

## The Hebrew Corner

The Tanach records a passage which describes Moses committing a sin, for which God disqualifies him from leading the Israelites into the promised land of Canaan, across the Jordan River. A common explanation for this among evangelists and other biblical speakers, was that Moses was disobedient to God's directive to speak to the rock to bring forth God's provision of water, instead of striking the rock as he did. A closer look at scripture clarifies the sin of Moses in this situation. First, let's look at the passage (Numbers 20:2-12):

“And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us into this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink. And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear

now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, 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.”

Two Hebrew words within this passage help to give us a better understanding of this matter. The verb form ehmantem (אִמַּנְתֶּם, eh-mahn-TEHM) means in English, you stood firm, you trusted, or you believed, referring to you in the plural (note: amen comes from the same root). It is preceded by the word lo (לֹא, LO) meaning not, and followed by the Hebrew word be (בִּי, BEE), meaning in me. So a better translation might be, “you did not stand firm in me”, or “you did not trust in me”, or “you did not believe in me.”

So Moses and Aaron did not fully trust, stand firm, or believe in God. What is the evidence of this? The Hebrew word following this is l'haqdashaynee (לְהַקְדִּישָׁנִי, luh-hahk-dee-SHAY-nee), the meaning of which in English is to sanctify me, containing the root word qadash (קָדַשׁ, kah-DAHSH) meaning to be set apart, hallowed. Notice that in the passage, neither Aaron nor Moses mentioned God. This is in contrast to the response of Moses after God had led the Israelites through the parted Red Sea (Exodus 15:1-2):

“Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my

father's God, and I will exalt him.”

Here Moses and the Israelites are giving him the full glory for his achievement. More light is shed on Moses' sin in the following passage (Psalm 106:32-33):

“They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.”

The key Hebrew word here is from the verb *batah* (בטא, bah-TAH), which means to speak rashly or thoughtlessly. Moses clearly was angered by the complaints of the people. Going back to the first passage, we see that Moses, before striking the rock, spoke out, “must we fetch you water out of this rock?” Moses spoke these words rashly out of anger, giving both himself and Aaron credit for bringing water forth from the rock, and not glorifying, sanctifying, or even mentioning the name of God. This was clearly Moses sin. The sin of Aaron was of a different sort, one of omission. He did not speak up to correct Moses, and give the proper honor to God for the provision. Neither man stood firm or trusted in God in this incident.

This is an object lesson for all of us. God is able to do mighty works in any one of us, but we must be sure to give God all the praise for the work that is done. Even a man such as Moses, who was identified in Deuteronomy as the meekest man on the face of the earth, was subject to forgetting who it was that gave him the ability. In addition, this story teaches us to speak up for what is right, when the situation demands it.

May you and your family have a blessed month, under God's love and protection.