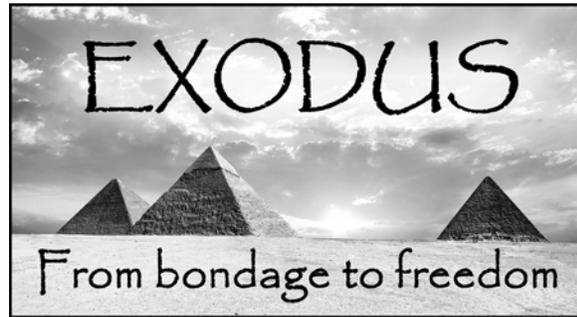


STUDY GUIDE

Week 6: Numbers 13 & 14

Wilderness Lament

October 23, 2016



Before you begin this study, ask the Holy Spirit to show you what God is saying in these scriptures.

Day 1: Numbers 13 – the promised land

God had promised to make the Israelites a great nation and He was leading them from their slavery in Egypt to a new promised land. As noted in Numbers 11 and 12, the Israelites journeyed from Kibroth Hattaavah to Hazeroth and then to the Desert of Paran.

1. In Numbers 13: 1, what was the new land that God was giving to the Israelites? Where is this land, relative to where the Israelites were in the wilderness? What did God tell Moses to do?
2. In verses 17-20, what instructions did Moses give to the men who were to explore Canaan?
3. What did the explorers (also known as the spies) find in Canaan? (see verses 21-25)
4. In verses 26-33, what did the explorers say about this land? What did they say about the people who lived in Canaan? What did they disagree about? Note the effect on the Israelites of the words of the faithless spies. Imagine that you were an Israelite listening to these conflicting reports. What would you have recommended? How would you have responded?
5. Can you recall a time when you were set to go forward in your life? Who influenced you at that time? What words did they speak to you? What effect did those words have on what you chose to do?

Day 2: Numbers 14: 1-3

1. How did the Israelites respond to the report of those who had explored the land of Canaan? Note how many of the Israelites responded this way. What words are used to describe their responses?
2. What were the Israelites afraid of? What did they think would happen to them? What did they wish for instead of the challenges they would have faced in entering Canaan?
3. Do you think that the response of the Israelites was justified? Why or why not?

4. The Israelites had a long history of complaints since they had left Egypt. Using the verses listed below, describe the complaints, the sins that were associated with the complaints, and the results of these complaints. (Numbers 11: 1 and 4; Numbers 16: 3 and 41; Numbers 20: 2 and 3; and Numbers 21: 5; see also the NIV Study Bible)

Day 3: Numbers 14: 1-4

1. In verse 1, the Israelites were described as “weeping,” but in verse 2 they were described as “grumbling.” What similarities and differences do you see between these two responses? Are the similarities and differences significant? Why?
2. God had continually promised to protect the Israelites, lead them to a new land, and make them a great nation. (Perhaps cite some of these passages?) Why now, in verse 3, are the Israelites wondering why God would allow them to be plundered and killed? Why might they have lost their trust in God?
3. How do you think you would have responded in this situation? Would you have trusted God’s promises or would you have been afraid that God was leading you into harm? Can you think of times in your life when you were not sure that you could trust God? How was this resolved?

Day 4: Numbers 14: 4 – 25

1. In verse 4, what did the Israelites want to do? What did they want to do to their leader Moses? What might explain this drastic response? Would you have responded differently? How? Why? Empathy is seeing a situation through the eyes of another person. Can you empathize with the Israelites?
2. Imagine that you are Moses, listening to the nearly constant complaining and grumbling of the Israelites. How would you have responded? What would you have said to the people?
3. In verses 5 – 10, what did Joshua and Caleb say to the Israelites? How did the people respond?
4. In verses 13 – 19, what did Moses say to God? What arguments did he use? How compelling are Moses’ arguments? Why?
5. In verses 20 – 25, how did God respond? What characteristics of God are revealed in these responses? Would you have been more angry or more forgiving in this situation?

Day 5: Psalm 13

Psalm 13 is one of David's prayers of lament, expressing his concern about God's apparent absence and his concern about his enemies.

1. As David describes the situation in Psalm 13, in what ways does it seem similar to the Israelites' situation in Numbers 14? How does it seem different?
2. Throughout the Israelites' wilderness experience, they were chronic complainers, constantly forgetting God's power and God's promises. In Psalm 13, the psalmist doesn't seem to be complaining, but he does seem to be lamenting. What are the differences between complaint and lament? (see a dictionary or DeGroat, pp. 135-136) What do you complain about? What do you lament about?
3. Consider how David closes this psalm. How is this different from the Israelites' response in Numbers 14? What might explain the difference? In your times of complaint or lament, how well do you remember and rely on God's promises and God's power?

Digging deeper: There are extensive descriptions of lament in the scriptures (see Habakkuk 1-3, Job 19, Lamentations). What were these individuals and groups lamenting about? How is their lament different from complaining?

Day 6:

(If you have the book Leaving Egypt, read chapters 10 and 11. If you do not have the book, consider how you might respond to these questions based on your own experiences and understanding.)

1. On pages 133-134, DeGroat writes, "Lament, the ancient art of crying out before God, provides us with a means of honest and raw expression in times when our grief is too much to bear. It does not offer a quick fix or a tidy theological answer. Rather, it invites us to bring ourselves fully to a God who can handle our pain, perhaps more than we've ever imagined." Think about how you have dealt with serious pain and suffering in your life. How have you lamented? How did this experience impact your relationship with God and with others? How did you walk that fine line between complaining and lamenting? How do we avoid blaming God for our woes? How do we sustain our trust in God during times of deep suffering? What do we look to for "fixes" for our suffering?
2. On page 137, DeGroat writes: "The church is the place where our personal laments can join the choir of hurt that sings its off-tune chorus before God." What would it look like to engage in communal lament during times of grief and suffering? How and when should Central College Church engage in lament? How can the church address those in our midst who are lamenting? How can you address those lamenters?

3. Why do we sometimes (or often) fail to lament? What are the safe places where you can lament? When and how are you the “safe place” for others to lament?

4. In chapter 11, DeGroat writes about the grasshopper effect, referring to the fear of the Israelites that they would seem small in comparison with the strong people who lived in the land of Canaan. Because of our self-doubt and our fears, we sometimes settle for less instead of reaching for what God promises. Have you experienced these times of self-doubt? When and how has your self-doubt led you to be unwilling to accept the inheritance that God has promised? (See Ephesians 1: 14; Colossians 3: 24; Hebrews 9: 15; I Peter 1: 4). In these times of self-doubt, how can you learn to depend on God to do what He has promised?