

BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR

In the beginning GOD
created the heaven and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

Summer Quarter

June | July | August

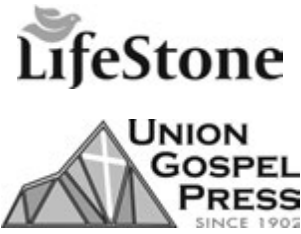
2026

Bible Expositor and Illuminator

SUMMER QUARTER

June, July, August 2026

Looking Ahead.....	2
Editorials	3
 The Lord's Patience with His People	
UNIT 1: Slow to Anger	
June 7 — Moses Prays for Mercy—Num. 14:11-24	4
June 14 — God Renews His Covenant—Ex. 34:1-14.....	18
June 21 — God's Mercy in History—Josh. 24:2-13.....	32
June 28 — God Grants Israel a King—1 Sam. 8:1-18.....	46
 UNIT 2: Faithful to His Promises	
July 5 — God Gathers All Nations—Jer. 3:11-20.....	60
July 12 — God Sends a Righteous Branch—Jer. 23:1-8.....	74
July 19 — God's Faithful Justice—Jer. 26:1-13	88
July 26 — God's Hope for Exiles—Jer. 29:1-14	102
Aug. 2 — God's Promised Land—Jer. 30:1-11, 18-22	116
 UNIT 3: His Compassion Never Fails	
Aug. 9 — God Reconciles His People—Jer. 31:1-14.....	130
Aug. 16 — The Good Shepherd—Ezek. 34:1-16	144
Aug. 23 — God's Love for Israel—Hos. 11:1-11.....	158
Aug. 30 — God's Faithfulness to Israel—Mic. 7:14-20.....	172
Topics for Next Quarter	188
Paragraphs on Places and People	189
Daily Bible Readings	190
Review	191



Editor in Chief: James M. Leonard, Ph.D.
Managing Editor: Michelle Birtasevic
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LOOKING AHEAD

This quarter, we will study “The Lord’s Patience with His People.” Our first unit explains how He is slow to get angry. Our first two lessons come from the life of Moses, as Moses begged the Lord for mercy, and the Lord renewed the covenant. In lesson 3, Joshua recounted ways the Lord had blessed His people. The unit ends somewhat ominously in lesson 4, as the people asked for a king so that they could be like all the nations.

The second unit, “Faithful to His Promises,” consists entirely of lessons from Jeremiah. In lesson 5, Jeremiah urged backsliding Israel to return to the Lord. In lesson 6, he declared woe to the selfish shepherds of the nation who abused their power for personal gain. The Lord promised that He would gather His people and appoint good shepherds, including the righteous King who would reign over them.

In lesson 7, Jeremiah solemnly and clearly laid out two options for the people: repent and be forgiven, or persist in sinful rebellion and experience the Lord’s discipline. Sadly, the people, led by the priests and false prophets (some of the shepherds from lesson 6), continued in sin and were taken into exile.

Nevertheless, in lesson 8, God sent good news to the exiles. Despite their persistent sins, God would bring them out of exile in seventy years. He would bless His people again, when they sought Him with all their hearts. The unit ends in lesson 9 with God’s promise to gather His scattered people once again.

The final unit, “His Compassion Never Fails,” contains four lessons from four different prophets. Lesson 10 is from Jeremiah, as God promised that Israel would be rebuilt and filled with joy. Lesson 11 is from Ezekiel, as God again declared woe to the wicked shepherds of the people and promised to be Israel’s Good Shepherd. This echoed Jeremiah’s pronouncements and added depth to Jesus’ later declaration that He is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-18).

Lesson 12 contains Hosea’s description of God’s love for Israel. Although she had been unfaithful to the Lord, like an unfaithful wife, He would welcome her back. Despite her many sins, the Lord would forgive and love His people. Lesson 13 concludes the quarter with Micah’s glorious promise that the Lord would cast the sins of His people into the depths of the sea.

—Tom Greene

PLEASE NOTE: Fundamental, sound doctrine is the objective of LifeStone Ministries, Union Gospel Press. The writers are prayerfully selected for their Bible knowledge and willingness to submit to the Spirit of Truth, each writing in his own style as enlightened by the Holy Spirit. At best we know in part only. “They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Promises to Keep

GLENN WEAVER

Much of the Bible's storyline is informed by promises God makes to various individuals and groups of people. The first notable individual is Abraham (Gen. 12). God promised to provide him a land and descendants and that through Abraham, all the families of the earth would be blessed.

God was faithful to give a land to Abraham and his descendants, and that is what led to Israel's deliverance from Egypt. On the basis of this same promise, Moses persuaded God to forgive His people when they refused God's directive to enter the land after ten spies reported that the inhabitants were strong and their cities fortified (Num. 13:26—14:24). God's promise to drive the inhabitants out of the land is also the result of His promise to Abraham (Ex. 34:11). Joshua's list of historical events whereby God blessed Israel and the patriarchs is the fruit of the same promise (Josh. 24:2-13).

Out of this promise to Abraham came the covenant that God made through Moses with Abraham's descendants (Ex. 24). This covenant was a contract. It contains many promises. Some of them are promises of blessings if the Israelites obeyed the covenant. But there are also promises of curses if the Israelites violated the covenant terms. These promises of blessings and curses are found in Deuteronomy 27 through 28.

Many of the promises God made to Israel in the prophets are applications of the promises made in the Mosaic covenant. Because Israel turned from God, the Lord notified Israel through the prophets that the people would reap the promised curses. Jeremiah told them

that Jerusalem would be destroyed like Shiloh and become debased in the eyes of all nations (Jer. 26:4-6, 9).

But God promises blessings for His people as well. The Lord promised that He would return the disobedient northern kingdom of Israel to the Promised Land if they would repent (3:11-20). After the Southern Kingdom of Judah went into exile in Babylon, God promised to return both the kingdoms to the Promised Land (30:1-3), rejoining them as one, with Jerusalem as the center of God's presence for all nations (3:17-18).

God's faithfulness to His people did not stop even after they went into exile. They would spend seventy years in a foreign land, but God promised to return them to Israel after their time of judgment was completed (29:10).

The Lord's statements in Hosea 11:1-11 are especially encouraging to those who have strayed from Him. In those verses, we see the rebellious nature of God's children and the need for God to judge sin. But we also see the Lord's great compassion for His people. As angry as He was over the sins of His people, He recoiled at the thought of giving up on them. God promised to seek out His children in the far-flung lands where their sin had taken them. He would lead them homeward and restore them to their land and a faithful relationship to Himself.

The good promises of the Mosaic covenant are the exact opposite of the bad promises. Instead of being few in number (cf. Deut. 28:62), God would multiply the Jews (Jer. 30:19; cf. Deut. 28:4, 11). Even though they suffered a

(Editorials continued on page 186)

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

NUM. 14:11 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.

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.

Moses Prays for Mercy

Lesson Text: Numbers 14:11-24

Related Scriptures: Exodus 32:7-14; Joshua 2:8-11;
Ezekiel 36:16-23; Joel 2:12-17; Hebrews 3:7-19

TIME: about 1443 B.C.

PLACE: Kadesh

GOLDEN TEXT—"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" (Numbers 14:19).

Introduction

When we pray, do we change God's mind? If God knows everything ahead of time, what does prayer really accomplish? Today's passage is a tense moment from Israel's history, where God seemed to promise to destroy Israel. They had seen God perform mighty miracles in Egypt and during their wilderness wanderings. He had miraculously protected and provided for them, yet they rejected Him. Their doom seemed inevitable, yet the Lord did not destroy them after Moses interceded.

What are we to make of this story? How does it impact *our* prayer lives? If we can work past our initial confusion, this passage contains valuable lessons on prayer. This passage can change our lives if we learn from it.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. **GOD'S OFFER**—Num. 14:11-12
2. **MOSES' PLEA**—Num. 14:13-19
3. **THE LORD'S RESPONSE**—
Num. 14:20-24

Exposition: Verse by Verse

After the spies' bad report in Numbers 13, Israel refused to enter the Promised Land. They rejected Moses for someone to return them to Egypt. They wanted to stone Caleb and Joshua, who had urged them forward! Then the Lord intervened (14:1-10).

GOD'S OFFER

NUM. 14:11 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.

After God miraculously delivered the people from bondage in Egypt and provided them with manna in the wilder-

ness, it should have been obvious that God could miraculously drive out their enemies before them. Sadly, it was not.

{The Lord asked Moses how long the people would despise Him and not believe. While pleas of “how long” were often directed to the Lord by His weary people throughout the Bible (cf. Ps. 13:1; Hab. 1:2), here the Lord strikingly asked that of Moses.}⁹¹ Clearly, the Lord had given His people far more than enough evidence to trust Him to deliver them. The plagues against Egypt, the daily provision of manna, and the pillar of cloud guiding them should have kindled belief in them. That it did not was incredible.

{Then the Lord made a surprising offer. He told Moses that He would destroy the people with a plague and make Moses a nation mightier than them.}⁹² What are we to make of this? The language is similar to that of Genesis 12, where God promised to make Abraham a mighty nation. Surely, Moses knew this.

Was God genuinely offering to destroy His people, or was this merely a test of Moses? {We must first recognize that God never lies and always keeps His promises (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2). The threat would not have broken God’s promise to Abraham, for had God destroyed Israel and created a new nation from Moses, Abraham’s descendants technically would still have become a mighty nation, since Moses was a son of Abraham. Thus, God would not have violated His promise to Abraham. Although some take this offer to Moses as merely a test, it may have been a truly genuine offer.}⁹³

Equally striking is that God did not seem to ask for Moses’ opinion on the matter; instead, He simply stated what He planned to do. He did not ask Moses whether he wanted this but simply declared that He would do it. That made Moses’ intercessory prayer much more urgent. From Moses’ perspective, the situation was dire!

