

The Fall of a Great Leader as Illustrated in the Life of Moses

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One distinctive feature that sets the Bible apart from other historical writings is its relentless willingness to mention the transgressions of its heroes. Even Moses, who without a doubt, is regarded as the greatest and most dynamic of the OT prophets and leaders, does not have his failures omitted. He was one who was tremendously used of God and yet one who fell into sin. Lessons can be learned from the sin of Moses for the benefit of God's leaders today. Such lessons will aid the leader when pressures mount; will guard against the hideous sin of unbelief; will reveal the increased demands that come with the title "leader;" and will warn against the high cost of disobedience paid by God's leaders who sin.

The Pressure of Difficulties on Leadership

In Difficulty People-Pressure is Inevitable

In Numbers 20:1-5, Moses the leader faces the pressure that comes when difficulty arrives. After 37 years had passed, the stage seems set for history to repeat itself, when the second generation appears no different from the first in their complaint about a lack of water at Kadesh. Why did God allow the situation regarding the lack of water to occur in the first place? What was His purpose?

First, the second generation was to be put to the test in order to find out whether it was better than the first; second, Yahweh's greatness and might were to be impressed upon them by His ability and readiness to help them in their hour of need in order to prove Himself as the God of their covenant. By purposely creating a situation in which the people lacked water (a most precious commodity in the desert), Yahweh causes the second generation to realize their dependence upon Him, as well as His readiness to help them as He had done to their fathers.¹

Difficult times tend to come all at once. This appears to have been the case with Moses. At Kadesh, Moses experienced pressure from all angles. In verse one, Miriam's death no doubt was a burden to Moses. The absence of water not only would cause irritation among the nation of Israel, but also with the leadership of Moses and Aaron (v 2). The effect of this great need was collective opposition (v 2b) and verbal strife (*rib*).

This opposition apparently was initiated by "ringleaders" who called and assembled the people together. Moses faced verbal complaint in verse three by the people who cried out, "If only we had expired or breathed out (*gara*) our lives when our brethren died before the Lord!" In other words, they were implying that "anything would be better than this!" More pressure is added in verses 4 and 5 as Moses' motives are questioned and he is credited (blamed) for a work that he did not do. It was God not Moses and Aaron who led Israel out into the wilderness. And it was the sin of Israel that resulted in her roaming around in the desert for 40 years; it was not Moses' fault. Moses also faced internal pressure as he recalled the last experience at Kadesh 37 years earlier. He was very concerned that Israel would produce a repeat performance, incur God's judgment again and restrict him from ever entering the land as he so greatly desired.

In Difficulty God's Prescription is Indispensable

The leaders, Moses and Aaron, did what all of God's leaders should do in times of pressure and need -- they entered God's presence and sought Divine answers (v 6). "They fell upon their faces; and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them." God then gave Moses and Aaron exact prescriptions (commands) which in turn demanded exact obedience (v 8). Moses is explicitly told 1) to take

the rod, 2) to assemble the congregation, and 3) both Moses and Aaron were to speak to the rock.²

It is interesting that God told Moses to take "the rod" with him, since he was not to use it, though he did use his rod in other miracles involving water (Num 7:20, 14:16). This time, however, "Moses took the rod from before the LORD." This phrase points to the same rod that budded in order to vindicate the Aaronic priesthood. After this event, it was then kept "before the testimony to be kept as a sign against the rebels" so that God might put an end to Israel's grumblings (Num 17:10). Now Israel is grumbling again, so God tells Moses to get the rod to remind the nation about her former sin of grumbling.

Moses did obey with exact obedience on two of the three commands. He took the rod (v 9) and he with Aaron gathered the congregation together to witness the miracle that God intended to perform. If Moses had obeyed the third command exactly, it would have been a testimony to the people who witnessed. The act of speaking to the rock by its unusual nature would draw attention to the rock and not to Moses. This indeed was God's intention, for the NT describes this rock as none other than Jesus Christ (I Cor 10:4). Thus "speaking to the rock" would reveal the rock as being the source of water and not the efforts of Moses. Moses, however, failed in regard to the third imperative.

