The Bronze Serpent

Numbers 13–14; 21

The people of Israel set out by stages from the wilderness of Sinai. The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan." So Moses sent them.

At the end of forty days, they returned. They gave Moses this account: "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large."

All the people of Israel grumbled, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

Joshua and Caleb, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes and said, "The land is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, He will bring us into this land and give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. The LORD is with us; do not fear them." Then all the congregation said to stone them.

The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise Me? And how long will they not believe in Me?"

But Moses said to the LORD, "Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of Your steadfast love, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now."

The LORD replied, "I have pardoned, according to your word. But truly, as I live, none of the men shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. Not one shall come into the land, except Caleb and Joshua. But your little ones, they shall know the land that you have rejected. Your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years,[1] and shall suffer for your faithlessness."

When Moses told these words to all the people of Israel, the people mourned greatly. Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people. Moses prayed for the people, and the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live."

So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Explanatory Notes

[1]They will have to stay in the wilderness for forty years.



If a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

For Reflection

1. How did Joshua and Caleb show their trust in God?
2. What happened because the people, except Joshua and Caleb, refused to trust in God?
3. How is Jesus like the bronze snake the Lord told Moses to lift up to save the Israelites?

Words to Remember

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up." *John 3:14*

Reprinted from *One Hundred Bible Stories* © 2015 Concordia Publishing House (https://www.cph.org/one-hundred-bible-stories).