

October 5, 2025 Session 5
Lack of Trust Numbers 20:2-13

Intro: Let's try this again. The Israelites were in the Wilderness of Zin forty years earlier. All aged twenty and above died during those four decades. One would think that after forty years there would be an improvement, but the people still complained and even said the same things. As the nation of Israel continued to travel toward the promised land, time and time again they were called on to trust God. Unfortunately, they often chose not to trust God and the consequences were usually severe.

The Problem (Numbers 20:2-5) p. 48

Chapter 20 begins with the death of Mariam and closes with the death of Aaron. In between is detailed Moses and Aaron's disobedience to God as to how He commanded that He would provide water for the Israelites. The years of wandering in the wilderness brought about by the disobedience of the nation of Israel were ending. Moses once again assembled the Nation on the southern edge of the land of Canaan. As before, they were camped at Kadesh, the site from which the twelve spies had been sent to explore the promised land. Their return to Kadesh points to the wasted time and lives of an entire generation lost because of their unbelief and refusal to obey God. The first encampment at Kadash, forty years ago, had no shortage of water. This time, however, things were different. Several possibilities have been proposed as to why the Israelites found no water: drought, the large population used up the water, or they were not in the exact spot they were before. The new generation of the children of Israel were following closely in their parents' footsteps. The entire incident recalls the earlier episode at Rephidim when God commanded Moses to strike a rock to produce water. Moses called the earlier incident "Massah [testing]" and the next incident "Meribah [quarreling]" because of the arguing of the people. Because of the scarcity of water, the people quarreled with Moses. The people were so distraught, they expressed a preference to have died in the wilderness. How many times have the people said that? Their thinking may have been that anything would have been better than slowly dying of thirst.

Vs. 4 The terminology the Israelites used, "the LORD'S assembly, repeats the phrase Korah and his followers used when they staged their rebellion against God's choice to lead them, Moses. **Numbers 16:3** *"They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, 'You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the*

LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?” Moses presented a test to prove his authority given to him by God, to lead the Israelites. *“And Moses said: ‘By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. If these men [Korah and his followers] die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. (vs. 28-29)* If Moses was not sent by God, the rebellious men would die horribly. *“But if the LORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD.” (vs. 30)*

Vs. 5 Moses was accused of guiding the nation into an evil place. Although not many of this new generation of the Israelites would have remembered life in the land of Egypt. The Israelites could have been in the land “flowing with milk and honey” had it not been for the previous generation’s rebellion against God. Now with their words, this present generation exhibited that same attitude of unbelief and rebellion against God.

The Plan (Numbers 20:6-8) p. 49-50

It is interesting that no record exists of the actions of the Israelites during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness due to the sin of rejecting God’s command to enter the promised land. A new generation now confronts Moses and Aaron. Like their ancestors before them, they doubted God’s provision for their needs. They were at a cross road and having to make the same decision: to follow God or not. I have never prayed facedown, but this was a common position for intercessory prayer. Moses and Aaron did this when the Israelites refused to enter Canaan. They fell facedown when God threatened to destroy His people after Korah’s rebellion. Jesus fell on His face and prayed. **Matthew 26:39** *“He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘Oh My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’”* It is good to remember how our Lord suffered and died for our sins. Moses and Aaron interceded before God most likely because they were frightened for the people. After all, the people once again were rebelling against God. Moses and Aaron over the years witnessed firsthand the consequences of such rebellion. The appearance of the glory of the Lord at Kadesh during this controversy mirrors the appearance of the glory of the Lord at Kadesh during the first visit to that oasis when the Israelites refused to enter the promised land. This was no coincidence. This manifestation of God’s glory gave weight to the instructions that God delivered to Moses.

Vs. 7 This was a new generation of adults confronting Moses and Aaron. However, just like their parents, they doubted God's provision for their needs. Such unbelief certainly deserved God's wrath. Instead, God chose to deal with them in mercy and grace. He would provide water for the Israelites and their animals. God would demonstrate to this new generation not only His power, but also His mercy and grace. "The LORD spoke to Moses." Did you contemplate the voice of God: the voice at the burning bush, the voice of creation, the voice at Jesus's baptism, the voice in the tent of meetings? I think of the Bible where God speaks to me the most. God told Moses to do three things: assemble the community, take the staff with him to meet the people, and **speak to the rock while they watch**. Most of the people were not around the last time water came from a rock. Why do you think God asked Moses and Aaron to speak to the rock instead of hitting it with the staff like Moses did the last time God caused water to come out of a rock? _____

The Result (Numbers 20:9-13) p. 51

God wanted Moses and Aaron to speak to the rock to bring forth water which would identify them as God's agents in providing for the needs of the people. It would perhaps eliminate the people's constant rebellion against the leaders that God chose. There is always a reason for the directions God gives.

Vs. 10 With this verse, everything suddenly changed. Instead of speaking to the rock as God had instructed him to do, Moses angrily confronted the people. One can almost hear the exasperation in Moses's words. An entire shift in attitude took place by Moses from one who pleaded before God on behalf of the people to one who was consumed by anger against the people. Moses lost sight of the fact that he was not the miracle worker but the instrument that God would use. By claiming that he and Aaron would produce water from the rock, "*Must we [Moses and Aaron] bring water out of this rock for you?*" Moses was stealing the glory away from God.

James 1:17 "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*" All goodness comes from God, and He alone should be praised.

Vs. 11 God was mercifully preparing to furnish the people with the water they so desperately desired. Instead of speaking and acting with the same kind of grace and mercy with which God was acting, Moses reacted with anger and a physical manifestation of that anger: he struck the rock twice with his staff. That was the way God brought water out of a rock before in

Rephidim, but it was not God's plan in this instance. After Moses struck the rock, water did come out of the rock face. Through this miracle God graciously provided abundant water for the people. The disobedience of Moses and Aaron did not stop God from being merciful to the people. He dealt with the people as He had planned.

Vs. 12 While Moses was the one who struck the rock, Aaron was implicated as being complicit in this disobedience. God held both of them guilty because of this action. As a result, God's judgment came on both by forbidding either of them from entering the promised land. **Vs. 24** *"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."* **27:13** *"And when you [Moses] have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people [ancestors], as Aaron your brother was gathered."*

Vs. 13 The phrase "water of Meribah" echoes the earlier incident at Rephidim (Exodus 17:6). There God contended against the people. Here, however, God also contended against His disobedient leaders Moses and Aaron. The test indicates that through this incident, God demonstrated His holiness by providing water to the people. He also demonstrated His holiness by the consequences for Moses and Aaron's disobedience—bringing severe punishment on His chosen leaders of His people.

Leadership requires responsibility and will receive a stricter judgment if they are irresponsible. **James 3:1** *"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."* This verse may focus on teachers, but anyone who is in a leadership position and does not obey God is at risk for God's judgment.