

# SPY IT OUT



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**WHEN YOU THINK OF SPIES**, you might think of wartime or perhaps the last spy novel you read. Israelis might think of famous spies like Eli Cohen (*Our Man in Damascus*) or the famous Aaronsohn family that formed part of Nili, a ring of Jewish spies working for the British in World War I. If you are thinking of the Bible, there are a few famous stories involving spies. In this teaching letter, I would like to look at two biblical accounts. The first is the account of the 12 spies sent out by Moses, and the second is the spies sent to Jericho by Joshua. The Jewish world read these two accounts during the reading of the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) portion *Shlach*, which means send.

## The Debacle of the 10 Spies (Num. 13–14)

Moses sent out 12 influential leaders—one from each tribe—to scout out the land God had promised to Israel. They followed Moses’s direction and thoroughly investigated the land. They spent 40 days on their spy expedition. They came back with a report of a good land and of the giants living in the land.

Ten of these leaders—all well-respected men—said the land was impossible to conquer. *“We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we...The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight”* (Num. 13:31b–33).



*“...The land  
we passed  
through  
to spy out  
is an  
exceedingly  
good land.”*

Joshua and Caleb  
in Numbers 14:7b

Only two spies disagreed: Joshua and Caleb. Tragically, the Israelites, with great weeping, decided they did not want to enter the land. They strategized about replacing Moses with someone who would take them back to Egypt. The Lord was angry.

Consequently, that generation of Israelites would wander 40 years in the desert and die there, all men 20 years and older. What a story of failure! A whole generation perished.

## The *Tisha B'Av* Connection

*Tisha b'Av* (the 9th day of the biblical month of Av) is the saddest day of the year for the Jewish people. On this day, they fast from all food and water. Why is this a day of mourning? On this day, some of the most horrendous tragedies in Jewish history have occurred.

The first recorded incident is found in the book of Numbers: the story of the 10 spies and their bad report. Additionally, both Temples were destroyed on this day in history. On *Tisha b'Av* in 1290, all the Jews were expelled from England, and in 1492, all the Jews were expelled from Spain. On August 2, 1941, Reich Leader of the Nazi Party, Heinrich Himmler, formally received approval from the Nazi Party for the Final Solution. As a result, the Holocaust began, during which almost one third of the world's Jewish population perished.

## What Went Wrong?

**The Israelites didn't have faith in God.** How is that even possible? They had witnessed the crossing of the Red Sea, the plagues and the triumph over Egypt, the superpower of the world. They had already defeated powerful enemies. How could they not trust God again? In Hebrews 11:6, we read: "*Without faith it is impossible to please God.*" It had been about one year after leaving Egypt when they went to spy out the land. In that year, they had also experienced the giving of the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) at Mount Sinai. They had seen the provision of God. They saw the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

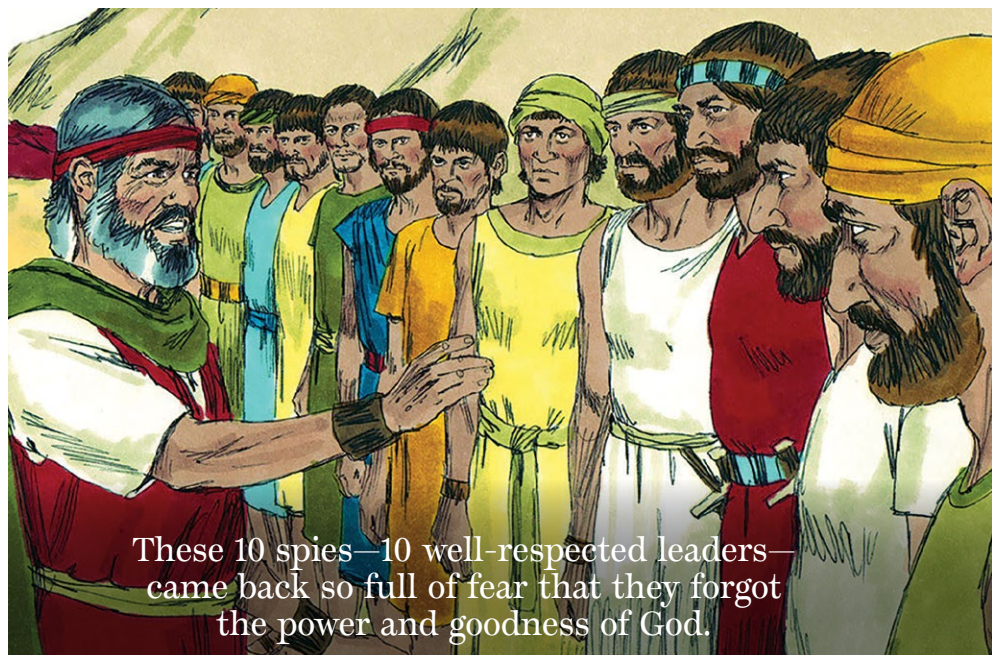
**They were afraid**, and so their perspective was off. These 10 spies—10 well-respected leaders—came back so full of fear that they forgot the power and goodness of God.

