



Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

Moses' Other Disobedience

In Numbers 20, the children of Israel had begun their forty-year wandering in the wilderness. They found themselves without water, and once again, they complained:

“If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord! Why have you brought the Lord’s assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here? Why have you made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water to drink.”

Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to them; and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink.”

So Moses took the rod from before the Lord, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and

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Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of the rock?" Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank.

But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." Those were the waters of Meribah, because the sons of Israel contended with the Lord, and He proved Himself holy among them.

This is a shocking passage, because we're not accustomed to seeing Moses on the receiving end of God's anger. The only one faithful to God, yes (Numbers 14:12); begging for God to forgive everyone else, sure (Exodus 32:7-14). But the object of God's anger, no! Still, Moses disobeyed, and so he suffered God's wrath as a result.

Thus, we learn that there is never a good excuse for disobedience. In fact, this episode is a particularly fruitful study, because we learn that God can get angry about disobedience even though there are many compelling extenuating circumstances:

Even Though Moses was God's Face-to-Face Friend

Deut. 34:10 and Num. 12:8 declare that no prophet was like Moses, for although the prophets heard God's message, only Moses knew the Lord "face to face." He had a relationship with God rivaled only by Christ's.

But that still didn't excuse his disobedience. Too often, we emphasize our friendship with God over our respect for God. While we can appreciate our intimacy, that through Christ we have become the very children of God (John 1:12, Rom. 8:15), we can never forget the great distance between God's holiness and our humanity. We'll never be so much God's buddy that we can ignore His commands.

Even Though Moses was Beat Up and Stressed Out

When reading the context, it seems that Moses struck the rock because He was angry at the Israelites' grumbling. Their constant moaning and

complaining had already worn out God “these ten times” (Numb. 14:22), and surely it had taken a toll on Moses, too.

Christians can never use the failings of the rest of God’s people as a reason to sin. Preachers will be tempted to say, “These people have done little for me, so I’m not going to put my best effort into these sermons and classes anymore.” Elders will be tempted to say, “After all this family has put us through, we’re going to leave them to their fate this time.” Wives will say, “I’m not going to cook his dinner if he won’t pick up his socks.”

We must not allow this spirit to slip in even one time! Christian love means always doing what is right, even when the object of our love is less than lovely. We must be faithful to God, even if our companions are not. Satan is the enemy in that case (2 Tim. 2:24).

Even Though Moses Only Disobeyed in One Small Detail

It takes a very careful re-reading to figure out what exactly Moses did wrong. Look again, and you’ll see that God told him to “speak to the rock,” but Moses “struck the rock.”

It’s impossible to know just what was in Moses’ heart, and what aspect of Moses’ sin so upset God. Maybe it was simple carelessness. Some have suggested that Moses’ real sin was presumptuousness and pride—glorying in his own power and authority rather than giving God the proper credit. In fact, God later mentioned this event to Moses, saying, “you broke faith with Me ... because you did not treat Me as holy in the midst of the sons of Israel” (Deut. 32:48–52).

Who knows for sure? But we know the actual deed, and can see the actual consequence. Its smallness is cautionary. Let us never say, “I’ve obeyed *most* of God’s will, so that’s good enough.” Any such thought is tantamount to complete rebellion.

Even Though Moses Did What God Asked on a Previous Occasion

What’s more, just a few years earlier, in very similar circumstances, God commanded Moses,

Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink (Exodus 17:5–6).

God commanded Moses to “strike the rock” the first time He provided water. Was it all that out of the ordinary for Moses to strike it the second time? Yes—for the simple fact that it wasn’t what God told Moses to do. Parents have often had to explain to children, “just because I asked you to take a shower in my bathroom last night, doesn’t mean I intended for you to take it in my bathroom this night.” Similarly, just because God was OK with instrumental music or Sabbath observance in the former covenant, doesn’t mean He intends for it in the present covenant. We must trust the wisdom of our heavenly Parent. He has good reasons to change the specifics of His commandments.

Even Though Moses’ Disobedient Actions Still Blessed the People

Ironically, God’s intended blessing still reached the people, even though God was upset with Moses himself. The water flowed, while God scolded Moses. Often, congregations can still manage to hear the truth out of the lips of a preacher motivated by greed or fame (see Phil. 1:12–20). Money obtained by criminal activity can still end up going to good causes (not that a church should knowingly accept it). Wonderful children can come from illicit relationships; even the Messiah from David’s affair with Bathsheeba.

While we can thank God that He can use sinful people to achieve righteous ends, we must understand that these ends never justify the means. Moses could have said, “Lord, You can’t be that upset, because the prayer for water still worked!” No, that was beside the point. Let us not make that mistake when evaluating our actions. —*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

“The one who keeps busy helping the man below him won’t have time to envy the man above him.”

—*Henrietta Mears*