

# Numbers 20 Commentary

PREVIOUS [Numbers: Journey to God's Rest-Land by Irving Jensen- used by permission](#)

NEXT

Source: Ryrie Study Bible

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS "Wilderness Wandering"								
WALKING Numbers 1-12			WANDERING Numbers 13-25			WAITING Numbers 26-36		
Counting & Camping Nu 1-4	Cleansing & Congregation Nu 5-8	Carping & Complaining Nu 9-12	12 Spies & Death in Desert Nu 13-16	<a href="#">Aaron</a> & Levites in Wilderness Nu 17-18	Serpent of Brass & Story of Balaam Nu 21-25	Second Census 7 Laws of Israel Nu 26-30	Last Days of Moses as Leader Nu 31-33	Sections, Sanctuaries & Settlements Nu 34-36
Law & Order			Rebellion & Disorder			New Laws for the New Order		
Old Generation			Tragic Transition			New Generation		
Preparation for the Journey: Moving Out			Participation in the Journey: Moving On			Prize at end of the Journey: Moving In		
At Sinai <a href="#">Mt Sinai</a>			To <a href="#">Moab</a> <a href="#">Mt Hor</a>			At <a href="#">Moab</a> <a href="#">Mt Nebo</a>		
En Route to <a href="#">Kadesh</a> (Mt Sinai)			En Route to Nowhere ( <a href="#">Wilderness</a> )			En Route to <a href="#">Canaan</a> (Plains of Moab)		
A Few Weeks to 2 Months			38 years, 3 months, 10 days			A Few Months		
Christ in Numbers = Our "Lifted-up One" (Nu 21:9, cp Jn 3:14-15)								
Author: <a href="#">Moses</a>								

**Numbers 20:1** Then the sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came to the wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people stayed at Kadesh. Now Miriam died there and was buried there.

- **Then:** This was the first month of the fortieth year after the departure from Egypt. (Compare Nu 33:38, with Nu 20:28 and Dt 1:3.) This year was the last of their journeyings, for from the going out of the spies (Nu 13:1-33) unto this time, was about thirty-eight years. Dt 1:22,23 2:14
- **into:** Nu 13:21 27:14 33:36 De 32:51
- **Kadesh:** Nu 20:16 Ps 29:8
- **Miriam:** Nu 12:1,10,15 26:59 Ex 2:4,7 15:20 Mic 6:4

See [Green Line](#) for Final Leg of the Exodus Eventually to the Plains of Moab

[Irving Jensen](#) helps set the context - Almost forty years of wilderness wanderings had now been experienced. In the first month of the fortieth year from the commencement of the wanderings—the exodus from Egypt—the people returned to the wilderness of Zin, the region around Kadesh (as to the time, see Nu 14:32ff.; Nu 20:1 and Nu 33:38). The time for a new start had arrived. **The old generation under judgment had passed away; the new was ready to march.** This section of Numbers recording the events from **Kadesh to Moab** (Nu 20:1–22:1), reflects a changed situation and reveals all the anticipations of actual conquest of the promised land of Canaan. Numbers 20 gives the first specifics of the retiring of the aged but faithful leaders, while Numbers 21 records the first set of new battle victories and marching advances. ([EvBC-Numbers](#))

- Refer to [Jensen's chart on Numbers above](#) - we would be in the segment under the headings "To Moab - The Journey (divided into Sinai to Kadesh, Desert Wanderings and Kadesh to Moab) which goes from Nu 10:11 to Numbers 21 and takes about 39

years. Beginning in Numbers 22 to the end in Numbers 36 is only a "few months" and ends with the nation at Moab. (See Jensen's excellent resource [Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament](#) on pdf)

**Constable** has an excellent summary of the travel of Israel... Here begins the fourth and last leg of the Israelites' journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.

1. From Egypt to Sinai (Ex 12–19)
2. From Sinai to Kadesh (Nu 11–12)
3. From Kadesh back to Kadesh—38 years of wilderness wandering (Nu 15–19)
4. From Kadesh to Transjordan (Moab) (Nu 20:1–22:1)

The first two of these journeys each began with triumph but ended in tragedy. The third and fourth each began with tragedy but ended in triumph.

**Gilbrant** on the journeys of Israel - Israel (again) at Kadesh. Israel left Sinai on the 20th day of the second month of the second year (Nu 10:11). They arrived at Hazeroth (Nu 12:16), then at Kadesh fairly soon thereafter (Nu 13:26). **After the aborted invasion from the South, they left Kadesh and wandered in the Sinai Peninsula.** Their journeys are summarized in the travelog in Numbers 33:1-56. After the mention of Hazeroth (Nu 33:17), none of the other stations can be identified until Nu 33:30. (Complete Biblical Library – Leviticus-Numbers)

**Merrill** - Here begins the last of the three travel narratives of Exodus—Numbers: **Red Sea to Sinai** (Exod 13–19), **Sinai to Kadesh** (Num 10:11–12:16), and **Kadesh to the Transjordan** (Nu 20–21). **G. J. Wenham** (TOTC-Nu) notes that all three narratives share certain motifs (1981:148): (1) battles with enemies (Nu 14:45; 21:1–35; Exod 14; 17:8–16), (2) complaints about lack of food and water and divine provision (Nu 11; Nu 20:2–13; Exod 16–17), (3) the need for faith (Nu 14:11; 20:12; Exod 14:31), and (4) the role of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (Nu 12; 20:1; Exod 15:20). ([CBC-Nu](#))

[UBS Handbook](#) says "Numbers 10:11–21:35 deals with the middle part of the Israelites' journey through the wilderness, from the desert of Sinai to Moab, east of the Dead Sea. Coming after the rebellions and the purity concerns of Numbers 16–19, Numbers 20–21 narrate a number of events on the journey **from Kadesh to the plains of Moab (the southern part of the area east of the Jordan River), where Numbers 22–36 take place.** From Numbers 20 onward the narrative of the book takes place in the fortieth and last year of the Israelites' journey through the desert. The old generation was dying out. A new generation had grown up. The end of the wandering now comes into view.

**Then the sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came to the wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people stayed at Kadesh** - There is an old saying what goes around comes around and it came to pass in two senses in this section. First as stated here they are now back at Kadesh where they had rebelled as a nation and were cursed to wander 40 years. Second, now not only does the nation rebel again, but now Moses and Aaron rebel and as a result they too were prohibited from entering the promised land. Note the phrase **the whole congregation** would be the first generation of Israelites that left Egypt (at least what was remaining of them after 40 years) and the second generation that would be allowed to enter into the promised land.

[Timothy Ashley \(NICOT-Nu\)](#) has a note on the time phrase **in the first month** - The day and year are missing. If the conclusions drawn above about the structure of the chapter are correct, then arrival at Kadesh comes after many years of wilderness wanderings. As the people had begun their wilderness wanderings at Kadesh (Nu 14:25), so they ended them there. According to Nu 33:36–38, the Israelites came from Kadesh to Mt. Hor, where Aaron died on the first day of the fifth month of the fortieth year. According to Deut. 1:3, it was on the first day of the eleventh month of that same year that Moses began speaking to the people on the plains of Moab. The year in the current verse should probably also be the fortieth year after the exodus from Egypt. Support for this conjecture may be drawn from the fact that the people were soon to be allowed to make progress toward Canaan again (beginning in 20:14), which would only happen at the close of the wilderness wandering (cf. 14:22–35). Also, as was pointed out above, ch. 20 gives the rationale for Moses' and Aaron's deaths outside Canaan, and this story would be most relevant close to the events narrated.

**NET Note on in the first month** - The text does not indicate here what year this was, but from comparing the other passages about the itinerary, this is probably the end of the wanderings, the fortieth year, for Aaron died some forty years after the exodus. So in that year the people come through the wilderness of Zin and prepare for a journey through the Moabite plains.

**Merrill** on first month - In the anniversary month of Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Nu 20:1; see Exod 12:1–2), the people arrived back at Kadesh, where the unbelieving scouts had misled a rebellious people into rejecting their Promised Land (Nu 13:26). ([CBC-Nu](#))

**Rod Mattoon** - Moses is around 120 years old and Miriam is around 130. A new generation is almost ready to enter Canaan land. The old generation has almost died out. They have come full circle and are back at the place where they left the will of God. Where you leave the will of God will be the place where you get back on track. Jonah fled from Nineveh. He got back on track by returning

to Nineveh. The Prodigal Son left home for the wrong reasons and got back on track by returning to his father. Peter denied the Lord and came full circle when he preached at Pentecost. The area of disobedience becomes the entrance ramp to further future growth. The place where you leave God's will is the place where you get back into it. If you get out of the will of God and stop doing things like tithing, praying, church attendance, refusal to be baptized, or reading the Word, then the area of neglect is the place where you must obey to be what God wants you to be and do His will. God's people here have come full circle, but they are still failing in some areas as before.

**UBS Handbook** on **in the first month** - It is probably the fortieth year that is meant, which was the last year of the Israelites' journey through the desert (so **Ashley** page 380). The Jewish medieval commentator Rashbam expressed this view. In 33:38 it is mentioned that Aaron died on Mount Hor forty years after Israel's exodus from Egypt. According to 33:36, Mount Hor was the first stop after Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, which is the same location as here in 20:1. It is also clear from 20:28 that Aaron died shortly after Miriam. So it seems most likely that from chapter 20 onward the narrative takes place in the fortieth and last year of the Israelites' journey through the desert.

**UBS Handbook** on **Kadesh** - Kadesh was an oasis area in the wilderness of Zin (see Nu 20:1; Nu 33:36), bordering the land of Canaan. However, Nu 13:26 locates Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran, which was further to the south. The fact that Kadesh is located in both these deserts may indicate that it was on the border between them. In any case, the place name "Kadesh" is an important locative marker within the structure of Numbers as a whole. It was at Kadesh (13:26) that the protest occurred in reaction to the report of the twelve spies, which led to the punishment of wandering in the wilderness for the whole Israelite community. A journey of some "forty days" (13:25) thus ended up taking almost forty years! This was due to the people's rebellious nature.

**Kadesh** (06946) (**Qadesh**) The name of two cities in the OT. The name "kadesh" means "holy" and often God showed himself holy in his judgments at this site (Nu 20:12).

1. Kadesh Barnea. An area of desert springs located fifty miles southwest of Beersheba. It is sometimes called simply Kadesh. One of the springs, Ain Qedeis, preserves the ancient name. The Masoretes made a vocalic distinction between this qadesh and the other name qedesh, but doubtless they came from the same form. The name refers to a holy spot, but of course a spot holy to the heathen pre-Israelite worship. Such "holiness" would be an abomination to Israel.

Kadesh Barnea is cited several times in connection with the patriarchs. In Genesis 14:7 Kadesh occurs in what is evidently a very ancient tradition describing a full-scale military action in which Lot, Abraham's nephew, was captured. The more ancient name of Kadesh, according to this account, was 'ên mishpat ("spring of judgment").

Kadesh Barnea was in the area to which Hagar fled (Genesis 16:14) and Abraham settled there for some time (Genesis 20:1).

Kadesh figured prominently in the wilderness period of Israelite history. It was the site of a prolonged stay in the wilderness (Deut. 2:14) and the place to which the spies returned from Canaan (Numbers 13:26). It is also one of the sites mentioned in the southern boundary of Canaan (Numbers 34:3-6; Joshua 15:1-4; Ezekiel 47:19; Ezekiel 48:28). According to Joshua 10:41 it was the southernmost boundary of the Conquest.

2. Kadesh on the Orontes. A Hittite capital situated on the Orontes River eighty miles north of Damascus. The RSV accepts a reading of the Lucianic recension of the LXX that includes Kadesh in the extension of the Davidic empire (2 Samuel 24:6). (Thomas McComiskey - Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament)

**Qadesh** - 18x in 18v translated - **Kadesh(15), Meribah-kadesh\*(1), Meribath-kadesh\*(2)** Gen. 14:7; Gen. 16:14; Gen. 20:1; Num. 13:26; Num. 20:1; Num. 20:14; Num. 20:16; Num. 20:22; Num. 27:14; Num. 33:36; Num. 33:37; Deut. 1:46; Deut. 32:51; Jdg. 11:16; Jdg. 11:17; Ps. 29:8; Ezek. 47:19; Ezek. 48:28

**Kadesh-Barnea** (06947) (**Qadesh Barnea**) Gilbrant says this is "An alternative name for "Kadesh" (see above), "Kadesh-Barnea" is sometimes termed "Kedesh" (cf. Josh. 15:23). It is used ten times in the OT, while "Kadesh" alone is used fourteen times. Kadesh-Barnea was located 107 kilometers southwest of the Dead Sea. It was situated just inside the southern boundary of Israel. A trip from the traditional location of Mount Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea took eleven days (Deut. 1:2), by way of the eastern borders of the Sinai Peninsula. Israel spent thirty-eight years of their total forty years in the Sinai Desert in the vicinity of Kadesh-Barnea (Deut. 2:14; cf. Nu 32:13). Joshua gained control of the area from Kadesh-Barnea to Gaza on the coast, northwest from Kadesh-Barnea (Josh. 10:41). The meaning of "Barnea" is still under investigation. See "Kadesh" (HED #7229) for the probability that Kadesh-Barnea is located near one of the three springs in the area, probably Ain el-Qudeirat. **Qadesh Barnea** 10x in 10 v - Nu 32:8; Nu 34:4;

### Related Resources:

- American Tract Society [Kadesh or Kadesh-Barnea](#)
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Kadesh-barnea](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Kadesh Barnea](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Kadesh-Barnea](#) [Kadesh-Meribah](#)
- Hawker's Poor Man's Dictionary [Kadesh-barnea](#)
- Watson's Theological Dictionary [Kadesh-Barnea](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Kadesh-Barnea](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Kadesh](#) [Kadesh-Barnea](#)
- Kitto Biblical Cyclopedia [Kadesh](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Kadesh](#) [Kadesh](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Meriboth-Kadesh](#) [Kadesh](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Kadesh](#)
- H Clay Trumbull - [Kadesh-Barnea, Its Importance and Probable Site \(1884\)](#)

**Merrill on in the first month-** Lit., “the first new moon” (Exod 19:1; cf. Num 1:1; 7:1; 9:1, 5; 10:11; 33:3, 38). The unstated year must be the fortieth, since the summary of Israel’s itinerary places Kadesh right before the stop where Aaron died in the fifth month of the fortieth year (33:38). **Kadesh-barnea** (Nu 32:8; 34:4; Deut 1:2, 19; 2:14; 9:23; Josh 10:41; 14:6; 15:3), the principal oasis in the wilderness of Zin ([CBC-Nu](#))

**Now Miriam died there and was buried there** - So in this chapter we see three of the leaders of the older generation who will not enter the Promised Land. While Miriam rebelled in Numbers 12, there was not notation there that her rebellion would keep her from entering the promised land. While it is not stated, it is implied that she must have expressed unbelief in the promised land, possibly siding with the 10 spies who brought a bad report, but that is speculation. Also recall that Miriam is older than Moses.

While Miriam had a rebellious episode in Numbers 12:1-16+, Moses surely could not help but remember it was his sister who helped save his life in Exodus 2:1-5+ and she was also the one who led the wonderful praises after the Red Sea deliverance (Ex 15:20-21+). One incident of rebellion left a black mark on her whole life.

**Spurgeon** - "Here was a great sorrow for Moses. Excepting her one fault in once being jealous of her brother, she was a noble woman—a true princess and prophetess. Moses, no doubt, sorrowed greatly under the bereavement."

**Irving** remarks that "It is significant that the record of the natural death of a prophetess of God should appear after the conclusion of a morbid era of judgment and at the commencement of a new and promising experience for the people of God." (Ibid)

### Related Resource:

- [Who was Miriam in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](#)

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**Gleason Archer** - Did the mission of the twelve spies start from Paran (Num. 13:3) or from Kadesh Barnea (Num. 20:1)? Both statements are true. The Wilderness of Paran extends from the port of Eloth (Eilat) on the Gulf of Aqabah in a north-northeast direction across the the Nahal Paran and Har Ramon (cf. Baly, Bible Geography, p. 34) to include the site of Kadesh Barnea, which lies on the same latitude as Punon (ibid., p. 95). The spies therefore set out from Kadesh, which is located in the Wilderness of Paran (cf. Num. 13:26: “in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh”). ([NIEBD](#))

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### Norman Geisler - —Was Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin or in Paran?-

**PROBLEM:** In this text Kadesh is said to be in the “Wilderness of Zin.” But in Numbers 13:26 it is said to be in the “Wilderness of Paran.” Which was it?

**SOLUTION:** There are several possible explanations, any one of which resolves the problem. First, some believe there were two places named Kadesh, one in each wilderness. Second, the name Kadesh could have been applied to both a city and a region in which the city lay. Third, that the same city was positioned between two wildernesses so as to be appropriately associated with either. ([When Critics Ask](#))

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**Question - [What is the significance of Kadesh Barnea in the Bible?](#)**

**Answer:** Kadesh Barnea is a region located in the Desert of Zin that is mentioned numerous times in the Old Testament. It was located somewhere along the border of Edom and Israel, southwest of the Dead Sea. Kadesh Barnea, sometimes simply called Kadesh, is connected to many significant events in Israel's history, specifically in the Pentateuch. The name *Kadesh Barnea* is thought to mean "the holy place of the desert of wandering."

Kadesh Barnea served as a place of combat in the book of Genesis when Abraham fought the Amalekites there (Genesis 14:7). It is ironic that the very place where Abraham experienced victory over the Amalekites is where the Israelites later failed to believe that God would give them victory in acquiring the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 9:23). The account in Genesis also includes Hagar's meeting with the Angel of the Lord "between Kadesh and Bered" after she was mistreated by Sarah (Genesis 16:14).

Kadesh Barnea seems to have been a regular camping spot for the Israelites throughout their years of desert wandering (Numbers 13:26; 20:1, 14; 33:36). It was at Kadesh that Miriam died and was buried (Numbers 20:1).

