

## ***Smiting the Rock - The Sin of Moses***

(Is it Serious to mistrust and misrepresent God?)

Numbers 20:1-13.

Doesn't God appear to be very arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving and severe in this story? God appears to be very considerate of the people but He seems very harsh on Moses. What had been Moses' role before the people? Didn't he almost stand in the place of God? Would one last minute lapse in faithfulness lead God to totally reject us?

What was Moses' sin at the rock? Did he disobey God? Did he get angry? Did he spoil God's symbol? Did he misrepresent God? Why did God not allow Moses into the promised land? Did He forgive Moses? If Moses was forgiven shouldn't he have been allowed to enter? It was only a short time after Moses' sin when he arrived in heaven. What do you think the angels said to him about this experience. What did he say to them?

Discussion:

Notice first of all what God said about the behavior of Moses and Aaron:

Numbers 20:12:

...Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. (*KJV*)

...Because you did not believe me, and because you did not honor me as holy before the people,  
*The New Century Version*

...Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, ... (*NASB*)

...Because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the people of Israel,... (*RSV*)

...Because you did not believe me and did not sanctify me in the eyes of the people of Israel,... *The Living Bible*

...Because you did not believe that I could proclaim my holiness in the eyes of the sons of Israel... (*Jerusalem*)

...Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people,...  
*Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures*

...Because you did not have-trust in me to treat-me-as-holy before the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore: you (two) shall not bring this assembly into the land that I am giving them! *The Five Books of Moses*

...Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites,... (*NIV*)

...You did not trust me so far as to uphold my holiness in the sight of the Israelites... (*NEB*)

...Because you did not trust me by paying me due honor in the presence of the Israelites... (*Smith-Goodspeed*)

...Because you did not have enough faith to acknowledge my holy power before the people of Israel... (*GNB*)

...You didn't trust me! You didn't show the Israelites how holy I am! So you will not bring this congregation into the land I'm giving them. *God's Word*

...Because you refused to believe in my power, these people did not respect me....(*CEV*)

Then the Lord said to Moses in the hearing of Aaron, 'Because you acted rashly and judged the people by calling them rebels, because you disobeyed me and struck the rock instead of speaking to it, and because you told the people that you would give them water confirming what they already believed—that you were the one who brought them out of Egypt, therefore, I will not let you lead these people into Canaan. They need to know that what you said is not true and what you did was not right. You have destroyed their faith in me. I am their Rock, not you.' (*The Clear Word*)

The most serious thing that Moses did was **not** disobeying God, the people had done a lot of that and they were allowed to go in. The most serious thing that Moses did was **not** spoiling a symbol, many symbols had been spoiled down through the years. The most serious thing Moses did was to misrepresent God before the people. Moses had come to stand in the place of God to the people. They had come to believe that whatever Moses did was God's will and represented God. So on this

occasion when God wanted to speak kindly to the people to win them by kindness (Romans 2:4) Moses spoke to them angrily instead.

How did God treat Moses after this? God was “just” by showing how seriously He regarded Moses’ sin. Even though Moses pleaded to be allowed to go in (Deuteronomy 1:27; 3:23-28) God needed to show that the sin that Moses had committed was serious not just because God was unhappy with it, but because it had serious consequences! But God’s mercy is shown so much more abundantly by the fact that He showed Moses the entire land of Canaan in vision from the top of Mt. Pisgah, and then He buried Moses, resurrected him (Jude 9), and took him to the heavenly Canaan! (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-36) Moses was even asked to come back down to this earth to encourage the Son of God when He was facing His toughest trial.

Misrepresenting God was the original sin of Satan! Satan came from God’s presence and said subtle things that misrepresented God. When Satan committed this very sin in heaven it started the great controversy! So what does it do to us and to others when we misrepresent God? What happens when we misrepresent God to our children? We stand in the same position to our young children as Moses did to the children of Israel! God had wanted to say something important about Himself to the people and Moses prevented it. How often do preachers misrepresent God in the pulpit? God had to show before the entire universe that what Moses had done was very serious.

