



Sunday, November 7, 2021: "Moses' Prayer and God's Answer"  
Commentary (The UGP Curriculum)

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**Lesson:** Numbers 14:13-24; **Time of Action:** about 1443 B.C.; **Place of Action:** Kadesh-barnea

**Golden Text:** "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" (Numbers 14:18).

**I. INTRODUCTION.** This week's lesson is actually a lesson in prayer. In response to God's offer which was a test for Moses (see Numbers 14:12), Moses interceded for the people of Israel. His intercession contains wonderful instruction on how to pray and guarantee that prayer will be heard and answered. Prayer that always receives what it seeks sounds too good to be true; but it is true. In his prayer, Moses appealed to God's glory and honor in asking for the pardon of His rebellious people. That really contains the key to effective prayer. When we seek God's heart in prayer, we are assured that He will hear and answer our prayer (see John 15:7; I John 5:14). Moses sought and found the heart of God in his intercessory prayer for the nation of Israel. Instead of seeking his own glory, which he had an opportunity to do; Moses sought the glory of God. May we learn to do the same.



**II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND.** After the Israelites left Mount Sinai and arrived at Kadesh-barnea which was near the border of Canaan, God commanded Moses to *"send...men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel"* (see Numbers 13:2). When the twelve chosen spies returned from exploring the land, ten of the twelve men brought a report indicating that the people would not be able to take the land because of giants. This caused all the people to weep in fear (see Numbers 14:1). But two of the twelve, Joshua and Caleb, declared that Israel was *"well able"* to take possession of the land (see Numbers 13:30). They also said *"If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us"* (see Numbers 14:8). The people believed the evil report from the other ten spies and turned against Joshua and Caleb. This led the people to call for the stoning of Joshua and Caleb (see Numbers 14:10). At this point, *"the glory of the LORD appeared in the temple of the congregation"* in front of all the people, and God told Moses that because the people had constantly provoked Him, He would destroy them and start all over with Moses (see Numbers 14:11-12). This is where our lesson begins.

### **III. MOSES' INTERCESSION (Numbers 14:13-19)**

#### **A. Moses appeals to God's reputation (Numbers 14:13-16).**

**1. (vs. 13).** This verse says **"And Moses said**



**unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them)."** Realizing that God was going to destroy and replace Israel with his descendants, "**Moses**" did as he had done before; he interceded for the people of God (see Exodus 32:11-13), first by basing his pleading on God's reputation and honor. We are told that "**Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them).**" He reminded God that if He did destroy His chosen people, "**the Egyptians shall hear**" about it since He alone "**in thy (His) might**" had delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt. Therefore, the Israelites belonged to God and were His responsibility. "**Moses**" was telling God that His honor was at stake. God's honour was closer to "**Moses**"' heart than his own interests. Indeed, God was first in his life (see Colossians 1:17-19). **Note: *Through his intercession for the Israelites, "Moses" proved to be a very selfless individual. He had learned the lesson of selflessness in leadership. As we shall see in the remaining verses, he resisted God's offer to make him a great nation which tested him to the core of his being; but he came away spiritually stronger. In contrast, when Aaron seemingly had been offered greater status by the people during the incident with the golden calf, he readily accepted. But when God offered "Moses" the opportunity of becoming a great nation, he refused. "Moses" had a great love for the people of Israel even though they had proved themselves to be unworthy of that love many times. He cared enough about others to intercede on their behalf. As Christians, we need that same quality***



