

Rebellion and Judgment  
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Numbers 14

Opening: There is an old saying. *“Never negotiate with a terrorist or a TODDLER.”*

Question: In what ways is a rebellious toddler like a disobedient child of God? What words come to mind that the two have in common?

Our study in Numbers 14 is all about the rebellion of the Children of Israel, but it can be a cautionary tale for every Christ-follower on the consequences of persistent disobedience to God’s commands. (1 Cor. 10:1-11)

The point: God is a loving and patient parent who desires to provide the best for us. When we willfully disobey His commands, we go back to our natural “toddler nature.” If we persist, there will be discipline and consequences for our rebellion. The good news of the gospel is Christ died to pay for all our rebellion. Still, disobedience robs us of a close relationship with our Heavenly Father and the blessings He has for us.

A little context before the text: In Numbers 13 God told Moses to send twelve spies to scout out the land of Canaan. The spies explored for 40 days bringing back the report that the land was good; but ten spies spread fear about strong enemies and fortified cities. Only Caleb and Joshua encouraged trusting God and taking the land.

In the first ten verses of Numbers 14, the Israelites reacted to the spies' report by crying and grumbling against Moses and Aaron, even wishing to return to Egypt. Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in distress, while Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes and urged the people to trust God and not fear the land's inhabitants. Despite their plea, the people wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb. At that moment, the glory of the Lord appears, showing God's presence amid their rebellion. His patience had run out!

**NLT)** — **11** And the Lord said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? Will they never believe me, even after all the miraculous signs I have done among them? **12** I will disown them and destroy them with a plague. Then I will make you [Moses] into a nation greater and mightier than they are!”

- *“I will wipe them out and start over.”* Stiff judgment but God had been patient.
  - They complained about bitter water (Exodus 15:22-24)  
God made the water sweet. No discipline.
  - Complained about hunger in the Desert of Sin (Exodus 16:1-3)  
God provided manna from heaven. No discipline.
  - Complained about no water at Rephidim (Exodus 17:1-7)  
God provided water from a rock. No discipline.
- Like a parent with a learning toddler, God was patient at first.
- When does a parent shift from patient to punishment with a small child?

- Dr. James Dobson wrote that “...parents should shift from patience to discipline when a small child deliberately disobeys clear limits or behaviors become unsafe. Discipline should be immediate, consistent, and loving, focused on teaching rather than punishing, with warmth reestablishing relationship after correction.”<sup>ii</sup>
- God said in **Exodus 34:6–7 (NLT)** — **6** ...The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. **7** I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty.” [In other words, patient to a point]
- As he often did, Moses interceded to God to show them mercy [a foreshadowing of Christ's ultimate mediation, interceding for believers (Heb. 7:25).]

**13** But Moses objected. “What will the Egyptians think when they hear about it?” he asked the Lord. “They know full well the power you displayed in rescuing your people from Egypt. **14** Now if you destroy them, the Egyptians will send a report to the inhabitants of this land, who have already heard that you live among your people. They know, Lord, that you have appeared to your people face to face and that your pillar of cloud hovers over them. They know that you go before them in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. **15** Now if you slaughter all these people with a single blow, the nations that have heard of your fame will say, **16** ‘The Lord was not able to bring them into the land he swore to give them, so he killed them in the wilderness.’ **17** “Please, Lord, prove that your power is as great as you have claimed. For you said, **18** ‘The Lord is slow to anger and filled with unfailing love, forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion. But he does not excuse the guilty. He lays the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations.’ [The effects of a person's sin can be felt by their descendants, but it doesn't mean children are held responsible for their parents' sins. See Ezek. 18:20 and Deut. 24:16]

**19** In keeping with your magnificent, unfailing love, please pardon the sins of this people, just as you have forgiven them ever since they left Egypt.”

- God responded with pardon but **not without** consequences.

**20** Then the Lord said, “I will pardon them as you have requested. **21** But as surely as I live, and as surely as the earth is filled with the Lord's glory, **22** not one of these people will ever enter that land. They have all seen my glorious presence and the miraculous signs I performed both in Egypt and in the wilderness, but again and again they have tested me by refusing to listen to my voice. **23** They will never even see the land I swore to give their ancestors. None of those who have treated me with contempt will ever see it. **24** But my servant Caleb has a different attitude than the others have. He has remained loyal to me, so I will bring him into the land he explored. His descendants will possess their full share of that land.

