

THE STORY
CHAPTER 6
THE WANDERINGS

The story:

The people leave Sinai for the Promised land, after having been given the law

They are hardly en route when they start complaining, craving the food of Egypt

Moses complains to God

God sends quail for a month – but judges them for their complaining

Miriam and Aaron complain about Moses

Miriam is judged with leprosy – Moses intercedes for her and she is healed

The spies are sent into the Promised Land

10 out of 12 bring back negative reports, the people doubt God

That generation is condemned to wandering in the desert for 40 years till they have died
(an 11 day journey becomes 40 years because of unbelief)

Miriam dies

Moses strikes the rock – instead of speaking to it. He brings water, but his disobedience means
that he will not enter the land

Aaron dies

They defeat the Canaanite king Arad

The people complain, God sends snakes, they need to look to the bronze snake to find healing

The Israelites do battle with Sihon

They settle in the land of the Amorites

They do battle with the Og king of Bashan

Balaam's donkey speaks to him

Balaam blesses, rather than curses, the Israelites

The Israelites sinned with the Baal at Peor

Moses preaches his final sermon and dies

1a. What do think was the root cause of most of the Israelites problems? Why?

We should first understand what problems the Israelites faced?

They had a tough time in the desert – that must have been a problem for them.

They faced the fire of God's wrath – huge problem.

The faced the boring-ness of manna every day.

The struggled with the absence of meat.

They listened to the reports of the spies and were over come by the challenges.

They faced opposition from enemies.

A lot of those problems had to do with the nature of where they were – the desert, with having to pitch your village and take it down. But the more life threatening issues were the problems they had with God. Jesus would say later that we need not fear those who can destroy the body. Rather fear the one who can destroy the body and soul in hell. I think they struggled with God who was at that often revealing himself in judgement.

The root cause of the problems they had with God had to do with a lack of faith. Could God provide food? Was the food the best – i.e. was it what they wanted? It might not be what they wanted, but it was certainly the best. Could God provide water. Why did God bring them out to die in the desert? Why should they go to battle in the Promised Land – Canaan – where they would be annihilated, and their children taken into slavery? All those problems were problems of lack of faith – they did not trust God.

But another cause of their problems was that they had very short memories. They had forgotten what it was like to be under whip of the task masters, making bricks without straw. It was hard in the desert, but they were free. They had witnessed the Exodus – what God had done, the miracles he had performed to free them. But that was soon forgotten in the hardships of the desert.

2. How did God respond to the people's lack of faith?

In the book of Hebrews we will be told that without faith it is impossible to please God. What the NT has in precept form, often we find practically illustrated in the OT. We see the displeasure of God in response to the people's lack of faith. When they complained about hardships, God's anger was aroused – he sent fire and consumed them.

When they complained about the manna, he gave them meat till they were sick of it – plus God sent a plague against them.

When they showed the ultimate lack of faith – not trusting God to give them the land that he had promised them – he condemned that generation to die in the desert.

I do believe that we need to emphasise grace - God is gracious, Calvary proves that beyond question. But unless we understand the holiness of God, and how abhorrent sin is to God, we will never fully understand just how amazing grace is.

3. Why is God so radically opposed to sin?

We have started to answer that question in the previous question. It has to do with who God is: God is holy, God is God and we are not. God is perfect. God knows the beginning for the end. He is Sovereign. God is not our buddy next door, with whom we can negotiate what we would like to do or not do. When God says some thing it is not a suggestion for us to consider – it is an order to be obeyed. In the OT we see illustrated what we are taught in precept form in the NT. Disobey God at your own peril. If God promises something he will do it. If he promised the Land Of Canaan, well, he meant it. And for us to doubt that God will do what he promises is accuse the almighty, sovereign God, the One for whom nothing is too difficult, that he is a liar, that he cannot do what he says he will do. Strip everything away and that is what lack of faith is.

So, the question is not: Why was God so rough on the Israelites? – that is not the right question. The question is rather: Why are we not consumed because we are really no different from those Israelites? And the answer to that is: God's amazing Grace! Jesus was consumed in our place. Every time we do in principle what those Israelites did, we deserve what they got. And because God is holy, punishment NEEDS to happen. And it has: on Jesus, when he who knew no sin became sin for us, so that his righteousness may become ours.

When we sing Amazing Grace, we really are singing about Grace that is truly Amazing – more amazing than I think we often realise.

4. What do you learn from Moses' leadership throughout this difficult period? How did he display frustration and faith?

Leadership is CHALLENGING! I think all leaders need to accept that leadership will be challenging, which makes Moses' leadership an important model.

All leaders will go through the frustration Moses went through – wondering what on earth they are doing in their current position. When the people complained about the manna, Moses

complained to God about his leadership position. Why, he wondered, did God ask him to lead the people? Was it because I displeased you that you made me lead these people? And yet Moses – as a good model to all leaders – was still concerned about the complaint the people made. They were tired of manna and wanted meat. Where can I get meat for all these people?

So, leaders will face frustration. Yet leaders will nevertheless remain concerned for those they are called to lead.

Then, leaders will be called upon to exercise faith which those they are leading chose not to exercise. When God said he would provide meat, Moses HAD to believe God and assemble the people and promise them meat – even though he had no idea how God would fulfil that promise! Leaders have to talk to God about their struggles. They have to deal with it with God. Its not that leaders have it all together, that they never doubt. Its just that leaders need to be at a level of spiritual maturity where they can deal with these issues with God.

Leaders need to be able to deal with challenges to their authority – as when Aaron and Miriam challenged Moses. And to be able to deal with those challenges without becoming vindictive.

When Miriam was left leprous, Moses cried out to God on her behalf.

Leaders need to remain committed to those they lead. When the spies returned from the land, and gave the negative impressions, the people wanted to return to Egypt. When Caleb and Joshua spoke up for God, telling the people they should trust God, and the people wanted to stone them, God reacted. God told Moses that that he, God, would destroy the people, and start again with Moses. “Good riddance” might have been Moses response, after all the people had put him through. But that is not how leaders behave: Moses pleaded for the people, and suggested that for his – God’s – own name’s sake, God should not destroy them. Leaders support their people – even when everything suggests they should do otherwise.

But what we see is that leaders are not exempt from God’s standards. So when Moses himself showed a lack of faith, God – holy, the same yesterday, today and forever – God had no option but to prevent Moses from entering the land.

Moses, the leader to the end, before he leaves them, hands over to a new competent leader, and encourages the people he had lead all those years.

5. Have you ever felt that you were “wandering in the wilderness” – spiritually or emotionally? Explain .

Anyone who has been in a position of not really knowing the next step knows what that feels like. It could be in a job context – where they need a job but nothing seems forthcoming. It could be after a bereavement – where they “wander around” feeling at a loss, not having motivation to do anything in particular. It could be at a time of illness – where the future seems unsure. It happens during those times when God seems silent, when he no longer speaks, especially at a time when you need to hear from him.

6. How can having faith in what God has promises help you in difficult times?

Sometimes we have God’s specific promises for a given situation. At other times we need to fall back on the general promises of God.

Specific promises will be a deep conviction that God has given us a “word” for that specific challenge.

A general promise will be a turning to the promises of scripture which are applicable in the challenge we are facing.

Either way, it will mean “walking by faith not sight.” This means believing that God will do what he has promised. This does give encouragement and help during difficult times.