

**Date** : 13 August 2023  
**Theme** : The Faith journey of the new generation  
**Topic** : Persevering Faith amidst of stress and pressure  
**Key passage** : Numbers 20:1-13  
**Key verse** : Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the tent of meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them. (Numbers 20:6)

## Introduction

Through the years of wandering in the wilderness, Israel came back to Kadesh, the place where they rejected God's offer (Numbers 13:26). The original grumbling generation of Israelites had, by and large, died. This new generation experienced God's goodness and power every day through God's provision (manna) and protection (cloud in the day and fire at night) while wandering in the desert. God was partnering with Moses to prepare the people for battle. Numbers chapter 18 to 19 were God's instructions to the people to live a life of worship and holiness.

So now, Numbers chapters 20 to 21 detailed the journey of Israelites from Kadesh to Moab from where the conquest of the Promised Land would be launched. Today we will look and understand the situation Moses was in and how God showed kindness when His shepherd was facing stress and pressure.

The question we will address today is: How do we have persevering faith amidst stress and pressure?

### (1) Moses' Stress (Numbers 20:1-5)

#### (1.1) Discomfort of the harsh desert at Zin (...the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin...Numbers 20:1)

- Things grew particularly tough! Days were intensely hot, and nights were uncomfortably cold. Much of their day was taken up with the needs of survival. Their enemies were nearby and the leaders were aging.

#### (1.2) Death of Miriam (...Miriam died and was buried. Numbers 20:1)

- Numbers 20 started with a sad event – the death of Miriam.
- Personal pain stung the leader. He had lost his friend and sister, so for Moses there was a great emotion behind this event.

#### (1.3) Dispute: Contention of the Israelites (Numbers 20:2-5)

- a) *Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. – Numbers 20:2*
- The Israelites were facing a severe lack of water. The same occurrence took place at Kadesh 37 years before. (Exodus 17:1); as their forefathers complained, so did their children.
  - The need was real, but their response was one of unbelief and a bad attitude — which unfortunately went together! When you find a bad attitude, you will also find a lack of simple, secure trust in God.
  - They could have trusted in God's goodness who had daily provided for them and made a faith-filled appeal to Moses and Aaron.
  - They showed no persevering faith, not realising that their days of water shortage was soon to be over.

- b) *If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the Lord! – Numbers 20:3*
- Their contention led them to make outrageous statements, words lacking in any trust in God.
  - They openly doubted God's promise that He would lead them into the land of promise.
- c) *Why did you bring the Lord's community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? – Numbers 20:4*
- Forgetting God's goodness led them to behave in a hostile manner. As a result, they would hit out at their leader.
  - They falsely accused Moses of irresponsibility, bringing them into the desert to die, but they had forgotten God's purpose and their destiny was to take possession of the land God had promised.
- d) *Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink! – Numbers 20:5*
- Their contentions led them to adopt a warped view of Moses and God. Of course, the wilderness was not a fruitful land, but this was not their destiny. But to make it to the land of plenty, they had to travel through the wilderness. It is a journey of faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God.
  - Instead of seeing this wilderness as the place of God's testing, they saw the wilderness as a dead end.
- The Israelites had not learnt about faith in God, not remembering how God had provided for them daily. They were insensitive to Moses' grief and stress. They left God out of their consideration and came to the foolish conclusion, that it was better back in Egypt, the land of slavery their fathers had endured.
  - Notice that these were the same complains Israel made some 38 years earlier. Some people never learn. Stubborn hearts controlled by the old sin nature would harden.
  - In these circumstances Moses was under a tremendous amount of stress. He was coming to the limit of endurance.
  - Who would not? 40 years of relentless complaining, anger of the whole nation, facing life threatening situations on many occasions and rejections. Anyone else would have cracked long ago. So here is God's faithful servant facing the test of his faith.

## **(2) Moses' Response (Numbers 20:6-11)**

### **(2.1) Moses – A great man of faithful endurance.**

- He was selfless. (Exodus 32:31-32)
- He spoke face to face with God. God Himself said Moses was the only one to whom He spoke this way. (Exodus 33:11)
- He was the greatest Old Testament prophet. (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)
- He set an example of robust faith. (Hebrews 11:24-27)

### **(2.2) Into God's presence.**

- Moses and Aaron listened to the complains of the multitude and went from the company of a disgruntled people into the presence of a Holy God.
- The immediate response of Moses and Aaron was the right response. In this we find a positive example of how we should respond when we face stress and pressure.
- When they approached God, the glory of the Lord appeared and provided them with instructions for dealing with their problem. Moses should gather the people together, take his rod and then speak to the rock before the eyes of the people. God promised that water would flow forth from the rock.

- God's instructions were plainly stated, there was no way Moses and Aaron could have misunderstood what God had instructed them to do.

(2.3) He was tested on persevering faith.