Two significant events that occurred at Kadesh Barnea were the Israelites' faithless refusal to possess the Promised Land (Numbers 13:32–33) and their opposition to [Moses](#) at not having enough water (Numbers 20:2–5). **These two events, marked by unbelief, grumbling, and disobedience, directly affected Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites.**

The men who had left Kadesh Barnea to scout out the Promised Land, except for [Caleb](#) and [Joshua](#), failed to believe that God could give them possession of Canaan (Numbers 14:30; Joshua 14:7). Instead, they insisted that the people of Canaan, who included the Nephilim, were too powerful for them to fight. The ten scouts bringing the evil report persuaded the people that the land would be impossible to acquire (Numbers 13:32–33). Because of their failure to believe, the Israelites had to wander in the desert for another 38 years, waiting until all those who were 20 years and older died, so that the next generation could take possession of the land (Numbers 14:29; Deuteronomy 2:14).

Years later, Moses and Aaron were also denied entrance into the Promised Land because of their disobedience to God at Kadesh Barnea. God had instructed Moses to speak to the rock to bring forth water for the grumbling Israelites, but he disobeyed by striking the rock twice (Numbers 20:12). Because the Israelites had failed to believe and obey the Lord, their arrival into the land "flowing with milk and honey" was postponed until Joshua led the younger generation out of the wilderness by the command of the Lord.

In the [desert of wandering](#), the Israelites experienced plagues, death, and testing. The Israelites failed the tests that took place in Kadesh Barnea, and that remained etched in their memory forever. Their unbelief led to the postponement of entering Canaan and claiming God's blessings (Psalm 95:8–11; Hebrews 3:7–19). May we not follow the unbelief of those who did not trust God to fulfill His promises. When times of testing come, may we display the faith that Joshua and Caleb had in trusting God at Kadesh Barnea. [GotQuestions.org](#)

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#### Related Resources:

- [Why was Israel cursed with forty years of wilderness wandering? | GotQuestions.org](#)

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#### Numbers 20:2 There was no water for the congregation, and they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron.

- **no:** Ex 15:23-24 Ex 17:1-4
- gathered: Nu 11:1-6 Nu 16:3,19,42 21:5 Ex 16:2,7,12 1Co 10:10,11
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Exodus 15:23-24 When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. 24So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"

Exodus 17:1-4 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?" 4So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me."

## ANOTHER "DRY WATER HOLE"

It is worth noting that although Israel was in an arid wilderness area for 40 years, there are only three dry water episodes - Exodus 17, Numbers 20:2ff, Numbers 21:5. Exodus 17:1-7 is a close counterpart to Nu 20:11-12, the critical difference of course being that in Ex 17 Moses was told to strike the rock and obeyed (Ex 17:6), but in Numbers 20 he was only to speak to the rock (Nu 20:8) and he disobeyed (Nu 20:11-12).

**There was no water for the congregation, and they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron**- This was a cause (no water) effect (confrontation) situation which Moses and Aaron had confronted in the past with this rebellious congregation.

**Against Moses and Aaron** - The preposition **against** ('al) was used in Ex 15:24 : "So the people grumbled **at** (against - 'al) Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" Similarly in Nu 16:3 (also Nu 16:11, 19) "They assembled together **against** ('al) Moses and Aaron...." And even after 14,700 were killed "on the next day ll the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled **against** ('al) Moses and Aaron..." (Nu 16:41, cf Nu 16:42) In Numbers 17:5 (cf Nu 17:10) we read that "It will come about that the rod of the man whom I choose will sprout. Thus I will lessen from upon Myself the grumbings of the sons of Israel, who are grumbling **against** ('al) you." The grumbings against Aaron and Moses may have "lessened" but they clearly did not completely cease as this new no water situation indicates.

[Irving Jensen](#) comments that "The test of leaders is in the discharge of their duties. Their main duty is the leading of the followers. Followers, then, are the testing grounds of the leaders. This was the case here."

[Guzik](#) - The need was real, but the response of Israel was filled with unbelief and bad attitude—which always go together! When you find a bad attitude, you will also find a lack of simple, secure trust in God. Their contention lead them to outrageous statements, words lacking any trust in God. The older generation of unbelief was almost dead, and now the younger generation started to act like the unbelieving generation. They openly doubted God's promise that He would lead them into the land of promise. Their contentions lead them to outrageous accusations. The new generation accuses Moses just as the generation of unbelief did! Their contentions lead them to a stunted vision. Of course the wilderness was not a fruitful land. But they would never make it to the land of rich fruit until they came through the wilderness trusting God.

**Numbers 20:3 The people thus contended with Moses and spoke, saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD!**

- Ex 16:2,3
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## CRISIS OF CONTENTION

**The people thus contended with Moses** - Note that in v2 they had come against both Moses and Aaron, but now they begin to focus on Moses. Same verb ([riyb](#)) used in Ex 17:2 where Moses warned them - "Therefore (no water - Ex 17:1) 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?" So here again they quarreled and disputed with Moses

**Contended** (07378)([riyb](#) [noun [riyb](#)]) means to strive, plead, quarrel (Ge 26:20), contend, conduct a lawsuit, make a charge or legal complaint. [NET Note](#) says that this is "a far more serious thing than grumbling—it is directed, intentional, and well-argued." **Riyb** is the root word in the name Meribah the commemorative name of this tragic event.

The Septuagint translates [riyb](#) with the verb [loidoreo](#) which means to hurl verbal abuse, shout insults, bring reproach and in the imperfect tense it indicates this went on over and over, again and again.

**And spoke, saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD-** "The Hebrew construction here expresses a strong desire, which is literally "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD" This sounds like deja vu but is some 40 years later than Nu 14:2 when "All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "**Would that we had died** in the land of Egypt! Or **would that we had died** in this wilderness!"

[Rod Mattoon](#) - The same old problem of ungratefulness and unbelief characterizes this group. They "chide" or strive and debate

with Moses. They are so discouraged that they wished they were dead. Moses shows us that leaders can be cheered on one day and jeered on another. Folks who seek high positions see the glory of the position, but not the groans and gripes that go with it. They are blaming Moses when they should be blaming themselves. If they had followed him 38 years earlier, they would not be in this position in the first place

**NET Note** on **If only we had perished** - The particle וְ (lu) indicates the optative nuance of the line—the wishing or longing for death. It is certainly an absurdity to want to have died, but God took them at their word and they died in the wilderness.

The rebellious people are implying that it would have been better to die of the plague through the intervention of the LORD than to die of thirst, for which they imply the LORD is also responsible. With this statement they show their impatience and lack of faith that the LORD would provide should they humbly ask. ([UBS Handbook](#))

**Numbers 20:4 "Why then have you brought the LORD'S assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here?"**

- **why:** Nu 11:5 Ex 5:21 17:3 Ps 106:21 Ac 7:35,39,40
- **for us:** Nu 16:13,14,41 Ex 14:11,12 16:3
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Numbers 21:4-5 Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. 5 The people spoke against God and Moses, **"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?** For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food."

### MOSES ACCUSED OF DESERT DEATH MARCH!

**Why then have you brought the LORD'S assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here** - While it is phrased as a question it is clearly rhetorical and reproachful! From Numbers 21:4-5 Passage, this complaint is a "preview of coming attractions" so to speak.

**NET Note** says why then is literally "any why" which they feel "seems to be recording another thing that the people said in their complaint against Moses."

**Wiersbe** - The people began to complain again, for Egypt was still in their hearts. In the will of God, no place is an "evil place"; but when your inner desires are not spiritual, no place is a good place—except Egypt! (WWBC)

**Numbers 20:5 "Why have you made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water to drink."**

- **this wretched:** Nu 16:14 De 8:15 Ne 9:21 Jer 2:2,6 Eze 20:36
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passage:

Nu 11:4-6+ The rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, "Who will give us meat to eat? 5 **"We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt,** the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, 6 but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna."

Numbers 16:13-14+ "Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, but you would also lord it over us? "Indeed, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Would you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"

## FROM "WONDERFUL" EGYPT TO A WRETCHED WILDERNESS

**Why have you made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place?**- They are not seeking information. Clearly this is another rhetorical reproach! Wretched ([ra](#)) means bad, evil, and basically conveys the sense of that which is opposite of "good." The Septuagint translates with [poneros](#) which describes evil that actively opposes what is good, not just bad in character, but bad in effect (injurious).

**THOUGHT** - The tragedy is that Yahweh was able to get Israel out of Egypt in one night, but unable to get Egypt out of the Israelites even after 40 years! Before we chuckle and point our finger at Israel's folly in the OT, we all do well to remember that while we are complete in Christ, we are still prone to wander and complain just like Israel because we have the sinful flesh nature. We are "works in progress." As someone has said, we have all of the Holy Spirit we are ever going to receive. The question now is how much of us does the Holy Spirit have. Are we "tethered" to the godless world system or are we daily fixing our minds on the things above and not on the things of this passing world (Col 3:2+)?

As [Clyde Woods](#) says 'Israel's grievance overlooked completely that the "dreadful desert" (Deut 1:19) was not Moses' desired destination but rather the scene of a generation's judgment brought on by its own infidelity (14:28–35)." (Leviticus-Numbers)

**It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water to drink-** In short they say it is not a "good" land. And yes, they are correct, but they have conveniently forgotten that the reason they are there and not in the good land is because they obstinately refused to go into Canaan and take the land God had promised. It is amazing when we are in a "wilderness" of our own making, we can forget that our own bad choices have gotten us in the mess! Notice that this is the same complaint Israel made almost some 38 years earlier (cf Nu 16:14+). Some things never changed, especially stubborn hearts controlled by the old sin nature.

**Spurgeon** - They taunted Moses with the old, worn-out cry that he brought them out to die in the wilderness, and added the new sting—that he had not brought them into the goodly land of promise; though, indeed, it was only their own sin which kept them out of it. Those who want to murmur are never very long without a peg to hang their complaints upon.

**Wiersbe** - It was a conditioned reflex: whenever the Israelites faced a difficulty, they complained about it to Moses and Aaron and wept because they hadn't stayed in Egypt. Difficulties either bring out the best in people or the worst; they either mature us or make us more childish (James 1:2–8+). Israel's words and attitudes revealed clearly that their hearts were still in Egypt. What a picture of the professed Christian who still loves the world (1 John 2:15–17+) and turns to the world for help whenever there's a problem! [Be Counted](#)

**Numbers 20:6 Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to them;**

- **they fell:** Nu 14:5 Nu 16:4,22,45 Ex 17:4 Jos 7:6 1Ch 21:16 Ps 109:3,4 Mt 26:39
- **the glory:** Nu 12:5 Nu 14:10 Nu 16:19,42 Ex 16:10
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## MOSES AND AARON FACE DOWN AND SHEKINAH GLORY APPEARS

**Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces** - This was their familiar intercessory posture (have you ever prayed flat on your face?) **REB** says "flung themselves on the ground." Moses (sometimes with Aaron) was frequently brought to falling on his face in consternation with the congregation (see Nu 14:5 Nu 16:4,22,45). Surely they knew from past experience that Yahweh would soon show up! The irony is that the wrong people were on their faces! It should have been the contentious rebels who were on their faces, but they had no fear of God (Ro 3:18+).

[Guzik](#) makes a good point that Moses and Aaron "realized how serious this was. With this contentious attitude, the new generation would be just as unbelieving, as untrusting in God as the old generation was, and **they would likewise perish in the wilderness**"

**Wiersbe** - Spiritual leaders pay a price as they seek to serve God's people, but the people usually don't appreciate it. The same people repeat the same sins and refuse to trust God and obey Him. ([Be Counted](#))



**Then the glory of the LORD appeared to them** - Yahweh showed up in a dazzling display of His presence to the rescue His servants just as He had done in previous rebellions against Moses (see Nu 12:5 Nu 14:10 Nu 16:19,42).

**Spurgeon** - These holy men knew where their great strength was, they fell down in prayer and adoration, leaving the matter with the Lord, who was not slow in appearing for them.

[Steven Cole](#) on the value of "falling on your face" when criticism comes - That's always a good thing to do when people criticize you or your service for the Lord: Take refuge in the Lord's presence. Look at His glory as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Savior was sinless and yet was relentlessly attacked by critics. So why should I, who am far from sinless, expect better treatment? Then, in the Lord's presence and through His Word, evaluate the criticism. Perhaps it's totally false and can be dismissed. But perhaps some of the criticism is valid and you need to learn from it. But whenever you're criticized, you have a choice: You can counter-attack your critics; or, you can allow the criticism to drive you into the Lord's presence, where you can experience a fresh glimpse of His glory. Moses and Aaron were on target on this first essential.

#### Related Resources:

- [Glory of God](#)
- [Shekinah glory cloud](#) - see Garland's [The Abiding Presence of God](#)

#### Numbers 20:7 and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

#### Ivan Steeds - CHRIST THE SPIRITUAL ROCK OF REFRESHMENT

The redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross and His exaltation are typified in the rocks of Exodus 17 and Numbers 20. The Holy Spirit has united these two rocks in several scriptures. Psalm 78:15–16 is noteworthy: 'He clave the rocks in the wilderness and God gave them drink out of the depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down as rivers'. The first rock is in Exodus, the second in Numbers. In 1 Corinthians 10:4 we read, 'For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ'.

In Exodus, the word for rock is 'Tsur' or 'bedrock'. In Numbers it is 'Sela' or 'high rock'. The types indicate that all spiritual blessings have their source in these two rocks.

The rock smitten by the Moses' rod typifies the smiting of Christ by Jehovah. In Isaiah 53, 'smitten by God' provides a reminder of the rock at Horeb and points forward to Christ on the cross. The rod used is the judgement rod. The waters flowed abundantly. The full needs of the thirsty were supplied freely. This is the picture of salvation offered in Revelation 22:17, 'And whoever will, let him take the water of life freely'. The water of life indicates the salvation of God provided through the smiting of Christ, the bedrock of redemption.

The rock scene in Numbers 20 took place the best part of forty years later at Kadesh. The word for rock here is 'Sela', the 'high rock', which sets forth Christ as exalted. Again, there was no water for the thirsting camp. The Lord acted in great compassion and instructed Moses to speak to the rock and hold the rod that budded in his hand, the symbol of resurrection. The rock smitten once prefigured the death of Christ which was never to be repeated. Moses failed. He did not speak to the rock but struck it. He spoiled the type of God's exalted Son, from whom flows the water of the Spirit. This is what is meant in John 7:37–39, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink'. Grace abounded, however, from the Lord and the rock gave forth water abundantly. But judgement fell upon Moses. He was forbidden to lead the people into Canaan. (Day by Day)

**Numbers 20:8 "Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink."**

- **the rod:** Nu 21:15,18 Ex 4:2,17 Ex 7:20 Ex 14:16 Ex 17:5,9
- **speak:** Ge 18:14 Jos 6:5,20 Ps 33:9 Mt 21:21 Mk 11:22-24 Lu 11:13 Joh 4:10-14 16:24 Ac 1:14 2:1-4 Rev 22:1,17

- **bring forth:** Nu 20:11 Ne 9:15 Ps 78:15,16 105:41 114:8 Isa 41:17,18 43:20 Isa 48:21
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## SPEAK TO THE ROCK

**Take the rod** - It is interesting that God told Moses to take the **rod** (or staff = [matteh, mattah](#)) except that it was certainly a symbol of Moses authority given to him by God in view of the many times it had been used for supernatural acts (see Ex 4:2,17 Ex 7:20 Ex 14:16 Ex 17:5,9). Some writers however (such as Wenham - TOTC-Nu; [Ashley](#) NICOT-Nu) think this was Aaron's staff, which was kept in front of the Covenant Box in the Tent of Meeting (Nu 17:10), but Keil, MacArthur and Wiersbe think it was Moses' staff.

**Merrill** - The reference to "the staff" (lit., "his staff," 20:11) favors Moses's staff (Hirsch 1971:366–367; Levine 1993:489; Milgrom 1989:165; Noth 1968:145). The mention of its being "kept before the LORD" (20:9), however, favors Aaron's staff (Ashley 1993:382; Budd 1984:218; Harrison 1990:264; Noordtjiz 1983:176; G. J. Wenham 1981:149). So "his" probably indicates that Moses had Aaron's staff in his possession for this incident. Since Moses placed Aaron's rod before the Lord, he could take it up again (Budd 1984:218). ([CBC-Nu](#))

**And you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes that it may yield its water** - "The Hebrew verb for tell (**speak**) is plural, so God gives this instruction to Moses and Aaron, which may be made clear by beginning this clause with "Both of you must command.... (The other verbs in this verse are in the singular, referring to Moses.)" ([UBS Handbook](#)) So here we see Aaron was included which indicates he clearly knew God's command and yet as God says in Nu 20:24 he "rebelled against (Yahweh's) command at the waters of Meribah." And for this reason he was not allowed to enter the promised land. **Before their eyes** so that God might be glorified in this miraculous provision.

**Matthew Henry** - He bids him speak to the rock, which would do as it was bidden, to shame the people who had been so often spoken to, and would not hear nor obey. Their hearts were harder than this rock, not so tender, not so yielding, not so obedient.

**Spurgeon on speak** - "To show that the Lord is not tied to any one mode of action, the rock is not to be smitten this time, but only spoken to."

**You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink**- The command was crystal clear and the promise was sure, so there was no excuse for confusion on Moses' part.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
 Let me hide myself in Thee!  
 Let the water and the blood,  
 From thy riven side which flow'd,  
 Be of sin the double cure,  
 Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

### **F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily - Numbers 20:8, 11 Speak ye to the rock; ... and Moses smote the rock twice.**

What a miracle of grace is here! Nothing could have been more explicit than the Divine command that Moses should, on this occasion, simply speak to the rock. We cannot fathom the deep reason; perhaps it was because the Spiritual Rock of our salvation could not be smitten by the soldier's spear twice. "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many." Moreover, we are taught to wait on God each time we perform duties which appear similar, for the ways in which they should be performed may vary widely. It is clear, whatever the reason, that Moses was to speak, not smite.

However, he grievously disobeyed; largely, probably, because he could not believe that mere speech would suffice for the miracle. He thought that he must do something to aid God, not realizing how slight a part man's is in the Divine esteem. No flesh may glory in his presence. God must be all in all. We must believe that a word is enough; and that God will do the rest.

But, in spite of his irritation, disobedience, and unbelief, the water gushed out. The sin of the servant did not annul the love and faithfulness of God. "If we believe not, He remaineth faithful." It is a sweet lesson. We are worthless and unprofitable servants; we fail to believe and obey. But God's grace flows over the bank, and inundates the wilderness with crystal streams. The Psalmist says the waters did not trickle, they gushed out. Oh, miracle of Divine faithfulness! But Moses himself had to pay the penalty in later years. Disobedience in God's servants cannot be condoned. In proportion to the saintliness of their character is the rigor of their punishment.

