

Moses - 8 - The Sin of Moses

Four different times during the life of Moses the wickedness and rebellion of the people led God to threaten / offer to destroy Israel and begin again with Moses. Each time Moses interceded and asked God to pardon.

1. After the Golden Calf

They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'" 9 And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! 10 Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation." Ex 32:8-10

Moses Intercession and God's Forgiveness

Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: "Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" 14 So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people. Ex 32:11-14

2. After the Twelve Spies Returned

Then the Lord said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? 12 I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they." 13 And Moses said to the Lord: "Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, 14 and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. Num 14:11-14

Moses Intercession and God's Forgiveness

And Moses said to the Lord: "Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, 14 and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, Lord, are among these people; that You, Lord, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 Now if You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying, 16 'Because the Lord was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness.' 17 And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, 18 'The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.' 19 Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now." 20 Then the Lord said: "I have pardoned, according to your word; Num 14:13-21

3. Twice in the Rebellion of Korah - First when Korah gathered the Congregation

And Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation. 20 And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 21 "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." Num 16:19-21

Moses Intercession

Then they fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?" Num 16:22

4. Second, after God made an Example of Korah and Israel Rejected it.

On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the Lord." 42 Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared. 43 Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting. 44 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 45 "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." Num 16:41-45

Moses Intercession

So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the Lord. The plague has begun." 47 Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. 48 And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped. Num 16:46-49

In spite of all Moses had done in the past to help and protect the children of Israel, even Moses was finally worn down by their rebellion and lack of faith in God. While God's wrath was measured and

focused, Moses wrath did not work the righteousness of God.

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. James 1:19-20

1. Moses was provoked (Num 20:1-8)

The children of Israel wanted something they did not have. "There was no water for the congregation." Instead of asking God for water with a humble and grateful heart, "they gathered together against Moses and Aaron," and "contended with Moses." They then made serious charges against them. "Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness," "why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place?" Israel blamed Moses and Aaron for all their problems. Instead of repentance and a patient waiting, they wished they were dead. This murmuring began at the Red Sea (Ex 14:10-12), and was their reaction every time they were forced to face adversity.

At the Red Sea

Then they said to Moses, "**Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness?** Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? 12 Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, '**Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?**' For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness." Ex 14:11-12

When Hungry

Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 And the children of Israel said to them, "**Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.**" Ex 16:2-3

When Thirsty

Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, "Give us water, that we may drink." So Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the Lord?" 3 And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "**Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?**" 4 So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!" Ex 17:2-4

General Murmuring

Now when **the people complained**, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp. 2 Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched. 3 So he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the Lord had burned among them. Num 11:1-3

Mixed multitude yielded to intense craving

Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat? 5 **We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6 but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!**" Num 11:4-6

After the spies returned

And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "**if only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?**" 4 So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt." Num 14:2-4

Murmuring about Discouragement

Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. 5 **And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread."** 6 So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. 7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. Num 21:4-7

We must learn not to "murmur as some of them" (I Cor 10:10). When we feel anger or frustration over something the apostles taught, we accept it as the word of God (1Th 2:14) and we do not murmur!

In all these previous acts of rebellion, Moses and Aaron had conducted themselves as holy men of God. They warned Israel that their murmuring was against God and they never took it personally. This time

was different. They became angry. Many who have gone to a brother to help, and been personally attacked for it, can empathize with Moses. Yet such anger must be carefully contained. It is very dangerous for it led Moses to lose sight of his reverence and respect toward God and his commandments.

God saw what Moses did in his anger as a lack of reverence and obedience toward him. Most of us have seen this today. A brother or sister, offended by mistreatment by another in the church, decides "I will never worship with them again." So they take out their anger against a brother on God (Heb 10:23-25). When anger against sin leads us to commit sin we have done as Moses. No matter how unfairly we are treated by brethren it must never affect our service to God.

2. Moses and Aaron went to God for instructions 20:6-9

Moses had been faithful to God from the moment he entered Egypt, always submissive and obedient. The Holy Spirit summed up his life: "*And Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant*" (Heb 3:5). After hearing their murmuring, complaints and accusations, "*Moses and Aaron went ... to the door of the tent of meeting, and fell upon their faces.*" They waited for God's judgment and instructions. God told them to "*take the rod; ... gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.*" Clearly there was nothing difficult to understand or to do in these commands.

