

Numbers Chapter 14

Verses 1-4: The rebellion reached a climax when the people said, "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt" (compare 11:5, 18, 20).

In the people's desire to make a captain and return to Egypt, they were rejecting both Moses as their leader and the promises of the Lord (Exodus 16:2; 17:3).

Numbers 14:1 "And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night."

"All the congregation ... wept": All of Israel bewailed the circumstances.

The ten spies, that brought back bad news about entering the Promised Land, told it in the camp. It did not take long for it to spread to all of the people. Isn't it interesting, they listened to the negative talk, and did not hear Caleb. The weeping was in disappointment.

Numbers 14:2 "And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!"

"Murmured": The term means "to murmur". Specifically, they wished they had died in Egypt or the wilderness.

The murmuring was slanted toward Moses and Aaron, as if it were their fault. They keep forgetting, they were slaves under hard bondage in Egypt. Their wish to die in Egypt would not be fulfilled, but their wish to die in the wilderness would come true. God will let them wander, until these doubters die off. Their trip through the wilderness on the way to their Promised Land, reminds me of our struggles in this life, on our way to our Promised Land (heaven). Murmuring does not help. In fact, it is showing a lack of faith in God.

Numbers 14:3 "And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?"

Unto the borders of it. Their murmuring did not cease at Moses and Aaron, the instruments. But proceeded against God himself, who had done such wonderful things for them. Not only in bringing them out of Egypt, but since they had been in the wilderness. And yet so ungrateful to complain of him and argue with him about favors bestowed on them, as if they were injuries done to them. And particularly as if God had no other intention in bringing them out of Egypt to the place where they were. But;

"To fall by the sword": The sword of the Canaanites, as the Targum of Jonathan adds.

"That our wives and our children shall be a prey?" To the same people. They supposed they should be killed, their wives abused, and their children made slaves of.

"Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?" And so escape the hands of the inhabitants of Canaan, of whom they had terrible apprehensions from the report made of them.

Hear-say gets a lot of people in trouble. This is certainly the case here. They have not even seen the Promised Land. How do they know the conditions are bad? God had protected them at every turn. Now as they are about to enter into their land of promise, they doubt that God is with them. They do not remember how God defeated Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, with no loss of life for them. It is as if they are saying, that God did that then but is not capable of protecting us here.

Numbers 14:4 "And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt."

"Make a captain ... return into Egypt": The faithless people were ready to reject God's leader, Moses.

This is the worst rebellion up until this time. They are not just rebelling against Moses, but against the leadership of God as well.

Numbers 14:5 "Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel."

Moses and Aaron fell on their faces", a response that must have been in exceeding remorse or fervent prayer.

Moses and Aaron are horrified at the actions of the people. They are not sure what God will do, but they know this will anger Him. They fall on their faces, not for the people, but for themselves. Moses and Aaron were ashamed of the actions of these people. They could not believe the amount of doubt these people were showing. This is really like Christians, who have walked with God, suddenly deciding the world is better. "Egypt" symbolizes the world.

Verses 6-10: "Joshua" and "Caleb" declared "the land" as "exceedingly good". They were also adamant that the Lord was truly able (Deut. 1:25). Nevertheless, the people were ready to "stone them". Only the Lord's appearance prevented them from following though.

Numbers 14:6 "And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, [which were] of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:"

"Rent their clothes": This was an indication of deep distress (Gen. 37:29, 34; Lev. 10:6; 13:45).

This is a sign of extreme mourning. Joshua and Caleb were the only two of the twelve, who came back with a good report, and wanted to take the Promised Land. They had faith in God, which the others did not.

Verses 7-9: Joshua and Caleb reaffirmed their appraisal that the Land was good and their confidence that the Lord would deliver it and its people into their hands.

Numbers 14:7 "And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, [is] an exceeding good land."

To as many as could hear them, to the heads of them.

"Saying, the land which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land": They observe that they were of the number of the spies that were appointed and sent to search the land of Canaan. And they had searched it, and therefore could give an account of it from their own knowledge. And they had not only entered into it, or just looked at a part of it, but they had gone through it, and taken a general survey of it. And they could not but in truth and justice say of it, that it was a good land, delightful, healthful, and fruitful. Yea, "very, very good", exceeding, exceeding good, superlatively good, good beyond expression. They were not able with words to set forth the goodness of it. This they reported, in opposition to the ill report the other spies had given of it.

Caleb and Joshua try to speak to all the people, and reassure them that this is an exceedingly good land. The land of promise is everything that God had told them it would be. Joshua and Caleb had looked at the land through the eyes of faith. The other 10 spies were looking with eyes of doubt.

Numbers 14:8 "If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey."

