



LEVEL 4
4·7
LESSON 1

Imperial Academy Bible Lessons



Wandering in the Wilderness

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At Mount Sinai, God gave the nation of Israel His Ten Commandments. Then He gave them many other statutes and judgments showing them how to live the right way of life. This included instructions for building God's tabernacle, the tent where God would dwell in spirit. The Israelites remained camped at the mount for more than a year. Then God told them it was almost time to travel toward the Promised Land. But first, He instructed Moses to count the people.

MOSES TAKES A CENSUS

God instructed Moses to appoint a prince over each tribe of Israel to help him. Moses's brother, Aaron, was the high priest, which also made him leader of the tribe of Levi. God had Moses appoint 12 more princes, one from each tribe and two from the tribe of Joseph (they represented Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh).

In this census, Moses and his helpers counted 603,500 men age 20 or older. This number did not include women, children or people from the tribe of Levi, who were counted later. This means that the

total number of people was probably well over 2 million, and their camp covered at least 40 square miles.

Never before or since have so many people camped and moved in this way. This meant that the people had to be well organized and obedient to directions. God told Moses how to arrange the camp. God's tabernacle was placed at the center of the camp. The people in the tribe of Levi camped around the tabernacle. The tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun camped on the east side. The tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Gad camped on the south side. The tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin camped on the west side. Finally, the tribes of Dan, Asher and Naphtali camped on the north side. One of the lessons of the book of Numbers is that God does things decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).

When God's miraculous pillar cloud hovered over the tabernacle, the Israelites remained camped. When the cloud began to move, Moses and the leaders informed the people, and they packed their things and followed it in an orderly fashion.

AARON AND MIRIAM

As the Israelites advanced toward the Promised Land, Moses's brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, became critical of Moses. They were older than him and had known him for much of his life, including his faults. They condemned him for having married an Ethiopian woman. They also criticized Moses for the amount of authority he held over everyone else.

"Has God spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Has He not spoken through us also?"

Suddenly God spoke to them and to Moses, saying, "Come out you three unto the tabernacle of the congregation."

When they arrived, God Himself descended within the pillar cloud to the door of the tabernacle. He had heard what they had said, and He treated this situation extremely seriously! He called forth Aaron and Miriam and said: "If there is a prophet among you, I the Eternal will make myself known unto him in a vision and will speak to him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses, who is faithful in all my house. With him will I speak face to face. So why were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (Numbers 12:6-8).

Then God departed. When Aaron and Moses looked at their sister, they were horrified to see that God had struck her with a disgusting and deadly skin disease: leprosy! Her skin was rotting away! Aaron turned to Moses and begged for

forgiveness, saying, "Oh, my lord! Please do not lay not this sin on us. We have done foolishly, and we have sinned. Let her not be as one dead!"

God was showing this important family and all of Israel how important it is to respect and obey God's government!

God had made Moses the leader of that government under Himself, but Moses was not proud or arrogant about it. He was *humble* toward God and toward other people. Moses loved his sister and prayed earnestly that God would heal her of this revolting, deadly disease.

God indeed heard Moses and spoke to him. Moses then relayed God's command: Miriam must bear her shame for speaking



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The newly appointed princes help take a census of the people.



God strikes Miriam with leprosy.

against His government and remain outside the camp seven days. She obeyed, and the millions of other Israelites waited until God allowed her to reenter the camp, miraculously healed.

God had taught Aaron and Miriam, and even Moses and the entire nation of Israel, an important lesson: We must fear speaking against God's servants.

SCOUTS IN THE PROMISED LAND

The Israelites traveled north toward an oasis called Kadesh. There, across from the Promised Land, the pillar cloud stopped. The Israelites set up the

tabernacle and the rest of their camp. God instructed Moses to send scouts into the land.

Moses selected 12 spies to enter Canaan, the Promised Land, before the Israelites crossed the Jordan River and invaded. He instructed these men to search the whole land to see whether the people living there were strong or weak, whether they lived in tents or fortified cities, and whether the land itself was fertile or barren. The men entered the land and searched it 40 days. They found it to be an exceedingly good land. As an example, they picked a cluster of grapes so large and heavy that it could only be carried by hanging it on a staff between two men. The scouts returned and showed the cluster and described the land: It was indeed a land of milk and honey, as God had promised.

But 10 of the scouts said that all this good news was less important than the bad news: The Canaanites who lived in the land were strong people, and they lived in fortified cities. Some of them were from a tribe of giants called Anakim, who grew to be about 9 feet tall. The scouts were so fearful that they exaggerated and said that these giants made ordinary men look as small as grasshoppers. They said that taking possession of the land as God and Moses commanded was impossible.

