

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' (לא-הִאמְנַתֶּם בְּיַ) means 'you did not believe in me,' suggesting that disobedience flows from faith failure. The phrase 'to sanctify me' uses 'qadash' (קדש), 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

Psalm 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 תַעֲשֵׂנִי אֶתְמָרְתָּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֵשֶׁה וְאַל
spake And the LORD H413 unto Moses H4872 and Aaron H175 H3282 H3808
H559 H3068 H413 H4872 H175 H3282 H3808

בְּנֵיכֶם לְעֵינֵיכֶם בְּנֵי אֶתְמָנָתְךָ מֵבָבָבְךָ
Because ye believed H0 me not to sanctify H6942 me in the eyes H5869 of the children H1121
H539 H3651 H3808 H935 H853 H6951

לֹא תִבְרְא לְעֵינֵיכֶם תְּבִרְא אֶת
of Israel H3478 H3651 H3808 therefore ye shall not bring H935 H853 this congregation H6951
H2088 H413 into the land H776 H834 H5414 H0

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.