern shore. The great miracle is already past. God does only one great work for any nation. He does not deliver piecemeal. Yes, we are already in the promised land; though things are rather rough here, and not quite up to our expectation and God's promise. We have had too rose-colored anticipations.

'Twas distance lent enchantment to our view.'

"We shall be acting wisely to tone down our expectations to harmonize with our surroundings. Things will gradually improve as we get used to the climate and better acquainted with the inhabitants. We must rely on natural processes -- growth, education, refinement, and the softening effects of the fine arts. Let us move slowly and steadily forward with no more such spasms like our deliverance from Egypt. Spasms indicate weakness and not robust health."

Many a Christian secretly confesses that his experience is not what he expected when he embraced Christ. He does not find complete satisfaction in him. But when told to go forward into the goodly land of full salvation how strangely he acts; he looks round him for proofs that there is no better experience, and he takes a kind of sad delight in dragging down the rich promises of God to his own meager realization. With such half-starved and stationary Christians the church is overstocked.

Palti, a prince of Benjamin, now takes the platform, and in a loud voice says, "My brethren, the land cannot be too highly praised. It is surpassingly excellent. Its valleys are fat with olives, and all you have to do with its terraced hills is 'to tickle them with a hoe and they will laugh into a harvest.' But I looked upon the land with the eye of a soldier and strategist. I observed that all the strong positions, the key points, are already occupied by our enemies. Their cities are stupendous fortresses crowning every high hill. Nature and art have made them absolutely impregnable. Why, you will scarcely believe me when I soberly say that their walls tower up into the very heavens. It is sheer presumption to think of dashing our heads against such munitions as these. I do not believe that the command to throw ourselves against these impregnable walls has been rightly interpreted. It is evidently figurative. It means that we are to contend against them with the arts of diplomacy, and to outwit them in a statecraft, by and by, when we shall have reached a higher intellectual and political status. There must, of course, be treaties of peace, then we will get the best of these bargains, and reduce them to serfdom, and make them pay tribute to us. There must be some mistake about that command of a universal extermination. Why, the very thought is horrible! The banishment or destruction of every one of these seven civilized nations! The thing is without precedent in the annals of mankind. We cannot hope for anything better than a gradual melting of the two peoples into one nationality, Canaan taking on circumcision and our Abrahamic covenant, while we meet them halfway by giving up our clannish exclusiveness and bigotry, our groundless prejudice against the Gentiles, and our over-nice rules of diet. I advise that we begin this process of assimilation as soon as possible. Let us immediately send a flag of truce and enter into peaceable treaty relations. By this means we shall lift our rude nation into cultivation, refinement, and wealth; for these Canaanites, as Prince Igal has just said, are polished, cultured, and rich, being of the same race with the great city of Tyre. Our sturdy Hebrew strength united with their elegance and taste will make a nation both heroic and splendid."

Many Christians think that the best way to conquer the world is to become just like it. Thus did not the Son of man, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, whose all-conquering moral power lies in his unlikeness to the world in spotless character.

Gaddiel, a prince of Zebulun, now speaks: "Sons of Abraham, the beauty and fertility of the land exceeds all the upreachings of man's imagination. It is beyond our most glowing dreams. It is a land worth fighting valiantly for, when we get fully ready. For it is folly for us to push headlong in our present unprepared condition. We lack military drill. We have had no experience in war except in a little skirmish at Rephidim near Mount Sinai. We need arms. For generations we have been in bondage. Slaves are never permitted to own arms. We must make arms by building forges and smelting iron and copper, which abound here in this wilderness. We must first get our materials, and then train our armorers to make shields, swords, spears, and battle-axes; for it will not do to depend on so rude an arm as the sling in besieging walled cities. To put ourselves in fighting order will take years. Discretion is the better part of valor. When we have a good military outfit you shall hear my voice for war, but not till then."

You will find many Christians of this procrastinating sort, distrusting God's promise of present complete salvation, and waiting in idleness for strength, which comes only through activity begotten of faith in God.

The vast audience of Israelites crowd near to the stand as Gaddi, a prince of Manasseh, stands up to report: "Hear, O Israel! if I were a painter I might transfer to your minds some idea of the indescribable loveliness and richness of Canaan. I hope to dwell amid its matchless charms, at least in my old age. For I see that its conquest is a work of many, many years. Although we are Hebrews, the chosen nation, we are human nevertheless, and we must proceed by the historic methods which have ended in success. We are a single nation marching against a strong confederacy of seven nations. We have no allies. It will be wise for us to form alliances with neighboring nations, and thus to multiply our strength. This will take time. This is the most reasonable course. The possession of reason argues that we should use it, and not go blindfold into battle and be butchered like sheep. What some people call faith I brand as sheer presumption. In addition to small arms, as was mentioned by my brother prince, we must have battering-rams, catapults, ballistas, and all the ponderous enginery of warfare. This will take more time."