***of love that will take us to prayer on other's behalf.***

2. (vs. 14). This verse says **"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."** Moses continued to tell God that when the Egyptians heard that He had destroyed His own people **"they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land"** which refers to the people already living in Canaan. Just as Moses had appealed to God's *honor* to spare Israel in the previous verse, here he appeals to God's *presence* among His people. Moses said **"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."** Those living in Canaan had heard that God dwelt **"among His people."** They had also heard that the LORD had been **"seen face to face."** Although Exodus 33:11 says that *"the LORD spoke to Moses face to face,"* this does not mean that he saw God's face because no one can see God and live (see Exodus 33:19-20). Moses was only allowed to see some of God's glory (see Exodus 33:21-22; 34:4-6). It appears that the expression **"face to face"** is used here to show how God spoke to all the Israelites (see Deuteronomy 5:1-4) as well as the special relationship between God and Moses (see Deuteronomy 34:10). Therefore, the expression **"face to face"** is a way of describing how God revealed Himself to Israel at that time. Moses also told God that the



Canaanites had also heard 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."** The phrase **"thy cloud standeth over them"** probably refers to the Shekinah-glory of God (see Ezekiel 9:3; 10:19) seen in a **"cloud"** that stood continuously over the Israelites. Not only had the Canaanites heard about the **"cloud"** that stood **"over them,"** Moses said that they had also heard about God's leading His people in **"a pillar of a cloud"** during the day and **"a pillar of fire by night."** **Note: *Since Israel enjoyed the special presence of the Shekinah-glory of God, whatever happened to them was especially related to His honor and glory. His presence signified in a special way that He was their God. Therefore, as far as Moses was concerned, any losses Israel suffered would be considered evidence by the inhabitants of Canaan that Israel's God lacked power.***

**3. (vs. 15).** This verse says, **"Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying..."** Here Moses begins to tell the LORD what he also thinks **"the nations"** in Canaan would say about God's **"fame"** or honor if He would **"kill all this people,"** the Israelites like they were **"one man."**

**4. (vs. 16).** This verse says **"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."** Now Moses tells God what he thinks the nations in Canaan would say about Him if He exercised His



discipline by destroying the Israelites. Moses said the rumor that would circulate would be that the LORD **"hath slain them (His people) in the wilderness"** because He **"was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them."** In other words, God would be dishonored among the nations of Canaan if He slew His people before bringing them into the Promised Land as He promised. The Nations would see this as an indication that God lacked the power to finish what He had started. In essence, Moses was reminding God that destroying the Israelites would negatively affect His standing in the eyes of the Egyptians (see Exodus 32:12) and other nations. Moses was not concerned about his own glory; he was concerned about the glory of God. **Note: Moses, who once had the world in his grasp as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, by faith chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God" (see Hebrews 11:24-25). Now he showed that he cared for God's honor and position more than his own as he demonstrated by pleading for Israel. How often do we follow his example of faith? Moses wanted God to continue to receive glory from even the enemies of His people. However, there is no question that sometimes God allows His own honor to suffer by disciplining His children. When David sinned by committing adultery with Bath-sheba and murdering her husband Uriah, Nathan told him that he had given the enemies of the LORD the opportunity to blaspheme or speak evil of Him (see II Samuel 12:13-14). The world cannot understand the methods that God uses when dealing with His own (see Hebrews 12:6-13). When believers fall, unbelievers rejoice, taking the opportunity to justify their sin in their own eyes. The**



***best pleas in prayer are those that refer to God's honor, for they agree with the first petition of the LORD's Prayer, "Hallowed be thy name" (see Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). So, in everything we do or say, we should not give the enemies of the LORD the occasion to blaspheme Him (see I Timothy 6:1).***

### **B. Moses appeals to God's glory (Numbers 14:17-19).**

**1. (vs. 17).** This verse says **"And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my LORD be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying..."** Moses' final appeal to God to save Israel pointed specifically to His revealed character and **"power."** As he continued to pray, Moses said to God **"And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my LORD be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying..."** Moses was about to remind God of His own words regarding His character (see Exodus 34:6-7). However, we must never think of this plea as a trick on Moses' part as if he was reminding God of something He had forgotten. Moses' plea depended on God being who He revealed Himself to be.

