

**Reformation Fellowship Notes • April 28, 2019**  
**Teacher: David Crabtree**  
**Handout #11**  
**Numbers 20 & 21**

**I. Introduction**

- A. These are very momentous chapters.
  - 1. Deaths of Miriam, Aaron
  - 2. Sin of Moses

**II. Exodus 20:1**

- A. Reach the Wilderness of Zin
  - 1. Not certain where this is
    - a) Desert surrounding Kadesh Barnea
- B. First month of the year
  - 1. Which year?
    - a) Must be a momentous year
    - b) They are beginning to move toward the Promised Land.
    - c) This is probably the 40<sup>th</sup> year.
- C. Miriam died and was buried.

**III. Numbers 20:2-13 (Introduction)**

- A. This is a very significant event.
- B. The incident where water is brought out of a rock is reminiscent of Exodus 17.
  - 1. The accounts are very similar.
    - a) Textual critics see them as two versions of the same tradition.
  - 2. Several similarities between the trek through the desert before Sinai and after Sinai.
    - a) Invites comparison
  - 3. I am assuming that the author wants us to compare these two accounts.

**IV. Exodus 17:1-7**

- A. Circumstances
  - 1. They had left Egypt a couple weeks earlier.
  - 2. God had miraculously provided for their food needs.
    - a) Bitter water turned sweet
    - b) God provided quail.
    - c) God had begun to provide manna.
  - 3. On the way to Mount Sinai

## B. Read account

## V. Numbers 20:2-7

## A. Circumstances

1. On the way to Mount Hor
2. The older generation is dying off and will not enter the land.
3. There have been a series of rebellions; challenges to authority.

## B. At Kadesh

1. No water
2. “for the congregation” instead of “for the people”
  - a) The word “congregation” appears 5 times in these 13 verses.
  - b) This people has become a unity rather than a mob.
3. We wish we had died when Korah and company died.
  - a) We would rather have had the fate of the blasphemers than to die of thirst now.
4. Why did you bring us out to die? (no mention of children)
  - a) Have they lost hope?
  - b) Or is the omission insignificant?
5. There are no food delicacies here.
  - a) The lack of water is an afterthought.
  - b) The lack of variety of food is a constant refrain.
  - c) More an occasion for complaint than a real crisis
6. Moses and Aaron fell on their faces.
  - a) This is the fifth time.
  - b) They are in the presence of blasphemy.
7. Moses was told what to do.
  - a) Then it says what Moses did.
  - b) The contrast is important.
8. Assemble the congregation.
  - a) In Exodus, the spectators were a smaller group.
  - b) Everyone will witness it (no intermediaries).
9. Moses took staff from the Tabernacle (Aaron’s staff).
  - a) The two staffs signify different things.
    - (1) Moses’ staff—display of power of God (in judgment?)
    - (2) Aaron’s staff—life giving power? Power invested in the priesthood?
10. “Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water...?”
  - a) Moses is not identifying with the people, and he is not defending them.
  - b) Moses is seeing himself in the position of God exercising His power.
11. Struck the rock two times

- a) Lifted his hand
  - (1) Moses took it upon himself to display God's power.
  - (2) Showing arrogance? (Ex. 7:20)(14:8)
- 12. Water came out abundantly.
  - a) Just because Moses did it wrong, God did not withhold the water.
- 13. Moses and Aaron condemned: "Because you have not believed me, to treat me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."
  - a) They have not believed God.
  - b) They did not treat God as holy.
  - c) They did not humbly obey.

## VI. So what happened?

- A. People were still influenced by Korah's theology.
  - 1. Lamented the death of their brothers
  - 2. Still complaining about being away from Egypt
- B. Moses was thinking all the rebellions would be done.
  - 1. He is angered by the rebellion.
  - 2. For the first time, he does not identify with the people.
- C. Moses might have come to think that he knew the mind of God.
  - 1. His gift of leadership came to be his own.
- D. For the second time, Moses does not position himself as an advocate for the people.
  - 1. The first time it was because he was tired.
    - a) God did not rebuke him for this.
  - 2. This time it was because he had lost his patience with the people.
    - a) For this, God finds fault
- E. He took the same action (doubled) as he took in Exodus rather than do what he was specifically told to do.

