

## A DOZEN SCOUTS

*Sin may delay God's plan, but cannot stop it!*

God's people have come a long way and have seen some pretty amazing things! They have seen God's super-rescue from Egypt with Moses leading the way. They have seen God open up a path right through the middle of the Red Sea so they can escape from Pharaoh's attack. They have seen God's presence come down onto Mt. Sinai and they have seen the tablets that God wrote on, telling them what He is really like. Besides these things, they have seen God provide all they need as they travel through a very dangerous desert on their way to the beautiful land God has promised them.

In today's story, they are now so close to their new homeland that they can see it off in the distance! Don't you think they must have been very excited? Don't you think they probably couldn't wait to stop their traveling and living in tents and finally have a home of their own? And after all they had seen God do for them, don't you think they would have been filled with confidence that God was going to now finish what he had started? These things are what you might expect, but we will see that it was not this way at all.

Before bringing them into their new land, God wanted to show them what a beautiful place he was going to give them. He wanted to show them it was nothing like the desert where they had been traveling. This land was filled with beautiful trees, clean rivers, green and growing crops, and all kinds of fruits. It was a green and growing land! God also wanted to show them the people there. The people in this land did not believe in God and they had become very, very evil. God was going to replace these people with his own people who loved Him. God would do this so that his people could be a good influence for God on all the surrounding nations by showing them how to live according to God's ways.

So God told Moses to choose twelve men to go into the new land like scouts and explore it.

"Bring back a report to us of what kind of land it is and what kind of people live there," Moses told them.

And off they went! Twelve of the most well-known leaders from all of God's people. These were men that the others looked up to and that others listened to because they were admired leaders. For forty days the twelve scouts traveled through the new land from one end to the other. They looked at the towns and the farms. They looked at the crops and the trees filled with fruit. They explored the valleys and they explored the mountains. They stopped and drank from the rivers and the streams. They looked at the people living in the cities and the people living in the country. When it was time to return, they even brought back some of the fruit so they could show the rest of God's people how large and beautiful it all was.

"We are ready to hear your report," said Moses.

What do you think the twelve scouts said? Just as we would expect, they described to the others how magnificent the land was and how it was filled to over-flowing with gorgeous, green crops. When people saw the fruit they had brought back, their mouths hung open with surprise. They had never seen fruit so large and so delicious.

But then a terrible, terrible thing happened. Ten of the twelve scouts started saying some very awful things to the people.

"Yes, it is a beautiful place," they said, "but we could never live there because the people there are large, strong, and powerful and they would squash us like grasshoppers."

Two of the scouts, Joshua and Caleb, spoke up and said, "No, no, don't listen to this bad report. Don't you remember all that God has done for us? Believe God that he will keep his word and finish what he has started!"

What the ten scouts had done was a terrible thing. God had sent them into the land to show them what a beautiful place he was going to give them. God had promised them this land and when God makes a promise we can always believe him. These ten men did something very sinful. They chose to disbelieve God and they convinced other people to disbelieve, also.

These men had a lot of influence and they convinced the rest of the nation that they could not trust God to keep his word. Their unbelieving report spread through all the people. They convinced people this was too big of a job for God! But is anything too hard for God? He had rescued his people from Egypt, why couldn't he do this, too?

No matter how hard Joshua and Caleb tried to convince the people otherwise, they would not listen. Instead of believing God, they just kept saying:

“We are all doomed!”

“We should have never left Egypt. Let's pack up and go back there.”

“Let's get rid of Moses, it's all his fault.”

“God has brought us here just to kill us.”

Finally, God had heard enough. A terrible sickness came upon the ten scouts who did not believe and they died. Then God told Moses, none of these people will enter into the land I have promised!

Could this be the end of God's great rescue plan? Would the sin of these ten men, and the others who listened to them, bring an end to God's plan? We might think so, but sin never ever stops God's plan.

“I will still keep my promise and give this land to my people,” God told Moses, “but I will not give it to these who have not believed. Instead I will give it to their children.”

And so it was. God will wait. God will wait until all the people who did not believe have died. His people will live in the desert for many years while God waits for them to have children, grow old, and then die. When all those who sinned by doubting God's promise have died and have been buried in the desert, God will then give this beautiful land to their children.

You see, sin does not stop God's rescue plan. Sometimes it seems to be delayed, but God can always be trusted to keep his promises and finish what he has started.

It's important for us to always remember that God keeps his word because of who he is, not because of who we are. God keeps his promises because he is trustworthy and always true. Even though we will never deserve it, God keeps his word to us no matter what.