**2. (vs. 18).** This verse says **"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."** Still pleading on behalf of the Israelites, Moses repeated the words God used to describe Himself in Exodus 34:6-7 almost verbatim. These words that Moses repeated directly from God Himself formed



the basis for Moses' entire prayer. Notice the attributes of God that Moses mentioned. First Moses said "**The LORD is longsuffering.**" God's attribute of "**longsuffering**" speaks of God's patience. Another attribute of God is "**great mercy.**" The word "**mercy**" is often translated in Scripture as "*lovingkindness.*" It refers to God's goodness shown toward those who are in misery or distress. God's "**great mercy**" is seen in Him "**forgiving iniquity and transgression.**" The Hebrew word translated "**iniquity**" comes from a word that refers to crookedness or twistedness. "**Iniquity**" is the appropriate word for sin, because sin leads men and women down crooked paths and produces twisted lives. "**Transgression**" is a violation of a law or command. The Hebrew word most often translated "**transgression**" in the Old Testament means "*revolt*" or "*rebellion.*" In the New Testament, the word "**transgression**" translates a Greek word that means "*a deliberate breach of the law*" (see Romans 4:15; I Timothy 2:13-14; Hebrews 2:2). According to God Himself, it was part of His character to forgive "**iniquity and transgression.**" However, both words refer to sins of all kinds. When Moses said that God "**by no means clearing the guilty**" he meant that God will not let sin go unpunished. But instead, He visits or brings punishment for "**the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.**" This means that since God will "**by no means**" or under any circumstances, find the guilty innocent, He will sometimes bring punishment for the wickedness and guilt of the fathers upon the children (that is, God will call the children to account for the sins of their fathers), even as late as the third and





fourth generations, Israel would suffer for their rebellion. We found this to be true for Israel. Because of their stubborn unbelief, they would wander for forty years until those who were twenty years old and older had died in the wilderness (see Numbers 14:26-32; 32:11-12). The only exceptions would be Joshua and Caleb (see Numbers 14:30; 26:65).

**3. (vs. 19).** This verse says **"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."** At this point in Moses' prayer for Israel, he requested God to **"Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy."** The phrase **"I beseech thee"** can mean *"I beg you."* It expresses the urgency of Moses' request. Moses was acknowledging that even though Israel's sin was great, God's **"mercy"** was greater. Moses didn't try to excuse Israel's unbelief and rebellion. He could not deny that they were guilty, especially to an omniscient and holy God. But Moses asked God to **"pardon"** or forgive Israel not on the basis of their goodness, for they had none, but based on God's own goodness, **"the greatness of thy mercy"** or His lovingkindness. Believers today are pardoned for our sins on the same basis. Like Israel, we are completely in God's debt for the **"pardon"** we have received from Him, a debt that we can never repay (see I Peter 1:18-19). Moses begged God to **"pardon"** or forgive His people just as He had **"forgiven"** them **"from Egypt even until now."** The very act of deliverance from **"Egypt"** had been a classic display of lovingkindness. And since their deliverance, every time God led Israel past an obstacle, He showed His **"mercy"** or



lovingkindness. Every time God provided sustenance for Israel, despite their murmurings, He manifested His lovingkindness. Moses asked God to continue to show the same "**mercy**" or lovingkindness to His people. **Note: God has not confined His "mercy" to His dealings with Israel. The supreme example of God's lovingkindness was when He sent His eternal Son into this sinful world to provide redemption through His substitutionary death on the cross. Ephesians 2:4-5 explains that "God who is rich in mercy, for his great love where with he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)." The only thing that prevents the exercise of God's "mercy" today is the refusal of sinful man to accept God's gracious and merciful offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The redemptive price has been paid. The provision has been made, but the individual must accept the free gift of salvation by faith (see Ephesians 2:8).**

#### IV. GOD'S PARDON AND JUDGMENT (Numbers 14:20-24)

**A. God pardons the people (Numbers 14:20).** This verse says "**And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word...**" When our prayers are rooted in the character and Person of God, meaning in everything that He is, He will not let them go unanswered. God responded to Moses' intercessory prayer with mercy saying "**I have**



