

# MOSES

## *A Man of Selfless Dedication*

### STUDY SEVENTEEN

## A Moment of Rage

*Numbers 20:1–13*

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*During his forty years in the desert school of self-discovery, Moses learned many wonderful lessons. But he did not learn how to control his temper.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EXPRESSIONS of anger vary in intensity, like degrees of heat. Psychologists have noted five levels. The lowest is *mild irritation*. It's a feeling of discomfort brought on by an annoyance. The next level is *indignation*—frustration over something unfair or unreasonable. From there, anger heats up to *wrath*—a strong desire to avenge or punish.

At this point, self-restraint diminishes significantly. As wrath intensifies into *fury*, the person's blood pressure rises. Eyes narrow. Teeth clench. This state is evidenced by yelling, flailing, throwing things, fighting. *Rage* is the final and most dangerous phase. In this state, people give full vent to their anger. They can lose control and commit terrible acts of violence, almost blacking out from the intensity of their blind rage.

Anger itself is not a sin, in the way that a spark is not a wildfire. Mishandled and uncontrolled, however, anger can ignite a deadly inferno. As the Proverbs say, “A hot-tempered person commits all kinds of sin” (Proverbs 29:22).

Moses struggled to control his temper. On God's desert training ground, he developed many admirable strengths—faith, perseverance, dedication, determination. But beneath the bedrock of his life, a cauldron of anger simmered.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll witness Moses erupt in an outburst of rage that led to severe consequences. His example serves as a warning to all who struggle with fits of anger. But take heart. God can help us turn down the temperature at the first degree, so it doesn't grow into a wildfire we can't control.



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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

“Search me, O God, and know my heart” (Psalm 139:23). As you look into the mirror of Scripture, invite the Lord to reveal “any hurtful way” (139:24 NASB) and lead you on His path of life.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The first eruption of Moses’ hot temper occurred when he attacked the Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Hebrew slave (*Exodus 2:11–12*). But that act of rage wasn’t an isolated hot spot for Moses. Other flareups followed. Read the following verses and identify Moses’ anger episodes.

**Final message to Pharaoh** (*11:4–8*): \_\_\_\_\_

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**Hoarding manna** (*16:16–20*): \_\_\_\_\_

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**The golden calf** (*32:19–20*): \_\_\_\_\_

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**Rebellion of Korah** (*Numbers 16:1–2, 12–15*): \_\_\_\_\_

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Righteous indignation is appropriate at times, and we expect Israel’s sin to trigger an angry response in their godly leader. Too much anger over too many years, however, may have eaten away Moses’ internal restraint. By the end of his life when the pressure mounted, he lost control. Let’s see what triggered Moses’ anger and the consequences that followed.

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## Observation: Moses' Moment of Rage

*Observation* sets a passage in its historical and geographical setting.<sup>1</sup> Numbers 20 opens with the Israelites arriving “in the wilderness of Zin” and camping “at Kadesh” (Numbers 20:1)—a historically significant location. At Kadesh, forty years earlier, the Israelites refused to enter Canaan after the ten spies’ report of giants and powerful enemies living in the land. Terrified, the people demanded “a new leader” who would take them “back to Egypt!” (14:4). Because of their rebellion, God told the adults “twenty years old or older” that they would never enter Canaan but die in the wilderness (14:29).

Their children, now adults, had come to the same spot. Would they repeat the same sin as their parents? How would this generation respond when tested? Not much better.

## Contention at Kadesh—Numbers 20:1–6

The latest name on death’s roll call was Moses’ sister. “While they were there, Miriam died and was buried” (Numbers 20:1). Moses’ emotions were still raw from grief when the next wave of trouble hit. What happened in *Numbers 20:2–5*?

The people threw verbal stones of blame at Moses, as well as hurtful accusations—“Why have you brought . . . the LORD’s people into this wilderness to die?” (20:4). Their parents leveled the same charge in *Exodus 17:3*! What must Moses have felt to hear these cruel words from this new generation?

How did Moses respond in *Numbers 20:6*?

