

## Lesson 28: Israel's Unbelief; God's Judgments and Deliverances

In today's lesson, we're going to see that God uses spies, somewhat like James Bond type of reconnaissance, and we'll hear about what they discovered in their undercover foray into the Promised Land. We'll also see how quickly the Israelites turn on Moses and on God; in some ways, it will be like looking in the mirror as we will probably see ourselves as well.

### Review Lesson 27

1. On what did God write His Ten Commandments? *On two tablets of stone.*
2. What did God tell Moses that he and the Israelites must build?  
*The tabernacle, a place where God would live among them.*
3. Why did God tell the Israelites to build this place? *God knew that the Israelites would disobey the Ten Commandments which He had given them. Unless they had some place where they could go to God and receive His forgiveness and mercy, they would all be punished by death.*
4. How were they to make everything? *They were to make everything exactly as God instructed Moses up in the mountain.*
5. In which room was the bright light, or Shekinah glory, which showed that God was there? *In the inner room, called the most Holy place, or the Holy of holies.*
6. Who was the only one who could go once each year behind the large, heavy curtain into the inner room? *The high priest.*
7. What must he take with him? *The blood of an animal which had been killed.*
8. What was the high priest to do with the blood? *He was to sprinkle it on the mercy seat.*
9. What did God promise He would do if the high priest did this? *God promised that He would hold off His judgment on the Israelites for one more year.*
10. Did the blood of animals satisfy God as a payment for sin? *No, the blood of animals could never pay for sin.*
11. What is the only payment for sin? *Sinners must die. They are separated from God and destined to be punished by Him forever.*
12. Would God have come to live in the tabernacle if they had not done everything exactly as God had instructed Moses? *No.*
13. Can sinners come to God in whatever way they wish? *No, if we don't come to God in the way that He says, we will not be accepted.*
14. How can we know the way to God? *Only through the Bible, the Word of God.*

### A. Introduction

The Israelites had trembled in fear when God spoke to them from Mount Sinai. Now God was graciously dwelling in their midst, offering them the mercy they needed and continuing to faithfully provide manna and water for them in the desert.

### B. Spying out the Promised Land

God lifted up the cloud from Mount Sinai where He had given the Israelites His Ten Commandments and the instructions for the tabernacle.

The Israelites followed the cloud when it moved, and the Lord led them right to the edge of the land which He had promised to give to them. Because the people who lived in the land of Canaan were very

wicked and worshiped idols, the Lord planned to have them destroyed and to give their land to the Israelites.

**Recall:**

*God cares about all people. II Peter 3:9 says that God is "...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

*We need to remember God's character when thinking about His judgment. He is holy and righteous and judges all sin. But He is also loving, merciful, and gracious.*

*What God planned to do to the Canaanites was in keeping with His character, just as were His judgments of Sodom and Gomorrah and of the whole world at the time of the flood.*

**Theme: God communicates with man.**

When the Israelites arrived at the border of the land which God had promised to Abraham and his descendants, the Lord told Moses to choose one man from each of the twelve tribes.

- These twelve men were to go and spy out the land before the Israelites entered.

**Numbers 13:1-2 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying,

<sup>2</sup> "Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, every one a leader among them."

Moses obeyed the Lord and sent the twelve men to look at the land and the people who were living there.

**Numbers 13:3 (NASB)**

<sup>3</sup> So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran at the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the sons of Israel.

**Numbers 13:17-24 (NLT)**

<sup>17</sup> Moses gave the men these instructions as he sent them out to explore the land: "Go north through the Negev into the hill country.

<sup>18</sup> See what the land is like, and find out whether the people living there are strong or weak, few or many.

<sup>19</sup> See what kind of land they live in. Is it good or bad? Do their towns have walls, or are they unprotected like open camps?

<sup>20</sup> Is the soil fertile or poor? Are there many trees? Do your best to bring back samples of the crops you see." (It happened to be the season for harvesting the first ripe grapes.)

