



Lack of Trust

GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO TRUST HIM IN EVERY SITUATION.

Scripture Passage: Numbers 20:2-13 Memory Verse: Numbers 20:12

Most of us exercise trust several times each day. We trust our car to get us where we want to go. We trust other drivers to obey traffic laws as they drive the same roads we do. We trust cashiers to ring up our orders correctly. We trust the chairs in which we sit to support us. Regarding even bigger issues of life, we probably have a small number of family or friends we trust deeply. We know these people care about us and have our best interests in mind, so we trust them with our most important concerns.

Most Christians would say they trust God for salvation, while admitting that it's harder to trust Him in other situations. They find it more comfortable to follow their own wisdom than to seek His guidance. Yet, God calls His people to trust Him in every situation. We will be with Him in eternity, but He also desires us to trust Him here on earth.

Today's passage reveals how even Moses, God's great leader, failed to trust God in a critical situation. As you dig into this session, ask God to help you trust Him in areas where you struggle. At the same time, ask Him to help you know how to encourage adults who also may be struggling to trust God.



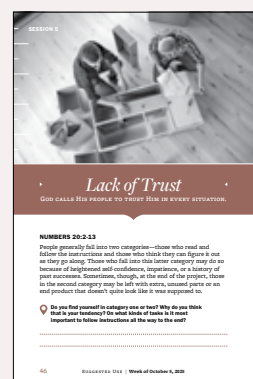
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People generally fall into two categories—those who read and follow the instructions and those who think they can figure it out as they go along. Those who fall into this latter category may do so because of heightened self-confidence, impatience, 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. (PSG, p. 46)

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 15:1–22:1)

The Lord gave Moses instructions about various offerings (15:1-31). God's people were to prepare the offerings as He commanded and worship Him as He prescribed. God provided certain kinds of offerings for those who sinned unintentionally, but He warned them about the consequences of defiant sin (15:30-31). He also instructed the people to wear tassels on the corners of their garments as a reminder of His commands (15: 37-41).

Three men from the tribe of Levi—Korah, Dathan, and Abiram—questioned why Aaron's sons alone should be priests (16:1-3). Moses told the rebels that they could see God confirm His choice of Aaron's sons the next day, but Dathan and Abiram refused to come (16:4-14). The Lord brought judgment on their households for their rebellion (16:25-35).

Later, when the entire community grumbled again, Moses and Aaron intervened before God (16:41-50). God then demonstrated His choice of Aaron and his sons to serve as priests out of all the families of the Levites (17:1-11).

The Lord also provided significant details about provisions for the priesthood (18:1-32). The priests and Levites were to ensure God's sanctuary remained holy (18:1-7). In return, the other tribes would provide for them by bringing tithes and offerings (18:8-32). Nevertheless, all such offerings were to be presented as God instructed.

The Levites would have no land inheritance; instead, God was their inheritance (18:20).

The Lord also gave instructions regarding the sacrifice of an unblemished red cow (19:1-10). Ritual cleanliness was important, and people were told to follow His directions carefully (19:11-22).

When God's people reached the Wilderness of Zin, the people complained again over the lack of provisions (20:1-5). The Lord instructed Moses to speak to a rock that would yield water (20:7-8). In his anger, Moses struck the rock, failing to treat God and His commands as holy (20:9-11). As a result, God told Moses and Aaron that they would not enter the promised land (20:12-13).

As the people traveled, the country of Edom would not let them pass through its territory, so Israel chose another route (20:14-21). In the course of their journey, Aaron died (20:22-29).

Despite God giving the people victory over the king of Arad (21:1-3), they again complained. In response, He sent fiery serpents among them (21:4-6). When the people cried to Moses, the Lord commanded him to make a bronze snake and put it in the middle of camp so the people might look at it and live (21:7-9).

With God's help, Israel defeated two powerful Amorite kings: Sihon (21:21-32) and Og (21:33-35). They took possession of this Amorite territory on the east side of the Jordan River.

