

INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS CHAPTER 14

This chapter gives us an account of that fatal quarrel between God and Israel upon which, for their murmuring and unbelief, he swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest. Here is,

- I. The mutiny and rebellion of Israel against God, upon the report of the evil spies, #Nu 14:1-4.
- II. The fruitless endeavour of Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, to still the tumult, #Nu 14:5-10.
- III. Their utter ruin justly threatened by an offended God, #Nu 14:11,12.
- IV. The humble intercession of Moses for them, #Nu 14:13-19.
- V. A mitigation of the sentence in answer to the prayer of Moses; they shall not all be cut off, but the decree goes forth ratified with an oath, published to the people, again and again repeated, that this whole congregation should perish in the wilderness, and none of them enter Canaan but Caleb and Joshua only, #Nu 14:20-35.
- VI. The present death of the evil spies, #Nu 14:36-39.
- VII. The rebuke given to those who attempted to go forward notwithstanding, #Nu 14:40-45. And this is written for our admonition, that we

"fall not after the same example of unbelief."

Ver. 1. thru Ver. 4.

Here we see what mischief the evil spies made by their unfair representation. We may suppose that these twelve that were impanelled to enquire concerning Canaan had talked it over among themselves before they brought in their report in public; and Caleb and Joshua, it is likely, had done their utmost to bring the rest over to be of their mind, and if they would but have agreed that Caleb, according to his pose, should have spoken for them all, as their foreman, all had been well; but the evil spies, it should seem, wilfully designed to raise this mutiny, purely in opposition to Moses and Aaron, though they could not propose any advantage to themselves by it, unless they hoped to be captains and commanders of the retreat into Egypt they were now meditating. But what came of it? Here in these verses we find those whom they studied to humour put into a vexation, and, before the end of the chapter, brought to ruin. Observe,

I. How the people fretted themselves: *They lifted up their voices and cried (#Nu 14:1)*; giving credit to the report of the spies rather than to the word of God, and imagining their condition desperate, they laid the reins on the neck of their passions, and could keep no manner of temper. Like foolish froward children, they fall a crying, yet know not what they cry for. It would have been time enough to cry out when the enemy had beaten up their quarters, and they had seen the sons of Anak at the gate of their camp; but those that cried when nothing hurt them deserved to have something given them to cry for. And, as if all had been already gone, they sat down and *wep't that night*. Note, Unbelief, or distrust of God, is a sin that is its own punishment. Those that do not trust God are continually vexing themselves. The world's mourners are more than God's, and the *sorrow of the world worketh death*.

II. How they flew in the face of their governors--*murmured against Moses and Aaron*, and in them reproached the Lord, **#Nu 14:2,3**. The congregation of elders began the discontent (**#Nu 14:1**), but the contagion soon spread through the whole camp, for *the children of Israel murmured*. Jealousies and discontents spread like wildfire among the unthinking multitude, who are easily taught to *despise dominions, and to speak evil of dignities*.

1. They look back with a causeless discontent. They wish that they had died in Egypt with the first-born that were slain there, or in the wilderness with those that lately died of the plague for lusting. See the prodigious madness of unbridled passions, which make men prodigal even of that which nature accounts most dear, life itself. Never were so many months spent so pleasantly as these which they had spent since they came out of Egypt, loaded with honours, compassed with favours, and continually entertained with something or other that was surprising; and yet, as if all these things had not made it worth their while to live, they wished they had died in Egypt. And such a light opinion they had of God's tremendous judgments executed on their neighbours for their sin that they wished they had shared with them in their plagues, rather than run the hazard of making a descent upon Canaan. They wish rather to die criminals under God's justice than live conquerors in his favour. Some read it, *O that we had died in Egypt, or in the wilderness! O that we might die!* They wish to die, for fear of dying; and have not sense enough to reason as the poor lepers, when rather than die upon the spot they ventured into an enemy's camp, *If they kill us, we shall but die*, **#2Ki 7:4**. How base were the spirits of these degenerate Israelites, who, rather than die (if it come to the worst) like soldiers on the bed of honour, with their swords in their hands, desire to die like rotten sheep in the wilderness.

2. They look forward with a groundless despair, taking it for granted (**#Nu 14:3**) that if they went on they must fall by the sword, and pretend to lay the cause of their fear upon the great care they had for their wives and children, who, they conclude, will be a prey to the Canaanites. And here is a most wicked blasphemous reflection upon God himself, as if he had brought them hither on purpose that they might fall by the sword, and that their wives and children, those poor innocents, should be a prey. Thus do they, in effect, charge that God who is love itself with the worst of malice, and eternal Truth with the basest hypocrisy, suggesting that all the kind things he had said to them, and done for them, hitherto, were intended only to decoy them into a snare, and to cover a secret design carried on all along to ruin them. Daring impudence! But what will not that tongue speak against heaven that is set on fire of hell? The devil keeps up his interest in the hearts of men by insinuating to them ill thoughts of God, as if he desired the death of sinners, and delighted in the hardships and sufferings of his own servants, whereas he knows his thoughts towards us (whether we know them so or no) to be *thoughts of good, and not of evil*, **#Jer 29:11**.

