

Numbers 14

Verses 1 - 4

Then all the congregation raised their voices and cried out, and the people wept that night. ² And all the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the entire congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or even if we had died in this wilderness! ³ So why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder! Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" ⁴ So they said to one another, "Let's appoint a leader and return to Egypt!"

Then the entire congregation raised their voices and cried out, and the people wept that night.

The author of Hebrews pinpoints the real problem with these people.

See Hebrews 3:16-19

¹⁶ For who provoked *Him* when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt *led by Moses*? ¹⁷ And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose dead bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

³ So why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder! Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

Despite all that God had done for them they were unwilling to trust Him.

1. God used 10 plagues against the king so they could leave Egypt.
2. They walked on dry ground thru a 10 mile long path at the bottom of the Red Sea that was 2400 feet deep at the center.
3. God provided water, bread and meat in a desert land.
4. God gave them the 10 commandments, the civil Law, and the priestly system.

⁴ So they said to one another, “Let’s appoint a leader and return to Egypt!”

Do you think they were actually serious about this plan?

See Nehemiah 9:17

**They refused to listen,
And did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You performed among them;
So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in
Egypt.**

**But You are a God of forgiveness,
Gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger and abounding in mercy;
And You did not abandon them.**

They actually appointed a leader and were ready to return to Egypt.

Verses 5 – 10

⁵ Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. ⁶ And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; ⁷ and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, “The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. ⁸ If the Lord is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey. ⁹ Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection is gone from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.” ¹⁰ But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the Lord appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.

⁵ Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. ⁶ And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes;

These 4 leaders showed their heart felt disapproval of this misguided plan in a way that all the people could see and understand.

⁸ If the Lord is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey. ⁹ Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection is gone from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.”

The 10 unfaithful spies told the people two lies. That the land ate up its inhabitants and all the people of Canaan were giants.

Joshua and Caleb told the Israelites the truth. The land was exceedingly good, not to fear the people of Canaan for they would be their prey and that their protection was gone from them, and the Lord is with us.

¹⁰ But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the Lord appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.

If God had not intervened these four men would have lost their lives.

Verses 11 - 19

¹¹ And the Lord said to Moses, “How long will this people be disrespectful to Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs that I have performed in their midst? ¹² I will strike them with plague and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they.”

¹³ But Moses said to the Lord, “Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought this people up from their midst, ¹⁴ and they will tell *it* to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, Lord, are in the midst of this people, because You, 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 put this people to death all at once, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say, ¹⁶ ‘Since the Lord could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, He slaughtered them in the wilderness.’

¹⁷ So now, please, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, saying, ¹⁸ ‘The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in mercy, forgiving wrongdoing and violation of *His Law*; but He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, inflicting the punishment of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth *generations*.’ ¹⁹ Please forgive the guilt of this people in accordance with the greatness of Your mercy, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”

¹¹ And the Lord said to Moses, “How long will this people be disrespectful to Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs that I have performed in their midst?

The following is a brief list of the miracles the people had seen:

1. The 10 plagues
2. The crossing of the Red Sea
3. The daily manna
4. The water supplied
5. God’s presence in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire.

This group of people had seen signs that no other generation had ever seen and yet they refuse to trust in the Lord. It appears that miracles do not create faith or change the mind of unbelievers.

This truth is confirmed in the New Testament.

See Luke 16:27 - 31

²⁷ And he said, ‘Then I request of you, father, that you send him to my father’s house— ²⁸for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not come to this place of torment as well.’ ²⁹ But Abraham *said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ ³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

¹² I will strike them with plague and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they.”

Could God start all over again? Sure He could. God chose one man, Abraham, a person of faith to bring about this mighty nation of 2.5 million people and He could do the same with Moses. However, Abraham’s descendants did not trust in God and they refused to enter Canaan. Would Moses’ descendants be any different? Mankind has freewill and every generation must choose whether they will believe in God.

In any case Moses was not willing to give up on the descendants of Abraham because he knew that God had promised to bless all nations thru Abraham.

¹⁵ Now if You put this people to death all at once, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say, ¹⁶ ‘Since the Lord could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, He slaughtered them in the wilderness.’

This is a great argument from Moses. He argues from the standpoint of the pagan nations that won't understand the true reason why God is doing this. He was saying, hey God, if you do that (put this people to death) it will make You look weak.

