

Deaths of Miriam & Aaron; Water of Meribah; Edomites Defeated

Numbers 20

Group ¹	C	V	Description
Death of Miriam	20	1	The Israelites camp in the wilderness of Zin, where Miriam dies
The Water of Meribah		2-8	The people complain about not having water and God instructs Moses to speak to the rock and water would come from it
		9-13	Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it. Moses is reprimanded by God for not doing as He instructed, Moses would not enter the promised land. Meribah = contention
		14-17	Moses sends messengers to the king of Edom asking for passage through his land, promising not the pillage as the passed through.
		18-21	Edom refuses and decides to fight instead and was defeated.
Death of Aaron		22-29	Israelites travel to Mt Hor where Aaron dies and Eleazar is made high priest in his place. The group mourned for 30 days.

Reflections

In this chapter we have the deaths of Miriam and Aaron, Moses sister and brother, recorded and the appointment of Eleazar, Aaron's son, as high priest. We also have another instance when the people complained about the conditions under which they were living, in particular, the lack of water. We also find the refusal of the Edomites to allow the passage of the Israelites through their land resulting in the military victory by the Israelites.

The incident of the complaint about the water is of importance because what Moses did resulted in his being excluded from entering the promised land. He was told to speak to the rock but instead, seemingly prompted by frustration, struck the rock twice with his rod. Why might he have done this? The answer is found in a previous complaint by the people about water in Exodus 17.

Exodus 17:1-7 NASB Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. **2** Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" **3** But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" **4** So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." **5** Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. **6** Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. **7** He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?"

It could be that the majority of the previous generation had died by the time of the event in Numbers who had witnessed the event just a few days after the exodus from Egypt and they hadn't been reminded of God providing for the people during their travels. If that were the case, it would be natural for them to complain about not having any water. They either didn't remember or didn't know

¹ (NASB) "Group" column from the headings in the NASB text.

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about the previous blessing of God on the people. That could be too why Moses was so frustrated with the people. It is interesting that God still provided water even though Moses didn't do as he was instructed.

The other aspect of Moses striking the rock was that he didn't give God the credit for the miracle. What does he say to the people, "...shall we bring forth water..." In essence, he and Aaron were taking credit for the production of water instead of giving God the credit and the glory He deserved. This resulted in Moses not being able to enter the promised land.

We find out more about Moses being excluded from the promised land in Deuteronomy 32.

Deuteronomy 32:48-52 NASB The LORD spoke to Moses that very same day, saying, **49** "Go up to this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab opposite Jericho, and look at the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the sons of Israel for a possession. **50** Then die on the mountain where you ascend, and be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people, **51** because you broke faith with Me in the midst of the sons of Israel at the waters of Meribah-kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin, because you did not treat Me as holy in the midst of the sons of Israel. **52** For you shall see the land at a distance, but you shall not go there, into the land which I am giving the sons of Israel."

What a sad situation for Moses at the end of his life. To look upon the land promised by some 400+ years previously to Abraham and yet being unable to enter into it. We would do well to learn from this instance in Moses' life.

The result of each of the instances of complaints about water was that the places received a name with a meaning. Consider the following.

- *Exodus 17*: "Massah" meaning testing, because they tested God; "Meribah" and quarrel or contention, because the Israelites quarreled with Moses and God.
- *Numbers 20*: "waters of Meribah" meaning quarrel or contention, because of the contention with the Lord.

What is the lesson to be learned from this? When faced with a difficult situation, consider how God has provided for His people in similar situations or in your own life. God might choose to do it a different way but He will provide and we need to give Him the glory and honor He deserves when it happens.

There and Then: Here and Now

Answer the questions below as you reflect on your own life and this part of our study²: *my LOG vs others SPECK*. Here are some possible responses I've identified from the text that might apply to anyone.

S - Are there *sins* for me to avoid or confess?

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P - Are there *promises* from God for me to claim?

•

E - Are there *examples* for me to follow or avoid?

•

C - Are there *commands* for me to obey?

•

K - How has this passage increased my *knowledge* about God / Jesus / Holy Spirit?

2 *Navigator Bible Study Handbook* (The Navigators), with additions & Matthew 7:1-5.

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