

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

May 17, 2020

- I. Review from last week's first half of the story
 - A. Last week we began looking at the story about Israel's 10-2 vote not to go into the Promised Land.
 1. This story begins in **Numbers 13**, and starting there, we worked our way to **Numbers 14:10** where we read that the Israelites wanted to stone Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb for getting them into a situation where they were being asked to face well-equipped armies, fortified cities, and giants in order to have a homeland.
 - a. And though Caleb and Joshua said they could overcome these challenges, the other 10 spies said the inhabitants of the Land would overcome them – killing the men and taking the women and children as plunder for their own enrichment and pleasure.
 - b. It was at this moment of Israel wanting to stone these four men that God stepped in – and so we ended last week's part of this story with these words, "**Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.**"
 2. As stated last Sunday, the Israelites were dealing with this seemingly threatening situation the way too many of us deal with similar situations. They were taking **what they could see** and using it to **project what would be**, and since what they could see looked bad, they were giving in to fear and projecting doom.
 3. However, they neglected to take into account what they could not see – which was God and what He was doing behind the scenes to bring about the fulfillment of His promises, the good of His people, and the accomplishment of His purposes.
 - B. Today, we will continue this story, beginning at **Numbers 14:11**.
 - C. Prayer
- II. God responds to Israel's refusal to enter the Promised Land and their decision to stone Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb.
 - A. **Numbers 14:11** . . . The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people **spurn Me** (*kick Me away, ignore Me, scornfully reject Me*)? And how long will they **not believe in Me** despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?
 1. In other words, how long will the Israelites distrust God when they have been given so many reasons to trust Him?

2. And just to remind you, the Israelites had seen God perform some amazing miracles – which included the 10 plagues, freeing Israel from slavery in Egypt, making it possible for them to plunder the Egyptians, holding the Egyptian army back while He took Israel across the Red Sea on dry ground, destroying the Egyptian army in the waters of the Red Sea, turning the bitter waters of Marah into sweet, drinkable water, bringing water from a rock at Rephidim (REF ih dim), feeding the Israelites with manna and quail, and turning Miriam leprous and then healing her at Moses' request.
 3. In addition, they had God's visible presence, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, in the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. And beyond all this, they had God's daily care of them and His choice of Moses as their leader – a leader who on several occasions acted as a mediator between God and them on their behalf.
- B. [12] I will **smite** (*kill*) them with pestilence and **dispossess** (*disinherit*) them, and I will **make you** (*Moses*) into a nation greater and mightier than they."
1. The Israelites had behaved so badly – not just once, but repeatedly – that God decided to wipe them out and start over with Moses.
 2. However, Moses responded to God's decision as an intercessor on Israel's behalf, and there are two godly character qualities in Moses' response which we would be wise to emulate – **humility** and **love**.
- C. [13] (*Therefore, Moses interceded with the Lord on Israel's behalf, and on behalf of wanting God to look good to the nations around who would not know the whole story and therefore think ill of God for destroying the Israelites, and so Moses said*), "Then the Egyptians will hear of it (*and it will change their view of You and what they say about You*), for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst, [14] and they will tell [how powerful You are] to the inhabitants of this land (*That is, the Egyptians will spread the word that Israel's God is too powerful to defeat*). They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people (*that is, God is ever present – which means no one can go up against the Israelites without their God knowing about it*), for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over 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 slay this people as one man (*kill all of them in a moment of time*), then the nations who have heard of Your fame will (*no longer hold You in high regard and they will*) say, [16] 'Because the LORD **could not** (*that is, was not powerful enough or lacked the means*

to) bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore (*to hide His failure – a failure that represents a weakness in Him*) He slaughtered them in the wilderness.'

D. [17] But now, I pray, **let the power of the Lord be great**, just as You have declared (*that is, let Your power be as great as You have said it is when You declared*), [18] 'The LORD is **slow to anger** (*not quickly or easily angered*), and **abundant in lovingkindness** (*has so much loving-kindness that it will never run out*), forgiving **iniquity** (*iniquity is doing what is unrighteous or unjust as a result of rebelling against God – which results in unjustly hurting others*) and **transgression** (*transgression is breaking the law or doing what you know is wrong*); but He **will by no means clear the guilty** (*That is, God will not free you from the more direct and immediate consequences of your sin. He may, in His patience and mercy, allow the consequences to be put off for a time so as to give you time to see your folly, repent, and change your ways. But all sin costs you something – even if the cost is confined to a duller conscience, a harder heart, an increased distance from God, and a decreased intimacy and enjoyment of God.*), [and He will] visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.' (*In doing this, God is not punishing the children for the father's sin, but rather giving the father's a powerful reason not to sin by making it clear their sin will have destructive consequences in their children, grand-children, and great-grandchildren's lives.*)

