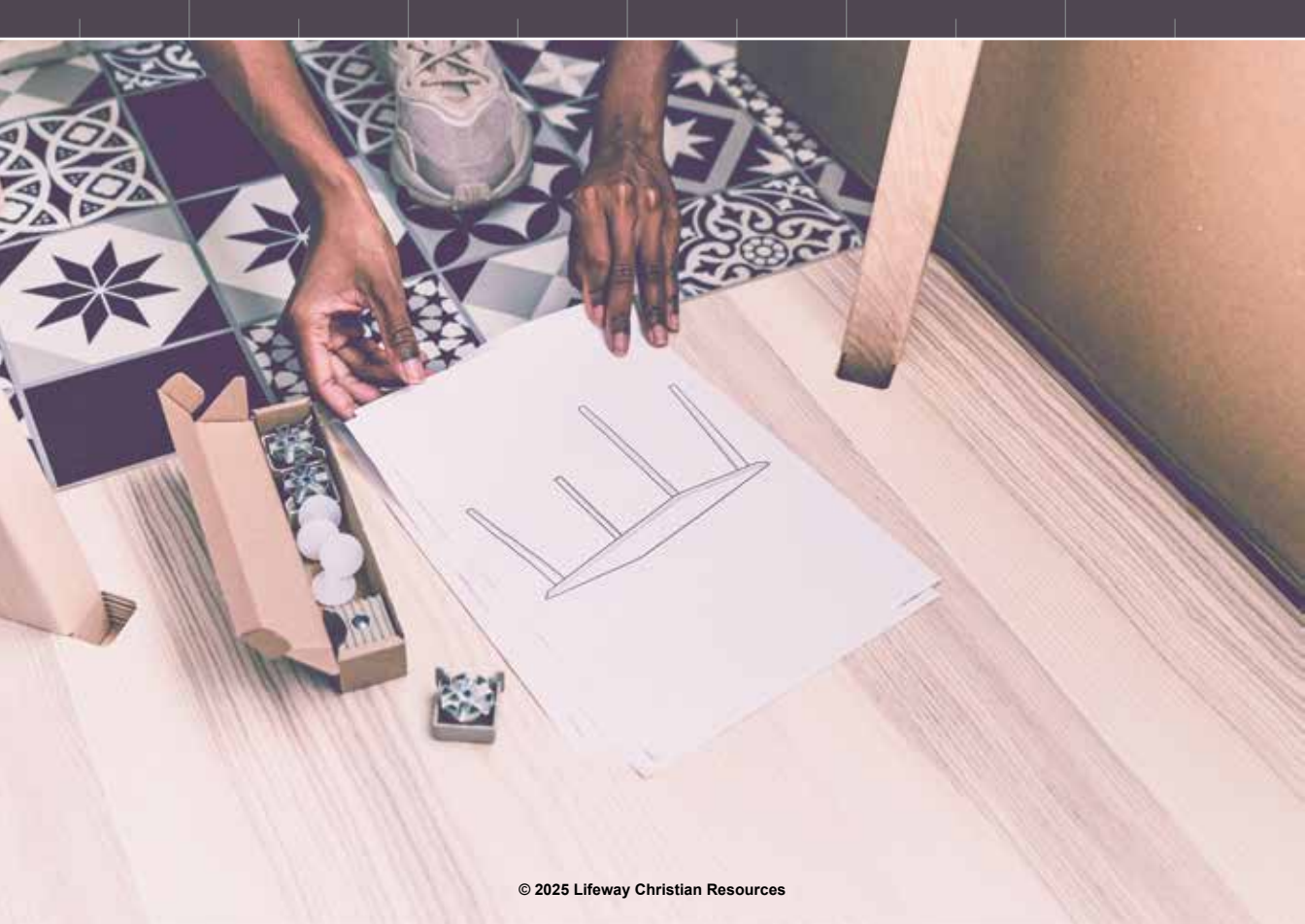


SESSION 5

Lack of Trust

NUMBERS 20:2-13

GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO TRUST HIM IN EVERY SITUATION.



People generally fall into two categories—those who read and follow the instructions and those who think they can figure it out as they go along. Those who fall into this latter category may do so because of heightened self-confidence, impatience, or a history of past successes. Sometimes, though, at the end of the project, those in the second category may be left with extra, unused parts or an end product that doesn't quite look like it was supposed to.

