

The Lord's Judgment for the People's Unbelief

Number 14:20-45

Numbers 14:20-45 - *"Then the LORD said: "I have pardoned, according to your word; ²¹ but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD— ²² because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, ²³ they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. ²⁴ But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it. ²⁵ Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valley; tomorrow turn and move out into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea."*

²⁶ *And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ²⁷ "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. ²⁸ Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: ²⁹ The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. ³⁰ Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. ³¹ But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. ³² But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. ³³ And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. ³⁴ According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection. ³⁵ I the LORD have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die."*

³⁶ *Now the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation complain against him by bringing a bad report of the land, ³⁷ those very men who brought the evil report about the land, died by the plague before the LORD. ³⁸ But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive, of the men who went to spy out the land.*

³⁹ *Then Moses told these words to all the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly. ⁴⁰ And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, "Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised, for we have sinned!" ⁴¹ And Moses said, "Now why do you transgress the command of the LORD? For this will not succeed. ⁴² Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. ⁴³ For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned away from the LORD, the LORD will not be with you."*

⁴⁴ But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop. Nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed from the camp. ⁴⁵ Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah.”

Background Notes

God answered Moses' prayer. He didn't remove or destroy Israel; rather, He forgave them for their sin (v20). However, both then and today, there are **always consequences to forgiven sin!** When Moses acknowledged that the iniquity of the fathers is visited on the children to the third and fourth generation (v18), what he mean? He was reiterating the biblical principle that the negative effects of sin can and will ripple down through several generations. It happens! The sins of adultery and abuse, for example, will cause bad fallout for many years to come.

In verse 22 the Lord said that Israel had put Him to the test *“these ten times,”* and had not heeded His voice. The Lord said “ten times,” and this was not just figurative language. You can actually count seven times in the book of Exodus, and three times in the book of Numbers.

In Numbers 11, the children of Israel complained about their problems and about God's provision of the manna for food. Now in Numbers 14 we have the proverbial “last straw,” when the people believed the false report of the ten spies rather than the true promises of the Lord. In verse 22, notice that committing the “sins of the wilderness” is **testing the Lord!** Complaining, criticism, contempt and compromise are all “sins of the wilderness,” and when we commit these sins we are testing the Lord! It was true then, and it is still true today!

Doctrinal Points

1. Entrance into the Land cannot be obtained when there is unbelief.

Because of unbelief, the people were not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Instead they would die in the wilderness. The people of Israel would wander in the wilderness for forty years, until the whole generation that came out of Egypt had died! (Oh, to be nineteen years old or younger at that time!) It looks like the ten spies who brought back the negative report were the first to die (v36-37).

Here's something important to understand. The fact that Joshua and Caleb were the only two people of that whole generation to enter the Promised Land doesn't mean that they were the only two people of that generation who will be in Heaven. Remember - the sin of unbelief that the people committed was **not unbelief in God**, but unbelief or a lack of trust in God's **promises** and God's **power**.

Unbelief paralyzes God's arm! The people believed in the one true God and they were His people, but they didn't believe that God could bring them into the Land. This is true of many God's people today. They are trusting in God's salvation, and they will go to heaven when they die, but they fall short of entering God's Land of blessing and victory now.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ..."(v3). This is the "Land of Promise" for the believer now – every spiritual blessing in heavenly places, or heavenly realms. Now this does not mean that Christians are to be "so heavenly-minded that they're no earthly good"! No! It means that we are to **appreciate and appropriate our spiritual blessings in Christ.**

In Ephesians 1 we have a list of our spiritual blessings. Look at the blessings in Ephesians 1:4-5 - *"just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will..."* Do you see the amazing blessings in these two verses? If you're a believer, you were **chosen by God!** You will be **holy and blameless** before Him in heaven forever! You are now in the **family of God** forever! What blessings!

Are you enjoying these spiritual blessings, or are you more concerned about the stock market and your 401k, or the value of your house - or whatever? If you're doubting God's promises to care for you, or questioning God's ways in your life, you're falling short of living in the good of these blessings - because of unbelief! Entrance into the Land of Blessings can't be obtained when there is unbelief.

2. Entrance into the Land cannot be obtained when there is presumption.

The people of Israel refused to enter the Promised Land with God's help. Then (can you believe?) they actually tried to enter **on their own** (v39-45)! They were guilty of the sin of **presumption**, and of course they were defeated. They assumed that they could enter at their own will and in their own strength. **They assumed that God would bail them out** - but they assumed wrong! Entrance into the Land cannot be obtained when there's presumption.

The people admitted that they had sinned in not entering the Land when God had told them to go, but this was not a true confession of sin. Notice that the Cloud of God's Presence didn't go before them, the Ark of the Covenant was not in their midst, and the word of the Lord didn't order their **self-directed** operation. In fact, they were told **not** to proceed, because the Lord would **not** be with them! No wonder they were defeated! Entrance into the Land can't be obtained when there's presumption.

Here's the spiritual lesson. Ephesians 6:10-12: *"...be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."*

Notice where our spiritual **battles** take place: "in the heavenly realms." Remember Ephesians 1? That's where our **blessings** are as well, right? That's the spiritual Land that's pictured for us in the book of Numbers.

The Lord has promised us the Land of spiritual blessings, but it is also the Land of **spiritual battles**. We are guaranteed victory in spiritual battle if we take on the full armor of God - but if we don't take on the armor that God has provided for us, **we will fail** in spiritual battles! If we try to do spiritual battle in our own strength, we will be defeated. Doubt and discouragement and despair cannot be overcome with self-help methods. We must look to the Lord! Don't commit the sin of presumption by trying to live the Christian life in your own strength. Entrance into the land can't be obtained when there's presumption.

Practical Application

Don't "water down" the Red Sea!

Verse 25 has a very sad ending. It is the beginning of the wilderness wanderings: *"Tomorrow turn and move out into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea."* The Red Sea mentioned here would be the part of the Red Sea that is known today as the Gulf of Aqaba.

The Hebrew words for "Red Sea" can also be translated "**Reed** Sea." For this reason, some people have tried to "water down" and diminish the miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea. These people say that Israel crossed over at a "marshy area" of the Red Sea, in eastern Egypt. But wait a minute! What about all the details of Exodus 14? What about the dry path between walls of water where the Israeli people walked? What about the return of the waters to completely cover the horses and chariots of the Egyptian army? What about the bodies of the drowned Egyptian soldiers that washed up on the beaches?

Read Exodus 14. That was no crossing of a "marsh"! The exact spot where they crossed the Red Sea is still unknown. Was it the Gulf of Suez? The Straits of Tiran? The Gulf of Aqaba? We don't know the precise place where they crossed, but we do know for sure that they didn't cross at a "marsh"!

In Numbers 14 they set out in their wanderings by the way of the Red Sea, but they didn't go back to some supposed "marshy area" way back on the border of Egypt. No! **The Red Sea is the Red Sea!**

Don't "water down" the Red Sea!