On two previous occasions Moses had correctly represented God at key points. (See Exodus 32:7-14; Deuteronomy 9:6-13; 26-29; Numbers 14:11-16) One of the chief characteristics of a true friend is that they stick up for your reputation. And Moses was known as God’s best friend even speaking to Him face to face. (Exodus 33:11; Numbers 12:1-8; Deuteronomy 34:1-12)

What does it mean not to trust in God enough to represent Him correctly? Is our relationship with God important enough to us—do we really trust Him enough—to do what He tells us to do? How often do we commit this sin of Moses’? How many things does God ask us to do that seem trivial or not important to us but may be very serious in God’s eyes? The most basic definition of sin in the Bible is Romans 14:23: “Any action that is not based on faith is sin.” (*GNB*) When there is a breakdown in trust between God and us He **cannot** heal us! Do we want to be servants or do we want to be trusting friends?

This story makes it clear that the whole sin experiment is not about us and how God saves us. It is about God: His character, His government, and how He wants to relate to His children. So when Moses misrepresented God to the very people who had been chosen to correctly represent God to the entire world, it was very serious.

Bible References: Numbers 20:1-13; Exodus 17:1-7; Deuteronomy 1:37; 3:23-28; 34:1-8; Jude 9; Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-36; Ezra 10:2; Romans 1:18; 14:23  
Ellen White: *Patriarchs and Prophets* 471-490.

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#### EGW Comments

“Here Moses sinned. He became wearied with the continual murmurings of the people against him, and at the commandment of the Lord, took the rod, and, instead of speaking to the rock, as God commanded him, he smote it with the rod twice, after saying, “Must we fetch you water out of this rock?” **He here spoke unadvisedly with his lips.** He did not say, God will now show you another evidence of his power, and bring you water out of this rock. **He did not ascribe the power and glory to God for causing water to again flow from the flinty rock, and therefore did not magnify him before the people.** For this failure on the part of Moses, God would not permit him to lead the people to the promised land.

“This necessity for the manifestation of God’s power made the occasion one of great solemnity;

and **Moses and Aaron should have improved it to make a favorable impression upon the people. But Moses was stirred; and in impatience and anger with the people because of their murmurings, he said, "Hear, now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" In thus speaking, he virtually admitted to murmuring Israel that they were correct in charging him with leading them from Egypt.** God had forgiven the people greater transgressions than this error upon the part of Moses; but he could not regard a sin in a leader of his people as in those who were led. He could not excuse the sin of Moses, and permit him to enter the promised land.

"The Lord here gave his people unmistakable proof that he who had wrought such a wonderful deliverance for them in bringing them from Egyptian bondage, was the mighty Angel, and not Moses, who was going before them in all their travels, and of whom he had said, "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice; provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions; for my name is in him." Moses took glory to himself which belonged to God, and made it necessary for God to do that in his case which should forever satisfy rebellious Israel that it was not Moses who has led them from Egypt, but God himself. The Lord had committed to Moses the burden of leading his people, while the mighty Angel went before them in all their journeyings, and directed all their travels. Because they were so ready to forget that God was leading them by his Angel, and to ascribe to man that which God's power alone could perform, he had proved them, and tested them, to see whether they would obey him. At every trial they failed. Instead of believing in, and acknowledging, God, who had strown their path with evidences of his power, and signal tokens of his care and love, they distrusted him, and ascribed their leaving Egypt to Moses, charging him as the cause of all their disasters. Moses had borne with their stubbornness with remarkable forbearance. At one time they threatened to stone him.