DO YOU FIND YOURSELF IN CATEGORY ONE OR TWO? WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS YOUR TENDENCY? ON WHAT KINDS OF TASKS IS IT MOST IMPORTANT TO FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS ALL THE WAY TO THE END?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Numbers 11:1 states that “the people began complaining.” This introduces a series of seven rebellions. In Hebrew writing, the climax of a series usually occurs in the middle. True to form, the fourth complaint was the most serious offense.

(1) Numbers 11:1-3 mentions a general complaint about hardships. Rather than being grateful for God's provisions, the people focused on their discomfort. God responded with fire. Moses prayed, and the fire and complaints ceased.

(2) Numbers 11:4-34 records the people complaining about their daily manna. Moses told God that the pressure was too great to bear. God instructed him to appoint seventy elders to help.

(3) Numbers 11:35-12:16 says Miriam and Aaron complained about Moses's wife. Their greater complaint was that God seemingly spoke only to and through Moses. God struck Miriam with a skin affliction. Moses prayed, and God healed her.

(4) Numbers 13:1-14:45 tells of twelve spies going into Canaan. Ten brought back a negative report, and the Israelites refused to enter. God caused the Israelites to wander in the wilderness for one year for each day the spies were in Canaan.

(5) Numbers 16:1-50 says Korah staged a rebellion against Moses. God was ready to destroy the Israelites. Moses interceded. The earth opened and swallowed Korah and his ring leaders. God then rained fire down on all the others. When the Israelites complained about what had happened, God sent a plague through the camp.

(6) Numbers 20:2-13 tells of the people again complaining about water. God provided water from a rock after Moses struck—rather than spoke to—the rock. This is the focus of today's study.

(7) Numbers 21:4-9 says the people complained about food and water. God sent serpents into the camp. The serpents bit the people, who then died. Moses prayed, and God told him to raise a bronze snake on a pole. All who looked upon it recovered.



2 There was no water for the community, so they assembled against Moses and Aaron. **3** The people **quarreled** **A** with Moses and said, “If only we had perished when **our brothers perished** **B** before the LORD. **4** Why have you brought the LORD’s assembly into this wilderness for us and our livestock to die here? **5** Why have you led us up from Egypt to bring us to **this evil place**? **C** It’s not a place of grain, figs, vines, and pomegranates, and there is no water to drink!” **6** Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the **tent of meeting**. **D** They fell facedown, and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. **7** The LORD spoke to Moses, **8** “Take the staff and assemble the community. You and your brother Aaron are to speak to the rock while they watch, and it will yield its water. You will bring out water for them from the rock and provide drink for the community and their livestock.” **9** So Moses took the staff from the LORD’s presence just as he had commanded him. **10** Moses and Aaron summoned the assembly in front of the rock, and Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels! **Must we bring water** **E** out of this rock for you?” **11** Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff, so that abundant **water gushed out**, **F** and the community and their livestock drank. **12** But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust me to demonstrate my holiness in the sight of the Israelites, you will **not bring this assembly into the land** **G** I have given them.” **13** These are the Waters of **Meribah**, **H** where the Israelites quarreled with the LORD, and he demonstrated his holiness to them.

A. “Contended” (NKJV); “Argued” (NASB). The term often is used in a legal context (Prov. 25:8-9). The people accused Moses and Aaron of neglecting their responsibilities as leaders.

B. In Numbers 16, God had wiped out a group of rebels. Here, the people wished they had been struck down with them.

C. The Israelites had forgotten that they were wandering in the desert due to their own sin.

D. The tabernacle (Ex. 29:4-11). This was a portable worship center for Israel in the wilderness. Located in the center of Israel’s camp, it was God’s dwelling place among His people.

E. Moses spoke to the people instead of the rock. In doing so, he seemed to take some credit for God’s work.

F. Moses had sinned by striking the rock. Still, God had mercy and provided for the people.

G. Moses would not lead the people into Canaan. He would never get to enter the promised land.

H. A name meaning “strife” or “contention.” Ironically, this story took place in Kadesh (v. 1), which means “holy.”

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Problem

(Num. 20:2-5)

Believers can trust God even when current circumstances appear bleak.

