

MOSES AND THE REBELLIOUS ISRAELITES

Numbers 10:1 - 14:38

STRUCTURE

Key-person: Moses

Key-location: Wilderness

Key-repetitions:

- People complained and then God disciplined: Israelites complained about hardship and manna. God sent a plague (Num 11:1-9, 18-30); Miriam and Aaron complained against Moses' black wife. Miriam had leprosy for seven days (Num 11:10-17); ten spies complained about giants in the promised land. They died in a plague (Num 13:28-33; 14:37); the Israelites believed the ten spies and complained. They wandered in the wilderness for forty years (Num 14:1-34).
- Spies: Moses sent twelve spies to check out land (Num 13:1-3); spies scouted the land for forty days (Num 13:25); they returned with grapes (Num 13:23); ten spies gave a negative report (Num 13:28-30, 30-33); Caleb and Joshua trusted God to give them the land (Num 13:30; 14:6-9); ten spies died of a plague (Num 14:36-37); Joshua and Caleb survived (Num 14:24, 38).

Key-attitudes:

- Israelites' constant complaining.
- Moses' frustration when criticized.
- Conflict between Moses and the complaining Israelites; between Caleb and Joshua who gave a positive report, and the ten spies who gave a negative report.
- The ten spies' unbelief in God and their fear of the giants.
- Caleb and Joshua's belief in God and their courage.
- God's anger because of the Israelites' complaints and attacks on Moses and Aaron.
- Israelites' lack of faith in God when they heard the ten spies' negative report.

Initial-situation:

The Lord liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. At Mount Sinai, he gave Moses the Ten Commandments and other laws.

Moses went up the mountain to be with God and stayed a long time. The Israelites asked Aaron to make them gods. The Israelites constructed the tabernacle as God's dwelling place among the people. Aaron and his sons were consecrated priests.

Initial-problem:

The Israelites complained about their food.

Final-situation:

The spies who had given a bad report were struck down and died of a plague.

BIBLE STORY

Complaining and Revolting Against God

The Israelites complained about their food, "If only we had meat to eat! Remember the fish we ate for free in Egypt; we also had cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. Now nothing tastes good here. All we have is manna, manna, and more manna!" (Num 11:1-9).

With a plague, God killed those who craved food other than manna (Num 11:31-34).

Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses because of his black wife. The Lord's anger blazed out against them and Miriam turned leprous for seven days (Num 12:1-16).

Spies Report; People Revolt

Moses sent twelve spies to go through the Promised Land and check it out. In the land, the spies cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. It took two men to carry it on a pole between them. The spies scouted the land for forty days; then they returned to the camp (Num 13:1-3, 17-21, 25).

The spies reported, "We went into the land. It does flow with milk and honey! But the people who live there are strong. Their cities are fortified and huge (Num 13:16-29).

Caleb interrupted, "Let's go up and take possession of the land."

But ten of the spies argued, "We can't attack those people. The people we saw are giants. Next to them, we felt like grasshoppers, and we looked like grasshoppers to them" (Num 13:30-31).

The Israelites complained, "Why didn't we die in Egypt? Why did the Lord bring us to this land only to be killed by the sword? We'd be better off returning to Egypt!"

Joshua and Caleb, two of the spies, argued, "If the Lord is pleased with us, he'll give us the land! Don't rebel against the Lord. The Lord is on our side. Don't be afraid of them!"

But the assembly talked about stoning Joshua and Caleb (Num 14:1-10).

The Lord commanded Moses and Aaron to tell the grumbling Israelites, "Everyone of you grumblers who are twenty years old or more, your corpses are going to litter the wilderness and rot in the desert. Not one of you will enter the land except Caleb and Joshua. I will bring your children in, to enjoy the land you rejected. Your children will live in the wilderness for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness. I, the Lord, have spoken."

The spies who had given a bad report were struck down and died of a plague. Of the twelve men who scouted the land, only Joshua and Caleb survived (Num 14:20-38).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story? | 3. Who are the main characters in the story? |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 4. What problems did the characters face? |

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| 5. | How did the characters face their problems? | 7. | Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 6. | How have you faced similar problems? | 8. | What does the story tell about God? |

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were some of the things the Israelites complained about? How did ten of the spies react differently toward the giants than Caleb and Joshua?
2. What did the spies' reaction show about their character?
3. How did Moses react differently to problems from the other Israelites?
4. What could help you pray better and complain less?
5. God had liberated the Israelites from Egypt, and had provided for their needs in the past. Why didn't they trust God when they faced a new crisis?
6. What are some of the things God has done for you that should give you confidence that you can trust him in the future?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **A person's character is revealed when he faces a crisis.** The ten spies saw the giants and forgot about God's power, while Caleb and Joshua saw God's power and didn't fear the giants (Num 13:25-33; 14:5-9).
2. **When problems come, God's people should pray instead of complaining.** The Israelites faced problems beyond their abilities to solve. They lost faith, complained, and criticized Moses. Moses faced the same circumstances, yet he had faith and prayed, asking God for help. See Philippians 4:6-7.
3. **Those who forget God's actions of the past, will make wrong choices when they are faced with a new crisis.** Each time the Israelites forgot God's past actions in their favor, they failed to trust him to give them victory over current situations, and they erred. When Moses was on the mountain for forty days, they felt insecure without his presence and made the golden calf (Ex 32:1-35). When the Israelites heard the ten spies' report, they lacked faith to conquer Canaan, rebelled, and rioted against God (Num 13-14).
4. **The majority is often wrong.** The ten spies were wrong when they saw the giants and lacked faith in God. The minority of two, Joshua and Caleb, were right when they trusted God to give them victory over the giants (Num 13:27-33; 14:6-7). The majority of ten was wrong when complaining against Moses, Aaron, and God, while the minority of four--Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua, was right (Num 14:1-2). Each Christian needs to follow Jesus and be true to him, even if no one else joins him.
5. **A person may experience his greatest fear(s) as a consequence of disobeying God.** The Israelites' greatest fear was that they would die in the wilderness (Num

14:2-3). The result of not believing in God was that they wandered in the desert until they died (Num 14:34).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Role-playing Drama:

Have two participants arguing. One represents Caleb and the other represents one of the ten spies who gave a negative report. Caleb argues that they should enter the Promised Land and the other argues that they would be fools to try.