

# An Evil Report and Its Influence

by Lewis Williams

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a consistent life and bringing back a good report, rather than an evil report, as a preacher or influencer.*

**Scripture:** Numbers 14:7, 1 Samuel 15:22, John 14:15, Galatians 6:7, Ephesians 5:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:22, Hebrews 3:12, James 4:17, 1 Peter 1:14

**Topics:** "Obedience To God", "Spiritual Leadership"

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## Description

Lewis Williams delivers a powerful sermon on the consequences of disobedience and the importance of obedience to God's commands. He uses the story of the children of Israel at Kadesh-barnea to illustrate how disobedience leads to suffering and the spread of sin's poison. Williams emphasizes the need for preachers to boldly proclaim the truth and not compromise, as their influence greatly impacts the spiritual life of their congregation. He warns against bringing back an 'evil report' like the spies who discouraged the Israelites from entering the promised land, highlighting the devastating effects of hypocrisy and compromise on faith and salvation.

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## Transcript

After the children of Israel refused to enter the land of Canaan at Kadesh-barnea and were driven back, they wandered about for some time and, becoming "discouraged because of the way, the people spoke against God and against Moses; Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness; for there is no bread neither is there any water and our soul loatheth this light-bread?" They had disobeyed and were now paying the penalty for their disobedience -- reaping what they had sown.

Friends, those laws are as unchangeable as the stars above your heads. Refuse to do the Lord's bidding, disobey, and you will suffer every time. "Obedience is better than sacrifice."

One of the results of their disobedience was that fiery serpents came among them. Imagine, if you can, the situation; those deadly, loathsome, poisonous reptiles, with their cold, slimy, bodies, crawling everywhere. Should the people start to walk across the camp, there they were crawling, right across the path. If they stepped out in the dark, it was to put their foot on a reptile, only to have it fasten its fangs in the flesh before one could get away; they were in the tents, crawling under and among the beds, their cold, clammy forms dragging across the face at night, coiling about the throat or limbs; in and among the cooking utensils, everywhere they were found, raising up their heads, hissing and striking here and there all who touched them. Serpents everywhere by day and by night, and if one was killed, its decaying body

drew swarms of flies and insects and an awful stench arose from its putrefying form.

These were called "fiery" serpents on account of the effect of their bite. The poison would spread all through the system and a high, burning fever take possession of the patient, while the surface of the body would turn to a bright crimson and delirium set in. It is God's photograph of the results of sin. Brother, if you disobey and walk contrary to the demands of truth and righteousness, the bite and sting of sin will poison and deaden you against God until, black and foul and contaminated, you will be shut up in Hell's infernal regions, the pesthouse of the universe, to scream and writhe in your agony with liars, whoremongers, thieves, God-haters and holiness-rejecters, where your influence can nevermore blast and blight the prospects of those about you, or by your actions influence your own loved ones against God. May God open your blinded eyes, that you may see what awaits you if you continue on as you have been doing!

By their awful influence and evil report, these spies brought terrible results on the entire encampment, caused them to waver, falter, and disobey God, and now the fruit of their disobedience is upon them. They had opportunity to enter the promised land, but chose not to do so, and now they themselves, their families and their friends were reaping the harvest.

There are preachers in this land of ours who have fought and opposed the preaching of holiness and heart purity, and their people, listening to them and being influenced by them, have been kept out of the experience; we personally know of some who have thus died, and died in the dark. O God! what will such preachers say when, before the Judgment Bar they once again, stand in their presence? We have had men curse us for our plain preaching, but we only felt sorry for them, for it did not hurt us. We would rather men would curse us here for preaching the truth, than to have them curse us at the bar of God's judgment for not preaching the truth. We would rather be kept away from a popular church or camp-ground that professes to be sailing under the banner of holiness, for our preaching the plain truth and for insisting that God's child is clean and free from worldly and ungodly entanglements, whether they be of a public or private character, and then have written across our tombstone, "He did his best," and meet with a warm welcome in the mansions of the skies, than be invited to such churches or camps and, withholding such truth, fawn over those present and receive their applause, as we have seen others do, and then be compelled to stand with them before the great white Throne where they will know the full truth. We would rather be true to God and, by the preaching of the full truth, drive men and women into a corner where they are compelled to decide, even though we are compelled to embarrass them in so doing, than to stand before God's throne embarrassed in their presence.

