

Lesson 13A: Look to God and Live

Reading Preparation:

- Numbers 11-14; 20-21; 27

Outline:

1. [The Book of Numbers](#)
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Lesson Notes:

1. The Book of Numbers

Why is the book called Numbers?

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

“The title of the book of Numbers in the King James Version comes from the Latin Vulgate Numeri (“Numbers”), which is descriptive of the census given in the first three chapters of the book rather than of its content in general. Therefore, Numbers is strictly the Christian name for this section of the Torah, or first five books of Moses.

“The Hebrews most often chose from among the first words of the text for a title or each of the books in the Bible. Thus, the Jews have called this book either Vayedabber (“And He Spoke”), which is the first Hebrew word of the book, or, more commonly, Bemidbar (“In the Wilderness”), which is the fifth word in the first verse.” (Old Testament Institute Student manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 197).

Overview of the book of Numbers:

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

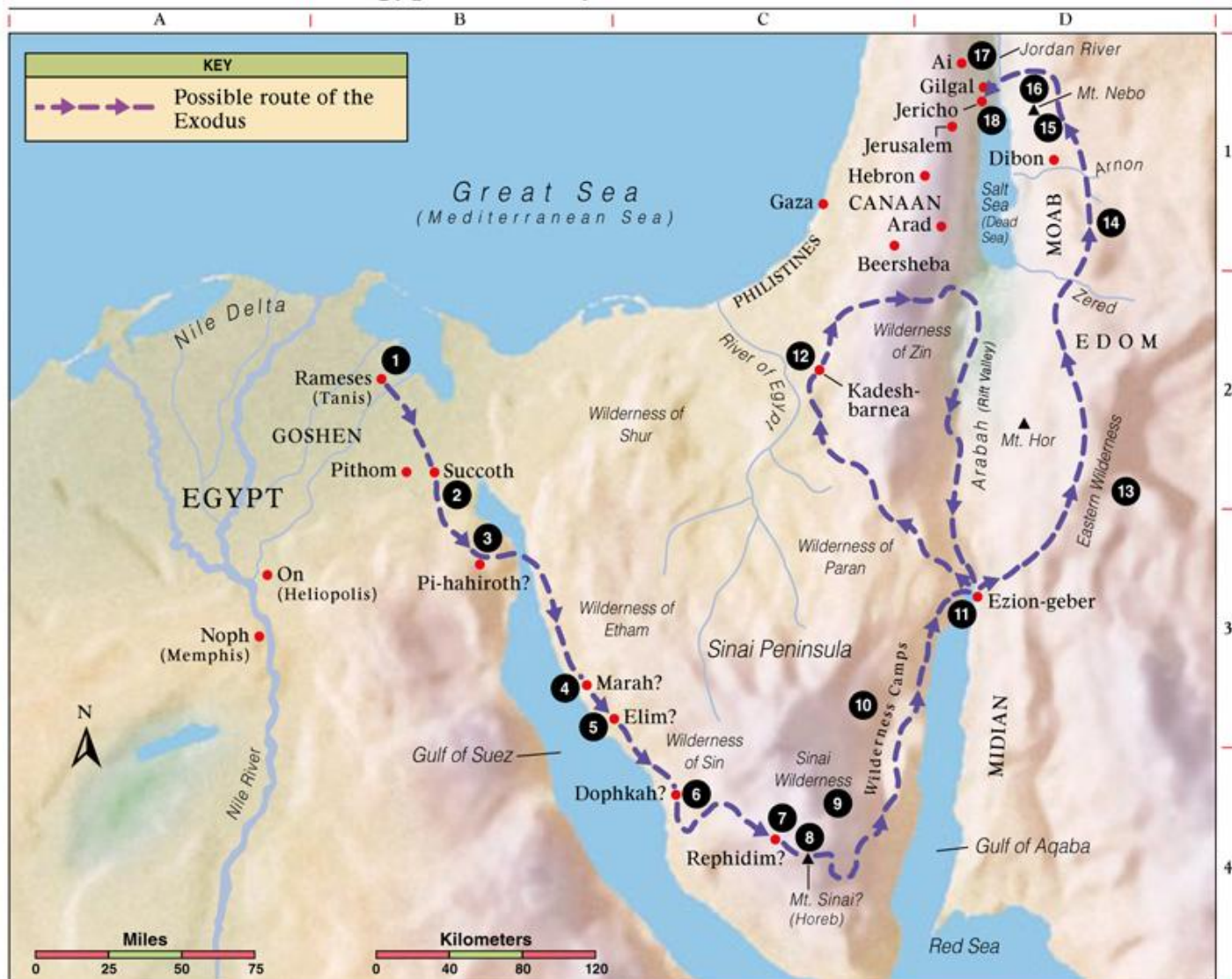
“The book includes an account of the numbering of Israel, the Levitical preparations for moving the tabernacle, why Israel was cursed with forty years of wandering, the second numbering of Israel after those above twenty years of age at the time of the Exodus had died, the choosing of Joshua to lead Israel, and a description of some land inheritances by the various tribes.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2nd Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 197).