<sup>21</sup> So they went up and explored the land from the wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near Lebo-hamath.

<sup>22</sup> Going north, they passed through the Negev and arrived at Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai—all descendants of Anak—lived. (The ancient town of Hebron was founded seven years before the Egyptian city of Zoan.)

<sup>23</sup> When they came to the valley of Eshcol, they cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes so large that it took two of them to carry it on a pole between them! They also brought back samples of the pomegranates and figs.

<sup>24</sup> That place was called the valley of Eshcol (which means “cluster”), because of the cluster of grapes the Israelite men cut there.

### **C. The Scouting Report: 10 of the spies didn't believe God.**

**Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.**

When these twelve men returned, they went to Moses. This is what they told the Israelites.

#### **Numbers 13:25-33 (NLT)**

<sup>25</sup> After exploring the land for forty days, the men returned

<sup>26</sup> to Moses, Aaron, and the whole community of Israel at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran. They reported to the whole community what they had seen and showed them the fruit they had taken from the land.

<sup>27</sup> This was their report to Moses: “We entered the land you sent us to explore, and it is indeed a bountiful country—a land flowing with milk and honey. Here is the kind of fruit it produces.

<sup>28</sup> But the people living there are powerful, and their towns are large and fortified. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak!

<sup>29</sup> The Amalekites live in the Negev, and the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country. The Canaanites live along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan Valley.”

<sup>30</sup> But Caleb tried to quiet the people as they stood before Moses. “Let's go at once to take the land,” he said. “We can certainly conquer it!”

<sup>31</sup> But the other men who had explored the land with him disagreed. “We can't go up against them! They are stronger than we are!”

<sup>32</sup> So they spread this bad report about the land among the Israelites: “The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All the people we saw were huge.

<sup>33</sup> We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that's what they thought, too!”

The spies return with amazing tales of an abundant land truly flowing with “milk & honey.” But because of the size of the enemy, most of the spies felt that any attempt attack would be met with disaster. They said that the enemy looked like giants, and they weren't exaggerating.

**But ten of the men had forgotten all the great and mighty things that the Lord had done for them.**

- They had forgotten that nothing is impossible to God.
- They forgot all the miracles that He had done in Egypt and how He had delivered them from slavery.
- They didn't believe that God was strong enough to overcome the people of Canaan and give them the land.

### **D. Caleb and Joshua believed God.**

**Theme: Man must have faith in order to please God and be saved.**

However, two of the spies, Joshua & Caleb believed God.

- They, also, had seen the strong walls surrounding the cities in Canaan.
- They, also, had seen the size of the people.
- But they had not forgotten that God is almighty and that He can do anything that He wants to do.

- They remembered the mighty things that God had already done, and they believed that He would drive out the people of Canaan and give the land to the Israelites just as He had promised.

### **Numbers 13:30 (NLT)**

<sup>30</sup> But Caleb tried to quiet the people as they stood before Moses. “Let’s go at once to take the land,” he said. “We can certainly conquer it!”

### **E. The Israelites did not believe God.**

**Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.**

### **Numbers 13:31-33 (NLT)**

<sup>31</sup> But the other men who had explored the land with him disagreed. “We can’t go up against them! They are stronger than we are!”

<sup>32</sup> So they spread this bad report about the land among the Israelites: “The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All the people we saw were huge.

<sup>33</sup> We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that’s what they thought, too!”

Who do you think the Israelites followed?

### **Numbers 14:1-4 (NLT)**

<sup>1</sup> Then the whole community began weeping aloud, and they cried all night.

<sup>2</sup> Their voices rose in a great chorus of protest against Moses and Aaron. “If only we had died in Egypt, or even here in the wilderness!” they complained.

<sup>3</sup> “Why is the LORD taking us to this country only to have us die in battle? Our wives and our little ones will be carried off as plunder! Wouldn’t it be better for us to return to Egypt?”