MOSES’ PLEA

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 swore 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.

{Moses responded with a twofold appeal to the Lord. First, he reasoned that the Lord’s name would be dishonored if He struck down His people. Second, Moses appealed to promises that God had made previously.}⁹⁴

God’s name would be dishonored (Num. 14:13-16). Moses first appealed to God’s character and to His glory. He argued that the nations would hear of how the Israelites had died in the wilderness and question God’s ability to bring His people into the land. After all, the Lord had delivered His people

out of Egypt, and they would surely be keeping an eye on their former subjects. They might tell the Canaanites or other people. News might spread about Israel. If the Lord slew His people after repeatedly commanding Pharaoh to let His people go, what would the Egyptians think? What would the nations of the Promised Land think?

{A common belief in the ancient Near East was that when one nation defeated another, their gods (or God) displayed mastery over the other nations' gods. During the exodus, the Lord Himself said that He was judging the gods of Egypt (Ex. 12:12). His ability to deliver His people out of Egypt and His systematic demonstration of power via the ten plagues demonstrated that He was more powerful than the Egyptian gods.}⁹⁵ Indeed, many scholars think each of the ten plagues demonstrated power over the Egyptian deities.

Moses claimed that the nations would think the Lord was not strong enough to lead His people into the Promised Land. Perhaps the nations would conclude that their gods were stronger than the Lord, and this would promote Canaanite paganism. At a minimum, the nations would not fear the Lord or turn to Him.

God promised to go with them (Num. 14:17-19). Next, Moses referred to what God had told him previously after the golden calf incident (Ex. 33). {In both Exodus 32:9-10 and 33:3, the Lord made declarations against Israel, but after Moses pleaded with the Lord, He relented both times.}⁹⁶

After Israel made a golden calf, the Lord commanded them to continue to the Promised Land but declared He would not go with them. Moses, however, had appealed to the Lord, and God relented and promised to go with them. Then the Lord revealed His character to Moses and promised that He would drive out the inhabitants of the land (34:1-11). Now Moses quoted

back the Lord's own self-description; by implication, Moses reminded Him of the promise He had made to bring them into the land.

{Though Moses' appeal to God's promise to bring them into the land was implicit, his appeal to God's promise regarding His character was not. He appealed to the Lord to be who He had revealed Himself to be. How could the Lord strike down all His people and start over after He had declared Himself to be slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and forgiving? Moses was not impertinent in the way that he questioned the Lord. He did not question God's character. Rather, he humbly asked God to keep His promises and be who He said He was.}⁹⁷ We too can pray boldly without praying in a disrespectful way.

It is important that the Lord had not asked for Moses' opinion or advice. He had not told Moses that He would do whatever Moses asked of Him. He had simply declared that He would judge the people. Moses' appeal was, therefore, a desperate one but not a hopeless one. Previously, in Exodus 33, the Lord had declared that He would not go up with the Israelites. But when Moses appealed, the Lord relented. Moses now appealed to God to relent once again and be merciful to His people as He had in the past.

THE LORD'S RESPONSE

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 swore 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.

{As Moses requested, the Lord pardoned the people and did not destroy them with a plague. But there was a substantial catch. None of the people who had seen the glory of the Lord and all the powerful plagues poured out on Egypt and yet repeatedly rebelled would see the Promised Land. They would not die of a plague, but they would not experience the full blessing that awaited God's people. Those twenty years old and older would die in the wilderness (Num. 14:29).}⁹⁸

The people had seen God's power displayed but remained obstinate in unbelief. They had said it would have been better to die in Egypt or in the wilderness, and so die in the wilderness they would (vss. 2, 28-30). They had mourned that their children would become prey, but the Lord would safely bring those children into the Promised Land. The ten spies who gave an unfavorable report of the land did die of the plague seemingly quickly (vss. 36-38).

{God's pardon does not always mean freedom from consequences. As Christians, we are forgiven of our sins, and we are free from God's final judgment. Sometimes when we sin, however, there are natural consequences. We may experience damaged relationships if we lie or gossip. Our bodies may suffer if we indulge in gluttony, the of abuse alcohol, or sexual sins. We may lose our jobs or be arrested if we break the law. God may forgive our sins without delivering us from the consequences of our actions.

The case of the Israelites seems a bit more complicated, for the Israelites dying in the wilderness may not seem to be a natural consequence.

Could the Lord have led them into the Promised Land? Why confine them to die in the wilderness? We feel tension between the declaration of pardon and the punishment here.