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## John Bennett - SPEAK YE UNTO THE ROCK

This solemn scene of failure had far-reaching consequences for both Moses and Aaron. Both would be denied access to the promised land as a result of their actions, v. 12. God is no respecter of persons in the matter of sin, and, in fact, the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility. Failure of leaders is more serious than failure of those not in positions of authority.

Thirty-eight years earlier the people had faced a similar situation in Exodus 17. Then, as now, they were in the wilderness of Sin. Then, as now, they thirsted and chode with Moses. Then, as now, the answer to their need lay in the Rock.

But there is a world of difference between the two incidents. In Exodus 17, Moses was told to smite the rock; here he is told to speak to the rock. In Exodus chapter 17 the normal word for rock is used; here it is a different word meaning 'elevated rock'.

The typical teaching is clear; 'that Rock was Christ', Paul reminds the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 10:4. Once smitten and elevated, the rock is a wonderful picture of His sufferings and ascension, securing the outpouring of blessing for His people. He will never be smitten again, and therein lies the seriousness of Moses' action.

Moses was sorely tried and as a result 'he spake unadvisedly with his lips', Ps. 106:33. He called the people rebels; He failed to sanctify the Lord by simple obedience; He smote the rock in anger twice. It is solemn to think of this supremely meek man giving vent to an angry outburst. We should not, however, judge Moses harshly. How true it is that we too often fail on our strongest points.

The once-for-all sufferings of our blessed Lord are over. We sometimes sing, 'Never more shall God, Jehovah, smite the Shepherd with the sword', R. C. CHAPMAN. From His elevated position at God's right hand our Lord Jesus has an abundant supply to meet our needs.

Thirsty soul, 'Speak to the Rock'. Just as the waters gushed out for the nation of Israel, so His fullness is there today for the asking.

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### Are You Listening?

Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water. —Numbers 20:8

Today's Scripture: Numbers 20:1-13

He was frustrated. He was angry. He was tired of being blamed for everything that went wrong. Year after year, he had gotten them through one disaster after another. He was continually interceding on their behalf to keep them out of trouble. But all he got for his efforts was more grief. Finally, in exasperation, he said, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" (Num. 20:10).

That suggestion might sound preposterous, but it wasn't. Forty years earlier, the previous generation had the same complaint: no water. God told Moses to strike a rock with his staff (Ex. 17:6). When he obeyed, water gushed out—plenty of water. When the grumbling started again so many years later, Moses did the thing that worked before. But this time it was the wrong thing to do. What Moses told the Israelites to do—to listen—he himself had not done. God had told him to speak to the rock this time, not strike it.

Sometimes in exhaustion or exasperation, we don't pay close attention to God. We assume He will always work the same way. But He doesn't. Sometimes He tells us to act; sometimes He tells us to speak; sometimes He tells us to wait. That is why we must always be careful to listen before we take action. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)) By: Julie Ackerman Link

Reflect & Pray

Lord, help us to obey Your Word,  
To heed Your still small voice;  
And may we not be swayed by men,  
But make Your will our choice.  
—D. De Haan

Listen—then obey.

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**Numbers 20:9 So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him;**

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- Nu 17:10
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## SO FAR SO GOOD

**So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him** - As the old saying goes "So far, so good." Moses is obeying the instructions from Yahweh. **From before the LORD** would support the premise that this is Aaron's rod for it was kept before the LORD.

**Numbers 20:10 and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, 'Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?'**

- De 9:24 Ps 106:32,33 Mt 5:22 Lu 9:54,55 Ac 23:3-5 Eph 4:26 Jas 3:2
- we fetch: Nu 11:22,23 Ge 40:8 41:16 Da 2:28-30 Ac 3:12-16 14:9-15 Ro 15:17-19 1Co 3:7

## MOSES THE REBEL ADDRESSES THE REBELS

**and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, 'Listen now, you rebels** - There is an old saying "It takes one to know one!" And so here we have is a bitter irony for Moses calls the people rebels when in fact it is he and Aaron will be held responsible as rebels and for which they will be punished (see Nu 20:24+)! The problem was Moses spoke to the people instead of the rock! Moses was not to touch the rock or speak to the people. He did both!

God did not command Moses to speak to the nation but speak to the rock!

**Guzik** - Moses, after doing what God had told him to do, then did something God had not told him to do: He lectured the nation.. Worse, he lectured the nation with an attitude of heart he had not shown before—one of anger and contempt for the people of God, with a bitter heart. Before, Moses fell on his face before God when the people rebelled (Numbers 16:4). At Meribah, when the people contended with Moses because there was no water, Moses cried out to the LORD, not against the people (Exodus 15:22–25). When the people did need to be boldly confronted, Moses did it; but without the edge of anger, contempt, and bitterness we see here (as in Exodus 17:1–7). There are a hundred explanations for Moses' frustration here (Psalm 106:32–33 describes how the people provoked Moses here), but not a single excuse.. Worse yet, Moses not only took the rebellion of the people against the LORD too personally, he also overmagnified his own partnership with God: Must we bring water for you out of this rock? Moses spoke as if he and God would do the job, as if they divided the work fifty-fifty; as if God couldn't bring water unless he was around to speak to the rock. His lapse into contempt for the people led him into a lapse of subtle pride.

**NET Note on you rebels** - The word is הַמְרִימִים (hammorim, "the rebels"), but here as a vocative: "you rebels." It was a harsh address, although well-earned. The word order and the emphasis of the tense are important to this passage. The word order is "**from this rock must we bring out to you water?**" The emphasis is clearly on "from this rock!" The verb is the imperfect tense; it has one of the modal nuances here, probably obligatory—"must we do this?"

**Rebels** (same word "rebelled" in Nu 20:24+) ([04784](#))([mara](#)) means to be contentious, rebellious, and openly defiant to an authority by not obeying commands. Most of the uses of marah refer to rebellion by Israel or Judah against Jehovah (exceptions = Dt 21:18, 20, Job 17:2, Job 23:2, Pr 17:11). There is repeated focus on Israel's rebellion in the wilderness after being set free from slavery in Egypt (Nu 20:10, 24; 27:14; Deut 1:26, 43; 9:7, 23), summed up by the statement "You have been rebellious against the LORD from the day I knew you." (Deut 9:24) Marah is used with similar descriptive words - stubborn (Dt 21:18, 20, Jer 5:23, Ps 78:8), to grieve (Isa 63:10, Ps 78:40), to refuse (Isa 1:20, Neh 9:17), to transgress (Lam 3:42), to sin (Ps 78:17), to test (Ps 78:56), to rebel (marad in Neh 9:26), to reject or profane (Ezek 20:13). **Mara** in the **Pentateuch** - Ex 23:21; Nu 20:10; Nu 20:24; Nu 27:14; Dt. 1:26; Dt. 1:43; Dt. 9:7; Dt. 9:23; Dt. 9:24 = "You have been **rebellious** against the LORD from the day I knew you." ; Dt. 21:18; Dt. 21:20; Dt. 31:27;

**Shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?** - Good News Translation - "Do we have to get water out of this rock for you?" The question is rhetorical and shows Moses is getting annoyed with the people because of their persistent protestations against authority! He knows that this is a reflection of their unbelief.

**Merrill** - He adopted "the fatal pronoun" **we** (Milgrom 1989:165), forgetting that he was only God's instrument, not the performer of

the miracle.

**Alexander Maclaren** on Moses use of **"WE"** (THUS CLAIMING SOME OF THE CREDIT) "He who claims power to himself, denies it to God." This reminds me of Paul's exhortations in 1 Corinthians

1 Cor 1:31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

1 Cor 10:31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

**Rod Mattoon** - We have seen Moses angry before. Exodus 2—The murder of the Egyptian. Exodus 11:8—After pronouncing the plague on the firstborn, he left Pharaoh in anger. Exodus 32—At the golden calf incident, he breaks the tablets from God. Why is Moses angry now? 1. He has been provoked by the griping of the people. 2. He was blamed by the people for something that was not his fault. 3. He was drained emotionally. Miriam has died. 4. He may have not liked God's answer or solution. He may have wanted the Lord to execute vengeance upon the people. Moses is not only angry, he is arrogant. Notice that he says, "Must WE fetch you water out of this rock?" Moses is taking credit for glory that belongs to God.

**Believer's Study Bible** - We are not explicitly told all the details of Moses' and Aaron's sin. It is clear that Moses did strike rather than speak to the rock (v. 11), and that God charged them ("you" is plural in v. 12) with not believing or hallowing (treating as holy) Him. Their disobedience may have consisted in not trusting that speaking to the rock would be sufficient; or they may have taken credit themselves for the miracle (v. 10), thus robbing God of His glory. The earlier occasion of grumbling about water was also called "Meribah" as well as "Massah" (cf. Ps. 95:8; 106:32, 33; 114:8). Paul the apostle understood the Rock as representing Christ (1 Cor. 10:1-6).

**Irving Jensen** - But within the hearts of Moses and Aaron the weight of impatience and unbelief, even rebellion, had been pressing harder and harder, and now the breaking point had come. First was the quick temper of unkindness in how Moses addressed the people, "Hear now, ye rebels" (Nu 20:10). Then came glorification of self by emphasizing the "we" and not saying a word about Jehovah: "Shall we bring you forth water out of this rock?" Finally follows the outright act of disobedience of God's instructions. God had said, "Speak ye unto the rock" (20:8); Moses instead smote the rock twice with his rod (Nu 20:11).

**Spurgeon** - Good men usually fail just where they think they are strongest, and where they really are strongest. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, yet did he fail in righteousness when his sons saw him in a state of drunkenness. Moses was exceeding meek, yet did he lose his temper and say, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" (Num. 20:10). Look too, at Job, one who excelled in patience, yet he failed in patience.

Psalm 106:32-33<sup>±</sup> They also provoked Him to wrath at the waters of Meribah, So that it went hard with Moses on their account; 33 Because they were rebellious against His Spirit, He spoke rashly with his lips.

**Spurgeon - They angered him also at the waters of strife.** Will they never have done? The scene changes, but the sin continues. Aforetime they had mutinied about water when prayer would soon have turned the desert into a standing pool, but now they do it again after their former experience of the divine goodness. This made the sin a double, yea a sevenfold offence, and caused the anger of the Lord to be the more intense.

**So that it went in with Moses for their sakes.** Moses was at last wearied out, and began to grow angry with them and utterly hopeless of their ever improving; can we wonder at it, for he was man and not God? After forty years bearing with them the meek man's temper gave way, and he called them rebels, and showed unhallowed anger; and therefore he was not permitted to enter the land which he desired to inherit. Truly, he had a sight of the goodly country from the top of Pisgah, but entrance was denied him, and thus it went ill with him. It was their sin which angered him, but he had to bear the consequences; however clear it may be that others are more guilty than ourselves, we should always remember that this will not screen us, but every man must bear his own burden.

**Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.** Which seems a small sin compared with that of others, but then it was the sin of Moses, the Lord's chosen servant, who had seen and known so much of the Lord, and therefore it could not be passed by. He did not speak blasphemously, or falsely, but only hastily and without care; but this is a serious fault in a lawgiver, and especially in one who speaks for God. This passage is to our mind one of the most terrible in the Bible. Truly we serve a jealous God. Yet he is not a hard master, or austere; we must not think so, but we must then rather be jealous of ourselves, and watch that we live the more carefully, and speak the more advisedly, because we serve such a Lord. We ought also to be very careful how we treat the ministers of the gospel, lest by provoking their spirit we should drive them into any unseemly behaviour which should bring upon them the chastisement of the Lord. Little do a murmuring, quarrelsome people dream of the

perils in which they involve their pastors by their untoward behaviour.

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### **James Scudder - Why Read the Instructions? Numbers 20:10-11**

When I go to India, I realize in that hot climate just how precious water is. When I get back from one of these trips I find that over the next few months I have a new appreciation for water. The children of Israel were again hot and thirsty. They wanted water, and Moses was instructed to speak to a rock to get water. Instead, Moses struck it with his rod. There might be some who would say, "But this is no big deal. Moses almost did what God said."

The key is that Moses didn't do what God said. He disobeyed, and because this was a bad example for the people, Moses was severely punished. He did not lead His people into the land flowing with milk and honey. For forty years, Moses had led the people through the wilderness, but now he didn't get to participate in the blessing and the joy of entering into the Promised Land.

An important lesson to learn is that God's way is the only way. Water came from the rock when Moses struck it, but God was angry and punished Moses. Moses needed to obey God to receive His total blessing.

The rock shouldn't have been struck for yet another reason. The rock represents Christ, and He was only "struck" once. He only needed to die once. Now we can have perfect fellowship with Him and "speak" to Him in prayer.

Decide today that you will obey God completely and fully. Don't deviate from His path. Do what Moses should have done—speak to Him in prayer.

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### **Joseph Stowell - DO RIGHT . . . REGARDLESS—1 Peter 1:14–15**

Have you ever been tempted to do something wrong, thinking that it really is all right since the results will be good? Like playing the lottery and telling God that you will give Him half if you win big. Or like cheating someone because he has cheated you and he needs to learn a lesson.

Or perhaps it's just a matter of telling one of those "little white lies" to help someone feel better. While the outcomes may seem worthy, we need to know that God is not impressed. He values who we are far more than what we do, and when we erode our integrity He is concerned, regardless of the outcomes.

I recall as a boy wanting to go to camp with my friends but having to recite Psalm 100 by heart in order to qualify. The deadline approached, and I hadn't committed it to memory yet, so I called my teacher on the phone, told him I was ready to recite the psalm, and proceeded to read the passage impeccably. At the end, he complimented me on a job well done but then said, "It sounded like you were reading it. Were you?" I was so embarrassed and have never forgotten the poignant lesson that it is important to do the right things in the right way.

**God commanded Moses to speak to the rock, but instead he struck it in anger and suffered the consequence** (Numbers 20:2–12). Saul sacrificed to God, yet did it in the wrong spirit and in violation of the prophet's instruction. Samuel's response was classic, "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22; see also Proverbs 21:3; Mark 12:32–33).

If we do what is right in wrong ways, we teach our hearts to value performance over character. And we deceive ourselves into thinking that our good works validate our standing before God when actually nothing could be further from the truth. It is important to remember that while "man looks at the outward appearance . . . the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Commit yourself to doing all you do under the guidance of the values of truth, integrity, justice, fairness, love, and purity. Don't ever fudge, regardless of how compelling the outcomes appear to be.

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### **Danger: Explosives**

"The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression." Proverbs 19:11

A man from Michigan had an idea for removing a tree stump from the yard of a friend. He decided to use some dynamite he had stored away in his house. It did the trick. The explosion turned the stump into an airborne missile that traveled 163 feet downrange before crashing through a neighbor's roof. The stump opened a 3-foot hole in the roof, split the rafters, and pushed through the ceiling of the dining room.

If we are honest, we can see ourselves in the actions of the dynamite user. We have used explosive words and actions to try to solve problems, which only made things worse. We get action, but we leave much damage in our wake.

We are not the first to let anger make trouble for us. It happened to people in the Bible too. Moses, for instance, became extremely frustrated with his murmuring followers (Numbers 20:10). So, instead of speaking to the rock to get water, as the Lord had instructed him, he angrily struck it twice (Numbers 20:11). He did get water from the rock, but there was a problem—Moses had disobeyed God. Because of this, God told him he could not enter the Promised Land (Numbers 20:12).

Anger, like dynamite, is explosive. Unless it is handled with wisdom and self-control, it can do great damage. —M R De Haan II [Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Angry words take just one moment  
And bring forth a flood of tears,  
But the wounds they have created  
Linger on for months and years.  
—Stairs

When a person's temper gets the best of him, it reveals the worst of him.

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### **Henry Blackaby - Fix Your Eyes on God—Numbers 20:10**

It is easy to see why Moses became frustrated with the Hebrew people. They were so hard-hearted and weak in their faith that Moses lost his patience and became angry with them. Yet every time Moses shifted his focus away from God, it cost him. When he sought to help his people by taking matters into his own hands, he spent the next forty years herding sheep in the wilderness (Exod. 2:11–15). This time his impetuous behavior cost him the opportunity to enter the Promised Land (Num. 20:12). In his frustration at the peoples' irreverence, Moses committed the very same sin, blatantly disobeying God's instructions. How did this happen? Moses allowed his attention to shift to the behavior of others rather than focusing on the activity of God.

This could happen to you as well. God has put people around you who need your ministry to them. You will never be able to properly help them, however, unless your primary focus is on God. If you concentrate on people, their weaknesses, their disobedience, their lack of faith, and their stubbornness will quickly frustrate you. You may, like Moses, commit the very sins you are condemning. If, however, your eyes are fixed on holy God, you will become more like Him—gracious, forgiving, long-suffering, and righteous. When a friend's behavior disappoints you, go immediately to the Lord. Seek to discern what God is wanting to do in your friend's life rather than concentrating on your friend's sin. Then you will have the strength, wisdom, and patience you need to help your friend in the way God desires.

**Numbers 20:11 Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank.**

- **smote:** Nu 20:8 Lev 10:1 1Sa 15:13,14,19,24 1Ki 13:21-24 1Ch 13:9,10 1Ch 15:2,13 Mt 28:20 Jas 1:20
- **water:** Ex 17:6 De 8:15 Ho 13:5 1Co 10:4
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **MOSES' GREAT SIN STRIKING THE ROCK**

**Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod** - This was literally a sin with an "high hand," a rod **lifted up** in Moses' hand. When he struck the rock at the beginning of the Exodus journey, he only had to strike it once, but now, out of anger and frustration, he did it twice. His action demonstrated his anger and as James says "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." (James 1:19-20+)

**Rod Mattoon** - He smote the rock twice which was a no no. By doing this, Moses directs the focus of the people and glory upon himself instead of the Lord. He also does not follow God's directions and commands. God wants His directions obeyed. Moses failed in his strongest area.... meekness. Other men have done the same thing. Paul issued a warning that we should heed. 1 Corinthians 10:12—Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. We are to be on guard in areas where we are strong and confident.

