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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1833 ~ Caleb and Joshua Sent as Spies.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

In today's *Bible Adventure*, jealousy surfaces in Moses' family. Moses' older sister, Miriam, had carefully watched over Moses' cradle while it floated on the Nile River when he was just a little baby. However, many years later, as Moses led the Israelites through the desert, Miriam didn't approve of Moses' marriage to a non-Israelite woman, which had taken place some 40 years or so earlier. Miriam voiced her upset that Moses had been selected to be God's chief spokesman to their brother and high priest, Aaron. She thought that Moses' marriage should have disqualified him from being the leader of Israel.

Since Moses' appointment of 70 Holy Spirit-led elders to work in the Israelite camp, Moses now wasn't relying on Aaron and Miriam as much as he did. Although Miriam herself was an acknowledged prophetess and had led the women in singing before God and the people, these honours didn't satisfy her. The Lord heard Miriam's complaint, as He knows everyone's thoughts. Just as the Israelites had rejected God's provision of manna, Miriam was rejecting God's provision of Moses' leadership. This was a rejection of God Himself and He took immediate action.

Moses, Aaron and Miriam were called to the Tent of Meeting. Moses hadn't tried to defend himself because God was his defender. The Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and spoke to them. He explained that when He spoke to an ordinary prophet like Miriam and Aaron, He used visions and dreams. But with Moses, He spoke to him plainly face-to-face. This distinction should have made them afraid to speak against Moses. The Lord angrily departed and when the cloud was gone, Miriam was covered in leprosy.

When Aaron saw her, he cried out for forgiveness from Moses for both of them. Moses then cried out to the Lord to heal her, which He did. However, Miriam had to spend 7 days outside the camp in punishment for being unclean with leprosy. When she returned, the people moved onto a place close to the border of Canaan.

While they were there, Numbers, Chapter 13, says that at God's command, Moses sent out 12 spies, one young leader from each tribe, to go through the Promised Land of Canaan and bring back a report of what it was like.

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In their tour of Canaan, the spies travelled through the desert in the south to the central area known as the hill country. The first city the spies came to was Hebron, the burial place of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, their wives and Joseph. Instead of seeing Hebron as a reminder of the great promises that God had given their ancestors, the spies only saw the large size of the men living there.

Then they went as far as the northern border of Canaan before returning back. The distance they travelled from camp was about 400 kilometres. The spies were gone for 40 days and they returned carrying a huge bunch of grapes and other fruit to demonstrate the soil's fertility. All the spies confirmed that Canaan was indeed a land flowing with milk and honey, just as God had promised Moses. Even so, they brought a mixed report. Ten men came back and reported obstacles, challenges, giants, and defeat. But 2 others saw the challenges for what they were: Joshua and Caleb saw that God would give them the victory if they would obey Him.

Caleb was from the tribe of Judah. And Joshua was Moses' assistant who was from the tribe of Ephraim. If you recall, earlier in the Bible, elderly Jacob had adopted Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, as his own so that Joseph would get a double portion of inheritance due to the eldest son? That extra son made up the number to twelve, as there'd be no representative from the tribe of Levi in the group of spies. Moses changed Joshua's name from meaning 'salvation' to Joshua meaning 'Yahweh (or God) saves'. This change of name showed that Joshua now had a new relationship with Moses – that of son and successor rather than merely being his assistant.

In a debate before the whole congregation of the Israelites, the 10 fearful spies listed the groups of people they saw living in the Promised Land, and these groups were the same ones that God had predicted that Israel would conquer. So why were these spies so afraid of these tribes? Had they forgotten what happened to the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, and that the people hadn't contributed a thing towards their defeat? God had promised Moses that the Israelites would drive out those very tribes. To doubt this was now a sign of unbelief.

On the other side of the debate, Caleb placed total trust in God's promises and provision, and strongly urged the Israelites to take possession of the land without delay. But the other 10 spies couldn't see Canaan through the eyes of faith. They told the people that it was actually impossible for them to attack those tribes already living in the land and they began to exaggerate the difficulties. They in effect were calling God a liar. This discouragement caused the people to weep in fear and disappointment. Then of course, they grumbled: "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in the wilderness! Why did God bring us here to be killed in battle?"

The Lord later granted the people their wish to die in the wilderness rather than enter the Promises Land and conquer it. The Israelites had chosen their own punishment for not trusting in God. This reminds us of Jesus' warning in Matthew, Chapter 12, that we will be held accountable for every careless word we speak.