If we look at the preceding verses, we may find some explanation. In verse 2, the people said it would have been better to die in Egypt or in the wilderness, and the Lord obliged them accordingly. They did not enter because of their unbelief (Heb. 3:19).}⁹⁹

Sometimes God shows mercy and restrains us from what we sinfully want. But sometimes He gives us over to our sins (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). Israel said it would be better to die in the wilderness, and God let them have it their own way. They had waited forty days and then accepted the counsel of men; now they would wait forty years before accepting the counsel of God.

Underneath this story is the question of whether God changes His mind. The Bible insists that He does not change (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8). Yet here, He seemed to change His plans because of Moses. How are we to understand that?

First Samuel 15 says both that the Lord has regret ("repents") and that, since He is not like a man, He does not repent (vss. 11, 29). If a chapter of the Bible says things that appear to be contradictory, we should not assume that the author is oblivious. Rather, he was likely conveying something nuanced, deserving further study.

God never changes His mind due to new data or a change in His character. In 1 Samuel 8, the Lord foretold that Saul would be a bad king. In chapter 15, then, His regret over Saul was not because of new information. Rather, God was grieved because of wicked human behavior (cf. Gen. 6:5-6).

A crucial passage for correctly understanding how God relents is Jeremiah 18:5-11. God promised that if at any time He declares a coming judgment

and a nation repents, He will relent. Likewise, if a nation turns away from Him to evil, He will no longer bless that nation. God's disposition is fixed, and He always acts consistently. If we abandon Him and turn to evil, or if we repent and turn to Him, His actions toward us will change. But that is not because *His* character has changed. We see this confirmed in Jeremiah 26:3 when God held out the possibility of His people repenting so that He might relent. He would not relent until they repented. Therefore, He commanded Jeremiah to speak.

The Lord's character does not change, but His relationship with us changes as we change. Whenever people repent, He will relent of judgment. The prophet Jonah was so certain of this principle that he avoided preaching to Nineveh—he knew that if they repented, God would spare them (Jonah 4:2).

{Numbers 14:21 contains a comment that could be easily skipped over. The Lord affirmed that these things would take place as surely as He lives and as surely as all the earth will be filled with His glory. Given that this statement is being used to affirm the certainty of something else, it is apparent that the Lord considers this an absolute certainty. The whole earth will be filled with His glory!}²¹⁰

In Habakkuk 2:12-14, God repeated this promise and said further that the earth would be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. How thoroughly does water cover the sea? The question is, of course, rhetorical—there is no part of the sea that is not water! Likewise, the glory of the Lord will completely fill the entire earth.

After affirming that the people would not enter the land, the Lord listed two exceptions. Because Caleb had a different attitude, one of obedience to God, God would allow him to enter the land. Joshua, Moses' personal assis-

tant, would also be allowed to enter the land, as the Lord promised a few verses later (Num. 14:30). Caleb is highlighted first, likely because he was the one who seemed to take the lead in urging the people to enter the Promised Land (13:30). Joshua agreed with him, but Caleb seems to have been the one who boldly contradicted the ten faithless spies. When everyone else was declaring doom and gloom, Caleb was willing to stand apart and stand alone, urging trust in the Lord.

Although it is a cliché, we should not follow the crowd but follow the Lord, no matter the consequences. It is better to stand against an entire nation than it is to stand against the Lord.

—Tom Greene

QUESTIONS

1. What did the Lord ask Moses, and how was that unusual?
2. What did the Lord offer Moses?
3. If God fulfilled His offer to Moses, would He have broken His promise to Abraham?
4. What two arguments did Moses make to the Lord?
5. What did many ancient Near East people think happened when one nation defeated another?
6. When had Moses previously interceded for Israel?
7. How did Moses appeal to God's previous revelation?
8. How did the Lord respond to Moses' request?
9. How could the Lord both pardon and punish His people?
10. What certain thing did the Lord use to affirm that what He said would come true?

—Tom Greene

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

The patience of God seems like a comfortable topic—until we begin to delve into it. God's patience with us means He has a *reason* to be patient. In His holiness and mercy, He is slow to anger, but that does not mean His anger is delayed forever.

In this quarter's first passage, Numbers 14:11-24, we see how the patience of God relates to His holiness and His coming judgment. God will by no means clear those who reject Him, but His patience displays His majesty.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to learn about the Israelites' rebellion, Moses' intercession, and God's response.

Principle: to understand that God's patience and mercy demonstrate the holiness of His character.

Application: to know that God has been patient with us and to repent and proclaim the gospel as a result.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

If we were to write the account of the Israelites as a fictional story, we would have written of their triumph at the Red Sea, their easy progress through the wilderness, and their quick conquest of Canaan. We might have written about some conflict, but we would likely have portrayed one side as a godly group in order to make us root for them. Instead, we find in Numbers an account of Israel's constant rebellion, despite seeing God's glory on display.

