

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
11-3-21
Numbers 14

Israel Rebels By Mourning At Their Dilemma Between Faith And Unbelief - Verses 1-4

¹ That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. ² All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! ³ Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" ⁴ And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

14:1-4 When the chorus of despair went up, everyone joined in. Their greatest fears were being realized. Losing their perspective, the people were caught up in the emotion of the moment, forgetting what they knew about God's character. What if the people had spent as much energy moving forward as they did moving back? They could have enjoyed their land—instead they never even entered it. When a cry of despair goes up around you, consider the larger perspective before you join in. You have better ways to use your energy than to complain.

The Reaction Of The Godly Against The Rebellion Of The People - Verses 5-9

⁵ Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. ⁶ Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes ⁷ and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. ⁸ If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. ⁹ Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

14:5-9 With great miracles, God had led the Israelites out of slavery, through the desolate wilderness, and up to the very edge of the Promised Land. He had protected them, fed them, and fulfilled every promise. Yet when encouraged to take that last step of faith and enter the land, the people refused. After witnessing so many miracles, why did they stop trusting God? Why did they refuse to enter the Promised Land when that had been their goal since leaving Egypt? They were afraid. Often we do the same thing. We trust God to handle the smaller issues but doubt his ability to take care of the big problems, the tough decisions, the frightening situations. Don't stop trusting God just as you are ready to reach your goal. He brought you this far and won't let you down now. We can continue trusting God by remembering all he has done for us.

14:6 Tearing clothing was a customary way of showing deep sorrow, mourning, or despair. Joshua and Caleb were greatly distressed by the people's refusal to enter the land.

14:6-9 Two wise men, Joshua and Caleb, encouraged the people to act on God's promise and move ahead into the land. The people rejected their advice and even talked of killing them. Don't be too quick to reject advice you don't like. Evaluate it carefully, comparing it to the teaching in God's Word. The advice may be God's message.

God's Charge Against Israel And Offer To Moses - Verses 10-12

¹⁰ But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites. ¹¹ The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? ¹² I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they."

14:10-12 The LORD said to Moses: God does not even speak with the nation; He knows they are past hearing Him. He will speak with Moses, and Moses alone. Many of child of God in rebellion wonders why they do not hear the voice of God anymore; why should they? They are rejecting what God has already said, do they think they can be open to what more He might say?

14:11 How long will these people reject Me? God had been only good to Israel, and had demonstrated His loving strength towards them countless times. Israel's rejection of God makes no sense.

14:12 I will strike them ... and disinherit them ... I will make of you a nation greater and mightier: This is a dramatic offer to Moses; God says He will give rebellious Israel what they deserve - judgment (indeed, what they said they wanted - to die in the wilderness! [14:2]), and He will fulfill His promises of a land, nation, and blessing to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through Moses instead!

Moses Intercedes For Israel, Appealing To God's Glory - Verses 13-16

¹³ Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them. ¹⁴ And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, LORD, are with these people and that you, LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. ¹⁵ If you put all these people to death, leaving none alive, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, ¹⁶ 'The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath, so he slaughtered them in the wilderness.'

14:13-16 The people didn't deserve it, but Moses pleaded for them because he was concerned about God's reputation among unbelievers. Think of the reputation you give God by the way you

live. What your friends and neighbors think about God is more important than what they think about you.

Moses Intercedes For Israel, Appealing To God's Power And Promise - Verses 17-19

¹⁷ "Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared: ¹⁸ 'The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.' ¹⁹ In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now."

14:17-19 Moses and Aaron asked God to have mercy on the very people who rebelled against them. They prayed for those with whom they were most angry and frustrated. Do you pray for those who try to hurt you? Or do you seek revenge, asking God to help you to get even? Only men and women who have a deep relationship with God can remain firm under pressure and pray for their attackers. They understand that the God who called them to their task will take the responsibility to settle the score with those who rebel. It is not the child's job to discipline a sibling, but the parents'. In the same way, it is not our job to seek revenge against those who wrong us. God will make certain that, in the end, justice is carried out.

14:17-19 Moses pleaded with God, asking him to forgive his people. His plea reveals several characteristics of God: (1) God is immensely patient; (2) God's love is one promise we can always count on; (3) God forgives again and again; and (4) God is merciful, listening to and answering our requests. God has not changed since Moses' day. Like Moses, we can rely on God's love, patience, forgiveness, and mercy.

