



“The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (James 1:20).

Controlling Anger

Central Truth: A decision made in anger is usually wrong.

L220. Date: May 1994. **Text:** Numbers 20:1-8, 10-13.

Topic: Anger: Control Of; Moses

Anger is a natural human emotion. Each person experiences it to some degree under some situations. It is neither good nor bad in itself. Anger becomes good or bad according to the person who controls it.

Many things may anger you. You may be angered by people. You may be angered by circumstances. The real issue is, “How do you control your spirit when you are angry?”

When not properly controlled, anger makes us forget God. We forget His provision and His purpose. In anger we may assume a prerogative which God has reserved for himself alone. In some instances, human anger brings divine judgment.

According to the divine record, there was only one time when Moses became angry. But that one time was sufficient to blight his otherwise excellent record and to keep him from realizing a goal he had pursued for forty years. Be aware of your own control of anger as you study this incident. Keep strict control over your passions, lest you suffer a like judgment from God.

Anger Is Caused by Human Error (Numbers 20:1-5, 13)

Sometimes we get angry at God. (But we seldom acknowledge it!) There were several things which might have caused Moses to be impatient and subject to a fit of anger at that time.

First, Moses might have been upset by the loss of a dependable helper. Miriam had died. She was the older sister of Moses who had talked

with Pharaoh's daughter and secured his mother to nurse him (Exodus 2:1-10). How often Moses must have heard that story. How much he must have valued his courageous sister. Then she was gone, and Moses suffered at her loss.

Second, the leading of the Lord had brought the nation into the semiarid desert region south of Palestine. It must have been very difficult on the people to travel through such a hot and barren countryside. Physical exhaustion may have added to the burden Moses felt when the people came complaining to him.

Third, the complaints of the people seemed to never end. Moses had heard them over and over. Ten times the nation had rebelled and seen the awesome power of God manifest in their behalf (Numbers 14:22). As their water supply got low, they came back to accuse Moses of failure as their leader. They said Moses had “made” them come up out of Egypt (as if they had no choice), and now they and their cattle would die of thirst.

That was almost more than Moses and Aaron could endure. They sought the presence of the Lord for His instruction and for the inspiration of His presence. At the door of the congregation they showed their dismay by prostrating themselves before the Lord with their faces to the ground. With dismay of heart they waited for a word from the Lord.

Those same pressures may be present in your life. Have you lost a person on whom you depended for encouragement and support? Have you found your daily life to be wearisome and difficult? Have you been accused of not doing your work well or even failing in what you were trusted to do? Have those under your leadership rebelled against following you? If so, watch out for anger.

The anger of today may be remembered in the tomorrows. Though the Lord gave them water from the rock by a miracle, they still named the place *Meribah*, which means quarreling. They quarreled with the Lord at that place, and we still remember it many centuries later. Guard your anger.

Anger Makes Us Forget God's Provisions (Numbers 20:7, 8)

God provides through His personal presence. He had given the Israelites water from the rock one time before. But notice His presence as indicated in His promise: *“I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink”* (Exodus 17:6). Moses struck the rock with his wooden shepherd's staff. It gave forth water sufficient for three million people to drink, to water all their livestock and to fill their water containers

to continue their journey across the desert. What a miracle!

They needed the miracle again. Moses must have remembered the Lord's promise to stand upon the rock in Horeb. If so, he should have looked for the Lord to go before him and stand there again. But apparently he forgot.

Numbers 20:8 describes very clearly the event as God designed it. (1) The people were to witness the miracle. (2) The rock was to break at the spoken word, not at the blow from a staff. (3) Water was to come in abundance from the rock. (4) The people and their beasts were to have sufficient water to drink. (5) God was to be glorified. That was the way God designed it, but that was not the way it happened. Moses' anger interfered.

Take care in your anger. You may forget the way God has worked in the past. You may ignore the instructions God gives for the present. You may make the greatest mistake of your life by yielding to the passion within you.

Anger Puts You Outside of God's Plan (Numbers 20:8, 11)

In anger, you may disobey the clear word of God. Moses did. God's instructions were plain, *"Speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall bring forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock"* (Numbers 20:8). The first time God gave water from the rock, Moses was instructed to strike the rock with his staff. This time God told him to speak to, not strike, the rock.