How long did it take the children of Israel to get from Sinai to Caanan?

Robert L. Millet notes,

“The book of Numbers takes the children of Israel from Sinai to Canaan. The period of wilderness wanderings described in the book of Numbers lasted for about thirty-eight years and nine months. Why such a long period to transverse such a relatively short distance?” (“Lessons in the Wilderness,” in Studies in Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 1730.

2. Israel's Exodus from Egypt and Entry into Canaan



(Reference: The Exodus, Map 2. LDS Bible. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1979)

Willam Stanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Fredrick Wm. Bush state,

"The journey from Sinai to Kadesh-barnea by way of the Gulf of Aqaba takes only eleven days (Deut. 1:2). The direct route would be but a few days less, and by way of Edon and Moab hardly more than a couple of weeks. Numbers makes clear that the thirty-eight-year journey was punishment for lack of faith, so none of the unbelieving generation would enter the land (cf. Deut 1:35f.)." (The Old Testament Survey. Grand Rapids, Michigan.: Eerdmans, 1982, 162; see also Robert L. Millet. "Lessons In the Wildernes," in Studies in Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake: Randall Book Co., 1985, 173-174).

It is striking to me a trip that would normally take approximately a month to transverse the distance, takes almost 39 years! The reason is not logistics or weather or even attack from other, it is the lack of faith of the first generation. Those who previously had been slaves in Egypt, in spite of the miracles they experienced, could not exercise faith sufficient to trust either the Lord or his appointed prophet for an extended period of time. Their collective punishment was they would live their entire lives wandering in the Desert. They would never see the promised land of milk and honey which awaited them. It is fortunate, however, that if they could not see the promised land, at least they would be able to teach their children to exercise sufficient faith that they would be able to accomplish that which their parents could not.

Victor L. Ludlow provides the following chapter outline,

"I. Chapters 1-10:10—two months—Near Mount Sinai;

"II. Chapters 11-22—thirty-eight years—Through the wilderness to Moab

III. Chapters 22-36—five months—In the plains north of Moab"

(Understanding the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981, 41-42).

2. Census

What is the population of the children of Israel?

We read the following.

Numbers 1:45-47

45 So were all those that were numbered of the children of Israel, by the house of their fathers, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel;
46 Even all they that were numbered were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty.
47 But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them.

The population of the men twenty years and up, is 603,550 soldiers.

Numbers 3:39

39 All that were numbered of the Levites, which Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the Lord, throughout their families, all the males from a month old and upward, were twenty and two thousand.

The population of the Levites men, a month and older is 22,000.

Numbers 3:42-43

42 And Moses numbered, as the Lord commanded him, all the firstborn among the children of Israel.
43 And all the firstborn males by the number of names, from a month and upward, of those that were numbered of them, were twenty and two thousand two hundred and threescore and thirteen.

The total population of first born males, including the Levites, is 22,273.

The populations numbers taken from the scriptures don't add up. What explanation is offered?

Victor L. Ludlow states,

"Many scholars support the figures of the second and third censuses, which indicate an Israelite community of from twenty thousand to fifty thousand families total of one hundred thousand to two hundred fifty thousand Israelites. They argue that the figures of the first census are misinterpreted... A figure of twenty-two thousand first-born sons and a total population of about two hundred thousand Israelites seems likely rather than 603,550." (Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 43-45).

Robert L. Millet states,

"The total figure for all tribes of Israel was 603,550. If the men of military age [twenty and upward] represented about 20-25 percent of the population—based upon what might be found in other nations—then the total population of all Israelites would number from two to three million people... After thirty-eight years (and after a generation of wayward Israelites have died) another census was taken (Numbers 26:51), this time showing a total male fighting age population of 601,730, just a slight decrease in numbers from the original total." ("Lessons in the Wilderness," in Studies in Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 176).

