

BOOK OF NUMBERS

Lesson 10: The Wilderness of Zin (Chapters 20-21)

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Wilderness of Sinai

Wilderness of Paran

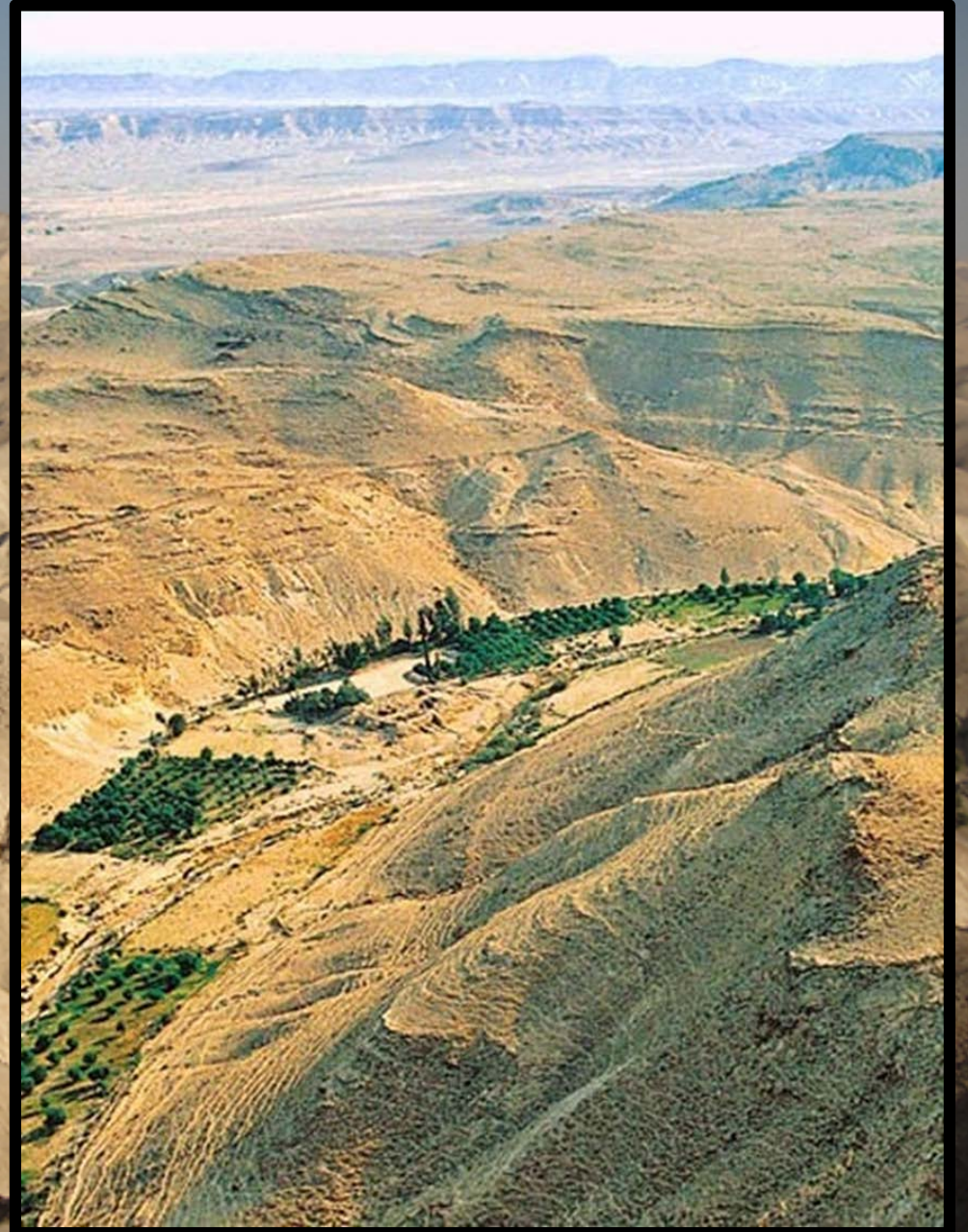
View of Israel

Wilderness of Zin

Arabah Valley & Moab

Kings Highway

Plains of Moab



Wilderness of Sinai

Wilderness of Paran

View of Israel

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Wilderness of Sinai

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Maktesh Katan

Maktesh, Hebrew for Grinding Bowl

Wilderness of Sinai

Wilderness of Paran

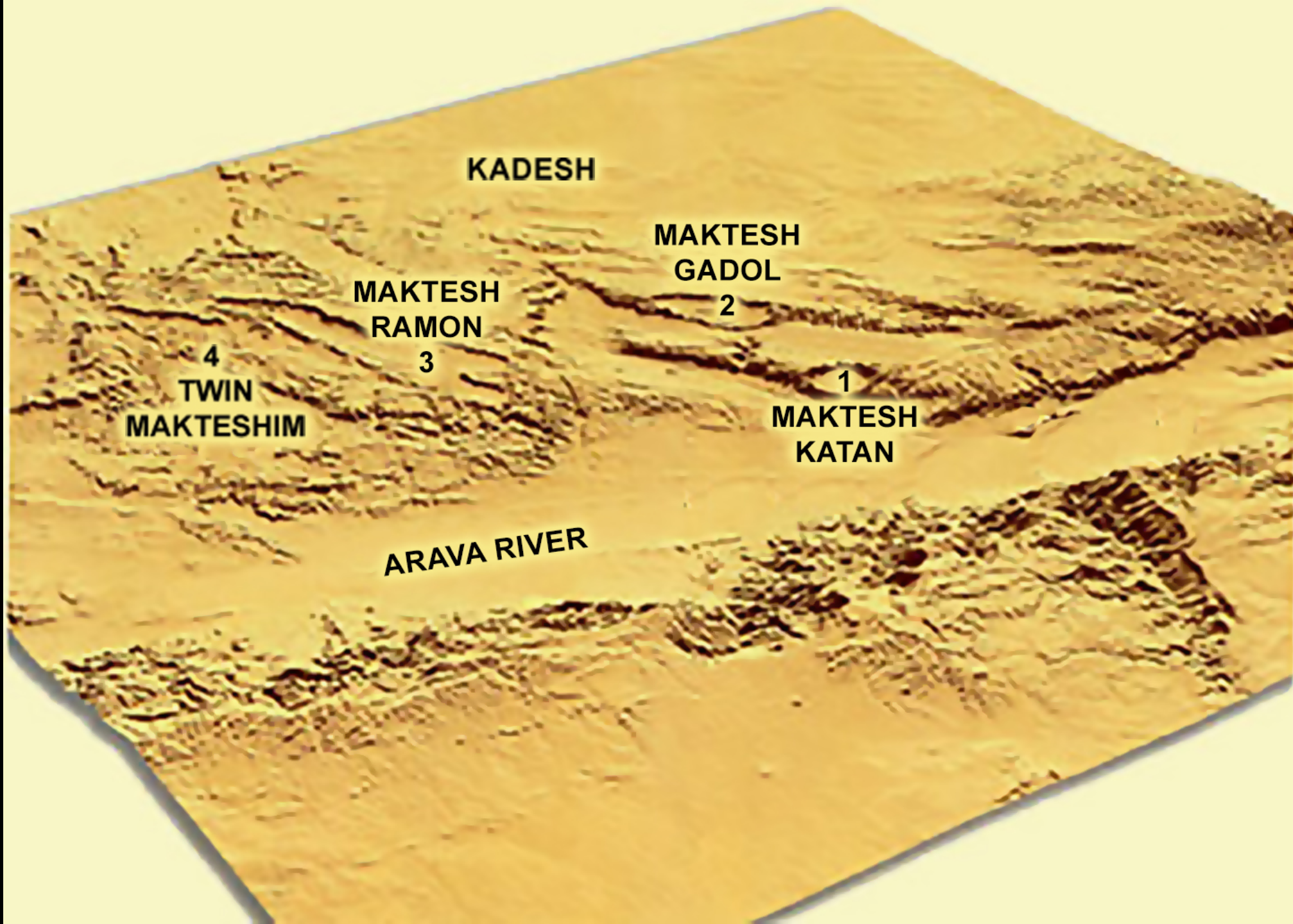
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Highlights of this leg of the journey

- Miriam's death at Kadesh (20:1).
- Moses' failing at Kadesh (20:2-13)
- We will come to an impasse with the kings of Edom and Moab who will not let us pass through their lands. (20:14-20)
- Death of the High Priest on Mount Hor, here on the edge of the Wilderness of Zin (20:22-29)
- Enemy engagement at Hormah (21:1-3)
- On the heels of our victory, some of us will fail again. The Bronze Serpent incident. (21:4-9)
- The biggest milestone will be when the last of the first generation die. (21:12)
- The next generation will be the ones to engage King Sihon and King Og (21:21-35)

This week we are going to focus on our personal testing and internal struggles within the camp, specifically Moses' error at Kadesh, the death of the High Priest and the bronze serpent incident.

