

Bi121 Old Testament

Lesson Bi121- 29 Water from the Rock (Num 20-21)

Have you ever complained to your spouse or friends about something? Is such behavior acceptable in your culture? Did the complaining ever make anything better? Today's lesson teaches about the danger of complaining and how serious it is to God.

After nearly 40 years of wandering, the Israelites arrived in the Desert of Zin, back at Kadesh, where there was no water. There Miriam died and was buried. The people gathered in opposition to Moses yet again and quarreled with him: "If only we had died with our fathers and brothers. Why did you bring the Lord's community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!" The children of the rebellious nation now desired to die with their parents.

Moses and Aaron went to the Tent of Meeting and fell on their faces. The glory of the Lord appeared and the Lord said, "Take the staff and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink."

So Moses took the staff from the Lord's presence and gathered the people together in front of the rock. He said, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. The anger and frustration of 40 years came to expression in his rash words. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock had enough to drink.

But the Lord was not pleased with Moses and Aaron. He rebuked them, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." These were again called the waters of Meribah, where the people quarreled with the Lord. It was as though Moses had not trusted that a word alone would suffice. His rash action had offended God's holy presence (Psa 106:33).

As the people of Israel moved on, they came to the border of Edom. Moses sent a message to their king asking permission to pass through their land. The people of Edom were descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob, whose name had been changed to Israel. Moses assured the king that the Israelites would not disturb anything, or drink water from any of their wells. But the arrogant king refused to let these close relatives pass through the land. He even sent a large and powerful army to his border and threatened war if the Israelites crossed into their territory. So Moses and Israel turned away.

Shortly after that Israel came to Mount Hor and the Lord said to Moses, "Aaron is about to die because both of you rebelled against my command. Therefore take Aaron and his son Eleazar up Mount Hor. Remove the high priest's garments off of him and put them on his son." So Moses did this in the sight of all the people and Aaron died soon afterwards. There was no

doubt about Aaron's successor, for God had designated Eleazar as the next high priest. The people of Israel mourned his death for 30 days. Moses was now the oldest person in the community. That generation would soon be gone.

As the Israelites traveled around Edom, the people grew impatient and started to complain again. They spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we hate this miserable food!" The parents' complaints about the bread from heaven were now repeated by the children.

As a result the Lord sent poisonous snakes into the camp. They bit the people and many Israelites died. The people rushed to Moses crying, "We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

The Lord instructed Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole. Anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. When anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived. This was a picture of how Jesus the Messiah would die on the cross, and whoever believes in Him will have eternal life (John 3:14-15).

As the people of Israel traveled on, they came to the border of the Amorites. Again they sent a message to the king of the land, asking if they could travel through his land. They assured King Sihon that they would not take anything and would drink no water. But the king of the Amorites would not let Israel pass. Not only that, the king and his army attacked Israel. So the people fought back and totally defeated them with God's help. They captured all their cities and occupied them. They controlled all their land right up to the Ammonite border, the kingdom directly north of the Amorites.

This story is **important** because it shows some of the consequences of the sin of complaining; especially grumbling against God's chosen leaders. It can make your situation even worse than it already is. The solution is trusting in God to bless and prosper His people.

The main **truth** of this story is that God is not pleased when Christians complain about their leaders or the circumstances in which God has placed them. It is sin.

To **review** this lesson, answer these questions.

1. Why did God not allow Moses to enter the Promised Land?
[Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said, "Because Moses did not trust God enough to honor Him as holy before the people," you are correct.
2. What happened when the people complained?
[Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said, "The Lord sent poisonous snakes into the camp. People were bitten, and many died," you are correct.
3. What did the people have to do to survive the plague among them?
[Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said, "People would be healed and live if they looked at the bronze snake," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to the story at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened; see the events in your mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. Then listen to the story again and retell it until you feel sure you are repeating the circumstances and actions correctly. You should spend at least 45 minutes in learning the story. You may need to have someone check that you are telling the story correctly.

Tell this story to someone and then ask the question, “When we complain, what is the effect on us, on those we complain to, and on those we may be complaining about?” Consider how God may punish people for complaining in our day.