

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Numbers 20:1-12, 24, 28 (read vv.1-6) “The Blessings We Lose When We Sin”

Intro. The chapter before us opens with the death of Miriam and it closes with the death of Aaron. This chapter is bounded by death. In between there is little good you can find in this chapter. But there are some lessons that we would do well to learn.

Up until this point the people of Israel had been wandering in the wilderness, going nowhere. That was due to God’s judgment for their sin of unbelief when the previous generation would not trust God to give them the victory over the inhabitants of Canaan. I’m afraid that too many believers today are simply wandering in this world, making little or no progress in their Christian lives, & in the call of God to fulfill our mission to reach the world for Christ.

Have you noticed that the Bible does not hide the sins & mistakes of the people of God? The Bible says (1 Cor. 10:11) these stories are written for *our* admonition. Today, we will read of the recurring sin of the Israelites. And even though Moses was one of the greatest men of God in the Bible, this chapter reports the sin which caused him to miss passing over into the Promised Land. We need to take to heart the lessons that we can draw from the mistakes of others.

Now as we study this chapter we see a familiar theme. We read of:

I. THE REOCCURRING COMPLAINTS OF THE PEOPLE

What we read in this chapter sounds familiar, doesn’t it. Once again, we read of the people of God complaining. Let me give you some background so you will understand what led to their complaints. In v.1 we read, “Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh” The place of their gathering is significant. 38 years prior to this incident, they were at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin. From there they sent out the 12 spies, but when 10 gave a bad report, they wanted to turn back to Egypt. It was a time of unbelief & rebellion in the history of Israel. As a result, God judged them, requiring them to wander until that older generation died off.

Now, they are back in that same spot. Well, let’s see what happens next. V.2 says, “Now there was no water for the congregation....” It is probable that the people had been at places in the wilderness where water was to be found and supplied in the normal ways. But now that they were gathered at Kadesh, they found that there was no water. The people were getting thirsty, & they grew impatient when no water was readily available.

This was to be an occasion of testing. The question to be tested is whether the new men are any better than the old. They should have learned from the mistakes of their parents, especially consider that they were at the very place their parents had so seriously sinned by failing to trust God. Now, let’s see what happened when they were tested. Instead of just trusting in God, and asking Him for water, notice what they did:

A. They Gather Against Moses & Aaron – The last of v.2 says, “so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron.” This must have been like a mutiny. Perhaps they gathered

against Moses and Aaron with arms of war. Imagine how Moses & Aaron must have felt as they were surrounded by the mob. Next:

B. They Complain Against Them – In v.3 we read, “And the people contended with Moses and spoke....” That is, they voiced their complaint & grievances. Notice that they do not complain directly against God, because they regard Moses and Aaron as responsible. Notice what they say in the last of v.3, “If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD!” In their mind things were so bad they wished they had died some time back, probably along with those who perished in the wake of Korah’s revolt (chs. 16-17). Have you ever wished that you were dead? They must have been in a really bad mood!

Then v.4 says, “Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness....” Some remembered leaving Egypt as children or young people. The rest certainly heard stories of that great deliverance. But they had no appreciation for the role Moses & Aaron played in leading Israel out of Egypt. In v.5 we see one of the reasons why. While in a fault-finding mood they said, “And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to *this* evil place? [No doubt pointing to the wilderness.] It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink.” It is as if they had said, “So this stretch of waterless sand is the fertile land you talked of, is it?” Had they forgotten that the wilderness was not the ultimate destination, but the land of Canaan?

So here are the people back at Kadesh, repeating the same kind of complaints they heard as children. Just as their parents had failed, even so the people are again complaining over a lack of water instead of trusting in God. It was like father, like son, and like mother, like daughter. It seems the people had learned nothing. In Ex 34:7 God warned that He would visit “the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.” This is another instance of the solemn law by which the fathers’ sins tend to be inherited by the children.

Have you tended to repeat the same sins as your parents? Are you a complainer like your mother or father? Man, if you don’t know what sinful tendencies you’ve inherited, just ask your wife! She can tell you! Well, are you doomed to repeat those sins? No, but God is the only solution. It starts with being born again. Let God give you a new heart, and a new nature. Let His Word transform your thinking. God can change you.

So we see the recurring sin of the people. Now let’s see:

II. THE REMEDY PROVIDED BY GOD

God knew all along the problems they would face. He was ready & willing to provide. God also knew the problems that Moses & Aaron would face. Here we see that God is the answer to problems you are facing. No problem is too great for the Lord. We see examples of that here. First of all, do what Moses & Aaron did:

A. Turn to the Lord – In v.6 we read, “So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces....” Moses makes no attempt to argue with the people, but casts himself before the door of the Tabernacle, as if crushed and helpless in the face of this heart-breaking proof of the persistent obstinacy of the old faults. No doubt they prayed, and asked the Lord’s help in this situation.

Even so, when you have a problem, turn to the Lord. That's the first thing you should do.

