

December 8, 2019

GOD JUDGES

Numbers 14:5-19

INTRODUCTION

The temptation not to trust the Lord is real. At every point there are obstacles that seek to undue and undermine our resolve that the Lord is of infinite value and is to be our greatest delight. What the Lord calls us to and the promises He gives to us will always be tested. Sometimes the testing comes from within (our passions); at others times, as is the case in our text today, they will come by discouragement of what (or who) gets in the way. Whatever the case may be, we are to live in the reality of the judgment of God on sinful living. Christ indeed has come to take the sting of our sin and death but we must never eliminate the judgment that comes upon all whose lives are lived, continuously, outside of allegiance to the Lord.

A CHALLENGED ISSUED (Number 14:5-9)

We must meet fear and rebellion with a decisive word about the Lord's gracious provision for obedience as well as His dreaded wrath towards disobedience. But this must be done in a spirit of brokenness and humbled gravity or sin's weight. Moses and Aaron "*fell down in front of the whole assembly of the Israelite community*" (Numbers 14:5). This was a posture of awe, not awe of God Himself (though this is implied) but shock regarding the blasphemy of this redeemed people to their Lord. In a similar sign of deep distress and agony, Joshua and Caleb "*tear their clothes*" (Numbers 14:6). Though these actions were postures of humility they were not afraid. They challenged them to see beyond the physical. The land, despite the enemies we see, "*is an extremely good land*" (Numbers 14:7). What the Lord has for His people is rarely given without contention and tests. Such obstacles are not to be seen as reasons to fear (Numbers 14:9), but as a call to trust Him in spite of what we see. It is rebellion to act on what we see more than on the Lord whose promises are yes and amen (Numbers 14:8) and whose protection is certain (Numbers 14:9). The enemy's entire enterprise began by changing how Adam and Eve *saw* the tree. When we see God above and before everything, fear will give way to faith.

ACCOUNTABILITY (Number 14:10-12)

What is compelling about these verses is that the Lord's words add a second the direction of punishment to that given by Joshua and Caleb. While Joshua and Caleb threaten to stone the rebellious faction, the text tells us "*that the glory of the Lord appeared to all the Israelites at the tent of meeting*" (Numbers 14:10). Several things are important implications here. First, the glory of the Lord appears because all rebellion is against the glory of the Lord. All sin does this. Second, in light of the first point, the glory of the Lord appeared to *all* of the people. This is, as I see it, a teaching moment for *all* the people. Yes, the faction will be held accountable, but so too will *all* who do not obey. We must be careful in holding people accountable while, at the same time, living unaccountable to the Lord. Here is the point of these verses: while men must hold one another accountable, all must live under the gaze and watchful eyes of the Lord. It is His judgment and the potential of death (spiritual exclusion) from the life of the Lord that must be ever before us. God asks Moses "*How long will this people despise me How long will they not trust me?*" (Numbers 14:11). Surely the Lord knows the answer to these questions and is not seeking information from Moses. Instead, He is challenging Moses to call the people to repent in light of the coming accountability (judgment) of God upon those who rebel.

GRACE SOUGHT (Number 14:13-19)

What is remarkable about these words of Moses is their God-ward and glory saturated bent. God has just told Moses that He would kill the rebellious people and then start again with Moses at the helm. Moses' thoughts were never on personal fame, but the Lord's fame (Numbers 14:15-16). It is true that he is pleading for grace in these verses but the way he does is very instructive to us. He appeals for grace on the basis of God's reputation among the nations. God has pronounced a coming judgment on the rebellious people and, like Exodus 32, Moses intercedes for grace. Moses, however, did not seek grace because the people were worthy of it or because they *really* should have it. Instead, Moses says, in effect, "Lord, if you killed this people what will this say about you to the nations? Grace was sought for the glory of God's name, not for the averting of judgment or the alleviation of some burden. Moses was most concerned about God and, because of this, the people reap the blessing of God's grace and pardon. In this way, Moses is a type of Christ. Christ was not, on this earth, concerned with His own glory but the glory of the Father living perfectly so that the nations would bow before God the Father. When we find others in sin and desire for the grace of the Lord to lavish their souls, may we have a heart and passion like Moses whose chief concern was the glory of the Lord in our experience of it.