

MOSES' END OF LIFE

Numbers 20 - 21; 33; Deuteronomy 34:1-8

STRUCTURE

Key-person: Moses

Key-location: Wilderness

Key-repetitions:

- Israelites complained: because there was no water (Num 20:2-6); against God and Moses about the lack of food and water (Num 21:5-9).
- Moses prayed: when the people complained that there was no water (Num 20:6); when God sent snakes (Num 21:7).
- God punished: Moses disobeyed God's orders, and God said Moses would not lead the community into the Promised Land (Num 20:12); the Israelites grew irritable, and spoke out against God and Moses, and God sent poisonous snakes (Num 21:6); God promised to punish the Israelites if they did not drive out the inhabitants of the land (Num 33:56).
- Moses gave the people orientation: drive out the inhabitants of the land (Num 33:52); destroy their idols (Num 33:52); take possession of the land (Num 33:53); distribute the land to family groups (Num 33:54).

Key-attitudes:

- Israelites' grumbling.
- Moses' frustration when criticized.
- God's anger because of the constant complaining and attacks on Moses and Aaron.
- God's anger at Moses' disobedience.
- Israelites' impatience with the long journey filled with constant hardships.

Initial-situation:

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

Moses sent twelve spies to explore the Promised Land. Ten spies said the people were giants, the cities walled, and the Israelites could not conquer the land. Two of the spies urged the Israelites to go in and conquer the land. The people believed the ten. God punished the people: for forty years the Israelites were to wander in the desert wilderness until that generation died off. It was toward the end of the forty years of desert wandering.

Initial-problem:

The Israelites complained about their food.

Final-situation:

Moses gave his last instructions to the Israelites, preparing them to enter the land the Lord promised them. Then he died.

BIBLE STORY

Moses' Sin

It was near the end of wandering in the wilderness desert for forty years. The older generation had died off. The new generation of Israelites were camped in the desert and they criticized Moses, "Why did you bring the Lord's community into this desert to die? There's no grain, figs, nor pomegranates to eat. There's no water to drink! We would be better off if we died when our brothers died."

Moses and Aaron went to the entrance of the tabernacle and bowed down.

The Lord told Moses, "Gather the assembly together. Speak to the rock that is in front of them, and it will pour out water."

Moses told the gathered assembly, "Listen, you rebels! Must we bring you water out of this rock?" Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock two times with his staff. Water gushed out.

The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, "You didn't trust me nor honor me as holy. Therefore, you will not lead this community into the land I will give them" (Num 20:2-13).

Poisonous Snakes

The Israelites grew impatient, became irritable, and spoke out against God and Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! We detest this miserable food! There is nothing but manna, manna, and more manna."

The Lord sent poisonous snakes that bit and killed many Israelites. The people told Moses, "We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and you. Ask the Lord to take the snakes away from us."

Moses prayed for the people. The Lord answered Moses, "Make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. If anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will live." Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Anyone who was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake lived (Num 21:4-9).

Moses' Last Instructions to the Israelites

The Israelites were by the Jordan River across from Jericho. Moses gave them the Lord's message, "When you cross the Jordan River into Canaan, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places. Take possession of the land and settle in it. Distribute the land by lot, according to your family groups.

"If you don't drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will bring you trouble in the land where you will live. And then I will punish you as I planned to punish them" (Num 33:50-56).

Moses climbed up Mount Nebo, which is across from Jericho. The Lord showed him all the Promised Land of Canaan. Then Moses, the Lord's servant, died there. Moses was

a hundred and twenty years old when he died; yet, he had perfect vision and he was still strong (Deut 34:1-8).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The second time the Israelites had no water, what mistake did Moses make?
2. Why was Moses disqualified from entering the Promised Land?
3. Why doesn't years of faithfully serving God immune a person for the consequences of wrong choices?
4. How did God punish the Israelites when they grew impatient, became irritable, and spoke out against God and Moses?
5. What plan did God give to save those who had been bitten by the poisonous snakes?
6. What plan has God established today for people to be saved from their sins?
7. What advice did Moses give the Israelites in his last speech?
8. What tempts you to complain?
9. How should a person react to a frustration instead of complaining?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **People who do not learn from history will repeat the mistakes of their ancestors.** The generation that God freed from slavery in Egypt grumbled about food and lack of water (Ex 15:23-26; 17:1-7). Forty years of desert wandering have passed and another generation complained about the food and lack of water. Another generation complained that it would have been better to die in Egypt than to suffer hardships in that barren wilderness. They preferred bondage, oppression, and death in captivity over their miraculous deliverance and provisions from the Lord (Num 20:2-5).
2. **Complaining is a sign of lack of faith in God, leads one to sin, and can test the patience of the Lord.** The Israelites were camped in a location that lacked water. They complained and accused Moses and Aaron, because they had no water. They didn't ask the Lord to give them water, because they didn't trust him (Num 20:3-5). Paul referred to this episode and gave the counsel, "Do not complain as some of them did" (1 Cor 10:10).

3. **God does not lead his followers to always stick to the same plan, use the same method, or to follow the same action.** Twice the Israelites had no water. The first time, God ordered Moses to hit the rock (Ex 17:1-7); the second time, God ordered Moses to speak to the rock (Num 20:8). On the second occasion, when Moses repeated the same action as the first, he committed a sin (Num 20:12).
4. **Years of faithfully serving God does not make a person immune to error or its consequences.** Moses disqualified himself to enter the Promised Land when he disobeyed the Lord and struck the rock twice, because God had told him to speak to the rock (Num 20:10-11).
5. **The spiritual leader, used by God, commits a great sin if he claims to have god-like power.** Moses was claiming to have god-like powers when he asked, "Must we bring you water out of this rock?" (Num 20:10). Moses' claim to god-like powers resulted in his dis-honoring God (Num 20:12).
6. **God only saves people who accept his conditions for salvation.** Poisonous snakes invaded the Israelites' camp. The Lord instructed Moses to make a snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake lived. There was only one way to be saved from the snake bite: trust God's promise and look at the bronze snake (Num 21:4-9). John's Gospel quotes Jesus' use of this imagery as a metaphor for his crucifixion. In Moses' day, all who looked at the bronze snake were healed. Today, those who look in faith at Christ who was lifted up on the cross will be healed of their sins (Jn 3:14-16).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. **Chant:** (Based on 1 Corinthians 10:6, 9-10.)

Words in **bold and underlined** are stressed. Stress words by stretching them out instead of increasing volume.

ALL	
No water to drink and nothing to eat but manna, manna, and more manna. We'd be better off in Egypt.	
GROUP 1	GROUP 2
Now these things occurred as <u>examples</u>	to <u>keep us</u> from setting our hearts on <u>evil</u> things as they did.
ALL	
No water to drink and nothing to eat but manna, manna, and more manna. We'd be better off in Egypt.	
We should not <u>test</u> the Lord	as <u>some</u> of them did—and were killed by <u>snakes</u> .
ALL	
No water to drink and nothing to eat but manna, manna, and more manna. We'd be better off in Egypt.	
And do not <u>grumble</u> , as some of them did	and were <u>killed</u> by the destroying angel.
ALL	
No water to drink and nothing to eat but manna, manna, and more manna. We'd be better off in Egypt.	
“Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did” (1 Corinthians 10:6 NIV).	

2. **Role-playing Drama:**

Have two ladies complaining about having nothing to feed their families but manna, manna, and more manna as they try to invent new recipes for using manna.