Just before our passage, the Israelites had sent spies into Canaan. Instead of feeling safe in God's promised victory, they rebelled out of fear. They even wanted to appoint a leader to take them back to Egyptian bondage. They were unwilling to face an enemy in battle but were willing to crawl back to

their previous oppressors! God could have justly ended their story there. Instead, we find His patience.

DEVELOPING THE LESSON

1. The Lord judges (Num. 14:11-12).

Our passage begins with the Lord's judgment against His people. As the whole assembly of Israel grumbled about their circumstances and even considered stoning Moses and Aaron, the Lord appeared at the tabernacle in His glory. All the Israelites witnessed this appearance, yet the Lord chose to speak with Moses only. He began with His complaint against His people: they were rebellious and ignored Him despite the signs He had done for them. As a result, He would wipe them out and make of Moses a new nation.

The Lord's judgment here would have drastically altered the Abrahamic covenant. Moses would have become the "new" Abraham, the founder of a great nation. When God chose Moses, however, to lead the people, He knew what He was doing. Upon hearing of the coming judgment, Moses called on the mercy of the Lord—which was exactly what God intended.

2. The Lord listens (Num. 14:13-19).

Having pronounced His judgment, the Lord heard Moses' prayer. Passages like this are difficult for us sometimes because it seems to us like God is changing His mind or is totally influenced by humans. In His sovereignty, however, God chose to hear Moses' plea. The words and stories in the book of Numbers bear witness to the character of God (cf. 1 Cor. 10:6, 11).

We see the witness of the Israelites' sin as a warning to us, and we also see the mercy of God as a comfort to us. Moses first appealed to the glory of God. Because God had brought His

people into the wilderness, if He killed them now, the nations might think it was because of God's weakness

The nations knew the Israelites were different because God's presence visibly went with them; nothing should endanger the glory that came with that. Moses then repeated God's own words back to Him: God is forgiving and slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

It is not as though God had forgotten His character or was wavering in His mind about what to do. However, the Israelites *did* need that reminder. They needed to know that God's presence marked them as different from everyone else, and it was His mercy alone that led Him to dwell with them. They did not deserve His forgiveness, yet He gave it to them. At the same time, God also works through our prayers. He appointed Moses to intercede so that Moses would foreshadow the greater Intercessor: Jesus Christ (Heb. 4:16).

3. The Lord relents (Num. 14:20-24).

In His patience, the Lord listened to Moses and relented from His judgment. Even so, He did not clear the guilty—the entire generation of rebellious Israelites would pass away, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, who were righteous. This is a good reminder for us that the Lord's mercy is meant to lead us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). That is why the author of Hebrews used the Israelites' wilderness wanderings as a call for the church today. God gives us *today* to repent, but He does not promise any other day. So let us not delay any longer, but let us enter the rest God has provided for us in His Son (3:7—4:1).

ILLUSTRATING THE LESSON

Today is the only day given us to repent and proclaim the gospel. So let us not rebel as the Israelites did in the wil-

derness, but let us praise God for His patience and tell of the good news of His mercy to all those around us before it is too late.



CONCLUDING THE LESSON

The patience of God displays both His mercy and His coming judgment. He would have been justified in wiping out the nation of Israel, just as He would be justified in destroying all those who sin. But He demonstrates His glory through His mercy, which should lead us to repent and to proclaim the gospel.

As you go throughout your week and interact with those who do not believe the gospel, let God's mercy season your words. Do not be afraid to proclaim the gospel, by both words and deeds, remembering that there is more at stake than your reputation or comfort. While there is life, we see God's mercy, but His judgment is also certain for those who do not repent.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In the next lesson, we will examine God's renewal of His covenant with the Israelites and the proclamation of His name and glory.

—Katherine Robinson

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Many people who do not believe have more than enough information needed to believe (Num. 14:11; cf. Rom. 1:18-19).
2. We should not give up on prayer when things seem hopeless (Num. 14:12; cf. Luke 18:1-8).
3. We can appeal to God's glory as we pray (Num. 14:13-16).
4. We should appeal to the promises of God as we pray (vss. 17-20).
5. The whole earth will be filled with the Lord's glory (vs. 21)!
6. There are often consequences for unbelief and disobedience (vss. 22-23).
7. The Lord rewards obedience (Num. 14:24; cf. Heb. 11:6).

—Tom Greene

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Think of a time when it was hard to trust God. What happened?
2. What should we do when God's Word is clear but trusting God is hard?
3. Did Moses convince God to change His mind in this lesson's passage? Why does that matter?
4. If the Lord pardoned the people of Israel, why did He still say that they would die in the wilderness?
5. Have you ever seen God answer seemingly hopeless prayers?
6. Are there any situations or people you have given up on praying for because it seemed hopeless?
7. What current obstacles in your life make it hard to trust God? What can you do to strengthen your faith in these areas and follow Him?
8. How can we stir one another up to follow the Lord?