Here is a type of the conservative Christian pleading for more and more time in which to get ready to be victorious over his spiritual foes within, not by a decisive battle, a crushing victory, secured by almighty power, but by a kind of easy human gradualism, which never comes to a deadly clinch with the foe within the heart.

Listen now to Ammiel, prince of Dan: "Children of Israel, enough has been said about the excellence of other people's land. What benefit is to come to our nation by aggravating them with descriptions of a country which they will never inhabit. Conquest by us is absolutely impossible. Our great-grandchildren may develop strength enough to drive out the Canaanites, should Israel hold together so long as a nation. I, for my part, am bold to say that we made a big mistake when we left Egypt, the great granary of the world, the center of learning, the mother of the arts, and the fountain of religion. Although our liberties were somewhat curtailed there, we were tolerably well off under the protection of a strong government. I wish that we were well back again. As it is now, we are just nowhere. We are neither luxuriating in the vineyards of Canaan, nor drinking the sweet, cool waters of the Nile. We are just living from hand to mouth, roving about in this wilderness, with no chance to lay up anything for more than twenty-four hours ahead, and that, a little insipid manna. I confess that when I turn my eyes northward toward the Promised Land, I see only thunder-clouds of appalling blackness. The idea of our immediate conquest of that confederacy of strong and warlike nations on their own soil, where they will fight like tigers for their altars and their fires, and the sepulchers of their sires, is the greatest absurdity of the age. It is time this humbug was exploded, and the true state of the facts was made known to this easily duped multitude. I say, let us take the back track to Egypt. For this state of being nowhere I do not enjoy. Since the olive groves of Canaan are out of the question, let us sit down once more by the flesh-pots of Egypt. It does not pay to seek the land of rest."

There were, doubtless, in the Jewish Church in the wilderness, discouraged and despairing members annoyed by any witnesses favorable to Canaan exhibiting the clusters of Eshcol. Such persons were finding little enjoyment in their mixed and wilderness experience, and were inclined to abandon a joyless unsatisfactory, and irksome service and return to hopeless eternal bondage. Because a Canaan of perfect soul-rest is not pointed out to Christians -- or if pointed out is regarded as unattainable -- they turn back to a life of sin. Love unmixed, and therefore perfect, enjoyed or earnestly sought is the divine safeguard against backsliding. When filled with the Holy Spirit we may jubilantly sing

"Creatures no more divide my choice;

I bid them all depart:

His name, his love, his gracious voice,

Have fixed my roving heart."

The tribe of Asher now puts forward its prince, Sethur, one of the far-famed explorers. "Hebrew brethren, I endorse all that has been said in praise of Canaan. But it gives me great pain of heart to proclaim without reserve my honest convictions. There are invincible obstacles to the conquest of the land of promise. Others have spoken of the vast number and gigantic stature of the foe, their impregnable walls, and closely cemented alliance, our feebleness, lack of military drill and arms. But there is another drawback to which it is my painful duty to allude. Moses and Aaron are excellent men. I do not wish to utter a word which shall detract from their influence, but I suppose I shall be telling no news when I say that there is a growing distrust of their capacity for leadership. Their haste to rush instantly into deadly conflict, trusting that Jehovah himself will descend from heaven and work miracles for us on the battle-field, routing our foes, betrays so much fanaticism that a widespread distrust of their guidance has already sprung up in the camp; and the popular enthusiasm which once loudly shouted, "On to Canaan," has visibly declined. We have not heard this shout for several days. We do not regret the change, for the cry had become distasteful to us; but it shows the waning influence of those two sons of Levi who have usurped the leadership of Israel. I recommend that we bring our minds to the idea of a rather protracted stay where we are, making ourselves as comfortable as possible, while we wait to see whether something favorable will not happen. Confidence in our leaders may be restored; the popular enthusiasm may revive. The Canaanites may die off of a pestilence without our risking our necks to kill them in battle. By no means should we advance another step. It is the height of presumption that we have come thus far."

