Faithful in Consequences
Numbers 14:10-20
SS Lesson for 09/29/2019

Devotional Scripture: Ps 103:1-14

OUTLINE

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Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

In the classic movie The Wizard of Oz, the wizard is reputed to be “the great and powerful Oz,” who causes fear and trembling within those who dare to approach him. When Dorothy and her three friends (along with her dog Toto) come before the wizard, they react in the same way. But when Toto pulls back a curtain, the friends find an older man who is making himself appear by means of trickery to be “the great and powerful Oz.” In reality, he is anything but great and powerful, and certainly no one to approach with fear and trembling. Many have a view of God as a kind, grand-fatherly figure who wouldn't hurt a flea. It follows, then, that we humans don’t really need to take Him seriously—when all is said and done, He will be merciful and simply overlook whatever sins we may have committed. But as the Israelites discovered at Kadeshbarnea, reality doesn’t support this position. The God of Israel is truly “great and powerful,” and His judgment of human sin and rebellion dare not be taken lightly. The writer of Hebrews reminds us of a truth that stands rock solid throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament and remains just as trustworthy today: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

The discouragement brought about by the 10 spies' report grew into a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. The text concluded with the congregation's desiring to stone Caleb and Joshua (Numbers 14:10a). Today's text begins with words even more ominous, as God comes in judgment to a people blinded by unbelief.

Key Verse: Numbers 14:19

Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

14:1-4. Unfortunately the people accepted the majority assessment and began to protest to Moses that they would have been better off to have died in Egypt or the desert than at the hands of the Canaanites. It would be better even now, they said, to choose a new leader and make their way back to Egypt.

14:5-10a. On hearing this, Moses and Aaron fell prostrate (facedown; cf. 16:4, 22, 45; 20:6; 22:31), no doubt in earnest supplication, while Joshua and Caleb reaffirmed their appraisal of the land and their confidence that the Lord would deliver it and its people into their hands. But all this was to no avail as the people even discussed stoning them.

14:10b-12. In the midst of this crisis the Lord appeared in His glory... at the tabernacle (v. 10b). He asked how much longer He could be expected to tolerate the people’s contempt and unbelief. The remedy, God said, was to destroy the nation and make Moses the founder of a new and greater one.

14:13-19. As tempting as the Lord’s offer (v. 12) might be to some, Moses’ love for his people and for the integrity of the Lord’s reputation led him to reject it and seek God’s forgiveness of the people. He reasoned that the Egyptians would view God’s destruction of Israel as His inability to keep His promise to redeem them and give them the land as a possession. Furthermore, the Egyptians would repeat this to the Canaanites and other nations with the result that even they would mock God’s impotence. The only action the Lord could take, Moses said, was to manifest His great power by forgiving the people even though they would have to suffer His punishment in some way. The basis for this forgiveness would be God’s great love (hesed, “covenant faithfulness or loyal love”).

14:20-25. God’s promises are sure and steadfast and He had promised to save Israel and give them Canaan as an everlasting inheritance (Ex. 6:6-8). So it is obvious that His threat to destroy Israel and begin anew with Moses was as much a test of Moses, the covenant mediator, as it was anything else. God therefore pledged to forgive the people but pronounced that the entire adult generation which had participated in the Exodus and had witnessed all the other great signs and wonders He had performed on their behalf would never see the land of promise. The people had disobeyed and tested Him 10 times, the Lord said (Num. 14:22). This could be a literal number but, more likely, it means a great many times (cf. comments on Job 19:3). The exceptions were Caleb (Num. 14:24) and Joshua (v. 30) because they obeyed the Lord without reservation. Not even Moses is mentioned for the omniscient Lord foresaw his future disobedience regarding the rock and water (20:12). Then, as part of the judgment, the Lord instructed Moses and Israel to resume the journey from Kadesh but not toward the valleys where the Amalekites and Canaanites lived. They now had to take the long and circuitous route toward the Red Sea, a route that eventually would end
at the Plains of Moab, east of Jericho. The Red Sea here refers to the eastern arm of that sea, known today as the Gulf of Aqabah.