—Tom Greene

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

How long will it be ere they believe me (Num. 14:11)

I asked my friend, "So you believe Jesus was a historical person?" "Yes." "And you believe He died on the cross?" "Yes." "And you think the tomb was empty afterward?" "Yes." "And you admit the disciples were willing to die rather than renounce their faith in the resurrection?" "Yes." "But you don't think Jesus rose from the dead?" "No."

In that moment, I understood that some people have enough information but do not believe because they do not want to.

Pardon, I beseech thee, . . . as thou hast forgiven this people (vs. 19)

When we think that we have sinned so badly that God could never forgive us, remember how Israel sinned so badly and still was forgiven. King Manasseh did tremendous evil, even sacrificing some of his own children. Yet when he repented, God forgave him (2 Chr. 33:1-20)! If you think God is not gracious, take time to remember His works!

But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit (vs. 24)

God gives His people not a spirit of fear but of power, love, and self-control (2 Tim. 1:7). Paul displayed this confidence when he declared the gospel while under arrest (cf. Acts 26:28-29). Peter and John also preached in a way that made people know that they had been with Jesus (4:13).

As believers, we should stand out, regardless of the consequences or discomfort that may bring. Whether we are speaking out against shady practices at work or lovingly correcting a Christian friend's crude humor, we are to be lights in the world (Matt. 5:14-16).

—Tom Greene

Golden Text Illuminated

"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" (Numbers 14:19).

The unfaithfulness of the Israelites in the wilderness stands as a stark reminder of the human propensity to rebel against God, even in the face of His abundant provision and miraculous interventions. We find the people of Israel on the verge of entering the Promised Land, yet their fear and unbelief lead them to despise God's gift and long for a return to Egypt (Num. 14:1-4). This rebellion provoked God's anger, as He declared to 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?" (vs. 11).

Faced with the prospect of divine judgment, Moses interceded on behalf of the people, appealing to God's *chesed*, His steadfast love and mercy. The Hebrew word *chesed* is a rich, multifaceted term that encompasses God's loving-kindness, faithfulness, and compassion. It is this very attribute that Moses invoked in his prayer, as recorded in the golden text, unto the greatness of God's mercy.

Moses' prayer is a powerful reminder of the depths of God's mercy. Moses acknowledged the Lord's reputation among the nations, recognizing that God's actions toward His people have a profound impact on how others perceive Him (vss. 13-16). By anchoring his plea in God's self-revelation as "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Ex. 34:6), Moses demonstrated his faith in the unchanging nature of God.

God's display of His loving-kindness in response to Moses' prayer is a testament to the efficacy of intercession

rooted in a deep understanding of God's nature. The Lord declared, "I have pardoned according to thy word" (Num. 14:20), showing His willingness to extend mercy in response to the heartfelt petition of His servant. God balances His mercy with justice, declaring that those who have despised Him will not see the Promised Land (vss. 21-23).

The account of Moses' intercession and God's response offers valuable lessons for believers today. First, it highlights the importance of seeking God's faithfulness in times of crisis or failure. When we find ourselves or others in a state of rebellion or disobedience, we must not hesitate to appeal to God's steadfast love and mercy, trusting in His willingness to forgive and restore.

This passage underscores the power of intercessory prayer grounded in a deep knowledge of God's character. As we approach the throne of grace on behalf of others, we must do so with a clear understanding of who God is and what He has revealed about Himself in His Word. By anchoring our prayers in God's character, we can have confidence that He will hear and respond according to His loving purposes.

Finally, the golden text and Moses' intercession remind us of the enduring nature of God's compassion. Just as the Israelites experienced God's steadfast love and mercy throughout their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, we too can trust in His unwavering commitment to His people. In times of doubt, fear, or failure, we can cling to the truth that God's mercy, or *chesed*, endures forever (Ps. 136).

—Gene Kissingner

Heart of the Lesson

This quarter's lessons explore the Lord's patience with His people. Such a virtue flows from the attribute of divine mercy. Steven Charnock, a seventeenth-century Puritan theologian, said it well: "God's patience is the silence of His justice and the first whisper of His mercy." From this lesson, learn how to intercede as Moses did for a rebellious people on the brink of God's judgment. How should we pray?

1. Acknowledge God's goodness at work (Num. 14:11-12). Israel had a rich history of God's manifested goodness, and the surrounding nations knew it (Num 14:22; cf. Josh. 2:8-11). Yahweh is glorious and not like the gods of the Egyptians. His weighty, holy presence loomed before their eyes, surrounding them and leading them to the Promised Land.

When we fail to acknowledge God's goodness at work, our hearts falter in discouragement. Cultivating gratitude helps create an awareness of where God is at work when we are prone to forget. Focusing only on the obstacles before us weakens our faith, courage, and resolve.

