



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## Satisfied With God

Numbers 20:2-13

Proverbs 27:20, "Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied."

This verse describes our heart's inclination when it comes to the things of this life: Because of our sinfulness, we rarely are satisfied. And thus, we read this:

Ecclesiastes 1:8, "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with

hearing.”

Ecclesiastes 4:8, speaking of the wealthy man, “...his eyes were not satisfied with riches...”

Now you would think that coming to Christ and being given “...everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of [Christ]...” (2 Peter 1:3a) would address this problem — yet even with all that is ours in Christ, our hearts want more. Speaking of God’s covenant people Ezekiel exhorts us this way:

Ezekiel 16:28-29, “Moreover, you played the harlot with the Assyrians because you were not satisfied [with Me]; you even played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied. You also multiplied your harlotry with the land of merchants, Chaldea, yet even with this you were not satisfied.”

So, what does God do in order to bring us to a greater contempt of this world and so a greater satisfaction with Him? You know the text referencing Gomer as the poster child of God’s people at the time:

Hosea 2:5b-7, “...she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give *me* my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’ Therefore, [this is God’s sanctifying plan for all of His rebellious children] behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. And she will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, but will not find *them*. Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now!’”

Truly, God wants His people to be completely and totally satisfied with Him. And thus, as reflected in Hosea 2, God’s sanctifying grace in our lives is designed to make us ones who genuinely:

- Rejoice in His character and so delight ourselves in the Lord.
- Long for Him as did:
  - The Sons of Korah who wrote, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God.” (Psalms 42:1)
  - Asaph who cried, “Whom have I in heaven *but Thee*? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth.” (Psalms 73:25)
  - Paul who said, “More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord... that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings...” (Philippians 3:8a, 10a)

And that is why Numbers 20 is so important. It contains that time in Moses' life when he found himself dissatisfied with God. We begin with...

### The Historical Context of our Passage, Select & Numbers 20:2-13.

From the departure from Egypt of God's people to the time of our passage, much had gone on.<sup>1</sup> If we could have accompanied Israel during this time, we would have witnessed the following..:



- From Exodus 15-18 we learn that on the journey to Sinai, God's people are without water in Marah (the water is bitter). And so, they grumbled and then God miraculously provided water via a staff (a tree thrown into the water) (Exodus 15:22-27).
- Next, we would travel with them to the Wilderness of Sin where we would observe the people grumbling for food and God miraculously providing manna and quail (Exodus 16:1-21).
- From the Wilderness of Sin, God's people travelled to Rephidim where once again they grumble for water and God miraculously provided water from a rock via the staff of Moses (Exodus 17:1-7).
- Next, we would observe Israel fighting with the Amalekites — this was the occasion when Moses lifted his hands and the people prevailed (Exodus 17:8-16).
- Eventually we would watch as God's people arrive at Sinai where the rest of the book of Exodus took place:
  - The giving of the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20.
  - The Renewing of the Covenant, Exodus 24.
  - The Golden Calf, Exodus 32.
  - The Construction of the Tabernacle, Exodus 34-40.

Now having camped at Sinai for about a year, God's people departed and traveled to Kadesh-barnea — the history of which we read about in Numbers 1-21. During their travel to and their time in Kadesh-barnea we read of these events:

- The numbering of the Israelites, Numbers 1-4.
- The incident of the quails and the seventy elders, Numbers 11.
- The rebellion of Miriam and Aaron against Moses, Numbers 12.
- The sending of the 12 spies into the Promised Land and their message of unbelief, Numbers 13-14.
- Korah's rebellion, Numbers 16-17.

- The death of Miriam, Numbers 20:1.

It now is the fortieth year after the Exodus<sup>2</sup> when the events of our text, Numbers 20:2-13, occurred. It is important to note that this was the second time God would provide water from a rock (and the 3rd time overall that God miraculously provided water for His people). Our text begins with the need.

#### The Need, Numbers 20:2.

Numbers 20:2, “And there was no water for the congregation; and they [the nation as they had done numerous times before] assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron”

At the outset, realize that this is NOT as petty as it may seem. Consider God’s people have been wandering in the wilderness now for forty years. They have witnessed the death of their loved-ones, specifically their parents — men and women who had hoped for so much when they first departed from Egypt.

