

1. The topic of this chapter is "sin, punishment and death". I have to admit, that is not the happiest way to start a lesson. This chapter starts with the death of Moses' sister Miriam and ends with the death of Moses' brother, the high priest Aaron. Most of the chapter deals with Moses' himself being punished for failure to listen to God. Moses' punishment is that he himself cannot enter the Promised Land. There is also a strange section about traveling a long distance around a small country, which I will also argue is about punishment. All in all, it is not a happy chapter. ☺
  - a) So why should I depress myself with these facts? After all, don't I have enough to worry about in life than to care about an event that happened thousands of years ago. The good news is that this chapter has a few wonderful lessons about how to help us properly deal with death. In fact, this chapter teaches a few things about how Jesus' death on our behalf should have been modeled by Moses and because he blew the model, he gets punished.
  - b) The other positive thing to say about this chapter is that we have actually "fast forwarded" the end of the wilderness wanderings. It is not the end of this book. There are 15 more chapters after this. The book of Numbers literally skips ahead roughly 38 years from the beginning of the wilderness wandering to near the final stop of this group in this chapter.
  - c) I admit that I have wondered why the story skips over these years. My favorite comment on that issue (not in the bible) is essentially, "These years were such a waste of time that the bible literally skips over them." It is as if God is saying, "I have sentenced this group of people to die for failure to do what I have asked of them, and since they have that death sentence, there is nothing good to write about them during that time." (Unknown source.)
    - i) In fact, the only comment we have about this long time gap is a few miscellaneous quotes throughout the bible that say in effect, they ignored God at that time.
2. Instead of wondering what was not said here, we should talk about what the text actually says: It focuses on the end of the wilderness wandering years. As I said, it records the death of Moses' sister and brother: Miriam (whose name could be translated Mary in English) and Aaron die. It reflects the fact that God sentenced everyone that was part of that generation to die off. Still most of the chapter focuses on mistakes Moses makes and the punishment for those mistakes.
  - a) Because both Miriam and Aaron are mentioned a good number of times from the book of Exodus and here in Numbers, it is important that they each get their own death mention.
  - b) Given that fact, most of the chapter focuses on a strange story where Moses is told by God to go speak to a rock in order to bring water to the Israelites. As unusual as that request was, the main point is Moses failed to obey that command. Instead of just talking to the rock, Moses hit it twice. Water still came out of the rock, as all of the Israelites living at that time were complaining about a lack of water. However, Moses failed to obey God's instructions about speaking to the rock and Moses' punishment was that he was not going to be allowed to join the second generation in actually entering the Promised Land.
  - c) This does seem like a harsh punishment after all the work Moses did for being a good servant of God for all of those years. I suspect Moses was still grieving over the death of his sister plus whatever else was may have been on his mind. So why was this punishment so harsh? It is in effect that Moses "blew the model" of how the Israelites are to approach God. Let me explain:
    - i) Think of how often Jesus had to pay the price for our sins: Once of course. Jesus didn't have to die over and over again. God told Moses to speak to the rock and not hit it. Way back in Exodus Chapter 17, that same rock was struck one time as God commanded Moses to hit the rock so water could miraculously come out of the rock. Since that rock was struck once it doesn't have to be hit again. That is why this rock is a model of both Jesus suffering for our sins and providing for us.

- d) Let me back up for the moment: John, are you saying that striking a rock and failure to not strike the rock again, is a model of our salvation? Essentially yes. It is not just about how we are eternally saved, but a model of how we are to live the Christian life.
    - i) Think of it this way: The Christian life begins with the key idea that one is saved by trusting that Jesus is both God and He is the one who paid the price for all of our sins, past, present and future. That is the beginning of the Christian life. Then God calls on us to speak to Him as to how He wants us to live in order for us to make that difference for Him. It is about using the individual gifts that God has given each of us to live to make a difference for Him.
    - ii) John, are you comparing Jesus to a rock that miraculously produced water? Not only do I do that, but also Paul did that in the New Testament. Paul wrote that Jesus is that same rock as described here in Numbers, in 1st Corinthians 10:4.
    - iii) My whole point is that this whole lesson about death and the failure of Moses to obey God's instructions teaches us a lot about how to live the Christian life.
    - iv) Despite the "downer" of the topics of sin, punishment and death that occur in this chapter, we will see how living the Christian life is modeled here.
  - e) With that said, thanks for reading so far, and I'll use the rest of the lesson to explain in more detail about the stories told in this chapter. With that said, let's start Verse 1.
