



The Bronze Serpent

Numbers 20:1-12, 22-29; 21:4-9



Our story last week was on the 12 spies going into the Promised Land, the land of Canaan. Do you all remember our story? What did the spies bring back with them to show all of Israel what they saw? (Huge cluster of grapes) Remember how 10 of the spies said the land of Canaan was filled with giants and their cities were too big to conquer? The Israelites were afraid of going into the land of Canaan. God's people forgot that God promised them the land of Canaan. The Israelites did not believe God would help them take the land back, so God punished His people. God had the Israelites wander in the Wilderness for forty (40) years! During this time of wandering, God's people continued to not trust Him and they disobeyed God many times. Today's story is one such occurrence, but we learn God provides rescue for His people too!



The Bible tells that in the first month of wandering in the Wilderness, the Israelites traveled through a desert and stayed at a place called Kadesh. When the Israelites arrived, they were very thirsty. They had walked a long ways through a very hot desert.



But there was a big problem the Bible tells us: there was no water for the Israelites. The Israelites became very angry and started to complain again. They were mad at Moses and Aaron especially. The Israelites said, "We should have died in front of the Lord as our brothers did. Why did you bring the Lord's people into this desert? Are we and our animals going to die here? Why did you bring us from Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain, figs or pomegranates. And there's no water to drink!"



So Moses and Aaron left the people, and ran to the entrance of the Meeting Tent. They bowed down, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them. In the Old Testament, when it tells us the glory of the Lord appears that means God is in that very place! The Lord said to Moses, “You and your brother Aaron should gather the people. Also take your walking stick. Speak to that rock in front of them. Then water will flow from it. Give that water to the people and their animals.” God was going to deliver His people; He knew they needed water to live. And all Moses had to do was talk to a rock!



So Moses and Aaron gathered the people in front of the rock just as God had commanded. Then Moses said, “Now listen to me, you complainers! Do you want us to bring water out of this rock?” Then Moses lifted his hand and hit the rock twice with his stick. Water began pouring out. And the people and their animals drank it.



Moses did not do as the Lord had said. Instead of speaking to the rock, Moses hit it. And because of that disobedience, there was a big consequence for Moses. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “You did not believe me. You did not honor me as holy before the people and do as I told you. So you will not lead My people into the land into the Promised Land.” As much as Moses had done to lead God’s people, Moses disobeyed the Lord and the consequence is that He would not see the Promised Land or lead the Israelites into it.

The Bible tells us here the Israelites argued with the Lord. And the Lord showed them he was holy.



The Israelites packed up their belongings and left Kadesh and came to Mount Hor. By now Aaron, Moses' brother, was very old. God told Moses that Aaron would soon die and to go be with God. God instructed Moses, Aaron and Aaron's son, Eleazar, to climb Mount Hor. Aaron had been the priest (the person who spoke to God for the Israelites, took care of God's house of worship and the ark of the covenant) for God's people since they left Egypt. The three men said their goodbyes and Aaron said his goodbyes to all of Israel, they started to climb up the mountain. Once they reached the top of the mountain, Aaron hugged his brother Moses one last time. Then Eleazar hugged his father once last time. Moses then took the coat that Aaron wore as a priest and placed it on Eleazar. Eleazar was now the priest for God's people. Aaron sat down, closed his eyes, and his soul went to be with God. Everyone in Israel was very sad because Aaron had left them, and they were sad for one month.



God's people continued to wander in the Wilderness. They had to fight a very powerful and evil king who lived in the land of Canaan, and now they were exhausted from the battle. The Israelites were exhausted from all the walking and now the battle. This was not what they thought life would be like out of Egypt. And like before the Israelites began to complain. They whined about how hot it was, how there was never enough food or water to drink, how they were tired of walking and moving from place to place.



They complained about God bringing them out of Egypt! They remembered what they wanted to about Egypt, how it had cool water to drink, melons and fish to eat, nice beds to sleep in, and that they had houses instead of tents to sleep in. But the Israelites did not remember that they were slaves in Egypt, they forgot they were punished a lot and had to work all day making bricks and building cities. God's people forgot what it was really like to live in Egypt and how hard it really was. The people finally had had enough of living in the desert and decided to tell Moses and God what they thought. All of God's people cried out "Why did you take us out of Egypt?!? So, we can die out here in the wilderness?!?" God's people continued to complain to Him, "God, don't you care they we have no water and no food out here?!? The food you give is nasty! Why did you do this to us?!?"



The Lord was not pleased to hear the complaints from His people. God rescued the Israelites from Egypt so they could serve Him and live in the land He promised them. God did not like it all that His people would not listen to Him or His servant Moses. God did not like it all at all that His people did not trust Him. There were consequences for the Israelites not trusting God or obeying Him. For their disobedience, very poisonous snakes came and bit the Israelites. If a person was bit by the snakes they became very, very, very sick. Many people were bit and many people were very sick. The Israelites realized what they had done. They did not trust God and they did not believe His promises would come true.



God's people ran to Moses and begged him to talk to God. "Please Moses! Tell God we are sorry! We sinned against Him and we are very, very sorry. Help us Moses! We should never have complained. God has done very wonderful things for us!" So Moses prayed to God for the people. God heard Moses and decided to help His people.



God told Moses to make a serpent out of a metal called bronze and it is sort of shiny. The bronze serpent looked like the one's biting the Israelites. Once Moses made this bronze snake, he placed it on a very tall pole in the middle of camp. God told Moses to tell everyone, "If anyone is bitten by the poisonous snakes, tell them to look at the bronze snake on the pole and they will be healed." As God had promised, anyone who was bit and looked at the bronze snake lived. God kept his promise to His people. God wanted His people to believe what He said would come true. God loved His people very much and He wanted them to love Him too. God would never leave the Israelites even if they did not believe Him or if they disobeyed Him.

Review Questions

Have the kids answer “Yes” if it is true, or “no” with the correct answer if it is false.

- God wants us to worship and love Him. (Yes.)
- God will never leave us either. (Yes.)
- God always keeps His promises. (Yes.)
- The Israelites wandered in the desert for 100 years. (No! For only 40 years.)
- God told Moses to speak to the rock and water would come out. (Yes.)
- Moses hit the rock twice and the water still came out. (Yes.)
- Moses disobeyed God by hitting the rock. (Yes.)
- The Israelites never wished to go back to Egypt. (No! They wanted to go back to Egypt often.)
- The Israelites were tired of walking and moving in the Wilderness. (Yes.)
- Because the Israelites complained a lot, butterflies came and tickled them. (No! Fiery serpents came and bit them.)
- The Israelites realized they did not trust God’s promises and were disobedient. (Yes.)
- Moses made a bronze serpent for people who were bit so they could be healed. (Yes.)
- God always keeps His promises. (Yes.)
- God always loves us. (Yes.)
- God will never leave us. (Yes.)