The Sin of Disbelief by Leadership

Attitude: Disbelief Manifested in Mood

In the Bible, God speaks of leaders who had moments of unbelief. Such lack of faith manifested itself in despair, such as Elijah who fled from Jezebel and John the Baptist who had moments of doubt concerning Christ. In Numbers 20:10, God records Moses as one who also manifested a lack of complete trust in Yahweh by the attitude he displayed. In this verse he "shows his exasperation, his famous temper (cf Exod 2:11-12), and his astonishing egotism."³ "The faithful servant of God, worn out with the numerous temptations, allowed himself to be overcome, so that he stumbled, and did not sanctify the Lord."⁴ Moses, who needed at this point to fully trust God for patience and self-control did not.

Moses was about to sin internally which like 'slippery steps' would lead to outward disobedience. In verse 10, he displays three

sinful attitudes: 1) impatience, 2) anger, and 3) pride or self-exaltation. His impatience is evidenced by his abrupt appeal for Israel to "listen." His anger is seen as he addresses them as "rebels."⁵ Though his description was accurate and true, his tenor was one of anger. Psalm 106:32-33 describes Moses as having been "provoked to wrath at the waters of Meribah . . . [and] because they were rebellious against his spirit, he spoke rashly with his lips." A man's anger never exhibits the righteous behavior that God expects (James 1:20). In his self-righteous anger, Moses then displayed a spirit of pride and independence by his question, "Shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" Moses' downfall began when he took additional presumptuous action and spoke to the people (v 10) about their quarrels, threats, and unjustified arguments, rather than doing exclusively what God said; namely, "speak to the rock" (v 8).

Presumption: Disbelief Manifested in Word

Moses' "rash words" mentioned in Psalm 106:32-33 are the words reflected in his implication that he and Aaron had the power to provide water out of the rock. Such pride by its very nature fails to foster true belief in and reverence for Yahweh. Many argue that the word "we" in verse 10 refers not to Moses and Aaron but to Moses and God. The most obvious antecedents to the plural pronoun "we" however are Moses and Aaron. The "we" is blasphemous, nonetheless, whether Moses intended it to refer to himself and Aaron or even to himself and God. The Bible is clear that it was God not Moses, who provided the water out of the rock. In Psalm 78 it is evident that God "split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them abundant drink like the ocean depths. He brought forth streams also from the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers" (vv 15, 16; cf Isa 48:21). Moses not only usurped God's place in word ("we") but this led also to deed ("he smote the rock").

Disobedience: Disbelief Manifested in Action

In the Bible, God shows no distinction between faith or trust and obedience. Faith always results in obedience and unbelief always results in disobedience. Such was the case with Moses. In Numbers 20:12, God's response to Moses' disobedience reveals his disbelief. The Lord said, "You did not believe [trust in] Me."

Commands omitted. The external manifestation of Moses' sin was two-fold: 1) He did what he was not told to do --- he struck

the rock, and 2) He did not do what he was told to do --- speak to the rock. Omitting from God's commands is just as dangerously wrong as adding to them.

It is important to note that an omission will eventually pave the way for an addition. Because Aaron was Moses' translator (Exod 4:14-17), Moses was to speak to the rock and Aaron was to repeat his words loud enough for all of the people to hear. The sin was not merely in Moses' striking of the rock, but in both his and Aaron's failure to "speak to" it. If the sin was exclusively in Moses' striking of the rock, the transgression of Aaron could not be explained (v 12). This truth reveals that sins of omission are just as costly as sins actually committed outwardly.

Sins committed. Along with Moses' failure to speak to the rock as commanded (v 8) his disobedience is seen in his action of striking it. God by commanding Moses to speak to the rock "before the eyes" of Israel intended the people to rejoice at the sight of abundant water and to

doubly and trebly rejoice at the knowledge that their God is with them and is showing Himself by one of his happiest miracles. It is this circumstance which Moses, in a fit of indignation, turns into a bitter denunciation; he curses the people, and in smiting the magic rod against the rock, destroys the hallowed moment that God had so clearly intended.⁶

In order to honor God as "being holy," trust or belief is a prerequisite. The idea in the original is that Moses did not have enough trust in God to treat Him as being holy (v 12). His striking the stone revealed a lack of faith. It had been striking the rock that brought results the last time God provided water for the people (Exod 17:6). Consequently, this time, rather than obeying God's new directions and "speaking to it," Moses struck it and for good measure he struck it twice. Moses' act of striking the rock twice was so done as if producing water "depended upon human exertion, and not upon the power of God alone."⁷ Moses' disobedience revealed his failure to trust God's faithfulness to His word.

