



## Sunday, November 28, 2021

**Lesson:** Numbers 20:1-13; **Time of Action:** 1405 B.C.; **Place of Action:** Kadesh

**Golden Text:** "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" (Numbers 20:8).

**I. INTRODUCTION.** Unless you are among the tiny minority of people who never seem to get frazzled, most likely you have times of frustration and disappointment. Sometimes our frustrations involve things that we can't control like traffic jams, bad weather, or illness. And many frustrations can be quite difficult to avoid, like those that involve our families or jobs. Of course, we may even get frustrated with ourselves. Frustrations frequently revolve around people who may be chronic complainers or simply uncommitted to serving God. But the main problem with being frustrated is that it can make us angry, causing us to say things that are unkind or do things we wouldn't normally do. When we allow anger to build up, we can lose our perspective and become bitter. The Bible has many verses that deal with the subject anger (see Psalms 37:8; Proverbs 14:17; 22:24; 29:22; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Matthew 5:22; Ephesians 4:26). This week's lesson centers on Moses' anger with the people of



Israel. He had endured almost forty years of the people and their murmurings and he finally reached his boiling point, and his resulting anger was not very pretty, but it never is.

**II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND.** At the time of this week's lesson, the Israelites were coming to the end of their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. After spending about two years at Mount Sinai (also called Mt. Horeb) after leaving Egypt, the Israelites proceeded toward Canaan. Eleven days later (see Deuteronomy 1:1-2) after leaving Mount Sinai, they arrived at Kadesh-barnea which was on the border of Canaan. Now some 38 years later, they were there once again. But during that earlier stay at Kadesh, the Israelites rebelled against both Moses and God when instead of believing the good report by Caleb and Joshua, they believed the evil report brought by ten of the twelve spies that Moses sent out to explore the land of Canaan (see Numbers 13:26-33; 14:1-10). As a result of the people's unbelief, God told them to turn around and go back into the wilderness (see Numbers 14:25; Deuteronomy 1:37-40; 2:1) where they would spend another 38 years before God allowed them to enter the Promise Land (see Numbers 33:38; Deuteronomy 1:3). After the remaining 38 years of wandering in the desert, the Israelites, once again came to Kadesh (see Numbers 20:1). Now after a total of 40 years from the time they left Egypt until arriving again at Kadesh, and the deaths of the entire generation that rebelled against God, a new generation was ready to enter Canaan, the Promised Land. They were now in the wilderness or desert



of Zin which was just north of Kadesh where God's people had once again made their camp. From Kadesh, the people would have direct entry into the land of Canaan. This is where our lesson begins.

**III. THE DEATH OF MIRIAM (Numbers 20:1).** Our first verse says **"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."** With the Israelites nearing the end of their 40 years or wandering that was decreed by the LORD (see Numbers 14:32-34), Moses wrote **"Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month."** Everyone in **"the whole congregation"** was under 60 years old (see Numbers 14:26-33) and therefore this was actually a new generation about to begin the next part of God's plan—entrance into Canaan and the conquest of the Promised Land. They arrived in **"the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh."** The **"desert"** or wilderness here was the **"desert of Zin"** which is the region that included **"Kadesh"** where the Israelites set up their camp. The reference to **"Kadesh"** does not mean that Israel arrived there for the first time, since they had years earlier sent the spies out from there (see Number 12:16; 13:16-26). It means that the people returned to **"Kadesh"** on this occasion. The fact that they arrived there **"in the first month"** might seem to indicate that these events happened at the beginning of the Israelites' journey.