My precious brother, what about your influence and what kind of a report are you bringing back?

Volumes could be written upon this question. The preacher is largely responsible for the spiritual life and standard of his people. "Like priest, like people" is generally the case, though there are exceptions to the rule; but where the preacher fails to cross over himself and call for his people to follow, there is not much likelihood of their getting into the "promised land" or "Canaan experience" under his ministry. His preaching will be the "report of the goodly land," and his people will largely go by what he says. Woe unto that preacher who brings back an "evil report"!

Alas! how Many people have been kept out of the "goodly land" by the influence of some preacher who spoke against it. As we pen these lines there comes to our mind a certain locality where a great meeting had been held and many people had been happily converted to God and started toward Canaan -- i. e.,

heart purity, "the goodly land." A fine work was going on; when a new pastor came on the scene. He began easily at first; as if he was hungry and anxious for the experience himself, but gradually took sides against the doctrine. Mark the results: his church, which had held its doors wide open to the proclamation of that truth, closed up and took sides against it. The fire which had been burning so brightly was smothered and put out; deadness and coldness took possession, and many of its members, who had been traveling toward the "promised land," turned back, backslid, and some of them today lie under the ground. Better that preacher had never been born. We would rather take the chance of a heathen across the sea who never had heard of God, than to stand in that preacher's place at the Judgment. He brought back an "evil report."

Recently we conducted a series of meetings in one of the hardest and most unspiritual places we ever visited. Before leaving, we learned many things concerning the place, and we shall not be surprised if it is visited by some awful calamity. We do not remember of ever visiting a place where we learned of so much vile practice and flagrant sin, and such little respect for godliness, but when we stop to consider the example that has been and is now being set before the people, we do not wonder. While there, a business man, who had been attending the meetings, said to us, "Brother Williams, you come here and preach a high standard of religion, and then tell us that it is the doctrine of our church and what our preacher declared he would preach. Now, listen till I tell you what I have to listen to, or what I have before me constantly." And this was his story:

"My preacher owns a fast horse, takes him to the race track and tries him out like any horse jockey would; he uses tobacco, and has a brother who is a drunkard; he says, 'My brother drinks because he likes it, and I use tobacco because I like it.' He teaches a class of young married people in the Sunday School, and tells his class that the best legacy a man can leave his wife is to leave her the widow of a Mason in good standing. His son-in-law says that he (the preacher) takes his toddy quite often. His first wife is dead, and his second wife has left him, I know not what for; but there is a reformed woman in this town who used to keep a house of ill fame, and she told that my preacher called on her several times before she would grant him an audience; and after she had made him come clear out and tell what he wanted, refused him, telling him she had quit the business; I believe the woman is now living a moral life, and that she told the truth.

"Now, you come along and preach to us as you are doing. My preacher laughs and scoffs at your preaching, and walks down the street, cigar in mouth, arm in arm with men that I know to be immoral. How do you expect us to have confidence in and live up to the standard you hold up, when we have such examples right here before our eyes?"

My God, is it any wonder that town seemed like Sodom to me? Is it any wonder that the people cared not for God and holiness? Is it to be thought strange that they had no confidence in the doctrine of heart purity? An evil report had been brought back to them. Their confidence had been shaken and, wandering in the wilderness, they lusted for the flesh-pots of Egypt.

In a town where we at one time resided, there was a gentleman much loved and respected by all who knew him. He was president of a prominent bank, and superintendent of a very large Sunday School in one of the most prominent churches in the place. Many of the laboring people, including the very poorest of the poor, took their small savings to him to be cared for. The children of the Sunday School fairly idolized him, and he was much loved and highly respected throughout the community. One day the bank was found closed and a sum of money running up into several hundred thousands of dollars was missing, together with the president. Detectives were placed on the trail and finally he was located and brought

back; then the story came out. For years he had been living a double life. His friends were shocked at the revelations made, and all that time he had been superintendent of the Sabbath School. Hundreds lost their confidence and faith in religion, and in scorn and derision pointed to him. He brought back "an evil report."

We say to you, no matter what position you occupy, if you make a profession of salvation and then live so that you cause others to lose confidence, it would have been better for you had you never been born. Those spies were supposed to be on the "King's business," in the interests of God's people, and their evil report was disastrous. There are communities where it would be far better for the people and for the kingdom of Christ if some who reside there would move away. With their constant profession of the Canaan experience, and their lives a positive and continual exposure of the falsity of their profession, they are sapping and robbing others of their confidence in such an experience and, we fear, doing irreparable injury to the cause.