It is important to note there is not complete agreement among the scholars as to the exact population, either before or after the original members had died. For example, Victor L. Ludlow estimates the population to "about two hundred thousand" while Robert L. Millet reports 601, 730. The difference between the estimates of the two scholars is great.

Victor L. Ludlow notes,

Based upon his figures... "Imagine moving the entire population of Salt Lake City for forty years through the deserts of Nevada. Not only would the leadership of the prophet be severely tested, but a daily miracle of manna and occasionally miracles of water, quail, and so on would be required to sustain the multitude." (Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 45).

Take your pick, the entire population of Boston, or Salt Lake City, or a similarly sized city, the task without spiritual direction and intervention would be extremely difficult if not impossible! Even with divine help, Moses feels the burden of leadership as the faith of the Israelites constantly vacillates.

Gleason Archer observes,

"The purpose of the census prior to the failures of Kadesh (Numbers 1-4), and of the census of the later generation at the plains of Moab (Numbers 26) was to show that they were not kept out of Canaan by their insufficient numbers. It was not the size of their army that mattered, but only the size of their faith." (A Survey of Old Testament. Introduction. Chicago: Moody Press, 1974, 246).

3. Appointment of Seventy Men

Exodus 16:35

**35 And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years,
until they came to a land inhabited; they did eat manna,
until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan.**

From this scripture, we learn that manna was the main course on the Israelite table for forty years. Even though there were few options, we do not know how often quail was available, their diet will become, just a month and a half out of Egypt, a reason for murmuring?

Exodus 16:12

**12 I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel:
speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and
in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye
shall know that I am the Lord your God.**

Note, as recorded in the book of Numbers, the similarity of their complaint.

Numbers 11:5-6, 10

**5 We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely;
the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the
onions, and the garlick:
6 But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at
all, besides this manna, before our eyes.
10 Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their
families, every man in the door of his tent: and the
anger of the Lord was kindled greatly; Moses also was
displeased.**

What is wrong? The response of the children of Israel to their monotonous diet is more similar to a child "throwing a temper tantrum," than a mature adult. They want what they want when they want it and are unwilling or unable to delay their gratification long enough to address the problem with their leader. It is understandable the meal option could create unhappiness. What is unacceptable, it how they chose to solve the problem. Moses turns to the Lord for guidance.

Numbers 11:13-14

**13 Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this
people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh,
that we may eat.
14 I am not able to bear all this people alone, because
it is too heavy for me.**

Moses seems to have forgotten the lesson he learned from his father-in-law, Jethro, when he counseled Moses not to bear the burden of leadership of the Israelites alone, but to call counselors to assist him (Exodus 18:13-27). We are counseled today to use our own intelligence to solve a problem and then to seek confirmation from the Lord. The Lord's response to Moses.

Numbers 11:16-17

**16 And the Lord said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy
men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the
elders of the people and officers over them; and bring
them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they
may stand there with thee.
17 And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I
will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put
it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the
people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.**

We may ask ourselves who are these seventy men? Are they those whom Jethro had earlier suggested be appointed as judges to assist Moses when he noted that the responsibility of judging the people upon Moses was "too heavy for thee?" (Exodus 18:21-22). Were they the same seventy who went up Mount Sinai and saw God? (Exodus 24:9-10). The record is not clear. What is known is that two were absent (Eldad and Medad) when the Lord's spirit rested upon the other sixty-eight. When Joshua heard that they also "prophesied while in the camp" (Numbers 11:26), he was

concerned and reported their action to Moses. Joshua's suggestion was that they be forbidden to prophecy (Numbers 11:28). Moses will now teach an important lesson to Joshua.

Numbers 11:29

**29 And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake?
would God that all the LORD's people were prophets, and
that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!**

Robert L. Millet states,

"One sign of spiritual maturity is the capacity to receive revealed truths and act upon them in a balanced and appropriate manner. The children of Israel [are now taught] the importance of every man and woman becoming a prophet within his or her own sphere and that it is the privilege of each person to be guided and enlightened by the Spirit of God." ("Lessons in the Wilderness," in Studies in Scriptures, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 188).