Well would it be if the Jewish Church were the only one cursed with cowardly members distrustful of all who urge them forward into complete victory over foes within their own hearts. The chief work that these do is to put the brakes on the chariot-wheels of King Jesus while it is laboring up the hill, and to predict that the trusty horses tugging with all their might at the traces will run away with it, and smash it all to pieces.

Nahbi, prince of Naphtali, now mounts the stand: "My beloved brethren in Israel, all twelve of us spies agree that Canaan is a splendid country. But war is horrid and barbarous. I am for peace at any sacrifice. If we advance, picture to yourselves the streaming blood, the ghastly wounds, the wailing widows, the sobbing orphans, the smoking cities, and the desolated homes if we should triumph; and the appalling disaster, if we should be worsted in the fight, with no fortifications, no walled towns, no base of supplies, to fall back upon, nothing in our rear but enraged Amalekites embittered by their former defeat. Should we advance one day's march, we should precipitate a decisive battle. It does not require great military experience to predict the result. We should certainly be disastrously beaten. I advise that we avoid the strain and struggle, the sacrifice and slaughter of hard-fought battles, by making a treaty of peace, that our policy of conquest be effected by gradually colonizing the land, and slowly proselytizing its inhabitants to Judaism by exhibiting the superiority of our style of civilization. In fact, I think that the Canaanites are a very nice people, who have been grossly slandered by the traditions which have come down to us from the patriarchs, or they have made marvelous progress since our father, Jacob, sojourned among them, and even then they only annoyed the old gentleman a very little by filling up some of his wells. They are evidently a people too good to be butchered; they have a capacity for high religious culture. We spies walked in the daylight from end to end of their land in perfect safety. They offered us no violence. Then, again, I am jealous for my nation's reputation. I do not wish that we should get the name of a race of filibusterers, a horde of land pirates and free-booters; a name which the whole world will fasten upon us as

an indelible stigma, if we oust these peaceable Canaanites from their rightful possessions. Let us have peace."

Did you ever see the portrait of a sentimental religionist? Here it is. His outgushing sympathies are a current so strong that they bear him into positive disobedience to God. He so highly prizes his inward spiritual foes that he would not have one of them suddenly slain. His own reputation also is too good to risk in a course of unquestioning, whole-hearted, downright obedience to God. What will people say?

The last of the ten spies is quite nervous with desire to speak. Geuel, a prince of Gad, takes the stand: "How happy should I be, fellow Israelites, if my judgment could recommend an immediate movement against the enemies' works. But I must be candid, and not let my heart run away with my head. In addition to all the objections brought forward by my nine honorable colleagues, I would mention two which have made a deep impression on my mind. First, the Hittites are abundantly supplied with splendid horses and war-chariots against which we cannot cope. Secondly, I find in my studies in history that mighty Assyria in the pride of her power once conquered this very country, but failed to retain her dominion over it. Many years ago Egypt subdued these nations and took Kedesh, their capital city, and they arose after a short time and threw off the Egyptian yoke. In our explorations as spies we found monuments of both the Assyrian and Egyptian conquests. The disheartening inference is, -- and I sigh as I give it utterance -- we could not retain possession even if we should conquer Canaan. Therefore, we should not waste our blood and treasure, and risk our reputation for an advantage so uncertain."

The report of this spy is a mirror in which many a Christian can see himself. Hear him think aloud: "I will not aspire to the Alpine heights of grace, because some one has fallen therefrom. If I should obtain that pearl of pearls, the love which casts out all fear, some pickpocket of an adversary may slyly rob me of my treasure. So I will remain in spiritual poverty. Burglars do not molest paupers."

Shammua, the first spy, is now ready to make his report. He has found out on which side the majority is, and he is now ready to give the policy of delay a hearty endorsement. He now regrets that he did not say so at the first, for this was his cowardly opinion all the time.

No wonder that all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night: "Would God that we had died in Egypt, or would God we had died in this wilderness! Were it not better for us to return into the land of Egypt. Let us make a captain and return." But hold! two of the spies have not reported. What are they doing? They are rending their garments in grief and righteous indignation at this cowardly report, in which the name of Jehovah, their great ally, is not even mentioned, who had conquered stubborn Pharaoh, and overwhelmed his hosts in the Red Sea, who had thundered on Sinai, and walked before Israel in pillar of cloud and pillar of fire, and who had promised to drive out their enemies in complete conquest, if Israel would obey him.