1. I want to return to the first part of vs 17, where Moses prays, “**let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared.**” When we consider the meaning of these words within the context of this story, three primary truths emerge.
2. The **first** truth is this: Our distrust of God, our rejecting or ignoring God's will in order to do what we want, and our selfish choices and sinful behavior causes problems for God – problems that require **His power** to overcome or work around.
 - a. A classic example is Jonah. God wanted Jonah to go to Nineveh to warn the city of God's impending judgment due to their wickedness. Jonah fled to Tarshish via boat because he knew that if the Ninevites repented, God would spare them, and he wanted them destroyed. So God, **by His power**, created a storm on the sea that resulted in Jonah being thrown overboard, and God brought along a large fish in order to swallow Jonah and chastise him in the belly of the fish for three days – for his disobedience and selfishness.

- b. In our story today, we see **God's power** in action following the Israelites 10-2 vote against going into the Promised Land. You see, God not only had to endure an additional 40 years of gross evil by the inhabitants of the Land, He also had to protect the Land from being conquered by outside forces so Israel could possess it according to His plans – though 40 year later.
 3. The **second** truth is this: Our distrust of God, our rejecting or ignoring God's will in order to do what we want, and our selfish choices and sinful behavior causes problems for those around us.
 - a. A clear example of this is the sin of Adam and Eve. Thousands of years later we are still bearing many of the consequences of their sin – the corona virus being just on of those consequences.
 - b. In our story today, we see that the parent's sin put their children in a situation of having to endure 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, being lowly shepherds, and having to eat manna and quail day after day. In other words, though the children did not commit this sin, they suffered nonetheless.
 - c. And so it is with us. Our sin, our selfishness, our distrust of God not only harms us and causes us to suffer, it harms others and causes them to suffer – especially those nearest and dearest.
 - d. However, by **His power**, God works with and in the children to draw them to Himself and show them the path of life – in spite of their parent's sinful choices and behaviors.
 4. The **third** truth expressed by the words, "**let the power of the Lord be great,**" is that the power of God is demonstrated just as much in restraining His anger, pouring forth His lovingkindness, and forgiving iniquity and transgression as in His 10 plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, providing food in the wilderness, and bringing water out of a rock. The one is no less a manifestation of God's power than the other.
- E. [19] [Therefore, Moses continues praying,] Pardon, I pray, the iniquity (*the rebellion*) of this people **according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness**, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."
 1. Much like Jesus does for us, Moses interceded with God on behalf of the people – even though they had repeatedly disrespected and mistreated him – which included wanting to kill him.
 2. And it is important to notice that as frustrated and disappointed as Moses probably was with the Israelites, and as heart-broken as he may have been over their behavior toward God, he still cared about

- them and was committed to seeking their good. To this end, Moses becomes an example for us.
3. Why, you may ask? Because people will disappoint us, frustrate us, hurt us, falsely accuse us, unjustly criticize us, mistreat us, or even harm us – yet God, humility, and godly love call us to care about them and in caring, seek their good.
 - a. Jesus put it this way in **Luke 6:27-28**, “But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, [28] bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”
 - b. Paul said it this way in **Romans 12:20**, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink.”
 - c. And my paraphrase of **1 Corinthians 13:8** says it in a way that helps me love as I ought, “Love never fails to be love.”
- F. [20] So the LORD said, “I have pardoned them according to your word (*that is, according to Moses’ request, supported by his reasons. In this we see the wisdom of prayer, for God does listen and does give consideration to our requests.*); [21] **but indeed** (*God goes on to say*), as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD.
1. The Greek text in **vs 21** can also be translated as, “but indeed, just as sure as I live, and just as sure as all the earth is filled with the glory of the Lord, [22] all the men...”.
 2. I prefer this translation because it fits the context better in that God is giving us two reasons why nothing is going to change the consequences of Israel reaping at least some of what they sowed in voting 10-2 against going into the Promised Land.
 3. In other words, in pardoning the Israelites, God freed them from what they deserved – which was being disinherited and killed right then and there. But though He let them live, He made them bear the consequence of dying in the wilderness – which according to **Number 14:2** is what they clearly stated they preferred over going into the Promised Land.
- G. (*God continues on and gives reasons for His actions and explanations for the consequences Israel will bear for their distrusting and rebellious choices and behavior.*) [22] Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have **put Me to the test** these **ten times** and have **not listened to My voice**, [23] shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.
1. For a list of the **ten times** Israel tested God, see Exodus 5:21; 14:11; 15:24; 16:2; 17:2-3; 32:1; Numbers 11:1; 11:4; 12:1; 14:2.

