

BaptistWay Bible Series for April 17: Disobedience robs Christians of God's bounty_40405

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Disobedience robs Christians of God's bounty

Numbers 20:1-13

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This week's lesson comes from Numbers 20. After nearly 40 years of leading a rebellious, resentful people, Moses finally breaks under the pressure. A final challenge to his authority, even after repeated endorsements from God, drives him to disobey God.

Numbers 15-19 covers events following the Israelites' failure to follow Caleb and Joshua and conquer Canaan. Numbers 15 repeats the sacrifices outlined in Leviticus 1-7 with modifications to be observed once the Israelites occupy Canaan and become settlers rather than nomads. The stoning of a Sabbath breaker emphasizes the gravity of this sin and

reminds Israel to remember what God requires of his holy nation.

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Chapter 16 records the rebellion of Korah, a Levite, against Aaron's priestly authority. Korah and Aaron compete to see whose offering will be accepted by God. God spoke and threatened to destroy not only Korah and his clan but all of the Israelites as well. Moses and Aaron interceded. God relented and only Korah and his followers were swallowed in a crevice in the earth.

Chapter 17 details another challenge to the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Representatives of each tribe brought rods as symbols of their tribes and placed them in the tent of meeting. When Aaron's rod budded and bloomed, God made it clear his was the priestly line. Chapters 18 and 19 deal with duties and privileges of the priests and Levites, and purification by those contaminated by touching a dead body or a tent made unclean by someone dying in it.

Numbers 20:14-29, the latter portion of the background passage, points out the continuing animosity between descendents of Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edomites). This ancient feud had started when Jacob stole Esau's birthright as firstborn. The Edomites refused passage through their territory, forcing the Israelites to take a longer and more dangerous route toward Canaan. This passage closes with the death of Aaron on top of Mount Hor. Moses ordained Eleazar, Aaron's son, as his successor.

The focal passage covers events while the Israelites camped at Kadesh (often called Kadesh-Barnea to distinguish it from other sites known as Kadesh). Kadesh-Barnea, located in the Desert of Zin, lies just south of Canaan. From this location, the 12 spies had been sent out earlier to scout Canaan. When 10 of the 12 reported negatively, the nation of Israel was punished by having to live in the desert until all of the men of fighting age who had left Egypt died. Only Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who urged the Israelite assembly to invade and conquer Canaan, would live in Canaan.

Numbers 20:1-13

The focal passage begins with a brief mention of the death and burial of Miriam at Kadesh-Barnea (v. 1). The Israelites again complained to Moses and Aaron about the lack of food and water. They longed for the good food they enjoyed in Egypt (20:2-5). After Moses and Aaron take the matter to the Lord, his glory came down and instructed them to gather the congregation. God commanded Moses to speak to a rock and water would flow from it. Moses gathered the people and they stood before the rock. Instead of speaking to the rock as God had commanded, Moses struck it twice with his staff (vv. 9-11).

This incident is similar to one recorded in Exodus 17:1-7 while the Israelites were camped at Rephidim. God had commanded Moses to strike a rock on Mount Horeb twice, using the same staff with which he had struck the Nile. Later that place was called Massah (testing) and Meribah (quarreling). This incident occurred just after the Exodus.

At Kadesh-Barnea, Moses employed the same tactic and struck the rock. This time, however, he acted in direct disobedience to God. Even so, water flowed from the rock and the people were satisfied (vv. 9-11). Moses' disobedience and lack of trust in God brought harsh punishment. Moses would not lead the people into Canaan. By punishing Moses for his lack of

faith, God showed his “holiness” and his demand for obedience (vv. 12-13).

We tend to sympathize with Moses because of the pressure that must have built as he led a nation of slaves into a realization of their role as a holy nation. The task would have been difficult even if the Israelites had been totally cooperative. Even Moses' own brother and sister had resented him at times in the desert.

But, regardless of the pressure Moses was under, he intentionally disobeyed God. When he lost his patience and substituted his authority for God's, Moses made a choice God could not overlook. Moses' display of arrogance challenged God's authority. God is unique and omnipotent, and he “showed his holiness” by demonstrating Moses himself was not entitled to be disobedient, even though the pressure he endured came as he followed God's will.

Application

As human beings, we have no control over circumstances. Even if we are squarely within God's will and doing exactly what he has told us to do, we will encounter obstacles that build pressure in our lives.

God allows us to encounter difficulties even while fulfilling his will in our lives. We must not allow the pressure of responsibilities to cause us to act out of frustration. If God allows us to be in a situation, he is certainly aware of what is happening to us and he will provide us with the spiritual as well as material resources. We must practice faith in our relationship with God.

God did what he said he would do. He had told the Israelites that he would protect them as well as guide them to Canaan. Even though Moses disobeyed, God still provided water for the people.

Moses, by his actions, denied himself the privilege of God's final blessing of

living in Canaan.

Discussion question

- ◆ *Do I deny God's blessings for myself by my actions?*

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