

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 7

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

CHAPTER 14

INTRODUCTION

The accounts of the Old Testament were put on permanent record for our learning. Paul wrote to the Corinthians Christians that it was for their admonition and that they should not follow the bad examples of those who murmured and rebelled against God. In another letter, Paul exhorted the Roman Christians that “whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”¹ One of the worst things in life that we should never do but keep on doing is to murmur and complain. The Israelites are not the only ones suffering from this malady. They had been complaining and murmuring since they left Egypt. They did not seem to be contented with what God had so graciously and mightily blessed and provided for them. Their complaining and murmuring came to its climax in this

¹ 1 Corinthians 10:11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Romans 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

chapter. Their attitude and action robbed them of all the wonderful things and experiences they could have if they had trusted and obeyed God. They made a terrible mistake that they should never have made. Literally, they got what they asked for. God gave to them what they wanted and desired.

We must learn from the mistakes of others, for it is less painful and costly. If we study carefully, we will learn that we too are prone to the kind of temptations the Israelites went through and in all probability we would react in the same way. But that is not the desiderative will of God for His children. God desires that we delight and do His will by trusting in Him wholeheartedly, even if doing His will means that there will be obstacles and difficulties ahead.

OUTLINE

A. The Israelites Despaired and Rebelled Against God (14:1-4).

1. The whole congregation that night wept loudly (v.1).
2. The people murmured against Moses and Aaron (v.2a).
3. The people wished that they had died in Egypt or in the wilderness (2b).
4. The children of Israel questioned the LORD'S motive for their deliverance from Egypt (v.3)
5. The people intended to choose a leader to lead them back to Egypt (v.4).

B. The Response of Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua to the Complaints of the People (14:5-10a).

1. Moses and Aaron fell prostrate on the ground with shame and sorrow (v.5).

2. Caleb and Joshua persuaded the people not to rebel against the LORD (vv.6-9).
 - a. Caleb and Joshua grieved at the people's rebellion.
 - b. Caleb and Joshua encouraged the people not to fear but to have faith in the LORD.
3. The people were bent on stoning Caleb and Joshua to death.

C. The Response of the LORD to the Rebellion of the Israelites (14:10b-25).

1. The LORD appeared in the tabernacle before all the people (v.10b).
2. The LORD spoke to Moses of His intention to destroy the people and make a greater nation of Moses (vv.11-12).
3. Moses pleaded with the LORD (vv.13-19).
 - a. He reasoned that the LORD'S name would be ill-spoken of by the Egyptians if the LORD carried out His intention to destroy the people.
 - b. Let the LORD manifest His power and His character of mercy and righteousness.
 - c. Moses called on the LORD to pardon the people just as He had pardoned them before.
4. The LORD responded to Moses' plea (vv.20-25).
 - a. The LORD pardoned the people.
 - b. The LORD decreed that the people who rebelled against Him would not see the Promised Land.
 - c. Caleb would enter the land because he had a right spirit.

- d. The Lord commanded the Israelites to turn into the wilderness and not proceed ahead.

D. The LORD Revealed to Moses and Aaron His Judgement Upon the People (14:26-35).

1. The LORD had given enough chances to Israel to stop murmuring against Him (v.26-27).
2. The LORD told Moses to tell the people that all who are twenty years old and above would die in the wilderness (vv.28-29).
3. They would not enter the land except Caleb and Joshua, and their children (vv. 30-31).
4. The people would wander in the wilderness for forty years (vv.32-34).
5. The LORD had spoken and He would do it (35).

E. The Punishment Upon the Spies and the Defeat of the People (14:36-45).

1. The death of the spies (vv.36-38).
 - a. Ten of the spies died by the plague.
 - b. Caleb and Joshua were spared.
2. The people did not learn their lesson (vv. 39-45).
 - a. Moses told the people all the words of the LORD.
 - b. The people rose up early in the morning to enter the land against the commandment of the LORD.
 - c. Moses warned them that they would not succeed.
 - d. The people were defeated by the Amalekites and the Canaanites.

