

# WHO MADE MOSES HIT THE ROCK?

By Bill Irby

“WHO MADE MOSES HIT THE ROCK?” OR “DO NOT DISDAIN YOUR DUTY” In Numbers 20 we read that “...there was no water for the congregation, so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron.” Things were not going very well and the people complained and were just about to rebel.

This had been their history from the beginning of their time in Egypt all throughout their wandering in the wilderness. Their behavior would cause the writer of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews to say, “Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years... Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (3:8-9, 12). If there is one thing that can be said of these people it is that they were hardheaded, selfish and unfaithful.

Moses had to deal with these folks every day. Don't you know that their attitude was a continual source of frustration? They did not appreciate the manna, the quail and the water that they had been given. And here they were, complaining again. So when Moses came to the rock he said, “Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring for you out of this rock?” He called them rebels, because they were and he was about fed up with them.

So now we return to our question, “Who made Moses hit the rock?” Well, the short and correct answer is “Moses.” Moses knew better. God had told him to speak to the rock. Speaking to the rock instead of using the rod on the rock would have had the effect of emphasizing their dependence on God. Moses used the word “we” in his statement before he struck the rock. If he had spoken to it, as God had told him to do, the role of Moses and Aaron would have been diminished in the peoples' eyes and the role of God exalted.

But Moses gave in to what I am convinced was a sense of frustration with the people with whom he had labored so diligently. Moses was a fine and faithful man, but he had dealt with these folks a very long time. Here, close to the end of this stage of his life, he had to endure another example of their unbelief and ingratitude.

But still, he knew better. He knew God and he knew that God meant what He said. He just had a lapse, and committed a sin that would keep him from entering the promised land of Canaan. His act does not keep him from being a hero of the faith, but it does show his humanity as well as the challenges of working with people.

What is the lesson for us? Notice again our subtitle, “Do not disdain your duty.” There are times in our lives when we allow the attitudes and actions the people around us, even and especially our fellow Christians, to have an undue and negative effect on how we respond to our own spiritual responsibilities.

Allow this example: I have spoken to a number of folks over the years that stop attending worship services and Bible study. When I ask “Why?” the answer frequently includes a critique of another person. At times the critique is valid, other times invalid. Makes no difference, because what has happened is this: One person's frustration with another's bad attitude and actions has led to a doubling of sin. We must not allow bad attitudes and actions on the part of others to keep us from doing our own duty. We must not disdain our duty.

We see this problem in the lives of those who work closely with the church, be they a Bible School teacher, a preacher, or some other church worker. Frustration is a substantial part of any work done with a large group of people. But we must not allow it to blunt our sharp sense of duty toward God and His great cause. Moses did, just for a moment, and we know the price he paid. (Thanks to my good friend David Sain for inspiring this article in a recent SBE class on Deuteronomy.)