



Unit .07

Session .01

The Rebellion of God's People

Scripture



Numbers 13:1-2, 30-33; 14:1-4, 30-35

1 The LORD spoke to Moses: **2** “Send men to scout out the land of Canaan I am giving to the Israelites. Send one man who is a leader among them from each of their ancestral tribes.”... **30** Then Caleb quieted the people in the presence of Moses and said, “Let’s go up now and take possession of the land because we can certainly conquer it!” **31** But the men who had gone up with him responded, “We can’t attack the people because they are stronger than we are!” **32** So they gave a negative report to the Israelites about the land they had scouted: “The land we passed through to explore is one that devours its inhabitants, and all the people we saw in it are men of great size. **33** We even saw the Nephilim there—the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim! To ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and we must have seemed the same to them.”... **1** Then the whole community broke into loud cries, and the people wept that night. **2** All the Israelites complained about Moses and Aaron, and the whole community told them, “If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this

wilderness! **3** Why is the LORD bringing us into this land to die by the sword? Our wives and children will become plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” **4** So they said to one another, “Let’s appoint a leader and go back to Egypt.”... **30** I swear that none of you will enter the land I promised to settle you in, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. **31** I will bring your children whom you said would become plunder into the land you rejected, and they will enjoy it. **32** But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness. **33** Your children will be shepherds in the wilderness for forty years and bear the penalty for your acts of unfaithfulness until all your corpses lie scattered in the wilderness. **34** You will bear the consequences of your iniquities forty years based on the number of the forty days that you scouted the land, a year for each day. You will know my displeasure. **35** I, the LORD, have spoken. I swear that I will do this to the entire evil community that has conspired against me. They will come to an end in the wilderness, and there they will die.”

Intro Options



Remember, this icon means there is a Leader Pack item that goes with the lesson. See Leader Pack for additional instructions.

Main Point:
Rebellion against God
is rooted in failing
to trust God.

Option 1

Life is hard. Beyond the objective realities that we face in the world like disease, natural disasters, and death, there are other complications that happen along the way. Every day is filled with moments for decision-making. Some are simple, and some will change the course of your life.

Moments of decision come frequently in our lives, and the same was true of the people described in the Bible. As our journey through the story line of Scripture continues, we join the children of Israel as they approach the brink of the promised land. The God who promised to bring salvation to the world through the seed of Abraham has rescued Abraham's descendants from slavery in Egypt, and now the people stand on the doorstep of entering into the land long ago promised. But before they could enter, they are confronted with a decision that requires faith.

- **When have you faced a decision that required faith? What helped or hindered your faith during that time?**

Option 2

There's a story of a girl sitting in a window of a New York City building that was on fire. The firefighters who responded to the call could not get their ladder truck onto her street because it was too narrow, so unable to get up to her, they devised a plan to get her down to them. The firefighters set up a net for the girl to jump into, and they pleaded with her to jump from the window into the net, doing their best to assure her that she would be safe. But there was a problem: the girl was blind. The girl could not see the net and could not bring herself to trust the pleas and assurances of the firefighters. But then the girl's father arrived on the scene, grabbed the bullhorn, and called out to his daughter for her to jump into the net. The girl jumped from the window and landed safely in the net.

Throughout the girl's life, she had trusted the sound of her father's voice to guide her where she could not see. As she sat in the window full of fear and uncertainty, the girl heard her father's voice and knew she could trust him because he had faithfully guided her so many times in the past. She knew he loved her and would protect her. Because of her trust in the faithfulness of her father, she escaped the burning building unscathed.

- **When have you had to trust someone you knew and someone you did not know? Did you approach these situations differently?**

TEACHING PLAN

As we continue our adventure into God's story, we pick up where we left off with Moses and the people of God on their way to the promised land. We have seen a lot unfold since the Israelites departed from their Egyptian captivity until now. The people have experienced more of God's faithfulness and sovereignty, but they've sinned more as well. And as they stand on the precipice of the promised land, they are going to once again see how the human heart fails to trust in God, despite all that God has done for them.

Read Numbers 13:1-2, 30-33



Israel's ability to take residence in the promised land was contingent on their faithfulness to God and their willingness to listen to Moses, the leader God had appointed and spoke through. To this point in Israel's history, God had given His people plenty of reasons to trust Him. Yet, as they stood at the cusp of the promised land, they refused to go in and take possession of what was already theirs because they had forgotten the faithfulness of God, faithfulness that had gotten them to where they stood. They could not move forward, in part, because they failed to look back.

Activity

Break students into groups and have them list some circumstances in their life that have helped them remember God's faithfulness to them. Afterward, have them discuss within their groups how God's faithfulness has led them to remain faithful to Him. After some time, come back together and discuss the answers together.