Read Numbers 20:2-13. Note what Moses and Aaron did right and what they did wrong. (PSG, p. 47)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: On a focal wall, display **Pack Item 1** (Map: From Kadesh-Barnea to Moab). Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (Handout: Complaints in the Wilderness).

READ:

Direct adults to read the opening paragraph on page 46 of the PSG silently.

ASK:

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? (PSG, p. 46)

SUGGEST:

Mention that sometimes even people who normally follow directions skip them because they think they know what they should do. Point out that sometimes this could lead to serious difficulties or unintended problems.

TRANSITION:

Today's study passage comes from Numbers 20. It's an account of a time when Moses, usually a person who followed God's directions, made a choice to act according to his own plan. As a result, Moses experienced a painful consequence.



VERSE	COMPLAINT	CONSEQUENCE	REASON FOR COMPLAINT
Numbers 11:1-6	They grumbled against Moses and Aaron because they did not like the manna.	God sent a plague against the people.	They were hungry for meat.
Numbers 11:7-12	Moses and Aaron gathered the whole assembly together and said to them, 'The Lord has heard your voice, for you have said, "We will not listen to Moses and Aaron."	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were angry with Moses and Aaron.
Numbers 12:1-10	Moses and Aaron spoke to the whole assembly of the Israelites and said to them, 'The Lord has spoken to us, saying, "I will take you from Egypt and lead you into a good land, a wide open country, a land of hills and valleys, a land of streams and rivers, a land of wheat and barley, a land of vines and fig trees, a land of olive trees and olive oil."	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were angry with Moses and Aaron.
Numbers 13:1-14	Moses and Aaron gathered the whole assembly together and said to them, 'The Lord has spoken to us, saying, "I will take you from Egypt and lead you into a good land, a wide open country, a land of hills and valleys, a land of streams and rivers, a land of wheat and barley, a land of vines and fig trees, a land of olive trees and olive oil."	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:1-4	The whole assembly of the Israelites murmured against Moses and Aaron and said to them, 'We will not go up into the land that the Lord has sworn to give to us, for the land is inhabited by giants, and we are but grasshoppers.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:5-10	Moses said to the whole assembly of the Israelites, 'The Lord has heard your voice, for you have said, "We will not go up into the land that the Lord has sworn to give to us, for the land is inhabited by giants, and we are but grasshoppers."	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:11-12	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:13-14	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:15-16	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:17-18	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:19-20	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:21-22	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:23-24	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:25-26	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:27-28	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:29-30	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:31-32	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:33-34	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:35-36	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:37-38	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:39-40	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:41-42	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:43-44	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:45-46	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:47-48	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:49-50	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:51-52	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:53-54	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:55-56	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:57-58	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:59-60	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:61-62	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:63-64	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:65-66	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:67-68	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:69-70	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:71-72	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:73-74	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:75-76	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:77-78	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:79-80	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:81-82	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:83-84	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:85-86	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:87-88	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:89-90	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:91-92	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:93-94	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:95-96	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:97-98	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.
Numbers 14:99-100	The Lord said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	God said to Moses, 'I will hear their voice and I will send you to the land of Egypt.'	They were afraid of the land.

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Group Activity Option

Music

Enlist a volunteer to read aloud the verses from "Trust and Obey" (*Baptist Hymnal* 2008, No. 500). Ask: **What is the relationship between trust and obedience when responding to a command from God? When has your obedience to God based on trust produced a positive outcome?** Share that this study recounts a time when Moses was not obedient to God and the consequences he faced as a result. Lead the group to sing a verse or two and the chorus.

The Problem (Num. 20:2-5)

2 There was no water for the community, so they assembled against Moses and Aaron. **3** The people quarreled with Moses and said, “If only we had perished when our brothers perished 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? It’s not a place of grain, figs, vines, and pomegranates, and there is no water to drink!”

(v. 2) The term *community* occurs four times in today’s passage (including twice in v. 8). It comes from a root word meaning “to appoint.” Consequently, it may denote a group that comes together by appointment or who acts together.

