

**Numbers 20**  
(A warning against discouragement)

- I. Israel's trials and failures are set forth for our benefit. **1CO 10:5-12.**
- II. Numbers 20 is a concentrated period of melancholy for the church and its leaders.
  - A. In this chapter Moses (and Aaron) are denied access into the promised land.
  - B. In this chapter Miriam dies.
  - C. In this chapter Aaron her brother and the High Priest of Israel dies.
  - D. These three siblings are all noted as leaders in Israel's exodus. **MIC 6:4.**
- III. The events of these pages occurred in the last year of Israel's wanderings. **NUM 33:38.**

**Numbers 20**

**vs. 1-6.**

- A. Miriam was a prophetess and a song-leader in Israel. **EXO 15:20-21.**
  - 1. One would think that some supportive, comforting words for Moses and Aaron would have been appropriate. Instead, we only read that Israel "...gathered themselves together against Moses and Aaron" (v. 2).
  - 2. Let us not forget to "...weep with them that weep" (**ROM 12:15**).
- B. The murmuring and rebellious spirit which had by now consumed virtually all the older generation was not yet subdued.
  - 1. Israel's striving was not so much against Moses and Aaron as it was against God. **EXO 16:7-8; NUM 16:11.**
  - 2. Though Israel was long out of Egypt, Egypt was not yet out of Israel. **ACT 7:39.**
  - 3. They even at times described their former land of bondage in the language of the promised land. **NUM 16:13.**
  - 4. They even went so far here as to wish they had already died rather than endure a few more days of hardship. Men should be careful what they wish for. **NUM 14:2, 28-29; 2TH 2:10-12.**
- C. From these verses we may observe:
  - 1. that we should be grateful for ample clean drinking water.
  - 2. we have, by grace and the gospel, been delivered from our spiritual bondage to which we should have no desire to return. **1PE 4:1-3.**
  - 3. that it is a terrible thing to abandon one's inheritance and hope due to temporary privations. **HEB 12:15-16.**
  - 4. that we ought not to doubt God's interest in our daily needs or His ability to provide. **PSA 78:19-22; MAT 6:31.**

**vs. 7-13.**

- A. Perhaps giving consideration to their condition (**PSA 78:38-39**) and the fact that they had wandered for 39 years as a consequence of their fathers' errors, God does not here answer them with judgment. Rather, He makes provision for their need, and that with a view to His own faithfulness. **PSA 105:41-42.**
- B. Moses was to hold the rod, but speak to the rock and it would bring forth water.
  - 1. Curiously, the words of God's minister would produce better results from a rock than from the people.

2. Such is the potential of man's heart. **EXO 9:35.**
- C. Previously when Israel similarly needed water, God told Moses to strike with the rod. **EXO 17:6.**
- D. "And Moses took the rod..." (v. 9). He followed *part* of the instructions.
- E. In a fit of anger, instead of speaking *to the rock*, Moses spoke hotly *to the people* and smote the rock. **vs. 10-11.**
- F. The rock brought forth water and a need was met.
- G. Because of this, Moses and Aaron were charged with unbelief and forbidden from entering the promised land.
1. The church had finally pushed Moses over the edge with their constant murmuring and rebelling. **PSA 106:32-33.**
  2. Though Moses and Aaron would suffer more for their lapse than Israel did for their provocation, yet it bodes not well for those who cause the righteous to stumble. **PRO 28:10.**
- H. From these verses we may observe:
1. willful half-compliance to God's order is non-compliance.
  2. willful rejection of known duty constitutes unbelief and sin (**JAM 4:17**). Let those who profess to believe in Jesus Christ but will not identify with Him in baptism take note.
  3. favorable results do not justify alteration of God's commands. **MAT 28:19-20; 1CO 11:2.**
  4. because Moses was in a position of high favor and authority in Israel did not mean that he was exempt from justice.
  5. that God holds those in high places to higher standards. **ECC 10:1; JAM 3:1.**
  6. that past faithful conduct does not excuse one from judgment for present rebellion. **EZE 18:24.**
  7. that an unguarded moment may sully an otherwise exemplary life or ministry. **1CO 9:27.**
  8. that we need to bridle our tongue, particularly when provoked. **JAM 3:2; ACT 23:1-5.**
  9. that control of our passions is a weighty concern. **PRO 16:32; 25:28.**
  10. that when God changes the order of things, we are not justified in continuing in the old ways. **GAL 3:19, 24-25; COL 2:14-16; HEB 10:19-20.**
  11. that if God can make waters come forth from a rock by the ministry of the mouth of the man of God, He can do likewise with hard-hearted sinners. **MAR 6:52 c/w JOH 7:37-39.**
  12. that in the accounts of the two rocks we have tokens of the old and new testaments.
    - a. The rod applied to the rock (**EXO 17:6**) is much like the Law covenant which gave the power of the sword to the church to bring forth obedience.
    - b. The order of speaking to the rock answers to the new covenant which affects men by the word, not the rod. **2CO 10:3-4.**
    - c. It is a grave error to do as Moses and try to impose the old order upon objects under the new order. **ACT 15:1; GAL 5:2-3.**
  13. That the law (called 'Moses' in **2CO 3:15**) will ever fall short of bringing God's people into their promised inheritance. **GAL 3:10 c/w ROM 8:3.**