"The Lord would remove this impression forever from their minds, by forbidding Moses to enter the promised land. The Lord had highly exalted Moses. He had revealed to him his great glory. He had taken him into a sacred nearness with himself upon the mount, and had condescended to talk with him as a man speaketh with a friend. He had communicated to Moses, and through him to the people, his will, his statutes and his laws. His being thus exalted and honored of God made his error of greater magnitude. Moses repented of his sin, and humbled himself greatly before God. He related to all Israel his sorrow for his sin. The result of his sin he did not conceal, but told them that for thus failing to ascribe glory to God, he could not lead them to the promised land. He then asked them, if this error upon his part was so great as to be thus corrected of God, how God would regard their repeated murmurings in charging him (Moses) with the uncommon visitations of God because of their sins." *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 310-312

"But Moses was provoked with the people because of their unreasonable course, and he spoke hastily in anger." RH December 9, 1909

"Aaron and Moses both sinned in not giving glory and honor to God at the waters of Meribah. They were both wearied and provoked with the continual complaining of Israel, and, at a time when God was to mercifully display His glory to the people, to soften and subdue their hearts and lead them to repentance, Moses and Aaron claimed the power of opening the rock for them." 3T 301,302

**"The sins of good men, whose general deportment has been worthy of imitation, are peculiarly offensive to God. They cause Satan to triumph, and to taunt the angels of God with the failings of God's chosen instruments, and give the unrighteous occasion to lift themselves up against God.** The Lord had himself led Moses in a special manner, and had revealed to him his glory, as to no other upon the earth. He was naturally impatient, but had taken hold firmly [40] of the grace of God, and so humbly implored wisdom from Heaven, that he was strengthened from God, and had overcome his impatience so that he was called of God the meekest man upon the face of the whole earth." *Spiritual Gifts* Volume 4A, pg. 39,40

“Moses smote the rock in wrath and took the glory to himself. The continual waywardness and murmuring of the children of Israel had caused him the keenest sorrow, and for a little time he forgot how much the Lord had borne with them, and that their murmuring was not against him, but against God. He thought only of himself, how deeply he was wronged, and how little gratitude they manifested in return for his deep love for them.” *Early Writings* 163

“More than this, Moses and Aaron had assumed power that belongs only to God. The necessity for divine interposition made the occasion one of great solemnity, and the leaders of Israel should have improved it to impress the people with reverence for God and to strengthen their faith in His power and goodness. When they angrily cried, “Must **we** fetch you water out of this rock?” they put themselves in God’s place, as if the power lay in themselves. **By these words they greatly dishonored Christ, their invisible Leader. God, not man, should have been glorified.** The Lord reproved these leaders, and declared that they should not enter the Promised Land. Before the Hebrew host He demonstrated that the sin of the leader was greater than the sin of those who were led.--Manuscript 169, Oct. 12, 1903; *The Upward Look* 299

“The water gushed forth in abundance to satisfy the host. **But a great wrong had been done. Moses had spoken from irritated feeling; his words were an expression of human passion rather than of holy indignation because God had been dishonored.** “Hear now, ye rebels,” he said. This accusation was true, but even truth is not to be spoken in passion or impatience. When God had bidden Moses to charge upon Israel their rebellion, the words had been painful to him, and hard for them to bear, yet God had sustained him in delivering the message. But when he took it upon himself to accuse them, he grieved the Spirit of God and wrought only harm to the people. His lack of patience and self-control was evident. Thus the people were given occasion to question whether his past course had been under the direction of God, and to excuse their own sins. Moses, as well as they, had offended God. His course, they said, had from the first been open to criticism and censure. They had now found the pretext which they desired for rejecting all the reproofs that God had sent them through His servant.

“Moses manifested distrust of God. ‘Shall we bring water?’ he questioned, as if the Lord would not do what He promised. ‘Ye believed Me not,’ the Lord declared to the two brothers, ‘to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel.’ At the time when the water failed, their own faith in the fulfillment of God’s promise had been shaken by the murmuring and rebellion of the people. The first generation had been condemned to perish in the wilderness because of their unbelief, yet the same spirit appeared in their children. Would these also fail of receiving the promise? Wearied and disheartened, Moses and Aaron had made no effort to stem the current of popular feeling. **Had they themselves manifested unwavering faith in God, they might have set the matter before the people in such a light as would have enabled them to bear this test. By prompt, decisive exercise of the authority vested in them as magistrates, they might have quelled the murmuring. It was their duty to put forth every effort in their power to bring about a better state of things before asking God to do the work for them. Had the murmuring at Kadesh been promptly checked, what a train of evil might have been prevented!**” *Patriarchs and Prophets* 417,418