

A REBELLIOUS PEOPLE

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

Rebellion occurs when God's ways and authority are despised.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Numbers 13–14

+ SETTING:

After the exodus, receiving the law at Mount Sinai, and constructing the tabernacle, the Book of Numbers moves the narrative forward as the Israelites follow God's lead out into the wilderness, headed to the promised land. The early stages of this leg of their trip were again marked with strife, however, as the people began to grumble and complain and some of Moses's own family members began to question his leadership. These events foreshadowed the trouble to come in the wilderness of Paran.

DAY 1

READ:

Numbers 13

FOCAL PASSAGES:

Numbers 13:1-3,27-33

NOTES

“Out of sight, out of mind” is a common expression used to describe one’s forgetfulness. The descriptor was apt for the people of Israel too. By this point in Numbers 13, the Israelites have already been delivered from Egypt and have reached their promised possession of a new land, one flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:17). But often in the midst of their journey to Canaan, they were prone to forget God’s promise.

In Numbers 13:1-3, the Lord instructed Moses to send out leaders from among the camp to spy out the new land. In verses 27-33, the spies returned with their report. The majority of them were paralyzed by fear of what they had seen and pessimistic at what was before them. Two of the spies, however, held out hope. Caleb, with Joshua alongside, brought a much-needed reminder of the Lord’s faithfulness to His people.

One ministry leader recently shared a unique way of reminding himself of the faithfulness of God. He picked out an ordinary object he knew he would encounter in some way every single day and determined that when the encounter occurred, he would think about the faithfulness of God. When he was younger, the object he chose was an old grandfather clock in his childhood family room. Every hour, the clock would chime, a perpetual reminder of God’s kindness to him. But the clock had no way of knowing what he was going through on a particular day. The clock chime caught him in moments of excitement over good grades and Little League wins. It also caught him in tough times, such as receiving the news of a family member’s illness and when he felt like he had let down his parents once again. Despite life’s ups and downs, the clock still chimed.

Such is the faithfulness of our trustworthy God—a steady chime of calm and respite in the midst of our ever-changing circumstances.

What is one consistent object or experience you can set in place to remind yourself each day of God’s faithfulness to you through Christ?

DAY 2

READ:

Numbers 14:1-4

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Numbers 14:1-4

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #38: 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.

Words are powerful. They can build up or tear down, liberate or stifle, comfort or damage. Words can communicate hope, healing, and restoration, or they can project displeasure, discontent, and gloom. Words can win and lose political elections, start and end wars, build careers and reputations or demolish them in one fell swoop. It is no wonder, then, that the apostles James and Paul instructed us to control our tongues (Jas. 1:26) and to let no foul language come from our mouths (Eph. 4:29).

The "trickle-down" effect of our words can be both positive and negative. Individuals can be encouraged and lifted up by the actions, words, and attitudes of others, or they can be disheartened. In Numbers 14:1-4, the latter was the case for the Israelites. Most of their leaders had returned from scouting out the promised land with a pessimistic report, and the people succumbed to fear and worry upon hearing it. Their anxiety blossomed into full-on sin against God and the leaders He had set in place over them. Further, they convinced themselves that they knew better than God.

The Israelites' response is lamentable, and the pessimistic spies were culpable for it. Because they did not wield their influence and words wisely and faithfully, a whole nation turned in rebellion away from God.

Today, we can decide how we will wield our influence and our words in the presence of others. Whether on social media or in the workplace or at home, our words have power, and they can be used for good or ill. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:29 that our language as believers should serve the purposes of grace, to build others up and never tear them down.

Who are three people you can encourage and build up with your words? Take time to go and encourage them today.

DAY 3

READ:

Numbers 14:5-45

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Numbers 14:5-10

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"This promise has been proved to me, this covenant has been proved true. I have thumbed my Bible many a year; I have never yet thumbed a broken promise. The promises have all been kept to me; 'not one good thing has failed.'"¹

-Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

In our culture, confidence is not easy to come by. In an age in which we grow up in a stream of self-doubt, image maintenance, and cancellation, saying something or doing something bold feels too costly, doubly so when it comes to speaking and acting boldly for Christ. The reality that drumming up confidence by oneself is nearly impossible must mean that such confidence needs to come from elsewhere, from a different source.

In Numbers 14:5-10, the leaders of Israel—Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb—needed to make a bold stand, and to our great benefit, they knew the right source from which godly confidence is derived. At first, their responses seem strange. Moses and Aaron fell prostrate before the Lord, while Joshua and Caleb ripped their clothes. These were acts of contrition, heartbreak, and lament on behalf of the rebellious Israelites. The leaders were humbly acknowledging the failure of the people before a holy God. A bold suggestion for a way forward was needed; thus, they tapped into the Source.

Joshua and Caleb delivered a stirring message to the people, reminding them that God's promised land was good and further that He had promised His presence and guidance along the way to their possession of it. They put the imposing threat within the land in its proper context and expressed confidence in the Lord's ability to overthrow any who would stand in their way. The gist of their message? "The Lord is with us! Don't be afraid!"

Are you fearful today? Are you doubting the Lord's presence, provision, and protection? Are you unsure of His love and care for you? Look to Christ, the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2). He will gird you up and give you the confidence needed to stand boldly in the face of adversity.

Are there areas of your life in which you doubt God's ability to provide? Confess them in prayer and ask the Lord to help you with your unbelief.

DAY 4

READ:

Psalms 42–43

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 42:1-5

NOTES

A wedding anniversary is a special occasion. It provides a formal time of year for spouses to express, in a tangible way, their affection and commitment to one another. The tenor of the celebration can change, however, based on one's motivation. A husband sending flowers to his wife's workplace in tenderness and love is quite different than a husband who leaves a box of chocolates on the dining room table with a small note that reads: "Figured I had to do this."

The genuineness of the anniversary experience rests in the balance between delight and duty. Men delight in their wives, and women delight in their husbands, which yields a sweet sort of weightlessness to the duty of going out and buying a gift. When the delight is absent, however, the duty feels more like a grind, as if it has to be forced.

Obedience to God is cast in similar hues. As John Piper notes, these two things—duty and delight—are not at odds in the Christian life.² At times, the duty precedes the delight. "I don't feel God in my Bible reading," says the man who feels distant from the Lord. "I don't sense any sort of connection," says the woman who feels estranged from her Savior. To these individuals, we might say: "Put yourself in front of the Word of God and pray with all your might that God would yield in you a change of heart." And He will. God grants that sincere desire in the hearts of His people when they come to Him acknowledging they feel far from Him but earnestly desiring closeness instead.

Psalm 42:5 is the perfect picture of the posture needed in a spot like this. The downcast soul of the psalm writer still finds his hope in God and still commits to praise Him who saves him.

How do you relate to various parts of Psalms 42–43? Jot down the parts of the psalms that restore your hope and trust in God today.

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 2

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 2:37-47

NOTES

Remarkable events are recorded in the Book of Acts. As Luke recounts the beginning and spread of the early church, it is impossible not to let our minds drift to the task ahead of us even now as believers plugged in to local-church contexts. In the course of Christian discipleship, the spread of the gospel does not cease with any one person. If the gospel has been shared with you and you have received it by faith, then it is meant to go through and from you to someone else. This is the crux of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

In Acts, we find the launch of that commission. In Acts 2, specifically, Peter delivered a stirring message to the crowd gathered around him. He recounted both age-old prophecies and recent and present realities concerning the person and work of Jesus.

The hearers' hearts were opened to the message of the gospel, and one among them asked a poignant question: "What should we do?" Peter told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus so they could receive forgiveness for their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. He urged them to be saved for their sake and the sake of their posterity. Upon accepting the message of the gospel, three thousand people were added to the kingdom and baptized. Verse 42 then captures what everyday life looked like for the new disciples.

This scene is a needed reminder of what can transpire when we heed the call to obey Christ's command to go to the nations to share the gospel and make disciples. But we need not wait until there are three thousand souls gathered to proclaim the good news. Perhaps there are three people within your sphere of influence who need to hear it. Go to those three. Even if it is just one, what is stopping you?

Who is one person you desire to share the gospel with? Make plans to sit down with that person to have a conversation within the next week.

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Often in a state of rebellion against God, one loses the benefit of spiritual mooring, whereby wisdom and discernment become elusive and proper decision making is made extremely difficult. Worry and fear dominate one's thought patterns."³

-R. Dennis Cole

POINT 1: Rebellion occurs when God's promises are forsaken (Num. 13:1-3,27-33).

The Lord gave a command for _____ and a sure promise for His people's _____.

The promised land was theirs for the taking.

? How have God's promises strengthened you to obey His commands?

Ten of the spies sent into the land returned with a negative report because they _____ or _____ God's promise when faced with the difficulties in the land.

POINT 2: Rebellion occurs when God's plans are scorned (Num. 14:1-4).

The spies' negative report affected the whole community, leading the Israelites to _____ God's plan and _____ Him of malicious intent.

? What are some signs that we may be guilty of rejecting God's plan for our lives?

Rejecting God's plan will result in rejecting the godly _____ He has _____ to shepherd His people.

? What role have godly leaders played in your life to help you obey the Lord and grow in your faith?

POINT 3: Rebellion occurs when God's authority is rejected (Num. 14:5-10).

Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb believed God's promise regarding the land and pleaded with the

Israelites to put aside their _____ of others and to _____ to God's authority. But the people chose rebellion.



What are some ways we can encourage others to submit to God's authority?

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MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced forgiveness through the Son's obedience, with gratitude and joy, we seek to obey God's call for us to proclaim His kingdom among the nations.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways God has demonstrated His faithfulness in your life?
- **HEART:** Under what circumstances and in what areas of your life are you prone to rebellion against God? How will you direct your heart toward humble submission to God instead?
- **HANDS:** For whom will you intercede and plead that they will choose obedience instead of rebellion?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"For faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience."⁴

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)