COMMENTARY

Defying God & Accusing His Servants

The Israelites mourned loudly on the night that the spies made their report of their reconnaissance. They were completely discouraged and in despair. Instead of turning to God for comfort, courage and strength, they turned **against** Moses and Aaron. They complained that it would have been better for them to have died in Egypt or in the wilderness. They even went to the extent of accusing God for bringing them into the land to be slaughtered by the Canaanites, and their wives and children to be taken prey. And they would choose a new leader to lead them back to Egypt!

We observe with horror and unbelief that the Israelites could adopt such an attitude and behaviour—a defeatist attitude and blatantly blaspheming God. How could a people who had received so much from God blame Him with such anger? Could it be that they were focussing on themselves rather than on God? Or could it be that they were leaning upon their own strength rather than on the mighty power of God? Could it be that they were trusting in themselves instead of trusting on the integrity and faithfulness of God who had proven to them in time past in a great and mighty way?

Since they left Egypt, had not God protected, preserved and provided for them? So their reason for panic and hysteria was their unbelief and disobedience. The ten spies and other leaders who joined them cared more for themselves than for the other people, and instigated them all to rebel against

God and His chosen servants, Moses and Aaron.

A great opportunity was laid before them by the LORD. They were to enter and claim their inheritance. But they missed that opportunity. Instead of trusting and obeying God, they rebelled and disobeyed God. It was a tragic and terrible mistake, the consequences of it were very sad and sorrowful. God is no respecter of persons and He will punish those who sinned against Him and He will mete out what the rebels deserve. They had denied the LORD'S salvation and providential care since they left Egypt. They showed a total lack of faith and trust in the LORD. They insinuated that the LORD had brought them to Canaan to be killed. This was the height of their rebellion. Moses and Aaron were dumbfounded and shocked, and they could only respond by falling on their faces to the ground in shame and sorrow at such open and unashamed rebellion against the LORD.

Stoning the Encouragers

Joshua and Caleb, two of the ten spies, agreed with the report of the ten spies. But they disagreed with their call not to enter the land. Instead, these two men said the opposite. They remarked that if the LORD delighted in them, He would bring them into the land and claim it. They urged the people not to rebel against the LORD. They encouraged their fellow Israelites not to fear the people of the land for “they are bread to us” an expression that they would have the victory because the LORD was with them. But their words and encouragement fell on deaf ears. The people were incensed by their words and decided to stone Caleb and Joshua to death. What wickedness can match this attitude of the people?

Caleb and Joshua meant well for them. They spoke peace for them before God and to one another. In return for such passionate effort and concern, the people wanted to stone Caleb and Joshua to death. The people behaved irrationally and insensibly. They were thinking of themselves only.

The LORD saved Joshua and Caleb. The glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle. The glory of the LORD is the flash of brilliance that arrested their wicked intent and action. The LORD spoke to Moses that the people had sinned against Him. They would not believe in spite of the signs and wonders He had performed before their very eyes. God intended to wipe them out and make a greater and mightier nation out of Moses.

Appealing to God's Goodness and Greatness

God's righteous indignation was upon the rebellious, disobedient and blasphemous Israelites. Moses and his posterity were promised greatness by God. The people had also misunderstood and mistreated him. This was the moment for him to give them up and accept God's proposition. But Moses rejected it. He was true to his character, a man who was "very meek above all men on the face of the earth".

Instead of grabbing and making a name for himself, Moses interceded for the people. Moses' forthrightness in pleading on behalf of the people showed the urgency and seriousness of the matter. He appealed first on the basis of the honour of God's Name. What would the Egyptians and all the other nations think and say about the God of Israel? What would they say about the LORD? They would say that the LORD was unable to fulfil His covenant promise to them to bring them into the

land, and so killed them in the wilderness. Finally, Moses appealed to the LORD on the basis of His revelation to him that the LORD is longsuffering and merciful, forgiving but righteously punishing the wicked unto the third and fourth generation. Moses appealed to God to pardon the sin of the people according to the greatness of His mercy just as He had forgiven them since they left Egypt until now.