It is interesting to note that the spies confirmed what God had said about the land, that it was flowing with milk and honey (v.27). They could see the truth of what God had said about the land and could not fail to acknowledge it before the people. They could touch and feel it. They even brought some of the land's fruit for the people to see and touch. But when they reported about the cities and the people in the land, they exaggerated their findings.

It was true that the Israelites were not mighty (Deut. 7:7). They were not trained warriors; they did not have superior weapons; they were not a world power. And it was also true that the people of Canaan were strong and lived in fortified cities. But God had promised to hand the inhabitants of the land into the hands of His people. The Israelite spies may have felt like grasshoppers compared to the people in the land, but the people of the land were not even ants compared to God. All the Israelites had to do was trust in God's power and faithfulness.

Which is exactly what Caleb did in Numbers 13:30 when he urged the people to go up and take possession of the land, having full confidence in God to help them in that process. Ten of the spies saw their weaknesses and stopped there, and that in turn stopped them in their tracks. Their narrow mindedness led to their disobedience and rebellion. But Caleb and Joshua looked through their weakness and looked upon God. Their spiritual vision led to their obedience and faithfulness.

- **What impossible situations have you faced, or are you facing, and how is God teaching you to trust Him in those situations?**

Read Numbers 14:1-4



COMMENTARY

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Numbers 13

13:26-33. Consider the incredible report the spies brought back about the beauty of the land. Moses, Aaron, and all of the Hebrews received amazing news. The early part of the spies' report could be summarized like this: "It's better than you can possibly imagine!" They said it was "flowing with milk and honey." The natural resources of the land were like nothing they had seen before.

As we often see in the Old Testament, the Israelites faltered in their faith. Right on the heels of describing the land as everything they hoped for, the spies also described why it was impossible to possess. Note the word "however" that shows up in verse 28. With that one word, the spies' report shifted from the goodness of God's promise to the difficulty of possessing the land.

In the face of the dangers present in the promised land, all but two of the spies lost their faith. Joshua and Caleb were ready to forge ahead, but they were outnumbered by the other spies who believed the fortified cities were too great for God to overcome. When their faith had faltered, and their eyes were no longer on the promise, they only saw an unconquerable force before them.

In the case of the Israelites, God was offering them a land where they could rest—a land flowing with milk and honey—and certain victory over their foes. But because they failed to remember what He had already done for them, they saw slavery in Egypt, or even death in the wilderness, as better for them than the abundant life that God offered.

99 Essential Doctrines *(p. 8, DDG)*


Sin as Rebellion

Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.



TEACHING PLAN

Our actions reveal what's already in our hearts (Luke 6:45). In Numbers 13 and 14 the Israelites were at a crucial moment in their history. They were steps away from entering the promised land and enjoying God's provision, rest, and protection in the land that He swore to give them. But this generation would never step foot into the promised land. They would never experience the fruit of the land. They would never find rest. Instead, they would be forced to wander in the wilderness for all their days—until every last person of that generation, except Joshua and Caleb, died.

Why? Because of their failure to trust that God is faithful, which led to disobedience and their refusal to enter the land. But we cannot miss where it started. Not all of the Israelites entered the promised land as spies—only twelve did. It was the bad report of the ten that condemned the people to wander in the wilderness instead of resting in God's provision. The report of the ten spies brought the entire nation down. Faithlessness and fear are contagious—they are symptoms of a cruel disease, sinful rebellion, that is fatal. 

- **What did the Israelites' fear reveal about their trust in God?**
- **How does fear sometimes keep you from following God's plan?**


The obstacles that the Israelites would face if they went into the promised land would have been real, but their faithless hearts and lack of trust in God blinded them to the fact that those obstacles were no match for God. The obstacle they failed to see, the one that did them in, was their own hearts.

- **What are some ways that our actions reveal what is in our hearts?**

Read Numbers 14:30-35



The sobering reality about the consequences of our sin is that in those consequences we are given the very thing we declare we want through our sin. When we sin, we are saying to God, “What You have promised me isn't good enough. I believe what my sin has to offer me is better than what You have to offer me.” And so, at times, God's response is to give us the very thing we want. And this is exactly what He did with the Israelites. They preferred to die in the wilderness rather than trust in God's faithfulness. God's judgment was that they would do just that.

God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish (2 Pet. 3:9), but God is also just (Deut. 32:4). God desires for us to turn away from our sin and look to Him, but God cannot allow sin to go unpunished. And the punishment, the consequence, of all sin is death. But in God's kindness, He provided a way to escape death. We see it here when God spares Caleb and Joshua. And we see it in the core of the gospel. God sent His Son, Christ Jesus, into the world to take the punishment of our sin on Himself. He laid down His life, and He pleads for the lives of those who trust in Him. The good news of the gospel is that God has made a way for sinners, who deserve death, to have life. And that way has always been the same—through faith in Him. Faith is what spared Caleb and Joshua from dying in the wilderness of judgment, and faith is what spares us from the same. And in this, we have only one reasonable response: God is indeed glorious! 