III. How they came at last to this desperate resolve, that, instead of going forward to Canaan, they would go back again to Egypt. The motion is first made by way of query only (**#Nu 14:3**): *Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?* But the ferment being high, and the spirits of the people being disposed to entertain any thing that was perverse, it soon ripened to a resolution, without a debate (**#Nu 14:4**): *Let us make a captain and return to Egypt;* and it is lamented long after (**#Ne 9:17**) that *in their rebellion they appointed a captain to return to their bondage;* for they knew Moses would not be their captain in this retreat. Now,

1. It was the greatest folly in the world to wish themselves in Egypt, or to think that if they were there it would be better with them than it was. If they durst not go forward to Canaan, yet better be as they were than go back to Egypt. What did they want?

What had they to complain of? They had plenty, and peace, and rest, were under a good government, had good company, had the tokens of God's presence with them, and enough to make them easy even in the wilderness, if they had but hearts to be content. But whither were they thus eager to go to better themselves? To Egypt! Had they so soon forgotten the sore bondage they were in there? Would they be again under the tyranny of their taskmasters, and at the drudgery of making brick? And, after all the plagues which Egypt had suffered for their sakes, could they expect any better treatment there than they had formerly, and not rather much worse? In how little time (not a year and a half) have they forgotten all the sighs of their bondage, and all the songs of their deliverance! Like brute beasts, they mind only what is present, and their memories, with the other powers of reason, are sacrificed to their passions. See #Ps 106:7. We find it threatened (#De 28:68), as the completing of their misery, that they should be brought into Egypt again, and yet this is what they here wish for. Sinners are enemies to themselves; and those that walk not in God's counsels consult their own mischief and ruin.

2. It was a most senseless ridiculous thing to talk of returning thither through the wilderness. Could they expect that God's cloud would lead them or his manna attend them? And, if they did not, the thousands of Israel must unavoidably be lost and perish in the wilderness. Suppose the difficulties of conquering Canaan were as great as they imagined, those of returning to Egypt were much greater. In this let us see,

(1.) The folly of discontent and impatience under the crosses of our outward condition. We are uneasy at that which is, complain of our place and lot, and we would shift; but is there any place or condition in this world that has not something in it to make us uneasy if we are disposed to be so? The way to better our condition is to get our spirits into a better frame; and instead of asking,

"Were it not better to go to Egypt?" ask, "Were it not better to be content, and make the best of that which is?"

(2.) The folly of apostasy from the ways of God. Heaven is the Canaan set before us, a land flowing with milk and honey; those that bring up ever so ill a report of it cannot but say that it is indeed a good land, only it is hard to get to it. Strict and serious godliness is looked upon as an impracticable thing, and this deters many who began well from going on; rather than undergo the imaginary hardships of a religious life, they run themselves upon the certain fatal consequences of a sinful course; and so they transcribe the folly of Israel, who, when they were within a step of Canaan, would make a captain, and return to Egypt.

Ver. 5. thru Ver. 10.

The friends of Israel here interpose to save them if possible from ruining themselves, but in vain. The physicians of their state would have healed them, but they would not be healed; their watchmen gave them warning, but they would not take warning, and so their blood is upon their own heads.

I. The best endeavours were used to still the tumult, and, if now at last they would have understood the things that belonged to their peace, all the following mischief would have been prevented.

1. Moses and Aaron did their part, #Nu 14:5. Though it was against them that they murmured (#Nu 14:2), yet they bravely overlooked the affront and injury done them, and approved themselves faithful friends to those who were outrageous enemies to

them. The clamour and noise of the people were so great that Moses and Aaron could not be heard; should they order any of their servants to proclaim silence, the angry multitude would perhaps be the more clamorous; and therefore, to gain audience in the sight of all the assembly, they fell on their faces, thus expressing,

(1.) Their humble prayers to God to still the noise of this sea, the noise of its waves, even the tumult of the people.

(2.) The great trouble and concern of their own spirits. They fell down as men astonished and even thunder struck, amazed to see a people throw away their own mercies: to see those so ill-humoured who were so well taught. And,

(3.) Their great earnestness with the people to cease their murmurings; they hoped to work upon them by this humble posture, and to prevail with them not to persist in their rebellion; Moses and Aaron beseech them, as though by them God himself did beseech them, to be reconciled unto God. What they said to the people Moses relates in the repetition of this story. **#De 1:29,30**, *Be not afraid; the Lord your God shall fight for you.* Note, Those that are zealous friends to precious souls will stoop to any thing for their salvation. Moses and Aaron, notwithstanding the posts of honour they are in, prostrate themselves to the people to beg of them not to ruin themselves.