In summary, Moses' sin was an unbelief that manifested itself in: 1) mood, 2) words, and 3) action. His anger, which served as a catalyst, prompted him to utter words he was not to speak. Moses' pride underlies his question "must we bring forth water . . ." and detracted from Yahweh's exclusive ability to provide the necessary

water. His forceful striking of the rock twice indicates his continued anger as well as his lack of faith in regard to the ability and good will of God to provide water the way He intended. Moses' reaction as a whole was diametrically opposed to the plan and intention of Yahweh which Moses was made to understand very clearly.⁸

The Increased Demands of Leadership

Leaders are Responsible to Pay for Their Own Sin

Deuteronomy 1:37 has caused much controversy concerning the time Moses' sin and restriction from the land took place. In this verse Moses says, "Also the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither." In the context (vv 34-40) of verse 37, Moses is basically recalling the unbelief coupled with grumbling and complaining of Israel when they refused to enter the land after hearing the bad report of the ten spies (Num 14:28-30). At that time God took an oath saying, "Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give your fathers" (Deut 1:35). The only exceptions were Caleb (v 36) and Joshua (v 38); Moses was not even included as one of the exceptions. Although Moses did not have part in the unbelief evidenced at the time Israel refused to enter the land (Num 14:26-27), the implication from verse 35 is that God in His foreknowledge knew Moses also would not enter the Promised Land. Though the announcement of Moses' exclusion from the land occurred 38 years after that of the Israelites at Kadesh, the reason for the exclusions was the same --- unbelief. While Israel refused to believe God's word at Kadesh (Num 14:22-23; Deut 1:32), Moses refused to believe God's word by the waters of Meribah at Kadesh (Num 20:12).

The phrase "for your sakes" (v 37) still needs explanation. The phrase, which occurs two other times in Deuteronomy (3:26; 4:21) seems to show that Moses is shifting the blame for God's anger and judgment toward him. The questions that must be answered are: When was God angry with Moses because of Israel? And when did God say, "not even you shall enter there"? Basically two views are held to by theologians brave enough not to by-pass this perplexity.

One view bases its position on the proposition that leadership bears full responsibility for the sins of the people it leads. For

example, an employer whose worker makes a mistake stands fully responsible for that error.

The reason for Moses' exclusion from the promised land, in this context (Deut. 1:34-39), seems to be directly related to his responsibility for the Israelites (i.e. "on your account") before the Lord. Although Moses was personally without blame for the failures of the Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea, his identification with the people as their leader meant that he also accepted with them the result of their failure.⁹

This view asserts that Moses' restriction from the land was because of corporate guilt, not individual guilt. That is, Moses as the representative of Israel was corporately restricted from entering the land while at Kadesh-Barnea (Num 14:22-39), while being proven and declared to be individually guilty by his own personal unbelief and rebellion 38 years later (Num 20:12-13). Those who espouse this interpretation make the application that sin affects others. When the ten spies lacked faith and sinned, Israel also sinned. The national sin left its toll on Moses who was forensically restricted from entering the Promised Land "on account of" Israel.

Whereas, in I Kings 14:16, the people are punished because of the leader's apostasy, in Deuteronomy 1:37, 3:26, 4:21, the leader is punished because of the peoples' lack of faith. This truth, is further evidenced in II Kings 8:19, where Judah is preserved by God "on account of David His servant's sake."¹⁰

While this view does contain elements of truth, it conflicts with God's principle that "everyone shall die for his own sin" (Jer 31:30; Ezek 18:19-24).

According to a second view, in Deuteronomy 1:37 it, at first glance, appears that Moses was forbidden to enter Canaan in consequence of the people's disobedience at Kadesh in the second year of the Exodus. This problem is easily resolved when it is remembered that the context is primarily hortatory and secondarily historical. Keil and Delitzsch state the following:

We are not to infer from the close connection in which this event, which did not take place according to Numbers 20:1-13 till the second arrival of the congregation at Kadesh, is placed with the earlier judgment of God at Kadesh, that the two were

contemporaneous, and so supply, after "the Lord was angry with me," the words "on that occasion." For Moses did not intend to teach the people history and chronology, but to set before them the holiness of the judgments of the Lord. By using the expression "for your sakes," Moses did not wish to free himself from guilt.¹¹

Moses says "because of you" not to blame-shift, but to warn Israel not to sin in the same way she did before.

When was God angry with Moses? And when did God restrict him from the land? It was not at Kadesh-Barnea when Israel sinned; rather, Numbers 20:12 and 27:14 reveal that it was on account of Moses' own presumptive anger and disobedience at the same spot, but on a different occasion 38 years later.

