

Instrumental Music And Moses' Transgression At The Rock

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Recently a friend of mine from the multiple cups who took their child to the bible school to study told me that their child, who had been taught at the school and by them that the use of the instrument in worship is sinful, is now questioning the “sound teaching” of his parents. This should be a wake-up call for all of us that the issues of the past will resurface if we fail to teach the fundamentals to a new generation and re-emphasize them to the current generation, “*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers ye have need that one you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*” (Heb. 5:12). He continued by saying that the argument used by the child was: “It does not say that you cannot use the instrument in the New Testament and they used it in the Old Testament. So what is it? When the Israelites set out on their journey from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan, they often allowed their physical desire to affect their judgment. In spite of God’s abundant goodness towards them, they murmured and complained all along the journey. Two events, closely related to their murmuring, are recorded for us in the Pentateuch. Both of these events have to do with God commanding Moses to draw water from a rock (Exo. 17:1-7; Num. 20:2-13). The contrast between these two accounts teaches a valuable lesson.

The first time that Moses drew water from the rock was after the Israelites had made a camp at Rephidim. They grew thirsty and became so enraged with Moses that he thought they were close to stoning him, “*And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying what should I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me.*” (Exo. 17:4). God told Moses to take his rod, go to the rock in Horeb, strike the rock, and water would come forth. Moses did so and water came as God had promised. Thus, Moses through the power of God, was able to meet the needs of the people and press on to Canaan.

The second recorded time that Moses drew water from the rock was nearly forty years later at Kadesh, in the Wilderness of Zin, “*Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.*” (Num. 20:1). The majority of the Israelites from the first episode had perished because of their lack of faith in God’s promise (Num. 14:1). Apparently, the new generation was similar to the previous. Notice their boasting: “*...Would God we had died when our brethren died before the LORD!*” (Num. 20:3). Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before the Lord, seeking guidance. God told Moses to take his rod, assemble the congregation, and speak to the rock, “*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.” (Num. 20:8). Moses took the rod, gathered the people, approached the rock, and rather than speaking to the rock, he struck it with his rod twice, *“And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said to them hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?”* (Num. 20:9-11). He did not do as the Lord had commanded him. Even though water came forth, the Lord did not overlook his error. Moses was not permitted to lead the Israelites into the promised land because of his transgression. Moses would be permitted to see the land of Canaan from Mount Nebo, but he would die in the land of Moab, (Deut. 32:48-52; 34:1).

How do these two events relate to the instrumental music? Some, in favor of the instrument in worship ask, “Where does the Bible say we cannot use the instrument in worship to God?” The question is not “Where does the New Testament say you may not worship with the instrument?” Rather, the question is: Where does the New Testament authorize worshiping with the instrument? The event at the rock illustrates the valuable lesson that we must follow the will of God as He has authorized it and when He has authorized it. One of the arguments used by the pro-instrument groups is “They uses instruments of music in praise to God in the Old Testament; therefore, God does not really care whether or not we use the instrument today.” A person needs to study Bible authority very closely. Paul wrote: *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”* (2 Tim. 2:15). We must understand that God changed the instructions at the second rock from the time that Moses brought water from the first rock. God did not just overlook Moses’ disregard for His latest instruction. Moses was punished for his lack of obedience.

If Moses missed the promised land of Canaan because he followed the old instructions rather than the new way that God had given him, then what will be the condition of those who practice the philosophy that says “Instrumental music may not be in the New Testament but it is in the Old Testament.” God gave the specific instructions that He expected to be followed. You may see that the first drawing of water was before the Mosaic Law, but the second was during the Mosaic Law. God held Moses accountable for his transgression of His new instructions even though only a few years had passed since the earlier instructions. Less than forty years had passed from the change in God’s instructions to Moses, but hundreds of years passed between the Old and New Testaments. Why cannot people see that they need to apply the laws given to them in

the New Testament and not look back for regulations of worship in the Old Testament?

The churches of Christ have long pointed out that instrumental music in worship to God is sinful. By this I'm talking of those that worship according to the instructions God gave in the New Testament. It is sinful for the same reason that Moses sinned at the second rock, because God's instructions had changed and Moses failed to obey the new instructions.