**and water came forth abundantly** - NLT says "and water gushed out" At first Moses probably felt vindicated. Did they deserve the water? Of course not. This pure water was purely grace! And notice it was not just a trickle but abundantly! Another foreshadowing of God's great grace upon grace (John 1:15+), which believers experience today in Christ (sometimes even have they have "struck the rock"). (cf Eph 3:20+). [Steven Cole](#) adds that "God brought the water gushing from the rock in spite of Moses' disobedience. Sometimes in His grace God grants results in ministry in spite of our disobedience. So if you see success in your ministry, you have to be careful (cf 2 Cor 3:5-6+) or you might start thinking, "My success is due to my great faith or because of something I did!" But results do not necessarily indicate faithfulness on the part of the one seeing the results!"

Cole goes on to point out that "The apostle Paul was always careful to give God the credit for any fruit that he saw in his ministry. When the Corinthians were boasting about whether they followed Paul or Apollos, he wrote (1 Cor. 3:5-7),

What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

Later, he explained (1 Cor. 15:10+),

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

Concerning his ministry, he explained (Ro 15:18+),

"For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed."

**Guzik** - despite Moses' lapse into sinful attitude and action, God still provided abundantly for the people. This teaches us that God's love for His people is so great, he will use very imperfect instruments, and that the fact God uses someone is no evidence—to themselves or to the people—that they themselves are really right with God or ministering according to God's heart. God would deal with Moses, but the people needed water—and so it was provided. Moses might have come away thinking he did right, and the people probably thought so as well—because what Moses did seemed to work. But what works is not the best measure of what is right before God.

**Rod Mattoon** - God's discipline of Moses shows us that He is concerned about the way we perform His will as well as His will itself. The rock was picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:4—And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. Striking the rock was a picture of the suffering of Christ at Calvary. His death provided living water for us. Speaking to the rock was a type of the "exalted Christ" who provides for our needs. He does not need to be smitten again. Hebrews 9:28—So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

**and the congregation and their beasts drank** - As Paul said in the NT they "all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ." (1 Cor 10:4)

God still miraculously provided water. He is faithful (see [Faithfulness](#)) even when we're not.

2 Ti 2:13+ If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself.

**Steven Cole** - Chuck Swindoll (Moses [Thomas Nelson], pp. 305-311) argues that Moses had a lifelong anger problem that led him to this tragic failure at the end of his life. He points out that Moses was angry when he killed the Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a fellow Israelite (Exod. 2:11-12; Acts 7:23-24). Forty years later, God called Moses to return to Egypt and demand that Pharaoh let Israel go. But even though the Lord had told Moses that He would harden Pharaoh's heart, when Pharaoh repeatedly refused to let Israel go, Moses "went out from Pharaoh in hot anger" (Exod. 11:8), which was unnecessary. Later, when Moses went down from Mount Sinai and saw the people worshiping the golden calf, in anger he smashed the Ten Commandments (Exod. 32:19). While his anger may have been righteous, Swindoll (pp. 307-308) argues that God did not approve of his destroying those tablets. Moses' unchecked pattern of anger is what now, 40 years later, caused him to strike the rock in anger, resulting in his being excluded from the Promised Land. While some of Moses' anger was righteous, we need to be careful not to justify most of our anger as righteous. The Scottish hymn writer George Matheson said (source unknown), "There are times when I do well to be angry, but I have mistaken the times." Or, as Aristotle said (source unknown), Anyone can become angry. That is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time and in the right way—that is not easy. Maybe your besetting sin isn't anger. Whatever keeps tripping you up, Moses' failure warns you to identify that sin and deal with it now before it causes you to stumble at the end of your life.

**Numbers 20:12 But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."**

- **Because you have not believed** Nu 11:21,22 2Ch 20:20 Isa 7:9 Mt 17:17,20 Lu 1:20,45 Ro 4:20
- **treat Me as holy:** Nu 27:14 Lev 10:3 De 1:37 32:51 Isa 8:13 Eze 20:41 36:23 38:10 1Pe 3:15
- **you shall:** Nu 20:24 11:15 De 3:23-26 32:49,50 34:4 Jos 1:2 Joh 1:17



- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### Related Passage:

Numbers 27:14+ for in the wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to treat Me as holy before their eyes at the water." (These are the waters of Meribah of Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.)

Leviticus 10:3+ Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy (IMPLICATION IS NADAB AND ABIHU DID NOT TREAT GOD AS HOLY WITH STRANGE FIRE) And before all the people I will be honored.'" So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.

## MOSES UNBELIEF PROVES COSTLY

**But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me to treat Me as holy in the sight (literally "in the eyes of") of the sons of Israel -** GNT = "Because you did not have enough faith to acknowledge my holy power before the people of Israel. NET = "Because you did not trust me enough to show me as holy before the Israelites." NLT = "Because you did not trust me enough to demonstrate my holiness to the people of Israel." Notice Yahweh associates disobedience with disbelief or unbelief. Note the divine charge is leveled against both Moses and Aaron, so even though Moses did the striking of the rock, Aaron was clearly complicit.

Leaders are disciplined by God, for with privilege goes responsibility.

-- Brian Bell

Guzik - Moses' sinful attitude and action was rooted in unbelief. He didn't really believe God when the LORD told him to speak to the rock and not to strike it.

Steven Cole - As we consider Moses' sin, we must conclude that what may seem to us to be a relatively minor sin may be a major sin to God. His ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8). God labeled Moses' sin as not believing in Him to treat Him as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel (Num. 20:12). Not to believe in God is in effect to call God a liar! It impugns His faithfulness! That's a big sin! Not to treat God as holy, especially as a leader of God's people, is to lower Him from His exalted throne where the angels cover their faces and cry, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isa. 6:3). It may cause His people to disrespect or disregard Him. That's a big sin! You may wonder, "Why did God change the command from striking the rock to speaking to it, and why was He so severe with Moses for his disobedience?" The apostle Paul tells us that the rock in the wilderness that produced water for the thirsty people was a type of Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). When Christ came the first time, He had to bear the penalty of our sins by being "wounded for our transgressions" (Isa. 53:5, New KJV). But Jesus had to suffer and die only once to make atonement for our sins, providing the living water of salvation for all who are thirsty (Rom. 6:9-10; Heb. 9:26, 28; 1 Pet. 3:18). Now that He has suffered and died for our sins, we only need to cry out to Him in prayer to satisfy our thirsty souls. So by striking the rock on this second occasion, Moses messed up the type of Jesus Christ and our salvation. And, as Pastor Roger Ellsworth observed (Moses [Evangelical Press], p. 224), "God is very precise about the whole business of salvation, and we must be precise as well."

Irving Jensen - He identified their sin as unbelief and failing to glorify Him in holiness before the people

**THOUGHT** - This crucial truth is found throughout Scripture, the truth that if we say we believe in God or more specifically in Jesus, we will obey His commands and instructions. In short, our profession that we believe in Jesus is authenticated or substantiated by our obedience to Jesus, which validates our profession as a genuine possession, so to speak (cf John 3:36+). In other words, we give evidence that we are truly born again. Be aware that since we all have the corrupt, sinful flesh, which continually wages war against our souls (1 Pe 2:11+, Gal 5:17+), we will never obey perfectly in this life. But our obedience should be characterized by a general direction ("heavenward", more Christ like, progressively more sanctified), but sadly not by perfection. Perfection in our obedience will come when we are glorified.

**NET Note**- The verb (aman) is the main word for "believe, trust." It is the verb that describes the faith in the Word of the LORD that leads to an appropriate action. Here God says that Moses did not believe Him, meaning that what he did showed more of Moses than of what God said. Moses had taken a hostile stance toward the people, and then hit the rock twice. This showed that Moses was not satisfied with what God said, but made it more forceful and terrifying, thus giving the wrong picture of God to the people. By doing this the full power and might of the LORD was not displayed to the people. It was a momentary lack of faith, but it had to be dealt with. Using the basic meaning of the word qadash ("to be separate, distinct, set apart"), we can understand better what Moses failed to do. He was supposed to have acted in a way that would have shown God to be distinct, different, holy. Instead, he

gave the impression that God was capricious and hostile—very human. The leader has to be aware of what image he is conveying to the people.

**Believed** (0539)([aman](#)) conveys the basic idea of providing stability and confidence. To be steady, firm and thus trustworthy. Aman speaks of certainty and thus can mean to confirm or to affirm. The Septuagint uses [pisteuo](#) which means consider something (Someone) to be true and therefore worthy of one's trust. **Uses in the Pentateuch** - Gen. 15:6+ (THIS IS THE KEY VERSE! ABRAHAM RECKONED RIGHTEOUS BY FAITH); Gen. 42:20; Gen. 45:26; Exod. 4:1; Exod. 4:5; Exod. 4:8; Exod. 4:9; Exod. 4:31; Exod. 14:31; Exod. 19:9; Num. 11:12; Num. 12:7; Num. 14:11; Num. 20:12; Deut. 1:32; Deut. 7:9; Deut. 9:23; Deut. 28:59; Deut. 28:66;

**Guzik** on **treat Me as holy** - What Moses did was an unholy thing. He made God look no different than an angry man or one of the temperamental pagan gods. He did not reflect the heart and character of God before the people. If Moses had spoken to the rock, then the miracle would have pointed to God's power and provision.

To glorify God, all believers, but especially Christian leaders, should seek to finish well.

-- [Steven Cole](#)

**THOUGHT** - Our purpose today is the same, to glorify the Holy God, a charge that is clearly expressed by Jesus in Mt 5:16+ "**Let** your light **shine** ([aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify (GIVE A PROPER OPINION OF) your Father who is in heaven."

**Treat...as holy** (Sanctify) (06942)([qadash](#)) means to set apart from from all common or secular purpose for a specific use. To removed from common use, to be holy, to consecrate. **Uses in Numbers** - Num. 3:13; Num. 6:11; Num. 7:1; Num. 8:17; Num. 11:18; Num. 16:37; Num. 16:38; Num. 20:12; Num. 20:13; Num. 27:14. Lxx uses [hagiazo](#) in [aorist active](#) (volitional choice) [indicative mood](#).

**Therefore** - Term of conclusion. And what a painful conclusion it would be!

**Merrill** - Moses blamed Israel for provoking him into this behavior (Deut 1:37; 3:26; 4:21), an explanation the psalmist accepted (Ps 106:32). But here God blamed Moses: inwardly—"you did not trust me"—and outwardly—you did not "demonstrate my holiness to the people of Israel" (Nu 20:12). Moses failed to reach the very destination to which he successfully led the nation. Perhaps this story lay behind Paul's apprehension, "I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified" (1 Cor 9:27). Certainly it demonstrates the principle that from him to whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48), which is why teachers are judged more strictly (Jas 3:1). ([CBC-Nu](#))

1 Corinthians 9:27+ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Luke 12:48+ but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

James 3:1+ Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

**you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them-** The word **assembly** is same word used in Nu 20:4 and Nu 20:6 indicating that the assembly that contended with Moses was primarily the second generation which would make sense since this is probably the 40th year of wandering as discussed in Nu 20:1. So despite their rebellious attitude they would still be brought into the promised land. I have given is in the perfect tense (in Hebrew and Greek) indicating past completed action with ongoing result, in this case indicating that God was fully committed to give the land of Canaan to Israel. In today's world this would not be viewed as "politically correct," for liberals would ask "What about the rights of the Canaanites?"

**Steven Cole** - As a result of Moses and Aaron not believing God to treat Him as holy, He imposed the penalty that they would not bring the people into the land. This must have been a huge emotional blow to Moses, who had spent the last 40 years enduring much hardship with the hope that one day he would set foot in the land. But later, in God's grace, Moses did stand in the land. He and Elijah stood with the glorified Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:3). In spite of our failures and disappointments in this life, we know that one day soon we will be with Jesus in glory, free from our sin and sharing His victory over sin and death! (**ED**: We will enter the promised life!)

**Phillip** - "The lesson is clear: grace is never a ground for complacency or presumption. By our carelessness, by our sinful neglect, we can sin away forever some of the privileges of our calling—not salvation itself, but our opportunities for service, our possibility for

usefulness, our contribution to the ongoing purposes of God.”

**Brian Bell**- A momentary loss of self-control can yield serious consequences & adversely affect our walk with God.

Q: What area in your life do you have the most trouble in losing your cool?

Q: What consequences did you suffer.

Q: Does this diminish your witness for the Lord?

Q: What can you do differently?

**Steven Cole** - Unbelief was the root sin that led to not treating God as holy. Regarding unbelief, Alfred Edersheim (Old Testament Bible History Eerdmans], pp. 185-186) pointed out that the people despaired of getting into the land and directed their frustrations against Moses and Aaron. They were looking to Moses and not to God as the one who had not yet brought them into the land (Num. 20:4-5). On the other hand, Moses and Aaron despaired of getting into the land and directed their frustrations against this grumbling people. Moses and Aaron were looking at the grumbling people rather than to the Lord and His promise to bring them into the land. Edersheim observed, “But at bottom, the ground of despair and of rebellion, both on the part of the people and of Moses, was precisely the same. In both cases it was really unbelief of God.” The point is, when we look at people rather than the Lord, we’re sure to grow frustrated, because people will always fall short in some way. Even a gifted leader like Moses had a lot of critics. And if leaders look at the people, they will get frustrated with their grumbling and many shortcomings. Look to the Lord!

**Guzik** - God’s correction of Moses was hard; he would not lead Israel into the Promised Land. That which he dreamed of and felt called to even as a child in the palaces of Egypt—to deliver God’s people—would not be completed. Another person would finish the job.. This is only painful because of Moses’ faithful heart; an unfaithful man is not pained at the idea that he cannot complete what God had called him to.. We might have thought, Israel might have thought, and Moses might have thought he was exempt from the decree that all the generation that was of age when the Exodus began would perish in the wilderness—after all, Moses was Moses! But Moses, great as leader as he was, was still a man subject to God and God’s law. This may seem an excessively harsh punishment for Moses. It seems that with only one slip-up, he now had to die short of the Promised Land. But Moses was being judged by a stricter standard because of his leadership position with the nation, and because he had a uniquely close relationship with God.. It is right for teachers and leaders to be judged by a stricter standard (James 3:1); though it is unrighteous to hold teachers and leaders to a perfect standard. It is true the people’s conduct was worse than Moses’ but it is irrelevant.. Worst of all, Moses defaced a beautiful picture of Jesus’ redemptive work through the rock which provided water in the wilderness. The New Testament makes it clear this water-providing, life-giving rock was a picture of Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:4). Jesus, being struck once, provided life for all who would drink of Him (John 7:37). But was unnecessary—and unrighteous—that Jesus would be struck again, much less again twice, because the Son of God needed only to suffer once (Hebrews 10:10–12). Jesus can now be come to with words of faith (Romans 10:8–10), as Moses should have only used words of faith to bring life-giving water to the nation of Israel. Moses “ruined” this picture of the work of Jesus God intended. At the end of it all, God was seen as holy among the children of Israel. Moses did not hallow God in this incident, but God hallowed Himself through the correction of Moses. God will get His glory, God will be hallowed—but will it come through our obedience or our correction?

#### **Related Resource:**

- Vince Sawyer - [The Fall of a Great Leader as Illustrated in the Life of Moses](#) Calvary Baptist Theological Journal 5.1 (Spring, 1989)
- John Beck [Why Did Moses Strike Out?](#) Westminster Theological Journal 65 (2003): 135-41
- Martin Emmrich [The Case Against Moses Reopened](#) JETS 46/1 (March 2003) 53–62

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**Dennis DeHaan** - What is preventable is an attitude of bitterness and regret as we grow older. Look at the life of Moses. When he was 120 years old, he stood with the Israelites before they crossed the Jordan River and entered the Promised Land. He could not go with them because he had disobeyed the Lord when in anger he struck the rock in the wilderness (Numbers 20:12,24).

How easily Moses could have slipped into a self-pitying and resentful frame of mind! Had he not borne the burden of a stubborn and stiff-necked people for 40 years? Had he not interceded for them time after time? Yet at the end of his life he praised the Lord and urged a new generation of Israelites to obey Him (Deuteronomy 32:1-4,45-47). ([A Bitter Attitude](#))

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**H A Ironside** - God will be sanctified in them that come nigh Him. Grace does not set aside government. The Lord is very jealous of the order of His house. Those who are in covenant relationship with Him are responsible to obey His voice. The more light given, the greater is the responsibility resting upon the recipient. God will not be trifled with. What might be in great measure overlooked in the case of one of lesser privileges may be considered a very grave offense on the part of one who has been signally honored of God.

The lapse of a greatly used and well-instructed servant of Christ is far more serious than the same offense on the part of one comparatively ignorant of divine truth and who has had lesser opportunities of service and testimony.

"A charge to keep I have,  
A God to glorify,  
A never-dying soul to save,  
And fit it for the sky:

To serve the present age,  
My calling to fulfil:  
Oh, may it all my powers engage  
To do my Master's will!

Arm me with jealous care,  
As in Thy sight to live;  
And oh, Thy servant, Lord, prepare  
A strict account to give!"  
—Charles Wesley.

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**P G Matthew** - Numbers 20 is filled with misery, the misery that ensues when God's people are stubborn and rebellious. It relates a most shocking and poignant instance of God's covenant sanctions, which fell upon the one who gave Israel the law and spoke with God face to face—Moses himself. God's promises, as well as his threatenings, are true, and God is no respecter of persons.

The context is, once again, murmuring on the part of the Israelites. Moses wisely went to the Lord and, falling facedown, sought guidance. He was told to take his staff and speak to the rock, and God in mercy would miraculously pour forth water for a complaining nation. How longsuffering is our covenant Lord!

We are told elsewhere that this rock is a metaphor for Jesus Christ. Moses had been told in Exodus 17 to strike the rock—a foreshadowing of what would later take place once for all at the cross of Calvary. But Jesus is not to be re-crucified; his people should now speak to the risen, reigning Christ in humble, submissive petition. The rock must not be struck again.

Moses, however, lost patience with the people. It may even be that he was frustrated with God himself for moving in mercy rather than judgment. Tragically, Moses became a rebel too. He had been instructed to speak to the rock; instead he lashed out at the people, shouting, "You rebels! Must we fetch water for you?" Then, in a continuing fit of anger, he struck the rock twice.

In God's marvelous grace, water gushed forth and the community drank their fill. Yet we must note with great sobriety the loss incurred by Moses: He was denied his greatest desire—to lead the people into the Promised Land. Disobedience always brings great loss and regret.