Next week we will begin to engage the enemy outside.

Discouragement

The greatest challenge on this part of the journey is **discouragement**.

Discouragement is an issue that develops late in the journey because it takes **time**.

It comes from:

- Having fought the same battle with the same people for too long
- Trying to move forward and hitting obstacle after obstacle that hinders our progress
- Trying to live with a fruitless relationship with God.

It was never God's plan for us to experience this wandering, aimless life.

This was our choice.

We gave up that deeper relationship that would have led to fruitfulness and rest because it demanded more from us than we were willing to give to God.

More effort. More trust. More faith.

Discouragement

The first generation settled for the least glorious relationship with God:

- He has given us daily provision and protection.
- He has been leading us, but not where we wanted to go.
- He has been teaching and disciplining us, but the lessons are harsh and unrelenting.
- The simple relationship is livable, but there is no reward in it, no feeling of accomplishment, no progress.

Having lived that basic relationship with the Lord for 39 years now, it has become apparent how unsatisfying this level of relationship is.

A lot of Christians opt for this level of relationship with God.

Discouragement is a consequence of unfaithfulness and a lack of trust in the Lord.

Fruitfulness is what makes the journey **bearable**. Those tastes of peace and rest and joy keep us going and keep the promise alive.

We are standing with Caleb and Joshua. Our hope is still assured of entering that land and receiving our promised inheritance. We press on because of that reward before us.

For the rest of our kinsmen from the first generation, there will be no hope for a more fulfilling experience.

At this point, discouragement sets in.

Discouragement

The only way to keep yourself from being overwhelmed by discouragement in the grinding bowl is to remain **focused on God**.

The grinding bowl is an extreme test of our faithfulness:

- How well we understand who God is in His glory and sovereignty and power
- How deeply we **trust** Him to carry us through this place.
- If we try to get through this time by our own effort, our own will, or our own wisdom, we will sink into discouragement and bitterness.

....and Hope

God takes the most inglorious, discouraging moment for men and transforms it into something of surpassing glory for Himself.

He is the master of these kind of reversals.

- Out of the depths of discouragement will come great hope.
- Out of the lowest point on our journey, the picture of the **Savior** will reach a new height.

In this place, the Lord is going to bring us to the deep understanding of our sin and the need for salvation, and then He is going to paint picture upon picture of a future Savior who will die for our sins.

- This place of great death will also be the place of great **release**.

Moses in the Grinding Bowl

Read Numbers 20:1-13.

It is the start of a new year. We come into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, which means we will celebrate the Passover here.

There is no water, no food. The people complain.

In the Wilderness of Sin

- We complain at the bitter waters of Marah; the Lord made them sweet (Exodus 15)
- We complained of no food; God gave us manna from heaven (Exodus 16)
- We complained of no water at Rephidim; God gave us water from the rock (Exodus 17)
Rephidim renamed Massah Umeribah (Massah and Meribah) meaning tempting and contention

The Wilderness of Zin

- We complained of no water at Kadesh, God gives us water from the rock (Numbers 20) Kadesh renamed Meribah Kadesh

Two places called Meribah –

Massa Umeribah in Wilderness of Sin

Meribah Kadesh in Wilderness of Zin

Miles apart in the physical journey, but in terms of a spiritual journey, we haven't made any progress at all. We are still at square one.

Moses in the Grinding Bowl

How many times has Moses heard these complaints?

“If only we had died when our brethren died...” (v3)

“Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness that we and our animals should die here?” (v4)

“Why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place” (v5)

“It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink.” (v5)

What are they missing in their life? Fruitfulness and water.

Their life may have been physically fruitless in this wilderness, but it didn't need to be spiritually fruitless.

After failing to enter the land, the Lord repurposed their life so that they should not live for themselves but for their children.

Their hope is not to realize physical gain for themselves, but a gain for their children.

If they had embraced this new purpose God gave them, there would have been a purposefulness about life that they are lacking (spiritual fruit, not physical).

They are still focused on themselves and their own lack of physical fruit.