In this case, the people had a common goal. Verse 2 suggests a delegation appointed to raise concerns with Moses and Aaron. The remaining three uses, though, point to the people as a whole. Those who came attempted to speak for the entire community because a great number shared the same concerns.

The primary issue was a lack of *water*. This was not the first time that water had been in short supply (Ex. 17:1-7). Yet, God’s previous provision did not move the needle for the Israelites in this setting. Instead of trusting Him to do what He had done already, they grumbled and *assembled against* Moses and Aaron. They presented a unified (and dangerous) front.

(vv. 3-4) The verb *quarreled* is related to the word “Meribah” in verse 13. In other contexts, it carries a sense of pleading or contending over a moral issue. For instance, Hosea urged the Northern Kingdom to “rebuke” their mother Israel for abandoning God (Hos. 2:2). Isaiah also used it to describe God declaring His case against dishonest and oppressive leaders (Isa. 3:13).

In verse 3, though, it denotes a contentious dispute, as the people verbally assaulted Moses and Aaron over their hardship. In reality, they were quarreling with God! They let their current challenging circumstances override their confidence in His promises.

The Hebrew word *qahal* (translated *assembly* in v. 4) occurs more than 120 times in the Old Testament and generally denotes God’s people gathered together either in whole or in part. The verb form also appears three times in today’s

passage, referring to either the people’s assembling on their own (v. 2) or to Moses calling them to assemble (vv. 8,10). The specific expression *LORD’s assembly* stresses the people’s relationship with God. Perhaps the complainers intended to convince Moses that he needed to treat God’s people better.

Interestingly, in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament that dates to about 250 BC, the Greek word *ekklesia* often translates the Hebrew word *qahal*. *Ekklesia* is also rendered “church” in the New Testament.

The people’s lack of spiritual focus also led them to revise history. The crowd reflected on their time in Egypt as the “good old days” in comparison to following God’s direction into *this wilderness*. They equated the exodus with a divine death march, where all the people and *livestock* would perish. Along with their families, the Israelites had brought a great number of animals with them from Egypt (Ex. 12:38).

(v. 5) The people’s angry exclamation that the wilderness was not overflowing with *grain, figs, vines, and pomegranates* verbalized their disappointment that they weren’t living in the promised land. The Lord had told them their new home was a land of plenty, and the scouts had brought produce to prove it (Num. 13:23). Because of their sin, though, the people were not experiencing that abundance.

Already on their journey, they had complained to Moses about the scarcity of food in contrast to the plentiful food they had enjoyed in Egypt (11:5). Instead of taking ownership of their rebellion, they made excuses and pointed fingers. They also forgot that the food in Egypt came with a high price: slavery. God had freed them and was moving them toward the land He promised their ancestors. But their patience was wearing thin.



OVERVIEW:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers can trust God even when current circumstances appear bleak.

Using **Pack Item 1** (*Map: From Kadesh-Barnea to Moab*), explain the location of the people of Israel. Summarize the activities of Moses and the Israelites in Numbers 15:1–20:1.



SAY:

In Numbers 16, a Levite named Korah stirred up a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. Again, God was ready to destroy the nation, but Moses interceded on behalf of the people. Hearing Moses’s pleas, God opened the earth, and it swallowed Korah and his family. The Lord also rained fire from heaven, killing 250 others. When Israel complained about God’s judgment, He sent a plague that killed more than 14,000 Israelites. Again, Moses went to God for the people, and He ended the plague.

READ:

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Numbers 20:2-5 and guide the group to follow along in their Bibles or PSG. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Complaints in the Wilderness*). Guide adults to underline and call out the complaints listed by the Israelites against Moses.

COMPLAINTS IN THE WILDERNESS			
VERSE	COMPLAINT	REASON	RESULT OF COMPLAINT
Numbers 11:1-6	Not enough food	The Israelites	God
Numbers 12:1-13	Moses and Aaron speaking too much for them	Moses and Aaron	Death
Numbers 13:1-14	Not enough water	All the Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:1-7	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:8-10	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:11-12	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:13-14	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:15-16	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:17-18	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:19-20	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:21-22	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:23-24	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:25-26	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:27-28	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:29-30	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:31-32	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:33-34	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:35-36	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:37-38	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:39-40	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:41-42	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:43-44	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:45-46	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:47-48	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:49-50	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:51-52	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:53-54	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:55-56	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:57-58	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:59-60	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:61-62	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:63-64	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:65-66	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:67-68	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:69-70	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:71-72	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:73-74	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:75-76	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:77-78	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:79-80	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:81-82	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:83-84	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:85-86	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:87-88	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:89-90	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:91-92	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:93-94	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:95-96	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:97-98	Not enough water	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons
Numbers 14:99-100	Not enough food	The Israelites	Death of Aaron and his sons

RECAP:

Explain what the people meant when they quarreled with Moses by summarizing the following from page 48 of the PSG:

“Verse 2 says the people assembled against their leaders. Although not violent, they were intense and assertive. . . . 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.”

ASK:

Why do we tend to romanticize “the good old days,” even though they weren’t always so good? (PSG, p. 49)

EXAMINE:

Encourage adults to work in pairs to review the content for verses 4-5 (PSG, pp. 48-49). Allow volunteers to share what they discovered. Emphasize that their quarrel with Moses and Aaron was really a quarrel against God and His ways.

TRANSITION:

In addition to the bondage of Egypt, the people also forgot that they weren’t enjoying prosperity because of the nation’s sin. They still struggled to take responsibility for their own actions.

The Plan (Num. 20:6-8)

6 Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting. 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.”

(v. 6) The phrase *tent of meeting* denotes the special tabernacle that served as the central point of Israel’s corporate worship. God also specifically met with Moses there (Ex. 33:9-11). Exodus 25–31 and 33–40 describe God’s instructions for the tabernacle, its completion, and its dedication. The term “tent of meeting” properly describes the edifice as both a tent and a place of meeting.

When Moses and Aaron went from the complaining *assembly* to the tent’s *doorway*, they symbolically were bringing their concerns before the Lord. They demonstrated proper reverence and honor by falling *facedown*. This was (and continues to be) an appropriate act of worship and humility when seeking God.

In general, the tabernacle was viewed as God’s dwelling place among His people. The appearance of God here also indicated that He was about to take action. The term *glory* basically relates to the concept of weightiness or heaviness. People today often speak of an important matter as being “weighty,” and the Hebrew word has the same range of meaning.

While the text isn’t specific, God’s glory likely appeared in the form of a cloud, an image that they would have recognized (Ex. 40:34-38). Of course, God’s glory far exceeds humanity’s glory. David wrote how God placed humanity over all creation (Ps. 8:4-6). Yet, His power and ways vastly exceed those of any human (Isa. 55:8-9).

Even Moses, for all his godliness, could not look directly at God’s glory, lest he die (Ex. 33:18-23). The prophet Isaiah announced that God would reveal his glory by bringing His people back to the land after years of living in exile (Isa. 40:5).

(vv. 7-8) Not only did God appear at the tent, but He also *spoke to Moses*. It is reasonable to believe that everyone who was present heard the voice along with Moses. This would have further affirmed Moses as God’s prophet and His chosen leader for Israel.

God’s message related to the *staff* (or “rod”) that Moses carried. The Bible often refers to Moses as carrying and using a staff. This would have been a long, heavy stick someone could use for support or protection. Shepherds carried their staffs to steady their walk as they led their flocks or to protect the animals from predators. David described the Lord as his heavenly Shepherd (Ps. 23:1) and confessed that His staff brought him comfort (23:4). The Lord would protect him through everything.

When Moses fled Egypt after killing the Egyptian, he lived in Midian and pastured his father-in-law’s flocks (Ex. 2:11-15; 3:1). However, the rod he used as a shepherd became the Lord’s staff once God called him into His service (4:2-5,20). Moses’s staff had no supernatural power in itself, but God worked many miracles through it, both in Egypt and in the wilderness (7:9-12,15-21; 8:5,16; 17:5-7).

The term translated *rock* denotes a rugged mountain or large rock formation. English often uses the terms “rocks” and “stones” interchangeably, but Hebrew does not. A large rock formation loomed near the people, where all could see it.

Such rocky and mountainous terrain is common in the Wilderness of Zin, though we do not know the people’s exact location in this vast desert at this point. God commanded Moses to *speak to the rock* that it might provide water for the people and their livestock.

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.)



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: We can turn to God with our needs and concerns.

Call on a volunteer to read Numbers 20:6-8. Direct half of the group to listen for actions that Moses and Aaron took and half of the group to listen for what the Lord told them to do. Allow volunteers to report what they discovered.

EXPLAIN:

Describe how Moses and Aaron positioned themselves in prayer before God. Summarize this information from page 50 in the PSG:

“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). Each instance was of a desperate prayer. The position communicates an anguished and humble attitude.”

ASK:

What kinds of difficulties get you facedown—either literally or figuratively—before the Lord? (PSG, p. 51)

RESTATE:

Briefly share how Moses used his staff in Exodus 17 to bring water from a rock. Note that in Numbers 17 God also had used Aaron’s staff to quiet Israel’s complaints. Point out that in verse 8, God instructed Moses to use a staff to assemble the people and to speak to the rock to bring out water.

Group Activity Option

Prayer

Lead adults to spend time in prayer during this session. Guide them to share some prayer requests and record those requests on the board. Divide adults into groups of two or three people and lead each group to pray for the requests on the board. (*Note: If the list is long enough, divide the requests among the small groups.*) If possible, encourage adults to kneel as they pray.

The Result (Num. 20:9-13)

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 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, 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 I have given them." **13** These are the Waters of Meribah, where the Israelites quarreled with the LORD, and he demonstrated his holiness to them.

(vv. 9-10) Moses took the staff and *summoned the assembly*, just as God had *commanded* him. Unfortunately, his obedience was short-lived. Despite his submission to God in the past, Moses let his emotions get the better of him. Instead of speaking to the rock, he spoke to the people, pouring out his frustrations in a way that focused more on his exasperation than on God's provision.

As in English, the Hebrew word for *rebels* denotes individuals with a consciously defiant attitude. The Israelites were rebelling against God when they failed to trust Him to provide their needs and to lead them to the promised land.

A form of this word also occurs in 1 Samuel 15:23, where Samuel told Saul that rebellion is equivalent to divination. Centuries later, God exiled His people for rebelling against His commands (Lam. 1:18). Obviously, God takes rebellion against His Word seriously.

Moses's first faulty step involved claiming the power to produce *water out of this rock* on his own. In doing so, he usurped God's role without God's power or authority.

(v. 11) Instead of speaking to it, Moses actually hit the rock *twice*. The Hebrew wording signifies a strong blow. Elsewhere the word can describe striking someone down in battle, as when David killed the Philistine giant Goliath (1 Sam. 17:50).

God wanted Moses to speak to the rock so Israel would see Him as Provider. Despite Moses's disobedience, water still *gushed* from the rock. Because of His grace, the people received God's provision. But God was displeased with Moses's failure. As noted, he had called attention to himself as the source of the water, not God.

(v. 12) Our English word "amen" comes from the Hebrew word translated *trust*. It literally means "to cause to confirm" or "to cause to be sure."

So, trusting God means confirming in one's own heart the truth of what He commands. Moses struck the rock in violation of God's command. As a result, Moses and Aaron would not enter the promised land. God's actions remind readers that no one is beyond the justice of God. He judges all sin because all sin is rebellion against Him.

God said Moses and Aaron failed to *demonstrate my holiness* in a way the people could see and understand. God expects His people to reflect His holiness and to display it before the world (Lev. 19:2). When Moses struck the rock, he was not allowing God to demonstrate His holiness to those who needed to see it and remember it.

(v. 13) • *Meribah* literally means "striving" or "contending" and is related to the word translated *quarreled* in this verse. God provided the people with the water they needed, but at a great price. And when Moses and Aaron failed to obey God's command, He closed their door to the promised land.