- **Why do we tend to romanticize “the good old days,” even though they weren’t always so good?**

2. The Plan

(Num. 20:6-8)

We can turn to God with our needs and concerns.

- **What kinds of difficulties get you facedown—either literally or figuratively—before the Lord?**

3. The Result

(Num. 20:9-13)

Believers should recognize that ignoring God’s instructions leads to consequences.

- **What does it say about God’s character that He provided such an abundance of water?**
- **What do we communicate to God when we follow His instructions? What do we communicate to Him when we don’t follow His instructions?**

Apply the Text

- **Moses and Aaron fell facedown before the Lord (v. 6). Have you experienced “facedown” situations? What advice would you offer to members of your Bible study group about how to pray for those issues?**

KEY DOCTRINE: God the Father

God is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. (See Psalm 146:5-10; Isaiah 41:10.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a key Bible teaching.

Numbers 20:9-13 records the failure of Moses and Aaron to follow God’s instructions exactly. As a result, God did not permit them to enter the promised land. Read the passage, noting how the Israelites frustrated Moses and Aaron (v. 10), yet God held the leaders accountable for their disobedience. Do you think God holds leaders to a greater degree of accountability or the same? Explain your answer, using Hebrews 13:17 and James 3:1 for additional insight.

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Numbers 20:12. Do you tend to ignore instructions? Can you give an example?

A water shortage led the Israelites to complain again (see also Ex. 15:24; 17:2). They questioned why Moses would bring them to such an inhospitable place. God instructed Moses and Aaron to speak to a rock, and water would come from it. But Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff.

What did Moses do wrong in this situation? Tell about a time you took matters into your own hands instead of doing it God's way? How did it turn out?

Because Moses didn't trust the Lord to provide water as He said He would, God declared that Moses would not lead the people into the promised land. While the Lord was gracious to provide water as He had promised, Moses had to face the consequences of his sin. God showed that He expects obedient trust from all of His people.

Why do you think God's judgment of Moses was so severe? What is the lesson to be learned here?

Memorize Numbers 20:12, considering the situations that call for you to trust Him this week.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Numbers 20:2-3

Compare Numbers 20:2-3 to Exodus 15:22-26; 17:1-7.

The Israelites were in the Wilderness of Zin, at Kadesh-barnea (v. 1). They had been there forty years earlier. From there, Moses had sent twelve spies into the land, and the people decided against entering Canaan (13:26). In the intervening years, they wandered in the wilderness. All aged twenty and above died during those four decades (14:26-35).

The need for water had been an ongoing problem. This was one of their earliest challenges after crossing the Red Sea (Ex. 15:22-26). Later, at Rephidim, likely just north of Mount Sinai, God supplied water by having Moses strike a rock (17:1-7). That was forty years earlier; most of this generation had not seen that miracle.

Verse 2 says the people “assembled against” their leaders. Although not violent, they were intense and assertive. The Israelites “quarreled” intensely with Moses and Aaron. When the people complained about a lack of water forty years earlier, they asked: “Why did you ever bring us up from Egypt to kill us . . . with thirst” (Ex. 17:3). Here they said they would have preferred to have “perished” with their “brothers” who had died. They likely were referring to those who died following Korah in his rebellion against Moses.

Give thanks to God for the ways He has provided for your needs.



Day 2: Numbers 20:4-5

Look for the irony in verse 5.

The Hebrews were not posing a question; rather, they were making an accusation. This is often the case with a question that begins with “why?”—especially if the why is followed by would, have, or did you. The terminology the Israelites used, the “LORD’s assembly,” repeats the phrase Korah and his followers used when they rebelled against Moses (Num. 16:3). These are the only two occurrences of the phrase in the book of Numbers. The phrase created a Moses-versus-them scenario and underscored the severity of both challenges to Moses’s leadership.

Verse 5 drips with irony. The “you” is plural; the people blamed Moses and Aaron for leading them from Egypt. They evidently had forgotten about the Lord’s deliverance “from the forced labor of the Egyptians” and their “slavery to them.” They gave no thought of God redeeming them “with [His] outstretched arm and great acts of judgment” (Ex. 6:6). Also, they called Kadesh-barnea “this evil place.” What an irony! God had led them to “an extremely good land . . . flowing with milk and honey” (Num. 14:7-8). This was Joshua’s and Caleb’s description of Canaan. The people could have been in “an extremely good land”; instead, they were in an evil place because of their lack of faith.