God is going to solve the water problem, but not the fruit problem. **Read Numbers 20:7-8.**

The Rod and the Rock

Exodus 17:5-6

“Take your rod with which you struck the river” that is **Moses’ rod** that struck the river in Egypt and turned it to blood. It is also the rod that parted the Red Sea and then brought it back down on the Egyptians. It is the **rod of judgment**.

“Strike the rock and water will come out” (**Exodus 17:6**) *Tsur*: a base rock or boulder from a quarry or cliff, a place of refuge in a time of siege or warfare; it stands in spite of being battered and struck

The first is a picture of Christ the Rock being struck at His crucifixion when He bore the judgment for sin.

Numbers 20:8-9

“Take the rod...from before the Lord (v9)” that is Aaron’s rod that came back to life, budded and produced fruit. It was placed in the Tabernacle with the Testimony (**Numbers 20:8**) as a reminder of the High Priest’s authority and glorification.

“Speak to the rock” and water will come out. (**Numbers 20:8**) *Cela*: a lofty rock that you must lift your eyes to see, craggy peak, a stronghold that cannot be breached

The second is a picture of Christ the Rock glorified at His resurrection. This is the picture of the elevated rock paired with Aaron’s glorified and resurrected rod.

Simply speak to the Rock and it will give you living water. Ask and you shall receive.

Moses' Response

Read Numbers 20:9-11.

In this moment, Moses is going to say something wrong, and then he is going to do something wrong.

Remember earlier in this study, we talked about how our tongue isn't really our problem. Our problem is our heart. Our tongue simply reveals what is in our heart.

From those words, what is in Moses' heart right now?

Anger... Frustration... Wanting to lash out... Bitterness

Bitterness, like discouragement, is something that happens over time.

Moses was displeased when we griped over our cravings.

He was incensed with Korah and company.

Now bitterness has set in.

Imagine for a moment what Moses is saying to himself as he is walking to the Tabernacle to get Aaron's rod and then walking out to speak to that rock...

“Hear now, you rebels [*marah*]! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?”

First use of the word *marah* means to be **rebellious or contentious** in the sense of lashing out or striking.

Second use of the word *marah* means **bitterness**, particularly when talking about bitter waters, including tears of anguish over personal failure.

- Marah is the spring of bitter water that Israel comes to at the outset of the journey. The waters of Marah (Exodus 15:23) were undrinkable because of their bitterness, but were turned sweet when Moses touched them with the branch of a tree (a rod). Marah was the first test of Israel’s faith and the place of their first failing.
- Marah describes a bitterness or anguish of heart that come with the realization of hopelessness or failure. Tears of anguish are bitter waters.
- According to the Law, the bitter water will bring a curse on an unfaithful wife (Numbers 5). If she has been unfaithful, the bitter waters will reveal it and cause her to lose fruitfulness the rest of her life. She will have no children.

“Hear now, you rebels [*marah*]! ...”

Moses calls the rebels *marah* because they are rebellious and contentious, lashing out at him and provoking him (and the Spirit within him).

Moses calls them *marah* because they have become a source of bitterness and anguish to him. Contentions that remain unresolved become rooted in bitterness over time.

Here in the depths of the grinding bowl, his own faithfulness is on trial. This is his trial by **ordeal**, just like the wife of a jealous husband.

- Just as the bitter waters reveal the unfaithfulness of the wife, so the waters that comes from this rock are going to become a bitter lesson in Moses’ life. His flood of rash words bear witness of the bitterness within him and it is counted as an act of unfaithfulness.
- Just as the bitter waters rob the unfaithful wife of future fruitfulness, Moses is going to lose the reward of fruitfulness in the land as a result of his unfaithfulness at this moment.

“Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.” (v12) “Believe”, in the Hebrew, means to support, confirm or be faithful to.

Why are Moses’ words counted as an act of unfaithfulness to God?

“... Must we bring water for you out of this rock?”

Who exactly is the “we” in this statement? Moses cuts God out of the act.