<sup>4</sup> Then they plotted among themselves, “Let’s choose a new leader and go back to Egypt!”

The Lord heard everything the Israelites said. He knew that they did not believe Him. They were acting as if God were a liar.

- God had promised to give them the land, but they refused to believe Him.
- The Israelites decided to go with the minority report.

### **Compare:**

*If someone tells you something and you don’t believe him, isn’t that calling him a liar? Yes, it is. If we hear God’s Word but don’t believe it, then we, too, are treating God as if He were a liar.*

### **F. God told them that they would all die in the wilderness.**

**Theme: God is holy and righteous. He demands death as the payment for sin.**

The Lord was very angry with the Israelites.

### **Numbers 14:26-32 (NLT)**

<sup>26</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron,

<sup>27</sup> “How long must I put up with this wicked community and its complaints about me? Yes, I have heard the complaints the Israelites are making against me.

<sup>28</sup> Now tell them this: ‘As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you

say.

<sup>29</sup> You will all drop dead in this wilderness! Because you complained against me, every one of you who is twenty years old or older and was included in the registration will die.

<sup>30</sup> You will not enter and occupy the land I swore to give you. The only exceptions will be Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

<sup>31</sup> ““You said your children would be carried off as plunder. Well, I will bring them safely into the land, and they will enjoy what you have despised.

<sup>32</sup> But as for you, you will drop dead in this wilderness.

God told the Israelites that all of them who were twenty years old and older who did not believe God would die in the wilderness. But Joshua and Caleb would not die, because they believed God.

God said that, after forty years, when they had all died, then He would take their children and Joshua and Caleb into the land and give it to them.

**Theme: Man must have faith in order to please God and be saved.**

It is a very evil thing not to believe God.

**Recall:**

*Satan told Eve that she would not die if she ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan called God a liar, and Eve believed him. Cain also did not believe God, and he came to God in his own way. God rejected him and his offering.*

*When Noah told the people that a great flood was going to be sent by God, they refused to believe God. They would not enter the ark, and they were all destroyed. The Egyptians also did not believe that the God of Israel was the almighty and only true God. They trusted in their idols to deliver them. But God destroyed their land, killed their firstborn, and drowned their armies in the sea.*

God will punish everyone who refuses to believe Him.

- God wanted to bring Israel right into the promised land of Canaan.
- But because of their unbelief, God made them wander in the wilderness.
- Just as He had said, all the unbelieving adults would die in the desert.

**G. Israel blamed Moses and Aaron because they didn't have any water.**

As the people wandered, they again complained.

**Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.**

**Numbers 20:1-2 (NLT)**

<sup>1</sup> In the first month of the year, the whole community of Israel arrived in the wilderness of Zin and camped at Kadesh. While they were there, Miriam died and was buried.

<sup>2</sup> There was no water for the people to drink at that place, so they rebelled against Moses and Aaron.

The Israelites blamed Moses and Aaron, his brother, because they didn't have any water. Why didn't the Israelites ask the Lord for water?

- The Lord had given them water from the rock when they needed it before.

- The reason they didn't ask the Lord is because they did not trust in Him even though He had done so much for them.

Compare:

*There are many people today who are like the Israelites. Every day and night, the Lord shows us that He is the almighty God. He shows us who He is by the things that He has made. He made the sun, the moon, and the stars. He sends the rain and the wind.*

*He makes everything grow. All things are under His control. He has given all of these things so that we will believe in Him. He has given us our very lives. God has also given us His Word so that we can know the truth. In spite of all these things which God does every day, the majority of people are like the Israelites. They will not believe God.*

**Consider:**

*Some people say that they don't believe in God because of some tragedy or disappointment that has happened to them or to a loved one. After having studied the Bible this far, we know that it is not God's "fault" that men suffer. It is the result of man's sinfulness.*

