

**Lesson 15 (Study Notes):** “Look to God and Live”

**Class Member Reading:** Numbers 11; 12; 13; 14; 21:1-9; Alma 37:46-47; Helaman 8:13-15

Numbers 11; 12; 13; 14; 21:1-9

**11** Now when the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes, the LORD heard it and his anger was kindled. Then the fire of the LORD burned against them, and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. <sup>2</sup>But the people cried out to Moses; and Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire abated. <sup>3</sup>So that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the LORD burned against them. **What the flaming....? We simply must push back against scriptures like this, because otherwise God is terrible. At least no one dies... yet.**

<sup>4</sup> The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, ‘If only we had meat to eat! <sup>5</sup>We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; <sup>6</sup>but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.’ This makes me think of contrasting easy, simple, and less rewarding times in our lives with more challenging times that require more of us but are also more rewarding. Childhood vs. adulthood for example (not that most of our childhoods were like slavery, thankfully) Makes me think of my fourteen year old’s naïve frustration that she isn’t legally allowed to get a part time job and rent an apartment with school friends. From a literary perspective, note that the Israelites’ yearning for Egypt seeks a reversal of God’s deliverance shown through the Exodus!!

<sup>7</sup> Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its colour was like

the colour of gum resin. <sup>8</sup>The people went around and gathered it, ground it in mills or beat it in mortars, then boiled it in pots and made cakes of it; and the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil. <sup>9</sup>When the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna would fall with it. As I noted last lesson, this substance is likely based on a secretion made by insects who eat the sap of Tamarisk trees (so kind of like honey).

10 Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, all at the entrances of their tents. Then the LORD became very angry, and Moses was displeased. <sup>11</sup>So Moses said to the LORD, 'Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favour in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? <sup>12</sup>Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, "Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child", to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? <sup>13</sup>Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they come weeping to me and say, "Give us meat to eat!" <sup>14</sup>I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. <sup>15</sup>If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once—if I have found favour in your sight—and do not let me see my misery.' Moses has a very human moment, and this honest frustration leads to a solution. I recommend having prayers like this from time to time. It feels good to vent to God. Note the maternal imagery ascribed to God (and Moses).

## **The Seventy Elders**

16 So the LORD said to Moses, 'Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting, and have them take their place there with you. <sup>17</sup>**I will come down and talk with you there; and I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself.** This is one of the origins of the Quorums of the Seventies, but also teaches a crucial lesson about delegation and sharing each other's

burdens. From leadership callings to taking care of things at home, we need to work together and communicate when the burden is too great. <sup>18</sup>And say to the people: Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wailed in the hearing of the LORD, saying, "If only we had meat to eat! Surely it was better for us in Egypt." Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. <sup>19</sup>You shall eat not only one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, <sup>20</sup>but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you—because you have rejected the LORD who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?" ' (Kind of an amusing if gross image) <sup>21</sup>But Moses said, 'The people I am with number six hundred thousand on foot; and you say, "I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month"! <sup>22</sup>Are there enough flocks and herds to slaughter for them? Are there enough fish in the sea to catch for them?' <sup>23</sup>The LORD said to Moses, '**Is the LORD's power limited?** Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not.' A key insight in the commentaries I read is that in Exodus the complaining/God providing pattern differs from the complaining in Numbers in two important ways: 1) They are more accountable after the covenant at Sinai and 2) the form of their complains represents a rejection of God's covenant (longing for Egypt seeks a reversal of the Exodus, for example)

24 So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. <sup>25</sup>Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again.

26 Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. <sup>27</sup>And a young man ran and told Moses, 'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.' <sup>28</sup>And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, 'My lord

Moses, stop them!’<sup>29</sup> But Moses said to him, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? **Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!**’<sup>30</sup> And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp. An extremely important scripture. We often talk in the podcast about how the scriptures provide a path rather than a destination. We read the scriptures so that we might have the spirit and write our own scripture. I love the progression in 2 Ne. 32 on this. This likely reflects an ancient debate about whether there can be one or more than one prophet active at a time, an interesting discussion for Latter-day saints to have as well.