God's divine commentary on the sin of Moses in Psalm 106:32-33, provides an indisputable answer as to when Moses sinned and faced the judgment of God. In Psalm 106 God describes Israel's rebelliousness in chronological order. Israel moves from Egypt (v 7), through the Red Sea (vv 8-12), into the wilderness (vv 13-18), to Sinai (vv 19-23), and then to Kadesh-Barnea (vv 24-27), and Baal-peor (vv 28-31). After God had already mentioned Israel's refusal to enter the land at Kadesh (vv 24-27), in verses 32-33 God introduces a distinct account; namely that of Meribah, where it is said that "it went hard with Moses because of them." This context clearly states that it was at Meribah that "they [Israel] provoked Moses to wrath. It was at Meribah where it went "evil [hard, bad, troublesome from *ra'a*] with Moses." In other words, it was at this point that Moses sinned and received the consequences for it. It was at this time, when the provocation to wrath and evil was "because of them." In verse 33, God gives the reason why it was "because of them" (v 32) that Moses was provoked to wrath and evil. He states that they (Israel) rebelled against his (Moses') spirit with the result that Moses "spoke rashly with his lips."

Deuteronomy 1:37 and 4:21 declare that God was "angry" with Moses. The word used is *'amnap* which literally means "to breathe" or "to emit breath through the nostrils." As a verb it occurs only in the figurative sense "to be angry."¹² In both Deuteronomy 1:37 and 4:21 the verb is used in the Hithpael stem and indicates God's action of showing Himself angry with Moses. A very clear statement in Deuteronomy 32:51 records God telling Moses that he would die as Aaron did (v 50) "because you (plural) broke faith with Me in

the midst of the sons of Israel . . . [and] because you did not treat Me as Holy in the midst of the sons of Israel" (v 51).

Leaders are Prone to Sin like the People They Lead

In Numbers 27:14 God clearly reveals that Moses sinned just like the people did. In addressing Moses and Aaron, God said, "You disobeyed [rebelled, plural from *marah*] My command in the Desert of Zin in the disobedience [*marah*] of the congregation." Moses' failure to carry out the Lord's instructions precisely was as much an act of unbelief as the people's failure to trust God's promises instead of the spies' pessimistic reports (Num 14:11).¹³

Like Moses the sin of Israel began in their hearts (Psa 78:8, 95:7-11), manifested itself in their speech (they "murmured" Deut 1:27, 34; Num 14:2), and resulted in disobedient action (they refused to obey the command to enter the land, Num 13:31-33). Israel's disobedience was also like that of Moses in that they presumed upon God when they later attempted to take the land in their own strength (Num 14:41-45).

While Moses' sin matched Israel's in degree (quality), a distinction is seen in the duration (quantity) involved. Moses' one-time act of unbelief and disobedient rebellion is contrasted with the continual sin of Israel. In Numbers 20:10 Moses addresses Israel calling them "you rebels." The phrase "you rebels," a masculine plural Qal participle of *marah*, literally "the rebelling ones" describes their rebellion as a permanent condition. Hebrews 3:10 quotes Psalm 95:10 to describe the first generation of the Exodus as ones who "always go astray in their heart." It is further evident that Israel had persisted in her unbelief. In Deuteronomy 1:32 the participle is used with the negative ("you were not believing") to indicate that the nation's unbelief was continual. When Israel sinned at Kadesh-Barnea, God pointed to their continual disbelief and unfaithfulness (v 51). He declared that they put Him to the test ten times (v 22) in only two years. Apparently those times were: 1) at the Red Sea (Exod 14:11-12); 2) at Marah (Exod 15:23,24); 3) in the wilderness of Sin (Exod 16:2); 4) and 5) in connection with Manna (Exod 16:20,27); 6) at Rephidim (Exod 17:1-3); 7) at Horeb (Exod 32:7); 8) at Taberah (Num 11:1); 9) the complaint of the mixed multitude (Num 11:4); and now 10) at Kadesh-Barnea (Num 14).

While God, on the one hand, declared that "all the men . . . [who] have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened

to My voice, shall by no means see the land . . ." (vv 22-23), on the other hand, Moses their leader sinned at Meribah one time and was restricted from entering the land.