Add to this huge “let down” the fact that Kadesh-barnea normally was a well-watered oasis and you have all the makings for a national temper-tantrum as recorded in our text. That brings us to the rebellion.

#### The Rebellion, Numbers 20:3-5.

Numbers 20:3-5, “The people thus contended with Moses and spoke, saying, ‘If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord [this is speaking of Korah’s rebellion!]! Why then have YOU brought the Lord’s assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here? And why have YOU made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water to drink’”

Such strong and shocking words! Notice first, at whom were these words directed? Moses! So, it was Moses’ fault that God’s people were in the desert and that Kadesh was now in a drought. Secondly, the people here have plunged to new depths in their complaining. They actually expressed regret that they were NOT part of Korah’s rebellion, “If only we had perished” with Korah!

If we were to rewrite this passage using modern language, it might go something like this, “*Moses, you are a horrible leader! Death would be a welcome friend in comparison to following you. In fact, how we wish we were among those who perished in Korah’s rebellion; that would have been more preferable than where we are now! You gave so many promises: grains, figs, vines, pomegranates, and abundant water. Where are the things by which you allured us from Egypt to follow you? Clearly you are a liar and a*

*wretched leader!*” Pretty strong words! This brings us to the supplication.

#### The Supplication, Numbers 20:6-9.

Numbers 20:6-9, “Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting, and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to them; and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink.’ So Moses took the rod from before the Lord, just as He had commanded him.”

God’s response here could be a sermon. That God put up with a miserable, grumbling, and complaining people for forty years speaks of His infinite kindness, goodness, patience, and grace. Clearly you must see that the God of both the Old Testament and the New Testament is a God of grace and mercy! Which brings us to the miracle.

#### The Miracle, Numbers 20:10-11.

Numbers 20:10-11, “And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he [Moses] said to them, ‘Listen now, you rebels [That’s a little strong... what happened to the man who prayed for these people in Exodus 32 when God was going to destroy them?]; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?’ Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank.”

As usual, though the people complain bitterly to Moses, God nevertheless graciously provided water for them, and that in abundance. Yet what is NOT usual was how Moses carried out the work of the Lord here. Prior to this we see a patient Moses, a meek Moses (strength under control). BUT NOT now! Moses clearly is incensed at God’s people. In fact, if we were reading from Exodus to this point, we might even think that the people of God are in peril as their heretofore faithful mediator clearly has run out of patience. Clearly the people needed to be disciplined by God!

And yet, we are shocked to read of the discipline of the Lord when it came NOT to His rebellious nation BUT to Moses and Aaron!

#### The Punishment for Moses’ and Aaron’s Disobedience, Numbers 20:12-13.

Numbers 20:12-13, “But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.’ Those

were the waters of Meribah [which translated means, ‘contention’ or ‘grumbling’], because the sons of Israel contended with the Lord, and He proved Himself holy among them.”

It is these last few verses that prove to be the shocker here! In the context of a national temper-tantrum where the people of God confess their regret that they were NOT part of the rebellion of Korah and the consequent discipline, we are shocked to read that Moses’ rather insignificant alteration of the divine command to *SPEAK* to the rock seemed to be the cause of discipline from the Lord. Isn’t this a little severe? Bear in mind that heretofore, the staff of Moses was used in connection with many miracles of the Lord. God Himself told Moses at the start:

Exodus 4:17, “And you shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.”

In fact, the two other times God used Moses to provide water miraculously, Moses’ staff was involved! So, what’s going on here? Why wouldn’t God discipline the people? Why Moses and Aaron? God did discipline the people, that is what the Wilderness was all about. They were under discipline. It is Moses here who is acting out of character! Consider Moses sin.

[Moses’ Sin, Numbers 20:10.](#)

Numbers 20:10, “And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, ‘Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?’”

While the precise nature of Moses’ and Aaron’s disobedience is much debated, there is enough evidence to conclude at least the following. Up to this point Moses had been a faithful Mediator. On numerous occasions throughout Exodus and Numbers when the people verbally attacked Moses, he brought their complaints to God. He knew that the people’s anger toward him ultimately was directed against God!

