

Deuteronomy 32:51

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Because ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; because ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel.

Analysis

Because ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh—the Hebrew ‘al ’āšer ma‘āltē bî (עַל אֲשֶׁר הִעַלְתֶּם בִּי, 'because you acted unfaithfully against Me') uses the root mā'al, meaning breach of trust or treachery. Meribah-Kadesh (מְרִיבַת קָדֵשׁ, 'contention of holiness') recalls Numbers 20:1-13, where Moses struck the rock twice instead of speaking to it. **In the wilderness of Zin; because ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel**—the phrase lō' qiddaštem 'ôṭî (לֹא קִדְּשַׁתֶּם אוֹתִי, 'you did not sanctify Me') explains the sin: Moses failed to honor God's holiness publicly.

Moses's sin seems minor—striking rather than speaking—but the issue was representation. Moses represented God to Israel, and by acting in frustration rather than faith, he misrepresented God's character. The plural 'ye' includes Aaron. God is zealous for His glory; even Moses, the meekest man (Numbers 12:3), could not tarnish God's holiness without consequence. This demonstrates that privilege increases responsibility.

Historical Context

The Meribah incident occurred in the 40th year of wilderness wandering (Numbers 20:1). Moses's anger ('Hear now, ye rebels') revealed his frustration after 40 years

of Israel's grumbling. Yet God required that His representatives display His character—patience, holiness, sufficiency. Moses's exclusion from Canaan became a sobering lesson in leadership accountability.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. Why would a seemingly small sin disqualify Moses from entering Canaan?
2. What does 'sanctifying God' mean in practical leadership and ministry?
3. How does Moses's punishment demonstrate that greater privilege brings greater accountability?

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Numbers 27:14 (Parallel theme): For ye rebelled against my commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me at the water before their eyes: that is the water of Meribah in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.

Leviticus 10:3 (Holy): Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.

Numbers 20:24 (References Israel): Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah.

Isaiah 8:13 (Parallel theme): Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

1 Peter 4:17 (Parallel theme): For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