## VII. Numbers 20:14-21

- A. Little archaeological evidence of civilization in Edom at this time

Although there are traces of civilization in this area from as early as 4000 B.C., and a high degree of it from about 2200–1900, there is a gap in cultural remains from about 1900 to 1300 B.C. During these centuries bedouin seem to have been the major inhabitants of the land. One first hears of Edom in Egyptian texts from the late 13th and early 12th centuries. Bartlett has shown that the Edomites were an independent state of the organized type only in the 8th–6th cents. (much after the time of the conquest). (Ashley, p. 389)

- 1. Probably Bedouin-like society at this time

- B. The Israelites ask for permission to pass through Edom.
  - 1. Mention their relationship with Edomites
    - a) Descendants of Esau
      - (1) Esau was very forgiving and gracious in his treatment of Jacob.
  - 2. Explain their trek across the desert
    - a) Include mention of hardships
  - 3. Do not say where they are going
  - 4. No hostile intent; just want right of passage
- C. Edomites flatly reject the request.
- D. Israelites clarify their request.
  - 1. Stay to the highway
  - 2. Pay for any food or water
- E. Edomites repeat their refusal.
  - 1. Appear on their border with an army
- F. Israel went around Edom rather than engage in conflict.

#### **VIII. Numbers 20:22-29**

- A. They go to Mount Hor.
  - 1. Location is not known.
  - 2. Could be Jebel Madurah (15 miles northeast of Kadesh)
- B. God restates his refusal to let Aaron to go into the Promised Land.
  - 1. “Because you rebelled against my command at Meribah.
- C. Aaron taken up Mount Hor with Eleazar
  - 1. Aaron was stripped of his position.

In no case does this stripping happen with the permission of the one stripped; an aspect of punishment or degradation is present as well. (Ashley, p. 396)

- 2. Garments put on Eleazar
- 3. Transition was all done in the sight of the whole congregation.
  - a) This has been a trend since Korah’s rebellion.
- 4. Aaron died there.
- 5. The people mourned him for 30 days.

**IX. Numbers 21:1-3**

- A. Israelites have returned to the place of their defeat 40 years earlier.
- B. Israelites were attacked by the king of Arad.
  - 1. He took some captives.
- C. Israelites pray to God.
  - 1. If God will help them defeat the Canaanites, they will give all the plunder to God.
  - 2. The Israelites destroyed the Canaanite cities,
    - a) But the Israelites were not able to subsequently control this area.

If one follows the history of this area from this point, it would seem that, although it was conquered, it was not easily held (cf. Josh. 12:14; Judg. 1:16-17). (Ashley, p. ?)

**X. Numbers 21:4-9**

- A. They grew impatient.
  - 1. It doesn't talk about any lack; they are just complaining.
- B. They spoke against God and Moses.
  - 1. This is the first time God is the primary target of their complaints.
- C. They list typical complaints.
  - 1. Why did you bring us out of Egypt?
    - a) You brought us just to die.
  - 2. There is no bread.
  - 3. There is not water.
  - 4. We are sick of this food.
- D. This is the most clearly hostile and ungrateful to God.
  - 1. There is no provoking incident.
- E. Without warning or negotiations, God sent poisonous snakes.
  - 1. They bite people, and many die.
- F. We sinned.
  - 1. This is the first time they ever concluded that they had sinned.
    - a) They sinned when they spoke against God and Moses.
  - 2. They asked Moses to pray for them.
    - a) Moses did so.
  - 3. This appears to be the most genuinely contrite that we have seen them.
- G. God provided salvation.
  - 1. God instructed Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole.

2. Anyone who gets bitten and looks at the snake will be saved.
- H. The Israelites were not becoming more faithful.
1. This was the most outrageously they had ever behaved.
  2. God responds immediately and harshly.
  3. This was the most repentant they had ever been.
  4. God responds to Moses' plea on their behalf and provides relief.