We must each learn this lesson. It does not matter how many years we have attended church. It does not matter how long we have been faithful Christians. We can lose our heads in an instant and behave wickedly. How we need to walk humbly and receive daily God's keeping grace! He alone can say, "I Am." We must continually say, "I am what I am only by the grace of God." (Daily Delight)

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**William MacDonald** - It is easy for a man of burning zeal to be intemperate with other believers. He is so self-disciplined whereas they need to be forever babied along. He is so knowledgeable and they so ignorant.

But what he must learn is that they are still God's beloved people, and that the Lord will not tolerate any verbal abuse of them. It is one thing to preach the Word of God in such power that people are convicted and torn up. But it is quite another thing to scold them severely as an expression of personal irritation. This will cut a man off from God's best rewards.

When David's illustrious men are listed in 2 Samuel 23, there is one name that is conspicuous by its absence. It is the name of Joab, David's commander-in-chief. But why is his name missing? It has been suggested that the reason is that Joab used the sword on some of David's friends. If so, the incident is full of warning for us when we are tempted to use our tongues as a sword on God's people.

When James and John, the sons of thunder, wanted to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans, Jesus said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of" (Luke 9:55). How apropos the rebuke is to us when we speak unadvisedly with our lips to those who are His not only by creation (as the Samaritans were), but by redemption as well. (Truths to Live By)

Because ye believed not in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.-Num. 20.12.

Perhaps there is no story in all the Old Testament more searching for all who are called to lead the people of God, than this of the failure of Moses. There is no honest heart which can fail to understand the action of Moses. What he did was most natural. Therein lay the wrong of it. If that sounds a hard thing to say, let the story be considered. The people murmured against Moses because they were without water; and that, in spite of all the evidences they had received of the Divine care and provision. Moses and Aaron went to Jehovah, and received instructions what to do. These instructions had in them no note of rebuke. Thus assured, Moses went before the people, and, as the Psalmist said, "spake unadvisedly with his lips" (Ps 106.33). By this manifestation of anger, which as we have said was so very natural, the servant of God misrepresented God to the people. His failure was due to the fact that for the moment his faith failed to reach the highest level of activity. He still believed in God, and in His power; but he did not believe in Him to sanctify Him in the eyes of His people. The lesson is indeed a very searching one. Right things may be done in so wrong a way as to produce evil results. There is a hymn in which in the first two lines we may miss the deep meaning, if we are not thoughtful Lord, speak to me that I may speak In living echoes of Thy tone. That is far more than a prayer that we may be able to deliver the Lord's message. It is rather that we may do so in His tone, with His temper. This is where Moses failed, and for this failure he was excluded from the Land.

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**Steven Cole** - When you're watching the Olympics, it's always sad to see a long-distance runner who is leading the race, but in the final lap, he stumbles and falls. All of his years of training toward winning the gold are ruined in the final lap. It's been said that the Bible paints its heroes warts and all! Sadly, there are many great men in the Bible who ran well for a while, but later in life they stumbled and fell.

David, who wrote so many beloved psalms, was probably in his fifties when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then arranged to have her husband Uriah, one of David's loyal mighty men, killed in battle (2 Samuel 11).

King Solomon, who had extraordinary wisdom and brought unprecedented prosperity to Israel, allowed his many wives to turn his heart to idolatry (1 Kings 11:3-4).

King Asa began by doing "good and right in the sight of the Lord his God" (2 Chron. 14:2). He made many godly reforms in Israel. But in the 36th year of his reign, rather than relying on the Lord, he stripped the silver and gold from the temple to hire a foreign king to fight against his enemies. When a godly prophet confronted him, rather than repenting, he became angry and put the prophet into prison (2 Chron. 16:1-11).

The godly King Jehoshaphat made many reforms, but later he allied himself with the wicked Ahab and his evil son, Ahaziah (2 Chron. 19:2; 20:35). King Joash began by repairing the house of the Lord and instituting reforms, but later he abandoned the Lord, served idols, and murdered the son of the man who had raised him (2 Chron. 24).

King Hezekiah restored worship in Judah and saw the Lord bring amazing victories, but late in life he foolishly showed the Babylonian envoys all of his treasures, setting the stage for the later Babylonian invasion (2 Chron. 29:2, 36; 30:26; 32:22; 2 Kings 20:12-19).

There are more examples, but they all warn us that starting well is no guarantee of finishing well. Past faithfulness and obedience do not guarantee future faithfulness and obedience. Even a lifetime of walking with God does not ensure that we will finish well. Our text shows us one of the greatest men of God in history stumbling near the finish line. His mission and one desire had been to lead God's people into the Promised Land. But now he makes a single mistake and God tells him that he won't be the one to lead Israel into the land.

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### **James Smith - Handfuls of Purpose - THE SIN OF MOSES, AND ITS FRUITS**

Numbers 20:1-13

"Speak gently to an erring one,  
E'en if a deed of shame be done;  
For else you but exasperate,  
Perchance turn anger into hate."

Let him that is without sin cast the first stone. Judge not that ye be not judged. Troubles seem to come in crowds. In this chapter three sad events are recorded: 1, The death of Miriam (v. 1). 2, The transgression of Moses (v. 12). 3, The stripping of Aaron (v. 28). Three results of unbelief. With respect to Moses we shall look at—

### 1. The circumstances connected with his sin—

1. THE PLACE. Back to Kadesh where they had been thirty-nine years ago when they sent to spy the land, where many doubted and brought the doom of forty years wanderings upon them. Beware of old sins and barren places in your experience.

2. THE CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE. Discontented and faultfinding. "They chode with Moses," and murmured against the providence of God (vs. 3–5). This is always a source of intense trial to the faithful man of God.

3. THE HUMILITY OF MOSES. "Moses and Aaron fell upon their faces" (v. 6). Not as before the people, but before the Lord, and His glory appeared unto them, and a way of deliverance was revealed. "Thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock" (v. 8). Moses could not make the water, but at his bidding it was to come.

2. The nature of his sin. "Thou shalt speak unto the rock (v. 8). This was his commission, but instead of speaking he smote the rock twice (v. 11). When water was to be brought from the rock the first time, God commanded Moses to smite the rock (Exod. 17:6). That Rock was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4), and so in the purpose of God He could only be smitten once, "He suffered once." Further blessing or fresh outpourings of His fulness comes to us by asking: "Speak ye unto the Rock." We have here an incidental evidence of the carefulness of Jehovah about those things which were typical of His coming Son. The teaching in the types is the teaching of the Holy Ghost. These things are spiritually discerned.

In this sin of the servant of God there was—

1. DISOBEDIENCE. God said speak, but he smote, and that twice over, as if there were impatience also in the act. Perhaps he was allowing himself to be guided more by his past experience than by the fresh Word of God. This is always a danger to the servants of Christ. The means used and blessed yesterday may not be the God-appointed means to-day. Wait on the Lord.

2. SELFISH PASSION. "Hear now, ye rebels." It is quite true that they were rebels, but calling them such names in these circumstances did not improve matters. His spirit was provoked, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips (Psa. 106:33). The best of men are but men at the best. The meekest man on the earth was not proof against pride. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

3. PRESUMPTION. "Must we fetch you water out of the rock" (v. 10). It is very grieving to God when we seek our own glory while doing His work. Note how different it was with Peter and John in connection with the healing of the lame man mentioned in Acts 3:12. "Do you wish me to show you the way of salvation?" said a preacher to an anxious soul. Such me's are apt to be magnified by the seeker so as to hide the Master. Without ME you can do nothing. It is the Spirit that quickeneth.

There are two things that we must not forget in dealing with the sin of Moses: (1) That he himself tells us of it. He does not seek to hide from the eyes of others his own failings. For the glory of God and our good it is recorded. (2) That his failure through unbelief (v. 12) did not alter the faithfulness of God. "The water came out abundantly" (v. 11). The unbelief of some does not make the faith of God of none effect. As Christians we all come short of what we might be, but He abideth faithful. Bless His Name.

### 3. The fruit of his sin. It—

1. DISHONoured THE LORD. "Because ye believed Me not, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel" (v. 12). The Lord's Name is profaned by the unbelief and self-glorying acts of His people. "I will be sanctified in you before the heathen" (Ezek. 20:41).

2. SHUT HIM OUT OF THE PROMISED POSSESSION. "Therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them" (v. 12). Servant of God, one sin may shut you out of the enjoyment of a great privilege, one small cloud may hide from your gaze all the blue of Heaven. This is why many of the Lord's people are hindered from entering into the fulness of blessing and power in their service for Christ, there is sin in the camp. They could not enter in because of unbelief.

3. IS A SOLEMN WARNING TO US. Boast not thyself. It is possible to be calm and clear like the placid pool, and yet not be clean at the bottom, so that when the stone of slander or calumny is suddenly cast in the whole may become polluted. Cleanse Thou me from secret faults, and keep me in the hollow of Thy hand.

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Milgrom's survey of the medieval Jewish commentators' definitions of Moses's sin is representative:

1. Moses's action in striking the rock: (a) that he struck it instead of speaking (Rashi, Rashbam, Arama, Shadal, Malbim); (b)

that he chose it although the people wanted another rock (Orah Hayyim, Yalqut, Lekakh Tov); (c) that he struck it twice instead of once (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Ibn Ezra).

2. His character, shown by (a) his blazing temper (Maimonides, Ibn Ezra, Tanhuma B. 4:210); (b) his cowardice (in fleeing to the sanctuary; 20:6; Albo, Biur); (c) his callousness (in mourning for Miriam while his people died of thirst; Yalqut, Lekakh Tov).

3. His words, (a) which in the form of a question were misconstrued as doubting God (Meir ha-Kohen, Ramban); (b) which actually doubted God (Tanhuma B. 4:121–122; Deuteronomy Rabbah 19:13–14); (c) calling Israel “rebels” (Ibn Ezra); (d) notsi, “shall we draw forth ...” (Hananel, Ramban). (Milgrom 1989:448)

Ruling out the other choices and focusing on arguments against 1a and 1c, Milgrom (1989:452) opts for 3d: “Moses and Aaron might be interpreted as having put themselves forth as God.” Perhaps a little of all three of these undermined God’s holiness in front of Israel. Occasional disobedience chips away at faith even as a little leaven can permeate a whole lump of dough (1 Cor 5:6). ([CBC-Nu](#))

**Numbers 20:13 Those were the waters of Meribah, because the sons of Israel contended with the LORD, and He proved Himself holy among them.**

- **waters:** De 33:8 Ps 95:8 106:32-48
- **Meribah:** Ex 17:7 De 32:51, Meribah-Kadesh
- **He proved Himself holy** Isa 5:16 Eze 20:41 36:23 38:16
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## COMMEMORATIVE NAME WATERS OF MERIBAH

**Those were the waters of Meribah** - Another place of national sin was memorialized! Merrill ([CBC-Nu](#)) calls it “Quarrelsville!” There are two places referred to as **Meribah**. “One of the sites called Meribah was located near Rephidim in the Desert of Sin (Exodus 17:1). At this location it was also called **Massah**, which differentiates it from the other **Meribah** mentioned in Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:16; 9:22; 33:8; Psalm 95:8). The other site named Meribah was located in Kadesh Barnea, and therefore was referred to as **Meribah Kadesh** (Numbers 27:14; Deuteronomy 32:51; Ezekiel 47:19; 48:28).” (Gotquestions)

**Meribah** ([04809](#))([meribah](#) from [riyb](#) = to strive, contend) means place of strife or quarreling. This name is used of two places, both sites of Moses’ striking a rock, the first being at the beginning of the 40 years of wandering and at the foot of Mount Horeb (Sinai) (Ex 13:7, Nu 20:13, Nu 20:24) and the second place also called Meribah (Meribah of **Kadesh** or Meribah-**Kadesh** - see notes on Nu 20:1-13) in the [desert of Zin](#) near **Kadesh**, ([map](#)) near the end of the 40 years of wilderness wandering when Moses disobeyed God and instead of speaking to the rock (Nu 20:8), in anger struck the rock twice. The [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) translates the proper name Meribah in Ex 17:7 with the noun **loidoreo** (not found in NT but related to verb [loidoreo](#)) which means railing or abuse.

**Baker** explains that **Meribah** means “quarreling or contention (from [riyb](#) = “to strive, quarrel”). It was the location of a place near Rephidim where there was no drinking water for Israel. The people verbally attacked Moses, and he struck a rock, at the Lord’s command, to bring forth water (Ex. 17:7+). The place is also called Massah, “testing.” B. Evidently another occasion of “contention” forty years later (see above but C below). C. This location is placed at Kadesh Barnea, not near Rephidim according to most authorities. But it is a clear reference to the incident in the Desert of Zin (Num. 20:13, 24). See B above. (Complete Word Study Dictionary)

**Gilbrant - Meribah** is the name of two locations. The name literally means “strife,” “quarrel,” “contention” and describes the nature of incidents that occurred at those locations.

At the beginning of the forty years of wandering, Moses named a fountain in the desert of Sin “Meribah.” The fountain issued from a rock at the foot of Mount Horeb, a rock which God commanded him to smite (Exo. 17:1-7). The people were ready to stone Moses (v. 4), because there was no water in the area. Moses struck the rock, and water came out. Verse 7 states, “And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’”

Another fountain was created similarly in the desert of Zin near Kadesh. This, however, was near the end of the forty years of wandering. Again the people complained that there was no water, and again God gave orders to Moses and Aaron. He said, "Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water" (Num. 20:8). In the heat of emotion, Moses instead chided the people saying "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" (v.10). He then smote the rock twice until the water flowed abundantly. God immediately rebuked the brothers for not believing and for not professing Him in the sight of the people. As a result, God did not permit either to enter the Promised Land.

As if to distinguish it from the other site, the latter Meribah is almost always indicated by the addition of "waters of" (see Pss. 81:7; 106:32). An additional distinction of "the waters of Meribah at Kadesh" also is used (Num. 27:14; Deut. 32:51; Ezek. 47:19). Only once is this latter location referred to simply as "Meribah," in Ps. 95:8. (Complete Biblical Library Hebrew-English Dictionary)

**because** - Explains the name **Meribah**.

**the sons of Israel contended** (see above on [riyb](#)) **with the LORD, and He proved Himself holy among them** - How did He prove Himself holy among them? They would undoubtedly be aware of Moses' punishment and thus in judging Moses righteously this would show the people that He was holy and was to be treated as holy! There is an interesting wordplay here for **holy** is [qadash](#) and the word for **Kadesh** is [Qadesh](#).

[Timothy Ashley \(NICOT-Nu\)](#) says, "As the people had **refused to rely on Yahweh** in their first sojourn at Kadesh and were condemned to die outside the land of promise (Nu 14:11, 22–35), so here in the second sojourn there (many years later), the leaders (MOSES AND AARON) make the same mistake and are sentenced to the same fate." (NICOT-Nu)

**Spurgeon** - This was one of the most memorable of Israel's sins, because it was a repetition of an old crime, in the face of former mercies and judgments. May the Lord save us from repeating our sins, lest we be made bitterly to smart for them! Keep us, dear Saviour, that we rebel not against thee.

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[Steven Cole](#) - Charles Simeon (ibid. 2:112) pointed out that Moses represents the Law, which can only condemn us, not save us. One violation of God's holy Law is enough to render us guilty of breaking the whole thing (James 2:10). One violation was enough to keep Moses out of the Promised Land. As Paul said (Rom. 3:20), "By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight." To enter the land, we need the new Joshua—Jesus, the Savior, who fulfilled the Law perfectly (Meyer, ibid. p. 177). As Paul stated (Rom. 10:4), "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Put your trust in Him! If you've never read the life of George Muller, I strongly urge you to do so. I first read George Muller of Bristol (A. T. Pierson, [Revell]) during the summer of 1970, and it changed my life. Muller was a man "who prayed earnestly that he might live a life and do a work which should be convincing proof that God hears prayer and that it is safe to trust Him at all times" (ibid., pp. 15-16). For over 60 years, without making any needs known to supporters, he trusted God through prayer alone to provide for thousands of orphans. At Muller's funeral service, a man related how a friend had said to Muller, "When God calls you home, it will be like a ship going into harbor, full sail." Muller replied, "Oh no! It is poor George Muller who needs daily to pray, 'Hold Thou me up in my goings, that my footsteps slip not.'" Pierson adds (p. 289) that the lives of men in Scripture who fell later in life were "a perpetual warning, leading [Muller] to pray that he might never thus depart from the Lord in his old age." Muller finished well! Finishing well in life depends on running well now, no matter where you're at. To enter the race, put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Then, each day meet with Him in His Word and in prayer. As Muller often advised (ibid., pp. 314-315), "The first business of every morning should be to secure happiness in God." Then, when you encounter problems, use them to drive you into the Lord's presence. Deal with your besetting sin, so that it doesn't trip you up. Develop the habit of obedience in what may seem to be relatively small things. Give God the glory for everything He uses you to accomplish for Him. Trust in Him at all times and treat Him as holy. One day you will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" You finished well!

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**Question** - [What is the significance of Meribah in the Bible?](#)

**Answer:** Meribah was a site that the Israelites passed through in their desert wanderings. Being a place of testing for the Israelites, it also had a major impact in the lives of Moses and Aaron. Apparently, based on the biblical text, there are two sites named Meribah (W. A. Elwell and B. J. Beitzel, "Meribah," [Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, volume 2, Baker, 1988, p. 1,442](#)). One of the sites called Meribah was located near Rephidim in the Desert of Sin (Exodus 17:1). At this location it was also called Massah, which differentiates it from the other Meribah mentioned in Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:16; 9:22; 33:8; Psalm 95:8). The other site named Meribah was located in [Kadesh Barnea](#), and therefore was referred to as Meribah Kadesh (Numbers 27:14; Deuteronomy 32:51; Ezekiel 47:19; 48:28).



Central to both locations is a miracle of water coming from a rock. At Meribah/Massah, the Israelites were extremely thirsty and quarreled with Moses about the lack of water (Exodus 17:2). Because of their thirst, they grumbled against Moses and asked, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?" (Exodus 17:3). Moses brought this problem to the Lord, and the Lord enabled Moses to strike the rock so that the Israelites would have water and know that God was with them (Exodus 17:4–7). Because of their grumbling and testing of God, Moses called the place Meribah, which means "testing," and Massah, which means "quarrelling" (John Hannah, "Exodus," *Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, ed., Victor, 1983, p. 135). Not only did the Israelites demonstrate doubt in God's provision, but they also tested Him because of their complaints and distrust.