Now the two believing spies lift up their voices to stem the tide of infidelity which is surging through the camp and engulfing all their hopes in the irretrievable ruin. "The land is an exceeding good land. If Jehovah delight in us, then will he bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and Jehovah is with us: fear them not." Here is courage. Here is insight into the real weakness of all God's foes. True faith is the best philosophy. Faith by its very existence and manifestation is a rebuke to unbelief. Courage is always a censure of cowardice. Hence, it was natural that the people bade stone them with stones. The side that has the weakest foothold in

reason, right, and truth is always the first to resort to violence. But brave Caleb begs the privilege of saying one word. And he stilled the people, and said, "Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." At once, without one hour's delay, for we have Jehovah with us enthroned in the very center of our camp; at once, despite the superior numbers, and gigantic stature, and better military preparation of our united foes; at once, despite the noise and confusion of a battle and garments rolled in blood; at once, for "Forward" is our Great Captain's order, and it is always perfectly safe to obey God. These heroic words of Caleb, worthy to be inscribed in gold on his tombstone and to be read by all nations and generations forever, received, methinks, this scornful reply from the ten; "Away with you, you have been riding this hobby ever since we left Egypt; morning, noon, and night we have heard your favorite theme till we are heartily sick of it. We tell you we are not able, just now, to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we. We object to this immediateness, this instantaneousness; it is unnatural and unreasonable. Conquest must be gradual. We must expel our foes by our growth, little by little crowding them out. This will be much better than risking a decisive battle in which we may lose all."

You know the sequel. The anger of Jehovah was kindled. He would have smitten them with a pestilence all the people as one man, if Moses had not stood before him in the breach to turn away his wrath. Though he did not destroy them on the spot, yet he said, "As truly as I live all those men who have seen my glory and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice, surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers. But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land; and his seed shall possess it." Here is God's opinion of those who follow him fully, and of those who oppose an immediate, total, irreversible self-surrender to him for instantaneous and entire sanctification through the provisions of the atonement as administered by the Holy Spirit. For, says St. Paul, "These things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world [R. V., ages] are come." In this age there is a minority who are preaching and testifying God's ability instantaneously to stay our inward foes and to bring every believer into the state of rest from inbred sin. If you believe this in your inmost soul, you are a Caleb whom God will soon bring in. But if you inwardly disrelish this doctrine, and are quite content with your mixed wilderness life, and are satisfied with a philosophy of your own in opposition to revelation, God will let you wander all your days and die in the desert at last.

Let us also fear lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you young converts, any of you veterans, any of you Christian workers, Sunday school teachers, deacons, class leaders, or preachers, should seem to come short. For unto them was the gospel preached as well as unto us, but it was not mixed with faith. There is a Canaan before every Christian, to be attained in the present life if he will credit the promise of Christ. I speak of perfect love, or evangelical perfection, in which Adamic depravity is destroyed root and branch through the Holy Spirit, whose sanctifying office is secured through the efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ --

"Thy blood shall over all prevail,

And sanctify the unclean;

The grace that saves the soul from hell,

Will save from present sin."

On the possibility of the whole church moving promptly forward and entering in and dwelling permanently in the land of holiness, there are two kinds of reports -- the majority, who see the giants and shrink back like frightened children; and the minority, who see the same terrible giants, but they see also the almighty giant-killer, with his drawn sword ready to behead them at a single blow. It is said that the Federal Army of the Potomac was for several days kept from assaulting a strong redoubt on their way to Richmond by an array of great guns looking defiantly at them. The guns were just like those which Satan uses to keep Christians from capturing the spiritual Canaan of rest; they were Quaker guns -- logs bored and blackened to imitate cannon.

Every Christian is believing one of these reports. If he believes the majority report on the impracticability of attaining perfect purity in the present world, he is settling down in a wilderness life, and has ceased to strive to enter in at the strait gate of entire sanctification. In this case, grace is attempting the impossible task of living on neighborly terms with the family of original sin, occupying another apartment of the same house. Or he is believing the minority report, and has either already been allotted his portion by his great Joshua in the spiritual land of promise, or he is urging his way thither. My only justification for my earnest advocacy of this advanced and victorious Christian experience is that the salvation of the church and her aggressive power lie in her eminent spirituality, deadness to the world, and testimony by life and lip to Christ's uttermost salvation from sin, not in her rich men, her fine churches, her high social position, her millions of members, and her hundreds of seminaries and colleges. These are good things for Christianity to have, but bad to lean upon. These are not the hidings of her all-conquering power --

"Thanks to thy name for meaner things,

But they are not my God."

There are several important inferences to be made.