Moses' intercession before God is effectual. It is effectual because he based his appeal for God's sake—His Name, His Promises and His Personality. Is this not the same pattern as the Lord Jesus Christ taught His disciples to pray? These three elements are the same basis of the "Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:9-13). We should learn to pray like Moses—praying always for God's namesake, God's glory and honour, God's will be done and God's personality be exalted. There is nothing that is of this earth that can exceed the glory of God!

Deserving God's Judgement

The LORD was moved. The LORD changed His way in which He intended to deal with the Israelites. On the basis of Moses' intercessory plea, the LORD did not destroy ALL the people. But these Israelites (20 years and upward), who had seen His mighty acts performed on their behalf, and who had tested Him, and spurned His goodness, would not "see the land" let alone enter it, except Caleb and Joshua.

Caleb and Joshua were exempted because they showed a different spirit—a God-fearing, God-honouring, God-believing and obeying spirit. They would be brought into the land. And the LORD told Moses that on the next day, he was to lead the Israelites back into the wilderness by way of the Red Sea. They

were not to attempt to go northwards towards the land where the Amalekites and the Canaanites lived.

The LORD then described the judgement upon Israel. All the Israelites who were twenty years old and above, and who had murmured against the LORD would drop dead one by one in the forty years of their wanderings in the wilderness. As for the children whom they feared would become prey to the Canaanites, the LORD declared that they would live and inherit the land. The LORD affirmed that this would surely happen according to His Word. They must realize what it meant by “my breach of promise” (what it means to thwart Me, v.34). And the ten spies who instigated all the people to rebel against the LORD, “died by the plague” instantaneously “before the LORD” (v37) except Joshua and Caleb.

The LORD’S judgement may seem harsh at first. We must not hastily come to such a conclusion. The LORD’S judgement is always righteous, although man may think that it is harsh or unfair. The righteous LORD judges righteously. In the first place, the Israelites’ rebellion against God was completely baseless, for God had been good to them since He delivered them out of Egypt. They were unbelieving in spite of the many assurances God had given them that His promises were true. Furthermore they charged God for having a wicked intent by bringing them to Canaan to be slaughtered by the inhabitants of the land. And on that count they wanted to dump Moses, God’s chosen servant, and choose a new leader to take them back to Egypt! This is the height of rebellion and blasphemy against God.

The people deserved death. So God intended to destroy them and because of Moses’ plea, God forgave the people.

God was merciful to them. God did not destroy all of them. The twenty years old and above would die in the span of forty years as they lived a nomadic life in the wilderness. God spared the children of the Israelites who were under the age of twenty but He granted those, who said “would God we had died in this wilderness!”(v.2), what they had asked for. In fact, in those forty years God mercifully continued to provide for them manna and their shoes did not wear off! God was indeed merciful and gracious. God forgave them. His covenant with Israel was not broken. But the Israelites who sinned against Him, each of them must bear the consequences of his sin.

Presumptuous Sin

The Israelites now went from the sin of rebellion to the sin of presumption. Moses told them the words of the LORD. The people “mourned greatly” (v.39). But the next moment we were told that they decided to go up and attack the Amalekites and the Canaanites. Moses must have told them that the LORD had commanded them not to do so. This was yet another act of disobedience. Was their mourning and sorrow the kind that produces contrition of heart and repentance? If it was so, they would have confessed their sins before the LORD and repented. They did not. Instead they became presumptuous in that since God had earlier wanted them to claim the land, then they should now obey. But God had told them not to. They were acting foolishly and presumptuously thinking that their previous sin was not that serious and now they could redress it by going up and attacking the inhabitants of the land. Moses warned them not to go for the LORD was not with them. Once again, they persisted in their way. They got what they deserved again. They

were routed by the Amalekites and the Canaanites. It was really sad.

SUMMARY

These were written for our learning. We learn from the mistakes of others. One precious lesson we ought to learn well is not to complain and murmur against God or against His chosen or anointed servant(s) without biblical basis. Such an attitude and behaviour is displeasing in the sight of God. It will not be tolerated. Such chronic complainers and murmurers in the church should be dealt with. If they are not dealt with, their sin will spread and affect others in no time.