¹⁷ So now, please, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, saying, ¹⁸ ‘The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in mercy, forgiving wrongdoing and violation of *His Law*; but He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, inflicting the punishment of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.’

Moses wants God to show His greatness by being:

1. Slow to anger,
2. Abundant in mercy
3. Forgiving wrongdoing

God had been doing this and will continue to do this **but** He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished. So forgiving does not preclude punishment.

Do children suffer for the sins of their father?

See verses 32 and 33 below.

³² But as for you, your dead bodies will fall in this wilderness. ³³ Also, your sons will be shepherds in the wilderness for forty years, and they will suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your bodies perish in the wilderness.

If that generation had trusted God and entered Canaan their sons could have been spared 38 more years in the wilderness.

The choices parents make affect their children, for good and for bad. But just because the children suffer for their fathers sins does not mean they are responsible for the sins of their father.

See Ezekiel 18:1 – 3

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ² “What do you *people* mean by using this proverb about the land of Israel, saying,

‘The fathers eat sour grapes,
But *it is* the children’s teeth *that* have become blunt’?

³ As I live,” declares the Lord God, “you certainly are not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore. ⁴ Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.

¹⁹ Please forgive the guilt of this people in accordance with the greatness of Your mercy, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”

Moses is saying, why change your approach now. You forgave them all those other times; forgive them now as you have done in the past.

Verses 20 – 25

²⁰ So the Lord said, “I have forgiven *them* in accordance with your word;

²¹ however, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.

²² Certainly all the people 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 were disrespectful to Me see it.

²⁴ But as for My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring him into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it. ²⁵ Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites live in the valleys; turn tomorrow and set out for the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea.”

²⁰ So the Lord said, “I have forgiven *them* in accordance with your word;

Moses' prayer was answered and God forgave the people for their sin and yet this is by no means the end to the story.

²¹ however, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord

God’s glory will not be diminished by this minor setback (38 years) because His greatness as a loving and forgiving God will be seen by all the earth.

²² Certainly all the people 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 were disrespectful to Me see it.

The people were forgiven, so they did not die immediately, but they still suffered a severe punishment. That generation would spend 38 more years in the wilderness and would not enter the Promised Land. To those who have been given much, much is required.

See 2 Samuel 12:9-14

⁹ Why have you despised the word of the Lord, by doing evil in His sight? You have struck and killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, you have taken his wife as your wife, and you have slaughtered him with the sword of the sons of Ammon.

¹⁰ Now then, the sword shall never leave your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ ¹¹ This is what the Lord says: ‘Behold, I am going to raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give *them* to your companion, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight.’ ¹² Indeed, you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and in open daylight.” ¹³ Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has allowed your sin to pass; you shall not die. ¹⁴ However, since by this deed you have shown utter disrespect for the Lord, the child himself who is born to you shall certainly die.”

David had been given much. He had seen numerous miracles done for his benefit and yet he turned his back on God because he desired a woman that belonged to another man. He paid a high price for his sin.

²⁴ But as for My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring him into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it.