3. Chapter 20, Verse 1: In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried.
- a) To explain, Verse 1, we need to describe briefly the "who, what, when's and why's of this story". I'll try to keep it brief:
    - i) The "who" is the entire community of Israelites wandering through the wilderness. As I've stated many times in this lesson, a good estimate is that there were roughly two million people living at that time southeast of what is Israel today. To make a long story short, the Israelites were pretty close to where they were when they first started wandering through this territory.
    - ii) Think of this chapter as marking a new section in the book. Think of the travels of the Israelites as going from Egypt to the place (Mount Sinai) where Moses received the 10 commandments. Then they traveled aimlessly for about forty years. By the end of this chapter, they are just outside of the land that God wants them to settle.
    - iii) Here we have the story in just one verse of the death of Moses' sister Miriam. She was considered the leader of all the women and is mentioned prominently in other chapters in Exodus and Numbers. She is important enough to get her own death mention here in Numbers. If this were not here, it would be like wondering what happened to that secondary character named Miriam? That is why she in effect got her own death scene here at the start of the chapter.
    - iv) The where is also a "rerun": This is the same place where the 12 spies gave the bad report about the Promised Land back in Chapter 13. The mention of this location (Kadesh) shows that the roughly 40 years of wandering in the desert was truly a waste of time. Now they are where they were before they started this journey.
    - v) How do I know they are at the end of this time of wandering? Because the end of this chapter mentions the death Miriam's brother Aaron. There is no time gap in this chapter. Numbers 33:38 says that Aaron died in the final year of that time.
    - vi) Finally, let me talk about why this is here. Yes it is to teach us that Miriam died. Yes it is to teach us the forty years of wandering has come to an end and in effect the Israelites are back to where they started this wilderness experience.
      - a) More importantly, it teaches us that when a long and difficult time in our life comes to an end, there are still going to be sin issues (which most of the chapter focuses upon) to deal with. The point is just because God brings a difficult period of our life to an end, does not mean we will be sin free.

4. Verse 2: Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. <sup>3</sup> They quarreled with Moses and said, "If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! <sup>4</sup> Why did you bring the LORD's community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? <sup>5</sup> Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!"
- a) Speaking of reruns, here we have another story in the bible about the entire community of Israelites grumbling to their leader Moses that they have no water. If you have some familiarity with the bible, this also happened back in Exodus Chapter 17. At that time, God told Moses to go strike a specific rock and enough water flowed out of that rock to provide for the entire group that again I estimate at around two million people.
    - i) It is interesting to consider that buried around the chapters of the parting of the Red Sea and the death of the firstborn sons in Egypt is also this wonderful miracle story of water coming out of rock. It doesn't get a lot of play historically because in effect as great as that miracle was, people remember the other miracles more. Still, a lot of water flowing out of a rock is a pretty good miracle itself.
    - ii) My point as it ties to Numbers Chapter 20 is that once again, the Israelites are complaining that they have no water. Remember that in effect this is a new generation making the complaint as "Exodus 17" was roughly 40 years earlier.
  - b) Now notice the nature of the complaints: We just finished a chapter that said in effect that in order to be holy before God, one has to mix water with ashes of a red cow. The people respond in effect with, "Moses, that ritual may be fine, but at the moment we don't have any water to mix with those ashes". Then they start complaining that it would have been better for them to die when "Korah's rebellion" took place some chapters back. They also said that where they were at the moment not in a Promised Land as not only is there no water to drink, but this is a lousy place to live as trees and plants won't grow here.
  - c) Think of the story this way: Why would the bible just give a whole chapter to the story of having to mix cow's ashes with water and then start a chapter with no water? To begin, it does teach the entire group of Israelites to focus on seeking God for their needs.
    - i) What is interesting to consider is that God never condemns the Israelites here for complaining. In fact, God will tell Moses to give them water. The point is when things are going wrong, even after our own wilderness experience is over, God wants us to bring our issues to Him. Remember again what the Promised Land is, "Learning to trust God with every aspect of our lives". Here were these Israelites without water. Seeking God through their leadership was the right thing to do. Complaining about their present situation is sinful, but at the same time, this group did not rebel against Moses, just sought his leadership to help them.
  - d) Meanwhile I picture Moses being in a bad mood here. He just buried his sister which if my time line is correct, he has known for about 120 years. It's as if Moses was thinking, "I know we all have problems right now, but I have my own issues to deal with and I don't appreciate everyone bothering me at this point about water." That concept is a reminder that whatever God calls us to do, He will also provide for us the means to deal with it. In Moses' case, God called him to be the leader and He will find a way for him to lead by proving for the Israelites water.
