

God Expects
January 12, 2020
Allen Power

Numbers 32:20-32

Opening: Finish the sentence: *"I don't trust that person as far _____."*

Sadly, those who are not Christ-followers are skeptical about the honesty of Christians. Ever see a businessperson with an ichthus (fish) symbol on their truck or their business card? **How do people often react to it?** (Illustration: Advertising as "your Christian plumber, exterminator, etc.") Truth: If you do business with integrity you don't have to shout to prove it!

It has been said that trust is the basis of any relationship yet we live in a world where more promises are broken than are kept. The tendency for people to fail to keep their word is what keeps our civil justice system in business.

What a blessing to know that God always keeps His word! If we didn't believe that what hope would we have for heaven? Because our Heavenly Father always keeps His word, we should keep ours. *"While others might lie, cheat, and deceive, believers are called to live by a higher standard – Christ himself."*

Big idea: We serve a promise-keeping God. He always keeps His word, and He expects us to keep our promises and commitments to Him and others.

- As we finish our very brief study in Numbers we see the children of Israel preparing to cross over the Jordan River to the Promised Land of Canaan.
- After decades of wandering through the desert because of their disobedience, the older generation is dying out and their children were preparing to conquer the land God promised as their inheritance.
- Conquer is the key word. In order to claim the land they had to fight and defeat the pagan tribes who were living there. This was God's punishment for the pagans and His method of keeping His promise to the Israelites.
- We know the previous generation's pattern was: trust God, stop trusting God, disobey God, be punished, say you're sorry, and repeat the cycle.
- As they came closer to moving into the Promised land this new generation seemed to finally connect the dots about how serving God works.
- One scholar wrote: *"With Numbers 21 we begin a new and positive chapter in the history of redemption. God's people are not suddenly perfect. They still fail. But a new generation takes over from the old. The generation that would not trust or obey is dying out...[t]he new generation began to respond to God's voice. And they made a great discovery. When God's people live in right relationship with Him, they are fully protected!"*
- This new, positive attitude of "trust and obey" sets the stage for this story.

- Numbers 32:1 tells us two of the twelve tribes, the tribes of Reuben and Gad, owned vast numbers of livestock. The land just east of the Jordan River (known as the Transjordan region) was perfect for a rancher!
- The leaders of the two tribes came to Moses with a request: *“This land is perfect for our livestock so we don’t want to cross over and live in Canaan, we’d like permission to claim THIS land as our inheritance.”*
- Moses’ had a knee-jerk reaction. *“I get it. You expect the other tribes to go over and do the fighting while you stay here and get rich breeding livestock! How dare discourage the rest of the tribes with this idea! This is exactly what your ancestors did when I sent the spies to check out the Promised Land and that’s why we’ve been going in circles for 38 years! That’s why no one over twenty years old will see the Promised Land other than Joshua and Caleb. I can’t believe you want to do the same thing you “brood of sinners! You’re going to destroy the nation!”*
- Moses was worked up! We can understand his reaction after all he’d been through with the children of Israel and their disobedience to God.
- The Reubenites and Gadites said, *“No, no, no, you’ve got it all wrong, Moses!”* Look at verse 16: *“We simply want to build pens for our livestock and fortified towns for our wives and children. ¹⁷ Then we will arm ourselves and lead our fellow Israelites into battle until we have brought them safely to their land. Meanwhile, our families will stay in the fortified towns we build here, so they will be safe from any attacks by the local people. ¹⁸ We will not return to our homes until all the people of Israel have received their portions of land.”ⁱⁱⁱ*
- Moses took a deep breath and his blood pressure went down about fifteen points. Maybe their proposal wasn’t total disobedience after all.

Numbers 32:20–24 (NLT)

²⁰ Then Moses said, “If you keep your word and arm yourselves for the Lord’s battles, ²¹ and if your troops cross the Jordan and keep fighting until the Lord has driven out his enemies, ²² then you may return when the Lord has conquered the land. You will have fulfilled your duty to the Lord and to the rest of the people of Israel. And the land on the east side of the Jordan will be your property from the Lord. ²³ But if you fail to keep your word, then you will have sinned against the Lord, and you may be sure that your sin will find you out. ²⁴ Go ahead and build towns for your families and pens for your flocks, but do everything you have promised.”

- The commitment these tribes made was no small thing. It was risky!
- One commentator said, *“What faith the men of these tribes exhibited! They were willing to build cities for their families and flocks, and then leave them unprotected as they traveled across the river to fight! God would take care of their families while they were away. They would do their duties, and trust Him.”^{iv}*
- Keeping a commitment is often risky and always requires faith in God.

- Verse 20: The key phrases are *“If you keep your word,” “then you will have fulfilled your duty to the Lord and to the rest of the people of Israel.”*
- Look at verses 20-22. **What phrase repeats four times in three verses? What do you think that meant about their commitment?**
- This was an obligation to God more than to their fellow Israelites.
- If these tribes had gone AWOL and not done their share of the fighting, it would it have been disobedience to God. In Deuteronomy 6 right after Moses read the Ten Commandments to the people, he told them the greatest command in 6:4:

Deuteronomy 6:4–5 (NLT)

⁴“Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. ⁵ And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.

- Then in the same “speech” Moses told them,

Deuteronomy 7:1–2 (NLT)

“When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are about to enter and occupy, he will clear away many nations ahead of you...² When the Lord your God hands these nations over to you and you conquer them, you must completely destroy them. Make no treaties with them and show them no mercy.

- If they had run away and refused to fight it wouldn’t have just been abandoning their fellow Israelites, but disobedience to God (SIN.)
- Let’s apply that to us today. When someone breaks their word to someone else the tendency is to rationalize that their sin was only against that person (who probably deserved it!) WRONG. Dishonesty, deception, and cheating are sins against GOD and the other party.
- Verse 23 contains a famous saying: *“Be sure your sin will find you out.”* **How do we often say it in the south? “Them chickens will _____.”**
- **If I’m a Christ-follower and I can’t lose my salvation, how does that verse about sin apply to my life? If I’m a promise-breaker how does that “find me out” and “come home to roost for a Christian?”**
- What about this, ever make a promise that later proved to be a bad deal for you (i.e. quoting a price for a job and it cost more to do it?)
- Psalm 15 talks about those who lead “blameless lives” and one description in 15:4 is they *“keep their promises even when it hurts.”*^v
- Verses 28-30: Moses instructed Joshua to make sure these tribes did what the promised to do. That was the first accountability group!
- One last question to ponder, one for which we have no clear answer: Even though Moses agreed to let these tribes settle just short of the Promised Land, **did they make a mistake in asking for this?**
- Hebrews 4 in the New Testament uses entering the Promised Land as an illustration of trusting God and claiming all He has for us as believers.

- The older generation didn't fully trust and obey and they missed the blessing of the inheritance. The Gadites and Reubenites went over and fought but came back. Did they miss their blessing?
- The other tribes fully trusted God for victory and claimed the land.
- One commentator writes, *"God wants His people to be like the new generation that trusted God, entered the land, claimed the victory, and enjoyed the blessings."*^{vi}
- Regardless of whether the two tribes were right or wrong not to move with the others, it does make us think about following God fully so He will bless us fully.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- We serve a promise-keeping God. He always keeps His word, and He expects us to keep our promises and commitments to Him and others.
- We're told to be imitators of Christ and 1 Peter 2:22 says, ²² *"He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth."* We're not perfect like Jesus but sin and deceit shouldn't be our reputation.
- Honesty and integrity doesn't make us a Christian, but because we ARE His followers we should be promise-keepers not promise-breakers.
- What does that mean? Obviously, we understand the sin of breaking covenants in our marriage, our family, and our business dealings. Being a cheating spouse, a deadbeat dad, or a crooked businessperson isn't a Christian witness. We all get that. What about the smaller promises?

Chuck Swindoll poses these questions about everyday promises:

- *"When you reply, "Yes, I'll pray for you"—do you?*
- *When you tell someone they can depend on you to help them out—can they?*
- *When you say you'll be there at such-and-such a time—are you?*
- *When you obligate yourself to pay a debt on time—do you?*

Granted, no one's perfect. But if you fail, do you own up to it? Do you quickly admit your failure to the person you promised and refuse to rationalize around it? If you do, you are really rare . . . but a person of genuine integrity. And one who is an encouragement and can encourage others."^{vii}

- We serve a promise-keeping God. He always keeps His word, and He expects us to keep our promises and commitments to Him and others.
- Let's all ask Him to point out to us any area of our lives where we are not living up to our promises, then let's fix that.

ⁱ Explore the Bible – Leaders Guide – Lifeway 2019

ⁱⁱ Richards, L. O. (1987). [*The teacher's commentary*](#) (p. 131). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

-
- ⁱⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Nu 32:16–18). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- ^{iv} Richards, L. O. (1987). *The teacher's commentary* (p. 136). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ^v Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ps 15:4). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- ^{vi} THE WIERSBE BIBLE COMMENTARY: OLD TESTAMENT © 2007 Warren W. Wiersbe
- ^{vii} <https://www.insight.org/resources/daily-devotional/individual/keeping-your-word>