14:26-35 In elaborating further on the judgment, the Lord said that He would grant the Israelites their wish—they would die in the desert (vv. 29, 35; cf. v. 2). Their children, however, would be spared and with Caleb and Joshua would enter Canaan (vv. 30-32). Even this would not come to pass till 40 years had come and gone because the people had to suffer for their sins (v. 34). This illustrates the fact that sin may be forgiven but its consequences may endure and preclude God’s otherwise intended blessings. Further, children sometimes must bear the results of their parents’ sins (v. 33; cf. Ex. 20:5; Deut. 24:16). This does not contradict Ezekiel 18:1-3, 13-18 because Moses was referring to material and physical aftereffects whereas Ezekiel spoke of individual responsibility and culpability for sin and its spiritual results.

14:36-45. As a token of the certainty of impending judgment, the 10 spies who brought back a negative report and undermined the people’s morale were struck by a plague and died. This so impressed the people that they then resolved to forget their fears and undertake the Canaanite conquest at once (vv. 39-40). But it was too late for they could no longer claim the presence and protection of the Lord (vv. 41-43). With characteristic obstinacy they rejected Moses’ counsel and without Moses and the ark pressed the attack in the hill country (v. 44). Not surprisingly, the Amalekites and Canaanites launched a counterattack and severely defeated Israel (cf. Deut. 1:41-46), driving them all the way to Hormah, some eight miles southeast of Beersheba.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

God Proclaims Consequences (Num 14:10-12)

10 And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel.
11 Then the Lord said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?
12 I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."

Consequences because of rejection (10-11)

Rejecting God through ignoring God's advice and not accepting His rebuke (Prov 1:24-26)

24 But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, 25 since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, 26 I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you

Rejecting God will cause trials and discipline to become heavier (Isa 28:22-23)

22 Now stop your mocking, or your chains will become heavier; the Lord, the Lord Almighty, has told me of the destruction decreed against the whole land. 23 Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say.

Rejecting God will cause God's anger to burn (Isa 5:24-25)

24 Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers blow away like dust; for they have rejected the law of the Lord Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel. 25 Therefore the Lord's anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down. The mountains shake, and the dead bodies are like refuse in the streets. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

Rejecting God through backsliding (Jer 15:6)

6 You have rejected me," declares the Lord. "You keep on backsliding. So I will lay hands on you and destroy you; I can no longer show compassion.
Rejecting God through oppressing and deceiving others (Isa 30:12-13)
12 Therefore, this is what the Holy One of Israel says: "Because you have rejected this message, relied on oppression and depended on deceit, 13 this sin will become for you like a high wall, cracked and bulging, that collapses suddenly, in an instant.

Consequences of wrath (12)

**Wrath because it is the punishment for wickedness of man (Rom 1:18)**
18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

**Wrath because of man’s stubbornness and unrepentant heart (Rom 2:5)**
5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

**Wrath because of disobedience (Eph 5:6)**
6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

**Wrath because of yielding to our sinful and earthly nature (Col 3:5-6)**
5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

**Wrath because of detestable conduct (Ezek 7:8)**
8 I am about to pour out my wrath on you and spend my anger against you; I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices.

Moses' Intercession (Num 14:13-20)
13 And Moses said to the Lord: "Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them,
14 and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, Lord, are among these people; that You, Lord, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.
15 Now if You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying,
16 'Because the Lord was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness.'
17 And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying,
18 'The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.'
19 Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."
20 Then the Lord said: "I have pardoned, according to your word;

Plea because of God’s Name (13-16)

**God’s Name sake so that God’s power is known (Ps 106:8)**
8 Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known.

