

**Key Passage: Numbers 14:18**

Key Thought: God punishing, disciplining, and rebuking His people doesn't deter God from keeping his intention to bring His people to the promised land

The story:

God rescued his people from Egypt. He did it with signs and wonders to show his power, which means the God who has the power to punish has chosen to save and redeem. He led them into the wilderness and there, at Mt. Sinai, he established his covenant with them. The entire section stretching from Exodus 19 to Numbers 9 takes place at Mt. Sinai. But in Numbers 10, God moves to the next phase of his plan, as he tells the people to go into the Promised Land.

But, as you can guess, after the rescuing, after the covenant, his people haven't learned the lesson that God's goodness should lead to repentance and holy living. Instead, their trust in God has turned into fear and rebellion.

God sends some of his people to spy out the Promised Land (Numbers 13). They report that the land is beautiful, but full of giants and thus they do not have the power or confidence to go into the land God promised. Their loss of faith in God, their focus on their own strength instead, leads them to abandon the quest for the land, and some

even desire to return to Egypt (Numbers 14). This, in turn, leads to virtually an entire generation missing out on the Promised Land, as they wander for another 38 years!

This wandering period is marked with murmuring and rebellion, as we see the full depths of sinful humanity played out among God's people! On the other hand, out there in the wilderness they experience the amazing grace of God. He feeds them, protects them from enemies, and keeps them alive even when they make Him angry enough to take them away (see Numbers 11 & 22-25). This is summarized well in Deuteronomy 8:2-5.

Obedience is hard. It is sometimes easier to be a slave than to freely choose obedience. God knows this. He judges the people's sin and disobedience because He is Just. He also provides the perfectly obedient one who doesn't turn back but rather "entrust himself to him who judges justly" (1 Pet 2:23) because He is the justifier.

Now, all who put their trust in Christ are able to "enter that rest", the promised land of God (Heb 4:3)

Even today, God expects obedience. When we give in to fear rather than trust, and disobey rather than obey, God lovingly corrects his children. "God disciplines us for our good, that we might share in His holiness" (Heb 12:10-11). But at the same time, we obey because that is what we were saved for (Eph 2:10; Titus 3:8), motivated by the free gift of Christ which we were saved by (Eph 2:5-9; Titus 3:3-7).¹

1. What Do We Learn About God & His Spirit (that tells the gospel)?

God keeps his promises. God provides for and protects even his wayward people.

God as King (Num 23:21-23). Yahweh as King protector of His people. Cp Ex 15:18; Deut 33:3-5. Only 3 texts in Torah where God is King. Had practical effects. And ethical. His rule was by righteousness and justice.

God is "jealous" in that he has zeal to protect the relationship (Num 25:11). He values life. Life and money are not comparable (num 35:31-34). No mere fine could be levied for taking life.

¹ See Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens*, Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences*, and H. H. Drake Williams, *Making Sense of the Bible*.

The Holy Spirit rests on Moses as he leads the people (Num 11:17, 29), the 70 elders as they resolved Israel's disputes (Num 11:25-29), and Joshua as he takes over the reins (Num 27:18).

2. What Do We Learn About Christ (that tells the gospel)?

Jesus wore the prescribed edge of his robe (Matt 9:20; Num 15:38-41) and observed Passover (Matt 26:17-19; Num 9:1-14)

Moses is a unique prophet (Num 12:6-8), so only Jesus could fulfill the “prophet like Moses” who was to come.

Jesus fulfilled the role of obedient servant; he didn't “shrink back” and thus he and he alone holds the status of “the righteous one.” Because of him, we can enter that rest.

See 2 Tim 2:19 / Num 16:5: What is said about God is applied to Jesus

3. What Do We Learn About Faith, Forgiveness & Hope (that tells the gospel)?

Redemption. You could “redeem” a son by paying 4 shekels to the priest (Num 3:44-51), which was called “redemption money” (Num 3:51).

Kinsman-Redeemer. A male relative who acts to buy back a relative from slavery or to take care of financial difficulties (Lev 25:23-24, 48-52), and he would also avenge the blood of a murdered relative by destroying the killer (Numbers 35:19). So we see examples of redemption involving protection, wrath toward wrong-doers, and purchasing freedom.

But some sins couldn't even find a sacrifice match. High handed sin was inexcusable (Numbers 15:30-31). Isn't it wonderful that every kind of sin finds forgiveness in Christ?!

4. What Do We Learn About Being the People of God (that tells the gospel)?

It is easy to forget God's wonderful works, and to try to go back to slavery (in sin). God punishes or disciplines us for our own good, and it is intended to help us see the error of our ways (and to ultimately protect and bless us). And as the people of God—a holy nation--we can enter “that rest” because Jesus has gone before us.

We are also a kingdom of priests. This speaks to the peculiar nature of the people of God. Balam is an outsider who notices the distinctness of Israel (Num 23:9; cp lev 18:3; 20:26). But it also has implications for outsiders. Priests “bless” the people (Number 6:22-27), As priests, we are called to be the people through whom God blesses the world.

We are called to be a people who remind the world of who God is. See Num 26:16-17: God will provide good human shepherds to lead his people. See Psalm 72. Earthly king is to act like the heavenly king.

5. Hook Questions:²

1. In what ways have you already begun to know God’s rest? How would you explain this rest to someone else? Can others see in you a peace, security, and fulfillment in life that they don’t have? Do you see these things in other believers?
2. What is keeping you from knowing God’s rest more fully? What are the biggest challenges in your life that threaten to cause you to forget how great God is? Where have you turned for rest and fulfillment in life instead of to God? Are you satisfied with the results of doing that?

² Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens* (Zondervan, 2012), p.20.