Continue to delight in them as he had. And as appears by what he had done for, them in Egypt, at the Red sea, and in the wilderness (see Deut. 10:15).

"Then he will bring us into this land": And give it us, as he has promised.

"A land which floweth with milk and honey": As the Lord himself hath described it, and as the unbelieving spies themselves had owned it (Num. 13:27).

I am sure the LORD did delight in Joshua and Caleb. The truth is, He did not like the report from the other 10 spies. The delight of the LORD is in an obedient people. The wrath of God is reserved for those of doubt.

Numbers 14:9 "Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they [are] bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and the LORD [is] with us: fear them not."

The spies with the evil report had used a great deal of exaggeration to make their point (see notes on 13:28, 31-33). Here, rhetorical flourish is returned by Joshua and Caleb. It is as if they are saying of the enemy: They have no chance; We will eat them like "bread".

"Their defense is departed" Literally, "their shadow" (which is an apt picture of divine protection in the hot lands of the Middle east (Psalms 91, 121:5), is removed "from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not" (compare Exodus 14:13).

Genesis 48:21 "And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers."

Even from the beginning, it was faith in God that brought miracles. Caleb and Joshua had confidence that God would give these people into their hands. The statement "they are bread for us" just means they will be theirs to devour.

Romans 8:31 "What shall we then say to these things? If God [be] for us, who [can be] against us?"

All they had to do, was stand fast in their faith, and God would deliver them.

Numbers 14:10 "But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel."

"The glory of the LORD appeared": In response to the people's violent rejection of Joshua and Caleb's challenge, God appeared.

It seems that this took place at the tabernacle. These angry people wanted to stone the two that gave them sound advice. The LORD appeared, before they could carry out their threat to stone them. The divine glory of God in the tabernacle was evident to all.

Verses 11-12: Numerous times in Scripture, a hurting believer will ask the Lord, "How long" will You wait before helping? Here, the words are expressed by God regarding the continued rejection of His people! The Lord would begin anew with Moses.

Numbers 14:11 "And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them?"

"Provoke ... believe me": They had refused to trust or rely on God and His power to give them the land of Canaan in spite of the signs that He had done in their midst.

The purpose of the signs performed in Egypt was to encourage the people to trust in God and follow Him (Exodus 4:5).

They were a rebellious house from the beginning. God asks what signs and wonders would be necessary before they would believe? The sign of the 10 plagues in Egypt should have been enough, without anything else. The parting of the Red Sea should have certainly been enough to show God's power. The greatest miracle of all was the manna feeding them from heaven. The manna showed God's care for their day to day needs. God that does all of this, could surely be with them to take the Promised Land. They do not want to believe. They are worldly, and will rebel against God every chance they get. They have no faith in God.

Numbers 14:12 "I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they."

“Will make of thee a greater nation”: As in (Exodus 32:9-10), God threatened to wipe out the people and start over again with Moses. This justifiable threat showed the seriousness with which God took rebellion on the part of His people.

God now promises or offers a second time to make of Moses a new nation in the place of this one (Exodus 32:10).

God is offering Moses the opportunity to be in the place of Jacob as the carrier of the blessings of Abraham to the whole world. Moses was of Abraham's descendants, so God would still keep His promise to Abraham. The wrath of God has risen against these rebellious people. Moses was such a humble man; he would not accept such an offer of fame for himself. We know that one Word from the Lord, and they would be destroyed. God is longsuffering however. He is not really willing that one should perish. He wants Israel for His people, He just wants their rebellious spirit gone. He truly wants their love and loyalty.

Verses 13-19: As in (Exodus 32:11-13), Moses interceded for Israel to protect the Lord's reputation with the Egyptians, who would charge the Lord with inability to complete His deliverance of Israel and thus deny His power. Second, the Lord's loyal love was the basis on which the Lord could forgive His people.

Numbers 14:13 "And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear [it], (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;)"

Moses is appealing to God to spare His people. Moses did not want the fame God had offered him. He instead, reminds God of the heathen countries looking on, who would doubt the abilities of God, if God killed His people here.

Verses 14-19: As was the case in (Exodus 32:11-14), following the apostasy of the worship of the golden calf, Moses again pleaded with God to forgive the people, even though they would have to suffer His punishment in some way. In this instance, Moses quoted the Lord's own words that describe Him as "longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression" (Exodus 32:10; 34:6-7; Neh. 9:17; Psalm 103:8). Moses' concern was for the glory and reputation of God among the nations. If He destroyed His chosen people, the pagan nations would doubt God's power and mercy.

Numbers 14:14 "And they will tell [it] to the inhabitants of this land: [for] they have heard that thou LORD [art] among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and [that] thy cloud standeth over them, and [that] thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night."