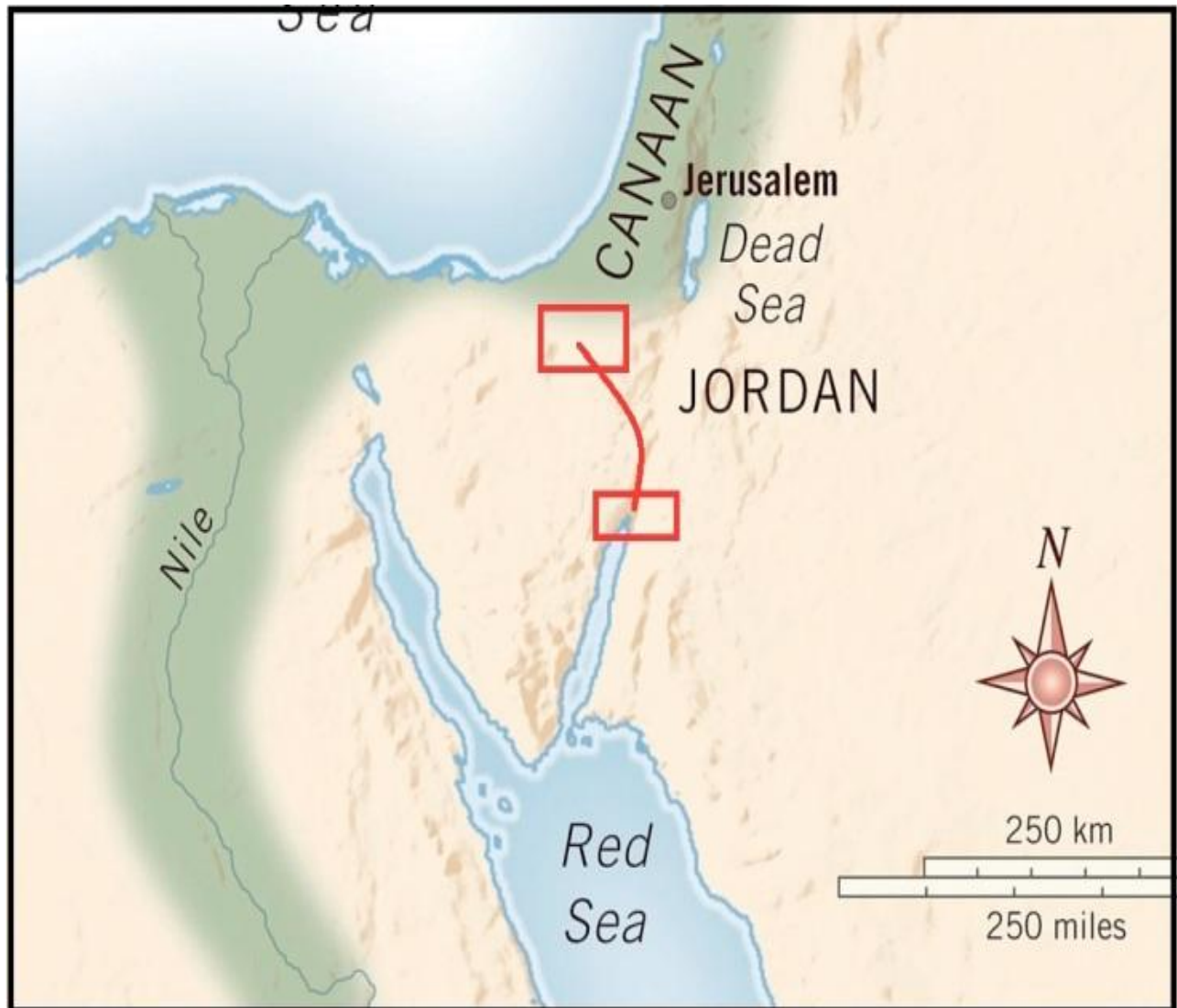
Some people wonder why Joshua is not mentioned here along with Caleb. The most obvious reason is that Joshua was a long time servant of Moses and his loyalty was already well established. In addition, God will mention both of their names in verse 30.

³⁰ By no means will you come into the land where I swore to settle you, except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

²⁵ **Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites live in the valleys; turn tomorrow and set out for the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea.**

Since the people had rejected the Promised Land God told them to set out for the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea. We don't know the exact location but it was probably close to the wilderness of Paran where they had been camped before they went to the Negev.

See pic 1405



After they rejected the Promised Land only a few events were recorded concerning what took place during the next 37 years. Those events are recorded in chapters 15 thru 19. Then the narrative will shift to their last year in the wilderness in chapters 20 thru 32.

Verses 26 – 35

²⁶ The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron again, saying, ²⁷ “How long *shall I put up* with this evil congregation who are grumbling against me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel which they are voicing against Me. ²⁸ Say to them, ‘As I live,’ declares the Lord, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you; ²⁹ your dead bodies will fall in this wilderness, all your numbered men according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. ³⁰ By no means will you come into the land where I swore to settle you, except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. ³¹ Your children, however, whom you said would become plunder—I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected. ³² But as for you, your dead bodies will fall in this wilderness. ³³ Also, your sons will be shepherds in the wilderness for forty years, and they will suffer *for* your unfaithfulness, until your bodies perish in the wilderness. ³⁴ In accordance with the number of days that you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall suffer the punishment for your guilt a year, *that is*, forty years, and you will know My opposition. ³⁵ I, the Lord, have spoken, I certainly will do this to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. They shall be worn out in this wilderness, and there they shall die.’”