    - i) The lesson for us of course, is about doing what God has called us to do whether we feel like it or not. Yes we all have our own problems and issues to deal with. At the same time, God never gives us anything we can't handle or anything that He does not provide us with the means or the ability to get through. If one needs proof as to whether or not God has called us to a certain role in life, a good clue is to watch the results or see whether or not He has provided us with the ability to perform that ability. If one is still not sure, simply "try and find out" and one will find out soon enough whether or not God has called us to that specific task.

5. Verse 6: Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the LORD appeared to them.<sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Moses,<sup>8</sup> "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink."
- a) Meanwhile, Moses was about to face a huge group of people who needed water. The good news is that Moses did what all of us need to do when we don't know what to do next: He prayed about it. Moses understood that God called Him to lead these people. Moses understood that there was no water. Also remember that his brother Aaron was the spiritual leader while Moses was the civil leader. Therefore, after both of them faced the entire assembly or at the least a group of leaders of them, they went to seek God at the "Tent of Meeting", which is another way of saying the tabernacle structure they set up in the desert.
  - b) Here is where it gets interesting. God's response was in effect, "Take the stick that all of the Israelites know is associated with the miracles performed in Egypt. Then God said to go speak to the rock that is apparently next to the tabernacle. Now tell that rock to bring out water like it did before. "
    - i) Think about how strange this is: First, they need to speak to a rock. Next they need to tell that rock to provide enough water to provide for two million people.
    - ii) One lesson for us to learn from this is that sometimes God asks us to do strange things that to us don't make sense. This is an example of God saying to us, "Trust Me, even though what you are doing now doesn't make sense at the moment."
    - iii) This text also teaches us that the rock that provided water back in Exodus Chapter 17 was either carried around with them for those 40 years, or since they are back at the same spot they were 40 years ago, the tent was set up by that same rock.
    - iv) No matter how that the Israelites worked with that same rock, the point is water flowing out of a rock is a miracle unto itself with no natural explanation.
    - v) If all of this is not strange enough, consider the fact that both the Book of Ezekiel and Revelation speak of water flowing from the "Temple of God" in eternity. (See Ezekiel 47 and Revelation 22:1). My point is somehow, when we get to heaven, water will be there and somehow it flows from God's throne. OK, and what does that have to do with this story here in Numbers? The connection is once again we have water that is going to flow from where God is located. It is simply another set of connections that show how God will always provide for our needs. He may not give us all that we desire, but He always provides for our needs when we ask.
  - c) The bottom line of these verses is that God's instructions were simply for Moses and Aaron to speak to the rock so that the rock gives enough water for all of these people to drink as well as enough for all of their livestock. The reason that God wanted Moses to bring his stick was not that the power was in the stick. It was simply that the Israelites associated Moses using that stick to do miracles and it would show all the more how the power of God works to provide for our needs.
    - i) Before I move on to Moses' failure in this story, let us think about what this story does and does not imply: It does not mean we can be lazy, not work and just ask the nearest rock to provide the food and water that we need to survive. If we ask God to make the nearest rock give us water, He would respond, "I did give you a mind, now go use it to figure out how to provide for yourself and your family."
    - ii) What if we are out of work and out of options? That is when God often does His best work of proving Himself. That is where trust comes in. He probably won't make a rock provide water, but I can guarantee that trust in Him will lead us to deal with His way whatever is our difficult situation of the moment.

6. Verse 9: So Moses took the staff from the LORD's presence, just as he commanded him.<sup>10</sup> He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?"<sup>11</sup> Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.
- a) Meanwhile, we come to the point in the story where Moses is disobedient. Instead of just speaking to the rock like God commanded him to, Moses struck the rock twice.
    - i) Let us remember life from Moses' perspective right now. He was probably still in a bad mood from losing his sister. He has dealt with the exact same situation forty years earlier when the previous generation complained about a lack of water back in Exodus Chapter 17. Back then, Moses was told to strike this rock.
    - ii) So did Moses fail because he had a "flashback" to 40 years ago? Did he fail because he was in a bad mood? We don't know. We just know that he didn't do what God commanded him to do, which was just to speak to the rock.
  - b) Think what a strange command that is: "Speak to the rock". Believe it or not, that concept is a key point of this chapter and a key point of our lives. Surprisingly often in the bible, God is compared to a rock. Not a little one that can fit in our hands. Think more like the giant Rock of Gibraltar that cannot be moved. In the Psalms, God is often compared to a "giant unmovable rock" that we can always trust in. Even in Paul's writings, he compared Jesus to a rock we can trust in with 1st Corinthians Chapter 10.
    - i) Coming back to Numbers, the point is God is trying to teach us that when we have a problem we have to deal with, we need to seek Him to deal with that issue. It is a matter of seeing Jesus as our "rock". To seek Him to deal with our problems and trust in Him to provide for our needs.
    - ii) The related picture is that Jesus didn't have to die for our sins over and over again. That is why God will condemn Moses for striking the rock instead of just speaking to it. Again, Moses sin was blowing the model of how Jesus only had to die for all of our sins once and for all. He blew the model by striking that rock a second time instead of just speaking to it.
  - c) Now that I've beaten that point to death, it is time to notice something else about the text: Water still flowed out of the rock, even though Moses disobeyed God's instructions.
    - i) To put it another way, God was still aware that the Israelites needed water. Even though Moses didn't do what He was told to do, God still miraculously provided water for the Israelites by this rock. If nothing else, it reminded that generation of Israelites that God still cared for them and would provide for their needs.
    - ii) This is an interesting visual picture. Even if one can imagine water flowing out of a rock, imagine there being enough water for two million people and all of their animals. It must have taken awhile for all of them to collect it. I picture the water flowing into some sort of pool and then everyone drank of this pool.
    - iii) Now let me come back to those references from Ezekiel and Revelation that talked about water flowing from God's temple. In Ezekiel Chapter 47, it said the water near the temple was "ankle deep" and as one moved further away, it became waste deep. As one traveled a little further away, the water was so deep that Ezekiel had to swim to get across it. That is sort of how I picture that water flowing here. The point is in Numbers, Ezekiel and also in Revelation 22, God provides water from next to His presence for whoever has need of that water.
  - d) OK, good for the Israelites I suppose. How does any of this affect me? Let's suppose we are dealing with something other than a lack of water. Suppose God is not answering my prayers and say someone near to me is still very sick? God never promises to answer our prayers our way or on our timing. God promises that He will work out life for His glory and it is a matter of trusting Him through the difficult times of our lives, no matter what.

7. Verse 12: But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."
- a) We now come to the punishment for disobedience. To explain, let us remember the exact location where the Israelites were: They were back at the spot where the 12 spies gave the bad report that the land of Israel was too difficult to conquer. Because those Israelites did trust in the bad report, they were sentenced to wander and die in the wilderness.
    - i) In effect, the years in the wilderness were considered such a waste of time, for the most part they are not even mentioned in the bible, other than stating that that this group was sentenced to suffer during this time period. My point is simply that the book of Numbers in effect focuses on what the Israelites did leading up to the time frame they were in the wilderness and what happened as that time was over. Most of the years of the actual wandering are skipped over in the bible.
  - b) From Moses' perspective, I don't know if he thought that he personally was exempt from that specific punishment up to this point. Maybe Moses and Aaron thought that because they were still alive, they could at least see the land of Israel as after all, they were the two leaders that did all of the miracles in Egypt and did lead the people up to this point.
    - i) If one reads of the life of Moses, he did commit a few sins that one would consider to be much worse than just striking this rock twice. Back in the early Chapters of Exodus he did kill an Egyptian (See Exodus 2:14). Of all the sins that Moses did commit or could have committed, why was he punished so badly, for striking this rock twice? After all, we don't think of the sin of being angry as being that bad.
    - ii) Remember that Moses was about 120 at this time. For all we know, he could have had a "senior moment" and remembered back to about 40 years earlier when God did ask Moses to hit the rock in order for it to bring out water (See Exodus 17:6).
    - iii) Yet the punishment for this action was banishment from the Promised Land. To state the obvious at this point, again, Moses blew the model that we don't have to strike the rock (our redeemer) dead a second time, but just speak to it (Him). By punishing Moses this hard here, God is teaching us about speaking to our rock.
      - a) Think of it this way: God does not want us to get mad at Him when things are going wrong in our lives. Yes we can tell Him how we are hurting by what is happening at the moment. Yes we can tell Him what are needs are at the moment. However, He does not want us to turn from Him because of the difficulty of our situation. That in effect is what Moses did here by not trusting His instructions to speak to the rock.
  - c) Let me quickly talk about why Aaron was punished as well. The apparent point is that Aaron agreed with Moses to strike the rock. It is not stated blatantly, but I do believe in a God that rewards and punishes people fairly for what they do. If God says in effect that Aaron agreed to go along with this plan, then I accept God's judgment on Aaron.
    - i) Does this mean that Moses and Aaron are not saved? Of course not. In fact we will have a reference to Aaron's salvation in his death scene later in the chapter.
  - d) Let me bring up one more related point, and then we can move on. Yes, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. However, in the Gospels, there is the classic story of Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus, while God says to Peter in effect, "Listen to Jesus and not to what the other two men may say". (See Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7, Luke 9:35.)