For years we have been acquainted with a woman who has made a profession of having entered the "goodly land" experience years ago. While she is kind-hearted and sympathetic, yet she has run off after so many foolish things religiously, that those who know her best care the least for her society. We can truthfully say that she has lost all influence over her husband, so far as doing him any good spiritually is concerned. We have talked with him about his soul's eternal welfare, and he has replied, "Yes, I know what you say, and the standard you hold up is good, but show me a living evidence that one can live that way." What is the matter in that home? That wife has brought back "an evil report."

We say to you, if you really have the "Canaan land" experience, it will tell in your home. We cannot assure you that your loved ones will all be converted, but we can and do assure you that your life will prove to them that there is a blessed reality in the salvation that you profess. It is impossible to get an individual to seek salvation who has no confidence in such a profession, and if you, by your life and daily deportment, bring back an evil report, you rob those about you of their confidence and run an awful risk of helping damn them forever.

Some time ago we were pleading with a young man to give up the world and seek salvation and be a blessing to those he would meet in life. Looking straight into our eyes, he said: "Mr. Williams, I can't believe it. Sometimes I have really tried to believe that it was possible to live as you preach. I have heard that standard held up, and often wished that it could be attained, and that folks could reach up to it; but you know that such a profession is made in my home, but there is constantly so much that takes place there, so much that transpires, that honestly I have lost all confidence in anyone having it. I do hope that you will not feel that I am endeavoring to insult you or your preaching, but I am telling you exactly how I feel and believe about this matter." We looked at him, a fine young fellow right in the bloom of his early manhood, and our heart went out for him. We thought what a power he might be, what untold good he might accomplish, if God could have complete control of him. But no, an "evil report" had been brought back of "that goodly land," and he had turned back to the wilderness.

Oh, dear reader, stop and lay down this book, and earnestly, in the light of the coming Judgment, ask yourself the question, "What kind of a report am I bringing back?" If you are a preacher, are you preaching the full truth; and, regardless of the smiles and favors of those about you, are you proclaiming God's Word boldly, or are you compromising on this point and that one, because you are aware that that particular subject or theme is not popular with a particular crowd? Are you driving down the road straight, regardless of men or devils? Do you insist that God's children are clean, and that to enter the "promised land" the world must be left behind?

At one time we spent a few days on a certain campground where holiness of heart, received as a second work of grace, was supposed to be taught. With our own eyes and ears we saw and listened to things that filled us with disgust. We saw women, with their clothing cut so low from the neck that their breasts were exposed, and with hundreds of dollars worth of jewelry upon their person, standing up testifying that they were walking with "the meek and lowly Nazarene," and, so far as we could see, they seemed to be favorites upon that campground. And not a word came from that platform in condemnation of such hypocrisy. Men were going about, both on and off the platform, with the badges of secret orders upon the lapel of their coats and dangling from their watch chains, and not a word did we hear from that platform regarding what the old Book says against such things. We saw enough worldly adornment, the wearing of which the Bible so plainly forbids, worn by professors of holiness, upon that campground, to have sent a number of missionaries to the heathen and supported them for years to come. Were people praying through? Was the power of God manifested in the regeneration and entire sanctification of souls? We saw the long altar filled with preachers as seekers, many of them decked out as above, but not one groan or agonizing cry for deliverance did we hear.

We repeat, we may not be invited to camps or churches of that character; we may be represented by some as "destructive instead of constructive;" camp-meeting committees and pastors may be advised that we are not the kind of an evangelist they should employ, that we are not "sane and safe," and anything else the devil can rake up or Hell vomit out, but, with the assistance of the grace of God, regardless of any man's gold or favor, we will do our best, in the light God gives us, to preach the truths we find in the Bible, and proclaim far and wide that God demands a clean separation from the world, its applause, its adornment, its fellowship, its pleasure and its love; that to all who will trust in and obey Him, He will lead them over into an experience to which carnal men are indeed strangers. Many may say, think and do as they please, join in with the majority and bring back an evil report, but we believe in the report that Joshua and Caleb brought back: "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." (Num. 14:7-9)

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