**pardoned according to thy word..."** But that **"pardoned"** or forgiving the people's sin didn't remove the consequences. Israel had offended God's glory and they would suffer in the wilderness, but they would not receive the judgment that their rebellion deserved (see Numbers 14:12) because of God's mercy. Notice that God said **"I have pardoned according to thy word."** But what **"word"** did God mean? Was it simply Moses' **"word"** asking for Israel's pardon? Maybe it was. But remember, when Moses prayed, he spoke the same words about God that God had said about Himself. **Note: *Let's be honest, we all love to hear people say glowing things about us that we try to live up to and so does God. So Moses prayed in accord, or in agreement with what God's "word" said about Him, and God acted in accord with His "word:" He showed mercy and pardoned His people. Knowing God's "Word" (for us, the Bible) and praying in agreement with it is the key to effective prayer that touches and moves the heart of God. The Apostle John explained the foundational truth of effective praying when he wrote "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (see I John 3:22). May we also learn God's heart and His will by learning His "Word" and the obedience it demands so that our prayers, like those of Moses may overcome our circumstances. Only as we live and pray in agreement with God's "Word" can we expect Him to honor our requests. Remember, every prayer we pray will be answered if what we ask for is in God's will, and we can only know His will by knowing His "Word," the Bible. Again, the Apostle John plainly tells us how to be sure***



*our prayers will be answered when he wrote "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (see I John 5:14-15).*

### **B. God pronounces His judgment on those who rebelled (Numbers 14:21-23).**

1. (vs. 21). This verse says, "**But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.**" Now God's "**glory**" takes center stage when He made a solemn promise and said "**But as truly as I live.**" He was promising by His own name that whatever He chose to do to Israel, whether it was His judgment of His mercy, "**all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.**" Moses in his prayer had shown great concern for "**the glory of the LORD,**" and God confirmed that "**all the earth shall be filled with the (His) glory.**" In other words, there is nothing anyone or anything can do to ever detract from "**the glory of the LORD**" being magnified throughout "**all the earth.**" God gave His word and He cannot lie, that the world would see just how much He hates sin even in His own people that He will punish it and still show how gracious and merciful He is. God turned Moses' prayer that glorified Him into a promise. Likewise, we can turn it into praise and sing along with the angels: "*The whole earth is full of his glory*" (see Isaiah 6:1-3).

2. (vs. 22). This verse says, "**Because all those**



**men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice..."** We must not forget that God's forgiveness does not remove accountability. There were consequences for the people's sin. So here God continued to tell just how *"all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord"* (see verse 21). This involved punishing His people even though He had forgiven them. God said, **"Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice."**

It was bad enough for the Israelites to rebel against God and His leaders, but they made it even worse after they **"have seen my (His) glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness.** They wouldn't believe their own eyes, which were witnesses for God that He was truly among them and caring for them. God also said that they **"have tempted me now these ten times."** The word **"tempted"** means *"tested."* These rebels had **"tempted"** or tested God by not trusting Him numerous **"times"** which is the meaning of the phrase **"these ten times."** Of course, God was not exaggerating because the Israelites had provoked Him at the Red Sea (see Exodus 14:11); at Marah (see Exodus 15:23-24); in the wilderness of Sin (see Exodus 16:1-2); At Rephidim (see Exodus 17:1-2); with the golden calf (see Exodus 32:1-35); at Taberah (see Numbers 11:1-4) and at Kibroth-Hattaavah (see Numbers 11:31-35). When we look at those occasions, it's quite possible that by now **"the LORD"** had been put to the test by His own people **"ten times."** Now, it appears that He had had enough!



