

NEW GENERATION FAITH-BUILDING STORIES

BY JERRY D. PORTER



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FAITH-BUILDING STORIES of God's mighty deliverance propelled the Israelites from Egyptian slave quarters to the very border of the land flowing with milk and honey. Because of their unbelief, however, they spent 40 hot Sinai years burying a faithless generation in the desert sands. Exodus 17 records a life-threatening water shortage during one of those years. They probably rationed water, caring first for the young and the elderly. "Do not wash your clothes. No bubble baths."

In their anger they cursed Moses and the day they left Egypt. The righteous leader fell on his face before God and received a majestic miracle. Obediently, accompanied by tribal representatives, he took his staff and struck the rock of Horeb. The rock gushed cool, sweet water. That faith-building story would be told and retold for years.

Probably two decades later, Moses was in the same place facing the same crisis (Numbers 20). Must God-fearing, explicitly obedient faith leaders face terrible problems? Moses was then older than old. Furious, the people attacked him again. They foolishly yearned for the good old days in Egypt. Most of the liberated pilgrims had died, and this younger generation never knew Nile slavery. Moses was again blessed with a divine word: "Take the staff, and . . ." (v. 8). Moses thought he knew the rest: *I know, strike the rock to produce water for people and flocks*. To his amazement, however, Jehovah changed methods.

"*Speak* to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water" (v. 8, emphasis added). "Say what? I don't talk to boulders. I am too old for new methods." As Moses' entourage walked, the young-buck

leaders were yawning. "Well, Moses, get on with it. Strike the rock! Our people are desperate for water."

What would have happened if Moses had ignored them and obeyed God instead? Imagine the transforming power of that God-moment. He would have cried out, "Rock of Horeb, in the name of Jehovah, *give us water!*" The compliant rock would have exploded with fresh spring water, and the new-generation leaders' hairs would have stood on end. "Did you see that? Dad told me an amazing faith story, but this is awesome. Look what God has done for our generation!" The miracle would have been the new faith-building story to carry the desert-born generation into their bright future.

But in his anger Moses disobeyed Jehovah. Rather than speaking to the rock, he yelled at the rebels and then struck the boulder twice. Because he did not sanctify God before the people, granting them the faith-building story they needed, Moses forfeited the privilege of leading them into the Promised Land.

We dare not spend our lives looking back at the good old days. We must boldly move forward, embracing the Author of yesterday's faith stories. Today God says, "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland" (Isaiah 43:19).

Although God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, yesteryear's effective methods are not necessarily the right approach for today. We are called to be conservative in message but liberal in methods as our creative Lord gives new tools. As leaders we must confront problems on our knees in radical obedience, permitting Almighty God to create new faith-building stories for generations to come. ♦

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