**vs. 14-21.**

- A. Israel now petitions Edom to allow them passage through Edom's land.
1. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, and as such were blood-relatives of Israel. **GEN 25:30; 36:1.**
  2. As such, God had put Israel on notice that Edom was not to be routed and its lands seized like the Canaanites' lands. **DEU 2:4-7; 23:7.**
- B. Israel assured Edom that they would present no danger or loss to Edom. All they desired was a

conduit through that land.

1. Edom, however, would cede Israel no passage whatsoever, being somewhat belligerent about the proposition.
2. Perhaps a distrust due to Jacob's subtle dealings with Esau was still stinging Esau's descendants. **GEN 27:35-40.**
3. That bitterness towards Israel ran on for generations. But whereas God would not suffer Israel to overrun Edom, God would neither tolerate Edom's rashness towards the covenant people's inheritance. **OBA 1:12-15; MAL 1:4-5.**

C. It is noteworthy to remember Paul's usage of Jacob & Esau in **ROM 9:11-24.**

1. Jacob represents the elect vessel of mercy afore prepared unto glory; Esau represents the non-elect fitted to destruction.
2. Edom's indifference towards Israel typifies the resistance that the ungodly portion of Israel (the non-elect of natural Israel) had/have towards Christ, His church and His gospel. **JOH 1:11; 8:37, 44; ACT 5:28; 13:45, 50.**
3. God will eventually make "Edom" know that His love is towards His church and is not based upon natural descent from Isaac. **REV 3:8-9.**

D. Israel was required to skirt Edom to access Canaan. Observe:

1. The way to our Canaan is not through "Edom."
  - a. Saints should remain separate from "Edom" en route to Canaan. **2CO 6:17; EPH 5:11.**
  - b. The church needs not the religion or customs of the ungodly portion of Isaac in order to see Canaan. **ROM 2:28-29; GAL 6:15.**
  - c. The church needs not the support of "Edom" in order to fulfill its journey to heavenly Canaan. Consider here the vanity of pandering to the whim of the political state of Israel based upon a faulty interpretation of **GEN 12:3.**
2. It was said that "...the soul of the people was much discouraged because of THE WAY" (**NUM 21:4**).
  - a. THE WAY unto Canaan was never meant to be hassle-free. **MAT 7:13-14; ACT 14:22.**
  - b. Going through Edom would have been a short-cut to Canaan. How many people are looking for a crown without a cross? **ACT 26:27-28 c/w PHIL 1:29.**
  - c. THE WAY which discouraged Israel was largely owing to their refusal to enter Canaan years earlier. Beware lest we confuse the Lord's discouragements (**1PE 1:6-7**) with those of our own making and so fret against God. **PRO 19:3.**

**vs. 22-29.**

- A. Aaron, Israel's high priest, dies.
- B. In view of the same, God said, "Aaron shall be gathered unto his people..." (v. 24).
  1. Though Aaron's error (v. 12) would forbid him from living to enter Canaan, God uses not the language of judgment here to describe his death.
    - a. The fierce language of judgment is that one should be "...cut off from among his people." **NUM 15:30** et.al.
    - b. But Aaron was about to be *gathered unto his people*. Aaron's soul was about to fly away to be with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. **ECC 12:7; LUK 16:23.**
  2. There is life after death and there is even hope of heavenly Canaan for God's elect who failed to persevere to earthly Canaan. **1CO 10:3-5 c/w JOH 6:54.**
- C. Aaron shed his garments on the mount which were then placed upon his son.
  1. He would return as he had come. **JOB 1:21.**

2. See in this the garments our High Priest left for us. **ISA 61:10; REV 19:8.**
- D. Aaron's dying short of Canaan reminds us that:
1. the Aaronic priesthood could make nothing perfect. **HEB 7:11, 19.**
  2. Christ's priesthood is infinitely superior. **HEB 7:23-25.**