



August 10–11 2013
Numbers 18–20
“Watch Your Witness”
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Between chapters nineteen and twenty of Numbers there is a time gap of nearly thirty-eight years. In chapter thirteen, the Israelites had travelled right up to the boarder of the Promised Land. The Twelve Spies went in to spy out the land and brought back samples of the wonderful fruit of the land. However, only two of the spies returned with a good report; the other ten spies complained that there were giants in the land and that it would be impossible to occupy the land that God had promised to them.

The Israelites believed the bad report of the ten spies instead of believing God. In effect, God said to the children of Israel, “All right then, if you do not want the land, your children will have it instead of you.” Over the next thirty-eight years, that entire generation would die in the desert. Besides the instruction that God gives in chapter nineteen concerning how to handle their dead bodies, those thirty-eight years go largely unrecorded in Scriptures. That is the gap between chapters nineteen and twenty of the Book of Numbers.

In chapter twenty, the Israelites are once again at Kadesh.¹ This is the same location where the spies returned with their mixed reports thirty-eight years earlier. This chapter is a sad one as it also records the death of Moses’ sister, Miriam, at the beginning of the chapter and the death of Moses’ brother, Aaron, at the end.

The next generation of Israelites are, in many ways, very similar to their predecessors. They are a generation that is characterized by complaining much like their fallen fathers before them. Their chief complaint in this story was that there was no water.

Moses and Aaron went to the Tabernacle and got on their faces before God. God was very specific in what he instructed them to do. God told Moses, *“Take the staff, and you*

¹ Kadesh is derived from the Hebrew word for “Holy”.

*and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water.”*² However, Moses did not do it the way that God instructed him at all. Moses lost it. He snapped.

This rash action cost Moses dearly. It cost him the Promised Land. He did not get to enjoy all that he had worked so hard for over the previous forty years.

It is important to note that God is not overreacting in this story. Before you feel too sorry for Moses, it is important to understand what God does. God took Moses to a high mountain from which he could overlook the Promised Land from a distance. After this, God took Moses home to a more glorious Promised Land and buried his body on Mount Nebo.

In this study, Pastor Gary shares how God is teaching us a few things both in Principle and in Practice in this story.

Principles from Kadesh

1. Do not get too attached to earthly rewards because the heavenly ones are “out of this world.”
 - a. God did not forsake Moses when Moses disobeyed. Moses’ time on earth was finished and, in his mercy, God gave him a greater and more glorious reward in heaven.
 - b. Before God took Moses, he told Moses to commission his protégée, Joshua, as his successor.
 - i. Joshua’s name means, “The Lord is Salvation.” It is a Hebrew name. The name Jesus is from the Greek transliteration of the same name!
2. The Law can never get you to heaven; only grace can. Good works are never adequate for salvation; only Jesus can do that for you.
 - a. Moses could not take the people into the Promised Land. He could only lead them so far. Likewise, the Law can only lead us to Christ, but only Jesus Christ can take us in.
 - b. You have to have a personal relationship with Jesus in order to get to heaven.

Practice from Kadesh

² Numbers 20:8

3. The practical issue in this story is a huge one. Moses failed to properly represent God before the people of Israel.
 - a. God wanted to show himself as powerful and holy in the sight of the people.
 - b. Speaking to the rock would have been a better miracle. When Moses started to beat the rock, it made God appear to be angry and simply makes it look as if Moses caused water to flow from the rock because he cracked it open with his staff.
4. Watch your witness! Moses blew his witness. He allowed his flesh to get the best of him.
 - a. No doubt, we all have been there at one point or another. Everyone has said or done something that was not a good witness.
 - b. Nevertheless, God is very concerned about how well or poorly we represent him to others.
5. In the same way that an ambassador sent from the United States to another country is meant to represent the identity, ideals, and interests of the President of the United States, so Christians are to be Christ's ambassadors.
 - a. When you are a Christian, who bears the name of Christ, you are representing his identity, ideals, and interests to the world.
6. The church father, Saint Francis of Assisi put it well: "Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary."
 - a. God know he is not dealing with perfect people.
 - b. The more we have of God, the less we are full of ourselves, and the better witnesses we will be.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Numbers 20:1-13](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Discuss with the group times where members have had an opportunity or specific circumstance in which they were to represent God.
 - a. Discuss how it went. Was God honored as Holy? Was God misrepresented?
4. Discuss with the group God's decision to not allow Moses to enter the Promised Land.

- a. Discuss situations in life where the earthly reward can easily take priority over a heavenly focus (i.e. jobs, education, personal accomplishments).
 - b. How are we, as Christians, to approach such circumstances?
 - i. Use [Romans 8:18](#), [II Corinthians 4:18](#), and [John 14:2-3](#) to help foster discussion.
5. Read and discuss with the group [Hebrews 4:1-11](#). How does obedience to God correlate with the ability to enter his “rest” or “promises”?
6. Discuss with the group the importance of maintaining a good witness. What does this look like practically (in the workplace, at home, in your marriage, at school)?
 - a. Read [Galatians 2:11-14](#). In this passage, Peter does not properly represent God and Paul opposes him. What can be learned from this story about maintaining a good witness? What are the dangers of failing to properly represent God?
7. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: be obedient to God instruction, to be careful to honor God as holy, and to be mindful of their witness to others.