

Forgiveness
God's Forgiveness
Focal Verses: Numbers 14:10-20¹

Aim for Change

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

In Focus

Denise felt it was time to tell her children the truth about why she was divorcing their father. 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.

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."

¹ Excerpt From Precepts for Living® Dr. Vince L., Bantu

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 (NKJV)***

Lesson Text

Numbers 14:10-20

10 And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel.

11 Then the Lord said to Moses: “How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?”

12 I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.”

13 And Moses said to the Lord: “Then the Egyptians will hear *it*, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them,

14 and they will tell *it* to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, Lord, *are* among these people; that You, Lord, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above 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 kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying,

16 ‘Because the Lord was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness.’

17 And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying,

18 ‘The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth *generation*.’

19 Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”

20 Then the Lord said: “I have pardoned, according to your 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 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?

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.

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?

2. Moses' Intercession (Numbers 14:13–19) Moses responds to God by arguing 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 will suffer disgrace. The other nations, who know of His love for Israel and powerful presence 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. Despite 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 (Numbers 14:20) 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 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?

Liberating Lesson

Moses believed intercession on behalf of the rebellious Israelites would make a difference in their lives. He understood 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 must forgive and pray for those who have harmed us, even while we trust God 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.

Closing Prayer

Daily Bible Reading



Monday: Genesis 43-45, Psalm 8

Tuesday: Genesis 46-47, Psalm 9:1-6

Wednesday: Genesis 48-50, Psalm 9:7-12

Thursday: Exodus 1-3, Psalm 9:13-20

Friday: Exodus 4-6, Psalm 10:1-6

Saturday: Exodus 7-9, Psalm 10:7-11

Sunday: Exodus 10-12, Psalm 10:12-18