

Forgiveness

GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Focal Verses • NUMBERS 14:10–20

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXAMINE the importance of Moses interceding for the people of Israel, feel CONVICTED for rebelling against God's plans and not trusting God's strength, and SEEK forgiveness for our sins.

In Focus

Even after counseling, Denise and her husband, Greg, decided to divorce after twenty-three years of marriage. Their college aged children, Nikki and Trey, wanted their parents to resolve their issues. Denise felt it was time to tell her children the truth about why she was divorcing their father.

As Denise began to share the reason behind the divorce, Trey interrupted her. "We already know, Mom. You and Dad are divorcing because you were too busy working at your news anchor job. You were never home. Dad always made time to attend our school activities – but you didn't."

"Trey, I am so sorry I've had to work so many hours. Six years ago, I discovered your father was having an affair. He now has four-year-old twins with another woman. When I first learned of the affair, I tried marriage counseling to see if we could work it out, but Greg wanted to be with the other woman. Plus, your father spent all the money in your college savings accounts. So that's why I've been working extra hard to replenish your college money. Please forgive us, Trey: Me for not always being there, and...try to forgive your father."

Trey hugged his mother. "Mom, I'm so sorry. I didn't know the truth of what was really going on. I understand, and I forgive you. But it may take some time for me to forgive Dad."

Nikki shrugged, "Well, I will never forgive you, Mom, for abandoning us and then lying to us. You chose not to tell us the truth. At least Dad never left us! I might go live with Dad."

What is the most challenging part of forgiving those you love who have wronged you?



Keep in Mind

"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, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Numbers 14:10 But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

11 And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?

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

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.

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

The People, Places, and Times

Numbers. The book of Numbers is the fourth book out of five that compose the Pentateuch. It gives us an account of Israel's journey from Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab on the border of Canaan, the Promised Land. The Western name of this book does not adequately communicate the book's actual theme of faithfulness of God and the faithlessness of God's people. The English name (taken from the Greek translation) refers to the fact that the book begins and ends with censuses of God's people. In Hebrew, however, Numbers is called *Bemidbar* (beh-MEED-bar), "in the wilderness." The Hebrew title is apt because it is actually about a familiar cast of characters (Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Caleb, and Joshua) who lead the Israelites through the wilderness for forty years.

Background

God had delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 14). He provided all their needs as they journeyed toward Canaan. But before they entered Canaan, God had to prepare the people first. God had requirements the people had to agree to follow. So while the Israelites were camped at Mount Sinai for a year, they received all the laws and requirements needed to live as a new nation in a new land. All the people agreed to fully obey all God had commanded.

Before they could depart from Mount Sinai, Moses was commanded by the Lord to take a census of all the people. They had to determine how many men were fit for military duty, as they would soon encounter enemies in Canaan (Numbers 1–4). According to God's command, Moses divided the men into various assignments

for military responsibilities and what they would carry. The Lord also wanted the people to remain pure, so strict guidelines were given to Moses (Numbers 5:1–10:10). Moreover, Moses also had to oversee the dedication and consecration of the tabernacle and all its furnishings.

The Israelites set out for the Promised Land, and that is when the people started complaining. Their complaints included: (1) their general misfortunes (11:1), (2) lack of meat (v. 4), (3) jealousy of Moses' authority (12:1–16), and (4) fear of battle against the men who inhabited the Promised Land (13:1–14:4).

How should we respond to God's gracious acts of love and forgiveness?

God spoke to Moses about the transgressions of the Israelites (v. 11). His questions reveal He has become impatient with the Israelites' refusal to trust in His power to defeat their enemies and give them the Promised Land. They have witnessed the signs of His power in sending the plagues upon the Egyptians, parting the Red Sea, providing manna from heaven, and more, but they still doubt. So God decides to enact a final judgment against the people, then start over with Moses and create people faithful to Him. We cannot expect God to continually allow us to rebel and not change.

How does one compare and contrast God's love versus God's justice?

At-A-Glance

1. The Israelites' Rebellion (Numbers 14:10–12)
2. Moses' Intercession (vv. 13–19)
3. God's Response (v. 20)

In Depth

1. The Israelites' Rebellion (Numbers 14:10–12)

Caleb and Joshua believed the Israelites would be able to defeat all the Canaanite armies. However, unbelief and fear spread among the people. How often do we doubt God's promises? No one believed Caleb's report. Everyone desired to go back to Egypt (14:4). Even after all God had done, they still did not trust Him.

Moses and Aaron fell on their faces and interceded on behalf of the Israelites (v. 5). Caleb and Joshua tried to convince the Israelites to trust God and go possess the land. The Israelites responded with death threats (v. 10). Then suddenly, "the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation." When we pray, God responds.

