September 20, 2017

Prison Ministry

**Story of Redemption** (1947) Chapter **20: The Spies and Their Report**

 THE Lord commanded Moses to send men to search the land of Canaan, which He would give unto the children of Israel. A ruler of each tribe was to be selected for this purpose. They went and, after forty days, returned from their search, and came before Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of Israel, and showed them the fruit of the land. All agreed that it was a good land, and they exhibited the rich fruit which they had brought as evidence. One cluster of grapes was so large that two men carried it between them on a staff. They also brought of the figs and the pomegranates, which grew there in abundance.

 After they had spoken of the fertility of the land, all but two spoke very discouragingly of their being able to possess it. They said that the people were very strong that dwelt in the land, and the cities were surrounded with great and high walls; and, more than all this, they saw the children of the giant Anak there. They then described how the people were situated around Canaan, and the impossibility of their ever being able to possess it.

 As the people listened to this report they gave vent to their disappointment with bitter reproaches and wailing. They did not wait and reflect and reason that God, who had brought them out thus far, would certainly give them the land. But they yielded to discouragement at once. They limited the power of the Holy One and trusted not in God, who had hitherto led them. They reproached Moses and murmuringly said to one another, This, then, is the end of all our hopes. This is the land that we have been traveling from Egypt to obtain.

 Caleb and Joshua sought to obtain a hearing, but the people were so excited that they could not command themselves to listen to these two men. After they were calmed a little, Caleb ventured to speak. He said to the people, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." But the men that went up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we." And they continued to repeat their evil report, and declared that all the men were of great stature. "And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

**Israel Murmurs Again**

 "And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt. Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel."

 The Israelites not only gave vent to their complaints against Moses but accused God Himself of dealing deceitfully with them by promising them a land which they were unable to possess. Their rebellious spirit here rose so high that, forgetful of the strong arm of Omnipotence which had brought them out of the land of Egypt and had thus far conducted them by a series of miracles, they resolved to choose a commander to lead them back to Egypt, where they had been slaves and had suffered so many hardships. They actually appointed them a captain, thus discarding Moses, their patient, suffering leader; and they murmured bitterly against God.

 Moses and Aaron fell upon their faces before the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation, to implore the mercy of God in favor of a rebellious people. But their distress and grief were too great for utterance. They remained upon their faces in utter silence. Caleb and Joshua rent their clothes as an expression of the greatest sorrow. "And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not."

 "Their defence is departed from them." That is, the Canaanites had filled up the measure of their iniquity, and the divine protection was withdrawn from them, and they felt perfectly secure and were unprepared for battle; and, by the covenant of God, the land is ensured to us. Instead of these words having the designed effect upon the people, they increased their determined rebellion. They became in a rage and cried out with a loud and angry cry that Caleb and Joshua should be stoned, which would have been done had not the Lord interposed by a most signal display of His terrible glory in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

**Moses' Prevailing Plea**

 Moses went into the tabernacle to converse with God. "And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke Me? and how long will it be ere they believe Me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they. And Moses said unto the Lord, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for Thou broughtest up this people in Thy might from among them;) and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that Thou Lord art among this people, that Thou Lord art seen face to face, and that Thy cloud standeth over them, and that Thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if Thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of Thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people unto the land which He sware unto them, therefore He hath slain them in the wilderness."

 Moses again refuses to have Israel destroyed and himself made a mightier nation than was Israel. This favored servant of God manifests his love for Israel and shows his zeal for the glory of his Maker and the honor of his people: As Thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now, Thou hast been long-suffering and merciful hitherto toward this ungrateful people; however unworthy they may be, Thy mercy is the same. He pleads, Wilt Thou not, therefore, spare them this once, and add this one more instance of divine patience to the many Thou hast already given?

 "And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word: but as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. Because all those men which have seen My glory, and My miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted Me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to My voice; surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked Me see it: but My servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed Me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it."

**Back to the Wilderness**

 The Lord bade the Hebrews return and go into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea. They were very near the good land, but, by their wicked rebellion, they forfeited the protection of God. Had they received the report of Caleb and Joshua, and gone immediately up, God would have given them the land of Canaan. But they were unbelieving and showed such an insolent spirit against God that they brought upon themselves the denunciation that they should never enter the Promised Land. It was in pity and mercy that God sent them back by the Red Sea, for the Amalekites and Canaanites, while they were delaying and murmuring, heard of the spies and prepared themselves to make war with the children of Israel.

 "And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against Me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against Me." The Lord told Moses and Aaron to say to the people that He would do to them as they had spoken. They had said, "Would God we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!" Now God would take them at their word. He told His servants to say to them that they should fall in the wilderness, from twenty years old and upward, because of their rebellion and murmurings against the Lord. Only Caleb and Joshua should go unto the land of Canaan. "But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised."

 The Lord declared that the children of the Hebrews should wander in the wilderness forty years, reckoning from the time they left Egypt, because of the rebellion of their parents, until the parents should all die. Thus should they bear and suffer the consequence of their iniquity forty years, according to the number of days they were searching the land, a day for a year. "And ye shall know My breach of promise." They should fully realize that it was the punishment for their idolatry and rebellious murmurings which had obliged the Lord to change His purpose concerning them. Caleb and Joshua were promised a reward in preference to all the host of Israel, because the latter had forfeited all claim to God's favor and protection.

Next Mailing: Story of Redemption Chapter **21: The Sin of Moses**