

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The whole congregation weep at the account brought by the spies, Numbers 14:1. They murmur, Numbers 14:2, Numbers 14:3; and propose to make themselves a captain, and go back to Egypt, Numbers 14:4. Moses and Aaron are greatly affected, Numbers 14:5. Joshua and Caleb endeavor to appease and encourage the people, Numbers 14:6-9. The congregation are about to stone them, Numbers 14:10. The glory of the Lord appears, and he is about to smite the rebels with the pestilence, Numbers 14:11, Numbers 14:12. Moses makes a long and pathetic intercession in their behalf, Numbers 14:13-19. The Lord hears and forbears to punish, Numbers 14:20; but purposes that not one of that generation shall enter into the promised land save Joshua and Caleb, Numbers 14:21-24. Moses is commanded to turn and get into the wilderness by way of the Red Sea, Numbers 14:25. The Lord repeats his purpose that none of that generation shall enter into the promised land - that their carcasses shall fall in the wilderness, and that their children alone, with Joshua and Caleb, shall possess the land of the Canaanites, etc., Numbers 14:26-32. As many days as they have searched the land shall they wander years in the desert, until they shall be utterly consumed, Numbers 14:33-35. All the spies save Joshua and Caleb die by a plague, Numbers 14:36-38. Moses declares God's purpose to the people, at which they are greatly affected, Numbers 14:39. They acknowledge their sin, and purpose to go up at once and possess the land, Numbers 14:40. Moses cautions them against resisting the purpose of God, Numbers 14:41-43. They, notwithstanding, presume to go, but Moses and the ark abide in the camp, Numbers 14:44. The Amalekites and Canaanites come down from the mountains, and defeat them, Numbers 14:45.

Verse 1

Cried; and - wept that night - In almost every case this people gave deplorable evidence of the degraded state of their minds. With scarcely any mental firmness, and with almost no religion, they could bear no reverses, and were ever at their wit's end. They were headstrong, presumptuous, pusillanimous, indecisive, and fickle. And because they were such, therefore the power and wisdom of God appeared the more conspicuously in the whole of their history.

Verse 4

Let us make a captain - Here was a formal renunciation of the authority of Moses, and flat rebellion against God. And it seems from Nehemiah 9:17 that they had actually appointed another leader, under whose direction they were about to return to Egypt. How astonishing is this! Their lives were made bitter, because of the rigor with which they were made to serve in the land of Egypt; and yet they are willing, yea eager, to get back into the same circumstances again! Great evils, when once some time past, affect the mind less than present ills, though much inferior. They had partly forgot their Egyptian bondage, and now smart under a little discouragement, having totally lost sight of their high calling, and of the power and goodness of God.

Verse 6

And Joshua, etc. - See on Numbers 13:33 (note).

Verse 9

Their defense - *tsillam* (tsillam), their shadow, a metaphor highly expressive of protection and support in the sultry eastern countries. The protection of God is so called; see Psalm 91:1; Psalm 121:5; see also Isaiah 51:16; Isaiah 49:2; Isaiah 30:2.

The Arabs and Persians have the same word to express the same thing.
(*nemayeed zulli doulet mamdood bad*).

â€œMay the shadow of thy prosperity be extended!â€

(*nemayced zulli doulet ber mufareki khayr khwahlen mamdood bad*).

â€œMay the shadow of thy prosperity be spread over the heads of thy well-wishers!â€

They have also the following elegant distich: -

(*Sayahat kem mubad az seri ma*

Bast Allah zullikem abeda).

â€œMay thy protection never be removed from my head!

May God extend thy shadow eternally!â€

Here the Arabic (*zull*) answers exactly to the Hebrew *tsel* (tsel), both signifying that which overspreads or overshadows. See the note on Numbers 14:14.

Verse 10

The glory of the Lord appeared - This timely appearance of the Divine glory prevented these faithful servants of God from being stoned to death by this base and treacherous multitude. "Every man is immortal till his work is done," while in simplicity of heart he is following his God.

Verse 14

That thy cloud standeth over them - This cloud, the symbol of the Divine glory, and proof of the Divine presence, appears to have assumed three different forms for three important purposes.

1. It appeared by day in the form of a pillar of a sufficient height to be seen by all the camp, and thus went before them to point out their way in the desert. Exodus 40:38.

2. It appeared by night as a pillar of fire to give them light while travelling by night, which they probably sometimes did; (see Numbers 9:21); or to illuminate their tents in their encampment; Exodus 13:21, Exodus 13:22.

3. It stood at certain times above the whole congregation, overshadowing them from the scorching rays of the sun; and probably at other times condensed the vapours, and precipitated rain or dew for the refreshment of the people. He spread a cloud for their covering; and fire to give light in the night; Psalm 105:39. It was probably from this circumstance that the shadow of the Lord was used to signify the Divine protection, not only by the Jews, but also by other Asiatic nations. See the note on Numbers 14:9, and see particularly the note on Exodus 13:21 (note).

