

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

NUM. 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;)

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.

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,

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.

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

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.

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.

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

21 But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.

22 Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;

23 Surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:

24 But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.

NOTES

Moses' Prayer and God's Answer

Lesson Text: Numbers 14:13-24

Related Scriptures: Nehemiah 9:16-21; Psalms 102:1-28;
145:8-13; John 12:37-40

TIME: about 1443 B.C.

PLACE: Kadesh

GOLDEN TEXT—"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" (Numbers 14:18).

Lesson Exposition

MOSES' GREAT REQUEST— Num. 14:13-19

What will the Egyptians say? (Num. 14:13-14). Because they were afraid, the children of Israel rebelled against entering the Promised Land and decided to replace Moses with another leader, one who would take them back to Egypt (vs. 4). Witnessing this was no doubt a very painful and stressful experience for Moses, yet when God tested him by offering to destroy the people and make a new and stronger nation out of Moses, the great leader pleaded on behalf of the very people who were rejecting his leadership.

Moses began his intercession for the Israelites by reminding God that if He destroyed these people He had previously delivered, news of it would eventually reach Egypt. The Egyptians, in turn, would tell the inhabitants of Canaan. These people would gloat.

What would the world say? (Num. 14:15-16). If God were to destroy the Israelites because of their unbelief,

then the report of the ten spies would be echoed throughout Canaan. The various peoples would rejoice and say that the Lord was unable to bring Israel into Canaan and inhabit the land, even as the spies had said.

It is important to note that Moses never said the children of Israel were undeserving of punishment. Instead, the basis for Moses' plea for Israel was the Lord's promise to give them the land, a promise that would not be kept if He destroyed the nation of Israel.

What the Lord Himself has said (Num. 14:17-18). Moses did not want the greatness of God's power questioned; instead, he wanted it put on display for all to see. He understood that the only way for the Lord to display such greatness and maintain His integrity was through forgiving Israel's sins.

God had described Himself as "longsuffering," or slow to anger (vs. 18). He is very patient with us, merciful and forgiving.

God is, and always has been, gra-

scious. However, that does not mean that He winks at sin and pretends it does not exist. Those who do not turn to the Lord in faith and receive His forgiveness and salvation, remain under God's just wrath (cf. John 3:36).

Sometimes sin becomes so entrenched in us that it becomes a "family thing." God does not punish a child for what the parent does, but many times children grow up and perpetuate the sins of their parents and grandparents. Those who repent, however, are forgiven of their sins.

What Moses prayed (Num. 14:19). Moses was close enough with God that he could make what on its face seems like an audacious request.

The basis for this plea, again, was the greatness of God's mercy, not the people's supposed goodness.

GOD'S GREAT JUDGMENT— Num. 14:20-24

Pardon for Israel (Num. 14:20). God responded to Moses by granting his request.

Punishment for the rebels (Num. 14:21-23). The fact that God had answered Moses' prayer did not mean there would be no consequences whatsoever for Israel's rebellion.

God announced to Moses that His glory would still be displayed throughout the earth. This would come both through His forgiveness and through the judgment He would bring.

Although God would not extinguish the entire nation, He would hold the rebels accountable for their unbelief. Those who had witnessed God's mighty hand of deliverance only to test Him over and over again would not see the Promised Land at all.

An exemption from the penalty (Num. 14:24). When the ten spies were giving their negative report and discouraging the Israelites from any hope of taking possession of the land,

Caleb went against popular opinion and the majority report. Although the people did not want to hear it, he spoke in accordance with God's promise and declared that they were able to take the land in spite of the presence of the giants that were there (13:30; 14:6-9).

Since Caleb was willing to speak up for God, God spoke up for him and exempted him from the punishment due that generation of Israelites. Joshua would not suffer that judgment either, because he had stood with Caleb against the tide of unbelief and negativity (cf. vs. 30). These two men were not spared from punishment because they were sinless but because they were faithful.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

QUESTIONS

1. How did Moses respond to God's offer to destroy the Israelites and start a new nation with him?
2. What did Moses argue that the pagan peoples would conclude if God destroyed Israel?
3. How would destroying the nation contradict God's own promise?
4. How did Moses want God to display His great power?
5. To what did Moses appeal in the Lord's description of Himself?
6. On what basis did Moses appeal to God to pardon the people?
7. What does being pardoned for sin not mean?
8. What judgment did the Lord pronounce on the rebels?
9. How had Caleb demonstrated his faithfulness to the Lord?
10. What two people were exempted from God's judgment?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Because we declare ourselves Christians, our reputation is tied to God's; we must be careful not to defame His name (Num. 14:13-14).
2. God's enemies are always looking for ways to discredit Him, but we must defend His character (vss. 15-16).
3. We can always appeal to God's attributes in our times of need because He is unchanging (vss. 16-18).
4. God's pardon of our sins is based on His mercy alone, so we can never appeal to Him on the basis of works (vs. 19).
5. Even though God forgives our sin, He may still chastise us for it. We must not test the Lord (vss. 20-23).
6. When we take a stand for God, He will reward us (vs. 24).

—Megan Hickman.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How can a Christian's success glorify God? How can a Christian's failure glorify God?
2. How is it comforting to know that the Lord is faithful to all His promises?
3. What is the role of intercessory prayer in the Christian life?
4. Why is it so necessary to remember and rehearse God's attributes in our own prayers?
5. We often miss out on blessing when we are disobedient to God. How can this truth transform our attitudes about obedience?

—Megan Hickman.

Golden Text Illuminated

“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” (Numbers 14:18).

In our golden text for this week, Moses quotes the Lord's own words concerning Himself from Exodus 34:6-7. Moses is pleading for the Lord to show mercy toward the rebellious Israelites.

He calls Yahweh's attention to the fact that if He were to destroy the Israelites here and now, as He threatened to do in verse 12, the Egyptians and the Canaanites would hear of it and interpret it as a demonstration of Yahweh's powerlessness to deliver on His promises. They would say that He not only failed the Israelites, but also the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Moses urges the Lord instead to continue to forgive and restore the people, though they do not deserve it, just as He has done all along since bringing them up out of Egypt.

It may seem strange to some that Moses would need to remind the Lord about His promises to the patriarchs and His reputation of forgiveness and longsuffering. Perhaps the Lord was merely testing Moses' faith, as He did when He commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

Moses passes the test, and rather than being a replacement patriarch, he becomes so much more. No other name is remembered with more honor than Moses except for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

—John Lody.