The Lord's solution to the Israelites' request for meat, is to send them quail from the sea, which was a day's journey from their location.

Numbers 11:31-33

**31 And there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought
quail from the sea, and let them fall by the camp... as it
were two cubits [1 cubit = 17 1/2 to 21 1/2 inches] high
upon the face of the earth.
32 And the people stood up all that day, and all that
night, and all the next day, and they gathered the
quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers [1
homer = 6 1/2 bushels dry measure]: ..
33 And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere
it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against
the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very
great plague.**

Why did the Lord put a number of people to death? The people had turned gluttonous. The smallest catch was equal to about sixty bushels, far beyond normal need. The greedy lust for more than they could use brought a just punishment upon the people. How many died in the plague is not recorded, but the place was called "The graves of lust." (Numbers 11:34a). The Lord is willing to provide for his children according to their needs, not their wants. He expects his children to be both temperate in their appetites and grateful, and when they have more than they need for themselves and their family to then share their abundance with others. Anything less in our conduct will surely bring his displeasure.

4. Opposition to Moses by Miriam and Aaron

What brought about the opposition of Moses' sister and brother?

Numbers 12:1-2

**1 And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the
Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married
an Ethiopian woman.
2 And they said, Hath the Lord only spoken by Moses? hath
he not spoken also by us? And the Lord heard it.**

What is the truth of this matter as we understand it?

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

"According to Josephus, when Moses was a general of the Egyptian army in the attack against the Ethiopians, he married an Ethiopian woman as a political alliance to end the war. (See Flavius Josephus Josephus Antiquities, Bk.2, chap. 10, par. 1 in Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 201).

It is true that Moses had married an Ethiopian, but this marriage had not disqualified him to serve as the Lord's anointed prophet. It is God, not man, who selects his mouthpiece upon the earth. I believe that the real reason is jealousy and envy towards their brother Moses, in that they wanted more power and authority than they presently held.

Numbers 12:6

**6 And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet
among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in
a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.**

Here the Lord is personally confirming his selection of Moses as his prophet. Miriam and Aaron and all of Israel are to give obedience unto his words as if they were those of the Lord. To undermine his authority or seek authority for themselves is a gross error on their parts.

Numbers 12:9-10

**9 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them; and he departed.
10 And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.**

Why was Miriam punished, and not Aaron?

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

"Miriam was the instigator of the attack on Moses' right to preside. Thus, her sin was the more grievous. Second, for Aaron to seek priesthood leadership demonstrated pride and self-aggrandizement. He aspired to a position to which he had not been called. When Miriam sought that position, she not only demonstrated pride, but also sought to set up an order contrary to God's system of government. From the beginning, the priesthood callings and the right to preside were given to men. Miriam's attempt to achieve equality with Moses was a serious breach of that divinely instituted system of order." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 202).

Aaron upon seeing his sister being struck by leprosy, turned to Moses.

Numbers 12:11

11 And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sins upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned.

Moses being moved by the seriousness of his sister's condition, petitions the Lord to remove the penalty from her. The Lord's direction to Moses.

Numbers 12:14

14 And the Lord said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again.

The Lord must act when his laws are violated. He also has the power to be merciful unto the sinner who is humble and seeks forgiveness. We may assume that both Miriam and Aaron learned a powerful lesson regarding the authority of a prophet and his being called of the Lord.

5. The Test

This section is entitled "The Test," although I do not believe the twelve men who were selected for this mission fully grasped the seriousness of their responsibility or the repercussions of their report. It will become a matter of life and death.

The Lord now instructs Moses to send a ruler from each of the twelve tribes to enter the land of Canaan as spies. Caleb, the son of Jephunneh of the tribe of Judah and Oshea (Joshua), the son of Nun of the tribe of Ephraim are two of the twelve. Their instructions are:

Numbers 13:18-20

**18 And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many;
19 And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds;
20 And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land...**

It appears to be a straight forward assignment. They are to go into the land in disguise. Learn about the people and their resources and to bring back a representation of the fruit of the land. They are to report their findings to Moses. The scriptures record their findings.

Numbers 13:25, 27-28

25 And they returned from searching of the land after forty days.

27 ...We came into the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.

