

A Very Simple Survey of the Old Testament

Sunday School Lessons — by Keith R. Blades

Lesson 31: Moses Makes a Mistake — Numbers 20

Comprehension Questions & Answers

PART ONE

Q1. Why did God have Moses number the men of Israel at the start of Numbers, and what were they being prepared for?

Answer: God had Moses number all men twenty years old and upward who were able to go to war (Numbers 1:3), to prepare Israel to move to the promised land and begin its conquest. They were getting ready to take the land of Canaan for God — the very land Satan had turned into his headquarters — and establish God's kingdom in it, with Israel as His 'great nation' and 'kingdom of priests and an holy nation.'

Q2. What was Israel's first recorded act of rebellion after leaving Sinai, and how did God respond?

Answer: Some of the people began complaining about the move itself — about where the LORD was leading them and the purpose of it. This not only 'displeased' the LORD but provoked His anger, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed those who were complaining at the edge of the camp (Numbers 11:1). Under the Law contract, they received exactly what their murmuring against God deserved.

Q3. What did Israel say they wanted instead of God's manna, and what did this reveal about their hearts?

Answer: The people longed for the food of Egypt — especially meat — and wished God had never brought them out of Egypt at all. God said they had 'despised the LORD' (Numbers 11:20). Rather than trusting and appreciating His miraculous provision, they were self-centered, forgetting they had been in bondage under Satan's dominion in Egypt. They were 'great in themselves and in sinfulness' but 'weak in the LORD' — walking after their flesh and satisfied with God only when things went their way.

Q4. What did the twelve spies report when they returned from the land, and how did the people respond?

Answer: The spies confirmed the land was wonderful and fruitful as God had said, but ten of the twelve declared that the inhabitants were too strong to conquer — especially 'the sons of Anak' — and that Israel would be destroyed if they tried. The people believed this evil report, cried in despair, wished they were dead, decided to return to Egypt, and even prepared to stone Caleb and Joshua who urged them to trust the LORD.

Q5. What did God declare about Israel's pattern of rebellion by the time of the Kadesh-barnea incident, and what was His judgment?

Answer: God declared this was the tenth time Israel had rebelled against Him and provoked His anger since He brought them out of Egypt (Numbers 14:22-23). His judgment was severe: not one man of that rebellious generation who had been numbered into the armies would ever enter the promised land. Instead they would wander in the wilderness for 40 years until every last one of them died off.

PART TWO

Q1. After God announced the 40-year judgment, the people mourned and said 'we have sinned' — then tried to go up into the land anyway. Why was this still disobedience?

Answer: Their sorrow was not genuine conviction of their sinfulness before God — it was simply disappointment over what they were now missing out on. Truly convicted hearts would have obeyed God's new command to return to the wilderness. Instead they directly 'transgressed the commandment of the LORD' by going up without Him and without His leading. Moses warned them 'the LORD is not among you' — and they were defeated by the Amalekites and Canaanites (Numbers 14:41-45).

Q2. What do Deuteronomy 2:7 and 8:4 tell us about how God treated Israel during the 40 years of wandering?

Answer: Despite Israel's persistent rebelliousness, God faithfully cared for His people throughout all 40 years of wandering. Moses reminded them: 'thou hast lacked nothing' (Deuteronomy 2:7). God blessed them in all the works of their hand, knew their every step through the great wilderness, and even their clothing did not wear out and their feet did not swell (Deuteronomy 8:4). Through all of this God was clearly demonstrating His faithfulness and His worthiness to be completely trusted.

Q3. What made the 'no water' situation in the desert of Zin a perfect test for this new generation of Israel?

Answer: It was the exact same type of situation God had placed Israel in 40 years earlier when He first brought them out of Egypt — a setup designed to show whether they had learned to trust the LORD implicitly regardless of circumstances. After 40 years of God's demonstrated faithfulness and miraculous provision, this generation had every reason to simply wait on the LORD to provide again. But amazingly, they responded identically to their fathers — gathering against Moses and Aaron and complaining (Numbers 20:2-5).

Q4. What exactly did God tell Moses to do at the rock in the desert of Zin, and what did Moses do instead?

Answer: God told Moses to take his rod, gather the congregation before the rock, and SPEAK to it — and it would bring forth water (Numbers 20:7-8). Moses instead rebuked the people himself and then STRUCK the rock twice with his rod. God still brought forth water because of His great mercy and grace, but Moses had directly disobeyed God's explicit instructions and in so doing failed to sanctify God in the eyes of the congregation of Israel.

Q5. What was the consequence of Moses' disobedience, and what did the entire lesson reinforce about Israel's condition before God?

Answer: God chastened Moses by declaring that he would not be permitted to bring Israel into the promised land — the very goal he had labored toward for 40 years. This sobering consequence, coming at the very end of a long series of failures, brought the whole lesson into sharp focus: not even the greatest man among them was above God's discipline. The entire pattern — ten rebellions, 40 years of judgment, continued failures, and now Moses' own mistake — all drove home the one truth Israel so desperately needed: she was nothing in and of herself, naturally contrary to God, and her only hope was to cast herself completely upon the LORD's 'Jehovah-ness' and grace.