However, **"in the first month"** undoubtedly refers to the **"first month"** of the fortieth year of their wanderings (see Numbers 20:22-29; 33:38). Then Moses wrote that **"Miriam died there, and was buried there."** **Note:** *Although her name is not given there, the first mention of "Miriam" in Scripture is in connection with Moses' birth. It was "Miriam" who stood by to see what would happen to baby Moses who was hidden in the bulrushes. It was also "Miriam" who suggested to Pharaoh's daughter that a Hebrew woman should be found to nurse the child for her (see Exodus 2:1-10). Along with Aaron, Moses' brother, "Miriam" played an important role in leading the people of Israel (see Micah 6:4). She is one of the few women in the Bible who are referred to as a prophetess (see Exodus 15:20; Judges 4:4; II Kings 22:14). Both "Miriam" and Aaron also challenged Moses' authority as God's chosen leader (see Numbers 12:1-15). Because of this, "Miriam" was struck with leprosy for a time, probably because she was the instigator of the criticism of Moses' position (see Number 12:10). Although "Miriam's" age is not given, she would have been somewhat older than Moses who died later that year at the age of 120 (see Deuteronomy 34:7), and Aaron who died at the age of 123 (see Numbers 33:39). In spite of the above noted incident concerning Moses, that put her in a poor light, "Miriam" was greatly respected by succeeding generations of Israel. In the New Testament the name that is the same as "Miriam" is "Mary." Because of Jesus' mother, "Mary" has been a popular name among Christians just as "Miriam" has been among Jews.*



## **IV. THE DISSATISFACTION OF THE MULTITUDE** **(Numbers 20:2-9)**

### **A. Israel's insurrection (Numbers 20:2-5).**

1. (vs. 2). This verse says **"And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron."** In spite of the fact that God had provided miraculously for Israel on numerous occasions during their forty year journey, they continued to complain. Here we are told that **"they (the people) gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron"** because **"there was no water for the congregation."** We probably should not understand the phrase **"there was no water"** to mean that there was **"no water"** at all. If that was the case, they all would have died in a matter of days (which may have been what they were afraid of). There may have been some **"water"** but not enough to satisfy their needs for cooking and bathing, with maybe only enough drinking **"water"** to barely sustain them. A similar incident occurred at the beginning of their forty year journey (see Exodus 17:1-7).

2. (vs. 3). This verse says **"And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD!"** As the long-time leaders, Moses and Aaron continued to bear the brunt of the nation's criticism. Here we are told that **"the people chode with Moses"** which means that they contended or quarreled with him. Filled with self-pity, the people spoke to **"Moses...saying, Would God that we had**



**died when our brethren died before the LORD!"** In other words, they were saying that it would have been better for them to have **"died"** like their **"brethren"** in the past that **"died before the LORD."** They were probably referring to their own mothers and fathers who **"had died"** in the wilderness from various judgments God brought upon Israel for their rebellion and disobedience (see Numbers 11:32-34; 14:36-37; 16:31-35, 47-49). **Note: How easy it was for God's people to forget how He had kept them (see Psalms 106:10-14). It's very hard to believe that anyone who was standing on the borders of Canaan would favor dying like Korah and others who rebelled against God. The people's attitude here shows that they never really trusted the LORD to provide for them or bring them into the Promised Land. It's interesting that once again God's people were complaining against Moses, who had constantly prayed for them whenever they faced God's wrath (see Exodus 32:9-14; Numbers 14:11-20; 16:20-22).**

**3. (vs. 4).** This verse says **"And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?"** In spite of the fact that God had met all of their needs for the past forty years, all that the people could do was focus on their current situation. So they continued to ask Moses, **"And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?"** We must not think that the lack of water was not real. They were in the **"wilderness"** or desert of Zin (see verse 1), a dry place where water was truly





scarce. So water being scarce meant that they had to conserve what little they had or their **"cattle"** or livestock would also die in **"the wilderness."** **Note: *The similarities between this event and the one in Exodus 17:1-7 is striking. The people didn't learn from that situation so they ended up repeating it. The lesson for us here is to realize how important it is to continually talk about the goodness and faithfulness of the LORD to the next generation. If we don't learn from our mistakes and instruct our children appropriately, they will be subject to the same weaknesses we experienced.*** Unfortunately, the people only focused on what they didn't have instead of what they had, a God who had been with them and provided for them all this time, and a servant of God who prayed for them often and God heard him. People are the same way today, including Christians. When trouble comes, too often we focus on the situation instead of the One who controls the situation. It's at those times that we really need to demonstrate our faith in a God who never fails, and wait patiently for Him to move (see Psalms 27:13-14; 40:1).