The Israelites now began to complain against Moses and Aaron, and they started looking back to Egypt as home, even going so far as to talk of selecting a new leader to take them back there. This was all open rebellion. Again, Joshua and Caleb tried to reassure the people and warn them not to rebel against the Lord. They told the people not to fear the tribes that they would meet in Canaan, as they would be protected by God. But the congregation's response was to say that they should stone Joshua and Caleb.

The Lord appeared at the Tabernacle and spoke to Moses. God wanted to know how long would these Israelites choose to reject Him? How long would they refuse to believe in Him after all the miracles that He had done for them? God said He was ready to wipe out all the people of Israelite and start again with Moses. But Moses interceded on their behalf and he asked God in His everlasting kindness, for forgiveness of their rebellion and fear. The Lord listened to Moses and gave the people pardon. But forgiveness didn't mean that the people would escape the consequences of their sin or ongoing hard-heartedness towards God. God decided that not one of those disobedient Israelites would ever see the Promised Land.

Certainly, the Israelites had seen some great undeniable miracles: God's display of power opening up the Red Sea so they could cross on dry land; God's feeding them, all 2 million of them, each day with manna; God bringing a massive number of birds to their camp in the desert for them to eat meat; God's provision of water when they needed it most; and now a bunch of grapes from Canaan so large that the 2 spies who had brought it back carried it on a pole between them. Was the conquest of Canaan too hard for God to do for them and through them?

All things within God's will are possible for God. While God can do anything He wishes to do, God will not do things that would be against His holy will or oppose His eternal purposes. God can commit no sinful act, for His character is completely holy and sinning has no part of it. And certainly, God had every right to punish the Israelites for their hardened hearts and refusal to obey and follow Him and Moses into the Promised Land.

The Israelites had lost their chance to have a new and blessed future when God turned them back into the desert to die a natural death there. Although the present generation of Israelites over the age of 20 had broken their part of the covenant with God, God still remained faithful to His part: He gave the Promised Land to the next generation of Israelites. Unbelief can delay the fulfilment of God's purposes but eventually, God's purposes will be fulfilled.

What lessons can we modern-day Christians learn from these ancient Israelites? Every spiritual defeat we experience is rooted in unbelief; our unbelief is always expressed in some form of disobedience to God's word or resistance to His Holy Spirit. As a result, we lose the very blessings that God is so ready to give us.

In Hebrews, Chapter 3, there's a warning to beware of the danger of getting a hardened heart through the deceitfulness of sin. To not be deceived by sin and stubbornness, we must closely walk with our Lord and do what He says. Because of Caleb's faith that God could conquer the land of Canaan so they could enter, he, along with Joshua, were the only two men in all that generation whom God allowed to enter the Promised Land with the next generation 40 years later. After the new generation of Israelites had taken their possession of the land, Caleb was given the area of Hebron (where the patriarchs were buried) as his inheritance.

Part of not being deceived by sin is to be aware of Satan's tactics against us: If Satan can't lure you into 'unbelief', which is not believing in and committing oneself to God's will, then Satan will try to lure you into 'MISbelief'. This is believing in wrong ideas of God and about God that are not taught in the Scriptures. For example, some people will falsely teach that Jesus and Satan were brothers, whereas the Scriptures teach that Satan was a created being but Jesus always existed. Such wrong thinking results in many murky opinions that leave people unable to discern between the works of God and the works of Satan.

But, if Satan can't lure you into MISbelieving an unworthy representation of God, then he'll try to lure you into DISbelieving the doctrines of God. Disbelieving is the rejection or neglect of the Scriptures, atoning work of Jesus' blood for sinners, the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit in committed believers of Jesus, and many more truths in the Bible. This position reduces a person's attitude to Christianity as being a useless and even an unnecessary system of belief.

In the present world system, genuine Christians are persecuted, in some places much more severely than in others. For some people, persecution is a disincentive to becoming a Christian. But the Bible says that part of the Christian life is a degree of suffering of one type or another, because Christ suffered for us. In 1 Peter, Chapter 2, it says: "If you endure suffering even when you have done right, God will bless you for it ... It was to this that God called you, for Christ Himself suffered for you and left you an example, so that you would follow in His steps." In John, Chapter 15, Jesus said: "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

One suffering group in Asia say that they tell each other: "If you're persecuted, just thank God that you haven't been beaten; if you've been beaten, thank God that you haven't been thrown in prison; if you're in prison, thank God that you haven't been killed; and if you've been killed, thank God that you're with the Lord Jesus in heaven."

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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