

AN UNFAITHFUL PROPHET

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

The unfaithfulness of people always comes at a great cost—the judgment of a holy God.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Numbers 20

+ SETTING:

Because Israel rebelled and refused to enter and conquer the promised land as God had said, they were punished with forty years of wandering in the wilderness, one year for every day the spies were in the land. That generation was condemned to die in the wilderness outside of the promised land, but the next generation would claim the land by God's grace. Still, the people continued to succumb to discontent and disobedience, a failing that affected their leaders as well.

DAY 1

READ:

Numbers 20:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Numbers 20:1-5

NOTES

Bad habits are easy to form and difficult to get rid of. For good habits, the converse is often true. Popular opinions on the formation of habits suggest it takes anywhere from 21 to 66 days to form a routine. On the other hand, some particularly harmful habits take a lifetime to break.

For the people of Israel, sin and rebellion was not a one-time occurrence. They could not disregard their poor behavior and unbelief as a mere symptom of their unusual circumstances. Their sin was habitual. Unfaithfulness over time had led to patterns of sin.

In Numbers 20:1-5, the Israelite people were discontent once again with their circumstances, and their unhappiness had manifested itself in constant groaning and complaining. They were even convinced that their former condition in bondage in Egypt was better than their current situation. In a stunning series of grievances, the people questioned both God's plans and Moses's leadership—a catch-all complaint that signaled their disobedience and would ultimately be their leaders' undoing.

Sin left unchecked festers and grows into deadly patterns of discontent and disobedience. This is why it is critical for believers constantly to check themselves with regard to their actions and their heart's posture toward God and their circumstances. The devil is not sitting passively but actively searching for prey to fall to his schemes (1 Pet. 5:8). As John Owen quipped, it is important for the Christian to "be killing sin or it will be killing you."¹

Thankfully, in Christ we have all we need to do battle. He has won the victory over sin and its temptations, and he faithfully provides a way of escape for us (1 Cor. 10:13).

Is there sin in your life that is left unchecked and roaming free? Confess your sin to God and to a trusted friend who can help you along the way.

DAY 2

READ:

Numbers 20:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Numbers 20:6-11

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #36: SIN AS MISSING THE MARK

One aspect of sin is missing the mark of God's standards set for humanity. This missing of the mark is not a simple mistake but a falling short of God's glory through conscious choosing of sin. We may refer to sin as a failure on the part of humans to live according to God's standards, but we must recognize this failure is intentional. We miss the mark when we deliberately choose to cast aside God's intention for us.

Before the days of GPS systems, smart phones, and Internet map services, traveling was an adventure. You may remember days on the road when your mom or dad took up the passenger seat post with paper maps and crumpled notes sprawled across the dash. These days it is hard to believe anyone actually got where they intended to go.

Clear directions are invaluable, and doubly so with God. In His Word, He has clearly spelled out the "terms of agreement" for life as a believer. There are indicative statements that remind us of our sure status and identity in Christ. There also are imperative statements that give us marching orders, helping us know what we ought to say and do.

In Numbers 20:6-11, Moses and Aaron were reminded of their status as anointed leaders in the sight of God when they met with Him at the tent of meeting. Then they were given directives related to God's provision for His wayward people. As the story often goes, however, Moses and Aaron failed to follow the Lord's commands and they sinned against Him by taking matters into their own hands. Moses, with Aaron alongside, demonstrated an obvious lack of trust in God's plan for the restoration of His people, and in so doing, the two became "rebels" themselves. The pair's unfaithfulness resulted from a failure to trust God.

The psalmist said God's Word is a lamp for our feet and a light on our path (Ps. 119:105). The writer of Hebrews said the Word is living and active, a faithful judge of what is going on in our hearts (Heb. 4:12). Paul reminded Timothy that all of Scripture is inspired by God and serves the purposes of teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Will we heed God's Word today, or will we ignore it and do our own thing?

How has your time in God's Word been lately? Pick up your Bible with a fresh devotion today. Find a quiet place, turn to Psalm 119, and read it aloud.

DAY 3

READ:

Numbers 20:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Numbers 20:12-13

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"[Moses] wavered only slightly, yet for this alone he immediately received the threat that he should not enter into the land of promise ... When I behold this man asking and not obtaining pardon, when I see him not deemed worthy of forgiveness because of those few words, even in consideration of so many righteous deeds, truly I discern, in the words of the apostle, 'the severity of God.' I am fully persuaded that these words are true: 'If the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear [1 Pet. 4:18]?'"²

-Basil the Great (c. 330-379)

Have you ever been to a major theme park? There is nothing quite like walking through the turnstiles to the smell of funnel cakes and cotton candy and the sound of screaming roller coaster riders piercing through the carnival noise intermittently. The towering roller coaster rides are usually the main attraction: You strap into a small seat as your heart beats wildly. The safety bar, which seems a little loose, falls over your shoulders, and before you know it, you're off, racing through the summer breeze, completely out of control yet tethered to the tracks.

This can feel like life with God sometimes. Complete surrender means a loss of control, yet we are called to trust that His ways are better than ours.

In Numbers 20:12-13, the result of Moses and Aaron's failure to trust God completely was devastating. They learned they would not make it to the promise land after their decades-long journey toward it. In their zeal, Moses and Aaron disobeyed God, thinking His holiness was theirs to assert. They failed to see, however, that obeying God's commands is the primary means of demonstrating His holiness. This is a stark reminder to us that even what we perceive as righteous anger may not actually be obedience to the Lord's commands. Rather, He calls us to trust Him despite what we think is best. This isn't blind trust; over and over again, the Lord has proven Himself trustworthy.

Christian, the Lord will not withhold what is best for us. He is faithful to keep His promises, and He does so in His timing, which also is best for us.

**What situation do you need to trust God with today?
Pray and ask for His guidance and His help in
trusting Him more.**

DAY 4

READ:

Colossians 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Colossians 3:1-4

NOTES

Throughout the Book of Numbers, we bear witness to the Israelites' disobedience and discontent. Doubt in God's faithfulness and provision hardened the people's hearts over and over again, to the point they had trouble seeing past their worry to God's goodness.

Yet we should not take the Israelites' plight as an indication that every bit of discontent and worry in and of itself is an affront to God that will immediately incur His judgment. Rather, the discontent and worry we often feel is a sign of our brokenness and proclivity toward sin. Therefore, it is good and right to take discontent and worry to the Lord, trusting that He can and will alleviate it in due time.

This is what repentance looks like: knowing the sinful inclinations of the flesh and confessing these sinful impulses to the Lord, asking Him for forgiveness and help to keep fighting the good fight. This is also the tension we see in chapter 3 of Paul's Letter to the Colossians. The believer experiences a constant toggling and reorienting, putting off the old things that lead to death and putting on those things that give life.

In the opening verses of the chapter, Paul spelled out the foundation believers stand upon in their battle against sin—we have the vantage point of having been raised with and hidden in Christ, who was raised from the dead and has ascended to the right hand of God the Father (Col. 3:1-4). Therefore, we can now look away from earthly things and toward heavenly things, confident that what we will find there will be the fulfillment of every desire of our longing hearts.

What can you do today to peel your eyes from earthly things and redirect your gaze to heavenly things?

DAY 5

READ:

Luke 8:26-29

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 8:38-39

NOTES

Giving children birthday or Christmas gifts is one of the simple pleasures in life. Yes, the act of gift-giving itself is fulfilling, but such transactions with kids are next-level due to their response. They often cannot contain their joy, and they fully embrace the need to tell everyone what they have received! If you have never been lovingly tasked with marveling in exaggerated fashion at an ordinary ball or toy car, you are missing out.

C. S. Lewis commented on this phenomenon in his *Reflections on the Psalms*. He observed this response not merely in children but in adults from every walk of life: "I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise ... The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game." He concluded that such ordinary praise is rooted in and completes one's pure enjoyment of a person or place or certain thing: "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation."³ Praise is not just telling someone about the gift; our shouting completes our enjoyment of the gift.

Recall the demon-possessed man in Luke 8. After his deliverance encounter with Jesus, chatter filled the town and countryside. The people were fearful, wondering who this Man could be. In their fear, many of the people begged Jesus to depart from them. But not the man Jesus set free. Verses 38-39 tell us that man begged to be with Jesus, but Jesus told him to go home and tell everyone what God had done for him. So the man went off and did exactly that. The man's praise, evidenced in his sharing the good news about Jesus, brought his joy in Christ to a high point. It completed his joy.

**Are you joyful for what Christ has done for you?
With whom will you share that joy and the good
news of Jesus?**

GROUP

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

POSITIVE LEADER QUALITIES	NEGATIVE LEADER QUALITIES

POINT 1: Unfaithfulness leads to a pattern of sin (Num. 20:1-5).

Failure to deal faithfully with disobedience leads to patterns of _____ and _____.

 Why do you think we gravitate to the same types of sin over and over again?

Generations of Israelites rebelled against God, _____ about their circumstances, _____ against their leaders, and desired to return to their previous life of _____.

 What does dealing faithfully with sin look like?

POINT 2: Unfaithfulness results from a failure to trust God (Num. 20:6-11).

Moses and Aaron approached the Lord in _____, and the Lord responded with _____ for the people to provide them water through their leaders speaking to a rock.

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #36: SIN AS MISSING THE MARK

One aspect of sin is missing the mark of God's _____ set for humanity. This missing of

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"In this world, one thirsts on a waterless road. But let us thirst that we may be filled. For 'blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice; for they shall have their fill.' And our thirst is filled from a rock in the wasteland. For 'the rock was Christ.'"⁴

-Augustine (354-430)

the mark is not a simple mistake but a falling short of God's glory through conscious choosing of sin. We may refer to sin as a _____ on the part of humans to live according to God's standards, but we must recognize this failure is _____ . We miss the mark when we deliberately choose to cast aside God's intention for us.



What are some lessons we ought to learn from Moses and Aaron's example?

POINT 3: Unfaithfulness brings the judgment of a holy God (Num. 20:12-13).

Moses and Aaron suffered a severe _____ because they did not honor God's _____ .



Why does God's severe discipline of Moses and Aaron not sit well with many of us?

God demonstrates His holiness in His _____ and in His _____ , seen especially in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced the good provision of God in Jesus, we strive to trust Him no matter our circumstances, knowing that He works all things for His glory and our good.

- **HEAD:** In what areas of life are you struggling to trust God? Confess these to God in prayer now.
- **HEART:** How will you obey the Lord today because of His holiness displayed in Christ on the cross?
- **HANDS:** What are some ways you will love, serve, and lead others so they can know Jesus by faith?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word, What
a glory He sheds on our way!
Let us do His good will; He
abides with us still, And with
all who will trust and obey.
Trust and obey, For there's
no other way To be happy in
Jesus, But to trust and obey."⁵

-John H. Sammis (1846-1919)