

The unbelief of God's people

Numbers 11:1-16:50

Key Verse 14:11

"The Lord said to Moses, 'How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?'"

In the first lesson we saw how God prepared his people as an army to conquer the Promised Land. (1:3) God wanted to give them victory through their obedience to his command and promise. (9:23) May God use us - the UBF next generations - as an army against the enemies of God through our obedience to God's command.

In today's lesson we learn that God is faithful to his people. The first generation of the Israelites could not enter Canaan and had to die in the desert because of their unbelief. This shows us the consequence of the rebellion and unbelief of God's people. However, God let Caleb and Joshua and the next generation take possession of the Promised Land. Even though his people treated God with contempt, God remained faithful to his promise. He continues to fulfill his promise today through those who live by the word of his promise. I pray that God may give us absolute trust in his word and reveal the fulfillment of his promise for world mission.

1. The repeated grumbling of the Israelites (chapter 11-14)

11:1 says: "Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp." The journey of the Israelites to the Promised Land had just begun. They had travelled for three days and set out at the Lord's command. (10:13) As soon as they had settled down, they complained about their hardships. Companies have Complaint Management, which helps them to satisfy their customers by reacting to their complaints. But God did not discuss with the Israelites. "...when he heard them his anger was aroused." (11:1) God's reaction on his people's complaining is his holy anger. God's anger was shown through fire burning among them and consuming some of the outskirts of the camp. (11:1) Moses was in the same situation as the Israelites, but what did he do? He prayed to the Lord and the fire died down. (11:2)

Let's read 11:4. When the rabble who had come out of Egypt with them began to crave other food, the Israelites started to wail. What was the source of their wailing? 1) their unthankfulness (11:6), 2) their craving of other food (11:4,34), 3) their rejection and rebellion against God (11:20) When the people of God forgot all the mighty works which God had done for them, they could only crave other food than manna and rebel against God's sovereignty and his servant Moses.

Verse 10 says, "Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled." God's anger was aroused by their wailing. Moses was troubled. It must have been not easy for Moses to carry the whole community of the Israelites who were only wailing and complaining. That is why Moses said: "They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat!' I cannot carry all these people by myself." (11:13,14) God showed his powerful arm by putting his Spirit on seventy of Israel's elders who would share the burden with Moses. God showed his powerful arm by giving them meat for a whole month. (11:16,17,20) A wind went out from the Lord and drove quail in from the sea. (11:31) Even though there was enough quail around the camp, the Israelites greedily gathered day and night for several days against the Lord's command. Their unthankfulness and craving made God angry so that he struck them with a severe plague (11:33).

Numbers 14:26-28 say, "The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: 'How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say.'" Our God hears

exactly what we say. In this lesson, the term "The Lord hears" appears 6 times. (11:1(2x),18; 12:2; 14:27,28) God's anger is burned when we complain against him. He hears all our complaints even though we might only complain very quietly when we are alone in our room: "Aishhh" May God give us a repentant heart of all our cravings and live a holy life as God's people who give thanks to God and obey his promise.

Chapter 12 tells us about Miriam and Aaron who spoke against Moses who was God's servant. God formed the Israelites as his army and prepared them to conquer the Promised Land. In this crucial time, Miriam and Aaron questioned Moses' leadership and challenged God's sovereignty by wanting to be leaders themselves. What was the consequence of their rebellion against God's servant? Miriam's skin became leprous, as white as snow. Again, Moses cried out to the LORD and ask God for healing her. God accepted his prayer but for seven days Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days.

After the people left Hazeroth and encamped in the Desert of Paran (12:16), not far from the border of the Promised Land. There God directed Moses to send some men who were leaders of the Israelites, to explore the land of Canaan (13:2-3). At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land. (13:25) They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey. Here is its fruit." But then they were complaining about the powerful people, the fortified cities, the Amalekites, the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites and the Canaanites. (13:27-29) The spies could not deny that it was a land which flowed with milk and honey. But they resigned by saying: "We can't attack those people" (13:31) Not only that. They spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land. (13:32)

God had already promised this land to Abraham and his descendants. God had promised them the land for six times in the book of Exodus that he would drive out the people of the land before them (Exodus 3:8; 3:17; 23:23; 23:28; 33:2; 34:11). But the spies except Caleb and Joshua, and the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. (14:1)

Joshua and Caleb were among the 12 spies and had seen the exact same thing as the other spies. But how could their report be so different? "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." (13:30) and "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good." (14:7) Their report was different because they did not rebel against the Lord and were not afraid of the people of the land. They fully trusted in their almighty God. (14:9) We learn from Caleb and Joshua to have God's word of promise in our hearts. When God's promise was in their hearts, they were able to share this encouraging report and honor God.