- Moses took the rod just as God had commanded him to do but rather than speaking to the rock as God had instructed him to do, he spoke harshly to the people. (*Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock...Numbers 20:10...Numbers 20:10*) Moses was angry with the people for their rebellious spirit. The stress and pressure he endured was reaching his limits.
- Moses' meekness was put to the test when he experienced pressure and stress. Meekness is self-control, restraining haughtiness and enduring injury with patience, without resentment or retaliation just as Jesus did.
- Throughout history there have been many who responded wrongly in a stressful situation. Often our greatest mistake tends to come in an unguarded moment, a momentary lapse of self-control and allowing the wrong attitude to arise, due to anger, frustration, or stress. Rather than asking God to handle the issue, Moses took it upon himself and failed to do things God's way. Moses' use of the pronoun 'we' showed that he wrongly thought that he was responsible to give them water.
- Moses had failed to understand God's instruction to speak to the rock. God was about to show these people His glory as a faithful and willing Provider and not a reluctant God which Moses had portrayed. In spite of the people's lack of faith, God wanted them to see His grace and mercy. He did not want this journey of the new generation to be shipwrecked from the start. God's plan was to plant this chosen generation securely in the land He had promised Abraham.

(2.4) Moses was tested on Honouring God as a Holy God

- Instead of speaking to the rock, he did it his own way. Just like many of us, we prefer things done our way. Moses struck the rock exercising authority of his own as the provider. (*...struck the rock twice with his staff...Numbers 20:11*) He did not properly acknowledge God's holiness before the people. (*...Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites...Numbers 20:12*)
- Forty years earlier, the previous generation had the same complain: no water. But at that time, God told Moses to strike the rock with his staff (Exodus 17:6). But this time God had told him to speak, not strike it because He wanted to convey a different message. Some theologians explain it this way: The rock pictures Christ (1 Cor 10:1-4). The first time, striking the rock is like Christ sacrificed once and for all to bring us salvation. Second time, speaking only to the rock, to preserve the picture created in Exodus 17. When Moses chose to strike the rock twice, he disrupted the picture that God wanted His people to see.

**(3) God's Response (Numbers 20:11-13)**

(3.1) Showed kindness to the Israelites.

- God knew the Israelites' needs. He cared for them and their life stock. This is grace because they certainly did not deserve such kindness. (*...and water came out abundantly...Numbers 20:11*)

(3.2) Showed kindness to Moses.

- The Lord did not shame Moses and Aaron before the people; he honoured their leadership publicly. Privately, however, the Lord rebuked them.
- God showed Himself holy among His people. He disciplined the leaders for their wrong attitudes by excluding them from entering the promised land. (*...you will not bring this community into the land I give them. Numbers 20:12*) Although God had to discipline their wrong attitudes, He extended grace to His servants too. He allowed Moses to see the promised land from a distance. (*Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go up this mountain in the Abarim Range and see the land I have given the Israelites. Numbers 27:12*)
- In the next phase of the journey of the Israelites, their battles would be intensified to conquer the promised land under their next leader, Joshua. This seemed an appropriate time to appoint Moses' successor. Although Moses still had the fighting spirit in wanting to enter the land, Joshua was more suitable to lead the troops into battle.

(4) **Moses' Repentance (Numbers 27:12-23)**

- Moses had blown it, but he repented. Who wrote the book Numbers? Moses wrote down his failures for the Israelites to know because he wanted them (and us) to learn from his mistakes. He stayed faithful the rest of his journey and made the most of the short time he had left.
- Although Moses did not enter the promised land, the Lord did compensate him by honouring him at the transfiguration. (Luke 9:28-36) He entered by grace and received his inheritance.
- Moses made only this one mistake after 40 years. What a remarkable servant. And what a wonderful God who backed him up all the way!

(5) **How can we have a persevering faith amidst stress and pressure? (Application)**

(5.1) Turn to the Lord when the going is tough. (Numbers 20:6)

- On the long journey Moses took, he had to endure endless complaining, grumbling, rebellion and wrong accusations. (Numbers 20:3-4) These behaviours were most irritating to God and certainly brought even a humble man like Moses to his wits ends.
- In the past times of crisis, Moses and Aaron would come before the Lord's presence in prayer and supplication and God had intervened on their behalf.

(5.2) Focus on the purpose not the problem.

- Moses and Aaron despaired of the people's frustrations. They were looking at the grumbling people and their accusations, rather than at the Lord's promise to bring them into the promised land.
- When we look at people rather than the Lord, we will grow frustrated, because people will always fall short in some ways. Trust the Lord to provide the solution.

(5.3) Treat God as Holy regardless of the situation.

- As a shepherd of God's flock, make it your goal to put God's glory first when you have to deal with rebellions people under your care. God will compensate you for your sacrifice.

**Discussion**

1. Have my wrong attitudes hindered God's work?
2. Do I see God's kindness in my life for every situation?
3. What must I do to cultivate persevering faith?
4. Can I trust God to compensate me where I am called to make a sacrifice for Him?