

“The Sufficiency of Scripture: Is God’s Word Enough?”

Numbers 20:2–13

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We will start by looking at Numbers 20. You may be familiar with this story in Numbers 20. Now I was not old enough to see Yogi Berra play baseball but he was one of those Hall of Fame catchers that played for some of those Yankee teams in the 1950s. He was quite the comedian. It’s hard not to like someone who says things like ‘Well 90 percent of the game is mental and the rest of it is from the neck up’ or ‘It’s déjà vu all over again.’ This story in Numbers 20 is familiar for it appears twice in the Old Testament none the less it happened twice but it very similar.

Numbers 20:1–13 says [1] *And the people of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh. And Miriam died there and was buried there.*

[2] *Now there was no water for the congregation. And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. [3] And the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD! [4] Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? [5] And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink.” [6] Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them, [7] and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, [8] “Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle.” [9] And Moses took the staff from before the LORD, as he commanded him.*

[10] *Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?” [11] And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. [12] And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.” [13] These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the LORD, and through them he showed himself holy.*

Prayer:

Father, we come to You asking for Your help. I need Your help. I need to speak with clarity and Lord only You can make that happen but I along with Your people need to hear Your Word and Lord, we need to help to hear it well. So I would ask that You would help both my speaking and our hearing that we might be hearers and doers of Your Word. I pray in Christ’s Name, Amen.

In the Old Testament you are aware that place is not just geography. Sometimes place is often times theology. It is geography for it’s real and historical. It happened but apparently as we study the Old Testament this is something that happened twice. This is not one story told a different way. It’s a similar story told about two different events. If you look at Exodus 17 this is happened pretty quickly after they came out of the exodus, right after God saved them from

that slavery they had a similar crisis in the wilderness. God provided water in that story just like He did in this story but that story differed not in the mumbling or in the grumbling or in the lack of faith but different instructions were given. In Exodus 17 Moses was told to strike the rock, he did and water poured forth. In Numbers 20 Moses is told to *speak* to the rock but Moses disobeys.

If you do parallels in both Exodus 17 and Numbers 20 there was disobedience in both stories. The people disobeyed, lacked faith and did not trust. The people didn't really hear God's Word in Exodus 17 but Moses did and Moses made intercession for them. Here in Numbers 20 the people and Moses sinned and there are consequences. Listen to what the people say here in Numbers 20.

Numbers 20:4–5a says [4] *Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle?* [5a] *And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place?* Do you realize where they are in the sequence of things? They are about to go into the Promised Land and they call where they are an evil place. That is why this carries with it two Hebrew names – Massah and Meribah. Massah means testing and Meribah means quarrelling.

Sometimes we are prone to do this when we read stories like this as we think 'How could they?' Don't think that or say that even inwardly. Instead I suggest you say 'Lord, help us.' Both of these stories had testing and quarrelling and now toward the end of their wilderness wandering but perhaps that's why here in Numbers 20 it starts with the death of Miriam. She was among the grumblers but she was also Moses' sister. She was also a part of the praise team too because she led songs and worship, but she is the last save Moses and Aaron to die because of that previous disobedience. All of them were dead and now they were about to go into the Promises Land. It's déjà vu all over again.

As I was going over my notes for this I thought 'Is one generation ever better than another?' Perhaps this text in some ways speaks to that because sometimes I think we really believe that. Sometimes we refer to people as the millennials or the baby boomers or the generation Xs and as we use these terms we don't seem to use them in encouraging and joyful ways but if anything this text teaches us that every generation is the same in some sense.

When they are tested they quarrel, grumble and mumble which is what we do and so the spiritual needs of every generation are the same, are they not? They need more faith, listen to the Word of God intently and that is where we are headed in this study because I believe this text speaks to how well we listen to what God has said. Moses didn't listen. The people didn't listen. Let's be honest, we don't listen very well at times too.

Matthew Henry says in his commentary, 'Meribah is the place of murmuring and mutiny. It is the same at the beginning and the end. Same test, same problem, same mumbling, same lesson not learned. The spoke the same absurd and brutish language that their fathers had before them.'