Even though Caleb and Joshua encouraged the whole assembly, they even thought of stoning them. Let us read the key verse 14:11: "The Lord said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?" People are treating God with contempt when they refuse to believe in him, in spite of all the signs God has performed among them. They had no word of God in their hearts. They did not have the promise of God in their hearts.

What was the consequence of the unbelief and disobedience of his people? 14:23 says: "...not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it." God's people lost their blessing when they refused to believe in and obey God. God punished them with 40 years of desert-wandering until they were completely worn out. We learn that from God's point of view, unbelief is the rejection of his grace, hope and promise, and thus is to treat God with contempt. No one who rejects the promise of God can obtain the promise that God has provided for them.

People who are grumbling and complaining out of their unbelief and rebellion are treating God with contempt. However, our God is faithful to those who have a different spirit as Caleb and follow God wholeheartedly (14:24) by living with the word of God and fully trusting in his promise. God is faithful for he wanted to bring the next generation in to enjoy the Promised Land. (14:31) Our generation seems to be hopeless. But God keeps his promise and fulfills it through a few of people who have a different spirit. "Sam Jeong, go up and take possession of the campus in USP, for you can certainly do it." "Anna So, take possession of the campus in Russia, for the land there is exceed-

ingly good." The land of all campuses in Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia, Middle East, Africa and Australia are good!" The Lord is with you! Let us conquer the Promised Land through preaching the gospel on each campus through our 1:1 Bible studies. Let us experience that God uses Europe once again as a missionary-sending continent.

I grumbled a lot against God by comparing myself with my peers, my friends in school and other 2nd gens and not wanting to receive any spiritual training. However, God gave me through his servant his word from Deut 6:5 and changed me completely so that I began to give my heart and strength for God and his sheep. God's grace in my life is so great that I no longer have any reason to be ungrateful or dissatisfied. I experienced God's leading in my life and how he changed an irresponsible man into a shepherd and blessed him with a beautiful house church. God has promised me through Ezk 37:10 that the dry bones of the young people will come alive and rise as a vast army. God wants me to live with this word, believing that God will bring spiritual resurrection among the students and the next generation. Since God surely fulfills his promise and works powerfully through his word, I may share God's word at each moment of my life.

2. The rebellion of Korah's group (chapter 15-16)

Let's look at 15:1-4. God gave his people additional sacrificial laws for the time after the taking of the Promised Land. They were to give supplemental food offerings for every sacrifice. God was faithful to his promise. Regardless of how hard his punishment is for his people or how long the detour seems, it is certain that God will remain faithful to his promise.

The first generation had sinned against God and said, "We cannot take the land." Therefore, the next generation should learn from the beginning to thank God for his wonderful grace, sovereign guidance and hope, so that they would not commit the same sin of unbelief as their fathers. God taught them what sacrifice to offer in the case of an unintentional sin in order to receive forgiveness. But defiant sin was punished with death. God is ready to forgive sin. But the one who sins defiantly and rejects God's grace cannot receive forgiveness, but will be cut off from the people. Even those who desecrated the Sabbath and thus despised the identity of God's chosen people, had to die. And at the end of this passage, through commanding them to make tassels on their clothes, God helped them to always remember the commandments of God. God is faithful. The first generation rejected his commandments and grace. But God remained faithful to his promise and gave them very specific instructions for living as his holy people.

Chapter 16 begins with the indignation of Korah, one of the Kohathites, and Dathan, Abiram and certain Reubenites who together with 250 Israelite men rose up against Moses. They were all leaders, prominent people and community leaders. They accused Moses and Aaron of setting themselves above the Lord's assembly. The Kohathites had the privilege of taking charge of the sacred instruments of the sanctuary, but Korah and the others tried to get the priesthood too. God had responded to the rebellion of the Korah's group and judged them. But the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron. God's wrath was so great that he wanted to destroy the whole community with a plague. Moses urged Aaron to hurry the assembly to make atonement for the people. Aaron offered incense, standing between the dead and the living, until the plague was finally quelled. But 14,700 men died. Through Moses we see that even in the midst of the spiritually darkest times the Israelites had a shepherd praying for them. Moses' intercession is the expression of his faith in God who faithfully fulfills his promise. Because God is faithful to his promise, may we also intercede for the young people in our generation and experience true joy and comfort from God.

Today we learn that God's people who live without the word of God experience God's wrath and cannot attain what is promised. Unbelief treats God with contempt and is rejection of the work and promise of God. But God is faithful and fulfills his promise through those who, as Caleb and Joshua, live their lives with the promise of God. Let us enter the Promised Land by believing in the word of God's promise and prepare ourselves to continuously writing the history of faith of world mission.