Toward the end of the Israelites' forty years of wandering, a similar situation occurred at Meribah Kadesh. Complaining about a lack of water for their livestock and themselves, the "people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. They quarreled with Moses and said, 'If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the Lord! Why did you bring the Lord's community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!'" (Numbers 20:2–5). Appealing to the Lord at the tent of meeting, Aaron and Moses were told by God to speak to the rock, which would bring forth water (Numbers 20:6–7). Instead of demonstrating God's glory and provision in speaking to the rock as the Lord had instructed, Moses struck the rock and claimed he and Aaron would bring forth water for the Israelites (Numbers 20:10–11). The Lord still kept His promise in providing water but told Aaron and Moses that they would [not enter the Promised Land](#) because of their failure to obey Him (Numbers 20:12). It is clear from the rest of Scripture that God tested the Israelites, including Aaron and Moses, at Meribah Kadesh to gauge their obedience and faithfulness (Psalm 81:7; 106:32).

Another place Meribah is directly mentioned in the Bible is in the book of Ezekiel. In the future allotment of the land of Israel in the [millennial kingdom](#), Meribah Kadesh will serve as a border for the section allotted to the tribe of Gad (Ezekiel 47:19; 48:28). As Meribah served to remind the Israelites following Moses of their lack of trust in the Lord, so also will it in the millennial reign of Christ.

Being a place of strife and testing, Meribah is worthy of remembrance. As Psalm 95:8 warns, "Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness" (cf. Hebrews 3:4). The Israelites' disbelief at Kadesh Barnea resulted in their inability to enter the Promised Land for another generation, and Aaron's and Moses' disobedience at Meribah Kadesh kept them from entering the Promised Land as well. Disobedience and unbelief have enduring consequences that can affect the rest of one's life. [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

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### [Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible](#) - Meribah, Massah and Meribah

**Meribah** - 1. Noun meaning "strife," named for a place at Horeb, near Rephidim (Wadi Feiran), where Israel contended with Moses for water near the beginning of the wilderness wanderings (Ex 17:7). This is the place probably alluded to in Deuteronomy 33:8 and Psalm 95:8, and is alternately called Massah.

2. Another place, near Kadesh-barnea in the wilderness of Zin, where Israel also quarreled with Moses for water, and God again provided it from a rock (Nu 20:13, 24; Nu 27:14); alternately called Meribath-kadesh in Deuteronomy 32:51. This episode took place toward the close of the desert wanderings. The waters of Meribah were waters of contention. Here God's anger was provoked against Moses and Aaron because they did not listen to him and sanctify him before Israel. Instead of speaking to the rock as God commanded, Moses, angered at Israel's hardness of heart, struck the rock twice with his rod. The psalmist records that here God tested Israel (Ps 81:7), and Israel's subsequent rebellion prodded Moses to sin (Ps 106:32). Meribath-kadesh is mentioned as a place on Israel's southern border (Ez 47:19; 48:28).

**Massah and Meribah.** Two Hebrew words meaning, respectively, "to put to the test" and "to find fault, quarrel." According to Exodus 17:7, after Moses got water from the rock at Rephidim, he called the place by these two names to memorialize the Israelites' "testing" of God's faithful provision. **Massah** is mentioned four times (Dt 6:16; 9:22; 33:8; Ps 95:8) as the site of the rebellious rejection of God by the Israelites. In contrast, Numbers 20:13, 24; 27:14; and Deuteronomy 32:51 place Meribah near Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin where Moses struck the rock twice to produce water. Psalm 81:7 and Deuteronomy 33:8 suggest that God was testing the Israelites in these instances.

**Numbers 20:14** From Kadesh Moses then sent messengers to the king of Edom: "Thus your brother Israel has said, 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us;

- **Moses:** Jdg 11:16,17

- **brother:** Ge 32:3,4 De 2:4-25 Dt 23:7 Ob 1:10-12 Mal 1:2
- **befallen:** Heb. found us, Ex 18:8
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Click to enlarge to see [Edom](#)

## A "TEXT" TO THE KING OF EDMO

Exodus 20:14-21 describes the King of Edom's rejection of Moses' request.

[Irving Jensen](#) - This is the first record in Numbers of a plan of march at the end of the forty years of journeyings. The easiest route to Canaan for two million people was not due north from Kadesh through the treacherous hills and mountains of Canaan, a route where they would be exposed to the waiting armies of defenders. Rather, as a topographical map of Palestine indicates, the line of march crossed the low plains of the Arabah which lie south of the Dead Sea, then proceeded northward along the east side of the Dead Sea on the plateau level, and finally reached the plains of the Jordan opposite Jericho, where preparation would be made for the final thrust into Canaan proper.

**Merrill** - Earlier the Israelites had failed to enter Canaan from the south (Nu 14:40–45); now they would try from the east, across the Jordan. The route from their base at Kadesh to the Jordan River would take them through the eastern Arabah, which was Edomite territory. ([CBC-Nu](#))

**From Kadesh Moses then sent messengers to the king of [Edom](#)** - Israel is preparing to leave the desert are of the Sinai peninsula for the home stretch to Moab and then the promised land. This would have been the easiest route in their journey to Moab.

Note that even though Moses now knows he cannot enter the promised land, he does not become bitter but presses on toward the goal for which God had called him. Moses is a good model of loyalty and faithfulness even in the face of adverse consequences. I don't see any grumbling or complaining from Moses saying "But it's not fair. Look how much it has cost me to bring these rebels this far!" Truly "the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth." (Nu 12:3+) A humble man accepts the consequences of his sin.

**Kadesh** ([06946](#)) see notes above on [Qadesh](#)

**Thus your brother Israel** (read Ge 25:19-34) **has said, 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us** - Israel or Jacob as he was know in Genesis had a twin brother named Esau who sold him his birthright. Thus Moses' allusion to **your** (Esau or Edom's) **brother Israel** (Jacob). Esau's descendants came to inhabit the territory known as Edom. If you enlarge the map you can see that it would have been a shorter distance to come to the King's Highway by going from Kadesh directly through Edom. ([map](#); [another map showing all major highways through ancient Israel](#)).

**Wiersbe** - This common heritage should have caused the Edomite leaders to have some sympathy for their brothers. [Be Counted](#))

**NET Note** - Some modern biblical scholars are convinced, largely through arguments from silence, that there were no unified kingdoms in Edom until the 9th century, and no settlements there before the 12th century, and so the story must be late and largely fabricated. The evidence is beginning to point to the contrary. But the cities and residents of the region would largely be Bedouin, and so leave no real remains. (**ED COMMENT:** Arguments from silenced are "silenced" by the inspired Word of God! Case settled regarding the king and kingdom of Edom!)

**[Guzik](#) uzik - This was the fifth stage of the Exodus.**

1. First, from Egypt to Mount Sinai (Exodus 12:31 to 18:27).
2. Second, the sojourn at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:1 to Numbers 10:10).
3. Third, the first approach to the Promised Land, beginning at Mount Sinai, but being aborted at Kadesh with the refusal to enter the Promised Land in faith (Numbers 10:11 to 14:45).
4. Fourth, the 38 years of wandering in the wilderness until the generation of unbelief had died (Numbers 15:1 to Numbers 20:13).
5. Now, fifth, the second and final approach to the Promised Land (Numbers 20:14 to Joshua 2:24).

The area southeast and southwest of the Dead Sea, on opposite sides of the Arabah, was known as Edom in biblical times and was the home of the Edomites. The name “Edom” derives from a Semitic root which means “red” or “ruddy” and characterizes the red sandstone terrain of much of the area in question. Moreover, the Edomite area was largely “wilderness”—semi-desert, not very conducive to agriculture—and many of the inhabitants were semi-nomads. Thus the boundaries of Edom would have been rather ill-defined. Yet not all of Edom was wilderness; the vicinity of present-day Tafileh and Buseireh, east of the Arabah, is fairly well watered, cultivable land, and would have boasted numerous villages during Old Testament times. This would have been the center of Edomite population. Buseireh is situated on the ruins of ancient Bozrah, the capital of Edom. Note that the modern name, “Buseireh,” preserves memory of the ancient one, “Bozrah.”

Most of the biblical passages pertaining to Edom refer to this Edomite center east of the Arabah. Isaiah 63:1, for example, speaks of one that “cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength.” (See also Jeremiah 49:22; Amos 1:11-12). Yet there are other passages which presuppose that the territory west of the Arabah, south of the Judean hill country and separating Judah from the Gulf of Aqaba, was also part of Edom. See especially the description of Judah’s boundary in Numbers 34:3-4 and Joshua 15:1-3, where Judah’s south side is described as extending “even to the border of Edom the wilderness of Zin.” Certain of the tribal groups which ranged this wilderness area south of Judah are listed in the Edomite genealogy of Genesis 36:1. In New Testament times, even the southern end of the Judean hill country (south of approximately Hebron) was known officially as Idumea (Edom).

The “land of Seir” seems to be synonymous with Edom in some passages (Genesis 32:3; Genesis 36:8; Judges 5:4). Egyptian texts from about 1300 to 1100 B.C. know of Shasu (apparently semi-nomadic tribes) from Seir and Edom. “Teman” also is used in apposition to Edom in at least one biblical passage (Amos 1:12), but normally refers to a specific district of Edom and possibly to a town by that name. One of Job’s visitors was Eliphaz the Temanite (Job 2:11; compare Ezekiel 25:13).

The Israelites regarded the Edomites as close relatives, even more closely related to them than the Ammonites or Moabites. Specifically, they identified the Ammonites and Moabites as descendants of Lot, Abraham’s nephew, but the Edomites as descendants of Esau, Jacob’s brother (Genesis 19:30-36; Genesis 36:1). Thus Edom occasionally is referred to as a “brother” to Israel (Amos 1:11-12). Edomites seem not to have been barred from worship in the Jerusalem Temple with the same strictness as the Ammonites and Moabites (Deuteronomy 23:3-8). Yet, as is often the case with personal relations, the closest relative can be a bitter enemy. According to the biblical writers, enmity between Israel and Edom began already with Jacob and Esau (when the former stole the latter’s birthright) and was exacerbated at the time of the Israelite Exodus from Egypt (when the Edomites refused the Israelites passage through their land). Be that as it may, much of the conflict also had to do with the fact that Edom was a constant threat to Judah’s frontier, and moreover blocked Judean access to the Gulf of Aqaba.

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## **John Bennett - THOU SHALT NOT PASS**

Have you come across a ‘no entry’ sign recently?

The enforced detour around the land of Edom must have been a sore burden to the weary Israelites. Perhaps they did not expect such a flat refusal. After all, was Edom not related to Israel? Edom was Esau, Jacob’s brother, Gen. 36:1, and Moses addresses the king of Edom in this way. But even an appeal to natural relationship falls on deaf ears, v. 18. Not only was this attitude unnatural, it was unreasonable. Moses offered to pay for all they consumed en route, v. 19. In natural terms it would have been a tremendous boost for Edom’s economy! Why was Edom so implacably opposed to Israel? For the answer to this question we must go back to Genesis.

Esau and Jacob represented two types of humanity. Esau represented what was natural. He was a ‘man of the field’. He valued earthly things and held spiritual things with a light hand. Jacob, for all his faults, was a spiritual man. His methods left much to be desired, but he truly valued God’s inheritance. He was, of course, the second man who would displace the first, Gen. 25:23.

It is clear that Edom knew of Israel’s bondage and suffering in Egypt, vv. 14–16. Is it possible that they had secretly rejoiced and, perhaps, felt that now the inheritance would be theirs instead? Thus, faced with a re-born nation seeking to fulfil the purpose of God, Edom is determined to impede the progress of Israel.

This teaches us the lesson that the natural man can have no sympathy with the purpose of God, because it clearly teaches his own judgement and demise.

We should compare this section with chapter 21 verses 21–25. In the latter passage a similar situation arose. The response, however, was different. Here, God told them simply to by-pass the area; in chapter 21, God told them to fight.

Similar situations may require different solutions. We need to be cast on God for wisdom every hour—regardless of how familiar

situations may feel. Applying the same remedy may not be the will of God.

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Ridley Pearson - "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle."—18:19.

Interpretation.—Quite opposite versions of this proverb are given. But our own Authorized Version is in accordance with the text of the original. Dissensions between brethren are the most hard to be composed. The allusion in the previous saying (ver. 18) to the ceasing of contentions, may have suggested a case in which it is too often impossible to make them cease.

Illustrations.—The implacable nature of quarrels between brothers is seen in the cases of Cain with Abel, Joseph's brethren with himself, Esau with Jacob, Absalom with Amnon, where nothing short of death was resolved and plotted. **How hard to be won was Esau; how long did his "strong city" hold out! and though himself conciliated, was not the enmity perpetuated between the descendants of the two brothers from generation to generation** (Numb. 20:14–21; Ezek. 35:5; Obad. 10–14)? Grace, however, will triumph, as where the "sharp contention" which for a while separated two brother Apostles, was completely and finally healed (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11).

Application.—Experience confirms and history attests the truth of this saying. No quarrels are (proverbially) so difficult to heal as family quarrels, no feuds so irreconcilable as those between brothers, when they have reached a head. The proverb is true also in a measure of those who have been close friends, and even of members of the same fraternity. As "blood is thicker than water," as the love implanted by nature is of the strongest, so when that natural affection gives place to enmity, there are no bounds to its vehemence. Again, as "the sweeter the wine the sharper the vinegar," so closest friendship has often turned to deadliest hatred. The "odium theologicum," which finds its counterpart in other professions, has its root in the overweening value naturally attached by men to their own opinions on matters they are specially conversant with and have very much at heart. In all such cases, a breach is the more deeply to be lamented, inasmuch as unity would have been a widespread blessing. I must as a brother not take liberties, not expect too much, and "leave off contention" betimes (17:14). It is generally best for brothers, however attached, not to become closely associated in business matters, unless as men of business. Friends who are not related should remember that intimacy, when it degenerates into undue familiarity, is perilously near a turning-point. From professional' quarrels (alas! even over the sacrament of love!) largeness of heart is the alone preservative. For my part, let me have but one enemy—the devil, with him never be reconciled, with my brother never fall out!

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#### Related Resources:

- [What is the significance of Edom in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- American Tract Society [Edom](#)
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Edom](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Edom](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Edom](#)
- Hitchcock Bible Names [Edom](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Edom, Edomites](#)
- Watson's Theological Dictionary [Edom](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Edom; Edomites](#)
- Kitto Biblical Cyclopedia [Edom](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Edom](#)
- The Nuttall Encyclopedia [Edom](#)

**Numbers 20:15 that our fathers went down to Egypt, and we stayed in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians treated us and our fathers badly.**

- **our fathers:** Ge 46:6 Ac 7:15
- **stayed:** Ge 15:13 Ex 12:40
- **treated badly:** Nu 11:5 16:13 Ex 1:11-14,16,22 5:14 De 26:6 Ac 7:19
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**EGYPTIAN HARDSHIPS  
ARE DESCRIBED**

that our fathers went down to Egypt, and we stayed in Egypt a long time (Lit, "many days"), and the Egyptians treated us and our fathers badly - Moses (in my opinion) was not trying to evoke sympathy but was simply giving the true history of Israel's past 400+ years, most of it in bondage. He of course would be hoping to appeal to King of Edom's compassion.

**NET Note** on **badly** - The verb רָעָה (*ra'a'*) means "to act or do evil." Evil here is in the sense of causing pain or trouble. So the causative stem in our passage means "to treat wickedly."

**Numbers 20:16** 'But when we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent an angel and brought us out from Egypt; now behold, we are at Kadesh, a town on the edge of your territory.'

- **we cried:** Ex 2:23,24 Ex 3:7-9 Ex 6:5 Ex 14:10
- **sent:** Ex 3:2-6 Ex 14:19 Ex 23:20 Ex 33:2
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## ISRAEL CRIED OUT TO JEHOVAH HE BROUGHT THEM OUT

**But when we cried out (tsaaq) to the LORD, He heard (shama) our voice** - In Ex 2:23-24+ Israel sighed and groaned and in Ex 3:7-9+ their cry was heeded by Jehovah Who delivered "them from the power of the Egyptians, and (brought) them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite." But to get to that land flowing with milk and honey by the shortest route, they had to pass through the kingdom of Edom.

**Wiersbe** makes a good point that this is not just a History of Israel lesson - Since God delivered them and was directing them, surely the Edomites would want to cooperate with Jehovah and let their Jewish relatives march through the land. ([Be Counted](#))

**And sent an angel (malak) and brought us out from Egypt** - See Ex 3:2-6+, the "angel" of course was the **Angel of the LORD**, the preincarnate manifestation of Jesus Christ. He brought them out (of Egypt) in order to bring them in (to Canaan). Some suggest the "angel" was Moses, but I think that is unlikely.

For **angel** see also Ex 14:19+ and Ex 23:20+

In short "Without elaborating on the power of Egypt, of which Edom was of course well aware, Moses hastened to impress on Edom the power of Israel's God. The sending of his "angel" or "messenger" was sufficient to break Egypt's resistance and to liberate Israel. Moses thus implied that Israel was backed by a strong God and that Edom should think twice before refusing its request" (Merrill [CBC-Nu](#)) The King of Edom apparently had no fear of God.

**Now behold, (hinneh** - directs attention to following) **we are at Kadesh, a town on the edge of** (Lit - "your border") **your territory** - Surely the King of Edom was aware of this large assembly of over 2 million souls.

**Kadesh** ([06946](#)) see notes above on [Qadesh](#)

**Numbers 20:17** 'Please let us pass through your land. We will not pass through field or through vineyard; we will not even drink water from a well. We will go along the king's highway, not turning to the right or left, until we pass through your territory.'