- So, what IS disobedience in general? When we disobey ANY authority what kind of things are we saying to ourselves (and in a sense to that authority figure)?
- When we studied Psalm 32, we said sin means falling short of God's perfect standard, “missing the mark”. We discussed three related biblical terms:

- Sin (failing God's standard, whether intentional or not),
  - Transgression (willfully crossing God's boundaries), and
  - Iniquity (deep moral corruption with lasting effects)
- Certainly, in Numbers 14, the Children of Israel transgressed.
- 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 indicates it became a pattern of moral corruption.
- Two key ideas to give us perspective about disobedience to God:
  - We shouldn't be surprised at disobedience from the unsaved. They are simply pagans living like pagans; they need Jesus!
  - Also, believers struggling to trust God in difficult circumstances is not sin. Even the Apostle Paul struggled with fear (Acts 18:9-10). It can become sin when it turns to willfully distrusting God or rejecting His guidance.
- So, when should a follower of Christ feel convicted of sin?
  - When reading or hearing Scripture exposes an attitude or behavior that contradicts God's commands.
  - When the Holy Spirit personally impresses on the heart that something done (or left undone) displeases God.
  - When sin disrupts peace with God, leading to restlessness, loss of joy, or conviction in prayer.
  - When another believer lovingly corrects or points out sin in a spirit of accountability.
  - When sinful patterns develop, such as pride, bitterness, selfishness, or hidden wrongs, and the Spirit brings them to light.
  - Conviction should ultimately lead not to condemnation, but to confession, forgiveness, and restoration in Christ (1 John 1:9; Romans 8:1).
- How to discern the difference in conviction from the Spirit vs guilt from Satan.
  - Remember: Satan is the "father of lies" (John 8:44) and the "accuser" of Christ-followers (Revelation 12:10). His accusations aim to condemn, discourage, and create despair.
  - His condemnation is persistent, aiming to rob peace, joy, and assurance of salvation.
  - He tries to distort God's grace, making believers feel unworthy or hopeless despite Christ's forgiveness (Romans 8:1).
  - When we sense it is Satan and not the Spirit, a Christ-follower should ask God to forgive any unknown sin and give the peace that follows His forgiveness. We should claim the words of David in **Psalm 32:5 (NLT)** — **5** Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.
- Salvation is NOT a "free pass" to sin all we want (antinomianism). A truly saved person will desire to please God and not live in a pattern of disobedience to Him.
- **Romans 6:1–2 (NLT)** — **1** Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? **2** Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?
- **CONSEQUENCES:** God pardoned them but there were consequences:
  - That generation, except for Caleb and Joshua would die in the wilderness.
  - Their children would wander in the desert for 40 years (but see the land).

- The ten unbelieving spies were struck dead because of their evil report.
- Question: Though we are forgiven, how should the reality of consequences help us strive for obedience to God's commands?
- John Piper writes, "...the aim of God-sent consequences of forgiven sin is not to settle accounts demanded by...justice. The aim of the God-sent consequences of forgiven sin are (1) to demonstrate the exceeding evil of sin, (2) to show that God does not take sin lightly even when he lays aside his punishment, (3) to humble and sanctify the forgiven sinner."<sup>iii</sup>
- The reality of consequences should be the Christ-follower's STOP SIGN before we dive into flagrant sin.

#### So, What's the Takeaway?

- God is a loving and patient Parent who desires to provide the best for us.
- When we willfully disobey His commands, we go back to our natural "toddler nature." If we persist, there will be discipline and consequences for our rebellion.
- The good news is Christ died to pay for all our rebellion.
- Still, disobedience robs us of a close relationship with our Heavenly Father and the blessings He has for us.
- We must make pleasing Him and obeying His commands our goal in life.
- We won't get it right 100% of the time, but the more we try, with the Holy Spirit's help, the more we can grow to look like Christ (sanctification).
- When we are tempted to cross God's boundary lines, we should say to ourselves, "Cut it out TODDLER!" When we HAVE transgressed, we need to ask for the forgiveness (and resulting peace) God has promised (1 John 1:9).

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<sup>i</sup> Benjamin Lotter in his book "Parenting Pitfalls: Common Parenting Mistakes and Common-Sense Solutions."

<sup>ii</sup> James C. Dobson, The New Dare to Discipline (summarized idea)

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/consequences-of-forgiveness#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20judgment%20whose,in%20their%20interpretation%20of%20life.>