

Chapter 6: Wandering

Key Question: What is the relationship between faith and obedience?

Opposition

Pages 71–74

The Israelites stayed nearly a year at Mount Sinai. There they made the items needed to properly worship God. They learned God’s laws and that if they sinned by disobeying those laws, they could receive forgiveness through sacrificial offerings.

God told them he was driving the Canaanites out of the land because they had defiled the land with sin: extreme sexual immorality and burning children as sacrifices to the god Molech. And God told them that if they defiled the land by committing the same sins as the Canaanites, God would drive them out too.

Finally the people set out for the Promised Land, where milk and honey flowed. For the desert journey, God fed them manna, a perfect food that met all their bodily needs and never carried disease.

But the non-Israelites who had accompanied them from Egypt—the “rabble”—complained.

1. (a) What did the rabble begin to do, and how did that spread (Numbers 11:4–6)? (b) Were the Israelites lacking a need or a desire? Explain. (c) The desert’s lack of other food showed the necessity for manna; why do you think the Israelites weren’t grateful for their needs being met? (d) How does remembering what we have to be grateful for help us to trust God? (e) List three things for which you are grateful to God.

Some Israelites wailed, “Why did we ever leave Egypt?” God explained the heart issue: “You have rejected the LORD, who is among you.”

2. (a) What hardships in Egypt were the Israelites forgetting? (b) How would remembering how God had delivered them from great suffering have helped them to trust God? (c) List three ways God has delivered you.

3. (a) The Israelites compared what they currently had with what they used to have; why do you think they neglected comparing what they currently had with what God said they would have in the Promised Land? (b) How would remembering what God promised to give them have helped them to trust God? (c) Your life is often a difficult, desert-like journey on the way to the heavenly Promised Land. List two ways God promises to bless you in heaven.

In response to their grumbling, the Lord brought them meat. A great wind swept quail into the desert and the people had what they craved. But with that meat came a curse, and many who had rejected God’s purpose and provision died of a plague.

They traveled on, but soon Moses’ own family opposed him. His siblings—the prophetess Miriam and the high priest Aaron—challenged his leadership.

4. (a) How did Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses (Numbers 12:2a)? (b) Who heard (12:2b)? (c) What can we learn about God from this that can help when we're unjustly criticized? (d) Who are some of the people God has put into positions of authority in your life?

5. (a) How did the Lord rebuke Miriam and Aaron for speaking against Moses (12:8)? (b) God wanted the people to trust Moses as the mediator of the covenant; how did he react to their exaltation of themselves (12:9)? (c) How did God humble Miriam (12:10)? (d) How did Aaron show repentance (12:11)? (e) What can we learn from this about speaking against legitimate, God-given authority?

Moses interceded for Miriam, and God in mercy agreed to heal her, but demanded she be confined in disgrace outside the camp for a week.

Rebellion

Pages 74–78

After Miriam's confinement ended, the people encamped at Kadesh Barnea, just south of their destination. Moses sent twelve men to scout the land. They discovered the land was indeed wonderful and filled with lush grapevines and bountiful fruit trees.

When they returned, two of the scouts, Joshua and Caleb, urged the people onward. But ten scouts balked: they said the Canaanites were too strong, the cities too fortified, and the task impossible. The peoples' faith failed. They asked why God had brought them there just to kill them, and they looked for a leader to take them back to Egypt.

6. (a) How did Joshua and Caleb try to convince the people not to rebel (Numbers 14:7–9)? (b) What evidences of God's power were they forgetting that allowed doubt to rule them? (c) Describe a time you saw God's protective hand in your life and explain how that should encourage you to do whatever he calls you to do.

When the people threatened to stone Joshua and Caleb, the glory of the Lord suddenly appeared.

7. (a) According to the Lord, how were the people treating him (Numbers 14:11a)? (b) What were they refusing to do (14:11b)? (c) What had he done for them to show he would complete the work he'd begun (14:11c)? (d) How would God punish their rebellion (14:22–23)?

They had come to the Promised Land, and refused to enter. God's judgment came: the ten disbelieving scouts died for instigating the rebellion, and those who rebelled with them would now wander the desert for forty years until they died too. Of those twenty years old and older, only Joshua and Caleb would enter the Promised Land. The rest would suffer for their unfaithfulness, and their children would enjoy the land they had rejected.

