

Moses' disobedience

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[0 : 00] Chapter that we read, Numbers chapter 20. And we will look together this morning at verse number 11. Where it says, And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice.

And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice. Now this chapter that we read is a very, very sad chapter, chapter 20 of Numbers, because we find in it that at the beginning of the chapter, Miriam dies.

Miriam, the sister of Moses. She was now about 130 years old, and Moses must have had a tremendous lot of memories to think back over, because Miriam and he were very close, apart from one little sort of slip up that Miriam had made.

He'd have remembered that Miriam was the one who looked after him when he was in the cradle, in the ark. When the children of Israel, the children, the boys that were born, were supposed to be drowned in the River Nile.

And you remember how Moses' mother, Jochebed, had put him in an ark, and Miriam was the one who kept an eye on the ark. And at this stage, it's getting near the end of the Israelite sojourn in the wilderness, and Miriam would have been one of the last people alive that Moses could speak to about the things of bygone days, because she would remember right back to his boyhood.

[1 : 31] And she would remember the days in Egypt, she would remember the pyramids, she would remember the miracle of the Red Sea, she would remember when she led the singing, the song of praise when they crossed the Red Sea.

There would be a lot of memories that Moses would have had. And then at the end of the chapter, we find that Aaron, his elder brother, dies as well. So that Moses, in the same chapter, in the space of a little time, loses two people who were very, very close and dear to him.

And in between the death of Miriam and the death of Aaron, we find that poor Moses stumbles and does something that was not in obedience to the Lord.

And he is very, very severely punished for this. Some of us would say, reading it quickly, that he was too severely punished for it. But we hope when we look at it, that we will realize that there's more to it than meets the eye.

He was severely punished by not being allowed to enter into the Promised Land. After leading the children of Israel, after all the troubles that he had getting the children of Israel out of Egypt and leading them through the desert, and now he's poised to enter in and he slips up and the Lord tells him that he is not allowed to enter into the Promised Land.

[2 : 49] We begin the story where we find the people gathered at Kibbosh. This is the same place as they had come to before. They've almost been 38 years wandering about and now they're gathering at Kibbosh once again, where they had slipped up before.

Because you remember that they had reached Kibbosh before and they had sinned against the Lord and the Lord had set them to wander in the wilderness for another 38 years. So that they were poised again to cross Jordan into the Promised Land.

It was a good place to gather because it meant that they could resume where they had left off, as they were the last time, where they had failed. But the people were so numerous that all the water that was being supplied to them was not enough, so that there was a great water shortage.

And we find that the people haven't changed a bit, that they come murmuring and moaning and groaning to Moses, saying, Why have you brought us here? We should have died in Egypt or we should have died in the desert.

I wish we had died before this because now we're going to die of thirst. And this was the same people who, every morning there was manna waiting for them. Every morning there was the pillar of cloud by day to guide them.

[3 : 56] And every evening there was a pillar of fire by night. They were still surrounded by God's mercies, and yet they came murmuring and moaning and groaning to Moses in the same way as their fathers had before them.

So Moses was very, very disappointed in them because the new stock, he could see, was just exactly the same as the old stock. And we find to this day that man's heart is exactly the same as it was in those days.

We find that man's heart is just like a pool of water, a pool of clear water, and when there's no wind and when it's nice and sunny, the pool of water looks nice and clean and smooth and peaceful. But if you drop a stone into it, it hits the bottom, you'll see the mud being churned up, and very soon the nice clear pool of water is a dirty brown color. But the Christian and others are very, very like that because when things are going well, it is easy to be a good Christian.

But when things, inexplicable things go wrong, and when you feel that you're in the path of obedience and yet things go wrong, it is not so easy when you're being unjustly accused of something or when some slight has been put upon you by either the church or by your friends, it's not so easy and not to harbor a grudge and not to slip up.

[5 : 18] Moses and Aaron did the usual thing that they always did when people came with them to a complaint. They took the complaint to the Lord, and we find them prostrating themselves before the door of the tabernacle.