2. Caleb and Joshua did their part: they rent their clothes in a holy indignation at the sin of the people, and a holy dread of the wrath of God, which they saw ready to break out against them. it was the greater trouble to these good men because the tumult was occasioned by those spies with whom they had been joined in commission; and therefore they thought themselves obliged to do what they could to still the storm which their fellows had raised. No reasoning could be more pertinent and pathetic than theirs was (**#Nu 14:7-9**), and they spoke as with authority.

(1.) They assured them of the goodness of the land they had surveyed, and that it was really worth venturing for, and not a land that *ate up the inhabitants*, as the evil spies had represented it. It is an *exceedingly good land* (**#Nu 14:7**); it is *very, very good*, so the word is; so that they had no reason to *despise this pleasant land*. Note, If men were but thoroughly convinced of the desirableness of the gains of religion, they would not stick at the services of it.

(2.) They made nothing of the difficulties that seemed to lie in the way of their gaining the possession of it:

"Fear not the people of the land, #Nu 14:9. Whatever formidable ideas have been given you of them, the lion is not so fierce as he is painted. They are bread for us," that is, "they are set before us rather to be fed upon than to be fought with, so easily, so pleasantly, and with so much advantage to ourselves shall we master them."

Pharaoh is said to have been given them for meat (**#Ps 74:14**), and the Canaanites will be so too. They show that, whatever was suggested to the contrary, the advantage was clear on Israel's side. For,

[1.] Though the Canaanites dwell in walled cities, they are naked: *Their defence has departed from them*; that common providence which preserves the rights of nations has abandoned them, and will be no shelter nor protection to them. The other spies took notice of their strength, but these of their wickedness, and thence inferred that God had forsaken them, and therefore *their defence had departed*. No people can be safe when they have provoked God to leave them.

[2.] Though Israel dwell in tents they are fortified: *The Lord is with us*, and his name is a strong tower; *fear them not*. Note, While we have the presence of God with us, we need not fear the most powerful force against us.

(3.) They showed them plainly that all the danger they were in was from their own discontents, and that they would succeed against all their enemies if they did not make God their enemy. On this point alone the cause would turn (#Nu 14:8):

"If the Lord delight in us, as certainly he does, and will if we do not provoke him, he will bring us into this good land; we shall without fail get it in possession by his favour, and the light of his countenance (#Ps 44:3), if we do not forfeit his favour and by our own follies turn away our own mercies."

It has come to this issue (#Nu 14:9): *Only rebel not you against the Lord*. Note, Nothing can ruin sinners but their own rebellion. If God leave them, it is because they drive him from them; and they die because they will die. None are excluded the heavenly Canaan but those that exclude themselves. And, now, could the case have been made more plain? could it have been urged more closely? But what was the effect?

II. It was all to no purpose; they were deaf to this fair reasoning; nay, they were exasperated by it, and grew more outrageous: *All the congregation bade stone them with stones, #Nu 14:10*. The rulers of the congregation, and the great men (so bishop Patrick), ordered the common people to fall upon them, and knock their brains out. Their case was sad indeed when their leaders thus *caused them to err*. Note, It is common for those whose hearts are *fully set in them to do evil* to rage at those who give them good counsel. Those who hate to be reformed hate those that would reform them, and count them their enemies because they tell them the truth. Thus early did Israel begin to misuse the prophets, and *stone those that were sent to them*, and it was this that filled the measure of their sin, #Mt 23:37. *Stone them with stones! Why, what evil have they done? No crime can be laid to their charge; but the truth is these two witnesses tormented those that were obstinate in their infidelity, #Re 11:10*. Caleb and Joshua had but just said, *The Lord is with us; fear them not (#Nu 14:9)*: and, if Israel will not apply those encouraging words to their own fears, those that uttered them know how to encourage themselves with them against this enraged multitude that spoke of stoning them, as David in a like cause, #1Sa 30:6. Those that cannot prevail to edify others with their counsels and comforts should endeavour at least to edify themselves. Caleb and Joshua knew they appeared for God and his glory, and therefore doubted not but God would appear for them and their safety. And they were not disappointed, for immediately *the glory of the Lord appeared*, to the terror and confusion of those that were for stoning the servants of God. When they reflected upon God (#Nu 14:3), his glory appeared not to silence their blasphemies; but, when they threatened Caleb and Joshua, they touched the apple of his eye, and his glory appeared immediately. Note, Those who faithfully expose themselves for God are sure to be taken under his special protection, and shall be hidden from the rage of men, either under heaven or in heaven.

Ver. 11. thru Ver. 19.

