

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

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

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!**

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?

4 And they said one to another, **Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.**

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

6 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, *which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:*

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.

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.

9 Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they *are* bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD *is* with us: fear them not.

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.

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 shewed among them?

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

NOTES

Rebellion of the People

Lesson Text: Numbers 14:1-12

Related Scriptures: Psalm 118:1-9; Psalm 96:1-11;
Numbers 21:4-9; Hebrews 3:8-16

TIME: about 1443 B.C.

PLACE: Kadesh

GOLDEN TEXT—"Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not" (Numbers 14:9).

Lesson Exposition

THE VOICE OF FEAR—Num. 14:1-4

Crying and weeping all night long (Num. 14:1-2). The negative report of the majority of the spies gave the people no hope of ever securing the land God had promised them (13:27-29, 31-33). This report reverberated throughout the community as the people wailed and wept throughout that night. What should have been a time of celebration and realization that God had brought Israel to the land He had promised them instead became a time of mourning because they saw only a frightening enemy instead of their omnipotent God.

By this time, the people were so exasperated they thought they would have been better off to have died in Egypt or in the wilderness. Anything would have been better than to have been brought to the very brink of freedom and prosperity only to have the rug pulled completely out from under them.

Planning to return to Egypt (Num. 14:3-4). As the Israelites bemoaned their circumstances, they shifted the blame and their anger to God. They

asked each other why the Lord brought them out of Egypt to let them die.

After lamenting their current situation, the people decided that going back to Egypt was the only thing to do.

In deciding to return to Egypt, the people were rejecting God's plan, which included His provision and protection. It is therefore appropriate to consider what prospects they had in Egypt. Slavery, cruelty, and an angry pharaoh awaited them there.

THE VOICE OF FAITH— Num. 14:5-10

Falling before God (Num. 14:5-6). The nation's desire to appoint a new leader and return to Egypt was devastating to Moses and Aaron, but it was not because they felt a blow to their egos. They fell on their faces before the people because they were witnessing full-blown unbelief.

Amid all the commotion, Joshua and Caleb also stepped forward to stand in opposition to the people. These two men were the only dissenters among the twelve spies. So they tore their clothes, a display of grief,

showing that they were appalled at the impulse to return to Egypt.

Calling for faith and courage (Num. 14:7-8). When the spies first reported on all they had seen in the land of Canaan, Caleb alone spoke in favor of taking the land and rejecting the negative recommendation to retreat. Now Caleb was joined by Joshua.

The land they had seen was a good land, one filled with lush fruits and vegetables and rife with opportunity. They had no fear of the inhabitants of the land because they knew that God was with them. God had brought them to this place not to kill them but to bless them far beyond what they could ever have imagined.

Warning against rebellion (Num. 14:9). Israel's unbelief was revealed by their rebelliousness. The rebellion of which Joshua and Caleb warned their fellow Israelites points back to their insistence on returning to Egypt and rejecting God's word concerning the taking of the Promised Land.

The rationale for Joshua and Caleb's faith was that the Lord was with them and had been all along. These two men trusted that God would do everything He had promised without exception.

Raging against Joshua and Caleb (Num. 14:10). After hearing Joshua and Caleb plead for the congregation to trust the Lord and obey Him, the people responded by threatening to execute them! They wanted the most severe punishment given in ancient times: death by stoning.

The people were so consumed with fear that they could no longer think clearly or even humanely.

Not surprisingly, the Lord was not silent when He heard this band of unbelievers rising against the leaders of Israel who spoke His word to the people. The glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to everyone.

THE VOICE OF JUDGMENT— Num. 14:11-12

God asked Moses how long the people would despise Him. But He was not seeking information. God was angry, and He was ready to pour out His wrath on these unruly people.

The anger of God comes into full focus in verse 12, where He states that He would strike the people with a pestilence and destroy them. After that He would start a new nation with Moses, one that would be greater than Israel ever could become.

How could God disown the people He had called to be His own? Would He destroy an entire nation and start over with one man as the leader?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

QUESTIONS

1. What did the Israelites do after they heard the spies' reports?
2. What did the people claim would have been better for them than entering the Promised Land?
3. Where did the people decide they should go?
4. What awaited the Israelites if they had returned there?
5. How did Moses and Aaron react to the people's rebellious plan?
6. Why were Joshua and Caleb sure they could defeat the inhabitants of Canaan?
7. What did the people's rebellion reveal? What did it consist of?
8. What did the people threaten to do to Joshua and Caleb?
9. Before whom did the glory of the Lord appear?
10. What did God say He would do to the Israelites?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Do not suffer by being rebellious against the Lord (Num 14:1-2; cf. 1 Pet. 3:17).
2. Even when circumstances seem to be against us, the Lord's plans are always best (Num. 14:3-4).
3. It is right to grieve over sin, but we must also do our part to correct it (vss. 5-6).
4. We should never stand down when it comes to truth, even if nobody will listen (vss. 7-9).
5. We will encounter persecution for standing up for truth, but we must persevere for Christ's glory (vs. 10).
6. Do not test the Lord's patience, for He has the power both to bless and to punish (vss. 11-12).

—Megan Hickman.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever cried out to God about something that you wanted but later realized that it was a sinful desire? How can we avoid this type of behavior?
2. Does it upset you when people sin? If not, why do you think this is?
3. Have you ever suffered persecution for doing the right thing? How do you know that you would be prepared to stand for Christ if you were faced with intense persecution?
4. Did God always deal immediately with sin in the Old Testament? Does He do so today?
5. Do you complain a lot? What does this say about the strength of your faith in God?

—Megan Hickman.

Golden Text Illuminated

“Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not” (Numbers 14:9).

The golden text for this week comes during another of Israel's worst episodes in terms of faith. Moses had sent out spies to appraise the Promised Land and its defenses. Continuing from last week's lesson text, the negative report brought back by the majority of the spies now holds sway in the minds and hearts of the people.

What a discouraging bunch these Israelites were! Even when Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb all rent their garments and begged the people not to rebel against the Lord and to take courage in the face of their enemies because the Lord was on their side, their response was to call for them to be stoned to death (vs. 10).

The history of Israel is one long descent from faithful beginnings down into the depths of idolatry, immorality, and injustice.

But even in this wretched condition of faltering faith, there is much encouragement. Even after this episode of rebellion, the Israelites eventually conquered Canaan under Joshua. Even after David committed adultery and murder, God established his dynasty forever. Even after Peter thrice denied Jesus, he became a leader of the early church. Our God is so gracious and powerful that He can even bring victory out of our failures. Amen!

—John Lody.