

SESSION 4

◀ *Rebellion and Judgment* ▶

NUMBERS 14:11-24

GOD BRINGS JUDGMENT WITH CONSEQUENCES ON THE DISOBEDIENT.



Most every parent has asked their child at some point: “If everybody jumps off the cliff (or bridge, roof, or into a fire), does that mean you should do it too?” The implied answer is, “No. I would never do that just because somebody else did.” Despite parents’ disapproval and internal warning bells going off, we’ve all made decisions that, years later, we regret. We look back and say, “If I only had the chance to do it all over again, I would have chosen differently.”

*HOW MUCH DOES THE OPINION OF OTHERS AFFECT YOUR
DECISION-MAKING? HOW MUCH SHOULD IT AFFECT IT?*

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Recall that Moses sent twelve spies into the land to scout it out and bring back a report (Num. 13:1-20). The report they brought back was not encouraging. They suggested that the obstacles in the land would be too difficult to overcome (13:21-29). Only two scouts, Caleb and Joshua, encouraged the people to go up and conquer the land (13:30). The others insisted the inhabitants were too strong to overcome (13:31-33).

When the Israelite community heard the scouts’ negative report, they wept (14:1). They complained to Moses and Aaron, suggesting they should have stayed in Egypt. Some suggested a return to Egypt (14:4).

Moses and Aaron fell facedown (14:5). Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes in lament and encouraged the people to go up and take the land (14:6-9). But the people refused to listen (14:10).

Suddenly, the glory of God appeared at the tent of meeting. He expressed His displeasure over the people’s failure to trust Him. He stated that He would strike them down and make Moses into an even greater

nation instead (14:11-12). Moses urged the Lord to forgive the people, lest the nations hear about it and the act result in God’s name being tarnished (14:13-19).

The Lord told Moses He would pardon the people, yet they would face consequences. The generation that had seen God’s miraculous works in Egypt and the wilderness would not enter the land. Caleb and Joshua would enter, the others would not (14:20-24).

When Moses reported God’s words to the people, they grieved and determined to go up and take the land after all (14:39-40). Moses warned them not to try because they would suffer defeat since the Lord was not with them (14:41-43). When some of the people tried to enter the hill country, the Amalekites and Canaanites attacked them and drove them away (14:44-45).



11 The LORD said to Moses, “How long will these people **despise** ^A me? How long will they not trust in me despite all the **signs I have performed** ^B among them? **12** I will strike them with a plague and destroy them. Then I will make you into a greater and mightier nation than they are.” **13** But Moses replied to the LORD, “The **Egyptians will hear about it**, ^C for by your strength you brought up this people from them. **14** They will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, LORD, are among these people, how you, LORD, are seen **face to face**, ^D how your cloud stands over them, and how you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. **15** If you kill this people with a single blow, the nations that have heard of your **fame** ^E will declare, **16** ‘Since **the LORD wasn’t able** ^F to bring this people into the land he swore to give them, he has slaughtered them in the wilderness.’ **17** So now, may my Lord’s power be magnified just as you have spoken: **18** The LORD is **slow to anger and abounding in faithful love**, ^G forgiving iniquity and rebellion. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers’ iniquity on the children to the third and fourth generation. **19** Please pardon the iniquity of this people, in keeping with the greatness of your faithful love, just as you have forgiven them from Egypt until now.” **20** The LORD responded, “I have pardoned them as you requested. **21** Yet as I live and as the whole earth is filled with the LORD’s glory, **22** none of the men who have seen my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tested me these ten times and did not obey me, **23** will ever **see the land** ^H I swore to give their ancestors. None of those who have despised me will see it. **24** But since my servant Caleb has a different spirit and has remained loyal to me, I will bring him into the land where he has gone, and his descendants will inherit it.”

A. “To reject with disdain or contempt or to undervalue something or someone.” In this case, the people were rejecting God as their superior and treating him with contempt.

B. God’s works had forced Egypt to free Israel. They revealed God’s power. The miracle of manna was a sign of God’s provision.

C. Moses framed the question in terms of God’s reputation. The Egyptians would question why a God whose power they personally experienced chose to destroy His own people.

D. The Hebrew refers to one’s eyes. While not even Moses could see God’s face (Ex. 33:18-23), the Israelites had seen His presence with their own eyes.