**God’s Names sake so that God will get the glory (Ps 115:1-2)**
1 Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. 2 Why do the nations say, "Where is their God?"
God’s Name sake so that God’s Name is acknowledged as great (Josh 7:6-9)

6 Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. 7 And Joshua said, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! 8 O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? 9 The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?"

God’s Name sake so that sins are forgiven (1 John 2:12)

12 I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

God’s Name sake to ensure remembrance of His Name (Ps 20:7)

7 Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

Plea for God’s mercy (17-18)

God’s mercy keeps God from putting an end to the wicked (Neh 9:29-31)

29 "You warned them to return to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, by which a man will live if he obeys them. Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. 30 For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples. 31 But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

God’s mercy sometimes causes Him to relent (Ps 106:45)

45 for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented.

God’s mercy empowers perseverance (James 5:11)

11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

God's mercy makes Christians a people of God (1 Peter 2:10)

10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

God’s mercy is great (Ps 5:7)

7 But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple.

God’s mercy should prompt the wicked to forsake their ways (Isa 55:7)

7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

God’s mercy is saving mercy (Titus 3:5)

5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

Plea for God’s pardon (19-20)

God's pardon means that He will not remember our sins any more (Heb 8:12)

12 For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."
God’s pardon sanctifies (Acts 26:17-18)

17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

God’s pardon rescues from a dominion of darkness (Col 1:13-14)

13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

God’s pardon is through Jesus’ blood (Matt 26:28)

28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

God’s pardon is in accordance with His grace (Eph 1:7)

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace

God’s pardon is an example of His love (Ps 86:5)

5 You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Thomas Constable

The rebellion of the people (14:1-12)

Verses 1-4

God had just proved His supernatural power to the Israelites three times since the nation had left Sinai (chs11-12). There was no excuse for this failure to trust Him to lead them victoriously into Canaan.

Verses 5-9

Moses and Aaron tried to persuade the people to enter the land (Deuteronomy 1:29-31). They also prayed for the nation in this hour of its rebellion (Numbers 14:5). Moreover Joshua and Caleb warned the people against turning back (Numbers 14:7-9). They rightly identified the true actions of the Israelite majority as rebellion against God and fear of the Canaanites (Numbers 14:9). They reminded the people that God was with them (Numbers 14:9).

Verses 10-12

Nevertheless the congregation violently rejected their pleas to trust and be guided God (Numbers 14:10). God Himself prevented the people from stoning Caleb and Joshua by manifesting Himself (Numbers 14:10).

"... the majesty of God flashed out before the eyes of the people in a light which suddenly burst forth from the tabernacle (see at Ex. xxv10)." [Note: Keil and Delitzsch, 3:92.]

As a faithful mediator Moses again interceded for the disobedient Israelites.

The failure of the Israelites grew out of unbelief (Numbers 14:11; cf. Hebrews 3:19). They failed to believe that God would give them the land of their enemies as He had promised.

"Like Pharaoh, they were hardening their hearts and ignoring God’s clear command (cf. Psalm 95:7-8) ..." [Note: Herbert M. Wolf, An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch, p194.]

Often in Scripture we read of people asking God, "How long?" (e.g. Psalm 6:3; Psalm 13:1-2; Psalm 35:17; et al.). However here it is God who asked this of Moses (cf. Exodus 16:28). This illustrates the intimate relationship that Moses and God enjoyed (Numbers 12:7-8).

Was God’s threatened action a real possibility, or was He only testing Moses” reaction with this offer? God had threatened a similar punishment at Sinai when the Israelites had made the golden calf (Exodus 32:10). God could have fulfilled His promises to Abraham by destroying and dispossessing all the other living Israelites and
by sparing only Moses and his descendants. However, God could not have fulfilled the prophetic promises that He had given through Jacob (Genesis 49) and done so. There would have to be descendants of Judah from whom a great ruler would come (Genesis 49:10) as well as some future for the other tribes. Perhaps God meant that He would completely destroy that older generation of Israelites immediately (cf. Exodus 32:10). He said that He would also give Moses and his descendants a much larger place in the nation. Perhaps then other peoples would regard Moses as the father of the Israelite nation.

