



# World Christian Fellowship

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## Walking in the Wilderness Disobedience to God's guidance

### Introduction

Excited to enter the Promised Land after almost 2 years in the wilderness. They were told it's a land of flowing with Milk and Honey.

Over the past year, the Israelites had been given the Law of Moses, and they had constructed the tabernacle. They were now ready to move out and to enter the land of Canaan.

Can you imagine the logistics that would have been required to get over two million people?

The Book of Numbers gives us some insight into how God made provision for the orderly march of the Israelites into the land of Canaan.

A detailed procedure for breaking and setting up camp was given in the early chapters of Numbers.

Finally, in Numbers chapter 10, the Israelites set out from the shadow of Mount Sinai for Canaan.

**Numbers 10:11-12**, *Now it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle of the Testimony. <sup>12</sup>And the children of Israel set out from the Wilderness of Sinai on their journeys; then the cloud settled down in the Wilderness of Paran.*

They have travelled three days' journey

Numbers 10:33-36, *So they departed from the mountain of the Lord on a journey of three days; and the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them for the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them. <sup>34</sup>And the cloud of the Lord was above them by day when they went out from the camp. <sup>35</sup>So it was, whenever the ark set out, that Moses said: "Rise up, O Lord! Let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You." <sup>36</sup>And when it rested, he said: "Return, O Lord, To the many thousands of Israel."*

The people who were travelling have seen God's awesome power in these past 2 years.

- Moses and Pharaoh ten plagues,
- Passover death of the firstborn,
- Red sea crossing,
- Lord's presence at Mount Sinai,
- Lord answering them with voice,

- God provided Manna,
- Pillar of Cloud,
- Pillar of fire,
- Many more miracles every day

## **Meat**

**Numbers 11:1-3**, *Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.<sup>2</sup> Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched.<sup>3</sup> So he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the Lord had burned among them.*

Only three days, again the people are already complaining against God.

Three days into their journey (Numbers 10:33) was very deliberate. Israel began to grumble just three days after they had crossed the Red Sea.

**Exodus 15:22-24**, *So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.<sup>23</sup> Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was*

*called Marah. <sup>24</sup> And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"*

It does not take much time or much trouble to get some folks to grumble. We certainly see this with the Israelites of old, and we can see it today. The emphasis in verses 1-3 is not so much on the displeasure of the Israelites as it is on the displeasure of God with the Israelites.

God was angry because His people complained.

God was greatly displeased with their grumbling, and He would not tolerate it.

**Numbers 11:4-9**, *Now the mixed multitude who were among them <sup>[c]</sup>yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat?" <sup>5</sup> We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; <sup>6</sup> but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!" <sup>7</sup> Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color like the color of bdellium. <sup>8</sup> The people went about and gathered it, ground it on millstones or beat it in the mortar, cooked it in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil. <sup>9</sup> And when the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it.*

We all grumble!

The complaining that began with the mixed multitude spread to the rest (11:10-14). If this is not bad enough, the grumbling of the Israelites prompted Moses to grumble as well.

Moses goes to God and he was saying that he can't bear them anymore. (Numbers 11:10-15)

God first responded to the complaint of Moses:

**Numbers 11:16-17**, *So the Lord said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. <sup>17</sup> Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.*

Moses father in law Jethro had suggested earlier, and that Moses just didn't implement it until this crisis forced him to do so. **(Exodus 18:17-24)**

By giving each of the 70 men a portion of the Spirit (Numbers 11:16-30), God visibly demonstrated to the nation that these men were divinely empowered to carry out the task that Moses once tried to handle by himself.

Having dealt with Moses, God now turns to the grumbling Israelites. They had the irritation to claim that their life was

better in Egypt under Pharaoh than it was in the desert, under God's rule.

They wanted more tasty food, so God assured Moses that they would get it, till it literally ran out their noses (11:20)

**Numbers 11:34**, *So he called the name of that place **Kibroth Hattaavah**, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.*

## **Grumbling Against Moses**

### **Numbers 12:1-16**

We may think that the Israelites had learned their lesson in regard to grumbling, but this was not the case. Numbers 12 is yet another account of grumbling against Moses and his leadership, but this time the grumbling did not originate from the masses, but from the very top, from Miriam and Aaron.

