

**MOSES, THE SINNER**

Moses - Part 21

Numbers 20:1-13

**Intro:** Today we are going to be considering this story of how the Lord provided water out of a rock. Next Sunday, the Lord willing, we look at the account of the brazen serpent. In both of these incidents we are dealing with what is called *types*. A type in Scripture is an illustration or an example, a picture, of some greater truth in Scripture. For example, we are going to observe the Lord's Supper after I finish my message as we usually do on the first Sunday morning of every month. As we take the bread I am going to remind you that when the Lord instituted this Supper, He said, "This is my body." And before we drink the grape juice, Dr. Uchiyama will remind us that our Lord said, "This cup is the new testament in my blood." When the Lord said these words, He was still in His body, and His blood was still running throughout His body. So He could not have meant that the bread was changed into His body, or that the grape juice had been changed into His blood. He meant that the bread represented His body, and that the grape juice represented His blood. In other words, the bread was a symbol of His Body, and the juice was a symbol of His blood. The bread was a type of His body; the juice was a type of His blood. The bread represented His body; the juice represented His blood. The bread illustrated the body of our Lord; the juice illustrated His blood. As you know the words we usually read during the Lord's Supper are found in 1 Corinthians 11.

In the chapter just before that, 1 Corinthians 10, we read about the event we are considering together this morning in Numbers 20 where the Lord provided water for His people out of a rock. And the Apostle Paul said this about what the people did:

4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4).

Notice that Paul said, "And that Rock was Christ." He didn't mean that Christ was that Rock, but he meant that that Rock represented Christ. The Rock was a type of Christ. The Rock was a picture of Christ.

And then earlier yet in 1 Corinthians, in chapter 5, verse 7, Paul said that "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." He did not mean that the Passover lamb was Christ, but that it pictured Christ, it represented Christ, it was a type of Christ.

The study of type in the Bible is a most interesting study, and very instructive. Unfortunately some people almost make a type out of everything so that they give the impression that we can't take the Bible to mean what it says, but we always have to be looking behind the obvious meaning for some hidden meaning. So care needs to be exercised in calling things in the Bible, types. But it is a legitimate study, and types always help us to understand the truth that it points to. The story of the Lord providing water out of a rock, is a true story. He actually performed that miracle. But the Holy Spirit wants us to know that that story looks ahead and points to some important truth concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. And that is why Paul said, "And that rock was Christ."

Next we when we go on to Numbers 21 where the Lord judged His people by sending poisonous snakes among them, and Moses was told to make a serpent out of brass, mount it on a pole, so that anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at that brazen serpent and not die, but would be instantly healed. Our Lord in speaking of this event said,

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:14-15).

What was our Lord saying? He was saying that the brass serpent was a type, a picture, a presentation of Himself when He would die on the Cross. But we will leave that story until next week.

Now let us go back to Numbers 20, the first thirteen verses.

The account here was almost an exact duplication of what happened soon after the Israelites left Egypt and got to Rephidim where they had no water. You will find this account in Exodus 17, the first 7 verses. The people complained bitterly and Moses was afraid that they were going to stone him, thinking that he had led them into a dead end. It was there that the Lord told Moses to take his rod and to strike a huge, mountainous rock where there was absolutely no sign of water. And when he did, the water flowed and was more than enough for all of the people plus their flocks and herds. Moses called it Massah and Meribah. You will notice in Numbers 20, verse 13, that this second place was also called Meribah. We might distinguish between them by calling the first, Meribah 1, and this later one, Meribah 2. And the people were different. By the time we come to this event in Numbers 20, practically all of the old generation who came out of Egypt had died, and this was the new generation. But

the younger generation surely knew about the first Meribah.

But what was the first thing that happened according to our chapter?

### **I. THE DEATH OF MIRIAM (Num. 20:1).**

Moses, Aaron, and Miriam had worked together for almost forty years. Miriam was the oldest of the three, and even though there had been that time when even Aaron and Miriam rebelled against Moses, yet for the most part there had been a good relationship between the three. It must have been a sad, sad time for Moses and Aaron to lose their sister.

But for the people to rebel against Moses and Aaron at this time, shows how insensitive the people were to their sorrow. But people by nature are inclined to be more concerned about themselves than they are about others.