The land of Canaan, between which they and Egypt there was an intercourse. Though not by the way of the wilderness, being neighbors, and their original ancestor's brethren, as Mizraim and Canaan were. Or "they will say", and that with joy, as the Targum of Jonathan adds. But what they would say does not appear so plain. Either it was that the Israelites were killed in the wilderness, a tale they would tell with pleasure. But that the Canaanites would doubtless hear before them, and not need their information, since the Israelites were upon their borders. Or that the Lord had brought them out of Egypt indeed, but could carry them no further. Could not introduce them into the land he had promised them. Or rather they would say to them what follows, for the preposition "for" is not in the text, and may be omitted. And so the sense is, they will tell them.

"They have heard that thou Lord art among this people": In the tabernacle that was in the midst of them, in the most holy place of it.

"That thou Lord art seen face to face": As he was by Moses, who was at the head of them.

"And that thy cloud standeth over them": And sheltered and protected them from the heat of the sun in the daytime, when it rested upon them in their encampment.

"And that thou goest before them": By daytime in a pillar of a cloud.

"And in a pillar of fire by night": In their journeys; they will tell of those favors thou hast shown Israel. And yet, after all, will observe that thou hast destroyed them, which will not redound to thine honor and glory.

All of the people around had heard that God was with the Israelites. They knew of the cloud by day, and the fire by night, that had led them. The Egyptians knew it very well, because it was the fire of God that held Pharaoh's army off, while the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea. The world knew that God was with these people, and that He was hovering over them, protecting them. The world seemed to be more aware of this, than did the Israelites themselves.

Numbers 14:15 "Now [if] thou shalt kill [all] this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying,"

Suddenly, and at once, as might be done by a pestilence. And as 185,000 were smitten at once, and as thought by the same disease, by the Angel of the Lord in the camp of the Assyrians, in later times (2 Kings 19:35).

"Then the nations which have heard the fame of thee": The Egyptians, Canaanites, and others, as Aben Ezra observes. Who had heard the report of the wonderful things done by him for Israel, and of the great favors he had bestowed upon them. And so of his power, and goodness, and other perfections displayed therein, which made him appear to be preferable to all the gods of the Gentiles.

"Will speak, saying": As follows.

If God kills His people, the nations around would begin to doubt God themselves.

Numbers 14:16 "Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness."

That though he brought them out of Egypt, he was not able to bring them through the wilderness into Canaan. And that though he had wrought many signs and wonders for them, he could work no more, his power failed him. He had exhausted all his might, and could not perform the promise and oath he had made.

"Therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness": Because he could not fulfil his word. And so made short work of it, destroying them all together. Which Moses suggests would greatly reflect dishonor on him. And in this he shows, that he was more concerned for the glory of God than for his own.

The heathen would not understand the God that brought the people this far, killing them for their disobedience. They would have instead said, that God was not powerful enough to guide so large a people to victory. Their awe of Israel's God would be gone.

Numbers 14:17 "And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my LORD be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying,"

That is, appear to be great. The power of God is great, not only mighty, but almighty. It knows no bounds, nothing is impossible with him, he can do whatever he pleases (Psalm 147:5). His power, and the greatness of it, had been seen in bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt. And through the Red sea, and in providing for them, protecting and defending them in the wilderness. And the request of Moses is, that it might appear greater and greater in bringing them into the land of promise. Or else he means an exceeding great display of the grace and mercy of God in the forgiveness of the sins of the people. For as the power of God is seen in his forbearance and longsuffering with the wicked (Romans 9:22). Much more in the forgiveness of the sins of men, there being more power and virtue in grace to pardon, than there is in sin to damn. And as it is an indication of strength in men, and of their power over themselves, when they can rule their own spirits. To keep under their passions, and restrain their wrath, and show a forgiving temper (Prov. 16:32). So, it is an instance of the power of God to overcome his wrath and anger stirred up by

the sins of men. And, notwithstanding their provocations, freely to forgive. Pardon of sin is an act of power, as well as of grace and mercy (see Matt. 9:6). And this sense agrees with what follows.

"According as thou hast spoken, saying": As in (Exodus 34:6); and is as follows.

God's greatness is unchangeable. He is all powerful. He can do as He wishes, anytime He wishes. Moses reminds God that He should not let the disobedience of these people alter His promise to Abraham.

Numbers 14:18 "The LORD [is] longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing [the guilty], visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth [generation]."

"Of great mercy" is a citation (from Exodus 20:6 and 34:7), both given in a covenant setting. The word mercy ("chesed"), indicates God's faithfulness to Israel in light of His promises made through the covenant. Mercy then, is His faithful love. This "faithful love" ("chesed"), led Israel through the Red Sea (Exodus 15:13). In (Lam. 3:22-23), it is used with the phrase "great is thy faithfulness". (Verse 19 uses the term like 1 John 1:9), "If we confess our sins, he is faithful because He has promised to do so (Exodus 20:6; 34:7), and just to forgive us our sins".