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.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers should recognize that ignoring God's instructions leads to consequences.

Guide the group to read Numbers 20:9-13 silently and to consider what Moses and Aaron's attitudes were like as they assembled the Israelites.

EXAMINE:

Group adults into four teams and direct each team to scan the content for verses 9-13 (PSG, pp. 51-53). Encourage one group to identify the people's demands, one group to reflect on Moses and Aaron's attitude, one group to examine Moses striking the rock, and one group to focus on God's response. After a few minutes, allow teams to report on what they discovered.

SAY:

Failing to follow God's instructions, Moses struck the rock. Because of this disobedience, he and Aaron would not enter the promised land.

ASK:

What does it say about God's character that He provided such an abundance of water? (PSG, p. 53)

EXPLAIN:

Use this content from page 53 of the PSG to explain the meaning of "Meribah":

The word Meribah means "contention" or "strife." The name reflected the people's quarreling with God rather than trusting Him fully and obediently.

ASK:

What do we communicate to God when we follow His instructions? What do we communicate to Him when we don't follow His instructions?

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: A Shepherd's Staff

Secure a large stick, cane, or piece of wood to represent a shepherd's staff. Hold the staff in one hand and read Numbers 20:10-11. Read the verses a second time. As you read, strike a wall or other surface with the staff. Ask: *How would you describe Moses's attitude as he addressed the assembled people? What do you think motivated him to strike the rock as he spoke to them?*

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review the following from Apply the Text on page 54 in the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *Believers can trust God even when current circumstances appear bleak.*
- *We can turn to God with our needs and concerns.*
- *Believers should recognize that ignoring God's instructions leads to consequences.*

REFLECT:

Guide adults to consider times in their lives when they haven't followed God's instructions completely. Lead them to turn to God and ask Him for forgiveness. In addition, encourage them to seek His continued guidance in their lives, even when the circumstances are difficult.

DISCUSS:

Direct the group to find the first set of questions on page 54 of the PSG and lead adults to share advice about how to pray for "facedown" issues.

PRAY:

Guide adults through a few moments of silent, directed prayer, praying for known requests, needs of your church, and their own personal needs. Conclude the prayer by asking the Lord to grant wisdom and strength in following His instructions obediently each day.

AFTER THE SESSION

If you used the **Group Activity Option: Prayer** (Leader Guide, p. 63), encourage adults to copy the prayer list on a sheet of paper or to take a picture of it with their phones. Suggest they use this list to guide their prayers for others in the upcoming week. If you did not use the option, send the group a text or email asking for specific prayer requests that can be shared with the group. Challenge adults to pray for the needs and concerns of family and friends during the week.

ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study?
Explore the Bible Adult Commentary
 offers additional information and biblical
 insights related to the key passages.
 (Available for purchase at **Lifeway.com**.)

EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

The Wilderness: Israel's Place of Testing

Todd Borger

Israel's time in the wilderness stands prominently among several important themes that course through Scripture. Historically, the wilderness period comprised the forty years from when God's people crossed the Red Sea to when they crossed the Jordan River and entered Canaan. It represented an open desert with few resources and required the community's absolute trust in God's provision.¹

One major theme during Israel's wilderness period was testing. The testing went in two directions: God tested Israel, but Israel also tested God through their endless complaining.² Exodus 15:23-25 tells that the Lord tested Israel at Marah, where the water was bitter. In this and other instances, God's tests gave His people opportunities to exercise faith and to persevere. A tragic tale of Israel's testing God occurred at Mount Horeb when the people complained because they lacked water.

The importance of the testing theme is highlighted in the name Moses gave the site, Massah, which means "to test" (Ex. 17:7). Psalm 95:8-9

and Hebrews 3:7-19 later recall this event. Both passages challenge God's people not to avoid repeating the rebellion Israel committed in the wilderness.

WILDERNESS TRAVELS

Egypt to Sinai: Israel's time in the wilderness occurred in four stages. The first began with the crossing of the Red Sea and continued to Mount Sinai, a three-month journey (Ex. 15:22-18:27). A main feature of this stage is God's providing water and food. Exodus 19 through Numbers 10:10 records Israel camping for about a year at Sinai, which provided a break from the wilderness theme.

