

MARCH 10

Numbers 14:1-15:16

Numbers 14

Vs. 1-10 When we read this, we have to remember that we are no better than the people here. I'm often tempted to think of these people or the people in Jesus' day as some lower category of dumb humanity. At times, I see this kind of irrationality in me, and being a pastor, I've definitely seen it in churches. It is tough for us, even with the Spirit, to live with raw obedience and faith rooted in God that is constant and enduring from day to day and from situation to situation. You can't explain this irrationality with any word other than "sin." It is a small word with power that staggers the imagination.

V. 5 After the people made their decision in v. 4, *Moses and Aaron fell on their faces*. They knew what was coming and there was only one place to appeal for mercy for the people. The people of this generation did not see the cause/effect link between sin and punishment, especially as it had to do with the whole congregation suffering for the sins of the few. The next generation would learn this lesson.

Vs. 6-10 Joshua and Caleb understood what was happening, too, and jumped in to try to speak sense to the crowd and direct them to faith in following God. The decision of the congregation to stone Joshua and Caleb was the last straw.

This is probably a good time to share something with you that is kind of exciting for me. Back in Genesis 49 when Jacob blesses his sons, as expected, he gave Joseph a huge blessing. The blessing of Joseph would be transferred to Joe's son, Ephraim, whom Jacob blessed as the firstborn. But what is surprising is Jacob's blessing on Judah. Looking at the proportion of text, Judah really gets a "lion's" share. So, how did the blessing of Jacob to his sons play out? God's blessing is often seen in giving leadership. Look closely at the tribes Joshua and Caleb come from. Do you think that it's a coincidence that these men will be two of the leaders who will lead the nation into Canaan in about 39 years?

V. 10 God moved in to protect Joshua and Caleb. Now He will issue judgment.

Vs. 11-38 We could spend a couple of days in this section, but it's ok not to, since you'll read this again next year and maybe someone will preach on it in between. You'll learn a lot about Moses in this section. You'll learn more about God. As disciples reading this account, we can learn about ourselves and working with others. All of what we're reading applies to Christians, and Paul refers to this history in dealing with the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 10 as a very solemn warning.

Vs. 11-19 God tested Moses' heart and Moses passed.

Notice in vs. 18 and 19 Moses refers back to his encounter with God on Mt. Sinai, when God revealed Himself to Moses in a very deep way (Ex. 33:12-34:8). Notice that in Exodus God says that He would make His goodness pass before Moses. That understanding of God's character, restated here, is what helped Moses stand secure as a leader for the people in this time of crisis.

Vs. 20-25 Wow! God pardoned, but boy did He punish. What's amazing is that out of all the men older than 20, only Joshua and Caleb will enter the land. This was a total, heartfelt rebellion of everyone. Except for a few men, in 40 years the oldest man walking into the Promised Land would be only 60.

(One note is that it doesn't say that the Levites fell under this punishment. They weren't represented by the spies. Aaron's son Eleazar does enter the land. Eleazar would have had to have been much older than twenty when this happened.)

At this point they were on a highway that led from Egypt to Canaan. Now God would be leading them back into the wilderness.

Vs. 26-35 The complaint of the people becomes their punishment and the children they used in their argument will inherit the promise. What interesting years these will be. Someone has figured that for this generation to die in the wilderness, there would have to be 400+ funerals a day for the next 38 years. They would be living in a camp of death. The lessons of following God would be emphasized by the daily mourning in the camp for the ones who rebelled against God. Every day the people would understand that the sins of a few can lead to the death of thousands.

V. 34 When we add this up later, the entire 40 years will be measured from the time the people left Egypt, which would have been the entire time they were in the wilderness. Actually, the first thing the people did when they left Egypt was to complain and want to go back.

Vs. 36-38 It is interesting that God immediately punished the 10 spies. At the same time, two very spiritual men were honored by God.

Vs. 39-45 This is kind of typical and very sad. Rather than repenting and praying and seeking God, they disobey and expect the Lord to bless them.