Moses mentions this same event in his parting words in Deuteronomy 33:8. I want you to see that this reverberates all through the Old Testament into the New Testament and that's why we need to pay careful attention to it. Psalm 81:7 says [7] *In distress you called, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah.* Psalm 95:7b–9 says [7b] *Today, if you hear his voice, [8] do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, [9] when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.* It is mentioned again in Psalm

106:24–25 says [24] *Then they despised the pleasant land, having no faith in his promise. [25] They murmured in their tents, and did not obey the voice of the LORD.*

Then it makes its way to the New Testament as we will see in Hebrews 4 and this is the culminating thing because Hebrews 3:7 echoes Psalm 95. Hebrews 3:7–9 says [7] *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, [8] do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, [9] where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.”* This is repeated in Hebrews 3:17, [15] *As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”* Hebrews 4:3 and 5 says [3] *For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. [5] And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.”* Then He repeats this again in Hebrews 4:7b which says [7b] *“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”*

So what was their disobedience? They did not listen. They did not hear what God has to say in the situation that they were in and they were in crisis. They were thirsty. Miriam had died. It wasn't that their need was unreal. It was a real need but God had spoken. God had promised. They did not hear and did not believe. That's why we need to pay close attention when we come to the end of Hebrews 4 because they culminate and emphasize what we need to do so instead of not doing, we need to recognize Hebrews 4:12–13 which says [12] *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. [13] And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

God's Word opens us up. God's Word exposes us and is powerful. That is really what Exodus 17 and Numbers 20 is about. They raise the question that when you're in the wilderness is God's Word enough? Is God's Word enough when you're thirsty? Is God's Word enough when the wheels of your life are coming off? Is God's Word enough when you're in crisis? Moses' sin was him believing that the power was in him and his rod and not in the Word spoken to Moses that was supposed to go through Moses to the situation. Moses took things into his own hands and didn't trust what God had said. It's not, how could he, but Lord, help us.

The battle for the Bible, largely, until recently, was over infallibility and inerrancy. I will not be so presumptuous to tell you that those battles are over but I will say that even in places where we embrace infallibility and inerrancy, often times, we don't believe in sufficiency. We don't believe that God's Word is really enough. It's enough for us even when it looks like there is no hope. That is what I mean by sufficiency. Where do you go for answers, guidance and direction? What ideas shape your view of God, yourself and your world? We need help and direction for both the normal and complex problems of daily life. We need hope as we face the darkness of sin and suffering? Where do we go to find healing, strength and encouragement?

We need hope and help. Do we search for our answers in the Bible or do we go elsewhere? The Bible is about the stuff of life. In there we find births, weddings, children and deaths. There's peace, war, work, rest, heroes and villains. There is an endless varieties in the realities of the Bible but when we are in such need where do we go for help, answers and guidance? Do we go to the Bible or to those who would help us understand how the Bible addresses that in our life?

Our reformed forefathers understood this. Here is the first part of the Westminster Confession of Faith 1.6; *The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own*

glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture. Do you believe this about the Bible? When you are tired and thirsty, not literally, do you know where the water is? Do you know where the water comes from?

I never played football beyond high school and it seems like there is nothing hotter than playing football in August in a helmet and shoulder pads. They didn't bring us water when we practiced, we had to go get it. We knew where it was and when the coach said 'water break' we ran to the water because it was hot and we were thirsty. Some of the new guys wouldn't know that and we'd just run over them to get to the water because we were thirsty. There was ice over there too and you could cool off just a bit as well before practice continued.

Is that the kind of urgency and thirst for knowing God's Word especially when things are in crisis, when you're in the desert of discontent, or the wanderings of life? Do you know where the water is and are you running toward it? Isn't it interesting in both stories, though they did not deserve it God gave them what they needed. In Exodus 20 they got water even though they were disobedient and in Numbers 20 they got water even when Moses was disobedient. So when we fail and even our leaders fail, God is still gracious. He still gives what we do not deserve and He gives it to us through the medium of His Word. That's how He speaks to us when we're in those desert places.