    - i) My point here is that even though Moses never did set foot in the Promised Land when he was alive, the Gospels do record that Moses did set foot in that land once Jesus did come on the scene. The point for us is punishment that we may receive in this lifetime is not necessarily reflective of how we will be treated in heaven based on our trust that Jesus is both God and the one who paid the price for our sins. Moses in effect did get to enter that land once Jesus was on the scene.

8. Verse 13: These were the waters of Meribah, where the Israelites quarreled with the LORD and where he showed himself holy among them.
  - a) Know that the word Meribah is the Hebrew word that means "quarreled". The point is God and Moses wanted this second generation of Israelites to consider the fact that they grumbled about the water issue. God still answered their prayer request by giving them water. In effect, this verse is Moses reaction to his own sin as well. Let's face it, he was the one who sinned by striking the rock twice and he was the one who "quarreled" by not following His instructions about just speaking to the rock, as strange as that sounds.
  - b) The point here is simply that even when we are disobedient to God, He is still willing to provide for our needs. Consider the fact that although we all have committed sins, we are still alive and breathing. My point is He still desires to guide our lives despite our faults. While that may seem like an obvious point, the reminder is that God is still there despite our quarreling (or any other issue) as described in this example in this verse.
9. Verse 14: Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, saying:
  - a) In this verse, the topic changes. The point here is that the Israelites were at a place where the shortest distance to enter Israel required them to travel through a territory at that time that belonged to a group of people called the Edomites.
  - b) To understand this story, one has to also remember something from the book of Genesis. The common ancestor of all the Israelites was a man named Jacob. His brother was Esau. Another name for Esau was "Edom". (See Genesis 36:1). The point as it relates to the next set of verses is that Moses understood that God gave this section of land to Esau. Moses wanted to ask the current king of Edom's permission in order for the approximately two million Israelites to cross through that territory. With that bit of background stated, it is time to read the rest of Verse 14.
10. Verse 14 (cont.) "This is what your brother Israel says: You know about all the hardships that have come upon us. <sup>15</sup> Our forefathers went down into Egypt, and we lived there many years. The Egyptians mistreated us and our fathers, <sup>16</sup> but when we cried out to the LORD, he heard our cry and sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt. "Now we are here at Kadesh, a town on the edge of your territory. <sup>17</sup> Please let us pass through your country. We will not go through any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king's highway and not turn to the right or to the left until we have passed through your territory."
  - a) To explain further, one has to remember that Esau and his brother Jacob lived 400 years earlier. Therefore, Moses is giving the current king of Edom a history lesson here. He is explaining to this king how "your relatives (us Israelites) went down to Egypt and were slaves there for 400 years. Now God has brought us out of Egypt and we Israelites just want to pass through your territory on the way to where God wants us to be. As we go through your land, we promise not to take anything that belongs to you, but only travel along the king's highway (Verse 17). We will not deviate from that highway until we are all out of your territory."
    - i) Let me also tell you a little more about this "highway". This was a well established trade route that ran through that portion of the world. Just like in modern times, if one wants to use a main highway, one has to pay a toll. The Edomites controlled who went through this highway in their territory. Since about two million people wanted to use that highway, it was necessary to ask permission.
11. Verse 18: But Edom answered: "You may not pass through here; if you try, we will march out and attack you with the sword." <sup>19</sup> The Israelites replied: "We will go along the main road, and if we or our livestock drink any of your water, we will pay for it. We only want to pass through on foot--nothing else." <sup>20</sup> Again they answered: "You may not pass through." Then Edom came out against them with a large and powerful army. <sup>21</sup> Since Edom refused to let them go through their territory, Israel turned away from them.
  - a) The "short version" is the Israelites had to go around that area as permission was denied.

- b) The "longer version" is the Edomites initially said no, probably as they feared such a large group traveling through their land. The text includes a second attempt by Moses to ask again if they could go through and once again the Edomites said no.
  - i) The significance here is that despite the fact the Israelites have already been in the wilderness for about 40 years, they now have to travel some more "the long way" in order for them to reach their destination.
  - ii) So why didn't the Israelites fight them? After all, the Israelites had around six hundred thousand fighting men, based on a count given earlier in this book. Moses understood that God gave this specific section of land to the Edomites and therefore it would be a sin to attack them. It would be like asking permission to use a person's home and attacking them if they said no.
- c) OK, it's time for everyone to ask me the "so what" question. This chapter so far dealt with the death of Miriam and then how Moses didn't speak to a rock in order for the Israelites to have water. So tell me why this story about the Israelites traveling around the territory of the Edomites is part of this chapter, and why we should care?