"... this passage intends to show that the people failed to inherit the Promised Land and hence died in the wilderness without inheriting the blessing, not so much for a specific act of disobedience or for fear of the battles that lay ahead, but rather for the simple fact of their unbelief. They failed to trust in God." [Note: Sailhamer, p388.]

**Verses 13-19**

Moses’ intercession for the people14:13-19

Moses interceded again, much as he had done at Sinai (cf. Exodus 32:11-13). Moses based his appeal on God’s reputation among the Egyptians (Numbers 14:13-14) and the other nations (Numbers 14:15-16). He also cited God’s promise that He would be patient (Numbers 14:17-18) and His past loyal love to Israel (Numbers 14:19). Moses’ words proved effective (Numbers 14:20).

**Verses 20-38**

God’s punishment of the people14:20-38

The fact that God granted the people pardon in response to Moses’ intercession is another indication of His grace (Numbers 14:20-21). The failure of the Israelites would not frustrate God’s purpose to manifest His glory throughout the earth through the seed of Abraham (Numbers 14:21). Even though the present generation would die in the wilderness, Caleb (and Joshua, not mentioned here, cf. Numbers 14:30) would enter the Promised Land.

The ten times the Israelites tested God (Numbers 14:22) by complaining were probably these.

1. At the Red Sea (Exodus 14:11-12)
2. At Marah (Exodus 15:23)
3. in the wilderness of Sin (Exodus 16:2)
4. In the wilderness of Sin (Exodus 16:20)
5. In the wilderness of Sin (Exodus 16:27)
6. At Rephidim (Exodus 17:1-2)
7. At Horeb (Exodus 32)
8. At Taberah (Numbers 11:1-3)
9. At Kibroth-hattaavah (Numbers 11:4-34)
10. At Kadesh (Numbers 14:1-3)

It is noteworthy that in Egypt God sent 10 plagues to build the faith of His people, but in the wilderness they complained against Him in unbelief 10 times. Evidently the measure of their iniquity had reached its capacity from God’s viewpoint with this tenth rebellion (cf. Genesis 15:16).

Because the adult generation had failed to trust God He would not defeat their enemies. Therefore He instructed them to march southeast toward the Gulf of Aqabah and away from the Amalekites and Canaanites (Numbers 14:25). Since they wanted to return to Egypt, God sent them back toward where they had been. Since they feared their children would die in Canaan, God would preserve those very children in the wilderness and give them a home in Canaan (Numbers 14:31). Since the adults had rejected Canaan, God would give it to their children (Numbers 14:31). Since they feared dying in Canaan, God would let them die in the wilderness (Numbers 14:2).

"Typical of the irony in this story, their punishment is made to fit their crime." [Note: G. Wenham, p123.]

Faithful in Consequences
"When the Lord asked "How long?" [Numbers 14:27] he meant this was the end. The oath formula "As I live" [Numbers 14:28] was the strongest denial conceivable. The things he said next were irrevocably going to happen. That is what lies behind Numbers 14:28; Numbers 14:30; Numbers 14:35." [Note: Maarsingh, p50.]

The Bible nowhere specifies a particular age of accountability for children. However the fact that God judged all the Israelites who were 20 years old and older for this sin seems significant. He evidently regarded those who had lived 20 years as responsible adults (Numbers 14:29). Jewish boys became "sons of the covenant" on their thirteenth birthdays in later Judaism. This is what the bir milzvah (lit. son of duty) celebrates.

The 40-year duration of the punishment was based on the 40-day duration of the expedition by the spies (Numbers 14:34). These 40 years included the two years already spent in the wilderness, since complaining characterized the people from the time they first departed from Egypt.

