

Moses Disobeys

Printed Text · Numbers 20:1-13

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **EXAMINE** the details of God's command and Moses' disobedience, **MOURN** times we have disobeyed, and **COMMIT** to support our church leaders in prayer.

In Focus

Chanel met Robbie at church in the career Bible study. Chanel just knew her sister Cheryl, who hosted the Bible study, wanted to set them up. After a hesitant start, they dated, got married, and had three beautiful children together. Robbie and Chanel wanted to raise their children to honor God. They understood that for their children to learn how to respect God, they first needed to learn to respect their parents. This lesson was not easy to teach and continues to be a work in progress for both the parents and the children. One way they demonstrated this lesson was by being selective about social media and online viewing in their home. The children were instructed that they couldn't watch just anything on their tablets or TVs.

One day, the kids assumed they were home alone because their parents were nowhere to be seen. Dad hadn't returned from his shift at their store yet, but Mom had come home early before anyone else. As the children entered the house, they went straight for the television, like any typical kids would. Mom listened quietly from a distance, pleased to overhear them reminding each other of the programs that their parents had prohibited.

Just like this, God wants us to hear His laws and instructions, and then He wants us to obey them.

What do you do when you notice one of God's law is hard for you to obey?

Keep In Mind

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. (Numbers 20:12, KJV)

But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust me enough to demonstrate my holiness to the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land I am giving them!" (Numbers 20:12, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Chode (Numbers 20:3) rib (Heb.)—To contend, plead.

B. Smote (v. 11) naka (Heb.)—To hit, strike.

Say It Correctly

Meribah. MEH-rih-bah.

KJV Numbers 20:1-13

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.

NLT Numbers 20:1-13

1 In the first month of the year, the whole community of Israel arrived in the wilderness of Zin and camped at Kadesh. While they were there, Miriam died and was buried.

2 There was no water for the people to drink at that place, so they rebelled against Moses and Aaron.

3 The people blamed Moses and said, "If only we had died in the LORD's presence with our brothers!

4 Why have you brought the congregation of the LORD's people into this wilderness to die, along with all our livestock?

5 Why did you make us leave Egypt and bring us here to this terrible place? This land has no grain, no figs, no grapes, no pomegranates, and no water to drink!"

6 Moses and Aaron turned away from the people and went to the entrance of the Tabernacle, where they fell face down on the ground. Then the glorious presence of the LORD appeared to them,

7 and the LORD said to Moses,

8 "You and Aaron must take the staff and assemble the entire community. As the people watch, speak to the rock over there, and it will pour out its water. You will provide enough water from the rock to satisfy the whole community and their livestock."

9 So Moses did as he was told. He took the staff from the place where it was kept before the LORD.

10 Then he and Aaron summoned the people to come and gather at the rock. "Listen, you rebels!" he shouted. "Must we bring you water from this rock?"

11 Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with the staff, and water gushed out. So the entire community and their livestock drank their fill.

12 But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust me enough to demon-strate my holiness to the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land I am giving them!"

13 This place was known as the waters of Meribah (which means "arguing") because there the people of Israel argued with the LORD, and there he demonstrated his holiness among them.

The People, Places, and Times

Miriam. Miriam was the sister of Aaron and Moses, and daughter of Amram and Jochebed. In Exodus 2, Moses' mother hides him along the bank of the Nile River, while Miriam watches over the basket. When Pharaoh's daughter, who is bathing in the Nile, sees the basket, she has it brought to her. Miriam then approaches Pharaoh's daughter and asks if she should find a Hebrew nurse for the child. Pharaoh's daughter agrees, and Miriam goes to get her mother, allowing Moses to be nursed by his own mother. Later, when God delivers the people from Egypt and they cross the Red Sea, Miriam, who is called a prophetess, teaches the women the song of victory sung by Moses. (Exodus 15:20-21).

Numbers 12 records that Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses for marrying a Cushite woman. God hears Miriam and Aaron, rebukes them, and strikes Miriam with leprosy. This shows an intentional irony, as Miriam was struck "white" with leprosy when she criticized Moses' Black wife. God's stance on racism is clear. Aaron pleads with Moses to intercede with God on Miriam's behalf, and he does so, and they are healed after seven days (Numbers 12:1-15).

Desert of Zin. This area is a dry and rocky region in southern Israel. It is the place where the Israelites cry out for water, yet it is also the path that the Lord has chosen for them. Therefore, this barren land that God leads the people to is a setup for a miraculous event—He will bring forth water.