Spend some time praying for your church leaders. In what ways can you encourage them this week?



Day 3: Numbers 20:6-8

Highlight the word “facedown” in verse 6.

“Facedown” was the common position when interceding for God’s people. Moses and Aaron did this when the Israelites refused to enter Canaan. They also fell facedown when God threatened to destroy His people after Korah’s rebellion (Num. 14:5; 16:22). Jesus assumed this same position when He pleaded, “let this cup pass from me” (Matt. 26:39). The position communicates an anguished and humble attitude.

“The LORD spoke to Moses.” How simple, yet profound, is this statement. This was the voice Moses first heard at the burning bush (Ex. 3:4). It was the voice that spoke creation into being. This voice declared at Jesus’s baptism, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased” (Matt. 3:17).

God told Moses to “take the staff.” If this was Moses’s staff, he previously used it while tending his father-in-law’s flocks. It became a snake in the courts of Pharaoh. The Nile turned to blood when Moses struck the water with it. More likely, the staff was Aaron’s. In Numbers 17, God miraculously caused Aaron’s rod to bud, blossom, and produce almonds—all in one night. Afterward, God told Moses to “Put Aaron’s staff back in front of the testimony to be kept as a sign for the rebels.” Moses and Aaron were to “speak to the rock,” and water would come forth.

What kinds of difficulties get you facedown—either literally or figuratively—before the Lord?



Day 4: Numbers 20:9-11

Circle the word “we” in verse 10.

Moses took the staff “from the LORD’s presence,” meaning from the tabernacle. He did “just as” God had “commanded” him. This had been Moses’s practice since first encountering God at the burning bush. How long, though, would that last? Moses’s and Aaron’s patience was gone. The verb “summoned” carries the idea of convening a group for a specific purpose. The multitude gathered in front of the rock. This word referred to a bare-face cliff. Thus, Moses was bringing the crowd to the base of a cliff wall.

Emphatically, Moses demanded they listen to what he had to say. The Hebrew term for “rebels” typically refers to individuals who are defying God. The people had complained about a lack of water and food before. What was different this time? Moses had not responded like this before. His anger—rather than the people’s behavior—caused this outburst.

In asking, “must we bring water out?”, Moses was calling attention to Aaron and himself. “Must we” is radically different from must God. Any accolades and praises would go to him and Aaron. Even though Moses asked, “must we bring,” he evidently struck the rock alone. Despite God’s instructing Moses to speak to the rock, he instead struck it twice.

God did not withhold His blessing because of Moses’s disobedience. Water gushed out, enough to satisfy the thousands and thousands of people and their cattle.

Give thanks to God for the ways He has demonstrated His grace to you.



Day 5: Numbers 20:12-13

Consider how Moses and Aaron failed to trust God.

Instead of speaking to the rock (v. 8), Moses struck it. How did striking the rock indicate Moses and Aaron did not trust God to demonstrate His “holiness”? Scripture does not say, but a few connections could apply. To defy God’s instructions meant the person thought he knew better than God. Moses and Aaron placed their plan in front of God’s plan. God saw this as an act of rebellion (see v. 24). Further, hitting the rock to get water could appear to be a sorcerer’s trick. Or the assembly might have thought this was a skill Moses had learned as a shepherd. But for water to come out because someone spoke to the rock was beyond human explanation. Moses’s action moved the focus away from God and put it instead on Moses. Because they had not followed God’s instructions to the end, neither Moses nor Aaron would enter Canaan. This was the final and ultimate Moses- and Aaron-versus-them scenario in this story.

The word “Meribah” means “contention” or “strife.” The name reflected the people’s quarreling with God rather than trusting Him fully and obediently. Events at Meribah demonstrated God’s holiness in two ways. First, God showed He was faithful. Second, by punishing Aaron and Moses, God showed that He expects obedience from all of His people. A person’s status does not influence or dictate God’s expectations. He expects all of us to trust Him.

Ask God to forgive you for the times you have failed to trust Him.

APPLY THE TEXT

In what areas has God given you specific instructions? How closely are you following those? What changes do you need to make to get back on track?

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