

The Sin Of Moses

Numbers 20:2-13

Introduction

1. Reading: Numbers 20:1-2

- a. It is 40th year of Israel wandering in the wilderness, after refusing at the Lord's command to enter the land of Canaan at the first occasion, recorded in chapter 14.
- b. For their unfaithfulness, that generation is condemned to wander in the wilderness 40 years until they all died.
- c. This chapter begins with the death of Miriam, Moses' sister, most probably from natural death rather for sin.
- d. Another situation has arisen; there is a lack of water and the people have assembled against Moses and Aaron.
- e. The chapter then goes on to describe a sin Moses commits that explains why he - a great leader and example of a faithful servant of God - is ultimately removed as leader of Israel and replaced by Joshua, who leads Israel into the Promised Land.

2. This lesson will focus on the sin of Moses, the circumstances surrounding it, and the lessons we can learn.

I. Context of the Sin (vv.2-5)

- A. As a result of there being a lack or insufficient water the people turn their frustration on Moses and Aaron.
 1. Instead of trusting God, they complain and accuse of Moses of leading them into the wilderness to die.
 2. They wished they had perished as they countrymen did before God - Korah's rebellion?
 3. They asked why he had led us out of Egypt where there was plenty into the harsh and barren desert.
- B. It is the same language used by the previous generation 40 years earlier - Exodus 17:1-4 also 15:23-24
 1. This new generation seems not to have learned anything about the sin of complaining and its consequences
 2. Like their parents, they failed to trust in God and remember His kindness and provision.
 3. It is that this sort of mindset that leads to constant complaining about life's challenges rather than rejoicing in our blessings.
- C. Are we guilty of the same - 1 Corinthians 10:10-11 and Philippians 2:14-15
 1. "So that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:10-14).
- D. When life gets difficult let's us not complain and be discouraged; let us rejoice for the forgiveness of sin and hope of heaven.

II. God's Instruction (vv.6-8)

- A. After, it seems, calmly withdrawing from the mob and approaching God for guidance, Moses is given a simple set of instructions.
 1. Take the rod - that had budded and had been deposited in the tabernacle - cp. Numbers 17:10
 2. Assemble the people - most likely or primarily the leaders
 3. Speak to the rock - speak what?
- B. Moses has simply to speak to the rock to bring forth water for the people - excess of 1 million - and the multitude of beasts and cattle.
- C. God was going to demonstrate before the eyes of the people His great power and mercy and love for this new generation of Israelites.

III. Moses' Sin (vv.9-11)

A. Moses follows God commands: takes up the rod and assembles the people. That's where his faithfulness ends.

1. Instead of speaking to the rock, Moses speaks to the people and strikes the rock, not once but twice
2. He is not commanded to speak to people, or to use the rod against; but simply to speak to the rock.
3. However, despite that God stills brings water from the rock, displaying His power and love for His people.

B. "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

IV. God's Judgment (vv.12-13)

A. God specifies the sin of Moses and Aaron and the consequences of His sin; removal as leader and denial to the Land of Canaan, both he and Aaron.

1. They did not believe, to treat God as holy.
2. The idea is not that Moses did not believe in God's power; but he became disloyal.
3. Moses is said to have broke faith with God - Deuteronomy 32:48-52

B. The miracle was meant to demonstrate God's patience and power; a moment to glorify God rather than a moment of anger.

1. "For in the wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to treat Me as holy before their eyes at the water. (These are the waters of Meribah of Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.)" (Numbers 27:14 NASB).
2. "They also provoked Him to wrath at the waters of Meribah, So that it went hard with Moses on their account; Because they were rebellious against His Spirit, He spoke rashly with his lips" (Psalms 106:32-33).

C. God was still able to achieve His objective of proving Himself holy before the people, despite Moses' failure to follow orders.

V. Lesson for Ourselves

A. Personal provocation does not give me license to sin

1. Moses was angry at God's people and openly expressed his anger at them - Adam Clarke says this literally means 'he was transported with anger'
2. Notice his outburst: He called them rebels - indicating they were not deserving of anything good
3. He may have had legitimate cause for anger: they constant complaining; this generation is just like their fathers - ungrateful
4. This is quite out of character for Moses described as more humble as any man, proving that none is beyond sin and temptation - Numbers 12:3
5. But even when we are genuinely wronged, God requires righteousness and self control.
6. "... my beloved brethren...everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20).
7. "BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Ephesians 4:26 NASB).
8. The lesson here is self control rather than being controlled by anger.

B. Details matter to God

1. On the first occasion, God was specific on what Moses was to do, and Moses was careful to do it; on this occasion God was specific on what Moses was to do; but Moses was not careful to do.
2. We are to be careful to do all that God command us.
3. As individual Christians and as a church we cannot choose between the commands of God and decide on their level of importance; conditions of salvation, church worship and organization, the qualifications of elders etc.
4. Many seem to think we are authorized to do anything God as not expressly forbidden or is silent about.
5. "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10).

C. Outward success is not evidence of God's approval

1. Just because we are successful in life and even in religion; it does not mean God is pleased with us.
2. The fact that water was brought from the rock did not mean or should Moses have thought it meant that God was pleased with him.
3. Many seem to think physical success is proof that we are right with God - this thinking is flawed.
4. "So that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45).
5. The church at Laodicea: "Because you say, I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17).

D. Sorrow and repentance do not necessarily remove the consequences of our actions

1. Though God forgave the sin; He did not remove the physical consequences - Deuteronomy 3:23-29
2. Moses pleaded with God to alter His decision regarding going into Canaan; but God would have none of it.
3. The same was true in the case of David and Bathsheba - God forgave David, but he suffered the consequences of the loss of a son and family infighting that followed.
4. Sorrow and repentance are good and necessary forgiveness but do not in themselves remove the consequences of our actions and our sins.

Conclusion

1. The sin of Moses reminds us that even the most faithful among us can commit the most egregious sin.
2. We do not read that Moses repented or that he was forgiven; only that afterward he continued in God's service and later appeared at the Christ's transfiguration, which suggests that both repented and was forgiven of his sin, and ultimately saved.
3. The ultimate lesson for us is that when we sin or our sin is drawn to our attention God is merciful to forgive and welcome us back into His fold.