

THE PEOPLE'S GRUMBLING AND DISCONTENT

Numbers 20–21



Water of Meribah

Toward the end of the journey through the desert, the Israelites once again had no water. They were desperate and dissatisfied. They abused Moses and Aaron for leading them out of Egypt. Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle to ask God for water. (*Meribah* means strife, contention)

The Lord gave them a precise directive as to what they should do to help the people get water. They did not carry out the Lord's instructions to the letter though. That is why God told them that they were not to reach the land of Canaan.

The brazen serpent

Out of dissatisfaction, the Israelites once again complained about God, Moses, and Aaron. They would rather have remained as slaves in Egypt than to continue on with this arduous journey through the desert. They also detested the manna, the nourishment which the Lord provided for them in the desert.

Then God sent poisonous serpents among the people. Many Israelites were bitten and died. Now they regretted their improper conduct, came to Moses to ask him to stand up for them before God, requesting His help.

The Lord instructed Moses to make a brazen serpent, i.e., a serpent made of brass, which was to stand upright. Everyone who had been bitten and looked up to it was to survive.

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LACK OF TRUST IN GOD – FORTY YEARS IN THE DESERT

EXERCISE 1



The following letter gives you a little bit of an impression of what life was like for the Israelites during the trek through the desert. The two girls Susanna and Esther are rarely able to see each other because the tents of their parents are located far apart.

This is how a letter from Susanna to her friend Esther could have read:

TO ESTHER REUBEN
TENT NO. 406

DEAR ESTHER,

I HAVE TWO NEWS ITEMS, ONE GOOD, AND ONE BAD !

FIRST, THE BAD NEWS!!

YESTERDAY I HELPED MY MOTHER TO TOP UP OUR WATER SUPPLIES. JUST IMAGINE, WE HAD TO STAND IN LINE UMPTEN TIMES AND WAIT FOR EVER IN THE LONG QUEUE UNTIL IT FINALLY WAS OUR TURN! AT THE END, EVERY BONE IN MY BODY HURT AND I BARELY HAD FEELING IN MY FEET. BUT STILL, I AM REALLY, REALLY GLAD THAT WE AGAIN HAVE WATER!!

NEXT WEEK I TURN THIRTEEN. DO YOU KNOW WHAT I WISH FOR? A GIGANTIC BIRTHDAY CAKE BECAUSE I JUST CAN'T STAND THIS MANNA ANY MORE. DON'T YOU FEEL THE SAME WAY? AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER, DAY IN AND DAY OUT, WE'RE ALWAYS GETTING UP EARLY TO GET MANNA. I LOOK FORWARD TO THE SABBATH ALREADY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE WEEK. BUT DON'T YOU ALSO THINK IT'S A MIRACLE HOW IT ALWAYS FALLS DOWN FROM HEAVEN?

AND HERE'S THE GOOD NEWS.

WHILE WE WERE GETTING WATER THE WOMEN SAID THAT IN THREE DAYS WE WOULD REACH OUR DESTINATION.

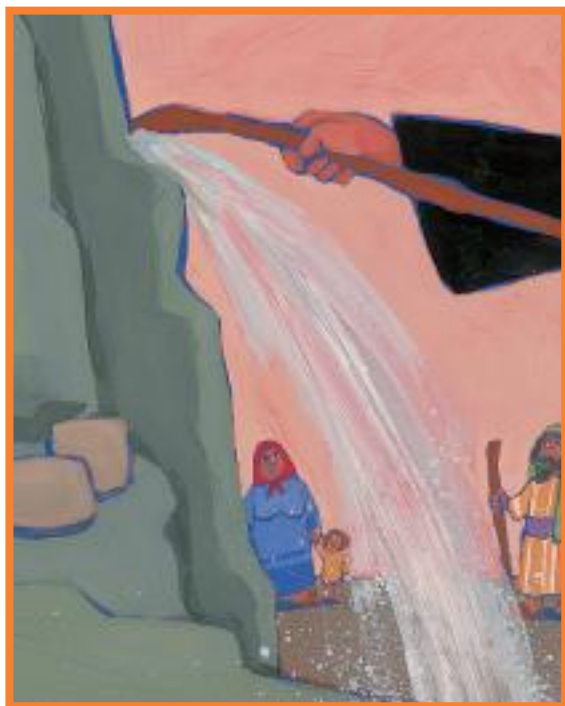
CAN CANAAN BE SOOOO CLOSE? I JUST CAN'T BELIEVE IT THAT THERE IS SUPPOSED TO BE A RIVER WITH PLENTY OF WATER THERE! THEN WE CAN FINALLY GO SWIMMING ONCE AGAIN! I AM REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO IT AND HOPE THAT WE WON'T BE LIVING SO FAR APART. THEN WE CAN FINALLY SEE ONE ANOTHER MORE OFTEN!

SEE YOU SOON. AND WRITE TO ME ABOUT HOW YOU ARE DOING.

YOUR BEST FRIEND

SUSANNA

EXERCISE 2



The Lord's order was:

Take the rod; you and your brother
Aaron gather the congregation together.
Speak to the rock before their eyes,
and it will yield its water (Numbers 20:8).

What Moses actually did:

Then Moses lifted his hand and struck
the rock twice with his rod; and water
came out abundantly (Numbers 20:11).

Can you find the small difference? Underline the parts that indicate what happens at the rock!