Verse 18

The Lord is longsuffering - See the note on Exodus 34:6.

Verse 19

Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people - From Numbers 14:13 to Numbers 14:19 inclusive we have the words of Moses's intercession; they need no explanation, they are full of simplicity and energy; his arguments with God (for he did reason and argue with his Maker) are pointed, cogent, and respectful; and while they show a heart full of humanity, they evidence the deepest concern for the glory of God. The argumentum ad hominem is here used in the most unexceptionable manner, and with the fullest effect.

Verse 20

I have pardoned - That is, They shall not be cut off as they deserve, because thou hast interceded for their lives.

Verse 21

All the earth shall be filled, etc. - כָּל־הָאָרֶץ (kol haaretz), all This land, i. e., the land of Canaan which was only fulfilled to the letter when the preaching of Christ and his apostles was heard through all the cities and villages of Judea. It does not appear that the whole of the terraqueous globe is meant by this expression in any of the places where it occurs connected with this promise of the diffusion of the Divine light. See Psalm 72:19; Isaiah 40:5; Habakkuk 2:14.

Verse 24

But my servant Caleb, etc. - Caleb had another spirit - not only a bold, generous, courageous, noble, and heroic spirit; but the Spirit and influence of the God of heaven thus raised him above human inquietudes and earthly fears, therefore he followed God fully; וַיִּלְכָּד אַחֲרָי (vaimalle acharai), literally, he filled after me: God showed him the way he was to take, and the line of conduct he was to pursue, and he filled up this line, and in all things followed the will of his Maker. He therefore shall see the promised land, and his seed shall possess it. A dastardly spirit in the things of God is a heavy curse. How many are retarded in their course, and fall short of the blessings of the Gospel, through magnifying the number and strength of their adversaries, their own weakness and the difficulties of the way, with which we may connect their distrust of the power, faithfulness, and goodness of God! And how many are prevented from receiving the higher degrees of salvation by foolishly attributing insurmountable power, either to their inward corruptions or outward enemies! Only such men as Joshua and Caleb, who take God at his word, and who know that against his wisdom no cunning can stand, and against his might no strength can prevail, are likely to follow God fully, and receive the heights, lengths, breadths, and depths of the salvation of God.

Verse 34

After the number of the days - The spies were forty days in searching the land, and the people who rebelled on their evil report are condemned to wander forty years in the wilderness! Now let them make them a captain and go back to Egypt if they can. God had so hedged them about with his power and providence that they could

neither go back to Egypt nor get forward to the promised land! God has provided innumerable spiritual blessings for mankind, but in the pursuit of earthly good they lose them, and often lose the others also! If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the fruit of the land, but not otherwise; unless for your farther punishment God give you your portion in this life, and ye get none in the life to come. From so great a curse may God save thee, thou money-loving, honor-hunting, pleasure-taking, thoughtless, godless man!

And ye shall know my breach of promise - This is certainly a most harsh expression; and most learned men agree that the words $\times\cdot x^a \ x^a x \ \times\cdot x\cdot x^a x^{\text{TM}}$ (eth tenuathi) should be translated my vengeance, which is the rendering of the Septuagint, Vulgate, Coptic, and Anglo-Saxon, and which is followed by almost all our ancient English translations. The meaning however appears to be this: As God had promised to bring them into the good land, provided they kept his statutes, ordinances, etc., and they had now broken their engagements, he was no longer held by his covenant; and therefore, by excluding them from the promised land, he showed them at once his annulling of the covenant which they had broken, and his vengeance because they had broken it.

Verse 37

Those men that did bring up the evil report died - Thus ten of the twelve that searched out the land were struck dead, by the justice of God, on the spot! Caleb, of the tribe of Judah, and Joshua, of the tribe of Ephraim, alone escaped, because they had followed God fully. Let preachers of God's word take heed how they straiten the way of salvation, or render, by unjust description, that way perplexed and difficult which God has made plain and easy.

Verse 40

We - will go up unto the place, etc. - They found themselves on the very borders of the land, and they heard God say they should not enter it, but should be consumed by a forty years' wandering in the wilderness; notwithstanding, they are determined to render vain this purpose of God, probably supposing that the temporary sorrow they felt for their late rebellion would be accepted as a sufficient atonement for their crimes. They accordingly went up, and were cut down by their enemies; and why? God went not with them. How vain is the counsel of man against the wisdom of God! Nature, poor, fallen human nature, is ever running into extremes. This miserable people, a short time ago, thought that though they had Omnipotence with them they could not conquer and possess the land! Now they imagine that though God himself go not with them, yet they shall be sufficient to drive out the inhabitants, and take possession of their country! Man is ever supposing he can either do all things or do nothing; he is therefore sometimes presumptuous, and at other times in despair. Who but an apostle, or one under the influence of the same Spirit, can say, I can do All Things Through Christ who strengtheneth me?