

Exegetical Notes, Numbers 20:1-13

"Speak, Not Strike"

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Pastor, Cornerstone Fellowship

101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320

610-384-1375

charleshjensen@aol.com

NUMBERS 20:1-13

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.

- The Hebrews were encamped in the desert at Kadesh.
- There Miriam, Moses' sister died and was buried.

Verses 2-5

Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. ³ They quarreled with Moses and said, "If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! ⁴ Why did you bring the LORD's community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? ⁵ 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!"

- Old behaviors, once learned and engrained, die hard. So once again, the Hebrews grumbled and complained about Moses and Aaron. This time their complaint is that they lack provisions in the place to which they have come. Their greatest lack is water. They contend that it would have been better if they had died when their brothers had been stricken by God's judgment. (see Numbers 16) Those deaths were quick. Now they were dying slowly from lack of water.

Verses 6-8

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. ⁷ The LORD said to Moses, ⁸ "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."

- As in every other case, when the people rose up against them, Moses and Aaron took the matter to God in prayer at the Tent of Meeting.

There, Moses was given specific instructions as to how to handle the matter.

- Holding his staff in his hand, Moses was told to "SPEAK" to the rock which was before him there. God told Moses that when he commanded the rock to do so, it would pour out water to satisfy Israel's need.

Verses 9-11

So Moses took the staff from the LORD's presence, just as he commanded him. ¹⁰ 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?" ¹¹ Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

- In this case Moses did not follow the specific instructions of God. The phrase, "Listen you rebels..." implies that he was angry with the Hebrews for returning to old behaviors. The phrase, "must we bring you"... implies that he was taking personal credit for the act instead of giving glory to God.
- But then, Moses did not "SPEAK" to the rock as he was commanded to do. Instead, Moses "STRUCK" the rock with his staff, not once but twice.
- None-the-less, God was faithful. Water flowed from the rock.

Verses 12-13

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." ¹³ These were the waters of Meribah, where the Israelites quarreled with the LORD and where he was proved holy among them.

- God then told Moses that because Moses and Aaron had not been faithful to him by doing exactly as he commanded them to do and by giving him glory for the miracle he performed, neither of them would lead the Hebrews into the Promised Land. Because of their sin, neither Moses nor Aaron would enter the Promised Land.
- The place was given the name Meribah in Hebrew. Some years before a similar event had taken place. (see Exodus 17:1-7) Then, Moses had been instructed to strike the rock. Moses had also named that place Meribah. Meribah comes from the Hebrew word which

means to quarrel over or to strike. In both events, God shows his ability to provide for his people and his great faithfulness.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Speak, Not Strike*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)