From Sinai to Kadesh: Israel entered the wilderness again, making the relatively brief journey from Mount Sinai to Kadesh in the wilderness south of the promised land (Num. 10:11-14:45). During this stage, Israel kept complaining about the food God provided. Additionally, disputes about leadership arose, sparked by Aaron and Miriam. The most tragic element of this stage



The Ein Gedi Nature Reserve is located in the Judean Desert, on the shore of the Dead Sea.

occurred when the Israelites heard the report of the ten spies, and fear motivated them to reject the land God had promised them (Num. 13–14).

Years of wandering: As a result of their unbelief, God sent them back into the wilderness until the last adult of that generation perished, except for Caleb and Joshua (32:13). Afterward, God would bring a new generation of faithful Israelites into the promised land (15:1–25:18). During this period, Israel continued to complain, and more leadership conflicts ensued. Israel also fell into idolatry, worshiping pagan gods.

Preparation for Canaan: In the fourth and final stage (chaps. 26–36), Israel’s leaders conducted a new census to count the new generation. Afterward, the people moved up to the Jordan Valley and began preparations for inhabiting the land. Scripture contains no reports of complaining or unfaithfulness at this stage.

WILDERNESS TESTING

Indeed, Israel went through severe trials in the wilderness and repeatedly tested God’s patience with their grumbling. As noted, the testing focused on three main areas: physical needs, leadership, and faith in God.

Physical needs: In the first stage of the wilderness journey, Israel complained three times about food and/or water (Ex. 15:22–27; 16:1–31; 17:1–7). Each time they complained, Moses took their complaint to God; and, each time, the Lord provided. Significantly, in these food and water stories, God did not judge Israel harshly. Despite their grumbling and testing, the Lord dealt with them out of compassion, not anger.

Contrast those with the food and water accounts of the second and third stages (Num. 11:4–35; 20:1–13). The later examples end with God’s wrath and punishment. God’s wrath extended from the people all the way to Moses, their leader. Numbers 20 describes Moses becoming angry with the people and inciting God’s anger against him. This resulted in God banning him from the promised land.

Leadership: During the wilderness journey, Moses’s leadership was challenged several times. As one writer had noted, “the wilderness appears as a place of political revolt, often described as

‘murmuring’ (Ex. 16:2) but implying an active rebellion against God’s commandments (Num. 27:14) and provoking his wrath.”³

God met each of these rebellions with anger. Numbers 12 records Miriam and Aaron criticizing Moses because of the wife he had chosen; they quickly shifted their complaint’s focus to their own self-proclaimed authority (Num. 12:2). At this critical juncture in Israel’s history, they were challenging the uniqueness of Moses’s prophetic role. Numbers 16:1–35 tells the story of Korah the Levite along with 250 other Israelites. They claimed that since the whole community was holy, Moses should not be exalted above the rest. Because of their rebellion, the Lord destroyed them.

Faith: The tense scene at Kadesh was the low point for Israel in the wilderness (Num. 13–14). Moses sent twelve spies into the land. While they all brought back a favorable report concerning the land’s potential, ten gave a report about the strength of the inhabitants. Despite the encouragement of Caleb and Joshua, the people decided against entering the land. Their words are chilling: “If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this wilderness!” (14:2). So, God sent them back into the wilderness to perish. God clarified, however, that their rebellion was not based in fear, but a lack of faith (Heb. 3:19).

When we read about Israel’s tests, we are reminded that trials can refine our faith or lead to a complaining spirit. As the psalmist and the writer of Hebrews challenged their readers, when you hear God’s voice, don’t harden your heart in rebellion. (Ps. 95:7–8; Heb. 3:15). Instead, trust Him and obey.

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1. David W. Baker, “Wilderness, Desert,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch [DOTP]*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 893.

2. Deryck C. T. Sheriffs, “Testing,” in *DOTP*, 832.

3. “Wilderness,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, gen. ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 949.