*We suffer because of our own sins, because of the sins of generations of other sinners, and because all of creation around us is suffering from man's sin. Sickness, disease, bad weather, hard work, etc. all came as a result of man's sin against God.*

*Knowing the things we have learned in the Bible should make us want to examine our own concept of God. Do you believe God? Do you believe His Word?*

## **H. God commanded Moses to speak to the rock.**

**Theme: God communicates with man.**

**Theme: Man can come to God only according to God's will and plan.**

### **Numbers 20:6-8 (NLT)**

<sup>6</sup> Moses and Aaron turned away from the people and went to the entrance of the Tabernacle, where they fell face down on the ground. Then the glorious presence of the LORD appeared to them,

<sup>7</sup> and the LORD said to Moses,

<sup>8</sup> "You and Aaron must take the staff and assemble the entire community. As the people watch, speak to the rock over there, and it will pour out its water. You will provide enough water from the rock to satisfy the whole community and their livestock."

The Lord commanded Moses to speak to the rock.

- Previously, when they had needed water, the Lord had told Moses to strike the rock.
- This time, the Lord told him to just speak to the rock.
- Each time, God told them exactly the way it should be done.

## **I. Moses disobeyed.**

**Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.**

Listen to what happened.

### **Numbers 20:9-11 (NLT)**

<sup>9</sup> So Moses did as he was told. He took the staff from the place where it was kept before the LORD.

<sup>10</sup> Then he and Aaron summoned the people to come and gather at the rock. “Listen, you rebels!” he shouted. “Must we bring you water from this rock?”

<sup>11</sup> Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with the staff, and water gushed out. So the entire community and their livestock drank their fill.

### **Moses and Aaron flared with anger.**

During these years of wandering in the wilderness, Moses' patience was continually tested by the murmurings, grumbings, and complaints of the people. At one point, Moses' patience reached its breaking point and he sinned against the Lord, in anger against the people. When the people again grumbled against Moses, saying they had no water, the Lord told Moses to speak to the rock and water would flow forth. Instead, Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod. Apparently because he disobeyed the Lord in this act, Moses was not permitted to enter the Promised Land (Num. 20:1-13). That privilege would belong to his successor, Joshua.

## **J. The Lord's punishment on Moses and Aaron**

**Theme: God is supreme and sovereign.**

Moses and Aaron reacted in anger instead of trusting the Lord and obeying Him. Through their words and actions they dishonored the Lord, for they failed to demonstrate His patience, grace, and mercy to undeserving Israel.

God wanted to show the people that He was faithful to provide water for them, just as He had promised.

God keeps His promises because He is perfect and holy. But instead of showing God's faithfulness and holiness to the people by obeying His perfect instructions, Moses and Aaron showed the people their own anger.

For this reason, God told Moses and Aaron that they would not be allowed to enter the land of Canaan.

### **Numbers 20:12 (NLT)**

<sup>12</sup> But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust me enough to demonstrate my holiness to the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land I am giving them!”

## **K. Israel murmured once again.**

**Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.**

The Lord had already given the Israelites water, but they still did not trust and depend on Him. They soon forgot what He had done for them and began to complain again.

### **Numbers 21:4-5 (NLT)**

<sup>4</sup> Then the people of Israel set out from Mount Hor, taking the road to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom. But the people grew impatient with the long journey,

<sup>5</sup> and they began to speak against God and Moses. “Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?” they complained. “There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!”

## L. God sent fiery serpents.

**Theme: God is holy and righteous. He demands death as the payment for sin.**

The Lord punished the Israelites so that many of them died.

### Numbers 21:6 (NLT)

<sup>6</sup> So the LORD sent poisonous snakes among the people, and many were bitten and died.

The Israelites died because they were bitten by the snakes.

- This was God's judgment on them because of their sin.

