

Lesson 19: Numbers 11–14; 20–24, “Rebel Not Ye Against the Lord, Neither Fear”

In today's lesson we will discuss events during the exodus that teach important lessons about following Christ. I'll present them in reverse chronological order.

Serpent of Brass

Num 21:5-9

5 And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread

6 And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.

8 And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

9 And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

What one act did the people who had been bitten by the snakes have to do in order to live?

(if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived)

Who does the brass serpent symbolize?

Christ said to Nicodemus

John 3:14–16

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Neal A. Maxwell

"Divinely deliberate and serious symbolism is involved. The symbolic emphasis in this episode is upon both the necessity and the simpleness of

the way of the Lord Jesus. The whole episode points toward the need to look upon Jesus Christ as our Lord.” (“Plain and Precious Things”, pp 21)

Several Book of Mormon Prophets used the story of the brass serpent as an opportunity to teach the people how to follow Christ

Look with faith

Helaman 8:13–15

14 Yea, did he not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come.
15 And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life which is eternal.

How must we look to Christ to gain eternal life?

(with faith, having a contrite spirit)

Carlos E. Asay

“We, like Israel of old, must rivet our eyes and minds upon Christ if we hope to gain eternal life. Our looks must not be allowed to wander across the way or to become fixed upon the perishable things of the world. The eye must be trained to look upward. We must look to God and live!” (CR, Oct 1978)

Hardness of Heart

Alma 33:18–20

18 But behold, this is not all; these are not the only ones who have spoken concerning the Son of God.

19 Behold, he was spoken of by Moses; yea, and behold a type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live.

20 But few understood the meaning of those things, and this because of the hardness of their hearts. But there were , therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them.

21 O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly, or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief, and be slothful, that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish?

What reason does Alma give for many not looking to the brass serpent?

(they did not believe that it would heal them
many who were so hardened that they would not look)

Neal A. Maxwell

"Many today do not believe, of their problems, that the gospel of Jesus Christ will heal them. But they are wrong. Many today are so hardened that they will not even look, but one day their knees, too, will bow in acknowledgment that Jesus is the Christ.

"Symbolically and actually, the Son of God has been lifted up upon the cross, and it is to him that we look so that we might 'live, even unto that life which is eternal!'" (That My Family Should Partake, p. 97)

The simpleness of the way

1 Nephi 17:41

41 And he did straiten them in the wilderness with his rod; for they hardened their hearts, even as ye have; and the Lord straitened them because of their iniquity. He sent fiery flying serpents among them; and after they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be healed; and the labor which they had to perform was to look; and because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished.

What reason does Nephi give for many not looking to the brass serpent?

(because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it)

Rex D. Pinegar

"We have been counseled by our prophets to do simple things which do matter. We have received simple instructions which we can all follow to strengthen our families, to heal our spiritual afflictions, and to become followers of Jesus Christ in thought and action....

"I pray that we will heed the counsel of our prophet and have the faith to follow the Savior by doing the simple things His gospel requires. For, if the Lord's prophet had bid us do some great thing to receive the Lord's great blessings, who among us would not do it?" (CR, Oct 1994)

With all that we're expected to do as members of His church – how is it easy?

“Slothfulness because of the easiness of the way”

Alma 37:46

46 O my son, do not let us be slothful because of the easiness of the way; for so was it with our fathers; for so was it prepared for them, that if they would look they might live; even so it is with us. The way is prepared, and if we will look we may live forever.

How can “the easiness of the way” make us slothful or lazy?

Neal A. Maxwell

"Muttering and murmuring are often the expressions of our conscience gone grumpy; it is precisely because we know we need to respond affirmatively that we let off steam—we start puffing in advance of the climb. These are reactions genuinely to be avoided, since they can precede the keeping of a commandment or the fulfilling of a task with a slothful heart, which is more serious.

"Mostly, to avoid muttering, we need to trust more. So many of the things muttered about before turn out to be marvelous experiences later, and we are inwardly, and deservedly, ashamed for having grumbled." (Deposition of a Disciple, p. 31)

"looking beyond the mark"

Jacob 4:14

14 But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it, that they may stumble.

What do you think it means to look beyond the mark?

