

WATER•FIRE•STONE

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MOSES

Session 18 – The Crab Bucket List, Part Three | Numbers 20 / Psalm 90

This chapter begins with endings. Miriam’s death punctuates the fact that forty years have passed and Israel’s wandering is over. But these are wilderness children, raised on tales and legends of Egypt and skilled in the same bellyaching habits as their parents. For them, Canaan has always been a vague destination; they are nomads, always moving, never arriving.

In the spring of that fortieth year, Israel migrated back to Kadesh-Barnea. It was a regular stop during the wandering years since it had a reliable source of water. But this time they found it dry. History repeats itself and we wonder if they’ll ever learn. (Will we?)

In this episode we see Moses’ greatest failure and deepest regret. Weep with him, but watch him rise and keep going, determined to finish well. The work isn’t done. It’s a new generation. And this chapter ends with beginnings.



In many ways, Israel was its own worst enemy. Like crabs in a bucket, they kept pulling each other down. Fear. Rebellion. Anger. Regrets. This three-part series, *The Crab Bucket List*, confronts sins that trip us up and attitudes that get in our way.

Icebreaker

Share one insight, about yourself or others, that you have gained in recent weeks.

Goals for this Session

- Discover what Moses learned about failure, hope, and God’s faithfulness.
- Consider the vital connection between belief and obedience.
- Pray honest prayers that confess regrets, accept correction, and move forward in faith.

1 The events in Numbers 20 happened over a four-month span from Miriam’s death at Kadesh in the first month of their calendar (March/April) to Aaron’s death in the fifth month (mid-July) on top of Mt. Hor (Exodus 33:38). Moses was 120 years old and still going strong but this had to be a personally difficult time.

a. Numbers 20:1-13 | What complaints and accusations did the people make against Moses?

b. Consider the crisis that Moses faced to provide leadership and maintain unity in the nation. The pressure was always there, but it intensified during this water shortage. How did Moses respond? Explain what he did, correctly and incorrectly, this time.

This wasn’t the first time Israel faced this crisis. God provided water from a rock on the way to Mt. Sinai, remember? But that was more than forty years ago. For this generation, that was a childhood memory or a tale from a time before they were even born.

c. Faithful as always, God provides water for the people. Crisis averted. Moses could breathe easy and move on to other matters, right? Read verse 12 again and let it sink in. Do you think Moses expected to hear the Lord respond in this way? Why or why not?

d. If Moses could have had one “do over” moment in life, this surely would have been it. It’s easy to understand why Moses was angry (look what he had to put up with!) but there is never an acceptable reason to disobey God.

What made Moses’ sin so grievous that he received the same punishment as the older generation?

“...you did not **believe** Me...”

Does this imply that Moses didn’t believe water would come from the rock unless he struck it? Not at all. He didn’t doubt what God said, he *disobeyed* what God said. In God’s vocabulary, unbelief and disobedience are interchangeable (Hebrews 3:18-19).

“...you did not **honor** Me...”

The rod was a symbol of God’s power and Moses’ authority. In a reckless moment, Moses took his God-given authority too far.

“...during the strife...you **rebelled** against My command to honor Me...” Numbers 27:14

2 Over the course of this study, we have seen that Moses was an exceedingly patient man with a very long fuse. But when he blew, he exploded. Put yourself in Moses' place and consider what that moment of anger cost him personally. Share your thoughts.

- a. As long as we inhabit these earthly bodies, there will be times when we break faith with God. He is faithful to forgive us (1 John 1:8-9) and He is just as faithful to correct us. The question is, how will we respond?

The verses below have something to say about correction. What do you learn about God's character and purpose in correcting His children? What outcome is promised when we submit and cooperate with God's correction?

Proverbs 3:11-12

Psalm 119:75

Job 5:17-18

Revelation 3:19

- b. What pushes your hot button? Here are some that Moses dealt with on a regular basis. Check any that apply to you. Describe your normal response; share what you have learned to do (or not do) in the heat of the moment. Identify any area you need growth and God's help with.

“
Anger is one letter
short of danger.
Eleanor Roosevelt

- A difficult situation or person that exhausts your patience and never seems to change.
- Unfair criticism; your motives questioned; taken advantage of; underappreciated.
- Seeing someone else be mistreated, abused, or put in harm's way.
- Being the object of gossip, slander, or false accusations.
- Other:

My response:

I need growth and God's help with:

3 Numbers 20:14-22 | Moses was eager to leave Kadesh and press on to Canaan. Decades earlier, in spite of Moses' warning, a foolish last-ditch attempt to enter from the south ended in disaster (Numbers 14:44-45). Since that route wasn't an option, Moses headed east and requested permission to pass through Edom.

a. The Israelites were Jacob's descendants and the Edomites were Esau's people. Given the history of conflict between these brothers, how did Moses present his request and what response did he get?

b. God required Moses to take the more difficult route to avoid conflict. The Israelites had to go 175 miles out of their way in the sweltering heat of summer because Edom refused to let them pass.