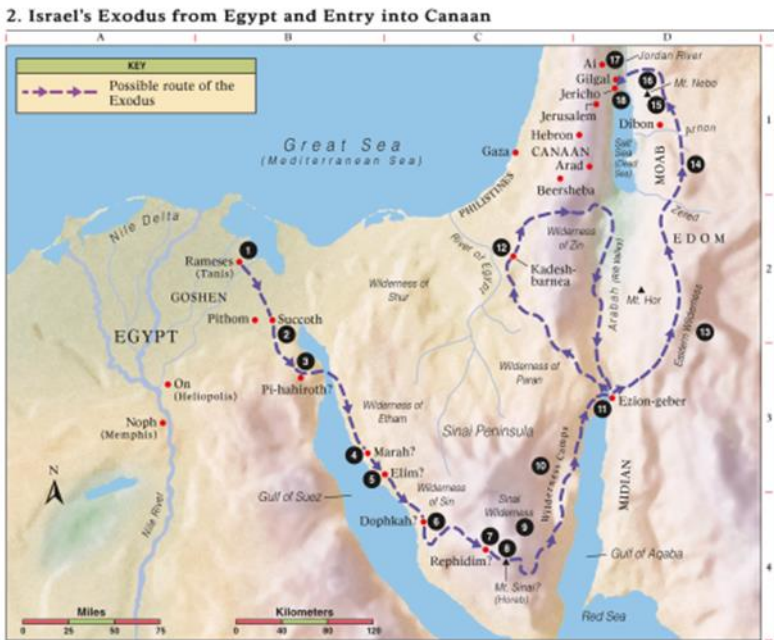
The Lord promptly ordered, "The three of you come out to the tent of meeting" (verse 4). When the Lord came down in the pillar of the cloud, He emphatically endorsed Moses as the main leader, superior in rank to Miriam and Aaron.

Did Miriam and Aaron consider themselves to be prophets? With Moses face to face but others only dreams and visions.

God struck Miriam with leprosy. Moses pled with God to heal Miriam immediately, and God did so, but He also required her to remain outside the camp for a week, until she was pronounced clean. The whole multitude of Israelites waited an entire week for Miriam to be pronounced clean.

## Failure of Faith

### Numbers 13-14



It seems apparent that Moses included chapters 10-12 as his introduction to Israel's great failure at Kadesh, as recorded in chapters 13 and 14. The way the book is structured, the failure at Kadesh is the climax of a long sequence of failures on the part of the nation.

The Lord instructed Moses to send spies into the land of Canaan, to determine its desirability and its defences.

**Numbers 13:1-2**, *And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.”*

This description of how the spies were sent out differs somewhat from the account Moses gives in the book of Deuteronomy.

**Deuteronomy 1:19-23**, *“So we departed from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the mountains of the Amorites, as the Lord our God had commanded us. Then we came to Kadesh Barnea. <sup>20</sup> And I said to you, ‘You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the Lord our God is giving us. <sup>21</sup> Look, the Lord your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the Lord God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.’ <sup>22</sup> “And every one of you came near to me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.’ <sup>23</sup> “The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from each tribe.*

The people did suggest that they send spies into the land. This idea appealed to Moses, who then consulted God. God then instructed the Israelites to do what they had proposed.

### **Why there is difference in the book of Numbers and Deuteronomy?**

1. In the book of Numbers, the emphasis is upon God, and His leading. Finally, when the spies were sent to Canaan because God commanded it. Who first suggested the idea is not as important?
2. God wanted the Israelites to know that this land was a good land, a land worth fighting for. None of the Israelites had ever seen the Promised Land. The report of the spies (and the sight of the cluster of grapes they brought back) would assure the Israelites that the land was as good as God had said it would be.
3. God wanted the Israelites to understand the magnitude of the task. God did not want the Israelites to be surprised when they met the enemy on the field of battle.  
He wanted them to understand that the taking of the land would be a miracle, that it would be His doing, and not theirs.

The spies were sent out, and they went about the entire land over a period of 40 days (Numbers 13:21-25).

When the spies returned, they were unanimous in their assessment that the land was a good land, a land “of milk and honey” (Numbers 13:26-27).

They differed little in their assessment of the strength of the Canaanites.

**Numbers 13:27-33**, *Then they told him, and said: “We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. <sup>28</sup> Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. <sup>29</sup> The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.” <sup>30</sup> Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.” <sup>31</sup> But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.” <sup>32</sup> And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. <sup>33</sup> There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”*

The real difference between the two spies: Joshua & Caleb.

The two faithful spies looked at the task ahead from the perspective of who their God was. Their God was the one who triumphed

- over Egypt,
- over Pharaoh, and
- over the gods of Egypt.

The response of the Israelites to the spies' report is tragic.