8. (a) What is God calling you to do that seems hard? (b) Will God call you to anything that he won't help you to do? What assurance does this give you?

The Next Generation

Pages 78–83

The people wandered in the desert, their grumbling hearts still bitter. Some tried to change the Lord's mind by going up against the Canaanites anyway, and they fell by the sword. Others refused responsibility and blamed Moses for not bringing them in successfully, instigating another cycle of rebellion, judgment, intercession, and mercy. Slowly the rebellious generation died out.

When nearly forty years had passed, the next generation of Israelites returned to Kadesh where their parents had rebelled. They found no water.

9. (a) How did this generation repeat the sins of their fathers (Numbers 20:3–5)? (b) The Lord told Moses to tell a rock to pour forth water, but instead he angrily beat the rock. What consequence did that bring (20:12)? (c) Moses pleaded with God to change his mind, but God finally told him not to ask again. Why do you think God held Moses to such a high standard?

The Israelites looked for a way into the land they were to possess. God had warned them not to provoke Edom, Moab, or Ammon, for they were not among the Canaanites God wanted driven out. They asked Edom to allow them passage, but Edom refused and sent an army against them, so they turned back.

As they traveled, a Canaanite king attacked the Israelites, and the Israelites defeated him. But as they looked for a way into the land around Edom, the people grew impatient and spoke against both God and Moses. Suddenly poisonous snakes appeared, biting and killing many.

10. (a) How did the Israelites respond to the snakes (Numbers 21:7)? (b) When Moses interceded for the people, how did God show mercy (21:8)? (c) What act of faith could someone bitten do in order to live (21:9)?

Anyone stricken by sin's consequence could look to the raised-up image of that consequence and live.

The Israelites then asked the Amorites—one of the Canaanite peoples—for passage. They not only refused, but attacked Israel. The Israelites overcame them and captured their cities. The taking of the land had begun.

When the Israelites camped along the Jordan River, the bordering Moabites were terrified. They joined with the Midianites in hiring the pagan diviner Balaam to curse them. God warned Balaam not to curse the people, but he tried to find a way using sorcery to speak some word that would earn him pay. But God gave him only blessings to speak.

Balaam found another way to feed his greed. He advised the kings to send women to entice the Israelites into joining them in the sexually immoral worship of the Canaanite god Baal so they would bring God's curse on themselves.

11. (a) What did the Israelite men do (Numbers 25:1–3)? (b) How can sexual temptation be an attempt to stop us from achieving all God wants us to achieve?

Israel's judges executed some of those who broke the first two of the Ten Commandments, and a plague killed others. In all, 24,000 Israelites died. What Moab and Midian could not accomplish in war, they managed through enticement.

Moses' Farewell

Pages 83–85

The time for Moses to pass on leadership to Joshua drew near, and he anointed him before the people. Then he gathered the people and began a farewell address.

12. (a) Why had God shown the Israelites so many miraculous signs (Deuteronomy 4:35)? (b) Why was that important considering what God called them to do?
13. (a) What did Moses call the Israelites to hear (Deuteronomy 6:4)? (b) What were they to do (6:5)? (c) How does the way Moses told them to treat God's commands emphasize their importance and the necessity not to forget them (6:6–9)? (d) What is something you do to know and remember God's commands?

The Choice

Pages 85–88

Moses set before the people the blessings they would enjoy if they obeyed the Lord God, and the curses they would suffer if they abandoned him. He warned them if they took on the detestable sins of the people he was driving out, he would likewise drive them out of the land.

14. (a) What was the way of life and prosperity (Deuteronomy 30:15–16)? (b) What was the way of death and destruction (30:17–18)? (c) What is the relationship between faith and obedience?

Moses climbed to the top of a mountain and God showed him the land the people would soon possess. Then he died.

15. How did Moses differ from all other Old Testament prophets (Deuteronomy 34:10–12)?

And yet, Moses said one day a prophet like him would arise. When he did, the people must recognize him and follow him, else they would be held accountable. For Moses was a type of someone greater, someone yet to come: the seed promised to Eve who would crush the ancient serpent. Like Moses he would fast forty days and nights, do mighty miracles, intercede for sinners, and offer a covenant from God to people, a covenant sealed in blood. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake that all who looked to it might be saved from death, so would he be lifted up that all who looked to him might be saved from the death brought by the serpent that deceived Eve and her children.