²⁷ “How long shall I put up with this evil congregation who are grumbling against me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel which they are voicing against Me.

This generation had seen enough to believe in God but they choose to reject his leadership despite the many miracles. This was Peters appeal to the Jewish people on the day of Pentecost.

See Acts 2:22-38

²² “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a Man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—²³ this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. ²⁴ But God raised Him from the dead, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

For now this world is controlled by Satan and he does all that he can to nullify the love of God toward mankind but a day is coming when his reign of hate will end.

²⁹ your dead bodies will fall in this wilderness, all your numbered men according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. ³⁰ By no means will you come into the land where I swore to settle you, except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

Any who did not murmur against God would be exempt from this punishment. How many people were spared? Only two men of that generation, Joshua and Caleb, would enter the Promised Land.

³¹ Your children, however, whom you said would become plunder—I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected.

The next generation, newborns up to the age of 19, would enter Canaan and enjoy its riches.

³³ Also, your sons will be shepherds in the wilderness for forty years, and they will suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your bodies perish in the wilderness.

This was covered in verse 18 above.

Verses 36 - 38

³⁶ As for the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, and who returned and led all the congregation to grumble against him by bringing a bad report about the land, ³⁷ those men who brought the bad report of the land also died by a plague in the presence of the Lord. ³⁸ But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive out of those men who went to spy out the land.

³⁷ those men who brought the bad report of the land also died by a plague in the presence of the Lord.

The 10 spies that had misled the people and caused untold harm died quickly so the message would be clear to the people.

Joshua & Caleb were spared because of their belief in God but they will still had to spend 38 more years in the wilderness with those who rebelled. People of faith often have to endure the consequences of evil men who reject God and cause needless pain and suffering in this world.

Verses 39 - 45

³⁹ Now when Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly. ⁴⁰ In the morning, however, they got up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, “Here we are; and we will go up to the place which the Lord has promised, for we have sinned.” ⁴¹ But Moses said, “Why then are you violating the command of the Lord, when *doing* so will not succeed? ⁴² Do not go up, for the Lord is not among you, to prevent you from being defeated by your enemies. ⁴³ For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there to confront you, and you will fall by the sword, since you have turned back from following the Lord. And the Lord will not be with you.” ⁴⁴ But they *foolishly* dared to go up 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 scattered them as far as Hormah.

³⁹ Now when Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly.

This was some bitter news but they had rejected God and His plan for them to live in the Promised Land so what did they think would be in their future?

⁴⁰ In the morning, however, they got up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, “Here we are; and we will go up to the place which the Lord has promised, for we have sinned.”

After hearing the bad news that they would die in the wilderness the people realized that they had sinned and to their credit they confessed it. Now they were ready to take the land of Canaan but it was too late.

⁴² Do not go up, for the Lord is not among you, to prevent you from being defeated by your enemies. ⁴³ For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there to confront you, and you will fall by the sword, since you have turned back from following the Lord.

The Israelites thought that their confession of guilt made everything ok, but they were missing the bigger picture. They had only confessed wrong to this latest rebellion. What about the other 9 cases where they had rejected Gods leadership. Moses warned them, but to no avail.

⁴⁴ But they foolishly dared to go up 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 scattered them as far as Hormah.

God was not with Israel and the people were defeated and scattered.

In contrast, 38 years later when the new generation goes into Canaan they will battle the people of this area and utterly destroyed them and their cities.

See Numbers 21:1-3

When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negev, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he fought against Israel and took some of them captive. ² So Israel made a vow to the Lord and said, “If You will indeed hand over this people to me, then I will utterly destroy their cities.” ³ The Lord heard the voice of Israel and turned over the Canaanites; then they utterly destroyed them and their cities. And the place was named Hormah.

God’s judgment on Israel was more than fair because they had a huge advantage that should not be overlooked. God spoke to Moses face to face and there was no “guess work” in understanding what the people should do. With that in mind we should remember that “To those who are given much, much will be required”.

See Luke 12:48

⁴⁷ And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accordance with his will, will receive many blows, ⁴⁸ but the one who did not know *it*, and committed acts deserving of a beating, will receive *only* a few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.