**Numbers 14:1-4**, *So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. <sup>2</sup>And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! <sup>3</sup>Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" <sup>4</sup>So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt."*

They wept because of the strength of their opposition.

They spoke of Egypt as a better place to live than Canaan.

They conspired to replace Moses with a leader who would take them back to Egypt.

Only four leaders standing on the Lord's side!

**Numbers 14:5-6**, *Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. <sup>6</sup>But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; <sup>7</sup>and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: “The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land.*

What about 70 leaders?

What about rest of the people?

Israel’s unbelief was far from passive. Had it not been for direct divine intervention, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb would have been stoned.

The community threatened to stone them. But the glory of the Lord appeared to all the Israelites at the tent of the meeting.

God’s words to Moses and his response are a strikingly similar to the earlier conversation between God and Moses in Exodus, which took place as a result of Israel’s worship of the golden calf.

Compare **Numbers 14:11-16** and **Exodus 32:7-13**

Moses pleads with God for Mercy.

**Numbers 14:17-20**, *And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, <sup>18</sup>‘The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and*

*fourth generation.’<sup>19</sup> Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”<sup>20</sup> Then the Lord said: “I have pardoned, according to your word;*

God deliberately repeated the threat He made at Sinai, knowing that Moses would recognize it as such, and that he would once again appeal to Him in accordance with His character and His covenant.

God is predictable in terms of His character, for He does not change. He is also predictable regarding His covenants, because He keeps His covenants.

God did forgive the Israelites, as Moses had requested. Forgiveness meant that God would not instantly destroy the Israelites on the spot, as threatened. It did not mean that Israel would escape all the consequences of their sin.

**Numbers 14:21-24**, *but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord—<sup>22</sup> because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice,<sup>23</sup> they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.<sup>24</sup> But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.*

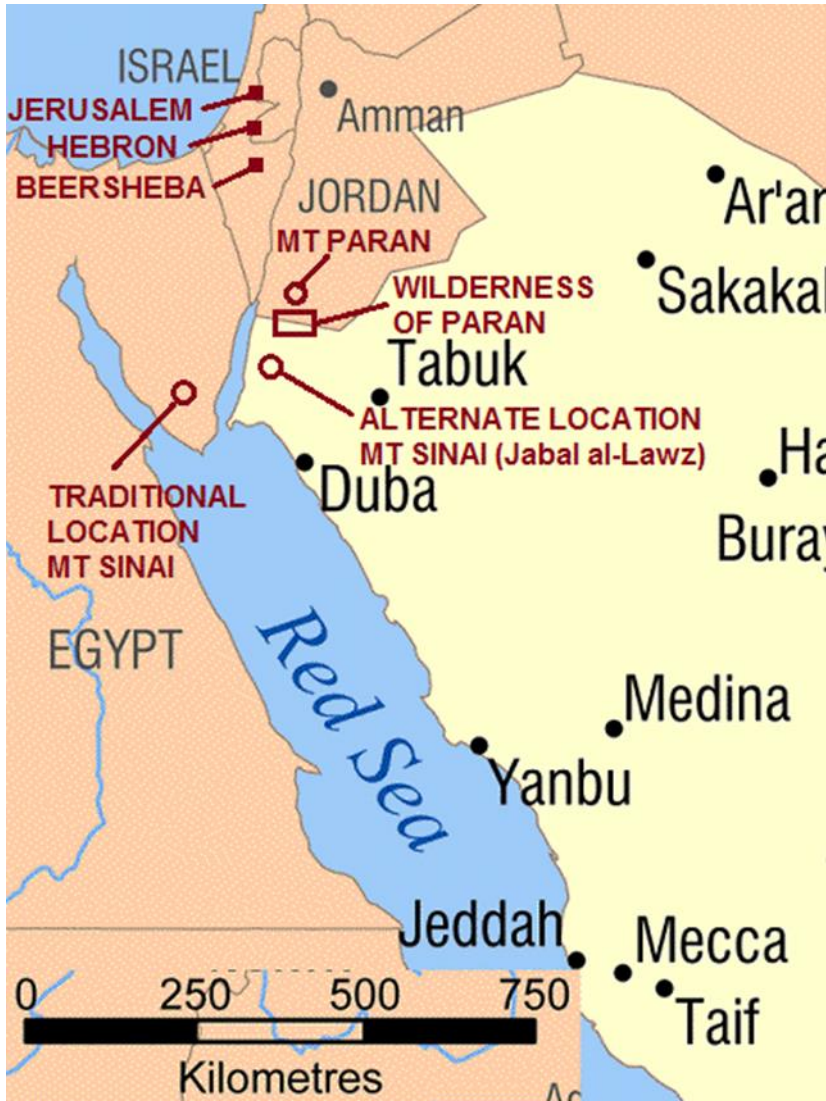
The Israelites would not experience the physical blessings God had promised. They would not enter the land of Canaan.

