

Complaints

The phrase “Vayehi Binsoah HaAron” is bracketed by two letters Nun upside down. One explanation is that this is a separate section of the Torah. But Rashi says it is a marker between two eras. The one before the Spies when they were ready to invade the first time. And then the period of a generation in the wilderness before the real invasion. Which makes sense because the following week we read why the Israelites were sent back for forty years.

We have reached the part of the Torah that deals with the time the Children of Israel spent in the Sinai Desert. It was a place we know today to be largely barren with occasional water holes and oases. It cannot have been easy for anyone. And so, it is only natural that people were under pressure, stress, strain and deprivation and began to complain instead of counting their blessings. After all that’s what we do nowadays all the time.

They complain and fire breaks out. They complain about not having meat and they imagined the food they had in Egypt, the fish, water melons, the garlic, the onions they had for free as slaves and they complain about the Manna being boring. To be fair, the Torah specifically says it was the Asafsuf, a lovely equivalent of the English word ruffraff! So, it was not the core of the people. Even so, discontent was inevitable given their expectation of a land flowing with milk and honey and a short march into a new homeland.

But complaints fall into several categories, genuine complaints, altogether dishonest complaints and badly framed or inappropriate complaints. We see them all in this week’s reading. Claiming they had it better as slaves in Egypt was clearly a lie.