Leaders Face Stricter Judgment than the People They Lead

Judgment on leadership is more strict because of the fact that of all people leaders should know better. James 3:1 says, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment." Jesus declared the principle that "to whom much is given much shall be required" (Luke 12:48).

While Israel faced God's judgment for her perpetual rebellion and unbelief, Moses did so for his one-time act.

Moses' unbelief was not a total distrust in the omnipotence of God, but rather was a momentary wavering of that immovable assurance, which the two heads of the nation ought to have shown the congregation, but did not show.¹⁴

Moses' transgression was extremely serious because it was committed in public. In front of the entire congregation of Israel, Moses "broke faith" with Yahweh (Deut 32:51). The phrase "broke faith" is derived from the verb *m'l* meaning "to act treacherously" or "to be faithless."¹⁵ The fact that it is a perfect verb points to Moses' one-time act of faithlessness "at the waters of Meribah." The verb translated "treat Me as Holy" *kiddashetem* again points to the one-time incident when Moses and Aaron failed to "set God apart" by their disobedience.

While Israel faced the consequences for their continual faithlessness and failure to uphold the holiness of God, Moses as the public leader faced a stricter judgment, when he received the consequences for his one-time sin. This should serve as a sobering warning to anyone who is leading God's flock today.

The High Cost of Disobedience in Leadership

Failure in Testimony is the Result of Disobedience

A testimony fails despite pragmatic results. When Numbers 20:8 is compared with verse 11, one finds that although Moses totally disobeyed God's instructions, God still provided abundant water. Moses' disobedience still brought about results. Though Moses'

striking of the rock brought forth water, it was not produced in the divinely intended way. This sin marred Moses' testimony as he failed to sanctify God "in the eyes of the children of Israel." An important lesson for contemporary leaders and preachers to learn is that the end does not justify the means and that results do not justify disobedience.

A testimony fails despite the fact that God still receives glory. God is concerned that His leaders uphold Him as trustworthy and holy in the midst of His people, because His reputation is vitally important to Him (Deut 32:51; Ezek 36:16-38). Moses' failure in preventing the full power of Yahweh from becoming evident in the eyes of Israel robbed God of the fear and reverence that was due Him. The miracle would have been more impressive if Moses spoke to the rock rather than striking it as he had done before in the presence of the elders (Exod 17:5-6).

However, in contrast to Moses' faithlessness God demonstrated His faithfulness because the waters flowed "abundantly." God received glory even though it was not through His leader Moses. Numbers 20:13 has an assertion contrasting from that in verse 12. On the one hand, while God said that He was not shown to be Holy (*qadash*) by Moses; Yahweh proved Himself holy (*qadash*) among the people (v 13).

The meaning of [*yqdash*] here is not passive, but reflexive, "He made Himself holy"; within this context, "He showed, proved, asserted His sanctity"; more accurately, "He reasserted it after it had been desecrated."¹⁸

Deuteronomy 32:51 reveals in an interesting play on words that it was at Kadesh (*qadesh*) that Moses failed to uphold God as holy (*qiddash*). And yet it was at Kadesh where God received glory even through man's disobedience (Num 20:13).

Restriction in Blessings is the Result of Disobedience

The result of Moses' disobedience was a limitation on the blessings he could have received. While God no doubt had a desire for Moses to enter the Promised Land, because of sin he was now restricted to merely seeing it from afar. He saw it from "Abarim," the range of mountains east of the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea (Numbers 27:12; Deut 34:4-5). Moses is limited to a "look" at the land. In Deuteronomy 32, God commands him to go up Mount

Nebo and "look at the land of Canaan . . . for you shall see the land at a distance, but you shall not go there" (vv 49, 50, 52).

Desecrating Yahweh's name is extremely serious as evidenced by the magnitude of the restriction. "The retribution stands in direct relation to the nature of the transgression and its enormity."¹⁷ It is also very important to note that the severity of the discipline is matched to the sin based on Moses' position as the leader of the people.

The regret of a leader. The result of disobedience is always regret. The regret of Moses is evident by his repeated statements that he would not enter the land (Deut 1:37; 3:27; 31:2). His regret is also evident by his pleading with God to enter the land (Deut 3:23-29), and by his somber statements such as: "I shall die in this land, I shall not cross the Jordan" (Deut 4:22).