- Nu 21:1,22-24 De 2:1-4,27,29
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Via [Maris](#) in [purple](#) on left. [King's Highway](#) in [red](#) to right of Jerusalem  
See [another map](#)

## ISRAEL'S APPEAL FOR PASSAGE THRU EDOM

**Please let us pass through your land** - "The request is expressed by the use of the [cohortative](#), "let us pass through." It is the proper way to seek permission." ([NET Note](#))

**We will not pass through field or through vineyard; we will not even drink water from a well. We will go along the king's highway** (lit. "the road of the king"), **not turning to the right or left, until we pass through your territory** - The king's highway was just to the east of Edom running north-south and providing a perfect route for Israel to make their journey north to the plains of Moab where Moses would give the second generation instructions in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses promises that Israel will be as [unobtrusive](#) as possible (would not disrupt agriculture, use up resources or go trample on Edom's territory) and would go along the [king's highway](#), which was a wide, well-marked trail that had been flattened so that kings could ride their chariots on it and people could drive wagons along it. (see "[highway](#)" [on map](#))([Holman Bible Dictionary article on king's highway](#)) Moses promises the Israelites would not veer off of the King's Highway.

[NET Note](#) on [king's highway](#) - This a main highway running from Damascus in the north to the Gulf of Aqaba, along the ridge of the land. Some scholars suggest that the name may have been given by the later Assyrians (see B. Obed, "Observations on Methods of Assyrian Rule in Transjordan after the Palestinian Campaign of Tiglathpileser III," JNES 29 [1970]: 177–86). Bronze Age fortresses have been discovered along this highway, attesting to its existence in the time of Moses. The original name came from the king who developed the highway, probably as a trading road (see S. Cohen, IDB 3:35–36). (See [Another Map on King's Highway](#))

[Wikipedia](#) on [king's highway](#) - The **King's Highway** was a [trade route](#) of vital importance in the [ancient Near East](#), connecting Africa with [Mesopotamia](#). It ran from [Egypt](#) across the [Sinai Peninsula](#) to [Aqaba](#), then turned northward across [Transjordan](#), to [Damascus](#) and the [Euphrates River](#).

**Numbers 20:18 Edom, however, said to him, "You shall not pass through us, or I will come out with the sword against you."**

- The Edomites were perpetual enemies of the Hebrews and refused them safe passage (cf. Deut. 2:1-8). The enmity went back to the dispute between Jacob and Esau, the father of the Edomites (Gen. 25:30; cf. Num. 24:18; 2 Sam. 8:13, 14; 2 Kin. 8:20-22; 14:7; 2 Chr. 28:17; Ps. 137:7; Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 25:12-14; Obad. 10ff.; Mal. 1:2-5).
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## FIRST REJECTION BY THE EDMITES

**Edom, however, said to him, "You shall not pass through us** - Presumably **Edom** represents the king of Edom (but see note below). "The imperfect tense here has the nuance of prohibition." ([NET Note](#))

[UBS Handbook](#) has an interesting note - However, there may be some significance that the king of Edom is not referred to explicitly after verse 14. It is as if Edom as an entire people/nation reacts negatively to Israel's request for safe passage (verses 18–21).

**or I will come out with the sword against you** - This abrupt, in your face refusal leaves no room for negotiation! This is not passive but active aggression and as noted from here on out they were enemies of Israel. Edom, because of her relentless hatred toward Israel, is singled out from the nations as the object of God's fury in Isaiah 34:1-17, 5, 6+. She was to suffer a fate like that of Babylon. Twenty-six centuries of desolation bear witness to the truth of this prophecy (cf. Mal. 1:4+).

**Comment** - There are also indications that Christ will return first to that land of the cursed Edomites (Oba 18; Mal 1:3,4+), then proceed to Jerusalem (compare Isaiah 63:1-4+), all the way treading the terrible "winepress of the wrath of God," wearing a "vesture dipped in blood" (Rev 14:19,20<sup>+</sup>; Rev 19:13<sup>+</sup>). Note also Isa 34:6+ which reveals that "the LORD hath...a great slaughter in the land of Idumea." The distance from Bozrah (Isaiah 34:6) to Jerusalem is about 1600 furlongs (Revelation 14:20<sup>+</sup>).

**Numbers 20:19 Again, the sons of Israel said to him, "We will go up by the highway, and if I and my livestock do drink any of your water, then I will pay its price. Let me only pass through on my feet, nothing else."**

- De 2:6,28
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## SECOND APPEAL FROM ISRAEL

**Again, the sons of Israel said to him** - An honest appeal from **the sons of Israel**, Moses' messengers. They are not begging or pleading, but trying to reason with the king of Edom assuring him there is nothing to fear.

**We will go up by the highway**- Presumably this refers to the King's Highway (see [location in relation to Edom in map above](#)). An idiomatic rendering in English is "We will keep to the beaten track" (NJPSV).

**And if I and my livestock do drink any of your water, then I will pay its price**- Moses uses personal pronouns but clearly it is the entire nation of Israel that is intended. Moses promises just recompense for water. Water was precious in the arid Middle East.

**Let me only pass through on my feet, nothing else** - So he makes a final appeal. Note **"nothing else!"** No military objectives, no economic threat, etc. NRSV = "It is only a small matter; just let us pass through on foot," NBJ = "It is only a matter of letting me pass through on foot," REB = "Ours is a trifling request; we would simply cross your land on foot." "The Hebrew expressions here are clearly submissive and deferential in tone. These words also seek to downplay the magnitude of this request." ([UBS Handbook](#))

**Numbers 20:20 But he said, "You shall not pass through." And Edom came out against him with a heavy force and with a strong hand.**

- **You shall not pass** Nu 20:18 Ge 27:41 32:6 Jud 11:17,20 Ps 120:7 Eze 35:5-11 Am 1:11
- **And Edom:** Ob 1:10-15
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## KING OF EDOM REJECTS APPEAL

**But he said, "You shall not pass through."**- Moses' second appeal provoked even a strong opposition. King of Edom firmly rejects any appeals from Moses. The final verdict is no passage.

**And Edom came out against him** ("to meet him") **with a heavy force and with a strong hand** - Edomites back up their words with a show of force to make sure Israel gets the message "Not Welcome! No Trespassing!" Obadiah prophesies that Edom will have a "payday, someday" declaring "For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head." (Obadiah 1:15)

**NET** translates it "Then Edom came out against them with a large and powerful force." (Nu 20:20 NET) The Heb literally reads "with many [heavy] people and with a strong hand." The translation presented above is interpretive, but that is what the line means. It was a show of force, numbers and weapons, to intimidate the Israelites.

**Numbers 20:21 Thus Edom refused to allow Israel to pass through his territory; so Israel turned away from him.**

- **refused:** De 2:27,29
- wherefore: De 2:4-8 23:7 Jdg 11:18,24
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## EDOM'S STEADFAST REFUSAL FOR PASSAGE

**Thus Edom refused to allow Israel to pass through his territory** - Firm refusal to give Israel a "pass."

**so Israel turned away from him** - Israel **turned away** for the time being, but from this point on in the Bible, Edom is mentioned as Israel's enemy, and the two nations fought frequently.

**Guzik** - This refusal made the journey of the children of Israel much more discouraging and dangerous (Numbers 21:4-5) In Dt 23:7 Israel was still commanded to treat the Edomite as a brother. God here showed Israel how to leave the judgment of those who hurt you up to the LORD (Ro 12:17-21), and how to love those who have acted as enemies against you (Mt 5:44+, Ro 12:14+)—

even if they were brothers.

[Irving Jensen](#) comments on Moses' leadership in face of 2 rejections by Edom for right of passage - This would have been a blow to the spirits of any leader, for were not the Israelites now to expect divine favor on their journey to Canaan? And was not Moses' offer to Edom a very considerate one? No marching through their fields and vineyards, no drinking of their water without paying for it, no detours along the way (20:17–19). Though the negotiations failed, Moses, so recently rebuked by Jehovah in severe judgment, showed the leadership he had formerly displayed, so that when Edom refused to give passage Israel merely "turned away from him" (20:21), that is, looked for another way. (Ibid)

**Wiersbe** concludes "Jacob and Esau had met and settled their differences years before (Gen. 32–33), but Esau's descendants were perpetuating the old family feud. Years later, when Jerusalem was attacked, the Edomites assisted the enemy and even stopped the Jewish fugitives from escaping (the Book of Obadiah; Ps. 137:7). It's tragic when a family feud is kept alive from generation to generation, poisoning hearts and minds and keeping brothers from helping one another." ([Be Counted](#))

[Brain Bell](#) - You've seen 9-11 bumper stickers "Never Forget"! - This act by the Edomites was never forgotten!

Amos 1:11 Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, **I will not turn away its punishment**, Because he pursued his brother with the sword, And cast off all pity; His anger tore perpetually, And he kept his wrath forever.

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**Norman Geisler - How could this verse say that Israel went around Edom when Deuteronomy 2:4 says they passed through it?**

**PROBLEM:** God would not allow Israel to do battle with the Edomites because He had given the land of Edom to Esau as an everlasting possession. Numbers 20:21 states that "Israel turned away from him." However, when Moses reviews these events in Deuteronomy 2:4, he states that the Lord said, "You are about to pass through the territory of your brethren, the descendants of Esau." Likewise, Deuteronomy 2:8 says Israel "passed beyond our brethren the descendants of Esau." Did they pass through Edom or did they go around it?

**SOLUTION:** In one sense it can be said that Israel passed through Edom when they entered it in order to make the request to continue their journey along the King's highway that ran through their land. However, the text never actually says that they did, or that they would pass through the land. Actually, the same Hebrew word (abar) is used in each case. It can be used to mean pass through or pass by. The historical record clearly describes their journey as passing along the eastern border of Edom (Deut. 2:8). God had warned Israel that as they would pass along the eastern border, they should not provoke the Edomites to war (Deut. 2:5). ([When Critics Ask](#))

**Numbers 20:22 Now when they set out from Kadesh, the sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came to Mount Hor.**

- Kadesh: Nu 20:1,14,16 13:26 33:36,37 Eze 47:19 48:28
- Mount Hor: . Nu 21:4 33:37,38 34:7
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Mount Hor

## FROM KADESH TO MOUNT HOR

**Now when they set out from Kadesh, the sons of Israel the whole congregation, came to Mount Hor-** Since Israel could not go east, they headed south to bypass Edom's land. They would have one small "detour" at **Mount Hor**.

**Guzik** - Here a definite marker, indicating the end of the 38 years Israel had been "sentenced" to in the wilderness. There is very little record of what happened during these years; they are compressed into only five and one-half chapters, while the single year at Mount Sinai is given almost 50 chapters. This was to demonstrate these years accomplished nothing, except the death of the generation of unbelief. These were just years of surviving in the desert.

**THOUGHT** - Are you still in the desert? Or are you journeying toward the promised land or more to the point, **the promised life** in Christ, the abundant life (Jn 10:10b) of "milk and honey?" Are you redeeming the time, the time of your life (Eph 5:16+), remembering that opportunity ([kairos](#)) only "knocks once" (Ps 90:12)



and that eternity will last forever?

**NET Note** on **Mount Hor** - The traditional location for this is near Petra (Josephus, Ant. 4.4.7). There is serious doubt about this location since it is well inside Edomite territory, and since it is very inaccessible for the transfer of the office. Another view places it not too far from Kadesh Barnea, about 15 miles (25 km) northeast at Jebel Madurah, on the northwest edge of Edom and so a suitable point of departure for approaching Canaan from the south (see J. L. Mihelec, IDB 2:644; and J. de Vaulx, Les Nombres [SB], 231). Others suggest it was at the foot of Mount Hor and not actually up in the mountains (see Deut 10:6).

**Kadesh** (06946) see notes above on [Qadesh](#)

**Pulpit Commentary** - "Because Israel had rebelled, their life has run to waste ever since, and only now, after such a lapse of time, and after so much suffering, did Israel find itself in a position to recommence the march that was suspended at Kadesh. So it is with the churches which have reached a certain point, then rebelled against the voice of God. Their history runs to waste; they exist, but hardly live; there is indeed a movement in them, but it has no definite aim, it leads no where; they just end up in the same place all the time. Only after a long time (if God has mercy on them) do they find themselves once more in a position to start afresh, and with not one step further forward in all of those years. Even so it is with individuals who will not go resolutely on when they are called. They are spent and wasted in movement back and forth which is not progress. After many years perhaps—perhaps after a whole lifetime—of wandering in dry places they find themselves once more at the very point to which they had come before, and not one step closer." (Winterbotham )

**Guzik** - Aaron's life shows us, among other things, that the office is more important than the man himself. Aaron the man was not always worthy of respect, but Aaron the high priest always was worthy of honor.

**Numbers 20:23 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying,**

- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **MOUNT HOR BORDERING EDM**

**Merrill** ([CBC-Nu](#)) compares Moses and Aaron - Aaron's death merits only a low-key report, though it parallels the story of Moses's subsequent death:

1. Both occurred on a mountain (Nu 20:22–28; Deut 34:1–4)
2. neither was allowed to enter the land (Nu 20:24; Deut 34:4)
3. mourning lasted for 30 days (Nu 20:29; Deut 34:8)
4. a transfer of leadership was effected (Nu 20:28; Deut 34:9). ([CBC-Nu](#))

**Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying-** Yahweh speaks to both leaders in preparation for Aaron's departure to the next world.

### **Related Resources:**

- American Tract Society [Hor](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Hor](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Hor](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Hor](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Hor](#)
- Smith Bible Dictionary [Hor](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Hor, Mount](#)
- Kitto Biblical Cyclopedia [Hor](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Hor](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Hor](#)
- Wikipedia [Mount Hor](#)

**Numbers 20:24 "Aaron will be gathered to his people; for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the sons of Israel, because you rebelled against My command at the waters of Meribah.**

- **gathered**: Nu 27:13 31:2 Ge 15:15 25:8,17 35:29 49:29,33 De 32:50 Jud 2:10 2Ch 34:28
- **because** ye: Nu 20:11,12
- **command**: Nu 4:27 De 32:50
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## AARON TO BE GATHERED TO HIS PEOPLE

**Aaron will be gathered to his people**- This is a euphemistic way (a "poetic expression") to say he is going to die, but otherwise the meaning is uncertain. NLT says "The time has come for Aaron to join his ancestors in death." Aaron was 123 years old (Nu 33:38–39).

Phrase **gathered to his people** - 7x in 7v - Ge 25:8 = Abraham; Ge 25:17 = Ishmael; Ge 35:29 = Isaac; Ge 49:33 = Jacob; Nu 20:24; Num. 20:26; Deut. 32:50 = Moses

More complete listing - (to his) Gen. 25:8; Gen. 25:17; Gen. 35:29; Gen. 49:33; Num. 20:24; Num. 20:26; Deut. 32:50 (to your) Num. 27:13; Num. 31:2; Deut. 32:50; 2 Ki. 22:20; 2 Chr. 34:28 (to their) Jdg 2:10

2 Kings 22:20 "Therefore, behold, I will **gather you** (KING JOSIAH) **to your fathers**, and you will be **gathered to your grave** in peace, and your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place." So they brought back word to the king.

**NET Note** on **gathered to his people** - This is the standard poetic expression for death. The bones would be buried, often with the bones of relatives in the same tomb, giving rise to the expression.

**For** - Yahweh explains what death at this point meant

**He shall not enter the land which I have given to the sons of Israel**- Aaron will not enter the promised land.

**because** - Explains why the penalty of prohibition to enter the promised land.

**You rebelled against My command** (literally "My mouth") **at the waters of Meribah** - **You** is plural (second person plural) so is saying "you both" (Moses and Aaron), the two of you rebelled. Is this the penalty for "high handed" or defiant sin? (read Nu 15:30-31 and notes) Certainly seems like that is possible.

The waters of Meribah were a **source of life** for the people of Israel, but they were also a **source of death** for their leaders on account of their disobedience.

-- [UBS Handbook](#)

**Rebelled** (same word in Nu 20:24+) ([04784](#)) see note above on [mara](#)

**Note on Gathered to his people** - **G A Lee** in ISBE (Revised) has this note on **gather** - Of the significant or unusual uses of the term, perhaps most interesting is its use in contexts of death. Most frequent in these contexts is the expression "**to be gathered** [Heb ne'ēsap, lit "to be added"] **to one's people**." This expression is used of Abraham (Gen. 25:8), Ishmael (25:17), Isaac (35:29), Jacob (49:29, 33), Moses (Nu. 27:13; 31:2; Dt. 32:50), and Aaron (Nu. 20:24; Dt. 32:50); perhaps it was intentionally restricted to this select group. A similar expression, "to be gathered to one's fathers," occurs only in Jdgs. 2:10 and 2 Ki. 22:20 (par 2 Chr. 34:28); the former passage concerns all of Joshua's generation, who "served the Lord" (v 7), and the latter passage is about Josiah (note that this passage adds the phrase "be gathered to your grave in peace"; for the significance of this and other apparent references to burial see below). The qal of 'āsap is used in apparently abbreviated forms of these expressions (Jgs. 18:25; 1 S. 15:6; Job 34:14; Ps. 26:9; 104:29; cf. Nu. 20:26, where the niph'al of 'āsap occurs alone, with apparently the same meaning as the fuller expression; cf. also Isa. 57:1). **The meaning of these expressions is debated.** Archeologists have found family graves with evidence of secondary burial and have concluded that these expressions refer to such group interment (see Kenyon, p. 263). This idea finds biblical support in several passages that mention the "gathering" (Heb 'sp) of bodies or bones (Jer. 8:1f.; 25:33; Ezk. 29:5). Some, e.g., Meyers, add that the expression "to be gathered to one's people" reflects not only a family burial but also a belief in the afterlife—in SHEOL the whole family of Israel is assembled (see also BURIAL IV). Tromp (p. 168) holds that this sense of reunion in Sheol developed from the practice of family burials, and that this development occurred before the biblical texts were written. For Heidel and others the expression refers only to the afterlife; it cannot refer to burial because other terms for burial occur in the context (cf., e.g., Gen. 25:8f.; 2 K. 22:20) or the burial is clearly a later event (cf. Gen. 49:33 and Ge 50:3–13). That the expression is used of those who were not buried in an ancestral grave, e.g., Abraham, Moses, and Aaron, seems a telling point (on these points see Alfrink; but cf. J. Skinner, comm. on Genesis [ICC, 1910], p. 352) (Here is Skinner's note on Ge 25:8 = "gathered to his kindred (see on Ge 17:14)] Originally, this and similar phrases (Ge 15:15; 47:30; Dt. 31:16 etc.) denoted burial in the family sepulchre; but the

popular conception of She'ol as a vast aggregate of graves in the under world enabled the language to be applied to men who (like Abraham) were buried far from their ancestors.—Isaac and Ishmael] ).