That is where they usually met with the Lord. And God spoke to Moses, and God told him, take the rod. And this is exactly the same rod as Moses had way back in Midian.

And way back at the beginning of his sojourn, he had this same rod all the way through. And God told him, take the rod and speak to the rock. Now remember, 38 years before, the same thing had happened, and God had told Moses, take the rod and strike the rock.

And it was the same rock exactly at Meribah, so that this time God says to him, take the rod and speak to the rock. This time there was to be the voice only, and there was water for man and beast who would come out of the rock.

Now normally Moses would have been completely in tune with the Lord's commands. And when the Lord would have said to him, speak, he would know that that's what he had to do.

[6 : 33] That all he had to do was to use his tongue to the rock, and the water would come out of the rock. Because Moses would have known that the gentlest whisper from God would unlock any door whatsoever.

But this time, remember the deaths of Miriam. The people murmuring again, the great disappointment of the people being exactly the same as they were before. The second time he was at Kadesh, and memories would come back in about how they were sent back all the way again, and he'd be wondering, surely the same thing isn't going to happen again, that we're going to be sent for another 40 years through the wilderness, because the people are doing exactly the same thing.

And he was irritated and short-tempered. That's all we can say about him just now. And he gathered the people together, and he accosted them.

He accused them, spoke to them as rebels. And he spoke as if the gift of water was something that he and Aaron were supplying.

As if the water depended on himself and on Aaron. And he said, here now, you rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock? And he strikes the rock twice.

[7 : 51] He strikes it. Ah, Moses, Moses. As the sound of that rod striking the rock echoes and re-echoes round the place.

Do you not know that your dreams of entering the promised land are shattered? That all your dreams and plans for entering the promised land, they are now shattered.

Because he struck the rock twice. Already angels are choosing his place of burial on Mount Nebel, where he would be able to see the promised land, but where he would remain at that gate, and not be allowed in to possess the land.

He wasn't allowed into it. But it's very interesting, although Moses failed in the commandment of the Lord, that the water did come out of the rock, and that the people did get water, and the cattle and the sheep and everything else got water from the rock, although Moses had failed in the commandment.

Because it's interesting to see that Moses' unbelief, and Moses' disobedience didn't keep the mercy of God from the people.

[9 : 07] God remained faithful to his own people, although Moses disobeyed him. We will look for a few minutes at what Moses actually did.

First of all, we find that there was a clear case of disobedience there. There's no ambiguity in the commandment. There can be no doubt but that he heard and understood exactly what the Lord said.

Because the Lord said, Speak ye unto the rock. There's no way that anyone could take any other meaning out of that. He was not told to strike the rock, and yet he did it twice.

And what was worse, he did it before the eyes of the people. The people were able to see him doing this. This was a bad example, because he should have obeyed.

And God demands a high standard of those who are in the public eye. Those that people can see, God seems to demand a higher standard of them.

[10 : 07] And this was one of his most able lieutenants, Moses. So he was, there was a tremendous lot more expected of him.

And God, we find throughout the whole Bible, will not tolerate a bad example or anything that desecrates his own name. So people in authority or people who are setting a bad example, there is a warning here for them.

We also find that there was unbelief in Moses' action, because he reckoned that a word wasn't enough. He wanted something practical to do. He wanted something more than just a word.

There was a human action to be seen to be done. Because if he spoke gently to the rock, maybe the people wouldn't see that it was Moses that did it. So that God has to say to him, ye believed, not me.

And it's interesting that God accuses Moses, of all people, that he didn't believe God. Moses was the one who took the children of Israel out of Egypt, was the one through whom all the plagues came upon the children of Israel, because Moses had the faith to believe what the Lord said.

[11 : 20] And Moses went to Pharaoh and said, in so many days' time, this plague will come. In so many days' time, that plague will come. In so many hours' time, the eldest of each family of the Egyptians will be taken away.

Moses was the one that God worked through. Moses was the one who stretched his rod over the Red Sea, and the Red Sea opened wide. And Moses was the same one who stretched his rod over it, and it closed upon Pharaoh and his people.