They must continue to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, until all the first generation (except for Joshua and Caleb) died.

This people refused to go up into Canaan to possess the land. They had personally witnessed the mighty hand of God in Egypt and in the wilderness (Numbers 14:22). They failed to trust God to defeat their enemies, yet He had already defeated Pharaoh and the Egyptian army.

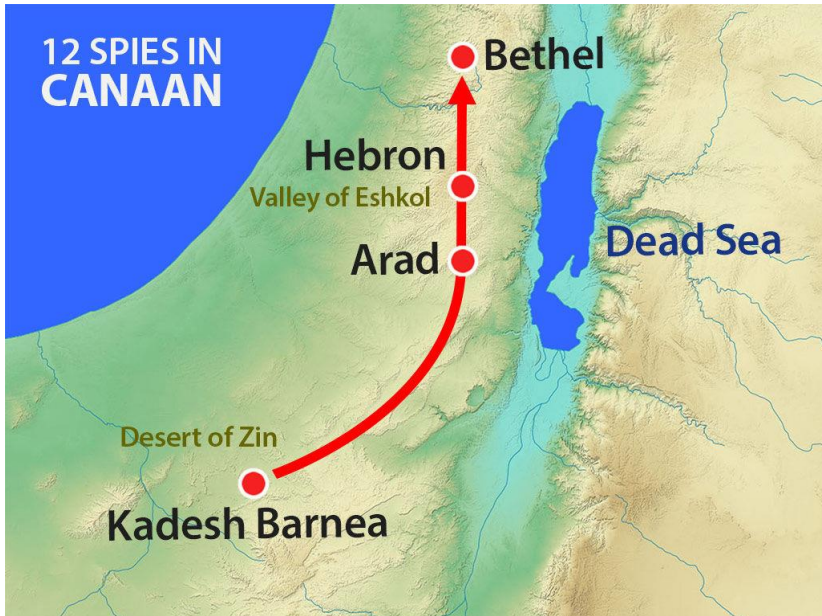
## Application:

### 1. How did they know the Promised Land?



**Numbers 12:16,** *And afterward the people moved from Hazeroth and camped in the Wilderness of Paran.*

The Israelites did not have any map or direction which way to go, so how do they know the promised land is the other side?



Number 13:21-24.

By the clouds!

By His presence.

Remember the Magi who followed the star and what happened to them when they reached Jerusalem?

## **2. Trust God**

The Israelites refused to go up into Canaan to possess the land. They had personally witnessed the mighty hand of God in Egypt and in the wilderness (Numbers 14:22).

They failed to trust God to defeat their enemies, yet He had already defeated Pharaoh and the Egyptian army.

They refused to trust God!

They did hear noises, but they did not hear the voice of God.

## **3. Unbelief rebellion becomes habitual**

They were guilty of habitual unbelief and rebellion. Moses indicates that the failure of Israel at Kadesh is the tenth and climactic offense against God.

We saw three rebellions of chapters 11-12 were but the “tip of the iceberg.”

The fact is that the Israelites constantly refused to trust and obey God. This rebellion at Kadesh was “the last straw” so far as God was concerned.

God had put up with enough from this stiff-necked generation. The Israelites must wander about in the wilderness 40 years —

1 year for every day the spies spent in the land of Canaan (Numbers 14:33-34).

A special judgment was pronounced upon the 10 spies who returned with a bad report. God sent a plague that brought about the death of these spies (Numbers 14:37).

#### **4. Failure of the leaders**

Israel's leaders did fail!

The ten spies who returned with a bad report were leaders of their tribes (Numbers 13:2).

I cannot help but wonder about the 70 leaders that were appointed in Numbers 11. They seem to have been silent, so far as encouraging the Israelites to trust and obey?

I wonder if they did not side with the 10 what would have been the result?

It seems almost certain that most of Israel's leaders failed to lead the people in a godly way at Kadesh.

Israel's unbelief began from the top to bottom.

We sometimes fail to grasp the impact we can have on others for good or evil.

**Psalms 73:15**, *If I had publicized these thoughts, I would have betrayed your loyal followers.*

## **5. Small grumble grows into full blown sin**

Did this generation loathe manna and prefer Egypt to Canaan?