And yet here, for whatever reason, Moses took the people’s complaints personally! We see this in a couple of places. It began with the people’s accusation:

Numbers 20:4, 5a, 10, ‘Why then have YOU brought the Lord’s assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here? 5a ‘And why have YOU made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place?...’ 10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, ‘Listen now, you rebels; shall WE bring forth water for you out of this rock?’”

While it is easy to read over this little word, “we”, the text is quite clear: Moses here is acting as if HE and AARON were the ones who were going to provide the water — NOT

God.

You say, *“After serving God so faithfully for so long, why would Moses say this?”* Psalms 106 gives the answer, describing this incident, the text indicates that Moses:

Psalms 106:33, *“...spoke rashly with his lips”*

In other words, he “lashed out with his mouth”. In other words, Moses is angry and so he was not thinking. Daniel Estes wrote of this:

Moses may have rationalized his response as righteous indignation, similar to that of Phineas, but it actually was a rash, angry, sinful retort. Rather than staying under control, Moses let his emotions affect his speech. On the whole, Moses’s life was characterized by meekness (cf. Numbers 12:3), but in this case he failed in what was typically his area of strength. (Dr. Daniel J. Estes, 2019, pp. 303-304)

Now think of it: *why would Moses do this after serving God so well for so long?”* It is hard to know. It may have been:

- The people’s statement that they wished they had rebelled with Korah.
- The fact that Miriam- his sister- had just died (Numbers 20:1).
- That having put up with this grumbling people for forty years Moses finally arrived at the breaking point.

For whatever reason, Moses lost it here. Rather than being satisfied with God’s approval as he always had in the past, Moses took the people’s complaints personally! Actually, we see it in the text before us, specifically v. 12.

Numbers 20:12a, *“But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel...’*- this brings the whole issue into focus. Moses’ sin was NOT his failure in observing the finer points of the law (as if his sin was hitting the rock instead of speaking to it)! RATHER, the issue was that Moses forsook God! He no longer was trusting in/relying upon the Lord!

At this point, God was NOT enough for Moses. Accordingly, Moses stood before the people on the basis of his past performance (rather than God’s acceptance) — i.e., his good leadership, his ability to provide water, his fidelity as a Covenant head!<sup>3</sup> The result was what you see in our text.

And, if we were honest, we’d see the result at times in our own lives!

As we’ve seen throughout the years, we too are performance based when it comes to

our fundamental inclination toward God. We were created with a default programming that endeavors to relate to God on the basis of our conduct. We love rebuilding what Christ has destroyed (Galatians 2:18)

Because of this, it gets really complicated in our lives. We've all fallen into mud puddles of sin — both before and after we were saved. The puddle might be...

- A quick temper.
- Lust.
- Pornography.
- An illicit relationship.
- Lies and deceit.
- A combative spirit.
- A quick tongue.
- Pettiness.
- Greed.

And because of our performance-based inclination, we will be apt to define ourselves by these past struggles/sin and so measure our relationship with God/others by what we did in some mud puddle!

In this context, what will be the fleshly inclination? It will double its effort to be good and so to do good things:

- Bible study.
- Church attendance.
- Study groups.
- Helping the weak.
- Memorizing Scripture.
- Church activity.
- Investing in people.
- Giving to the needy.

Yet do you see in this context what we are doing here? We are seeking satisfaction from our religious performance, just like Moses in our text!

## References

- DeGraaf, S. G. (1977). *Promise and Deliverance: From Creation to the Conquest of Canaan v. 1*. Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia Press.
- Dr. Daniel J. Estes, P. D. (2019). *Psalms 73-150: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Volume 13) (The New American Commentary)*. Nashville: B & H Publishing Group.



## Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> After Israel left Egypt, we discover primarily three settings in which much of the content of Exodus and Numbers occurred: the region of Sinai, the region of Kadesh, the Plains of Moab. In each of these locations, God revealed Himself to His people in a dramatic way.

<sup>2</sup> See Numbers 20:29 and compare it with Numbers 33:38.

<sup>3</sup> S. G. DeGraaf put it this way, "Moses had always been able to divert these charges from himself and pass on the people's complaint to the Lord. He had always been a true mediator, not standing in the Lord's way. He had always known how to handle the complaints, bearing in mind that they were not his concern but the Lord's. But now he could take it no longer. He became bitter." (DeGraaf, 1977, pp. 359-360)