**They were unable to hear the truth** spoken by Joshua and Caleb. *“If the LORD desires us, He will bring us to this land and give it to us, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’ But you shall not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of that land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them”* (Num. 14:8–9).

According to some Jewish sources, **the Israelites liked their life in the desert.** It had become comfortable for them. God provided everything they needed. His presence was in the center of the camp. They didn’t have to work to provide for their families. They were just able to bask in God’s presence all the time.

Whatever their motivation, it angered God. *“Then the LORD said to Moses: ‘How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed 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. 14:11–12).

That generation of Israelites never entered the Promised Land. They had missed their God-appointed time. Their actions sabotaged their future. Only the next generation had the chance to enter the Promised Land, 40 years later.



These 10 spies—10 well-respected leaders—came back so full of fear that they forgot the power and goodness of God.



## Take Two: 40 Years Later

Joshua sent the second pair of spies to check out Jericho. These spies went incognito, secretly. Although Scripture does not identify them by name, Jewish tradition teaches that they were Caleb and Phinehas, two highly respected and godly men.

*“...for  
the LORD  
your God,  
He is  
God in  
heaven  
above and  
on earth  
beneath...”*

Rahab  
in Joshua 2:11b

Once in Jericho, these two spies came to the place of Rahab, the prostitute. Some Jewish sages say she was an innkeeper. Regardless, her establishment was a place travelers frequented. The Bible says the spies stayed there, and when the king of Jericho heard about them, he perceived that they were spies. He demanded that Rahab bring them to him. Rahab decided to defy the king. She chose to lie and then to hide the spies.

Why would she do such a risky thing? It was treason! She defied her king. She explained her reason to the spies. *“I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted, neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath”* (Josh. 2:9–11).

Her words show faith in God based on His acts, the very thing lacking in the original spies. She was less afraid of the consequences she might suffer at the hand of her king because she feared the Lord. She recognized that the Children of Israel were called for a special purpose and was determined to be on their side.

The 10 spies didn’t have the right perspective. Actually, the “giants” they feared so much were terrified of the Israelites. They wandered in the desert for 40 years because they didn’t see the truth. Their fear and unbelief blinded them to what God was doing. Their rebellion robbed them of their future.

The two spies who were sent to Jericho were different. They returned to Joshua with these words: *“Truly the LORD has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us”* (Josh. 2:24a).

## What Is Stopping You from Receiving God's Promises?

Do you lack faith? Are you fearful of the situation? Are you in rebellion against the plan of God? Or have you become too comfortable in your present circumstances?

Personally, I can identify with each of those reasons. At one time or another in my life, I have succumbed to these exact same things. What does the Word say?

### Faith

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen...But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Heb. 11:1, 6).

Rahab appears in this chapter too!

*“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace”* (Heb. 11:30–31).

### Fear

*“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love”* (1 John 4:18).

*“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me”* (Ps. 23:4a).

### Rebellion

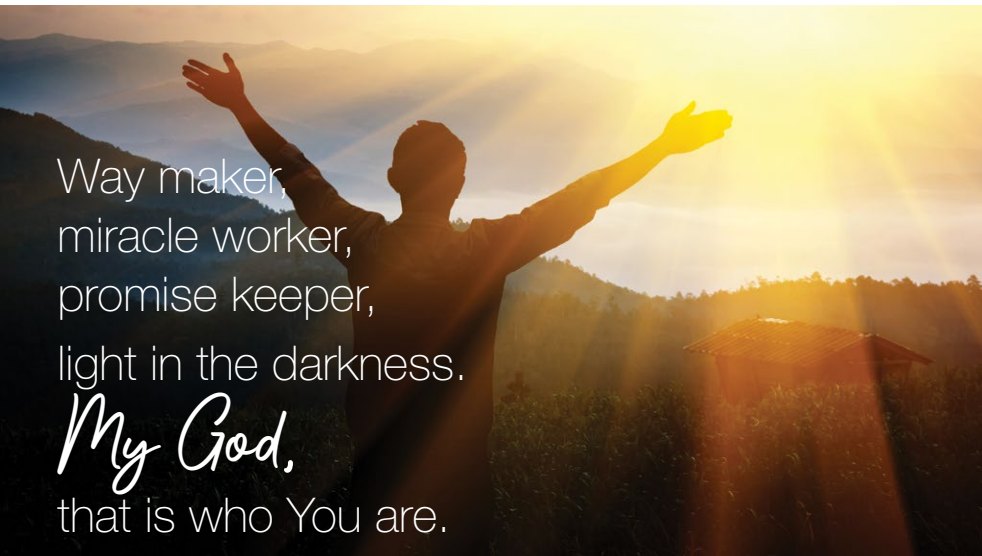
*“Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they tried Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, ‘It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.’ So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest’”* (Ps. 95:8–11).

### Complacency—Getting too Comfortable

Don't settle for less than God has planned. God is not impressed with less than all of us. His words to the Church of Laodicia should cause each of us to tremble. *“I know your works,*

*that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish that you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth” (Rev. 3:15–16).*

The Church of Laodicia was complacent. They didn’t need God.



Way maker,  
miracle worker,  
promise keeper,  
light in the darkness.

*My God,*  
that is who You are.

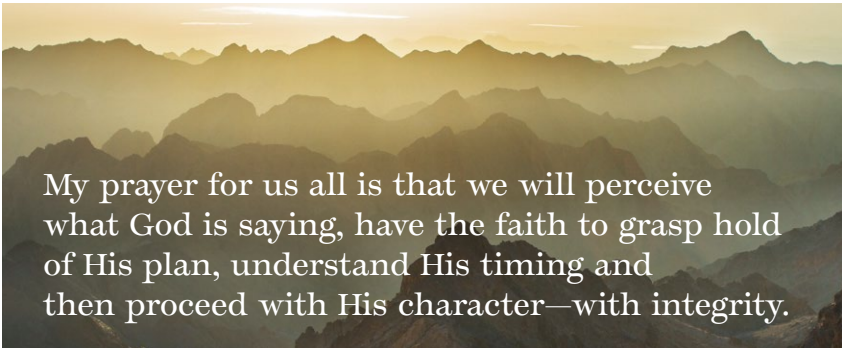
My prayer for us all is that we will perceive what God is saying, have the faith to grasp hold of His plan, understand His timing and then proceed with His character—with integrity.

I first taught this message to the Bridges for Peace team in Jerusalem. Before I spoke, we sang a song with very encouraging lyrics. If you are struggling to step into God’s perfect plan for your life, I encourage you to listen to the song *Way Maker*, written by Nigerian gospel singer, Sinach.

The chorus says, “Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper, light in the darkness. My God, that is who You are.”

God had revealed Himself to the Children of Israel in all these ways. He made a way through the sea, worked miraculously on their behalf, kept His promises to their fathers and provided fire by night during their journeys.

Don’t make the mistake of the 10 spies. God is able to bring you to the place He has planned for you. I pray you don’t let fear, lack of faith, complacency or rebellion derail your life.



My prayer for us all is that we will perceive what God is saying, have the faith to grasp hold of His plan, understand His timing and then proceed with His character—with integrity.

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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

#### TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- Tanakh (Old Testament or OT)—Tanakh is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for Torah, Neviim or Prophets and Ketuvim or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- Torah (Gen.—Deut.)

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A higher purpose.*

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