They would eat manna for nearly 40 years, and they would wander about the wilderness. Even though God had delivered this generation from their bondage in Egypt with a powerful hand, they would not trust God to give them the victory over the Canaanites. It was a great failure of faith.

We should note that this sin is neither sudden nor unexpected in the Book of Numbers.

Israel's grumbling and complaining began shortly after they safely passed through the Red Sea.

Moses informs the Israelites that this failure at Kadesh was the tenth such act of rebellion (**Numbers 14:22**).

Sin is not nearly as sudden and unexpected as it may at first appear.

Israel had developed a pattern of grumbling and rebellion. This event was "the last straw" so far as God was concerned.

God is gracious and longsuffering, but there finally comes a “point of no return.” Israel reached that point at Kadesh. Even though they expressed sorrow and a willingness to confront the Canaanites, it was too late.

Let us be very careful about grumbling. Our grumbling, like that of ancient Israel, is often directed toward our circumstances.

How often God has provided for our needs?

How often we think that God could have done better?

We are frequently not content with His blessings and complain about our lot in life.

Our grumbling, like that of the Israelites, is often directed at our leaders. We fail to grasp the fact that when we grumble against our leaders, we ultimately grumble against God.

**(Exodus 16:7; Numbers 17:5, 10).**

## **6. Repent when there is time**

Too Little, Too Late

Numbers 14:40-45, *And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, “Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the Lord has promised, for we have sinned!”* <sup>41</sup> *And Moses said, “Now why do you transgress the command of the Lord? For this will not succeed.* <sup>42</sup> *Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for the Lord is not among you.* <sup>43</sup> *For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before*

*you, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned away from the Lord, the Lord will not be with you.”<sup>44</sup> But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop. Nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the Lord nor Moses departed from the camp.<sup>45</sup> Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah.*

Those who sin, often come to regret their decision to disobey. While some may genuinely repent, many seem only to regret their actions, and more particularly, the consequences of their actions.

What they really want is to turn the clock back, to make things just as they were before they sinned.

This appears to be the case with the Israelites.

Realizing that God was not going to allow them to enter the land, they came to regret their refusal to enter the land of Canaan, as God had initially commanded.

Now they are suddenly determined to go up against the Canaanites, as though this will reverse the consequences God had declared.

The Israelites assembled for battle, early in the morning, ready to attack the Canaanites and to possess the land. It was too late.

Moses made very clear that attempting to take the land would be disobedience, just as refusing to do so earlier was also sin.

They must suffer the consequences for their actions, even though God had forgiven them. (Had God not forgiven them, I assume He would have wiped the entire nation out immediately, as He threatened to do.)

The Israelites once again refused to heed God's word, spoken through Moses. They went to battle without Moses, without the ark of the covenant, and without God. When they engaged the Canaanites in battle, they suffered a terrible defeat. And now they must wander about the wilderness, until the whole generation has died.

## **7. You are contagious**

As we are in the lockdown because of Covid-19, you can easily carry the virus and spread it same way you can spread your faith or unbelief.

Both unbelief and faith are contagious.

Our grumbling and doubting can influence others.

Our faith and obedience can inspire and encourage others.

This is one of the reasons why the Israelites later worshipped at the temple.

There they could proclaim the mercies of the Lord and challenge others to walk by faith.

(Psalm 52:9; 116:14, 18; Jeremiah 33:11).

Surely this is one of the reasons why New Testament saints are exhorted to assemble together as a church.

**Hebrews 10:24-25**, *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

What our Kadesh will be?

Each of us will experience some kind of “Kadesh” at least once in our lives.

It will be a matter of faith and obedience.

Either we will trust in God’s promises and power, and obey,  
or

we will be overcome by doubts, fears and disobey.

While unbelief kept this generation from possessing the land of Canaan, it did not frustrate God’s purposes or promises. This generation did not enter the blessings that God had prepared for them, but the next generation.

Our unfaithfulness does not negate or frustrate the faithfulness of God!

The Scriptures make much of the failure of the Israelites at Kadesh.

It is the central theme of Psalm 95.

That Psalm begins with a call to worship, and ends up with a warning, a warning not to be like the Israelites at Kadesh (and elsewhere where they grumbled).

Praise is the preventative and the cure for grumbling. It focuses on God and urges others to do likewise.

It thinks on the greatness of God and on His wondrous deeds. It inspires faith and obedience.

Remembrance of our Lord's work at Calvary and praise for the gift of His salvation is a central theme in our time of worship at the Lord's Table every week. It is something we should eagerly anticipate.