E. Other nations knew about God. Rahab said the residents of Jericho knew about God’s works and His promises (Josh. 2:8-12).

F. Israel’s enemies would question God’s power and goodness, assuming that He could not do what He promised.

G. Moses quoted the description of God’s holy character given to him when God forgave Israel for idolatry with the golden calf (Ex. 34:6-7).

H. Israel had seen God’s glory. But because of their rebellion, they would never see (or set foot in) the promised land. They would die in the desert.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. God's Judgment

(Num. 14:11-16)

Believers honor God by trusting Him.

- **How would you have felt if you were in Moses's situation as God considered wiping out the people and starting fresh with you?**
- **What impact does our faithfulness to God have on our witness?**

2. God's Glory

(Num. 14:17-19)

We can count on God to act according to His character.

- **Why was it important for Moses to appeal to God's character in his prayer for the people?**
- **What are some appropriate ways of appealing to God's character when praying?**

3. Future Consequences

(Num. 14:20-24)

We must understand that sin has consequences.

- **Since God is willing to grant forgiveness for our sin, why do you think He does not remove the consequences as well?**

Apply the Text

- **Moses was faithful in interceding for God's people. How might your Bible study group strengthen its prayer ministry?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

God the Son

In His substitutionary death on the cross Jesus made provision for the redemption of men from sin. (See Romans 5:6-10; Colossians 1:14.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Compare an Old Testament and New Testament passage.

Read Numbers 14:11-24. Note how God pardoned the people, yet their unbelief brought sad consequences. The writer of Hebrews 3-4 referenced this story, drawing parallels between the Israelites' unbelief and his audience's struggle to believe God's promises. Read Hebrews 3:16-4:2,11. What consequences of unbelief and disobedience was the writer of Hebrews concerned about for his audience? What applications might we draw for Christian living today?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Numbers 14:18a. What does this verse reveal about God's character? Why is this good news?

Numbers 14:13-19 record the prayer of Moses. He was asking God to forgive the Israelites of their sin. When they heard the spies negative report about the inhabitants of Canaan, they complained and said they wanted to go back to Egypt (14:3-4). The Lord threatened to strike the people with a plague. Moses then prayed on their behalf.

When was the last time you prayed on behalf of someone who was struggling with sin and unbelief?

Moses based his prayer on the character of God, proclaiming Him to be slow to anger, abounding in love, and forgiving of sin. Moses was not suggesting that God ignore sin. Instead, he asked God to demonstrate His mercy and forgive their sin based on His character.

What is a prayer that you could pray for someone that is based on God's character? Spend time praying for others.

Put Numbers 14:18a on your phones or cards and agree to memorize the verse together.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Numbers 14:11-12

Reflect on why the people failed to trust God.

God accused the people of two things: they had despised Him and not trusted in Him. The Hebrew verb translated “despise” means to spurn or reject someone due to contempt. Despite the “signs” God had done, the people still did not trust Him. The signs included His parting the Red Sea, sending plagues that struck Egypt, and providing food and water in the desert.

Next, God made two promises. One involved the Israelites and the other, Moses. He would strike the Israelites with a plague that would kill both man and beast. God would then enact His second promise—to make from Moses another, more powerful nation. This would reset God’s covenant with Abraham. God had made a similar statement when the Israelites had been worshiping the golden calf (Ex. 32:10). With the golden calf, the Israelites had participated in blatant idolatry. Currently, they expressed a lack of faith. Fear, rather than trust, had shaped the report of the ten spies and the people’s response. Saying He would destroy His people shows how offended God is when His people do not trust Him or His promises.

The people were trusting themselves more than they trusted God. To not trust God is to doubt His truthfulness, and Scripture teaches that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).

How would you have felt if you were in Moses’s situation as God considered wiping out the people and starting fresh with you?



Day 2: Numbers 14:13-16

Pay attention to what caused Moses’s concern.

Moses’s concern was not what the Egyptians thought about the Israelites. His concern was what they thought about God. The Egyptians’ telling how God had destroyed His people would discredit the Lord’s name among the Canaanites.

