



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

JUNE 24 2023

drama in the desert

Scripture Story: Numbers 20; 21:1-9.

Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 37 and 38.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The Israelites' trek through the wilderness took on a different shape following Korah's rebellion. God was still smarting from this sad episode, but the thing that grieved His heart most was the constant desire of His people to return to Egypt, a place where they had been enslaved and had worked like animals. That they could choose such a fate over the freedom He offered them through faith in His care was like a slap in the face to God.

In the aftermath of the rebellion, the Passover feast had been suspended, circumcision had been stopped, and all of these pronouncements came from God. Yet if one were to conclude that after seeing how much they hurt God, the Israelites would put away their disobedience, they would be mistaken. Not only do the Israelites continue to complain, but their griping seems to affect Moses and Aaron, both of whom got very angry. When God told Moses to speak to the rock and out of it would flow water to quench the people's thirst, Moses struck the rock in open disobedience of God, an act that cost Aaron and himself their opportunity to enter the Promised Land.

But the story doesn't stop there. The people's lack of faith in God when the king of Edom denied them passage through his territory meant that they had to take a circuitous route to the Promised Land, one that they didn't want to take.

During the long journey they began again to complain about God's failure to provide for them, and this time God allowed poisonous snakes to come among

them and kill them. But in an act of ultimate grace that foreshadowed the cross, God had Moses make a bronze snake and put it on a pole, declaring that all who looked at this snake would live. There was no power in the snake on the pole. However, when the faithful looked at the snake, healing power flowed from God—and when believers look at Jesus Christ today, this power flows from God to even the humblest ones. Praise God!

II. TARGET

The students will:

- See that disobedience hurts the heart of God. (*Know*)
- Experience a desire to trust God even when times get difficult. (*Feel*)
- Ask God to show them how to use the gift of faith He has placed within them. (*Respond*)

III. EXPLORE

The Son, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 4

“God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly human, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from

the dead, and ascended to heaven to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things” (Isa. 53:4-6; Dan. 9:25-27; Luke 1:35; John 1:1-3, 14; 5:22; 10:30; 14:1-3, 9, 13; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; 2 Cor. 3:18; 5:17-19; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 2:9-18; 8:1, 2).

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Ask the students to share their answers with the class.

Ask them to share some of the more difficult trips they’ve had to make. After sufficient sharing time has passed, make the point that one of the challenges of any long journey is the potential for unexpected things to occur—storms delay flights, buses break down, trains lose power while you sit baking on the tracks, etc. Ask if in such moments it isn’t normal to long for home, even if home is not the greatest place on earth.

Make the point that for the Israelites, home in Egypt was not the greatest place. In fact, they were enslaved there. Faced with the unknown, it is natural to complain and long for what you know. However, there is one big point worth noting about their journey: It was not something that they just decided to do; God heard their cries in Egypt, and He delivered them. When God takes us on a journey, we have to remember to trust Him.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

There is a tale of an old master and his student. One day the student came to the master and inquired: “Master, I’m trying to find success. Where can I find it?”

The master listened quizzically, pointed to a far-off road, and declared, “Down there. Success is right down there.” The young man thanked his master and took off speedily for success.

As he traveled the road to success, however, he came to a point in the road at which a big rock fell on his head, *splat*, almost crushing him. He ran back to

his master and said, “Master, I don’t see success anywhere. A rock hit me, and nearly splattered my brains. Are you sure it’s there?”

“Yes, my son,” the old man intoned. “Try again.”

The young man set out on his journey again, only to come to the same spot where the same rock went splat again, crushing him. Battered and bruised, limping noticeably, the young man came back to his master.

“Master, you lied to me,” he declared. “Success is not out there.”

The master listened for a while, then put his arm around the shoulder of his pupil. “Son,” he began, “success is there, right down that street, just past *splat!*”

On the road of life, disappointments will come, but success is usually right beyond the splats of our lives. Of the estimated two million people who left Egypt for Canaan, only two made it into the Promised Land—the two who persevered on the journey past all the splats.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

God knows that we have needs. Jesus said to His disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” (Matthew 6:25, 26, NIV).

The great debate in the Christian life is the same as it was when Israel was headed home: Will we trust God to get us there, provide for our needs along the way, and prove Himself to us? Or will we curse God and charge Him falsely? That’s the decision of the Christian life, and it is one of faith.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

Debrief by asking students to share their responses with the class. After they have done this, have them explore the topic of God’s amazing grace. Divide the class into groups of two. Assign each group a scripture

from each column. Have the groups look up both scriptures and share what each says about humanity's need of a Savior, and what God did to help us.

Our Need	God's Provision
Romans 5:12	Isaiah 53:12
Isaiah 64:6	Hebrews 2:9
Romans 3:23	Luke 19:10
1 John 1:8	Hebrews 7:25

Make the point that in the wilderness the Israelites experienced God's grace much more than they did His chastisement. It is never God's will that we should perish, but that all of us would repent and return to Him (2 Peter 3:9).

