

Numbers 20:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.

Analysis

God instructs Moses to speak to the rock to produce water, demonstrating divine power to supply Israel's needs through means requiring only faith-filled obedience. The command 'Take the rod' refers to Aaron's budded rod that confirmed God's choice of Aaron's priesthood (Numbers 17:10). This rod symbolized divine authority and miraculous provision. The phrase 'gather thou the assembly together' emphasizes that the miracle would occur publicly, vindicating God before the congregation. The central command—'speak ye unto the rock before their eyes'—requires only verbal address, not physical striking as Moses did at Rephidim forty years earlier (Exodus 17:6). The change from striking (Exodus) to speaking (Numbers) may symbolize progression from Law's demands to grace's provision—Christ the Rock was struck once (crucifixion), but now we simply ask in His name. God promises: 'it shall give forth his water'—the rock will respond to spoken command. The comprehensive provision—'give the congregation and their beasts drink'—demonstrates God's care extends to all needs.

Historical Context

This event occurred near the end of Israel's forty years of wandering, during the first month of the fortieth year (Numbers 20:1). The location was Kadesh in the

wilderness of Zin—ironically, near where Israel's unbelief had begun their wilderness sentence forty years earlier. The congregation's complaint about water shortage (20:2-5) paralleled their ancestors' complaint at Rephidim (Exodus 17:1-7). However, Moses' response here diverged from God's instructions: instead of speaking to the rock, he struck it twice in apparent anger (20:10-11). Though water still flowed (demonstrating God's grace), Moses' disobedience cost him entry into Canaan (20:12). This incident illustrates that even great leaders face consequences for presumption and failure to honor God's exact instructions.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What does the change from striking to speaking reveal about God's progressive revelation and grace?
2. How does Moses' subsequent failure (striking instead of speaking) warn against presuming on past experience?
3. In what ways does the rock symbolize Christ as the source of living water?
4. What does God's command to act 'before their eyes' teach about public witness and testimony?
5. How should we balance confidence in God's provision with careful obedience to His specific instructions?

Interlinear Text

חָקֵץ	אֶת	הַמֶּטֶל	לְ	וְהָקַף	אֶת	הַקְּעֹדָה
Take	H853	the rod	H4294	and gather	H853	so thou shalt give the congregation
H3947				H6950		H5712
אַתָּה	וְאַהֲרֹן	אֶת	יְבִי	וְדִבַּרְתָּ	אֶל	הַסֵּלֶעַ
H859	together thou and Aaron	thy brother	H251	and speak	H413	out of the rock
	H175			H1696		H5553
לְעֵינֵיהֶם	וְנָתַן	מֵי	וְהוֹצֵאתָ	לָהֶם		
before their eyes	and it shall give forth	his water	and thou shalt bring forth			
H5869	H5414	H4325	H3318			
מֵי	מִן	הַסֵּלֶעַ	וְהִשְׁקִיתָ	אֶת		
his water	H4480	out of the rock	drink	H853		
H4325		H5553	H8248			
הַקְּעֹדָה	וְאֵת	בְּעִיֲרֵיהֶם				
so thou shalt give the congregation	H853	and their beasts				
H5712		H1165				

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 4:17 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs.

Revelation 22:17 (Parallel theme): And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Isaiah 43:20 (Parallel theme): The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen.