



"You should be terrified if you have the truth and yet that truth does not grip, control, and transform you."

—Dale Ralph Davis

11-Dec-20

Why Was God So Angry With Israel? (Part Two)

In Part One, we saw the children of Israel stalled in fear at the border of the Promised Land in Kadesh, unwilling to cross over into their inheritance ([Numbers 14:1-5](#)). Not even the faithful testimony of Joshua and Caleb could change their minds—in fact, the Israelites called for them to be stoned ([Numbers 14:6-10](#))! [God](#) was incensed, telling [Moses](#), "I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they" ([Numbers 14:12](#)).

Why were the Israelites so afraid that they refused to enter the Promised Land? Again, we need to look at their recent history. God had always provided everything they needed, including water, food, and protection. In [Exodus 17:8-13](#), God defeated the Amalekites' attack through the miracle of Moses' raised hands. The Israelites, products of generations of slavery, did not have to learn hand-to-hand combat skills or figure out and employ tactics and strategies. Pretty much all they had to do was show up, and God handed them the victory.

Notice [Numbers 13:17-20](#), where Moses gave Israel's spies instructions about what to look for in the Promised Land. He told them to determine

whether the people were strong or weak, whether they were few or many, whether the cities were like camps or strongholds, and whether there was enough food in the land to support an army, plus enough for the more significant population of Israelites. These are instructions for a military expedition!

To this point, the Israelites had not had to do very much for themselves, and now, having to scope out the enemies' positions and resources by themselves felt a bit unsettling. After all, they had worked as slaves all their lives. They were accustomed to having their masters supply their needs and tell them what to do. They likely had little education beyond how to do their jobs—making bricks and erecting buildings with them. They had no experience in fighting or using weapons.

They may have thought that God had stepped aside, requiring them to rely on their own understanding and abilities. When they saw the multitude of enemies secure in the land, they became downright scared! Notice [Numbers 13:27-29](#), 31, where they report on their mission:

Then they told [Moses], and said: "We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan. . . . We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we."

So, when their fear spread throughout the camp, and the Israelites refused to march into the Promised Land, God's anger suddenly "waxed hot" against them! He had been patient with them, knowing what sort of people they were, but this time was different. This time, He wanted to destroy all of them and start over with Moses.

Why was God so furious with Israel this time? We need to consider the overall situation.

In the plagues and exodus, God wanted Pharaoh to know that He, not Pharaoh, was God. He demonstrated His power over Pharaoh through the ten plagues. The first plague He sent on Egypt was to make the waters undrinkable; they turned to blood. The first miracle God performed after leaving the Red Sea was its inverse, turning undrinkable water into sweet, drinkable water. (Another inversion: The last disaster that God inflicted upon the Egyptians was to turn a path through the Red Sea into a deathtrap. The final miracle with which God blessed Israel before entering the Promised Land was its opposite, parting the waters of the Jordan River, providing a safe, dry path across the river.)

God wanted the Hebrews to realize that He was God and would take good care of them. On the other hand, He would be a terror to their enemies and fight their battles for them. In short, He wanted to have a mutual, trusting relationship with them. Notice the situation in [Exodus 15:24-26](#):

And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them, and said, "If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you."

However, the vast majority of Israelites would have none of it. While God called them to a covenant in which He would provide for them and they gave Him their obedience, they wanted a genie in a bottle who would supply them with all their needs yet make no demands of them.

Consequently, they did not come to know God and did not learn to trust Him. Even though God provided abundantly with miracles of food, water, clothing, rest, and protection from heat and cold, they consistently dropped their end of the load. They would not submit to Him.

The Almighty God was thoroughly disgusted with them. He had run out of [patience](#) and was ready to blot them out completely. This was not the first

time either: He was prepared to do the same at Mount Sinai when the people worshipped the Golden Calf (see [Exodus 32:7-10](#)).

Their refusal to enter the Promised Land was the final straw. God saw that they were just as stiff-necked and self-absorbed as they were at Mount Sinai. They had shown no progress, no growth in being willing to submit to Him. He was through with them, finished! Only because of Moses' intervention did God not destroy the entire nation like Sodom and Gomorrah. Over the next 38 years of wilderness wandering, He killed every last Israelite over the age of twenty at the time of their refusal except for Joshua and Caleb ([Numbers 14:26-38](#)). He allowed only that youngest generation to enter the Promised Land.

Our takeaway from this incident is that the well of God's patience is not bottomless. Today, we are witnessing God's waning patience with this nation as He removes His hand of protection. As time grows short before Christ's return, we need to work out our salvation carefully and persistently ([Philippians 2:12-13](#)). By submitting to His will and holding up our end of the covenant, we can ensure that God's patience and goodwill toward us, individually, does not wear thin.

- Mike Fuhrer

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Numbers \(Part Two\): Graves in the Wilderness](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Hebrews 3:7-17 referring to the stiff-neckedness and evil hearts of our forebears; we must not imitate them in their hard-heartedness. The whole generation rebelled and went astray, never believing God; their corpses fell in the wilderness (at a rate of 100 or 200 per day), rotting from one end of the desert to the other. People were literally dying like flies, suffering the wages of their sin. If we, like Israel of old, choose to sin, we will inexorably receive the same consequence. Temptation comes from our own lusts; God is never at fault. Two thirds of the book of Numbers emphasizes that if we sin,

we die. The continuous census reports in Numbers indicates a wholesale extermination dying because of sin. Only Joshua and Caleb were left. Only the succeeding generations entered the Promised Land: the following generations were born there. The Children of Israel parallel the Israel of God (that is, the true Church) in a number of ways: They are both under God's guidance to redemption, baptized (into Moses and Christ respectively), both receiving spiritual food and drink (manna and Christ respectively), and both following the same leader (that is, Christ). If we slip and fall now, our death will be eternal. The stakes are life-and-death. We dare not yield to lusts, to intimidating and destructive fears, covetousness and lack of contentment, the tendency to murmur, complain, and rebel, the tendency to become impatient and letting our tempers get the best of us, or yielding to idolatry (spiritual adultery). God's called-out need to be diligent to enter God's rest.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Head 'Em Up and Move 'Em Out!](#)

by Mike Ford

Among the many doctrinal debates that cycle through the churches of God on a regular basis is the question of when the Passover should be kept, the fourteenth or the fifteenth of Abib/Nisan? Leviticus 23:5 reads plainly that Passover should be kept "on the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight." Does it matter as long as we keep it? Mike Ford shows how the logistics of Israel leaving Egypt prove that Passover should be kept on the 14th.

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