

BE FAITHFUL TO THE LORD

20 In the first month the children of Israel, the whole congregation, arrived at the wilderness of Zin, and they camped at Kadesh. Miriam died there and was buried there. ²Now there was no water for the congregation, so they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. ³The people contended with Moses and said, "We wish that we had died when our brothers died before Jehovah! ⁴Why have you brought the assembly of Jehovah into this wilderness? [Have you done so] in order that we should die here, both we and our livestock? ⁵Why did you force us to come up out of Egypt, only to bring us into this terrible place? This is not a [land that produces] grain, or figs, or grapevines, or pomegranates. There is not even any water to drink!" ⁶Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting; there they fell upon their faces, and the glory of Jehovah appeared to them. ⁷Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, ⁸"Take the staff and assemble the congregation, you and your brother Aaron. Speak to the rock before their eyes, so that it may yield its water. You shall bring water out of the rock for them; so shall you provide water for the congregation and their livestock to drink." ⁹So Moses took the staff from Jehovah's presence, as [Jehovah] commanded him. ¹⁰Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Now listen, you rebels! Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?" ¹¹Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the congregation and their livestock drank. ¹²But Jehovah said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me, in order to honor me in the sight of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them." ¹³These are the waters of Meribah; because the children of Israel contended with Jehovah, but he was honored* before them. (Num. 20:1-13)*

*Literally, "sanctify," "sanctified"

Introduction

William Reed was a barber in the city of Bath, England. He had a fine shop located in an upscale establishment; his patrons were among the elite socialites of the city.

William was a Christian man who loved God and sought to serve Him as best he could.

One Sunday William's minister preached a sermon on the fourth commandment: Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. William approached his minister after the worship service. "If I close my barbershop on Sunday," he said, "I will lose all my wealthy customers. I will be reduced to poverty."

The minister pointed William to the words of the LORD: *"If any man would serve me, let him follow me ...I f any man serves me, the Father will honor him"* (Jn. 12:26.)

They prayed together, and William Reed the barber committed himself to the LORD.

William, in obedience to God's commandment, closed his barbershop on Sundays, and his business became smaller and smaller. Finally he had to sell his shop in the upscale section of Bath and move to a small shop in a cellar under the old market house. William still loved and served God. But he often wondered why God had allowed him to be reduced to such a beggarly condition.

One Saturday evening just before closing time, a man came into his shop.

"Is it too late to get a hair cut?" he inquired. "I hope not; for tomorrow is Sunday, and I have resolved to always keep that day holy unto the Lord."

William invited the man to be seated in his barber chair. As he went about cutting this customer's hair, tears began to appear in William's eyes. The customer took notice and asked what the trouble might be. William explained that he, too, was a Christian who had resolved to honor the LORD's Day, but he had come upon hard times because of his commitment.

"Please remember me in your prayers," begged William, "because sometimes the devil mocks me for my faith and allegiance to Christ."

"I certainly will remember you in prayer," the customer assured him. "Tell me your name."

"My name is William Reed, Sir."

"William Reed. Well, William, tell me something about yourself and your family."

"Well, Sir, I originally came from Kingston. My father's name was Thomas. I was named after one of his brothers. That brother went off to the Indies and we have never heard from him again. We presume he is dead."

"He is dead," replied the customer, "and I have come to Bath in search of his nephew, William Reed. I am a lawyer, and it is my assignment to inform William Reed that his uncle has left him a very sizeable fortune. Congratulations, Mr. Reed."

And so it was that William Reed, the man who had honored God for so many years, at last found himself amply rewarded by the Lord for his faithfulness. (*Mrs. Knight's Book of Illustrations*, pp.120-121)

God honors faithfulness, He may not always bestow that honor in the form of material prosperity, but He will surely honor those who are faithful to Him. But, as this passage of Scripture warns us, the converse is also true: When we are unfaithful to the LORD, we stand in jeopardy of losing the privileges and blessing He bestows.

Be faithful to the LORD in order that you may receive, and not forfeit, the blessing and all the good the LORD desires to impart to you.

I. Be Faithful to the LORD, No Matter What May Be the Circumstances

Once again, when the people of Israel encounter adversity, they bring their complaint to Moses and lay the blame on him (vs. 2.) To be sure, it was a serious situation. They were in a barren wilderness and were without water. But how many times had they not been in similar situations and found the LORD faithful to supply their need?

But rather than recall God's many acts of past faithfulness, and confidently turn to Him for help, the people turn on Moses. They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron (vs. 2.) They contended with Moses (vs. 3,) blaming him for their plight: *"Why have you brought the assembly of Jehovah into this wilderness?"* and accusing him of incompetence or even maliciousness: *"[Have you done so] in order that we should die here, both we and our livestock?"* (vs. 4.)

These people have no sense of God's providence—He has been leading them. They have no sense of their own responsibility—if they had trusted and obeyed the LORD they would have been in the Promised Land of Canaan by now. They have no sense of appreciation—if Moses had not interceded for them, the LORD would have annihilated them at the time of their making the golden calf. These people are totally obnoxious.

Verse 1 notes that this incident occurred in the first month (of the fortieth year. In other words, Moses had put up with this kind of treatment for a very long time. Being bitterly provoked, unjustly provoked, provoked by these obnoxious people for forty years, Moses reacts with a fit of rage:

Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Now listen, you rebels! Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?"¹¹Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the congregation and their livestock drank. (Num. 20:10-11))

Assembling them before the rock pointed out by God, he calls them *"rebels"* and slams his staff against the rock, not once but twice, in a display of anger

We can sympathize with Moses. But the LORD said to Moses, *"Because you did not trust in me, in order to honor me in the sight of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them."* (vs. 12.)