28 Nevertheless...

Nevertheless... The word represents doubt, and in this case also fear. Now follow the reasons why they cannot succeed! They not only doubt themselves, they doubt the Lord's ability to bless them. Two of the twelve do not doubt. Ten will add to their lack of faith by then going to the rest of the congregation and murmuring against their leaders, Moses and Aaron, which precedes their revolt against authority!.

Numbers 14:2-4

2 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.

3 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?

4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

How tragic is their response! At the first sign of resistance or trial of their faith, the majority want to return to Egypt. What awaits them is but a continuation of their lives as slaves to often cruel masters for the rest of their lives! We learned earlier of Esau being willing to sell his birthright for a bowl of pottage (Gen. 25:30-34) and we were amazed at how little he valued his birthright. Here are a majority of the camp who are willing to forsake the direction of the Lord and his Prophet for a life of servitude. The sand and rocks of Egypt for a land of milk and honey! Fortunately, there are two who also made the journey to the land of promise, and whose faith is yet strong who will first speak to the people.

Numbers 13:30

30 And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are will able to overcome it.

Numbers 13:31

31 But the men that went up with him [with the exception of Joshua] said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.

Listen to the words of Caleb and Joshua as they speak as witnesses of the truth.

Numbers 14:6-9

6 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh...

7 ...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.

8 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.

9 Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us; their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not.

When witnesses are needed to stand up for what is right, the Lord sent Caleb and Joshua, with courage and faith in the Lord, to bear their witness and to remind others when the cause is right and the Lord is on our side we cannot fail, regardless of the obstacles before us. The test is who is on the Lord's side, who? The response of the people?

Numbers 14:10

10 But all the congregation bade stone them with stones...

The Lord will now speak in response to the consensus of the people regarding their leaders.

Numbers 14:10-12

10 ...And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

11 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?

12 I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.

Moses pleads with the Lord for mercy regarding the children of Israel that they not be put to death, however, justice must also be rendered.

Numbers 14:22-23, 30

22 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;

23 Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:

30 Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneth, and Joshua the son of Nun.

What happened to those in the congregation who rebelled against the Lord and his Prophet?

Numbers 14:33-34

33 And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness.

34 After the number of days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.

What happened to the ten who brought the report to the congregation?

Numbers 14:36-37

36 And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land.

37 Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the Lord.

Results of the Test

Of the twelve, only two will live to enter the promised land. Caleb and Joshua. The test was administered and only two of the twelve passed. All Israel will also now be required to wander in the wilderness until all those who rebelled against Moses have died! This will take a total of forty years.

6. Moses and the Waters of Meribah at Kadesh

The waters of Meribah are a significant watermark in our journey because here we see that even prophets of God have human frailties. For some individuals, this can become a trial of their faith. It is "as if" we expect our prophets to be without flaws while all the time we also know they are human, just like us. To some, It seems like such a contradiction when the flaw is seen, their faith is weakened.

It is while the children of Israel are camped at Kadesh that Moses' sister Miriam dies and is buried. There is no water there which initiates upset by the people.

Numbers 20:2

2 And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.

When will the children of Israel learn the Lord did not bring them into the Desert so they could die. He brought them here to teach them to rely on him for all their needs and to learn for themselves that He will never let them down regardless of the challenges they would face of food or water or strength against their enemies. He had provided them with manna six days a week with a double portion for the Sabbath. He had fought their battles for them and if they had

exercised even a particle of faith, He would have brought them to the promised land. When will they trust Him and Moses, his prophet? Not today!

Numbers 20:3-5

3 And the people chode [contended] with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord!

4 And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?

5 And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink.

The Lord will provide for he knows they have need of water.

Numbers 20:7-8

7 And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

8 Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.

Moses is to: (1) Speak unto the rock before their eyes, and (2) He is to acknowledge the power of the Lord as the provider of the water. The instructions seem simple, but Moses, I believe because he is angry with the Israelites constant complaining, does not follow the Lord's directions as directed. He does it his own way! He smites the rock twice and rather than acknowledging the power of Lord as the source of the water. He states, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" (Num. 20:10), thereby taking the honor to himself.

The Lord responds to Moses irreverent actions.

Numbers 20:12-13

12 And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.

13 This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the Lord,...

Everyone of us must learn to follow the exact directions of the Lord at all times, including his prophets. Something failing to turn left, instead of right, may bring disastrous consequences rather than certain freedom. Moses compounded his errant actions, when he failed to acknowledge the Lord as the provider of the water instead inferring that he and Aaron were the providers!

Spencer W. Kimball makes the following observation,

"The Lord was displeased with Moses in assuming to perform the miracle. I can imagine the Lord saying something like this: 'Who, did you say? Who made the water? Who made the rock? Moses! Who brought the water from the rock?'....Moses, that was a sad day. You did such a great work in moving Israel from Egypt. You were so patient, generally, with their whims and antagonisms. Oh, Moses, why did you let your humility deteriorate?" Moses had integrity in great measure....[but] for a single moment he had forgotten." ("Humility," in *Speeches of the Year, 1963*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, January 16, 1963); see also Daniel H. Ludlow. *A Companion to Your Study of the Old Testament*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 179).

While lessons must be learned by each of us, the Lord also knows there are times when we will falter and make mistakes. I believe that is one reason for the principle of repentance, so we may be forgiven after we have exercised the requisite contrition and restitution. Moses is not exempt from exercising that principle of the gospel.

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

"At least two other scriptures indicate that Moses was denied entrance into the promised land as a result of Moses sin in striking the rock at Meribah (see Numbers 27:12-14; Deuteronomy 32:51-52). Other passages, however, help to clarify the matter. Deuteronomy 3:26 and 4:21 indicate that the Lord told Moses that the reason he could not enter the promised land was that the Lord was angry with him "for your sakes" (emphasis added). This statement could imply that there were reasons other than the error of Moses for the prohibition. Two other facts strengthen this supposition. First, both Moses and the higher priesthood were taken from Israel because of the people's unworthiness, not Moses'. (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:23-25), Second, Moses was translated when his mortal ministry was finished (see Book of Mormon, Alma 45:19). In other words, Moses was privileged to enter a land of promise far greater than the

land of Canaan.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 208).

7. Aaron Denied Entrance Into the Promised Land

Why is Aaron denied entrance?

Numbers 20:24

24 Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah.

Moses is directed of the Lord to release him from service.

Numbers 20:25-26

25 Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto mount Hor:

26 And strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there.

It is important to understand the removal of Aaron's garments and putting them on his son Eleazar implies a transfer of that office to him. Aaron, however, was not being retired in dishonor or disgrace. His death was imminent. In fact, he dies while on mount Hor (Numbers 14:28). It was now time for new and younger leadership which is now passed to his son, Eleazar.

8. The Serpent of Brass

It seems Israel is slow to remember the Lord in spite of his repeated efforts to nurture and care for their needs. As they travel around the land of Edom, again they complain against both God and Moses.

Numbers 21:5

5 And the people spake 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 souls loatheth this light bread.

It appears their complaint is not either a lack of food or water. In truth, it is not that they do not have any food to eat or probably water to drink, they want instead what they don't have. Despite their stay in the wilderness, they have failed to learn a simple lesson. When they turn to God and Moses in humility, they will be given what they need in order to survive and to spiritually become the covenant children of the Lord. The underlying problem is their lack of trust in either God or Moses! They doubt the purpose for being in the Desert. They distrust their leaders. They look backward to Egypt, where viewed through their distorted perspective, things were better rather than looking forward to the Promised land of milk and honey. They fail to look to the Lord for their needs, physical or spiritual. The response of the Lord is decisive and swift.

Numbers 21:6

6 And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

Only after the Lord had taken such drastic action were the hearts of the people softened.

Numbers 21:7

7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.

Moses now petitions the Lord on behalf of the people and receives the following instructions.

Numbers 21:8

8 And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole, and it shall come to pass, that everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

For further information regarding the response of the Israelites to the Brass serpent, we turn to the Book of Mormon.

B/M Alma 33:19-21

19 Behold, he [the Son of God] was spoken of by Moses; yea, and behold a type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live.

20 But few understood the meaning of those things, and this because of the hardness of their hearts. But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that he would heal them.

21 O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly, or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief, and be slothful, that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish?

Again we see the cost to some of not believing the Lord could/would heal them. Rather than live, they chose death, because they would not follow the simple directions of their prophet and look! Are we not also guilty of the same behavior in our lives today when we also refuse to follow the directions of the Lord as given through His leaders?