2. Moses' Intercession (vv. 13–19)

Moses responds to God by arguing that it is important for Him to protect His reputation, especially among the Egyptians. If they realize God has removed His protection from the Israelites, He would suffer disgrace. The other nations, who know of His love for Israel and powerful presence that dwells with them, would now say God killed the Israelites because He was not able to fulfill His promise for them to possess the Land (14:15–16).

As Moses interceded for the Israelites, he quoted God's own description of Himself back to God. Numbers 14:18 is quoted from Exodus 34:6–7, when He revealed Himself to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In spite of the Israelites' rebellion, Moses pleads for God to show patience, love, forgiveness, discipline, and mercy. Even today, we each need to ask God to do the same for us. Our sins not only affect our lives but those we love as well as others.

When people harm you, do you pray for them? Why or why not?

3. God's Response (v. 20)

God's response to the prayers of Moses and Aaron is to pardon the Israelites. But He also

disciplines the people so they wander in the wilderness forty years and do not enter the Promised Land. We must recognize that God hears our prayers and is willing to forgive us. But there are consequences for our sins. God loves us enough to discipline us, so we can learn from our mistakes and strive to live holy and be faithful servants of God (cf. Hebrews 12:6).

How often do you pray, repent, and seek forgiveness from God?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why was God impatient with the Israelites (Numbers 14:11–12)? What action was God going to take against the Israelites?
2. What characteristics of God are mentioned (v. 18)?
3. What reasoning did Moses give to God for forgiving the iniquities of the Israelites (v. 19)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Moses struggled as the leader of the rebellious people. What impact did his prayers make in the lives of the people? What impact have you seen in the lives of people you have prayed for?
2. How can your sins draw others away from God? How can you seek reconciliation with those you have harmed?
3. Often we are surprised by God's plans for our lives. How can we rely on our faith that God will accomplish His will for our lives?

Liberating Lesson

Moses believed intercession on behalf of the rebellious Israelites would make a difference in their lives. He understood that God is loving, merciful, and forgiving. God hears our prayers and will respond. So when we fail to obey God's commands, we can pray and ask Him to forgive us. We also should take the time to pray for others, including our communities and nation. Everything we do has a direct or

indirect impact on someone's life. So when we are wounded by another person, we must forgive them just as God forgives us.

Forgiving those who have harmed us can prove difficult sometimes. For example, how can a young man forgive a police officer who shot him in the back due to mistaken identity? How can an innocent man forgive the justice system that gave him a life sentence in prison, only to realize twenty-five years later it was a wrongful conviction? The people's water in Flint, Michigan, was poisoned because of the actions of city officials in 2014, so many of them now have serious illnesses, and some problems continue with the water. No matter the circumstances we can forgive and pray for those who have harmed us, even while we trust God and work to bring justice. God is just, so we can believe He will make sure the people responsible for harming us are held accountable. It frees us to live a life of peace and fulfill God's plans. We are also called by God's Word to pursue justice and hold those in power accountable to act justly.

Application for Activation

This week take some quiet time in prayer to confess all your sins of thoughts, words, and deeds and ask God to reveal to you any other hidden sins so you can repent. Second, pray for your family and friends. Ask God to help you forgive any of them who have harmed you in any way. Pray for God to change their lives and bless them. And third, pray for your church, community, and nation. All our leaders need us to pray for them, whether we agree with their direction or not. Our communities and nation can change when we intercede for God to convict those who are doing wrong to repent and do what is morally and spiritually right. The world is blessed by the presence of God's people who testify to His Kingdom in the midst of temporary kingdoms.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

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- Milgrom, J. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers*. (N. M. Sarna, Ed.) Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990.
- Unger, Merrill F. *Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press. 1985. 799.
- Unger, Merrill F. *The New Unger's Bible Handbook*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press. 1984. 100–101.
- VanGemeren, W. A. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Vol. 2. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997.

Say It Correctly

Kadesh Barnea. KAY-desh bar-NEH-ah.

Pentateuch. PEN-tuh-took.

Aaron. AIR-on.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 15

Genesis 43–45

Psalms 8

DAY 16

Genesis 46–47

Psalms 9:1–6

DAY 17

Genesis 48–50

Psalms 9:7–12

DAY 18

Exodus 1–3

Psalms 9:13–20

DAY 19

Exodus 4–6

Psalms 10:1–6

DAY 20

Exodus 7–9

Psalms 10:7–11

DAY 21

Exodus 10–12

Psalms 10:12–18