  - i) To answer that question, let me come back to my lesson title of "sin, punishment and death". As I stated in the introduction, this chapter starts with the death of the leading woman of this large group and is going to end with the death of Aaron. After a long story about Moses refusing to speak to a rock and hitting it instead, a model of "speaking to Jesus" after He has suffered for our sins, we get this strange story of the Israelites having to go around Edom's land.
  - ii) The question is why is this story here? The answer deals with sin.
  - iii) First consider this story from Moses' perspective. He understood that he blew it by hitting the rock and he understood that he could not enter the Promised Land for that action. I suspect at this point he was afraid to trust God.
    - a) Consider that through 40 years of going through the desert, we never read once of Moses asking permission of any group. Their job was, "when the cloud over tabernacle" they moved. When that same cloud stopped, then the Israelites stopped. It was a model about following God's lead.
    - b) Now in effect, Moses got his eyes off the cloud due to his sin and focused on the Edomites. Grant it, God gave the land to the Edomites, but Moses could have just traveled along the main highway, and not taken anything that belonged to them. If the cloud moved that way, the Israelites were supposed to follow that cloud. Therefore, there is the possibility that this whole section may have been a lack of trust by Moses.
    - c) There is no record of God punishing the Israelites for this action, but then again, they did have to travel a long way around this territory, so in effect that may have been the punishment for their murmuring about water.
  - iv) The second idea is to consider this from the point of view of the Edomites. They knew the Israelites were their relatives. They should have said in effect, "OK, you can travel along the main highway". They could have even profited by charging some sort of toll for their crossing. Consider the fact that Edomites no longer are around today, but the Israelites are. That alone is a lesson in doing God's will.
  - v) The point is no matter how one looks at this story, good does not come out of it. The Israelites had to travel a long way around this territory because they didn't follow the cloud like they have in the past. The Edomites knew they were related to the Israelites and refused to help them. In fact, they sent soldiers out to greet them as if that could stop God from accomplishing His will.
    - a) Therefore, even though this whole section is not listed as a sin, no good results came out of it. While Moses intentions of writing may be good, the truth is there is a lack of trust in God at this point in the story.



- d) OK John, once again you explained the story, but didn't explain how to apply it.
  - i) The question for you and me is in effect, "Are we trusting God or not?" He calls you and me to live to make a difference for Him. God says in effect the gifts and abilities that you have can use to make a difference for Me. Here is the unknown amount of time that you have to live. He asks that we use the most valuable thing He gives us, our time in order to make that difference for Him in this world.
  - ii) My point here is simply, "Unless God tells us otherwise, keep doing what we have been called to do". Moses and the Israelites were told to follow the cloud as to where they were to go. Instead Moses sends messengers to the Edomites asking in effect, "can we go this way?" There is a lack of faith at this point in Moses' life.
  - iii) What we need to learn from this story is when we don't know what to do next, we need to go back to "following the cloud". What I mean by that is if we know we have certain gifts and abilities, or if we know we are given some resources we can use to make a difference for Him, we should continue to do those things for Him until we are sure we are to do otherwise.
    - a) What if I don't know what I should do? Welcome to the club. The answer is always to pray about it and do what seems logical to do. In hindsight it is usually obvious what is God's will for our lives. If one studies how Paul traveled in the book of Acts to make a difference for God, one notices that he just went from place to place and watched the results.
    - b) A related point is that life is not always pleasant following God. Let's face it, Paul was whipped and beaten constantly for living to make a difference for Jesus in life. Were his eternal rewards worth all of this pain? I'm sure of it. Consider that after Jesus Himself, Paul is the second most influential person in the last two thousand years, other than a case one can make for Mohammed in the Islamic culture.
    - c) Coming back to Moses, I don't know if it was God's will for Moses to send messengers to the Edomites. I just know that Moses "broke the pattern" of just following the cloud and doing what he was doing for forty years. The price the Israelites paid for that action was to travel the long way to reach their desired destination.
  - iv) To finish, the point for us, when we don't know what to do next with our lives, God usually wants us to keep on doing whatever it is He has already called us to do. Think of it this way: If you have been praying about what to do next, and have not gotten an answer from God, that silence usually means, "I already gave you instructions to do "x", and until I say otherwise, keep on doing "x".
    - a) To say it even another way, when we are not sure what to do next, then that is God's way of saying keep on doing what we have been doing and when it is time to change, I (God) will make it obvious to you what is My will for your life in the future.
  - e) OK, with that overlong speech out of my system, it is time to get back to the Israelites. At this point in the story, we are going to read of them reaching their final destination before actually start conquering people. This is a place called Mount Hor. In other words, all of their traveling through the wilderness is summed up in this next one verse:
- 12. Verse 22: The whole Israelite community set out from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor.