## The Quails

<sup>31</sup> Then a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quails from the sea and let them fall beside the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and a day’s journey on the other side, all around the camp, about two cubits deep on the ground.<sup>32</sup> So the people worked all that day and night and all the next day, gathering the quails; the least anyone gathered was ten homers; and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp.<sup>33</sup> But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague.<sup>34</sup> So that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had the craving.<sup>35</sup> From Kibroth-hattaavah the people journeyed to Hazeroth. So God sends the people quails, and then kills them for gathering them?? I hesitate to say this, but this is the behavior of an abusive parent. The etymology of this place name is strikingly vivid: “Graves of craving”. The Jewish Study Bible suggests however that the people are punished for their own greed, as they gorge themselves to death. That would make more sense.

## Aaron and Miriam Jealous of Moses

**12** While they were at Hazeroth, Miriam and Aaron spoke against

Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had indeed married a Cushite woman); <sup>2</sup>and they said, 'Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?' And the LORD heard it. <sup>3</sup>Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth. <sup>4</sup>Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, 'Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting.' So the three of them came out. <sup>5</sup>Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the entrance of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward. <sup>6</sup>And he said, '**Hear my words:**

**When there are prophets among you,  
I the LORD make myself known to them in visions;  
I speak to them in dreams.**

<sup>7</sup> Not so with my servant Moses;  
he is entrusted with all my house.

<sup>8</sup> With him I speak face to face—clearly, not in riddles;  
and he beholds the form of the LORD.

Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?<sup>9</sup> And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed.

<sup>10</sup> When the cloud went away from over the tent, Miriam had become leprous, as white as snow. And Aaron turned towards Miriam and saw that she was leprous. <sup>11</sup>Then Aaron said to Moses, 'Oh, my lord, do not punish us for a sin that we have so foolishly committed. <sup>12</sup>Do not let her be like one stillborn, whose flesh is half consumed when it comes out of its mother's womb.' <sup>13</sup>And Moses cried to the LORD, 'O God, please heal her.' <sup>14</sup>But the LORD said to Moses, 'If her father had but spat in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp for seven days, and after that she may be brought in again.' <sup>15</sup>So Miriam was shut out of the camp for seven days; and the people did not set out on the march until Miriam had been brought in again. <sup>16</sup>After that the people set out from Hazeroth, and camped in the wilderness of Paran. **Strange story. It does teach the principle that there are prophets and there are Prophets. We can have spiritual gifts but the principle of stewardship still holds. I guess we**

can draw insights about consequences from this story as well. Touching that Moses interceded on Miriam's behalf. Another personal application involves consequences and "tough love". It requires thorough knowledge of someone to know which approach works best.

There is more to this story than meets the eye. This should not surprise you after so many lessons, but some scholars doubt that Moses, Miriam, and Aaron were actually siblings. This explains the texts which portray conflicts over authority between them (so once again, originally oppositional groups were brought together through later traditions) (Confirm this before I record) The surface narratives of the Bible paint over deeper historical conflicts between groups vying for authority.

Note that this also addresses the issue of intermarriage. "Cushite" usually refers to Ethiopians (the Septuagint concludes this must refer to an otherwise unknown second wife, perhaps a Nubian Moses married while in Egypt). "Cush" could also refer to a place in Arabia, which could then refer to Tzipporah. Either way there is an undercurrent of disapproval against intermarriage and Moses' "dark skinned" wife.