**4. (vs. 5).** This verse says **"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."** Here is proof that Israel's heart was still in **"Egypt"** for they continued to say to Moses, **"And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place?"** Although **"Egypt"** had been no friend to the Israelites holding them in bondage for over 400 years (see Exodus 12:41), the people saw the wilderness of Zin as



an **"evil place"** instead of **"Egypt."** They were right when they said **"it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink."** But that does not mean their behavior was right. The people failed to realize that the wilderness of Zin was only a stopping point for them, a temporary place they had to go through; it was never meant to be a place for them to remain in. Just to the north of where they were in Kadesh was the Promised Land, only days away. It could provide the people with the very fruits and vegetables they now longed for. If the previous generation had not been faithless, the nation could have been enjoying the bountiful land even at that moment. All they had to do was believe that God was going to bring them into the Land of Promise and before long they would be there. The fact that the Israelites' hearts were still in **"Egypt"** is a picture of the professed Christian who still loves the world (see I John 2:15-17) and turns to the world for help whenever they have a problem.

## **B. God's instructions (Numbers 20:6-9).**

**1. (vs. 6).** This verse says, **"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."** After listening to the complaints from the people, **"Moses and Aaron"** immediately left **"the presence of the assembly"** or the gathering of the Israelites, and went to **"the door of the tabernacle of the congregation"** and **"fell upon their faces"** before the LORD, most likely in prayer to get guidance from Him. Too





often when we are confronted with problems or complaints, we try to argue with the complainers or solve the problem on our own. But we must give "**Moses and Aaron**" credit because these two leaders of Israel sought the LORD during this crisis. "**Moses and Aaron**" prostrated themselves before the LORD in prayer acting as intercessors for the people, for undoubtedly they were afraid that God would bring swift judgment upon them. Of course, God heard the murmurings of the people, so it appears that before "**Moses and Aaron**" could say anything, "**the glory (or brilliance) of the LORD appeared unto them.**" God's "**glory**" is His moral beauty and perfection shown as a visible presence.

**Note:** *While God's "glory" is not a substance that we can see or feel, sometimes God does reveal His perfection to man in a visible way. Such a display of the presence of God is often seen as fire or dazzling light, but sometimes as an act of power as in the pillar of cloud and fire (see Exodus 13:21); the LORD'S deliverance of the Israelites at the Red Sea (see Exodus chapter 14); and especially His "glory" revealed in the tabernacle (see Leviticus 9:23-24), and later in the Temple (see I Kings 8:11). Since the close of the Old Testament, God's "glory" has been shown mainly in Jesus Christ (see Luke 9:29-32; John 2:11; Hebrews 1:3) and in the members of His church, for Jesus now shares His divine "glory" with His followers (see John 17:5-6, 22), so that in our lives we are being transformed into the glorious image of God (see II Corinthians 3:18). Believers will be fully glorified at the end of time in God's heavenly presence (see Romans 5:2; Colossians 3:4), and the "glory of God" will be seen everywhere (see Revelation 21:23).*



2. (vs. 7). This verse says **"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying..."** Having heard the people's complaints and murmurings, and seeing **"Moses"** and Aaron, humbly falling on their faces to seek His direction, **"the LORD spake unto Moses, saying."** God would give **"Moses"** specific instructions concerning the solution for the lack of water in the next verse.

3. (vs. 8). This verse says **"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."** Here God first instructed Moses to **"Take the rod."** This was the **"rod"** that had been used to perform miracles (see Exodus 4:17; 7:10-12, 20; 8:17; 9:23; 10:13; 14:16). Then God told Moses to **"gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes."** The LORD commanded Moses to **"speak to the rock"** right in front of the people. The **"assembly"** of Israelites was gathered to witness what God was about to do, so that by their own eyes they might be convinced and made ashamed of their unbelief. In a nearly identical incident that had occurred some forty years earlier at Rephidim, God told Moses to strike **"the rock"** and bring **"water out"** of it (see Exodus 17:6). But here, God said **"speak to the rock...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."** The LORD made it clear that when Moses spoke to **"the rock"** it would



provide enough **"water"** for the people and **"their beasts"** or livestock.