- What God told him to do is to speak to the rock, not answer back the children of Israel.
- God asked Moses to focus on doing what God wanted him to do in this moment because He is painting a very important picture here. He needed Moses to facilitate that picture for Him.
- Instead, Moses focuses on his own hurt and his own desire to justify himself to these rebels.
 - He forgets his purpose
 - He forgets to give glory to God
 - He forgets who the rock represents
 - He forgets humility
 - Instead of lifting God up, Moses lifts himself up
 - Lashes back at the accusations
 - Justifies himself
 - Builds himself up in Israel’s eyes

Psalm 106:32-33 *“They angered Him [God] also at the waters of Meribah, so that it went ill with Moses on account of them: because they rebelled against His [God’s] Spirit, so that he spoke rashly with his lips.”*

Moses spoke “rashly” meaning to **babble**, run off at the mouth. Trash talking. Grandstanding.

Speaking rashly

Do we do this, especially when we get angry, frustrated or bitter?

We may put up with the digs and slights for a while but at a certain point, it becomes personal.

Then we get angry. It may be a righteous anger or a self-righteous anger.

When we have been severely provoked, it can be almost impossible to restrain the urge to lash back.

Does it ever go well with us as a result?

The wrath of man never produces the righteousness of God (James 1:20).

These are grinding bowl moments. Even the most mature Spirit-filled believers can fail at moments like this.

Overcoming our natural tendency

- **Identify** with the Lord so much that we let go of self
- Remember Christ redeemed us and we are precious to Him – regardless of what the world says
- Remember our spiritual purpose – it is more important than our physical purpose
 - To paint a picture of Christ as we live our lives. Confirm and support that picture.
 - Glorify Christ and do not bring shame on His name – the duty of the faithful bride.
- Remember that every slight or hurt that we receive, the Lord sees and will remember. Pour out the rage and the hurt to Him in private, and let Him deal with the rebels.
- Lift your head and bite your tongue.

Striking the Rock

Exodus 17:5-6 Strike the Rock with the rod of judgment

Picture of Christ being struck at His crucifixion when He bore the judgment

Numbers 20:7-8 Speak to the glorified Rock while holding Aaron's budded (resurrected) rod

Picture of Christ in His glorified, resurrected state. Ask and you shall receive.

Moses doesn't speak a single word to the rock.

His anger and bitterness have so clouded his judgment that he has failed to do what the Lord commanded him.

His verbal lashing at his kinsmen follows through into a physical lashing. He lashes out at the rock as if it were some cursed thing. Not once but twice.

By striking the rock, Moses has crucified Christ again. He has put Him to open shame publically.

Hebrews 6:4-6

It is one thing to blow off steam with the Lord in private. God grants grace in moments of wrestling.

It is another thing to do it publically. Public display of disrespect requires the Lord exert His own authority for the sake of His own glory. Moses is publically rebuked. He will not enter the land.

It is a testament to God's great love and grace that He allows the water to burst from that rock abundantly, in spite of Moses' failing.

Death of Aaron

Moses has struck the rock a second time. Now the High Priest will die. **Read Numbers 20:22-29.**

This happens a little while after the incident at Kadesh. All the people have now come through the grinding bowl of the Wilderness of Zin and have arrived on the Arava River valley, across from the mountains of Edom. Our High Priest has been through the grinding bowl with us.

²⁴ 'Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah.'

Numbers 18:1-3

The priesthood bears the iniquity for a Levite's mishandling of the items in the Tabernacle. Moses mishandled Aaron's rod. Now Aaron will die for Moses' sin.

Is it fair that one man should die for another's sin?

But isn't that part of the picture that the Lord is orchestrating of a future Savior? Moses' sin gave the Lord opportunity to present a picture of hope.

Death of Aaron

Imagine having to:

- Take your brother outside the camp,
- Go up on Mount Hor in the eyes of all Israel,
- Strip him of his robe and give it to another
- Watch him die

Aaron's life

- He has been through the grinding bowl with us
 - Tempted as we were tempted
 - Suffered as we suffered
- He interceded on our behalf
- He has done mighty works before our eyes
- Now he has died for the sin of another
 - 123 years old, in the 40th year after coming out of Egypt
 - First day of the 5th month (month of Av)

The Bronze Serpent

Read Numbers 21:4-9.

Our High Priest has died.

We have mourned him for thirty days.

Now we are on the way now to the Land.

We are at the end of this long trial. We are tired.

We are impatient and frustrated for the time be shortened – to just get it over with.

We are **discouraged (qatsar)**.

Qatsar, means **to be short or impatient**.

In broader use, means **to be shortened or cut short**, as in the length of days.

Most often, qatsar means **to reap** something that has been sown, physically or spiritually.