God's reaction

You will find it in Numbers 20:12. Read the passage and strike out the incorrect answers:

Moses was punished through a severe sickness.

Moses was removed as the leader of the people of Israel.

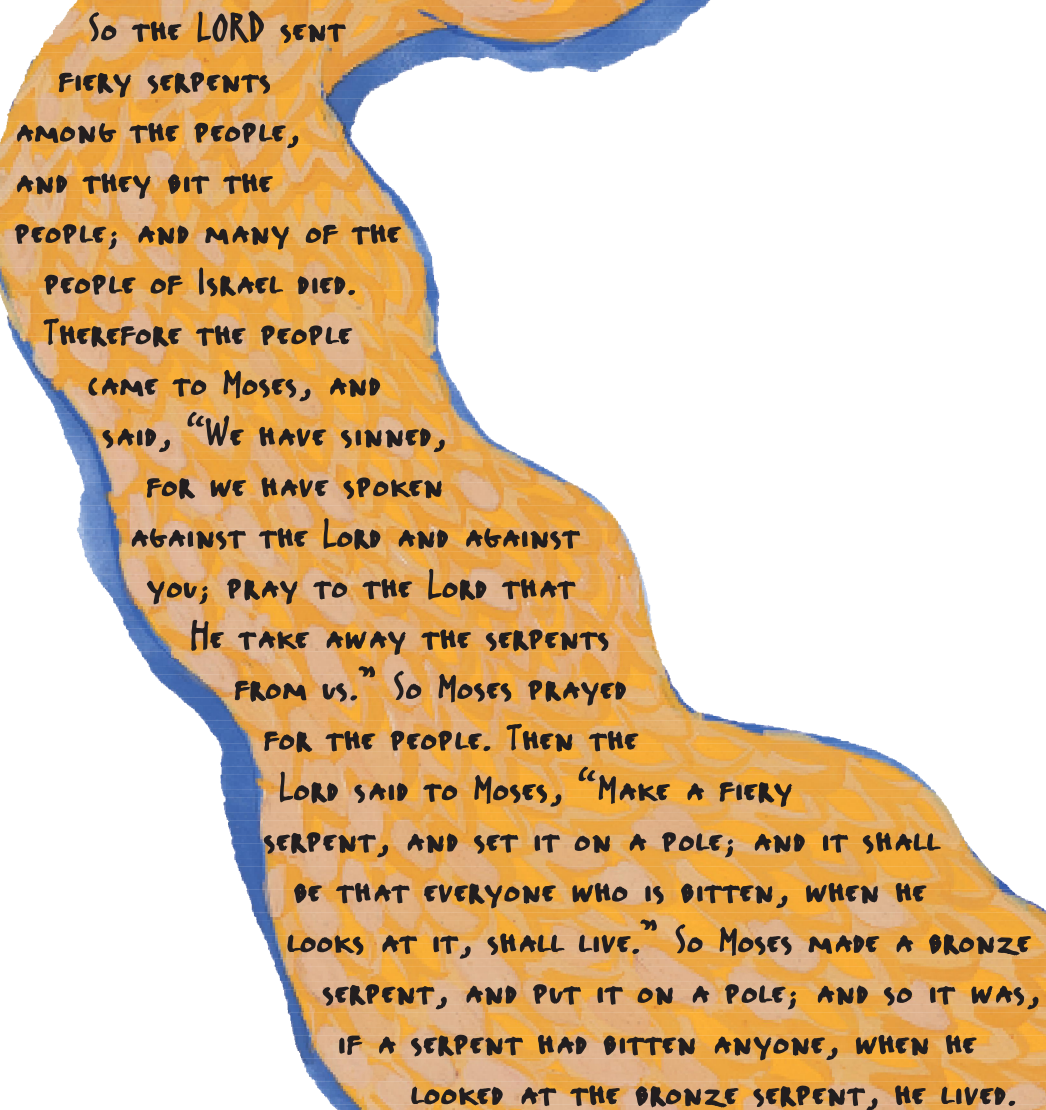
Moses was not permitted to bring the people into Canaan.

Moses was not able to talk to God any more.

EXERCISE 3



When, in their discontent, the Israelites complained about God, Moses, and Aaron for the umpteenth time, the following happened:
Numbers 21:6-9



SO THE LORD SENT
FIERY SERPENTS
AMONG THE PEOPLE,
AND THEY BIT THE
PEOPLE; AND MANY OF THE
PEOPLE OF ISRAEL DIED.
THEREFORE THE PEOPLE
CAME TO MOSES, AND
SAID, "WE HAVE SINNED,
FOR WE HAVE SPOKEN
AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST
YOU; PRAY TO THE LORD THAT
HE TAKE AWAY THE SERPENTS
FROM US." SO MOSES PRAYED
FOR THE PEOPLE. THEN THE
LORD SAID TO MOSES, "MAKE A FIERY
SERPENT, AND SET IT ON A POLE; AND IT SHALL
BE THAT EVERYONE WHO IS BITTEN, WHEN HE
LOOKS AT IT, SHALL LIVE." SO MOSES MADE A BRONZE
SERPENT, AND PUT IT ON A POLE; AND SO IT WAS,
IF A SERPENT HAD BITTEN ANYONE, WHEN HE
LOOKED AT THE BRONZE SERPENT, HE LIVED.