  - a) Notice we get no details about what happened during this time frame. In fact, most of the years actually wandering in the wilderness are not recorded for us in the bible. That is God's way of saying, "wandering in the wilderness (i.e., not doing My will for one's life) is such a waste of time, I'm not even going to record such an event in the bible for others to study. " Our own "wilderness" is whatever time we spend ignoring His will for our lives.

- b) It may help to remember again what the "Promised Land" is. It is not the land of Israel. If the Promised Land was that place, why have wars been constantly been fought there for thousands of years? What the Promised Land is a mental state of trusting God with every aspect of our lives. The Promised Land is about following God's lead of what He desires of our lives. The Promised Land is about studying the bible and living according to what it teaches us about how to live. The Promised Land is about using our lives in order to make a difference for Him by using our time and our gifts for that purpose.
  - i) The actual physical rewards for such service do come in the next life. One also finds that once one uses their lives to make a difference for God, that gives one far greater joy than anything else this life has to offer.
  - ii) OK, enough lecturing. It is time for Aaron to die. ☺
- 13. Verse 23: At Mount Hor, near the border of Edom, the LORD said to Moses and Aaron,<sup>24</sup> "Aaron will be gathered to his people. He will not enter the land I give the Israelites, because both of you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah.<sup>25</sup> Get Aaron and his son Eleazar and take them up Mount Hor.<sup>26</sup> Remove Aaron's garments and put them on his son Eleazar, for Aaron will be gathered to his people; he will die there."
  - a) Let me give the good news first. The text states blatantly that God told both Moses and Aaron that he would be gathered to his people in Verse 26. That is the bible's way of saying Aaron will live for all of eternity in heaven along with everyone else who has trusted in the God for the forgiveness of their sins.
    - i) Think about this: If one knew one was going to die tomorrow, besides wanting to say goodbye to those one loved, one would want to look back at one's life and know that one has made a difference. Next, one would want to know that one was saved. Aaron did accomplish that as both assisting Moses and his role as the high priest. In effect, God told Aaron Himself that he was saved.
  - b) OK John, good for Aaron I suppose. However, I don't know how long I have to live, and neither do you. God does not audibly tell us that we will be in heaven. In effect, one is wrong about that answer if one studies one's bible. It teaches we are saved if we trust that Jesus is both God and He died for our sins. (See Romans 10:9 on that point.) I am willing to bet my salvation that this information is true and live accordingly. Therefore we too can have as much assurance as Aaron himself does because of our trust in those facts.
    - i) If we do accept that Jesus did die for our sins, the big question for all of us is what are we doing about it? If one doesn't know, pray about the question. I will argue that nothing God likes more than a prayer like, "Dear God, show me how I can be a better servant of You today. How can I use my life today to make a difference for You and Your kingdom?" If you want a direct answer for one's prayer, try that one and watch what happens to your life when we dedicate it to serving Him.
    - ii) Meanwhile Moses still has to go bury his brother Aaron.
  - c) Notice how Aaron went along with this plan. He didn't say, "I don't care what God has to say. I'm not ready to die and I'm not going up there." I suppose when one is about 120 years old like Aaron and Moses, one would go along with this plan, but I don't know that.
    - i) I suspect that because Aaron knew it was God's will for him to be eternally saved, he more readily accepted this plan.
    - ii) If you think about it, what more can one want out of life than to know that one has made a difference for God and that one's children are going to continue to use their lives to do the same. That is what Aaron got to experience. In effect that is what you and I can experience if we use our lives to make that difference for Him.
    - iii) Did Aaron make mistakes in his life? Big ones that are recorded in the bible that millions and maybe billions of people have studied over the millenniums. Yet despite those mistakes, Aaron is assured he is saved. That in effect is the type of assurance we can have if we use our lives to make a difference for Him.

- d) Meanwhile, let us finish going over the facts of this story. Moses and Aaron traveled up to the top of this mountain along with Aaron's oldest living son. God commanded that Moses take off Aarons' priestly garments here and put them on his son Eleazar.
    - i) What I wondered is, if this is such a big "passing of the baton" moment, why was it not done more publicly? Why not pass on the uniform in front of Aaron's family or any Israelite who wanted to watch the ceremony?
    - ii) I kept thinking about if an actor wanted to play Aaron's big "death scene" here. Wouldn't one want a big public death scene as opposed to a private one? I am guessing that the answer is simply that, just as only God the Father knows when it is our turn to die, so that moment of transition is private. This scene was played out mostly in private as if God was saying "I and I alone decide who is saved and I and I alone know when it is everyone's time".