Well, does God answer prayer? Indeed He does. The last of v.6 says, "And the glory of the LORD appeared to them." The glory that was normally hidden away behind the curtains of the tabernacle was revealed to them, & probably to the people who were nearby. God affirmed His servants before the people, and responded to their prayers in a very evident way. Notice how the Lord responded to the prayer of Moses, & provided a remedy for the need of the people. Here we see another lesson:

B. Trust God to Provide through the Rock – God knew the people needed water, and He was more than willing to provide water, but He would do so in a special way. God said in v.8, "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals." Note God's repetition of His old gift to the new generation. God's answer recalls the former miracle at Rephidim in Exodus 17, where in the early days of their march the rock was smitten by the rod at God's command & it yielded water. The only differences are that here Moses is told to *speak* to the rock, not strike it. This would be an even greater miracle, as there is no possibility that a physical blow will simply dislodge a natural plug to a hidden source of water. Secondly, in the former miracle it was to be done before the elders only; here it is done before the entire congregation! Both variations seem to have the common purpose of enhancing the wonder, and confirming the authority of Moses, to this new generation.

Why was a rock involved in this miracle? Many times in the Old Testament God is compared to a Rock. Then we find another reason in 1 Corinthians 10. There we see that the rock in the wilderness was a type of Christ. It represents Christ in certain respects. In v.4 Paul says, "...for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." In Mt. 21:42 Jesus applied the following prophecy to Himself, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone."¹ This fact provides one important reason why Moses was not to strike the rock, but only speak to the rock. As we have already noted, many years before the rock was struck and water came forth. Since the rock was a type of Christ, it was to be smitten only once! You see, Christ suffered only once for sins. The book of Hebrews emphasizes that Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice only once, unlike the sacrifices of the Old Testament that were repeated (Heb. 7:27; cf. 9:26, 28). Also, Heb. 9:12 says that Christ "with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all..."

One of the main lessons we should see from the fact that God supplied their need through the Rock is the fact that we should look to Jesus Christ in our time of need. If you need forgiveness, look to Jesus. Don't look to the Catholic Mass for forgiveness. Christ does not need to be sacrificed all over again. He suffered & died once for sin, and that was enough. You just need to *speak* to Christ & ask Him to save you, for the Bible says (Rom. 10:13), "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." Furthermore, if you need eternal life, look to Jesus. If you need daily bread, look to Jesus. If you need peace & comfort, look to Jesus. If you need strength, look to Jesus. He is our Source that we are to look to in faith & prayer.

¹ Quoted also in Mark, Luke, Acts, & 1 Peter. Paul also quotes this prophecy in Rom. 9:33, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

So God gave a great remedy to supply the water that the people needed. Moses only had to speak to the Rock, and water would miraculously gush forth! But then the story takes an unfortunate turn. We move from the remedy provided by God to:

III. THE REBELLION OF MOSES

That may seem like a strong word, but that is the word God used in v.24 to describe the actions of Aaron & Moses. In vv.9-11 we read, “So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, ‘Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?’ Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod...” Moses accused the people of being rebels, but he himself become one here in our story today. I can see a total of 4 sins that Moses committed on this occasion. So notice first of all:

A. He Became Very Angry & Spoke Rashly - Psalm 106:32 says, “They angered Him also at the waters of strife...” Can’t you just hear the anger in his voice? He had been with them almost forty years in the wilderness, and frankly, he was getting pretty tired of their complaints & unbelief. He was upset that the children seemed no better than their parents. His anger also resulted from taking their complaints personally, & being hurt thereby. He was annoyed at their ingratitude & rebellion against his own authority. As a result, his anger boiled from frustration. The breaking-point of his patience was reached. The people hadn’t changed, but Moses has. He no longer has the invincible patience, the utter self-forgetfulness, the readiness for self-sacrifice, which had borne him up of old. He seems to have little love for the people at this point.

As a result of his anger, Psalm 106:33 says “that he spoke rashly with his lips.” He called them rebels & he made a big mistake when he claimed power to bring water from the rock (v.10b).

The Bible says, “Be angry and sin not” (Psa. 4:4; Eph. 4:26). There are times when we will get angry, but we must be careful not to sin in our anger. One of the first ways we may sin in our anger is with our lips, as in the case of Moses. You may start calling someone an ugly name. You may curse. Watch out! The more emotional you are, the less self-control you will have, & the more likely you will sin with your lips, or in some other way. You had best withdraw from that situation until you have had time to cool off!

B. He Disobeyed God - God told him very clearly that he was to speak to the rock. That was all he needed to do. But Moses failed to obey God, & follow the specific instructions. V.11 says that he “struck the rock twice with his rod.” When God said, “Take the rod,” Moses may have assumed that he was to do as he had done before, & strike the rock.² But he did not carefully follow God’s instructions. He did it *his* way in spite of the fact that God clearly said, “*Speak* to the rock.”

How often do we disobey God? How often do we modify God’s will for our lives, & do things our own way? Are you going to obey God, and follow the way of salvation that He has provided? That way is the cross of Christ, & faith in His blood. Don’t try to get to heaven some other way.