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## The Lord's Instructions—Numbers 20:6–8

So far, Moses did the right thing. He turned from his accusers and sought the Lord's counsel. What directions did the Lord give to Moses and Aaron in *Numbers 20:6–8*?

How were the Lord's instructions similar to His instructions to Moses when the Israelites complained about water forty years earlier in *Exodus 17:5–6*? How were they different?

## Moses' Anger on Display—Numbers 20:9–13

At first, Moses did what the Lord told him to do:

*He took the staff from the place where it was kept before the LORD. Then he and Aaron summoned the people to come and gather at the rock. (Numbers 20:9–10)*

Then, the trouble began. Moses erupted like a volcano spewing words like hot lava. Observe closely *Numbers 20:10–11*. What heated emotions can you identify in Moses? What sinful words and actions poured out of him? What sign of God's grace do you see?

How did the Lord discipline Moses in *20:12–13*? What was Moses' core sin? How did that sin fuel his fiery reaction to the people?

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*Numbers 20:1–13*

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*Moses never completely got a handle on his anger. It should shock us into realizing the terrible ramifications of an uncontrolled temper.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Interpretation: The Lord's Anger

The Israelites' complaints provoked the Lord on several occasions (*Numbers 11:1, 33; 16:46*). What makes God's anger justified? First, He is the One the Israelites sinned against, not Moses. What core sin did the Israelites commit again and again?

Second, the Lord *alone* sits as judge over His people. What purpose did the Lord's judgment accomplish? How was His judgment different from Moses' angry outburst?

Third, the Lord *knows best* when to hand out judgment or show mercy. What message did the Lord deliver to Moses on Mount Sinai in *Exodus 34:6–7*?

When Moses presumptuously declared, “Must we bring you water from this rock?” (*Numbers 20:10*, emphasis added), what role was Moses assuming that he had no right to take on himself? Why do you think Moses' sin was serious enough to disqualify him from entering the promised land?

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Moses' anger blurred his good judgment. Whether striking the Egyptian taskmaster or striking the rock, Moses took matters into his own hands rather than trust the Lord to handle things. Once again, Moses was doing the Lord's will *his own way*.



## **Correlation: Moses' Role as Mediator, Not Judge**

What did Paul say was Moses' proper role in *Galatians 3:19*?

Moses struck the rock like a judge banging a gavel of judgment. He took God's place and stole God's glory. Yes, the people falsely accused Moses and treated him unfairly. How should he have handled their injustice, according to *Romans 12:17–19*?

Moses was a sinner in need of grace, just like us. His imperfections direct us to the “child who was promised” (*Galatians 3:19*)—the only perfect Mediator and Intercessor, Jesus Christ . . . and He alone is Judge.

*Have you ever acted in rash unbelief and God opened the door in spite of your actions? That's the way God's grace works. Grace brought water from the rock.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## **Application: Lessons about Anger to Never Forget**

Three lessons tie like strings around our finger. First, *any disobedient act stems from unbelief*. Do you sometimes doubt God's justice—that He will make right the wrongs done against us? Or doubt His goodness—that He will provide all we need? Anger erupts when we struggle to trust our just and good God. How has unbelief led to anger in your experience?

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Second, *any public act of disobedience diminishes God’s glory*. Moses got angry. He disobeyed. But the primary offense that barred him from entering Canaan was that he stole God’s glory. What can you do to make certain you keep the spotlight on God as you serve Him?

Third, *any such act—though forgiven—bears consequences*. Even in Moses’ discipline, however, God showed mercy. Moses retained his role as Israel’s mediator, and when he died, he inherited a great reward in heaven. What hope do you hold onto when your sin sometimes leads to long-lasting, seemingly unbearable consequences?

Despite Moses’ disobedience, God’s grace poured out of the rock, satisfying the people’s thirst as a spring of refreshing, life-giving water. Even when we sin, God’s grace prevails—for which we are eternally grateful.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, my anger is a symptom of my lack of faith. Help me to trust You when enemies hurl false accusations. Give me the faith to stay calm. All authority is Yours. You are Judge. You are the Rock from whom all blessings flow. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

### ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*”

For the 2024–2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 1975, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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