Only two spies disagreed. Joshua, from the tribe of Ephraim, and Caleb, from the tribe of Judah, confirmed that the Canaanites were strong. But they also believed God and His promises. They

urged the Israelites to have faith in God and to invade Canaan anyway.

Sadly, though, the Israelites absorbed the faithless, fearful attitude of the 10 scouts. “The Canaanites will kill us and our children!” they complained. “We wish God would have let us die in Egypt rather than bring us into the wilderness to be killed by Canaanite giants!” Some began



The scouts carry a cluster of grapes back from the Promised Land.



Ten of the spies give a faithless report of the land.

discussing how they could appoint a new leader to lead them back to Egypt. For the 10th time in two years since leaving Egypt, the Israelites were complaining against God!

Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes, grieved and angry, and urged the people to enter the good land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants for more than 430

years. But the people began to throw stones at Joshua and Caleb, which could have killed them!

Suddenly the glory of God appeared at the tabernacle and caused them to stop.

MOSES PLEADS FOR THE PEOPLE

At the tabernacle, God spoke to Moses and said, “These stubborn people are yet again provoking me. I will destroy

them. Instead of them, I will make a new, greater nation from you and your descendants.”

This would have been a tremendous honor for Moses, and surely very few men would have contradicted God at that point. Yet Moses humbly pleaded with God not to do it. He cared for the Israelites, even though they were rebelling. He also cared deeply about God. He told God that if He destroyed the Israelites, the Egyptians and other nations would say that He must not be a great God, because He was unable to defeat the Canaanites and destroyed His own people in the wilderness.

Moses’s appeal to God changed the course of history! God did not destroy the Israelites. But He did have to punish them to teach them to overcome their faithlessness and rebellion. God sentenced the Israelites to 40 years of wandering in the wilderness: one year of punishment for each day the scouts had traveled the Promised Land. By that point, all the adults would be dead of old age. But God would keep Joshua and Caleb alive, because they had believed and obeyed God. God also struck dead the 10 faithless scouts to teach all Israel the consequences of disbelieving and disobeying God.

Some of the Israelites reacted to this by doing what many children and even adults do. Since they did not like the punishment, they decided that *now* they would do what God had commanded

before and go into Canaan. Moses told them that now *this* would be disobedient to God and that their plan would fail. “Go not up, for the Eternal is not among,” he warned. “You are only going to get yourselves killed!” They stubbornly decided to cross into Canaan anyway.

The Canaanites attacked these Israelites and drove them back out, exactly as God said. The Israelites would spend the rest of their lives wandering in the wilderness.

KORAH WANTS MORE AUTHORITY

On their journeys, another rebellion arose against God and His government. It came from a Levite named Korah, who was Moses’s cousin. Even after God had corrected Miriam and Aaron and had struck dead the 10 spies, Korah was committing the same sin: speaking against Moses’s leadership. Korah and three men from the tribe of Reuben—Dathan, Abiram and On—spread their ideas and convinced 250 other leaders in Israel to join them.

After assembling this impressive group, Korah led the men to Moses’s tent. He then spoke up: “Moses, we are all God’s people. But *you have taken for yourself too much authority*. You should let us make more of the decisions.”

Korah and others had ignored the strong lesson God had taught them again and again since sending Moses into Egypt: We must fear speaking against God’s servants!



God opens up the Earth to swallow Korah and his followers.

When Moses heard these men, he put his face to the ground. He was humble. He had not taken his authority over Israel for himself; God had assigned it to him whether he wanted it or not! Moses used God's authority to serve God and His people, not to make himself richer or more exalted.

He told the men to return the next day, when God would make clear whom He had chosen to lead His people. "God has given you leadership positions above the rest of the people and to serve Him at the tabernacle," Moses told the rebels. "Is that not enough for you?"

The next morning, Korah and his group returned to the tabernacle, along with a great multitude of other Israelites. The glory of God appeared. God told Moses and Aaron to separate themselves from the Israelites so that He could destroy them! Moses and Aaron pleaded with God not to destroy the whole congregation. God answered, "Tell the people to remove themselves from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan and Abiram."

"Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men!" Moses cried out. "Touch nothing of theirs, or you will be destroyed!" The people believed Moses. Instead of standing with Korah, his men and their families, they backed away.

"God will show us by a miracle who His leader is!" Moses said. "If the men leading this rebellion die in a normal way, I am not God's leader. But if they die in a miraculous earthquake and fall down

into the earth, you will know that they are dangerous rebels against God and His government."

Immediately there was terrible rumbling, and the ground under Korah and his family and his men split apart and swallowed them! Then God sent bolts of fire that killed all 250 of the men who had followed Korah. This was God's powerful answer to Korah's challenge against His government!

Even after this awesome miracle, the next day the Israelites murmured among themselves that Moses had killed Korah and his men unfairly! Clearly, though, it had been done not by Moses but by God Himself!

Many more than just Korah and his 250 men were guilty of the sin of thinking they knew better. To teach the terrible results of rebellion against His government, God punished them by sending a deadly plague. Once again, Moses and Aaron prayed to God on behalf of the rebellious people. God answered the prayer of Moses and Aaron and stopped the plague—but only after 14,700 people had died.

After all this conflict over government, God told Moses to give an instruction to the people: Each of the 12 tribes would write the name of its leader on a wooden rod, which was a symbol of government. Aaron's rod would be the rod for the tribe of Levi. These rods were just dead pieces of wood with no roots or leaves. God instructed them to put them in the



Moses strikes the rock.

tabernacle, and He would miraculously make one of them come alive with blooms to show all Israel which tribe and which man He was using. When the men came back to collect their rods, they saw that Aaron's rod had budded, blossomed and produced almonds! By this miracle, God

showed that Aaron was the high priest He had chosen, just as Moses had said.

MOSES LOSES HIS TEMPER

Year after year passed. The Israelites continued to wander. After almost 40 years in the wilderness, almost all the older Is-



raelites who had rebelled and refused to enter the Promised Land had died of old age. Now God led the new generation of Israel back to Kadesh to prepare to receive their promised inheritance.

But the oasis at Kadesh was dry. There was no water! Even though God had

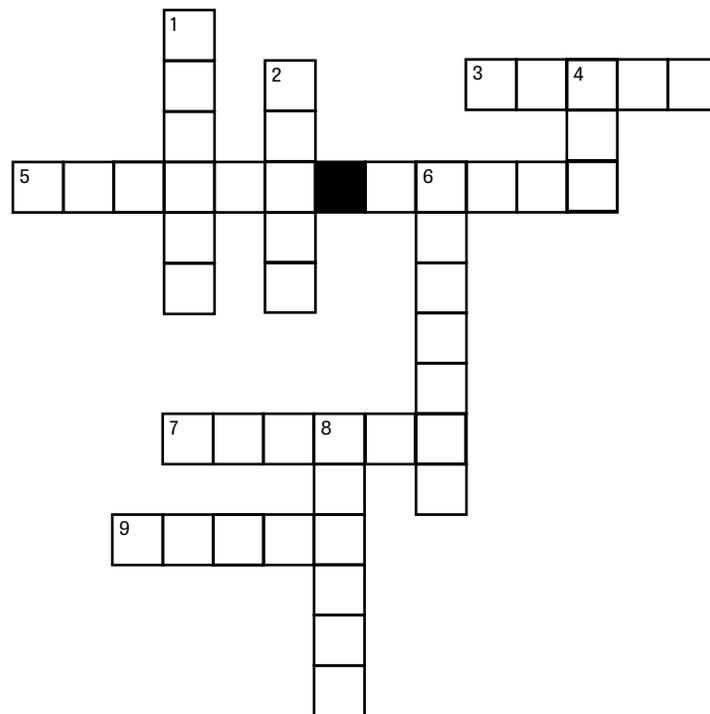
performed miracles for them and their parents, the new generation of Israelites also failed to trust God! With babies wailing, people feeling faint, and the sun beating down, they complained that Moses had brought them all this way just to die of thirst.

Moses prayed to God, who told him to take the rod, gather the people around a rock, and speak to the rock. He would then miraculously give them water from the rock—a wonderful display of His love and generosity. Moses took the rod and went to the rock, but he was angry at the people. “Hear now, you rebels!” he said. “Must we fetch you water out of this rock?” He struck the rock once. Nothing happened.

Nervously, Moses struck the rock again. At that point, water began to flow for the Israelites to drink.

But Moses had not *spoken* to the rock as God commanded. And he had focused the people on *himself* rather than on God. Sin brings unhappiness, punishment and correction. This was true for Aaron, Miriam, the 10 scouts, Korah and his men, all of Israel and all of mankind. It was also true for Moses and Aaron. God punished them by refusing to let them enter the Promised Land. The two men had lived long lives (about 120 years), but God was teaching them one final lesson before they died. It is a lesson they are sure to remember when God resurrects them in the future to become leading God beings in His Family!

Wilderness Crossword



ACROSS

3. God sentenced Israel to wander in the wilderness for this many years.
5. God's miraculous _____ hovered over the tabernacle.
7. In the _____, Moses and his helpers counted 603,500 men age 20 or older.
9. Moses's brother, the high priest

DOWN

1. Moses selected _____ spies to enter Canaan.
2. The name of Moses's Levite cousin who rebelled
4. A wooden staff that is a symbol of government
6. God struck Miriam with this disease.
8. God gave the nation of Israel His commandments at this mountain.