Furthermore, Moses sinned when:

² The only purpose of the staff in hand was to serve as a reminder of the earlier miracle.

C. He Failed to Believe God Fully – This is stated in v.12, “Because you did not believe Me...” Moses did not trust the Lord enough to believe that speaking alone would bring forth water.³ He thought he had to help God out by striking the rock.

This reminds me of the story of the Centurion. In Mt. 8:8 the centurion said to Jesus, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.” Then Jesus replied in v.10, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” He said it was not necessary that Jesus come & touch his servant. Just speaking the word of healing from where He was would be sufficient! That’s the kind of faith Moses should have had!

Today, unbelief is our great sin also. One of the most common & unrecognized sins that we commit is not believing God. The Bible says, “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6). Unbelief is a serious sin because it casts doubt regarding the character or power of God.

Moses was guilty of yet another sin:

D. He Did Not Sanctify God Before the People - How we speak of God in public is very important. Again, Moses said, “Shall we fetch you water out of this rock?” He who claims power to himself, denies it to God. Moses did not say that *the Lord* would bring forth water from the rock. Instead of exalting God’s holiness before them by declaring Him to be the Giver, he assumed for himself a power that belonged to God. Moses is not going to fetch them water out of the rock at all. God is the One who will provide the water. He arrogates to himself the power of working miracles. He forgets that he was as much an instrument, and as little a force, as his own rod. Moses, the miracle worker; indeed!

If God uses you as an instrument in His hand, and does great things through you, always remember to give God the glory. In Isa. 42:8 God says, “My glory I will not give to another...” Furthermore, always be careful to speak well of God publicly, and don’t take His name in vain.

So we see the rebellion of Moses. Next we see from our text:

IV. THE RESULTS OF SIN

Here in this chapter we see examples of the important lesson that sin has consequences. The Bible says, “whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” If you sow the seeds of sin you will harvest a crop of corruption & sorrow. Sin can be attractive. It can even be fun & bring pleasure. But before you yield to the temptation of sin, you had better look beyond the short-term pleasure and see the long-term consequences. Notice three examples of the consequences of sin:

A. Miriam Cannot Enter the Promised Land – In the last of v.1 we read, “Miriam died there and was buried there.” Do you remember the sin of Miriam? She had sinned in murmuring against Moses (12:1). Now she is denied entrance into the Promised Land.

³ Some suggest that his unbelief was this: Moses was afraid that the rebellion of the people would lead to another long delay. Moses began to doubt that God would ever lead His people into the Promised Land.

B. Aaron Cannot Enter the Promised Land – In v.24 we read, “Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah.”

C. Moses Cannot Lead Israel into the Land – God pronounced the sentence of judgment against Moses in v.12, “Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.” Was his momentary failure not far too severely punished? To answer that question, we must recur to the thought of the importance of this event as beginning a new chapter for both Moses and Israel. A tiny blade above-ground may indicate the presence of a poisonous root, needing drastic measures for its uprooting. Besides, there was some grace mingled with this judgment. Soon, Moses’ would be able to rest from his hard & at times frustrating labor.

So none of them were able to enjoy the victories & fruits of the Promised Land. What should that tell us? The next time you are tempted to sin, remember that there will be consequences in your life, & even the lives of others. We also see the truth that no amount of human merit amassed through past obedience can atone for even one sin.

Finally, we see one more primary lesson from this story. We will end on a high note as we see an example of:

V. THE OVERCOMING GRACE OF GOD

God deals with His people on the principle of grace. Notice what God graciously does for His people. First of all:

A. God Still Gave Them Water – In spite of the sins of the people & their spiritual leaders, the last of v.11 says, “and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.” The error of Moses did not keep the water from coming out. When need is repeated, the supply is forthcoming. As the song says, “He looked beyond my fault and saw my need.” God’s grace is greater than our sin. Unbelief is obstinate, but His loving purpose is more persistent still. Notice also that the water came out abundantly. Oh, how gracious God is! Jesus said in John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

The same long-suffering Hand that poured water from the rock for two generations of distrustful murmurers still lavishes its misused gifts on us. This is yet another reason why we should look to God in our time of need, even if we don’t deserve anything from His good hand.

B. God Gave Them New Leaders – In v.28 we read, “Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son...” God raised up a new generation of leaders.

We lost our youth pastor a few months ago, but I believe God will give us a new Youth & Associate Pastor. You can count on that.

C. God Still Took the People to the Promised Land – We read about this later. The people had sinned like their fathers. They didn’t deserve to go into the Promised Land either. But God’s purpose & grace prevailed over the sin of man.

Conclusion: Do you have some recurring sins that you are having trouble overcoming? Well look to the Lord. He will forgive & help you overcome those sins. Do you have a recurring need? Look to the Lord. He will supply your need. If you fail to trust God, you will sin and suffer the consequences. You don't want that. If you have a need in your life today, turn to the Lord, and trust in Him. Obey His voice, & He will supply your need!

Sources: Roy Gane, *The NIV Application Commentary: Leviticus, Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961), originally published by 1721; Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:10] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2011). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).