Think about it. Romans 8:28 assures us that God causes all things to work out for our good according to *His* purpose. Does that include roadblocks and difficult people?

If we used Edom's history as a people to form a composite character, you would get someone who:

- Nurses a grudge instead of forgiving.
- Gloats when their enemy suffers.
- Overreacts when they feel threatened.
- Uses undue pressure to get their own way.
- Goes out of their way to make life difficult.
- Tries to undermine your progress.
- Schemes behind your back.
- Stands by while others attack instead of coming to your defense.

What did God say to Moses and the Israelites about Edom?

"Don't detest him...he is your brother." Deuteronomy 23:7

"Do not provoke him...I will not give you his land." Deuteronomy 2:4-6

God dealt with Edom when the time came. The short book of Obadiah records God's judgment on Edom:

You will be humbled...put to shame...and your actions will come back on your own head.

Do you know any Edomites? Lord help us, do we ever behave like an Edomite? How can we respond in God-honoring ways? Use the verses below for help with your answer.

Proverbs 17:14

Romans 12:18

Luke 6:27-29

Colossians 3:12-13

Colossians 4:6

4 Numbers 20:23-29 | Fifteen miles after leaving Kadesh, Moses and the multitude came to Mount Hor. Setting up camp was always a hive of activity, with Levites setting up the tabernacle while families busied themselves pitching tents and watering animals. There were cookfires to build and small children to warn against wandering too far away.

A typical day in the camp for most—but not for brothers, Moses and Aaron. The Lord spoke to them saying it was time for Aaron to be gathered to his people.

- a. What instructions did the Lord give to Moses? In your observation, explain how God mercifully made this painful transition as smooth as possible for:

The Ministry of Priests -

Aaron -

Moses -

- b. When news of Aaron's death spread through the camp, the people mourned for thirty days. When we think of Aaron, we remember the golden calf, his failure and excuses. But Moses remembered the brother who fearlessly stood by him in Pharaoh's court. The brother that God forgave and ordained to be His high priest. The brother who ran through the plague-filled camp* to make atonement for the people and stood between the dead and living so the plague was stopped.

If you could take one lesson from Aaron's life, what would it be?

Memory Verse

So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
Psalm 90:12 NKJV

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? How or in what way?

* Numbers 16:41-50

“How did Moses manage to become a man of God after forty years in pagan Egypt that ended in failure, forty years in Midian as a humble shepherd, and forty more leading a funeral march through the wilderness? Life was not easy for Moses, but he triumphed, and in this psalm he shared his insights so that we, too, might have strength for the journey and end well.”¹

– Warren Wiersbe

5 Moses wrote this psalm sometime during the wilderness years; possibly even in the days of mourning Aaron’s passing.

- a. Psalm 90:1-6 | Moses meditates on God’s eternity and man’s fleeting years. Highlight what stands out to you and why.

- b. Psalm 90:7-12 | Reflecting on the wilderness years, Moses talks about the futility of ignoring sin and the toll it takes on us. Highlight what stands out to you and why.

- c. Psalm 90:13-17 | Moses expresses longing, looks up, and looks forward. Highlight what stands out to you and why.

6 Because life is brief, we pray *teach* us. Because life is difficult, we pray *satisfy* us. Because we are God’s children, we pray *establish* us. Share what this psalm teaches you about failure, hope, and God’s faithfulness.

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, (©2004 Warren W. Wiersbe, Colorado Springs, Colorado: David C. Cook), p. 21

Action Steps ►► As you think through this part of Moses' story, what is the most important takeaway point for you personally? How will you put what you've learned into action?

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. —Ephesians 6:18 NIV

Adoration – Giving praise and honor to God for who He is and what He does.

Confession – Honestly deal with sin; acknowledge to God the ways (and whys) you fall short.

Thanksgiving – Verbalize your gratitude; express your praise and a thankful heart.

Supplication – Pray specifically for the needs of others, ourselves, our church, our nation.



Close your discussion time by praying together. Use the A·C·T·S pattern as a group focus and keep it simple. No need to be lengthy or profound—just authentic.