And so beginning with verse 2 we learn about:

### **II. ANOTHER REBELLION OF THE PEOPLE (Num. 20:2-5).**

As I have already said, the people would have known very well what happened at Meribah 1, but, as is so often the case, they failed to apply the faithfulness of the Lord, and His power to meet the needs of His people again and again in the past, they rebelled again against Moses saying that they wished that they had died with their brethren, probably referring to the plague back in chapter 16 where 14,700 of them died under the judgment of the Lord. And they even brought up their original complaint that this whole move had been engineered by Moses so that they would die in the desert. In addition, they had no seed, nor figs, nor vines, nor pomegranates, not even any water. There is no indication at all that the people were trusting the Lord. They were influenced more by their circumstances than they were by the presence of the Lord or by His perfect record of caring for them for almost forty years. And we are prone to be the same way, aren't we? New tests often raise up new bitterness in our hearts. They did not stop to remind themselves that the Lord had not changed. He had proved Himself to be sufficient in every other time of need. He was still their Lord and their God. So why couldn't they trust Him in these present circumstances? That is the big question, isn't it? And it is a question for us to answer as it was for them. What did Moses and Aaron do?

### **III. MOSES AND AARON'S INITIAL REACTION (Num. 20:6).**

So often our first reaction to a situation like Moses and Aaron faced, is our worst, but with Moses and Aaron, this was their best. We see them where they had been many times before – on their faces at the door of the Tabernacle, humbling themselves before the Lord, probably confessing the sin of the people, but looking to the Lord for the wisdom to know what they should do. They were great examples of what godly leaders should be, or what all of us should do when we don't know what else we can do. Moses and Aaron could give them no water. They may have been just as confused as the people were, but they were willing to trust the Lord, believing that what they could not do, the Lord could do!

But then history repeated itself in a very wonderful way: “The glory of the Lord appeared unto them.” James wrote in his epistle, “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you” (Jas. 4:8a). And Jeremiah wrote in his Lamentations, “Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee: Thou saidst, “Fear not” (Lam. 3:57). I would not be surprised to learn that this is what the Lord said to Moses and Aaron. The Lord would have assured them that He would take care of them and of the people, and that all that they needed to do was to trust Him. Moses and Aaron could not go to the Bible for their encouragement like we can go to a verse like Isaiah 41:10:

10 Fear thou not ; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

But perhaps the Lord spoke words like these to His embattled servants. The Lord always comforts us by the Word. He is always sufficient. He is always willing. He always understands.

But then we see what the Lord told Moses and Aaron to do.

### **IV. THE REVELATION OF GOD'S WILL (Num. 20:7-8).**

Moses and Aaron had sought the Lord, and the Lord did not fail them. He told them, especially Moses, what to do.

Almost forty years before the Lord had told Moses to strike the rock; this time He told Moses just to speak to the rock. Now this called for more faith on Moses' part. He had seen results when he struck the rock previously, but what would be the sense of speaking to a rock – and to do

this before the people? The Lord's word must have been somewhat confusing to Moses. Why would the Lord tell him to do one thing at one time, and then when the same situation came up again, tell him to do something entirely different? That was not for Moses to decide; he was to obey the Lord. But what did he do? Let us take note of:

## V. THE RESPONSE OF MOSES (Num. 20:9-11).

Well, we discover a very unfortunate thing as we read on. It becomes clear that Moses was fed up with the people. He was very angry because they continued to blame him when things did not go the way the people wanted them to go. Moses forgot (and I am reasonably sure that he must have known this principle of godly living, although it had not yet been written in a book), that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (Jas. 1:20). Moses might have excused his feeling as *righteous indignation*, but righteous indignation speaks of jealousy for the glory of God. Plain human anger usually carries with it a desire to get even with somebody who has done something wrong against us. That is why we are instructed in the Word not to let "the sun go down upon your wrath" This is what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:26-27:

26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

27 Neither give place to the devil.

There are times when it is right to be angry, but that is when we have to be very, very careful. Kenny Rogers, the Texas Rangers' pitcher, made a fool out of himself this week, and he is liable to have more to pay for it than just missing twenty-six or seven games.

So what did Moses do? Instead of speaking to the rock, he spoke to the people, and he struck the rock twice! He did not act in faith; he was furious. And he probably would like to have hit every rebel among the Israelites twice with his rod.