The Fate Of The Rebels And The Fate Of The Faithful - Verses 20-25

²⁰ The LORD replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. ²¹ Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, ²² not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times— ²³ not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. ²⁴ But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. ²⁵ Since the Amalekites and the Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea."

14:20-23 The people of Israel had a clearer view of God than any people before them, for they had both his laws and his physical presence. Their refusal to follow God after witnessing his miraculous deeds and listening to his words made the judgment against them more severe. Increased opportunity brings increased responsibility. As Jesus said: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded" (Luke 12:48). How much greater is our responsibility to obey and serve God—we have the whole Bible, and we know God's Son, Jesus Christ.

14:22 God wasn't exaggerating when he said that the Israelites had 10 times failed to trust and obey him. Here is a list of their 10 failures: (1) lacking trust at the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:11-12); (2) complaining over bitter water at Marah (Exodus 15:24); (3) complaining in the Desert of Sin (Exodus 16:3); (4) collecting more than the daily quota of manna (Exodus 16:20); (5) collecting manna on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:27-29); (6) complaining over lack of water at Rephidim (Exodus 17:2-3); (7) engaging in idolatry with a golden calf (Exodus 32:7-10); (8) complaining at Taberah (Numbers 11:1-2); (9) more complaining over the lack of delicious food (Numbers 11:4); (10) failing to trust God and enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14:1-4).

14:24 The fulfillment of this verse is recorded in Joshua 14:6-15 when Caleb received his inheritance in the Promised Land. Caleb followed God with all his heart and was rewarded for his obedience. Are you wholehearted in your commitment to obey God?

The Death Sentence Upon The Rebels - Verses 26-35

²⁶ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: ²⁷ "How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. ²⁸ So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say: ²⁹ In this wilderness your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. ³⁰ Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. ³¹ As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. ³² But as for you, your bodies will fall in this wilderness. ³³ Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. ³⁴ For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.' ³⁵ I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against me. They will meet their end in this wilderness; here they will die."

14:34 God's judgment came in the form the people feared most. The people were afraid of dying in the wilderness, so God punished them by making them wander in the wilderness until they died. Now they wished they had the problem of facing the giants and the fortified cities of the Promised Land. Failing to trust God often brings even greater problems than those we originally faced. When we run from God, we inevitably run into problems.

14:35 Was this judgment—wandering 40 years in the wilderness—too harsh? Not compared to the instant death that God first threatened (14:12). Instead, God allowed the people to live. God had brought his people to the edge of the Promised Land, just as he said he would. He was ready to give them the rich land, but the people didn't want it (14:1-2). By this time, God had put up with a lot. At least 10 times, the people had refused to trust and obey him (14:22). The whole nation (except for Joshua, Caleb, Moses, and Aaron) showed contempt for and distrust of

God. But God's punishment was not permanent. In 40 years, a new generation would have a chance to enter Canaan (Joshua 1-3).

An Immediate Death Sentence Upon The Ten Unfaithful Spies - Verses 36-38

³⁶ So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it— ³⁷ these men who were responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD. ³⁸ Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived.

14:36-38 Now the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land ... died by the plague before the LORD: If the death of the unbelieving generation would take some 38 years (the number of years left to make a total time of the exodus forty years), the death of the ten unfaithful spies was immediate.

Died by the plague before the LORD: God has one prescription for the old man, and the flesh: to kill it. It can't be reformed. We are not called to turn over a new leaf for God. The old man dies, and only then can the new man patterned after Jesus Christ, can inherit God's land of rest and promise.

Failure Of The Attempt To Take The Promised Land By Man's Strength And Wisdom - Verses 39-45

³⁹ When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly. ⁴⁰ Early the next morning they set out for the highest point in the hill country, saying, "Now we are ready to go up to the land the LORD promised. Surely we have sinned!" ⁴¹ But Moses said, "Why are you disobeying the LORD's command? This will not succeed! ⁴² Do not go up, because the LORD is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, ⁴³ for the Amalekites and the Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the LORD, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword." ⁴⁴ Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the highest point in the hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the LORD's covenant moved from the camp. ⁴⁵ Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah.

14:40-44 When the Israelites realized their foolish mistake, they were suddenly ready to return to God. But God didn't confuse their admission of guilt with true repentance because he knew their hearts. Sure enough, they soon went their own way again. Sometimes right actions or good intentions come too late. We must not only do what is right, but also do it at the right time. God wants complete and instant obedience.