- See related discussion of gathered to his people in Numbers 31

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### Ivan Steeds - AARON: LED ASTRAY

Aaron had many great qualities but he had his failings too. He lacked strength of character, allowing himself to be easily led.

By the people, he was led into idolatry. In Moses' absence, Israel sought a god other than the Lord, 'in their hearts' turning back again to Egypt, Acts 7:39–40. Clearly, they had carried this rival god out of Egypt in their hearts and now pressured Aaron to give it a physical form. Surely, if Aaron was aware, as he later claimed, that the people were bent on 'mischief', it was his duty to resist their demands, even at the risk of his life. Alas, we find him labouring, not to help 'make' a sanctuary to serve as a focal point for the worship of the true God, Exod. 25:8, but to 'make' a calf to be worshipped as a false god; not to build an altar where sacrifice would be offered to the Lord, but an altar where sacrifice would be offered to an idol, Acts 7:41. Moses had nothing to say to Aaron about his pathetic attempt to excuse himself and to shift all of the blame onto the people. But if Moses had not spoken to God on his behalf, Aaron would have died there and then at the hand of the Lord—as 3,000 guilty Israelites soon would die at the hand of the Levites, Deut. 9:20.

By Miriam, he was led into envy. That the leprosy was inflicted on Miriam alone implies strongly that she was the instigator. Again Aaron is carried along, associating himself with Miriam's insubordination against Moses. This time Aaron was drawn by envy into conflict with the sovereign rights of God! Thinking that we sit in judgement on the poor spiritual condition of others, we too usually expose only our own.

By Moses, he was led into unbelief and rebellion. Aaron was allied to Moses when Moses struck the rock. They committed two great sins: (i) they 'believed' not God, presumably doubting that words addressed to a rock would suffice to bring out water, and (ii) they 'rebelled' against God's word, Num. 20:12, 24. These very sins had cost the former generation of Israel entry into the promised land; Num. 14:9, 11; Neh. 9:17. Together with Moses, Aaron was guilty of the same offences—and paid the same price!

Lord, give me the courage to stand up always for what is right. (Day by Day with Bible Characters)

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### John Bennett - AARON SHALL DIE THERE

What a poignant scene is before us today!

Think of what it meant to Aaron. How solemn to take that last journey up Mount Hor, knowing that he would never descend. His death was a direct result of the governmental dealings of God. It is good to remember, however, that God called him home from a mountain. Despite the ups and downs of Aaron's life, he finished on the mountaintop.

Many saints have been conscious that the time of their departure was at hand, 2 Tim. 4:6. As a result, they looked at all around them in a different light. How this should solemnize us and motivate us today.

Think of what it meant to Moses. Aaron was his older brother. They had been through much together. No doubt there had been tears and smiles, mutual fellowship and support. All that would now end. Moses would strip his brother of his priestly clothes, v. 26. The clothes would be taken from a living man, not from a corpse. No one would die with the priestly garments on, reminding us of the fact that our Lord's high priestly ministry cannot be touched by death. Moses had once dressed Aaron in these clothes, now he must strip them off. Our Lord Jesus will never be stripped of the dignity of His priestly office! 'Their priesthood ran through several hands, for mortal was their race; Thy never-changing priesthood stands eternal as Thy days', ISAAC WATTS.

Think of what it meant to Eleazar. He would both lose and gain. He lost a father—he gained an office. The garments are all that Aaron had to bequeath. He had no inheritance or property. Yet, what a rich legacy! Who can conceive the emotions of Eleazar as he feels the weight of the priestly garments rest on him! Both privilege and responsibility rest on his shoulders. And he was of such a stature that no alteration was needed.

If the Lord does not come each one of us must pass this way. May we end our journey on the mountaintop. May we have something of lasting value to bequeath to the next generation. Or, if we are 'Eleazers', let us rise to the challenge of new responsibilities. (Day by Day)

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**Numbers 20:25 "Take Aaron and his son Eleazar and bring them up to Mount Hor;**

- Nu 33:38,39
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Numbers 33:38-39+ Then Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of the LORD, and died there **in the fortieth year after the sons of Israel** had come from the land of Egypt, on the first day in the fifth month. 39 Aaron was one hundred twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor.

### ASCEND TO MOUNT HOR

**Take Aaron and his son Eleazar and bring them up to Mount Hor** - [Eleazar](#) was Aaron's oldest (living) son who was in charge of the tabernacle transport (Nu 3:32; Nu 4:16), and was given the gruesome job of sifting through the ashes to gather the censers used by the rebels who had been burned by God.

[UBS Handbook](#) on **Mount Hor** - This site of Aaron's death is highlighted in the text through repetition (verses 22, 23, 25, 27, 28) and by the somewhat unusual, alliterative Hebrew construction for Mount Hor (hor hahar, which is literally "Hor, the mountain").

**Numbers 20:26 and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on his son Eleazar. So Aaron will be gathered to his people, and will die there."**

- Ex 29:29-30 Isa 22:21,22 Heb 7:11,23,24
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### PERPETUATING THE PRIESTHOOD

We've all heard the saying "The clothes make the man," but here the saying is "The clothes make the priest."

**and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on his son Eleazar** - This does not suggest they left him naked but simply devoid of his priestly garments. The priestly garments were unique and clear symbolized here the transfer of priesthood from Aaron to Eleazar. Read Ex 28:1-39+, especially Ex 28:2+ "You shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty."

Aaron was "decommissioned", Eleazar was "commissioned."

Exodus 29:29-30+ "The holy garments of Aaron shall be for his sons after him, that in them they may be anointed and ordained. 30 "For seven days the one of his sons who is priest in his stead shall put them on when he enters the tent of meeting to minister in the holy place.

**Merrill** comments that "This may be compared with Moses laying his hands on Joshua as his successor (27:20), or even more with the transfer from Elijah to Elisha, which was symbolized by a transfer of a garment (1 Kgs 19:19; 2 Kgs 2:13). This ceremony was something that "the whole community watched," not necessarily because they could see what was happening on the mountain, but because they had watched Aaron leave robed as the priest and saw Eleazar return enrobed—without Aaron. ([CBC-Nu](#))

"God buries His workmen but His work goes on."  
-- John Wesley

**So Aaron will be gathered to his people, and will die there** - [See uses of phrase gathered to his people](#) above.

[NET Note](#) on **will be gathered** - Heb "will be gathered"; this is a truncated form of the usual expression "gathered to his ancestors," found in v. 24. The phrase "to his ancestors" is supplied in the translation here.

**Numbers 20:27 So Moses did just as the LORD had commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation.**

- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## MOSES, AARON AND ELEAZAR ASCEND MT HOR

**So Moses did just as the LORD had commanded** - Unlike the instructions in striking the rock, Moses is back to his general deportment of an obedient servant of whom there was no one more humble.

**THOUGHT** - In spite of his failure, it is time to get ready to go onward. Moses doesn't quit. He begins again. Much of the victorious Christian life is constant new beginnings. Though failure comes, the victorious Christian learns from his mistakes and gets right back up into the battle. Have you messed up? If that is the case, get right with God, get right with others, and get going forward again. ([Rod Mattoon](#))

[Brian Bell](#) adds a good word for all of us who to one degree or another have had a "faith failure" - What's most amazing to me is after Moses was forbidden to go in to the Promise Land, he didn't rebel like the other Israelites, he didn't pout, he didn't become a chronic complainer like so many; instead he led, instructed, & prepared the next generation, w/o hope of sharing their success. His renewed faith helped him complete his divinely assigned leadership task. Maybe your life hasn't been exactly as you would have written the script. So what! Hallow your God; give honor to Him & His name; complete your God given task even if your husband or wife isn't on board; even if you're handicapped by money, even if your disadvantaged by debt, even if your deprived of your health, or disenfranchised & don't feel worthy. Like our brother Moses, Complete your God given task!!! Failure is not the final word when God is so gracious! :)

**and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight** (Lit "eyes") **of all the congregation** - It was elevated but still their forms were visible to the people below.

Compare similarities with the death of Moses in Deut 32:48-52; Dt 34:1-12.

I like **Warren Wiersbe's** application - Moses has experienced two family funerals, two confrontations with critics in the camp, and a personal failure at Kadesh; yet he picks up his rod and goes right back to work. Victorious Christian service, like the victorious Christian life, is a series of new beginnings. No matter what mistakes we've made, it's always too soon to quit. ([Be Counted](#))

**Numbers 20:28 After Moses had stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on his son Eleazar, Aaron died there on the mountain top. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain.**

- **Moses:** Nu 20:26 33:38-49 Ex 29:29,30
- **put them:** Nu 27:16-23 De 31:7,8 34:9 1Ch 22:11,12,17 28:5-9 Ac 20:25-29 2Pe 1:15
- **died there:** Nu 33:38,39 De 10:6 32:49,50 34:5 Heb 7:23-25
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## AARON DIES ON MOUNTAIN MOSES AND ELEAZAR DESCEND

**After Moses had stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on his son Eleazar, Aaron died there on the mountain top.**

This event is described again in Numbers 33

Numbers 33:36-38 They journeyed from Ezion-geber and camped in the wilderness of Zin, that is, Kadesh. 37 They journeyed from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, at the edge of the land of Edom. 38 Then Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of the LORD, and died there in the fortieth year after the sons of Israel had come from the land of Egypt, on the first day in the fifth month.

**Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain** - The people clearly understood what had happened - (1) the priesthood had been transferred (Eleazar had the holy garments on) and (2) Aaron had died.

The writer of Hebrews comments that

The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, 24 but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb 7:23-25+)

**Spurgeon** - A common priest served from thirty to fifty years of age, and then his work was done. Priests of the house of Aaron, who

became high priests, held their office through life. Sometimes a high priest would continue in his office, therefore, for a considerable length of time, but in many cases he was cut off as other men are by premature death; hence there was priest after priest of the order of Aaron to go within the veil for the people. Our Lord Jesus is not as Aaron, who had to be stripped of his garments on the top of Mount Hor, and to die in the mount; neither is He like to any of the sons of Aaron who in due time suffered the infirmities of age, and at last bowed their heads to inevitable death. He died once, but death has no more dominion over Him; it is witnessed of Him that He lives. **Jesus...continues forever** - Here is our comfort: We have only one priest, and He ever lives. He had no predecessor and He will have no successor, because He ever lives personally to exercise the office of high priest on our behalf. My soul reposes in the faith of His one sacrifice, offered once and no more. There is but one presenter of that one sacrifice, and never can there be another, since the One is all-sufficient, and He never dies. Jesus reads my heart, and has always read it since it began to beat: He knows my griefs and has carried my sorrows from of old, and He will bear both them and me when old age shall shrivel up my strength. When I myself shall fall asleep in death He will not die, but will be ready to receive me into His own undying blessedness.

**Guzik** - The man dies, but the priesthood—and the access and relationship with God it describes—carries on. No one's relationship with God in Israel was to depend on Aaron, but on the high priest—whomever he was. God has ensured there will always be a high priest for us to come to in Jesus (Hebrews 4:14–16), and we need not depend on any man for our relationship with God.

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**Gleason Archer - Just where did Aaron die?** Deuteronomy 10:6 says that it was at Moserah, but Numbers 20:28; 33:38 say it was at the top of Mount Hor.

Deuteronomy 10:6 contains a parenthetical statement in the midst of Moses' reminiscences about events near Mount Sinai, which goes as follows: "Now the sons of Israel set out from Beeroth Bene-jaakan to Moserah. There Aaron died and there he was buried and Eleazar his son ministered as priest in his place" (NASB). But Numbers 20:28 relates how Moses and Eleazar accompanied Aaron to the summit of Mount Hor, where he passed away. This is confirmed by Numbers 33:38: "Then Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of the LORD, and died there, in the fortieth year after the sons of Israel had come from the land of Egypt" (NASB).

In all probability Moserah was the name of the district in which Mount Hor was located (so P.A. Verhoef in Tenney, Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia, 4:279), just as Horeb was the name of the mountain complex in which the mountain known as Sinai was situated. There has been no archaeological investigation in the vicinity of Jebel Madurah that might give us additional information concerning the limits of the Moserah district; but it is fair to assume that the one ancient source that does mention it (namely, the Pentateuch) was well aware of its location, and that it placed it in the vicinity of Mount Hor.

Mount Nebo was alleged by Josephus (Antiquities 4.4.7) to be the same as Jebel Neby Harun, a mountain forty-eight hundred feet high, overlooking Petra. But since it was located in the middle of Edom rather than at its border, and since it is somewhat too rugged to ascend without special equipment, and too lofty for its summit to be easily observed from below, it is rather unlikely that this traditional identification is the correct one.

Stephen Barabas (in Tenney, Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia, 3:201) suggests Jebel Madurah as a more likely site for Aaron's death, for it lies northeast of Kadesh on the northwest border of Edom; and its summit can be observed by watchers standing at its base, as Numbers 20:27 specifies. But whether or not this is the correct identification, it is quite unwarrantable to assume that the Pentateuch erred in placing Hor in the district of Moserah. ([NIEBD](#))

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### **James Smith - Handfuls of Purpose - THE DEATH OF AARON, PREFIGURING THE DEATH OF CHRIST Numbers 20:23–29**

On seeing a butterfly just escaping from its chrysalis an anonymous writer has said:

“Why lovely insect dost thou stand,  
And wave thy quivering wing;  
As half afraid thou wert aloft  
On fields of air to spring?  
But now has reach'd thy slender form  
A sunbeam warm and bright,  
And instant thou hast upward sprung  
Towards the source of light.”

The Christian never dies, 'tis only a rising up to the source of his life and being, lost in the brightness of His presence. Aaron in his

calling and priestly character is a well-known and full-orbed type of Jesus Christ our Great High Priest. It is just what we might expect that he who resembled our Lord so closely in his life and work would also be like Him in the cause and manner of His death. Aaron's death was like Christ's, in that—

#### **1. He knew of it beforehand.**

The Lord revealed to Aaron that he was to be gathered to his people (Nu 20:23, 24). Jesus knew the time and manner of His death long beforehand. Even the prophets had spoken of it. "My time is not yet." He came not to be ministered unto, but to give His life a ransom. On the mount of glory they spake of His decease (Luke 9:31).

#### **2. It was sudden.**

Aaron went up Mount Hor for the purpose of dying. No time of sickness is hinted at. It would seem as if he had been cut off suddenly. "The Messiah shall be cut off." "They marvelled that He was dead already." The soldiers expected Him to linger on for a while in His dying, but reproach broke His heart (Ps. 69:20).

#### **3. It was because of sin.**

Aaron was cut off from entering the promised land "because he rebelled against My Word" (Nu 20:24). Sin was imputed to him, and for sin he died. Christ died for sin, but not His own. The Lord laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. He bore our sins in His own body, in His very soul, which was exceedingly sorrowful even unto death, and which He poured out as an offering for sin.

#### **4. He murmured not in prospect of it.**

It is most significant that through all this trying time Aaron's voice is never heard. Like the great Antitype he opened not his mouth. He for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross. No murmur ever escaped the lips or ever found conception in the heart of Jesus. Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done.

#### **5. He died on a mount.**

"Take Aaron and his son and bring them up unto Mount Hor" (Nu 20:25). It was to him a solemn climb, leaving all others behind him, to see their faces no more on earth. Jesus set His face like a flint to go up to Jerusalem, although He knew it was to accomplish the decease referred to by Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. A handful of corn on the top of Mount Calvary, destined to fill the whole earth (Psa. 72:16).

#### **6. He was stripped.**

"Moses stripped Aaron of his garments" (Nu 20:28). Christ also was stripped, and even to His shame. "They parted My garments among them, and for My vesture did they cast lots." This they did that the Scripture might be fulfilled, both in type and prophecy.

#### **7. Two were with him in his death.**

There were only three on that mount when Aaron died, one that was exalted through his death and one who was not (v. 28). On Mount Calvary, when Jesus died, there were other two with Him, Jesus in the midst, and on either side one. One was also blessed and exalted through His death: "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." It may not be lawful to compare the other unbelieving thief to Moses, but, like Moses, he was shut out because of unbelief (Nu 20:12).

#### **8. His work was continued after he was gone.**

"His garments were put upon Eleazar his son" (Nu 20:28). His son perpetuated the work begun by his father, and this by the commandment of the Lord. Aaron's mantle fell on Eleazar, as afterwards the mantle of Elijah fell on Elisha, and as further down the course of time the Spirit that possessed the Lord Jesus Christ fell upon His heirs in the upper room that they might continue the priestly work of intercession after His departure. He hath made us kings and priests unto God. Eleazar, the son of Aaron, ministered in his stead (Deut. 10:6). We beseech you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God. This is our priestly work. May the holy anointing be upon us for it.

**Numbers 20:29 When all the congregation saw that Aaron had died, all the house of Israel wept for Aaron thirty days.**

- Ge 1:10 De 34:8 2Ch 35:24,25 Ac 8:2
- Numbers 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **MOURNING FOR AARON**

**When all the congregation saw that Aaron had died, all the house of Israel wept for Aaron thirty days-** The usual time of mourning was 7 days (Ge 50:10; 1 Sa 31:13). but 30 days indicates the esteem he had with the people which is interesting considering the times they challenged his authority. The same could be said for Moses who also was mourned for 30 days when he died (Deut 34:8).

[Irving Jensen](#) - people learned of his death, everyone “wept for Aaron thirty days” (20:29). Theirs was the experience which God’s people centuries later would not have to suffer. Their high priests over the years were “many in number, because that by death they are hindered from continuing” (Heb. 7:23). The Christian would have but one high priest, Christ, who, “because he abideth forever, hath his priesthood unchangeable,” ever living to make intercession (Heb. 7:24, 25). **So ends the dark chapter.** In it has been recorded the death of a prophetess, the critical sin of Moses and Aaron, the refusal of negotiation, the death of Aaron, and the mourning of the people. The chapter has emphasized the limitations of man—even God’s leaders! Now with a brighter spotlight on the grace and glory of God, Numbers resumes its story of advance. (Ibid)

[Believer's Study Bible](#) - Aaron experienced the same end as the patriarchs (Gen. 15:15; 25:8) and was mourned, like Moses, for 30 days (v. 29; Deut. 34:8).