But what happened? Did he get water? Yes, he did. If you are blessed in what you do, does it mean that you are right in what you have done? Does it mean that you have done the will of God?

We often hear people say, "If it works, it must be right, it has to be right!" But this incident proves that that statement is not true. What Moses did was not right. It was wrong. In fact, it was outright SIN! Moses' anger with the people expressed itself in disobedience to God. Why, then, did

the Lord give such an abundance of water? Paul expressed why in his second epistle to Timothy, and we have it in these words: “If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). The Lord had promised to care for His people, and He would not let the disobedience of Moses stand in the way.

Did He punish Moses? He certainly did. And it might seem very harsh to us because Moses had a record of years in which whatever the Lord told him to do, he did it.

## **VI. THE LORD’S JUDGMENT UPON MOSES (Num. 20:12).**

The Lord did not delay in telling Moses what his judgment was: *he would not lead the people into the promised land*. This was the worst thing that the Lord could possibly have done to Moses. I never read this passage without feeling very sorry for Moses. It was truly a great tragedy for him.

Why was the judgment of God so severe upon Moses? Let me give you several reasons.

First, it was because Moses was the leader. Again let me refer to the epistle of James, chapter 3, verse 1, where he said,

1 My brethren, be not many masters [teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

Moses was the greatest teacher that Israel ever had in OT times. And he, like all other teachers, taught by what he did as well as by what he said. By what he did he was teaching that there are sometimes when even a teacher is justified by disobeying God. And God cut that message very short, showing that disobedience to God is never right. So those of us who teach the Word need to be very, very careful about our own relationship with the Lord.

The second is related to the first: Moses did disobey the Lord. The Lord doesn’t deal with any of us according to our sins, but sin is always an offence to God. We can all be thankful for the mercies of God, thankful that He keeps us as well as saving us. But oh how careful we need to be about obeying the Word.

A third reason is that Moses sinned because he did not believe the Lord. See what the Lord said in verse 12. This was one place in his life when Moses was not trusting the Lord because he was so angry with the Lord’s

people. If the Lord says that He will give water by speaking to a mountainous rock, we had better believe Him and speak to the rock.

A fourth reason is what Moses did not glorify God before the people. Whatever we do, we are to do all to the glory of God. Speaking to the rock would not have shown how powerful Moses was, but it would have shown how powerful and glorious and sufficient God was. But the people were not given that message. We all need to beware of taking any action that is going to hide God's glory by throwing the spotlight on ourselves. This was a most sinful part of what Moses did.

Fifth and finally, God judged Moses because he marred the type. What do I mean by that? As I have reminded you, there were two instances when the Lord gave His people water out of a rock. The Apostle Paul makes it very clear that the rock was a type of Christ. When Moses struck the rock, God was giving us a picture of our salvation. A rock is a familiar type of God, and of Christ, because it is unchanging and immovable, a picture of strength. In our recent trip to the coast we stayed where there was a huge rock out in the ocean right before us. And like the rock at Cannon Beach it is referred to as Haystack Rock. That term is an oxymoron. There is a lot of difference between a haystack and a rock. Our Lord is our Rock, our Strength, our Salvation. And Isaiah in chapter 53 tells us this:

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:4-6).

You see, the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross was "smitten of God." "He was bruised for our iniquities." "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." But how often did He have to do this? *Just once!* By that one smiting we can drink of the water of life freely.

But do we need to come to Him again to continue to drink of that living water. Yes, we do! But how do we get it? Does He have to die every time we come? No! You know as well as I do that we come and ask, and we receive. So Moses marred the type. By what he did we would have to think that Christ had to die more than once. He has to be smitten again

and again. That is not the way it is. There is no perpetual sacrifice of Christ. He only had to die once, not even twice – just once!

Contrasting the work of the OT priests with the priestly work of our Lord Jesus Christ, the writer of Hebrews teaches us the truth in the following words:

- 11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:  
12 But this Man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God . . .  
14 For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified (Heb. 10:11-12, 14).

**Concl:** But God by His judgment on Moses has shown to all future generations that Christ, our Rock, only needed to die once in order to save all of the elect for all eternity. And thus the type is preserved.

I trust that seeing this great truth again, will enable all of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, to approach the Lord's Table today in deep humility and with hearts prepared to worship the Lord "in spirit and in truth."