The ten spies brought an adverse report about giants in the Promised Land; it stirred fear and distrust of Moses. The people angered God because of their contempt for Moses' leadership. God was ready to destroy them and start over with Moses alone (cf. Ex. 32:10-14). Where do you start when faced with problems? Do you complain as the spies did? Moses understood that God was not capricious or untrustworthy but relational and caring. He hears His people's prayers. Prayer is the starting point!

2. Appeal to God's great mercy (Num. 14:13-19). Moses appealed to God as the Promise Keeper and to the

glory of His name among the nations. Servant leadership is a biblical leadership model, and Moses was a servant leader. Humility is necessary in any sphere of leadership. Moses humbly prayed. He sought God's glory in the situation!

Moses understood that sin has generational consequences but that God, being slow to anger and kind, would mercifully pardon. Moses knew God's glorious power displayed in creation could be restrained through His patience if He wills. Perhaps in mercy, God would remember the promise of blessing to their forefathers (cf. Ex. 32:12-14). We learn that effective prayer is shaped by understanding God's nature.

3. Anticipate God's gracious answer (Num. 14:20-24). God is justified in bringing swift judgment. The slowness of God's anger is not an indifference to man's sin but an opportunity for repentance. God's patience prepares the way to express His mercy. He restrains His power and withholds immediate judgment for mercy's sake.

God heard Moses' intercession and promised His glory would fill the earth. Yet his generation faced spiritual defeat and failed to enter the promised rest (cf. Heb. 3:7-19). Unbelief hinders us from God's best in our lives.

God graciously answered Moses' prayer. The next generation, led by Caleb and Joshua, faced giants in the conquest of Canaan. God always honors surrender and trust. Andrew Murray summarized such faith, saying, "God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded to Him." God graciously works His perfect will through prayerful servants. As Moses did, let us pray for God's rich mercy.

—Gregory H. Sergent

World Missions

A young man had invested more than a decade of his life working among Muslim people in Asia. He went on home assignment in 2001, near New York City. On that fateful day, September 11, 2001, a relative called, urging him to turn on the television right away.

To his horror and great disbelief, he watched smoke billowing from both towers of the iconic World Trade Center. He saw the first tower, then the other, collapse in a heap of smoke and dust. The horrible news quickly emerged that those responsible were Muslim extremists.

The young man was furious, disoriented, and frightened. Considering his life's passion, he honestly wondered whether he could ever return to Asia and lovingly minister to Muslims, which he had felt was his calling.

As he started to pray, however, God began to soften his heart and to remind him of the mercy and grace *he* had been shown in his own journey. He recalled the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus taught His followers to love their enemies by blessing them, doing good to them, and praying for them (Matt. 5:44).

The following day, tension filled the air as believers, some who had worked in the World Trade Center, crowded into a packed room to pray. Some had missed work that day, but others lost their lives as the towers collapsed.

After the pastor's brief talk, people started to pray for the area churches, for missing persons to be found, and for traumatized firefighters.

The young man raised his voice in prayer too. The people looked shocked as he dared to intercede on behalf of those who were engaged in such terror, that they would have a revelation of

Jesus and enter into the life that God would offer even to them.

Initially, one man was offended and responded angrily to the prayer. Later, however, he realized that the young man's prayer for enemies was precisely how God would have him to respond.

Over the following years, the young man rejoiced to hear news of not only ordinary Muslim people but also violent extremists finding Jesus. They told how God used visions or dreams of Jesus to seek God and abandon their destructive and hateful way of life.

The young man had, in effect, prayed much like Moses when he pleaded for mercy upon God's own people in their wilderness rebellion (Num. 14:13-19). The people were attacking Moses and Aaron, preparing to stone them (vs. 10). Instead of praying for God to smite them, Moses cried out to God, "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" (vs. 19).

We will find that as we pray for the nations, including those nations or people who constantly trouble us, God will begin to change us. He transform us so that we can love our enemies and become like Jesus as we walk with God.

Let us also cry out for God to show them mercy, as He has shown us every day of our lives.

God shows mercy for His "holy name's sake" (Ezek. 36:22). His exalted name will be lifted up and honored in our midst and among the nations. They will know that He is the Lord (vs. 23), not only as we pray, but also as they observe the reality of the life of God in Christ within us.

—Matthew Friedman

The Jewish Aspect

In Numbers 13, Israel sent spies into the Promised Land. Each tribe supplied a chief to be a spy—these men were leaders in Israel. The spies spent forty days traveling, observing the inhabitants, and gathering some of the produce before returning to give their report.

They declared that the land was good, as evidenced by the fact that a single cluster of grapes was carried on a pole by two of them (vs. 23). They confirmed that it was flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord had promised (vs. 27). The descriptions were meant to remind the reader of Eden—God was restoring the fallen earth. This all seemed like good news!