God knew this was going to happen. So, what do you learn about Him? God promised to lead them into the land and it was a valid offer. They could see His love and His power every day. But these people were not ready and they proved it. The people were judged rightly for their sin and rebellion. Now God uses this entire generation as a lesson for the next generation to make them ready to enter the land. But what an education. The next generation learns the lesson, but at the great cost of lives lost and time lost. God works the same way today. His use of time and people and their rebellion is righteous, but outside of our ability to understand.

For us as disciples, we need to understand that God's plans can't be frustrated. He knew what was going to happen and used the rebellion for good. Even the disasters and our service for Him are known by Him. Regardless of what happens in our service for Him, our challenge is to follow Him as if following is the only goal, and not to be eaten up with considerations of time, money and success. Our expectations regarding things like "success" and "time" and "return on investment" don't mean much to God. Jesus defined success as, *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.* God's power has not been diminished. His plan since the Fall has not changed. If we can grasp that, as we follow Christ in the harvest, it will give us a lot more peace and security. Imagine the frustration of guys like Joshua and Caleb who loved God and had the faith, but now because of 10 guys everything was ruined. But they waited with God and followed Him every day. If we are following Christ as disciples on earth, our home is in heaven and our life and times are in His hands. We are servants working for Him here, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. That's got to be enough.

Numbers 15:1-16

Now, believe it or not, we are in a time warp. We have no idea when God said this to Moses. It could very well be that 10-30 years have passed between chapters 14 and 15. Chapter 20 will take place on the first month of the 40th year. We know that, because soon afterward Aaron will die, and the date of his death is given in Numbers 33:38.

This is the reason why chapter 15 goes on as if nothing happened in chapter 14. During the 40 years of wandering, the new generation is learning and absorbing the law. They are becoming a nation. These commands are an addition to the sacrifices for a fellowship offering. Ironically, these were offerings of thanks and celebration to please the Lord when the people expressed their joy for being brought into the land. After chapter 14, it is ironic that the Lord would teach a new generation how to express thanks in their sacrifices as they were being prepared to come into the Promised Land.

Mark 14:53-72

Vs. 55-59 In the name of God, they were seeking testimony from liars so they could justify killing Jesus, but it wasn't working. How frustrating for them.

Vs. 60-65 You can only be awed by the power of sin. Jesus' words in v. 62 are clear.

V. 64 All who were there condemned Jesus, meaning that both Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who were members of the council, hadn't been invited.

Vs. 66-72 Notice how much space Mark gives to this. Mark was that failed servant who ran away from Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. After Barnabas restored Mark and got him back into ministry, Mark became the companion of Peter. Peter had also been a failed servant. I'm sure the reason that God made sure Peter's story was in all the Gospels is for us. Peter failed and yet later became a great follower in the harvest. For us too, it is never too late. The Lord is always standing before us, ready to forgive and restore and welcome us to follow Him in the harvest.

Psalm 53

Vs. 1-3 Paul quotes from these verses in Romans 3:10-12, showing that all men are under the power of sin. What an interesting psalm to read today, after reading about Israel and Jesus' trial. This applies to all men, and we would be just as bad if not for God's grace to us.

I was thinking about the fool saying, *There is no God*. I have never seen anything explode and produce nearly perfect spheres. Everything we have that is round was made by someone. Yet we look into the sky and see the sun and moon and think that these were produced by an explosion. How silly.

Vs. 4-5 As David wrote this, he was most likely still running from King Saul. Those who were saying in their hearts that God didn't exist were the people doing this. That tells me that they probably "said" God didn't exist, not so much by their words, but by their actions. They thought they could do evil (like Saul having Doeg kill the priests) and get away with it.

V. 6 With the promises God had made to Abraham and had made to David personally (Samuel's anointing of David to be king), David knew that in spite of his hardship, God would bring justice to victory and that all would rejoice.

Proverbs 11:4

Amen.