

## SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**NUM. 20:1** Then came the children of Israel, *even* the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.

**2** And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.

**3** And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD!

**4** And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?

**5** And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it *is* no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither *is* there any water to drink.

**6** And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them.

**7** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

**8** 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, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.

**9** And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him.

**10** And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?

**11** And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts *also*.

**12** And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.

**13** This *is* the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them.

### NOTES

# Water from the Rock

Lesson Text: Numbers 20:1-13

Related Scriptures: Exodus 15:22-27; Deuteronomy 1:37-40;  
32:48-53; Numbers 20:24-29; Psalm 95:1-11

TIME: about 1405 B.C.

PLACE: Kadesh

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"Speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock" (Numbers 20:8).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **NATIONAL SADNESS—Num. 20:1**

The children of Israel were nearing the end of their wilderness wanderings. They had come to the wilderness of Zin, where the people were now once again encamped after four decades of wandering.

A sad moment for Israel came as they stood on the brink of the wilderness of Zin at Kadesh when Miriam, the sister of Moses, died. Her obituary is admittedly quite simple, but it was undoubtedly a profound moment.

Miriam was a leader in Israel (cf. Mic. 6:4). She was the sister of Moses, the divinely chosen leader and intercessor of Israel, and of Aaron, Israel's first high priest. She was also a songstress and prophetess (cf. Ex. 15:20-21).

### **NATIONAL CRISIS—Num. 20:2-9**

#### **Out of water again (Num. 20:2-3).**

The Zin wilderness was a dry place where water was scarce. Now, in the familiar setting at Kadesh, they found the water supply there dried up as well. This was a problem they had faced almost forty years earlier, and their reaction this time was the same as it had been then. They met the sit-

uation with anger and unbelief.

The people raised their voices against Moses and Aaron in rage and stated that it would have been better for them to have died along with their brothers before the Lord. This may refer specifically to those who died in Korah's revolt (Num. 16:32, 35), though others had died in God's judgments along the way.

It is absolutely striking that the people were saying that being killed like Korah and other rebels was preferable to standing on the brink of entering the Promised Land.

**An old accusation renewed (Num. 20:4-5).** The people asked Moses why he brought them into a wilderness that would surely end up being their graveyard.

Let us be clear about one thing. The need for water was very real. Everywhere they looked was arid. There was no visible water supply around them. However, the one thing they lacked besides water was the one thing that would carry them through: faith.

The people referred to the wilderness of Zin as an "evil," or bad, place (vs. 5). Again, they expressed their desire to have stayed in Egypt.

**Moses and Aaron fall before the Lord (Num. 20:6-7).** After hearing the people grumble against them once again, Moses and Aaron turned from the assembled crowd to the entrance of the tabernacle. There, they fell on their faces before the Lord as they had done numerous times before.

**God instructs Moses and Aaron (Num. 20:8-9).** God told Moses to take the rod, or staff, he had and hold it in his hand while speaking to the rock that was before the people.

The next instruction was to gather the people.

The final command was then for Moses and Aaron to tell the rock to bring forth water.

### **PERSONAL DISOBEDIENCE— Num. 20:10-13**

**Moses' anger burns hot (Num. 20:10-11).** Moses and Aaron gathered the people together at the rock, and then Moses had an uncharacteristic outburst of anger.

Calling the people rebels, Moses included himself along with God as one who would bring forth water. Notice that nowhere did God instruct Moses to speak to the people. Rather, He told him to speak to the rock.

Moses' pride got the best of him as he talked down to the people in anger. Infuriated with their incessant insubordination, he took his staff and twice struck the rock with it.

Water came immediately gushing out of the rock, and the people drank to their full. They also had plenty to give to their livestock. Despite His servant's pride and disobedience, God still provided for His people.

**Moses and Aaron are punished (Num. 20:12-13).** God was angry with Moses and Aaron because they did not represent Him appropriately.

Some have asserted that Moses was prevented from entering the Promised

Land merely because he struck the rock instead of speaking to it. That was the outward act of disobedience, to be sure, but God was more concerned with the motive behind it. Moses apparently did not *believe* God was going to do what He promised and achieve His purpose in this instance apart from using Moses' staff and rebuke, so he angrily struck the rock.

Because of their unbelief, God declared that neither Moses nor Aaron would enter the Promised Land.

The water here was named Meribah, which means "quarreling." The people quarreled with the Lord, yet the Lord showed them that He is still holy. Their continued ingratitude did not keep Him from doing as He had promised.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. How long had the Israelites been on their wilderness journey when they came into the "desert of Zin" (Num. 20:1)?
2. Why was the death of Miriam so significant?
3. What crisis did the Israelites face at Kadesh?
4. How did the people react to this crisis?
5. What did the people say they would have preferred?
6. What familiar accusation did the people bring against Moses?
7. What did God tell Moses and Aaron to do to provide water?
8. In what uncharacteristic way did Moses react?
9. How did Moses transgress in his words to the people?
10. What was God most concerned about with Moses' disobedience?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Use your testimony to witness to your children so they do not make the same mistakes as you (Num. 20:1-2).
2. Do not blame the Lord for His chastisements; take responsibility for your sins and learn from them (vs. 3).
3. When God leads you into an uncomfortable situation, you should praise Him for the things He has delivered you from (vss. 4-5).
4. God would be right to punish us for our sins, but instead He often chooses to bless us; remember this (vss. 6-8).
5. We must not only follow the Lord's commands, but we should follow them with a pure heart (vss. 9-10).
6. Including when it is due to an angry impulse, disobedience is sin (vss. 11-13).

—Megan Hickman.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why is it that we often look back fondly at the sins of our past? What does this say about our hearts?
2. How can complaining shape the way we feel about God (cf. Phil. 2:14-15)? Why do you think it is such a culturally prevalent sin?
3. Does it seem fair to you that we can sin through emotions? How does this show the impossibility of following God's law?
4. How do we often not realize that we are striving with the Lord when we fight with other people in our lives?

—Megan Hickman.

## Golden Text Illuminated

**“Speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock” (Numbers 20:8).**

The favorite song of the Israelites in Exodus and Numbers goes something like this: “Why have you brought us into this wilderness to die?”

No matter how often or how severely they were punished for complaining against Moses and about the Lord's provision, their attitudes never seemed to reform.

After the people finished their lament, Moses and Aaron dashed immediately to the door of the tabernacle, where they fell on their faces to intercede for the complaining people.

But the Lord said nothing about any punishment. Perhaps this was intended as a test for Moses and Aaron. Would they follow the Lord's instructions explicitly to the last detail, or would they use this occasion to exalt themselves, chiding the people?

Rather than merely speaking to the rock, as the Lord had commanded, Moses called the people “rebels” (vs. 10), arrogated credit for the miracle to himself, and angrily struck the rock with his staff. Aaron was complicit in this act. Water did indeed come forth abundantly from the rock.

But the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron and pronounced a bitter judgment on their impudence: because they did not trust the Lord and did not give Him the glory, neither of them would lead the people into the Promised Land. They would both die before the Israelites entered their inheritance.

—John Lody.