

## Lake of Trust

Numbers 20:2-13

### FIRST THOUGHTS

Most Christians would say they trust God for salvation, while admitting that it's harder to trust Him in other situations. They find it more comfortable to follow their own wisdom than to seek His guidance. Yet, God calls His people to trust Him in every situation. We will be with Him in eternity, but He also desires us to trust Him here on earth.

### UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

The Lord gave Moses instructions about various offerings (15:1-31). God's people were to prepare the offerings as He commanded and worship Him as He prescribed. God provided certain kinds of offerings for those who sinned unintentionally, but He warned them about the consequences of defiant sin (15:30-31).

Three men from the tribe of Levi—Korah, Dathan, and Abiram—questioned why Aaron's sons alone should be priests (16:1-3). Moses told the rebels that they could see God confirm His choice of Aaron's sons the next day, but Dathan and Abiram refused to come (16:4-14). The Lord brought judgment on their households for their rebellion (16:25-35).

#### KEY DOCTRINE *God the Father*

God is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. (See Psalm 146:5-10; Isaiah 41:10.)

The Lord also provided significant details about provisions for the priesthood (18:1-32). The priests and Levites were to ensure God's sanctuary remained holy (18:1-7).

When God's people reached the Wilderness of Zin, the people complained again over the lack of provisions (20:1-5). The Lord instructed Moses to speak to a rock that would yield water

(20:7-8). In his anger, Moses struck the rock, failing to treat God and His commands as holy (20:9-11). As a result, God told Moses and Aaron that they would not enter the promised land (20:12-13). As the people traveled, the country of Edom would not let them pass through its territory, so Israel chose another route (20:14-21). In the course of their journey, Aaron died (20:22-29).

### THE PROBLEM (NUMBERS 20:2-5)

The term **community** occurs four times in today's passage (including twice in v. 8). In this case, the people had a common goal. Verse 2 suggests a delegation appointed to raise concerns with Moses and Aaron. The primary issue was a lack of **water**. This was not the first time that water had been in short supply (Ex. 17:1-7). Yet, God's previous provision did not move the needle for the Israelites in this setting. Instead of trusting Him to do what He had done already, they grumbled and **assembled against** Moses and Aaron. They presented a unified (and dangerous) front.

The verb **quarreled** is related to the word "Meribah" in verse 13. In other contexts, it carries a sense of pleading or contending over a moral issue. In verse 3, though, it denotes a contentious dispute, as the people verbally assaulted Moses and Aaron over their hardship. In reality, they were quarreling with God! They let their current challenging circumstances override their confidence in His promises.

The people's lack of spiritual focus also led them to revise history. The crowd reflected on their time in Egypt as the "good old days" in comparison to following God's direction into **this wilderness**. They equated the exodus with a divine death march, where all the people and **livestock** would perish. Along with their families, the Israelites had brought a great number of animals with them from Egypt (Ex. 12:38).

The people's angry exclamation that the wilderness was not overflowing with **grain, figs, vines, and pomegranates** verbalized their disappointment that they weren't living in the promised land. The Lord had told them their new home was a land of plenty, and the scouts had brought produce to prove it (Num. 13:23). Because of their sin, though, the people were not experiencing that abundance.

### THE PLAN (NUMBERS 20:6-8)

When Moses and Aaron went from the complaining **assembly** to the tent's **doorway**, they symbolically were bringing their concerns before the Lord. They demonstrated proper reverence and honor by falling **facedown**. This was (and continues to be) an appropriate act of worship and humility when seeking God.

In general, the tabernacle was viewed as God's dwelling place among His people. The appearance of God here also indicated that He was about to take action. The term **glory** basically relates to the concept of weightiness or heaviness. People today often speak of an important matter as being "weighty," and the Hebrew word has the same range of meaning.

Not only did God appear at the tent, but He also **spoke to Moses**. It is reasonable to believe that everyone who was present heard the voice along with Moses. This would have further affirmed Moses as God's prophet and His chosen leader for Israel. God's message related to the **staff** (or "rod") that Moses carried. The Bible often refers to Moses as carrying and using a staff. This would have been a long, heavy stick someone could use for support or protection.

The term translated **rock** denotes a rugged mountain or large rock formation. English often uses the terms "rocks" and "stones" interchangeably, but Hebrew does not. A large rock formation loomed near the people, where all could see it. God commanded Moses to **speak to the rock** that it might provide water for the people and their livestock.

### THE RESULT (NUMBERS 20:9-13)

Moses took the staff and **summoned the assembly**, just as God had **commanded** him. Unfortunately, his obedience was short-lived. Despite his submission to God in the past, Moses let his emotions get the better of him. Instead of speaking to the rock, he spoke to the people, pouring out his frustrations in a way that focused more on his exasperation than on God's provision.

As in English, the Hebrew word for **rebels** denotes individuals with a consciously defiant attitude. The Israelites were rebelling against God when they failed to trust Him to provide their needs and to lead them to the promised land. Moses's first faulty step involved claiming the power to produce **water out of this rock** on his own. In doing so, he usurped God's role without God's power or authority. Instead of speaking to it, Moses actually hit the rock **twice**. The Hebrew wording signifies a strong blow.

God wanted Moses to speak to the rock so Israel would see Him as Provider. Despite Moses's disobedience, water still **gushed** from the rock. Because of His grace, the people received God's provision. But God was displeased with Moses's failure. As noted, he had called attention to himself as the source of the water, not God.

God said Moses and Aaron failed to **demonstrate my holiness** in a way the people could see and understand. God expects His people to reflect His holiness and to display it before the world (Lev. 19:2). When Moses struck the rock, he was not allowing God to demonstrate His holiness to those who needed to see it and remember it.

• **Meribah** literally means "striving" or "contending" and is related to the word translated **quarreled** in this verse. God provided the people with the water they needed, but at a great price. And when Moses and Aaron failed to obey God's command, He closed their door to the promised land.

**Next Week –God's Plan, Numbers 22:22-35**

