

Numbers 20:1 ¶ Then came the children of Israel, *even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.*

Reminder—Many of the Old Testament books do not have a strict chronological flow. JFB offers the following explanatory note: “In this history only the principal and most important incidents are recorded, those confined chiefly to the first or second and the last years of the journeys in the wilderness....”

As I read through this chapter, it became obvious that we are near the end of the wilderness wanderings. The “first month” seems to be in reference to the last year before entering the promised land as indicated by a verse in chapter 33 in reference to the death of Aaron which is recorded at the end of this chapter.

Numbers 33:38 “And Aaron the priest went up into mount Hor at the commandment of the LORD, and died there, in the fortieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the first day of the fifth month.”

They have established camp in Kadesh in the desert of Zin on the southern border of Canaan. It is noted that Miriam dies during this time and is buried there. We know that Moses was 120 years old when he died. Miriam was at least 10 years older considering that she interceded with the princess to be able to get her Mom chosen to nurse him. So Miriam lived to a ripe old age.

Numbers 20:2 And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.

Numbers 20:3 And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD!

Numbers 20:4 And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?

Numbers 20:5 And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink.

It seems this location had no good water source, and the people quickly began to complain to Moses and Aaron. Again, they accused them of bringing them and their cattle into the desert to die. They declared that they would rather have died when their brethren had died. (I would assume this to be a reference to Korah and his followers and those that died of the plague after the fact. Or maybe it is a reference to those that were told they would not be allowed to enter the land of promise, almost all of whom would have died by this time.) They bemoaned the fact that Moses had led them out of Egypt to bring them to such an evil place—a place without seed (grain), figs, vines, pomegranates or water.

Guzik made a great observation: “The need was real, but the response of Israel was filled with unbelief and bad attitude - which always go together! When you find a bad attitude, you will also find a lack of simple, secure trust in God.”

Numbers 20:6 And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly

unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them.

Numbers 20:7 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

Numbers 20:8 Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.

Moses and Aaron headed immediately to present themselves before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle. The LORD made His presence known to them and told Moses to take his rod (the same one he had used before Pharaoh and at the parting of the Red Sea denoting that he was acting as God's representative) and gather the people together before him and Aaron. Moses was then to speak to the rock in their presence and the rock would give forth water for them to drink. There would be plenty for them and their animals.

Reminder—This isn't the first time the LORD had provided water for His people. Exodus 17 is a record of the first time in which Moses had been instructed to strike the rock to produce water.

Exodus 17:5–7 “And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?”

Numbers 20:9 And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him.

Numbers 20:10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?

Numbers 20:11 And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts *also*.

Moses did exactly as the LORD had commanded. He and Aaron gathered the people before the rock, but at this point Moses began to act in the flesh—not according to the LORD's command nor with the attitude of heart He demonstrated. Remember, Moses was God's representative to the people—as are we all who call ourselves Christian. He spoke in anger calling the people rebels and then intimated that it was he and Aaron that were going to provide water from the rock. The psalmist words it this way.

Psalms 106:32–33 “They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.”

Then, instead of speaking to the rock as the LORD had commanded, Moses struck the rock twice with his rod. The LORD still provided the water that the people needed, but not without grave consequence for Moses and Aaron.

Numbers 20:12 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.
Numbers 20:13 This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them.

The LORD basically told Moses and Aaron that they had misrepresented Him before the people of Israel; and, therefore, they would not be allowed to enter the land of promise. Aaron was just as guilty in spirit as Moses and was judged accordingly.

It is interesting to note that Moses has nothing further to say at this point in his record. In my study of Deuteronomy, however, we know that he didn't let the issue drop; he did some complaining of his own.

Deuteronomy 3:23–26 “And I besought the LORD at that time, saying, O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter.”

Deuteronomy 4:20–22 “But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day. Furthermore the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, and sware that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance: But I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan: but ye shall go over, and possess that good land.”

Deuteronomy 31:2 “And he said unto them, I am an hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in: also the LORD hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan.”

Without further enlightenment, I think most of us would consider this judgment from God to be too harsh. (Reminder—To whom much is given, much will be required.) Again, we must remember that everything in the scripture is intended to point us to Jesus the Christ. We know from scripture that Jesus is identified as the “rock” or “stone.”

Deuteronomy 32:3–4 “Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect....”

1 Corinthians 10:1–4 “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all

baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

Acts 4:10–11 "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner."

