

In The Wilderness

Numbers 20:1-29

- As this chapter opens it has been forty years since the Israelites left Egypt, and thirty eight years since they sent the spies into the land. At this point Miriam is one hundred and twenty seven, Aaron one hundred and twenty three, and Moses one hundred and twenty, and for thirty eight plus years Israel has been circling the desert, dying off one by one, until everyone who was over twenty when they rebelled against God during the Korah uprising has gone off the scene.
- You might find it surprising that thirty eight years are summed up in less than six chapters, but that's what happen when we don't surrender to the will of God and fight against His purposes for our lives, we just begin to wander around for days, months, years, decades, and consequently not a lot happens in our lives that is noteworthy for God. We know all of this because **Num 33:38-39**- says how old Aaron was when he died, and the year that he died since Israel came out of Egypt, so Miriam, Aaron, and Moses all died in the very same year > 40th.

V1-29

- **V1** the place where Miriam dies is the place where Israel rejected the Lord's plan to enter into the promise land (Kadesh) saying that **"the people of the land was too strong for them to overcome"** **Num 13:26-28**. So Miriam's death signals the end of an era, as she is the first of the siblings to die in the wilderness, and her death demonstrated that what God promised was going to be fulfilled, as the generation that refused to enter Canaan would all die in the wilderness without exception, including Moses and his family, for only Joshua and Caleb would enter in.
- **V2-5** this is the new generation as seen by what they said in **V3** "if only we ad died when our brethren died before the Lord", so although we see a new generation crop up you still see the same old problems as the previous on > a lack of faith, sprinkled with murmuring and complaining, with some rebellion on top, sounds like a sinful desert doesn't it?
- There is going to be some interesting lessons that we'll see in this chapter > **1st** you'll see how not to respond to a real need in your life, **2nd** we'll see now not to react when God is using you to minister to that person's need, **3rd** we see the serious consequences of misrepresenting God in a public way especially when it can affect so many immature believers.
- **1st lets look at how not to respond to real needs in our lives**- whenever the Israelites had a difficulty they complained about it to Moses and Aaron, and then wept that they should have stayed in Egypt, is been correctly said **"that difficulties either bring out the best in people or the worst, they either mature us or make us more childish"**, James chapter **1:2-8** attest to this.
- Notice they have a real need, there is a lack of water, but their response is one that is filled with unbelief fueled by a bad attitude, these two always go together by the way, for where you see unbelief, a bad attitude is sure to follow. For this led to some outrageous claims > if only we had died when our brethren did, you brought us here to kill us, there's no fruit, grain, or water around, so nothing to eat or drink, well if that was the case they would have been died.

- **Deut 8:2-4, Neh 9:21** tell us that even Israel's clothes or shoes didn't wear out after forty years in the wilderness, and once they come out they weren't emaciated either but well taken care of. **V6-11 2nd how not to respond** – initially Moses and Aaron do the right thing they take Israel's complaints to the Lord, and the Lord tells him exactly what to do in order to satisfy their needs.
- Moses had done this before in **Ex 17:6** at Mt. Sinai, there God told Moses to strike the rock and water came forth, but this time God tells Moses to only speak to the rock for water to come forth. Moses does as God said taking is staff before the people but then he deviates from God's plan and takes this opportunity to lecture the people on their rebellion and stubbornness, no doubt they needed to hear it, but not right now, and not in this situation. So Moses strikes the rock and it brings forth water and both the people and the animals received water.
- What caused Moses to react like this? Maybe it was the death of his sister Miriam and the nation's insensitivity in not allowing him to grieve properly, maybe Moses saw too much of the old generation in the new generation, or maybe Moses was just tired of people rebelling against Lord, whatever the reason as we'll see it wasn't good enough for God. One thing for sure Moses had over magnified his role with God saying "must we bring water out of this rock" when we start to think that God's work is an us venture and not a His will being done, we get into trouble.
- **12-13** the serious consequences of misrepresenting God in front of immature and needy people- Moses is forbidden to take Israel into the promise land, and the reason is he didn't "**hallow God in their presence**" no one not even Moses can be seen as being able to do their own thing and get away with it, especially if its being done in the name of the Lord.
- Notice Moses didn't just hit the rock but he struck the rock twice to emphasis how upset he was concerning them > **Jam 1:20** the wrath of man doesn't work the righteousness of God, meaning all they saw was Moses anger, and not their own disobedience. So Moses got in the way of how God wanted to deal with Israel and it cost him his entrance into the promise land, and another person would have to finish the job, some might think, all this over one slip up!
- But what they forget is **Jam 3:1**- Moses was being judged by a stricter standard because of his leadership position with the nation, and his unique close relationship with God. Is it right to hold teachers and leaders to a different standard than others (yes) but it is wrong to hold them to a perfect standard, that is only reserved for God, as He is The Only One Who can fulfil that.
- **V14-17** Now Moses takes Israel north through the plains of Moab where he would prepare the new generation to enter the promise land, the easiest route was through Edom on what was called the Kings highway, a main trade route at the time. Remember Edomites are related to Israel being descendants of Esau Jacob's twin brother, so one would expect a treaty can be reached. But Moses knows the history between Jacob and Esau so he uses diplomacy in his approach by asking for permission to pass through the land before entering it.

- **V18-21** even when you do things the right way sometimes you are still met with resistance and opposition, as Edom refuses to let Israel pass, even after telling them that they would stay only on the road and anything that is eaten or used they would pay for it, is still met with a resounding no, in fact they come out against Israel threatening a war if they try and pass through the land. In **Ch 21** we read that this detour is going to make Israel's journey more difficult, and later in **Deut 23** God is going to tell Israel to treat Edom like a brother and not an enemy.
- **V22-29** after Miriam now comes Aaron, we see that Aaron is also told that he cannot enter in because he didn't represent the Lord properly at the water of Meribah, and he's told to go up to the top of the mountain called Mt Hor, and the transition would happen as Aaron's eldest son Eleazar will now be Israel's High Priest. Although the man dies notice the work goes on, as God has prepared Israel for this transition, but it is still hard as the whole congregation mourns him.
-