

February 10

Numbers 20, 21, and 33

In Numbers chapter 20, the children of Israel have returned, after nearly 40 years, to Kadesh - the place where their parents rebelled against God and were condemned to die in the wilderness - and (how frightening is this?) they very nearly do the same thing again! The sins of the fathers are being visited on the children here.

There is no water, and that old familiar refrain begins again, *"Why did you bring us into this desert to die?"* Moses and Aaron go face down before the Lord in the tabernacle and once again the Lord gives them instructions for bringing water from the rock. This is like a replay of the incident recorded in Exodus 17 when Moses was told to strike the rock. The name of the place is even given as the same, Rephidim. This time, however, he is told to speak to the rock. Because he strikes it, he too is prevented from entering the Promised Land. Now this seems unbelievably harsh. God keeps Moses from entering the Promised Land just because he 'hit' the rock instead of speaking to it!!

But there you have it, and once more we are going to be forced to think deeply about something that will probably make us very sober people. When it comes to obeying the Word of God - be it a word of promise - or one of command - whether it relates to giving - or praying - or whatever, near enough is never good enough. Moses did what God said - sort of - but not exactly - and for that he paid a dear price. A little while later Moses will be gone and God will say to the new leader of Israel, to Joshua, *"Be careful to do ALL the words that I have commanded you. Do not turn from them to the right or to the left - do everything just as I say!"*

Near enough wasn't good enough for Nadab and Abihu - they offered strange fire and they died. It wasn't good enough for Moses - he didn't enter the Promised Land. The wonderful word concerning Caleb was that he *"wholly followed the Lord His God!"*

Now there may have been other things going on here as well. It is probable that Moses hit the rock because he was angry - angry with Israel and maybe even angry with God - and in his anger he sinned. Certainly the text indicates that he was failing to show the proper amount of respect for the holy presence of God in that place - that is clear from God's words in verse 12. It is possible that Moses' words to the children of Israel in verse 10 shed more light on how he failed to honor the presence of God. *"Listen you rebels,"* he said *"must we (Aaron and I) bring you water out of this rock?"* He was angry and in his anger he may have taken credit himself for what God was about to do - that is always a very dangerous thing!

Obeying God in the right spirit and for the right reasons is all part of what true faith is all about! This passage helps us to understand that godly faith is not just believing Him, but obeying Him and doing that completely. So let me ask you a question, "Is there any area in your life where you are half-heartedly being obedient

to God? Are you settling for 'just good enough' when it comes to wholly and completely following what you know to be right? If so, take it to God today.

Moving on to chapter 21 we read that Miriam and Aaron both die. For all of their defects - Aaron made the golden calf when he caved into the rebellion of the people while Moses was on Mt. Sinai - he and Miriam together murmured against Moses later in the wilderness and Miriam was smitten with leprosy which God removed at Moses' request. For all their defects I am very sure that Moses would have missed them terribly. Taking the priestly garments from Aaron and putting them upon Eleazar, his son, would have been one of the hardest things Moses ever had to do. But Aaron was only a man and men die and others come to take their place. Eleazar takes Aaron's place. Soon enough Joshua will stand in Moses' shoes!

Turning aside from Edom (populated by the descendants of Esau) because permission to journey through the land was twice refused, Israel now traveled up the east side of the Dead Sea, through the area of present-day Jordan, to the place from which they would gain entrance into the Promised Land. Opposed by the King of Arad and then by Sihon, the king of the Amorites, and Og the king of Bashan, God gave them military victories that clearly demonstrated His presence with them. Word of these victories was already filtering back into the land of Canaan.

There are two "types" - Old Testament things that are divinely planted sign posts pointing toward Christ - that are mentioned in the chapters that we read today. We can confidently identify these as "types" because the New Testament does it for us. The first is the rock from which the water flowed - there was a rock in Exodus 17 at the beginning of the journey and another here at the end. I Corinthians 10 says that the rock was a type of Christ - from whom the living water, of which Jesus later spoke, continually flows.

The other, more easily recognized "type" is seen, of course, in the bronze serpent, which was lifted up in the wilderness. When Israel rebelled yet again, God sent the vipers to afflict them. He gave Moses a divine antidote - a bronze snake (snakes were always - from Eden onward - a symbol of sin) but this bronze snake, this symbol of sin, was hung upon a pole. All who had been bitten, and who looked upon that serpent in faith, were healed - the penalty of their sin was removed. The old rabbinical scholars could never understand why God did that with Moses. Why a snake -- a symbol of sin - as the instrument by which healing came through faith? While they couldn't understand it - you can.

Jesus said in John 3, "*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes on Him may have eternal life*" (John 3:14-15). Who would have ever thought that a snake on a stick would be a foreshadowing of the cross. Jesus was lifted up in death so that we might have life. If we look to him, we will have healing from our sin - that as sure as snake venom - leads to death

You may want to write this in your journal on the page about foreshadowing Jesus.

Beyond that, let's all look to Jesus. He is our rock. He is our source of living water. He is the one who was lifted up that we might have life. And God thought all this up 1400 years in advance and put it in this very cool book.

May God add his blessings to your life through the reading.