Here is,

I. The righteous sentence which God gave against Israel for their murmuring and unbelief, which, though afterwards mitigated, showed what was the desert of their sin and the demand of injured justice, and what would have been done if Moses had not interposed. When the glory of the Lord *appeared in the tabernacle* we may suppose that

Moses took it for a call to him immediately to come and attend there, as before the tabernacle was erected he went up to the mount in a similar case, #Ex 32:30. Thus, while the people were studying to disgrace him, God publicly put honour upon him, as the man of his counsel. Now here we are told what God said to him there.

1. He showed him the great evil of the people's sin, #Nu 14:11. What passed between God and Israel went through the hands of Moses: when they were displeased with God they told Moses of it (#Nu 14:2); when God was displeased with them he told Moses too, *revealing his secret to his servant the prophet*, #Am 3:7. Two things God justly complains of to Moses:--

(1.) Their sin. They *provoke me*, or (as the word signifies) they *reject, reproach, despise me, for they will not believe me*. This was the bitter root which bore the gall and wormwood. It was their unbelief that made this a day of provocation in the wilderness, #Heb 3:8. Note, Distrust of God, of his power and promise, is itself a very great provocation, and at the bottom of many other provocations. Unbelief is a great sin (#1Jo 5:10), and a root sin, #Heb 3:12.

(2.) Their continuance in it: *How long will they do so?* Note, The God of heaven keeps an account how long sinners persist in their provocations; and the longer they persist the more he is displeased. The aggravations of their sin were,

[1.] Their relation to God: *This people*, a peculiar people, a professing people. The nearer any are to God in name and profession, the more he is provoked by their sins, especially their unbelief.

[2.] The experience they had had of God's power and goodness, in *all the signs* which he *had shown among them*, by which, one would think, he had effectually obliged them to trust him and follow him. The more God has done for us the greater is the provocation if we distrust him.

2. He showed him the sentence which justice passed upon them for it, #Nu 14:12.

"What remains now but that I should make a full end of them? It will soon be done. *I will smite them with the pestilence*, not leave a man of them alive, but wholly blot out their name and race, and so disinherit them, and be no more troubled with them. *Ah, I will ease me of my adversaries*. They wish to die; and let them die, and neither root nor branch be left of them. Such rebellious children deserve to be disinherited."

And if it be asked,

"What will become of God's covenant with Abraham then?"

here is an answer,

"I shall be preserved in the family of Moses: *I will make of thee a greater nation.*"

Thus,

(1.) God would try Moses, whether he still continued that affection for Israel which he formerly expressed upon a like occasion, in preferring their interests before the advancement of his own family; and it is proved that Moses was still of the same public spirit, and could not bear the thought of raising his own name upon the ruin of the name of Israel.

(2.) God would teach us that he will not be a loser by the ruin of sinners. If Adam and Eve had been cut off and disinherited, he could have made another Adam and another Eve, and have glorified his mercy in them, as here he could have glorified his mercy in Moses, though Israel had been ruined.

II. The humble intercession Moses made for them. Their sin had made a fatal breach in the wall of their defence, at which destruction would certainly have entered if Moses had not seasonably stepped in and made it good. Here he was a type of Christ, who interceded for his persecutors, and *prayed for those that despitefully used him*, leaving us an example to his own rule, **#Mt 5:44**.

1. The prayer of his petition is, in one word, *Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people* (**#Nu 14:19**), that is,

"Do not bring upon them the ruin they deserve."

This was Christ's prayer for those that crucified him, *Father forgive them*. The pardon of a national sin, as such, consists in the turning away of the national punishment; and that is it for which Moses is here so earnest.

2. The pleas are many, and strongly urged.

(1.) He insists most upon the plea that is taken from the glory of God, **#Nu 14:13-16**. With this he begins, and somewhat abruptly, taking occasion from that dreadful word, *I will disinherit them*. Lord (says he), *then the Egyptians shall hear it*. God's honour lay nearer to his heart than any interests of his own. Observe how he *orders this cause* before God. He pleads,

[1.] That the eyes both of Egypt and Canaan were upon them, and great expectations were raised concerning them. They could not but have heard *that thou, Lord, art among this people*, **#Nu 14:14**. The neighbouring countries rang of it, how much this people were the particular care of heaven, so as never any people under the sun were.

[2.] That if they should be cut off great notice would be taken of it.

"The Egyptians will hear it (**#Nu 14:13**), for they have their spies among us, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of the land"

(**#Nu 14:14**); for there was great correspondence between Egypt and Canaan, although not by the way of this wilderness.

"If this people that have made so great a noise be all consumed, if their mighty pretensions come to nothing, and their light go out in a snuff, it will be told with pleasure in Gath, and published in the streets of Askelon; and what construction will the heathen put upon it? It will be impossible to make them understand it as an act of God's justice, and as such redounding to God's honour; *brutish men know not this* (**#Ps 92:6**): but they will impute it to the failing of God's power, and so turn it to his reproach, **#Nu 14:16**. They will say, He slew them in the wilderness because he was not able to bring them to Canaan, his arm being shortened, and his stock of miracles being spent. Now, Lord, let not one attribute be glorified at the expense of another; rather let mercy *rejoice against judgment* than that almighty power should be impeached."