Moses would have known what had happened to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. He had seen firsthand what God did to the Egyptian army at the Red Sea. Thus, Moses knew the Lord could wipe out all the Israelites “with a single blow.” This detail underscores the fact that all the people had shown a lack of faith (Num. 14:1-2,10).

Moses mentioned God’s “fame.” He knew that the Lord’s protecting His people and providing for them was a testimony of who He was to the Canaanites and Egyptians. In essence, Moses was saying, “Lord, your reputation is at stake.”

Moses next hypothesized what people would say about God—that He “wasn’t able” to finish what He had begun. He had gotten the Israelites out of Egypt but couldn’t get them into the land of Canaan. This would call into question God’s power and reliability.

What impact has your faithfulness to God had on your witness?



Day 3: Numbers 14:17-19

Compare Numbers 14:18 to Exodus 34:6-7.

The message that God is slow to anger and abounding in faithful love resounds throughout the Old Testament (Neh. 9:17; Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). God's "faithful love" refers to His loyalty based on His covenant relationship with the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and their descendants. In Hebrew, the word translated "forgiving" means to lift or carry, meaning God would lift and carry away the sinner's punishment. This was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24).

Because God is holy and just, He punishes the guilty. God, however, does not punish children or grandchildren for the sins of their parents (Deut. 24:16). Breaking ungodly traditions may take generations; thus, the consequences continue.

Verse 19 is the conclusion of Moses's intercession. Moses had been pleading with God to show mercy to the people. This is the picture of intercession—praying for someone else's needs with the same intensity that we would pray for our own. It is seeking God on behalf of someone else. Because God had forgiven His people in the past, Moses was asking Him to do it again. Because God has extended grace and forgiveness to others in the past, we should be confident we can ask on our behalf as well.

What are some ways you can appeal to God's character when praying for someone?



Day 4: Numbers 14:20-23

Take note of the consequence of sin.

The Lord responded to Moses by granting forgiveness. He spoke in past tense; He had already "pardoned" them. God was saying, "You asked Me to forgive them, I have done it." For God to pardon them did not mean they would not bear the consequences for their sin. This becomes evident in verses 22-23.

God spoke of those whom He had led out of Egypt. The phrase "these ten times" can mean time and again (see Gen. 31:7; Job 19:3). Or, "ten" could signify completion, as in the Ten Commandments. If this was the case, then God was saying He had His fill of His people rebelling.

In verse 23, God introduced the punishment. They would not see the promised land. Later in this chapter (vv. 28-35), He would describe the details: the Israelites would wander in the wilderness for forty years, one year for each day the spies had been in the land. Then, all aged twenty and older would die in the wilderness; their children would inherit the land.

God repeated the charge He introduced in verse 11—the people had "despised" Him. Interestingly, none of the spies had returned from their trek and said they despised God. None of the people said it. To despise someone is an internal thing. God knew their hearts—plus, their words and behavior revealed their hearts. He saw the peoples' not believing Him as treating Him with contempt.

Since God is willing to grant forgiveness for our sin, why do you think He does not remove the consequences as well?



Day 5: Numbers 14:24

Reflect on how Caleb had “remained loyal” to the Lord.

God’s turning His attention to Caleb in this way is reminiscent of how the Scriptures describe what happened with Noah. The text speaks of the great evil in the land and how God regretted creating mankind. Genesis 6:8, though, says, “*But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD*” (KJV, emphasis added). Noah stood in stark contrast to the culture around him. The same occurred with Caleb. He remained loyal amid a disobedient people.

God’s calling Caleb “my servant” was an honor. Before this, the Lord had spoken only of Abraham and Moses this way. Centuries later, He would also refer to King David with the same title (Gen. 26:24; Num. 12:7-8; 2 Sam. 3:18).

Verse 24 shows that God responds to the prayers of the faithful. Because he had brought back a favorable report and encouraged the people to proceed, Caleb was promised he would enter Canaan. Joshua, who had also brought a positive report, would be allowed to enter the promised land as well (Num. 14:6-9,30,38). Both men and their descendants would enter the land and receive what God had promised the patriarchs.

Consider ways your faithfulness to God can encourage other believers to be faithful. Pray for someone who needs that kind of encouragement.

APPLY THE TEXT

What can you do to prepare yourself to remain faithful to God when the crowd around you wants to do the opposite?

JOURNAL

