

The Book of Numbers

The Waters of Strife

Text: Numbers 20:1-13

- I. The Death of Miriam (Numbers 20:1)
- II. The Complaining of Israel (Numbers 20:2-5)
 - A. The children of Israel gathered against Moses and Aaron because there was no water for the congregation.
 1. This is similar to the actions of the people at Marah and at Rephidim (Exodus 15:23-27; 17:1-7).
 2. On both occasions, God proved Himself to the children of Israel, sought to strengthen their faith, and provided them with water.
 3. He sought to do the same here.
 - B. They felt it would have been better to have died with those who had been punished by God rather than to die of thirst.
 - C. They placed the blame upon Moses and Aaron, even claiming that God had led them to an evil place.
 - D. As this passage is studied, it must be remembered that this is a new generation of Israelites.
- III. The Instructions of God (Numbers 20:6-8)
 - A. Moses and Aaron left the people, went to the door of the Tabernacle, and fell upon their faces before God.
 - B. God's instructions to Moses and Aaron were clear:
 1. Take the rod.
 2. Gather the congregation together.
 3. Speak to the rock before their eyes.
 - C. If they obeyed these instructions, God – through them – would provide water for the people and their animals.
- IV. The Transgression of Moses (Numbers 20:9-13)
 - A. Moses obeyed God's instructions almost completely:
 1. He took the rod.
 2. He gathered the congregation.
 3. However, he struck the rock instead of speaking to it.
 - B. Due to His grace and mercy, God provided water for the people in spite of Moses' error.
 - C. However, He declared that Moses and Aaron would not be allowed to enter into the Promised Land due to this transgression.
 - D. Thus, this place became known as the water of Meribah – meaning, the water of strife.

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- E. A closer look at the transgression of Moses:
1. It is true that Moses sinned by striking the rock instead of speaking to it.
 2. However, God declared that Moses' sin was two-fold:
 - a. First, he did not believe God – meaning that he did not take Him at His word and obey His command.
 - b. Next, he did not sanctify God in the eyes of the people.
 3. To sanctify God is to set Him apart, to hold Him up as holy – thus, to reveal the truth about Him.
 4. God wanted Moses to speak to the rock before the eyes of the people (vs. 8) so they could see and learn the power, authority, holiness, and faithfulness of God.
 5. Instead, Moses became angry and transgressed God's will (Psa. 106:32-33).
 6. Furthermore, he “spake unadvisedly with his lips” – meaning, that he spoke rashly out of his anger.
 7. Note that Moses said, “Must we fetch you water out of this rock?”
 8. In his anger, he failed to give glory to God.
 9. In his disobedience, he failed to sanctify God.
- F. There is another important lesson to be learned from this incident:
1. Remember that this was a new generation of Israelites – the first had died in the wilderness in the last 40 years, save a few.
 2. For Moses, this struggle against rebellion had be going for many years.
 3. To him, the complaining of these Israelites was just another in a long string of rebellious acts.
 4. But to God, this was the first transgression of a new generation.
 5. Just as with the previous generation, God would not destroy them immediately – demonstrating great longsuffering toward them.
 6. He was patient with their sin; but, Moses had run out of patience.
 7. In fact, this generation seems to have a different heart than that of their parents (cf. 21:7).
 8. This reminds us that God's mercy and compassion are “new every morning” (Lam. 3:22-23).