In Deuteronomy 3:23-29 the lesson to be learned is that sin leaves lasting scars (consequences). In this section Moses unveils, in his personal testimony, his earnest desire to enter the Promised Land. Moses testified that he pleaded or quite literally "sought favor or grace" (*qnn*) with Yahweh to enter the land. "The verb used (*qnn*) is a strong one, implying a solemn request for the Lord to be compassionate (see Psa 30:7-8 for a similar use)."¹⁸ In verse 24 Moses addresses God as "Master Yahweh" or "Lord Yahweh" (*'adonay yhw*) a name or title for God used only twice in Deuteronomy in prayers of Moses (cf 9:26). The combined title is indicative of a deep personal tone of request. Moses in desperation appealed to God's character to His greatness, strength, uniqueness, and mighty works. He appealed saying that he as Yahweh's servant had only just begun to see all that God would do (v 24). Moses' request shows the deep sorrow and tragedy in his life.

He had begun to see the marvelous works of the Lord, from the Exodus to the conquest of the lands east of the Jordan. But now, just when the climax was drawing near, he would be unable to see the Lord's fulfillment of the ancient promise. It was a promise to which he had devoted his whole life, and the thought that he would not see its fulfillment was too much for him to accept without question.¹⁹

In verse 23, Moses next appealed to God's emotions, begging Yahweh to allow him to cross over and see the "fair land" beyond the Jordan that "good hill country and Lebanon" (v 25). All of this

pleading, however, was to no avail. Because God had declared that Moses would not enter the land, He would not so much as listen to Moses' plea. But God in reply said, "Enough! (*rab*) Do not continue to speak to Me anymore about this matter."

Leaders need to be on guard for the unintentional misplacing of priorities. Moses' persistence in intercessory prayer for Israel was a great quality he possessed. His request for God to alter His prohibition by His grace was probably not in itself illegitimate either. However, Moses' persistence in requesting a reversal of God's prohibition in a sense reflects a slight shift in Moses' focus. The vision of the promise had become a consuming passion to set foot in the land, but the vision had slipped from the Lord of the promise to the promise itself. Moses had taken his eyes off of the God of Canaan Land and wrongly refocused them on Canaan Land itself.

The removal of a leader. Disobedience brings its own consequences. That God was now ready to remove Moses from his position of leadership is evident by His stern words, "You shall not bring this assembly into the land" (Numbers 20:12). God's refusal to hear and heed Moses' proposal in Deuteronomy 3:23-29 reveals the tragic result of sin.

Forgiveness of sin does not always carry with it alleviation of the consequences of that sin. While sin can be removed, its scars very often cannot be. For example, when God restricts a divorced man from holding the office of pastor or deacon (II Tim 3:2,12) this does not imply that such a sin is unforgivable. What it does mean, as with Moses, is that the scars of that sin are not removed. The leadership of Moses faced a restriction and God's leaders must be devoid of such restrictions to remain qualified to serve in an official capacity.

Does God's refusal to restore Moses to the former privilege of entering the land mean that God did not forgive Moses for his sin? No! David, who sinned with Bathsheba (II Sam 11:1-13) and murdered Uriah her husband (II Sam 11:14-27) was forgiven (II Sam 12:1-15; Psalms 51). But it is vitally important to note that the repercussions, the after-effects, never were removed. Nathan the prophet told David, "Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house . . . The child also that is born to you shall surely die" (II Sam 12:10,13). The Bible's universal, unchanging principle that "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal 6:7) was again proven true.

The result of Moses' disobedience was a premature death. Moses would be gathered to his people, just as Aaron was, even though he might have enjoyed many more years of leadership. This is evidenced by the words following the account of his death, "Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated" (Deut 34:7).

The replacement of a leader. No leader is irreplaceable. Even though Moses was the most uniquely privileged human leader to ever live (Deut 34:10-12), God replaced him with the faithful man - Joshua. As "great" a shepherd as Moses was, he was not indispensable. Yahweh saw fit to remove Moses and replace him. God, foreknowing the damage one sin could cause, was not found "short-changed" to meet the need that resulted from sin in the life of His leader. The same truth applies today. None of God's preachers, teachers, etc. are irreplaceable. While it is never God's will for one of His representatives to be disqualified, God in His holiness demands that His standards be upheld (I Tim 3:1-7) and replacements be made as necessary.

The sheep learn by watching the shepherd. Therefore, the shepherd's life is to be a model for them to follow. When a leader's testimony fails he then becomes incapable of credible teaching. For the welfare of the people he must step down so that God can replace him as was necessary in the case of Moses (Num 27:18-20).

