

Leadership: Doing God's Will God's Way
[Moses and the Rock: Exodus 17 and Numbers 20]
By Bob Young

"Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water" (Num. 20:7-8).

Beginning Bible students often confuse the two "Moses and the rock" stories from the Old Testament (Ex. 17 and Num. 20). Many don't know that God helped Moses bring water out of a rock for the Israelites on two different occasions. Contrasting these two accounts provides helpful insights.

Moses was a unique servant of God; he walked closely with God so that God spoke to him face to face. God calls him the most humble man on earth (Ex. 3:11; Num. 12:3). Moses met God at the burning bush, and God sent him to deliver the Israelites from Egypt. God gave Moses signs to convince the Egyptians. He turned Moses' staff into a snake. Later Moses brought forth the plague of blood with his staff. With his staff, he parted the Red Sea. As they traveled from Egypt to Sinai, Moses used his staff to strike the rock at Horeb to bring forth water. In all these matters, Moses acted on God's command; Moses obeyed God.

Later during the Exodus, after they left Sinai and after the discouraging report of the spies, the Israelites came to Kadesh, and there was again no water. This time, God told Moses to take his staff with him, but Moses was to speak to the rock. Moses was to do things differently than before. Instead of using his normal tool (his staff) to perform this miracle by hitting the rock, God called Moses to speak to the rock in the presence of the assembly so that it would pour forth water. What happened next is hard to understand. Perhaps Moses was frustrated by the continued rebellion of the people. Perhaps he thought a show of power would bring Israel back into line. Perhaps he was merely frustrated with the task of providing the needs of the people. Regardless, instead of speaking to the rock as God commanded, he struck the rock—twice! Note that God still gave Moses the desired result. God still provided for his people in their time of need. In spite of his disobedience, God allowed Moses to get water out of the rock. But there was price to be paid. Moses failed to trust and honor God, and ultimately, Moses would not lead his people into the Promised Land.

Here is a great lesson for all Christians, but especially for leaders. God often continues to work through us for the good of his people, even when we fail, when we depend on self and our own power, and demand to do things our way. God sometimes blesses for the sake of others. But beware. Such 'progress' is at great cost. How many leaders, like Moses, have failed to enjoy the ultimate blessings God has in store because they are stuck in the past and cannot bring themselves to new ways of doing things? God calls us to do his will in his way. God calls us to availability, not authority. God calls us to his power, not ours. This is the kind of relationship God uses to lead his people forth still today.

Success is not measured by what happens today. Success is doing God's work and God's will in God's way regardless of what happens today, knowing that God holds the future.