

Lesson 9 - June 26, 2011.

The Failure of Moses and Aaron

Lesson Scope: [Numbers 20](#)

Lesson Focus

The years of wilderness wanderings are passed over with almost no comment in the Scriptures. Acts 7:42-43 reveals that many Israelites practiced idolatry during these forty years. After what appears to be almost a total loss of national unity and spiritual life, Israel reassembled at Kadesh to march again to the Promised Land. This lesson occurs in the first month of the fortieth year. During the previous thirty-nine years Moses' leadership ability and personal integrity were tested and challenged intensely and repeatedly.

Again, as the children of Israel needed water, many previous complaints were renewed. The people stirred up a mob spirit and declared their preference for death under the judgment of God rather than living under God's providential care. They blamed Moses for bringing them out of a wonderful life in Egypt to live in the awful desert. Rather than calling on the Lord for help, they turned the situation into a controversy with Moses.

The temptation to act on impulse, rather than divine direction, faces every person in times of crisis. People are to failure when they are under trader pressure to respond to the failure of others. Which of us has not at some time failed because of the failure of others? Which of us has never blamed others for our failure? This lesson teaches personal accountability, the jealousy of God for His holiness, and God's righteous judgments.

This lesson also teaches that people without the fear of God, who are not conscientious in their very heart and soul, will make life very difficult for their leaders.

In the New Testament church, everyone should build his brother up, and no one should make difficulties for his brother

Lesson Aim: To learn from Moses and Aaron's failure to follow divine direction.

Theme Verses: [James 1:19-20](#). Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

Lesson Text:

"There Was No Water"

Numbers 20:1-6

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. ²And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. ³And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! ⁴And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? ⁵And 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. ⁶And 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.

"He Smote the Rock Twice"

Numbers 20:7-11

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ⁸Take 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. ⁹And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. ¹⁰And 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? ¹¹And 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*.

"Ye Believed Me Not"

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 20:22-29

And the children of Israel, *even* the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh, and came unto mount Hor. ²³And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, ²⁴Aaron 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. ²⁵Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto mount Hor: ²⁶And strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered *unto his people*, and shall die there. ²⁷And Moses did as the LORD commanded: and they went up into mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. ²⁸And 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. ²⁹And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, *even* all the house of Israel.

Questions for Study

"There Was No Water"

1. Why did the people strive against Moses and Aaron instead of beseeching God for help?
2. What attitudes did Moses and Aaron reveal by their initial response?
3. Under what circumstances might our responses become a test to others?

"He Smote the Rock Twice"

4. What uncontrolled feelings led to Moses and Aaron's failure?
5. How did Moses dishonor God?
6. What are some situations in which we might fail through frustration?

"Ye Believed Me Not"

7. What other sins accompanied Moses and Aaron's unbelief (Numbers 20:12)?
8. From this passage, what do we learn about God's punishment of sin?

Analyzing the Passage

Chode (Numbers 20:3) means "to hold a controversy, wrangle. The issue was deeper than the need for water. If they needed water, they could have asked for it. The children of Israel did not see Moses and Aaron as God's servants, doing His will. They seemed to have seen Moses and Aaron as manipulating God for the people's harm. Actually, Moses had interceded for them and saved their lives on various occasions.

Moses failed in his strongest point. When Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses (Numbers 12:1) the Scriptures note that "the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

"They angered (Moses) at the waters of strife" (Psalm 106:32). "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). Moses' words

"Hear now, ye rebels: Must we fetch you water out of this rock?" (Numbers 20:10) revealed his anger.

[They] did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1Corinthians 10:4). Christ was smitten once. Moses had smitten a rock earlier to give the people water (Exodus 17:6). Moses obscured God's type of Christ when he also smote this rock and smote it twice.

In God's sight Moses and Aaron had rebelled (Numbers 20:24), believed not (20:12) and failed to sanctify Him in the eyes of the people (Numbers 20:12). God did not overlook their sin (Numbers 20:12).

Meribah means "provocation, strife." This name was also used for the earlier location near Mt. Sinai, where Moses struck the rock and brought forth water for the people (Exodus 17:6-7).

Principles and Applications

"There Was No Water"

1. In times of special need, people tend to blame others (Numbers 20:1-2). This is a natural and human response that tends to bring the worst out of our brethren. We should rather recognize that God has allowed each difficult situation we face. God is more fully aware of our situation than even we ourselves. God is working for our good and planning for our benefit even before we call upon Him. "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24).

2. Unfair, unreasonable, and false accusations against the righteous creates the potential for strife and failure (Numbers 20:2-5). We must avoid meeting accusation with counter-accusation. Our indignation against injustice must result from our love for God's law and not from personal self-defense. Meditating on false accusations will cause anger to rise and self-defense will follow. In contrast, "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psalm 119:165).

3. In a crisis, we must turn to the Lord in prayer (Numbers 20:6). We must first ask the Lord to take control of ourselves. Only then can He work through us to do His will.

"He Smote the Rock Twice"

4. God reveals His gracious provision even to men who are striving with Him (Numbers 20:7-8) There is no goodness in men that merits God's grace. In fact, man, for his strife with God, deserves divine wrath. Yet God's provision for man's need is free, without any work "speak ... to the rock ... and it shall give forth his water." "For whosoever shall call upon

the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Roman 10: 13).

5. God counts partial obedience as failure (Numbers 20:9-11). When we take our focus off the Lord and look at our circumstances, we become frustrated. In our frustration, we focus even less on the Lord. As our frustration increases, we fail to pay close attention to the voice of God. We mix our own way with God's way. God sees our partial obedience as failure.

6. We sin when we take God's glory to ourselves (Numbers 20:10-11). This is presumptuous. Moses ascribed the water from the rock to -'we." Thus God did not receive the glory due His Name. A similar thing happens when we take credit to ourselves for our God given talents and accomplishments. **"Ye Believed Me Not"**

7. Unbelief is the root cause of disobedience (Numbers 20:12). Why do men sin? They do not believe God or His Word. Why do men call themselves Christians and ignore the teachings of Christ? They do not believe that Christ will finally judge them by His every word. How can we ignore even one sentence of His message if we truly see Him as the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of life who will return to judge the quick and dead? (See John 1:18).

8. God punishes sin regardless of one's position or past record (Numbers 20:12, 24, 28). God made it clear to Israel through Ezekiel that a long life of faithfulness will avail nothing if one sins at the last. Nor will God have respect to certain persons because of who they are or of how much good they have done.

9. When men fail, God sanctifies Himself in them (Numbers 20:13). God's Word will remain true and binding although men disbelieve and disobey it. God's holiness is not marred by man's sin. If men fail to honor God before their fellow men, His righteous judgments upon them will move others to acknowledge His holiness.

10. Failure affects one's service and usefulness to God (Numbers 20:12, 24-29). The reaping for some sins cannot be changed or annulled. Moses served faithfully as long as he could, spending his last days preparing Israel to enter the Promised Land. But he could have no part in leading Israel in, though he pled with God to be permitted to do so.

Important Teachings

1. In times of special need, people tend to blame others (Numbers 20:1-2).
2. Unfair, unreasonable, and false accusation against the righteous creates the potential for strife and failure (Numbers 20.2-5).
3. In a crisis, we must turn to the Lord in prayer (Numbers 20:6).

4. God reveals His gracious provision even to men who are striving with Him (Numbers 20:7- 8).
5. God counts partial obedience as failure (Numbers 20:9-11).
6. We sin when we take God's glory to ourselves (Numbers 20:10, 11).
7. Unbelief is the root cause of disobedience (Numbers 20:12).
8. God punishes sin regardless of one's position or past record (Numbers 20:12, 24-28).
9. When men fail, God sanctifies Himself in them (Numbers 20:13).
10. Failure affects one's service and usefulness to God (Numbers 20:12, 24-29).

Answers to Questions

1. Why did the people strive against Moses and Aaron instead of beseeching God for help?

The people lacked faith in God, that He was working through Moses and Aaron and that He would bring them into the Promised Land. They felt that Moses and Aaron somehow manipulated God's power against them. They did not have a real relationship with God. They did not really believe that it was because of their fathers' sins that they were in the wilderness. They did not have a true fear of God.

2. What attitudes did Moses and Aaron reveal by their initial response?

This first response of Moses and Aaron demonstrated meekness, humility, and dependence upon God. They looked beyond themselves to God for direction in this crisis.

3. Under what circumstances might our responses become a test to others?

We might insinuate or even directly state that our failure is the fault of others rather than take personal responsibility where we have done wrong. Perhaps someone else fails, and we point a finger of blame at a third party whom we feel has greater faults or whom we think may have been a poor influence. We might test others by being harshly critical of one who has failed or by taking the offender's part.

4. What uncontrolled feelings led to Moses and Aaron's failure?

Moses expressed anger and frustration toward the people. Moses displayed impatience and lack of self-control. Moses failed to maintain a shepherd's heart of love for his people.

5. How did Moses dishonor God?

First, Moses failed to obey God. Second, Moses made it appear as though he were fetching them water. Third, if Moses had spoken to the rock, and God had given them water, then the people would have seen God at work

rather than Moses. God wanted the people to see past Moses to Himself, something Israel often failed to do.

6. What are some situations in which we might fail through frustration?

Perhaps someone accuses us falsely after we have done much for them. In addition, people might believe the reports they heard about us, because of some misunderstanding. We might feel that we are not appreciated or used, because people have accepted a wrong impression. Perhaps we might try to explain ourselves to others, and yet there seems to be no understanding.

7. What other sins accompanied Moses and Aaron's unbelief (Numbers 20:12)?

God declared their unbelief to have been rebellion against His Word. Without this verdict, we might suppose that Moses and Aaron merely failed to catch a detail of God's message. But no, they rebelled. They also failed to sanctify God in the eyes of the children of Israel. By acting in an unholy way, they did not show God to Israel as the holy God whom He was.

8. From this passage, what do we learn about God's punishment of sin?

God is jealous of His holiness before men. When men fail, God must punish sin to vindicate His holiness, that is, to sanctify Himself among men. God will not overlook sin because of man's position or past faithfulness.

Summarizing the Lesson

God deals with each man and with each man's failures in perfect righteousness. The sin of the children of Israel did not excuse Moses' sin. Moses' position did not excuse his sin. Yet God, in His grace, forgave Moses sin and continued to work through him, although not in the fullness of Moses' first hope.

May we sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, which will keep us from sin. Then God will not be sanctified among us by the punishment of sin.

Research Guide

Read these Scriptural comments on this event: Deuteronomy 1:37; 3:23-29; 4:21, 22; 33:8; Psalm 81:7; 106:32, 33; 1 Corinthians 10:1-6.