Caleb and Joshua present a good example for us to emulate. Be courageous and strong, knowing what the will of the LORD is, and do it. Although they were the minority, they stood their ground knowing that it was the right thing to do, to do the will of the LORD. This lesson we must learn well. If we suffer for Christ's sake, our rewards will be great in heaven as the Lord has promised (Matthew 5:11-12).²

Like Moses, pray on their behalf that they would change, repent and turn back to God. And God has promised that He will bless us who walk in His ways. AMEN

² Matthew 5:11 Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

Monday: Numbers 14:1-4; Proverbs 18:21; Psalm 46:10; Isaiah 57:20-21.

Tuesday: Numbers 14:5-10; Psalm 37:1-9.

Wednesday: Numbers 14:11-25; Lamentations 3:22; Matthew 6:9-13.

Thursday: Numbers 14:26-38; Psalm 95:10; Galatians 6:4-8.

Friday: Numbers 14:39-45; Proverbs 16:18; Psalm 19:13; 2 Peter 2:10.

3. What kind of tears did the Israelites shed? How many kinds of tears are there in the Bible?

Discussion Questions

1. What mistakes did the Israelites make?

2. Why did the Israelites listen to the ten spies and not to Caleb and Joshua?

4. In the light of this account, what must be done to chronic complainers?

5. How would you describe the sin of the Israelites?

6. Why did the people accuse and rebel against Moses and Aaron?

7. What were Caleb and Joshua's basis for urging the people to claim their inheritance?

8. What were Moses and Aaron doing when the people wanted to stone Caleb and Joshua? Who saved them?

9. What are the elements of Moses' prayer that we can learn to pray like him?

10. God forgave the Israelites, yet they were punished for their sins. What important and precious truth does that teach us?

11. In what way was God's judgement upon the Israelites merciful and gracious?

12. Was the Israelites attempt later to enter the land a mark of obedience to the LORD?

13. Are decisions made by majority votes a safe method of making decisions for Christians? What about our church election?

14. What lesson(s) have you learned from this chapter?

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

SUPPLEMENTARY

MONDAY

Proverbs 18:21 Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

Psalm 46:10 Be still, and know that I *am* God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

Isaiah 57:20 But the wicked *are* like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 21 *There is* no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

TUESDAY

Psalm 37:1 {*A Psalm* of David.} Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.

2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.

3 Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

4 Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. 5 Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring *it* to pass.

6 And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.

7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. 9 For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.

WEDNESDAY

Lamentations 3:22 *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.*

Matthew 6:9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

THURSDAY

Psalm 95:1 O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.

Galatians 6:4 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

5 For every man shall bear his own burden. 6 Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

FRIDAY

Proverbs 16:18 Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

Psalm 19:13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins*; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

2 Peter 2:10 But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous *are they*, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.

LIFE APPLICATION

- A. We must guard against the attitude of always complaining and murmuring.
1. Because it displeases God.
 2. Because such an attitude is contagious and spreads quickly in the church.
 3. Because such a spirit will cripple the spiritual growth of the church.
- B. We must not unreasonably and falsely accused and criticized the Lord's anointed or chosen servant/leader.
- a. Such action actually attacks God and not His servant who is carrying out God's will.
 - b. Such behaviour against the leader places a hindrance to his effort to serve God, and therefore undermines the work of God. One becomes a tool for our adversary.
- C. Be strong and courageous in obeying God even if it means going against the majority and be spurned by them.
1. Caleb and Joshua are our examples.
 2. Observe their character:
 - Believing in God and not being faithless.
 - Trusting God and take His Word implicitly.
 - If God is with us, fear no man.
- D. Pray in accordance to the will of God.
1. That is the only way we can ever be sure that God will answer the prayer.
2. Pray for others who have sinned against God and man that they will repent and turn to God.
- E. Don't be presumptuous but know what the will of God is.
1. Don't be presumptuous by doing things that are right in our own eyes.
 2. This kind of sin is just another show of our pride and arrogance.
 3. The correct course of action is to confess our sins, repent, and walk in newness of life in the Lord.