    - iii) The positive news about this story is that both Moses and Aaron obeyed God even at the moment of Aaron's death. Aaron could brag that he saw the God work in a mighty way, more than most people in history. The point for you and me is that we too can see God work in a mighty way once we let go and trust Him to guide our lives. That is the real lesson here for all of us.
14. Verse 27: Moses did as the LORD commanded: They went up Mount Hor in the sight of the whole community.<sup>28</sup> Moses removed Aaron's garments and put them on his son Eleazar. And Aaron died there on top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain,<sup>29</sup> and when the whole community learned that Aaron had died, the entire house of Israel mourned for him thirty days.
- a) The short version of these verses is that the Israelite community watched all three men go up the mountain and only two of them came back. Then the entire Israelite community mourned for Aaron for thirty days.
  - b) The final question I want all of us to think about is, "Why did Aaron get 30 days?" In fact, how does one even mourn for thirty days? Does that mean that one sits around the house in "funeral clothes" and not do much else, other than for them to gather the daily manna to eat and feed the animals? I suppose it is so. The related point is the Israelites did not do any more traveling as they in effect sat there for 30 days as a sign of respect.
  - c) I also suppose that for Aaron's son Eleazar, this was now a difficult time. It is one thing to deal with the death of one's father. It is another to realize one is now in charge. I know for most men, including myself, the death of one's father is a difficult time. There is the realization that one cannot turn to one's father for questions or inspiration. I suspect that this was Eleazar's own moment of realizing, "Now I have to trust in God and not my own father as to how do what God has called me to do."
15. With that said, let us wrap this up. We started with a brief mention of the death of Moses' sister and end with a big funeral procession for the death of Moses brother. Meanwhile, most of this chapter dealt with the definite sin of Moses not speaking to the rock and the probable sin of Moses not "following the cloud" but instead, sending messengers to the Edomites. The point is this chapter is truly a picture of sin, consequences and death.
- a) OK John, one last time, so what? Why I should care about any of this ancient history? How does it affect my life? The answer is to remember the obvious concept that death is the opposite of life. When we displease God by sinning, we are in effect taking a big step toward death and not eternal life. When we confess sin as wrong and actually turn from that sin, we are again turning back to "life".
  - b) These Israelites sinned due to their lack of trust in God. That is why they were sentenced to wander in the wilderness in the first place. Neither Moses nor his siblings could enter the Promised Land due to their lack of trust in God. Are these three people in heaven? I am positive. Did they get to enjoy the life of being able to trust Him with every aspect of their lives? No, due to their own lack of faith.

- c) But John, none of us, including you are perfect. How do you expect us to live a life in the "Promised Land" as you describe when all of us sin and make mistakes? Great question.
  - i) In other words, how are we supposed to live any better than Aaron and Moses, other than the hindsight of reading of their mistakes?
  - ii) The answer, surprisingly enough comes back to how Jesus handled His own time in the wilderness. When Jesus was tempted by Satan for forty days, Jesus main response was in effect, "The job of people is to do all that God commands of them" (That idea is based on what Jesus said in Matthew 4:4 or Luke 4:4.)
    - a) In other words the way to overcome temptation is by our trust in Him and to study what is written in His word. That does not mean we can become perfect, but God does give us the power to overcome the temptation to sin, not by trying harder, but by trusting in His power to do His will. Does that mean we don't need medical help at times or no friends? Of course not. It just means we rely on His power to overcome sin and then we are welcome to use whatever resources would benefit our lives.
    - b) This whole lesson I have been lecturing about doing His will. The secret to doing His will, is literally about drawing upon His power to do so. I am convinced the one thing Christians don't pray enough for is simply to draw upon His power in order to do His will. The apostles prayed for boldness in the early chapters of the book of Acts. We make the mistake of trying to do things by our own willpower instead of drawing upon His power.
  - iii) To sum up this point and my lesson, what we all need to be reminded of every now and then (myself included), is to draw upon His power in order to use our lives to make a difference for Him. In effect, that was Moses and Aaron's great mistake: They stopped trusting in His ability to give them the power to continue to do what He called them to do.
  - d) With that said, an appropriate ending for this lesson would be about praying for His power to have the boldness to accomplish His will for our lives.
- 16. Heavenly Father, one thing many us as believing Christians forgot to do is draw upon Your power in order to make a difference for You in this world. Help us to remember that You desire to give us the power and ability to accomplish what it is You want us to do to make a difference for You in this world. We know that there are no magical words in order to receive that power, just a trust that You will provide that power for us. Help us to our lives to make a difference and have meaning. In order to avoid wandering in a wilderness, we not only need to trust You to guide us, but to provide that power to guide us. Help us to learn from these lessons about Moses and his family as we trust in your guidance and power. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.