"The round number forty (Numbers 14:34) may refer to a human lifetime: generally speaking, everyone above the age of twenty would die in the wilderness in a period of forty years, because very few people lived beyond the age of sixty. There is a curious connection between the forty days of preparation for an entry that did not take place and forty years of awesome preparation for an entry that would take place—but only for a new generation." [Note: Maarsingh, p51.]

The 10 spies who brought the majority opinion seem to have died shortly after God pronounced their sentence as a result of a plague He sent (Numbers 14:37).

"As an unmistakable evidence that God’s word of judgment would be literally fulfilled, the spies, except Joshua and Caleb, at this moment were struck dead with a plague from the Lord." [Note: Jensen, p67.]

(Adapted from URL: https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dcc/numbers-14.html)

**Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

From cover to cover, the Bible reveals the devastating consequences of sin. When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He clearly told them, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:16, 17). Many are familiar with Paul’s declaration in Romans 6:23: “The wages of sin is death.” The climax of that death sentence is specified in Revelation. According to Revelation 22:15, sinners will be outside of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, much as the Israelites were left outside of the promised land because of their unbelief. Consider this tragic irony: 12 spies brought back samples of the fruit of the promised land, fruit that could have been enjoyed by them and their fellow Israelites had they possessed the faith that God would give them victory over the land’s inhabitants. But they rejected that fruit and ate instead the bitter fruit that results from choosing a path of unbelief and disobedience. Intercessory prayer, such as that which Moses offered on behalf of the rebellious Israelites, remains a vital ministry for Christians today. The person who prays for another stands between Heaven and earth, calling on the Lord to intervene on behalf of a person in need of His mercy. When the prophet Samuel gave what amounted to his farewell address, he said, “Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you” (1 Samuel 12:23). Though his leadership role was changing, Samuel’s ministry of intercession for God’s people remained the same. The apostle Paul also wrote of the importance of intercessory prayer, particularly for those in positions of authority (1 Timothy 2:1, 2). But intercessions can and ought to be carried out on behalf of anyone (possible exception: 1 John 5:16). How many times have we heard someone describe a problem or a crisis that the person (or someone he or she knows) is going through and we respond by promising to pray for that individual in need? How many times have we then failed to follow through on that promise? To pray for another is one of the most sacred privileges a follower of Jesus has. We must keep our promise to pray! There is so much in our hurting, broken world that needs to be covered by the prayers of faithful Christians. Instead of ceasing to pray, may we “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
**Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary**

**Belief vs. Unbelief** - Moses sent 12 leaders, one from each of Israel’s tribes, to investigate Canaan, the land God promised. Only two men, Joshua, and Caleb, returned with a positive report. They refused to see the giants and other obstacles as barriers to what God could do for them. Joshua and Caleb stood on God's Word, but the unbelieving, rebellious nation failed to believe. They picked up stones to silence Joshua and Caleb. They also threatened Moses and Aaron, vowing to appoint another leader to take them back to Egypt. Moses and Aaron prayed while Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes, a sign of deep mourning. Each of them begged the people to believe in the power of God and the faithfulness of His promises rather than focusing on the obstacles.

**Consequences** - In the midst of this uproar, God showed up in a powerful way. A magnificent bright light appeared in the form of a cloud from the door of the tabernacle. God told Moses and Aaron to step aside so He could bring judgment on His children, wiping them all out. God would then create a new people through Moses to inherit the Promised Land. It would be a nation greater than the present one.

**Mercy** - Moses humbly responded that the Egyptians would hear of God's children being wiped out and take pleasure in the destruction. Moses imagined their arrogant taunts of surrounding nations against Israel's God— their Deity got them to the gate of the Promised Land but no farther. Moses pleaded for the heavenly Father to show compassion and have patience with His people. God responded by approving Moses as a faithful leader and mediator. The people were not destroyed, though they suffered the consequence of not entering Canaan.

**The Lesson** - It's a great lesson for us. It's in God's character to be loving, forgiving, and patient with His children. He is longsuffering with us, and He wants the best for us. But He does not always erase a devastating outcome.