Note, The best pleas in prayer are those that are taken from God's honour; for they agree with the first petition of the Lord's Prayer, *Hallowed be thy name. Do not disgrace the throne of thy glory.* God pleads it with himself (#De 32:27), *I feareth the wrath of the enemy;* and we should use it as an argument with ourselves to walk so in every thing as to give no occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, #1Ti 6:1.

(2.) He pleads God's proclamation of his name at Horeb (#Nu 14:17,18): *Let the power of the Lord be great.* Power is here put for pardoning mercy; it is his power over his own anger. If he should destroy them, God's power would be questioned; if he should continue and complete their salvation, notwithstanding the difficulties that arose, not only from the strength of their enemies, but from their own provocations, this would greatly magnify the divine power: what cannot he do who could make so weak a people conquerors and such an unworthy people favourites? The more danger there is of others reproaching God's power the more desirous we should be to see it glorified. To enforce this petition, he refers to the word which God had spoken: *The Lord is long-suffering and of great mercy.* God's goodness had there been spoken of as his glory; God gloried in it, #Ex 34:6,7. Now here he prays that upon this occasion he would glorify it. Note, We must take our encouragement in prayer from the word of God, upon which he has *caused us to hope,* #Ps 119:49.

"Lord, be and do *according as thou hast spoken;* for hast thou spoken, and wilt thou not make it good?"

Three things God had solemnly made a declaration of, which Moses here fastens upon, and improves for the enforcing of his petition:--

[1.] The goodness of God's nature in general, that he is long-suffering, or slow to anger, and of great mercy; not soon provoked, but tender and compassionate towards offenders.

[2.] His readiness in particular to pardon sin: *Forgiving iniquity and transgression,* sins of all sorts.

[3.] His unwillingness to proceed to extremity, even when he does punish. For in this sense the following words may be read: *That will by no means make quite desolate, in visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children.* God had indeed said in the second commandment that he would thus visit, but here he promises not to make a full end of families, churches, and nations, at once; and so it is very applicable to this occasion, for Moses cannot beg that God would not at all punish this sin (it would be too great an encouragement to rebellion if he should set no mark of his displeasure upon it), but that he would not *kill all this people as one man,* #Nu 14:15. He does not ask that they may not be corrected, but that they may not be disinherited. And this proclamation of God's name was the more apposite to his purpose because it was made upon occasion of the pardoning of their sin in making the golden calf. This sin which they had now fallen into was bad enough, but it was not idolatry.

(3.) He pleads past experience: *As thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt,* #Nu 14:19. This seemed to make against him. Why should those be forgiven any more who, after they had been so often forgiven, revolted yet more and more, and seemed hardened and encouraged in their rebellion by the lenity and patience of their God, and the frequent pardons they had obtained? Among men it would have been thought impolitic to take notice of such a circumstance in a request of this nature, as it might operate to the prejudice of the petitioner: but, as in other things so in pardoning sin, God's thoughts and ways are infinitely above ours, #Isa 55:9. Moses looks upon it as a good plea, *Lord, forgive, as thou hast forgiven.* It will be no more a reproach to thy justice, nor any less the praise of thy mercy, to forgive now, than it has been formerly. Therefore the *sons of Jacob*

are not consumed, because they have to do with a God that changes not, #Mal 3:6.

Ver. 20. thru Ver. 35.

We have here God's answer to the prayer of Moses, which sings both of mercy and judgment. It is given privately to Moses (#Nu 14:20-25), and then directed to be made public to the people, #Nu 14:26-35. The frequent repetitions of the same things in it speak these resolves to be unalterable. Let us see the particulars.

I. The extremity of the sentence is receded from (#Nu 14:20):

"I have pardoned, so as not to cut them all off at once, and disinherit them."

See the power of prayer, and the delight God takes in putting an honour upon it. He designed a pardon, but Moses shall have the praise of obtaining it by prayer: it shall be done *according to thy word*; thus, as a prince, he has power with God, and prevails. See what countenance and encouragement God gives to our intercessions for others, that we may be public-spirited in prayer. Here is a whole nation rescued from ruin by the effectual fervent prayer of one righteous man. See how ready God is to forgive sin, and how easy to be entreated: *Pardon*, says Moses (#Nu 14:19); *I have pardoned*, says God, #Nu 14:20. David found him thus swift to show mercy, #Ps 32:5. *He deals not with us after our sins*, #Ps 103:10.

II. The glorifying of God's name is, in the general, resolved upon, #Nu 14:21. It is said, it is sworn, *All the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord*. Moses in his prayer had shown a great concern for the glory of God.