1. The question of faith in God is the test question of every age, God's perpetual touch-stone of character, the hinge of probation, and the pivot of destiny. "What must we do, that we may work the works of God?" To this inquiry of the Jews, Jesus answered, "This is the work of God which he requires, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." That through faith in Christ we have forgiveness is among evangelical Christians an easily accepted truth. It is so elementary that with believers it has lost its testingpower. Beyond and above this is the truth, that the gospel contains a power to purge human nature of its vileness, to wash out even the old Adamic principle of sin, and to make the soul whiter than snow. This doctrine affords the Christian a test of faith, as the doctrine of forgiveness tests the faith of the penitent seeker. Hearer, do you abide this higher test, or does your faith break down under it as did that of the ten spies?

2. The fact that we are God's people delivered out of Egyptian bondage to sin by faith in the blood of Christ, our Passover, is not an insurance policy against unbelief, rebellion, and rejection by God. The Israelites were all church members in good and regular standing; they were ALL baptized unto Moses, they ALL passed through the sea, they were ALL regular attendants at the sacrament table, for they ALL did eat the same spiritual meat, and did ALL drink the same spiritual drink; but these ordinary means of grace were not sufficient to bring them into Canaan. For with MANY of them God was not well pleased. Now, these things are our examples, types of the faithful few and the unbelieving many in the church, who assent to the easier gospel truths, and reject those glorious doctrines which really test faith.

3. This historic scene should be earnestly contemplated by all Christian leaders showing as it does their awful responsibility for their right influence on the mass of Christians who look to them for guidance in the

spiritual life. In the question of faith or unbelief in God's promises, the adage is still true. "Like priest, like people." Unbelief is more contagious than faith, because of the greater susceptibility of fallen humanity to distrust God's promises and threatenings. Says Dr Daniel Curry, "Let the pulpit be silent on any doctrine a single generation, and that doctrine will be exterminated from the faith of the church." I can but think that a sad era of spiritual weakness and incoming worldliness, with no dike to keep out the devastating flood, would follow Methodism's relaxed grip upon this distinctive truth committed to her by God through John Wesley. If mere silence will exterminate a vital truth, then silence is culpable. It is easy to proclaim accepted truth. It seems to be difficult to herald distasteful and unpopular truth. But this is just the kind of truth which God wants to have published. The false prophets can all be depended on to advocate doctrines pleasing to the masses. Only the true prophets will voice unpleasant truth, with the gibbet, the stake, and the block in full view. There is about as good a chance for martyrdom in our day as in the time of Nero; that is, as good an opportunity of suffering with God's truth, his unaccepted truth, which he has a special partiality for. On the other hand, there is just as wide a scope for selfish ambition in the pulpit as in politics, especially in denominations having a graded ministry, from an exhorter up to a bishop.

If worldliness dominates the church and controls the pulpit, the temptation will increase to neglect the doctrine of sin and repentance, regeneration and retribution, and above all, the necessity of self-crucifixion and entire sanctification, in order to the attainment of the most vigorous spiritual life and the highest efficiency in service.

What became of the ten spies? No ordinary punishment was inflicted (read Num. 14:36, 37). They died by the plague before the Lord. A plague is a stroke. This was given immediately by Jehovah, without secondary causes. They died suddenly by a bolt which proceeded visibly from Jehovah.

4. God's estimate of religious cowardice, or the subordination of religious convictions to selfish ends through fear of loss of popular favor or worldly gain. Cowardice in military law is a capital crime. So is it in God's law. (Read Rev. 21: 8.) Here we have the world of wicked men trooping in platoons down from the left hand of the judge to the open gates of hell. Beginning at the rear of the column, scrutinize each platoon, and see how they increase in the enormity of their guilt -- 1st, liars; 2nd, idolaters; 3rd, sorcerers, pretenders to a control of spiritual agencies; 4th, whoremongers, who have blighted human happiness and ruined souls for gold; 5th, murderers red with blood; 6th, the abominable, those polluted with unnatural lusts, such as the sin of Sodom; 7th, the unbelieving, who willfully reject sufficient proofs of the truth through stubbornness or some selfish end; 8th, the last platoon is the cowards. They are not stained with crimes, nor filthy with vices. They do not defiantly reject the word of God, but they are convinced of the truth as it is in Jesus; yet from fear of loss of reputation, property, or life, they refuse to follow where the truth leads. Such, be they preachers or laymen, will head the procession which will march from the judgment seat down to the lake of fire. Jesus has his eye on religious cowardice when he says, "If any man is ashamed of me or of my words." His own life-blood throbs in his words. Are you ashamed of the words "perfect," "perfection," "sanctify," and "sanctification"? and do you dodge them whenever you meet them? Beware, lest Jesus dodge you when you seek his recognition in the day of the saints' coronation.

