

“...AS HE COMMANDED HIM”

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Sometimes it may be easy to overlook profound statements in the Scriptures because they are so simply stated. During one of the times Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness, the Lord gave Moses instructions on how to deal with the problem. He told him to take the rod, which he had so often used, and with Aaron speak to the rock before the assembly. When he did so, water would come forth for all to drink (by the power of God) (Num. 20:8). Verse 9 adds, “So Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him.” Those last four words are scarcely even noticeable, but they highlight a contrast that is about to occur.

When Moses and Aaron got the congregation assembled together, they were angry at their rebellious ways and spoke harshly to them: “Must we bring water for you out of this rock?” (v. 10). Who does Moses mean by *wê*? How much water would come forth because of Moses and Aaron and how much would flow because God willed it so? “Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod...” (v. 11). Is that what God had told him to do? Whereas Moses did as the Lord commanded him in verse 9, in verse 11 Moses did not do what the Lord commanded him. He substituted speaking to the rock with striking it twice. Although the words do not say it, the implication is there: “Then Moses struck the rock twice with his rod,” as the Lord had not commanded him. God’s punishment for this action was that Moses was not allowed into the Promised Land.

On a preceding occasion, we see this latter phrase used. The sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, took their censers and put fire in them and incense on it “and offered profane fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them” (Lev. 10:1). God demonstrated His displeasure by having fire go out from Him, which devoured them (v. 2). The Lord had not commanded Moses to strike the rock twice. He also did not command Nadab and Abihu to use strange fire. Both were punished for their disobedience—Nadab and Abihu more because what they did involved worship.

Notice that there is very little difference in the two statements—“as He commanded him” and “which he had not commanded them.” Just as in the Garden of Eden the critical word is *not*. We may safely do what God has authorized, but we ought to be fearful of doing that which He has not commanded. What a simple statement is expressed in Genesis 6:22: “Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him” (cf. 7:5). Blessed are all those who do likewise (cf. Matt. 7:21).