**4. (vs. 9).** This verse says **"And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him."** Having received God's instructions, **"Moses"** obeyed and **"took the rod from before the LORD."** The fact that **"Moses"** had to take **"the rod from before the LORD"** indicates that **"the rod"** was normally kept near the Ark of the Covenant and was used only when necessary (see Numbers 17:10). So far, **"Moses"** obeyed as God **"commanded him,"** but unfortunately, that was about to change.

## **V. THE DISCIPLINING OF MOSES (Numbers 20:10-13)**

### **A. Moses' indignation (Numbers 20:10-11).**

**1. (vs. 10).** This verse says **"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?"** Following the LORD's command, **"Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock."** Clearly upset with the people of Israel, **"Moses"** addressed them as **"rebels"** which they were. Even up to this point, the nation had been guilty of several instances of blatant rebellion (see Numbers 12:1-2; 14:1-4; 16:1-3). With **"Aaron"** by his side, **"Moses,"** frustrated and angry said to the people **"Hear**



**now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?"** Although "**Moses**" was correct in his criticism of the people, he made two specific blunders. His first mistake was implying that he and "**Aaron**" had the power to provide "**water**" from the "**rock**" when he asked "**must we fetch you water out of this rock?**" His use of the pronoun "**we**" indicates that he and "**Aaron**" were taking credit for producing the "**water**" from "**this rock.**" After years of constant service to God and the people and demonstrating unparalleled patience, "**Moses**" failed at his strongest characteristic—meekness (see Numbers 12:3). He spoke in anger and appeared to usurp the work of God. Because he was so frustrated and angry with God's people, "**Moses**" failed to give God the glory for the miracle He was about to perform. **Note: *As Christians, there are times when we may become frustrated with fellow believers. We may be tempted to vent our anger in various ways. But doing so is not helpful in promoting unity among God's people. We should take the advice of James seriously: "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" (see James 1:19-20).***

2. (vs. 11). This verse says "**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.**" Here we see "**Moses**" second mistake. He "**lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice.**" God commanded "**Moses**" to "*speak to the rock*" (see verse 8), but instead he hit it



**"twice"** or two times. That he **"smote the rock twice"** seems to indicate that **"Moses"** was so angry that he didn't wait at all for **"the water"** to come out after the first strike. There is also the possibility that he **"smote the rock twice"** because the first time he hit it, no **"water"** came from it immediately, so he hit it again. When **"Moses"** hit **"the rock"** the second time, **"the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also."** Even though **"Moses"** disobeyed God by striking **"the rock,"** the LORD still allowed the **"water"** to gush out **"abundantly."** It was so much that the entire **"congregation"** of Israel had plenty to drink as well as **"their beasts"** or livestock. **Note: *This was truly a demonstration of God's grace and mercy, for He provided for His people even though they had provoked Him many times (see Numbers 14:22). The truth is that God keeps His promises based on who He is and not who we are or what we've done. We should be grateful that even the sins we commit and our times of disobedience cannot prevent our God from showing grace and mercy whenever He wants to and to whomever He wants to (see Exodus 33:19; Romans 9:15). We must not forget that this was a new generation of Israelites. Thirty-eight years had passed since God declared that because the people listened to the evil report from the ten spies, everyone twenty years old and older would not enter the Promised Land and by this time most of them had died in the wilderness. But even though this was basically a new generation, they were as bad as those that went before them. Murmuring and complaining seemed to run in***



*their blood; yet God's divine favor was not hindered. Instead, in this instance God's divine patience was demonstrated as brightly as His divine power.*

## **B. Moses' indiscretion (Numbers 20:12-13).**

1. (vs. 12). This verse says **"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."** Although it was **"Moses"** who actually disobeyed God and struck the rock, **"Aaron"** was also at fault. Therefore **"the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron."** God directed His words of judgment to both **"Moses and Aaron,"** since **"Aaron"** had accompanied **"Moses"** (see verses 8, 10). As a result, **"Aaron"** was implicated in the rashness of his brother's action. Then God said to both men, **"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."** God rebuked **"Moses and Aaron"** as He said, **"Because ye believed me not."** This does not mean that they doubted God's power, but that they failed to obey and trust in Him completely and fully on this occasion. Some may say that **"Moses"** was not completely disobedient to **"the LORD"** since he and **"Aaron"** did everything else they were commanded to do on this occasion. But that's not the point. The point is that even partial obedience is still disobedience and God will deal with it. Moses had been a great, faithful leader for a long time, but God demanded complete obedience, not partial





