

What Did Moses Do Wrong?

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In 1947, a year before Israel officially became a nation again, the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered in various caves in Qumran, Israel, which is located by the Dead Sea. These scrolls were an amazing find! Their discovery confirms the words in the scrolls that Jesus read from are the exact words in our modern-day Bibles. They validate that the words of Scripture, such as the words Jesus read from Isaiah (Luke 4; Isaiah 61), have not changed. So, when I visit the caves in Qumran where the Dead Sea scrolls were found, I am reminded just how incredible it is to have this reassurance that the Bible we have today is true to the original text.

Another fantastic experience comes when one begins to leave Qumran, for in the distance, one is confronted by a vast mountain range located across the Jordan River. The Abarim mountain range is where the tallest mountain can be seen – Mount Nebo.

For Moses, the one God chose to lead the Israelites from Egypt into the Promised Land, Mount Nebo was the final stop. In Deuteronomy 34:4, the Lord said to Moses, *"This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it."* So, why did the Lord not allow Moses past Mount Nebo?

Speak to the Rock

Nearing the end of their forty years of wandering, the Israelites came to the Desert of Zin. Since there was no water, the community turned against Moses and his older brother Aaron (Exodus 7:7). In anger, Moses said to the people, *"Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?"* Moses struck the rock twice with his staff. But, God had only commanded Moses to speak to the rock, NOT to strike the rock (Numbers 20:8-12).

However, in Exodus 17, God had instructed Moses to strike the rock with his staff, so at one point, God was okay with this action, but in this instance, God wasn't. What changed? Why was striking the rock now disallowed, and why was Moses now only to speak to the rock?

How Was Moses' Response Different than Peter's Response?

Before we answer those questions, I can understand why Moses disobeyed God. I sympathize with Moses yielding to his emotions while being frustrated with the people he was leading. But, were his actions any worse than the Apostle Peter's response to Jesus in Caesarea Philippi or his denials in Caiaphas courtyard in Zion?

On that day in Caesarea Philippi, moments after declaring Jesus the Messiah, Peter rebuked the truth Jesus was sharing about His approaching trip to Jerusalem and His death at the hand of

the religious leaders. Mark 8:33 verifies the error of Peter's emotional outburst, *"You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."* Jesus then said to Peter, *"Get behind me, Satan"* (Matthew 16:23). Like Moses, Peter's response to the Lord was in the flesh, not as a servant of the living God.

After Jesus' arrest in the garden, in Caiaphas' courtyard, it was Peter who three times directly and publicly denied knowing Jesus. This fraudulence response is recorded in all four Gospels (Matthew 26:69-74; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:55-62; John 18:15-27). Yet, God allowed Peter to continue to serve Him for years. So, why was Moses punished while Peter was commissioned to continue in ministry? There must be a lesson there!

The Rock Is Jesus

The answer is found in the Apostle Paul's writing in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul explains that the rock represents Jesus Christ. It was He who was struck once (the Crucifixion), out of which spiritual living water flowed and will flow forever. Jesus was "struck" just once, NOT twice. Jesus died once, NOT twice. Yet, as our Lord and Savior, He continues to provide living water to those who, in faith, trust in Him.

Lessons from Moses' Error

Moses made several critical mistakes. First, he sinned by disobeying God's command. He sought God, which was right, but did not do as God instructed. Hiding behind an emotional outburst or a moment of frustration was not a justifiable response.

Second, Moses committed another sin. He took the credit for bringing forth the water, implying that his and Aaron's work provided for the people. For this, Aaron was also punished, for he too died on top of a mountain – Mount Hor – which is near the border of Edom (also located in Modern day Jordan) (Numbers 20:22-29).

Moses' failure did not break his relationship with God, but it did cost him the desire of his heart – to step into the Promised Land. Being able to stand in the very land Moses was forbidden to step in is one of the most humbling experiences I have ever felt. To stand on the ground in Qumran and look straight ahead and see Mt. Nebo, knowing I am standing in the land Moses so deeply desired but was forbidden from experiencing, is always hard for me to completely comprehend. Know that you, too, can travel to the Promised Land and stand in the very land Moses craved but was not allowed to achieve. It is a unique yet humbling moment.

There are several lessons here. First and most important, never misrepresent the sacrificial death of Christ, either in word or deed. God chastised Moses and Aaron when He said, *"You did not trust in Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel"* (Numbers 20:12). When speaking about Jesus, always acknowledge Him being Holy, whether it's about His righteousness or His judgment. I like to challenge people to become "contagious" for Jesus, meaning to let people see how much you love and enjoy Him and then watch that overflow onto others.

Second, do not yield to the temptation of taking credit for what God has done. There may be some things that you have worked very hard for, and it's tempting, almost justifiable, to say, "Look at what I have done." Resist that temptation and know that if it wasn't for the talent God gave you or the opportunity He created for you, your accomplishment would not have happened. Always yield to the Lord and let the praise and credit be His.

Like Moses, you may not physically make it to Israel. But, by the grace of God, Jesus has promised us a place that is far better than any place here on earth, and that is a place you can enjoy for eternity!