Now Moses begins to intercede for this people. God has forgiven this people over and over on this trip to the Promised Land. They did not deserve to be forgiven. He forgave them, because He is merciful. Moses reminds Him that the transgressions even though they are forgiven, are not completely done away with. The consequences of the sins, sometimes continue on for generations. The blood of an animal could not abolish sin; it could just cover it up. The blood of Jesus Christ abolishes sin.

Numbers 14:19 "Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

Intimating, that though the sin of this people was great, the mercy of God to pardon was greater. And therefore, he entreats that God would deal with them, not according to the greatness of their sins, and the strictness of justice, but according to the greatness of his mercy. Who would, and does, abundantly pardon.

"And as thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now": Which shows both that these people had been continually sinning against the Lord, ever since they came out of Egypt. Notwithstanding the great goodness of God unto them, and that he had as constantly pardoned. And therefore, it was hoped and entreated that he would still continue to pardon them, he being the same he ever was. And whose mercy and goodness endure for ever. He had pardoned already sins of the like kind since their coming out of Egypt. As their murmurings for bread in the wilderness of Sin (Exodus 16:1). And for water at Rephidim (Exodus 17:1). And even a greater sin than these, idolatry, or the worship of the calf (Exodus 32:1).

Moses begged forgiveness from God for these sinful people. He knows they do not deserve forgiveness, but he also knows God's great mercy. Forgive them one more time Lord, is the prayer of Moses.

Verses 20-25: This generation would not enter Canaan because they believed their doubts and doubted their beliefs (1 Cor. 10:5). The hardening of their hearts was not restricted to his one occasion either; it apparently happened on "ten" different occasions. In contrast to the fear of the people was the fearless confidence of Caleb; God declared that he "followed Me fully" (Deut. 1:36).

Numbers 14:20 "And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word:"

So as not to kill them utterly as one man. Which is an instance of his being plenteous in mercy, and ready to forgive. And of the virtue and efficacy of the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man. And of the great regard the Lord has to the prayers of a good man for others. The Jerusalem Targum is, "and the Word of the Lord said, lo, I have remitted and forgiven according to thy word." Which must be understood of Christ, the essential Word. And shows, according to the sense of the Targums, that he has a power to forgive sin, and must be a divine Person. For none can forgive sin but God (see Mark 2:7).

The LORD answers Moses. He grants Moses' request, and pardons them one more time.

Numbers 14:21 "But [as] truly [as] I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD."

Which is the form of an oath, as the Targum. The Lord swears by his life, or by himself, because he could swear by no greater.

"All the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord": This is not the thing sworn unto or confirmed, but that by which the oath is made and confirmed. And the sense is, that as sure as the earth "had been" filled with the glory of the Lord, as it may be rendered. As it had been with the fame of what he had done in Egypt, and at the Red sea. Or as it "should be" filled with it in later times, especially in the kingdom of the Messiah in the latter day (see Isa. 6:3). So sure the men that had provoked him should not see the land of Canaan.

This is a statement of the glory of the LORD, who is Jesus Christ our Lord. His goodness and might and glory shall fill the earth.

Romans 14:11 "For it is written, [As] I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

Numbers Chapter 14 Questions

1. What effect did the news have on all the people?
2. What does the author find interesting about their attitude?
3. Who was their murmuring slanted toward?
4. What do the people keep forgetting about Egypt?
5. Their wish to die in the wilderness _____ come true.
6. What does the struggles of these people in the wilderness remind the author of?
7. Murmuring shows a lack of _____.
8. What have they forgotten about God's protection of them?
9. They decided to appoint a captain and _____.
10. What is verse 4 speaking of really?
11. What sign of horror did Moses do?
12. How did Moses and Aaron feel about these people?
13. How are Christians sometimes like these people?
14. What did Joshua and Caleb do in mourning?
15. What statement did they make to the people?
16. Joshua and Caleb had looked at the land through eyes of _____.
17. Who did the LORD delight in?
18. What did the congregation want to do to Caleb and Joshua?
19. How did God stop them?
20. What did God say to Moses?
21. The sign of the ____ plagues in Egypt should have been proof enough.
22. What does the LORD offer Moses?
23. Why did Moses not take Him up on the offer?
24. What does Moses remind God of, to keep Him from destroying the people?
25. What had the heathen people around them heard of the presence of God being with them?

26. What will they think, if God kills them here?
27. In verse 18, Moses begins to _____ for the people.
28. Why did God forgive them?
29. In verse 19, Moses begs _____ for these sinful people.
30. How does God answer his prayer?