COMMENTARY

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Numbers 14

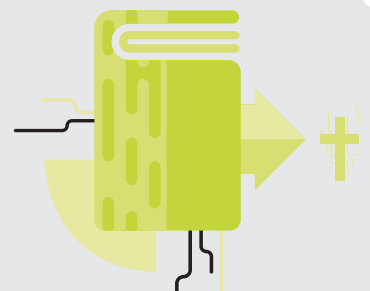
11-16. When we sin, even sin that's done in the dark, we are not the only ones affected. Our sin always affects those around us, directly or indirectly, whether we see it or not. Our sin has the ability to hurt those around us and cause us to disdain the wisdom that God gives us through others. The result is often a compounding of our sin. One sin leads to another as our hearts are further hardened against God. We see that happen in this narrative. The people not only desire new leadership, they want to kill the leaders God had placed over them (14:10). But in that moment, the glory of God appeared before the people and God spoke to Moses.

God's proposed solution to His people's rebellion was to kill all of them and start over with Moses, the one they wanted to kill (14:11-12). If this plan were to be carried out, though, not only would those who had complained be affected, but also those in the camp who had not. But Moses pleaded on behalf of the people before God saying, "If you kill this people with a single blow, the nations that have heard of your fame will declare, 'Since the LORD wasn't able to bring this people into the land he swore to give them, he has slaughtered them in the wilderness'" (14:15-16). Moses recognized that God's name was at stake: if He were to wipe out the Israelites, even if they deserved it and even if they had just threatened to kill him, God would be blasphemed among the nations. He would be mocked for leading His people out of captivity only to kill them in the wilderness. The sin of the Israelites affected them and the way they viewed the leaders God had given them, and it had the potential of affecting how the nations around them viewed God.

Our sin is no different. Not only does our sin have the ability to hurt those around us, but our sin has the ability to cause those around us, both believers and nonbelievers, to see God as something He is not. Therefore, we must be careful to obey all that God commands (Deut. 8:1). The truth is, because we are broken by sin, we will mess up. And these mistakes may very well affect the way people see God. But God can redeem even the most sinful of actions. When we repent of our sin and turn from rebellion to obedience, the grace of God is proclaimed, believers are called to walk in faith, and sinners are called to turn to Christ in faith.

(p. 9, DDG) Christ Connection

God's people rebelled against Him and refused to enter the land He had given them because they failed to trust His provision and promises. Jesus fully trusted the Father and entered the world in obedience bringing about the fulfillment of God's promise to provide One to save people from sin.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



Share about a time when you allowed circumstances to negatively affect your sense of identity.

Why is it important to know that our identity as Christians can never be changed or altered because of what Christ has done for us?

Heart



How does the disobedience of the Israelites provide a glimpse into our own disobedience toward God?

How can we learn from the mistakes of the Israelites and avoid disobedience in our own lives?

Hands



How can God's work in your own life be used to draw others to Him?

What is an instance of God's faithfulness in your life you can share with someone this week?

Main Point: **Rebellion against God** **is rooted in failing** **to trust God.**



Head

When you think about it, the Israelite spies lost sight of their identity as the people of God. They were the people of promise, saved by God and commissioned to take the land He had for them. Instead, they looked at some really large soldiers and made a poor assessment of themselves. “Like grasshoppers” is how they saw themselves, but that is not how the Lord saw them. A failure of faith is not only losing faith in God’s power, but losing a sense of yourself as His child.

For those without Christ, having a sense of identity can be a real struggle, especially when they seek it in accomplishments, activities, or in their personal self-expression. For Christians, however, it is comforting to know that our identity as children of God and followers of Jesus never changes, giving us a foundation for a joyful and God-honoring life.



Heart

We often read stories like this one in Scripture and think to ourselves: “How could they respond this way when God had clearly showed them His power to protect them and His ability to provide for them?” But the reality is, we do the same thing every day. Every time we sin, we say to God, “I don’t trust that what You have promised me is good enough. I believe what my sin has to offer is better than what You have to offer.”

But it does not have to be this way. If we fight to remember everything God has done for us and all He has provided for us—food, water, family, friends, the church, life, salvation—and fix our minds and hearts on His faithfulness, it becomes easier for us to trust that whatever He offers is far better than whatever our sin offers.



Hands

The heart of the gospel means that we have been fully represented before God by Jesus. And because of that, we now are able to represent God before the people of the world who do not know Him. Today, our calling is not to conquer the nations but to take the gospel to them. No matter if the obstacles make us feel “like grasshoppers,” we trust that God will give us all we need to accomplish His mission.

One of the ways we can represent Christ today is by telling others of His past and current faithfulness to us in our own lives. We may not be able to answer every question or objection raised by others, but neither can they deny our own experience of God’s continual love, pursuit, and care for us that we know to be true.