Keeping Perspective

We are in the 40th year. The time is rapidly nearing when the last of men of war from the first generation will die. Their time has grown short. They will be cut off.

If we had been in the land of Israel at this point (somewhere around the 7th month), we would have been reaping a harvest now and celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles under vine-covered booths.

But here we are still living in these rough little booths, eating manna. We have sown iniquity and reaped bitterness. Now that bitterness is pouring out our mouth.

These are poisonous, biting words aimed at God and Moses. God bites back, venom for venom.

***(v6)** So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.*

The Bronze Serpent

(v7) " Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people."

Does Moses intercede immediately or does he wait?

Moses has repeatedly interceded for us when God was ready to deliver punishment – he interceded even before we asked for it, before we confessed to a sin.

As a result, our relationship with Moses has grown, but our relationship with God has not.

Now, in this moment, Moses has stepped out of the way, and let us work out our own relationship with God.

This time Moses waits until we **confess** we have sinned and need intercession. He waits for us to ask for prayer. Then he prays.

Lesson from leadership:

We can spend much of our lives trying to intervene for immature people to keep them from getting into trouble. Not necessarily a bad thing...

But there is a down-side to being constantly merciful: it doesn't encourage growth on the part of the immature person. Sometimes consequences are needed to drive home the lesson.

The Bronze Serpent

(v7) " Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people."

The **healing** can't begin until we admit we have sinned – not just that we have sinned but an acknowledgement of how we have sinned.

Do you realize this is only the second time in this journey we have actually admitted to sin?

The first time was when we refused to go into the land: *Numbers 14:40 NKJV "And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, "Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised, for we have sinned!"*

That was not repentance. That was a flippant response, like saying "Sorry. My bad. I'll be good now."

This time we are repentant.

This is a sign of ripening spiritual maturity. Even though we have failed in this moment, we have had a spurt of spiritual growth!

The venom that came out of us has made us sick. Our sin is embodied in our infirmity.

Here in this moment, the Lord tells Moses to present another picture of a future Messiah who will take away our sin and heal our infirmity.

The Bronze Serpent

Fiery serpent – a saraph, means burning as from fire or poison. The same burning quality that characterizes seraphim who attend the Lord.

Made of bronze

- Bronze is associated with the altar of sacrifices.
- The bronze serpent on the pole would facilitate the covering of their sins.

John 3:14-15 NKJV - "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Why use the serpent to represent Christ?

Representative of our particular sin and our sickness. The symbol of our suffering.

An awful image...

Something disgusting, repulsive, fearful to look at.

Something to be struck at and avoided.

Something to be killed and disposed of.

Something to put away from yourself.

Lift your head and look at this detested thing as a savior that would heal us, if we would have faith and believe.

Israel's reaction to seeing that serpent on that pole was the same reaction they would have to Christ as He hung on that cross. (Isaiah 53:3-5)

Two ways of handling discouragement

Moses became discouraged after fighting the same battle with the same complaining people for too long.

Moses at Kadesh:

- How he reacted to the complaining did not bring glory to God.
- He gave in to frustration, and tried to take matters into his own hands.
- He focused on the fight with the people in his life rather than on what God wanted him to do.
- Lifted himself up instead of lifting God up.

Moses and the Bronze Serpent:

- How he reacted to the complaining brought glory to God.
- Instead of taking charge of the situation, he stepped aside and let God handle things.
- Focused on the task God gave him rather than the people.
- Acted as intercessor only after the people confessed their sin.

Personal Reflection

We all go through times of discouragement. Discouragement often comes when we feel we aren't making progress the way we feel we should.

If you feel like you are not making progress:

- Maybe you are reacting to the situation in a way that is not glorifying to God.
- Maybe you are trying to remedy the situation by your own will or wisdom, instead of submitting to God's will or wisdom.
- Maybe you are trying to control the situation instead of letting God have control.
- Maybe you have retreated to that basic level of relationship with Him instead of stepping up to a greater level of trust and dependence.

Questions to ask yourself:

- What do I know of God's power and glory?
- If I give my situation over to Him, do I believe He has the power to deal with it?
- If He has the power to deal with it, do I trust Him to deal with it?
- Do I trust Him enough to be at peace with His handling of the situation?
- Am I willing to let go of my own control, and give control to Him?
- Is the way I am handling the situation glorifying to God, or am I taking glory for myself?
- What would be glorifying to God in this moment?