The spies, however, added that the inhabitants of the land were tall, strong, and dwelled in fortified cities. They were descendants of the Nephilim (vs. 33). They were giants who made the spies feel like grasshoppers, and they looked down on the spies like grasshoppers. Only Caleb and Joshua urged the people to go up and take the land; the other ten insisted that the Canaanites were too strong.

The word “Nephilim” draws great interest from many. Though they are only mentioned somewhat briefly in Genesis 6:1-4, they have been the subject of no small debate. This is not due to the word “Nephilim” appearing in Ezekiel 32:27, where it is translated as “fallen.” Rather, it is due to the extra-biblical testimony of the book of 1 Enoch. Although neither Christians nor Jews consider Enoch to be an inspired part of the canon, Jude 1:14-15 quotes 1 Enoch and says that Enoch prophesied. Therefore, we must acknowledge that there is at least some truth in the book.

It is important that there are contradictions with Scripture in 1 Enoch, such as 1 Enoch 10:2, where God supposedly commanded Enoch to talk to Noah. This was impossible, for Enoch was taken up into heaven before Noah was born (cf. Gen. 5:21-29). Christians disagree on how much of 1 Enoch is true, ranging from just the section referred to by Jude to large sections of the book. This is worth emphasizing because of how striking the description of the Nephilim is in the book of Enoch.

In 1 Enoch, the Nephilim are described as the children of rebellious angels who lusted after and impregnated human women. Accordingly, the Nephilim were part angel and part human. The spies also described them as massive giants. Such descriptions might have been intended literally or hyperbolically. At a minimum, they intended to convey that there were very large, strong people living there. At most, they meant that there were evil giants there who were only part human. Either way, they feared their foes more than they feared the Lord.

This was all very intimidating, but there was a small catch—it was not all true. Most of it was true—the land was good, there were walled cities, and we have no reason to believe that the people were not large. But we have good reason to think the inhabitants of the land did not look at the Israelites as easily crushed grasshoppers. Decades later, Rahab told a different pair of Israelite spies that the Canaanites had heard of how the Lord had delivered Israel from Egypt and were in dread of *them* (Josh. 2:9-11)! The Canaanites seemed to have a higher regard for the Lord's might than Israel did!

—Tom Greene

Guiding the Superintendent

When teaching on today's lesson, Numbers 14:11-24, inevitably someone will ask whether Moses changed God's mind. After all, God seems to declare that He would destroy Israel, but after Moses prayed, He relented. What are we to make of this?

Elsewhere, Jonah proclaimed that Nineveh would be overthrown, seemingly without any possibility of repentance. Yet when they repented, God relented (Jonah 3:4-10). Did God fail to keep His promises of judgment?

Jeremiah 18:5-12 is helpful. God promised Jeremiah that if He declared judgment against a nation, but it repented, He would relent of disaster. Likewise, if a nation forsook Him, it would be judged. Even when the possibility of repentance is not declared, the opportunity for repentance and forgiveness is always present. If people repent, God will *always* forgive. God always hears prayers.

DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

1. The Lord's declaration (Num. 14:11-12). The Lord declared that He would judge Israel for their sin. Although He did not offer the possibility of repentance to Israel, practically, in God's good graces, that is *always* an option, whether stated or not (see above).

2. Moses' appeal (Num. 14:13-19). The nation of Israel did not immediately repent. Instead, Moses interceded for them, and God relented of the disaster He had forewarned.

Similarly, we can intercede and pray for others, including those who may not pray for themselves. While we do not know how God will respond, we can be confident that He *does* answer prayer. This passage should provide motivation for us to pray for others.

Just as Moses was Israel's mediator, Christ is our Mediator. He died for us, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God (1 Pet. 3:18). Not only that, but He continues to intercede for us today as well (Rom. 8:34).

3. The Lord's response (Num. 14:20-24). Although God forgave the Israelites, that did not mean they were free from the consequences of their actions. If we are in Christ, we are fully forgiven of our sins. Yet if we lie, people may trust us less. If we steal, we may face legal action. Forgiveness of sins does not always mean freedom from consequences.

The discipline fit Israel's actions. They had complained that it would be better to die in Egypt or the wilderness (vs. 2), and God gave them what they had wished for. They proclaimed that their children would die (vs. 3), but it was they who would enter the Promised Land.

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Encourage children that even if the crowd is against God, we can trust Him. Although they were outnumbered by the other spies, who did not trust God's promises (cf. Num. 13:25-33), Caleb and Joshua held to their faith and were the only ones to enter the land (14:38).

Children and teens often look to all sorts of things to find their identity. Christ is our Mediator. When we were still His enemies, He died for us (cf. Rom. 5:6-8). This quarter is about the Lord's patience with His people, and the first week provides an excellent opportunity to highlight that Christ's life, death, and resurrection are the basis for our standing with God.

—David Chambers