**3. (vs. 23).** This verse says, **"Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it."** Still talking about the ones who rebelled against Him, God said **"Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it."** It appears that the pronoun **"they"** refers specifically to the ten spies who brought back an evil report from their exploration of Canaan (see Numbers 14:37). God declared that they **"shall not see,"** much less enter the Promised Land, **"the land which I swear unto their fathers."** The word **"fathers"** refers to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, each of whom God promised to give the land of Canaan. The LORD then declared that **"neither shall any of them that provoked me see it."** This refers to all the adults twenty years old and older. They would all die in the wilderness wanderings (see Numbers 14:28-38), including Miriam and Aaron, Moses' sister and brother (see Numbers 20:1; Deuteronomy 10:6). Moses would also die at the border to Canaan just before the new generation entered it (see Deuteronomy 31:7, 14; 34:1-5; Joshua 1:1-2). However, God also said that there would be two exceptions to this promise, Joshua and Caleb (see Numbers 14:30, 38) who were faithful to God and brought back a good report from Canaan (see Numbers 14:5-9). Joshua and Caleb would be the only ones over nineteen years old to enter the Promised Land.

**C. God omits the faithful from His judgment (Numbers 14:24).** Our final verse says **"But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land**



**whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it."** As noted in the previous verse, only two men over the age of 19 would enter the Promise Land. But at this point, only "**Caleb**" is mentioned, for God said "**But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went.**" The word "**But**" contrasts Caleb with the rest of the Israelites twenty years old and older who would die in the wilderness. God said "**him will I bring into the land whereinto he went**" meaning Canaan "**the land**" that he explored with the other spies. In addition, the LORD said "**and his seed shall possess it.**" In other words, because of "**Caleb's**" faithfulness, not only would he enter the Promised Land, but "**his seed**" or his descendants would also "**possess it**" and dwell there. The descendants of those adults who were under twenty years old would also be the generation to enter and take possession of Canaan.

**Note:** *Although not part of our printed text, God commanded His people to turn around and go back into the wilderness (see Numbers 14:25). They were camped on the very borders of Canaan (see Deuteronomy 1:1-2), but instead of going forward to the Promised Land, God told them to turn around and get to the wilderness towards the Red Sea again. Now, over the next forty years all those twenty years old and older would at one time or another die in the wilderness. Earlier they had murmured wishing that they had died in the wilderness (see Numbers 14:2), and now they would get their wish. God granted them their wish and determined that their "carcasses (bodies) shall fall in this*



**wilderness" (see Numbers 14:28-29, 32, 35). Their forefathers desired Canaan so much that many of them had their bodies carried there to be buried (see Genesis 49:1-2, 28-31), indicating that they depended on God's promise that they would have that land for a possession (see Genesis 17:8; 48:4). But those who despised such a good land and didn't believe God's promise to give it to them wouldn't even have the honor of being buried there. They would all make their graves in the wilderness. They would wander back and forth in the wilderness for forty years before they entered Canaan (see Numbers 14:33-34). What's interesting about the attitude of the Israelites is that they waited content to wait patiently for forty days for the twelve men to return with their report because they refused to take God's word. Now they would have to rightly wait forty years before anyone entered the the Promise Land according to God's promise.**

**V. Conclusion.** The Israelites, who were on the very borders of Canaan, because of unbelief, rejected their God-given opportunity to occupy the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb were almost stoned because of their positive attitude and faith (see Numbers 14:6-10). God expressed great anger and frustration because of Israel's lack of trust in Him. He proposed to Moses that Israel be destroyed and that a new nation be established through Moses himself (see Numbers 14:11-12). But Moses courageously interceded with God on behalf of His people, Israel. He argued that the sparing of





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Israel would preserve God's reputation in the heathen world and would stand as a monument to God's merciful nature. God chose to pardon Israel as His faithful servant, Moses had requested. Like Moses, love for others should motivate us to intercede for them before God.

**\*\*\*The Sunday School Lesson, Union Gospel Press Curriculum; The Bible Expositor and Illuminator\*\*\***