

Lesson 5 – Wandering in the Wilderness

Text: Numbers 14-36; Deuteronomy; Joshua 1-5

Significant Figures and People: God, Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram

Key Verses

- Numbers 14:1-4 – The people became afraid, complained, and wanted to go back to Egypt.
- Numbers 14:26-35 – God punished the nation of Israel for their lack of faith in Him.
- Joshua 5:6 – The unfaithful generation had died; a new generation was ready to take Canaan.
- Joshua 5:13-15 – The captain of the Lord’s army appeared to Joshua and began to instruct him.

Transition from Exodus from Egypt

The people listened to the ten unfaithful spies and refused to go into the land to accept the promises that God had given to the patriarchs. Thus, God sentenced them to wander in the wilderness until the entire generation (not including Joshua and Caleb) died as a punishment for their lack of faith (40 years).

Main Storyline

After hearing the testimonies from the spies, all of the Israelites became upset. They had lost their faith in God and complained once again about how they wished they were back in Egypt. The people became so distraught that they complained against Moses and Aaron, and they even discussed selecting a new leader to bring them back to Egypt. Despite the urgings of Joshua and Caleb, the people did not have faith in God.

God became so angry because of Israel’s unfaithfulness and rebellion that He told Moses that He was going to destroy the nation and instead build a nation from Moses’ line. Moses begged God to forgive the people once again, and God relented. However, because of their sin, God promised that, except for Joshua and Caleb, all of the Israelites who were then 20 years old and above would not see the Promised Land (Canaan). Instead, they would wander around in the wilderness for 40 years (about 38 additional years of life in the wilderness, as they had been traveling for about 2 years by that time). Additionally, the spies that had convinced the people that the land could not be taken were immediately struck with a plague and died.

At some point, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram confronted Moses and Aaron. They and some others alleged that Moses and Aaron had unfairly exalted themselves over Israel. God condemned these rebels and destroyed them. Incredibly, the people again complained about Moses and Aaron, claiming that they were responsible for the people’s deaths. As a result, God plagued the people again, and an additional 14,700 people were killed.

Unfortunately, Korah’s rebellion was not the only misstep by some among the nation of Israel. The people struggled with complaining, rebellion, fornication, and idolatry. Moses, even, was guilty of disobedience and pride when he struck a rock to obtain water rather than speaking to it as God had commanded. For this sin, Moses was prohibited by God from entering the Promised Land.

Finally, after a total of 40 years of in the wilderness, the people were allowed to enter into Canaan. Just weeks before the end of the journey, Moses gave numerous speeches to the people, reminding them to follow the Lord, unlike their ancestors. These sermons were recorded in Deuteronomy. Before he died, Moses saw the Promised Land from a distance. When Moses died, Joshua took over in his place.

Joshua led the people into Canaan at the end of their fortieth year of wandering. There, Israel prepared to conquer the wicked Canaanites who inhabited the land. God stopped providing manna to the people on a daily basis, and the Israelites began to eat of the fruit of Canaan, instead.

Transition to Invasion and Conquest of Canaan

After Moses died, Joshua was commissioned by God to lead His people into Canaan. After spying out the land again, Joshua led the people across the Jordan River and into Canaan, the Promised Land. Just before they invaded the land, the captain of the Lord’s army appeared to Joshua (much like God appeared to Moses in the burning bush) to give him instructions on how to proceed.

Overview of Significant Events in the Exodus from Egypt Time Period:

- The Israelites rebelled against God and did not believe that they could conquer the land of Canaan. God subsequently condemned the people to wander in the wilderness for 40 years (Numbers 14).
- Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled against the authority of Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16).
- Aaron's rod budded to signify that the Lord had chosen him to be in authority (Numbers 17).
- Moses spoke rashly and struck a rock instead of speaking to it as God had commanded in order to bring water out of it. As a result, Moses was prohibited from entering the Promised Land (Numbers 20).
- The Israelites complained again, and God sent fiery serpents to bite and kill the people. God gave Moses specific instructions on how to save the people from being killed (Numbers 21:1-9).
- Balaam and Balak tried to curse Israel, but they ended up blessing them instead (Numbers 22-24).
- The Israelites were seduced to commit fornication and idolatry with the Midianites because of the counsel of Balaam. Israel was punished, but Midian and Balaam were also punished (Numbers 25; 31).
- Inheritance rules were clarified for certain uncommon cases (e.g. Zelophehad, Numbers 26-27; 36).
- Joshua was selected to succeed Moses as the leader of the Israelites after Moses' death (Numbers 27).
- Instructions were given regarding the cities of refuge (Numbers 35).
- Moses died at the age of 120 (Deuteronomy 34).
- God commanded Joshua and the people to "Be strong and of good courage" (Joshua 1).
- Canaan spied out by 2 men; Rahab protected them from being caught (Joshua 2).
- The Israelites crossed over the Jordan River on dry land (similar to the Red Sea) (Joshua 3).
- Memorial stones were set up in various locations to help the people to remember God (Joshua 3-4).
- Those who were not circumcised in the wilderness were circumcised (Joshua 5).
- After forty years of being in the wilderness, God stopped providing manna (Joshua 5).
- Joshua met the Commander of the Lord's Army in a manner very similar to Moses' meeting with God at the burning bush (Joshua 5).