3. The Sin of Moses and Aaron 20:10-11

From subsequent events, it is clear that Moses was filled with righteous indignation. It does not appear that the anger occurred in God's presence. So it either developed on the way to pick up the rod or after he again came among them. "*Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock; and he said to them, Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock? Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.*"

Some time later, "*Jehovah said unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed not in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.*" God charged them with insubordination. Their conduct had publicly displayed a lack of reverence and respect. God determined that this needed an equally public punishment. As punishment for this sin, both would die before entering the promised land.

What did Moses do wrong?

God said Moses "*failed to sanctify me in the eyes of the people,*" but did not specify exactly what this failure was. First, Moses fell into the same error as Nadab and Abihu. They offered "*strange fire which he had not commanded them*" (Lev 10:2). God had told Moses to "*speak to the rock,*" but the account states "*Moses lifted up his hand, and smote the rock with his rod twice.*" Clearly, Moses did more than God commanded. He had no authority to strike that rock. As Paul later warned the Corinthians, Moses had to learn not to "*go beyond what is written,*" (1Cor 4:6). He was told to speak to the rock (which he did not do), but given no authority to strike the rock. God later charged him with this error: "*ye rebelled against my word at the waters of Meribah*"

"Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. Num 20:24-25

For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes." (These are the waters of Meribah, at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.) Num 27:14

At God's word he could "speak to the rock," but in rebellion he struck it.

Added to this was a second sin. The Psalmist revealed that "*it went ill with Moses*" because "*he spake unadvisedly with his lips.*"

They angered Him also at the waters of strife, So that it went ill with Moses on account of them; 33 Because they rebelled against His Spirit, So that he spoke rashly (unadvisedly asv) with his lips. Ps. 106:32-33

What did he say? "*Hear now, ye rebels; shall **we** bring you forth water out of this rock?*" This was a serious failure. There was a problem with that "**we**." By striking the rock and using this pronoun Moses "*believed not in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel.*"

Moses sin established the truth that specific commands must be obeyed exactly as given without human input. When the organization of the church or its worship is modified because God didn't say we couldn't, we are following in the steps of Moses. The truth is that if God doesn't say we can, then we cannot. If Moses could not strike a rock, then elders must not oversee any portion (even the money) of any flock "*not among them.*" (1Pet 5:1-4).

The Results

Though some today believe that the ends can justify the means and if good comes from an addition to God's commands God will be so pleased with results he will overlook the means. Clearly the results of

Moses actions were exactly what he hoped for, the water came from the rock. By today's reasoning, Moses must be right because it resulted in good. Clearly God saw it very differently. Moses and Aaron were sinning in the manner in which they fulfilled the command.

The water coming of the rock did nothing to remove the guilt nor the consequences of their sin. No matter how much good comes from sin, sin still destroys the one practicing it. Those who say "*let us do evil that good may come*" will be those whose "*condemnation is just,*" (Rom 3:8) It was Jesus who quoted Isaiah and applied it to his own generation "*And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*" No amount of good can change that! When Moses used a command of men to strike a rock he "*believed not in me, to sanctify me.*"

Moses was Forgiven, but the Consequences Remained

It is important to see this application of Moses sin. Though the water came, Moses was severely punished. Punished in a way that no amount of repentance could remove. "*And I besought Jehovah at that time... **Let me go over, I pray thee, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But Jehovah was wroth with me for your sakes, and hearkened not unto me; and Jehovah said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter***" (Deut 3:23-27).

That God forgave the sin is obvious. Moses appeared in glory with Elijah and spoke to Jesus when he was transfigured (Lk 9:28-31). But repentance did not remove the consequences. Though Moses continued to plead with God about these consequences, God finally told him, "*speak no more unto me of this matter.*"

Many today would do well to hear God on this. All sins can be forgiven. But the consequences of some sins can't be removed by God's forgiveness. Those who seek to avoid the consequences of their sin by saying "God would want me to be happy" are ignoring the lesson taught from the sin of Moses.

We can grieve with Moses over the consequences of his sin, and we can learn to respect God's judgment over such conduct. "*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*" (Eph 2:10).