

The Knowing

(what the person knew)

Moses knew

that he was to speak to the rock (Num. 20:8) rather than striking it as he had done in an earlier similar setting (Ex. 17:5-6).

Moses would have remembered

at least some things about the earlier water-from-the-rock incident in Exodus chapter 17, but perhaps he did not realize that striking the rock was somewhat like striking the Lord himself as implied in Exodus 17:6. (Also see 1 Cor. 10:4!)

Moses had “muscle memory”

of using his rod to strike things such as the Nile River in Egypt (Ex. 7:20). Moreover, the Lord directly told Moses to take the rod with him (Num. 20:8).

Moses knew the people well,

especially the fact that they were rebellious. Psalm 106 has much to say about this. So it is no surprise that Moses was thinking negatively in Num. 20:10.

The Doing

(what the person did)

Moses spoke rashly

to the sinful people (Psa. 106:33) about needing to bring water from the rock (Num. 20:10). He did not speak rashly earlier in Exodus 17:1-7.

Moses struck the rock twice

rather than speaking to it as he was commanded to do (Num. 20:8, 11). This was done in anger because of the bad attitude of the people (Psa. 106:33), since Moses was mainly thinking of them and himself at the time.

Moses acted hastily

rather than slowly and thoughtfully. He might have realized that there was something wrong after no water came from the rock after he first struck it. However, there was probably very little time for thought between the two strikes. He probably instinctively quickly struck the rock the second time. Angry people naturally keep on hitting things, rather than stopping to think about using a different approach.

The Overcoming

(what God did / will do)

God could have provided

water without using a human leader, as he did for Hagar (Gen. 21:19). By using Moses, however, God pointed to the future Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 8:6).

God stopped Moses

from striking the rock three or more times, by providing water after the second strike. The Lord was not reluctant to meet the need. Rather he wished to show that the future striking of the Messiah was to be a one-time event (Zec. 13:7, Heb. 9:28).

God rebuked Moses

and Aaron for dishonoring Him (20:12), and this was probably done in front of the people. If the national leaders had not been publically rebuked for their sin, the honor of the Lord would not have been upheld properly (20:13). Moreover God did not allow Moses and Aaron to enter the promised land because they acted in unbelief (20:12), speaking of themselves rather than God in 20:10.

Ultimately, Moses’ failure was overcome by the once-for-all death of Christ. In fact, Moses and Elijah apparently discussed this with the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:30-31).

The Problem

(what went wrong)

Moses’ sin of dishonoring God regarding the rock was because of unbelief (Num. 20:12). This involved emotionally focusing on the people and self-effort rather than upon God and his Word. Though usually clear minded and prayerful, on this special occasion Moses did not think clearly / biblically. © 2023 by Jon Mahar, Hakusan, Japan