Where are you right now? Marriage is hard. Raising children is hard. Making ends meet is difficult. We all face difficulties but where are getting the answers, the direction and the light that we need? I would say that if we're not getting it from God's Word we're going to be misdirected and even greater calamity is going to come our way because God has graciously given us everything we need. That is really the question of sufficiency. It is not whether His Word is true for it is, or whether it's infallible for it is, but is it sufficient, is it enough or do we need other worldly philosophies or other -isms to figure out what to do next when we're confused or disillusioned?

I don't mean this to be offensive but there is always someone saying 'Oh yeah but...' when they hear something like this. A person may be thinking 'what happens if I go out to my car and it takes it a while to crank up and then I hear all this clinking and clanking, are you saying all I have to do is read a few Psalms to my car and the sufficiency of Scripture will help me?' And no that is not what I mean. So does that make the Word insufficient?

Not at all, instead I would simply say to you that everything you need to know about yourself, your world and even your car repair (not that it is a mechanics guide) is in the Word because the Word might speak to you about the stewardship of your car or your finances or about how much now you're going to trust God to find the money for you to fix the car. Not only is God's Word sufficient for you as you wait to get your car fixed but it's sufficient for the mechanic whose marriage is in shambles. That's what I mean when I say His Word is sufficient.

God's Word is enough and it's all we need. There are other passages that seem hard as a rock sometime but there is water there. White light giving life sustaining water and it's there for us to take and drink. It is what will take us through those places that so often like deserts. I know in some ways I'm preaching to the choir because you wouldn't be in this church if you didn't believe that.

As I counsel people I have to remind myself of this all the time because sometimes I get this strange, disillusioned idea that I can fix people. If you will just tell me your problem I will listen to it and give you some good wisdom and you'll be okay. I have to remind myself time and time again that all I am is an instrument in the Redeemer's hands and what I need to give the

people I counsel most, is a word from the Scriptures that will give them some light, a lift, some water so that they can live their life. That doesn't happen in one visit sometimes but often times. The Word of God indeed is sufficient, for it is enough.

The lesson of Meribah and Massah was that they didn't really believe that. I believe that's why it keeps coming up, not just in Exodus 17, Numbers 20, those Psalms I noted but also Hebrews 4. It also comes up another time in the New Testament and that's in I Corinthians 10.

I Corinthians 10:1–4 says [1] *For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, [2] and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, [3] and all ate the same spiritual food, [4] and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.* Here is the Gospel.

It is there in the Old Testament and Paul brings it out loud and clear here in I Corinthians 10 that Christ is that Rock. I Corinthians 10:5 says [5] *Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.* Here it is again, in a passage where we hear the words about communion. I Corinthians 10:16–17 says [16] *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? [17] Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

Are you listening to this, not just to me but to God's Word, as you drink from it daily? Lord, help us to be better listeners. I like Michael Card's music and you don't hear much from him anymore but he wrote a song called 'Will You Not Listen?' and I want to share the words of this song with you as I conclude.

*Is not He who formed the ear
Worth the time it takes to hear?
Should He who formed our lips for speaking
Be not heeded when He speaks?*

*Will you not listen?
Why won't you listen?
God has spoken love to us
Why will you not listen?*

*Listen to the sacred silence
Listen to the Holy Word
Listen as He speaks through living
Parables that must be heard*

*He spoke a word of flesh and blood
Flesh and blood that bled and died
Bled and died just to be heard
How could you not hear this Word?*

*Why will you not hear this Word?
Will you not listen?
Why won't you listen?*

God has spoken hope to us

How could you not listen?

Why will you not listen?

How could you not listen?

Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we come to You humbly confessing we don't listen enough but Your Word is enough. Your Word is a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path for all of life, not just for the easy things or the religious things or the things of faith but for all of life. I pray that the warnings of these stories in Exodus 17 and Numbers 20 would remind us of how important and sufficient Your Word is to listen, believing that Your Word is enough and believing that we need no other wisdom, no other life or direction. It's easy to say but hard to practice but we pray that You would help us to do it, cling to it, run toward it and we pray You would continue to bless us even now as we continue to listen and receive Your Communion, graciously given to us, in Christ's Name, Amen.