Background

The Book of Numbers details that the Israelites remained camped at Sinai after they departed from Egypt. Throughout this book, we witness their journey through the wilderness of Sinai, which lasts for the next 40 years. Eventually, they reach Moab, located on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Despite facing numerous challenges and obstacles, the Children of Israel are now ready to occupy the land of Canaan, which God had promised to them long ago through Abraham and his descendants. Moses serves as the leader of the Israelites. However, like the older generation that perished in the wilderness, the new generation tests his patience with their constant murmuring and complaining. Eventually, Moses's patience wears thin, and he sins. As a result of this disobedience, God informs Moses that he will not lead the people into the Promised Land.

At-A-Glance

1. The People Complain and Rebel (Numbers 20:1–5)
2. God Supplies Water (vv. 6–11)
3. God Announces Punishment (vv. 12–13)

In Depth

1. The People Complain and Rebel (Numbers 20:1–5)

Due to the disobedience of God's chosen people, their journey through the desert lasted for forty long years. A new generation of Israelites was now ready to enter Canaan, the Promised Land. However, because of her rebellion against God, Miriam—Moses and Aaron's sister—was not allowed to enter. This new generation of Israelites had adopted the same attributes as their parents. Their parents had complained and lacked trust in God, despite being told that God knew what was best for them. Following in their parents' footsteps, this new generation questioned where their food and water would come from. Their desire for necessities, which God intended to provide, ultimately offended Him. God loved them and wanted the best for them, but their lack of faith caused Him great pain.

2. God Supplies Water (vv. 6–11)

Moses and Aaron heard the complaints of the people and went to the Tent of Meeting, where they fell face down in prayer. God then appeared to them and provided specific instructions, showing He hears and answers prayer. God told Moses to gather the community and speak to the rock, assuring him that it would pour out water. Unlike previous instructions to strike the rock, this time Moses was to speak to it. The Lord promised enough water to satisfy everyone, including livestock.

3. God Announces Punishment (vv. 12–13)

God wanted His holiness to be known. He was displeased with Moses and Aaron because they did not trust Him enough to demonstrate His holiness to the people of Israel. The lack of trust is a form of sin, and the wages of sin is death. God made it clear that, because of their disobedience, Moses and Aaron would not lead the people of Israel into the land He had promised them. Moses had been with these people for a long time and was looking forward to seeing the Promised Land. However, because he mistrusted God one too many times, he lost what he truly wanted. It may seem to us that this was a harsh punishment for simply losing his temper. We often make excuses for disobeying God, with some justifying their sin by saying, "God knows my heart." The sad truth about this statement is that God does indeed know our hearts (see Genesis 6:5; 1 Samuel 16:7). Our hearts are more often than not precisely what enticed us to sin. The place where all this happened was known as Meribah, which means "arguing," because this is where the people argued with the Lord.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did the people rebel against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 20:2)?
2. What did Moses and Aaron do before they went to the entrance of the Tabernacle (v. 6)?
3. Why did the Lord say that Moses and Aaron would not lead the people into the Promised Land (v. 12)?

Discuss The Meaning

1. As believers, what must we do to remain holy in a sinful world?
2. How can leaders guard against being influenced by those they lead to make decisions that are not aligned with God's will?

Liberating Lesson

We live in a society where honoring God is not a priority. Many people attend church regularly, yet if we examine our neighborhoods, the visible impact of good morality is often minimal. We have cameras to capture images of cars that run red lights or disobey stop signs. When leaving stores, there is frequently someone checking bags or utilizing metal detectors to minimize theft. Many private businesses have security around the clock, and local police officers carry firearms. Yet people go to prison for breaking the law every day. Would we need so many forms of law enforcement if people were really concerned about doing what was just?

How can we as believers honor God in ways that stand out in a world willing to break laws that harm others for personal gain?

Application For Activation

God is gracious to us. Sometimes we feel like God has called us to do something or know that God has told us to do something, and we delay, disobey, or do what we want instead. In Moses' case, we see the example of God being holy and strict about obedience, and how disobedience cost one of God's greatest leaders from literally walking into God's promises for him. For leaders, the standards are often higher than others. And yet, God's grace is what keeps all of us from receiving the penalties we deserve for disobeying God. Take some time this week to thank God for grace despite what you have done and write down ways you can be more faithful with the things God has called you to do.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Numbers 20:1-13

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.

