

The older generation was passing on. For an additional thirty-eight years the children of Israel had wandered in the wilderness and all those who rejected God's plan for salvation perished in the way. Now even the eldership was vulnerable and the family of Moses itself was to pass away and leave the entrance into the promised land to others.

First Miriam died. She was the eldest of the three. When baby Moses was cast adrift on the Nile it was his elder sister who watched over the ark of bulrushes and persuaded the Egyptian Princess to hire a Hebrew wet nurse to suckle the child. Having survived leprosy, she now succumbed to the most fatal of diseases, old age. Her final age is not given, but it seems she was about 130, one of the longest living females recorded in the annals of history. Largely supportive of her two brethren, she was a leader of the daughters of Sarah of her day and generation, leading the singing after the miraculous deliverance by the Red Sea after the escape from Egypt. Her name, according to Youngs, means fat, thick or strong and she exemplifies the strong woman in the Lord. However, she was not publicly mourned but was buried where she died in Kadesh at the edge of the wilderness of Paran and the border of Edom.

Aaron was mourned for thirty days when he died, by all the congregation. This could be taken to reflect the public nature of his role as the high priest, rather than any disrespect to his sister. However, he was specifically forbidden from entering the promised land because of his public stance against the divine position at the water of Meribah, verse 24, see also verse 12 *"Because ye believed Me not, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring the congregation into the land which I have given them"*. As with Moses, so with Aaron, they were the public face of the leadership of the nation and therefore must publicly pay the price for this lack of faith.

Despite the condemnation of their leadership the people themselves proved no better, but even worse in their attitudes and behaviours. They were wandering in a wilderness because they refused to enter the land flowing with milk and honey and now complained because their circumstances were restricted. They lacked water in sufficient quantities not just for themselves but for their cattle. They were a rich people, because they had the accumulated wealth of large herds. These needed to be fed and watered. They stubbornly refused to slaughter their cows when they lacked food because to them their purpose to be cattle herders was paramount. They regarded the presence of so many cattle as their future, being unprepared to trust as Abraham did to leave behind a life of predictability and abundance to go a land with which they were unfamiliar and to put their trust in God without the knowledge and experience of how it would work out for them.

The miraculous provision of water from the rock should have demonstrated to everyone that not only was God present amongst them but that He cared enough about them to intercede. God continues to be amongst His children but because He is unappreciated, they remain ignorant of His current plans and purposes for them and ultimately all peoples.

The two brothers were supposed to speak to the rock before the eyes of the people, but instead of following the divine direction, they introduced their own element into the incident and smote the rock twice. This was not what God required. Water still came out from the rock but the additional miracle of the voice splitting stone was lost to them and the witness of the power of the word over violence was passed over! If they had spoken to the rock as directed, then it would have demonstrated that faithful obedience to God's requirements would produce its own wonderful reward without the need for so much suffering. Smiting the rock underlined that there was really no other way than the way of violent suffering. The old man needs to be

oppressed and kept under, if we heed not the spoken word then it will be driven out of us by force. Are we so foolish as to always choose the path of violence and lift up the rod to advance what we see as the end purpose, water? Can we not see that the means can be as important as the end of a matter? Can we not see that God can put an end to sin by destroying mankind and therefore all sinners but that He chooses not to, by offering a different way, which permits the power of the spoken word, verbal communication can break even the stubborn stone, therefore the weakness of mortal flesh itself cannot stand in its way!

However, like Moses and Aaron we are too quick to intervene with our own ill thought out and ill-considered response which perhaps might honour us without giving God all the glory as we should!

When conversing with the King of Edom, Moses emphasised the divine element in the development of the status of Israel thus far – “*He heard our voice and sent an angel*”. He did not shy away from stating religious truths to a gentile King but sadly there was no reciprocation and sensitivity in response, just a blunt refusal. As then so it is today. No one is prepared to accept the involvement of the God of heaven in the fate of His people Israel and they are denied access others take for granted.

An army came out against the tribes, and they declined to enforce their passage at that time but instead found another path. Edom would make their match at another time of God’s choosing, but their fate was commented upon by God as in Amos 1v11-12.

It was after this natural set back that the responsibilities of the High Priesthood were transferred from Aaron to his eldest son Eleazar. He would be the new christ who would take the nation back to the promised land and ensure that they received their inheritance as God had decreed. There is another Christ, as yet unrecognised by the nation of Israel who will shortly eclipse Eleazar (God is helper) and fulfil

the anti-typical return and the full and final settlement in the land covenanted to the fathers.

When he comes down, he will rule in the midst of his enemies and the congregation will mourn for themselves and their dead! The house of Aaron will have been eclipsed by the order of Melchizedek, even though Levi will remain, as we have been considering in our future temple studies.

A Voice from the Altar

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