And yet here we have God saying, you did not believe me. Ye believed, not me. Well, we find that Moses himself wrote the book of Numbers, and he warns, he records this, specially for us, for our warning.

Moses was attacked on his strongest point, that was his faith, and we also can fall down, can be tripped on our strongest point. We find that our faith can be broken up by something like an unholy passion, say a sudden flash of temper, or a momentary irritation, when our guard, as it were, was down, or a temporary yielding to envy, or to jealousy, or to spite, or to greed, or even to sensual desire.

Moses was attacked on his strongest point, and he stumbled, and he records it for us as a warning, and in order that we will be prepared to face up to whatever lies ahead.

[12 : 54] And we find also that Moses, there was a lot of pride in what Moses did. He speaks down to the people. It's not like Moses at all. He says, hear now, you rebels. He's accusing them.

He's speaking down. Must we fetch you water out of this rock? He wasn't giving God all the glory. Remember Herod, who didn't give God the glory when he made a great speech, and he was eaten of worms.

When we have any degree of success whatsoever, where we should be found is on our knees before the Lord, thanking him for that success, because it is not through ourselves that we have any degree of success.

But these, we feel, are not the only things that we find in Moses' sin of striking the rocks. We believe there was a deeper reason still for God punishing Moses so severely, and we look to the New Testament, we look to Paul for guidance upon it.

You know how in the Old Testament everything really points to Jesus Christ? Every single thing from the very beginning of the Old Testament right through to the New Testament there's built into it

lessons for people to be brought to a knowledge of Jesus Christ, to prepare the way for Christ.
[14 : 12] And we find that his work as Savior is frequently brought before us in other ways rather than just telling us about Christ.

So in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 4, Paul, in speaking of the children of Israel in the wilderness and during their wanderings, he says, they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them and that rock was Christ.

So that the rock that gave out the water to the children of Israel, Paul says, it was Christ. It was a symbol of Christ still to come.

That rock at Meribah was a type of Christ. And we have very, very simple sort of comparisons if we carry sort of the typology further on because we find that the rock at Meribah answered a felt need. The people felt a need. They were thirsty, they needed water and the rock gave them water. we find that people who live and who feel a need of a savior, who are afflicted by sin and recognize that they need help, they look to Christ and Christ gives them what they need.

[15 : 39] There is also a tremendous unlikelihood regarding the source. we find that water from the rock was quite an unusual thing because you would think that it would be in a hollow that you would find the water.

Not on a high range of hills near the top of a mountain coming out of the actual rock. So do you think that the people would expect to find the savior of Israel born as a babe into a manger in Bethlehem?

Do you think that they would think that the promised Messiah was a carpenter from Nazareth? Do you think that they would think that the king of kings was this humiliated man on the cross at Calvary?

And then we find to carry on the typology but further the means of obtaining blessings. The rock was smitten. In other words the first time that Moses came to the rock at Meribah he hit the rock with his rod and water came out to the thirsty.

And we find that Christ was smitten once at Calvary and from him flowed the water of life to thirsty sinners. And we also find the all sufficiency of the water supply.

[17 : 13] There was plenty water for every one of the children of Israel from this rock at Meribah the same way we find that salvation for all believers is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now for this typology to be carried on for this comparison between this rock and Jesus Christ to be carried on this rock had to be struck once only for Christ's work on Calvary was a finished work. Christ didn't have to be crucified once or twice or three times he had to be crucified once and that was it. And to carry this typology on we find that Moses was to strike this rock at the beginning of the sojourn the first time they came to the rock at Meribah and he didn't have to strike it ever again. But Moses had stricken it at the beginning and had stricken it again at the end. Just now when we're ready it just now. So that there was there by Moses a misrepresentation of eternal facts. A misrepresentation to the children of Israel there and then. And a misrepresentation to the church of Jesus Christ to the end of time. And Moses poor Moses had to be punished for this.

[18 : 32] And not only had he to be punished but he had to be seen to be punished because of this. Because God insists that there can be no tampering with his divine plan for the salvation of man.

There was one sacrifice by the Lord Jesus Christ and there was nothing else allowed to interfere with that. And you see nowadays religions putting up extra help as it were for the Lord Jesus Christ. You see them taking away things from you see them tampering with what Jesus Christ has done. with his finished work. And here we have a warning that God will not allow anyone to tamper with the finished work of Jesus Christ.

And it is a warning that we must take seriously when we teach our young people that any church or any person who tampers with the work of Jesus Christ and tries to explain it into human terms is laying himself open to a severe punishment from the Lord because there is to be more tampering with the Lord's plan for salvation of man.

There was a once only sacrifice and God is very very jealous of the finished work of his own dear son. Moses, poor Moses pleaded that he be allowed to enter into the promised land.

[19 : 56] he yearned for Canaan with a yearning that we really can't understand. He yearned for it but it was not to be. He himself records God's answer. He says, the Lord was wrath with me and said unto me, let it suffice thee, speak no more unto me of this matter.

The sins of disobedience, of unbelief, of bad temper, of pride were all forgiven but the consequences were allowed to work out their own curse. And we find that God does the same to this day.

God forgives sins but the consequences of sin are allowed to go on and it's all allowed to go on because it's part of our training.

But it's very interesting to see God's mercy. You sometimes think that God was very, very hard there but through every decision of God there comes this, as it were, a golden lining of mercy. Moses' stumble here is recorded as an all-time warning for us and he was given severe punishment because he did die before he entered the promised land but Moses' prayers were answered in a most amazing fashion because Moses was taken to the top of Mount Pisgah, to the top of Mount Nebo where he saw with his human eye the earthly promised land.

[21 : 28] And once he saw the earthly promised land, he was removed immediately to the heavenly promised land. But over a thousand years later, we find Moses in the promised land, on the top of Mount Hermon, in the company of Elijah, Peter, James and John, seeing the transfiguration of Jesus Christ himself, the rock of ages.

So that Moses' prayers were answered in an amazing fashion, where he appeared on the top of Mount Hermon. It was right that Moses, as a lawgiver, was not able to lead his people into the promised land, because to this day the law cannot take you into the promised land.

There is somebody special who has to take you in to the land of rest. Somebody special and that someone is the New Testament Joshua, the Lord Jesus Christ, who never stumbles, who never slips or slides, but who leads us the whole way through the wilderness, into the promised land. He doesn't get stopped. He leads us the whole way into the promised land. And there's no danger of him tripping up or of disobeying God, because he's already done it all, and he is ready to lead each and every one of us right through.

And when we need strength in the desert, when we need water in the desert, when we're mourning and groaning in the desert, he is right beside us. My grace is sufficient for you.

[23 : 13] My strength is made perfect in your weakness. That's what Jesus Christ says. So no matter the types that we have in the Old Testament, no matter all else around it, shining through is the sheer perfection of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us.

No, please don't think that we're talking sort of above your heads. We're talking to each person individually. It belongs to you to come to know the Lord Jesus Christ who has led so many thousands of people through the wilderness into the promised land and what he's done for others he can do for you if you will let him because he will not do it against your will.

He respects you enough to recognize that your will is important so that he waits for you to ask him. Please don't delay. Don't leave it. But place the care of your immortal soul and of your life here and now in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ who will lead you through wilderness of life into the promised land that he has prepared and promised for you and for me.

Amen. Let us pray. O Lord God of heaven and earth we pray and ask thy blessing upon us. We ask that we would understand really understand thine own word.

[25 : 10] That we would understand about Moses striking the rock twice. That we would see because of that the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ and Calvary. That when he said it is finished there is nothing else left for us to do but to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

O Lord it is so simple and yet so hard. We cannot believe and yet we must. O help us to see and understand that paradox.

Remember all the young people here especially we pray Lord that they would be able to grasp some of the loveliness of Christ if they could only just touch the hem of his garment. We ask thee Lord we plead with thee that this would be the case that they would get just the smallest measure to begin with and we know that they would be drawn forever more to the attractiveness of the risen saviour.

Help them to see Christ. Help them to have their eyes open. We ask it for Christ's sake. Amen.