## **Spies Sent into Canaan**

**13**The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup>Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites; from each of their ancestral tribes you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.<sup>3</sup> So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the LORD, all of them leading men among the Israelites.<sup>4</sup> These were their names: From the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zaccur; <sup>5</sup>from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori; <sup>6</sup>from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh; <sup>7</sup>from the tribe of Issachar, Igal son of Joseph; <sup>8</sup>from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun; <sup>9</sup>from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti son of Raphu; <sup>10</sup>from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi; <sup>11</sup>from the tribe of Joseph (that is, from the tribe of Manasseh), Gaddi son of

Susi; <sup>12</sup>from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel son of Gemalli; <sup>13</sup>from the tribe of Asher, Sethur son of Michael; <sup>14</sup>from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi son of Vophsi; <sup>15</sup>from the tribe of Gad, Geuel son of Machi. <sup>16</sup>These were the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses changed the name of Hoshea son of Nun to Joshua.

17 Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, 'Go up there into the Negeb, and go up into the hill country, <sup>18</sup>and see what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, <sup>19</sup>and whether the land they live in is good or bad, and whether the towns that they live in are unwalled or fortified, <sup>20</sup>and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be bold, and bring some of the fruit of the land.' Now it was the season of the first ripe grapes.

21 So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath. <sup>22</sup>They went up into the Negeb, and came to Hebron; and Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the Anakites, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) <sup>23</sup>And they came to the Wadi Eshcol, and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them. They also brought some pomegranates and figs. <sup>24</sup>That place was called the Wadi Eshcol, because of the cluster that the Israelites cut down from there.

### **The Report of the Spies**

25 At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. <sup>26</sup>And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the Israelites in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. <sup>27</sup>And they told him, 'We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. <sup>28</sup>Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. <sup>29</sup>The Amalekites live in the land of the

Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan.'

30 But Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, 'Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.' <sup>31</sup>Then the men who had gone up with him said, 'We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we are.' <sup>32</sup>So they brought to the Israelites an unfavourable report of the land that they had spied out, saying, 'The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. <sup>33</sup>There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.'

### **The People Rebel**

**14** Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. <sup>2</sup>And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, 'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! <sup>3</sup>Why is the LORD bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?' <sup>4</sup>So they said to one another, 'Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt.'

**5** Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the Israelites. <sup>6</sup>And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes <sup>7</sup>and said to all the congregation of the Israelites, 'The land that we went through as spies is an exceedingly good land. <sup>8</sup>If the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. <sup>9</sup>Only, do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.' <sup>10</sup>But the whole congregation threatened to stone them.



Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites. <sup>11</sup>And the LORD said to Moses, 'How long will this people despise me? And how long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? <sup>12</sup>I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.'

### **Moses Intercedes for the People**

<sup>13</sup> But Moses said to the LORD, 'Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for in your might you brought up this people from among them, <sup>14</sup>and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people; for you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go in front of them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. <sup>15</sup>Now if you kill this people all at one time, then the nations who have heard about you will say, <sup>16</sup>"It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land he swore to give them that he has slaughtered them in the wilderness." <sup>17</sup>And now, therefore, let the power of the LORD be great in the way that you promised when you spoke, saying,

<sup>18</sup> "The LORD is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation."

<sup>19</sup>Forgive the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have pardoned this people, from Egypt even until now.'

<sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, 'I do forgive, just as you have asked; <sup>21</sup>nevertheless—as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD— <sup>22</sup>none of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested me these ten times and have not obeyed my

voice, <sup>23</sup> shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised me shall see it. <sup>24</sup> But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me wholeheartedly, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it. <sup>25</sup> Now, since the Amalekites and the Canaanites live in the valleys, turn tomorrow and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea.'

### **An Attempted Invasion is Repulsed**

26 And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying: <sup>27</sup> How long shall this wicked congregation complain against me? I have heard the complaints of the Israelites, which they complain against me. <sup>28</sup> Say to them, 'As I live', says the LORD, 'I will do to you the very things I heard you say: <sup>29</sup> your dead bodies shall fall in this very wilderness; and of all your number, included in the census, from twenty years old and upwards, who have complained against me, <sup>30</sup> not one of you shall come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. <sup>31</sup> But your little ones, who you said would become booty, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have despised. <sup>32</sup> But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. <sup>33</sup> And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness for forty years, and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. <sup>34</sup> According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day a year, you shall bear your iniquity, forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.' <sup>35</sup> I the LORD have spoken; surely I will do thus to all this wicked congregation gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall come to a full end, and there they shall die.