Why does the LORD impose such a harsh penalty? We must remember Moses' position, and the word of our LORD: *"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much*

more will be asked” (Lk. 12:48b.) Take notice, too, of Ecclesiastes 10:1, “As dead flies give perfume a bad odor, so does a little folly outweigh wisdom and honor.”

Be faithful to the LORD, no matter what may be the circumstances. We are called to be like our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the writer to the Hebrews remarks, *“Consider [Jesus] who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood”* (Heb. 12:3-4.) Let us take to heart the words of the LORD addressed to the church in Smyrna, *“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer ... Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life”* (Rev. 2:10.)

II. Be Faithful to the LORD, In Order to Reverence Him

Note carefully the reason the LORD gives for pronouncing against Moses and Aaron this severe penalty: *“Because you did not trust in me, in order to honor me in the sight of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them”* (vs. 12.) The text literally reads, *“Because you did not trust in me, in order to sanctify me in the sight of the children of Israel.”*

Moses, as the servant of God, was expected to remain faithful to the LORD and thereby *“sanctify”* the LORD, that is to say, reverence and honor Him. We must trust and obey the LORD because He is the sovereign God and He requires our confidence and obedience: *“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?” says Jehovah of hosts”* (Mal.1:6.) We must trust and obey the LORD because He is the faithful God and as such He is worthy of our confidence and obedience: *“Know therefore that Jehovah your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments”* (Deut. 7:9.)

Moses, as the representative of God, was supposed to reflect God’s character. In this present case he was being called upon to reflect the divine attribute of long-suffering patience, and thereby reverence the LORD and bring honor to His Name. (Note Matthew 26:62-63, a passage that reveals the patient long-suffering of our Lord Jesus under the most provoking of circumstances: *“Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you? ⁶³But Jesus remained silent.”*)

But rather than allowing the glory of the LORD to shine through him, (by being a model of the divine dignity, gentleness, and patience in the midst of a provoking situation,) Moses allowed himself to become just like the people who were gathered against him. They were guilty of making a sinful response to the situation in which they found themselves, and Moses became guilty of doing the same. Compare the accusation Moses brings against the people, *“Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, ‘Now*

listen, you rebels! Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?" (Num. 20:10); with the accusation the LORD brings against Moses: *"the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Both of you rebelled against my word in the wilderness of Zin ... failing to sanctify me at the waters before their eyes'"* (Num. 27:14.)

Be faithful to the LORD, in order to reverence and honor Him.

We are required to render obedience to the LORD because it is right to render such to Him as the sovereign God: *"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man"* (Eccl. 12:13.) The question is: Will you serve God because He is God and because it is right to do so?

We are required to trust the LORD because He is worthy of our absolute trust and complete confidence. Consider how the LORD proved Himself faithful to Job: *"Jehovah released him from his captivity; then Jehovah gave Job twice as much as he had before. ...¹²Jehovah blessed the latter part of Job's life more than his earlier years"* (Job 42:10,12a.)

As we offer the LORD our obedience and trust, especially in the most difficult of times, we are reverencing and honoring His Name—our trust and obedience is one of the highest forms of worship.

III. Be Faithful to the LORD, By Following His Instructions

When they are confronted by the people of Israel, Moses and Aaron initially do the right thing: they take the matter to the LORD in prayer (vs. 6.) Note the prayer of King Jehoshaphat under very trying circumstances: *"O our God, will you not judge them? We have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you"* (2 Chron. 20:12.)

In answer to Moses' prayer for help and guidance, the LORD instructs him to assemble the people before a designated rock and to speak to the rock, commanding it to yield water for the people (vs. 7-8.) Note that on this occasion the LORD does not address the rebelliousness of the people, rather, He chose this occasion as a time to display and exalt His covenant faithfulness to an undeserving people—and He intended to do so through His servant Moses.

But when Moses and Aaron assemble the people before the designated rock, Moses fails to carry out the LORD's instructions. He harangues the people for their sin and in anger he strikes the rock, not once, but twice (vs. 10-11.)

Moses sought the LORD's counsel (vs. 6,) he received the LORD's instructions (vs. 7-8,) but he did not follow those instructions. He allowed himself to be

controlled by his own emotions rather than by Christ's revealed will, and he wound up having to pay a very severe penalty.

Be faithful to the LORD, by following His instructions.

Sometimes it requires restraining and denying strong emotional desires—in Moses' case it was the desire for retribution and the refusal to exhibit forbearance.

Sometimes it may consist of doing something "stupid" in the eyes of the world. Note the instruction Jesus gave to the servants at the wedding feast at Cana:

When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." ...⁵His mother said to the servants, "Whatever he tells you to do, do it." ⁶Now there were six stone water jars, designated for the Jews' purification ritual, each able to hold about twenty to thirty gallons of water. ⁷Jesus said to them, "Fill the water jars with water." So they filled them up to the brim. (Jn.2:3,5-7)

The LORD's instructions to us will always be derived from and be consistent with His written Word: *"Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to them who take refuge in him. ⁶Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you to be a liar"* (Prov. 30:5-6.) When you comply with the LORD's instructions the end result will be to see and reflect His glory: *"Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'"* (Jn. 11:40.)

Conclusion

God honors faithfulness. He may not necessarily honor you in the same way He honored William Reed, but you have His Word that He will surely honor those who are faithful to Him. But, as Numbers 20 warns us, the converse also is true. When you are unfaithful to the LORD, you stand in jeopardy of losing the privileges and the blessing He bestows. Be faithful to the LORD in order that you may receive, and not forfeit, the blessing and all the good the LORD desires to impart to you.

Then those who feared Jehovah talked with each other, and Jehovah listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared Jehovah and honored his name. ¹⁷They will be mine, declares Jehovah of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. ¹⁸And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not. (Mal. 3:16-18)