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

1. "Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank" (Numbers 20:11, NIV). For the act of striking the rock Moses was denied entry into the Promised Land. That's quite a punishment for one act of disobedience. Many wonder why God was so harsh with Moses, given that Moses had endured so much at the hands of a stubborn people. Surely God could have cut him some slack.

Besides the obvious point that Moses was leader of the people and more was required

of him, Moses displayed a certain lack of faith in God at a crucial moment. "More than this," writes Ellen White, "Moses and Aaron had assumed power that belongs only to God" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 418).

2. One of the tests of a true leader is what they do when they make a mistake, when they mess up. Moses made no effort to hide his sentence from the people. He told the people how he had pleaded for forgiveness. While God did forgive him of the sin, He did not excuse him from punishment. Moses told the people: "But because of you the LORD was angry with me and would not listen to me. 'That is enough,' the LORD said. 'Do not speak to me anymore about this matter' " (Deuteronomy 3:26, NIV).
3. In Numbers 20:14-21 the Edomites are seen complicating Israel's march to the Promised Land. They refused to allow the Israelites passage through their territory. What is strange about this story is the fact that the Edomites were descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob, from whom the Israelites were descended. These two groups had much in common. They were brothers, but old hurts die hard. It was Jacob who stole his brother's blessing and defrauded him of his birthright. While Esau forgave him, his descendants never forgot. There was an uneasy peace between these two groups, but Ellen White notes that had the Israelites not complained in the desert,

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson. Invite students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Key Text**

Invite the students to share the Key Text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Flashlight**

*Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.*

- **Punch Lines**

Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.

- **Further Insight**

Ask them how the quote in Further Insight conveys the point of the story in this lesson.

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Covenant Love

One resource that you have as a youth teacher is the Christian lives and experience of older members of your church. They can be asked to share experiences from their past, or be interviewed by the students.

In the study of this lesson there is a distinct possibility that the students may get so caught up in the crazy actions of the Israelites and God's responses to them that they miss the breakdown that is occurring in the relationship between God and His people.

Bring a married couple to class to share what they do to keep their relationship strong and Christlike. Have them also share how they get through difficult times.

God would have made a way for them to pass through Edom to Canaan, which was a stone's throw away (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, chapter 38, sixth and seventh paragraphs).

4. Too much of a good thing? Consider this passage: "In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, Hezekiah son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. . . . He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done. He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it" (2 Kings 18:1-4, NIV).

What was Israel doing still worshipping the snake Moses made for them in the wilderness? They still did

not get the fact that the power to heal resided in God. Instead, they made an idol of His provision. Do we do the same thing?

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Select a favorite song, one that deals with placing one's trust in God. Play that song for the class to close your study time together, then ask a volunteer to pray, asking God to help everyone place complete faith in Him.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

There are those who claim that there is no grace in the Old Testament. It is the record of stubborn people being beaten down by an angry God. This week's lesson declares unequivocally that is not so.

By all rights, God could have wiped out all the Israelites in the wilderness and no one could have argued with Him, for the penalty for sin is death (see Romans 6:23). He even offered to do it, but Moses pleaded with Him several times, and God cushioned His punishment against His people. When they were hungry, He fed them. When they were thirsty, He gave them drink.

When they refused to obey Him, He sent plagues among them, but in each instance God stopped the plagues from utterly decimating Israel. He even foreshadowed Calvary and the act of love that Jesus would perform for the sins of the world. That is the power of God's amazing grace.

It is this grace that leads us to repentance, that should lead us to place our complete trust in Him, for He cares for us (see 1 Peter 5:7).

RABBI 101



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 37 and 38.



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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Numbers 20; 21:1-9.

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drama in the desert



Photo by Frank Bondurant

keytext

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.’ ”

(Numbers 21:8, NIV)

flashlight

“The wilderness wandering was not only ordained as a judgment upon the rebels and murmurers, but it was to serve as a discipline for the rising generation, preparatory to their entrance into the Promised Land. Moses declared to them, ‘As a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee,’ ‘to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no’” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 407).

what do you think?

Traveling has several big hassles associated with it.

If you're flying on an airplane, boarding a train, or riding on a bus, all faraway trips require some preparation. List five things you must do before embarking on any trip. One is provided for you.

1. Pack everything you'll need for the trip.
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

did you know?

It is difficult to pinpoint how many Israelites there were who walked through the wilderness toward the promised land of Canaan. The Bible records that there were 600,000 males above the age of 20 (Exodus 12:37; Numbers 2:32). If you used this number as a starting point making allowances for women and children, the total number of Israelites could easily exceed 2 million people. How much food do you think it required to feed 2 million people every day? Yet God did it every day for 40 years. What an awesome God we serve!

INTO THE STORY

Complaints

“In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried.

“Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. They quarreled with Moses and said, ‘If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! Why did you bring the LORD’s community into this wilderness, 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!’ ”

Detours

“Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, saying: ‘This is

what your brother Israel says: You know about all the hardships that have come upon us. Our ancestors went down into Egypt, and we lived there many years. The Egyptians mistreated us and our ancestors, but when we cried out to the LORD, he heard our cry and sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt.

“ ‘Now we are here at Kadesh, a town on the edge of your territory. Please let us pass through your country. We will not go through any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the King’s Highway and not turn to the right or to the left until we have passed through your territory.’ ”

“But Edom answered: ‘You may not pass through here; if you try, we will march out and attack you with the sword.’ ”

God’s punishment and grace

“They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!’ ”

“Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. . . .

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.’ ”

(Numbers 20:1-5, 14-18; 21:4-6, 8, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

What parts of this week's story were new to you? (*Underline* them.)

What characters in the story are most interesting to you? Why?

What complaint from the Israelites are you most likely to make?

Draw a *rectangle* around the most emotional words and phrases.

What lesson or lessons did God want to teach His people?

What new thing did you learn about God from reading these Bible passages?

What lesson can you apply to your life this week, based on your reading?

punch lines

"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22, NIV).

"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you' " (Hebrews 13:5, NIV).

"Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me" (Psalm 31:3, NIV).

"Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools" (Ecclesiastes 7:9, NIV).

"Record my misery; list my tears on your scroll—are they not in your record?" (Psalm 56:8, NIV).

"But godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6, NIV).

further insight

"Nothing less than the infinite sacrifice made by Christ in behalf of fallen man could express the Father's love to lost humanity."—Ellen G. White,

Steps to Christ, p. 14.

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Exodus 12:31-36.

Complete the *What Do You Think?* section of this week's lesson if you have not already done so. What were some of the preparations you listed that have to be made before any trip? Here are a few: You have to be sure that you know the directions to your eventual destination, or be sure you're with someone who does; you must have all necessary identification on you at all times; you must arrive at the station or airport allowing sufficient time to check in, purchase tickets, navigate delays, etc.

Were the Israelites able to make any preparations for their trip through the wilderness? When they left Egypt, what did they pack? Were they anticipating a long journey?

Sunday

Read Psalm 56:8.

Read carefully the *Into the Story* section of this week's lesson. Notice that there are three distinct episodes related here. What does each of the stories tell us about the difficulties the Israelites faced in the wilderness? Were they justified in being angry with Moses and with God? Explain your answer below.

What special comforts might the Israelites have had in Egypt as slaves? Why would they long to go back? Do you sometimes forget where God has brought you from?

Monday

Read Numbers 21:8.

The *Key Text* for this week's Bible study has to be one of the strangest verses in the Bible. God tells Moses to make a bronze snake, wrap it around a pole, and anyone who looks on it will live. Why did God urge Moses to do this, instead of curing all the people with a word from His mouth?

How much faith do you think it took for dying

Israelites to look at a snake on a pole for healing? What was God trying to teach the Israelites about His power and their willingness to trust Him?

Tuesday

Read Numbers 20:6-12.

The *Flashlight* quotation for this week tells us that there was a method to God's punishment of the Israelites in the desert. A great example of this is found in our reading today. When the Israelites were complaining about thirst in the desert, what did God tell Moses to do? What did Moses do?

How did God respond to Moses' disobedience (verse 12)? Was God's punishment too hard on Moses and Aaron? Moses allowed his anger to control him, and he disobeyed God. How would the people have viewed God if He had allowed Moses and Aaron to go unpunished? God forgave Moses and even allowed him to see the Promised Land, though he could not go in.

Wednesday

Which of the *Punch Lines* texts caught your attention? Paul counseled Timothy that godliness, or God-likeness, with contentment is great gain. Rewrite this scripture in your own words, explaining what you think it means. What does it mean to be contented?

King David, the writer of many psalms, longed for God's leadership because he knew that God was his rock and fortress, or his safety. Why was it so difficult for the Israelites to claim God as their rock and fortress? When do you tend to complain about the direction in which God is leading you? What about your friends? Do they do the same? How can you change this habit?

Thursday

Read Proverbs 3:5, 6.

One of the most difficult parts of the journey faced by the Israelites was the trip they took around Edom, a nation that refused to let them pass through their territory. Take a moment to read the sixth and seventh paragraphs of chapter 38 in *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Edom lay a short distance from the Promised Land. It was God's will that Israel should go through this territory, but something prevented them from going through Edom, and it wasn't Edom's king who denied them passage. Are you doing something that might be preventing you from achieving the blessing God has for you?

Friday

Read Psalm 31:3.

Israel's journey in the wilderness to the Promised Land should have taken a few days, but it took them 40 years. Can you identify some things that delayed them from receiving their blessing? (For instance, their constant complaining and disbelief in God.)

Write a short prayer to God. Identify anything in your life that is preventing God from living in you and working His will through you. Close by asking God for strength to trust His leading even when the way seems difficult.

this week's reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 37 and 38.

**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URLhF1rB09s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.