In Numbers 27:16-17 Moses demonstrates his concern over his failure in his responsibility as leader by requesting that the Lord place a spiritual man over the people. In his concern "that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep without a shepherd" (Num 27:17) Moses demonstrates the compassion of a great leader. Even though the people had provoked Moses to sin at Meribah and he had missed his heart's desire to enter the Promised Land, Moses still had a loving concern for the people. This same type of concern is demonstrated to an even greater degree in Matthew 9:36 and Mark 6:34 by the "Great Shepherd" Jesus Christ. Just as Moses when he was about to die prayed that a replacement for himself be given to an unworthy people, Jesus Christ knowing of His approaching death and of the desperate need "was moved with compassion" and asked his disciple to pray for workers to be sent out into the harvest fields (v 38). Israel at the time of Christ's public ministry was without a spiritual leader among the nation. In fact the leaders of the theocratic kingdom at this time were so totally corrupt that when

Jesus saw the multitudes, "he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt 9:36).

Even though Israel would enter the land and Moses would not he did not let this heart-breaking personal loss keep him from being faithful to fulfilling his task. Moses was obedient in proclaiming God's Word to Israel even though he knew he would die. As the people are being prepared to enter the land, Moses gives them God's Word and warns against the greatest danger they will face. In Deuteronomy 4:21-22 he warns the people to take notice of his own fate which was the result of divine chastening for disobedience. The people, having been reminded of the result of Moses' disobedience in leadership, that is, his restriction from entering the land, are warned not to forget the covenant (v 23). Such forgetfulness would lead to disobedient idolatry (v 36b) and result in God's judgment, that is, expulsion from the land (vv 26-27). The strong warning is based on the fact that "the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (v 24). Because the covenant relationship was one of love, initiated by the love of God and responded to by the love of Israel, "to construct images would be to indicate that the first love of the Israelites had been forgotten and to this the response of the Lord would be jealousy."²⁰ In the twelfth chapter of Hebrews after describing the chastening or discipline of the believer (vv 3-11) and the moral purity demanded by a Holy God (vv 12-27), the Lord commands the believer to show gratitude and awe (v 28), based on the fact that "our God is a consuming fire" (v 29).

Conclusion

Just as Moses and the nation of Israel found out by experience that it was impossible to escape divine discipline for sin, the NT believer, especially the leadership, is also warned that divine discipline for sin is inescapable. "If those did not escape when they refused Him Who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape who turn away from Him [Jesus Christ] who warns from Heaven" (Heb 12:25). With a new covenant, more revelation, and greater benefits having been provided by Christ, much more is expected of Christians today than was expected of Moses and the nation Israel. Christ's leaders today must not depend upon their experience or age

to keep them from sin and its resulting disqualifications. Moses' sin came at the end of a life of great spiritual victories, faithful service and astonishing miracles. In spite of all this he was still disqualified because of his sin. If you are a leader today "take heed lest ye fall." Leaders should dread the thought of being "a castaway" of being rendered useless; of being disqualified for service (I Cor 9:27). The believer's and especially the leader's goal ought to be that stated by the apostle Paul, who when ready to die said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith!"

Notes

- ¹ M Margaliot, "The Transgression of Moses and Aaron Numbers 20:1-13" *JQR* 74-2 (1983) 217-218
- ² Note the plural verb form *dibbaretem*.
- ³ Eugene Arden, "How Moses Failed God" *JBL* 76 (1957) 52
- ⁴ Keil and Delitzsch, "The Pentateuch" *Commentary on the OT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 1:131
- ⁵ Literally "you continually disobedient ones!"
- ⁶ Arden, "How Moses Failed God," 52
- ⁷ Keil, *Pentateuch*, 131
- ⁸ Margaliot, "Transgression of Moses," 218
- ⁹ Peter C Craigie, "The Book of Deuteronomy" in *NICOT* ed by RK Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 105
- ¹⁰ Thomas W Mann, "Theological Reflections on the Denial of Moses" *JBL* 98 (1979) 490
- ¹¹ Keil, *Pentateuch*, 289
- ¹² F Brown, S R Driver, C Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979) 60
- ¹³ Gordon J Wenham, "Numbers" in *Tyndale OT Commentaries* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-varsity Press, 1981) 150
- ¹⁴ Keil, *Pentateuch*, 130
- ¹⁵ Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 591
- ¹⁶ Margaliot, "Transgression of Moses," 226
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, 228
- ¹⁸ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 126
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, 137