5. The question how much God can do for a soul in probation is not left to be determined by the majority vote of the great men of any church. This question, in the words of Joseph Cook, has not been left to be decided "by a count of heads and a clack of tongues." In a question of speculative theology or of scriptural interpretation, it will do to lean on the authority of a majority of experts; but on the practical question of the extent of gospel salvation from sin, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the unlearned minority who have put the doctrine to experimental proof may be very much wiser than the learned majority of the magnates

of the modern church, who have never subjected the question to the test of personal experience. Here the testimony of some Uncle Tom or Amanda Smith of the slave plantation may outweigh the opinion of a whole faculty of German theological professors. Experience outweighs theory; faith makes philosophy kick the beam.

6. As Caleb and Joshua were kept out of Canaan thirty-nine years through the unbelief of the majority of the church in the wilderness, so many in our day are kept from perfect soul-rest in entire sanctification through the chilling apathy and palsying unbelief of the body of Christians with whom they are in fellowship. We mean to say that their own faith never mounts up and grasps the prize because so heavily weighted with the unbelief of others. Are not these, who thus obstruct the faith of earnest souls, near akin to those woe-deserving Jews, who entered not themselves, and them that were entering they hindered?

7. Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest any of you should seem to come short of it. Fear for yourselves, and fear for the disciples kept out of full salvation through your influence. I may be addressing professors who have so little love for holiness that their most anxious inquiry is to find the lower limit of the Christian life, and their highest ambition to live as near down to that limit as will enable them to escape from hell, instead of mounting up to the upper boundary line of possible salvation this side of glory, and pitching their tents --

"Where dwells the Lord our Righteousness,

And keeps his own in perfect peace,

And everlasting rest."

Let us labor to enter into this rest; labor to conquer the pernicious habit of unbelief, to tear away from our souls the deadening apathy of half-hearted Christians around us; labor to pile up promise upon promise, till we have a pyramid on whose summit we may plant our feet, and with outstretched hand of faith grasp the realization of the tallest promise in the word of God.

The future of obedient Israel -- alas that it is only ideal -- is fully described in Lev. 26:3-13. This typifies a state of perpetual victory over sin, not repressed, but exterminated, the enjoyment of cloudless communion with the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit, who maketh free indeed.

Each of you choose this day between Israel as he might have been, God's ideal Israel, and Israel as he was through his lack of faith, actual Israel, wandering forlorn and comfortless, under the ban of the Almighty, sowing the Sinaitic desert with his bones, with the vineclad hills of Canaan in full view. Ye choose today between the majority and the minority report, and ye shall be forever richer or forever poorer for your choice --

'Let us go up'; were we redeemed by blood,

And by the wonders of a mighty hand,

That we should linger this side Jordan's flood,

Heirs of a wilderness of sand?

"Why did the sea open her crystal gates,

Bidding her waves stand up like jasper walls?
'Forward!' the waters said, 'for Canaan waits,
With palms and vines and Salem's princely halls.'
" 'Let us go up,' and end the desert strife,
Claiming the land of plenty as our own;
Beyond the river is the better life,
Of harvest, harps, with Temple and a Throne.
'Let us go up,' the Jordan's waves will part;
Faith, like her Lord, can walk upon the sea:
God's promised lands are for the brave of heart --
Obedience, trust, these are the only fee.
'Tis God who gives us rest, we but receive;
'Tis he who fights, we gather up the spoil;
His strength is ours if we will but believe,
And ours the land of corn and wine and oil.
"We conquer by surrender; loss is gain
If self and sin are lost, for Christ is won:
In Christ abiding, Satan tempts in vain,
And having Christ, we have a heaven begun.
"To those who doubt, God gives a desert grave,
A lonely burial in the burning sands:
The Calebs pass beyond the Jordan wave,
To find an Eshcol in the southern lands.
"Who follow 'fully,' with a heart that clings
Fast to the promise of the faithful Lord,
They find the upper and the nether springs;
Cities of 'peace' and 'song' are their reward.

"Go up, then, children of the promise, claim
The land of rest and plenty as your own;
You have the Ark, you have the mighty Name;
Pass up, the kingdom waits, the palm, the Throne!"
Henry Burton

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/daniel-steele/the-ten-spies-an-evil-report/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net