Since the rock had been struck to provide water for the people the first time, Moses destroyed the type of Jesus in the rock by striking it a second time. Jesus only had to suffer the strike of the enemy at the hands of the people one time; He was not to suffer another such strike from the enemy. The sacrifice of Jesus was sufficient once for all to satisfy the judgment for the sin of mankind and make possible the gift of the Holy Spirit. The water represents the baptism of the believer with the Holy Spirit who becomes the earnest of our inheritance in the LORD.

Acts 11:16 "Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost."

Ephesians 1:13–14 "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

"Because ye believed me not" – Why did striking the rock show unbelief? We know this is true because God said it. It seems that Moses didn't believe that just speaking to the rock was enough; after all, he had had to strike it previously. Isn't that a picture of the problem that so many have concerning the gift of salvation? They insist on believing that works have to be part of the picture, that just believing in Jesus as their LORD and Savior are not enough. Scripture is clear in declaring that all we have to do is believe and call upon the name of the LORD to be saved.

Romans 10:13 "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Romans 10:9 "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Moses then notes that this place was called Meribah, meaning "to strive, complain, contend." At this place the people had complained before the LORD, and He was proven holy as He once again provided what they needed.

Numbers 20:14 ¶ And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us:

Numbers 20:15 How our fathers went down into Egypt, and we have dwelt in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians vexed us, and our fathers:

Numbers 20:16 And when we cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt: and, behold, we *are* in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border:

Numbers 20:17 Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink *of* the water of the wells: we will go by the king's *high* way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders.

While encamped at Kadesh, Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom. He noted that they were brothers. Jacob and Esau were twin brothers; Israel descended through Jacob and Edom through Esau. Moses also said that he was sure that the people of Edom knew all that the people of Israel had suffered in the land of Egypt. That they surely knew how the LORD had delivered them and that they were currently encamped on their border at Kadesh. Moses then asked permission for the camp of Israel to pass through their country while promising that they would not harm their fields or vineyards, or drink of the water from any of their wells. He promised that they would stay on the king's highway the whole way through the country.

From his research, Coffman describes the king's highway as follows: "This road was in use during the 23rd and 22nd centuries B.C.; and it was marked along its length with early Bronze Age settlements. It led from the gulf of Aqaba in the south up through Edom to Damascus...."

Numbers 20:18 And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword.

Numbers 20:19 And the children of Israel said unto him, We will go by the high way: and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it: I will only, without *doing* any thing *else*, go through on my feet.

Numbers 20:20 And he said, Thou shalt not go through. And Edom came out against him with much people, and with a strong hand.

Numbers 20:21 Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him.

The king of Edom refused the request and threatened to attack them if they tried to go through his land. Moses made one more overture, reiterating that they would pay for any water they drank and would travel straight through the country. This appears to be a contradiction, but Coffman provides some enlightenment: "The wells were privately-owned, but waters from streams, which would normally be used by the cattle, were not mentioned in that verse." JFB adds further insight: "From the scarcity of water in the warm climates of the East, the practice of levying a tax for the use of the wells is universal; and the jealousy of the natives, in guarding the collected treasures of rain, is often so great that water cannot be procured for money."

Again the king of Edom refused and presented himself at the border with a strong show of force. So Israel turned away—discouraged I am sure since this would have been the shortest route to the land of promise.

You would think that they turned away in anger, but it is revealed in Deuteronomy that the LORD did not allow that.

Deuteronomy 23:7 "Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother...."

Numbers 20:22 ¶ And the children of Israel, *even* the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh, and came unto mount Hor.

Numbers 20:23 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying,

Numbers 20:24 Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah.

So the people journeyed from Kadesh to Mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom. The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron at this place and told them that Aaron would die here. It is repeated that Aaron was not going to be allowed to enter the promised land because of their disobedience to God's command at Meribah.

Numbers 20:25 Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto mount Hor:

Numbers 20:26 And strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered *unto his people*, and shall die there.

Numbers 20:27 And Moses did as the LORD commanded: and they went up into mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation.

Numbers 20:28 And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there in the top of the mount: and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount.

Numbers 20:29 And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, *even* all the house of Israel.

Moses was instructed to take Aaron and Eleazar his son with him up mount Hor. He was to strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar, in essence declaring him the new high priest. Moses did exactly as the LORD had commanded in the sight of all the people. Implication is that they witnessed the transfer of the high priestly garments from Aaron to Eleazar. Aaron died (and presumably was buried), and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount. When the people saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for him for 30 days.

I liked Guzik's observation on Aaron: "Aaron's life shows us, among other things, that the office is more important than the man himself. Aaron the man was not always worthy of respect, but Aaron the high priest always was worthy of honor."

This is a very convicting thought for me—especially in connection with my attitude toward most of the current leaders of government.