"Let me alone," says God, "to secure that effectually, and to advance it, by this dispensation."

All the world shall see how God hates sin even in his own people, and will reckon for it, and yet how gracious and merciful he is, and how slow to anger. Thus when our Saviour prayed, *Father, glorify thy name*, he was immediately answered, *I have glorified it, and will glorify it yet again*, #Joh 12:28. Note, Those that sincerely seek God's glory may be sure of what they seek. God having turned this prayer for the glorifying of himself into a promise, we may turn it into praise, in concert with the angels, #Isa 6:3, *The earth is full of his glory*.

III. The sin of this people which provoked God to proceed against them is here aggravated, #Nu 14:22,27. It is not made worse than really it was, but is shown to be exceedingly sinful. It was an evil congregation, each bad, but altogether in congregation, very bad.

1. They tempted God--tempted his power, whether he could help them in their straits--his goodness, whether he would--and his faithfulness, whether his promise would be performed. They tempted his justice, whether he would resent their provocations and punish them or no. They dared him, and in effect challenged him, as God does the idols (#Isa 41:23), to do good, or do evil.
2. They murmured against him. This is much insisted on, #Nu 14:27. As they questioned what he would do, so they quarrelled with him for every thing he did or had done, continually fretting and finding fault. It does not appear that they murmured at any of the laws or ordinances that God gave them (though they proved a heavy yoke), but they murmured at the conduct they were under, and the provision made for them. Note, It is much easier to bring ourselves to the external services of religion, and

observe all the formalities of devotion, than to live a life of dependence upon, and submission to, the divine Providence in the course of our conversation.

3. They did this after they had seen God's miracles in Egypt and in the wilderness, **#Nu 14:2**. They would not believe their own eyes, which were witnesses for God that he was in the midst of them of a truth.
4. They had repeated the provocations ten times, that is, very often: the Jewish writers reckon this exactly the tenth time that the body of the congregation had provoked God. First, at the Red Sea, **#Ex 14:11**. In Marah, **#Ex 15:23,24**. In the wilderness of Sin, **#Ex 16:2**. At Rephidim, **#Ex 17:1,2**. The golden calf, Exodus 32. Then at Taberah. Then at Kibroth Hattaavah, Numbers 11. And so this was the tenth. Note, God keeps an account how often we repeat our provocations, and will sooner or later set them in order before us.
5. They had not hearkened to his voice, though he had again and again admonished them of their sin.

IV. The sentence passed upon them for this sin.

1. That they should not see the promised land (**#Nu 14:23**), nor *come into it*, **#Nu 14:30**. *He swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest*, **#Ps 95:11**. Note, Disbelief of the promise is a forfeiture of the benefit of it. Those that despise the pleasant land shall be shut out of it. The promise of God should be fulfilled to their posterity, but not to them.
2. That they should immediately *turn back into the wilderness*, **#Nu 14:25**. Their next remove should be a retreat. They must face about, and instead of going forward to Canaan, on the very borders of which they now were, they must withdraw towards the Red Sea again. *To-morrow turn you; that is,*

"Very shortly you shall be brought back to that vast howling wilderness which you are so weary of. And it is time to shift for your own safety, for *the Amalekites lie in wait in the valley*, ready to attack you if you march forward."

Of them they had been distrustfully afraid (**#Nu 13:29**), and now with them God justly frightened them. *The fear of the wicked shall come upon him.*

3. That all those who had now grown up to men's estate should die in the wilderness, not all at once, but by degrees. They wished that they might die in the wilderness, and God said *Amen* to their passionate wish, and made their sin their ruin, *snares them in the words of their mouth, and caused their own tongue to fall upon them*, took them at their word, and determined that their *carcasses should fall in the wilderness*, **#Nu 14:28,29**, and again, **#Nu 14:32,35**. See with what contempt they are spoken of, now that they had by their sin made themselves vile; the mighty men of valour were but carcasses, when the Spirit of the Lord had departed from them. They were all as dead men. Their fathers had such a value for Canaan that they desired to have their dead bodies carried thither to be buried, in token of their dependence upon God's promise that they should have that land for a possession: but these, having despised that good land and disbelieved the promise of it, shall not have the honour to be buried in it, but shall have their graves in the wilderness.
4. That in pursuance of this sentence they should wander to and fro in the wilderness, like travellers that have lost themselves, for forty years; that is, so long as to make it

full forty years from their coming out of Egypt to their entrance into Canaan, #Nu 14:33,34. Thus long they were kept wandering,

(1.) To answer the number of the days in which the spies were searching the land. They were content to wait forty days for the testimony of men, because they could not take God's word; and therefore justly are they kept forty years waiting for the performance of God's promise.