The connection between this passage and the note in 2 K. 18:4, in which King Hezekiah breaks in pieces a snake made by Moses, is a matter of debate among scholars. . . .The traditional view is that Num. 21 gives the story of the creation of a snake that over time became venerated in an idolatrous way and was finally removed by Hezekiah. (Ashley, p. 403)

### **XI. Numbers 21:10-20**

- A. Israelites make their way to the Arnon river.
1. On the border of Moab
    - a) Mention of the Book of the Wars of the Lord
- B. These victories were memorialized in song.

### **XII. Numbers 21:21-35**

- A. Israel sent messengers to the King of the Amorites.
1. Asked permission to pass through his territory
    - a) Same thing they said to Edom
  2. Sihon refused.
    - a) He brought his army against Israel.
- B. Israel defeated the Amorites.
1. Took control of their territory
    - a) Including Heshbon
    - b) Some of this area Sihon had taken from the Moabites.
  2. A poem celebrating this victory
- C. Israelites settled in this area.
- D. The Israelites took the area around Jazer.
- E. Israelite encountered Og king of Bashan and his army.
1. God told Moses to fight him.
  2. God will be with them.
- F. The Israelites defeated him, killed his whole army.
1. Israelites took possession of the land.

**XIII. Conclusion****A. What are we to think of the leadership of Israel?****1. Miriam**

- a) No fanfare (in the text) when she died.
- b) What do we know about her?
  - (1) She kept watch over Moses when he was in a basket in the Nile.
  - (2) After the crossing of the Red Sea
    - (a) Dancing and singing
    - (b) Called a prophetess
  - (3) Challenged Moses' authority
    - (a) God rebuked her and punished her.

**2. Aaron**

- a) He was stripped of his priestly garb and died.
- b) What do we know of him?
  - (1) He comes to meet Moses in the desert.
  - (2) Incident with the Golden Calf
    - (a) He is not singled out for wrong doing.
    - (b) He just could not stand up to the mob.
  - (3) Challenge to Moses' authority
    - (a) He was not punished.
    - (b) He played a secondary role.
  - (4) 3 challenges to Aaron's authority.
    - (a) He was unjustly attacked.
  - (5) Incident at Meribah
    - (a) He plays a secondary role.
    - (b) But he, too, was punished.
- c) He is depicted as a very passive figure.
  - (1) He is not very assertive.
  - (2) He just goes along.
- d) But I think we are to view him overall positively.
- e) The kingdom will be inhabited by all kinds of people.
  - (1) This is good news for all of us!

**3. Moses**

- a) Why does such a noble and faithful person get punished so severely for just one little mess up?
  - (1) Moses is an exemplary person.
    - (a) There can be little question about this.
  - (2) He does not get punished severely.
    - (a) His eternal destiny is intact.
    - (b) To not get to lead the people into the Promised Land is not so bad in the bigger picture.
    - (c) God is not averse to subjecting people to hardship and disappointment.
      - (i) That is the testing that is at the heart of human existence in this life.

- (3) God did not just wait for Moses to make one little mistake and then pounce.
  - (a) What Moses did was a significant act of disobedience.
    - (i) God is just; he does not overlook evil.
    - (ii) What Moses messed up God's symbolism.
  - (b) This incident just exposed a latent flaw in Moses.
    - (i) It was not an isolated slip up, but rather an incident which made evident something that was part of Moses' essence.
- b) The story demanded it.
  - (1) God wants to tell a particular story in a particular way.
    - (a) We all play a part in that story.
  - (2) One aspect of the story in Exodus and Numbers is that every Israelite was a rebel against God.
    - (a) That is abundantly shown with respect to the Israelites masses.
    - (b) But it was also true of the leaders.
    - (c) As remarkable as Moses was, he was also a rebel.
      - (i) The story demanded that even Moses be shown to be a rebel.

Here Moses and Aaron succumb to the same sin; they have refused by their actions to rely on God to quench his people's thirst without their aid in spite of all that he has done. They therefore disobeyed what God had commanded, culminating with Moses' striking the rock twice. As the people had refused to rely on Yahweh in their first sojourn at Kadesh and were condemned to die outside the land of promise (14:11, 22-35), so here in the second sojourn there (many years later), the leaders make the same mistake and are sentenced to the same fate. (Ashley, p. 386)