A. Noordtzij has observed,

"[T]he snake is on the one hand the carrier of evil that kills many, on the other hand it represents life....[T]his duality is very different from that generally found in the ancient Near East: the life-giving aspect of the serpent is not inherent in the animal itself. The snake on the pole can give life only because of the Lord's gracious will, and its curative effect is experienced only by those who see in the snake the symbol of the Lord's grace that forgives and delivers from death. Only thus could the snake point forward to the coming Christ." (A. Noordtzij. Numbers: Bible Student's Commentary. Translated by Ed van der Maas. Grand Rapids, Michigan.:Zondervan Publishing House, 1983, 87; see also "Lessons in the Wilderness" in Studies in Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 181).

Is it not striking that the very animal (the snake) which people then and now have come to fear is the symbol to which if they would look would heal them. I believe that found in the choice of the symbol is also the need for the individual to exercise faith in order to overcome their fear which is fundamental to their being healed.

Ellis T. Rasmussen observed,

"It is probably more than coincidental that the serpent-motif became symbolic of both the coming of death and of life in various cultures, including the Mayan and the Aztec. We find the serpent-motif even today in our culture as it serves as the symbol of the American Medical Association. In a sense, a pattern of relationships may exist, that as the serpent in Eden was related to the serpent on a pole, even so was the man in Eden related to the Man on a Cross. Moreover, even as the first death brought also the capacity for reproduction of life, so also the other death (Christ's) brought about resurrection and eternal life." (Introduction to the Old Testament, Vol. 1. Provo: Brigham Young University Publications, 1972, 119).

The parallel that Ellis Rasmussen offers is indeed thought-provoking as we contrast the Garden of Eden and the Cross with the connection between life and death.

Carlos E. Asay reminds us,

"We, like Israel of old, must rivet our eyes and minds upon... Christ if we hope to gain eternal life....Our looks must not be allowed to wander across the way or to become fixed upon the perishable things of the world. The eye...must be trained to look upward. We must look to God and live!" ("Look to God and Live" in Ensign, November, 1978, 54).

We must be careful not to become critical of the children of Israel. Are we not also guilty of the failure to look up and forward with hope for a better day? Do we not also become mired down in the trivial of the day which dampens our spirits and often causes us to lose sight of who we really can, with God's help, become?

[9. Joshua Set Apart As a Prophet](#)

Just as the time had come for Aaron to be released from the service he had rendered, it was also time for Moses release. In recognition the time had come for Moses, he petitions the Lord.

Numbers 27:16-17

16 Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation,

17 Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may

**bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not
as sheep which have no shepherd.**

The Lord has already selected Moses' successor and so directs Moses.

Numbers 27:18, 22-23

**18 ... Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is
the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him;
22 And Moses did as the Lord commanded him: and he took
Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before
all the congregation:
23 And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge,
as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.**

Robert L. Millet states,

*"Forty years have now passed from the time of the deliverance. A new generation had arisen and was ready to enter the promised land. Israel now awaited further light and knowledge from Him who had led their fathers. Moses would soon deliver his final three discourses (Deuteronomy) before being translated and leaving the people in the hands of a younger successor. Indeed, a new day was dawning on Israel." ("Lessons in the Wilderness," in *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co. , 1985, 203-204).*

Joshua, having proved his faithfulness and obedience to the Lord, will now succeed Moses as the Lord's anointed prophet. Joshua will lead the remaining Israelites into the land of promise, a land of which their forefathers could not enter, but only dream about.

10. Conclusion

The Israelites had been led out from the power of the greatest empire in the world at that time. They had personally been witnesses to the plagues that afflicted the Egyptians but left Israel untouched. They had, with their own hands, smeared blood on the doorways of their homes and then heard the cries of the Egyptians as their firstborn fell. They had walked between towering walls of water that divided at the command of Moses, then watched as those walls collapsed on the armies of the pharaoh. They ate bread that miraculously appeared each morning, drank water gushing from a rock, felt Sinai quake, and saw it glow with fire. What people in all of history have had greater witness that God was with them and would use his unsurpassable power in their behalf? They had so much and were promised so much more. Then came the choices. Each time, they turned toward Egypt instead of toward the Lord and his prophet, until they lost it all.

Before, however, we pass judgment on the children of Israel, each of us must first examine our own hearts and determine for ourselves our own obedience and faith in the Lord. Would I have been like so many of the children of Israel who, when tested, faltered and then murmured against the Lord or would I have been faithful like Caleb and Joshua and put my complete trust and faith in the Lord? Remember, while their test is passed, my test and also yours is still on-going.