obedience. **Note:** *It's true that difficulties will bring the best and the worst out of people. God's judgment of "Moses" may seem harsh to us. After all those years of putting up with Israel's complaining, murmuring and rebellion, one would think that "Moses" was entitled to at least one emotional outburst at all the complaining people. But for those who feel that way, they are missing the point. As God told "Moses," the issue was belief. He had failed to believe what God said (see verses 7-8). This instance helps us put belief and unbelief in the proper context.* By failing to trust God and allow Him to receive the glory for the miracle from the rock, God said that "**Moses**" failed to "**sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel.**" To "**sanctify**" God means to demonstrate His holiness or purity. In other words, "**Moses and Aaron**" had turned the people's attention away from God and focused it on themselves. In essence, they did not give God the glory for this miracle which was due Him. As a result of "**Moses and Aaron**" failing to "**sanctify**" God before the people by their disobedience, there would be consequences. God pronounced the same judgment on both men. He said "**therefore (or because of your distrust) ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.**" In other words, like those who had already died and would not enter the Promised Land, neither would "**Moses and Aaron.**" This simple act of disobedience by "**Moses and Aaron**" took away from the glory God should have received on this occasion. They acted and sounded like they were the ones producing the water for Israel when in fact it was God's doing, and He will not give His glory to another (see Isaiah 42:8). If they had acted correctly, God



would have been seen as sanctified or set apart from all false gods as well as from man, His creation. **Note: Since God is a "jealous God" (see Exodus 20:5), He will have no rivals. Not even His appointed deliverer and lawgiver, "Moses," or the first high priest of Israel, "Aaron" would be permitted to take away from the glory of the LORD by failing to "sanctify" Him among the people. Throughout history there have been many examples of well-intentioned religious leaders who have allowed power and popularity to go to their heads and then experienced great falls. As the apostle Paul said, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (see I Corinthians 10:12).**

2. (vs. 13). Our final verse says **"This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them."** This place where **"water"** came from the rock after Moses struck it twice became known as **"Meribah"** which means *"a place of strife or quarreling."* Here the water that came from the rock is called **"the water of Meribah"** or *"the water of strife."* This place was called **"Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them."** The phrase **"he was sanctified in them"** means that God showed the people that He was holy. Moses and Aaron publicly disrespected God and He publicly pronounced their punishment right before the people proving that He was holy. Later, when Moses recounted the forty year wanderings, he referred to this place as *"MeribahKadesh, in the wilderness of Zin"* (see Deuteronomy 32:51). This was because on this occasion, the people were



camped in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin (see verse 1) where the rock was located and where the people “**strove**” or contended with the LORD. **Note:** *This place was called the “water of strife” in remembrance of the people’s and Moses’ sin, and especially of God’s mercy, for He supplied them with water, and pronounced judgment on Moses and Aaron. Therefore, God was “sanctified” or set apart from anyone or anything that attempted to stand in His place. Moses and Aaron did not sanctify God as they should have in the eyes of Israel, but God was “sanctified” in them by His judgment; for He will not allow His honor to take second place to any man or anything. If God is not glorified by us, certainly He will be glorified through us when He deals with our disobedience.*

**VI. Conclusion.** Moses’ actions in the wilderness in this week’s lesson should remind us of what can happen when we give in to our anger. Yes, Moses acting in anger produced water for the people, but it failed to demonstrate God’s holiness. Here is a lesson for those who are prone to unleashing anger. Stop and listen to what God is saying (trust me, He will be speaking to you), yield to Him, and step out into His plan. When God gives us a directive, we need to take it seriously and follow it. As His chosen vessels, we are obligated to follow the LORD’s instructions and therefore bring glory to Him. Remember, partial obedience is still disobedience.



Sunday, November 28, 2021: "Water From the Rock" Commentary  
(The UGP Curriculum)

**\*\*\*The Sunday School Lesson; The Union Gospel Press Curriculum, The Bible Expositor and Illuminator\*\*\***