36 And the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation complain against him by bringing a bad report about the land— <sup>37</sup> the men who brought an unfavourable report about the land died by a plague before the LORD. <sup>38</sup> But Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh alone remained alive, of those men who went to spy out the land.

39 When Moses told these words to all the Israelites, the people mourned greatly. <sup>40</sup>They rose early in the morning and went up to the heights of the hill country, saying, 'Here we are. We will go up to the place that the LORD has promised, for we have sinned.' <sup>41</sup>But Moses said, 'Why do you continue to transgress the command of the LORD? That will not succeed. <sup>42</sup>Do not go up, for the LORD is not with you; do not let yourselves be struck down before your enemies. <sup>43</sup>For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will confront you there, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned back from following the LORD, the LORD will not be with you.' <sup>44</sup>But they presumed to go up to the heights of the hill country, even though the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, had not left the camp. <sup>45</sup>Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them, pursuing them as far as Hormah.

Bracketing the very disturbing idea of divinely commanded spying and war, this is quite a complex narrative with several lessons. Again, the people seek to undo God's covenants. This time, in the most serious way—they want to reject the very goal of the covenant (promised land), find a new leader (rejecting God's prophet) and return to Egypt (rejecting the covenant itself). This is why despite the prophetic intercession (teaching another important lesson that we can push back against even things that seem inevitable), God enacts the most serious punishment, the death of the entire Exodus generation. Finally, the failed invasion teaches that we must not only do the right thing ("right" here from the perspective of the narrative), but do it in the right way, with God's support.

## **The Bronze Serpent**

**21** When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negeb, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he fought against Israel and took some of them captive. <sup>2</sup>Then Israel made a vow to the LORD and said, 'If you will indeed give this people into our hands, then we will utterly destroy their

towns.’<sup>3</sup> The LORD listened to the voice of Israel, and handed over the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their towns; so the place was called Hormah.

4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way.<sup>5</sup> The people spoke against God and against Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.’<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died.<sup>7</sup> The people came to Moses and said, ‘We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people.<sup>8</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.’<sup>9</sup> So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

If we take this story at face value, this is a magical cure. This is called “apotropaic” magic, magic that averts evil. Fascinatingly, a bronze serpent, Nehushtan, was worshiped in Jerusalem until Hezekiah destroyed it in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century (2 Kings 18:4). This seems to be an example of using “tame” evil to avert wild evil (since the problem and cure use the same symbol). Snakes, winged and otherwise, symbolized the divine in the ANE. Think about the cobra on Pharaoh’s headdress.

[Alma 37:46-47](#)

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.

47 And now, my son, see that ye take care of these sacred things, yea, see that ye look to God and live. Go unto this people and declare the word, and be sober. My son, farewell.

[This type of advice sounds good, but how exactly does one apply it?](#)

### Helaman 8:13-15

13 But, behold, ye not only deny my words, but ye also deny all the words which have been spoken by our fathers, and also the words which were spoken by this man, Moses, who had such great power given unto him, yea, the words which he hath spoken concerning the coming of the Messiah.

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.

Additional Reading: [John 3:14-16](#); [1 Nephi 17:41](#); [Alma 33:18-22](#)

### 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.

### 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. [Was anyone else unduly entertained by this passage as a child? Dragons in the Book of Mormon!](#)

### Alma 33:18-22

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 many who were so hardened that they would not look,

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?

22 If so, wo shall come upon you; but if not so, then **cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God**, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; and that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him, to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works.

Other Reading: