

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE FAITHLESS

CORE PASSAGE: NUMBERS 14:11-24

CONTEXT

Numbers 14 marks a tragic turning point in Israel's history. In Numbers 13, Moses sent spies into the promised land, charging them to scope out the land and bring a report back to the people. The spies came back and gave their "good news / bad news" report. The good news was that the land was everything the Lord had said it was. The bad news was that the cities were fortified, and the people were strong—also, giant (see Numbers 13:1-29). Despite the urging of Caleb and Joshua, the Israelites listened to the other ten spies and decided they wanted to go back to Egypt, and God judged them for their rebellion.

KEY CONCEPT

God is faithful both to forgive and to punish faithlessness.

As you examine Numbers 14:11-24:

- Recognize that the Israelites deserved punishment and judgment for their faithlessness.
- Consider that God punished those who rebelled against Him but showed His faithful love by not abandoning His covenant people.



TIMELINE

Moses Sends Twelve Spies into the Promised Land (Numbers 13:1-20)

The People Refuse to Enter the Promised Land, Threatening to Stone Their Leaders (Numbers 14:1-10)

Israel Continues to Grumble, Complain, and Rebel Until the Rebellious Generation Dies (Numbers 15-36)

The Spies Return, but Ten Spread a Bad Report (Numbers 13:21-33)

SESSION STUDY: Moses Intercedes Before God, but There Are Consequences (Numbers 14:11-38)

Daily Readings

- Day 1:** Numbers 13:1-14:45
- Day 2:** Numbers 15:1-41
- Day 3:** Numbers 16:1-50
- Day 4:** Numbers 17:1-18:32
- Day 5:** Numbers 19:1-22
- Day 6:** Psalm 86



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

NUMBERS 14:11-20

THE LORD IS FAITHFUL TO FORGIVE EVEN WHEN HIS PEOPLE ARE FAITHLESS.

Underline the aspects of God's relationship to His people that the other nations had witnessed.

11 The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people despise me? How long will they not trust in me despite all the signs I have performed 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, 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, 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 will declare, **16** '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.' **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, 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."

FIGURE STUDY

MOSES: On six occasions, Moses interceded for the people of Israel (Exodus 32:10-12; Numbers 12:13; 14:19; 16:22,45-49; 21:7). Moses's patience and long-suffering are a foreshadowing of Jesus, the new and better Moses (Hebrews 3:1-5).

Key Concept: God is faithful both to forgive and to punish faithlessness.

Israel deserved punishment. After everything they had seen and experienced with God's presence among them, at the very edge of Canaan, they were ready to submit themselves to slavery again rather than follow God into the promised land. Yet, it wasn't until "the whole community threatened to stone" Moses and Aaron that God appeared to them (Deuteronomy 14:10). Notice in verse 10 in your Bible that God appeared to all the Israelites. That means all of them heard God say that He was ready to destroy them.

In what ways do we, like the Israelites, despise God when we doubt His plan for our lives?

God's response to Israel's rebellion was to threaten to strike all the people with a plague and make Moses a great nation instead. This was the second time God had made this threat. The first was after Israel's idolatry with the golden calf (see Exodus 32:10).

What was God up to? We know that God made a covenant with Abraham to make of him a great nation. God doesn't break His promises. More than likely this was to test Moses. After all, Moses had expressed plenty of frustration about the Israelites (see Numbers 11:14-15). Would Moses again intercede for the people as he did before (see Exodus 32:11-12) or would he accept God's offer to make him a great nation?

Moses interceded for the people, just as he did when they made the golden calf. Moses appealed to God, first on the nature of His glory and fame, caring for God's reputation. Then, he appealed to God based on His character, not on the people's actions. Moses even quoted God's words about His character back to Him. In Exodus 34:6, God proclaimed, "The LORD is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth." In Numbers 14:18, Moses reminded God of His self-description.

Why do we feel we must earn forgiveness instead of depending on God's grace?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

SIN AS REBELLION: The Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation. The Bible, then, often portrays sin as rebellion toward God. God said, "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me" (Isaiah 1:2). Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the one true King.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

NUMBERS 14:21-24

FAITHLESSNESS CAN BE FORGIVEN AND YET STILL HAVE CONSEQUENCES.

In the margins, draw a frown emoji next to God's promise of consequence.

Draw a smile emoji next to God's promise of reward.

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 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.”

GOSPEL CONNECTION

The Lord, being perfectly holy and just, must punish faithlessness and rebellion, yet in keeping with His faithful love, He desires to show mercy and grace. So God proves Himself to be both just and the justifier of sinners through our faith in the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ, in our place (Romans 3:26).

Key Concept: God is faithful both to forgive and to punish faithlessness.

When Moses interceded for the people, God pardoned them as Moses requested (vv. 19-20). However, that doesn't mean they escaped consequences. The word translated "pardon" (*salah*) is used often in the Bible, most often in Leviticus and Numbers, in reference to the forgiveness that came from presenting a sin offering. It was a temporary condition, not a permanent release from punishment. This is clear in verses 21-23 when God promised that none of those who rebelled against Him would see the promised land. Later, in verse 29, God filled in the details: Everyone twenty years old and older would die in the wilderness over the next forty years.

When has God forgiven a sin but not removed the consequences of the sin in your own life?

The people had said it would be better if they died in the wilderness instead of entering the promised land, and that is exactly what they'd do. Yet God showed grace to Caleb and Joshua, the two spies who tried to convince the people they could take the land. Both of them would be blessed to survive the 40 years of wandering and enter the promised land. More than that, they would both play a crucial role in conquering it. Joshua's role is emphasized throughout the book that bears his name. Caleb, who had a "different spirit" (v. 24), would receive the very land in which the unfaithful spies saw the

Anakim and the fortified cities—at 85 years old (Joshua 14:7-15)!

Besides blessing Caleb and Joshua, God showed even more grace. In Numbers 14:18, Moses repeated the name that God had declared of Himself in Exodus 34. Part of God's name was that He would not allow the guilty to go unpunished but would punish sin "to the third and fourth generation" (34:7). If God had extended the punishment to the third and fourth generation, Israel would have been in the desert for another century, until the great-grandchildren of the rebels had dropped dead in the wilderness. God's mercy was greater than Israel's sin!

What are some examples in Scripture or in your own life of God not dealing with people as their sins deserve?

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

✕ ————— ✕
"Let us take heed lest there be at any time in us an evil heart of unbelief. Let a tender heart, hearkening to His voice, listening to and trusting His word, ever be the sacrifice we bring Him."¹

—Andrew Murray (1828–1917)

GROUP EXPERIENCE



WHERE JUDGMENT MEETS GRACE

Using one sentence or phrase, summarize each element of this week's Scripture.

THE PEOPLE'S SIN (NUMBERS 14:1-4):

GOD'S RESPONSE (NUMBERS 14:11-12):

MOSES'S PLEA (NUMBERS 14:13-19):

GOD'S JUDGMENT (NUMBERS 14:20-24):

Reflecting on God's response to sin, how does that make you respond?



Key Concept: God is faithful both to forgive and to punish faithlessness.



HEAD

Think of a “wake-up call” God has given you in the past. How did you respond?

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 86, and note every first person pronoun (I, Me, Mine). Focus on verse 11’s prayer for an undivided heart. What is dividing your heart right now and keeping you from wholeheartedly trusting God? Confess those things. Then pray verses 11-13 out loud to God.



HEART

How have you seen yourself grow in faith over the last year?

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HANDS

Whom can you encourage to embrace the mercy of God through faith in Jesus?