(2.) That hereby they might be brought to repentance, and find mercy with God in the other world, whatever became of them in this. Now they had time to bethink themselves, and to consider their ways; and the inconveniences of the wilderness would help to humble them and prove them, and *show them what was in their heart*, #De 8:2. Thus long they *bore their iniquities*, feeling the weight of God's wrath in the punishment. They were made to groan under the burden of their own sin that brought it upon them, which was *too heavy for them to bear*.

(3.) That they might sensibly feel what a dangerous thing it is for God's covenant-people to break with him:

"You shall know my breach of promise, both the causes of it, that it is procured by your sin"

(for God never leaves any till they first leave him),

"and the consequences of it, that it will produce your ruin; you are quite undone when you are thrown out of covenant."

(4.) That a new generation might in this time be raised up, which could not be done all of a sudden. And the children, being brought up under the tokens of God's displeasure against their fathers, and so *bearing their whoredoms* (that is, the punishment of their sins, especially their idolatry about the golden calf, which God now remembered against them), might take warning not to tread in the steps of their fathers' disobedience. And their wandering so long in the wilderness would make Canaan at last the more welcome to them. It should seem that upon occasion of this sentence Moses penned the ninetieth Psalm, which is very apposite to the present state of Israel, and wherein they are taught to pray that since this sentence could not be reversed it might be sanctified, and they might learn to *apply their hearts unto wisdom*.

V. The mercy that was mixed with this severe sentence.

1. Mercy to Caleb and Joshua, that though they should wander with the rest in the wilderness, yet they, and only they of all that were now above twenty years old, should survive the years of banishment, and live to enter Canaan. Caleb only is spoken of (#Nu 14:24), and a particular mark of honour put upon him, both,

(1.) In the character given of him: he had *another spirit*, different from the rest of the spies, an *after-spirit*, which furnished him with second thoughts, and he *followed the Lord fully*, kept close to his duty, and went through with it, though deserted and threatened; and,

(2.) In the recompence promised to him: *Him will I bring in due time into the land whereinto he went*. Note,

[1.] It ought to be the great care and endeavour of every one of us to follow the Lord fully.

We must, in a course of obedience to God's will and of service to his honour, follow him universally, without dividing,--uprightly, without dissembling,--cheerfully, without disputing,--and constantly, without declining; and this is following him fully.

[2.] Those that would follow God fully must have another spirit, another from the spirit of the world, and another from what their own spirit has been. They must have the spirit of Caleb.

[3.] Those that follow God fully in times of general apostasy God will own and honour by singular preservations in times of general calamity. The heavenly Canaan shall be the everlasting inheritance of those that follow the Lord fully. When Caleb is again mentioned (#Nu 14:30) Joshua stands with him, compassed with the same favours and crowned with the same honours, having stood with him in the same services.

2. Mercy to the children even of these rebels. They should have a seed preserved, and Canaan secured to that seed: *Your little ones, now under twenty years old, which you, in your unbelief, said should be a prey, them will I bring in, #Nu 14:31.* They had invidiously charged God with a design to ruin their children, #Nu 14:3. But God will let them know that he can put a difference between the guilty and the innocent, and cut them off without touching their children. Thus the promise made to Abraham, though it seemed to fail for a time, was kept from failing for evermore; and, though God chastened their transgressions with a rod, yet his *loving kindness he would not utterly take away.*

Ver. 36. thru. Ver. 45.

Here is,

I. The sudden death of the ten evil spies. While the sentence was passing upon the people, before it was published, they *died of the plague before the Lord, #Nu 14:36,37.* Now,

1. God hereby showed his particular displeasure against those who *sinned and made Israel to sin.*

(1.) They sinned themselves, in bringing up a slander upon the land of promise. Note, Those greatly provoke God who misrepresent religion, cast reproach upon it, and raise prejudices in men's minds against it, or give occasion to those to do so who seek occasion. Those that represent the service of God as mean and despicable, melancholy and uncomfortable, hard and impracticable, needless and unprofitable, bring up an *evil report* upon the good land, *pervert the right ways of the Lord,* and in effect give him the lie.

(2.) They *made Israel to sin.* They designedly *made all the congregation murmur* against God. Note, Ring-leaders in sin may expect to fall under particular marks of the wrath of God, who will severely reckon for the blood of souls, which is thus spilt.

2. God hereby showed what he could have done with the whole congregation, and gave an earnest of the execution of the sentence now passed upon them. He that thus cut off one of a tribe could have cut off their whole tribes suddenly, and would do it gradually. Note, The remarkable deaths of notorious sinners are earnest of the final perdition of ungodly men, #2Pe 2:5,6. Thus the wrath of God is revealed, that sinners may hear and fear.