The text states that the entire congregation was located in the desert of Zin. This desert lies between the Dead Sea and the Arabah to the east, with Kadesh Barnea situated within it. With the older generation of complainers now gone, Moses hoped that the new generation was ready to make a fresh start and obey God. The account of Miriam's death indicates that she passed away before entering the Promised Land.

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

In this dry desert, there was no water, and the new congregation began to murmur and complain. Instead of voicing their grievances directly to God, they directed their complaints toward His messengers, Moses and Aaron. The Hebrew word *qahal* (**KAH**-hal) means to gather, assemble, or even to gather in opposition. In this context, the use of the term indicates that the Israelites are not just coming together to express a concern; instead, they have united to oppose Moses and Aaron. This notion is further emphasized by the repeated use of the Hebrew word *'al* (**ALL**), which translates as "against."

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

Verse three further illustrates the opposition the people have toward Moses. The Hebrew word *rib* (**REEB**) can be translated as "to strive," "to chide," or "to contend." The people are resolutely against Moses, and they express their dissatisfaction with God's decision. They lament that they would prefer to have died alongside those who perished in the wilderness due to their lack of faith.

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.

The congregation accused Moses of leading them into the wilderness to die. The Hebrew word for "go" is *bo'* (**BO**). However, when this verb is used in the Hiphil stem, it takes on a causative meaning, implying "you caused us to go" or "you brought us up." They also accuse Moses of making them leave Egypt. In this context, the Hebrew word is *'alah* (aw-**LAW**), which is also in the Hiphil form. Therefore, the Israelites are essentially asking Moses, "Why did you make us leave Egypt?" They label the place as evil (Heb. *ra'*, **RAH**) due to the lack of provisions.

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.

Moses and Aaron addressed the rebellion of the assembly by seeking God's guidance. The text describes how they fell on their faces, which shows their humility. The appearance of the glory of the Lord before them likely signifies God's acceptance of their intercessory prayer. 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.

When we go to an all-knowing God for help, He expects us to follow His directives—His edicts—His battle plan. Moses did not have a plan, but God did and He expected Moses to follow the blueprint. He told Moses to take the rod and speak to the rock. It is obvious that God wanted to show the congregation His power. He did not want to show them Moses' anger. He did not need Moses to hit anything. After all, in the beginning, the God we serve spoke things into existence (Genesis 1). Since He made the water and the rock, they, too, are subject to His command.

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 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.

Moses followed God's directives partially. He took the rod and gathered the congregation at the rock. However, what happened next determined Moses' future and cost him his blessing: he spoke to the people in anger.

When he asked, "Must we bring you water from this rock?" he was taking credit for God's miracle. It's important to remember that Moses was God's chosen leader over the nation of Israel; he was not God and was not equal to Him. Sometimes, leaders in the church can forget who the true head of God's church is. No one person can claim that role—the church belongs to God. Moses referred to the people as rebels. The Hebrew word marah (maw-**RAW**) can be translated as "contentious" or "disobedient." While Moses clearly recognized the sins of his fellow human beings, he failed to see his own shortcomings. He did not pause to consider that he and Aaron were leaders. We must take the time to reflect on our actions and collect ourselves, as acting in anger can lead to serious consequences.

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.

Moses faced serious consequences for disobeying God. His actions revealed a lack of faith, which was apparent to both God and the congregation. Because Moses failed to show proper reverence for the Lord through his actions, he incurred severe penalties, including death and the loss of his blessings. As a result, he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Importantly, the text does not state that Moses was denied access to heaven. His severe penalties stemmed from disobedience, which conveyed disbelief to both God and the congregation.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Reflection on How the People Angered God and Caused Moses to Speak Rashly
(Psalm 106:32-33)

TUESDAY

God Reminds Moses of the Incident Before Viewing the Promised Land
(Deuteronomy 32:48-52)

WEDNESDAY

Israel's Encounter with Edom
(Numbers 20:14-21)

THURSDAY

The Death of Aaron on Mount Hor
(Numbers 20:22-29)

FRIDAY

The Grumbling of the People and the Grief of Losing Miriam
(Numbers 20:1-6)

SATURDAY

God's Specific Command and Moses' Angry Reaction
(Numbers 20:7-11)

SUNDAY

God's Judgment and Naming the Place Meribah
(Numbers 20:12-13)