

### Moses Strikes the Rock Again; Edom Refuses to Help Israel

#### Numbers 20

**Numbers 20** - *"Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there.*

<sup>2</sup> *Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. <sup>3</sup> And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! <sup>4</sup> Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? <sup>5</sup> And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink." <sup>6</sup> 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. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them.*

<sup>7</sup> *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>8</sup> "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." <sup>9</sup> So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him.*

<sup>10</sup> *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?" <sup>11</sup> Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.*

<sup>12</sup> *Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "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."*

<sup>13</sup> *This was the water of Meribah, because the children of Israel contended with the LORD, and He was hallowed among them.*

<sup>14</sup> *Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. "Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us, <sup>15</sup> how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. <sup>16</sup> When we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. <sup>17</sup> Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory.'"*

<sup>18</sup> *Then Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through my land, lest I come out against you with the sword."*

<sup>19</sup> *So the children of Israel said to him, "We will go by the Highway, and if I or my livestock drink any of your water, then I will pay for it; let me only pass through on foot, nothing more."*

<sup>20</sup> *Then he said, "You shall not pass through." So Edom came out against them with many men and with a strong hand. <sup>21</sup> Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory; so Israel turned away from him.*

<sup>22</sup> *Now the children of Israel, the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor. <sup>23</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying: <sup>24</sup> "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. <sup>25</sup> Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor; <sup>26</sup> and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; for Aaron shall be gathered to his people and die there.” <sup>27</sup> So Moses did just as the LORD commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. <sup>28</sup> Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. <sup>29</sup> Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.”

## Background Notes

Numbers 20, a sad chapter, includes the deaths of Miriam and Aaron, the failure of Moses, and the refusal of Edom to help the children of Israel. There is a gap of about 38 years between Numbers 19 and 20. During all those years the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness because of their sins, primarily the sin of unbelief about the good Land that God had promised them.

The Israelites were camped at Kadesh – where they were camped 38 years previously, when the 12 men were sent out to spy out the land of Canaan (v1). They didn't advance very far, in spite of all their wanderings - just from Kadesh to Kadesh! And we won't get very far in our Christian walk if we commit the same “sins of the wilderness” that Israel committed – complaining, criticizing, compromising, and showing contempt. So the events of Numbers 20 take place 38 years after the spies went out, and forty years after the Exodus from Egypt. The older unbelieving generation that refused to enter the land of Canaan had largely died off by this time, and a new generation is about to enter the Land of Promise.

Verse 1 records the death of Miriam, the older sister of Moses and Aaron. Miriam was gifted as a prophetess and also as a musician (Exodus 15). Miriam criticized Moses back in Numbers 12, and her discipline involved contracting the disease of leprosy. However, her sin is not mentioned here, only her death. Miriam was buried in the wilderness.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The discipline of Moses was for his irreverence.

Verse 12: “Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, “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.”

Do you think God's discipline of Moses was too harsh? After all, Moses had been a faithful leader for forty years, and the ungrateful people of Israel were complaining again because there was no water - even saying they wished they were dead! Didn't Moses have a right to be uptight? Didn't he have the right to lash out against these people?

The answer is No! Moses represented God before the people, and he failed to do what God specifically told Him to do. God told Moses to **speak** to the rock, and water would flow. Instead, Aaron and Moses said to the people, “*Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?*” Then Moses **struck** the rock - in anger! In His grace, God

allowed water to flow from the rock, but Moses was disciplined for his irreverence and disobedience. Moses lost the privilege of leading Israel into the Promised Land – in fact, he was not even allowed to enter the Land himself.

Moses' irreverence was very significant, because in his disobedience he “broke the *type*.” He spoiled the spiritual picture that God intended from the event of the rock providing the life-giving water. 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 tells us that the “rock” here in Numbers (as well as the “rock” back in Exodus 17) is a *type*, a spiritual picture of Christ, the true Rock. *“...all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”*

So what's the Scripture saying here? The rock in Numbers and Exodus was a real rock, but it was “spiritual” in that it was a picture, or foreshadowing, of Christ, the Rock of our salvation. In Exodus 17, Moses was told to **strike** the rock, and water would flow as a result. When Moses took his rod (that had been used for judgment on Egypt) and struck the rock, it produced life-giving water. Certainly this is a picture of Jesus Christ on the cross, when God's “rod of judgment” came down on Christ, in judgment for our sin. As a result, the life-giving water of the Holy Spirit has been given to believers.

How many times did God's rod of judgment have to come down on Christ for the penalty of our sin to be paid? Answer: **ONCE!** Hebrews 9:28 - *“so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many....”* So when Moses struck the rock again in Numbers 20, he spoiled the beautiful spiritual picture that God intended. On this occasion, Moses was told only to **speak** to the rock, **not to strike** the rock a second time! The work of Christ on the cross for sin was accomplished **once** - and it is now finished! The water of life is now freely offered to anyone who will believe.

The discipline of Moses was for his irreverence.

## 2. The death of Aaron was for his rebellion.

*“So Moses did just as the LORD commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation... and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days” (v28-29).*

Aaron was 123 years old when he died (Numbers 33:38-39). The exact location of Mount Hor is not known, but it was not far from Kadesh, and not far from the border with Edom.

God saw the sin of Moses and Aaron not only as irreverence, but also as **rebellion**: *“Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land... because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah”(v24).*

Disobeying the Lord in any way is, in essence, rebellion against the Lord. Even though their frustration seems justified, as the people were complaining again about having no water, God saw Moses and Aaron's disobedience as **rebellion**. This

is especially true when leaders, who are God's representatives, disobey God. Both Moses and Aaron were removed from their leadership positions because of their failure. Aaron died because of his rebellion, and his son Eleazar replaced "*Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*" 2 Timothy 2:22 tells us to flee the flesh - the strong desires or lusts of the sinful nature. We are not to fight the flesh - we are to **flee** the flesh!

## Practical Application

### Let's flee the flesh!

1 Corinthians 10:11 says, "*all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition...*" This spiritual picture, or example, is shown in verses 14-20, the account of Israel turning away and bypassing Edom.

The nation of Edom was descended from Esau, a man who loved "fleshly" things.. Hebrews 12:16 warns us not to be "*an immoral person like Esau,*" who sold his birthright for a morsel of food. So Esau and Edom emerge in Scripture as a spiritual picture of the flesh, in its lusts and its activities

In Numbers 20, Edom refused Israel's request to pass through Edom peacefully on their way to the Promised Land. Israel could have fought Edom for the right to pass through its land, but God planned for Israel to go around Edom, not fight Edom. So "*Israel turned away.*"

This account forms part of a spiritual picture of the Christian life and walk. 2 Timothy 2:22 tells us to flee the flesh - the strong desires or lusts of the sinful nature. We are not to fight the flesh - we are to **flee** the flesh! "*Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*"

So our practical application from this event in Israel's travels is: **Don't try to fight the flesh - flee those strong desires of the flesh!** Let's flee the flesh!