II. The special preservation of Caleb and Joshua: *They lived still*, #Nu 14:38. It is probable that all the twelve spies stood together, for the eyes of all Israel were now upon them; and therefore it is taken notice of as very remarkable, and which could not but be affecting to the whole congregation, that when the ten evil spies fell down dead of the plague, a malignant infectious distemper, yet these two that stood among them lived, and were well. God hereby confirmed their testimony, and put those to confusion that spoke of stoning them. He likewise gave them an assurance of their continued preservation in the wilderness, when thousands should fall on their right hand and on their left, #Ps 91:7. Death never misses his mark, nor takes any by oversight that were designed for life, though in the midst of those that were to die.

III. The publication of the sentence to all the people, #Nu 14:36. He told them all what the decree was which had gone forth concerning them, and which could not be reversed, that they must all die in the wilderness, and Canaan must be reserved for the next generation. It was a very great disappointment, we may well think, to Moses himself, who longed to be in Canaan, as well as to all the people; yet he acquiesced, but they wept and mourned greatly. The assurance which Moses had of God's being glorified by this sentence gave him satisfaction, while the consciousness of their own guilt, and their having procured it to themselves, gave them the greatest vexation. They wept for nothing (#Nu 14:1), and now they have cause given them to weep; so justly are murmurers made mourners. If they had mourned for the sin when they were faithfully reprov'd for it (#Nu 14:9), the sentence would have been prevented; but now that they mourned for the judgment only their grief came too late, and did them no service; they *found no place for repentance, though they sought it carefully with tears*, #Heb 12:17. Such mourning as this there is in hell, but the tears will not quench the flames, no, nor cool the tongue.

IV. The foolish fruitless attempts of some of the Israelites to enter Canaan, notwithstanding the sentence.

1. They were now eager to go forward towards Canaan, #Nu 14:40. They were up early, mustered all their force, got together in a body, and begged of Moses to lead them on against the enemy, and now there is no more talk among them of making a captain to return into Egypt. They confess their fault: *We have sinned*; they profess reformation: *Lo, we be here, and will go up*. They now desire the land which they had despised, and put a confidence in the promise which they had distrusted. Thus when God judges he will overcome, and, first or last, will convince sinners of the evil of all their ungodly deeds, and hard speeches, and force them to recall their own words. But, though God was glorified by this recantation of theirs, they were not benefited by it, because it came too late. The decree had gone forth, the consumption was determined; they did not seek the Lord while he might be found, and now he would not be found. O, if men would but be as earnest for heaven while their day of grace lasts as they will be when it is over, would be as solicitous to provide themselves with oil while the bridegroom tarries as they will be when the bridegroom comes, how well were it for them!

2. Moses utterly disallows their motion, and forbids the expedition they were meditating: *Go not up*, #Nu 14:41-43.

(1.) He gives them warning of the sin; it is *transgressing the commandment of the Lord*, who had expressly ordered them, when they did move, to move back towards the Red Sea. Note, That which has been duty, in its season, when it comes to be mistimed may be turned into sin. It is true the command he refers to was in the nature of a punishment, but he that has not obeyed the law is obliged to submit to the penalty, for the Lord is our Judge as well as Lawgiver.

(2.) He gives them this warning of the danger:

"It shall not prosper, never expect it."

Note, It is folly to promise ourselves success in that which we undertake contrary to the mind of God.

"The Canaanites are before you to attack you, and the Lord is not among you to protect you and fight for you, and therefore look to yourselves that you be not smitten before your enemies."

Those that are out of the way of their duty are from under God's protection, and go at their peril. It is dangerous going where we cannot expect God should go along with us. Nay, he plainly foresees and foretels their defeat: *You shall fall by the sword of the Amalekites and Canaanites (who were to have fallen by their sword); because you are turned away from the Lord, from following the guidance of his precept and promise, therefore the Lord will not be with you.* Note, God will certainly leave those that leave him; and those that are left of him lie exposed to all misery.

3. They venture notwithstanding. Never was people so perverse and so desperately resolved in every thing to walk contrary to God. God bade them go, and they would not; he forbade them, and they would. Thus is the *carnal mind enmity to God: They presumed to go up unto the hill-top, #Nu 14:44.* Here,

(1.) They struggled against the sentence of divine justice, and would press on in defiance of it.

(2.) They slighted the tokens of God's presence, for they would go though they left Moses and the ark of the covenant behind them. They had distrusted God's strength, and now they presume upon their own without his.

4. The expedition speeds accordingly, #Nu 14:45. The enemy had posted themselves upon the top of the hill, to make good that pass against the invaders, and, being informed by their scouts of their approach, sallied out upon them, and defeated them, and it is probable that many of the Israelites were killed. Now the sentence began to be executed that their *carcasses should fall in the wilderness.* Note, That affair can never end well that begins with sin. The way to obtain peace with our friends, and success against our enemies, is to make God our friend, and keep ourselves in his love. The Jews, like these their ancestors, when they had rejected Christ's righteousness, attempted to establish their own, and it sped as this.