The people may have continued their murmuring and accusing as they walked with Moses and Aaron to the chosen rock. By the time they reached there, Moses' patience was at an end. He was so angry that he forgot God's instructions. He struck the rock twice with his staff saying, *"Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?"* (Numbers 20:10). O Moses, I weep with you over your mistake. Do you not realize the damage you have done to yourself and to the message of God?

Moses' angry act caused him to blemish the message God would have given on that occasion. The rock had to be struck one time for the water to flow. After that one time, speaking to the rock was sufficient to receive the life-giving flow.

Do you see a picture of Jesus in that? He was struck one time (crucifixion) for the water of life to flow. After that one sacrifice, we speak (pray) to Him and He gives according to our need. But Moses destroyed the picture. By striking the rock a second time, and striking it twice at that, it was no longer a type of Christ our Savior. Such is the damage done by

uncontrolled anger.

Anger Assumes a Divine Responsibility (Numbers 20:9, 10)

Anger perverts our obedience to God. God said “*speak,*” but Moses struck the rock. That was evident disobedience and deserved to be disciplined. Anger which causes God's Word to be disregarded still deserves punishment.

Anger assumes to do what only God can do. Listen to Moses' angry retort: “*Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?*” (Numbers 20:10). Note the pronoun “*we.*” “Must WE fetch you water out of this rock?” Did Moses think he could bring forth the water? No. He knew that only God could do it. But in his anger he assumed a prerogative reserved for God himself.

Do not judge Moses too harshly. It is very likely that you have made the same kind of mistake in your anger. Since undisciplined anger takes your eyes off God, it is very easy for you to assume the authority which only God can hold. Be careful what you say and do in your moments of anger. God will hold you accountable.

Anger Brings Divine Judgment (Numbers 20:12)

God gave two reasons why He would discipline Moses for his act of anger at the rock in Meribah. (1) He disciplined him because of his lack of faith, “*because ye believed me not*”. Moses remembered how he had to strike the rock at Horeb and thought the water would not come forth at Meribah unless he struck that rock also. His striking the rock was intentional, therefore, and not a rash act done without forethought. God disciplined him for such unbelief, just as He will discipline you for doubt today.

(2) God disciplined Moses for irreverence. “*Ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel.*” O how God would have been honored if Moses had spoken to the rock in the name of God and the water had flowed forth! The people had seen or heard of the rock which was struck at Horeb. This would have been a greater miracle and they would have worshiped God. But the uncontrolled anger of one man blemished the glory of God.

God's judgment on Moses was very severe: “*Ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.*” Poor Moses! For forty years he had labored day after day with one goal in mind: to lead Israel into

the Promised Land. One occasion of uncontrolled anger kept him from realizing his dream. The people entered the land, but Moses could not. Beware of anger.

Anger Can Be Controlled So It Will Not Be Sin

Here is how you can “*be . . . angry and sin not*” (Ephesians 4:26). Follow these six principles.

1. Keep your anger unselfish. Never get angry to promote or protect your personal interests. Be angry only at what angers God.
2. Keep your anger spiritual. Center on God's purposes and His glory. Be angry only at what runs counter to the way of God.
3. Keep your anger controlled. Do not let words or actions get out of hand and become more than the occasion demands.
4. Keep your anger limited. Do not let the sun go down before your anger is settled and the differences involved in it are resolved (Ephesians 4:26).
5. Keep your anger kind. Never cause hurt to another person by word or deed or attitude just because you are angry. Notice how easy it is to do and say hurtful things in anger.
6. Keep your anger forgiven. Settle immediately any offenses which arouse your anger or which are caused by your anger. Forgive and receive forgiveness.

We are an impatient generation. We take frustrations at work home with us and bring frustrations at home to work with us. We should blame anger on our personal attitudes, not on external things. We must learn to “ride the wild horses” of passion and never lose control of our temper (Ephesians 4:26, 31). Remember this divinely stated truth: “*The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*” (James 1:20).