Compare:

*The Israelites were bitten by the snakes, and they died. In a similar way, all people have been "bitten" by Satan and sin, and all died to God. I don't mean to say that Satan is a snake. He is not.*

*I am only speaking figuratively when I say that Satan and sin bit us. Through Satan and sin, Adam and Eve died to God. They were separated from Him. It is also through Satan and sin that we were born sinners, dead to God and separated from God.*

The Israelites could not escape the poisonous snakes sent by the Lord.

**Theme: God is supreme and sovereign.**

Recall:

*When God decides to punish sinners, there is no place where they can hide from Him. In the days of Noah, was there any place where the people could escape judgment after God shut the door of the ark and sent the flood? Could the people of Sodom and Gomorrah escape the judgment of God when He sent fire and brimstone on them? Did Lot's wife escape God's judgment when she disobeyed the Lord and looked back? When God decides that it is the time to punish people, there is no place where they can go to escape.*

**Theme: Man must have faith in order to please God and be saved.**

When God sent the poisonous snakes among them, the Israelites quickly changed their attitude toward God and acknowledged their sin.

### Numbers 21:7 (NLT)

<sup>7</sup> Then the people came to Moses and cried out, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take away the snakes." So Moses prayed for the people.

They realized now that only the Lord could save them from His punishment, and so they asked Moses to ask the Lord for His help.

**Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.**

They could not help themselves, and Moses could not save them from the snakes. Only the Lord could save them.

## M. The bronze serpent

**Theme: God is loving, merciful, and gracious.**



Because the Lord is merciful, He decided to forgive and save them. They didn't deserve God's help, but He saves all those who trust in Him.

**Theme: God communicates with man.**

The Lord told Moses what he must do and what the Israelites must do if they were to be saved from death.

**Numbers 21:8 (NLT)**

<sup>8</sup> Then the LORD told him, "Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!"

**Theme: Man can come to God only according to God's will and plan.**

The Lord didn't tell them to find their own way to be healed.

- God told Moses what to do.
- Moses had to do what God said, and the people had to look at the serpent just as God had instructed Moses.
- It had to be done God's way.

**Numbers 21:9 (NLT)**

<sup>9</sup> So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed!

**Theme: Man must have faith in order to please God and be saved.**

**Consider:**

*Do you think people would have been healed if they had prayed but not looked? No! What if they did not look at the brazen serpent but offered God a gift instead? Would they have been healed? No! They had to look at the brazen serpent, just as the Lord said.*

**Theme: God is faithful; He never changes.**

*Do you think some did look, but the Lord did not heal them? No! God always keeps His promises. All who looked were immediately healed by the Lord. God can be trusted to do everything He says.*

I'm reminded of the Israelites who were only three days into their journey in the desert, after the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, and they had no water. They started complaining to Moses.

**Exodus 15:23-26 (NLT)**

<sup>23</sup> When they came to the oasis of Marah, the water was too bitter to drink. So they called the place Marah (which means "bitter").

<sup>24</sup> Then the people complained and turned against Moses. "What are we going to drink?" they demanded.

<sup>25</sup> So Moses cried out to the LORD for help, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. Moses threw it into the water, and this made the water good to drink. It was there at Marah that the LORD set before them the following decree as a standard to test their faithfulness to him.

<sup>26</sup> He said, "If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his sight, obeying his commands and keeping all his decrees, then I will not make you suffer any of the diseases I sent on the Egyptians; for **I am the LORD who heals you.**"

Israel is traveling through the sweltering desert and found themselves without water. When they finally stumbled upon a pool of water at Marah, they quickly discovered it was unfit to drink, and Moses cried out to God in desperation.

The Lord responded by telling Moses to find a branch and toss it into the water. Moses obeyed and the waters instantly were purified or “healed.” Immediately, God told Moses, “If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all His decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, **for I am the Lord who heals you.**”

The expression “**the Lord who heals**” is derived from the Hebrew word, **Jehovah-Rapha**, meaning literally, “**the Lord Healer.**” In Jeremiah 8:22, this same Hebrew word is translated “physician.” This word suggests the expression implies all that a physician might be and do, from caring for an illness through its duration to instruction a person in areas of health maintenance. Not only does the Lord promise to heal Israel, but He specifically declares that His presence will prevent illness. He is saying, “I will not only heal you if you become ill, but I will keep the illness from you in the first place.”