Harold B. Lee

"Some may say all of what I have said sounds so simple. It is. It is like the rod of Moses on which the serpent-bitten Israelites had only to look to be healed. But, as the Book of Mormon reminds us, 'because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished' (1 Nephi 17:41). Strange as it seems, some men are, as Jacob described them, forever 'looking beyond the mark' (Jacob 4:14), missing the plain and simple truths

in their search for complexity!" (Teachings of Harold B. Lee, p. 334)

Scouting the Land of Canaan

Moses sent 12 men, one from each tribe, to scout out the land and bring back information about the bounty of the land of Canaan and the strength of those who possessed it. In 40 days they return and reported to Moses and the people what they had found

Num 13:27-33

27 And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.

28 Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.

29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.

30 And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.

31 But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.

32 And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature.

33 And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

How did the 12 scouts describe the bounty of the land of Canaan?

(surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it)

How did they describe the strength of those who possessed it?

(people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great

a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature.

And there we saw the giants... we were in our own sight as grasshoppers)

Let's read the reaction that this report had on the people

Num 14:1-5

1 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!

3 And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

How would you describe the faith of the Israelites based on these verses?

Let's read how Joshua and Caleb responded

Num 14:6-10

6 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:

7 And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.

8 If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

9 Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not.

10 But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

Note that Joshua and Caleb didn't dispute the strength of those who possessed the land. Then -

Why did Joshua and Caleb feel that the Israelites could possess the land despite the strength of their enemies?

(the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us - neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not)

Gordon B. Hinckley

"The story of Caleb and Joshua has always intrigued me. They were the only ones who had the privilege of entering the promised land concerning which they had reported in a positive manner.

"We see some around us who are indifferent concerning the future of this work, who are apathetic, who speak of limitations, who express fears, who spend their time digging out and writing about what they regard to be weaknesses which really are of no consequence. With doubt concerning its past, they have no vision concerning its future.

“This is an age of pessimism. Ours is a mission of faith. To my brethren and sisters everywhere, I call upon you to reaffirm your faith, to move this work forward across the world. You can make it stronger by the manner in which you live” (CR, Oct. 1995)

What can we learn about do what the Lord has asked us to do even though it seems beyond our abilities?

The Miracle of the Quail

We've already discussed a couple of instances where the Israelites complained about their circumstance and about not being grateful for all the blessings and miracles that had been provided by the Lord:

Num 21

5 And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread

Num 14

2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!

3 And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

In the account of the miracle of the quail we see again how the Israelites complain and the Lord again blesses them – But they still don't learn the lesson of gratitude.

Num 11:4-5,31-32

4 And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?

5 We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:

6 But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

31 And there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth.

32 And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp.

Instead of being grateful for the manna, what did the Israelites mummer about?

Neal A. Maxwell

"Murmuring seems to come so naturally to the natural man. Murmurers have short memories. Israel arrived in Sinai, then journeyed on to the Holy Land though they were sometimes hungry and thirsty. But the Lord rescued them. Strange, isn't it, brothers and sisters, how those with the shortest memories have the longest lists of demands! However, with no remembrance of past blessings, there is no perspective about what is really going on.

"This powerful verse in the Old Testament reminds us of what is really going on:

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no' (Deut. 8:2)." (CR, Oct 1989)

Why is it important that we remember all the Lord has done for us instead of murmuring about our trials?

(Trials are to bumble us, prove, us and reveal our heart
Murmuring shows that we don't remember or appropriate our blessing)

Seventy Called to Help Moses

Moses burden is unbearable because of the ceaseless complaining and wickedness of the Israelites. The tells him to call 70 men to relieve his burden

Num 11:16-17,24-25

16 And the Lord said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.

17 And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.

24 And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the Lord, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle.

25 And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.

What is the purpose of these 70 men?

(they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone)

Compare with calling of the Seventy in this dispensation

D&C 107: 34, 25

T34 he Seventy are to act in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Twelve... in building up the church and regulating all the affairs of the same...

25 The Seventy are also called to preach the gospel, and to be especial witnesses unto the Gentiles and in all the world...

Levi Edgar Young

"The seventy of the Church bear a noble and divine title.... There was under Moses, and apparently in all ages, a senate or council of elders numbering seventy... on whom lay a special responsibility as the advisers of the nation. Shortly after leaving Sinai, a council of seventy was chosen from among the elders or chiefs of all the tribes except Levi and solemnly set apart to their dignity by Moses, as a kind of senate to aid him by their counsel. After being confirmed in their dignity by the people, they assembled around the sacred tent, and the whole number broke out into prophetic enthusiasm under the influence of the Spirit of God. The seventy chosen from all the tribes anticipated, in their prophetic gifts, a characteristic of future generations." (CR, April 1951)