- H. [24] But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit (*a godly spirit, maybe even the Holy Spirit – not because he was special but because he trusted God and acted accordingly*) and has followed Me fully (*following fully is the natural result of trusting God fully*), I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it.
- I. [25] Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites live in the valleys (*and so to avoid encountering them and potentially having to do battle with them*); turn tomorrow and **set out to the wilderness** by the way of the Red Sea (*where they said they preferred to die rather than being slaughtered in the Promised Land by the well-equipped armies and giants*)."
- J. (*Verses 26-38 are an elaboration of what has already been said*) [26] The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, [27] "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. [28] Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; [29] your corpses will fall in this wilderness (***Numbers 14:2***), even all your numbered men (*old enough and strong enough to fight in battle*), according to your complete number **from twenty years old and upward**, who have grumbled against Me.
1. This means God did not hold those who were 19 years old and below accountable for the decision not to go into the Promised Land, or for wanting to stone Moses.
 2. To me, this implies that with God, there is an age of accountability. In this instance, it was 20 years and above. I don't know if this is God's universal and eternal age of accountability, but it does seem to say that God takes into account our individual ability to make decisions regarding trusting or distrusting Him, obeying or disobeying Him, and rebelling or submitting to Him.
 3. And though we are not God, we too ought to deal with children, teenagers, and young adults in a manner that takes into account their age, experience, education, background, and personal history.
- K. [30] Surely you **shall not** come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh (*jih FUHN nee*), and Joshua the son of Nun. [31] Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey—I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected. [32] But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness.

- L. [33] Your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness (*in other words, whatever upward mobility you may want for your children educationally, job wise, or even socially is not going to happen*), and **they will suffer for your unfaithfulness**, until your corpses lie in the wilderness. [34] According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years, and you will know My opposition (*They had known His grace and mercy, but having gone too far in distrust and disobedience, now they would know His opposition.*). [35] I, the LORD, have spoken, surely this I will do to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be destroyed, and there they will die." (*End of God talking through Moses*)
- M. [36] As for the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land and who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing out a bad report concerning the land, [37] even those men who brought out the very bad report of the land **died by a plague** before the LORD. [38] But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh (*jih FUHN nee*) remained alive out of those men who went to spy out the land.
- N. [39] When Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people (*seeing the foolishness and resulting consequences of distrusting and voting against God*) mourned greatly (*After getting caught, many mourn over the consequences of their sin, while few have a broken and contrite heart over displeasing God and harming others by their sin.*).
- O. [40] In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, "Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised." [41] But Moses said, "Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD, when it will not succeed?"
1. First, they turned against God and wanted to kill Moses instead of obeying God regarding the Promised Land. Now they are trying to avoid God's ordained consequences by proceeding to do what they previously voted against doing. Both are an act of rebellion against God.
 2. The reality is, distrust of God, self-will, and self-rule breeds foolishness, and this kind of foolishness brings the kind of results or consequences you don't really want – just as it did with Israel.
 3. However, as long as distrust of God, self-will, and self-rule are the primary influences over your thinking, choices, and behavior, you won't give any thought to the destructive consequences that are

- sure to come – until they arrive. And of course, once they arrive you begin to realize how foolish you have been—but by then it is too late.
4. I look to David as my example of accepting, and without complaint, submitting to God's chosen consequences for my sin. These Israelites weren't as wise as David, and it cost them dearly. The same will be true of you if you follow Israel's example when God chastises you, instead of David's.
- P. [42] [Moses went on to say,] Do not go up, or you will be struck down before your enemies, **for the LORD is not among you.** [43] For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there in front of you, and **you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned back from following the LORD. And the LORD will not be with you.**" (*You see, the Lord was leading them into the wilderness to die, so to follow God would mean accepting the consequences of their sin and following God where He was leading them.*)
- Q. [44] But (*they were unwilling to listen to reason and wisdom*) [so] they went up heedlessly to the ridge of the hill country; neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses left the camp. [45] Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down, and struck them and beat them down as far as Hormah.

III. Conclusion

- A. Such things as unbelief, irrational fear, disobedience, self-will, self-rule, an unwillingness to listen and give proper consideration to what God has said in His word or is saying, an unwillingness to bear the consequences of our sin, and thinking we can change God's mind once we have crossed the line of no return, are all things that fuel a blinding foolishness that drives us down the path of self-destruction, that harms others unjustly, and eventually brings us to death.
- B. Therefore, may we, individually and as a church practice the words of **Hebrews 3:12-13**, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. [13] **But (as a church) encourage one another day after day**, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."