The context of this scripture reveals God’s character as **Healer**.

The bitter waters of Marah reflect the disappointments of life that can embitter the soul and sour our existence. Think about Israel’s feeling of disappointment. At a distance they saw what appeared to be their salvation—a pool of refreshing water. It had been 3 days since anyone had had anything to drink and serious dehydration was no doubt beginning to set in. You can imagine the utter despair when they discovered that the water was unfit to drink.

It was at this point in the narrative that Jesus’ name took effect—God told Moses to find a branch and toss it into the water. And just as Moses’ branch ultimately healed the bitter waters of Marah, Isaiah the prophet predicted that the coming Deliverer or Messiah’s suffering on the cross would result in healing for all who looked upon Him and received Him.

I’m thankful that today, we can pray to the God who is **Our Healer**. He is the one who can heal our broken hearts, our bitterness and disappointment, and the sickness in our bodies as well our pains and suffering. He can restore us to health. If you find yourself in this situation today, call upon God Almighty as **the Lord Our Healer**. Ask him to touch you at your point of need today.

## **N. Conclusion**

The events we have just read about in the Bible happened some 3,400 years ago. Yet they are fresh for today.

God put these accounts in the Bible for us. Even though we may never have been out in the desert in need of water, we can certainly identify with the **attitudes** of the Israelites. Human nature hasn’t changed. And neither has God.

We, like the Israelites, need to listen to God and believe Him.

### QUESTIONS for REVIEW:

1. Why didn't the ten spies think that Israel would be able to enter Canaan?  
*a. Because they saw the giants and the walled cities.*  
*b. Because they did not believe God's promise that He would give them the land.*
2. Why did Joshua and Caleb think that Israel could enter Canaan?  
*Because they believed God's promise that He would give them the land.*
3. What are we calling God if we do not believe His Word and trust in Him? *We are calling God a liar.*
4. Will God accept anyone who does not believe what He says? *No, all who do not believe God will go to everlasting punishment.*
5. What was God's punishment on the Israelites because they did not believe His promise to give them the land? *God said all who did not believe Him would die in the wilderness. They would not enter Canaan.*
6. Who did God say would enter into the Promised Land?  
*a. Caleb and Joshua, because they had believed God.*  
*b. The children of the Israelites.*
7. What should the Israelites have done when they needed water? *They should have trusted in the Lord.*
8. Why did the Lord say that Moses and Aaron would not enter the Promised Land?  
*a. Because they did not trust and obey Him and thereby honor Him as holy and perfect before the people. Instead they showed their own anger.*  
*b. Because Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it as God had instructed him.*
9. What did the Lord do to punish the Israelites for their unbelief? *The Lord sent poisonous snakes which bit and killed many people.*
10. Who, like a snake, has "bitten" all people and brought death into the world? *Satan.*
11. How did Satan bring death to all people? *Satan led Adam and Eve to sin against God so that they, and all of us, would die.*
12. What did God tell Moses to do to save the Israelites from death? *The Lord told Moses to make a serpent out of brass and put it on a pole.*
13. What did those who had been bitten by a snake have to do in order to be healed? *They had to look at the snake on the pole.*
14. Did the snake of brass have magical power to heal those who looked? *No.*
15. Who healed those who looked? *The Lord did.*
16. Did they deserve to be healed? *No, they were sinners and deserved to die.*
17. Why did the Lord heal all who looked? *a. Because He is loving, merciful, and gracious.*  
*b. Because they believed His promise and looked at the brazen serpent just as He commanded.*
18. Did anyone who looked at the snake on the pole die? *No, God always does what He promises.*

### Next Lesson 29: God Gives Israel a King