

Numbers 20:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

God's judgment on Moses and Aaron stands as one of Scripture's most sobering passages. The charge—'Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel'—identifies their sin as unbelief expressed through failure to honor God publicly. The Hebrew 'lo-he'emantem bi' (לֹא־הֶעֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי) means 'you did not believe in me,' suggesting that disobedience flows from faith failure. The phrase 'to sanctify me' uses 'qadash' (קָדַשׁ), meaning to set apart as holy, to treat as sacred. Moses' angry words—'Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?' (20:10)—and his striking the rock twice instead of speaking to it (20:11) failed to honor God's holiness before Israel. The 'we' suggests Moses took credit for the miracle rather than attributing it to God alone. The consequence—'ye shall not bring this congregation into the land'—seems disproportionately severe, but leadership carries greater accountability (James 3:1). Moses' privilege (closest human relationship with God) made his failure more serious. This judgment teaches that God's holiness cannot be compromised, even by His most faithful servants.

Historical Context

Moses' disqualification from entering Canaan occurred near the end of his forty-year wilderness leadership (approximately 1406 BC). The severity seems shocking

given Moses' faithful service, intercession for Israel (Exodus 32:11-14, Numbers 14:13-19), and unique intimacy with God (Exodus 33:11, Numbers 12:6-8). However, leadership failures have public consequences—Moses represented God to Israel, and his angry, self-promoting response misrepresented God's character. Deuteronomy 3:23-27 records Moses pleading for entry to Canaan, which God denied. However, Moses did ultimately enter the Promised Land—he appeared with Elijah at Jesus' transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-3), discussing Jesus' 'exodus' to be accomplished at Jerusalem. This demonstrates that God's temporal discipline doesn't equal final rejection, and that grace ultimately triumphs.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Moses' failure teach us that past faithfulness doesn't exempt us from present obedience?
2. What does God's charge of 'unbelief' reveal about the connection between faith and obedience?
3. Why does leadership carry greater accountability, and how should this affect Christian leaders today?
4. How can we guard against subtle ways of taking credit for what God has done?
5. What hope does Moses' eventual entry into the Promised Land (via transfiguration) offer regarding God's grace beyond temporal consequences?

Interlinear Text

לֹא	אֶת־	וְאֶל־	מֹשֶׁה	אֶל־	יְהוָה	וַיֹּאמֶר
H3808	H3282	H413	H4872	H413	H3068	H559
	and Aaron	unto Moses	And the LORD	spake		
בְּנֵי־	לְעֵינֵי־	לֹא־	קִדִּישׁ־נִי	בִּי	הֶאֱמַנְתָּ־	
H1121	H5869	H6942	H0		H539	
of the children	me in the eyes	me not to sanctify	Because ye believed			
הַקֶּהֱלָל	אֶת־	תִּבְּיֹאוּ	לֹא־	לְכֹךְ־	יִשְׂרָאֵל	
H6951	H853	H935	H3808	H3651	H3478	
this congregation	therefore ye shall not bring	of Israel				
לָהֶם:	נָתַתִּי	אֲשֶׁר־	הָאֶרֶץ	אֶל־	הַזֶּה־	
H0	H5414	H834	H776	H413	H2088	
which I have given	into the land					

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 1:37 (References Lord): Also the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither.

Ezekiel 36:23 (References Lord): And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.

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.

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.